

# The Phenomenon of the Impossible in Jean-Luc Marion

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**Abstract:** In a world where philosophical thinking and thinking in general have become more and more manipulative in an ever escalating manner, Jean-Luc Marion pledges us back into that originary philosophical disposition of wonder before the insurmountable. In place of a “limiting modern metaphysics” that confines any appearing within the lifeless realm of intellectual certainty and logical precision, *the philosopher* sketches for us the possibility of an appearing beyond the clutches of Being. Marion’s new phenomenology thus births a possibility of accommodating revelation, back into philosophical discourse. His philosophy is an outlining of the possibility of what is rendered conceptually impossible by modern “conditions of possibility” – God.

For any philosophy of religion to thrive, he says, it must be able to provide intelligibility in what religion reports. Hence, Marion’s new phenomenology is a sketching of the philosophical possibility of revelation itself. This paper is a critical exposition of the heart of Marion’s thought: the saturated phenomenon – the site where the ineffable can in fact present itself without restriction. In order to facilitate understanding, the paper also traces the trajectory of Marion’s thought. From his critique over the intellectual provincialism of the moderns, (which shut the doors for the revelatory character of truth) to the failed attempts of Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger to render a phenomenon worthy of the name. Until at last, we arrive at Marion’s proposal of the saturated phenomenon –the center of a breakthrough that forever changed the face of phenomenology.

**Keywords:** *Jean-Luc Marion, Phenomenology, Overcoming Metaphysics, Descartes, Kant, Husserl, Heidegger*

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## Envoi

It remains, then, to question.<sup>1</sup> To envisage whether a question merits our valuable thoughtfulness is in itself a question that takes precedence even over the outcome of the question itself. To what profit must we approach the question? It remains here necessary to sketch the fecundity of the question we are about to approach. Let me here present a hypothesis; the question of God, which in fact is the only real question posed in this project, is an inquiry that can either bequeath or abate, as it always did, the whole world of the two thousand year old-kingdom (indeed an empire) of a people who claims to be of God's: ourselves! It remains hypothetical whether the world is in need of another 'madman' to proclaim the death of God, only to usher at last the rise of a god who is not so godly. Or whether the world anticipates the rise of another 'preacher' that can present to us an architectonic rendition of 'the Being.' Or at last, whether we are expecting the resurrection of 'the philosopher' who claims for himself a rigid form of atheism only to despair over his silence before the divine. Indeed, we can only hope that at the end of this hurdling inquiry, we may not be accused of the very same indictment Socrates received from his detractors, '*He introduces new gods to the city... and he corrupts the youth!*'<sup>2</sup> I henceforth plead guilty to any error and corruption this project can possibly submit. I, among anyone else, am ultimately aware of them.

## Introduction: An Apology for the Impossible

### *The Question of God*

The question where philosophy runs the greatest risk of losing itself is the very same question by which it unfolds the greatest promise of recovering itself – the question of God. The thought of God is, par excellence, that which does not belong to thought itself.<sup>3</sup> It is a question that tests and exhausts the frontiers of reason. The question of God is the terminal point -the precipice where philosophy must resist the advance lest it falls into an impassable labyrinth. Indeed, the history of philosophy had so often testified of this inglorious downfall. A downfall for which, philosophy as metaphysics have gained the infamous branding as onto-theology.<sup>4</sup> The question

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and the Distance: Five Studies*, Trans. Thomas Carlson, (New York, USA: Fordham University Press, 2003) 1. Henceforth cited as *ID*.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *The Apology*, in *The Great Dialogues of Plato*, Trans. W.H.D. Rouse, (New York, USA: Mentor Books, 1974) 26c & 23d. My emphasis.

<sup>3</sup> John Manoussakis, "The Phenomenon of God: From Husserl to Marion," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 1, (Winter 2004) 53. Henceforth cited as *The Phenomenon of God*.

<sup>4</sup> The term 'onto-theology' was popularized by Martin Heidegger as a catch-phrase (and accusation) for the alleged failings of metaphysics. A failing which, for analytical philosophers and for Heidegger himself, consists in an empty claim to a knowledge of essences beyond the realm of empirical and inductive analysis. The accusation further stretches to a suspicion over the true motive of metaphysics, hereby suggesting that metaphysics covertly incorporates theological agenda into its methods, thereby rendering the whole tradition an *a priori* (preconditioned) thinking that seeks to

of God is confronted most openly by metaphysics – the science of beings, which promises an unparalleled precision in decoding the essences of things (but it does so only by reducing reality into an object). Metaphysics poses the question of God in the same sphere as when it poses the question of other objects; in the mind, in my mind! In fact, God Himself is proclaimed as the rightful object of reason. The ultimate truth! A truth regarded supreme, and yet sarcastically shredded into the limited horizon of reason – as if to humorously suggest that what is absolute and transcendent can be wholly contained by the cogito-mind. God, that is, the idea of God appears always in my cogitation; “appears, so to speak of course, because within the mind, nothing can really appear.”<sup>5</sup> Hence, the ‘thought of God’ in this tradition, which altogether gained the ire of the deconstruction philosophers, is no more than a humoristic euphemism of a veiled idolatrous thought destined to think itself. “The thought of God is nothing else but the masqueraded thought of man about himself.”<sup>6</sup> An objective genitive; an arbitrary attribution! This very same tradition believes in the human who creates God “in his likeness” (Gen. 1:27). ‘The idolatry of the concept of God is the same as that of the gaze, imagining oneself to have attained God and to be capable of maintaining him under our gaze or under a name, like a thing of the world.’<sup>7</sup> Metaphysics, or at least the metaphysics that imposes itself as an authority on the question of God, is a thought that poses and limits the question of God within its own cogitation. God is nothing more but one of the *cogitationes* of this cogitare! Could we, however, dare to imagine a thinking that does contain a thought about God, but encounters God posthumously face to face? Can we conceive of a possibility where God is neither constituted in and by the mind, nor constructed by an arbitrary attribution, but appears to it? An appearing whereby the mind finds itself bedazzled and stunned by its unpredicted encounter with the divine. Could we ever think of a phenomenon of God? Can we experience God?

### *god meets God*

Our inquiry leads us back to the age-old bifurcation between on the one hand the God of the philosophers, and on the other hand, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The distinction forthrightly separates the ‘properly theological’ thought of God from other non-theological philosophically-oriented thought about

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justify what one already perceives and accepts as true. Hence, it is an abomination of everything that philosophy was about, that is, the ‘search’ for truth. Metaphysics gained the ire of postmodern thinkers (as Heidegger and Nietzsche), lending the accusation of being a transvestite theology. A thinking that for some, is a form of robbery and injustice. A thinking for which I felt confused whether rendering a patriotic stance for one’s belief is a form of criminality. What then should consist proper behavior if standing up for one’s faith is in itself the most fatal form of corruption? As if it is even possible for reason to be a *thinking from nowhere*!

<sup>5</sup> Manoussakis, *The Phenomenon of God*, 54.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of Negative Theology*, in *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism*, John Caputo & M. Scanlon (Eds.), (Indianapolis, USA: Indiana University Press, 1999) 34. Henceforth cited as *In the Name*.

God. The former expresses God by means of the language God Himself provides the humans to use in praising Him, the latter expresses a subjection of God within the measure of human thought and language. In recent academic history, however, we encounter a philosopher-theologian that poses a possibility of bridging what many consider an impassible line, which separates the realm of the sane from that of empty mysticism. Jean-Luc Marion in his groundbreaking phenomenological work, outlines the possibility of a phenomenon of God.<sup>8</sup> In the wake of Marion's publications, a great number of mixed reactions have appeared, all suggestive of the great perplexity that the thinking of the possibility (or impossibility) of a religious phenomenon is destined to cause. Some thinkers welcomed Marion's originality and conventionality; others questioned the partiality of his readings on Heidegger, Husserl, and even Nietzsche. Some, however, who I think were all readily disposed to suspect and dismiss any kind of reduction, almost instinctively accused Marion of theological colonialism.<sup>9</sup> An accusation that rests on Marion's alleged 'hidden agenda' to advance his theological claims, by means of rendering a more scientific approach through recourse to phenomenology. A phenomenology which, for them, is guilty of serving the reduction of religion to theology. And even worse, to Christianity and Catholicism, alas! Here then arises the need to outline the points of interplay where Marion's phenomenology and theology endlessly confronts, informs, and challenges each other.<sup>10</sup>

### *At the Crossroads of Phenomenology and Theology*

One can quickly outline this frame, first with regard to the intellectual current for which Marion's project was an understated response. Both of Marion's phenomenology and theology were in absolute terms, responses to the 'death of god,'

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<sup>8</sup> Marion's current phenomenological preoccupations have ceaselessly manifested even within his earlier theological works. From the first edition of *L'idole et la distance- The Idol and the Distance* (1977) to the work for which he is perhaps most famous and misinterpreted for, *Dieu sans l'ère: Hors-texte- God Without Being* (1987). The concept of the 'Saturated Phenomenon' has always been laid down as a possible mode of revelation.

<sup>9</sup> The objection is most openly set forth by the eminent Dominique Janicaud. The whole criticism is published as 'The Theological Turn of French Philosophy,' Trans. Bernard Prusak, in 'Phenomenology and the Theological Turn,' (New York, USA: Fordham University Press, 2000). A volume of Marion's reply to Janicaud's criticisms can be read in his work, 'In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena,' (New York, USA: Fordham University Press, 2002). Congruent objections are also echoed by the famous Lorenz Puntel in his magnum opus, *Structure and Being. A Theoretical Framework for Systematic Philosophy*, Trans. Alan White, (Pennsylvania, USA: Penn. State University Press, 2008). Another criticism was highlighted by no less than the eminent Jacques Derrida, where in a conference-debate published as *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism*, John Caputo & M. Scanlon (Eds.), (Indianapolis, USA: Indiana University Press, 1999). Derrida accused Marion of blindly proposing the 'anonymous voice in the saturated phenomenon' to be none other than the voice of the 'father' in Christian revelation.

<sup>10</sup> I am here indebted to Thomas A. Carlson, who, in his introduction to Marion's *The Idol and the Distance*, has already accomplished the task of outlining the points of interplay between Marion's phenomenology and theology (the very task the author, at this point, is trying to accomplish).

that is, the destruction of the modern metaphysical god, understood, constituted, indeed defined by the limits embraced by the Enlightenment era. We can begin by saying that the modern epoch turns rather to be an *epoche*.<sup>11</sup> An imperative whereby modernity have confined knowledge to human reason alone (rationalism), and or to sense-experience alone (empiricism), hereby drawing a 'realm of the possible' A realm that operates either with the language of intellectual certainty (rationalism) or empirical precision (empiricism). The influence of scientific thinking is evident here. "Science attains certainty only by distinguishing in things what can be reduced to permanence and what cannot. Hence, it derives on the one hand, the object –'the known', and on the other hand, the unobjectifiable in short, the doubtful."<sup>12</sup> The nub however is that, science reduces what lay beyond its realm of certainty into nonexistence. It unjustly dismisses the doubtful and the ambiguous, simply because it cannot objectify them. What else can best describe sheer close-mindedness and mediocrity? Just because the doubtful confronts our primacy, just because it antagonizes our power to know, just because it poses a threat to our comprehension, the modern man is quick to dismiss the unobjectifiable as unreal in order to hide his weakness. Indeed, we have thrown the unobjectifiable and the unfathomable into the cold forgotten realms of our sufficient reason, together with the unintelligible, the unmentionable, the unscientific, the mythical, and the illogical! Modernity has imposed certain restraints and limitations to our thinking. Borrowing an expression popularized by Kant, modernity invented 'conditions of possibility.'<sup>13</sup> 'The moderns imposed restraints upon our thinking, which, like border police, marks off the boundaries and patrols the limits of possible experience.'<sup>14</sup> The moderns erected barricades and patrol stations to secure for themselves the 'realm of the possible.' Albeit discriminating on the other side of the border, the unobjectifiable, the doubtful, indeed the absolute! By limiting reality to the 'thinkable' and to the 'sentient', modern philosophy shut the doors for the revelatory character of truth. It domesticates reality as the realm of beings. Hence, it consequently produces a caricature of the absolute in terms of the limits embraced by being. In its attempt to objectify the unobjectifiable, in its resolve to reduce the unthinkable into the thinkable, lies the idolatry of modern thought! Not only does it exclude the unfathomable reality of the divine, but it

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<sup>11</sup> The term was popularized by Edmund Husserl, where in his transcendental phenomenology, he explained *epoche* as a form of provincialism where the 'I' focuses on a particular phenomenon-event (or a memory of it) allowing itself to speak of itself once more. This consequently meant of course, the isolation of the event (as if it to dismiss whatever that is beyond).

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, Trans. Stephen Lewis, (Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 2007) 12. My emphasis. Henceforth cited as EP.

<sup>13</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Trans. Mary Gregor, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 235. Here, we find an allusion to the contemporary attitude of relying on 'factual data'. As if truth can be reduced to facts!

<sup>14</sup> John Caputo, From his Introduction in *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism*, J. Caputo & M. Scanlon (Eds.), (Indianapolis, USA: Indiana University Press, 1999) 2.

substitutes for the divine a caricature of its own making, –a god limited by concepts! But in the same manner that philosophy itself began as a passionate response propelled by ‘awe and wonder’ before the unknown, so is the human-subject ceaselessly moved by the unfathomable, by the unknown, indeed by the impossible! To borrow John Caputo’s expression, ‘Being impossible is what ignites our passions, gets us off dead center, and drives our desire to make it happen.’<sup>15</sup> Hence, ‘the indisputably apparent absence of the divine (because of the limits imposed by modernity) becomes the very center of a questioning concerning its manifestation.’<sup>16</sup>

We can thus view Marion’s project as an embracing of the possibility of the resurrection of the exiled God. A bridging into the realm where the ‘methods’ prescribed by modernity prohibits us to go. His work is a sketching of the ‘phenomenon of the impossible,’ the revelation of the unfathomable reality unjustly dismissed by modern conditions of possibility. Marion’s project can hereby be considered as an apology for the impossible. A task to restore the good name of the unfathomable, a task to unravel once more that sense of awe and wonder before which all effort at objectifying crumbles! Here lies the basic antagonism between Marion’s phenomenology and theology. A delineation which I think is too incautiously outlined so as to suit the taste of those who were raised to suspect any form of reduction. “Between phenomenology and theology,” Marion remarks, “the border passes between revelation as a possibility and revelation as historicity.”<sup>17</sup> By embarking the possibility of a ‘saturated phenomenon,’ Marion’s phenomenology merely sought to describe how a revelation can occur, that, if a revelation would take place, then it would assume the figure of the phenomenon. Phenomenology thus accounts on the one hand, *only* a description of a possible revelation. It does not vouch an actual historical revelation at all. Theology on the other hand, begins with and presupposes an accepted account of an historical revelation, such as those embodied in the scriptures and saintly accounts. It is the character of theology to faithfully respond towards an historical actuality. The science therefore that approaches the possibility of revelation (Marion’s phenomenology) is totally distinct from the discipline that begins with the acceptance of a revelation as its first grace (theology).

