Institute for Christian Studies

Before or Outside the Text:

A Comparative Study on Jean-Luc Marion and

Paul Ricoeur's Idea of Revelation

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Abstract

This essay explores the idea of revelation of two French philosophers, Jean-Luc Marion and Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur and Marion are very important figures not only in contemporary continental philosophy, but also in their contributions to the discussion of religion, or what some may call the "theological turn." Marion contends that revelation is the saturated phenomenon *par excellence,* free from the constraints of reason and metaphysics. For Ricoeur, a longer route in approaching the phenomenology of religion through the detour of hermeneutics is much needed. Such a longer path serves to concretely ground the discussion of revelation in a historic, linguistic, and textual milieu. Therefore, while Marion thinks that revelation is immediate and unconditionally given, Ricoeur maintains that revelation as manifestation names the possibility for biblical Scripture, and through hermeneutic interpretation, is able to open a world into which one might project one's ownmost possibilities.

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past two years. I would also like to mention Rosanna and Eddy Sham who for many years, have opened up their house to me and my children. Over their dining table, we dined, talked and shared my ups and downs both in my studies and in my daily life. My family and I would like to thank them for their friendship, caring and encouragement. I also want to thank those who wanted to stay anonymous. Your gifts of prayer, support, listening and encouragement are such a true gift to me.

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Introduction

What is revelation? To reveal is to disclose what is hidden. From this definition or understanding of the word "reveal," we can imagine a great range of related topics.[1] I can say this book is revelatory, which perhaps means it is insightful or allows me to acquire meaningful insights that I did not realize before. Or when I say this book is revealing, I could mean this book discloses facts that I did not know before, and gives me knowledge that I did not previously possess. This wide range of understandings of revelation applies to the realm of religion too, and the debate about the meaning of revelation gets stronger especially among those religions which claim to be revelatory. In the context of religion, do we distinguish between the acquisition of insights and divine revelation? Does divine revelation communicate knowledge and facts, or does it help us to find meaning and properly situate ourselves in our life, or does it do both? If revelation discloses knowledge (either in the sense of facts, values, or meanings), how do we justify such a disclosure? Or are we even able to justify such a disclosure? Does it require justification at all? If justification of revelation is in fact possible, what is the grounding we employ for such a justification? If justification of revelation is not achievable, does it mean that revelation is impossible?

While I could continue on in this vein, asking many more questions pertaining to the content, mode, and mechanism of revelation, in this essay I will instead focus on two figures who, while they bear a high degree of similarity to each other, nonetheless

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[1] Nicholas Wolterstorff suggests that revelation can be divided into agent and agentless revelation. For agent revelation, it can be further divided into intended and unintended revelation. While the mode of unintended revelation always takes the mode of manifestation, the intended revelation can take both the manifestation and non-manifestation modes of disclosure. Non-manifestational revelations involve propositions and assertions, and manifestational revelation takes the form of interpreting symbols and metaphors. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 22-31.

suggest two different approaches to the question of revelation: one approaches the subject by way of pure phenomenology, while the other by way of a hermeneutical phenomenology.

Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Luc Marion are no doubt very important figures in the contemporary scene of continental philosophy, and their work has been the focus of much discussion on North American soil. They have many things in common. Both of them taught in France and North America, with Marion still holding a position at the University of Chicago, a position previously held by Ricoeur. They both come out of the tradition of phenomenology influenced by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. They also make important contributions to both philosophical and religious discussions, with Marion being a Catholic and Ricoeur a Protestant. As we will see in this essay, their philosophical and theological projects bear many similarities with each other on such topics as language, metaphysics, subjectivity, alterity, transcendence, ontology, phenomenology, and hermeneutics. Despite their philosophical and theological similarities, however, they also take different directions and display different inclinations within the cluster of philosophical issues in which they both situate themselves. In this essay, we will first look at Marion's phenomenology of revelation. Then I will expose some confusions and difficulties in Marion's purely phenomenological approach. Finally, I will suggest that Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the text provides a better, more robust description of revelation. Whereas Marion conceives revelation phenomenologically as the saturated phenomenon *par excellence*, Ricoeur considers revelation hermeneutically as a world opened before the text. Although both are concerned with the destiny and new

possibilities of phenomenology, Marion pursues this end via the saturated phenomenon, while Ricoeur pursues it through hermeneutics.

In the present stage of Western thought, where metaphysics has been called into question, Robyn Horner tells us that "philosophy becomes phenomenology and hermeneutics."[2] While Marion has been striving to bring a breakthrough to phenomenology, and Ricoeur's hermeneutics has established a unique position in its tradition, it is fruitful to see how these two trajectories may help one to construct a theory of revelation. In this essay, I will argue that Marion's saturated phenomenon is not determinate enough to elucidate the full character of revelation. A more rigorous hermeneutical effort is required in order to balance Marion's often mystical and somewhat apophatic treatment of revelation. With respect to my chosen theme of revelation, I will not try to suggest that Marion's project is a failure; instead, maintaining Ricoeur's dialectical spirit, I will suggest that "there exists, between phenomenology and hermeneutics, a mutual belonging."[3]

Ricoeur has emphatically pointed out that the phenomenology of religion is "condemned" to "run the gauntlet of a hermeneutic."[4] All experiences, including religious experiences, are interpreted experiences which are always situated in a certain historical context, within a certain canon, and following a certain tradition. The world that we live in and with which we identify ourselves has layers of meanings embedded into it. Ricoeur thus sees a need for hermeneutics in a universal sense; that is, he sees the

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[2] Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), p.20.

[3] Paul Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics", *From Text To Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), p. 23.

[4] Paul Ricoeur, "Experience and Language in Religious Discourse," *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, ed. Dominique Janicaud, Jean-François Courtine, et al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 130.

need for us to suspend a universal and pure phenomenology, and instead to commence

with a particular (perhaps one's own) conviction. From this vantage point, Ricoeur

suggests that we engage hermeneutics in a particular sense, one that works out "a process

of analogizing transfer" that assures a respectful dialogue with other religions. This

hermeneutic detour, beginning from one's conviction and then moving off to explore

other convictions, will finally reach into a phenomenology of revelation that remains a

manifestation of truth.

Chapter One: Jean-Luc Marion's Phenomenology of Revelation

1.1. Metaphysics and the Possibility of Phenomenology

Marion's attempt to develop a phenomenology of revelation, in response to a confident rationalism that rejects the intelligibility of revelation, appears as early as his 1992 essay, "The Possible and Revelation." Marion is anxious to free revelation from the control of reason and metaphysics altogether.[5] In this essay, Marion describes a dilemma he faces between two options: either subsume revelatory religion under the principle of sufficient reason, so that religion can remain in this world, but under the rules and constraints of reason and metaphysics; or exclude revelatory religion altogether from this world, and admit that being religious amounts to nothing other than "enthusiasm" or "fanaticism."[6] Marion believes that phenomenology, and, by extension, a phenomenology of religion, can be developed so that religious discourse can be freed from the control of reason.

According to Marion, the generally accepted presupposition in the methodology of the philosophy of religion is that "it is not possible to test the possibility of impossibility." To fulfill the principle of sufficient reason, actuality has to precede possibility because, for something to be possible, it has to have a sufficient cause which must be necessitated by actuality. Thus actuality is required as a cause for something to have the possibility to happen or appear.[7] To think of the possibility of impossibility is to

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[5] In his essay, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology," Marion, after a brief historical survey on the concept of metaphysics up to Kant, finds the notion of metaphysics as "a single science bearing at one and the same time on the universal common being and on being (or beings) *par excellent*" to be a "textual fact" hard to contest. See Jean-Luc Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology," in *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner et. al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 51.

[6] Jean-Luc Marion, "The Possible and Revelation," in *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner and others (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 2.

[7] According to Marion, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* already spells out the proposition that "it is obvious that actuality precedes potentiality." See "The Possible and Revelation," p. 4.

think outside the logic of causation and sufficient reason, and this effort therefore works outside the methodology and presuppositions of metaphysics. For Marion, this is where phenomenology comes onto the scene, allowing us to recognize "phenomena without the preliminary condition of a *causa sive ratio* (cause or reason), but in the way as and insofar as they are given." In this way, suggests Marion, "phenomenology is able to return to the things themselves."[8] He believes that such a phenomenology does not only "free the thought of revelation in general," but is also "the only appropriate philosophy, not only for religion in its essence but also for knowledge as revelation."[9]

Therefore, the task in front of Marion is to construct a phenomenology of religion which will finally encompass not only the very essence of a revealed religion (*R*evelation), but also the knowledge and understanding of revelation in general (revelation). Marion first uses the term "saturated phenomenon" in his attempt to sketch the possibility of a phenomenology of religion.[10] For revelation to be conceivable, phenomenology must overcome metaphysics. To that end, Marion seeks to discover whether there are any restrictions that phenomenology itself imposes upon religion, restrictions that will obscure the possibility of revelation. He finds two such restrictions. One restriction is the question of reduction, which is the "leading back" of a phenomenon to the subject *I*. In phenomenology, it is the lived experience and the consciousness of

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[8] It is important to note that Marion already develops this thesis in such an early work as *Reduction and Givenness*. For there, he goes on to claim his new principle, "So much reduction, so much givenness," which he says is "more adequate than the other principles proposed for phenomenology." This principle is better able to "thematise explicitly a new definition, at once broader and more basic, of the phenomenon – no longer as object or being, but as given." See Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward A Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University, 2002), p. 3.

[9] "The Possible and Revelation," p. 4.

[10] In his "Notes on the Origin of the Texts," Marion says that "the 'saturating/saturated phenonmenon is announced in this essay ["The Possible and Revelation"] for the first time."*The Visible and the Revealed*, p. xiii. Then he further develops the idea of the saturated phenomenon after his *Reduction and Givenness*, and finally gives it a full exposition in his *In Excess*.

the subject that constitutes a phenomenon.[11] The phenomenon of revelation, if there is

one, will then run against this characteristic of phenomenality because revelation by its

very nature cannot be perceived or anticipated ordinarily. It surprises, shocks, puzzles

and even initially invokes the subject's unbelief as opposed to her belief. Revelation

does not belong to the ordinary correspondence of lived experience. Indeed, Marion goes

so far as to concede that revelation invokes a "powerlessness to experience," as opposed

to a lived experience. Paradoxically, when the subject *I* tries to exhaust revelation with

her lived experience, revelation disappears.[12] The phenomenological reduction, which

leads the phenomenon back to the constituting *I*, is thus restricted and bounded by

subjectivity. Therefore, for Marion, we either allow revelation to be "confined by the

revealed lived experience" (in which case it disappears), or we need to free it from

subjectivity.[13]

Another obstacle phenomenology poses to the possibility of revelation is its idea

of a presupposed horizon. For Marion, following Heidegger, this horizon is set by

Being.[14] Under the restriction of this horizon, if revelation happens, it has to appear

within "the space of manifestation" determined by the "horizon of Being" and not that of

God. Therefore, "Being precedes God," and consequently, Being precedes revelation.

The implication is that Heidegger's phenomenology severely damages the possibility of

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[11] This principle of all principles is always used to describe a Husserlian phenomenology. The principle of all principles states that "every originarily giving intuition is a source of right for cognition – that everything that offers itself originarily to us in intuition must simply be received for what it gives itself, but without passing beyond the limits in which it gives itself." *Being Given*, p. 12.

[12] "The Possible and Revelation," p. 9.

[13] Ibid., p. 10.

[14] Marion argues that Heidegger always includes God within Being so that for Heidegger "the truth of Being" precedes "the word 'God'." God is then confined under the space disposed by Being. Marion concludes that, according to Heidegger, "since thinking and saying the word 'God' does not depend first and solely on God, one must conclude that God cannot be said or thought directly from himself, in short, that he cannot reveal himself." Ibid., p. 10-11.

revelation, because it is limited by Being, which controls all the terms and conditions within which revelation can manifest itself.[15] The horizon of Being of phenomenology, which is supposed to be the site of all possible manifestation, now becomes the limitation of the possibility of revelation. The second obstacle Marion has to overcome, therefore, is to free God or revelation from Being.

For these reasons, Marion holds that within the structure of the aforementioned method and presuppositions of phenomenology, phenomenology is unable to account for the possibility of revelation. Recognizing these two obstacles (the question of subjectivity and the notion of a horizon) Marion continues to ask if there are areas where phenomenology can transgress these limitations so as to, on one hand, account for the possibility of revelation, and, on the other, not damage, but rather further, the intended goal of phenomenology, which is a "leading back" to things themselves. Upon closer examination of these two presuppositions (subjectivity and horizon), Marion argues that they are not legitimate presuppositions, and thus not valid obstacles for the possibility of a phenomenology of revelation. Concerning the subject *I*, Marion questions its origin: "What is this *I*? Is the *I* original or derived?" So long as the autonomous origin of this constituting *I* remains highly dubious, Marion argues that we may want to reverse the dependence traditional phenomenology posits between the phenomenon and the constituting *I*; the subject *I*, rather than constituting, is itself constituted "from a givenness that cannot be constituted, cannot be objectified and is therefore prior to it." The subject *I* may be even derived from a revelation.

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[15] Ibid., p. 11.

Marion applies a similar approach to the question of horizon. If the site or horizon of the presentation of a phenomenon varies,[16] and often finds itself inadequate to present the phenomenon, or, more radically, if revelation cannot be presented by any horizon, but nonetheless still requires a horizon, should we not then consider that revelation "presents itself in a horizon by *saturating* it?"[17] This saturation, disruption, damage, and confusion do not represent any corruption of revelation itself, but simply shows the "incommensurability of any revelation with any phenomenological horizon."[18] What Marion tries to show is then an inverted relationship between intention and intuition in the traditional understanding of phenomenality, while arguing that this inverted relationship is in fact what phenomenology is trying to achieve: that is, to describe our experience in this world. In a common phenomenality, there is a correlate between intention and intuition, the intention of a subject and the appearance of an object intended for. Subject consciousness is structured by intentionality, which means that "all consciousness is 'consciousness *of* something.'"[19] Intentionality concerns the way in which the subject is related to the world, the world that the subject experiences, perceives, remembers, thinks, judges, and so on. The world is there *for* me and accepted by me.[20] Intentionality is therefore always directed towards something (in the world), an object that is aimed at or "glanced towards." But intentionality is also "ordered towards

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[16] According to Marion, different thinkers will use different horizons for the presentation of a phenomenon. For Husserl, it is objectivity, Heidegger Being, Levinas ethics, and Merleau-Ponty the body of the flesh. "The Possible and Revelation," p. 14.

[17] Ibid., p. 15. Italic is original.

[18] Ibid., p. 16.

[19] Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), p. 25. My emphasis.

[20] Ibid. According to Horner, the idea that the world exists 'for me' is the way Husserl thinks a subject is related to the world. Horner quotes Husserl, "Anything belonging to the world, any spatio-temporal being, exists for me.... The world is for me absolutely nothing else but the world existing for and accepted by me in such a conscious *cogito*." Horner here quotes from Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), §8, p.21.

intuition," which is basically about "meaning-making."[21] This meaning-making is the

correlate between the *noema* (the meant object, the perceived) and *noesis* ("the act of

consciousness correlative to the *noema*," or perceiving). A given phenomenon is then

manifested in a subject's act of constitution.[22] An empty intention is simply an intention

targeting something that is not there. A perfect intuition, on the other hand is one that

fills an intention; this means that the object, either in its bodily "actual presence" or as

"an object of insight (such as mathematical truth)," coincides with what is intentionally

meant.[23] If I look for a pencil in the drawer and there is no pencil in the drawer, my

intended object is not present and my intention is not filled. However, if I find a pencil in

the drawer, my intention is filled by the presence of the pencil. Marion goes even further,

and distinguishes between three types of intuition: poor, common, and excessive. In

classical phenomenality, we aim at poor and common phenomena. An example of a poor

phenomenon is a mathematical equation such as $1+1=2$, which almost gives no intuition;

it displays a mere fact. A common phenomenon is like the example of looking for a

pencil when the pencil is where one looks for it. The pencil in this case is manifested in

intuition, for it fills the intentionality of my consciousness of a pencil. Marion's own

example of a common phenomenon is the production of a technological object first

designed on a computer. The appearance of the object at the end of the production line

fills (imperfectly, more often than not) the design or the intention of the designer. In this

case, the produced technological object, intended in the design, appears in the intuition

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[21] Ibid., p 28.

[22] In common phenomenality, Marion emphasizes that in order to constitute an object in its common and proper phenomenality, "it is not a matter of what is perceived but of what is perceived insomuch as ordered to definition, to essence, or in short, to the sense of the object." Such "privileged and adapted" perception represses other invisibilities of the object. See Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), p. 107-108.

[23] *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, p. 28.

(either exactly or partially, given the imperfection of machinery), thereby filling the

intention. Going beyond Husserl, Marion posits a third type of intuition. This is an

intuition, not of shortage, but of excess.[24] As Christina Gschwandtner points out,

according to Marion's reading of Husserl's intentionality, "Husserl believes that the field

of signification is much larger than that of intuition." Hence, the fulfillment of intention

in intuition is always missed.[25] Arguing for the existence of this third type of intuition,

Marion claims that revelation is a phenomenon with saturated intuition, such that "instead

of common phenomenality striving to make intuition adequate to intention, and usually

having to admit the failure in givenness of an incompletely intuited though fully intended

object, revelation gives objects where intuition surpasses the intentional aim."[26] This is a

very preliminary sketch of the idea of the saturated phenomenon, an idea which Marion

thinks will allow him to work out a phenomenology of religion. He develops this idea

further in his subsequent writings, to an examination of which I now turn.[27]

1.2 The Saturated Phenomenon

For Marion, a saturated phenomenon is a phenomenon with its intuition in such an excess

that it exceeds and precedes the intention of the subject. In saturated phenomena,

"intuition always submerges the expectation of the intention" and "givenness not only

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[24] *Being Given*, p. 189-93.
[25] Christina Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 77.
[26] Ibid.
[27] An essay entitled "The Saturated Phenomenon" first appeared in French in *Phénoménologie et théologie*, ed. Jean-François Courtine (Paris: Critérion, 1992), 79-128. It was subsequently translated into English and published in *Philosophy Today* 40.1-4 (1996): 103-24, as well as in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, ed. Dominique Janicaud, Jean-François Courtine, et al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 176-216. Still, Marion later on gives a "later version" of the saturated phenomenon in his books *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), and *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

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entirely invests manifestation but, surpassing it, modifies its common characteristics."[28]

Describing intuition in this way certainly changes phenomenology's traditional way of describing a phenomenon. Horner describes such a phenomenon as a disruption: "saturated phenomena disrupt the fulfillment of an intentional aim in intuition, not because intuition is lacking but because it is excessive."[29] According to Gschwandtner, Marion interprets Husserlian phenomenology as a phenomenology that focuses on the poor phenomenon, or intuition in shortage, in which intentionality or the concept is always fuller than intuition.[30] With the saturated phenomenon Marion organizes phenomenality in such a way that it is the phenomenon, rather than the intention of the subject, that "imposes itself onto consciousness, which becomes a mere passive recipient."[31] Marion thus reverses the traditional understanding, according to which intentionality precedes intuition, and intention, often enough, can only be partially filled. Now the subject experiences a surplus rather than a lack as in nominal phenomenological description. Since the saturated phenomenon now precedes and exceeds the intention, it can no longer be constituted or synthesized by intentionality; it no longer appears as an object to the intention. A saturated phenomenon is then no longer subsumed by any concept or conscious subject.

