Phenomenology and the Self's Measure: Studies in Subjectivity

Steven DeLay
Christ Church, Oxford

A thesis submitted for the degree of DPhil in Philosophy
at the University of Oxford

Hilary 2017

Abstract

The philosophical tradition has long understood subjectivity solely in reference to the self's place within the world and the powers of intentional transcendence which open it. Nowhere is this presupposition more apparent than in the thought of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. Despite the precise differences among their respective philosophies of transcendence, each understands the self as little else than that which opens the exteriority of a world and is thereby exhausted and determined by it. Against this prevailing assumption that the self is a 'being-in-the-world', I contend that the essence of subjectivity instead consists in the unworldly interiority of life's affective self-revelation. The studies that follow accordingly investigate five related aspects of subjectivity: the irreducibility of the self's individuality to society; the blow of vanity that reveals this inwardness; the resultant life that marshals and in turn deploys it; the power of the work of art to express it; and finally the promise of immortality that sustains it.

Word Count: 74,996

Introduction

First Study

The Toiling Lily

Second Study

The Vanity of Authenticity

Third Study

Against Onto-theology: Will and Love in the Mystical Tradition

Fourth Study

Painting the Invisible: Michel Henry on Kandinsky

Fifth Study

Metaphysics and Immortality

Postscript

He to whom all transient things are not trivial and as nothing will not find God.

—Meister Eckhart

Introduction

The present work comprises five studies. In each, because the issue at stake is accordingly one of self, the central question is essentially the same: in what way is subjectivity revealed, how do the history of philosophy's long entrenched and cherished dogmas distort the matter, and what is consequently brought into relief when the distortions concealing the experiential truths regarding its manifestation are identified and cleared away? These essays, each in their own way, aim to contribute to an undertaking already well underway, one most famously typified by the sustained meditations of Kierkegaard, and, in more recent memory, those of Michel Henry, whose 'phenomenology of life' has investigated, perhaps more steadfastly than anyone, what shall here constitute our own theme, a subject, as we shall see, that is not only quintessentially phenomenological, but just as equally one of basic concern. How, in short, we shall ask, are we truly revealed to ourselves, and what does it precisely mean to be the selves that we are?

This very concern, it so happens, invites another of its own, one as essential as it is perennial, and it is this phenomenon, in constituting our principal theme really, that serves as the topic to which we will repeatedly turn throughout the studies to follow. And what question is that? It is one every one of us has asked ourselves at some point in our lives, precisely because it is distinctly emblematic of our being selves to have asked it: is there any ultimate and absolute point to the time that leads to death—and hence to existence and so ourselves? These studies collectively shall argue 'yes'.

The first two studies examine the venerable philosophical idea, still so prevalent today, that the self must necessarily be understood as worldly. In the first, 'The Toiling Lily: Narrative Life, Responsibility, and Ontological Self-Deception', I broach the question of subjectivity by investigating the self's ontological status—the 'question of the subject', as it were—in relation to the sphere of practical identity, the space of reasons, and narrative.

Genuine responsibility and ethical self-understanding, I contend, are possible without narrative—or, narrative is at least not always sufficient. Crucial to establishing and clarifying this case is the distinction between our ontological subjectivity, on the one hand, and our everyday practical identity, on the other. It was Sartre who, following Hegel and Heidegger, did well to exploit this distinction, noting that it is within the context of everyday life that we initially orient ourselves, and thereby derive a guiding sense of what it means to be what (or who) we are. A characteristic passage from *Being and Nothingness* flatly asserts so: 'in the quasi-generality of every day acts, I am engaged, I have ventured, and I discover my possibilities by realizing them and in the very act of realizing them as exigencies, urgencies, instrumentalities'.[1] And yet, Sartre is also quick to note—correctly, as we shall see—that although the rhythm of our daily lives supplies us with a working sense of who we are, it nevertheless involves us in an inescapable alienation. According to these well-known Sartrean existential insights, even the greatest banalities of ordinary life are pregnant with dizzying absurdity. My everyday experience incontestably reinforces the impression that I am identical to whatever role I take up within the world's hustle and bustle; and yet, in point of fact, the very opposite is really the case. The tranquilizing confidence characterizing my everyday certainty that I am who I straightforwardly take myself to be, Sartre reminds us, is in fact a very grand and indeed very stubborn, *illusion*. Contrary to what the coziness inculcated by the exigency of everyday life's projects and concerns might suggest, I am *not* who I take myself to be. For, as Sartre observes, I am what I am only in the mode of my *playing* at being it. Who can forget the famous vignette of the Parisian café waiter Sartre paints to illustrate the point? 'Let us consider this waiter in the café […] All his behaviour seems to us a game […] He is playing, he is amusing himself. But what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing *at being* a waiter in a café […] [He is] a waiter in the mode of *being what*

[1] 1956, p. 60.

[he is] not'.[2] Sartre was no doubt not the first to realize that pressing into worldly practical identities involves us in the contradictory condition of failing to be what we are.

Or recall Kierkegaard's memorable appraisal of the illusory veneer overlaying the world's hustle and bustle, which, in concealing the conspiracy of collective self-deception that lies beneath it, proves responsible for perpetuating it: 'Consider for a moment the world which lies before you in all its variegated multiplicity; it is like looking at a play, only the plot is vastly more complicated. Every individual in this innumerable throng is by his differences a particular something; he exhibits a definiteness but essentially he is something other than this—but this we do not get to see here in life. Here we see only what role the individual plays and how he does it. It is like a play'.[3] If existence is a play, this is so, on Sartre's particular analysis anyway, because 'we can be nothing without playing at being it'; and so it must be, he thought, since 'The *for-itself* is the being which determines itself to exist inasmuch as it cannot coincide with itself'.[4] The very structure of subjectivity itself, according to Sartre, entails alienation. For Sartre, unlike Kierkegaard, there only exists the world we know in the everyday roles and possibilities handed down to us by tradition. Hence, we are doomed to a fractured existence, a masquerade ball in which behind the masks we wear while playing upon the world's stage lies nothingness.[5] When the self is characterized exclusively in terms of its place within the world, as in Sartre's philosophy, there is no way I can ever truly be myself. For when I act, I am in the first instance revealed to myself in the exteriority of the role I take up, but it is precisely in my pressing into that very role that I fail to coincide with who I am. Thus, when my trying to be something is accomplished in the mode of a worldly practical identity, instrumentality, or possibility, I accordingly cease to be myself. As Jean-Luc Marion has remarked, my doings in the world, restricted as they are to mere practical exigencies, obey a

[2] 1956, p. 82-3.
[3] 2009, p. 95.
[4] 1956, p. 102.
[5] It is worth noting, because it is telling, that the Latin term for person is 'personne', which originally designated the actor who wears a mask on the theatre stage.

principle of non-identity: 'The supposed *ego* manifests itself by demonstrating the contradiction in it of its equality to itself. From the beginning A is *not* A; I am not *myself*'.[6] For Sartre, then, in the last analysis we are all condemned to a fate of indefinition and incompletion since to be the kind of beings that we are is to be what we are only in the mode of not being it.[7] Confined to the ek-stasis of the world, I am never myself.

Why does the ek-stasis of intentionality render impossible a self-coincidence? Or, said another way, why is it impossible in the world to wholly be myself? Why, when exteriorized in the world projected by care, am I split in such a way that, in being who I am insofar as I am my capacity-to-be, I always end up reduced to *not* being who I tried to be? Reduced to the ecstatic structure of projective becoming, in trying to *be*, I never *am*, for I am inevitably rendered other than myself. I end up exteriorized, reduced to experiencing myself in the inflected reflection of an alienated image, a worldly projection—a 'double', as Dostoevsky would say—with whom I can never coincide. Is it any wonder, then, that in pressing into existence according to the *l'inquiétude* of care I should find myself haunted by a fissure whose abyss leaves me feeling hollowed out inside, separated from myself, never quite content, but instead always somehow restless? Is it not ineluctably the case that such an existence, insofar as it is characterized by the ecstatic temporality of being-in-the-world, should bring with it what from within its own perspective will appear to be an inescapable uncanniness?

Henry has better than anyone explained beautifully why this form of self-experience plunges those it does into alienation: 'To relate oneself in and through the care of oneself is to throw oneself forward toward oneself, project oneself ahead, open toward oneself a path that is 'outside oneself,' that it 'outside' the world. It is to be projected toward an exterior self, a self that is to-come and unreal: unreal not because the exterior self is still to-come, in the mode of not-yet, but because it is exhibited in the world's truth, where there is no Life, no

[6] 2012, p. 65.
[7] 1956, p. 21.

Ipseity, and consequently no possible Self.[8] In the last analysis, it is the very mode of the world's phenomenalization that explains the uncanniness of experiencing being-in-the-world. The impossibility of self-coincidence is not at all the consequence of incidental circumstances or even the stroke of bad luck; it lies instead in the temporalzing structure inherent to the world in itself and as such. It therefore behoves us to further clarify what we mean by world, and the sense in which the term can signify one of two distinguishable (yet essentially related) phenomenological structures.

First, following the brilliant analyses of Henry, the world signifies a mode of manifestation, that is, a *way* in which a phenomenon is phenomenalized. We can call this the 'ontological' sense of the world, for here, the issue concerns the status of the world's very form of appearing, *how* it happens to appear as it appears. It accordingly bears further asking: by what means does it exactly appear?

Its appearing is a function of what Heidegger called 'ek-stasis', or hence an 'opening' or 'clearing' in which entities can show themselves. The world in this sense is a 'horizon' opened in and through a distance—or rather a 'distancing' or 'extending'—an 'exteriority' the classical phenomenologists called 'transcendence'. There is, in this mode of appearing, always a distinction between that which shows itself and the fact of the thing's self-showing. In short, here appearing is a function of intentionality. As Heidegger's analytic of Dasein has shown, the ek-stasis here at work, determined as it is by intentionality, is hence ultimately a function of *temporality*; it is *time*—to be more precise, the 'originary' temporality of care (which Heidegger is always careful to distinguish from the concern of 'world time' or the 'objective time' of physics), that brings about the opening that is the world. Ek-stasis, thus, is the transcendence by which originary temporality projects a world.

As a result of the temporalizing structure of projective care, anything manifesting itself in the world must already have been thrust beyond itself, for, in appearing in the

[8] 2003, p. 143.

'outside' of the world, it does so as an entity whose own appearing is also subject to time. Nothing that appears in the world is gathered into itself; instead, temporality creates a duration in which nothing endures. Placed within the inner-temporal flux of change opened by ecstatic time, everything is scattered and dispersed, destined to accomplish itself in the mode of a past that once was, but now no longer is, present. Time, in conditioning the appearing of that which appears in the exteriority of the world, ensures that everything manifest within the horizon of the world's visibility appears precisely to the extent that it does so as subject to time's law of dispersion. In this respect, Aristotle's appraisal of time (here quoted from Claude Romano's *Event and Time*) proves as incisive as ever: 'It is clear then that time must be in itself, as we said before, the condition of destruction rather than of generation (for change, in itself, makes things depart from their former condition), and only incidentally of generation, and of being'.[9] Everything that appears in the present was once 'yet-to-come', which is why, when it at last arrives, in its very present appearing there is already the trace of its own perishing; in appearing as the fulfilment of what was formerly something awaited, it appears in the present as something soon to be little more than present as absent, as a 'once-was'. In coming upon us from the future, we experience it as inevitably bound to press on behind us, slipping past us and beyond reach. Thus, even in the very 'living present' in which it would most incontestably appear to be, the entity or event is subject to a law of dissolution that hollows it out from within. All things appearing in the world must recede into the past and, eventually, nothingness. It is this fact concerning temporality—anything showing itself in the world does so only insofar as it is inserted into a flux of change—that renders the things of the world subject to transience, decay, and ultimately total dissolution. The things of the world, simply in virtue of their mode of temporal appearing, are always already submitted to destruction, because they do not, and indeed cannot, abide.

[9] 2014, p. 61.

This is what Henry means by the world's 'truth'—its mode of appearing, being temporal, entails that whatever appears does so only insofar as it appears in the form of always already passing away, having been ejected into an 'outside'. Indeed Henry, with characteristic precision, summarizes how this rule of temporal manifestation only ensures that the entities it allows to show themselves do so at the price of having been emptied of any abiding substance: 'In time, things come into appearance, but since this coming-into-appearance consists in coming-outside, things do not rise into the light of this "outside" except as torn from themselves, emptied of their being, already dead'.[10] Anything that is manifest in the world (which here in this immediate context is simply to say *temporally*) accordingly manifests itself in the form of that which is always already vanishing. Even the event or thing which from the perspective of the present still lies in the future therefore already carries within itself the pall of death, for precisely in its appearing as something still 'yet-to-come', it stands against us as something that will eventually, and inevitably so, slip away from us, receding into an irretrievable past, consigned at best to the dark sea of memory. This is how regrets happen, and why indeed, looking back upon the entirety of one's life, many will be forced to admit to themselves that their entire life has been one single regret. Having lived exclusively for the world, and hence the time that constitutes it, nothing remains but the weight of an accumulated past now gone.

For this reason alone, one can never coincide with oneself when projected into the 'outside' of the world. Ontologically speaking, in manifesting itself temporally, the 'outside' of the world ensures that all that appears within it is in some respect already de-realized because it cannot abide; to appear within the world is to appear strictly on the condition that it will eventually be destroyed. Hence, in coming to understand who I am in such a fashion, in coming to negotiate my existence strictly in terms of the concern of the world opened by the projective structures of ecstatic temporality, in short, by organizing my existence according to

[10] 2003, p. 19.

the ecstatic temporality proper to the worries and anxieties of life that as a result inevitably arise, I accordingly come to understand my own existence strictly in terms of that which manifests itself in the form of something always already passing away. How, then, could I myself ever hope to escape the same fate? Does not the world render me transient, too?

The very mode by which this self-experience of being-in-the-world phenomenalizes itself proves that this is the case. This exteriorized self, the one concerned with the world, the contours of which were most rigorously analyzed in Heidegger's phenomenological description of care, by projecting itself into the world opened by temporality becomes, like everything else manifest in the visible ek-stasis of such transcendence, never present to itself, never gathered into a whole coincident with itself, because there is never any living present. There is only a temporal flux, a constant change from a future that is 'yet-to-come', which, in later becoming a 'present-for-now', only slips into a 'once-was' never to be 'here' again. How, then, thrust into the never ceasing passage of time, can I hope to abide within the very same flux that destroys all else that appears within it? The answer is as clear as it is tragic for those who choose to cling to the world's transience even till the bitter end of their dying day: one cannot.

In projecting oneself into the world as a being whose being is at stake for it in the concern with the world, that is, in projecting oneself as a self whose being is defined by the temporality of care, I come to understand myself in terms of a possibility 'yet-to-come' and hence 'not-presently-here'. I am always awaiting myself in the anticipation of a future awaiting me, but I never coincide with myself, because this future, which must phenomenalize itself in terms of possibilities always still to arrive, never does or can arrive, because it in principle cannot be actualized; it remains within the realm of ontological possibility, which in truth proves to be really little else than imaginary fantasy. Nothing is ever exactly as we had anticipated it; and even when events do occur as we had basically anticipated they would, there is something alienating about their finally being here. This very transition from something

anticipated in the form of a future possibility to an experience of a present reality only abolishes it; in point of fact, the true essence of the thing lay in its anticipatory form, its substance was a goal coveted, something that guided my striving, and hence, in arriving, it annuls itself since it is accomplished and hence no longer what it was. As possibility, it was something that I encountered in the mode of my having pressed into and toward it. When the apparent goal at last arrives, thus, I come to realize that it was all along really a phantasm; a projection of some future panacea that never could arrive because, by virtue of its very mode of phenomenolzation, it can never be made actual, for it takes on the reality it appears to possesses only insofar as it remains something to be anticipated.

Reduced to a tragic procession of mere exteriorized possibilities, should I take myself to be nothing more than what the mode of self-experience defining being-in-the-world would suggest, I am would always prove to be a shadow or image of who I am, because who I am, when that self-understanding is as here consigned to a self projected outside itself into a caring capacity-to-be, is an illusion. The illusion, we have just seen, consists not solely or even primarily in the fact that such a self-understanding depends upon a future self to-come, but rather, as Henry above noted, that the very mode of manifestation by which these self-projections take on their reality is itself invariably a visible mask for the pathos of my living subjectivity that invisibly bears them.

What more, then, is precisely to be said of this illusion? I can of course take up a project whose role seems to outwardly define me just fine (today invariably the most common way in which this is done is in identifying with one's job), but I do not coincide with the possibility, because to press into it just is to project myself into a flux of temporally structured possibilities governed by an *image* of self, but not the living subjectivity upon which this projection rests. My visible body, along with the social and normatively structured role in which it is meaningfully situated, are without doubt discernible to the others who know me; and it is on the basis of this visibility that nearly everyone who encounters me will come to

identify me. But I am not identical to the role to which I have been reduced. Writing of this exteriorized self projected outside itself into the void of public personas, Henry says this: 'To relate oneself in and through the care of oneself is to throw oneself forward toward oneself, project oneself ahead, open toward oneself a path that is 'outside oneself,' that it 'outside' the world. It is to be projected toward an exterior self, a self that is to-come and unreal: unreal not because the exterior self is still to-come, in the mode of not-yet, but because it is exhibited in the world's truth, where there is no Life, no Ipseity, and consequently no possible Self'.[11]

This structure of being-in-the-world's non-coincident transcendence exhibits what has come to be named—first by the existentialists and phenomenologists, later by critical theory—'alienation'. Ejected into the 'outside' of a world, the exteriorized self of care understands itself in terms of purposes whose end is always 'yet-to-come'. In turn, this form of self-understanding inevitably begets a form of life in which I understand myself in terms of the *entities* entwined with these same projects. I am thrust into a web of possibilities, all of which at least initially appear as bright beginnings. But as anyone who has travelled this path knows, there are never any truly satisfying conclusions. In embarking on these projects, I set out on what appears to be a path open unto a bright vista; in the end, however, I come to see that I was striving toward what, now here, was in reality a false summit. In care, there is always the enticing lure of an eventual completion to my project and with it the promise of a contented self who in turn chooses to pursue it, but that is precisely the illusion. The contentment never arrives, because I never reach it, for the peace I sought is always further deferred, one inevitably rationalizes, to the next successful goal or conquest. It is a quixotic quest, an infinite task consigned to finite waystations, where there is never any final rest. This is why Heidegger, following Augustine, thought it necessary to conclude that anxiety is the fundamental attunement of being-in-the-world, and hence restlessness.

[11] 2003, p. 143.

But is that so? Must things be this way? Are we relegated to a fractured restlessness simply and necessarily in virtue of being the selves that we are?

To the contrary, here, I believe, we are led to a second and related dimension of the world that explains why it must alienate, and hence destroy, whoever is entirely swept up into it. And yet, at the same time, it indicates a possible way forward that would allow us to escape from alienation and find true peace. Now, taken in this second sense, the world denotes what we name its 'moral' salience, though ultimately again we are referring to a phenomenological structure at work in the experience of the one who lives in the way we are presently about to describe. To understand oneself strictly in terms of a 'circumspective comportment' toward entities—that is, in the mode of Dasein—is, as we have just seen, to project oneself into a milieu that is always already fading away. This experiential fact highlights a further and related reason as to why the exteriorized self of worldly concern never coincides with itself.

The exteriorized self, in having forgotten that the living condition in which it currently stands is due to no doing of its own, in ignoring that it is God instead who has brought it into the possession of the powers that it now takes to be the result of its own autonomy, and hence, in coming to see its experience only with a view to the visibility of the world and the things that stoke its burning lust for more, such a one becomes an *idolater*. By idolatry, we do not simply have in mind some normative assessment whose validity would first require an intricate and convoluted theological argument; instead, we have in view the phenomenological structure of self-experiencing that defines the one we are here calling the idolater and which in turn justifies that 'theological' censure. For, in having exteriorized oneself into the concern of the world, the idolater becomes someone who, transfixed by worldly goods, is 'living only with a view to the world and the things of the world, being interested solely in them and expecting their salvation solely from them'.[12] Temporal entities—the things manifest within the visible horizon of the world—become the sole aim and reason of one's effort, attention,

[12] Henry 2003, p. 80.

and awareness. They take on what, following the Apostle John, we name the 'deceitful lusts': the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). One's experience is exteriorized to the point that there only exists a concern for visible things and the projective capacities-to-be underpinning their sensual economy: projected into an exteriority subject to the passage of time, one becomes allured by the entities that are there manifest, but to the exclusion of the very condition that the world's own manifestation presupposes: namely, the manifestation of the self to itself in the immediate pathos of what Henry calls, and which we will analyze, auto-affection.

Hence, contrary to the conclusion drawn by Sartre, or Heidegger, or the other thinkers of transcendence, we should not perceive alienation as the necessary consequence of self-experience—it is not an essential fact about how the self must manifest to itself. Instead, it is a degenerate form of self-experience to be avoided, and one that indeed can be avoided and overcome. This system of transcendental egoism, the experience of oneself exteriorized into a world of concern for oneself and with a view to worldly things, is thus in fact pure illusion since, in remaining strictly and solely confined to that which manifests itself within the exteriority of time, it preoccupies itself with these things to the exclusion of its own condition as a living self generated in the 'image of God'. In other words, the *ontological* fact of the world's manifestation—that it is manifest as an 'outside' in accordance with the projection of ecstatic temporality—in turn leads, naturally but not inevitably, to a form of self-experience in which all that occupies our attention and concern are the temporal objects situated in this opening—the journalistic event (Romano) or the technological entity (Marion)—in short, one becomes ensnared by the hustle and bustle of the 'public' (Kierkegaard). The self so exteriorized (Dasein, in effect) is not therefore the fundamental structure of all self-experience, as Heidegger's existential analytic contends, but instead really a particular *way* of being a self, and one moreover which the preceding experiential facts justifiably entitle us to call an 'idolatrous consciousness'. It forgets life, as Henry observes in

Material Phenomenology: 'Without the auto-affection of life, nothing would ever be seen'.[13] Or, as he puts the same point just as well elsewhere in a later text, "Forgetful of its 'me,' the ego is concerned with the world. Thus an extraordinary situation is created: once it loses sights of its condition as Son, the ego is only interested in what lies outside. Everything shown, the entire realm of the visible, has value in its eyes and merits effort and perseverance. Nothing is desirable except what is accessed in the world's 'outside,' and the desire to take hold of what it covets must also follow this same path, the one leading outside itself—to 'worldly goods'".[14] The alienated self of exteriority, thus, is not a being inescapably consigned to a form of tortured non-coincidence; the uncanny separation it takes to be definitive of its own existence is, to the very contrary, in fact simply an idolatrous mode of existence that is unwilling to admit its condition for what it is. In loving the world, the alienated one lives contrary to the truth concerning one's own phenomenalization in life, and hence to one's own willful destruction. To be worldly, in short, is to be mad.

Thus, the notion that we are ineluctably doomed to self-alienation *tout court* only follows on the assumption that the world—the realm of practical identity, the space of reasons, the exteriority of visibility opened by the temporalizing structure of ek-static care—is the self's ultimate place and hence the only place in which it is revealed to itself and can deploy its powers. It is this very assumption that Marion and Kierkegaard deny, and one I shall too in the studies that follow. It is perhaps Henry, however, who has done the most to explain exactly why this 'ontological monism'—as represented by modern metaphysics, classical phenomenology included—deserves to be rejected. It is simply false, Henry has shown, that the only way in which I am revealed to myself is in accordance with the world's regime of visibility, exteriority, and transcendence. In point of fact, the reverse is true: I am revealed immediately without any delay or distance in the interior invisibility of subjectivity's pathos.

[13] 2008, p. 96.
[14] 2003, p. 142.

There are therefore two kinds of manifestation that govern phenomenality: the way in which the world and its objects manifest themselves and the way subjectivity manifests itself. Sartre's error—as well as Husserl's, Heidegger's, and Merleau-Ponty's too for that matter—is to have investigated subjectivity only in terms of intentionality and hence transcendence. By understanding the self as something that opens up and is open to a world, classical phenomenology overlooks the way in which the self is truly revealed to itself. This failure of classical phenomenology to appreciate how the self reveals itself has important consequences.

We must acknowledge, with Sartre, that the world is indeed a drama with no ultimate purchase on us. Sartre realized it, and about that he was right. But that is not the complete story about what it means to be the selves that we are, because the essence of subjectivity does not reside in the world anyway! Though the world's glory is ultimately empty and hollow, this does not decide whether life itself is glorious. As Henry has commented, and as the following studies shall confirm, the glory of existence does not reside in the world, but instead in the interiority of life's affective self-revelation:

> This reciprocal situation of the two glories will be taken up in Christ's final prayer: 'I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began (John 17:4-5)'.[15] That this glory always refers to Life and to its phenomenological essence in its radical opposition to the world's 'glory'—which designates only the stage lights of this grand theatre where people parade their qualities and struggle for prestige—can be readily inferred from the passage I have emphasized above.[16]

The glory of existence resides within the unworldly self-affective revelation of subjectivity, the invisible pathos in which I suffer and enjoy myself engendered in absolute Life as son of God, not some mere imposter in the exteriority of a worldly role.

This first study proceeds, on the basis of the distinction between the self of practical identity and the ontological dimension of subjectivity, by arguing that narrative is unable to ground ethical choice and decision. For, although acting in light of practical identities is

[15] 2003, p. 101.
[16] 2003, p. 91.

something we *do*, it cannot wholly capture what it is to be who we *are*. Irrespective of whatever worldly projects or identities we press into, something comparatively fundamental about our subjectivity remains unchanged. Narrative identity, which trades merely on practical identity, thus obscures this ontological dimension of life wherein human action, decision, choice, and responsibility truly originate. By way of conclusion, I briefly examine depictions of the narrative life found within the works of Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, and Voltaire, illustrating how self-narrative at times invites self-deception and annuls responsibility. A life of genuine responsibility, we come to see, demands more than what the most candid and best intentioned of self-narratives can supply us. Living the good life, I intimate, is not something that involves mere narrative. Rather, it depends, on inwardness.