While Marion invariably insists on a strict distinction between his phenomenological and theological work, it is clear that commentators find it quite illuminating to read each in the light of the other, henceforth aggravating the suspicion on the true agenda of Marion’s project. Nevertheless, we must put into account that “for a philosophy of religion<sup>18</sup> to thrive, it must be able to constitute

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

<sup>16</sup> *ID*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology*, Trans. Thomas Carlson, (Critical Inquiry, Vol. 20, No. 4, Summer 1994) 590.

<sup>18</sup> Or as how Marion wants to put it, a ‘Phenomenology of Religion.’

phenomena. That is to say, it must find evidence and articulate the intelligibility in what religion reports.”<sup>19</sup> And this is simply what Marion intends to do; in order to provide credibility for theology’s accepted revelations, his phenomenology is an outlining of the philosophical possibility of revelation itself. Concomitantly, the subsequent chapters of this research take on the cudgels of outlining Marion’s apology for the possibility of revelation. His response lies on his proposal of a God-Love who utterly defies the language of being and metaphysics, hence the work he is most prominent for: *God without Being*.<sup>20</sup> This research then hearkens to expose Marion’s proposal of the philosophical possibility of revelation, which culminates in the excess of givenness and love.

### *Significance of the Study*

In a world where technological breakthroughs and scientific advancements have confirmed in various ways the “power” of the human, Jean-Luc Marion pledges us back into that originary philosophical disposition where one finds himself speechless before the insurmountable. Marion reminds us that in the end, when objectifying or even knowing itself fails, the truth beckons us, calls us back, and reminds us that there is infinitely more to the limited gaze we have so often been proud of. Marion’s phenomenology is a testament to our unknowing! And yet this unknowing is in itself the evidence of our giftedness, that even at the face of misery and despair, this dint of ignorance that defines our knowledge becomes the only consolation for us. There is more to life!

Marion’s phenomenology is one of the most important philosophical breakthroughs of our generation. In a philosophical landscape that was ‘once upon a time’ lyrical and romantic, until of course ‘philosophers’ converted it into a sepulcher, precisely for that passion which was once its very life, Marion gives us a fresh beginning. A return path to recover that originary passion, by sketching possibilities of revelation, where we can once again marvel at the wisdom that is now unveiled before us. But make no mistake, Marion’s phenomenology does not hold us infinitely into some form of empty mysticism, rather he points us back into the world, back into life. He awakens us into our ‘finite’ existence, which is exactly the most mysterious revelation of all, where the ineffable ceaselessly manifests Himself in ways we could have never imagined.

Having said this, I humbly (but honorably) propose this research as an introductory contribution into a contemporary discourse on the philosophy of

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Kosky, *Philosophy of Religion and Return to Phenomenology in Jean-Luc Marion: From God without Being to Being-Given*, (American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 78, No. 4, Fall 2004) 632.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Horst Texte*, Trans. Thomas Carlson, (Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Henceforth *GWB*.

Jean-Luc Marion, whose catholic philosophy of religion, seems ‘terra incognita’ in the Catholic University of the Philippines. The research does not presume any philosophical breakthrough, but its significance is derived from the very fact that it envisions to rouse a contemporary philosophical discussion on God and revelation. This is a discussion that is now forgotten in philosophy, in fact even dismissed as downright theology or onto-theology.

### *Structure and Organization*

This research is an analysis of Jean-Luc Marion’s concept of the phenomenon of God. It hearkens to demonstrate Marion’s attempt to accommodate revelation into philosophical discourse. As a response to a philosophy that is at once close-minded and esoteric, Marion ushers us into a new revelation-based philosophy. Following the route of this philosophizing, Marion invariably endeavors to introduce a philosophy/phenomenology of religion that can provide a ground for theology while refusing to admit theological undertakings, the fundamental mistake for which modern metaphysics have been accused of onto-theology. We shall tread upon this course according to the fashion I will now outline.

**Deception Point: The Dismissal of the Divine.** The research begins with a survey of modern metaphysics, particularly Cartesian philosophy. In this section, we shall engage into an examination and critique of how Cartesian metaphysics and modern philosophy in general, created a ‘realm of the possible’ operative only in the language of intellectual certainty and or empirical precision. In so doing, modern metaphysics discriminated the possibility of revelation. Since, by creating a realm of possibilities, (which by the way hinges on the primacy of the ego) it dismisses precisely the impossible God Himself. And yet what proves even more pivotal, is not only the modern’s dismissal for the possibility of revelation, but its attempt to create for itself an idol of the infinite, either in the language of ideas or sensual accessions.

**The Collapse of the Idols.** In his attempt to synthesize and moderate the competing modern schools of thought, namely rationalism and empiricism, Immanuel Kant hearkened to create categories of knowledge accommodating rationalism in the aspect that these categories are found in the mind, but also satisfying empiricism in that these categories of the mind are accented from reality. However, these categories lean once more into a limited realm of possibility that discounts revelation. And instead, speaks of it in terms of a boastful (but limited) categorical language that offers itself as the only arbiter to reality, hereby falling into the same idolatry. This mishap will be addressed in detail in chapter three. This section will also include a detailed discussion of Edmund Husserl’s principle of principles, the concept of horizon, and the constituting ‘I’. Rendering that phenomenon is that which presents itself, this



chapter will focus on the subject to whom the phenomenon gives itself and suffers injustice in return: the constituting 'I'. Capping the discussions of chapter three is Martin Heidegger's Dasein – the last in the long line of subjects who succumbed into the deceptive logic of idolatry while at once trying to elude it. While with Marion's insights, we shall hearken to spot the idolatry errors embraced by the philosophies aforementioned, it is also our intention to show that the efforts of the postmodern thinkers to overcome the idolatry purported by modern metaphysics initiated, indeed inspired Marion's phenomenological breakthrough.

**Sketching the Phenomenon of the Impossible.** Taking its cue from both earlier chapters, chapter four will then introduce Marion's resolution, which is found in his attempt to overcome metaphysics (from chapter two), and in his rehabilitation of phenomenology as revelation-based (from chapter three), until at last his proposal of the saturated phenomenon – the site where the divine can manifest itself beyond objectification. Chapter four will also explore the impact of Marion's new phenomenology (which I think was never foreseen by Marion Himself). Here, we shall also provide situations and examples where Marion's thought can be applied. Scriptural texts will also be rendered as models. But more importantly, this chapter will provide allusions to our life, that is, the most primary revelation itself – the life that springs from the Love Himself.

## **Deception Point: The Dismissal of the Divine**

### **Prologue**

Every beginner in philosophy knows the remarkable train of thoughts contained in the *Meditations*.<sup>21</sup> Let us recall its guiding idea. The aim of the *Meditations* is a complete reforming of philosophy into a science grounded on an absolute foundation.<sup>22</sup> The aim for which Descartes devoted his lifework is one which ambitions to establish an 'all-inclusive' philosophy a knowledge that can provide a firm and acceptable foundation to knowledge itself! However, the audacity of the aim pales in contrast to the difficulty of the method it calls for. Precisely because the *Meditations* aims at a firm and absolute foundation to knowledge, it must in effect dismiss all knowledge that exhibit any dint of incertitude. In fact, it must presume all knowledge as doubtful, if at all it searches for that principle that is at once certain and foundational. Hence, the *Meditations* begin with a creed of ignorance, a creed so eloquently phrased by the father of phenomenology: 'I have thereby chosen to

<sup>21</sup> Rene Descartes, *The Meditations*, Trans. John Veitch, in *The Rationalists*, (New York, USA: Anchor Books, 1974). Henceforth cited as *The Meditations*.

<sup>22</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, Trans. Dorion Cairns, (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960) §1, 43. Henceforth cited as *Cartesian Meditations*.

begin in absolute poverty, with an absolute lack of knowledge.<sup>23</sup> Nothing is certain. Nothing is yet known.

The creed of humility we find in Rene Descartes is a euphemism that comically shrouds the audacity of his aim. And yet, this very irony resembles the conviction that once upon a time inspired the beginning of philosophizing –one’s astonishment before the unknown. It is in this sense that Descartes turns the affairs of philosophy into a personal conviction. It is my task here to doubt everything, and to go about searching for that sole foundation of reality. Descartes promulgated a ‘philosophy turned toward the subject himself.’<sup>24</sup> For while the ego pledges ignorance and incertitude, it nonetheless assumes, (indeed owns!) the destiny to discover that sole indubitable principle. It is I who doubts, seeks, and shall understand. It is mine, –my own!

Concurrent with the ‘scientific turn’ of the renaissance, ‘men of intellect were lifted by a new belief –their great belief in an autonomous philosophy and science.’<sup>25</sup> Dismissing the otherwise ‘lifeless conventions’ of religious discourse, philosophers (here Descartes) sought to provide a foundation to knowledge that is congruent to a logic which admits scientific rigor. Hence the proclamation of the sole and absolute criterion to knowledge: scientific certainty! The cogito’s claim begins with the phenomenon that ‘I am to myself’ – the first indubitable data ever to be discovered. From the certainty of the self, the certainty of everything else is defined. But notice that the greatest things for which man would fight and die for are precisely those things which admit to a certain degree of uncertainty. The uncertainty of success makes the success ever more glorious when achieved. The possibility of death makes life all the more meaningful. The test of losing one’s love makes the love ever more precious. The doubt over God’s existence makes one’s faith ever more valuable. Unknowing sparks a search for knowledge! It remains necessary to examine the validity, indeed the meaningfulness of the cogito’s ‘absolute standard’ to knowledge. What do we make of a standard that dismisses precisely those things that matter to me? The true issues that define my being? Much, if not all the things dismissed by scientific certainty and reduced to irrationality, are usually those which elude the limit of certainty itself. And that is simply what certainty means, a limitation. The limit that discriminates all things that lay contempt to its rigor! And let it not be forgotten that life itself is unpredictable, indeed the most uncertain reality in the world. If at all, then the cogito dismisses life itself.

After an arduous task of axiomatically sketching the first indubitable principle-knowledge, the ego cogito, Descartes then acknowledges the certainty, and

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* § 1, 44.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

thus the existence, of everything that can be grounded from his ideas. What better description can we give to this than sheer compulsiveness! An ego that reduces the world into mere static objects; boxed, fossilized, petrified, idolized, indeed lifeless. Here, the 'other' suffers the most natal form of injustice: you are who I say you are! The world is reduced into mere object of the cogito. As soon as the cogito guarantees the certainty of things outside the mind, it consequently assumes the place of a first principle, hopelessly aloof and elevated. It proclaims itself the principle who is also the sole being meriting the name 'subject'. Hence, we might ask, 'how does the cogito see other minds, if not other egos?'<sup>26</sup> If at all the cogito reduces everything into mere objects, how can it approach other intelligent beings without demoting them into the dishonorable rank of objects? It cannot!

It is hypothetical how much more injustice the 'wholly other', the ineffable, the indefinable, suffers while not being able to defend Himself from this objectification and idolatry. This is ultimately what Marion puts into question – the annulling of any possibility of revelation where the ineffable can truly speak about Himself. Mused by the certainty of a world created by his own ideas, the cogito turns his back from the revelatory character of truth, and ultimately away from the self-revelation of the Truth Himself!

In this chapter then, I present Jean-Luc Marion's Cartesian critique – the first step in accommodating any conceptual possibility for the phenomenon of the impossible. In order to accommodate revelation into philosophical discourse, it remains necessary to destroy the very tradition that renders it conceptually impossible. Marion began his philosophical career as a Cartesian scholar. His encounter with the egotistic methods of Cartesian philosophy inspired his phenomenological breakthrough. "Marion recognized first in Descartes the crucial conflict between the respective poles of the ego and God."<sup>27</sup> It is therefore a question of reading the *Meditations* once again with the light of Marion's insights.

### **1. First, of Philo-Sophia**

Man is a criminal. He is guilty of pretense. A pretense which he claims to be his reality, the reality to which he would exchange anything for. Yet his reality is a tale, a tale which leads him away from true reality. And his tale holds the promise of mastery, the false promise of domination and control. Thus, man claims primacy over life, and over the horizon of his life. Yet in declaring his control, he becomes controlled by the very sensation of controlling. Thus, he finds himself (one who has proclaimed dominance) to be dominated by the very thought of dominating. He finds

<sup>26</sup> CQ, 121.

<sup>27</sup> Ian Leask & Eion Cassidy, *Introduction to Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, (New York, USA: Fordham University Press, 2005) 2. Henceforth Introduction.

himself trapped by his hubris, trapped into the delusion of his pride. The beginning of this entrapment is one conditioned by the hollow assumption of the height of human reason, a deceitful assumption that declares that the world exists to serve as object by which reason can approve of its primacy. Yet its end seems to rebound into reason's meaningless wallow into the labyrinth of despair, of which the only way out is to painfully trace the very path on which he was lost. Thus, the task that arises now is that of sketching the story of reason's downfall, the narrative of philosophy's radical mistake of departing from her original character: Love.<sup>28</sup>

Philosophy takes its origin from the great god, Love, and from it alone.<sup>29</sup> Since antiquity, Philosophy has always adopted the character of love. 'Nothing less than the name "philosophy" bears witness: 'love of wisdom.'<sup>30</sup> The beginnings of philosophy point neither immediately to a science of objects, nor to a quest for being, it is firstly a calling –a calling to love. Precisely because philosophy defines itself as love for wisdom, that it must in effect begin by loving before claiming to know.<sup>31</sup> And inasmuch as we encounter love when we first step forward as a lover-beloved, 'Philosophy comprehends only to the extent that it loves.'<sup>32</sup> In other words, the task of understanding begins with the inception of a passion to understand. No less than Aquinas himself confirms, 'wonder is the motive that led man to philosophy.'<sup>33</sup> And wonder is the only motive that will keep him there. 'In order to attain truth, it is necessary in every case, first to desire it, and therefore to love it.'<sup>34</sup> Thus philosophy is a passion, a passion which originates in wonder, ushering man towards a search for truth and meaning. And this passion was firstly articulated by the Greeks as a question of what is? A question which points to being.