Since a saturated phenomenon escapes the concept of consciousness, an experience of a saturated phenomenon becomes a counter-experience, according to Marion; it no longer appears as a simple, ordinary, lived experience. A saturated

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[28] *Being Given*, p.225.
[29] *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, p. 123.
[30] *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 77. Gschwandtner also points out that Marion's poor, common and excessive intuitions are derived from Marion's reading of Descartes' "mathematical" simple nature, common objects, and separated substances (such as God and angels). See Ibid., p. 78.
[31] *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 79.

phenomenon, as proposed by Marion, exceeds Kant's four categories and principles of understanding: quantity, quality, relation, and modality. It is "*invisable* (unfore-seeable) according to quantity, *unbearable* according to quality, but also *unconditioned* (absorbed from any horizon) according to relation, and irreducible to the *I* (incapable of being looked at) according to modality."[32]

The saturated phenomenon as an excess inverts the categories of quantity. According to the categories of quantity, the phenomenon as a whole can be represented according to "the sum of its parts."[33] The finite summation and combination of finite parts into the whole allows the phenomenon (poor and common) to be seen and measured before hand, thus allowing it to be foreseeable and measurable. But for a saturated phenomenon, the excess of the phenomenon cannot be predicted and measured. It brings amazement.[34] Marion gives the example of an historical event as an example of this type of saturated phenomenon which exceeds the categories of quantity.[35] For Marion, a historical event that "is not limited to an instant [time], a place [space], or an empirical individual"[36] is an event that is not foreseeable or measurable and therefore is a saturated phenomenon that surpasses the principle of quantity.

The saturated phenomenon also exceeds the categories of quality which measure the intensity of a phenomenon. The categories of quality give the phenomenon a degree of intuition that perception can anticipate. But in the case of saturation, the phenomenon

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[32] "The Saturated Phenomenon" in Dominique Janicaud, Jean-François Courtine, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, and Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy 15 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p.211. Italics original.
[33] *Being Given*, p. 200.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., p. 228.
[36] Ibid.

blinds and bedazzles the gaze, rendering the phenomenon unbearable.[37] According to

Marion, the phenomenon of the idol has "an intuitive intensity that goes beyond the

degree that a gaze can sustain."[38] For instance, painting, the privileged occurrence of the

idol, sets up a situation in which intuition "surpasses the concept or the concept proposed

to welcome it."[39]

The saturated phenomenon also "appears *absolute* according to relation, which

means it evades any analogy of experience."[40] The categories of relation look at

experience through "the representation of a necessary connection of perceptions."[41] But

for Marion, a saturated phenomenon either exceeds the concept that foresees it, or

articulates several horizons simultaneously, or it lumps together both possibilities of

exceeding the concept and engaging in multiple horizons. Such a saturated phenomenon

is thus absolute, singular and unconditioned. According to Marion, the flesh, which is

defined "as the identity of what touched with the medium where this touching takes

place,"[42] is the saturated phenomenon without analogy. The flesh "auto-affects"[43] itself;

it is the "mine-ness"[44] of myself. Thus, it is freed from any horizon of intentionality

because it is the place where intentionality is formed. Marion concedes that such an

immanent, auto, and self-affection of the flesh exceeds and precedes all intentionality and

signification.

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[37] *Being Given*, p. 203.
[38] "The Saturated Phenomenon," p. 202.
[39] *Being Given*, p. 229-230.
[40] Ibid., p. 206.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., p. 231.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., p. 232.

Finally, inverting the principle of modality, the saturated phenomenon is said to be *irregardable*.[45] Marion maintains that the first three categories (quantity, quality and relation), belong to the question of horizon. The fourth categories of modality belong to the question of the constituting subject. Quantity, quality, and relation denote the objects in themselves (quantity, quality) or their relationships with other objects (relation). Modality, however, refers to the relationship of the objects to the thought of the subject. The possibility of a phenomenon is then determined by the experience and concepts of the transcendental *I*. This dependence of the phenomenon on the transcendental *I* does not *show* itself *by* itself (thus the meaning of phenomenon: showing itself by itself), but instead is alienated *from* itself because it is the experience and concepts of the transcendental *I* that render the phenomenon possible. Inverting the categories of modality, the saturated phenomenon is autonomous and does not depend upon the gaze, or the experience and the concepts of the subject for its appearance. According to Marion, the icon is such a saturated phenomenon. Different from the idol which saturates the horizon of any single hermeneutics, the icon blocks or interrupts the gaze of the transcendental *I* by exceeding it, annulling "all effort at constituting."[46] The icon goes further besides interrupting the gaze of the subject; the icon reverses the gaze by exerting "its own gaze over that which meets it." For Marion, such inversion turns the subject *I*

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[45] Jeffrey L. Kosky explains that "*Irregardable* designates what cannot be looked at or gazed upon." Kosky then maintains the translation of the verb *regarder* as "to gaze" and the noun *regard* as "the gaze." See *Being Given*, p. 364, n. 59. Marion also explains the difference between "to gaze" and "to see." For Marion, "[i]n order to see, it is not as necessary to perceive by the sense of sight (or any other sense) as it is to receive what shows *itself* on its own because it gives *itself* in visibility at its own initiative, according to its own rhythm, and with its essential contingency, in such a way as to appear without reproducing or repeating itself." However, "gazing, *regarder*, is about being able to keep the visible thus seen under the control of the seer, exerting this control by guarding the visible in visibility, as much as possible without letting it have the initiative in appearing (or disappearing) by forbidding it any variation in intensity that would disturb its inscription in the concept, and especially by conserving it in permanent presence through postulating its identical reproducibility." See *Being Given*, p. 214.
[46] *Being Given*, p. 213.

into *me*.[47] Therefore, the four types of saturated phenomenon: event, idol, flesh and icon, present an inversion of the four Kantian categories of understanding. As Kevin Hart helpfully puts it, "[w]hile poor and common law phenomena allow themselves to be mastered by intentionality, the rich phenomenon eschews any such attempt; it gives itself to us saturated in intuition, breaching, or overflowing the horizons of intentionality." Concerning the way in which the saturated phenomenon exceeds the terms of the Kantian understanding of experience, Hart continues, "[w]e cannot experience the saturated phenomenon, at least not according to the Kantian notion of 'experience'; it manifests itself to us only in counter-experience, for it is not an object that can be described in terms of the Kantian table of judgments."[48]

Therefore, a saturated phenomenon is "an unconditioned phenomenon" which "gives itself as absolute—free from any analogy with already seen, objectified, comprehended experience."[49] It is also irregardable: its "possibility" to appear is no longer constituted by the subject *I*. In a formal condition of experience, the possibility of experience is governed by the conceptual consciousness of the subject. But in saturation the possibility of things no longer needs to agree with the concept of things under the formal condition of experience.[50] In this regard, in saturation the phenomenon is not constituted as an object because there is a disagreement between the given phenomenon and the subjective conditions by which one can experience such a phenomenon. This inability to objectify the phenomenon does not stem from a lack, defect, or deficit in the

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[47] Ibid., p. 233.
[48] Kevin Hart, "Of Love and How," *Journal of the American of Religion*, September 2009, Vol. 77, No. 3, p.717-718.
[49] *Being Given*, p.211-212.
[50] Ibid., p.212.

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phenomenon, but, on the contrary, from its excess.[51] Since a saturated phenomenon gives

itself, it must be able to be seen, albeit not as an object. But its ability to be seen is not

under the control and the terms of the subject, because the subject is unable to retain,

transform, and conform the saturated phenomenon within the range of subjective

conceptualization. For Marion, such a counter-experience of the saturated phenomenon

is not a non-experience, but an experience that "contradicts the conditions for the

experience of objects," and "resists the conditions of objectification." Nevertheless, the

intuition of a saturated phenomenon appears blurry because the receptive side has a "too

narrow aperture, the too short lens," and "the too cramped frame" to receive the

intuition.[52]

In other words, the saturated phenomenon can be experienced as a counter-

experience, one that is initiated by the phenomenon instead of the intentionality of the

subject, but cannot be objectified by the subject within her horizon of concepts. Thus,

Hart comments that, in Marion, "phenomenology has come to acknowledge the priority

of intuition with respect to intentionality.... Horizons of intentionality are breached more

often than we have thought, and we need to acknowledge that phenomenality has the

power to surprise us."[53] Only when it allows for the possibility of a phenomenon to be

given in excess, Marion believes, will phenomenology be able to move forward.

A saturated phenomenon, as suggested by Marion, not only reverses Kant's four

principles of understanding, but it also surpasses Husserl's "principle of all principles."

According to Marion, the "principles of all principles" states that *every originarily*

giving intuition is a source of right for cognition—that *everything* that offers itself

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[51] Ibid., p.213.
[52] Ibid., p.215.
[53] Hart, "Of Love and How," p. 716.

originarily to us *in intuition* (in its fleshly actuality, so to speak) *must simply be received for what it gives itself,* but without *passing beyond the limits in which it gives itself.*"[54] For Marion, there are three "traits" in this Husserlian "principle of all principles." First, intuition has "the source of right" for knowledge and "[i]ntuition is sufficient for the phenomenon to justify its right to appear, without any other reason," and "without any presupposition." Thus givenness alone ensures "the full right" of appearance and alone is "the reason of that appearance."[55] The second trait points to the fact that the "principle of principles" posits a limitation on intuition. Intuition is given "only *within the limits* in which it is given there." Marion's interpretation here emphasizes how this second trait limits (whatever that limit is) the possibility and full right of the givenness as stated in the first trait. For Marion, Husserl's intentional horizon becomes "the delimitation" that circumscribes the right of appearance of the intuition.[56] The third trait of this principle that Marion distinguishes also restrains intuition, because it emphasizes the idea that intuition is meant to "offer itself to *us*." Thus, while givenness "keeps its originary and justifying function," it can nonetheless "give and justify nothing except before the tribunal of the *I*."[57] For Marion, Husserl's principle cannot cover all phenomena because intuition is now limited to a horizon and reduced to the constituting *I*.

Marion goes on to suggest, however, that by inverting the priority of intentionality the saturated phenomenon surpasses the limitations set by Husserl's "principle of all principles." Marion concedes that, in the first two of the four ways in which the saturated

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[54] *Being Given*, p.12. Italics original.
[55] "The Saturated Phenomenon," p.181.
[56] According to Marion, "any intuition, in order to give within certain factual 'limits', must first be inscribed by right within the limits of a horizon" which is "according to its etymology, the delimitation." See "The Saturated Phenomenon," p.181-182.
[57] See "The Saturated Phenomenon," p.180-184.

phenomenon overturns Kant's characterization of the conditions of experiences (the notion that a saturated phenomenon is *invisable* and *unbearable*), the saturated phenomenon accords with the first trait of Husserl's principle (that givenness can give and justify itself). This is because "what intuition gives can quantitatively and qualitatively surpass the scope of the gaze." These two features of phenomena thus accord with the Husserlian principle of principles. However, the unconditioned (without horizon) and irreducible (irreducible to *I*) features of saturated phenomena contradict Husserl's principle, insofar as "the horizon and the constituting *I*" are no longer unquestionably presupposed as conditions of possibility for receiving a phenomenon. This contradiction, for Marion, brings phenomenology to a different level, a level upon which we can seriously consider "the possibility of the impossible."

By allowing for the possibility of a saturated phenomenon to appear based on intuition alone, and not on "sufficient reason" or a "conceptual *a priori*," Marion creates space in which Husserl's "principle of principles" is still able to free phenomenology "from the metaphysical requirement of a ground."[58] For Marion, the reason that Husserl preserves the horizon and the *I* in his "principle of principles" is because he still wants to circumscribe the possibility of a phenomenon by these two conditions: the horizon and the *I*. Marion interprets this move by Husserl as simply giving "a reserve of phenomenology itself – which still keeps a reserve *of* possibility so that it may itself be overcome in favor of a possibility without reserve." The saturated phenomenon, Marion claims, would offer this possibility without reserve that phenomenology itself envisions. In order to achieve this, however, the saturated phenomenon must overcome certain limitations set by the Husserlian principle, especially those parts of its framework that

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[58] *Being Given*, p.12.

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posit the horizon and the *I* as the conditions of possibility for any phenomena. As a result, an intuition will no longer be rendered impossible simply because it does not fall solely within the range of subjective intention. No longer circumscribed by the horizon and the constituting *I* in the way that Husserl thought inescapable, the unconditioned and irreducible character of the saturated phenomenon frees intuition from its previous constraints, and turns what is impossible in Husserl's construal of phenomenology into a possibility. Marion goes even further, and argues that the saturated phenomenon should not be "understood as an exceptional, indeed vaguely irrational (to say it plainly, 'theological'), case of phenomenality." Rather, he contends that it unreservedly meets "the most operative definition of the phenomenon: it alone appears truly as itself, of itself, and on the basis of itself," by "giving *itself* as a *self*."[59] By freeing the phenomenon from the objectifying constraints of the horizon and the subject *I*, the phenomenon is now visible as it-*self*.

Marion has thus shown how the saturated phenomenon surpasses both the Kantian formal conditions of understanding as well as the Husserlian principle of all principles. As Gschwandtner points out, Marion shows that Husserl initially seems to overcome the Kantian categorical conditions of experience, yet he still limits phenomena by positing the horizon and the *I* as the condition of phenomena. Yet Marion contends that (saturated) phenomena should be able to explode the horizon and transgress subjectivity, and therefore not be constrained by "synthesis and judgment." As Gschwandtner summarizes Marion's position: "[o]nly in this way can givenness be thought unconditionally and irreducibly."[60]

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[59] *Being Given*, p.219. Marion follows this definition of phenomenology from Heidegger's *Being and Time*.
[60] *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 77.

1.3. Revelation as the Saturation of Saturation

For Marion, as the only phenomenon that appears truly as itself, the saturated phenomenon most adequately expresses the true definition of a phenomenon. It is the phenomenon *par excellence*. Marion proposes that there are four categories of saturated phenomena: the event, the idol, the flesh, and the icon. Interpreting paradox as *para-doxa*, which is not just a counter-opinion but a counter-expectation, saturated phenomena become paradoxes in the way that, through their donation, "the intuition always submerges the expectation of intention."[61] Marion asks a further question in this context: Is there a maximum or highest degree of phenomenality? He claims that there is such a maximum phenomenality, and he calls this absolute maximum phenomenality the phenomenon of revelation.[62]

According to Marion, revelation is the paradox of all paradoxes, saturation of saturation, or saturation *par excellence*. This paradox of paradoxes gathers at once all four types of saturations (event, idol, flesh, and icon) and thus their characteristics (unforeseeable, unbearable, absolute, and irregardable). If the saturated phenomenon is a saturation of phenomenality of the first degree, then revelation is a saturation of phenomenality of the second degree: the saturation of saturation, a phenomenon of saturation *par excellence*. The character of such saturation *par excellence* is that it has to remain a phenomenon even though it reaches "the potential maximum." By remaining a phenomenon, it will continue to transgress itself and surpass all the forms of actuality that

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[61] *Being Given.*, p.225-26.
[62] Ibid., p.235. See also "The Saturated Phenomenon" in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, 212-213. "This phenomenon with its possibility free of any preliminary determination is called revelation."

it becomes. Following the discipline of phenomenology, Marion asserts that phenomenology does not and "cannot decide if a revelation can or should ever give itself." But in case a revelation does appear, such revelation "should assume the figure of the paradox of paradoxes."[63] By appealing to Christianity, Marion claims that Jesus' life is a revelation which "concentrates in itself an event, an idol, a flesh, and an icon, all at the same time."

However, for Marion, the revelation which is the possibility of the saturated phenomenon *par excellence* is different from the Revelation which is an event or actuality. The small 'r' revelation is the possibility of the phenomenon in which God, if God were to manifest himself, configures himself. The capital 'R' Revelation is the actuality and the event in which God manifests himself. In *Being Given*, Marion cautions that "*R*evelation (as actuality) is never confounded with *r*evelation (as possible phenomenon)."[64] He also admits that "[t]he fact (if there is one) of Revelation, exceeds the scope of all science, including that of phenomenology." He continues: "Only a theology constructed itself on the basis of this fact alone" can reach this Revelation.[65] The motive behind separating the small 'r' and capital 'R' Revelation is that Marion wants to separate his phenomenology from his theology. In *In Excess*, Marion explicitly states that his position on the phenomenon of revelation in the essay "The Saturated Phenomenon" has now been "rectified" in *Being Given*. He continues, "the phenomenon of revelation no longer enters into the series of four saturated phenomena (under the title of icon), but, outside the series, picks up the four figures again in a paradox to the second

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[63] *Being Given*, p.235.
[64] *Being Given*, p. 367. n. 90. Italics original.
[65] Ibid.

degree, outside the norm, although accomplishing all of them."[66] The reason for this

rectification is discussed in "Notes on the Origin of the Texts" in his *The Visible and the*

Revealed. Marion explains that the "fifth type," or the saturation *par excellence*, allows

him to create a "distance between the saturated phenomenon in its quadruple banality

[event, idol, flesh and icon], on the one hand, and the phenomenon of revelation (hence

the possibility of Revelation), on the other." This distance "makes it possible to maintain

a neat distinction between phenomenology (event of givenness) and theology (event of

Revelation)."[67]

Despite Marion's effort to distinguish between Revelation and revelation, these

two terms, small 'r' and capital 'R' revelation, "are frequently interwoven" in his work.