In what does this inwardness precisely consist? If the initial study establishes the existence of an ontological dimension to subjectivity that is irreducible to either practical identity or the space of reasons, there is still a comparatively deeper inwardness that eludes any strictly ontological characterization. There is, in short, a kind of interiority to subjectivity even more interior than the ontological dimension of the self that remains correlated to the world's transcendence. This collection's second study, 'The Vanity of Authenticity', sheds light on this dimension of subjectivity with an analysis that explains why, where the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger each respectively conceals it, Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology of givenness in contrast reveals it. Because it is a study in phenomenology's method and matter, the issue of the reduction proves key. Only with a proper appraisal of the reduction does the genuine importance and power of Marion's thought come into view. To establish the significance of his view of the self, I therefore explain how Marion's accounts of vanity and the erotic reduction are an implicit critique of the conception of authentic resoluteness that Heidegger offers in Division II of *Being and Time*. To explain so, I first present Husserl's and Heidegger's formulations of the phenomenological reduction and Marion's respective critiques of each. Next, I explain how inasmuch as the resulting question

of subjectivity proves to be of a piece with how one should meet the challenge of vanity, Heideggerian resoluteness is wanting because it succumbs to the blow of vanity. By vanity, we shall see, Marion means a phenomenon in which, similar to other experiences such as anxiety or deep boredom, the things of the world quit mattering to us; whereas they usually grip us and captivate our attention in concern, in vanity, their 'call' fails to exert its typical effect. Rather than showing up as mattering, they are experienced as useless or empty. In short, it is important to note that here, by vanity, I mean it in the sense of futility or uselessness, not in the other, but not totally unrelated, sense of egocentrism or undue self-importance. In such an experience, I discover that there is something about my own existence that desires a kind of satisfaction these worldly things simply cannot satisfy; they appear petty or futile in the face of this yearning within me for an absolute meaning to my life. As Marion so well puts it, when this overwhelming sense of futility comes upon us, we ask 'What's the use?' As we shall see, neither Husserlian nor Heideggerian phenomenology has the resources to respond to the view of things that the phenomenon of vanity reveals, which is precisely what in turn mobilizes the need for an additional phenomenology reduction—Marion's 'erotic' reduction—that can comes to grips with the blow of vanity. Love, we shall see, is the only resource that proves able to overcome the power of vanity. Finally, by way of conclusion, I briefly explain how the erotic reduction offers us a rejoinder to vanity in the form of the claim of love, a claim I suggest that Marion himself gives us compelling reason to understand as one that is nothing less than the call of Christ.

The first pair of studies invites many questions. This especially so from those who remain locked in the natural attitude, since the fact that the self is not of the world runs contrary to what they consider common sense. In this attitude, everything is reduced to biological and other naturalistic entities and causes; the whole or reality, in short, is equated with the 'nature' of the modern natural sciences. This, strictly speaking, is what Husserl means by the term. However, he also sometimes means by it what he elsewhere will distinguish and

name the 'personalistic attitude', namely, the experience of the world in our everyday life, and hence, akin to what Heidegger would later call 'average everydayness'. In our ordinary, everyday, and unreflective engagement with the world, we do not reflect upon the accomplishments of transcendental consciousness responsible for constituting the meaning structures of the world; that is Husserl's point, and it is this demarcation between the unreflective 'natural' attitude, on the one hand, and the philosophically reflective attitude, on the other, that comes about as a result of the phenomenological reduction, that brings the phenomenological field of investigation into thematic view. However, whether one is locked into the unreflective engagement of the natural attitude's average everydayness, in which we simply take the meaning structures of the world for granted, or else even the phenomenological attitude that reflects upon how the world is constituted or given, subjectivity is always understood within or upon the *horizon of the world*. It is the world, on this view, from which and upon which all life, including the life of phenomenological reflection, must return. By the natural attitude, thus, I mean the opinion—philosophical or otherwise—that the world provides the only and ultimate horizon for all possible experience.

If there is indeed an inwardness that characterizes subjectivity, if this inwardness consists in a phenomenality irreducibly opposed to the world's own contrasting mode of phenomenality, and if its place proves to be that of love, what can be said about this inwardness? In what, in short, does a life lived with love as its measure consist, and how does one accede to it?

It is here that the third study, 'Against Onto-theology: Will and Love in the Mystical Tradition', takes up these questions. A life lived with love as its measure, and the phenomenology that strives to do the contours of such a life justice, I argue, is a corrective to the onto-theological tradition of theology and philosophy. Whereas onto-theology treats God as a mere item in the demonstration of a proof or disproof, the mystical tradition, by contrast, reminds us that God is instead our companion along a long spiritual journey.

It is thus in light of the distinction between approaching God exclusively (or even primarily) by the way of thought, on the one hand, rather than proceeding by an open and honest and simple heart of loving obedience, on the other, that stages the manner in which we shall herein characterize the longstanding question concerning the meaning of metaphysics. For what, we might ask, is 'metaphysics', or, more specifically, its 'onto-theological' constitution? The term is polysymous, and consequently it defies what any singular definition is capable of providing.[17] And that, we know, is due in no small part to the fact that what we take metaphysics to signify can drastically vary, depending upon the presuppositions one brings to bear in even beginning to analyze the question, and indeed the corresponding range of philosophical figures, texts, problems, and methods from and by which one chooses to philosophize at all. Without then suggesting that the following excursus is at all exhaustive, some characteristic features of metaphysics are worth mentioning, and will go some way toward clarifying the phenomenon for our own present purposes.

Historically, metaphysics as a term originates with the Greeks. Etymologically, its prefix '*meta*' can signify 'above' or 'beyond', so a very literal translation of the term would simply be that which is 'above or beyond nature'.[18] As a discipline, metaphysics accordingly denoted a uniquely reflective inquiry into nature's 'first principles'—as 'first philosophy,' it

---

[17] For a very careful and illuminating study on the many different things metaphysics has come to signify in the history of philosophy, see Frédéric Nef's *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique?* (Paris: Folio 2004). For Nef, a start can be made by noting that metaphysics exhibits a very basic division : 'Le débat sur l'histoire de la philosophie en general et sur l'histoire de la métaphysique en particulier peut se ramener à l'affrontement de deux positions que nous appellerons A et B et qui peuvent se schématiser ainsi…' (2004, p.51). In what way? There is what Nef terms 'Position A', which contends for Holism, Relativism, and Discontinuity, and 'Position B', which contends for Atomism, Absolutism, and Continuity.

[18] According to Levinas and Marion, whose respective work has been instrumental in producing the 'post-metaphysical' turn in phenomenology we take for granted today, the prefix '*meta*' properly evokes the implication that metaphysics is an inquiry that continually transcends or 'surpasses' itself. As Marion has said » Des lors, dépasser la métaphysique devrait s'entendre comme un pléonasme, qui renforce la métaphysique, plus qu'il ne la met en cause—puisqu'il appartient à l'essence de la métaphysique de se dépasser » (Nef 2004, 942-3). For an illuminating, if very brief, analysis of how this phenomenological view of metaphysics may however trade on an equivocation, see Nef (2004, p. 943-4). Summarizing the matter, he concludes » L'équivoque consiste à joindre les deux sens de *meta*, en combinant l'élément de dépassement d'une frontière, de transgression et l'élément de redoublement » (2004, p. 944). And yet, it is worth noting that the Greek word 'φύσις' can sometimes mean a principle of growth and so expansion. When the term 'nature' is heard in that inflection, it clearly, if only perhaps coincidentally, resonates with the sense of *meta* as a 'surpassing'.

interrogated the foundational structures and primary substance of reality. It investigated, we might thus say, 'fundamental' reality. This is why, in doing so, the early 'pre-Socratic' Greek philosophers offered competing accounts of nature's elemental constitution (earth, fire, wind, and water), typically assigning one a privileged status upon which the others were in turn said to arise or foundationally understood; sometimes, in lieu of these elemental accounts of nature's constitution, cosmological principles such as the 'love' and 'strife' of Empedocles or the '*apeiron*' of Anaximander were advanced. Later, most famously, there is Plato's theory of the Forms, which drew a distinction between sensible and intelligible reality, claiming that knowledge of the truth (rather than mere '*doxa*'), and hence genuine reality, resided not in the visibility of temporal things, but rather the eternal realm of the universal Forms. Still later, with Aristotle, we see next a continuation of the question concerning what reality *is*—yet here, the question becomes equivalent to one of *ontology*, or, as Aristotle himself was to put it, and as it has come to be called ever since, a 'science of Being *qua* Being'. Here as before, only more conscientiously so, Aristotle poses the question of first principles—for him, a thing's nature is a matter of its substance, something governed by the 'four causes' determining it. It is here in Aristotle, thus, that an examination of the principles said to dictate the reality of substance takes up causality for its explanatory framework; in turn, subsequent philosophical systems to think metaphysically about the nature of nature will follow suit. Thus, in the moment at which metaphysics becomes ontology, the science of Being is simultaneously situated within a mode of explanation that, in its theorizing about substance, does so by means of causality.

Indeed, causality comes to play a key role in conceptualizing the nature of what nature itself is. In the case of Aristotle, to continue our present example, ontology climaxes in a very theological end: God, 'eternal and immovable substance', is at once the 'first cause' of

everything else that exists.[19] Eventually, in due course, after a series of transformations done in Neo-Platonism and medieval scholasticism, nature came to be conceived still in terms of this general framework of substance and causality—in short, metaphysics became a theological science of substance for which the primary category of explication was causality. However, in time, a reconceptualization of the essence of causality took place, one entailing a drastic revision in what reality itself was taken to be. Where for Aristotle a thing's causes were said to lie in the thing itself, in Descartes, to take just one relevant example, the question concerning the relationship between thought and Being is radically recast; for perhaps the first time in the history of philosophy, epistemological constraints take precedence over the earlier idea that the substance of reality is in itself accessible apart from the mediating thought that thinks it.

We correspondingly witness a radical departure from Aristotle's metaphysics of substance and causality, in that, for Descartes like Galileo before him, nature is now reduced strictly to efficient causality. There is still an inquiry into the subject of substance, but in the

[19] The mutually reinforcing relationship between ontology and theology in Aristotle immediately raises a question: is not this an example, perhaps even *par excellence*, of metaphysics as onto-theology? There are many commentators who have argued that any such conclusion would be much too facile. For instance, Frédéric Nef says, 'Avons-nous ici quelque chose qui vérifie l'hypothèse onto-théo-logique? La réponse est non' (2004, p. 254). And why not? The answer: 'La conclusion de ces considérations sur Aristote est la suivante: la métaphysique aristotélicienne est plurielle; elle est une archéologie (science des principes ultimes des sciences), une ontologie (science de l'être en tant qu'être), une ousialogie (science de la substance), une hénologie (une science de l'un). Nous avons insiste sur l'ontologie. La conclusion de notre examen de l'hypothèse d'une constitution onto-théo-logique a été que rien ne la vérifie, à moins d'en faire une hypothèse triviale qui asserterait la présence chez Aristote d'une ontologie et d'une théologie, ce qui est le cas' (Ibid.). Is the matter therefore decided in favor of the view that Aristotle's theology is not onto-theological? On the contrary, Nef's assessment seems to overlook the most compelling reason for concluding that Aristotle's science of Being is in fact onto-theological: does not it operate, as Henry notes, according to the Greek *logos* of thought, and hence subject to the prejudice that truth only appears in the mode of ek-stasis? In other words, and this will likewise be what explains the ultimate sense in which the theology of Aquinas is no less also an onto-theology, the issue is not decided by the fact of whether or not the mode of thought by which God is conceptualized is 'totalizing', 'violent', or too 'abstracting'; instead, and more foundationally, it is decided by the fact that, in any and all rational theology, God is approached by thought simply as such. But if thought is truly the way by which God is to be approached, how are we to explain the circumstances as Paul confronted them in Athens? In the seventeenth chapter of the Book of Acts, we read that shortly before delivering his sermon at Mars Hill, the Apostle had encountered a religious engraving upon an altar reading: 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD'. How, we should ask, had the God Paul came to preach remain unknown to the Greeks if not in part because, in having attempted to approach the Most High by way of thought's *logos*, the living God had thereby eluded them, remaining inaccessible and hence unknown?

act of dividing substance into two as he does (mind and body, thinking and extension), Descartes introduces a principle inherent within the power of thought to determine and circumscribe that which counts as real. With Descartes, thought is said to essentially determine what had previously been assumed to exist in itself independently on the side of Being. Being, still thought according to the category of substance, yet now in coming to be determined by the power of thought itself to think it, is in Descartes no longer seen so much as the *object* of thought, but instead the *reflection* of thought itself. Or put otherwise, Being is henceforth investigated on the presupposition that it is inextricably entwined with the structure and power of the very thought that thinks it. Onto-theology, in the figure of the Cartesian God as *causi sui*, was by then well under way: even if such an accounting of God was not yet completely 'totalizing' to the extent that it admitted the divine nature must in some respect remain incomprehensible to us, there is still an underlying onto-theological current present in the rational theology of the early-modern period, insofar as it proceeds by imposing the logic and limitations of the human mind on nature, and God too.

From here it is a short step to Kant, who most notably deepens and broadens the preceding Cartesian decision to supplant the ancient science of substance with the modern, transcendental metaphysics of critique; the very meaning of the phenomenon for Kant—that which appears to us, including what we call 'physical nature'—is now taken to be mediated completely by finitude, by the mind's forms of sensibility and its categories of understanding. The question of Being—which previously lay within the purview of an essentially naïve realist ontology—is therefore revolutionized. The metaphysical question *par excellence* henceforth becomes, not, 'What is nature in itself insofar as it is Being?' but now 'What conditions allow us to experience things as we do?' With Kant, then, the disciplines of 'special metaphysics'—rational cosmology, rational theology, and rational psychology—are no longer a viable enterprise, because each of these three subsidiary domains presupposes, naively Kant takes himself to have shown in the *First Critique*, the very kind of unfettered access to 'things in

themselves' that is not in fact attainable. As a result, the kind of ambitious metaphysical systems of both recent and distant philosophical past—those epitomized by thinkers such as Leibniz, say—are swept aside in a wave of suspicion. No longer is it possible, it has generally been agreed after Kant, for thought to accomplish a complete and accurate accounting of fundamental reality as it is 'in itself'—Being, it is said, remains accessible only and precisely to the extent that it is given through the finite thought responsible for mediating it.

Today, then, what we call 'analytic' philosophy as a result generally sees metaphysics as little more than apriori 'conceptual' work. It clarifies the meaning of our concepts, it is said, to the extent that those concepts are already operative in our natural scientific accounting of reality. Metaphysics, in short, becomes what it was already for Locke, the 'underlaborer of the sciences'. However, this is not what metaphysics means for us.

Instead, we follow the lead of Heidegger for whom metaphysics denotes, provocatively of course, the entire history of philosophy, beginning with at least Plato and leading all the way to today. According to this broadly Heideggerian history of philosophy, metaphysics is the attempt to think the entirety of reality in accordance with, on the one hand, an exemplar being ('*summum ens*'), a supreme entity by means of which a hierarchal chain of entities is derived (the degree of reality correspondingly ascending as we rise progressively higher toward the supreme entity); and, on the other, a general conception of contingent beings (*ens commune*), in terms of which we understand what it means to be an entity at all as the function of being caused by the supreme being. This is what Heidegger means by its onto-theological constitution: *ontological* because it defines Being in its generality—monads, atoms, corpuscles, etc.; *theological* insofar as it thinks this general class of beings by way of an exemplary, highest one who in turn grounds the other beings. In short, metaphysics in this respect is the attempt to answer the question 'Why something rather than nothing?' by vesting the causal ground of all beings in the power of a single supreme one. Most frequently, though not always, that highest being is God.

Marion has deepened this Heideggerian conception of metaphysics in order to subject it to a comparatively radical critique. Whereas for Heidegger the problem with the history of philosophy as metaphysics lay in its having concealed the question of the meaning of Being, for Marion, in contrast, the problem really lies elsewhere. Metaphysics, says Marion, never properly identified and in turn overcame the inherent limitations associated with assigning Being the pride of place it has. For Marion, then, metaphysics is something to be put behind us not because it poses the question of Being amiss, but because it questions everything within the horizon of Being. If for metaphysics the ultimate question is one of Being, for Marion, the failure of metaphysics is that it cannot see any horizons beyond Being.

This leads directly to an array of implications, not just for metaphysics understood as philosophical ontology, but also of course for theology, too. Dating at least to Aquinas, there has been a venerable tradition that equates the God of the Bible with the statement of Exodus 3:14 ('I am who I am'). God as an entity of theological investigation becomes entwined with ontology's science of Being. As a consequence, the conceptuality of pagan rationalism (especially that of Plato and Aristotle) set the agenda with and by which the phenomena of Christianity are understood. In short, the God of the Bible is conceptualized according to the philosophy of substance, and hence, by the question of Being as the ancient Greeks had bequeathed it to us. For Marion (and others as well), this constitutes a use of metaphysics in a very bad sense, for it in effect amounts to a form of *conceptualism*.[20] It is a conceptualism that outright declares (or else at the very least proceeds as if) it is possible to

[20] For a wonderfully clear explanation of how metaphysics as onto-theology is a regrettable kind of conceptualism, see Joseph Rivera's essay, 'God and Metaphysics in Contemporary Theology: Reframing the Debate' (2016). Rivera, clarifying what precisely conceptualism consists in, has this to say: 'conceptualism, the reduction of God to a concept, may often license total representation, which counts as a "totalizing" strategy, an event of abstracting God out from concrete experience' (2016, p. 825). It is worth considering to what extent, however, Rivera's partial rehabilitation of metaphysics might defend itself against the Henryian critique of onto-theology. For, according to Henry, the problem with metaphysical approaches to God typified by theologies like those of Aquinas is not so much that they reduce God to a totalizing economy of abstraction, but more fundamentally that they attempt to approach God by way of thought at all and as such. No doubt this dim view of thought's power to know God is very extreme. Yet still, even if reflection itself is not necessarily an evil, there is still a delicate balance to be struck, since, as Rivera himself very rightly notes, in our unending striving to meet up with God here in this life, 'true progress lies not in comprehension but in endurance' (2016, p. 833).

account for all of reality, including God, by bringing all that entails under the imperial domain of our finite concepts. Here again, at issue is the relationship between thought and Being. It may be true that someone like Aquinas, for instance, was happy to insist that in a fundamental respect God invariably defies our entire comprehensibility; God, simply in virtue of being what or who He is, will remain incomprehensible to us due to our own finitude. The 'quiddity' of God remains incomprehensible to us, for, according to Aquinas as Gregory Rocco has observed: 'God dwells in a supereminent darkness, and the human darkness of unknowing is a direct consequence of God's excessive, dazzling light'.[21] In short, in the rational theology of Aquinas, human thought is forced to acknowledge that it lacks comprehensive knowledge of God's essence; we certainly can know *that* God exists, but in this earthly life we cannot know what God *is*.[22] Thus, on the view of many commentators, the question of onto-theology turns on the question of how we *speak* of God, given the limitations of our being able to conceptualize God: so long as theology acknowledges that we can never bring God under the complete domain of any totalizing abstract economy, then, so the argument goes, we are not doing theology in an onto-theological way.

And yet, to say this and rest there is to miss the thrust of the critique of metaphysics, as that critique is understood here for our purposes. For although someone such as Aquinas does indeed acknowledge that the categories and powers of our theoretical abstraction will never be equal to the task of grasping the full splendor and inner essence of God, he nevertheless leaves unquestioned the presupposition that God is to be approached in the *mode of thought*. In short, Aquinas admits that God in some essential respect exceeds the category of thought, but nevertheless insists that God be understood in terms of the transcendence of thought—his natural theology, as all rationalistic attempts to approach God, does so through the Greek *logos* of thought. If traditionally the critique of metaphysics is said to turn on the

[21] 2004, p. 29.
[22] 2004, p. 30.

allegation that it reduces everything, including God, to the horizon of Being, this is so, in our own estimation at least, only because the operative principle of metaphysics is the prioritization of thought in itself and as such as the way to truth. As Henry would say, such a presupposition—he calls it 'ontological monism'—amounts to the assumption that the Greek *logos* exhaustively determines all possible modes of appearing, as if, that is, there were only the world's mode of appearing. It is thus by first deciding to measure reality in terms of our finite thinking—submitting every phenomena including ourselves to the *logos* of the world—that everything in turn comes to be reduced to the horizon of Being.

Thus, for us, this is what makes Aquinas and the entire history of 'natural theology' to which he belongs a form of onto-theological metaphysics; as a matter of method, if not attitude, it proceeds on the tacit conviction that God is to be rationally *thought*, rather than worshipped and lovingly obeyed. Rational theology of course in no way explicitly denies that it is possible, and admirable and even necessary, to worship and love and obey God; nevertheless, doing so is always already framed within a horizon of thought in which *thinking about* God takes precedence. This is why for rational theology it inevitably seems foundational, to first demonstrate the existence of God before carrying on. Theology, which literally means the 'science of God', ends up reducing God to an intellectual object of inquiry and study (an object of 'knowledge'), rather than the living One to whom and upon whom and in whom everything we do must be wrought. There is a shift, ever so subtle perhaps, from the primacy of *doing* what God has individually and specifically given us to do, to that of merely thinking *about* God in a form of depersonalized reasoning that in no way makes a claim upon *me* to act. In short, theoretical reflection upon God deploys an economy of abstraction that ends up serving as a refuge from one's ever having to subjectively appropriate the truths it discusses, by putting them into living action. Theory, as so often is the case, replaces action. Or, as Kierkegaard was to put the point toward the end of his own life, Christianity becomes a matter for theological *reflection* upon God rather than one of passionate *imitation* of Christ.

It is telling, for instance, that in the same biblical text that metaphysics takes as definitive support for the identification of God and Being, neither the prophets nor the apostles ever once offer an 'argument' for the existence of God; they simply rebuke people for the decision to live defiantly *as if* there were no God. For them, unlike the rational theologians who came centuries later, God's existence was simply presupposed. It never crossed the mind of Abel, or Abraham, or Joseph, or Moses, or Samson, or Elijah, or David (much less the minds of the apostles or the early martyrs for the faith) to first prove the existence of God. Instead, it was simply admitted that the question of God—to the extent it even makes sense to make of God a *question*—presented a moral and existential call to *obedience*, one accordingly left to each and every individual to answer for himself, and not, as we commonly think today, one to be endlessly deferred in favor of intellectual debate pro and contra.

The heroes of the Scriptures acted on the assumption (or the *conviction* more exactly) of what, since the medieval times of Anselm, has come to be treated as a contested conclusion of the so-called 'ontological argument': the conduct of their lives, the biblical narratives testify, evince an understanding of God whereby it would have been silly to think or speak of God as *not* existing. It is all the more interesting when we observe, against this same biblical backdrop, that of all the traditional arguments given for God's existence, the only one Aquinas in the end dismisses as invalid is the ontological argument. Why does an undeniable metaphysical genius such as Aquinas, for whom God and Being are essentially identified, reject the very argument for God's existence that would seem to most unabashedly assert the identity between Being and God? In response, many would tender a reply framed in terms of Aquinas's own theology, and which no doubt initially seems compelling: because we only know God darkly, in speaking of God or indeed in predicating things of God, we may do so only by analogy. For Aquinas, however, this means that existence itself, which is typically taken to be a predicate, cannot justifiably be predicated of God based on an apriori understanding

of the divine essence, because that very essence is precisely what defies our own finite power of comprehending; hence, we are forbidden from inferring, as the ontological argument would have us, that God's essence indeed entails his existence. This entire evaluation of the ontological argument no doubt initially sounds, if anything, to be a very *post*-metaphysical way of conceptualizing God. How, then, could it be fair to conclude that, despite his disavowal of the ontological argument, Aquinas' theology nevertheless represents an instance of the inherent onto-theological tendencies of rational theology?

In a way, Aquinas' refusal to concede the ontological argument's validity corresponds to why the figures of the Bible rejected the need for *any* kind of argument for God's existence: the certainty of God's existence is an *experiential* insight, one neither to be adduced nor challenged by the *logos* of thought. God in the last analysis is ultimately above or beyond any demonstrative analysis, for, if by 'God' we merely name something the referent of which whose existence is open to question and hence in need of proof, then we have simply not named God. God, whatever else may be said or predicated of Him, lying above and beyond all demonstration, is not in need of one.

Hence, as a result of conceptualizing of God at all, and especially as a being whose existence is at once capable and hence requiring of a demonstration, rational theology finds it both useful and possible to 'prove' the existence of God by way of the natural theology's other battery of traditional arguments. However, and in this respect we are merely following the theological example of someone like the Apostle Paul, in so doing, rational theology in effect submits God to an extrinsic power or principle—*human rational thought* comes to be elevated to a rank of authority whereby it is said to possess the resources and right to settle, not only God's proper name, but first indeed whether He even exists.

It is impossible to overstate the gulf here between someone like Aquinas and Paul. In the first chapter of Romans, for instance, Paul does not 'argue' that unbelievers are without excuse because they have failed to properly infer what some otherwise impeccable chain of

reasoning has done to satisfactorily demonstrate the existence of God. Instead, he simply declares they are without excuse, because they have suppressed the truth of God's existence in unrighteousness, choosing instead to disobey Him. It is not that they do not *know* the truth, but that they do not *love* it. The essential takeaway, then, for us at least, in challenging the onto-theological metaphysics of natural theology is not one of contesting that the only basis for faith in God is by an 'irrational' belief in the absurd; instead, the point is one of questioning whether God in fact appears, as metaphysics presupposes is the case, in the mode of thought, or whether God in fact appears elsewhere and by other means—in short, according to a *logos* besides that of Greek thought.

For as Paul's own words from his Epistle to the Romans suggest, and as we shall explain later in the related context of our discussion of vanity, it is the phenomenon of *love* that conditions whether and to what extent God can appear. For us, consequently, the central contention at stake in critiquing metaphysics is this: by submitting God to a mode of thought that makes it seem as if it is even necessary to 'prove' God's existence, metaphysics places God at a distance from us, alienating the one who attempts to approach God via thought rather than by love. That is to say, instead of working from the experiential fact that God is always already accessible to those who diligently seek Him, because He appears readily to those who do not turn away from Him (namely, in the auto-affection of life, as Henry will argue), metaphysics consigns God to thought—God becomes, as Marion would put it, a conceptual idol.

The critique of theology in its metaphysical acceptation is thus not in the first place or primarily one of challenging the assignation of God to the horizon of Being; it is one of challenging the decision of substituting the living God in whose image we all know ourselves to be made with a surrogate 'God' projected into a system of finite thinking and representation that leaves us with an image of Him, a mere conceptual idol, whose very existence it even becomes possible to deny, or at least without contradiction, conceive. Such a

'God', the one of the Greek *logos* determined by the ek-stasis of intentionality, is not at all God, but a creation of men's own darkened imaginations.