From the rubbles of ancient Greece, there once stood the majestic Agora that has been a witness to the self-possessing enactments of the tragedies of Sophocles and Aeschylus, the exquisite lyricism of Aristophanes, and the stunning realism of Euripides. Yet beyond these magnificent spectacles, which have drawn thousands of spectators, there arose a strange form of discourse that has startled the minds of the ever curious citizens of Athens. A looming type speculation that concerns neither a proclamation from the Delphic oracle nor a rumor of a plague from the goddess Athena. But strangely, the subject of the conversation was so ordinary, too ordinary

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<sup>28</sup> If at all we are so concerned in scribbling the history of philosophy's regress from its status as a science, a status she gained by departing from her erotic character. Does it not at all merit tracing the history of philosophy's departure from love?

<sup>29</sup> *EP*, 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Trans. John Rowan, (Notre Dame, Indiana, USA: Dumb Ox Books, 1990) I, III, 55.

<sup>34</sup> *EP*, 3.

it was, that in its familiarity we have become estranged from it: our own lives, our own selves. The disastrous endings portrayed in the lyric poems of the great Greek tragedians put into question the whole story itself. And is not the story after all, about life? And is not questioning precisely the beginning of philosophy? Hence, in the Greeks' questioning and marveling, began the noblest quest of humanity – its quest for wisdom. The first subject of such pursuit was no less than the world itself.<sup>35</sup> The Greeks were preoccupied with the question of the cosmos, particularly on what underlies the world. They were in search for that basic stuff which constitutes the world, and from which the world sprang into being. The cosmos was the horizon of their inquiry, precisely because it presented to them their first encounter with what shall we specify here as *reality*. The captivating scenes of dramas, tragedies and myths now fail to release them from that erotic aphasia of 'wonder' before the marvels of the world. They needed a new channel to resonate their ideas and release them from the erotic entrapment. And thus the Greeks birthed philosophy, pulsating and full of vigor.

Philosophy tenaciously pursues wisdom, claiming the search for it as her sole life work. Philosophy acts almost like a stubborn suitor, relentlessly finding (in fact creating) avenues to win the love of her life. Yet in burdening herself with the task of finding, she puts herself in danger of compromising her first calling, namely 'to love.' And inasmuch as the first horizon of philosophizing was precisely the world itself, man began his search through whatever that 'is,' that is to say 'through beings.' It is no wonder that the first theories on the origin of the world were widely consistent with a keen observance of beings. Hippolytus, for instance, writes of Thales of Miletus, "Thales of Miletus, one of the seven sages, is said to have been the first to pursue natural philosophy. He said that the beginning and end of the world was water."<sup>36</sup>

Aristotle conjures Thales' proposal saying that, "he took this position because he saw that the nutriment of *all things* is moist."<sup>37</sup> Thales' theory, just like those of other early Greek thinkers was a product of their encounter with the world. From here onwards, being took the center stage having been designated as the proper

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<sup>35</sup> It is the opinion of many authors, including established philosophical historians such as Anthony Kenny and Enoch-Stumpf that the Greek *problematique* was firstly a geocentric inquiry, by which early Greek thinkers were preoccupied with the questions of cosmology.

<sup>36</sup> Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies*, I, I, 1-4. In *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy Part I*, Daniel Graham (Ed), (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 30. Comparable to Thales' theory, early Greek thinkers also developed cosmological theories that arise from an observation of the world. For instance, Anaximenes, observing that life is always associated with breathing, proposed that air is the basic stuff of the world. Anaximander on the other hand, while positing that the world is always made up of opposites (i.e. hot and cold, wet and dry, etc.), suggests that the basic stuff is an infinite boundless or 'apeiron'.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 983<sup>b</sup> 22-27, In Aquinas' *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Trans. John Rowan, (Notre Dame, Indiana, USA: Dumb Ox Books, 1995). Italics added for emphasis. Henceforth In *Metaphysicam*.

object to knowledge. And thus, philosophy birthed the grand project of science<sup>38</sup> -the project of decoding the secrets of the world with the intention of controlling and manipulating it. In so doing, philosophy conditioned even the contemporary problem of technology's grip upon the world. Philosophy took up the character of *scientia* and began to concern itself in unraveling the essence of being, but only at the price of reducing being to an object of his mind. Man thus proclaimed control over being, and over the Being that reveals itself through beings. Philosophy disowned the fire-love that ignited her burning heart, and in turning away from that fire, she begins to turn to herself. In turning to herself, philosophy ceases to accept love and her powerlessness. Philosophy forgets love, and 'philosophy forgets her forgetting to the point of denial,'<sup>39</sup> because she cannot bear to acknowledge her original astonishment towards that which she does not know. Philosophy shams her identity, declaring all things as subjected to the rigor of her method, almost in the same manner as how a scientist would declare control over the specimens of his experimentation. However, this philosophy is a false philosophy. One that diverges precisely from its true beginning – a beginning characterized by awe and wonder before the unknown. Man in the final analysis, reinvented philosophy in such a manner that it would exalt the ego. Man placed being at the center stage, only to usher the entrance of the ego that overcomes the being. Man places being and the world on stage, destined to be the actor and the plot of the ego's private spectacle. This philosophical mishap I have tried to explain from the very beginning of this treatise finds its ultimate entrapment in no less than the father of modernity, Rene Descartes.

## 2. Cartesian Egotism and the Primacy of the Ego

From the lips of Blaise Pascal, we hear an outwardly treacherous pronouncement which necessitates our hindsight: "It is not in Montaigne, but *in myself*, that I find all that I see in him."<sup>40</sup> The allusion of Pascal's pronouncement brings forth an apparent injustice by which an 'other' is judiciously judged according to the knowing ego's perception. 'Such an unsullied declaration which is given neither the intellectual significance it deserves, nor the proper rational scrutiny it calls for, is re-echoed into a more rigorous argument proposed by Descartes. 'I think, therefore I exist!'<sup>41</sup> My thinking ascertains my existence. Beyond the metaphysical implications of Descartes' cogito, the argument seems to deliberate an apparent retrospective character by which the ego assumes a place almost equal to that of a first principle (I think, I exist). Descartes' seemingly plain declaration of what he discovered after a hermetic reflection to be the first indubitable data, has after all birthed an unjust proclamation of the 'self' as the center of all things. For 'if man defines himself to

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<sup>38</sup> *EP*, 3

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 64. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>41</sup> Rene Descartes, *The Meditations*, II, 121.

himself as an ego that relates to itself constantly through its cogitation, he must establish himself as the single and necessary center of any possible world,<sup>42</sup> that everything in such world is mere object to the knowing self. This is the height of vanity!

After an arduous struggle with the deceptions of what he calls an 'evil genius,' Descartes has finally fulfilled the first goal he has set out in his *Meditations* namely, "To proceed by casting aside all that admits of the slightest doubt ... And to continue in this track until I shall find something that is certain."<sup>43</sup> Descartes has therefore proclaimed that despite the mind-bewildering deceptions this evil genius presents to him, (which has shuddered the ground for any possibility of 'certain' knowledge) there is one thing the devil cannot conceal; that is the simple fact that Descartes is being deceived, and that the devil deceives him. Descartes narrates:

I assuredly existed since I was persuaded ... I exist since I am deceived; and let him deceive me as he may, he can never bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I shall be conscious that I am something.<sup>44</sup>

Descartes has inaugurated a philosophy of consciousness,<sup>45</sup> a consciousness which stems firstly from the consciousness of one's indisputable existence.<sup>46</sup> In other words, Descartes has established the first unarguably certain fact by which the certainty of everything else can possibly be confirmed. And thus he continues; 'I am a real thing and really existent, but what thing? The answer was a *thinking thing*.'<sup>47</sup> In defining the human as 'thinking thing,' Descartes has unjustly limited the human as mere 'cogitare,' and insofar as it is unto this first unshakeable truth that the certainty of any knowledge depends on, then everything is reduced as mere '*cogitationes*' of this 'cogitare.' Descartes, on the onset of this pronouncement, has irrevocably reduced everything else (even other possible cogitare) as mere objects. And so we inquire: 'does this ego which enjoys an uncontested metaphysical and epistemological primacy, acknowledge other "subjects" that are not directly dependent on it as so many objects?'<sup>48</sup> True enough, Descartes never failed to mention an 'other' or more appropriately, 'another mind or human.' Minds other than the ego do appear in the *Meditations*, in Meditation I in particular. But they do so only to disappear

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<sup>42</sup> CQ 118.

<sup>43</sup> Descartes, *The Meditations*, II, 118.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 119.

<sup>45</sup> Lilian Alweiss, *I am, I exist, in Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, Ian Leask and Eion Cassidy (Eds.), (New York, USA: Fordham University Press, 2005) 37.

<sup>46</sup> Although perhaps it remains questionable how Descartes could have carelessly qualified his inference 'Cogito ergo sum,' whence he fails to logically deduce 'sum' from the 'cogito.' Alweiss put it quite plainly: "the equation between thinking and existence is merely assumed." Quoted From Lilian Alweiss' *I think, I Exist*, 38.

<sup>47</sup> Descartes, *The Meditations*, II, 121.

<sup>48</sup> CQ 120.

immediately when radical doubt is brought to bear.<sup>49</sup> Descartes mentions another ‘mens,’ only to label it as crazy or mindless!

In the course of the *Meditations*, we observe Descartes doubting the existence of all things (including other *mens/cogitare*) only to conclude later that these external realities do exist insofar as his idea of them confirms their existence. He narrates:

Because I can draw from my thought the idea of an object (and this idea cannot come from nowhere), it follows that all I clearly apprehend to pertain to this object, does in truth belong to it.<sup>50</sup>

Descartes indeed was able to establish the existence and certainty of things external of the ego. But he does so secondarily. Jean-Luc Marion argues; “how can it be that the existence of other, separate intelligences is actually not one of the first things to be discovered by philosophizing in an orderly way?”<sup>51</sup> Descartes has unjustly established the ego as first principle through which an ‘other’ is confirmed as existent. The other is rendered existence and certainty through the ego’s acknowledgement. But “can we not know others without accepting also to be acknowledged by them?”<sup>52</sup>

Adding up to the already treacherous implications of Descartes’ Cogito is the glaring realization that the egotism it sends forth is one which results neither from a free decision nor from a moral mishap that can be reversed by some Augustinian altruism, but an egotism which stems from the definition of the cogito – I think, therefore I am. I cannot but think, I cannot but objectify reality, I cannot but be egoistic. ‘I am not free, nor is the self within me, to be unjustly egoistical, for if I were not egoistical, I would simply not be, since I exist only through the ego.’<sup>53</sup> The egotism of the human is one which amounts precisely to his very definition as subject or ego. Jean-Luc Marion points out:

The Self cannot cease to be unjust, even if it may cease to be inconvenient; a free decision can alter the inconvenience, but not the injustice of the egoism of the self. In other words, the self is not free to entirely free itself from its own egotism ... it may overcome the inconvenience of the egoism—that is to say, the external appearance it offers to the gaze of others, but not the injustice, that is to say, the intimate constitution of the self by itself (and according to which it appears to itself)<sup>54</sup>

The ego lays claim to all things as dependent to him. In fact, even in proving the existence of God, the ego falls into a problematic ontology of suggesting the

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Descartes, *The Meditations*, V, 155.

<sup>51</sup> CQ, 121.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*



existence of an all-perfect God by means of idolizing his idea of God as perfect and existent. God as all things are, is rendered dependent to the confirmation of the ego; my idea of a perfect and infinite God cannot come from nowhere, for nothing comes from nothing. Therefore 'this idea is truly a perception of a really existing perfect and infinite God.'<sup>55</sup>

### 3. Reduction into Objects and the Blindness of the Ego

In his frantic search for certainty, Descartes has transformed the ego into some metaphysical solipsist, where the self becomes the absolute arbiter to reality. After concluding that the purest and sole indubitable data is the '*ego cogitatio*,' that is to say, that his 'thinking of himself' is the precise proof for his own existence. He nonetheless went too far so as to suggest that anything external of the ego can be granted existence through recourse to his idea of them. "What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that this world is my world."<sup>56</sup> Things outside are nothing more but the things in my head! Following Descartes' logic, the existence of an other is subjected to the rigor of knowledge. The cogito becomes the sift that handpicks what can exist and what cannot. Whatever things I grant to be knowable with certainty, are the only things that merit the name being. The existence of other beings (including God) depends on the clarity of my thought. They all depend on me! "Men are men not because they make themselves known to the ego, but because the ego decides that they are men, and decides for them in their absence."<sup>57</sup> Here, the ego imposes its idea as the sole standard to reality. Almost like a sculptor, the cogito claims for itself the freedom to fashion a world of its own liking. By objectifying the world, the ego creates an idol of everything else. It perceives the world according to the shades of his ideas. Like a cold-blooded beast, the ego hopelessly sees the world in a single color. While assured on the clarity of a colorless world, it misses precisely the colorfulness that is life itself. In is in this sense that the cogito is the epitome of idolatry. Not only does it exclude the uncertain, but it substitutes for the uncertain a lifeless certainty.

### 4. Dismissal of Revelation

In idolizing a world created of by his own ideas, the ego imposes a definitive injustice to all. It prevents any 'other' from reaching-out and presenting his 'true self.' Indeed it subdues any epiphany, any encounter, and any phenomenon. Since, the existence and definition of everything else is already concluded from the ego's ideas, then the ego turns a blind eye from the revelatory character of reality. It is in this sense that the ego conceptually restraints any possibility for revelation. In creating a world 'preset' and 'limited' to objects, the ego prevents the 'other' from appearing.

<sup>55</sup> Descartes, *The Meditations*, III.

<sup>56</sup> Lilian Alweiss, *I am, I Exist*, 40.

<sup>57</sup> CQ 124.

The other is always already constituted even before it presents itself. The other is mute, unable to speak about himself. And yet, what proves to be a greater injustice is not only the dismissal of revelation, but its replacement by an identity created by the ego.