As Horner points out, this ambiguity between small 'r' and capital 'R' revelation suggests

that "the possibility of r/Revelation is not easily separated from its actuality.[68] Horner

also notes that in *Being Given*, while the distinction between small 'r' and capital 'R'

revelation is explicit, the small 'r' revelation "seems inevitably to refer to revelatory

phenomena from the Christian tradition."[69] According to Horner, it is in the final volume

of his phenomenological trilogy, *In Excess*, that the small 'r' revelation "does not define

an extreme stratum or a particular region of phenomenality, but rather the universal mode

of phenomenalization of what gives *itself* in what shows *itself*."[70] This means that small

'r' revelation is no longer just the condition of possibility of phenomenality but is a

phenomenality itself. Horner seems to suggest that the distinction between small 'r' and

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[66] *In Excess*, p. 29n41.
[67] *The Visible and the Revealed*, p. xiv.
[68] Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*, p. 132..
[69] Robyn Horner, "Aporia or Excess? Two Strategies for Thinking r/Revelation," *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 331.
[70] *In Excess*, p. 52. Italics original.

capital 'R' revelation becomes undone as Marion broadens the definition of small 'r' revelation to include all other saturated phenomena such as historical events. For Horner, while Marion still considers phenomena with capital 'R' revelation, the capital 'R' revelation becomes "one of a range of possibilities of the small r revelatory phenomenon." This is evident when Marion suggests that his saturated phenomenon should "abolish definitely" the caesura between "the world of objects," constituted and rational, and "the revealed of Revelation," non-constituted and irrational. The abolition brings the consequence of treating "Jewish and Christian Revelation" as rightfully phenomena, "obeying the same operation" of the saturated phenomena.[71]

Horner thinks that this rejoining of small 'r' and capital 'R' revelation in *In Excess* calls for a hermeneutical supplement to both phenomenology and theology, which I will discuss further in the next chapter.[72] But for now, I will summarize by first recalling Marion's intention to produce a phenomenology of religion. This phenomenology of religion is to move beyond a metaphysics which only describes poor and common law phenomena. By introducing the saturated phenomenon, Marion is able to account for phenomenality beyond poor and common phenomena. Moving to the extremity of the saturated phenomenon, Marion introduces the saturated phenomenon *par excellence*, which is the small 'r' revelation. But this small 'r' revelation is only a possibility; its actuality is under the jurisdiction of revealed theology, or the capital 'R' revelation. If one pictures the whole phenomenality of the poor, the saturated, and the saturated *par excellence* with three concentric circles, with the poor in the middle, the

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[71] *In Excess*, p. 52-53.
[72] "Aporia or Excess?" p. 332.

saturated surrounding it,[73] and the *par excellence* as the outmost circle, one sees that

Marion attempts to establish a phenomenology of religion which nonetheless rightfully

exists in the realm of phenomenality; in his words, "the data produced by Revelation...

must be read and treated as rightfully phenomena."[74]

However, the question of possibility remains, because the outmost circle is only a

possible description of saturation *par excellence*. The presence of this outmost band

explains why Marion is often accused of doing theology within his phenomenology. In

In Excess, Marion seems to dissolve the boundary between the outmost circle and the

circle of the saturated phenomenon, by suggesting that other saturated phenomena (at

least the event) are also revelatory. This move allows for a smooth continuity between

saturation and saturation *par excellence*. But this gesture still requires the saturation *par*

excellence or capital 'R' revelation to stay at the outmost limit of saturation because it is

a saturation *par excellence*, a saturation at the limit of saturation. Thus Marion assures a

continuity between the actuality of both small 'r' (which now includes other saturated

phenomena) and capital 'R' revelations. It is at this point that two hermeneutic moments

are required. The first hermeneutic moment differentiates the capital 'R' revelation from

other revelatory saturated phenomena (or to differentiate the *par excellence* from other

instances of saturation. This moment helps remove the ambiguity between small 'r' and

capital 'R' revelation. The other hermeneutical moment is to differentiate between

different revelatory religions within this capital 'R' revelation. The aporia between

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[73] This is how Marion describes the poor and saturated phenomena. "As soon as phenomenology was able to reopen the field of phenomenality, to include objects there as a simple, particular case of phenomena (poor and common) and to surround them with the immense region of saturated phenomena, this caesura [the caesura that metaphysics hollows out between the world of objects and the world of the revealed of Revelation] is no longer justified." See *In Excess*, p. 52.
[74] *In Excess*, p. 52-53.

*r*evelation and *R*evelation in Marion will be further discussed in Chapter two. For now, we need to turn to Marion's discussion on the reception of such saturated phenomenon *par excellence* if such saturated phenomenon is possible.

1.4. The Gifted

If the saturated phenomenon, especially the saturated phenomenon *par excellence* (revelation), surpasses the intention (horizon) and the subject (the constituting *I*), how would one respond when one is confronted by it? Ricoeur answers this question by attending to hermeneutics, according to which a subject is "formed and transformed" by constantly interpreting the signs around her. Marion, following his previous thesis of givenness,[75] concedes that the subject is the medium "to which and unto whom" revelation makes itself manifest. In a move away from Husserlian phenomenology, however, Marion maintains that, when it comes to the saturated phenomenon, the subject *I* no longer performs the role of object constitution. In this case the *I*, instead of constituting, is itself constituted.

When confronted by a saturated phenomenon, an inversion occurs. In 'poor' or 'common' phenomena, the intuition partially fulfills the intentional aim of the subject. When intuition appears in such a manner that no concept from the subject is able to hold the surplus, the phenomenon is said to be saturated. With no concept to hold the saturated phenomenon, the constituting *I* can only take the role of a witness, a

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[75] "Givenness" is the thesis of Marion's phenomenological project. He asserts, in his own words, that "once the principle 'As much reduction, as much givenness' [as concluded from his *Reduction and Givenness*] was acquired, the question of the saturated phenomenon could only become explicit." "The excess of intuition over signification and over the concept" is further accounted for by givenness from the relationship between "what gives itself and what shows itself," which is the theme of Marion's *Being Given*. See *In Excess*, p. xxi-xxii.

"constituted witness." The transcendental status of the subject is eradicated when the subject now becomes an object of the givenness, or a witness to the givenness. The understanding and concepts possessed by this *I* become inadequate to the task of constituting the meaning given in the saturated phenomenon. Even the gazes between this *I* and the phenomenon are inverted. The *I*, instead of aiming at the intuition, thereby trying to find in previous experience a concept with which to signify what happens, is now being *aimed at* by the saturated phenomenon. For this reason, the witness loses her transcendental stance, cannot see the phenomenon in its totality, has no concept to adequately comprehend its excess, and so is eventually judged and determined by the phenomenon. The witness in this case can no longer assume the "eloquent or heroic" role to report, convey, and defend; rather, she becomes "luminous" as soon as the phenomenon "arrives" at her.[76] Marion calls such a witness, the gifted (*l'adonné*).[77]

According to Marion, the gifted is one who is exposed to a saturated phenomenon, and is willing to emancipate this givenness, or let it show itself. Ultimately, by offering himself to receive and thus let the phenomenon show itself, the gifted receives himself according to the unfolding of the phenomenon.[78] When the gifted encounters a saturated phenomenon, two things happen: the phenomenon shows "itself" and the subject *I*

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[76] *Being Given*, p. 216-218.

[77] As Jeffrey L. Kosky points out in his translation notes, the "gifted" is translated from the French word "*l'adonné*." A more literal translation would be "he who is given over." Some other meanings also include "the addict" or "the devotee." Kosky probably chooses "gifted" as a translation in order to maintain consistency with other translations, such as "givenness," "giver," "givee," "gift" and "given." See *Being Given*, p.369, n. 22. In *In Excess* the translators Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud have left the French word untranslated.

[78] The gifted as a receiver responding to a given saturated phenomenon is different from a receiver receiving the given as a gift. Marion's (new) principle of "so much reduction, so much givenness" has already bracketed the giver, the gift and the givee. By bracketing the givee, and for a gift to be an authentic gift (a given), the receiver or givee has to be invisible, otherwise her presence would become a sufficient cause of the gift and her potential repayment to the giver would also economize the gift. Therefore, the visibility of a givee damages the purity of the givenness. See *Being Given*, 85-93. However, Marion also points out that the given as it gives itself has to come to a givee. When it comes to "'[w]hat comes after the subject' – I call him 'the gifted.'" *Being Given*, p. 4.

receives his "self/me."[79] Adhering to the principle method of phenomenology, which is a leading back to "things themselves,"[80] Marion believes that the twofold task of dethroning the transcendental *I* (the subject) and effacing the horizon (the concept) restores an operation of "that which brings the semblance of appearing to the appearing of phenomena such as they are." Therefore, this ultimate reduction[81] allows the phenomenon to show "itself," and transforms the constituting *I* into the gifted. Consequently, the "conditions of possibility of experience" are now not determined and fixed by the subject *I*. This seemingly contradictory process of replacing the role of the operator subject from a determining agent to a receiving agent nevertheless permits the phenomenon to manifest itself. In order for the "given" to show itself inasmuch as it gives itself, the governing agency or the subject *I* has to be reduced to a receiver. The given or the phenomenon is now not contaminated nor validated by any subject or operator. The givenness now "validates the manifestation," determines "its own conditions of manifestation," maintains its "uninterrogated" identity, and finally shows itself "by virtue of" it-*self*.[82]

This dethroning of the *I* seems to be impossible because, according to Kant, if there is something represented in me which could not be thought of, then that something is nothing to me or that representation is impossible.[83] All objects that are organized and

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[79] *Being Given*, 268.

[80] Quoting Heidegger, Bruce Ellis Benson points out that "the Greek term *phainomenon* 'means that which shows itself.'" See Bruce Ellis Benson, *Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida and Marion on Modern Idolatry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 174.

[81] This reduction is a third reduction introduced by Marion. The first two reductions are the transcendental (or phenomenological) reduction and the existential reduction (Heidegger). See Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 203-205.

[82] *In Excess*, p. 47-48.

[83] This is how Marion quotes Kant, with whom he disagrees. "[I]t must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations, for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be

represented are always accompanied by the "I think." Without this attachment between

the *I* and objective representation, it is impossible for the subject to claim any

representation that is inside the subject; whatever is inside the subject has to be thought,

and therefore, attached to the "I think" by the subject. Without the accompaniment of

this subjective synthesis, "the representation would be impossible, or at least would be

nothing to me." Marion takes issue with what he considers to be the degeneration of the

phenomenon to the process of objective representation by synthesis. He argues that, even

though no phenomenon can escape representation, including the saturated phenomenon

(which though blurred, nonetheless cannot be cut off from representation), this necessary

relationship between representation and the phenomenon is not necessarily the result of

the subject *I*'s production (through a spontaneous synthesis involving conceptual

understanding). Marion argues that the relationship between a phenomenon and its

representation can be 'I think', but it can also be 'I feel'. The representation can be a

result of 'I think', as in "the spontaneity of understanding" as well as a result of 'I feel',

as in "the affection of sensibility," a "sensibility *vis-à-vis* intuition." Solving a

mathematical problem can be an example of representation through the "I think,"[84] but

the description of our need for love and affirmation will belong to "the affection of

sensibility."[85] Thus, Gschwandtner describes Marion's idea of the lover as one that

provides "the most successful overcoming of the metaphysical subject."[86] Hence, Marion

goes further: He argues that since sensibility comes face to face with intuition, the claim

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thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me." See *Being Given*, p. 249.

[84] *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 216.

[85] If the Cartesian "I think" seeks for certainty and an answer to the question "Of what am I certain?" then the question "Does anyone out there love me?" seeks assurance for one's identity. See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 41.

[86] *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 220.

that synthetic apperception precedes affective sensibility is thus unfounded. In fact, any understanding has to presuppose intuition or the givenness of the phenomenon. Marion's argument, therefore, proposes to reverse the antecedence of apperception to sensibility; instead he posits an inverted priority which makes the passive sensibility, the "recipient of givenness" the '*a priori*'.[87]

By inverting the priority between the "I think" subject and the "I am affected" receiver, the gifted becomes situated between "what gives itself as itself" and "what shows itself as itself." The apperception and synthetic process is postponed and delayed. Through the receiver, what gives itself shows itself as itself without the determination or validation of the subject. Using the analogy of a prism, Marion explicates the relationship between a white light, a prism, and the resulting colored rays that emerge once the light passes through the prism. The prism is a pure receiver of the white light, inserted in the path of the white light. What come out on the other side of the prism are the multiple colored rays of the white light, which is the white light *itself*. The prism does not modify, validate, or determine the result. As a receiver, the prism simply *lets* the white light show *itself*.[88] However, the receiver or the gifted does not only receive the phenomenon, the gifted also receives himself (as the gifted). In Marion's words, "the visibility risen from the given provokes at the same time the visibility of *l'adonné* [the gifted]."[89] Keeping with the analogy, the prism is not seen *as* a prism until the given, the white light, shows its color by passing through the prism. The single operation of making visible the invisible elementary colors of a white light thus renders two things visible: the given and the gifted. As visibilities, the given and the gifted are shown together at the

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[87] *Being Given*, p. 250-251.
[88] *In Excess*, p. 50.
[89] Ibid.

same time; they are also shown reciprocally. The prism (the gifted) phenomenalizes the white light (the given), and at once the white light phenomenalizes the prism.[90]

1.5. Concluding Remarks

So far, we have discussed how Marion's idea of the saturated phenomenon emerges as an unavoidable consequence of his phenomenology of givenness. Trying to overcome metaphysics and the purported autonomy of reason, the saturated phenomenon gives revelation and its receiver their characters. Revelation comes to the gifted as a saturated phenomenon. The gifted, unto whom[91] the revelation manifests itself, is now summoned, surprised, and overwhelmed. The power that revelation exerts on the gifted only leaves her with an immediate submission, with the *I* turned into a *me* and into an *"unto whom."* Being summoned by such revelation, the subject is given her identity. Lacking any concept to objectify the saturated phenomenon, and therefore without full comprehension of the vision, the gifted is surprised and overwhelmed. In this position, the subject only finds a lack of knowledge and, because of the excessiveness of the saturated phenomenon, is incapable of conceptualizing it; she wonders. But Marion resists characterizing such response and receptivity as a form of solipsism. He claims that a dialogue, an unequal one between the revealed and the gifted, takes place here, with the subject answering to the call of the phenomenon. The subject in this dialogue

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[90] Marion also uses the process of developing film as an analogy to describe this reciprocal relationship. "*L'adonné* operates as the developer of the given, and the given as developer of *l'adonné.*" *In Excess*, p. 50-51.

[91] Marion carefully distinguishes the difference between the "to whom" and the "to which" the given shows itself. Only the "to whom" is able to play the full role of a receiver, although both the "to whom" and the "to which" can welcome the given. Marion argues that it is the "feeling" of the receiver that aims at presenting the phenomenon "for thought, manifesting for a consciousness, forming for vision what, otherwise, would give itself to the blind." *Being Given*, p. 265.

definitely does not assume a nominative, genitive, or even accusative position.[92] Instead, Marion characterizes the subject's position as "ablative," a position in which the gifted receives herself as 'me' and becomes a means to the given. The gifted thus takes the position of opening herself, responding to the unknown and the indeterminate.[93] Given Marion's depiction of revelation here, it is difficult to recognize where in this very tight encounter between the excess and the subject there is any room for interpretation from the side of the subject. The pure and total receptivity of the subject tends to squeeze out any elements or layers of hermeneutics.

However, is such a total passive receptivity with no supplement of hermeneutics possible? Is there a "placeless place, a surveillance point, from which the uninterested epistemological subject considers with a neutral and simply curious eye"[94] the phenomenality of saturation? Is the subject not always already in a life world full of meaning, symbols and signs, by which the subject identifies herself? In the next chapter, I will explore the aporia of the subject which is at once a master and a slave to the saturated phenomenon as explicated by Marion. Furthermore, I will also suggest that Marion's phenomenon of revelation as possibility eventually transgresses the mere possibility and includes the actuality of Revelation (chapter 2). But in either position— the position of revelation as mere possibility or the broadened position that includes Revelation as a subset of revelation—a supplement of hermeneutics is still required. This requirement of hermeneutics will lead us to consider Ricoeur's explication of revelation as a manifestation of the world in front of the text (chapter 3).

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[92] These positions are represented by Husserl (nominative), Heidegger (genitive) and Levinas (accusative). *Being Given*, p. 269.
[93] *Being Given*, p. 269-270.
[94] Paul Ricoeur, "Experience and Language in Religious Discourse," in Janicaud, et. al. *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate.* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 131.

Chapter Two: Questioning Jean-Luc Marion

2.1. Questioning the Saturated Phenomenon

In Chapter One, I explored how Marion attempts to reach the idea of revelation through the saturated phenomenon. Despite his exceptional innovations, there is reason to remain suspicious and critical of his portrayal of the saturated phenomenon, which he tells us forms the basis of both revelation and Revelation (where revelation is a pure phenomenon of possibility and Revelation is the actual historical event). Marion's position, as stated, suggests many additional questions: Can one describe the possibility of revelation if Revelation has never in fact happened? In other words, does revelation presuppose Revelation?[95] If this is the case, is Marion guilty of merging the two disciplines of theology and philosophy, in which Revelation becomes the presupposition for revelation?[96] There is reason to suspect that this is indeed the case, insofar as Marion's project seeks to free Revelation from metaphysics and rationality, and insofar as he thinks that the phenomenology of religion is able to animate this overcoming of metaphysics.

Yet this is not the only line of questioning one might pursue concerning Marion's understanding of the mediation of Revelation. As a further question, one might inquire whether the givenness Marion posits "crashes" onto the gifted like a projected picture crashes onto a screen. Does the self-consciousness of the gifted receive Revelation so directly? What could this "immediate" or un-mediated revelation do to the gifted? In the

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[95] Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), p.132.

[96] For example, Dominique Janicaud has accused Marion of the "theologicalization" of phenomenology. See *Phenomenology "Wide Open": After the French Debate*, p. 34. See also *Phenomenology and "The Theological Turn": the French Debate*, p. 3-107.

end, how can we tell whether such an event is an immediate revelation or a mere construction of self-consciousness?

Lastly, if the phenomenon of revelation defines the conditions of possibility of Revelation, would revelation at the same time confine Revelation? Would the terms of phenomenology thereby subsume the appearance of the divine? And in Marion's case, would his givenness become a kind of idolatry which Marion himself rejects?

In this chapter, I will investigate these lines of questioning by first exploring the question of subjectivity in Marion's phenomenology of revelation. I will attempt to show that, with respect to revelation, Marion's idea of the gifted, the one who receives the saturated phenomenon, ends up caught in an aporia of being a master and a slave at the same time. From there I will go on to investigate the question of the ambiguity Marion posits between revelation and Revelation. This ambiguity ironically allows Marion's critics to accuse him form both sides: Subversion of phenomenology to theology or subversion of theology to philosophy. These explorations will bring us to a position where we can critically assess Marion's interpretation of revelation as a saturated phenomenon *par excellence*, and therefore determine whether his phenomenological account of revelation stands in need of a hermeneutic supplement.