Thus, for Marion (and for us his general definition will more than do), metaphysics can be defined in terms of the two key principles said to mobilize it, because each in turn characterize the form of thought itself. First, the 'principle of non-contradiction' and, second, the 'principle of sufficient reason'. The issue of metaphysics comes, according to Marion, to one of conditioning the appearing of phenomena, so that, rather than the phenomenon being free to appear as and for itself, all that can show up is what some extrinsic principle allows to appear.[23]

In order to establish this rupture between mystical and onto-theological approaches to God, I examine an unexamined overlap between the mystical theology of Meister Eckhart and the philosophy of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard, like Eckhart, argues that one must withdraw from the bustle of worldly affairs by means of self-surrender if one is to encounter the living God. By renouncing self-love and willfulness, this act of detachment, they both argue, clears a 'place' that allows for the self's reception of God. Having achieved this inwardness in virtue of self-renunciation, the self, they agree, finds itself poised to appropriate a life now made anew. And here, their respective descriptions of such a life are once again significantly similar. Among other notable similarities, the life they describe is one conditioned in silence, borne by selfless love and obedience, and grounded in the changelessness of God. Their shared vision of God does well to show the genuine relationship between God and the human being is not

[23] Says Marion: 'To sum it up very briefly, I think "metaphysics" means, first, that Being amounts to beings insofar as beings are present. To be present is to persist, to be self-identical (principle of identity), to be in time, that is, to be is to be as long as you can: the *conatus essendi* as perseveration *in suo esse*. The principle of identity leads to persistence and persistence may be achieved in the best possible way when no indetermination is left. The best case of this is that of the "object." The object can be exhaustively produced, any indetermination being rejected from its definition, from the essence of the object. It can be reproduced so as to be present. The second characteristic is that presence is made real so long as it has a reason. That reason can either be the essence itself, in which case the thing is *causa sui*, or the reason comes from outside, in which case we speak of a foundation. And you have *causa sui*—foundation—with the principle of sufficient reason. I think you can articulate metaphysics with these two concepts, I mean both *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis'* (2016)

something confined to discursive thought. One can only truly approach God within the interiority in which God himself engenders us, not in the transcendence of conceptual thought. It is this shared refusal of Kierkegaard and Eckhart to subjugate God to calculative-representational thinking that explains their work—and Christian mysticism more generally—remain relevant, as ever, to the contemporary landscape.

Yet in what way is this anti-metaphysical mode of approach exactly relevant? What, if anything, can this way of viewing subjectivity position us to appreciate that we otherwise mightn't?

I suggest that it reveals the truth of the work of art. In the fourth study, 'Life, Art, and Painting the Invisible: Michel Henry on Kandinsky', I defend two intertwined claims of Michel Henry's philosophy. The first concerns the neo-Kierkegaardian characterization of self at stake in his phenomenology of life: the essence of subjectivity is an invisible pathos—a transcendental self-affectivity as he sometimes put it—that experiences itself immediately without any delay or any distance, precisely because it does not manifest itself within the exteriority or visibility of the world. In other words, self-disclosure in the first instance is non-intentional. The second concerns a related thesis about the essence of the work of art: the essence of art, according to Henry, is the expression of this very invisible pathos. The point of painting, therefore, is to paint the invisible! I first examine the relationship between Henry's phenomenology of life and Kandinsky's own abstract painting, illuminating each in light of the other. I next examine the works of Signac, Harrison, Osbert, Tanner, and Manet to show how and why their own respective styles of representational painting unwittingly attempt, but fail, to express the pathos of life as Kandinsky does. Finally, by way of conclusion, I address some Heideggerian and Merleau-Pontyan objections to Henry's position and explain why they all fail. I thus conclude that not only does Henry's philosophy of art deserve to be taken seriously as the audacious, comprehensive, and brilliant theory it is, but that it is exactly right. The point of art is to reveal the invisible.

The new phenomenology does not eliminate the venerable questions that dominate the history of philosophy; it simply poses them in a way that allows them to appear from themselves and as themselves. By identifying the way in which the tradition occludes the things themselves, the new phenomenology opens old questions in fresh ways. As an example of its ability to make headway on what would otherwise remain insoluble problems, I turn to the question of the immortality of the soul.

In the final study, 'Metaphysics and Immortality', I contend that the essence of subjectivity reveals, to those suitably attuned to it, the truth of immortality. For although traditional philosophical demonstrations of the immortality of the soul—those for instance of Plato, Aquinas, and Descartes—might fail, this does not entail that immortality is without evidence or beyond proof. The immortality of the self is not demonstrable by means of a chain of arid ratiocination, but it is revealed in 'inwardness'. To explain the way in which this revelation takes place, and why both the common sense of the natural attitude and the discursive thought of metaphysics remain oblivious to it, I first draw upon the phenomenology of Michel Henry to illustrate the neo-Kierkegaardian point that our present age negates subjectivity. This negation of subjectivity, I explain, entails that we are not in a position to sincerely adjudicate the question of immortality in discursive thought as metaphysics would prefer, for the question of immortality simply in principle eludes objective demonstration. Metaphysical attempts to either prove or disprove the immortality of the soul, thus, are in fact neither the serious nor reasonable discursive exercises they are typically thought to be; in truth, they are a form of diversion that avoids the existential import of the question of immortality. I use the impressive but ultimately unsuccessful respective attempts of Plato, Aquinas, and Descartes as illustrative examples of this inability of metaphysics to settle the question of immortality. In light of the starkly contrasting ways in which immortality is existentially at stake in inwardness, on the one hand, and not for metaphysics, on the other, I next marshal the collective insight of Pascal, Kierkegaard, Henry, and Marion to explain how

inwardness opens, where objective thought does not, a horizon of givenness beyond either the finitude of the earth or the world. As a result, what remains at most a perplexing hypothesis for the discursive thought of metaphysics is experiential reality for those who live in inwardness: just as the love of God revealed in inwardness is this life's ultimate measure, so it promises those who have been saved by it immortality in the next. For love, as Revelation proclaims and the new phenomenology confirms, raises from the dead.

How will those under the grip of metaphysics reply to these studies? Immediately, an objection will be raised. Some will be suspicious, and understandably so, of a set of studies which begins with an examination of the existential underpinnings of everyday practical identity only to conclude with what would appear to be a purely speculative undertaking on immortality. They begin somewhere sensible, it will be said, with a respectable form of philosophical inquiry into a relatively acceptable if not banal question, only to eventually lapse into theological fancy. These studies, it will be said, have transgressed some rule or other that partitions philosophy from the excesses of theology. Something, this natural attitude's line of thought will contend, must have gone wrong somewhere.

Assuming that a neat division between philosophy and theology holds (the credo that there exists a legitimate division between the two is itself one of the many presuppositions the new phenomenology puts in question), these studies would appear to transgress it. But does such a transgression disqualify the legitimacy of the mode of thought that accomplishes it? There is every reason to think it does not.

To see this, it is worth revisiting the traditional view of the relationship between phenomenology and theology. Its objection, when put in the form of a question, is as predictable as its onto-theological assumptions are prevalent: what principle could conceivably unify the investigative line of advance these studies have chosen to deploy when, as here, the first study examines the conditions on the possibility of our everyday, mundane, practical self-identities, on the one hand, and the sixth concerns a seemingly unimaginable mode of

subjectivity put at play by the eschatological horizon to which both immortality and the hope of beatitude belong, on the other hand? From the standpoint of metaphysics, there is no discernible connection between these two forms of subjectivity, much less everything else that intervenes between them. From the standpoint of the natural attitude and the philosophies that enshrine it, these two figures of subjectivity appear to be disparate to the point of total irreconcilability. Phenomenology, the traditional view will say, may reflect upon our everyday dealings in the world and the conditions that make them possible, and theology for its own part may speculate over beatitude and immorality all it wishes. Yet the two, it will be said, have nothing legitimate to contribute to the other.

According to this objection that does not see or pretends not to see any connection between phenomenology and theology, the self of everyday practical identity and the beatified self prove unrelated. This is due, it is said, to a fact defining the very structure of selfhood itself. Not only does my present condition as a self in the world of exteriority seem to have no obvious bearing upon the condition I hope to receive in beatitude, but this gulf between my current condition of self-alienation and the self-coincidence I currently wait upon exclude one another. What explains the exclusion?

Here, metaphysics will predictably deploy an objection as popular as it initially appears decisive: this first mode of subjectivity, the one of practical identity defining my present condition, it insists, involves a non-coincidence which renders hope of beatified subjectivity vain. The desire for beatitude, it contends, is vain hope because what it presumes to be possible—a form of non-alienated subjectivity in which I am at last truly who I am—is in fact not. For if alienation is necessary and unavoidable, as metaphysics says, then a condition in which I fully coincided with myself is therefore unachievable—hence beatitude proves fictitious, indeed delusory in principle, as it posits as possible a particular condition of selfhood that is unattainable. Beatitude, therefore, would not only prove to be a false hope simply because it involves us waiting expectantly upon some futural event that is less likely to

materialize than not. It is illusory, metaphysics claims, due to a more fundamental reason. To hope for beatitude is to wait upon a form of non-alienated subjectivity that is in principle impossible due to the very structure of that subjectivity itself.

In a way, this metaphysical objection is correct, though the reason that explains why in fact only refutes metaphysics itself. It is true that the worldly self—the self of exteriority—cannot win beatitude. The self, when consigned to the exteriority of the world, no doubt inviolably obeys a principle of non-identity.[24] However, the conclusion that the tension between a beatified self and the self in its present fractured state entails a necessary alienation is only as strong as the key assumption required to complete the objection. If the conclusion that I am irrevocably sentenced to a form of non-coincidence is to follow, it must be the case that I phenomenalise myself solely within the world's horizon of visibility, exteriority, and transcendence. For the conclusion to follow, thus, the objection presupposes that subjectivity is ultimately a function of its openness unto, and immersion within, the world of transcendence. According to metaphysics and this objection to beatitude it deploys, the self is nothing else than a function of the world disclosure it accomplishes in intentionality.

But it is precisely this assumption that does not hold! When the self exteriorizes itself in the world, and when metaphysics accordingly understands the self exclusively in terms of this transcendence, it is indeed impossible to see how the alienated self of exteriority could ever possibly coincide with itself in the way that beatitude presupposes. From the view of metaphysics this fact appears decisive since, from the perspective of the presuppositions that determine and guide it, there is no way to make intelligible sense of how this non-coincident self that I currently am in the world, on the one hand, and state of coincidence with myself that I await in eschatological hope, on the other, could accommodate the other. Thus, if I am essentially non-coincident with respect to myself and hence incomplete, beatitude remains delusory for at least two related reasons.

[24] See note 1 above.

First reason: if the beatified self demands coincidence, it therefore depends upon a non-alienated subjectivity that is strictly impossible. The impossibility at issue appears to rise even to the level of what current opinion portrays as a pure conceptual truth: *to be a self just is to be alienated*, so it makes no sense to imagine (much less anticipate) a non-alienated condition of selfhood.

The second reason in turn unfolds simply as a result of taking the first to its final conclusion: even supposing that there could be a form of non-alienated subjectivity, and thus even supposing that a transition from my present alienated state to a non-alienated one is possible, this very transition, far from securing my existence, would in fact only obliterate it. I would only become this non-alienated self in the mode of ceasing to be the alienated self I currently am. The transformation from alienation to beatitude would therefore not accomplish my transfiguration. To the very contrary, it would produce my destruction.

This entire train of thought, convincing as it initially appears, only remains persuasive when one grants an assumption as essential to classical phenomenology as it is to the rest of the history of metaphysics. The essence of self-manifestation, we are continually told, is decided by exteriority and transcendence. However, this is precisely wrong: I am revealed to myself, not in transcendence, but in immanence.

Subjectivity reveals itself in an affective pathos that admits no distance or ek-stasis; it experiences itself as itself without rupture or alterity. The various ways in which critical theory, psychoanalysis, classical phenomenology, and the naturalism of analytic philosophy characterize the self—as something which dwells solely within the world and can thereby only be understood in terms of the body of representative knowledge it erects—are accordingly exactly wrong. Contrary to what these prevailing ideologies of our day insist, self-coincidence is indeed possible. *That these philosophies of transcendence assert otherwise simply proves that exteriority is the wrong frame of reference to determine whether such coincide can occur.* Transcendence is the wrong frame of reference to characterize the self, because it from the start overlooks the original way

in which self-revelation happens. By treating the modes in which the *ego* or *Dasein* phenomenalise themselves as the way in which transcendental life does, metaphysics simply ignores and elides—indeed distorts—the essence of self-manifestation. *Only the radical immanence of transcendental life explains why the self fails to coincide with itself when exteriorized in the world's transcendence, and only it explains why the coincidence the self desires is nonetheless possible despite the impossibility of this coincidence's actualization within the milieu that the intentionality of care opens*. Thus, the pertinent question is no longer, as critical theory, or psychoanalysis, or classical phenomenology declare, one of determining how the self should reconcile itself to an inescapable alienation; instead, the question is one of rediscovering how this singular *me* that I am can overcome the alienation I experience when I exteriorize myself. Though the exterior self cannot win beatitude, this does not foreclose it: it simply indicates that if it is to be won, it must be won by the interior self, the very interior self metaphysics itself ignores.

Thus, perhaps the single greatest objection to these studies is met. Initial appearances notwithstanding, there is indeed an inner coherence at work in them. Their aim is not simply to draw attention to aspects of subjectivity that today's ideologies of transcendence ignore in order to prove that the affective interiority of life's radical immanence is indeed the absolute form of self-revelation. The point, rather, is to comprehend for oneself why we habitually forget this dimension of transcendental life, how this forgetting is possible in the first place, and to abandon the philosophies of transcendence that propagate it. In the last analysis, then, the point is not merely to poke holes in this or that abstract theory. This is not an exercise in winning some scholarly debate or academic competition of wills. It is an attempt to reawaken the very transcendental life of subjectivity which academic debates, and the cult of 'society' underpinning them, negate in a thousand different ways. The new phenomenology therefore is radical praxis; it not only identifies, *but puts to work*, the very transcendental life it retrieves.

It is with this goal in mind that it becomes possible to answer the natural attitude's original objection, one according to which nothing essentially unites these studies. To be sure,

they do open with a comparatively mundane question to that of immortality: how, as a matter of fact, do we attempt to make meaningful sense of our everyday lives? How do our everyday routines and the identities that underpin them allow us to make sense of our lives as a whole? Is the degree and manner of self-understanding they deliver complete or partial, serious or superficial? Upon examination, it proves to be the case that something crucial about what enables us to make sense of our lives, and what in turn is at stake in that further understanding, is a depth to subjectivity that practical identity only mimics. Subjectivity therefore escapes the world, because it neither reveals nor receives itself there.

This leads us to the issue of vanity. It is when vanity strikes that the transcendental illusions of the *ego* and *Dasein* are exposed, revealing the interiority of the self-affection in which the self is first engendered as the singular *me* that it is. The fact that some pretend never to have experienced the blow of vanity or to have encountered the radical immanence of life that it discloses, or that many turn away from it the moment they have, does not disconfirm the existence of this form of self-revelation; to the very contrary, the fact that our everyday dealings within the world and the positivistic theories that accrue to them murder life is precisely what we should expect to find on the presupposition that such life does exist. If the radical pathos of life is difficult to bear, this is because it is there that I must confront myself in the singularity of my individuality and the corresponding fact that proves essential to its mode of self-givenness: *I cannot escape or disengage from myself*. Is it therefore at all surprising that we prefer not to bear the weight of the radical immanence in which we receive ourselves?

Not at all! This is why, in the guise of a self-possessed *ego* or autarkic *Dasein* who gives itself its own possibilities by setting its own agenda, we choose the immediacy of a world that fascinates us with inexhaustible objects, projects, and preoccupations. It is in this mode of care's self-absorption that the world, and the 'others' who are just as keen as me to keep up the pretense, relieves us of ourselves by allowing us to forget the Life that engenders us. It is this flight from transcendental life, and really ultimately the God who dwells within it, that

explains why Pascal was for instance able to diagnose, without neither distortion nor contradiction, our everyday existence as little more than a ceaseless movement from one diversion to the next.

In truth, irrespective of how deeply we plunge into the anonymous transcendence of worldly roles, exigencies, and relative ends, doing so never accomplishes the total escape from the interiority of life we desire when we do. Though modern society craves it, the total abolition of self is never fully complete; the self-forgetting it achieves is always as provisional as it is illusory. For I can choose to project myself, by means of my exercising the intentional faculties of *Sorge*, into a future where I await myself, only to learn each time that I never do in turn coincide with myself. When I fail to meet myself at the conclusion of the fantasy I have projected for myself, I invent a new one, and do it all over again. This is exactly what most people choose to do, 'living' in a perpetually recurring epicycle of illusory projects, tasks, and possibilities. The phenomenologies of transcendence know this non-coincidence, and to their credit they insist upon its acknowledgment because the experiential facts demand it, but they misapprehend what explains the very non-coincidence they identify. *The reason for this non-coincidence is not some necessary or essential fact about subjectivity as such, but rather the fact that no genuine self was deployed there in the first place*.

It is this irreality of a self completely exteriorized by the unfettered projection of transcendence, which in turn leads to vanity. Hollowed out from within, empty of all substance, bereft of any measure, the transcendent self at last collapses under the weight of its decision to try to define itself on its own terms—those of the world's. Vanity is thus first of all a blow to the *ego* because it reveals the fundamental delusion that characterizes its entire mode of being: for the self-possessed *Dasein*, what it is to be this self that I am remains little more than a task to be negotiated in terms of my own discretion: 'my' powers, 'my' choices, 'my' ventures, and 'mine alone'. Ask whosever lives this way who that very 'me' is, however, and he does not know. They do not know because, as the experience of vanity painfully

impresses, what they thought they knew—themselves—is really the product of a false consciousness. Those who only know themselves as *egos* or *Dasein* do not know themselves, for they do not know the transcendental affectivity that first gives themselves to themselves. As Henry comments, they do not know that 'I am myself, but I myself have no part in this "being-myself": I experience myself without being the source of this experience. I am given to myself without this givenness arising from me in any way'.[25] To live is to be in possession of powers, to act, to think, to move, to feel, to experience, to desire, to fear, to hope, but the fact that I possess these powers I do is itself beyond my power. I owe the possession of these powers to no power of my own; I can refuse them as little as I can bring them into being, for I simply receive them. It is this powerlessness to bring oneself into the possession of one's own powers the self-possessed *ego* ignores. The *ego* forgets all this, thinking instead that it gets its power from itself. Vanity reminds us that the 'me' of the world is in fact a pseudo-me, a facade I project; a subtle strategy I deploy, almost as if by reflex, to manage how I hope I might be perceived; the pseudo-me I hope the others will admire and praise, or at least not totally loathe, even though they too are just as deeply in disguise as me. There are many, 'pleasers of men but not God', who do not know anything beyond this, who think that to be a *me* just is to be an autonomous, self-possessed *ego* lives with a 'reputation' at stake. The blow of vanity therefore not only returns us to a radical immanence of life we habitually hate; in doing so it exposes the *ego* and *Dasein* for the transcendental illusions they are.

This is why the philosophies of transcendence that portray the self strictly in terms of intentionality and its openness unto the world go to such incredible lengths, employing the most desperate strategies, to ignore vanity. If we should ask one of its champions: 'Why should beings such as ourselves who are otherwise capable of making sense of entities nevertheless sometimes find ourselves subject to the blow of vanity?' he has no answer. If we should ask one of its proponents: 'Why are we the sort of beings who not only make sense of

[25] 2003, p. 107.

entities, but beings for whom things can altogether quit making sense because they can *quit mattering*?' he again has no answer. Those who adhere to a philosophy of transcendence will admit, albeit begrudgingly and only to an extent, that there is an inescapable form of non-coincidence that characterizes the self when it phenomenalises itself in the form of the *ego* or *Dasein*. But this is where they quit. They will acknowledge this non-coincidence, but they will not admit that this very non-coincidence entails the fact that the *ego* and *Dasein* are transcendental illusions. They do not, because to admit so would require them to come to grips with a mode of self-revelation that in truth explains *why* the exteriorized self never coincides with itself: the irreal self of care flees and pretends not to know the radical immanence of transcendental life. *The philosophies of transcendence acknowledge that the exteriorized self obeys a principle of non-identity, but because they do not explain this non-coincidence for what it is, as something due to willful self-forgetting of the radical immanence of life itself, they are thus themselves the theoretical consequence of the very same alienated self-consciousness they attribute to the self's fundamental condition; they epitomize a form of inquiry that has itself forgotten the radical interiority of transcendental life. These philosophies do not establish the truth of alienation; they are simply that very alienation's consummation.*

Consequently, we have an answer to the question of why vanity assails us whereas the metaphysical tradition which precedes us does not. The exteriorized self, the only one classical phenomenology knows, for example, to say nothing of the rest of contemporary philosophy, experiences the blow of vanity on occasion because it is crushed by the futility of a desire that, having abandoned hope of anything higher, chooses to confine itself to a merely worldly set of stakes.

There is a need in us so great that the world itself cannot satisfy, one which explains an experience we accordingly all know too well. Jean-Louis Chrétien expresses things perfectly, as is his habit, when he says of that familiar experience this: 'It is disappointing and

properly disheartening to obtain precisely what one wanted'.[26] Indeed, but why? The answer lies in the nature of transcendental life's desire, particularly in the fact that reality reveals itself in the form of one of two ways of manifestation already mentioned—the first, and the one which typically preoccupies us, is the mode of exteriority, of distance, of visibility. This is the way of the world, and the domain that preoccupies metaphysics. What manifests itself in the world is always already passing away. The life that chooses to cling to the world is itself accordingly no exception to the same rule of transience that stages the world's manifestation, for such a self, the self of exteriority, is the self of transient goods and hence a life of death since one 'that lives in pleasure is dead while one lives' (1 Timothy 5:6). The second mode of self-manifestation, by contrast, the way of Life, unfurls in accordance with the way in which subjectivity manifests itself. Here, its own comparative rule of revelation perfectly contradicts that of the worldly way: inward not exteriorized, immediate without distance, invisible not visible. This other mode of manifestation is the very mode of life itself, one revealed as immediately as it is incognito. It stands opposed to the roles and exigencies that comprise modern society's everyday routines because it resides in the light of Life, not in the darkness of worldly visibility. For it is there, in the world's darkness, ejected into an exterior phenomenality already alienated from life itself, on this stage of everydayness that people are taught to consider reality, that the care-self phenomenalizes itself according to the principle metaphysics itself subsequently enshrines in thought: all that matters is the entities that the transcendental *ego* or *Dasein* make sense of, and maybe perhaps the intentional capacities themselves that negotiate them. In both thought and deed, there is no difference, this self of the natural attitude dwells only within the ek-stasis its own powers of intentionality open.

This is precisely the prejudice, call it 'ontological monism' as Henry does, that Marion's phenomenology has done so well to reverse. The phenomenological reduction, when seen rightly, demonstrates that I ultimately dwell within a horizon besides that of the world.

[26] 2015, p. 64

As Marion writes in *Reduction and Givenness*, 'Could not the indetermination in which Husserl—indisputably—leaves [the self] also indicate that the *I* does not have first nor especially to be determined by Being?'[27] We can answer Marion's question positively: I am not determined by the world, for neither am I determined by exteriority, a fact itself understandable in light of the truth that I am always in the first place immediately manifest to myself in the self-revelation of life's radical immanence.

There is a radical immanence, an inwardness, characterizing my subjectivity that necessarily escapes the exteriority of the world and the horizon of Being. It is precisely this same interior dimension of transcendental life that Henry himself has in mind when he observes: 'The thesis of man as the "Son of God" thus has a dual significance, part negative and part positive. In a negative sense, it prevents man from being understood as a natural Being, as do common sense and the sciences'.[28] It is to classical phenomenology's credit that it at least identified this error of common sense and the philosophies that enshrine it (logical positivism, dialectal materialism, psychoanalysis, and naturalism, etc.). Nevertheless, it has ignored this lesson's greater significance, which consists in a fact that Henry himself puts this way: 'But it also prevents him from being understood, from the transcendental viewpoint, as a Being for whom the world would constitute the horizon of all experiences, or the mode of appearing common to each of these experiences'.[29] This conclusion Henry draws is neither baseless nor metaphorical, for the experiential facts themselves confirm it: 'Just like Christ, as a man I am not of the world in the radical phenomenological sense that the appearing out of which my phenomenological flesh is made, and which constitutes my true essence, is not the appearing of the world. This is not due to the effect of some supposed credo, philosophical or theological; it is rather because the world has no flesh, because in the "outside-itself" of the world no flesh and no living are possible—they cannot take shape anywhere other than in

[27] 1998, p. 165.
[28] 2003, p. 101.
[29] Ibid.

Life's *pathétik* and a-cosmic embrace'.[30] It is thus actually those who would deny the reality of this non-worldly affectivity who revert to empty credos, thoughtless slogans, prejudicial theory, and breezy ideology. When the question of the self remains, as it did for classical phenomenology just as much as the tradition it attempted to escape, one only posed in terms of intentionality, the question of self remains relegated to the spectacle of the visible world—and hence, no progress is made beyond the realization that the self is alienated in the world. In truth, this insight, important as it might be, should be a prelude to an even more radical questioning; a questioning classical phenomenology refuses since it has proven unwilling to abandon the presupposition that self-manifestation is simply a matter of world manifestation. Indeed, it is not only the phenomenologists who were guilty of what Henry has aptly called this 'ontological monism'. It is in fact our customary way of thinking about ourselves, one accordingly reflected throughout the philosophical tradition time and again. In truth, as much as classical phenomenology talked about radical beginnings and new starts, it simply codified what the natural attitude already sediments. For classical phenomenology, that the self phenomenoalises itself within and according to the world is a thesis that remains as unquestionable as it does non-negotiable. But, as Henry says, the mode in which we first experience ourselves, that is, in the mode of an undergoing of ourselves in the immediacy of a pure subjective suffering, rises to the level of an a priori principle of appearing. It is not something that we have to argue for, nor is it something we ever could, for it is the very presupposition of our being able to do anything at all, including the possibility of conceiving and articulating any argument at all on any subject, since, doing so, like anything else we are capable of producing, presupposes that we have already been given to ourselves, a self-givenness which itself is the work of life's affective pathos. Hence, as Henry says, and as we would concur, life is the fundamental principle upon which all else derives: 'Now, this condition of life and of everything that carries within itself life's essence does not result from

[30] Ibid.

some speculative assertion. It is a phenomenological condition'.[31] The auto-affectivity of life, thus, conditions everything, including the very perplexity of the thought itself that would deny the existence of such a phenomenality, or that pretends not to have any familiarity with what is signified by it. After all, puzzlement and confusion, even irritation, are—as Henry aptly notes—intellectual attitudes which, being modes of thought, move within the phenomenality of life.

The Heideggerian philosophy, which perhaps best epitomizes the prejudice of 'ontological monism', repeatedly insists that we are beings who open and sustain a world. Heidegger himself summarizes the essential claim of *Sein und Zeit's* portrayal of the 'subjectivity of the subject' in a lecture course at the University of Marburg in the summer of 1927. There he put it this way: 'The structure of being-in-the-world makes manifest the essential peculiarity of the Dasein, that it projects a world for itself, and it does this not subsequently and occasionally but, rather, the projecting of the world belongs to the Dasein's being. In this projection the Dasein has always already *stepped out beyond itself*, ex-sistere, it *is in* a world. Consequently, it is never anything like a subjective inner sphere. The reason why we reserve the concept "existence" for Dasein's mode of being lies in the fact that being-in-the-world belongs to this its being'.[32] To be a self, according to Heidegger, is therefore to be determined by transcendence and hence exteriority: 'Because the Dasein is constituted by being-in-the-world, it is a being which in its being is out *beyond* itself. This transcending does not only and not primarily mean a self-relating of a subject to an object; rather, transcendence means *to understand oneself from a world*'.[33] Yet it is this very idea that the self can be understood only in terms of intentionality, and thus worldhood, which leads Heidegger to distort the transcendental pathos of subjectivity. Even when he does acknowledge the importance of affectivity, as he does in *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, it is solely within the context of

[31] 2003, p. 105.
[32] 1982, p. 170.
[33] 1982, p. 299-300.

the care-structure and hence the ek-stasis of originary temporality. For Heidegger, affectivity is only understood in terms of its contribution to the disclosure of a world and the entities and possibilities which reveal themselves within it. Affectivity, and hence the question of self-manifestation, is consigned to the problem of intentionality.