Here, we find an allusion to the story of the golden calf. The children of Israel did not only dismiss and prevented Yahweh from manifesting Himself through the prophecies of Moses, but they substituted for Him a god of their own making –the golden calf. And this is essentially what Cartesian reduction is all about–idolatry par excellence! In concluding the existence and definition of God, Descartes turns to his ‘certain idea of God.’<sup>58</sup> Revelation itself has no place. God is rendered mute, already constituted and objectified like a thing of the world. From this Cartesian mishap, Jean-Luc Marion thus envisions a rehabilitation of the ‘subject,’ a reinvention of the cogito into a subject that admits phenomenon. Here, Marion already anticipates an aspect to his later proposal, namely, the subject as a recipient. He thus turns his gaze to other thinkers with the hope of encountering a concept of the subject that admits the revelatory character of truth. The search for the ‘gifted’ has begun.

## Epilogue

In a world where philosophical thinking (in fact thinking in general) have become more and more manipulative in an ever escalating manner, we find in Marion a return-path to the originary ‘revelatory character’ of truth, before whom man is essentially a witness. As Marion ventures into a phenomenological understanding of the possibility of revelation, he likewise turns his thought towards ‘the gaze’ to whom this revelation is revealed, indeed given! To whom is the revelation revealed? To whom is the gift given? Insofar as gifts point firstly to a possible recipient, then giving embarks some manner of receiving, including the manner of not receiving. ‘Giving’ is an act of reaching out where one renders himself vulnerable to rejection. A rejection not only of the gift, but in a cruelty disguised in a remarkably subtle manner, the rejection of the giver Himself. The earliest philosophical account to which Marion alludes this ‘manner of reception,’ is one attributed to the second most notable proponent of rationalism, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Marion cites: “Nothing is done without sufficient reason, nothing happens without it being possible for the one who sufficiently knows things to give a reason why it is thus and not otherwise.”<sup>59</sup> Here, Leibniz’s proposal for the intelligibility of revelation hinges on the power of a mind to justify the revelation’s having appeared. In simple terms, for a gift to be rendered a given, the gift must be presented in a manner that respects the recipient’s justification for a gift. The gift ‘therefore appears only on condition, alienated by an

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<sup>58</sup> Descartes, *The Meditations*, II.

<sup>59</sup> BG,184.

imposed phenomenality.<sup>60</sup> It is imposed, insofar as the gift's phenomenality comes to it by a power other than itself. And alienated, insofar as the gift loses its pristine generosity to a self that manipulates the givenness of the gift itself. Not only is the gift manipulated, but the 'act of giving' is itself blatantly dismissed! The subject, who is a gifted witness and beholder to the unfolding of reality, proclaims himself as its master! And not only does the subject account the appearing of phenomenon to himself, but in a strikingly bold manner the subject creates a world for himself, arbitrarily handpicking which 'truth' deserves to 'exist' (and which does not). This form of nihilism is one that Leibniz perhaps inherited from his pretentious predecessor.

Here onwards, Marion turns his thought towards the concept of the human-subject at the hope of rehabilitating it. A rehabilitation which was first taken up by the early postmodern thinkers. Thinkers from whom Marion owes his phenomenological breakthrough, thinkers who like Marion, envisioned to escape the Cartesian entrapment. We shall henceforth proceed into an exposition of Marion's critique on these 'philosophers of the subject.'

### **The Collapse of the Idols: Critiquing the Philosophers of the Subject**

The ground-breaking statement for which the father of phenomenology is perhaps most known for, is the very same remark that exhibits the summit of his sarcasm: "One might call transcendental phenomenology a neo-Cartesianism, (*but only*) to the extent that it is obliged to reject nearly all well-known doctrinal content of Cartesian philosophy."<sup>61</sup> The turn of phrase barely conceals the depreciating humor behind the praise. And yet, "inasmuch as one does not overcome a true thinking by refuting it, but rather by repeating it, and borrowing from it the means to think with and *beyond* it,"<sup>62</sup> then perhaps the sarcasm is after all a sigh of satisfaction. A sigh of relief, nay of liberation, nay of breaking-free from the Cartesian ego that haunted him for years. Liberation perhaps according to Husserl's satisfaction, but not basing on the convenience of his texts. Let not the audacity of this (my) claim shroud the strong contention behind it: Husserl's work, and that of his intellectual kinsmen, is haunted by the ego to this very day.

If at all modern philosophy is criticized for its conception of a close-minded science, to the point where cognition loses its very meaningfulness to an ego that assumes the place of a 'know-it-all' intellectual primate, then a breakthrough work destined to usher a new era of philosophizing is one that must accommodate cognition back to its witness stand –to yield more space for knowing, indeed for knowing to yield more knowledge than some poor a priori ideas. While for Marion, "possibility

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, § 1. My emphasis.

<sup>62</sup> RG, 3.

in truth surpasses actuality,”<sup>63</sup> we shall thus approach this difficulty as a question of breadth and extent. To what extent is knowledge made possible? Or to put it more delicately, what is the extent of possible knowledge, according to the philosophers of the subject? Breadth and extent thus becomes the measure of a breakthrough. It is not our intention here to pit one philosopher against another by some mock refutations, but only to discover how one overcomes another by thinking beyond him. And thus accommodating more possibilities to knowledge, until at last we arrive at that plane where knowledge admits a genuine possibility for revelation.

It is therefore a matter of re-reading once more the breakthroughs of early postmodern thinkers, with the aim of outlining the extent to which their thinking allows the appearance of the phenomenon. Observing thereupon their limitations, and therefore the yielding into a thinking that will accommodate revelation – Marion’s phenomenology.

### 1. Kant’s Last Vain Attempt

The story begins with Immanuel Kant’s last attempt at rehabilitating the modern tradition. Kant envisioned to accommodate rationalism while at once refusing to disregard empiricism. If at all, his goal was to admit *a priori* knowledge while at once acknowledging their *a posteriori* source. Cynicism is not uncommon here. Let alone in itself, Kant’s argument might as well pass for a genealogy of requirements (categories). The *Prolegomena*<sup>64</sup> itself pronounces, “The formal aspect of nature is the conformity to law of all objects of experience.”<sup>65</sup> The same logic is admitted by Kant in his famous edict herewith cited from Marion’s text: “that which agrees with the formal conditions of experience, that is, with the conditions of intuitions and concepts is possible.”<sup>66</sup>

Following Kant’s (supposedly analytical) pronouncement, ‘only those phenomena which admit these conditions are allowed the right to appear.’<sup>67</sup> We can therefore know things only as they appear in experience (phenomenon), albeit discriminating the ‘supra-experience’ nature of things –the things in themselves (noumenon). What better name can we give to this if not idolatry! From our experience, we produce *a priori* determinations according to which alone, we shall name and evaluate future experiences. “We can” says Kant, “prior to all given objects have a knowledge of those conditions according to which alone experience of

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, Trans. L.W. Beck, (New York, USA: Liberal Arts Press, 1951) § 17. Henceforth *Prolegomena*.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> See BG, 181.

<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey Kosky, *Philosophy of Religion and Return to Phenomenology*, 633.

them is possible.”<sup>68</sup> In some pre-cognitive phase, we produce through experiential deduction the categories of being.<sup>69</sup> Heretofore, any possible experience or cognition shall bear upon the categories. The categories thus serve as the sole determinant of the breadth for which knowledge is possible. A prior experience is thus consecrated into a pedestal, signifying its lording over future experiences. One can, for instance, recognize a chair only according to a prior knowledge (and category/standard for which one can name something as a chair) resulting from a previous encounter with a chair in the past. Here, every experience becomes shrouded by presuppositions. Things can be known, but only to the extent that *mya priori* judgment allows it. Experience thereby fails to provide a new and fresh encounter. In fact, experience itself is mocked and insulted. No experience is new, since the very encounter is itself arbitrated according to what I already know! That which gives itself in experience is therefore rejected for what it truly is.

Let us consider this example. When Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt, the Israelites encountered God in his pristine might and power. Following Kant’s principle, the experience thus creates an image of God as the ‘mighty and powerful.’ God is therefore understood, indeed limited to the definitions of ‘power’ and ‘might’ – as if these alone constitute the essence of God. Hence, when Yahweh manifested Himself as a carpenter’s son, the Israelites did not recognize Him. In fact, they murdered Him! Here then lies the idolatry of Kantian synthetic a priori judgment. It seeks to petrify and fossilize reality. It seeks to encapsulate a reality whose very essence is precisely its inexhaustibility! In its attempt thus to judge future experiences according to past deductions, lies the idolatry of Kantian philosophy. What Kant perhaps misses is the simple fact that reality is always new. It offers itself in every encounter, pregnant with fresh and new aspects to itself. One can walk in the same street all the time, and still discover something he did not notice in the past.

### 1. The Breakthrough: Husserl and the Primacy of Intuition

Phenomenological breakthrough as Husserl sees it must therefore consist of approaching reality without presuppositions –to philosophize without assumptions. One must embrace a creed of ignorance, but not with the goal of conquering it in the end (as with Descartes), but only to relive the ancient site where man approaches reality with the waiting eyes of a willing witness. Husserl pronounces: “We thus begin, everyone for himself and in himself with the decision to disregard all our present knowledge. We do not give up Descartes’ guiding goal of an absolute foundation for knowledge. At the beginning, however, to presuppose even the possibility of that

<sup>68</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena*, § 17.

<sup>69</sup> It is not our task here to evaluate the categories (namely quantity, quality, relation, modality), nominal awareness of them and the ends for which they were devised will be sufficient.

goal would be prejudice.”<sup>70</sup> If one thus poses the question of cognition on the father of phenomenology, he would perhaps point to the originary giving intuition one encounters in experience. To approach reality is to go back to our basic experiences and let our experiences speak of what reality is all about. To know reality is to describe ‘the given’ in experience, and to describe it as broadly as possible. Here, Husserl overcomes the limitation of Kantian thought by suspending judgments on reality, and approaching it only as it presents itself *hic et nunc*! Husserl then names the given as ‘intuition.’

In the process where one intends or aims at an object, one needs only to go back to the intuition-birthing experience, and discover from it the different aspects to the intended reality.<sup>71</sup> “One must lead reflection back to its own acts, and therefore lead conceptions back toward the intuition that corresponds to them.”<sup>72</sup> To know a person for instance, is to reflect upon our experiences with this particular person. And let those experiences reveal who the person really is. Borrowing the carry-on tag line of the whole of phenomenology: We must return to the things themselves!<sup>73</sup> “It is *only* by tracing knowledge back to adequate fulfilment in intuition can we uncover its pure forms and laws.”<sup>74</sup>

In order to shed light on what our limited natural human-gaze fails to let appear or understand, there corresponds the need to go back to the originary fulfilling intuition. Intuition thus (apparently) assumes primacy. Marion remarks, “The breakthrough has to do with the elevation of intuition as the worker of evidence.”<sup>75</sup> And did not Husserl himself proclaim: “(I) judge only by the evidence?! ”<sup>76</sup> Hence, to ‘go back to the things themselves is nothing more but to return to the given intuition.’ There is however one point of confusion here. While, on the one hand, every intentionality (thought) receives assurance from a corresponding intuition, or experiential evidence (thus granting primacy to ‘the given’ in intuition), intuition on the other hand, correspondingly gains meaning only and only if, it had an intentional signification (expectation) whose fulfilment it assures. “Intuition would remain blind if no concept subsumed it.”<sup>77</sup> This implies that in order for ‘the given’ in intuition

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<sup>70</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Paris Lectures*, (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964) 46. Henceforth *Paris Lectures*.

<sup>71</sup> Perhaps this is the reason the simplest human desire is in the nostalgia. This dreamy recounting brings us back to the memory itself, and allows the memory to speak to us once again –to teach us once more! Nostalgia thus offers the possibility of experiencing the delight of learning and relearning fresh and anew.

<sup>72</sup> RG, 7.

<sup>73</sup> C.f. Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations* Vol. 2, Trans. J.N. Findlay, & Ted Honderich (Ed)., (London, UK: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1977) 6<sup>th</sup> Investigations starting pp. 667.

<sup>74</sup> Timothy Mooney, *Hubris and Humility*, 48.

<sup>75</sup> RG, 8.

<sup>76</sup> Husserl, *Paris Lectures*, 46. My emphasis.

<sup>77</sup> RG, 12.

to appear, it should present itself as a ‘fulfilling intuition’ – one that addresses the intentionality of the subject. It should present itself only as an answer to a query, to my query. In order to recognize a house for instance, I must somehow see this house first. And only upon this pre-knowing ideal of a house that we can claim the intuition of this ‘particular house’ as fulfilling and meaningful. The phenomenon thus appears only if it finds an expecting intentionality. Here, the breakthrough Husserl painstakingly tried to legitimize rebounds into some form of absolute subjectivism, “I and my life remain – in my sense of reality.”<sup>78</sup> We are thus led to the center of cognition itself, the conscious self, the transcendental ‘I’. We discover that we ourselves are the life of consciousness through which the objective world exist in its entirety.<sup>79</sup> Husserl proclaims, “I have discovered my true self. I have discovered that I alone am the pure ego, with pure existence . . . Through this ego alone does the being of the world, and, for that matter, any being whatsoever, make sense to me and have possible validity.”<sup>80</sup> Any intuition thus is valid and meaningful for as long as it fulfills my intentionality, my aim, indeed my conceptual expectation. Unlike Descartes who acknowledged the ego as the first premise in a logical derivation of the world, Husserl argues that the world is contained in the experiences and intuitions of the self, in my intuition. “For me, the world is nothing other than what I am aware of and what appears valid in such acts of my thoughts... I cannot live, experience, think, value, and act in any world which is not in some sense in me, and derives its meaning and truth in me.”<sup>81</sup> Here lies what Timothy Mooney would term as Husserl’s philosophical hubris. And “this hubris lies in the understanding of *everything as a meaning for me*, from God through to the world.”<sup>82</sup>

## 2. The Broadening: Husserl and the Principle of Principles

In an effort to save or perhaps to “stiffen” his phenomenological breakthrough, Husserl introduced his own version of the principle of principles: “Every originally giving intuition is a *source of right* for cognition – everything that offers itself originally to us in intuition must simply be received for what it gives itself.”<sup>83</sup> Here, the subject is rendered a witness (a most privileged recipient) to the birthing of reality. The primacy accorded to the phenomenon gives it the power to justify itself ‘from itself’ before the gaze of Husserl’s transcendental ‘I’. Hence, cognition assumes its true humble (yet noble) place as the vanguard of truth. A servant of truth! A custodian who admits truth to itself according to his own capacity. With this pronouncement,

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<sup>78</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Paris Lectures*, 50.