2.2. Before or Outside the Text

The question in front of us is whether Revelation can be immediate and pure, thus showing itself inasmuch as it gives itself (as Marion suggests), or whether it is mediated by texts and narratives that require interpretation and explanation (as Ricoeur suggests). This question is succinctly described by Ricoeur himself; he points out that "the biggest difficulty" of a phenomenology of religion "concerns the status of *immediacy*" claimed

by religious experience assuming a "call-and-response" structure.[97] Ricoeur asserts that

this difficulty does not lie in the fact of a missing "linguistic" layer, which is a layer for

"mere reflection," but in the fact that the phenomenology of religion has to confront "the

cultural and historical mediation" that is added to this linguistic layer. "This weighty

fact," Ricoeur continues, "condemns phenomenology to run the gauntlet of a hermeneutic

and more precisely of a *textual* or *scriptural* hermeneutic."[98] We will see how Ricoeur

undertakes this textual hermeneutic in his development of the idea of Revelation in

chapter three. In chapter one, on the other hand, we explored how Marion, trying to free

Revelation from any form of objective representation, describes Revelation as a saturated

phenomenon *par excellence*, as something which is pure and immediate. In my opinion,

Marion's understanding of Revelation, because it fails to pay sufficient attention to the

textual mediation of Revelation that Ricoeur insists upon, and instead claims unmediated

access to the givenness of Revelation, is problematic. In making this case, I will first

take a detour behind the scenes and examine the way in which Ricoeur relates

hermeneutics to phenomenology. This exploration will show how the cultural and

historical mediation of the text is indispensable in Ricoeur's hermeneutical

phenomenology. I will then examine Marion's saturated phenomenon through the

Ricoeurian lens of hermeneutical phenomenology, and from that perspective explore any

possible drawbacks to Marion's position.

It is well known that Ricoeur began his career as a phenomenologist. In his

autobiography, Ricoeur tells us that, after his publication of *Freedom and Nature* and

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[97] Paul Ricoeur, "Experience and Language in Religious Discourse," in Janicaud, et. al. *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate.* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 129. Italics original.
[98] "Experience and Language in Religious Discourse," p. 130. Italics original.

Fallible Man, he came to a point where he had to make two decisions concerning his phenomenological analysis of the will, one ontological, the other methodological. The ontological decision concerns an analysis of the phenomenology of the will that is neutral with respect to evil, or that considers the will separately from "historical evil." Ricoeur describes the methodological decision as having to do with "the graft of hermeneutics onto phenomenology." This methodological decision concerns the interpretation of "symbols and myths transmitted by great cultures." Both decisions come out of Ricoeur's study of the will and human finitude. Ricoeur tells us that the latter decision (the methodological decision to graft hermeneutics onto phenomenology), is particularly influenced by his suspicion of the presumed immediacy, transparency, and apodicticity of the *cogito*. Ricoeur suspects that the subject "does not know itself directly but only through the signs deposited in memory and in imagination by the great literary traditions."[99] It is through the interpretation of the signs and symbols of great literary traditions that Ricoeur finds "the expressions of the consciousness of evil."[100] This task of understanding the human will in relation to evil, through the "detour" of the interpretation of great literary traditions, eventually leads Ricoeur to explore the role that hermeneutics plays in the development of this understanding.

Ricoeur is emphatic about his turn to hermeneutics. Yet in taking it he does not intend to ruin phenomenology, but rather "to continue to do philosophy with and after Heidegger and Gadamer without forgetting Husserl." He has two theses concerning the relationship between hermeneutics and phenomenology. First, he holds that the hermeneutic critique of phenomenology is a critique of Husserlian idealism. Second, he

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[99] Paul Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), p. 16.
[100] "Intellectual Autobiography," p. 16.

insists upon a mutual belonging between hermeneutics and phenomenology.[101] In

Ricoeur's own words, "[*p*]*henomenology remains the unsurpassable presupposition of*

hermeneutics" and "phenomenology cannot constitute itself without a *hermeneutical*

presupposition."[102]

For Ricoeur, the underlying presupposition of any hermeneutics is "the choice in

favor of meaning." This choice for meaning is the structure of intentionality in

phenomenology where all conscious experiences are "about" something, so that "[e]very

act of loving is a loving *of* something, every act of seeing is a seeing *of* something."

Whether or not the object to which the act is intended in fact exists, such an intentional

act still "has meaning and a mode of being for consciousness;" it is "a meaningful

correlate of the conscious act."[103] Following this "universal character of intentionality,"

Ricoeur argues, against Husserlian idealism, that the meaning opted for by consciousness

"lies outside [consciousness] itself."[104] Ricoeur considers consciousness to be ecstatic in

this way simply because "no consciousness is self-consciousness before being

consciousness *of* something towards which it surpasses itself."[105] Thus, when one says

one is conscious of, that is self-conscious, one means one is aware *of* or conscious *about*

something. This something does not lie within consciousness itself but is located outside

it. Meaning, then, does not reside solely within the subject but is related to a site outside

of the ego, and "from and in [meaning,] self-understanding occurs." Concurring with

Ricoeur's criticism of Husserlian idealism, Henry Venema maintains that idealism

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[101] Paul Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," *From Text To Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), p. 23.
[102] Ibid., p.23-24, Italics original.
[103] Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 16. Italics original.
[104] "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," p. 34.
[105] "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," p. 37.

"betrays the intentional aim by turning away from the intended to that which intends."[106] This is also Marion's critique, as we have seen in chapter one; Marion's motivation for de-centering the subject has to do with his desire to have us focus on the givenness that lies outside the subject. In other words, both thinkers maintain continuity with the phenomenological intention of "going back to the things themselves."

Once Ricoeur grasps the "confusion" concerning Husserlian idealism's understanding of meaning, a confusion which is then mistakenly taken up into its understanding of the constitution of subjectivity, he tries to dissolve it by shifting "the axis of interpretation" from subjectivity to the world. Ricoeur's theory of the text as the hermeneutical axis of interpretation is able to accomplish just this task. The task of hermeneutics then becomes discerning the world that the text opens and discloses. The world opened by the text is no longer composed of objects manipulated by an ideal Husserlian subject, but is a world which "I could inhabit and in which I could project my ownmost possibilities."[107] Ricoeur thus shifts phenomenology's original subjectivist focus, used to manipulate the objects outside itself, onto an autonomous text that manifests a habitable life-world rife with possibility. From this hermeneutic theory of the text, Ricoeur is able to "exchange the *me, master* of itself, for the self, disciple of the text." Subjectivity is no longer the starting point of a hermeneutics that begins with the subject who "understands;" rather, it is the final phase or achievement of hermeneutics, in which the subject only comes to understand itself once it learns to inhabit the world

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[106] Henry Isaac Venema, *Identifying Selfhood: Imagination, Narrative, and Hermeneutics in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 26.
[107] "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," p. 34.

projected by the text. In Ricoeur's own words, "to understand *oneself* is to understand oneself *in front of the text*."[108]

We have seen how Ricoeur's hermeneutics overcomes the confusion of Husserlian idealism by appealing to the theory of the text. Marion's saturated phenomenon, and thus his understanding of Revelation, can certainly not be considered as succumbing to the subjectivism of Husserlian idealism. Quite to the contrary, Marion emphasizes the fact that the saturated intuition surpasses all horizons; it comes as a summons, a call to the gifted to respond and to receive. Therefore, in the saturated phenomenon, it is not even the intentional consciousness that aims. In fact, nothing can be phenomenalized until the subject has submitted to the call. Marion's insistence upon the passivity of the gifted (the subject) simply rejects the subjectivism inherent in Husserlian idealism. Marion's idea of the gifted, however, suffers a *parallel* confusion to the one we find in Husserlian idealism. Ricoeur has pointed this out: Any religious experience that claims immediacy, and thereby strips away the hermeneutic character of such experience (the fact that such experience is always already interpreted within a religious tradition and according to its sacred texts) will become unsettled. Such unsettling is a result of the fact that there is nothing to prevent such 'pure' experience from being each time felt and practiced "in a different way and with a different signification." [109] Ricoeur's critical comments concerning such purportedly immediate religious experience are telling because they help us understand the curious tendency of

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[108] "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," p. 35.
[109] Ricoeur does not think that a "naked immediacy" of religious experience is possible. The fundamental feelings and dispositions of religious experience are "always already interpreted according to the canonic rules of reading and writing." Ricoeur continues, "[w]e cannot even be sure that the universal character of the structure call/response can be attested independently of the different historical actualizations in which this structure is incarnated." See "Experience and Language in Religious Discourse," p. 130.

Marion's critics to criticize him from seemingly opposed directions: Some commentators criticize Marion's saturated phenomenon for being too determinate, while others complain that it is too indeterminate.[110] Ricoeur's analysis helps us see that, when one strips away the historical structure in which religious experience attests itself, and opts instead for a "naked immediacy" of pure religious experience, one will become susceptible to critiques from all sides.

With Marion, such a confused situation is unavoidable, given his construal of the purity of the saturated phenomenon. Regarding the gifted, Marion emphases both her passivity and receptivity. The gifted person has to lose herself in order to gain herself. She receives herself from what gives itself. The gifted is given. In the final analysis, however, Marion reverses this 'lowering' of the gifted; she receives a prize, a prize of gaining direct access to the given. Such 'elevation' of the gifted gives the gifted the unique privilege of affirming that such and such Revelation has just appeared, because it makes itself manifest through the gifted. In the end, the gifted is able to make the judgment that such a phenomenon can be described according to the scheme of saturation, and therefore she is able to conclude that such a phenomenon is Revelation. Yet the question remains: how is it possible for anyone except the gifted to see and to judge a givenness that has been so completely phenomenalized? Such subjectivism could lead to an arrogant, triumphant and authoritarian posture, which unfortunately could become the source of religious violence. While Marion tries to dethrone the subjective *I*,

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[110] Gschwandtner has surveyed and documented a series of commentators who express diametrically opposing views concerning Marion's project. As Gschwandtner points out, "[o]n one hand, Marion is criticized for his emphasis on transcendence, on purity, on anonymity, on separation of God from particular historical idols. On the other hand, he is also censured for his emphasis on immanence, for his use of biblical examples and the incarnation, for his faithfulness to the Roman Catholic tradition [...]." Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 175.

subjectivism re-enters the scene through a back door. In Ricoeur's understanding of hermeneutics, however, the response of a subject to Revelation is never independent of the canonical and historical situation to which the subject belongs. For Ricoeur, the subject's prior belongingness conditions her reception of the gift, rendering any notion of a 'pure' gift mute.

Another consideration in this examination of the problematics surrounding Marion's understanding of the purity of the given is that, for Marion, that which is given will not become a phenomenon, a gift, until the gifted is willing to receive it. If the gifted wills to receive the given, the saturation of saturation can be phenomenalized. However, if the subject decides not to respond to the call, either by classifying the call as a hallucination, or through ridicule, there will not be any phenomenon. Nobody, perhaps only the given, can be disappointed that a phenomenon *could* have appeared but did not because the subject refused to recognize the givenness of that which is given. Therefore, when one says he had a hallucination, no one can accuse him of missing a Revelation, because he is the only one who has potentially experienced a saturated phenomenon and has wrongfully (for whatever reason) decided that it was a hallucination or something not worthwhile submitting to. Thus, in order to receive that which is given in its givenness, the gifted must begin by lowering himself, and through his humility, he is elevated to the highest plane where the given gives itself directly to the gifted, much like a picture projected directly on a screen or a white light shone directly through a prism. This is almost equivalent to saying that the gifted, while abandoning himself, is finally able to gain direct access to the givenness, attaining an experience that is outside any text, any form of interpretation. Therefore, it becomes hard for others to discern whether the

subject receives or conceives the phenomenon once the textual character of Revelation has been extracted. While Marion wants to de-center the constituting *I* who claims to be able to inscribe revelation within her own limited horizon, he eventually allows this constituting *I* to return surreptitiously. While no longer able to inscribe revelation within an immanent horizon of intentionality, this constituting *I* returns in the form of a subject who is able to reach outside the text, perhaps to the author.

Marion is not unaware of this problem and the potential misunderstandings it can produce. He therefore attributes to the gifted a gift of willingness to receive.[111] Through the interplay between seeing (understanding) and wanting (willing), Marion tries to efface the receptivity of the gifted as a condition posed on the givenness, and thus maintains the unconditional character of the givenness. According to Marion, in the case of a poor phenomenon, the intuition always partially fulfils the intention. In a poor phenomenon, the seeing (understanding) precedes the will (wanting). But as the phenomenon becomes richer, the will begins to catch up with the seeing because of the richness of the intuition; the wanting begins to surpass the seeing.[112] As the phenomenon in question becomes increasingly rich, the will eventually surpasses understanding. Now the position between the will and understanding is switched with understanding following the will. However, though the wanting surpasses the seeing, it encounters its own deficiency of finitude. Confined by her finitude, the subject's desire grows weaker and

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[111] Thomas A. Carlson, "Blindness and the Decision to See: On Revelation and Reception in Jean-Luc Marion," *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 164.
[112] "There is no worse blind man than the one who does not want to see," concedes Marion. See *Being Given*, p. 305.

her understanding decreases the more saturated the phenomenon becomes. According to Marion, the given thus "humbles the gifted" as the given becomes more saturated.[113]

We can appreciate the continuous relationship that Marion posits between the given, the will, and the understanding, once we understand that for Marion it is a relationship in which level changes in one element affect all the others: The more saturation there is on the part of the given, the more humility is required on the part of the gifted in receiving it; at the same time, it becomes increasingly difficult to will such reception, and our ability to understand the given also decreases. As the level of saturation increases, the autonomy of the will and the understanding decreases. Marion thinks that this relationship elucidates the way in which the subject finds himself humbled before the saturated phenomenon. At the level of the saturation of saturation, the will finds itself totally humbled, so that any further willing is a mere gift from the given. At this point, the willingness of the subject is totally surrendered to the given, and any further willingness shown by the subject is given as a gift by the given. So Marion can say that the will to see the saturation of saturation is in fact a gift from the given, and that here finally the receiving subject becomes the gifted.

My question for Marion at this point does not so much concern this process, or the progressive relationship between the will of the subject and the (saturated) intuition to which the will finally submits itself. My question concerns the subject who nonetheless is able to stop being further humbled by the saturation, and who thereby is able to disengage from the given. Perhaps the subject finds the entire process too difficult to bear, and therefore refuses to continue to be led by the given; or perhaps she reverses the priority Marion posits between seeing and wanting, and lets the understanding precede

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[113] *Being Given*, p. 305.

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the wanting and thereby tries to conceptualize the givenness. In any case, for such a subject the given cannot be further phenomenalized, because she "decides" not to bear the difficulty or finds the phenomenon absurd. It is true that the subject does not pose any condition for the given to show itself. So, as far as showing is concerned, the given still gives itself by itself. But, even on Marion's account, the appearing of the given can nonetheless be stopped or terminated by the subject at her will, at any time before her will is totally submitted to the given. In other words, while Marion is correct in pointing out that the subject by herself is not a sufficient condition for phenomenalizing the given, she is still a necessary condition for it to appear at all. For something to appear, there must be someone to be appeared to.

As I hinted at earlier, here Marion has failed to extract himself from a troubling aporia whereby, on the one hand, he renders the gifted as finite and immanent, while, on the other hand, he describes the decisive character of the gifted as someone who "inasmuch as finite, has nothing less than the charge of opening or closing the entire flux of phenomenality." Thus, the gifted becomes the "gatekeeper for the ascent into visibility of all that gives itself." Yet this gate-keeping role is not solely materialistic and instrumental, like a screen or a prism which is absolutely passive, as Marion sometimes wishes to imply; for Marion also recognizes that the gatekeeper possesses a will which can prohibit the visibility of the givenness. As Gschwandtner puts it, "[e]ach saturated phenomenon can be denied, turned away from, refused articulation, and thus abandoned."[114] In this vein, Gschwandtner also refers to Kosky, who agrees that "there is

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[114] Gschwandtner also discusses Marion's distinction between the call and the responsal, because "[o]n one hand, the recipient is entirely passive and a mere screen for the self-giving phenomenon;" but on the other hand, "no phenomenon can ever become visible or even possible without this reception by the

some givenness that does not appear, some givenness that exceeds phenomenality, and this failure to show itself is not due to a deficiency in givenness, but to the finitude of the gifted."[115] It is therefore possible to conclude that, while the *showing* of the given is the sole work of the given, the *veiling* (or failure to appear) of the given can be due either to the withdrawal of the given or the unwillingness of the subject in receiving it. The subject still holds the site (reminiscent of Husserlian idealism) in which the given is able to show itself all by itself. The given, in contrast, only exerts control in the positive direction of phenomenalization, which is the showing of the givenness: but it cannot exert control over the negative direction in which the subject gives up the possibility of becoming the gifted.[116] This paradox is reiterated by Marion when he closes his book *Being Given* saying, "thus the gifted remains in the end the sole master and servant of the given."[117]

Yet when we consider a more hermeneutical theory of the text, such as Ricoeur's, the milieu of Revelation no longer seems to reside solely in the subject (as in Husserl's idealism), but in the text, or better, in the active engagement it enjoys in relation to the interpretative effort of the reader. For Ricoeur, the text, which is the site of Revelation, always lies in front of those who read. While for Marion, Revelation is the givenness which directly and immediately manifests itself to the gifted outside the text (outside any textual and linguistic mediation), for Ricoeur, Revelation involves the interpretation of

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consciousness of the self and thus in some fashion seems entirely dependent upon it." See *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 218.

[115] Jeffrey L. Kosky, "Philosophy of Religion and Return to Phenomenology in Jean-Luc Marion: From *God without Being* to *Being Given.*" *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 78.4 (2004), p. 640.

[116] According to Thomas Carlson, this may be unethical. Carlson argues in his essay that the gifted carries the responsibility to show (or let show) the givenness. See his "Blindness and the Decision to See," p. 168-9.

[117] This is the last sentence by which Marion closes his chapter on "the Gifted" in *Being Given.* See *Being Given*, p. 319.

the (biblical) world opened before the text (Scripture);[118] this is a site in which the aporia of the subject who can be both the master and servant of the given is resolved into the active interpretative engagement of the text by the subject. This subject however is not a master of himself. His religious experience is always an interpreted experience and is not independent of the historical character of his religious conviction. The situatedness of the subject, as some of Marion's critics insist, suggests that the phenomenon of revelation as Marion describes it has to presume Marion's theology (the historical character of his particular religious conviction). In other words, Marion's phenomenology is a kind of cryptotheology[119] in which his theology is assumed in order to make his phenomenology sound. In the next section, I will look more closely at Marion's phenomenology of revelation in order to show that, in order to defend himself against the accusation that his phenomenology amounts to a kind of cryptotheology, Marion's phenomenology of revelation must accept a hermeneutic supplement.

2.3. Phenomenology Subverted to Theology

In the previous section, we explored the confusion of subjectivity in Marion's construal of his phenomenology of revelation. To claim the immediacy of revelation, Marion cannot avoid the aporia of the subject being a slave and a master at the same time. In this section, we will examine another confusion Marion's phenomenology of religion

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[118] I should be clear that for Ricoeur, literature in general is also revelatory and opens potential habitable worlds. However, since this paper focuses on the discussion of revelation in a religious and Christian context, examples given will be that of the Christian Scriptures.