This is the fatal flaw not only of the Heideggerian philosophy, but really of the same working assumption that defines the entirety of classical phenomenology, as well of the same metaphysical tradition it attempted to overcome. When for instance Merleau-Ponty rightly criticizes 'objective thought' for having forgotten the perceived world and the embodied self that is said to open it, his critique still proceeds without ever noticing, much less challenging, the presupposition that the self should be exclusively understood in terms of its relation to the world. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the lived body, its interesting contributions notwithstanding, proves to be another instance of ontological monism. It correctly denies that the self can be reduced to what biology, sociology, descriptive psychology, or neuroscience say is true of us and the body, but it in turn understands the self as little else than that which opens a worldly horizon through perception. For Merleau-Ponty like the other classical phenomenologists before him, even when subjectivity is said to be something that cannot properly understood by the objectivism of today's representational sciences, the self still remains something understood in sole reference to the worldly horizon which it opens in care. In short, though the question of self is no longer regarded as one of objectivity in Merleau-Ponty's thought, it for all that still remains one of exteriority.

However, as it is nowhere else than within the radical immanence of life's invisible pathos that the primary form of self-disclosure occurs, and this very mode of self-revelation has absolutely nothing at all to do with the exteriority of a world or *Dasein's* transcendence which opens it, classical phenomenology, due to its single-minded obsession with transcendence, ignores the fact that I receive myself according to the rules which the world's phenomenality obeys. The problem of intentionality, fully radicalized, will reveal *Dasein* as that

which supplies the necessary transcendence to open a world. But this entire programmatic remains oblivious to the essence of subjectivity since the essence of subjectivity is not ultimately a matter of world disclosure or the intentional functions the self performs in order to open it. In attempting to think the essence of self in terms of the question of intentionality, thought proceeds by deploying the methods, categories, and assumptions that philosophy and the sciences have devised to do so. Yet none proves adequate to the question of self since the question of self is one of inwardness not transcendence. It is not that the philosophies of transcendence fail to comprehend the essence of subjectivity due to some lack of strength or dedication they could have mustered but did not; they never complete the journey simply because they set out down the wrong course the very moment they followed the path of transcendence.

That it is to some deeper inwardness beyond being-in-the-world that we owe our uniquely human ability, not to make sense of entities, but ourselves—an *interior intimo meo*, an inwardness more interior to us than we are to ourselves—is without doubt a notion many will find provocative, even silly. Should we? Is the claim that love stages and directs the entire production of our everyday and authentic endeavors to make intelligible sense of both the world and ourselves truly as preposterous a claim as some might wish to allege? On the contrary, I think it is quite plausible, and is it not the very hypothesis the studies to follow will challenge us to test? And if perhaps the relatively recent developments in phenomenology that inspire them have not yet wholly confirmed it, those who have accepted the challenge they invite do know that the philosophical claims made on love's behalf, though dramatic, are nonetheless very serious. Those who know so do for at least one simple reason: it is the claim of love itself that works in them, a love that abides so long as one remains willing to meet rather than flee or silence it.

The investigations that follow will, I hope, contribute to the reception of this ongoing inquiry into subjectivity. There is every reason to think they should, if only because the

importance and power of recent developments in phenomenological philosophy they take up are by now already apparent. In the wake of an encounter with the phenomenology of Marion, Henry, Lacoste, or Chrétien, it is simply impossible to continue reading last century's phenomenological masters and texts in the way one previously had. This new phenomenology has revitalized and reconfigured venerable questions; it has opened new horizons. And little wonder why: when the issue concerns, as it is does for us, nothing less than the essence of subjectivity, and so when accordingly at stake is the status of love and hence the very measure of life itself, how could one not but see the import?

References

Chrétien, J-L. (2015). *Under the Gaze of the Bible*. Trans: John Marson Dunaway. New York: Fordham University Press.

Heidegger, M (1982). *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. A. Hofstadter. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Henry, M. (2003). *I am the Truth: Towards a Philosophy of Christianity*. Trans: S. Emanuel. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Kierkegaard, S. (1992). *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. Trans: Howard and Edna Wong. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kierkegaard, S. 1980. *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*. Trans: Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kierkegaard, S. 2009. *Works of Love*. Trans: Howard and Edna Hong. Harper Collins Publishers.

Marion, J.-L. (2012). *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*. Trans: Jeffrey Kosky. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Marion, J.-L. (1998). *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*. Trans: Thomas Carlson. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

F, Nef. (2004). *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique?* (Paris: Folio).

Pascal, B. (1996). *Pensées*. Trans: A.J. Krailsheimer. London: Penguin Books.

Sartre, J.P. (2003). *Being and Nothingness: An essay on phenomenological ontology*. Trans: Hazel Barnes. London: Routledge.

Lacoste, J-Y. (2004). *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*. Trans: Michael Raftery. New York: Fordham University Press.

Rivera, J. 'Generation, interiority and the phenomenology of Christianity in Michel Henry'. *Continental Philosophy Review* 44(2) pp. 205-235, 2011.

Rivera, J. 'God and Metaphysics in Contemporary Theology: Reframing the Debate'. Theological Studies 77(4): 823-844, 2016.

Rocca, G. *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press.

Steinbock, A. 'The problem of forgetfulness in Michel Henry'. *Continental Philosophy Review* 32(3): 271-302, 1999.

Zahavi, D. 'Michel Henry and the phenomenology of the invisible'. *Continental Philosophy Review* 32(3) 223-240, 1999.

The Toiling Lily

What is a life, and what does it take to lead it well? Whatever else the good life might involve, presumably it at least involves taking life up as a whole in some way, to take ownership of it. Indeed, it would seem that it is not only necessary to take it up simply in any way, but to do so honestly, in a way that is free of illusion about where one's life currently stands and where one ultimately aims to take it. Accordingly, there is a not uncommon view on which narrative self-appraisal is understood as a condition of possibility for living a life that is at once genuinely responsible and free of self-deceit. In this regard, self-narrative is portrayed as essential to living authentically. One advocate of this view, Charles Taylor, perhaps best expresses how and why one might think that narrative and authenticity are inextricably entwined. Because our beliefs, attitudes, values, and choices 'give our lives meaning and substance', and the course of life exhibits a narrative structure, an understanding of ourselves, he argues, is thus 'inescapably narrative'.[1]And as Paul Ricoeur concurs, 'How, indeed, could a subject of action give an ethical character to his or her own life taken as a whole if this life were not gathered together in some way, and how could this occur if not, precisely, in the form of a narrative?'.[2] Taken together, these remarks of Ricoeur and Taylor do well to distinguish two related yet independent ways of understanding self-narrative. The first, a descriptive claim, avers that we necessarily construe our lives narratively. The second, normative in nature, contends that we *ought* to do so, since doing so is part and parcel of living an ethical, responsible, authentic life.

Before turning to the relationship among responsibility, self-narrative, and self-deception, let us clarify what narrative itself precisely amounts to. As Galen Strawson has helpfully noted, to adopt a narrative outlook upon one's life is to adopt an attitude that entails

---

[1] 1989, pp. 51–2. This chapter of the dissertation has appeared in print: 'The Toiling Lily: Narrative Life, Responsibility and the Ontological Ground of Self-Deception', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* (2016), 15 (1), 103-116.
DOI: 10.1007/s11097-014-9348-0
https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:7073/journal/11097/15/1/page/1
[2] Strawson 2004.

more than the mere penchant to recount facts about one's past. Nor, for that matter, does it involve some inordinate tendency to worry or fantasize about one's future. It exemplifies something else besides. In order to be said that one has crafted a self-narrative, one must engage in some construal of one's life overall. Narrative self-understanding, as he says, thus entails 'large-scale coherence-seeking, unity-seeking, pattern-seeking, or more generally, [a] form-finding tendency'.[3] In addition to this form-finding tendency, genuine narrativity, Strawson observes, must also include a storytelling tendency: an inclination to apprehend one's life as 'fitting the form of some recognized narrative genre'.[4] Form-finding and story-telling, taken together, entails that narrative self-appraisal is a manner of self-understanding in which one's life is viewed 'as some sort of ethical-historical-characterological developmental unity, or in terms of a story, a Bildung, or "quest"'.[5]

Only by crafting such a narrative, it is argued, do the attitudes, beliefs, and choices I have made in the past and will make in the future assume the weighty significance that explains why, as a matter of fact, I am truly answerable for them. Only once I have organized the events over the course of my life into narrative structure do they cohere in such a way that I am aware of, and hence responsible for, the deep way in which they have shaped the trajectory of my life's past and future course. Only then, to put it differently, do my actions, decisions, and values acknowledge and express my conceptions of who I am, what I think I ought to be, and what I wish to become. For inasmuch as personhood presupposes that I be answerable in this way, and this very answerability seems to presuppose the possession of a narrative self-conception of oneself, narrative would appear to be a condition of possibility for the good life.

This line of argument is both powerful and compelling. Still, I think there is ultimately good reason to reject the position that narrative suffices for genuine self-understanding and

[3] 2004, p. 436.
[4] 2004, p. 442.
[5] Ibid.

responsibility. Here, it seems me that certain figures within the phenomenological tradition, particularly Heidegger and Sartre, give us reason to resist the tempting idea that the good life necessarily presupposes narrative. Let me begin with Heidegger.

Consider, as Heidegger does, the manner in which we are given to ourselves in everyday life: 'The self is there for Dasein itself without reflection and without inner perception, before all reflection. Reflection, in the sense of a turning back, is only a mode of self-apprehension, but not the mode of primary self-disclosure […]'.[6] And yet, if this self-givenness is not equivalent to cognitive self-reflection, what is it? This givenness, says Heidegger, is a pre-reflective involvement in the world:

> [Dasein] finds itself primarily and constantly in things because, tending them, distressed by them, it always in some way or other rests in things. Each one of us is what he pursues and cares for. In everyday terms, we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of.[7]

Consider a straightforward example: my self-understanding of being a son. On one natural way to parse what this involves, to be a son is simply for me to meet a set of objective criteria. It is, for instance, something that can be made sense of by the biological conceptions of reproduction and heredity. It is, likewise, something that the law recognizes. On my birth certificate, after all, it states both my legal name and that of my parents. However, while these criteria are not completely irrelevant to my being a son, they nevertheless pass over the *existential* import of being one. It is this existential dimension that Heidegger has in mind.

At issue, then, is sonhood considered in the context of daily life. To be a son presupposes a meaningful situation, a situation whose sense draws on the goal-directed activities and the societal norms that govern them. It is a matter, then, of *practical identity*. If, for instance, I forget to send a gift to my mother on her birthday, this has no bearing whatsoever on whether I am still her son in the eyes of either biology or the law. From an existential standpoint, however, I have failed to live up to what is expected of me insofar as I

[6] 1983, p. 189.
[7] Ibid.

am a son. For suppose that upon learning I haven't sent a gift to my mother, a friend asks me why I didn't. Should I attempt to justify my not sending a gift simply by noting that my birth certificate states that I am still a son as much as ever, my answer would obviously fail to appreciate the sense of my friend's question. What he wants, of course, is an explanation for my not having sent a gift. This demand for explanation obliges me to give my reasons for having done what I've done. By demanding that I give an account of myself, he calls me into question. He summons me to acknowledge my responsibility for what I have done. In the Heideggerian sense, then, to understand myself as a son is to deal with the responsibilities, tasks, and expectations that arise in virtue of my *trying* to *be* one—and part of trying to be something includes responding to situations in which I'm asked to explain and justify my actions to others. And all this, in turn, draws upon the practical, existential understanding I have of what I take my being something—in this case being a son—to *mean*. The very meaning of what it means to be what I am, a son, is at *stake* in what I do.

Thus, on the narrativist view, practical identity is essentially entwined with narrative. One might put the point this way: the intelligibility, wholeheartedness, and coherence of one's practical identity—and accordingly one's life as a whole—correspond to the degree to which it has assumed narrative coherence.[8] As John Davenport contends, the diachronic coherence bestowed by narrative structure constitutes humans as responsible agents; it constitutes a human being as a person subject to contrastive judgments of ethical worth. Not only that: on this view, the personal identity and responsibility underpinning practical identity are explained by equating them to narrative identity. Increasing degrees of personal responsibility, thus, are explained in terms of correspondingly higher levels of narrative structure.[9]

Consider again, then, my practical self-understanding of being a son. I can, to be sure, construe how my being a son fits within what I take to be my overall life story. However, any

[8] Davenport 2012.
[9] Davenport 2012, p. 91.

such self-conception based on full-blown form-finding and story-telling presupposes the existential dimension of what it is to be a son. It presupposes, in other words, a manner of self-givenness that is pre-reflective and so cannot be reduced to whatever sort of explicit narrative self-understanding I may subsequently come by. Only because I have already done the sorts of things that one does in virtue of being a son—sending gifts, answering my mother's phone calls, eating my vegetables, and so on—am I able to retroactively reflect upon them and place them into some (more than trivial) narrative context. Indeed, if my narrative is to have any basis in truth, it must always be grounded in an understanding that consists in my trying to live up to the standards that govern my behaviour by lending the situations in which that behaviour is situated sense. I cannot situate the meaning of my being a son into narrative context without already having done the sorts of things sons do. To think about one's life in light of some recognized narrative genre, then, implies an antecedent form of self-disclosure. It is a kind of self-disclosure rooted in our everyday affairs and thus something prior to whatever explicit, wider narrative coherence we might later seek to give them.

Narrative self-regard therefore turns on a deeper sense of what it is to be a self. After all, though I am a student, I could just as well be something else, say, a taxi driver. And even though I would surely be a different person had I pressed into the possibility of being a taxi driver rather than a student (I would incur a different set of societal and normative expectations associated in doing so), it isn't the case that, had I done so, I would be an entirely different self. For something essential about my subjectivity always remains unchanged regardless of whether I try to be a student or a taxi driver. This invariant element of subjectivity, what I like to call, following Sartre and Heidegger, the 'ontological dimension' of selfhood, is not completed delimited by the practical identities that partly constitute the person I am or will become. For although acting in light of social roles is something I *do*, it does not exhaust who I *am*. This disambiguation between one's social identity and one's ontological subjectivity raises a substantive issue.

In light of this gap between the self-understanding associated with pressing into worldly possibilities, on the one hand, and the dimension of selfhood these possibilities must presuppose but cannot constitute, on the other, what is to be said about the latter? What, in short, is it to be a self as such? And what, moreover, does this ontological dimension of selfhood have to do with narrative self-understanding, responsibility, and self-deception?

The distinction between personhood and the ontological dimension of selfhood, it seems to me, entails that the kind of culpability and answerability associated with the reason-giving in everyday life is rooted in a comparatively basic capacity for responsibility. Why? To be a self as such is to always already be responsible for ourselves. To understand personal responsibility in sole reference to narrative—and the reasons for my actions I give in light of it—is to elide the ontological ground of responsibility, since narrative turns upon a milieu of practical identity that itself presupposes this ontological subjectivity, for I cannot take-up a practical identity without first having already been revealed to myself in a form of ontological self-acquaintance.

And yet, we may well wonder when, if ever, this apparently mysterious ontological dimension of subjectivity is given thematically. When do I experience it, and how does it reveal itself? In answer, Heidegger famously enjoins us to consider the experience of anxiety. It is in anxiety and other 'limit situations' that we are brought before it. In anxiety, he explains, 'beings as a whole become superfluous', such that in this 'slipping away of the whole', we ourselves sink into indifference.[10] When anxiety strikes and the ordinary existential possibilities and their attendant norms have 'slipped away', I am thus brought before myself, my own unvarnished subjectivity as such, my own unmitigated being-in-the-world—my sheer existence, stripped of any governing worldly norms, practices, or social structures.

But what precisely is the nature of the self thus revealed? In saying that in the experience of limit-situations such as anxiety or boredom we are summoned to ourselves, and

[10] Heidegger 1993, p. 101.

that this involves a confrontation with our unmitigated being-in-the-world, have we not contradicted our earlier thesis, according to which the essence of self-givenness unfolds within an unworldly interiority? In short, what is the relationship between this anxious or bored self and the self of inward pathos? They are one and the same self in terms of numerical identity; it is just that they unfold in accordance with two opposing modes of phenomenalization. In the case of the self brought before itself in anxiety, there is still the residue of worldliness, because the one who undergoes the 'world-collapse' of anxiety has not yet broken free of the transcendental illusion that, in its own being, it is not the one responsible for having brought itself into possession of itself—in short, it has still not broken free of its idolatrous consciousness, by returning to its condition as Son of God. Thus, the self revealed in anxiety is the same self that is phenomenalized in the transcendental affectivity of Life; it is just that the self as yet does not know this, because it still dwells in forgetfulness of its condition as a self engendered by a power outside itself. It still is turned to the world, and has not yet returned to its first and true condition of Son of God. In sum, the unmitigated being-in-the-world unveiled in such limit-situations is a self that is upon the precipice of a possible *conversion*; in the moment that the world breaks down, and its call is temporarily suspended, there stands the possibility of, not turning back into the world of concern, but instead entering into the rest of God.

With anxiety, then, comes the recognition that because I am a self, I have always already been responsible for what I make of my life. This responsibility, I come to see, does not originate in the fact that I may happen to be a son (I could have been born a woman or even not at all!), a student (I could be a drop-out), or whatever else may be the case. This ontological responsibility is one whose origin is my own radical subjectivity as such, a subjectivity preceding social roles. Reminiscent of Kierkegaard's famous claim that the recognition of despair reveals that I have been in despair all along, we observe the same is true

of responsibility. I am, just in virtue of being the sort of entity that I am, answerable for the decisions I make, the actions I take, and the principles I value.

Here, Heidegger's philosophy of authenticity comes to centre stage. Anxiety forces me to confront something about my existence that everyday life generally elides: *I* am the basis of society's norms and practical identities exerting the force they do. In daily life, because I am gripped by the tasks at hand, I overlook the fact that what I'm doing ultimately makes sense only insofar as I tacitly lend these tasks their exigency.

Everyday life is replete with examples that nicely illustrate what's at issue here. At the local café, for instance, the hustle and bustle of my surroundings conceals the ontological dimension of others' selfhood—indeed, even my own. Since Pierre over there is a waiter, his carrying the serving dish delicately as he does is perfectly sensible. And his stride is a waiter's indeed: briskly purposive yet unhurried enough so not to belie its rehearsed nonchalance. The pleasant smile with which he greets each patron is impeccable: personal enough to pass as sincere, but not invasive. But as apt as this description of Pierre and the café may well be, it passes over *who* he genuinely is. For as Sartre illustrates with his trademark wit and aplomb, Pierre is a waiter in the mode of his not being one. His being a waiter is a worldly mask, a face he presents to the world, but one that never truly discloses the deeper ontological dimension of his subjectivity underling it, for there is no practical identity that would allow him to be this radical subjectivity. His subjectivity, in other words, exceeds the horizon of any practical identity.

Thus the radical subjectivity underlying his waiterly behaviour is not some worldly possibility on a par with doing what waiters do; it is not a practical identity lying 'out there' in the world. Whereas his being a waiter is something whose intelligibility turns on public norms and expectations, his being a self as such certainly doesn't. This is why, by robbing us of the capacity to do anything, a limit-situation like anxiety forces us to confront ourselves as such. As Steven Crowell notes, 'since my ability-to-be is the skill "one" exercises in everyday

practices, death is the disabling of these skills as a whole: the inability to do anything'.[11] A mood like anxiety, thus, illuminates a dimension of first-person experience that narrative self-appraisal must merely presuppose but cannot constitute. For although worldly identities entail all sorts of responsibilities, obligations, and expectations, these trappings are only possible for a being who is capable of such responsibility. This capacity for responsibility, however, is not itself one that emerges after having entered into a life project. To the contrary, the very ability to be responsible in the way we are in everyday life, as we've just seen, presupposes this ontological dimension of radical first-person subjectivity.

For example, I very well may attempt to justify my not sending a gift to my mother by invoking some everyday reason. Perhaps I fancy myself as a prodigal son, and so, in virtue of this narrative understanding, I take myself to be justified in not having sent her a gift. After all, isn't this precisely the sort of thing that a prodigal son is expected to do? Is not failing to send a gift precisely the kind of thing that makes me who I am? In a way, yes. But ultimately, no. For notwithstanding whatever narrative I may wish to rationalize my decisions in light of, I am always responsible for my actions just in virtue of being the kind of entity that I am. By conceiving of the milieu of practical identity as the locus of my responsibility—the space of meaning in which we publicly enact the roles of sonhood, studenthood, taxi driving, or whatever—I fail to own up to the ontological source of my actions. I fail to acknowledge my own selfhood as such.

As self-narrative can only organize an understanding of our lives at the level of practical identity, so it conceals the ontological dimension of selfhood that underpins the responsibility we have for the actions we take and the choices we make while engaging in everyday practices. Such a self-understanding precludes the possibility of taking genuine responsibility for ourselves. But why?

---

[11] 2004, p. 65.

What it is to be a subject, consequently, cannot be entirely understood in terms of the meaningful whole into which narrative attempts to situate one's values, attitudes, beliefs, and actions. Because we generally think about ourselves and our responsibilities in light of practical identities, understandably the dimension of selfhood underpinning such practical possibilities tends to go unnoticed. When we pay this crucial element of selfhood heed, though, it is quite apparent that it will always elude the most replete, honest, and coherent of self-narratives. There is a kind of responsibility and self-understanding that is the ontological condition on everyday responsibility; to live life in virtue of the idea that one's self can be wholly grasped in self-narrative involves a forgetfulness of one's 'ownmost' self. Such a life amounts, let us say, to an inauthentic one.[12] Minding this distinction between ontological subjectivity and practical identity, we can at last presently turn to the relationship between narrative and self-deception.

In the interest of tying everything together (or at least pressing on), allow me to offer literary examples which illustrate the pitfalls of self-narrative. Contrary to the notion that a narrative self-construal of one's life is imperative for authenticity, the construction of a self-narrative can stifle it. The works of Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Voltaire show so. Kierkegaard's depiction of the story of Abraham shows that the ethical game of giving and asking for reasons turns on a generality that annuls our singularity, a generality that narrative self-regard only exacerbates. The temptation of narrative, we might say, is one that invites genuine irresponsibility. We find this same message in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. The plight of Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov testifies that narrative navel-gazing is as likely to engender self-deceit as it is anything admirable. And like the religious Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, we find the same lesson extolled by the atheist Voltaire. For the telling lesson that Candide learns from his voyage is one at odds with the narrative life: we ought to be open to the subtle

[12] Heidegger 1982.

texture of events as they truly unfold rather than interpret them in light of some preconceived narrative leitmotif. Let us begin with Kierkegaard.

To see how authenticity without narrative is perhaps attainable, recall Kierkegaard's portrayal of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*. 'Take Isaac', God commands Abraham, 'your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering on a mountain that I shall show you'.[13] Obeying God's will, Abraham steadfastly draws his knife on Isaac atop Mount Moriah, his hand stayed by a divine sign's appearance moments before his blade would have slain Isaac. As is commonly noted, if judged strictly in light of societal morality, Abraham is a ghastly would-be murderer. Yet this, Kierkegaard suggests, is a testament to the paradox of faith and the actions that it inspires. As he emphasizes, because Abraham had faith by virtue of the absurd, what motivates his doing what he did is entirely outside 'human calculation' altogether.[14] Done in obvious violation of what any reasonable, ordinary ethical calculus would dictate he ought to have done, Abraham's action achieves what Kierkegaard famously called a 'teleological suspension of the ethical'. By transcending the realm of *Sittlichkeit*, and only in so doing, he earns the laudatory status 'father of faith'. Abraham represents a form of responsibility that parts ways with narrative. Why?

When I act in light of reasons, there must always be a distance between what such reasons suggest I ought to do, and my actually acting. As Derrida has tellingly noted in this regard, there is always an abyss between contemplation, on the one hand, and concrete action, on the other. And so, although Abraham might have been able to cite a litany of reasons if asked why he did what he did, in the final calculus, there is a gap between what these reasons might have suggested needed to be done and his doing it. This ineradicable abyss between resolution and action is something the narrative of Abraham illustrates so well. This distance between deliberation and action corresponds to one between blasé justification and genuine

[13] 1983, p. 19.
[14] Kierkegaard 1983, p. 35.

responsibility. In ordinary life we enter into discourse with one another. We attempt to explain, justify, understand, persuade, and condemn both ourselves and one another. And yet, following Kierkegaard, Derrida notes that this ethical practice of giving and asking for reasons must necessarily take place at the level of *generality*. In so doing, it 'impels me to speak, to reply, to account for something and thus to dissolve my singularity in the medium of the concept'.[15] Yet, narrative self-conceptions—public, general, and ideal—fail to pick *me* out individually as the concrete subject I am. They rather remain ways of organizing one's mere social identity. By depending upon the generality of practical identity in the manner it does, self-narrative consequently dissolves one's singularity, appealing to the amalgamation of practical identities as available to everyone else as they are to me. The attempt to guide one's deliberation about how to respond to a pressing moral or ethical dilemma, when done merely in a narrative register, consequently entails that, in an important sense, it is no longer I myself who is make the decision, do the deliberation, or take the action. Instead, such narrative activity annuls responsibility, attributing it to an ideal type, a mere practical identity. Regardless of what one happens to choose to do in response to what a situations demands, then, any decision or action founded on narrative self-appraisal alone cannot justify—much less absolutely so—that one should have done this rather than that. For just as acting in light of a practical identity depends on everyday practices that in turn conceal my ontological subjectivity, so too will any narrative story I appeal to, since such stories already traffic in the very everyday dealings of practical identity that annul my ownmost self.