<sup>79</sup> C.f. *Paris Lectures*, pp. 50 onwards.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Timothy Mooney, *Hubris and Humility*, 48. My emphasis.

<sup>83</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas I*, in *The Idea of Phenomenology*, Trans. Ted Klein & William Pohl, (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Publishing, 1995) §2. My emphasis.

Husserl would already anticipate Martin Heidegger's famous description of the phenomenon as "that which shows itself in itself from itself."<sup>84</sup> For Husserl of the text quoted above, the phenomenon attributes to itself the primacy of its own appearing. And it may appear that the father of phenomenology could have promulgated what Marion believes to be the rightful 'phenomenological breakthrough', if not for the phrase that follows his esteemed pronouncement, which, according to Marion, has invalidated everything he (Husserl) believed in. This action is seen when Husserl added the qualifying phrase: *without passing beyond the limits* in which it gives itself.<sup>85</sup> While the revelatory character of the phenomenon is granted primacy (without any intuition given to intention there is no possibility for any phenomenon), it is after all defined, indeed restricted by the horizon of the transcendental 'I' (with no intention to receive this intuition, there is no possibility for any phenomenon). Hopelessly assuming once more the role of an intuitive primate, the transcendental I constitutes reality by means of a horizon. This horizon, drawn by one's intentional aim, lays down the condition for any phenomenon. "Intentionality therefore displays an autonomy to which intuition offers only an eventual complement."<sup>86</sup> Husserl thus "submits givenness to the *unquestioned* paradigm of a constituted object."<sup>87</sup> Any phenomenon that gives itself through intuition is therefore rendered a dry, limited, indeed a lifeless response to an intentionality that already conditioned within itself the only response it can admit for an answer. It is as if the constituting 'I' creates an empty cylindrical container, of which the given in intuition is the liquid that fills the cylinder. Hence, even before the intuition-response is given, the 'I' already sketched the very possibility and limitation of the response itself.

For a while, it seemed to make sense that in order for something to be understood, it must address the intentionality of the subject. But one must realize that this pronouncement discounts the character of the phenomenon which appears. It does not distinguish between objects, humans, or even the unthinkable. Moreover, this also implies that 'the appearing phenomena are all seen by the 'I' in some kind of symmetry to its own self, a symmetry that indicates, even further, a kind of appropriation."<sup>88</sup> In such a subtle manner (that often eludes the scrutiny of Husserl diehards), the transcendental 'I' assumes a solitary place where he can examine reality in an utterly impersonal manner, in which he can decide which object can satisfy his intentionality. "The world becomes a private spectacle for consciousness, a consciousness that is also the absolute director and exclusive audience of this

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<sup>84</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, (New York, USA: Harper and Row, 2008) §7.

<sup>85</sup> Husserl, *Ideas*, §2. My emphasis.

<sup>86</sup> Timothy Mooney, *Hubris and Humility*, 49.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* 52. My emphasis.

<sup>88</sup> John Manoussakis, *The Phenomenon of God*, 56.



performance.”<sup>89</sup> Here, the ‘I’ leaves neither room nor possibility of encounter with the other. The other suffers injustice and violence by secretly being perceived as a character in a world of fake performances. For just like in any performance, the character played by the actor is in no way suggestive of who the actor really is in person. This is precisely why the actor is called an “*actor*,” because he is conditioned to act in a predetermined role. Hence, acting does not only violate the person’s freedom to proclaim to the world who he truly is, but it also forces him to assume someone he’s not. This is the very same indictment Jesus received from the Jews. Because he revealed his true-self instead of acting-out a preconditioned role tantamount to a ‘carpenter’s son,’ Jesus was accused of falsity, ironically, for being true.

Following Husserl’s logic, reduction is perverted into some state of solipsism where the ‘I’ assumes the identity of a first cause. – the primate to whom others depend for their existence and intelligibility. Paul Ricoeur provided insightful statements in his analysis of Husserl’s phenomenology, he writes: “The sense ‘Other’ is drawn from the sense ‘Me’...there is something ‘alien’ because there is something ‘own’ and not conversely!”<sup>90</sup> Here, Ricoeur concludes that the possibility for an other (including the Wholly Other –God) to appear, necessitates a ‘me’ – a lieu in whose intentionality lies both the possibility and limitation of appearing. In simple terms, for an other to appear, it must find a ground or affinity in ‘me.’ And ultimately, Ricoeur’s proposal hinges on Husserl’s transcendental ‘I’ which (yes which) operates only by means of a horizon. A horizon that corresponds to what Husserl calls an ‘as-if-experience’<sup>91</sup> –a realm of imagination. Whatever is imaginable is possible! Or more appropriately, whatever I render imaginable is possible. But the ineffable and the transcendent is precisely the unimaginable. Hence the problematique is how the unimaginable can assume a place in the realm of the imaginable, whence precisely being the unimaginable, it cannot find a ground in the sphere of imagination. Here, the ineffable suffers injustice since Husserl situates His appearing within the limits of a horizon. And that is exactly what horizon means: the limit.<sup>92</sup> I have to somehow see God, in order for me to register his appearing as experience. God can therefore appear, but only in a manner my imagination renders possible.

The concept of horizon seeks ‘to ground the groundless, to limit the limitless, to reduce the infinite into the finite proportions,’<sup>93</sup> in short, to create an object out of the unobjectifiable. What else should best describe idolatry. In a seemingly

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of his Phenomenology*, Trans. Eduard Bollard & Lester Embree, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1967) 119.

<sup>91</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, Trans. Dorion Cairns, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970) §12.

<sup>92</sup> John Manoussakis, *The Phenomenon of God*, 58.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 57.

pessimistic admittance, Derrida suggests that in order to avoid the objectifying gaze of the transcendental 'I,' the infinite and the ineffable should altogether prevent itself from appearing. Hence the famous saying attributed to Derrida; 'let God be God;' let Him maintain His aloofness if but He could save himself from objectification. Marion, for his part, perceives this apparent 'divine silence' not as a saving grace that can prevent us from objectifying the divine, but as an utter approval that can further ignite our passion to create more idols of a God who refuses to be seen!<sup>94</sup> Instead of preventing us from murdering the divine by means of our idolatrous imaginations of his appearing, this divine silence all the more entices us to recite the parting lines of Rene Char's sonnet, 'Remain the celestial, the one killed.'<sup>95</sup> Again, the possibility of a religious phenomenon is here dismissed and rendered not possible without some form of injustice.

### 3. Supra-Philosophy: Heidegger and the Demarcation of the Question of God

In a world beset by the mentality which seeks to petrify and fossilize reality (to the point where 'statistics' become the arbiter of human decisions), we envision to understand, predict, while at once limiting reality's possibilities. However, in our fanatical rush towards decoding the secrets of the world, we at once fall into the frenzy of controlling it – to place it under tags and labels almost in the same manner as when we produce markers for specimens. We fail to recognize that 'truth' is a process of unveiling, of lighting and clearing.<sup>96</sup> In the words of Martin Heidegger, "thinking is awakening a readiness in man for a possibility whose contour remains *obscure*, whose coming remains *uncertain*."<sup>97</sup> It is a propensity by which Dasein must approach the world and encounter in it both the defining questions to life, and the answers therein revealed obscurely and tentatively in the unpredicted events of life. To borrow the words of the Pseudo-Areopagite, "the realities of the world both reveal and conceal the truth behind them."<sup>98</sup> Here we can interpret Heidegger's appropriation as a leaning towards the revelatory character of reality and truth which at one point is concealed from human vision, hereby birthing the Dasein's angst and anxiety. Heidegger thus describes the human-Dasein as 'being-in-the-world' –a description which is also a

<sup>94</sup> Here we find an allusion to the story of the 'golden calf'.

<sup>95</sup> Attributed to Rene Char, quoted from Marion's *The Idol and the Distance*, 1.

<sup>96</sup> In a tribute work to Martin Heidegger, Gadamer re-echoes precisely this point: "Truth is constant in danger of receding back into darkness, that efforts at conceptualization must involve efforts to keep truth from receding back, and even this receding back must be thought of as an event of truth." Quoted from Heidegger's *Ways*, Trans. John Stanley, (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 1994) 63.

<sup>97</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, in *Basic Writings*, David Krell (Ed), (New York, USA: Harper Collins, 1993). My emphasis.

<sup>98</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, quoted and translated by Fran O'Rourke, in *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992) 11.

subtle exhortation to approach the world. To approach reality and life, despite its unpredictability and ambiguity! After all, is not ambiguity the character of life? Is not life's haziness precisely what propels all hope and longing? Heidegger seems to have adopted what Marion would consider the proper disposition towards the ineffable. A disposition that acknowledges one's utter incapacity to fully understand reality, much more the ultimate reality. Dispositional thinking however, does not always convert into the same quality of knowledge. Let us then examine Heidegger's unique breakthrough, beginning with his indebtedness to Husserl.

Despite all oppositions, "the breakthrough is a break beyond Metaphysics!"<sup>99</sup> Edmund Husserl's phenomenological breakthrough designated the givenness of Being in intuition. In so doing, it allowed Heidegger to pursue the question of the meaning of Being, as if it were already beyond metaphysics!<sup>100</sup> After Husserl, Being became 'the given' in all intuition-birthing experience. "Being is no longer a concept, (nor) a pure abstraction."<sup>101</sup> Being became the Being of encounter, the Being of temporality, the Being of life. The question on the meaning of Being thus points us back to the world, it ushers us back to life. It leads us on a quest concerning the truly ontological determination of Being, concerning what it reveals and conceals of itself. It is in this sense that Heidegger calls on us to revisit those primordial experiences where being is encountered and given. Unlike the presumptuous modern metaphysics, which 'already has the pre-conception of the meaning of Being in the mode of simple ideal deduction,'<sup>102</sup> Heidegger raised the question of Being under the aspect of temporality. Here, one might recall Heidegger's condemnation of traditional metaphysics and ontology. Traditions, which according to him, were nothing more but "mere joining together of traditional pieces into a single edifice"<sup>103</sup> – traditions which veil the fact that they have no ground of their own to stand on. "Metaphysics indeed does not think its own foundation."<sup>104</sup> Heidegger thus condemns metaphysics (or at least the metaphysics that he knew) as a thinking devoid of both historicity and practicality. It is a thinking that claims an access to Being and reality, but only by concealing the fact that it departs from any ground in reality itself. Hence the publication of his famous triptych: "The task of destroying the History of Ontology."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> RG, 5.

<sup>100</sup> C.f. RG, Chap. 1 and 4; Martin Heidegger, *Summary of a Seminar on the Lecture Time and Being*, in *Zur Sache des Denkens*, (Pfullingen, 1976).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Martin Heidegger, Freiburg Lecture of 1921 – *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, cited in Jean Luc Marion's *Reduction and Givenness*, (Illinois, USA: Northwestern University Press, 1998) 77.

<sup>103</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, II, ¶ 6, 22.

<sup>104</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Heidegger's Ways*, 48.

<sup>105</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, II, ¶ 6, 20-27.

Metaphysics furnishes us with a groundless body of concepts, specifically a concept of Being without basis. It leads us to assume that the contexts through which the concepts were pulled-out are not important. Metaphysics, as Heidegger sees it, is a thinking that approaches the heavenly discourse of logic in place of perhaps a more meaningful side to speculation, namely, the opportunity to think life itself. Heidegger notes that philosophy makes sense only when it touches upon our deepest experiences and concerns in life. Nothing less than the title of his magnum opus confirms, *Being and Time*. Being is in time, it is situated in temporality, in the practical concerns of man.

It is upon this background that Heidegger demarcates the question of God from philosophical speculation.<sup>106</sup> It might be reasonable to think that Heidegger's decision to demarcate the question of God is a result of his prejudice against the prevalent onto-theological approach to God. Heidegger perceives metaphysics as an entanglement to faith. He accuses metaphysics, in fact philosophy in general, as a veiled theology. Heidegger argues that metaphysicians have erroneously equated Being to God. In so doing, metaphysics transformed itself into an abstract thinking of God. This contention led Heidegger to reject any form of 'God-talk'. He adopted what Paul Hemming termed as 'methodical atheism.'<sup>107</sup> Heidegger refused to think philosophically the essence of God, but only for the sake of appropriation. He envisioned to free God from the ruthlessly abstract metaphysical speculations. Likewise, he frees philosophy from the clutches of onto-theology. Heidegger thus falls silent on the discourse on God, but he nonetheless offered the question as a fundamental challenge to Dasein. Heidegger transposed the question of God as a concern for the human.<sup>108</sup> As if to imply that the question of God's manifestation is one that must be addressed by the believer as a fundamentally temporal concern. The question of God is therefore reduced as a mere 'issue' for Dasein. Just one of the my many issues. The possibility of revelation is wholly dependent on the being who can either admit or dismiss God as one of his concerns in life. "God is reduced into a supreme being who is not in fact supreme-since in order to operate at all, he must first operate within the conditions of Dasein."<sup>109</sup> Again, the logic we have painstakingly tried to elude resurrects once more in Heidegger.

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<sup>106</sup> See Lawrence Paul Hemming, *Heidegger's Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press) 2002.

<sup>107</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Although perhaps, a great volume of his text lead precisely to this question. The resolution of this issue however, is not the business of this study.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas Carlson, *From His Introduction in Marion's The Idol and the Distance: Five Studies*, (New York, USA: Fordham University Press, 2001) XXI.

## Epilogue

To liberate –this has been the summary of all our efforts to this very point. To liberate God from the alienation in which He has been placed, indeed condemned to dwell. We have so far outlined a genealogy of philosophies which understand God's revelation in terms of everything else, but His unconditional self-showing. To those for whom generalization is a crime, let me here commit that sweet transgression if at all it is for so noble a cause. Permit me thus to make this bold claim–the philosophies we have presented to this point, all together occlude revelation in its truest sense. They are nothing more but traditions that demand the ineffable to appear not in His own manner of appearing, but according to some objectified human experience. Objectifications which took different names and versions that forwarded varying degrees of injustice. From the ego cogito, to the transcendental I, nay to Dasein even, the search for a thinking broad enough to accommodate God's appearing remains elusive. Perhaps we might have observed the gradual broadening of horizon as we moved from one thinker to another, but none to the point where a revelation worthy of the name can in fact appear. Phenomenality is still alienated, that is, the reason and mode for appearing is placed outside or beyond the appearing itself. Either the mode of appearing is domesticated according to the taste of some assuming perceiver, or restricted by the limitations forwarded by a constructed horizon. Before this utter close-mindedness, the divine remains silent. Or perhaps, silenced.