[119] Cryptotheology is a term I picked up from Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*. Ricoeur tries to maintain the separation of theology from philosophy and claims his philosophical investigation is free of "cryptotheology", one that "involves no ontotheological amalgamations." Ricoeur also maintains that he also refrains from assigning to biblical faith a "cryptophilosophical function." See *Oneself as Another*, p. 24.

introduces, namely the ambiguity between revelation and Revelation. This ambiguity has two paths, the subversion of phenomenology to theology and the subversion of theology to phenomenology. This section will consider the first path while the next section will consider the second.

In Chapter one, we looked at Marion's phenomenology of revelation, a phenomenology in which revelation surpasses any horizon, refuses any constitution from the subject, and is meant to show itself in itself and from itself. This is the phenomenology that leads back to "the things themselves." So, according to Marion, double saturation, or the saturation of saturation, cannot be objectified and is unconditional. We cannot conceptualize, understand, or comprehend the source or origin of such givenness. One obvious problem raised by this construal of the supposed purity of revelation (the saturated phenomenon as untainted by any subjective interpretation) is that such phenomenology can easily slide into a kind of cryptotheology. It seems that, despite his claim to be practicing pure phenomenology, Marion actually assumes a certain theology, in particular a Roman Catholic understanding of God, in his description of the saturated phenomenon. Revelation is presupposed in Marion's phenomenology of revelation, and the gift seems to be simply a gift of this God.[120] By secretly importing this cryptotheology into his phenomenological account, Marion's position can be understood to be one-sidedly deterministic.

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[120] See the conversation between Derrida and Marion in "On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion, Moderated by Richard Kearney,"in *God, the Gift and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 54-78. Derrida's comment on Marion's idea of the gift has something "to do with – I will not call this theological or religious – the deepest ambition of your thought." Derrida further suggests that "everything that is given in the phenomenological sense, [...] is finally a gift to a finite creature, and it is finally a gift of God." "On the Gift," p. 66.

Praising Marion's "extraordinary achievement" in his phenomenological work on givenness, Horner nevertheless expresses the reservation that Marion's phenomenology might only "include the possibility, rather than the actuality" of theology.[121] If Horner is correct that this is an entailment of Marion's phenomenology, that result would run counter to Marion's stated position, which holds that only *r*evelation is a possible phenomenon, whereas *R*evelation is an actual phenomenon. Regarding the phenomenology of revelation, all the examples that Marion gives to demonstrate Revelation, which he understands as the actuality of revelation, derive from Christian tradition. For Horner, the argument in *Being Given* is legitimate if Marion's task is to ask a phenomenologist of religion to catalog and describe "what religious traditions refer to by 'phenomena of revelation,'" assuming that this phenomenologist is able to stand back and do the cataloging. However, according to Horner, what Marion is asking instead is for us to "contemplate that when someone bears witness to a revelatory phenomenon, it might actually be Revelatory."[122] For Horner, to describe a revelatory phenomenon requires a prior commitment to a religious tradition. This commitment, which is very different from the dispassionate and distant stance assumed by the phenomenologist as an outside observer without such commitment, is a commitment "not to the possibility of revelation, but to its actuality." In other words, if God gives himself in double saturation (the saturation of saturation, or the phenomenon of revelation), and if a Christian is confronted by this saturated phenomenon and finds it revelatory, this excessiveness will be called God. But from an agnostic perspective, when confronted by the same double saturation, an agnostic would not refer the excessiveness to God. In this

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[121] Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Derrida, Marion, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), p. 153, 157.
[122] *Rethinking God as Gift*, p. 157.

situation, we can only conclude that *r*evelation has occurred if God (or *R*evelation) is already assumed (cryptotheology). Without this assumption, the so-called saturation of saturation remains inconclusive, and thus cannot be called a phenomenon of *R*evelation. For Horner, Marion's project of phenomenology "seeks the enlargement of phenomenology to include the possibility, rather than the actuality, of something like theology, based on the point that revelatory phenomena cannot simply be excluded from the limits of phenomenological investigations."[123]

One might defend Marion against the accusation that his phenomenology of revelation presumes Revelation by drawing attention to the fact that Marion injects a "delay" into his description of the response of the gifted once the call has been received. In this light, Marion does not necessarily assume *R*evelation. He says that because "that response necessarily – and forever – lags behind the call that provokes it, I can as *adonné* [the gifted] name the source of that call only after the fact, and thus always incompletely and provisionally, never comprehending nor defining the essence of that which calls."[124] The call is not only anonymous, but also requires an "infinite denomination"[125] – "the necessity of an endless attempt to name over and over again that which no name will capture."[126] In other words, the saturation of the saturation is in such excess that the name we give it diametrically offers an extreme poverty, such that "no call would offer *less* of a name than that of a phenomenon of revelation." In the case of Revelation, God gives his Name "in an empty tautology – I am who I am – which opens the field to the

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[123] *Rethinking God as Gift*, p.157.
[124] "Blindness and the Decision to See," p. 157.
[125] *Being Given*, p. 297.
[126] "Blindness and the Decision to See," p. 158.

endless litany of all the names."[127] Yet this delay in naming, when joined to the infinite requirement to continue naming which follows it, seems to affirm Horner's thesis that Marion's phenomenology can only allow for the possibility of God, and cannot therefore become a place holder for an actual God. The delay in naming, and finally the inability to name, God affirms God's incomprehensibility. In other words, when one suggests that a Revelation has occurred, the best he can do is to describe an unnamable or a possible God. Hence, it is only *possible* that God reveals himself in the phenomenon. It is then up to one's own traditional religious affiliation to fill out this possible unnamed God according to the narratives and the interpretations one inherits as one enters and assumes that tradition. This filling out of the possible unnamed God has to be assumed (taken on through the appropriation of a particular, traditional interpretation); it cannot be derived from the phenomenon alone. In other words, if we follow the schema of infinite naming, the givenness of the revealed phenomenon is so indeterminate that no God (in particular), but only a 'God' of indeterminacy, can fill the place holder of givenness.

The issue of naming introduces yet another question: Does not Marion's call for "infinite naming" express more than just the incomprehensibility of God? Does it not also imply our responsibility to engage in an infinite hermeneutics? As Marion argues, although God remains incomprehensible but not imperceptible, the "infinite proliferation of names does indeed suggest that they [names for God] are still there, but it also flags as insufficient the concepts they put in play and thereby does justice to what constantly subverts them."[128] These concepts, indeed any concepts, are insufficient for naming God, yet the naming goes on. To decide on one name over another, or one name along with

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[127] *Being Given*, p. 297.
[128] Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), p. 160.

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another, requires an interpretation that develops an understanding of the way God is depicted in different phenomena. As Horner asserts, embedded in such naming is the need for a "hermeneutic supplement."[129] In *Being Given*, Marion tries to make a clear distinction between revelation and Revelation by pointing out that his phenomenology only describes the possibility of revelation and "nothing more, since phenomenology cannot and therefore must not venture to make any decisions about the actuality of such a phenomenon."[130] Only revealed theology can so decide.[131] Yet, as Horner points out, in Marion's *Being Given*, "lower case r revelation seems inevitably to refer to revelatory phenomena from the Christian tradition." However, Horner thinks Marion has broadened the definition of this lower case r revelation in *In Excess*. In that book, Marion defines small r revelation as open to the resistance of the receiver, in which case the revealed does not "define an extreme stratum or a particular region of phenomenality [thus not only Christian tradition], but rather the universal mode of phenomenalization of what gives *itself* in what shows *itself*."[132] Horner seems to welcome the broadening that occurs in Marion's definition of small 'r' revelation, because it defines the possibility of revelation as the potential donation of an excessiveness that "must be ultimately ambiguous." Thus, ambiguity, undecidability, and uncertainty call for a decision, a hermeneutics. For capital R Revelation, which is now just "a range of possibilities of the small r revelatory phenomenon," revealed theology is required as the hermeneutical supplement. For any other revelatory phenomena, hermeneutics is also inevitable. According to Horner, the whole discussion around the issue of revelatory phenomena

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[129] "Aporia or Excess?" p. 336. n. 33.
[130] *In Excess*, p. 158.
[131] *Being Given*, p. 367. n. 90.
[132] "Aporia or Excess?" p. 331.

"comes down to a hermeneutics;" the aporia that it carries "is not solved but resolved through a decision to commit oneself...in one way rather than another."[133] That is to say, we are always already situated in a certain historical and textual tradition to which we belong and from which we appropriate ourselves to the phenomenon. There is no abstract or hypothetical excessiveness; every saturated phenomenon in front of us requires us to make a concrete and committed decision regarding it, and that cannot be done without accepting some form of hermeneutic supplement.

2.4. Theology Subverted to Phenomenology

In the last section, I have argued that Marion's understanding of the possibility of revelation as a saturated phenomenon *par excellence* assumes the actuality of Revelation. This assumption explains the suspicion voiced by several critics that Marion's phenomenology of Revelation is a version of cryptotheology. However, critics have also raised another, diametrically opposed, worry regarding Marion's phenomenological way of describing Revelation. Some of his more theologically-minded critics think that his theology has given too much of its determinacy away to phenomenology. In this section, I will explore the comments of John Caputo and Kathryn Tanner, who think Marion has subverted his theology to his phenomenology.

While the actuality of Revelation is a fact, determined only by revealed theology, the phenomenology of revelation is only a description of the possibility by which "we do

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[133] "Aporia or Excess," p. 332. In this vein, Ricoeur describes his particular form of Christian commitment as "a chance happening transformed into a destiny by means of a choice constantly renewed, in the scrupulous respect of different choices." See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 24.

justice to [Revelation's] possibility."[134] *Revelation* thus becomes the content of

*r*evelation; *r*evelation acts like a structure in which Revelation is contained. In this

respect, *r*evelation can acquire a universal structure in and through which actual

individual Revelation becomes possible. John Caputo thinks that when theology is

related to phenomenology in this way, phenomenology simply hijacks theology.[135]

Caputo suggests that Marion's approach amounts to a phenomenological turn of theology,

rather than a theological turn of phenomenology. According to Caputo, if Marion is right,

then theology will be circumscribed by "preconceived philosophical conditions or

prejudices." We either agree with the scheme of the saturation of saturation, or else we

need to render Revelation impossible. This choice forces itself upon us because, as

Marion claims, traditional phenomenology or metaphysics is unable to describe

Revelation. For this reason, he thinks that phenomenology needs to be broadened to

include "the measure of the possibility of manifestation demanded by the question of

God" which is that God shows himself "starting from himself alone."[136] *Revelation* now

has to be either allied with the saturated phenomenon, or have its possibility eradicated.

Caputo is not alone in worrying that, in Marion's hands, Revelation succumbs to

the dictates of phenomenology. Kathryn Tanner pursues a similar line of critique. If

Marion's motive for developing a phenomenology of revelation is to enable himself to

describe the phenomenon of Revelation free of such metaphysical constraints as concepts

and reasons, does that move subjugate Revelation to a new tyrant, the revelation of

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[134] *In Excess*, p. 158.

[135] "[T]heology has been invaded by phenomenology and … it is theology that suffers a distortion." See John Caputo, "The Hyperbolization of Phenomenology: Two Possibilities for Religion in Recent Continental Philosophy," *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 83.

[136] *Being Given*, p. 242.

phenomenology? According to Tanner, there are ample reasons to worry about such a consequence. Specifically, Tanner worries that through Marion's attempt to establish a pure phenomenology, one in which Revelation can be seen to become actuality, "the theological aim of respecting the unconditionality of God cannot be sustained...."[137]

Tanner's critique of Marion is not without irony, because she ends up accusing him of the same conceptual idolatry for which he chides both traditional metaphysics as well as Heidegger's thinking of Being. Marion criticizes traditional metaphysics for placing conditions on God; metaphysics inscribes God in causality, and God thus becomes the first cause who nonetheless must remain obedient to the causality and sufficient reason of metaphysics. When it comes to his criticism of Heidegger, although Marion has admitted that Heidegger has gone beyond metaphysics, he thinks that Heidegger has invested Being with an absoluteness that should belong solely to God. According to Marion, idolatry occurs when "God is submitted to the measure of human thought."[138] In spite of Marion's criticisms of such conceptual idolatry, Tanner finds that Marion commits a similar form of idolatry. He too submits God to philosophical terms: not causality, not ontological difference, but rather "the givenness of the given." If metaphysics establishes the first idol (God as first cause), and Heidegger's effort to demolish this metaphysical idol establishes a second idol (ontological difference), Tanner concludes that Marion's phenomenology of revelation "would be haunted by a third

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[137] Kathryn Tanner, "Theology at the Limits of Phenomenology," *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 202.
[138] Kosky helpfully summarizes the difference between idol and icon in Marion's thought. "[T]he former [idol] refers to a false or non-theological thought of God where God is submitted to the measure of human thought and language, while the latter name [icon] belongs to what might be called a 'properly theological thought and language of God,' which is the thought and language that God Himself gives to humans to use in praising him." See "From God without Being to Being Given," p. 630.

idolatry."[139] For Tanner, there is no difference between saying that God is the highest being, or the first cause, or the ground of Being, and saying that God is the givenness. Whether one is speaking of Metaphysics, ontological difference, or the saturated phenomenon *par excellence*, all these positions can be seen to subject God to their highest term (causality, Being, or givenness). Thus Tanner concludes that Marion, in spite of his desire to prevent this eventuality, nevertheless collapses Revelation into the revelation of philosophy.

2.5. Concluding Remarks

We have seen the confusions and questions pertaining to Marion's saturated phenomenon, confusions and questions particular to his construal of the immediacy of revelation and the relationship between Revelation and revelation, or between theology and phenomenology. These confusions involve 1) the aporia of a subject who is at once the master and slave of givenness, 2) the diametrically opposed suspicions that Marion's phenomenology tacitly affirms a hidden theology (cryptotheology) that nevertheless shapes it, or, conversely, is a phenomenology that idolatrously restrains theology. In the next chapter, I will turn to investigate Ricoeur's understanding of Revelation, which, though it bears some similarity to Marion's understanding, suggests the importance, indeed inescapability, of hermeneutics in the exploration of the idea of Revelation.

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[139] "Theology at the Limits of Phenomenology," p. 206.

Chapter Three: Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation

3.1. Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The questions and aporias surrounding Marion's position, which we witnessed in the last

chapter, supply a thinker like Ricoeur with ample reason to suggest that phenomenology

is condemned to "run the gauntlet" of hermeneutics. It must do so because the attempt to

establish a religious phenomenology necessarily includes the need to face the challenge

of the fragmentation of textual collections and scriptural traditions that are scattered

everywhere "like a detached archipelago." Hence, Ricoeur takes a different route, a

much longer detour, to first examine his own religious tradition; from there, "progressing

one step at a time, starting from the place where one stands at the outset," he proceeds

through "a process of analogizing transfer," and in doing so practices an "imaginative and

sympathetic adoption" in regard to other religions. Finally, he reaches "Religion" as an

"*idea*," which always "remains just an idea," fluid and open to interreligious

conversations, but still an idea "by which one is to understand a regulative ideal projected

on the horizon of our investigations."[140] This longer route of approaching the

phenomenology of religion through the detour of hermeneutics tends to eliminate the

confusions that arise between the possibility and actuality of Revelation, confusions to

which Marion's position remains susceptible. Ricoeur's longer path also serves to

concretely ground such investigation in a historic, linguistic, and textual milieu.

Such a long hermeneutic route is not new to Ricoeur; in fact it has been his effort

to graft hermeneutics onto phenomenology all along. Differentiating himself from the

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[140] "Experience and Language in Religious Discourse," p. 132.

"short route"[141] of going directly from hermeneutics as epistemology to the ontology of understanding which he thinks Heidegger has taken, Ricoeur takes this longer route in order to examine language and semantics, and to converse with different historical sciences. Only after taking this journey does he think that one reaches the desired destination of understanding hermeneutics as a mode of being. In addition to language, which is the expression of all self-understanding, Ricoeur believes that the "reflection on exegesis, on the method of history, on psychoanalysis, on the phenomenology of religion, etc.," is "touched," "animated" and "inspired by the ontology of understanding."[142] For Ricoeur, explanation and understanding form a dialectical pair. On one hand, in writing where codes and signs are inscribed, explanation of these signs and codes are necessary for understanding the text. On the other hand, no explanation is ever satisfactorily achieved unless understanding is reached. Following Gadamer, understanding for Ricoeur is the understanding about "the *thing of the text*", "the appropriation of meaning by subjects" before the text. [143] Therefore, we should not bypass all these cultural and historical moments because the question on hand is the question of hermeneutics and phenomenology, which does not come out of nowhere, but is located in the historical site of human sciences that help form Western culture. This approach reflects the difference between Marion and Ricoeur, in that Marion seeks the purity of phenomenology in the hope that such phenomenology, while staying within the realm of traditional

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[141] Paul Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics," *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 6. The reason why Ricoeur describes Heidegger's hermeneutical method as the short route is because "[the short route] carries itself directly to the level of an ontology of finite being in order there to recover *understanding*, no longer as a mode of knowledge, but rather as a mode of being." Italics original.
[142] "Existence and Hermeneutics," p. 7.
[143] Paul Ricoeur, "Explanation and Understanding," *From Text To Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), p. 125-126.

phenomenology and surpassing metaphysics, nonetheless has the ability to extend itself

to the discussion of Revelation. We have seen that not only is such purity questionable,

but its extension to the field of religion also invokes confusions between theology and

phenomenology. Therefore, there are ample reasons for Ricoeur to take the longer route

of hermeneutics, not only in phenomenology, but also in religious experience.