Hence, just as narrative self-understanding is sometimes unnecessary for genuine authenticity and responsibility, neither is it always sufficient. Once again, a famous literary example does well to illustrate the point. Consider Raskolnikov, the murderous protagonist of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. While contemplating whether he ought to murder the greedy pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanovna, Raskolnikov convinces himself that his motives are

[15] 1995, p. 60.

grounded in the fashionable Utilitarian logic of 1840's intelligentsia Russia.[16] His desire to murder, as he understands it, is inspired by a humanitarian concern for social justice. But upon committing the crime he slowly begins to realize that such thoughts were just a lofty, but misguided, ideological facade that disguised the true seed of his deed. In truth, his motive was simply an egoistic test of strength, a vainglorious desire to determine whether he is in fact an 'extraordinary' man.[17] The murder, originally conceived to have been a small but symbolic victory in the name of social justice, is thus recast as no more than an unseemly desire to determine whether he is immune to the pangs of moral conscience that he believes only afflicts 'ordinary' men. The intense self-consciousness that plagues him after the murder demonstrates the travails of an unruly egoism. And what fuels his egoism, in no small measure, is the narrative self-regard toward his life as a whole that he has crafted, a kind of self-conception according to which he considers himself to be a sort of proto- Nietzschean ubermensch. His intellectual hubris and willfulness are inspired by a cult of the great man, one typified by the achievements of Napoleon I and the aspirations of Napoleon III.[18] And this motif is one which captivated the imagination of nineteenth century revolutionaries and intellectuals. Raskolnikov, while talking to the detective Porfiry, embodies this cult all too well:

> Perhaps one in ten thousand is born with a broader independence (I'm speaking approximately, graphically). With a still broader independence—one in a hundred. Men of genius—one in millions; and great genius, the fulfillers of mankind—perhaps after the elapsing o many thousands of millions of people on earth. In short, I have not looked into the retort where all this takes place. But there certainly is and must be a definite law; it can be no accident.[19]

Their conversation about such questions is haunted by the spectre of his murder and the guilt that is slowly beginning to gnaw at him. And while Raskolnikov is no longer convinced that he is such a man, he surely still wishes that he were. The ubermensch self-regard is, to be sure, a counterfeit self-image. It turns on obsessive self-evaluation, one distinctly narrative in kind.

---

[16] Frank 2010.
[17] Frank 2010.
[18] Jones 2005, p. 12.
[19] Dostoevsky 1992.

So, far from inculcating an admirable self-honesty, humility, and compassion in him, Raskolnikov's narrative self-appraisal instead provokes self-deception, hubris, and callousness. As Dostoevsky's narrator notes, shortly after having committed the crime, Raskolnikov finds within himself 'a new and irresistible sensation of boundless, almost physical repulsion for everything around him […]. He loathed everyone he met'.[20] Though outside the ordinary, the dramatic events of Raskolnikov's fate do well to demonstrate that, even if one concedes that authenticity should involve the kind of intense moral self-evaluation and self-examination which narrative self-understanding sometimes supplies, it hardly can guarantee it. Narrative navel-gazing, as Dostoevsky demonstrates, is as prone to engender self-deceit as it is anything admirable.

At this point, a natural rejoinder on behalf of the narrativity thesis will be deployed. A critique of narrative, it might be said, or at least one like the above, seems to presuppose that whatever narrative structure life admits of is something that is somehow imposed upon life. One might therefore object: since life in fact on the contrary always evinces a degree of narrative structure, the practice of story-telling and form-finding involved in narrative self-understanding is not inherently falsifying. Narrative coherence, so the argument goes, isn't nearly the retrospective illusion that its detractors suggest. This is an important rejoinder on behalf of the narrative view, of course, because it is sometimes alleged that narrative coherence and structure require an established, recognizable form of literary genre. But because no particular life in all its richness ever can be adequately encompassed by such coarse distinctions, narrative would thus be inherently falsifying. In short, the idea that narrative unity turns solely and essentially upon an explicit articulation or schematization overlooks the experiential fact that lived experience always already exhibits a narrative structure. Much of life, it thus might be said, is already narratively structured even prior to any explicit narrative reflection one might subsequently engage in.

[20] Dostoevsky 1992, p. 87.

A recognition of this fact is hence directly relevant to the issue of self-deception. If life is after all inherently narrative in structure, then narrative cannot be intrinsically falsifying simply because of its form. The elimination of self-deception from one's own life, consequently, wouldn't require the abandonment of narrative. To the contrary, that a particular narrative falsifies one's life would simply demonstrate that what is required is a *better* narrative. I am happy to concede this to a large extent. The claim that narrative is naturally falsifying because it seeks to impose a structure that is actually absent in pre-reflective experience is false. Narrative can, in certain circumstances and to a certain degree, get things right.

Yet, I still think there is reason for reservations here. Recall that narrative coherence is not merely intended to apply to particular practical identities and projects within a life. It is, rather, also meant to be a thesis about how we can, and should, understand our lives when taken as a whole. And yet, as narrative theorists themselves admit, such a construal of one's life, taken as a whole, requires that we make sense of death—and what, if anything, comes after it. But unlike in the case of coffee-making, taxi driving, or being a good son, it doesn't seem as though we have any way of knowing what follows death. While there are experiential facts to determine whether I am mistaken, say, about what it means to be the sort of son I am, there don't seem to be any equivalent set of facts concerning my understanding of what mortality means. If the question of mortality, then, is central to the meaning of a life when taken as a whole, but we are left in the dark with respect to the ultimate nature of our mortality, how then can we adjudicate whether or not our stance toward such a mystery is self-deceiving? Put simply, what conceivable correctness conditions are available to evaluate whether the relationship we adopt toward our own impending deaths is self-deceived? How could narrative reconstruction, retrospection, or enactment shed any light on how I should, in the face of my mortality, accordingly lead my life?

And here, I think an account that acknowledges the value of narrative while admitting that it still leaves something to be desired is the best approach. Consider two characters of Voltaire's *Candide*: the novella's namesake and Dr. Pangloss. Pangloss, Candide's eternally optimistic tutor, maintains that this, despite what events might otherwise suggest, is indeed the best of all possible worlds. Even in the face of the countless calamities that befall Candide—conscripted into the army, shipwrecked, lashed, robbed, betrayed, tortured by the Inquisition, separated from his love—Pangloss considers each misfortune in terms of his beloved doctrine. He and Candide, in the best estimation of Pangloss, are the heroes, the characters, as it were, of a harmoniously ordered, divinely scripted odyssey. Certainly the degree of adversity that befalls Candide exceeds what most of us encounter in our own daily lives. But the relevance of how Candide reacts to events is nonetheless of genuine import. Whereas Pangloss substitutes grandiose self-narrative for sensitive, subtle, and authentic attunement to the texture of events as they in truth unfold, Candide lacks this narrative inclination so characteristic of his mentor and friend. Rather, he exists for the sake of the situation itself.

By not acting in light of what some narrative self-conception dictates ought to be done or how events ought to be understood, he is open to the situations that confront him in a way that Pangloss is not. All this, it seems to me, suggests that self-narrative is often unrelated—if not an outright hindrance—to authentic existence. The narrative life, epitomized by Pangloss, encourages the very opposite of what a life free of self-deception demands: that we take responsibility for our choices, beliefs, attitudes, and values in a way that pays heed to the fact that there is an ontological dimension of our selfhood which always remains irreducible to these characteristics.[21]

And thus, before we can decide whether the creation of a self-narrative is a worthwhile ethical endeavour, much less begin to weave one, we might pause and consider

[21] Fisher 2010, p. 634.

what it is to be a self in the first place. Doing so, I believe, discloses that living a life of genuine responsibility is something which precedes and escapes whatever the best intentioned, rigorous, and candid of self-narratives can hope to achieve. It is a task that involves not elaborate narrative, but simple inwardness. Indeed, in a prefiguring of how Dostoevsky's, Heidegger's, and Kierkegaard's analyses of sociality, self-narrative, and choice come to portray the good life, the weary but content Candide, having reflected upon what his voyage has taught him, strikes a similar chord. First and foremost, he says, 'we must cultivate our garden'.[22] Ah! And yet, sagacious as Candide's recommendation may well be, is it not regrettable that, too often, we assume that the words of another human being are offered in the genuine hope that they will occasion an understanding of this lesson?

Alas, typically, the opposite is the case. Practical identity is the realm of the world; the latter is the place in which, by giving and asking for reasons, others wish to exact a confession: an account of why I've done what I've done and, in turn, they think, an exhaustive impression of who I am. This is, for better or for worse, the way of the space of reasons. The world, after all, is a place of naming and categorizing; everything in it is already named. And yet, what holds for the world and its corresponding measure of intelligibility in no way holds true of subjectivity. The life of our subjectivity, indeed, obeys a rule different than the world. Here, Kierkegaard: 'Once you label me, you negate me'. Because the world demands what it does, content to eclipse subjectivity in the only light it knows, as though subjectivity casts no abiding shadow, it is no wonder that we wear our worldly masks as we do, forgetting the inwardness that indeclinably lies beneath practical identity.

Thankfully, such a slippage, stubborn as it may be, needn't be necessary. For surely the lilies in the field—ever silent, eternally free of toil—can remind and teach us to see this slippage for the confusion that it is. Although it is a hard saying, what they give us to understand is anything but inexplicable: 'Why do you worry about masks? Be like us. See how

[22] Voltaire 2003.

we grow. We do not labor or spin.' This lesson, of course, is one that the world elides and would gladly have us forget. Yet, the lilies do not care; it does not bother them that the world holds in such low esteem what they wish to teach us. Eager to fulfil their appointed task, they wait expectantly to instruct us.

Awaiting us, they whisper. To hear what they tell us of being human one needn't first attempt to justify oneself in their eyes. Nor need one debate the matter with them ad nauseam. Among them, one sees that such fuss—and its ultimate futility—is the trappings of the world. For out in the fields with the lilies there are no masks, no pretences. Indeed, in the end, to learn from them, all one must do is merely wish to listen.

References

Carr, D. (1991). *Time, History, and Narrative*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Crowell, S. (2004). 'Authentic historicality'. In D. Carr & C.-F. Cheung (Eds.), *Space, Time, and Culture*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Davenport, J. (2012). *Narrative identity, Autonomy, and Mortality: From Frankfurt and MacIntyre to Kierkegaard*. New York: Routledge.

Derrida, J. (1995). *The Gift of Death* (trans: Willis, D.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press
.

Dostoevsky, F. (1992). *Crime and Punishment*, trans: Pevear, R.,&Volokhonsky, L.). NewYork: Vintage Classics.

Fisher, T. (2010). 'Heidegger and the Narrativity Debate'. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 43, 241–265.

Frank, J. (2010). *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Guignon, C. (1993). 'Authenticity, Moral Values, and Psychotherapy'. In C. Guignon (Ed.*), Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1982). *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans: Hofstadter, A. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1993). 'What is Metaphysics?' In D. Krell (Ed.), Basic writings. New York: Harper & Row.

Jones, M. (2005). *Dostoevsky and the Dynamics of Religious Experience*. London: Anthem Press.

Kierkegaard, S. (1983). *Fear and Trembling*, trans: Hong, E., & Hong, H.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1980). 'Narrative Time'. In W. J. T. Mitchell (Ed.), *On Narrative* (pp. 69–190). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rudd, A. (2009).' In Defence of Narrative'. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 17, 60–75.

Rudd, A. (2013). *Self, Value, and Narrative: A Kierkegaardian Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sartre, J. (1956). *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay in Ontology,* trans: Barnes, H.). New York: Washington Square Press.

Strawson, G. (2004). 'Against narrativity'. *Ratio*, 16, 428–452.

Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the Self: The making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Voltaire. (2003). *Candide*, trans: Morley H. New York: Barnes & Nobles Books.

The Vanity of Authenticity

That something so obvious as the vanity of the world should be so little recognized that people find it odd and surprising to be told that it is foolish to seek greatness; that is most remarkable.
—Pascal

Among the many indelible contributions of Jean-Luc Marion's oeuvre, perhaps most noteworthy above all has been its revitalization and reconfiguration of contemporary phenomenology. If the last century's great phenomenological figures all posed the issues of selfhood and philosophical method in one of reciprocal exchange, then little wonder Marion has done the same. In *Reduction and Givenness*, for instance, we find phenomenology's previous failures to do subjectivity justice explained as the consequence of an antecedent allegiance to one dubious methodological commitment or other: just as Husserl ultimately conceals the 'things themselves' concerning the *I* due to his obsession with a science of consciousness, so Heidegger conceals the essence of *Dasein* with his obsession with Being. Marion's formulation of the phenomenological reduction, in its turn, thus attempts to succeed precisely where both Husserl's and Heidegger's own reductions failed. In short, because neither Husserl nor Heidegger characterizes subjectivity adequately, their shared inability to do so, Marion has reminded us, invites phenomenology to revisit the 'question of the subject' anew.

There are of course many different ways one might choose to explain and then exploit the immense breakthrough that Marion's work represents. There are two reasons that I shall choose to pursue the line of advance that an analysis of the phenomenon of vanity uniquely opens. First, it places Marion's version of the phenomenological reduction, the so-called 'erotic reduction', in the immediate historical and methodological context of Husserl's and Heidegger's own reductions that preceded it. But more importantly for us is perhaps a second: the blow of vanity underscores that authenticity is not nearly the crucial item that the Heidegger literature suggests it is.

Indeed, as I shall show, no current or even conceivable interpretation of authenticity, however novel, can withstand the challenge of vanity—much less propose a genuine solution to it in terms of *Dasein's* resoluteness. This inability reveals that authenticity is phenomenologically unsalvageable. The true issue of authenticity, then, is not simply a surface one of interpretation; for even if commentators finally do clarify what it precisely involves, the account they'll have reconstructed will anyway in principle be incapable of overcoming the blow of vanity.

As Michel Henry wrote in 1989 following the publication of Marion's *Reduction and Givenness*, '[Marion's principle "so much reduction, so much givenness"] does not merely provide phenomenology with a simple enrichment of developments already included in its historic presuppositions. By assigning to phenomenology previously unnoticed objectives, and greater ambitions, it leads phenomenology down new paths'.[1] Is this not, indeed, the very possibility that Marion's investigation of the reduction has seized? Has it not shown that the conditions for phenomenality, as well as the self who corresponds to them, must be reconsidered in light of the reduction's true power? Though the answer, of course, is a resounding 'yes' as any reader of Marion will know, I should like in what follows to examine in some detail how and why.

Bookkeeping preliminaries out of the way, let us turn to the question of the phenomenological reduction. Marion's credo 'so much reduction, so much givenness' enjoins us to see that each iteration of the reduction—first Husserl's, next Heidegger's, and finally Marion's own—unveils a correspondingly inward dimension of selfhood. But why does the reduction unfold in the tripartite procession it does, and in what exactly does the increasing deepening of self that results consist?

There is a strict reciprocal correlation between the mode of reduction, on the one hand, and the manner in which subjectivity is understood, on the other. For depending upon

[1] 2015, p. 20.

which of the reductions one prefers to deploy, the self will assume at least one of two corresponding personages. When initially reduced transcendentally (Husserl), I am revealed to be the constitutive, indeclinable source of intentional meaning; according to the logic that governs this correlation between reduction and transcendental consciousness, the fact that the entities of the world can show up as what they are, *to* or *for* a consciousness, is due to the 'pure consciousness' that underwrites and certifies their appearance. The transcendental reduction plumbs, and so illumes, the enabling condition of how experience is intentionally *of* something *as* something.[2] As Husserl says of our transcendental subjectivity in §39 of *Ideen I*:

> All the essential characteristics of experience and consciousness which we have reached are for us necessary steps towards the attainment of the end of which is unceasingly drawing on us, the discover, namely, of the essence of that '*pure*' consciousness which is to fix the limits of the phenomenological field.[3]

And yet, because this phenomenological investigation of selfhood is mobilized at the behest of explaining the conditions without which intentionality would be impossible, then although the transcendental reduction it deploys is valid within its own rights, it still for all that fails to deliver an exhaustive account of what inspired its inquiry to begin with. Its story about the origin and source of intentionality remains incomplete. For it illuminates part, but not all, of what makes possible a meaningful encounter with the world. As a consequence, it meets with failure and for at least one decisive reason. Because consciousness—and here it matters little whether one prefers to formulate it in its empirical, transcendental, or even psychoanalytic modes—is insufficient for intentional meaning, the correlation between the world and the consciousness to which it is given presupposes some other enabling condition. This further condition, whatever it proves to be, would explain where transcendental consciousness alone does not, why and how I stand open to the world in the manner that I do. Such a condition,

[2] There is a massive literature on Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and its investigation of the problem of intentionality. For the highlights, see Crowell (2001 and 2013), Drummond (2013), Sokolowski (1970 and 1999), Welton (2002), and Zahavi (1999; 2002; and 2008).
[3] 1962, p. 113.

when identified, would complete an account of how intentionality is possible.[4] To recover this missing link, the reduction is once again essential, and it is here where Heidegger comes in.

Here a second reduction, this one ontological, is deployed. If the a priori correlation between intentional act and object cannot alone explain what allows the meaning of the entities disclosed within it to be so disclosed, such a correlation remains a merely necessary albeit insufficient condition for intentional meaning. Some additional condition, one always operative though heretofore undiscovered by the phenomenological gaze, must be at work if the sense bestowed in first-person experience can be afforded as it is. Transcendental subjectivity, in short, is alone insufficient for intentional experience, because underlying this correlation between an intentional act and the world is a dimension of transcendence to my being beyond the ken of consciousness.[5]

But what transcendence exactly? As Heidegger explains, operative beneath the transcendence of our intentional acts lies another transcendence always already at play: 'being-in-the-world' (*In-der-Welt-sein*). When I perceive, imagine, wish, judge, remember, will, or act, I do so on only in virtue of my already being open to, and so immersed within, the world. An equilateral triangle, a Presidential executive order, a walk-off homerun in the bottom of the ninth, a Dutch still life hanging in the museum, or a promise to friend, these are all real things. However, they only reveal themselves in their reality—as the kinds of entities they are—due to my occupying the appropriate intentional stance toward them. To lie within the domain of my powers of negotiation or manipulation, in short, to be given for me to be able to do with them what I please, I must first occupy and deploy the appropriate intentional act. If,

[4] See again Crowell (2001 and 2013), Golob (2014), Haugeland (2013), and McManus (2014).

[5] For Heidegger's perhaps most lengthy and lucid discussions of how his own discovery of being-in-the-world was due essentially to a radicalization of the question of intentionality which Husserl's transcendental phenomenology had already opened, albeit only partially, see his 1925 *History of the Concept of Time* and 1927 *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. As he says there in 1925 with regard to the relation between his own question of Being and Husserl's question of intentionality, the two essentially make one: 'The task of bringing to light the Dasein's existential constitution leads first of all to the twofold task, intrinsically one, of *interpreting more radically the phenomenon of intentionality and transcendence*' (1982, p.162.) Heidegger's *seinsfrage*, therefore, is not the abandonment of the ambitions of Husserl's transcendental philosophy, but instead its corrective consummation.

however, I am to exercise the requisite intentional act that enables, say, thinking about a triangle in geometry class, or appreciating a Kandinsky at the National Gallery, or watching Obama's annual State of the Union Address on the television, I must already be situated within a meaningful context that allows me to do so—the world must have already taken possession of me. Things, that is, can only take possession of me if I know how to comport myself toward the entities that appear within the world that the transcendence of intentionality opens, but I am able to exercise one of its comportments only insofar as my being is such that, in it, that very being is itself at issue. To deploy an intentional act then, I must, in short, be the kind of being whose mode of being is 'being-in-the-world'. To traffic among entities as I do, I must already be open to the world. I must, thus, be *Dasein*.

Heidegger's ontological reduction, following on Husserl's initial reduction, consequently opens the horizon of being-in-the-world. And, as anyone who reads *Sein und Zeit* is sure to know, Heidegger does not simply identify the indispensable role that being-in-the-world contributes without which intentionality would remain impossible. More importantly, he also characterizes the very status of it. Being-in-the-world, we are told, is fundamentally anxiety.[6] He writes, 'That in the face of which one has anxiety is Being-in-the-world as such';[7] 'That which anxiety is anxious about is Being-in-the-world itself';[8] 'Thus the entire phenomenon of anxiety shows Dasein as factically existing Being-in-the world'. *Dasein* thus knows anxiety because anxiety is its fundamental attunement; as Marion himself comments, 'through the ontic determination of anxiety, *Dasein* reaches its ontological determination; its transcendence with regard to being is accomplished only through radical ontic indetermination (the nothing); only thus can it be determined in its Being'.[9] It is due to *Angst* that *Dasein* occupies the status of a being whose mode of being is concern over the question

[6] 1962, p. 230. I shall henceforth abbreviate *Being and Time* as *SZ* (references are to the standard Macquerrie and Robinson translation).
[7] *SZ* 187.
[8] *SZ* 193.
[9] Marion 1998, p. 101.

of not only its own being but also the meaning of Being in general: only anxious beings such as ourselves could pose the *seinsfrage*.

For Heidegger, anxiety dethrones everything but fundamental ontology as the self's highest possibility.[10] Not only, then, does fundamental ontology withstand 'world-collapse' induced anxiety; it is in that very collapse, in the face of anxiety's uncanniness, that we are said to find ourselves at last uniquely poised to take up fundamental ontology as a possibility of our being. As Heidegger writes, 'The analytic of Dasein, which is proceeding towards the phenomenon of care, is to prepare the way for the problematic of fundamental ontology—the question of the meaning of Being in general'.[11] And it is anxiety that supplies the gateway, for only in anxiety does fundamental ontology rise into view as a possibility for us. As Heidegger himself asserts, if I am to find myself positioned to conduct fundamental ontology, I must first somehow confront the ontological dimension of self that explains why, in my being, I am the sort of being whose 'being-questionable' (*fraglichsein*) invites the kind of investigation fundamental ontology deploys. And it is this dimension of ontological subjectivity, my 'being-questionable', that comes into view when, and only when, I am assailed by anxiety. According to the Heideggerian philosophy, then, anxiety is a privileged attunement that temporarily silences the claim of everyday possibilities of life in such a way that the alternative possibility of fundamental ontology rises into salience. As Marion has said of anxiety's ontological accomplishment: 'Anxiety thus carries out a phenomenological reduction

[10] I am convinced that Heidegger considers philosophizing over the question of the meaning of being to be *Dasein*'s highest possibility. After all, he says that we have a pre-ontological understanding of the meaning of being, so explicitly philosophically questioning the meaning of that very being would seem to be the consummation of one's being. Philosophy as fundamental ontology, on this view, is therefore itself the explicit formalization of *Dasein's* own pre-philosophical mode of being. As Heidegger himself says: 'the question of Being is nothing other than the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself—the pre-ontological understanding of Being" (*SZ* 35).To philosophize, for Heidegger, I would say, is thus the 'ownmost' way to put one's being into question. However, some commentators disagree: fundamental ontology, they say, is not the only—or even simply the preferred—possibility for an authentic life. Though I think that is mistaken (why bother writing *Being and Time* if it were true?), I am happy to concede for argument's sake that Heidegger thought authenticity is merely a way of appropriating possibilities that does not entail engaging in ontology is one's 'ownmost' authentic possibility. However, as we will see, vanity annuls authenticity all the same irrespectively of whether or not one privileges fundamental ontology as something special.

[11] *SZ* 183.

by leading being in its totality back toward Being'.[12] Not only does it retain its exigency under anxiety's attack, fundamental ontology rises into presence as something worthwhile to do precisely in anxiety. For it is in anxiety that I not only learn what it means to be the kind of being that I am, but that I am the kind of being who can (and should) explicitly question the meaning of his being by doing fundamental ontology. Though for Heidegger much about everyday life is banal or trivial or superficial (the stuff of 'idle talk'), anxiety reveals that fundamental ontology is a privileged exception.

And yet, while *Dasein* is intimately acquainted with anxiety and hence the horizon of the meaning of Being, it does not know vanity. The true significance of Marion's own reduction, the third in our review, is as we shall that it shows *Dasein* is unable to adequately undergo—much less survive—the blow vanity delivers to existence.

In contrast to anxiety, vanity knows no bounds. It privileges nothing by disqualifying everything. Nothing escapes its reaches because, without exception, it rescinds the exigency of every worldly claim, including even the solicitation of fundamental ontology itself. A radical disinterest cuts to the heart of the world and beings. In reply to vanity's question—as Marion puts it, 'What's the use?'—the 'Who' of the *seinsfrage* is therefore left speechless.[13] A closer consideration of anxiety reveals why. Whereas anxiety supplies those who resolve to be authentic an exigency to abandon the banality of everydayness to instead openly question the meaning of their being in fundamental ontology, vanity pulls the rug from under every question's feet. When vanity strikes, it renders me radically disinterested in beings or the horizon of the meaning of Being. Vanity, indeed, delivers a blow so all-encompassing that

---

[12] 1998, p. 73.

[13] The 'Who' here, of course, is *Dasein*, the being which *Being and Time* characterizes as the being uniquely capable of posing the question of the meaning of Being in general. For Heidegger, *Dasein* is the being in whom that being is at issue—in short, *Dasein* is the being who, even prior to explicit philosophical reflection, is already working out the question of the meaning of its own being—and the meaning of Being itself in general. Philosophy, when done in the form of fundamental ontology, is therefore itself the explicit formalization of *Dasein's* own pre-philosophical mode of being. As Heidegger himself says: 'the question of Being is nothing other than the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself—the pre-ontological understanding of Being' (*SZ* 35).

even fundamental ontology, *Dasein's* 'ownmost' possibility, is rendered just as uninteresting as anything else. No worldly possibility's claim, even the claim that fundamental ontology would issue, survives vanity's cold gaze. Says Marion: 'Vanity thus disqualifies every certainty, whether it bears upon the world or upon myself […] Nothing resists vanity, since it can still skirt and annul all evidence, all certainty, all resistance'.[14]

Vanity hence disrupts the logic of the existential analytic by rendering the very goal of that logic—an understanding of the meaning of Being—a matter of complete indifference to me. It is silenced, meaningless. The existential analytic's own ineluctably nihilistic presuppositions, we shall see, entail so—just as vanity confirms. Indeed, as we shall see, far from the existential analytic showing that the question of the meaning of Being is the question most proper to the self, it actually shows that there is no point in asking any question, the *seinsfrage* included, but one when vanity strikes. I will introduce what Marion has shown that one question is at the appropriate time, but for now, let us simply consider the mercilessness of vanity. If *Dasein*, as Heidegger says, is the being who questions, then vanity, by highlighting the futility of worldly existence, reveals the uselessness of this very questioning. The recognition of fundamental ontology's uselessness—and hence anything within the power of authenticity as well—in turn motivates the need for a reduction beyond Heidegger's ontological reduction. And it is precisely this need that Marion's own erotic reduction will meet.

First, though, the existential analytic: on ontology's preferred logic, whether it realizes so or not, nothing in fact really matters, neither the meaning of my own individual existence nor the corresponding possibility of engaging in fundamental ontology that attends it. At least three experiential facts verify this conclusion were anyone to dispute it.

First fact: worldly practical identities in the last analysis lack any absolute purchase upon my subjectivity. Do they orient, guide, and to a considerable extent vouchsafe my

[14] 2003, p. 19.

identity? To be sure, they do to a degree, yet ultimately they don't completely. For something about my subjectivity always escapes the milieu of worldly projects and their attendant form of self-understanding. The exigency that existential projects, instrumentalities, and tasks typically exert over me only do so because they presuppose my *trying* to take them up.