To think that this exposition is one that condemns the breakthroughs of the philosophies *pre-sented*, is downright misconception. We must note that, “Deconstruction is also *de* construction.”<sup>110</sup> The retracing we have painstakingly carried–out is therefore an essential step to understanding the trajectory of Marion's thought. The breakthroughs and failures of Marion's intellectual predecessors both contributed to the birthing of the new phenomenology. If at all, Marion's breakthrough was in fact necessitated by the difficulty exposed by these philosophers. The audacity of our criticism is therefore the true mark of our humble indebtedness. Philosophy is a light, and philosophers are bearers of that light. In the event thus that a bearer falls, and the light together with him, then perhaps another must rise to bear the light to a new path. Marion's intellectual journey is a chasing of that light, to the point where he himself will now have to carry the light to a fresh path. We thus understand Marion's breakthrough not as a rejection of Descartes, nor Kant, nor Husserl, nor Heidegger, but a re-fashioning! A broadening of their concepts until at last we reach that thinking that can accommodate revelation back to philosophical discourse.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Anthony Morrow, *The Love without Being that Opens the Distance Part 1*, HeyJ, Vol. XLVI, (2005). 282.

<sup>111</sup> Anthony Morrow phrases it quite clearly: “Put somewhat differently, Marion is concerned to show that metaphysics in its preoccupation with Being fails to offer a sufficiently broad enough

## Sketching the Possibility of the Phenomenon

Being given – the phrase seems most self-evident.<sup>112</sup> A metaphysically disposed mind readily understands the phrase to mean that a ‘being’ *is* given. The statement thus points to being firstly as ‘*is*,’ that is to say, that ‘the being *is*,’ and is thenceforth given. But if this is the case, then why not on the contrary simply restate the formula perhaps with a copula or an article? If this is the case, then why not simply speak the tautology, which philosophy spoke of again and again since time immemorial, that ‘being exists’ and is thus given to us in existence? Perhaps to re-echo Husserl’s proclamation that intuition *is given* to intentionality, or maybe to restate Heidegger’s pronouncement regarding Dasein’s quest on the meaning of being. And yet, this thinking begs the question of givenness itself. To whom do we attribute the act of giving? If the cogito, the transcendental I, and the Dasein, render themselves as the receiver of the given (without enquiring yet on the nature of the given), that is to say, to let the subject be the receptor of whatever one might choose to call the given (intuition, being, idea, or anything else), the question that remains essential is this –to whom should the appearing be attributed? Or to put it more delicately, who makes the appearing possible? The answer is quite obvious. For the cogito, any possibility hinges on the clarity of *my* thought. For Kant, *my* past deductions outline the possibility of any future appearing. For the transcendental ‘I,’ appearing is possible only when it is within the ambit of *my* imagination. For Dasein, appearing coincides with *my* concern over the appearing itself. In summary thus, it is *I* who render the appearing possible, it is *I* in fact, who constitute the appearing itself, according to the purview of *my* thought. The phenomenon thus suffers injustice, since in order to appear, it must in effect render itself limited and commensurate only to the intentionality and horizon of the subject. The appearing thus culminates in a final humiliation where the Ineffable should present itself in a manner that violates precisely His ineffability. This is what is at stake in Jean-Luc Marion’s objection. To say that the phenomenon is granted phenomenality by the *I* is to suggest indeed that the phenomenon appears according to the conditions of the *I*. According to an imposed and borrowed phenomenality, as if the phenomenon has no right in itself to appear! No less than the title of Marion’s greatest phenomenological work bears the objection: “Being-Given.” The apparent self-explanatory gesture of the phrase barely conceals the dispute it manifests. Being-given can be interpreted both in the reflexive and passive modes. The philosophers of the subject on the one hand, favor the passive textual rendition –“being is given.” This interpretation “implies a hidden

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horizon for love to appear as such, because this preoccupation ineluctably leads metaphysics to restrict the phenomenality of the things themselves solely to their beingness as certified objects (Descartes), as the intentional objects of consciousness (Husserl), as temporally ecstatic beings (Heidegger).” The need to broaden these conceptions thus necessarily arises. Quoted from Anthony Morrow’s *The Love without Being that Opens the Distance Part 1*, 285.

<sup>112</sup> BG, 1.

agent...or the operation of an anonymous power of manifestation other than the phenomenon.”<sup>113</sup> This rendition thus allows the “I” to assume the power to make manifest. Jean-Luc Marion’s intention on the other hand, militates in favor of the reflexive “gives-itself.” “To say that the phenomenon ‘gives itself’ is to say that the phenomenon takes initiative in appearing and does so without the reserve of an in-itself.”<sup>114</sup> The phenomenon is therefore granted the power to appear from and through itself, and according to its own conditions and horizon. Phenomenology as Marion sees it must envision to think the phenomenon without restricting its phenomenality. That is to suggest “that we try to think a God without Being, a God who is free from any condition whatsoever.”<sup>115</sup> How thence can we achieve this? Marion’s response begins “by rethinking the whole problematique in terms of an *icon* that is not reducible to idolatry.”<sup>116</sup> Here, he situates the grey egocentric subjectivity perpetuated both by Descartes and the philosophers of the subject in the rigid self-projection of the idol. Marion thus leads phenomenology to embrace a new path – the mirroring character of the icon.

### 1. The Idol and the Icon: Towards a New Phenomenology

In the work through which he is perhaps most known for in the English-speaking world, Marion begins with a subtle warning: the idol and the icon are not classes of being, but they instead “determine two manners of being for beings.”<sup>117</sup> The idol and the icon are two ways in which beings are seen. Both are significations of a reality making-manifest. The idol and the icon both present themselves to the subject. However, their value and significance depends on the manner in which they remain a *signum* and a representation. The idol as *eidolon* literally refers to that which is seen<sup>118</sup> while the icon refers to that which appears.<sup>119</sup>

The idol restricts the gaze to itself. It fascinates and captivates the gaze precisely because anything in it must expose itself to the gaze, attract, fill, and hold it.<sup>120</sup> By presenting itself, the idol freezes, indeed imprisons the gaze. The gaze is held by the idol’s irresistible lure. Ironically, a thing is rebirthed into an idol once the gaze has decided to fix itself upon it. “The idol with its visibility fills the intention of the gaze, which wants nothing other than to see.”<sup>121</sup> This captivity creates a self-projection. The self projects to the idol its own longings, in the same manner perhaps as how the

<sup>113</sup> Jeffrey Kosky, *Philosophy of Religion and Return to Phenomenology*, 631.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Ian Leask & Eoin Cassidy, *Introduction*, 4.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* My emphasis.

<sup>117</sup> *GWB*, 8.

<sup>118</sup> *GWB*, 9.

<sup>119</sup> *GWB*, 17.

<sup>120</sup> *GWB*, 10.

<sup>121</sup> *GWB*, 10-11.

‘transcendental I’ would project its intentional aim to intuition, or maybe as how Dasein would render being in its temporality a concern for himself. In which cases, both finds its own created satisfaction – a domesticated intuition or experience. “The idol thus acts as a mirror that reflects the image of the gaze’s aim and the scope of its aims.”<sup>122</sup> The idol is a human projection. It “reflects back ‘me:’ my assumptions, presumptions, and conceptions.”<sup>123</sup> The idol is my own self-created reality. I thus see in it what I decide to see. “They are reflections of my subjectivity.”<sup>124</sup> The self remains to be the ultimate determinant of anything that appears. “Our conceptions of God are precisely that: *our* conceptions.”<sup>125</sup> For Marion, this logic has infected the Cartesian system and that of the philosophers of the subject. He thus sought a “counter-intentionality, brought about by ‘counter-phenomena’ that are imposed upon us and never reducible to our intentional grasp.”<sup>126</sup> Hence, his rendition of the Icon.

“The icon does not result from vision but *provokes* one.”<sup>127</sup> It is not constituted by the gaze. In fact, the icon escapes the gaze itself. In so doing, the icon always invites the self to cast its vision farther. The icon is thus the irruption of the transcendent into the horizon of the tangible. It is a manifestation of the fact that something always exceeds the limitation of any aim or projection. A painting, for instance, renders visible not only some artistic arrangement of colorings, but it ‘portrays’ and ‘signifies’ something beyond itself. It leads imagination beyond the petty graffiti on which the colorings are impressed. It brings to consciousness the aspect of life portrayed by the drawing itself. The painting is thus seen only to disappear afterwards, in order to let appear that which it portrays. Concomitantly, the icon is the visibility of the invisible, the possibility of the impossible. The icon summons the gaze to surpass itself by never freezing on the visible, since the visible only presents itself here in view of the invisible.<sup>128</sup> In this respect, Marion suggests that, in addition to the gaze that comprehends and domesticates, (i.e. the cogito, the constituting I, and the Dasein) “there is also the possibility of an icon that ruptures visibility, representation, and even intentionality.”<sup>129</sup> The icon opens into a boundless realm that annuls even the deepest of my expectations. It opens into an infinity that cancels the rigor of my conceptual grasp. There is then a possibility of a counter-intentionality. An appearing where the given can in fact give itself without ever becoming an object of my gaze.

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<sup>122</sup> *GWB*, 12.

<sup>123</sup> Ian Leask & Eoin Cassidy, *Introduction*, 3.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* My emphasis.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *GWB*, 17. My emphasis.

<sup>128</sup> *GWB*, 18.

<sup>129</sup> Ian Leask & Eion Cassidy, *Introduction*, 3.



## 2. Excess Beyond All Categories

On Marion's reading, the philosophers of the subject proposed phenomenal possibilities that appeal to the constituting I and are therefore regulated by it. "There, I am the subject and God is expected to appear as the object of my consciousness,"<sup>130</sup> and according to the manner that I alone will specify. In Kant, for instance, God can appear but only when He subjects himself within the a priori constitution of my consciousness, according to which alone, any experience is judged. God can appear but only as an object birthed by the categories. Following Kant's logic, Husserl proposed a phenomenon grounded on the subject's intentionality. God can appear but only as a fulfilling intuition that addresses the intentional aim of the subject. "Against this phenomenality in need of assistance from the I and supplementary from the horizon, Marion proposes an alternative, one where the lack of intuition is overcome by the intuitive excess of what he calls the 'saturated phenomenon.'"<sup>131</sup>

Instead of succumbing into some limited horizon where revelation itself loses its very meaning, Marion offers an alternative where revelation can in fact appear in a manner that does not limit the excessiveness of its giving-itself. The saturated phenomenon is thus outlined first with reference to its excessive annulling of the categories of knowledge. The saturated phenomenon gives itself in a manner that precedes all intentionality and horizon. Thus blurring through excess any horizon or category the 'I' have precariously instituted. The saturated phenomenon gives itself in saturation of quantity, quality, relation, and modality. Birthing thus, the once upon a time a 'possibility', and now an actuality of a phenomenon that inverts all intentionality, aim, and expectation.

### A. Quantity

The saturated phenomenon is 'invisible' according to quantity.<sup>132</sup> That is to say that the saturated phenomenon cannot be foreseen. It exceeds any form of expectation nor anticipation given by intentionality. In fact, it transgresses even intentionality itself. It comes even before we know it. While a quantified phenomenon is predictably determined in terms of concepts that apply to it, the saturated phenomenon transgresses the limit of any possible concept. It is incommensurable. It is "marked by the simple impossibility of our applying a successive synthesis to it, permitting an aggregate to be foreseen on the basis of the finite sum of its finite parts."<sup>133</sup> In other words, we lack concepts that can apply quantifiedly to the saturated phenomenon. 'Amazement' is a mood that encapsulates our response to

<sup>130</sup> John Manoussakis, *The Phenomenon of God*, 63.

<sup>131</sup> Jeffrey Kosky, *Philosophy of Religion and Return to Phenomenology*, 636.

<sup>132</sup> C.f. BG, 199.

<sup>133</sup> BG, 200.

the saturated phenomenon in terms of quantity. Amazement is an unusual passion that characterizes our perception in that phase where we fail to recognize the thing in its wholeness. We are amazed when we encounter an object that is not wholly manifested, where we are mystified over our incomprehension of its entirety. “It is amazing because it arises without measure in common with the phenomena that precede it, but cannot announce or explain it.”<sup>134</sup> We are amazed because there is nothing in the ordinary sphere that pre-empt the saturated phenomenon. It surprises us in the same manner that we would perhaps be surprised if one day we come into the classroom and the ever-present Fr. Dean announces ‘we will not have class.’ It amazes us because it violates the sphere of how we think things should be! Here, we recall how the Jews were so distressed over Jesus Christ claiming to be God. For while the Jews expected (indeed intended and predicted) their messiah to come in his pristine might and power, the Lord, on the contrary, and to their surprise, came into our world in the meekness of a manger.

### B. Quality

The saturated phenomenon is ‘unbearable’ according to quality.<sup>135</sup> While “quality allows intuition to fix a degree of reality for the object by limiting, eventually to the point of negation,”<sup>136</sup> it offers itself to be measured in terms of its magnitude. Hence, quality is arbitrated by means of comparing its magnitude to the magnitude of previously perceived qualities. However, in the case of the saturated phenomenon, “the saturating phenomenon attains an intensive magnitude without measure... such as that starting with certain degree, the intensity of the real intuition passes beyond all the conceptual anticipations of perception.”<sup>137</sup> ‘Bedazzlement’ therefore is our response to the saturated phenomenon in terms of quality. The very bedazzlement as what the ‘prisoner’ in Plato’s allegory of the cave experienced when he first landed his gaze upon the sun. It is not about our incapacity to see or perceive, after all, we only see through the light. Rather, the question hinges on our incapacity to sustain our gaze before this light that overshines. Thus the imprisoned man perceived the sun but only on account of its unsustainable perceptibility – its being ‘unbearable.’ In this context, finitude is brought to bear by means of the gaze that falls short.<sup>138</sup>

### C. Relation

The saturated phenomenon is ‘absolute’ according to relation.<sup>139</sup> Opposed to Kant’s definition of experience in terms of representation and necessary connection of

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>139</sup> C.f. BG, 209.

perceptions, Marion questions the doctrinal rendition of phenomenon as respecting the unity of experience. Should every phenomenon respect the unity of experience? Marion refuses to agree. The saturated phenomenon he says, happens “without being inscribed ... in the relational network that assures experience its unity, and that they matter precisely because one could not assign them any substratum, any cause, any commerce.”<sup>140</sup> Analogies, in the strict sense, do not in fact constitute the objects they pertain to. Since the saturated phenomenon passes beyond quantity and quality, it therefore renders analogy incoherent precisely because analogy operates firstly in terms of quantity and quality. Marion notes, “intuition, by dint of pressure, attains the common limits of the concept of horizon; it does not cross them, however, and running up against them, it reverberates, returns towards the finite field, blurs it, and renders it in the end invisible by excess.”<sup>141</sup> A perfect demonstration of this is the Eucharistic miracle. For while the Eucharist is a ‘communion’ with God (in fact the host is God himself), there is nothing in that small piece of bread that can serve as analogate to the amplitude of God. And yet it remains for us absolute and certain.