So, Ricoeur applies the same methodology to the phenomenology of religion. To

take the longer route of understanding one's own tradition, as well as understanding

religious experience expressed in different languages and a wider circle of religions, is to

understand Revelation right where you are. But this mode of being and belonging as a

result of hermeneutics is not the only milieu for self-understanding. Besides reflection

and critique, there is also this "chance" by which one is born to a certain community,

religion, and even certain language. For Ricoeur, to be a religious person is to belong to

"this vast circuit involving a founding word, mediating texts, and traditions of

interpretation." This belonging, different from the belonging through critique, is a

belonging of conviction which perhaps is not totally by chance but still "is chance

transformed into destiny by a continuous choice." As Ricoeur further explains, "[i]f

pushed, I would agree to say that a religion is like a language into which one is either

born or has been transferred by exile or hospitality; in any event, one feels at home there,

which implies a recognition that there are other languages spoken by other people."[144]

Therefore, in addition to that self-understanding achieved through reflection, we also find

ourselves belonging to a presupposed "inclusive relation which englobes the allegedly

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[144] Paul Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with Fransois Azouvi and Marc de Launay*, trans. by Katherine Blamey (Oxford: Polity Press – Blackwell, 1998), p. 145.

autonomous subject and the allegedly adverse object... that I call participation or belonging to."[145]

Through these interplays between conviction and critique, belonging and distanciation, Ricoeur arrives at the conclusion that a phenomenology of Revelation needs to begin precisely from where we are. There is no encompassing, neutral, and universal theory that can stand outside all hermeneutic circles and assume a "placeless place" from which to describe the "dispersed field" of religious feelings and dispositions. Such a theory must either suffer from hiding a presupposition of its own religious or non-religious stance, which means that Revelation is already assumed, or it must subjugate its own religious reflection to philosophy, meaning that Revelation is no longer Revelation, because it has to be inscribed within this philosophy. It is of no surprise that Marion's attempt to seek for a pure phenomenology which attempts to rid all presuppositions falls prey to the similar tension and aporia between Revelation and phenomenology. With Ricoeur's hermeneutical phenomenology, we start from our own religious stance, incorporating our belonging and conviction. We admit that we are not pure and we always carry our own presuppositions. At the same time, we can engage in distanciation from and critique of that belonging and conviction. In so doing, we reflect upon the texts which mediate and open a world in front of us. It is this world before the text that we can inhabit and into which we can project our ownmost possibilities. Therefore, "Revelation, in short, is a feature of the biblical world proposed by the text."[146]

3.2. Revelation as Manifestation

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[145] Paul Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 107.
[146] "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p. 104.

Ricoeur's interest in the text—in narrative, poetics, and imagination—contributes significantly to his discussion of revelation. He takes the concept of revelation to be in a "living dialectic" with the concept of reason. Together, they "engender something like an understanding of faith."[147] Ricoeur refuses to begin any discussion of revelation from the perspective of propositions. Propositions such as 'God exists' or 'God is immutable and omnipotent', are for Ricoeur a form of second-order discourse that grows out of speculative philosophy when it considers first order religious texts and uses of language.[148] Instead of being located at the level of such second-order propositions, Ricoeur thinks revelation takes place within the originary interpretation and understanding of a particular community of faith. These originary interpretations are expressed through different genres or forms of discourse, such as "narration, prophecy, legislative texts, wisdom sayings, hymns, supplications, and thanksgiving."[149] The differences between these forms of discourse are to be interpreted and respected because they are theologically significant. Thus, Ricoeur urges us to resist the temptation to neutralize these differences, to locate theological content only in second-order propositional abstractions, because according to him the meaning of religious language cannot be separated from the particularities of these genres or from the contexts in which they are used.

This distinction between first and second order discourse distances Ricoeur from the analytical tradition in the philosophy of religion. According to Ronald Kuipers, the analytic tradition locates the discursive meaning of religious language "in its

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[147] "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p. 73.
[148] Ibid., p. 90. See also his essay "Original Sin: A study in Meaning," *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 269-286.
[149] "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p.90.

propositional content." This tradition considers as meaningful only that feature of a

statement (i.e., the propositional content) that is capable of referring to objective reality

(on this understanding, a meaningful statement can fail to refer and still be meaningful; in

that case it is simply false, but not meaningless). Analytic philosophy of religion

therefore locates meaning in second-order discourse, paying scant attention to the variety

of first-order, or 'natural' uses of religious language that Ricoeur says forms the home of

religious meaning and insight. Following Ricoeur, Kuipers points out that we can adopt

an "alternative understanding of linguistic meaning" in which "a cognitive dimension of

language is already thought to be an integral component of an original, unanalyzed use of

natural language."[150] Kuipers goes on to say, however, that this cognitive dimension is

not secured by, and may in fact not even survive, the abstractive procedure of

philosophical analysis.[151] All language, including religious language, does more than

simply refer, and its meaning is tied up with these varieties of use. As Ricoeur also

argues, we must therefore look for the revelatory capacity of religious discourse where it

is to be found: amidst the plurality of first-order genres that I mentioned in the previous

paragraph.

Ricoeur's insistence on the irreducibility of first-order religious discourse,

however, does not commit him to the position that "everything is language." Rather, his

more subtle position is that everything is "always within language."[152] With its different

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[150] See Ronald A. Kuipers, *Critical Faith: Toward a Renewed Understanding of Religious Life and its Public Accountability* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2002), p.115.
[151] Ibid., 112.
[152] Paul Ricoeur, "Naming God," *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 218. For Ricoeur, religious faith is identified through its language, which is meaningful for its community and for communication. It also displays truth in its own terms, a truth that differs from other truth values found in such disciplines as scientific inquiry. See Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophy and Religious Language", *Figuring the Sacred: Religion,*

forms and genres, religious discourse is "so pregnant with meaning."[153] The symbols and

metaphors employed within religious discourse open up dimensions and meanings which

invite readers to further exploration.[154] The multiplicities thus opened renounce the idea

that revelation has a static and uniform character. Instead, they affirm that Revelation is

"polysemic and polyphonic."[155] Writing from a Protestant perspective, I think it is

important for all interpreters of Scripture to recognize the possible multiple meanings

inherent in the multiple genres of Scripture. That very multiplicity is part of our religious

inheritance, and we would miss much of the richness of that heritage if we were to

impose a monolithic interpretation onto such textual variety. It is so easy to fall into the

temptation to advocate one single meaning for the sake of certitude and authority. Very

often, these (often unjustified) forms of certitude and authority not only violate the

polysemic nature of the text, but they can also generate enmity, as well as prevent further

dialogue with others who may hold a different interpretation of the text.

We should therefore resist any form of authoritarianism or totalitarianism that

results from our claiming to possess exclusively the ultimate truth concerning a static and

uniform Revelation. One of the major reasons for resisting such a stance is because it can

form the root of violence and marginalization. Such a suspension of fixed and final

certitude and authority is evident in Ricoeur's construal of revelation as a "limit-

expression."[156] That is, while the divine life is described, narrated, and praised through

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Narrative, and Imagination, trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 35.

[153] "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p.92.

[154] See also his discussions of "symbol gives rise to thought" in his *Symbolism of Evil* and *The Rule of Metaphor*.

[155] "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p.92.

[156] By "limit-expression," Ricoeur means the "transgression of the usual forms of the parable, the proverb, and the eschatological saying through the concerted use of extravagance, hyperbole, and paradox" so that

different forms of discourse in Scripture, God is also concealed within these discourses. This simultaneous revelation and concealment renders any given revelation incomplete. Ricoeur, while asserting the analogical character of revelation, also emphasizes the "limit-idea" of revelation, in which the "God who reveals himself is also the one who conceals himself."[157] It is precisely because of this dialectic of the revelation and concealment of God within Scripture that "the naming of God cannot be transformed into a form of knowledge." The God who reveals himself in the burning bush declares his name to be unnameable. For Ricoeur, this is a God who cannot be held "at the mercy of our language."[158] As a result of the dialectic between revealing and concealing, then, "revelation can never constitute a body of truths which an institution may boast of or take pride of possessing."[159]

If God as revealed and concealed cannot be transformed into a form of knowledge, and revelation is not to be understood as truth in the traditional sense of correspondence between the mind and the world, as something which can be the simple subject of empirical verification or falsification, then what kind of truth does revelation disclose? Ricoeur does not understand revelatory truth from the correspondence theory perspective; rather, he puts forward what he calls "a new concept of truth as manifestation," a concept which, though it exposes our real dependence on revelation, does not commit him to a

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"every form of discourse [is affected] through a sort of passing over to the limit," and thereby, "a new category appears that we may call the category of *limit-expression*." See "Naming God", p. 230.

[157] "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p. 93.

[158] "Naming God", p. 228 -230. Ricoeur has traced many concealments of God throughout the different genres of the Bible. The following are some examples he provides: "Yahweh . . . is not a defining name but one that is a sign of the act of deliverance"; "the kingdom [of God] is signified only through parables, proverbs, and paradoxes for which no literal translation can exhaust their meaning." These examples show that, for Ricoeur, such scriptural rhetorical strategies as paradox, hyperbole, and the descriptions of the timing of the second coming of Jesus (like a thief in the night), resist our temptation to claim total control and knowledge of God.

[159] "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p. 95.

heteronomous understanding of our reception of this revelation.[160] Heteronomy, in the sense related to the authoritarianism I mentioned above, involves a passive obedience to an authority that claims to possess the final truth of a static and uniform revelation. From the heteronomous perspective, the concern is to find out once and for all what God's manifestation *is*, and then to act upon it accordingly with unreflective and undiscerning obedience. Ricoeur is suspicious of such a heteronomous attitude precisely because he thinks there is still another layer in any human reception of revelation, a hermeneutical layer, the layer of discourse that needs to be accounted for, and which the heteronomous perspective fails to take into account. This hermeneutical layer is absent in Marion when he accounts for his notion of revelation from pure givenness. As I have pointed out in chapter two, when Marion suggests that the gifted has to be totally submitted to the given so that the purity of givenness can be sustained, an aporia becomes unavoidable because the gifted, being a slave, nonetheless is the master of the phenomenon. But if I follow Ricoeur, the recipient of revelation is neither a slave nor a master. He is a witness who faithfully and continuously engages in the interpretation of the Scripture and is always aware of the dialectics between the revealing and concealing characters of the divine as well as the particular religious language he uses to account for his religious experience. Perhaps such an attitude will prove capable of avoiding the problem of authoritarianism.

Following Gerhard Von Rad's assertion that the religion of Israel is "organized around certain fundamental discourses,"[161] Ricoeur agrees that these fundamental historical writings, together with their various and ongoing historical interpretations, form the basis of the various Judeo-Christian religious traditions. Ricoeur gathers the

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[160] Ibid., p. 98.
[161] Paul Ricoeur, "Manifestation and Proclamation," *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 56.

characteristic traits of such writings under the heading of "proclamation."[162] Any

reception of revelation must take a hermeneutic layer into account precisely because

revelation is already embedded in a form of proclamation that is historical and always-

already interpreted. For this reason, Ricoeur finds a dynamic and mutually reinforcing

relationship between manifestation and proclamation. They are not identical;

proclamation is not immediately a manifestation. Yet they do not form an antinomy or a

dichotomy either. According to Ricoeur, "[t]here would be no hermeneutic if there were

no proclamation. But there would be no proclamation if the word, too, were not powerful;

that is, if it did not have the power to set forth the new being it proclaims."[163] The awe

and power manifested by the sacred is proclaimed in writing, deposited in history and in

tradition, but such proclamation cannot go by without interpretation. Not only is this

interpretation required to explain the possibility of manifestation within the structure of a

religious tradition and its writing, it also emancipates the power of proclamation so that

the reader's awe and fascination is transformed into obedience and fervor. The

manifestation of the sacred, while being "transmuted into speech" and writing, is at the

same time reaffirmed as "it is surpassed" and "internalized into proclamation."[164] The

transforming experience that results from the dialectic between proclamation and

manifestation redescribes our relationship with reality; this relationship is no longer one

of opposed subjects and objects, but one of "participation-in or belonging-to an order of

things."[165] Therefore, Ricoeur deliberately chooses to enter the investigation of

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[162] "Manifestation and Proclamation," p. 48. Ricoeur identifies three traits of proclamation for Judaism, Christianity and Islam: writing, historicity of the transmission of the founding tradition, and the incorporation of the interpretation of such tradition. These traits form the site for hermeneutic activity.
[163] "Manifestation and Proclamation," p. 65.
[164] Ibid.
[165] "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p. 101.

manifestation through hermeneutics, which understands the world as opened by the text, and in Christian tradition, by Scripture.[166] In order to understand the function of the text, we need to investigate Ricoeur's discussion of language and discourse.

3.3. Discourse and the Dialectics of Textual Interpretation

Ricoeur says that the central thesis of his essay, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and Surplus of Meaning*, is to understand language "at the level of such productions as poems, narratives, and essays, whether literary or philosophical."[167] That is to say, he attempts to understand language as "work," and as "discourse." In doing so, Ricoeur confronts the structuralist claim that language is no longer a mediation between our mind and the world, but instead constitutes a system of its own within which each entity points to another entity through oppositions and differences within the same system. While Ricoeur does not ignore the insights provided by the modernist discourse of structuralist linguistics, he does re-affirm the idea that the interpreter is also the bearer of meaning.[168] Structuralism attends to a linguistic system which is unconscious, independent of the subject or observer, and based only on internal references of difference and opposition.[169] For structuralism, language "is no longer treated as a 'form of life', as Wittgenstein could call it, but as a self-sufficient system of inner relationships."[170] However, Ricoeur observes that in addition to approaching language as semiotics, which "relies on the dissociation of language into constitutive parts," language should also be understood as semantics, which

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[166] Ibid., p.98.
[167] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1976), p. xi.
[168] The question that Ricoeur asks is "how are hermeneutics and structuralism joined, one to the other?" See Paul Ricoeur, "Structure and Hermeneutics," *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 55.
[169] Ibid., p. 56.
[170] *Interpretation Theory*, p. 6.

"is immediately concerned with the concept of sense..., to the extent that semantics is

fundamentally defined by the integrative procedures of language." The "key to the whole

problem of language" is to realize the distinction between semantics and semiotics.[171]

The study of language as discourse provides criteria to help us differentiate between

semantics and semiotics. But what are these criteria and how do they emerge from the

study of discourse?

For Ricoeur, semiotics only exists virtually, since the codes it examines exist

outside of time. It is speaking or discourse that "testifies" to the actuality of semiotics by

arranging and applying the codes.[172] In this manner, discourse is an event and through

this event brings the semiotic linguistic system into actuality. Although the "event

vanishes while system remains,"[173] the temporality of discourse as event is overcome by

its meaning. A discourse is composed of a subject and a predicate.[174] The noun of a

sentence is a singular identification, which identifies one and only one subject. The

predicate, on the other hand, is a universal function, which points to a quality, a

classification, a relationship, or a type of action. The meaning of discourse is a synthesis

of these two functions: identification and predication. Therefore, while discourse as

event is transient, it is the meaning, the interplay between noun and verb, the content of

the discourse that remains our concern. David Klemm has helpfully described the

relationship Ricoeur posits between event and meaning in his explication of language,

saying, "[a]s event discourse is fleeting and transient, but as meaning it endures in the

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[171] Ibid., p. 8.
[172] This is how *langue* is different from *parole*. *Langue* refers to the internal structure of the language while *parole* refers to the speaker who produces a speech by employing the structure of language. In Ricoeur's words, "[*l*]*angue* is the code – or the sets of codes – on the basis of which a particular speaker produces *parole* as a particular message." See *Interpretation Theory*, p. 3.
[173] Ibid., p. 9.
[174] Ibid., p. 1. "[D]iscourse requires two basic signs --- a noun and a verb."

propositional content."[175] We can say that meaning has suppressed and surpassed the event. Hence, for Ricoeur, it is the enduring meaning and not the transient and temporal event that we seek to understand.[176]

The dialectic of event and meaning also yields the performative and communicative functions of discourse. Discourse is performative when saying or speech is actually linked to an act. J.L. Austin understands the performative aspect of language by distinguishing between three speech acts, the locutionary, the illocutionary, and the perlocutionary. A locutionary act is the act of saying itself. An illocutionary act is doing something in saying, such as making a promise. Finally a perlocutionary act brings something into effect through saying, such as a command.[177] The "grammar" or semiotics of these speech acts ensure the "force" or semantics of both locutionary and illocutionary acts. The dialectic of event and meaning also generates communicative action. Ricoeur is not only interested in the mere fact of communication in dialogue, but also in the interaction that takes place between the speaker and the hearer. The possibility of directly transferring one's experience to another person is simply "an enigma, even a wonder" because one's experience as an event cannot directly become another's experience. Hence, Ricoeur concedes that what is being transferred from the speaker to the hearer is not "the experience as experienced [by the speaker], but its meaning." Through discourse, the meaning of one's lived experience is made public. The possibility of publicizing such meaning relies on the structure of the sentence, which

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[175] David Klemm, *The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur: A Constructive Analysis* (East Brunswick: Associated University Press, 1983), p. 77.
[176] *Interpretation Theory*, p. 12. Thus, Ricoeur contends that "all discourse is actualized as an event, it is understood as meaning."
[177] See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 108.

is a system exterior to the sentence itself. This structure includes grammar, tone, and

voice, in the case of speaking, and signs such as question marks and exclamation marks,

in the case writing. Thus, for Ricoeur, communicability is the "elevation of a part of our

life into the *logos* of discourse," which illuminates for a moment "the solitude of life."[178]

Through the "meaning of what has been experienced," the speaker is therefore able to

transfer a private experience to a public audience.

Therefore, for Ricoeur, the event is transient while the meaning endures; while

experience is private, the meaning of experience can be externalized. However, these are

not the only two aspects we need to consider in attempting to understand the meaning of

discourse, or how discourse is able to carry meaning. For Ricoeur, meaning, besides

being related to what the speaker does, is also related to what the sentence does. That is

to say, in addition to the utterer's meaning, there is also the utterance meaning in a

dialogue.[179] The utterance meaning has two dimensions: its sense and its reference.[180]

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[178] *Interpretation Theory*, p. 19.

[179] The utterer's meaning is the "subjective side" of meaning which is conveyed from the speaker's "self-reference of the sentence [such as I speak], the illocutionary dimension of the speech act, and the intention of recognition by the hearer." The utterance meaning is the "propositional content," the "objective side of the discourse. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 19.

[180] In an essay, "Reference and Refiguration of Ricoeur's Hermeneutics," Robert Sweeney compares the use of reference and refiguration in Ricoeur's work. Sweeney notices that as Ricoeur develops his work up to his *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur seems to move away from reference toward refiguration, although both terms are still used in *Time and Narrative*. Sweeney finds that the former points more to epistemic objects while the latter points more to the ontological condition of being-in-the-world. Sweeney concludes by suggesting the need for a dialectic between reference and refiguration in order to mediate the apparent paradox between them. However, as a response to Sweeney, David Pellauer suggests that Ricoeur's movement from reference to refiguration basically reflects his "exploration of different dimensions of what he [Ricoeur] has called 'the fullness of language' in terms of contemporary theories of linguistic analysis." It is discourse, beginning from the notion of *langue* and moving from simpler (words and sentences) to more complex forms (extended discourses such as narratives) that enables Ricoeur to develop "methodological tools and concepts appropriate to each level [of linguistic examination]." I think Pellauer's observation reflects well Ricoeur's movement, because we will see later in this essay that Ricoeur already develops his notion of the ontological condition as opened up by reference prior to his discussion of narratives. See Robert D. Sweeney, "Reference and Refiguration in Ricoeur's Hermeneutics," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* Vol 62 issue 0, 1988, p. 72-80. Also David Pellauer, "Response to Professors Sweeney and Ingbretsen," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* Vol 62 issue 0, 1988, p. 89-91.