Thus I am, as Sartre would remind us, the things that I am in the mode of my *not* being them. For regardless of whatever endeavor I press into, something about my subjectivity remains essentially unchanged—the dimension of transcendental *trying* that all my worldly possibilities presuppose but none explains. It was Sartre after all, following Heidegger, who did well to note that it is within the context of the world and its practical identities that we initially orient ourselves and hence derive a sense of what it means to be what we are. As he observes in *Being and Nothingness*, 'in the quasi-generality of every day acts, I am engaged, I have ventured, and I discover my possibilities by realizing them and in the very act of realizing them as exigencies, urgencies, instrumentalities'.[15] And yet, Sartre is quick also to note that although these possibilities supply us a modicum of self-understanding, they entail an inescapable form of self-alienation. For to the extent that I am indeed something due to what I do within the milieu of practical identity, I am, Sartre reminds us, what I am simply in the mode of *playing* at being it. Everyone will remember the famous description of Pierre the café waiter he uses to illustrate the point: 'Let us consider this waiter in the café […] All his behaviour seems to us a game […] He is playing, he is amusing himself. But what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing *at being* a waiter in a café […] [He is] a waiter in the mode of *being what [he is] not*'.[16] Sartre of course was hardly the first to realize that pressing into worldly practical identities involves us in the contradictory condition of failing to be what we are.

[15] 1956, p. 60.
[16] 1956, p. 82-3.

Similarly, recall Kierkegaard's memorable appraisal of the illusory spectacle of the world and the collective self-deception that sustains it: 'Consider for a moment the world which lies before you in all its variegated multiplicity; it is like looking at a play, only the plot is vastly more complicated. Every individual in this innumerable throng is by his differences a particular something; he exhibits a definiteness but essentially he is something other than this—but this we do not get to see here in life. Here we see only what role the individual plays and how he does it. It is like a play'.[17] If for Sartre existence is like a play because 'we can be nothing without playing at being it', this will always remain so, since, as he claims, 'The *for-itself* is the being which determines itself to exist inasmuch as it cannot coincide with itself'.[18] The very structure of subjectivity itself, according to Sartre, entails alienation. For Sartre then, unlike Kierkegaard, there only exists the world we know in the everyday roles and possibilities handed down to us by tradition. Hence, we are doomed to an alienated and fractured existence, a masquerade ball in which, behind the masks we wear while we play at doing whatever it is that we do upon the world's stage, lies a nothingness. Thus, when the self is characterized exclusively in terms of its place within the world, as in Sartre's philosophy, there is no way I can ever truly be myself. For when I act, I am in the first instance revealed to myself in the exteriority of the role I take up and press into, but it is precisely in my taking up that very role that I fail to coincide with who I am. Thus, when my trying to be something is accomplished in the mode of a worldly practical identity, instrumentality, or possibility, I accordingly cease to be myself. As Marion has explained it, my doings in the world, restricted as they are to mere practical exigencies, *obey a principle of non-identity*: 'The supposed *ego* manifests itself by demonstrating the contradiction in it of its equality to itself. From the beginning A is *not* A; I am not *myself*'.[19] For Sartre, then, in the last analysis we are all condemned to a fate of indefinition and incompletion since to be the kinds of beings that we

[17] 2009, p. 95.
[18] 1956, p. 102.
[19] 2012, p. 65.

are is to be what we are only in the mode of not being it.[20] Confined to the ek-stasis of the world, I am never myself. When vanity strikes, the world is rendered a matter of indifference to me. And little wonder why: if, as Sartre says, the world is nothing but a place to play a role, then it is precisely in vanity that I experience the meaningless of the performance. Divested of all desire to *try*, I no longer wish to *play*.

From whence the second fact follows: the logic of non-identity between practical identity and my subjectivity, when fully appreciated, only exacerbates ontology's tacit nihilism by deepening the origin of the nihilism's source. For in reply to the question of whether there is any ultimate fact about what I am or what I should do, the answer, from a strictly ontological perspective, is once again 'no'. On ontology's view, after all, I am a *nullity*—nothing but pure projection. In anxiety then I am not only plucked from the shallows of everyday practical identity or simply temporarily deprived of my public personas. The stakes are deeper and more complete: when rendered bereft of any public mask, anxiety reveals that there is no substance to my subjectivity beneath the guises to which I deploy it in everydayness. Indeed, from this strictly ontological perspective, underneath the milieu of practical identity I am in truth nothing but an abyssal anxiety anyway: a sheer nothingness beneath whatever I play at being. Without any identity aside from the everyday roles that I play at, I am like a fish out of water when plucked from the milieu of practical endeavors. In Sartre's unforgettable formulation: 'We can be nothing without playing at being it'.[21] Hence, when anxiety assails me, there remains nothing to play at and hence I accordingly suffocate.

Heidegger's own strictly ontological portrayal of subjectivity, then, obliges us to admit a third and additional fact even if Heidegger himself doesn't: from the perspective of the existential analytic, there is no answer to the question about who one is, because one is really nothing at all anyway. As Heidegger himself declares in *Sein und Zeit*, '*Care itself, in its very*

[20] 1956, p. 21.
[21] 2003, p. 123.

essence, is permeated with nullity through and through'.[22] It will do no good to deny the objection that Heidegger's philosophy leads to nihilism by claiming that the sense of 'nullity' relevant to the care-structure is a technical term of art different than the 'nothingness' of café existentialism. As the nullity of care is due to the ek-static transcendence of *Dasein's* temporality, so this transcendence entails an irrevocable non-coincidence between me and myself. The transcendence defining *Dasein* entails nihilism, then, since there is no way for me to be bring myself into equilibrium with myself. As *Dasein*, I project myself into a future that is in principle irreal, since even when I realize myself in a possibility, the self that is there to greet me is just as virtual as the very self who projected itself in the first place. This is why, even in the latest periods of Heidegger's philosophy, when he attempts to think 'Beyng' independently of all beings, the self who thinks is ultimately alienated from itself. When the self is exteriorized, as is the case in Heidegger's thought, there is no home for us. Only uncanniness awaits the self that exhausts itself in the openness of the ek-static horizon of the world's temporality.

The existential analytic cannot supply me a final measure due to a fact that is as straightforward as it is experientially incontestable: *vanity reveals a remainder of the radical immanence of life itself that is not a matter of the world's transcendence*. By immanence, we are simply following Henry's usage of the term, which denotes the identification between the one experiencing and that which it experiences. Unlike in the case of the transcendence of intentionality, in which there exists a distinction between that which appears and the one to whom it appears, in immanence, there is a full coincidence between that which I endure and the one who endures it, for the trial at issue is simply the immediacy of the pure affectivity of whatever it is I feel: sadness, joy, suffering, anxiety, hatred, love, etc. As Henry explains in the context of a lengthy analysis of Husserl in *Material Phenomenology*, the self-givenness of life 'is structurally different' from intentionality since it 'is not outside of itself but in itself, not

[22] *SZ* 331.

transcendence,' but the radical immanence of transcendental affectivity (2008, p.81). As he says in the preceding pages of this same text, the self-givenness of transcendental affectivity excludes all transcendence because 'givenness and what is given are the same; it is a self-givennes in an original sense,' since, here at stake is the pure experiencing of one's own experiencing self.[23] For although *Dasein* might phenomenalize itself in the form of the world's exteriority, *I* am not always revealed to myself that way. Vanity, as Marion explained, shows that there is an essential remainder to my existence that escapes the horizon of the world and all that appears within it. Vanity therefore neutralizes the Heideggerian assertion, so frequently repeated, that resoluteness is the 'truth of existence'. When Heidegger characterizes resoluteness—'the choosing to choose a kind of *being-one's-Self* which, in accordance with its existential structure'—as my 'ownmost' possibility, he distorts the very essence of the self by portraying it as a matter of transcendence. This notion of self, far from identifying the truth of my existence, totally ignores its ineradicable interiority, and thus in fact identifies a *virtual* self, a transcendental illusion deployed within the delimitations of the world's ek-stasis that only leaves us estranged from ourselves.

If there is nothing that I should specifically do with my life on the ontological understanding, this is so because the fundamental predicament of the self, *when circumscribed within the world*, is one of homelessness. Heidegger himself acknowledges the fact: 'From an existential-ontological point of view, the "not at home" must be conceived as the more primordial phenomenon'.[24] However, this is where the ontological reading quits. It does not investigate what ultimately explains this homelessness much less how we might overcome it. It concludes that uncanniness is the final horizon of existence without ever suspecting that vanity lurks beneath *Dasein's* anxiety. We therefore must move beyond Heidegger's account of the self as care, and it is here that we can turn to Marion to do so.

---

[23] 2008, p.51.
[24] *SZ* 189.

The first step is to pose a question that the existential analytic does not formulate because it necessarily remains blind to it: does not the experiential fact that I am not at home *in* the world suggest at least the possibility that my home might accordingly lie elsewhere? It is a phenomenological hypothesis at least worth testing rather than hastily dismissing.[25] After all, from the fact that the *ontological* structure of my self does not supply a *telos*, it by no means follows that something else could not provide me a genuine measure. Without further argument, then, the ontological position which claims that I *necessarily* lack an end is invalid because it begs the question. For it stipulates that there is no such end only because it assumes, without ever establishing, that the horizon of the word delimits the bounds of my subjectivity. But to the extent that an ontological portrayal of subjectivity ignores the possibility that the self might indeed have a final end and measure, the above ontological characterization of selfhood fails to live up to its transcendental billing. It presents as necessary what is in fact open to immediate doubt.

Where then would things accordingly stand, supposing this ontological characterization of self were true? What is the consequence of consigning the self to the horizon of the world? On such a view, existence is really a matter of 'just gaming'. I can play at being this or that, or doing this or that, or trying this or that, or caring about this or that, but it is a ruse. Doing so, vanity reveals, is simply a repressive strategy, a form of diversion, meant to conceal a disquieting truth about myself from myself: if my openness unto the world is explained in virtue of my existence being at issue for me, and if the final end of my existence is strictly world-bound, then everything is futile. Condemned to the realm of worldly practical identity, my ontological understanding of being is little more than an enabling condition to join the senseless masquerade of everyday life. It is a masquerade because the sphere of practical endeavors resigns me to an inescapable alienating non-identity,

[25] This is a venerable hypothesis, one Augustine, Aquinas, Pascal, and Kierkegaard, to name just a few, have all in a way deployed.

as no worldly possibility ever allows me to equal myself. Regardless of whatever I choose to do, I am always *not* myself.

An important consequence follows from this strictly ontological conception of subjectivity. From the exclusively ontological viewpoint, there is no satisfactory answer to the question about who I am, because I am in a final sense really nothing at all anyway. One's openness unto the world, for Heidegger, is explained in virtue of one's existence *being at issue for itself*, but because one may only negotiate the enigma of what it means to be who one is within a purely worldly set of stakes, one's being proves to be little more than an enabling condition for Being to deploy its own playhouse (*Spielraum*).[26] For whatever Being might

[26] A (relatively) brief comment regarding the thorny thicket of Gnosticism is in order. Henry is often accused of having tendered a conception of self that is (whether he would admit so or not) gnostic. The impression is only exacerbated by two key aspects of that account. First, Henry is undeniably and harshly critical of what he calls the 'world', since, for him, it is a place whose way of doing things negates God. Second, his view of the flesh involves a view of embodiment that might appear to cast aspersions on the body, when the body is understood in its traditional sense as a material, organic entity. However, I ultimately think it would be a mistake to accuse Henry of Gnosticism—at least for either of these two reasons.

As I understand the issue, for the saints of the first two centuries especially, Gnosticism was worthy of refutation because it alleged that human nature was dual—there was a principle of good (residing in our immaterial Spirit) and another of evil (dwelling in our material body). However, Henry does not claim, on my reading of him at least, anything which in that respect is the least gnostic; he does not, that is to say, contend that the materiality of the body is evil or morally corrupt per se. I by no means intend to follow the Gnostics either. By claiming that the world is an illusion in the respect I have explained (see pp. 8-17), I do not mean to suggest that our body understood as an organic entity is evil.

Following Henry, I simply mean to emphasize that the genuine site of reality is our God-relationship, which takes place within a living subjectivity that itself is not to be understood as a material or biological process. And yet, saying all this is not to imply with the Gnostics that materiality is the bearer of evil. On the contrary, far from this being a criticism of embodiment, it accords with the Scriptural teaching that Christ was made flesh. Indeed, the genuine Gnostic position is one according to which we are said to have inherited a 'fallen' nature that affects our natural ability to obey God—typically, following most notably Augustine in the fourth century and the Reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this idea is formulated in the doctrine of original sin, which claims that the source of this supposed inborn depravity and corruption resides in the flesh. That was not what the earliest saints taught, however. Instead, they taught man's 'natural ability'—the doctrine of an evil or otherwise depraved flesh was, to them, the Gnostic position.

This is what, for instance, the Apostle John in his First Epistle contended against the Gnostics, where he repeatedly makes a point of insisting that Christ came in the flesh. In short, the pure apostolic teaching was that the body (understood as a material entity) is corruptible insofar as it is *subject to physical decay and death*. Death is the curse of the Fall. The teaching was *not* that the body itself was in any way the origin or bearer or principle of some inbred site of evil rendering us with a limited ability to obey God's commands. The flesh, in short, was never thought to be a *sinful* principle or entity.

Thus, in locating with Henry the site of divine revelation in the inwardness of subjectivity, I do not mean to conclude with the Gnostics that the *flesh* is inherently corrupt or evil; I am simply affirming, along with the Scriptures, that the world in its present condition lies in darkness due to the corrupting presence of sin in it. It accordingly seems to me that the devaluation of the body is not so much present in Henry as it is elsewhere in theologies that, following Augustine who was himself for a time a Manichean, claim that the body is born vile or prone to evil.

supply, it does not supply any final point to my existence or any assurance. In the world there is no true destiny, no genuine end, to which my subjectivity is mobilized, and so my trying is thus just a blind striving. Plunged into the anonymity of transcendence, and thus set on a path that leads to nowhere, *Dasein's* existence can only traverse a path that leads to existential incompletion. Inasmuch as my ultimate fate is a death that shall annul all purpose and any hope of existential fulfilment, my end—*insofar as I am Dasein*—is no destiny at all. Thus, when it is strictly a question of *Dasein*, existence is ultimately senseless as the world has come from nowhere, is headed nowhere, and for no reason at all.

There is however always an alternative working hypothesis available to us even if ontology ignores it: far from demonstrating the inescapability of nihilism, does not the ontological understanding of self merely disconfirm its own presupposition that the self has no genuine place? What if it merely demonstrates the reality (or at the least the *possibility*) of a place besides the exteriority of the world? What if, though I am certainly a being for whom my being is at stake, this experiential fact only indicates the reality of some deeper truth about me, one that a strictly ontological inquiry elides? This is precisely the hypothesis that Marion himself invites us to test, and it is the one that *Reduction and Givenness* has confirmed:

> Is the putting into play of the self by itself that characterizes the *I* devoted only to Being? Or indeed, in the *I* that I undoubtedly am, is not something also, or even first, at stake other than to be? Is what it put into play in, through, and in spite of the *I*

Still, it bears emphasizing that none of this admittedly resolves the issue concerning Henry's potentially 'over-realized' eschatology. It is true that Henry's phenomenology of life insists that we can have a radically unmediated access to the rapturous presence of God in us. In that respect, it would seem to cut against the traditional teaching that in some respect, in this life at least, we see God through a glass darkly, as we await the final redemption of our bodies and the saving of our souls. At the same time, it is equally true that the Scriptures themselves are replete with indications that the Kingdom can indeed be present here and now to us, since, as Christ himself says, to know Him *is* the resurrection of eternal life (John 11:25), and moreover that the Kingdom of God is *within* us (Luke 17:21). Without deciding the question of how it may be possible to reconcile Henry's conception of a-cosmic Life with the issue of the redemption of the body, I will simply say that, in my own estimation at least, it is possible for God to be present to us in the way Henry claimes (in the interiority of absolute subjectivity's flesh) and yet maintain that final redemption of the body and the world will in some sense further radicalize the way in which this is so; not only will the Kingdom of God be present within us as it is now, for its glory will be made visibly manifest when the corrupting stain of sin is removed from Creation. This is precisely why, I take it, the Scriptures teach that we are the 'firstfruits' of what is in fact a cosmic redemption having begun with us; for the glory that is currently *in* us, will, as Paul says, be brought into the light of the world when the world is finally redeemed from the power of sin's darkness.

> exhausted necessarily, indisputably, and exclusively in terms of Being? Is it Being that is first at issue in the *I*, or, beyond that, is a more original stake at play?[27]

The question that Marion invites us to ask is simply this: is there a third phenomenological reduction which, once deployed, demonstrates that I do indeed have a bona fide place? We know that such a place is not within the world (that is a place of fundamental uncanniness and alienation), but is there a place besides the world's nexus of objects and instrumentalities in which I could reside?

Immediately, the natural attitude will say no. The self of the natural attitude, after all, is the ordinary *ego* of the world, who nourishes itself upon a naïveté that confirms its interests. By refusing to acknowledge a vanity for which it would have no rejoinder, the natural *ego* puts it out of its mind, diverting itself with the instrumentalities of daily life. This way of life is as common as it is, thus, because it obeys a self-serving strategy. Better to ignore vanity, it secretly concludes, than admit that its own form of life has no good reply to vanity, precisely because its own life is in point of fact a glaring instance of it.

An assessment of Husserl's and Heidegger's reductions shows so. The transcendental reduction's question—'What enables intentionality?'—and the ontological reduction's corollary question—'What is the meaning of beings and Being?'—equally overlook vanity's question. For in the end vanity's own question—as Marion puts it, 'What's the use?'—disables the point of investigating either of the other two. Indeed, *what's the use* in investigating the conditions of possibility without which intentionality would be impossible? I might usually believe that such a question is interesting in its own right, but when I'm of that opinion, I'm simply just allowing my curiosity to kid myself. At stake in my being the self that I am is something that demands more than anything the facts of intellectual curiosity can supply, so transcendental phenomenology's question concerning the conditions on the possibility of intentionality is a matter of indifference to me. It concerns objects, and that is it. The same

[27] 1998, p. 107.

indifference applies just as much when it is a question of existential phenomenology's fundamental ontology. For *what's the use* in pondering the meaning of Being when such a question in the last analysis merely reveals that nothing I do with my life really matters anyway? Subjecting myself to an ontological self-investigation is just as pointless an exercise as pressing headlong into the everyday dealings that typically busy me. Just as nothing is absolutely at stake in busying myself with everydayness, so the *seinsfrage* is empty too. Such an inquiry, in truth, is thus a diversion deployed to keep vanity at bay. It sometimes keeps me busy, but that is it. Husserl's epistemic reduction concerns objects—along with the world horizon in which they appear and the transcendental consciousness that constitutes them—and Heidegger's reduction unveils the question of the meaning of Being. But what, in the end, do *I* have to do with either objects or the Being they respectively reveal? The answer, as vanity attests, is definitive: nothing essentially, since the certainty they sometimes supply, or the curiosity they ordinarily provoke, can always just as easily be rendered a matter of pure indifference to me.

First transcendentally and next ontologically, I am assigned locations—the horizon of the world and the transcendence of Being—neither of which withstands the blow of vanity since, as Marion says, the reductions that open them concern 'objects, which relate to me precisely as not being me, and not being like me'.[28] How then is one to salvage, much less mobilize, genuine meaning in the face of existence's apparent vacuity? We at least now know this: certainly not by means of the transcendental or ontological reductions. Because they fail to open a horizon that assures me that life is truly worth living, the transcendental and ontological reductions, as Marion helps us to see, deploy questions that don't in the end matter to *me*.

Heidegger's commentators will no doubt be happy to concede that Marion's line of argument is conclusive against the transcendental reduction, but they will deny that it similarly

[28] 2003, p. 13.

disqualifies the ontological reduction. For even though vanity disqualifies the use of leading a merely inauthentic existence, is there not still a point to living a resolute one? Were one of this opinion, one will insist that being-in-the-world has the resources to explain how and why the self's highest measure is an authentic existence after all. And yet, a further look at Marion's analysis of vanity refutes this rejoinder of ontology's: in point of fact, authentic resoluteness is just as vapid as the inauthentic life it repudiates.

Recall Heidegger's portrayal of authentic *Dasein*. By the time in *Sein und Zeit* that Heidegger introduces authenticity, he has shown that the un-concealment of entities that occurs in intentional experience is co-extensive with *Dasein's* own self-disclosure; *Dasein* typically understands the meaning of its own being in terms of what it takes care of and pursues. In everydayness, self-understanding is negotiated strictly in terms of beings, but this self-understanding is only possible because entities at least *matter* to us in some way. Thus, were beings for whatever reason to *quit mattering* to us, our corresponding ability to understand ourselves in the mode we ordinarily do would be disabled. Were there a condition in which *nothing any longer mattered*, such an experience would destroy one's own typical *self*-understanding. It is a disabling conditioning approaching this that we saw Heidegger identify in *Angst*.

Because anxiety is the attunement most essential to being-in-the-world, when it explicitly surfaces as it does in the existential breakdown of 'world-collapse', I am brought before the unvarnished truth at stake in the enigma of my existence. When disengaged from the hold, sway, and exigency of *das Man*, anxiety reduces me to a 'world-hungry' subjectivity, something little more than a 'project-less projecting'. Authenticity then, as the story is usually told, is a re-appropriation of the 'everyday' possibilities comprising the world's social roles, practical identities, norms, customs, practices, and taboos in light of the radical individuation that a confrontation with one's underlying anxiety affords. Authenticity thus, it is repeatedly

said, involves seizing upon everyday possibilities in a way that, because they are no longer *das Man's*, they cease to be everyone's and no one's. Instead, they are appropriated as *mine*.

On the Heideggerian view, there is allegedly a crucial difference between existential possibilities that matter and those that don't; and here, what differentiates the two is whether they are seized upon authentically or not. Those possibilities seized authentically matter, and those seized inauthenitcally do not (or at least not as seriously as they can or should). In this way, commentators frame the distinction between inauthenticity and authenticity as one in terms of *conformism*: whether I succeed at being an authentic self, the commentators say, is a matter of whether I reject the lure of conformism. Despite the subtle distinctions they draw and the details they dispute, commentators thus maintain a view of what it means to live up to being a self that exhibits the same essential form: one's typical way of existing, we are told, involves seizing possibilities in an 'un-owned' way, a pattern of behavior which anxiety disrupts by revealing the conformist nature of doing so, which for its own part in turn allows one to escape conformism by instead seizing upon them authentically. Authenticity, consequently, amounts to little more than the decision to seize upon the normative sphere of practical identity in a way otherwise than the banality of conformism. For in resoluteness unlike in inauthentic everydayness, possibilities are appropriated as *mine* rather than anyone's and hence no one's.

This view of authenticity is open to devastating objection, and Marion's presentation of the phenomenon of vanity shows why. For are we not in effect being counselled to plunge headlong back into the world despite the banality that inescapably attends doing so? Heidegger's commentators themselves admit it, but strangely they counsel us to do so nevertheless. We read such advice time and again. The representative passages are everywhere: 'It is incumbent upon us, as the kind of entity that we each are, to let the world make claims

on us';[29] this is necessary, it is said, because according to the existential analytic there is no place besides that which the world delimits: 'A life lived with this greater flexibility is inflected by authenticity, though still lived within the everyday. One must return authentically to the everyday, for there is nowhere else to live';[30] far than from anxiety revealing any stakes besides those governing the banality of everydayness, we are told that all one can do in resoluteness is return to everydayness since 'Dasein does not extricate itself from the shared, cultural background';[31] so consequently, 'the most stable self—the one that is most independent or autonomous—is the self that is a consistent, stable, and coherent integration of thrownness and projection'.[32] The advice is clear: inasmuch as authenticity determines what is ultimately at stake in the enigma of what it means to be a self and these stakes themselves are negotiated strictly within the exteriority of the world, it follows that my true self, as well as its highest calling, remains consigned to *the world*. The truth of self, the commentators insist, is thus identical to the world's truth. Nothing essential about subjectivity exceeds the horizon of the worldly confines in which *Dasein* deploys its instrumental abilities-to-be: I am being-in-the-world. As Heidegger himself emphasizes, '*authentic* existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon'.[33]

However, an indisputable fact reveals the incoherence of resoluteness even if the conformist interpretation of authenticity fails to recognize it: if anxiety momentarily disorients our conformist selves by rendering everydayness uncanny, so vanity unveils an even comparatively deeper malaise, one disqualifying the very use of even anticipatory resoluteness itself. When I endure vanity, being resolute matters just as little as the pressures of conformism do to me when I have experienced the clarity of anxiety. A phenomenological

[29] Wilthy 2015, p. 33.
[30] Blattner 2015, p. 131.
[31] Dandelet and Dreyfus 2015, p. 189.
[32] Wrathall 2015, p. 213.
[33] *SZ* 179.

rule of manifestation concerning the a priori relationship between call and response proves so.

The world manifests itself in the form of the call that accomplishes it, so the world, as Marion observes, is just as subject to its own claim being disqualified as the particular claims within it. Not only is the exigency of specific projects subject to annulment; the annulment can be total and global when, as in vanity, the *world itself* is rendered completely indifferent to us. As Marion has reminded us in regard to the phenomenon of boredom—itself a symptom of existence's vanity—this is precisely what occurs:

> Boredom suspends the claim that Being exerts over *Dasein*. In other words, if *Dasein* is defined as *Dasein* by its openness to (and by the fact of) Being, and therefore because it 'stands ecstatically into the truth of Being', if boredom provokes the desertion of the *I* in opposition to all that is precisely because it hates all that is, one must therefore conclude first that the *I* can elude the destiny of *Dasein*, and next that it can suspend every claim, hence also and above all that of Being.[34]

This entails two crucial, interlocking consequences. First, profound boredom demonstrates that there would be no possible escape from vanity's clutches were the self strictly and exhaustively a matter of being-in-the-world. Second, this boredom attests that the self can be delivered over to itself completely independently of any worldly stakes. In profound boredom—what Pascal called the 'boredom of the depths'—my being ceases to be at stake for me; hence, I am delivered from the horizon of the world. Consequently, I am irreducible to *Dasein*. *Dasein* is the being in whom its being is at issue, yet boredom is a mood in which this *very being ceases to be at stake*. However, *I am still there in boredom* despite the fact that I am not there in the mode of *Dasein*. Thus, a dimension to subjectivity exceeds the bounds of *Dasein*. Heidegger's philosophy, as Marion therefore notes, mischaracterizes subjectivity as it wrongly concludes that the self only resides within the milieu of the world.

Bearing these experiential facts in mind, it becomes apparent how downright odd the recommendation that one should plunge back into the world truly is. This recommendation

---

[34] 1998, pp.192-3.

perversely *encourages* us to double-down on the world, but that, as we now see, in effect entails plunging headlong into vanity's wheelhouse. When put like this, in a way that the proposal's dubiousness is obvious, why then is it nevertheless tendered time and again? It is, because to endorse the Heideggerian cult of authenticity demands it. Recall that on that view, living up to the measure of our subjectivity is simply a matter of seizing upon *Dasein's* possibilities in a way that we typically don't. It is, we are told, a matter of choosing to press into possibilities resolutely rather than in the inauthentic mode in which we do in the everyday way.