#### D. Modality

The saturated phenomenon is ‘irregardable’ according to modality.<sup>142</sup> Here, Marion recounts Kant’s definition of modality by means of their relations to thought. For Kant, it is the object’s agreement (or perhaps succumbing) to the formal conditions of experience previously determined by the *I* that ascertains the object’s possibility. The appearing of the phenomenon is rendered without its ‘giving’ on account that it merely passes within the horizon of the *I*’s power of knowing. The situation is, however, different in the case of the saturated phenomenon. “The *I* undergoes disagreement between an at least potential phenomenon and the subjective condition for its experience; and as a result, it does not constitute an object.”<sup>143</sup> The saturated phenomenon refuses to be determined as object precisely because it appears with multiple and indescribable excess that annuls all effort at constitution.

The flood of intuition characterizes here the absolute and at once self-giving of the phenomenon. The saturated phenomenon appears and yet the ‘I’ cannot in fact confront it. For appearing in a manner contrary to my ideal of how things should appear, it thus holds me in awe. The phenomenon appears in the paradox of a counter-experience. Marion explains, “(counter-experience) offers the experience of what irreducibly contradicts the conditions for the experience of objects ... That is, confronted by the saturated phenomenon, the ‘I’ cannot see, it cannot any longer

<sup>140</sup> BG, 207.

<sup>141</sup> BG, 209.

<sup>142</sup> C.f. BG, 212.

<sup>143</sup> BG, 213.

gaze at it as its mere object, intuition, or idea.”<sup>144</sup> Precisely because the phenomenon presents itself not as some intuition set to fulfill the intentionality of the subject (idol) but as an event that far exceeds any intentional expectation (icon), the phenomenon thus confronts the primacy of the subject himself. The subject ceases to be an active constituting I, surrendering itself to this phenomenon which by its very definition is in fact unobjectifiable. The subject is thus refashioned as an awed witness to this revelation.

### 3. Birthing the *L'adonne* and The Decision to See

Marion's phenomenological breakthrough hinges on a return-path towards the logic of 'constituted me' (or as how he loves to put it, the *L'adonne*) which for him, precedes the esoteric stances of the Cartesian Cogito, the constituting 'I', and the compulsive Dasein. Marion introduces the possibility of a phenomenon saturated by excess, a phenomenon which as we have seen, inverts all four Kantian categories, a phenomenon which refashions the human into his original character as a witness. And finally invites him into a life of witnessing. Marion suggests:

To the phenomenon that is supposed to be impoverished in intuition, can we not oppose a phenomenon that is saturated with intuition? To the phenomenon that is most often characterized by a defect of intuition, and therefore a deception of the intentional aim and, in particular instances, by the equality between intuition and intention, why would there not correspond the possibility of a phenomenon in which intuition would give more, indeed immeasurably more, than intention ever would have intended or foreseen?<sup>145</sup>

In an attempt to sketch the possibility of revelation, Marion offers a blurred scenery where the unthinkable frustrates all intentionality, blurring through excess all categories and expectations the 'I' have precariously instituted in its hopeless attempt at objectifying. In its pristine divinity, the ineffable presents itself in a phenomenon that is not constituted by the 'I' but rather constitutes it. Marion situates revelation in an at once anonymous voice that calls. Awestruck by this anonymous call, the subject turns his gaze on a horizon that is either empty or full of intuition (what is the difference after all). In the midst of an hazy and fogged horizon, the *L'adonne* is confronted by this call that pierces through the darkness. And yet what baffles the *L'adonne* is precisely that this call is hidden. It remains anonymous since it finds neither ground nor affinity in any intentional aim.

By responding to the call: “*me voici!* –hear I am”<sup>146</sup> the *L'adonne*, the witness, the gifted is birthed. It is therefore the response that births the *L'adonne*. We thus

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>145</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Saturated Phenomenon*, 112.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

receive ourselves from what gives itself. The *L'adonne* is given a new identity—a 'constituted me.' "The *L'adonne* is this radically passive self who no longer precedes the phenomenon as the point to which phenomenality is reduced, but comes after it."<sup>147</sup> The gifted emerges only upon his response to the call that precedes him. The gifted is therefore always already constituted, belated, delayed, and therefore coming after the call. As the gifted, I therefore give up the primacy in rendering phenomenality. I lend myself to this call that will have always already constituted and summoned me, even before I am there to intend the appearing. Prior therefore to any constituting nominative subject, there appears the *L'adonne*, "which means the one who, before being, is called into a being that is at bottom response... one who, before becoming a subject in the first person, is originally given over to givenness and, through givenness, given back to itself."<sup>148</sup> In thus giving myself to this call by means of my response, I in fact gain my very identity. It makes sense to mention here a remarkable allusion to Jean-Paul Sartre's phenomenological analysis of the gaze. Sartre writes:

When I see the 'other' there is always the possibility to be seen by the other as well. As far as I see the 'other,' I see him only as an object. But the 'other' truly becomes an 'other' at the crucial moment that I am seen by the 'other.' When I cease seeing the other and allow him to see me in a wonderful exchange of reciprocal gazes, then the 'other' leaves the realm of a thing among other things and regains his or her status as a subject in relation and communion with me.<sup>149</sup>

The look of the other astonishes us. It brings us back to a deep awareness of ourselves. "First of all, I now exist as myself for my unreflective consciousness. It is this irruption of the self which has been most often described: *I see myself because somebody sees me*."<sup>150</sup> In the look of the 'other,' it is not only the 'other' who is given to us, but in a most paradoxical way, our very own self becomes apparent.<sup>151</sup> It is therefore the 'other' that births us. It is the phenomenon that constitutes us. Here, we find an explanation for the uneasy sensation one feels when confronted by the piercing gaze of an icon—painting, say for instance the 'Pantocrator'. We feel uneasy, because the gaze of the icon makes us aware of ourselves as a 'seen.' We are seen even before we are able to see. And indeed, we see only because we have been seen, in the first place. "The world is thus viewed 'as seen by God – as bathed in another light, transfixed by exteriority, suspended by another breath."<sup>152</sup> That which presents itself in revelation thus births for us our very identity and meaningfulness.

<sup>147</sup> Jeffrey Kosky, *Philosophy of Religion and Return to Phenomenology*, 638.

<sup>148</sup> Thomas Carlson, *Blindness and the Decision to See*, 156.

<sup>149</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Trans. Hazel Barnes, (New York, USA: Washington Square Press, 1956) 362-363.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 349. My emphasis.

<sup>151</sup> John Manoussakis, *The Phenomenon of God*, 63.

<sup>152</sup> Derek Morrow, *The Love without Being that Opens to Distance Part 1*, 287.

Our 'self' is thus borrowed. Hence, even the very language and thought by which 'I' seeks to understand the phenomenon is in itself an originary gift tantamount to my given identity as a 'gifted'.<sup>153</sup> The *L'adonne* henceforth finds itself without a language to speak, and without a thought to think the phenomenon that is now fully unveiled before him. Marion thus describes the phenomenon as "invisible according to quantity, unbearable according to quality, absolute according to relation, and irregardable according to modality,"<sup>154</sup> in short, unobjectifiable, or even unknown. Here, the concept of horizon and intentionality thus explodes. Our very response is in itself incapable of rendering the call wholly audible in our language and thought. And yet this very poverty which prevents any secure naming of the call, generates precisely the vocation of the *L'adonne*—the endless task of naming and renaming. Precisely because it is inexhaustible that the phenomenon invites us to constantly return. In its "defect" therefore, understood as its unknowability, lies the lure of the phenomenon. In the same manner, the *L'donne's* finitude that renders him incapable of securing any certain knowledge of the phenomenon proves to be his true defining character. While finite and limited, the *L'adonne's* decision to constantly return to the call that beckons him, marks the infinity of his will. To seek, and seek again, and again! In this endless seeking lies infinity itself. Here, the wisdom behind the daily celebration of the Eucharist perhaps comes to light. The Eucharistic miracle is inexhaustible, it gives itself without limit nor restriction. It thus ceaselessly beckons and calls us to partake in this infinite communion!

The *L'adonne* therefore engages into a ceaseless process of naming and renaming this call, until at last it appeals to anonymity. Into the nameless, into the ineffable, into Yahweh who proclaimed 'I am who am!'<sup>155</sup> Finally, in a moment of clear vision, the *L'adonne* realizes that when all efforts at objectifying and knowing crumbles, what remains is the act of giving and responding. And that, this unconditional act of giving in fact has a name and a face, – Love.

### Epilogue

Let it be said that the site where the ineffable reveals Himself in excess does not in any way demand a response of nomination or determination outright. It firstly calls for a simple recognition that the phenomenon gives itself to us: "I receive the phenomenon even before I can understand it."<sup>156</sup> Here, we might recall the experience of Moses at Mount Sinai, where Yahweh manifested himself in the form of the inconsumable burning bush. The spectacle of an 'unconsumed

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<sup>153</sup> Here the creed of humility that should permeate any thinking that dare approach God is laid down: I can only properly speak of God by the language He Himself provides humanity. This is perhaps why the liturgy takes into account the faithfulness of the prayers to the original Greek scriptures.

<sup>154</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Saturated Phenomenon*, 113.

<sup>155</sup> From the *New American Bible, Personal Size*, (Manila, Philippines: Paulines 2010) Exodus 3:14.

<sup>156</sup> Kevin Hart, *Introduction*, 16.

bush' confronted Moses' deepest ideals of how things can and should appear. The phenomenon held Moses' reason aback, incapable of even thinking the possibility of the actuality that already lay before him. The phenomenon thus silences the feeble mumblings of human reason that stubbornly wrestles with the knowledge about God. In the presence of the God who makes Himself known, reason is at a loss and confusion. Likewise, in the presence of what saturates, we just have to let our cup be filled with what is spilled. After all, maybe the phenomenon does not in fact appeal to our knowing. Perhaps the self-giving of the phenomenon necessitates nothing else but a 'giving of ourselves' in return. Perhaps the Love does not demand firstly to be known, but before all else, to be loved.

The phenomenon departs from any concept. Its overflowing givenness renders us mute. It embraces an unordinary light that refuses to make us see, but all the more blinds us. It points us towards the nothing, towards the unspeakable, towards the ambiguous, towards emptiness, towards the impossible! And yet, one must realize that life itself is the unspeakable, the ambiguous, indeed the unpredictable topos of any manifestation. Life itself is the vehicle of emptiness and nothingness. Indeed, life itself is the site of the phenomenon. We recall that the locus of Moses' encounter with something that saturates his gaze is not some extraordinary trance-state or levitation. But a mountain that has always been part of his life. Perhaps, he had been to Mount Sinai many times over, tending his brother-in-law's sheep. The place is most ordinary, so close and familiar to him, that he might have thought nothing extraordinary would happen. The realm of this encounter is not something out of this world. The encounter happens in the 'here and now' of Moses' time. And Moses' time is no different from our time. The world he treaded is the very same ground we stand on today. Moses' feet are no different from our feet. He is as embodied as we are. The experience of the transcendent – what apparently is beyond experience – happened in 'flesh and blood' in Mount Sinai. Today, everywhere or any place can be a Mount Sinai, and anyone can in fact be Moses!

For the ways of the ineffable are in themselves ineffable...

## Summary and Conclusion

Despite the egotistic attitude and logical provincialism Cartesian philosophy is loathed for, it remains convincing that Descartes' famous *cogito ergo sum* envelopes one key forgotten side to philosophy. Although of course, it cannot be discovered without much thoughtfulness, and may not lie within or might even militate against Descartes' original intentions.

I think therefore I exist! The term *exist* is a nuance. It denotes not only one's being existent, but in a very subtle manner, existence also points to one's manner of existing (as the original Latin 'sum' denotes). Hence, Descartes' famous edict

does not only propose that existence is some metaphysical consequence of thinking (I think, I exist), but also that thinking is a defining measure to one's life, or more appropriately, to one's manner of living. It is in this sense that philosophy imposes a moral obligation to live by one's thinking. Philosophy evokes espousal. Insofar as love demands fidelity from a lover, so does the 'love for wisdom' demand faithfulness to her teachings. The eminent Maurice Merleau-Ponty puts it quite clearly, "true philosophy consists in relearning to look at the world."<sup>157</sup> Philosophy thus makes sense only when it obligates one to live according to some perspective birthed by her sound reflections. Philosophy is brought before the tribunal that is life itself. Hence the measure of a thinking (as we have stated elsewhere in this text) does not bear upon what we know, but on us – we who know. It lies upon how a thinking can influence one's gaze, one's outlook, one's perspective of life itself. If there is one thing thus, for which any thinking must be evaluated, it should be one that surveys the perspective or attitude it endorses. Correspondingly, the value of Marion's thought bears upon its effort to accommodate an 'attitude of witnessing' before the truth reveals Himself. In a time when thinking have, in an ever escalating manner, become unscrupulous and manipulative, Marion unveils a new path to philosophizing – that of givenness and saturation, before which all intentional compulsiveness explodes.

The research began by pointing out that philosophical thinking, or at least the philosophy that takes on the cudgels of thinking the essence of God are limited to precisely that – essence. As if the infinite can in fact be maintained under some essence, or preserved under a gaze or a name. In place thus for a metaphysics that imprisons and limits God into the dry categorical language of being, Marion sought for a thinking that can approach God without having to succumb to the onto-theological methods of metaphysics. In place of a thinking that seeks to petrify and fossilize the inexhaustible and dynamic reality of God, 'the philosopher' offers us a perspective of approaching God not by means of the same imaginative attributions but by outlining the possibility of a phenomenon of God. The very possibility of encountering God posthumously face to face in flesh and blood! This he addresses however without much difficulty.