The propositional content of discourse or the utterance meaning answers the two questions: "what" and "about what." The "what" question is the sense of the discourse, and the "about what" is the reference of the discourse. The sense is the identification and predication within the discourse, while the reference is what discourse points to in the world.[181] It is our experience with the world (the reference to the world) that we bring to language (the internal identification and predication in the discourse).

The notion that there is something to be identified in the world has to be presupposed before any identification function (sense) of language can take place. If there is nothing out there in the world, nothing can be said to be identified in a sentence. Our experience with the world is brought together by the dialectic of sense and reference. The "sense" of discourse is connected to our experience or the subjective side, whereas the "reference" of discourse is connected to the world or the objective side. Thus Louis Roy points out that "[i]n the pursuit of sense, signs refer to other signs within the system of language. But reference directs us outside the system, to objects, things, facts, states of affairs, etc."[182] Thus, language alone is unable to justify the existence of the world because reference is only presupposed. But this presupposition is not purely speculative, because what we identify in language is our experience of being in the world, of what is. When discourse refers to the external world, it is nonetheless the ontological condition, the experience of being in the world that we express in language. This relation between sense and reference again forms a dialectic, one that Ricoeur thinks is "so fundamental and so originary that it could rule the whole theory of language as discourse."[183] It is fundamental and originary because now the semiotics, the inner difference between the

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[181] *Interpretation Theory*, p. 20.
[182] Louis Roy, OP "Reference and Testimony: Paul Ricoeur's Approach to Revelation," p. 285.
[183] *Interpretation Theory*, p. 21.

signified and the signifier, presupposes the semantics, the reference to the things which the semiotics stand for. For Ricoeur, this connection between sense and reference through dialectics gives semantics a concrete definition. "The most concrete definition of semantics, then, is the theory that relates the inner or immanent constitution of the sense to the outer or transcendent intention of the reference." The structure of discourse thus acquires a double reference. It "refers back to its speaker at the same time that it refers to the world." Ricoeur claims that this is the "ultimate criterion of language as discourse."[184]

For Klemm, Ricoeur's discourse theory "signals a pursuit of a middle path between structuralist and Romantic alternatives at either extreme, while it allows Ricoeur to incorporate aspects of each alternative into his own theory [of discourse]." Klemm further points out that

> "the sense-reference dialectic situates the structuralist approach of semiotics as a necessary but insufficient aspect of a hermeneutically significant theory of language.... [C]odification of signs...could not be meaningful at all if it were not fundamentally referential in the first place.... On the side of the...Romanticist tradition...the event-meaning dialectic allows Ricoeur to overcome the priority given to the speaker's or author's intention...[and] preserves a place for the subjective intention (utterer's intention) in the event of discourse while still insisting on the objective exteriority of what is to be understood as such."[185]

Thus, language as discourse and its movement from immanence to transcendence lays out the groundwork for the idea that the text can open up a world in front of its readers (if the text is truly a form of authentic discourse). Up to this point, the theory of discourse rejects both the romanticism and structuralism of interpretation by alluding to the idea that discourse "refers back to its speaker at the same time that it refers to the world." For romanticism, the task of interpretation is to recover the author's intention. For

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[184] Ibid., p. 22.
[185] "The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur," p. 79.

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structuralism, the task is to work out the meaning of discourse by a structural analysis of the propositional content of discourse. The dialectic of event and meaning, sense and reference, enable Ricoeur to surpass both romanticism and structuralism by connecting the meaning of discourse to the world it refers to. But before we look at the relationship between text and the world, we need to find out how the text is related to language. The detour we must take to explore the relationship between text and language reminds us of the importance of mediation between text, tradition, and experience for Ricoeur, which will eventually form a response to the aporia that results from Marion's pure and un-mediated experience of the saturated phenomenon *par excellence.*

I think David Pellauer has succinctly summarized Ricoeur's understanding of how the text is related to language. Following Ricoeur's linguistic turn, Pellauer observes three moments in Ricoeur's philosophy of language. First, there is Ricoeur's construal of the "fullness of language," in which propositional language that admits of verification or falsification does not "exhaust language." Not only is the scope of propositional language too limited, but the techniques employed in its analysis, such as verification and falsification, do not necessarily apply to language uses that are non-propositional. Language is thus bigger and fuller than what we consider when we focus on mere propositions and the techniques for their analysis. Second, as we have discussed above, there is a distinction between the structure of language and discourse. It is at the level of discourse that "language is meaningful for human beings and where understanding is expressed."

Thus, the question of the meaning of discourse has to go beyond a mere sum of differences among words and sentences. The last moment of Ricoeur's hermeneutic

theory, as Pellauer points out, is the idea of the text as an object of interpretation. Discourse is inscribed in a text which "can outlive its author and its original audience and setting."[186] But there is a difference between a text and a mere inscription. When a speech or a speaking is fixed, it becomes writing. Writing can simply be the transcription of a speech for the purpose of transmission and preservation. But writing is not necessarily just an inscription of a speech. In the case of literature, writing is the direct inscription of thought rather than speech.

Therefore, for Ricoeur, a text is "really a text only when it is not restricted to transcribing an anterior speech, when instead it inscribes directly in written letters what the discourse means."[187] In the case of speaking, we have speaker and audience; in the case of writing, we have author and reader. While in the event of a speech, both speaker and audience appear in the same spatial and temporal situation and engage in a dialogical relation, in the event of writing the writer and reader engage in a different relation which ultimately involves interpretation, a hermeneutic of the text. In the situation of speech or dialogue, confusions from the audience can be clarified by the speaker. In writing, the author is no longer present to answer or to clarify. However, according to Ricoeur, a dialectical relationship continues to exist between the author and the text, as well as between the text and the reader. Once the textual meaning is no longer capable of directly answering any questions put to it by the reader, we can consider the text to have an author and not a speaker. The meaning of the text is linked to the meaning developed

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[186] See David W. Pellauer, "Paul Ricoeur and Literary Hermeneutics," *Between Suspicion and Sympathy: Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*, ed. Andrzej Wierciński (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2003), p. 374.

[187] Paul Ricoeur, "What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding," in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, Trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group), p. 102.

by the author. On the other hand, since the author is not available to answer the reader's questions, the text has "semantic autonomy," a meaning developed by the text. The autonomy of text and authorial meaning become counterparts of one another. A similar dialectic can be found between the text and the reader. In writing, the audience is no longer limited to interlocutors; the text widens the range of readers.[188] In other words, the characteristic of the autonomy of the text is to create readers. By the response of the readers, multiple interpretations are imposed on the text. The semantic autonomy of the text thus forms the dialectic counterpart of the pluralistic interpretation of the text. Ricoeur contends that this struggle among text, authorship, and reader "generates the whole dynamic of interpretation." "Hermeneutics begins where dialogue ends."[189]

In the tension between author, reader, and text, we observe the dialectic between the event of writing and textual meaning, and between the event of reading and textual meaning. But the second order dialectic of sense and reference pertaining to meaning[190] is much more complex in the case of writing. In the case of a text, the author is not available to answer. The dialogical situation is shattered.[191] The definite description or singular reference in the situation of a dialogue, where the speaker can always clarify through gesture or ostensive indicators, is no longer available. The space and time that are common to speaker and audience disappear and, instead, a distance is now inserted between the writer and the reader. But at the same time that writing dissolves the

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[188] In dialogue, the number of audience members is limited. In writing, the text is opened to whoever knows how to read. Although the group or community that reads the text may be limited by social condition, the circle of readers is still potentially bigger than that of speaking. See *Interpretation Theory*, p. 31.

[189] *Interpretation Theory*, p. 32.

[190] In discourse, the first order dialectic is between event and meaning. Writing and speaking is the event, while the content of writing and speaking is the meaning. But there is a second order dialectic within meaning, which is the dialectic of sense and reference. It is this second order dialectic which provides for the exteriority characteristic of discourse.

[191] *Interpretation Theory*, p. 35.

common and singular situation of speaking, the text it produces opens a world, because now the text no longer addresses a single, non-repeatable situation limited by a specific space and time.[192]

The reality portrayed by the text is thus emancipated from "situational references" and slides into "non-situational references." Situational references are characteristic of dialogue. Through gesture, demonstrations, and definitive identification, the speaker directs all references to unique positions of "the here and now determined by the interlocutionary situation." Therefore, in dialogue, all references are rendered situational: common and unique to all parties participating in the dialogue. But, in the case of a text, these situational references are relaxed and freed. A distance is inserted between the author and the reader; the common dialogical situation common to speaker and audience is dissolved. Now, the references in a text lose the singular, unique character characteristic of the dialogical situation. Instead, the scope of the reference of a text, in the absence of a common spatial-temporal situation between the speaker and the listener, extends "to an indefinite range of potential readers in indeterminate time." The references are thus freed from a particular situation or from the "narrow boundaries" of a dialogical situation.

For Ricoeur, textual references to these "non-situational" accounts of reality assemble or open up a "world" before the reader.[193] Furthermore, the literary and poetic function of discourse further eclipses situational accounts of reality. By employing such literary devices as narrative (in the case of fictional literature), the text introduces a

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[192] For Ricoeur, the world "is the ensemble of references opened by every kind of text, descriptive or poetic, that I have read, understood, and loved. And to understand a text is to interpolate among the predicates of our situation all the significations that make a *Welt* (world) out of our *Umwelt* (environment)." *Interpretation Theory*, p. 37.
[193] *Interpretation Theory*, p. 36.

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structure of narrative time, a time that is unique within the narrative, which disconnects the narrative from the common space and time structure assumed by situational references. This wider extension of the scope of reference through poetry, metaphor, and symbol further liberates a "power" of reference, allowing us to refer to those aspects of our being in the world that heretofore could not be expressed in a direct, descriptive way. In the case of non-situational reference, the "world" which the text opens is no longer restricted to the confines of descriptive reference, but is one that can be assembled by poetic and narrative texts. According to Ricoeur, "to understand a text is to interpolate among the predicates of our situation all the significations that make a *Welt* [world] out of our *Umwelt* [situation]."[194]

3.4. Before the Text

Therefore, for Ricoeur, the exteriorization of discourse allows the text to open a world. Such a world could come into conflict with the real world in such a way that the text redefines, reconstructs, and, sometimes, even denies the so-called 'real' world. This transformative character of the text functions to help us refigure reality, to allow us to refuse to "identify our reality with empirical reality" or to "identify our experience with

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[194] Ibid., p. 37. But Ricoeur never intends to abolish the referential function of the text. Through metaphors and narrative, the referential function is only redirected, multiplied, and transformed. See *Interpretation Theory*, p. 36 where Ricoeur gives a definite "no" to the question about the abolition of all reference. "My contention is that discourse cannot fail to be about something. In saying this, I am denying the ideology of absolute texts." See also *Symbolism of Evil* and *The Rule of Metaphor*, where Ricoeur's discussion of symbols and metaphors suggest that multiple layers of reference reside in symbolic and metaphoric expressions. Again on p. 103 of "What is a Text?", Ricoeur argues that a text, if not a mere transcription of a speech, is in fact liberated from a dialogue. This "emancipation...entails a veritable upheaval in the relations between language and the world, as well as in the relation between language and the various subjectivities concerned (that of the author and that of the reader)."

empirical experience."[195] The suspension of empirical method as *the* method by which to understand reality makes room for the poetics of the text, which operates in such a way that "the truth claim related to the transfiguring action of fiction can be taken into account."[196] The aspect of truth and the aspect of transfiguration, Ricoeur concedes, affirm the relationship between the text and human existence.

In the case of writers or artists, their productions involve a creative discovery, made through an imagination emancipated from predicative and categorical imprisonment. In the case of reading, the task of interpretation is similarly creative. As observed above, the text opens multiple interpretations. The very first task of interpreting a text is "not to bring about a decision" but to let the text unfold a new world before the reader; "[t]hese are the realities that unfold before the text."[197] This proposed new world, the result of interpretation, is one "which I could inhabit and in which I could project my ownmost possibilities."[198] It is this notion of a world of possibilities and not a world that

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[195] Paul Ricoeur, "On Interpretation," *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, Trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group), p.11.

[196] Ibid., p.12.

[197] "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p.92. For Klemm, the world of the text in Ricoeur has two references. The first meaning refers to "the set of references formed by the reader's imagination as [she] works on the content of the story." The second meaning refers to "the world projected *by* the analyzed structure of the text *for* the reflexive subject." See "The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur," p. 87.

[198] "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p.102. Ricoeur here closely follows Heidegger's *Being and Time*, especially Heidegger's discussion of the relationships among understanding, possibility, and projection. Heidegger argues that possibility, as "*not yet* actual" or "*not at any time* necessary," characterizes the "*merely* possible." But this does not imply that possibility is free-floating or indifferent. Possibility is tied to *Dasein* in Being-possible, where Dasein constantly lets go of its own possibilities. In other words, *Dasein* "has been delivered over to" or is "thrown" into "possibility through and through." "Dasein is the possibility of Being-free *for* its ownmost potentiality-for-Being." And how are we able to recognize this possibility? It is disclosed by understanding; and understanding "is the Being of such potentiality-for-Being." As a mode of existence, understanding "is" with the Being of *Dasein*. *Dasein* therefore, "knows" or understands in every case "*what* it is capable of." Thus, "[u]*nderstanding is the existential Being of Dasein's own potentiality-for-Being; and it is so in such a way that this Being discloses in itself what its Being is capable of.*" Furthermore, according to Heidegger, understanding not only discloses the capability of *Dasein*, but understanding also opens up these possibilities. Heidegger describes this existential structure of understanding as "*projection.*" This projection has to be differentiated from planning or arrangement, which efface the character of understanding as disclosing possibility. On the

is simply given, which calls for continuous interpretation. These possibilities thus point to the plurality of interpretations that frees oneself from "the ideology of absolute text."[199]

Reading will then be a transforming experience when it is freed from the confines of direct, empirical reference. The act of reading generates a "productive reference," one that is able to confront the reader's world with the alternative world of the text, thereby refiguring it. The capacity to produce or to transform should be the result of reading if reading is taken as a response to the text. According to Ricoeur, the two roles assumed by reading are "an interruption in the course of action" and "a new impetus to action." These two roles seem to run against each other. Interruption seems to suspend movement, while impetus seems to force movement. But for Ricoeur, the world of the text and the world of the reader are connected by this dialectic of reading. When the real world of the reader is confronted by the imaginary world of the text, readers can go so far as to subordinate the real to the imaginary. Then, Ricoeur concedes, "[r]eading becomes a place so unreal that reflection takes a pause." But at the same time, when readers incorporate what they have learned from the imaginary world of the text into their reality, by modification and transformation of their memories, reading at once becomes a place

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contrary, projection is a thrown-ness where Daesin "has already projected" and "is projecting" itself in terms of possibilities. Any thematization of what is projected will reduce possibility into some kind of given contents and therefore eschews possibility as possibility. Thus, for Heidegger, "projection, in throwing, throws before itself the possibility as possibility [not as any content], and lets it *be* as such." Understanding, as projection, "is the kind of Being of Dasein in which it *is* its possibilities as possibilities." See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1962), p. 182-185. All italics in quotations are original. Also see Ricoeur's appropriation of Heidegger's notion of *Verstehen* in "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," p.82-83. Klemm also draws our attention to Ricoeur's acknowledgement that his notion of 'the world' is adapted from Heidegger. See "The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur," p. 87.

[199]*From Text to Action*, p.144. In *Interpretation Theory*, Ricoeur mentions the two fallacies concerning the semantic autonomy of text. One fallacy is the intentional fallacy which "hold[s] the author's intention as the criterion for any valid interpretation of the text." The second fallacy is the fallacy of the absolute text which claims the authorless nature of the text. See *Interpretation Theory*, p. 30.

that they must cross through, one where they can no longer come to rest. Reading thus is the "fragile unity of stasis [where reflection pauses] and impetus [where action is provoked]" when the reader's world is confronted by the world of the text.[200] Ricoeur spells out the very paradox that results from this work of reading as follows: "the more readers become unreal in their reading, the more profound and far-reaching will be the work's influence on social reality." The act of reading therefore creates a space in reality where readers ponder the possibilities of their existence. This movement from language to discourse, then to text and reading, makes a round trip back to Ricoeur's earlier writings, where the capacity of the agent to act is the focus.[201] Through encountering the world before the text, the reader can once again affirm that "I can," not only with respect to her ownmost possibilities, but also with respect to changing social reality.

If the criterion of revelation is to respond to a call, a call to the possibilities of existence, then Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the text, which describes a movement from text to action, shows that the text is revelatory; that is, language in its poetic function "is a vehicle of revelation."[202] The text, our reading, and thus our actions, change our relationship with reality, and thereby change reality too.

3.5. Testimony

If reading a revelatory text (Scripture, in a Christian context) becomes an "impetus to action," how do we describe such a response to revelation? How do we describe the

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[200] *Time and Narrative 3*, p. 179.
[201] Here I refer to Paul Ricoeur's first title of his trilogy, *Freedom and Nature*. In his response paper in the 1999 conference in Chicago, he describes his work, though seemed to be scattered, revolves around a problematic, which he names it "the problem of human capability". John Wall, William Schweiker, and W. David Hall. ed. *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary moral thought* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p.280.
[202] "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p.102.

experience of a subject confronted by this revelation? While Ricoeur has criticized the authoritarian and heteronomous concept of revelation, he is also suspicious of those positions that claim the autonomy of the subject who is the master of her thought. Beyond these two options, Ricoeur suggests that the response to revelation is a question of existence, where one asks "what a thinking subject formed by and conforming to poetic discourse might be."[203]

The thinking subject, according to Ricoeur, is always mediated. Our reflection is always "the appropriation of our effort to exist and of our desire to be, through the works which bear witness to that effort and desire."[204] Ricoeur thus dethrones the masterful, autonomous self; instead, the self must come to understand itself by interpreting all the signs around it. This need for interpretation points to the idea that the thinking subject already exists in a state of "belonging-to" or "participation-in" relationships which precedes the subject's self-reflection. Even though it is through distanciation[205] that the subject becomes aware of her belonging-to a culture, it is through the "prolongation" of the "dialectic of participation and distanciation" that the thinking subject discovers "a specific mode of belonging to a culture where signs are made up of texts." Appropriation, for Ricoeur, is such a "subjective" understanding before the "objective" text, a response to the world disclosed by the text.[206]

We may find similarity and dissimilarity between Ricoeur and Marion in terms of the subject. Doubtlessly, both propose the de-centering of the self. Marion dethrones the transcendental *I* to emancipate the appearing of the phenomenon so that the given shows

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[203] Ibid., p. 105.
[204] Ibid., p. 106.
[205] See "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," *From Text to Action*, p. 72-85.
[206] "Toward A Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p. 107-108.

itself by itself. The dethroned self becomes so passive that she becomes a screen of passivity onto which the phenomenon projects itself; she becomes a placeless place for the phenomenon to appear. On the other hand, for Ricoeur, the dethroned self comes to realize that she is always mediated and belongs to a particular tradition. Her 'dethronement' takes the form of a continuous interpretation of the signs around her. While Marion's de-centered subject now becomes a passive receiver of the phenomenon, Ricoeur's de-centered subject now becomes an active interpreter of her world. As I have pointed out in chapter two, Marion's passive receiver cannot avoid the aporia of being both a slave and a master to the phenomenon at once. Furthermore, once the subject wants to express her experience of the saturated phenomenon *par excellence*, she cannot avoid the layer of hermeneutics she needs to employ to describe her experience. Therefore, I think Ricoeur has well positioned himself to suggest that hermeneutics is required in experiencing the phenomenon, in expressing the phenomenon and eventually in understanding oneself.