The difficulty with these portrayals of authenticity, and the conception of self as being-in-the-world underpinning them, is that they overlook the fact that authenticity's own exigency is as disqualified by vanity as the exigency of everyday possibilities was by anxiety. If everyday worldly affordances only solicit us due to our own complicity, so we must respond to the call of authenticity if it is to claim us. The question to ask here is hence obvious: as vanity severs the tie between me and the world's transcendence, does this fact not entail that authentically seizing upon worldly practical identities is useless? Marion's exposition of vanity, by demonstrating that the claim of the world itself can be disqualified, shows that the decision to choose to be resolute is a choice not really worth resolving to make. No doubt this uselessness is due to an essential fact the conformist interpretation of authenticity conceals: since all of *Dasein's* abilities-to-be are confined to the milieu of the world, each is disabled when the blow of vanity strikes. Resoluteness is consequently as pointless a possibility as any other. Its own exigency is only as strong as the exigency of the field of worldly possibilities that array themselves before us. But in reply to vanity's question—'What's the use?'—these possibilities themselves have no answer; they are little more than objects of total disinterest. And thus, when vanity disqualifies the use of objects and possibilities, it severs the claim of the world, in one stroke rendering even resoluteness itself dumb.[35]

[35] Marion 1998, p. 192.

Far from resolving the stakes that would lend me any true assurance, resoluteness simply ignores the fact that the exigency at issue in its own ideal, like all the worldly possibilities it in turn would seize upon, is in fact senseless. Resolutely choosing to be-towards-death, therefore, is no resolution at all. The futility of resoluteness is confirmed by the existential analytic's inability to justify it in the face of vanity: in the last analysis, it does not explain *why* being authentic matters. Inasmuch as one seizes upon *Dasein's* abilities-to-be, but these very practical identities have been shown not to matter, then how could seizing upon them resolutely be anything but a doomed attempt to resolve the enigma of one's being by exercising abilities that are in principle unequal to the task? By pretending that the world always exert an exigency upon us that it actually in fact sometimes doesn't, Heidegger's characterization of resoluteness conceals a malaise even more primordial than being-in-the world's anxiety. Vanity wholly disables the claim of resoluteness that the existential analytic presupposes is immune to disqualification. As a result, with Marion, we must acknowledge the plain experiential facts: just as anxiety discloses to *Dasein* that conformist worldly abilities-to-be do not properly matter unless they are appropriated resolutely, so vanity discloses that this very decision to appropriate them matters equally little.

Vanity impresses the stark truth that, even if resoluteness would remain blind to it, seizing upon worldly projects is useless. It reminds us that, as every worldly ability-to-be is of no ultimate consequence, so too is taking them up authentically pointless. Nothing subject to the world's transcendence, including resoluteness itself, survives the blow of vanity.

Moods, as any reader of Heidegger will know, are said to allow the world to disclose itself as mattering to us in some way. They also allow us to matter to ourselves. And it is this mattering—my ability and willingness to *try*—that I exercise when pressing into some ability-to-be in acting in light of a practical identity. Yet if anxiety *disables* all of my abilities-to-be because it is an attunement in which I am temporality disoriented and hence alienated from the milieu of practical identity, when it passes, how am I to return to acting in the world

authentically? Presumably by giving and asking reasons, or by preparing for the next anxiety attack, or whatever. But if I do so, would I not simply be self-deceived? It would seem so.

The Heideggerian conception of *Angst* is thus a mere surface phenomenon, which is why authenticity cannot do the work it is assigned to do: it is unsalvageable since it has no purchase on the deepest stakes of my being. At the heart of resolute being-towards-death lies pure incoherence: it exhorts me to seize upon everyday possibilities without seeing that, because the world supplies me no final end or absolute assurance, doing so is strictly useless. It attempts to elide this uselessness by downplaying its importance, as if blithely pressing on were somehow not simply commendable or courageous, but an experiential *fait accompli*. Authenticity's sense of security is as much false bravado as it is pure deception: it chooses to avoid the blow of vanity because it knows that it would be powerless to overcome it if it ever mustered the courage to actually confront it.

Resoluteness, by fleeing from vanity as it does, exhorts us to plunge back into the world since that is all it knows how to do. But when as here the concern is the very meaning of my life, the world cannot in principle resolve it. Without any assurance against vanity, resoluteness consequently helps itself to a false security. It attempts to immunize itself against vanity by ignoring it. No doubt this is why so many deploy the predicable strategy they do when vanity is brought to their attention: one can always choose to plead total ignorance of vanity's trial, or else admit a familiarity with it only to try to downplay it. What can be said in reply to this ploy? There really is not much one can say to people such as this, because the position they choose to adopt lies, as Marion himself diagnoses, in either a willful ignorance or a hypocritical humility:

The inadequacies of resoluteness therefore invite a pressing question: if it is no antidote to the vanity of worldly existence, precisely because it is actually just an unwitting instance of it, what then is? It is here that I propose we once again turn to Marion for answers. Our review of the phenomenological reduction began with Marion's critique of

Husserl's transcendental and Heidegger's ontological reductions. Authentic resoluteness, we saw, rises into appearance in the experience of anxiety, a revelation which for Heidegger motivates the possibility of seizing upon fundamental ontology as the highest implicit possibility of one's being. Yet the blow of vanity annuls the use of deploying these reductions—the transcendental reduction, the ontological reduction, and the possibility of resoluteness all proved equally empty. To the question of self—'Who am I?' and then 'What's the use?'—Heidegger's ontology was as unable as Husserl's transcendental phenomenology to supply any inviolable measure.

The provisional lesson, thus, would appear to be one as obvious as it is inescapable: to experience the blow of vanity is to feel, perhaps for the first time, the uselessness of deploying one's powers of intentional transcendence within the world. To experience vanity, thus, is to experience the Absolute as what we genuinely want most of all, even if, for now, in the time that leads to death, this desire must remain a lack unfulfilled.

It is here that Marion explains why, initial appearances notwithstanding, vanity perhaps needn't have the final word. When vanity has disabled the world's exigency and everything accordingly seems useless, what does one ask? I don't ask myself whether I'll get that work promotion, I don't ask whether the idea of a Set of all Sets is truly incoherent, I don't retire to the lab to play with lasers, I don't ask whether the French Defence is in fact the best rejoinder to the Scotch Game, I don't ask whether a carbon tax is really the best solution to meet the supposed ravages of global warming, nor do I ask where I should dine tonight for dinner.

What *do* I ask? One likely already knows, as we have all asked it at some point in our lives, even though we might blush to admit it. Here, Marion deploys the third reduction. It is a reduction accomplished in an erotic acceptation. When I find myself in the clutches of the dark hour of vanity, I ask: 'Does anybody love me?'[36] As if from some unknown or mysterious depth of my being that I formerly knew not or maybe just suppressed, one asks,

[36] 2003, p. 20.

'Does anybody love me'? My one and my all hinges on the answer. For everything would be worth it, or nothing at all, depending on the answer to this one crucial question. Everything else is perfectly immaterial, for what's the use of the world, and the people I encounter within in it, and the countless ways in which we all busy ourselves, if nobody should love me? I can scarcely imagine such an existence; should no one love me, everything is dead to me.

When the erotic reduction is mobilized, I see that the Absolute which vanity suggests was out of reach is, on the contrary, accessible. *I access it in love*. Hence, while the beings and possibilities which manifest themselves within the horizon of the world are tantamount to death (they are always passing away), love in contrast, by opening a fullness above and beyond the world, gives life. And this is exactly what it indeed accomplishes. Marion's phenomenology has reminded us of that. As he writes in the Third Meditation of *The Erotic Phenomenon* shortly after deploying the erotic reduction: 'love raises from the dead'.[37] This proposition, he notes, is as little a matter of speculation as it is exaggeration, because the experiential facts indisputably confirm it.

To explore and test this possibility, Marion redeploys the phenomenological reduction in its erotic acceptation. And unlike the previous two reductions which had failed to even bring the vanity of existence into stark relief, the erotic reduction not only meets vanity on its own battlefield; it vanquishes it. What sets Marion's own erotic reduction apart from the other reductions, thus, is that it directly confronts the devastation of vanity where the others simply suppress it. Remember that for *Dasein*, total world-collapse, we saw, 'is an experience in the face of which one can do nothing'; indeed vanity defies even its power of comprehension: 'it is difficult to imagine how an authentic person could regain her footing'. Vanity leaves the *ego* or *Dasein* destitute, disabled, and perplexed. But not the *lover*. When *Dasein* senses that vanity is near, it suppresses it, and turns to double-down on the world in resoluteness. But not the *self*:

[37] 2007, p. 72.

when I accede to my status as lover I can face, and withstand, the blow of vanity in all its wrath.

If you doubt love's transcendental primacy, just ask yourself and be honest: could you live life in the knowledge that right now this second nobody loves you, and that no one ever will? Such a possibility, as Marion notes, would be equivalent to a 'transcendental castration' since to give up on the possibility of love 'would bring me down to the rank of an artificial intelligence, a mechanical calculator or a demon, in short, very likely lower than an animal'.[38] A loveless life is inconceivable; it would drive anyone to madness or suicide. As Marion accordingly concludes, it is the erotic reduction, and it alone, that meets vanity on its own battlefield. Only it can undo the blow of vanity because vanity will reduce anything else to a state of utter indifference, but not love: 'in my being I only resist the assault of vanity under the protection of this love, or at least its possibility'.[39] And thus the inwardness of love successfully withstands the blow of vanity precisely where the transcendence of resoluteness fails: by untethering me from the instrumentality and banality of the world and its objects, when I love, I no longer plunge headlong into the futile.

With the arrival of the erotic reduction the self's true measure emerges. Who I am, I see at last, is not essentially to be a cogitator (Descartes), *homo faber* (Marx), unconscious *Triebe* (Freud), will-to-power (Nietzsche), nor a being for whom that being is at stake (Heidegger). My quintessence therefore is not best expressed by the familiar adage 'I think, therefore I am', nor, as the critique of authenticity demonstrates, will the motto 'I am a being in whom that very being is at issue' completely do. As Marion rightly insists, what's most true of me is rather this: 'I *love*, therefore I am'. Love is my first and final court of appeal for meaning since it decides whether my existence is anything but futile. While the world discloses itself due to the claim of Being and the transcendental *ego's* and *Dasein's* exercises of sense-making which

[38] Ibid.
[39] 2003, p. 21.

underpin it, the resultant play of meaning presupposes a more essential one. It is put at play as it is solely because the otherworldly horizon of love stages and directs the whole production.

It would be silly then for anyone to deny the existence of a phenomenality beyond the world, for as anyone who has played the role of lover knows, one establishes the existence of such a place simply in virtue of one's own occupying it. Though Husserl's transcendental reduction determines the initial stakes of self-investigation, and though Heidegger's ontological reduction deigns to complete them, neither by any means finalizes them. I do not reside strictly within world's exteriority, as both the ontological and transcendental reductions misguidedly suggest. For as Marion has established, the erotic reduction completes and thus supplants the stakes at issue in being a subject. Love, in response to vanity, deploys a reduction that accomplishes nothing short of a perfect reversal of the self's place: for love, and not the world, proves to have final purchase on us. Marion's third reduction therefore reveals an extraordinary result. To be who I am is, in the strict sense, to be *not of this world*. As the blow of vanity reminds us, the world will turn any *Dasein* inside out. But not *me*.

If the self is not of this world, where is its place? At the intersection between the method of phenomenology and the matter of theology, Marion's analysis of the relationship between vanity and the erotic reduction ushers in an audacious yet compelling answer, one not without historical parallel: just as the 'inward life' championed by Kierkegaard was meant to annul vanity's worldly sway, so too is Marion's own portrayal of the 'saturated', erotic one.

By painting, as masterfully it does, a portrait of what this life of love—that is, the inward life— would involve, enact, and exact from anyone who wishes to embark upon it, Marion's phenomenology has set for itself a measure of success and failure reminiscent of one Kierkegaard likewise heeded when evaluating whether a work of his own had met the measure that occasioned the decision to write it. This measure is not one that merely stirred the creative impulse to write; more importantly, it nourished Kierkegaard's own efforts to answer a calling to the religious life. The measure, in short, is one that can take, among many

others, the form of authorial gadfly. What measure exactly? We read it stated in the Epistle of James: 'Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins' (James 5:20). In light of what Marion's writings on vanity and the erotic reduction give to understand, we might do well to consider a question by way of conclusion: is not this measure articulated in James, the very one that stirred Kierkegaard to his own life's vocation, the same defining measure of Marion's authorship, too? I think that it is.

Marion's phenomenology, after all, especially in its expositions of vanity and love, establishes that there is indeed a horizon above and beyond the world and that it is there, and there alone, that the self properly belongs. This theme is of course a scriptural one. For instance, consider three emblematic passages from the Gospel according to John. The first, John 8:23, presents Christ as redeemer, a status uniquely His in part due to the otherworldly nature of His origin and the kingdom over which He presides: 'And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world'. Next, Christ appears as prototype, or exemplar, because He invites the self to follow His lead precisely by abandoning the world for a higher measure and place: 'If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you' (John 15:19). And finally, a word of confirmation that those who follow Christ's example do so by means of the second birth that left Nicodemus so befuddled: 'They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world' (John 17:16). The implication is as intriguing as it is controversial: because Marion argues that love asserts its primacy only when vanity has first disqualified the call of the world, is he thus not suggesting that the self's place resides, not in the world, but in Christ?

This is precisely the implication that Henry is happy to have already made explicit: 'The reason behind it is given quite precisely, in the form of an absolute justification: the nonworldly condition of Christ—the fact that, co-engendered in the self-engendering of

absolute phenomenological Life that is alien to the world, the Arch-Son is himself alien to his world and its temporality'.[40] It is worth emphasizing that Christ was made flesh (*σάρξ*), which is *not* at all strictly equivalent to saying that He was made a body (*σῶμα*). A question that will have inevitably crossed the mind of anyone who has read the biblical accounts of Jesus' ministry only impresses the pertinence of the phenomenological distinction. How are we to understand the fact that Jesus, in speaking to the multitudes, was recognized by only some to in fact be the Messiah, while others flatly rejected his claim to be the Son of God? How, in short, were some able to discern the truth that Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter and son of Mary, was in fact the Christ? What kind of 'optics' is at work in the eyes of faith, which, when not at work, explains the blindness of those who were, and are still today, unable to see? Henry's answer, and in this we would agree, is this: the fact that some were able to discern that Jesus was the Christ, while others were not, has nothing to do with perceiving a fact or state of affairs that was made visible in the world—in the world, Christ appears as just another visible body, but the reality of his eternal filiation with the Father as the eternal Word resides in the invisibility of a Kingdom which, as Jesus himself remarks explicitly on at least one occasion, lies *within* us; it is hence in the interiority of life's affective pathos, in the truth of life, as Henry would say, and not in the truth of the world's exterior visibility, from whence Christ has descended and to whence He beckons all men everywhere to return.

In short, and according to Christ's own declarations, the words of eternal life testify to an *unworldly* mode of phenomenality, one therefore discernible to those, and only those, who are no longer themselves dispersed into the visibility of the world's ek-stasis, having softened their hearts and thereby having heard the call to repentance, turn back to the invisibility of life wherein the living God has always already engendered them.

In asserting that the Christ and those who walk with Him are no longer of the world, we are in no way denying the traditional doctrine of the Incarnation, which declares that God

[40] 2003, p. 76.

was indeed made man in the flesh. To the contrary, in saying so, we are laying the only basis upon which it becomes possible to explain adequately what this actually signifies, and why in turn so many who, seeing Jesus in person, were nevertheless incapable of perceiving in him anything distinguishable from anyone else who was similarly visible as a body in the world. They could not, or better, they *chose* not, to discern the truth that He was the 'Holy One of God' (Mark 1:23) come in the flesh.

Let us pause briefly to take stock: what does the blow of vanity teach us, and how does its teaching us what it does bear on the things of the world? How are we to interact with them without dissipating ourselves in the flux of time, or yet, no less dangerously, coming to loathe that which is good about them, even despite the no doubt objective goodness they possess? In short, we are called to a life of discernment, one that, 'resting transparently in the power that establishes it', takes up finite goods always with an eye to the fact that they should never be treated as absolute goods in themselves. We are, in short, describing a transformation in the structure of experience whereby finite things are no longer seen simply as entities readily-at-hand to gratify my interests, but as creatures made by God.

This is simply to say that if we are to possess finite things in a way befitting them, if we are to act in accordance with the truth that comes into view when we have recognized that, being merely finite they are not deserving of our worship, and yet, being objectively good, they are just as equally not deserving of our scorn, we must take them up in a sincere spirit of joy and gratitude, but also with a humble admission that they are not to become the ultimate or sole focus of our exertions and perseverance.

Some temporal things and pursuits have more objective meaning than others, to be sure, but this is ultimately the case precisely and only to the extent that they provide greater or lesser opportunity for us, in taking them up, to expand in love. In a striking way, vanity reminds us of this truth, that no finite temporal thing—no matter how great its objective value—is deserving of our attention to the detriment of the loving God who sustains and has

brought them into being. In vanity, we experience the fact that, in serving created things with an eye to themselves as their own end, our worldly way had actually been depriving them of what ultimately grounds the objective meaning they do possess. In ignoring God, the things of creation become worldly idols.

This is why, for Kierkegaard as for us, there must be a 'letting-go'; in order to experience the full joy and true hope of life's goodness, we must 'give up' things in a willful act of submission, a movement of our inner spirit he famously calls 'infinite resignation'—one whose importance is impossible to overstate, since, as Kierkegaard notes, it is the act by which I gain 'my eternal consciousness'. It is in this deliberate act of choosing to take leave of finite things, and hence no longer to live simply with an eye to how they can satisfy my own selfish goals and desires, that it becomes possible to experience them in light of a higher radiance, just as God created them to be enjoyed. In short, it is here that I at last open myself—in opening myself to the love of God within life—to the possibility of genuinely loving relationships with others in which, having escaped the worldly nexus opened by care, I can discern and seize upon genuine meaning in my life, and be responsive to the meaning of the lives of others, too. In dying to the selfish self of the aesthetic and ethical stages of life, I come to experience 'all things made new' through a living exuberance in which finite things and their objective value are no longer experienced as lying solely in my own needs and uses and desires with respect to them, but instead in their inherent value insofar as they reflect the invisible substance of Christ—'Do you look on things after the outward appearance?' (2 Corinthians 10:7). If all things look dark and shabby and even repulsive when vanity strikes, it is precisely because I see them under the pall of my own worldly delusion. The darkness that has settled over things, along with the oppressive and disquieting atmosphere it brings with it, is in fact only emblematic of the darkened eye gazing into the apparent void: 'The lamp of the body is the eye: if therefore your eye be sound, your whole body shall be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you

is darkness, how great is that darkness!' (Mathew 6:22-23). This darkened eye is the eye disassociated from the invisibility of life, the self that has ejected itself from the light of life, and instead decided to subject everything before it to a carnal gaze that reduces them to little more than a projection of its own selfish passions and possibilities. Is it any wonder why, in due course, vanity should shatter the illusion that things, when reduced to mere possibilities of my own personal satisfaction, should matter at all to me?

But as with all things, even vanity in the end can be the occasion for a good, so long as the one who undergoes it is willing to confront the source of its production: in alienating himself from the truth of things, they have been reduced to mere idols of his own insatiable desire. But in responding truly to the blow of vanity, in choosing infinite resignation, as Kierkegaard would say, the one who does so, having liberated himself from the shackles of his own blindness, stands ready to accomplish the final movement, the one of faith: 'The paradox of faith is that there is an interiority that is incommensurable with exteriority, an interiority that is not identical, please note, with the first but is a new interiority'.[41] And if, as Kierkegaard notes, 'faith begins precisely where thought stops',[42] is this not because faith, in unfolding within the immediacy of life, lies in a secret invisibility, hidden from the world? This interiority is the pathos of life of which Henry speaks, the unworldly self-givenness in which I experience myself as engendered by the power of God, placing me in possession of my own power to in turn act—for His glory.[43] Thus, in returning to the inwardness of life by way of

---

41 1983, p. 69.

42 1983, p. 53.

43 It bears noting explicitly that life, understood here as the pathos in which self-givenness occurs, is invested with the power of what is traditionally called 'libertarian free-will'. Life is not only the experience of experiencing ourselves; for in experiencing ourselves in such a way, we feel ourselves endowed with the power to deploy our powers of movement, choice, decision, action, and so on. This is what, since Husserl, the phenomenological tradition has called the experience of ourselves as an 'I can'. Life, as Henry has more radically emphasized, and as we agree, is in a primary respect therefore a *force* or *power*. It is something that can either correspondingly *expand* or *stagnate*. With life, then, we have in view a mode of phenomenality that includes the experiential power to act when and how we desire. In a striking way, did not Kierkegaard have such a phenomenon of our fundamental capacity to act radically freely in view when discussing the nature of self as 'Spirit'? A phenomenological analysis of how life as we are understanding it here sheds light on the sense in which libertarian free-choice is not only possible, but indeed a manifest experiential fact and

resignation in the face of vanity's stinging reminder that the objective value of finite things nevertheless presupposes a power absolutely other and beyond them, the things of the world can finally be appreciated and enjoyed for what they are, as gifts of God demanding that I treat them with all the due reverence, but never again the covetousness, they deserve. We are here tracing, in phenomenological outline, the way by which one is transcendentally born again, converted from a life whose operating principle had, in coveting finite things, been its own negation, to a life rejuvenated and restored, operating peacefully in the power of God that establishes it, and hence one acting by a 'purity of heart' to will just one thing—whatever God would will us to do.

Thus, in returning our attention to Marion, we can now say more. While the erotic reduction does not admittedly determine how one will necessarily respond to it—it is always just as possible to ignore or suppress as to surrender to it—is not the inwardness it reveals nothing less than the love of God? In establishing that the *only* claim that truly claims me is love's claim, the erotic reduction invites each of us to confront the possibility that the claim of love is itself equivalent to the call of Christ. And when as here it is a question of knowing

---

phenomenological presupposition of being a self at all, would require a careful study which space does not permit.

However, we can at least say this: very often, libertarian free-will is dismissed on the supposed grounds that the relevant notion of choice it entails is somehow inconsistent with what a scientific understanding of the world as causally determined permits; it is also often alleged that, even if such choice were possible insofar as determinism were false, the resulting kind of choice is not at all worth taking practically seriously, for it would simply be a performance of luck, chance, or randomness—it would lack, as it is sometimes called, 'guidance control'. But these two popular criticisms of libertarian free-will simply presuppose the idea, continually contested in these studies, that the self is to be understood according to the world's truth. Without even noticing it, these objections reduce the self to a naturalistic, objectivistic entity within the causal nexus of the physical world. But that is precisely the view of the self that phenomenology's analyses of the 'life-world' have already taught us to question—here the famous analyses of Husserl's *Crisis* or Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* come to mind. The initial basis for rejecting traditional arguments against libertarian free-will, thus, is the recognition that they wrongly suppose that the essence of self-givenness (and hence the principle of power by which our experience of ourselves as free agents accordingly unfolds and operates) is to be understood on the same basis by which we understand the things of the world from the perspective of natural scientific laws of causality. In overlooking the essence of life as a force containing within itself its own inherent principle of power and expansion, skeptics of libertarian free-choice suffer from a fundamental blindness precisely to the phenomenon that's at issue: *thought itself moves within the phenomenality of life*. As the very condition of power by which we are able to *do* anything, life is the basis of everything we can say, think, or put into action. This is why, in denying the felt reality of the very power of freedom that makes thinking and reasoning and speaking possible, denials of libertarian free-will end up contradicting themselves.

the truth of love for ourselves, it is accordingly one of answering its claim with a response befitting its call. Marion's work thus cannot answer that call for us—only we ourselves can. But if what Marion's phenomenology says of love is true, that love is indeed the self's place, no wonder it ultimately evokes precisely the saturated implication it does: for those who would answer the claim of love truly, it is the call of Christ, not authenticity's worldly resolution, that shepherds them home. Phenomenology, thus, must make the theological turn. Vanity disqualifies anything less.

References

Barbaras, R. (2005). *Desire and Distance: An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Paul B. Milan. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Blattner, W. (2015). 'Essential guilt and transcendental conscience', in D. Mcmanus (ed), *Heidegger, Authenticity, and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*, 116-134.

Chrétien, J.L. (2004). *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne Davenport. New York: Fordham University Press.

Chrétien, J.L.(2015). *Under the Gaze of the Bible*, trans. John M. Dunaway. New York: Fordham University Press.

Chrétien, J.L.(2002). *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, trans. Jeffrey Bloechl.New York: Fordham University Press.

Courtine, J-F. and Janicaud, D. (2011). *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: the French Debate*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Coyne, R. (2015). *Heidegger's Confessions: the Remains of Saint Augustine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Crowell, S. (2001). *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning: Paths towardsTranscendental Phenomenology*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Crowell, S. (2013). *Normativity and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Crowell, S. (2015). 'Responsibility, Autonomy, Affectivity: a Heideggerian Approach', in D. Mcmanus (ed), *Heidegger, Authenticity, and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*, 215-242.

Dalhstrom, D. (2015). 'Authenticity and the Absence of Death', in D. Mcmanus (ed), *Heidegger, Authenticity, and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*, 146-162.

Dandelet, S & Dreyfus, H. (2015). 'Reordering the Beginning Chapters of Division Two of *Being and Time*', in D. Mcmanus (ed), *Heidegger, Authenticity, and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*, 186-192.

Drummond, J. (1990). *Husserlian Intentionaity and Non-foundational Realism: Noema and Object.* Netherlands: Kluwer.

Guignon, C. (2015). 'Authenticity and the Question of Being', in D. Mcmanus (ed), *Heidegger, Authenticity, and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*, 8-20.

Heidegger, M (1982). *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. A. Hofstadter. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson. New York: Harper & Row.

Heidegger, M. (1985). *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. T. Kisiel. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Heidegger, M. (2005). *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, trans. D. Dalhstrom. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Heidegger, M. (2001). *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, trans. R. Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Henry, M. (2012). *Barbarism*, trans. S. Davidson. London and New York: Continuum International Publishing.

Henry, M. (2015). 'The Four Principles of Phenomenology', trans. J. Rivera and G.E. Faithful. *Continental Philosophy Review* 48 (1), 1-21.

Henry, M. (2003). *I Am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity,* trans. Susan Emanuel. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Henry, M. (1973). *The Essence of Manifestation*, trans. G. Etzkorn. Netherlands: Kluwer.

Husserl, E. (1962). *Ideas I: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, W.R. Boyce Gibson. New York: MacMillian Publishing Company.

Lacoste, Y.V. (2014). *From Theology to Theological Thinking*, trans. Chris Hackett. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press.

Lacoste, Y.V. (2004). *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. M. Raftery-Skehan. New York: Fordham University Press.

Lewis, S. (2011). 'The Lover's Capacity in Jean-Luc Marion's *The Erotic Phenomenon'*. *Quaestiones Disputatae: A Journal of Philosophical Inquiry and Discussion from Franciscan Catholic University of Steubenville.*

Marion, J.-L. (2002a). *Being Given: Towards a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey Kosky. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Marion, J.-L. (2007). *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis. Chicago: University Chicago Press.