To begin with, philosophical discourse rarely speaks of revelation, or perhaps it refuses to speak about it. And for good reason, philosophy no longer has the concepts to think about it. The rigid language for which she has sacrificed her original identity as a passion – the language of logical certainty and empirical precision seeks nothing but to appropriate significations, and thus refuses to admit the inexhaustible language of revelation. Marion thus begins his quest with a criticism of the tradition that renders any phenomenon conceptually impossible – Cartesian metaphysics and modern tradition as a whole. Chapter two painstakingly outlined the logical egotism of which Descartes' cogito is utterly guilty. In his renowned declaration *Cogito ergo*

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<sup>157</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (London, UK: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962) 91.



*Sum*, Descartes crowned the ego as the absolute arbiter to any knowledge. In so doing, Descartes fell into a metaphysical prism where everything is reduced into the ego's clear and distinct ideas. Things other than the ego (including and specially God) are granted intelligibility by being reduced into poor and limited objects situated in the ego's mind. Everything thus depends on the clarity of *my* thought! Drowned with the rigor of logical precision, the cogito impulsively dismisses any knowledge of the slightest dint of ambiguity.

And yet, is not the absolute and the infinite, precisely because He is absolute and infinite, must necessarily be ambiguous in the standpoint of the limited human gaze? Descartes thus dismisses any real possibility where the absolute can in fact speak about Himself. In place of revelation, the cogito muses himself with his lifeless "limiting" ideas. Here, the possibility for any revelation is blatantly dismissed by a thinking that is utterly close-minded and esoteric. Marion thus recognizes the need to broaden thinking itself, to the point where we find a thinking broad enough to accommodate the possibility for revelation.

Chapter three took on the cudgels of searching for such a thinking. Jean-Luc Marion firstly takes the discussion on a detour to examine the method of modern philosophy's great synthesizer, Immanuel Kant. In his effort to accommodate both rationalism and empiricism, Kant laid down an epistemological system where past deductions (*a priori*) serve as sift to evaluate future experiences. Here, experience itself is mocked, since they become shrouded, nay, regulated and tuned by past deductions. The categories birthed by past experiences draws for the self, the limits of possible experience. Any appearing is thus arbitrated by what *I* already know. Here, the infinite suffers injustice, since in order for Him to appear He must in effect be regulated by the limits of the subject's past knowledge, his assumptions and presuppositions. In this respect, Marion points out that the father of phenomenology was therefore correct in suggesting that a breakthrough should consist of approaching reality without presuppositions. Edmund Husserl in his *Logical Investigations*, calls on a 'return to the things themselves.' Husserl suggests that reality can be understood only by returning to those primordial experiences where reality in fact reveals itself to us. To describe reality is therefore to describe the 'given' in experience – intuition. 'One must therefore lead conceptions back toward the intuition that corresponds to them.'<sup>158</sup> Marion however lays down one important point of objection. While intuition takes primacy on account of the assurance they alone can offer to any intentional aim, intuition is nonetheless domesticated by this very same intentionality that in turn assures its very meaningfulness. Hence, Husserl brings unto the table a subtle condition for any appearing – it must be a fulfilling intuition to the intentional aim of the 'I'. Any phenomenon can thus appear, on the condition that they present themselves as a fulfillment to the expectations of the one

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<sup>158</sup> RG, 8.

who sees. Here, the world becomes a private spectacle to consciousness, where he is also the absolute director and the sole audience to this performance. Everything and everyone becomes a character to this fake performance, forced, indeed mandated to act a predetermined role. The 'I' is therefore reduced into some state of solipsism where it assumes the place of an intuitive primate, hopelessly aloof and elevated. The competing poles of the self and the phenomenon becomes apparent here.

In a vain attempt to save his phenomenological breakthrough, Husserl, Marion notes, introduced his own version of the principle of principles. However, this grace envisioned to save Husserl's method turned out to be the last nail in the coffin of his metaphysical-phenomenology. The principle goes, "Every originally giving intuition is a *source of right* for cognition – everything that offers itself originally to us in intuition must simply be received for what it gives itself, *but also without passing beyond the limits* in which it is presented there."<sup>159</sup> Marion divides the principle in two parts – the subject and the qualifying phrase. The first part states quite compellingly Husserl's intention of rendering the 'the right of cognition' to the phenomenon that appears, that without any intuition given to intention there is no possibility for any appearing. The modifying phrase however reveals too, that intuition can be received only to the extent that it finds a ground in intention. This seems to be the core of the problem. For while Husserl's intention weighs on to grant primacy to the appearing phenomenon, he nonetheless draws the very same limitation he had in the past – things can appear but only if they find a ground in the very consciousness that awaits their appearing. Appearing thus is subjected to the limitations of what he calls an 'as-if' experience – a realm of imagination where appearing is imperiled according to the ambit of the imaginable, to what the 'I' can imagine. The phenomenon is thus seen, but only with certain symmetry to self's own ownness. The appearing is constituted, nay, founded in consciousness itself. And yet, it remains to be mentioned here that God being infinite and absolute, is precisely the unimaginable. Here, the ineffable suffers injustice since Husserl situates his appearing within the limits of the I's horizon. What else then should best describe idolatry than this reduction of the infinite within the limits of the finite proportions. To this point, the possibility for a religious phenomenon remains elusive.

In the same manner that Heidegger in the early 1900s took center stage at the price of deposing Husserl from prominence, so did he now gain Marion's attention again at the price of his predecessor's failure to yield for Marion a thinking broad enough to accommodate revelation. "The philosopher of disclosure" however does not go without debt to Husserl. It is worth mentioning that Husserl's breakthrough allowed Heidegger to pursue the question of being as if it were already beyond metaphysics. After Husserl, being became 'the given' to in intuition. Heidegger can thus now speak of being-in-experience, or as how he loves to put it, being temporal. Heidegger understood that philosophy makes sense only when it touches upon man's deepest experiences and concerns in life. Hence, being should be understood under

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<sup>159</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas I*, §2. My emphasis.

the aspect of its temporality. Being is in time he says, it is situated in temporality, in the practical concerns of man. Upon this background, Heidegger criticized metaphysics for its empty talk about being. Empty so to speak of course, because it lacks neither ground nor fundament from reality itself. He also accused metaphysics of equating being to God. Hence, the empty talk about being is nothing else than a lifeless God-talk. This led Heidegger to all together refuse to think God philosophically. And following his attitude of admitting the meaningfulness of temporality, he thus offered the question of God as a fundamental challenge to Dasein. As if to imply that the question of God's manifestation is one that must be addressed by the believer simply as a fundamentally temporal concern in life. In this case however, God is transformed into a supreme being who is not in fact supreme, since in order to operate at all, he must first operate within the condition of Dasein. Again, any possibility of revelation is once again subjected to the primacy of the self.

Towards the end of the discussion in chapter three, the research winded with a conclusion that philosophies that were presented so far, all together occlude any revelation worthy of the name. They are a genealogy of traditions that forces any phenomenon to appear not in His own manner of appearing, but according to some objectified human experience, which in turn constitutes the phenomenon itself. Against this utter close-mindedness, Marion sought to understand the problem with the logic of the idol and the icon. Here, he situates the grey egocentric subjectivity perpetuated by Descartes and the philosophers of the subject in the rigid self-projection of the idol. Marion thus leads phenomenology to embrace a new path – the mirroring character of the icon. The icon, proclaims Marion, “does not result from vision but *provokes* one.”<sup>160</sup> The gaze does not constitute it. In fact, the icon escapes the gaze itself. In so doing, the icon always invites the self to cast its vision farther. The icon is thus the manifestation of the fact that something always exceeds the limitation of any aim or projection. In this respect, “Marion suggests that, in addition to the gaze that comprehends and domesticates,” (i.e. the cogito, the constituting I, and the Dasein) “there is also the possibility of an icon that ruptures visibility, representation, and even intentionality.”<sup>161</sup> The icon opens into a boundless realm that annuls even the deepest of expectations. It opens into an infinity that cancels the rigor of all conceptual grasp. There is then a possibility of a counter-intentionality. An appearing where the given can in fact give itself without ever becoming an object of the gaze. With this opening or possibility, Marion then offers his concept of the saturated phenomenon as a plausible site where the ineffable can indeed present itself. In an attempt to sketch the possibility of revelation, Marion offers a blurred scenery where the unthinkable frustrates all intentional aim, blurring through excess all categories and expectations the ‘I’ have aimlessly instituted. To the phenomenon of objects and constituted imaginations, why not correspond a phenomenon that breaks away from the limitations of objects and is no longer constituted by the mind but constitutes it? Upon this background, Marion outlined the saturated phenomenon in terms of

<sup>160</sup> *GWB*, 17. My emphasis.

<sup>161</sup> Ian Leask & Eion Cassidy, *Introduction*, 3.

its surpassing the categories of knowledge (quantity, quality, relation, modality). And precisely because it exceeds all categories and horizons, the phenomenon holds reason aback, belated, and delayed. The self ceases to be a constituting 'I', but is in turn constituted by this phenomenon that defies all expectations and horizons. The self thus gains a new identity, a 'constituted me.' Against an attitude that worships the intentional aim of the self, Marion thus offers a possibility where the constituting I can in fact be constituted before it can even constitute anything. In this section, the research hinted some allusions to Jean-Paul Sartre's phenomenological analysis of the gaze. According to Sartre, everything that is seen cannot but be reduced into an object unless the seen can in turn respond by looking back. The look of the other brings the self into a deep consciousness of oneself. And only in that wonderful exchange of gazes can the other become a truly other. The look of the other does not just birth the other, but in the subtlest manner beyond any recognition, it delivers the self into this beautiful dialogue, it constitutes the self, it births the self. In the same manner, the saturated phenomenon, constitutes the subject by offering itself in the excess of intuition that prevents the 'I' from setting up any aim or intention. The unpredictability of the phenomenon holds reason aback. Through the I's response to the anonymous voice that calls, the constituted self, the gifted, the *L'Adonne* is birthed. Prior thus to any constituting nominative first-person subject, there appears the *L'Adonne* – the one whose being is at bottom response! The *L'Adonne's* identity is therefore a 'given.' Hence, even the very language by which 'I' seeks to understand the phenomenon is in itself a gift. The *L'Adonne* thus finds himself without any thought or language to capture the phenomenon that is now wholly unveiled before him. Here, the concept of horizon and the primacy of intentionality are laid to its tomb!

The *L'Adonne* is left with a poverty that prevents any secure naming of the call. And yet, even this very poverty becomes the true mark of his giftedness. This apparent degeneration in fact generates the deepest vocation of the *L'Adonne* – the vocation to constantly go back to the phenomenon that saturates, to return and seek it endlessly. The finite lowly mortal finds himself elevated into the realm of immortality. In his endless task of naming and renaming the call that saturates, the finite is brought into a prism of infinity. He thus engages into a ceaseless process of naming and renaming this call, until at last he appeals to anonymity, into the nameless, into the Ineffable, into Yahweh who proclaimed 'I am who am!' At this point, the research set out to investigate the experience of Moses at Mount Sinai in order to make clear our explanation. But let me here present another allegory.

In the book of Kings, one encounters the story of King Solomon. When the Lord manifested Himself and rewarded Solomon with a wish, Solomon, in all his humility asked the Lord for only one thing –wisdom to rule God's chosen people. God thus granted Solomon's wish, "But in addition, I give what you have not asked for, such riches and glory that among kings there is not your like."<sup>162</sup> To his surprise,

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<sup>162</sup> From the *New American Bible, Personal Size*, (Manila, Philippines: Paulines 2010) 1 Kings, 3:13.

Solomon is taken aback. He did not only receive what he expected of God, but he was given far more than what he could have asked and ever imagined. The saturated phenomenon works in the same way, it refuses to give what the self intends, but gives Himself whole and entire, leaving the self overwhelmed and birthed into this strange new consciousness –there is more, there is infinitely more to what the limited human gaze is able to shed light. Perhaps then, the Ineffable does not first intend from gifted a response of nomination or determination. Perhaps it demands before anything else, to be loved.

In the wallow of this winding discussion, there is one underlying intention for which the research has been expected to achieve, namely, to accentuate the possibility of admitting revelation to philosophical discourse. Whether the discussions were convincing enough, the ultimate point the research hopes to have pointed out, is the fact that even the remote phenomenon of revelation cannot (and should not) be alien to philosophical discourse. Philosophy itself was birthed through wonder and astonishment before that which we do not in fact know (the impossible), and to turn away from this birthing epiphany is the greatest tragedy philosophy can ever dig herself into.

## Recommendations

Without the slightest intention at provocation, Marion's phenomenology is all too provocative. His ground-breaking methods have inspired numerous researches both in the affirmative and contentious sides. One prominent objection arises from the block where none can ever be valid unless Saint Thomas mentions it in the venerable lines of his opus. Marion's proposal (which clearly militates against all kinds of metaphysics) incurred criticisms from those who took offense, assuming a hurt which to my opinion were not in fact incurred against them. And thus proposes surrogate objections of being metaphysical himself. Upon this background, this study deems the following researches worth investigating.

1. One of the most intriguing phase of Marion's thought is precisely that it collides with our 'usual' metaphysical breeding. His methods rarely employ the philosophy of St. Thomas which we have all come to learn and love. And for good reason, for whenever he speaks of metaphysics, he does so only to declare its limitations. A good research thus is a dialogue between **Jean-Luc Marion and Saint Thomas on the limits of metaphysics.**
2. This research presented Marion's concept of revelation by employing his ground-breaking 'saturated phenomenon.' The research led to a realm where only existentialists dare to tread – that of givenness and love. The work of Marion began as a response to the apparent conceptual impossibility of revelation. And his response employed the methods of phenomenology. One can thus coin his work as a phenomenology of God. However, his most

recent intellectual preoccupation is to proclaim the excessive givenness of the saturated phenomenon as the standard to all appearing phenomena. It is as if, what was first discovered in the case of God's revelation, he now suggests to be applicable in every phenomena of all sort. This problematique is also deemed to be worth the pains of investigating.

3. Kevin Hart in his introduction to the famous article collection, *Counter-Experiences*, proclaimed that "we see Marion in sharpest focus when we perceive that he can be grasped in his totality as a philosopher of Love."<sup>163</sup> Insofar as this research ends by pointing toward an appeal to love and givenness, it is therefore worth extending a research on Marion's phenomenology of givenness explicitly into the arena of love. ■

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<sup>163</sup> Kevin Hart, *Introduction*, 3.

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