In addition to the characteristics of mediation, belonging-to, and appropriation, characteristics that Ricoeur explores in his discussion of the subject and the world of the text, we have yet to explore the question of historical contingency.[207] The category of testimony, Ricoeur concedes, brings external history and internal self-reflection into an "alliance." In religious experience, the judgment to which testimony appeals is the judgment that the consciousness makes by interpreting the divine through historically contingent signs. The deeper that consciousness reflects upon itself internally, the more it must interpret the external signs that the divine gives of itself. This alliance between the interiority and exteriority of consciousness forms "the proper character of the

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[207] Ibid., p. 109-110.

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perception of the divine by and in a finite consciousness."[208] Thus, without agreeing with

the idea of the mastery of the subject, Ricoeur still emphasizes the category of testimony

as the subjective side of a hermeneutics of revelation (just as he emphasizes the category

of poetics as the objective side).[209] Thus, Jean Greisch helpfully points out that we must

choose between the philosophy of absolute knowledge (the idea of the mastery of the

subject) and the hermeneutics of testimony (the operation of the reflexive consciousness

and the historical understanding based on the signs that the divine gives of itself).[210] If

we choose the hermeneutics of testimony, which I think is what Ricoeur is proposing

here, we will avoid the pitfall of the mastery of the subject. Marion's idea of the gifted as

the master of the phenomenon is in danger of succumbing to this pitfall, despite the fact

that he rigorously argues against the mastery of the transcendental *I*.

Following Jean Nabert, Ricoeur contends that testimony, though it relates to our

daily lives, work, ideas, and action, involves an "original affirmation." For Ricoeur,

original affirmation is the very limit or perimeter that the concrete reflection of a subject

will eventually reach or rejoin. It is the absolute affirmation of the absolute, and yet it is

not able to retain itself internally or express itself externally; it is an act which is "pure"

and "internal." It is not one of our experiences and seems to be "indefinitely inaugural,"

only concerning "the idea that the self makes of itself." An act so originary that it is

"numerically identical" to each person's "real consciousness," yet it is able to transgress

the limitations that circumscribe a person's destiny. For Ricoeur, original affirmation is a

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[208] Ibid., p. 148.
[209] Ibid., p. 110.
[210] Jean Greisch, "Testimony and Attestation," *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, edited by Richard Kearney (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), p. 82.

"divestment" or "the letting go of self."[211] By this "divestment" or "letting go of self," an individual is able to give up all possible empirical, rational, and transcendental support for thinking and understanding, so that an opening to contingent signs of the absolute becomes available. It is through such encountering of these contingent signs that the absolute, with its generosity, appears to such an individual.[212] However, external contingent signs require interpretation. Through the three dialectics—event and meaning, the trial of true and false, and contingent history—testimony, as an internal reflection of consciousness, lets go of itself, and yet "accepts being led by and ruled by the interpretation of external signs which the absolute gives of itself."[213] For Ricoeur, it is through the convergence of these two movements—the letting go of self and being led by the interpretation of external signs—that "the *experience* of the absolute" joins "the *idea* of the absolute."[214] Such is the absolute characteristic of testimony. In other words, it is the convergence of the two exegeses, "the exegesis of self and the exegesis of external signs," that shapes the character of the hermeneutic of testimony.[215]

First, the convergence occurs when we realize that it is through external events that we understand ourselves; but such understanding also affirms that these defining and founding events are not events that "pass away." They "endure," and we "continue to attest and to testify to them."[216] While the appropriation of such events does not happen without a trial, it is precisely through the sorting and sifting of true and false witnesses that we discern the divine and "form a certain idea of it." What we discern to be absolute

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[211] "Toward A Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p. 110.
[212] Ibid., p. 111
[213] Ibid., p. 112.
[214] Ibid., p. 119.
[215] Ibid., p. 112.
[216] Ibid., p. 114.

and divine often comes through the testimony of many others who reproduce in their lives, deeds, and works the excellence that is predicated to the divine. The trial or judgment has thus moved away from the plane of epistemology, the true and false of the facts, to the plane of ontology, a life reproducing and testifying to such judgment.

Finally, when the witness herself is put on trial and her testimony becomes "the price of life itself," the witness changes names; we call her a martyr.[217] Such a renouncement of one's life as a response to a historical manifestation of the divine demonstrates the "non-heteronomous dependence"[218] of self-consciousness on historical testimonies. The dependence is non-heteronomous because historical testimonies do not ask the consciousness to submit. Instead, such historical testimony presents itself to our consciousness in a way that invokes our imaginative power which in turn encourages us to think and reason further. Greisch has summarized this dependence as follows:

> "[T]he hermeneutical possibility of a philosophy of testimony is tied to two conditions. First, the exegesis of historical testimonies must be able to approach self-exegesis, which can take place only if the testimony *gives* something to be interpreted, namely the immediacy of the absolute which challenges us – and if at the same time the testimony itself becomes the *object* of interpretation, by virtue of the threefold dialectic which inhabits it (meaning and event, testimony and prosecution, witness and testimony). Second, the originary affirmation and the criteriology of the divine, which convey the most detailed analysis that a human consciousness is capable of, must 'make a detour through an interpretation of the contingent signs that the absolute gives of itself in history.'"[219]

Thus, in history, the absolute has given itself through different contingent signs and, for Ricoeur, it is "this dependence that gives philosophy a certain idea of revelation." This experience of testimony becomes the "subjective side" of the idea of revelation, a

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[217] Ibid., p. 113. According to Ricoeur, martyr means witness in Greek. Ricoeur is well aware that dying for one's conviction does not prove the conviction to be true; but martyrdom is nevertheless a "test" to the witness, a "limit situation" of the witness.
[218] Ibid., p. 117.
[219] "Testimony and Attestation," p. 82-83. Italics original.

counterpart to the world of the text which is the "objective side" of the idea of revelation.[220] Ricoeur's recognition of the historical contingency of the subjective experience of testimony, an experience that always requires interpretation, gives him an advantage over Marion. Through this recognition, Ricoeur is able to avoid a claim of total neutrality in one's experience of the divine, a claim to which Marion's phenomenological position seems committed. Unlike Ricoeur, Marion largely ignores the hermeneutical dynamic between the world of the text and the development of self-consciousness.

3.6. Concluding Remarks

In his movement towards a hermeneutics of the idea of revelation, Ricoeur approaches the discussion by maintaining a "living" dialectic between revelation and reason. Not only does he reject the idea of revelation as authoritarian and opaque, he also objects to the belief that reason is its own master, a position that would render revelation unintelligible.[221] From the pole of revelation, Ricoeur considers the originary discourse of revelation to be pluralistic and polysemic. We should resist any individual or institution who might claim to know the revealed truth in its totality or to possess the authority to withhold it. Similarly, considered from the pole of reason, we see that the subject is not totally autonomous, and neither is truth totally transparent. Marion's position could benefit from Ricoeur's critique of totality and subjective autonomy, insofar as it would prevent this position from claiming immediacy and neutrality for the

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[220] "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p. 117.

[221] Ibid., p. 95. Ricoeur considers philosophy's understanding of "the appeal of revelation as an unacceptable claim," which is "in the final analysis that of a *sacrificium intellectus* and a total heteronomy under the verdict of the magisterium," to be itself a pretentious claim.

experience of the saturated phenomenon, or revelation. No matter how original and immediate such experience seems to be, we need to admit that there is the possibility of multiple interpretations. No matter how passive and neutral the recipient happens to be, the subject is always situated in a tradition. For these reasons Ricoeur argues that, objectively, revelation is a manifestation where a truth claim is considered to possess meaning beyond simple verification or falsification. For Ricoeur, meaning is the engagement between the subject and the text in which a world of possibilities is disclosed. Sacred Scripture opens such a world in front of the reader, who is then able to appropriate to her own existence the possibilities presented in this world. This appropriation leads to the effacement of the total autonomy of the thinking subject who always-already belongs to a world, and whose understanding of his own existence is always mediated by interpreting the signs around him. Thus, Ricoeur's idea of revelation involves a mediation between a polysemic text or Scripture, and the subject's appropriation of the world it opens.

It is therefore my contention that Ricoeur's detour through hermeneutics runs ahead of Marion's pure phenomenology in a couple aspects. First, for Ricoeur, the subject is always oriented within a certain historical tradition. This historical orientation allows pluralistic interpretations of the signs of our world and avoids the pitfall of the claim of immediacy and perhaps authoritarianism into which Marion's pure phenomenology may be prone to slip. Moreover, the admission of a prior historical orientation hopefully lays bare the presupposition and prejudice inherent in one's commitment to an historical religious tradition, and thereby avoids the pitfalls inherent in assuming a hidden theology (Revelation versus revelation). Ricoeur's cards are on the

table. Second, the master/slave aporia that results from Marion's construal of the gifted recipient can be resolved by Ricoeur's understanding of non-heteronomous dependence. Instead of being a master of the phenomenon, Ricoeur's subject simply admits that it is impossible to have "a total mediation between self-consciousness and its symbolic experience."[222] Instead of being a slave of the phenomenon, Ricoeur's subject seeks dependence without heteronomy which means the subject thinks of dependence not as submission and obedience, but as the opening of the imagination, which involves having one's "understanding suspended," "derealized," and "made potential"[223] in front of the text.

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[222] "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p. 116.
[223] Ibid., p. 117.

Conclusion

Revelation answers the question of how we can come to know God. For Marion, revelation appears as a saturated phenomenon *par excellence*, one that surpasses all human conception and reason. By definition, revelation has to surpass human conception and reason before a phenomenon can be called revelation. I need to appreciate Marion's affirmation that revelation is the gift of God's grace, which can therefore never be confined by human reasons, concepts, verification, or any logical activities. To free us from the grip of any metaphysical concepts, the limitations of our rationality, and to demonstrate once more the failure of all human attempts to categorize God as an object similar to all other objects that we can apprehend, Marion proposes the inversion of Husserlian intentionality. This inverted intentionality, according to Marion, allows him to stay within the course of phenomenology and yet meet the very requirements of a revelation that it is not restrained by human conception. For Marion, revelation is not to be conceived and perceived in the conventional way of phenomenology, in which intuition fulfils the intention of the constituting subject. Instead, revelation comes as an intuition that saturates the horizon and the intention of the constituting *I*. It comes as a call which strikes and humbles the recipient. The call demands a response from the recipient; only by totally submitting herself to this call will she allow the given to show itself by itself.

For Ricoeur, revelation is not a set of doctrines authorized by the *magisterium*. Instead, he understands revelation as those "revealed truths" that are manifested at the originary level of the Scriptures, a level at which revelation maintains a polyphonic, historical, and living character. Ricoeur's return to the originary scriptures suspends both

speculative philosophy and theology, and instead seeks self-understanding through the hermeneutics of a "discourse of faith" or "the text of faith." The hermeneutics of the text, in this case the hermeneutics of sacred Scripture, thus confronts the pretensions of the transparency of truth and the autonomy of the thinking subject. Revelation, or the manifestation of revealed truths, is therefore not a product of objective verification and falsification. Instead, revelation as manifestation names the possibility for biblical Scripture, through hermeneutic interpretation, to open a world into which one might project one's ownmost possibilities. Such interpretation, however, is not the result of an autonomous interpreter scrutinizing the Scriptures with her own standard of meaning. On the contrary, for Ricoeur, to understand Scripture is to receive oneself by appropriating oneself to the biblical world that the Scriptures propose. Hence, to understand in this hermeneutic sense is not to constitute the meaning of the text, but instead to allow oneself to be constituted by the biblical world of the Scriptures.

There are great similarities between Marion and Ricoeur's explication of revelation. They both attempt to de-center the subject, to critique the presumption of sufficient reason operating in such philosophical schools as logical positivism, and both are ready to receive revelation by witnessing and testimony. Yet despite their many similarities, there is a major difference between Ricoeur and Marion concerning the mediation of revelation. Can revelation come to consciousness with immediacy, or do we only receive it through the mediation of the text? Can revelation happen *outside* the text, or does it only occur *before* (in front of) the text? These are questions to which Marion and Ricoeur give significantly different answers.

Marion's pure phenomenology of revelation claims the immediacy of the revealed. Carlson observes that Marion's project possesses this thrust in order to suggest that "the given gives itself unconditionally and so before/outside [preceding] any hermeneutic horizon." In this vein, I have also shown the *aporia* that emerges in Marion's discussion of the subject or the gifted's status as simultaneously the master and the slave of the appearing of the phenomenon. With immediate access to the givenness, the gifted, to put it in Thomas Carlson's terms, is "elevated" to "the status of creator and savior, charged with responsibility for all phenomenality."[224] What would happen if political and ecclesial decisions were to be made based on this understanding of revelatory vision? How do we settle any dispute in an ecclesial or political discussion between two rival parties who both claim to have received a personal revelatory vision? I think Ricoeur's hermeneutics of testimony gives us far better practical advice than does Marion's phenomenological understanding of revelation, because, for Marion, revelation surpasses or precedes any available hermeneutic horizon. In contrast, when challenged by the absolute, the witness in Ricoeur's philosophy of testimony understands himself through the interpretation of external signs. It is through the convergence of self-exegesis and the exegesis of the external signs that a certain event assumes its absolute character. Furthermore, such an absolute character has to go through a trial of witnesses before we can "form an idea of the divine." This idea is "a regulative ideal," as Ricoeur points out, which is not static but is motivated with the aim for hospitality.[225] Therefore, one can hardly eliminate the element of hermeneutics even in the face of divine revelation. Carlson, in my opinion, rightly questions such a possibility of pure phenomenology

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[224] Carlson, "Blindness and the Decision to See," p. 172.
[225] "Experience and Language in Religious Discourse," p. 132.

without hermeneutics. He asks: "Is every decision to see the given '*as* ...' therefore also, and always already, an interpretation, and so yielding not the given *itself* but my take on the given, as and in the measure that I manage to receive it?" His question lingers, "[D]o I risk entering a violence that, in the name of the given itself, masks the *as* according to which I decide to receive it?"[226]

For the reasons stated in the previous paragraph, I think Ricoeur has rightly pointed out that when a phenomenology of religion tries to attain a universal character, confusion begins to evolve. I agree with Ricoeur here, because in Marion's saturation of saturation, and despite his effort to formulate the passivity of the recipient, self-consciousness still runs the risk of immediacy, a risk which Ricoeur's hermeneutics consistently challenges. Saturation *par excellence* seems to imply, or at least to risk the possibility of, a very direct contact and access to the givenness. With such an implication, however humble the gifted might become, this affirmation of immediacy risks leading to the possibility of an unnecessary authoritarianism and exclusivism, elements which unfortunately have haunted humanity with gruesome religious violence in our history.

This criticism of Marion to the contrary notwithstanding, it is also fair to say that he never denies the importance of hermeneutics. On one occasion, he admits that he has learned his hermeneutics from Ricoeur, and "Ricoeur is very clear on this: if we are to have hermeneutics, it has to be an endless hermeneutics."[227] Perhaps Marion is aware

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[226] "Blindness and the Decision to See," p. 173.

[227] Richard Kearney, "A Dialogue with Marion", *Philosophy Today*, 48,1 (2004), p.12-13. Gschwandtner tries to defend Marion from accusations that Marion's phenomenology of religion lacks hermeneutic elements. She argues that Marion understands faith as "a hermeneutic vision," which is a lack of conception rather than a lack of evidence, and thus enables us to "recognize what it would not otherwise see." She also argues that Marion's examples of Revelation as the saturated phenomenon are "hermeneutically grounded in the texts (Scriptures) and experiences of the liturgy and the actions of the Eucharistic community." However, as I have already pointed out in Chapter three, the tension between the actuality and possibility of the saturation of saturation has left space for critics like Horner, Caputo, and

that his description of revelation as the saturated phenomenon does not amount to an exhaustive description of religious experience, for as he himself admits, once such experience is expressed, it can hardly avoid hermeneutics. But does Marion want such a hermeneutic horizon? How does the gifted make the phenomenon visible "as" something without any prior interpretive moment? As Carlson has pointed out, these hermeneutic moments run the risk of jeopardizing the givenness, as Marion understands it, because the visibility of such a phenomenon, hermeneutically appropriated, will no longer reflect any more as what shows itself of itself, but now only as what "I manage to receive [of] it."[228]

Ricoeur, on the other hand, assumes hermeneutics as the primordial mode of human existence, by which we are always situated in a certain context. So, by interpreting the Scriptures, we understand ourselves. There are precise moments in this ongoing interpretation in which event moves on to meaning, sense moves on to reference, and otherness moves on to the re-figuration of self. While Marion's simple inversion of intentionality tempts us to take a shorter route, through which revelation gives itself, as itself, to the gifted, Ricoeur, as usual, insists upon the necessity of taking the long route— a detour through the interpretation of symbols, metaphors, narratives, and myth—before coming back to the world that is opened before the text.[229]

I suggest that this detour in understanding revelation is especially important for such interpretive communities as communities of faith. It allows us to respect the pluralistic and polysemic character of revelation. It allows us to understand that any

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Tanner to challenge the ambiguous relationship he posits between phenomenology and theology. See *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 176-177.

[228] See Carlson's "Blindness and the Decision to See," p. 173.

[229] This is similar to Richard Kearney's description of Ricoeur when he compares Ricoeur's project to that of Heidegger. Richard Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p.100.

theological and dogmatic construct is speculative, and therefore to reject exclusive and authoritarian attitudes. Following Ricoeur's path, we will refuse to marginalize or exclude speculations that are other than ours. Revelation as a pluralistic concept, mediated by language and discourse, and in the case of Christianity, a polyphonic text, will always have openings by which to invite dialogue with others who differ from oneself. This "interconfessional hospitality of one religion to another" can only be achieved by "a long chain of interpretations" and through "an ongoing choice."[230]

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[230] "Experience and Language in Religious Discourse," p.146 and p.135.

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