Marion, J.-L (2002b). *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud. New York: Fordham University Press.

Marion, J.-L. (2012). *In the Self's Place: the Approach of St Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey Kosky. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Marion, J.-L. (1998). *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. T. Carlson. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Marion, J.-L. (2008). *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina Gschwandtner. New York: Fordham University Press.

McManus, D. (2015). *Heidegger, Authenticity, and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*. London and New York: Routledge.

Romano, C. (2013). *Event and Time*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis. New York: Fordham University Press.

Romano, C. (2009). *Event and World*, trans. Shane Mackinlay. New York: Fordham University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Sartre, J.P. (2003). *Being and Nothingness: An essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. H. Barnes. London: Routledge.

Sokolowski, R. (1974). *Husserlian Meditations: How Words Present Things*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Sokolowski, R. (2000). *Introduction to Phenomenology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Thomson, I. (2013). 'Death and Demise in Being and Time', in M. Wrathall (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's Being and Time*, 260-290.

Welton, D. (2002). *The Other Husserl: Horizons of Transcendental Phenomenology*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Withy, K. (2015). 'Owned Emotions: Affective Excellence in Heidegger on Aristotle', in D. Mcmanus (ed), *Heidegger, Authenticity, and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*, 21-36.

Wrathall, M. (2015). 'Autonomy, Authenticity, and the Self', in D. McManus (ed), *Heidegger, Authenticity, and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*, 193-214.

Zahavi, D. (2003). *Husserl's Phenomenology*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Zahavi, D. (1999). *Self-awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Zahavi, D. (2005). *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Against Onto-theology: Will and Love in the Mystical Tradition

Meister Eckhart says, 'Man has a twofold birth: one *into* the world, and one *out of* the world, which is spiritual and into God.'[1] In speaking of this birth Eckhart at once anticipates and verifies the limits of modern metaphysics—the self's twofold birth of which he speaks reveals an insight that disqualifies the presupposition, so widespread today, that subjectivity is strictly and exhaustively a matter of the world's transcendence or the powers of intentionality it deploys to open a world. For as Eckhart would have us realize, *in truth the self is not of this world.*

Metaphysics, in its onto-theological acceptation, as we know, can be understood as the history of attempts to understand subjectivity as if everything essential about what makes a self a self is due strictly to our place within the world. This is precisely why metaphysics knows nothing of the second birth. Metaphysics only knows the world, because all it chooses to examine are the powers of intentional transcendence that open it. When it investigates the issue of self—and here psychoanalysis, critical theory, classical phenomenology, and the philosophy of mind popular today are all cases in point—metaphysics accordingly examines the self as nothing else than that which opens the world in intentionality and something which thereby remains consigned to it. As Heidegger's philosophy has claimed (and is now mentioned with incessant repetition), the self is a being-in-the-world.

As metaphysics investigates the self only in terms of intentional transcendence, so it knows nothing of the transcendental birth beyond the world to which Eckhart refers, nor does it know the kind of subjectivity that results from this birth, nor does it know the living God who accomplishes it. Instead it simply substitutes, by means of a procedure that amounts to a form of conceptual idolatry, the transcendental life of subjectivity and God with transcendent surrogates: first, an exteriorized and hence virtualized self—the rational animal,

[1] 2009, p. 84. This chapter of my dissertation is slated to appear in "Against Onto-theology: Will and Love in the Mystical Tradition." In P. Cooper and S. Kikuchi (eds.) *Commitments to Medieval Mysticism within Contemporary Contexts*. KU Leuven, Belgium: Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium (in press), 95-110.

res cogitans, transcendental *ego*, *Dasein*, the capitalist or the proletarian, or simply the positivistic 'empirical man' of glandular secretions and neuronal events. It matters little which of these particular characterizations of self one happens to prefer as most proper to man's essence, since in any case each one commits the same error of insisting that there is nothing essential about subjectivity beyond what can be comprehended about it in terms of the world's exteriority and the its correlation to this transcendence. For the aim of these philosophies of transcendence, whether they explicitly admit so or not, is to reduce the self to the intentional powers that it deploys within the world and the 'form of life' that accrues to them.

But what do we mean in referring to the transcendental birth? Once this reduction is complete and the transcendental life of subjectivity is equated with what biology, or physics, or anthropology, or history, or economics say is true of us, what happens to God? This is where the second transcendent surrogate, the second conceptual idol of thought, appears, one introduced in strict correlation to the false notion of self that preceded it. To the continually diminishing extent that God is even still acknowledged by modern culture, God is understood as a being approachable only in thought, as a mere term in a proof or disproof, rather than the living God who dwells in the 'unapproachable light' (1 Timothy 6:16) of the self's interiority. Just as the positivistic sciences and the philosophies that enshrine them know increasingly less and less about man even though they claim to study him more efficiently than ever, so the scholars today truly know God less than ever. One, indeed, has every reason to suspect that the organizing principle of today's inquiry in the desire not to study, but to *avoid*, God. If today we alternatively hear that one can deduce the existence of God by dint of a long calculation in Bayesian probability theory, or else one should conclude there is no God due to the impressive body of facts that Darwinian evolution is said to supply, this is so only because both strategies betray the same metaphysical pedigree. They pretend God is a transcendent being in need of proof or disproof, confirmation or refutation.

Its sober analysis and serious inquiry prove to be the opposite of what they at first appear. Metaphysics exercises the form of thought it does because, in doing so, those who extol and deploy it, those in short who are willing to *play along*, find the means they need to indefinitely defer the decision to seriously seek. Metaphysics enjoys a good puzzle and the open-ended scholarship it generates; this is why it always relishes the prospect of 'further investigations' and 'new problems'—but nothing more than that. There are people who spend their entire lives reading the *Summa* in Latin in order to somehow refute Aquinas, or who learn Greek to be able to read Plato's *Phaedo* in the original, or can recite at length Nietzsche and Goethe in the German, and so on and so forth—and this is precisely how we know that the God they claim to know (or not) is really a transcendental illusion, a figment of their thought's imagination. It is a God tailored to their own measure. The god of the scholars is a dead god, a vestige of periodic curiosity, a relic of intellectual pomposity. The life wasted ruminating over this god of the scholars will perhaps win tenure, but not salvation. Kierkegaard saw the ploy of scholarship for the diversion it too often is when he summarized it this way: 'The speculative thinker ends with paper and mistakes this for existence'. And of course, as Kierkegaard himself surely knew, the scriptures anticipate the scholar even if their admonitions never deter him: 'Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth' (2 Timothy 3:7). There is, for those who are willing to see it, a manifest contradiction at work in the history of metaphysics: the erudition in which it consists is not the result of some noble will to truth, since in point of fact it only hopes to justify the existential deferment it accomplishes. *In consuming myself with science's endless debate and research, I can take leave of my own self.* Metaphysics is therefore the theoretical symptom, as inevitable as it is predictable, of a self *aversio Dei.*

The hypocrisy of metaphysics, however, suggests a way forward if we look back to the example of thinkers like Meister Eckhart as an exception to it. The first point I wish to show is thus this: the Christian mystical tradition is especially relevant to the present age since it is a

way of thinking about and discussing such questions that escapes, subverts, and supersedes an onto-theological manner of questioning. In short, the mystical tradition is relevant today because it marks an antidote, alternative, and corrective to the calculative-representative thinking which so often holds sway within contemporary culture—both in the University and outside it. Finally, the new phenomenology, by following the lead of thinkers like Eckhart, has shown that subjectivity is not exclusively or even primarily a function of world disclosure, for genuine subjectivity consists in inwardness, but inwardness is only actual in a God-relationship, and the living God—not the conceptual idol metaphysics substitutes for Him—appears only when one leaves the world behind. In short, the self's measure, just as Eckhart says, resides in the God-relationship established when the self undergoes the transcendental rebirth that opens an inwardness beyond the world.

In order to demonstrate the rupture between mystical and onto-theological thinking, I shall examine an unexamined point of intersection between the mystical theology of Meister Eckhart and the philosophical thinking of Søren Kierkegaard. Like Eckhart, Kierkegaard argues that one must withdraw from the bustle of worldly affairs by means of self-surrender. By renouncing self-love and willfulness, this act of detachment, they both argue, clears a "place" that allows for the self's reception of God. Having achieved this radical inwardness in virtue of self-renunciation, the self, they agree, finds itself poised to appropriate a life now made anew. And here, their respective descriptions of such a life are uncannily similar. Among other notable similarities, it is a life conditioned in silence, borne by selfless love and obedience, and grounded in the changelessness of God. The variegated points of intersection between Eckhart and Kierkegaard certainly do well to show that both thinkers hold similar views about the human being, God, and the relation between God and the human being. And yet, more importantly perhaps, it is this shared refusal to subjugate the divine to calculative-representational thinking that explains why their thought—and Christian mysticism more generally—remains relevant to today's contemporary context. And the importance of this

thought is nowhere more apparent than in the work that the new phenomenology has achieved by means of taking it up.

Early-modern philosophy evinces the dire consequences of placing a god in such a register—one ruled by the principle of sufficient reason. For instance, despite Descartes's insistence that God's essence is one characterized by 'incomprehensible power' and thus will always remain partially inscrutable to human reason, he characterizes this power in terms of causality.[2] The divine essence, when measured solely within this register of reason, entails two problematic consequences. First, and most immediately, as mentioned, it assigns God to a position within the economy of causal exchange. God's infinite power is reduced to the fact that he is *causa sui*. This is in no way peculiar to just Descartes, of course. Such a construal initiates a logic that advances without respite, culminating in a second, even more disastrous consequence than the first. Consider the divine essence as portrayed by Malebranche: 'But the reason we consult is not only infinite and universal, it is also independent and necessary, and in one sense, we conceive it as more independent than God himself. For God can act only according to this reason—He has to consult and follow it'; 'the essences of beings . . . do not depend on a free act of God'; 'the geometrical and numerical truths, as two plus two makes four, are eternal and independent, preceding the free act of God'.[3] Not only is God thought of merely in terms of reason and causality, but reason supersedes God himself. The subjugation of the divine essence to a principle *extrinsic* to itself is brought to a head, and most glaringly so, in Leibniz's *principe de raison suffisante*: 'the final reason of things must consist in a necessary substance . . . it is this substance that we call God'; 'This final reason for things

[2] This characterization of God as an 'incomprehensible power' appears in a letter to Mersenne dated 6 May 1630. I quote these passages of Descartes from Jean-Luc Marion, *On the Ego and on God: Further Cartesian Questions*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 170. For the passages in the oringal French see *Oeuvres de Descartes*, vol. 1, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1983), 150, 6-7 and 18-19. For the English translation, see John Cottingham, et al., eds. and trans., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 25.

[3] I quote these passages of Malebranche once again from Marion, *On the Ego and on God,* 127. For these passages in the original French, see *Responses a Régis* 2.23 (*Œuvres* complètes *de Malebranche*, vol. 17/1, ed. André Robinet [Paris: J. Vrin, 1958-67), 308.

is called God'.[4] God, then, is simply identified, when not subordinated, to an item finite thinking requires in order to place everything within the totality of intelligibility its own principle of reason demands.

Thus, although the early-modern metaphysicians do disagree about how precisely to understand the relation between divine decree and eternal truths, their otherwise disparate notions of the divine essence share a crucial pattern. The divine essence, in every case, is situated within the horizon of causality and 'rational' truth. It is here that another and more pressing consequence of metaphysical discourse comes into view. In virtue of having been measured by an external, autonomous principle, God ultimately is reduced to little more than a 'postulate of practical reason' or 'regulative Idea'. In short order, God is ultimately reduced to a 'useless hypothesis'; the explanatory role that onto-theology took God to fulfill ultimately leads to the realization of the very opposite. At last able to make the totality of being intelligible on its own terms, onto-theological reason finds itself unable to put God to any useful conceptual work. Evacuated of any theoretical role left to play, God is discarded. The logic of onto-theology, then, unfolds is a predictable procession whose highlights are as obvious as they are undeniable. The representative historical facts: first Descartes's God of 'incomprehensible power' who is self-caused and creates, by fiat, the eternal truths; next the God of Kant's 'postulate of pure reason' of moral theology; and finally, the complete evacuation of anything divine from theoretical or practical discourse once the God of philosophers is discovered to be what Sartre called the 'useless hypothesis'. Deployed onto-theologically, reason thus initiates and then accomplishes the 'death of God'. The reason why the history of metaphysics culminates in the 'death of God', is precisely because *the origin of this history was inherently atheistic to begin with* since it conceived of God as a transcendent being whose comprehensibility and accessibility is understood only in terms of the intentional

[4] Marion, *On the Ego and on God*, 131. For these passages in Leibniz see respectively, *Monadology*, §38 Loemker, 646 and *Principles of Nature and Grace* §8, Loemker, 639 in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989).

transcendence that finite thinking projects. To think God in terms of the powers of our own powers of finite representation, as metaphysics eventually came to learn, is really to murder Him.

The conceptual insertion of God within this horizon of thought is not, thus, exclusive to sixteenth and seventeenth century philosophy alone. It is, rather, the hallmark of the metaphysical tradition's ambition to place the world at our total theoretical disposal. What follows is a third consequence as unsurprising as it was perhaps albeit initially unintended: with God placed at our theoretical disposal, the divine accordingly ceases to inspire awe, mystery, fear, or devotion. With the totality of beings now subjected to a conceptual gaze that demands they confirm to its own measure of intelligibility, the infinitely qualitative distinction between humanity and the divine is effaced. But is this inevitable? Is meditation on the divine essence bound, necessarily, to end up effacing whatever distinction may have initially appeared to separate the finite from the infinite? Is the putative 'death of God' unavoidable? Because of its inner logic, this is the destiny of onto-theological thinking. Yet the divine essence needn't be thought of in the manner in which onto-theology has thought it. Indeed, as both the mystical tradition and the new phenomenology show, and as we shall see, God is only God when he is not thought at all—God is only approachable in what the mystics call a 'pure unknowing'.

This difference between metaphysics and the mystical tradition is immediately evident. In its discussion of God, the mystics place the point of emphasis somewhere else entirely than does onto-theology. If metaphysical discourse prefers to situate its discussion of the divine primarily, if not totally, within the horizon of efficient causality and the desire for total conceptual mastery, the mystical tradition chooses to situate the infinity of God in the context of love and devotion. In other words, the mark of God's infinity is no longer understood primarily, much less exclusively, according to understanding, as in the metaphysical tradition, but instead according to love.

Here, in characteristically mystical fashion, God's infinity—what Descartes defined as God's 'incomprehensible power'—is depicted as a measureless, unfathomable, abyss of love. We find this view of the divine essence throughout the mystical tradition. To wit, William of St Thierry, describing the relation between God and the human being as something not reducible to merely cognition: 'As the sun hovers over the waters, warming and lighting them and drawing them to itself by the heat, by some natural force, that it may thereby furnish rains to a thirsty earth in the time and place of God's mercy, so the love of God hovers over the love of his faithful person by breathing upon and by doing him good, seizing to himself the person who follows him by some natural hunger and who has the natural ability of rising upwards like fire';[5] John of the Cross, emphasizing the same: 'And as this is an infinite fire of love, so when he touches the soul somewhat sharply, the burning heat within it becomes so extreme as to surpass all the fires of the world . . . When the divine fire shall have transformed the soul into itself, the soul not only feels the burn, but itself is become wholly and entirely burned up in this vehement fire';[6] Bernard of Clairvaux, again explaining how one comes to know God by means other than arid ratiocination: 'Hence, the soul is both anticipated and surpassed in loving. Happy is she who merits to be anticipated in such a blessed sweetness! Happy is she who receives the experience of an embrace of such great delight! This is nothing else than holy and chaste love, sweet and delightful love, a love of such calm and serenity, a mutual love, deep and strong, that joins two persons and makes the two no longer two but one, not in one flesh, but in one spirit';[7] *The Cloud of Unknowing* claims much the same: 'No one can fully comprehend God with his knowledge; but each one, in a different way, can grasp him fully through love. Truly this is the unending miracle of love: that one loving person, through his love, can embrace God, whose being fills and transcends the entire creation. And this marvelous work of love goes on forever, for he whom we love is

[5] Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Random House, 2006), 199.
[6] McGinn, 215.
[7] McGinn, 260.

eternal';[8] St Theresa of Avila, echoing the same sentiment of love's centrality: 'It is a caressing of love so sweet that now takes place between the soul and God that I pray God of his goodness to make him experience it who may think that I am lying';[9] and finally, perhaps most famously, the words of St Paul: 'When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity'.[10] In the mystical tradition, in contrast to the incipient atheism of metaphysics, God's infinity is not explicated in reference to finite reason, but instead to love.

Within this view, what marks the divine as divine is not, say, that God possesses a complete concept of every contingent truth, as in Leibniz, or that he knows all rational truths. To render justice to the divine as divine, God must be thought of as more than the mere repository for truths of Reason. Of course, this isn't to deny that God possess such knowledge. It is merely to emphasize that God should be thought of as more than the Great Mathematician. Not to do so is to elide something crucial about the divine essence. Whereas onto-theology treats God as the mere term in a proof or demonstration so that it may place the world into a totality wholly intelligible to human understanding, the mystical tradition refuses such an ambition. In this way, the mystical tradition emphasizes that God is neither the Divine Mathematician (Leibniz), nor a Regulative Idea that supplies epistemic warrant for the theoretical sciences (Kant), nor the Highest Cause that permits a facile answer to the vexing question 'Why something rather than nothing?' (Aristotle or Aquinas). No, to the contrary, as the mystical tradition is so keen to insist, God is a mysterious, transcendent, unfathomable, abyss of eternal Life and Love. On such a mystical view, then, God is not to be

[8] McGinn, 263-4.
[9] McGinn, 359.
[10] 1 Corinthians 13:11-13.

reached by means of a long chain of impeccable reasoning but at the end of a long spiritual journey.

That those who have never even begun such a journey should announce the death of God is therefore hardly surprising. For them, all that remains at stake is an idol anyway.

I will have more to say about onto-theology, as well as the new phenomenology's repudiation of it, by way of conclusion in due course. However, for now, the preceding provisional characterization does well enough to set the stage for my examination of Eckhart and Kierkegaard as two representative figures of the mystical tradition. Let us begin with Eckhart.

If onto-theology's stance toward God is one of theoretically detached arid ratiociaction, Eckhart's own is one altogether different. Consider, for example, the following representative statement: 'I say that if a man will turn away from himself and from all created things, by so much will you be made one and blessed in the spark in the soul, which has never touched either time or place. This spark rejects all created things, and wants nothing but its naked God, as he is in himself'.[11] Eckhart's view about the relation between the self and God is quintessentially anti-metaphysical: to know God is to live in experiential union with him, a relationship that in turn requires the abandonment of concerns and preoccupations with everything else. This is the very notion, for example, that finds vivid expression in Christ's own words, when Jesus instructs his listeners that one cannot serve two masters for he shall 'love the one and hate the other'.[12] Eckhart, unlike the natural theology prevalent in the schools of his time, is concerned with describing how the eternal Word of God is born in the soul and helping others achieve it. Where what defines metaphysics is its preoccupation with supplying a 'universal' and 'objective' proof or disproof of God's existence, Eckhart wishes to explain the actual transfigured existence which results when the self in detachment stands

[11] Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, trans., *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 109.
[12] Mt 6:24.

coram Deo and thereby dwells 'with things [in the world but] not in them'.[13] Eckhart, in short, suggests that the essence of the self lies in an interiority that escapes the care-structure precisely because the measure it obeys no longer consists in the world's transcendence or the allure of its objects or possibilities. This is why, no doubt, Eckhart appeals to St Augustine with approval: 'St Augustine says there are many who sought light and truth, but only outside where it was not to be found. Finally they go out so far that they never get back home or find their way again. Thus they have not found the truth, for truth is within, in the ground, and not without'.[14] The chief mistake of metaphysics is that it presumes, wrongly, that an objective demonstration of the existence or non-existence of God would resolve the essential. Yet metaphysics is simply mistaken in this: for although it might be possible to know that there is a God by means of natural reason, it hardly follows that one will know God. When I get caught up in metaphysical argument, I at the very best approach a representational substitute, a conceptual effigy really, of God; not God Himself. In fact, as Eckhart well understood, the desire to know by means of demonstration, proof, or evidence only turns us away from God: 'So in truth, no creaturely skill, nor your wisdom nor all your knowledge can enable you to know God divinely. For you to know God in God's way, your knowing must become a pure unknowing, and a forgetting of yourself and all creatures'.[15] Far from settling the history of philosophy's 'question of God', metaphysics defers it by substituting a conceptual imposter for the living God—the one that only reveals Himself when 'the powers have been completely withdrawn from all their works and images', for it is only then that 'the Word is spoken'.[16]

If one cannot know God either in thought or by the deployment of one of its proofs, then how does one know? How is one ever to be adopted as a Son of God? Only by means of the self-renunciation accomplished when the self quiets its powers of intentionality, and,

[13] 2009, p. 85.
[14] Eckhart 2009, p. 41.
[15] 2009, p. 56.
[16] 2009, p. 33..

rather than exercising them at the behest of what some worldly project demands, returns inwardly to a condition of total silence and passivity. Says Eckhart: 'If anyone wishes to come into God's ground and his innermost, he must first come into his own ground and his innermost, for no one can know God who does not first know himself'.[17] Eckhart draws upon the story of Joseph's and Mary's return to Jerusalem to find Jesus as emblematic of this, since the crowd in Luke 2:42, he explains, signifies the transcendental ego's capacity to open a world and negotiate the objects that dwell within it: 'And so in truth, if you would finish this noble birth, you must leave the crowd and return to the source and ground whence you came. All the powers of the soul, and all their works—these are the crowd'.[18] It is in this detachment, in the self's relinquishment of its intentional powers of representation and action, that the birth of the Word can take place. Eckhart echoes this. 'No cask', he writes, 'can hold two different kinds of drink'. The upshot, thus, according to Eckhart, is that if one is to receive God, 'everything that is to receive and be capable of receiving should and must be empty'.[19] To die to all things in exchange for God, he writes, is a 'fair exchange and an honest deal: By as much as you go out in forsaking all things, by so much, neither less nor more, does God go in, with all that is his, as you entirely forsake everything that is yours'.[20] So, whereas onto-theology would have it that our relation to God is ultimately one of dispassionate *cognition*, Eckhart places the locus of a human being's relation to God in the *will*. Only by self-surrender is the soul made ready to receive God. This act of detachment, then, is ultimately a gesture of resignation and self-forgetfulness. One need forsake oneself and all creatures if one is to receive God. This is not, of course, to suggest that this self-surrender is voluntaristic in any problematic sense. As I read him, Eckhart does not mean to deny that grace is required to know God. Thus, his doctrine of *gelassenheit* is not, say, a premonition of Nietzchean Will-to-Power. The issue, rather, is that reason alone (at least of the onto-

[17] McGinn 2001, p. 42.
[18] 2009, p. 57.
[19] Colledge and McGinn, *The Essential Sermons*, 220.
[20] Ibid., 250.

theological stripe) cannot adjudicate the question of God, much less bring us into an experiential relation with Him. Consequently, there is nothing heterodox about Eckhart's formulation of detachment. After all, all he means to emphasize something that Christ himself says, 'He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it'. The movement of detachment, then, entails a moment of what I like to call 'appropriation'. In order to clarify what this amounts to, let us first turn to Kierkegaard's own notion of resignation, which, as we shall see, is strikingly similar to Eckhart's own conception of detachment. In turning to Kierkegaard we will be one step closer to tracing the mystical tradition's understanding of the God-relationship to its contemporary heir in the new phenomenology.

The first notable overlap between Eckhart and Kierkegaard is that the latter's notion of resignation is the functional equivalent of the former's detachment. Let me explain. Kierkegaard's first work, for example, the pseudonymously published *Either/Or*, which is typically categorized as one of his aesthetic works, is actually underpinned by religious considerations.: This Kierkegaardian either/or—either God, or anything else—bears a striking likeness to Eckhart's distinction between God and creatures. Recall that, according to Eckhart, one can only receive God—and have his Son begotten in us—if we first forsake everything else. Furthermore, recall that this decision, whether we choose God or something else, is correlated with our will. Choosing God, says Eckhart, is to submit self-interest and willfulness to God's will. The decision to choose something besides God, thus, according to Eckhart, is due to a will oriented toward satisfying selfish self-interest.

In regard to resignation, which I wish to suggest is a version of Eckhartian detachment, Kierkegaard has this to say: 'Infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith, for only in infinite resignation do I become conscious of my eternal validity, and only then can one speak of

grasping existence by virtue of faith'.[21] What, though, does Kierkegaard have in mind by this eternal validity, this eternal consciousness? In response, he writes, 'The act of resignation does not require faith, for what I gain in resignation is my eternal consciousness . . . because every time some finitude will take power over me, I starve myself into submission until I make the movement, for my eternal consciousness is my love for God, and for me that is the highest of all'.[22]

The movement of resignation and detachment, thus, is one by which I submit my own will to God. Indeed, were it not for our own will, the decision to serve God's will rather than our own would not be difficult at all. Yet, as Kierkegaard does well to observe, the will, at bottom, is the greatest obstacle to securing what is best for us. Because we cling to our own self-will, Kierkegaard notes, we invent goods to substitute for the true Good that is God. The result, as he points out, is an elaborate game of crafting diversions, distractions, and machinations by which we measure success, triumph, loss, and failure. He writes, 'Human beings have been very clever in devising many things to please and distract their thoughts, and yet these kinds of inventions are subject to a law that renders all their efforts fruitless and self-contradictory'.[23] By absolutizing some transient good or other, we predictably encounter disappointment when it fails to abide and give us the rest and satisfaction we wished it would. Staking our existence on a good beside God, he claims, leads only to sorrow and anxiousness. As Kierkegaard observes, such a life is one in which people 'slave away from morning till night, making money, putting it aside, keeping things moving, and if you talk to them you will hear them constantly saying that this is the serious business of life. Oh, frightful seriousness, it would almost be better to lose one's mind'.[24] Frightful indeed. For as Eckhart himself observes, 'If you want to be free of all affliction and suffering, hold fast to God, and turn

[21] Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, eds. and trans., *Søren Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling / Repetition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 46.
[22] Ibid., 48.
[23] Pattison, *Spiritual Writings*, 115.
[24] Hong and Hong, *Works of Love*, 176.

wholly to him, and to no one else. Indeed, all your suffering comes from this, that you do not turn in God to God and no one else'.[25] Similarly to Kierkegaard, Eckhart notes that the decision to turn to something else besides God for rest and peace is a performative contradiction. He writes, 'If I sorrow for the harm done to external things, that is a true sign that I love external things, and that, in truth, I love sorrow and desolation. Is it then surprising that I am afflicted, I who love and yearn for sorrow and desolation? My heart and my love are squandering upon created things the good things that are God's own possession. I run after created things, from which by their nature desolation comes, and I run away from God, from whom all consolation flows'.[26] Eckhart and Kierkegaard, in sum, wish to give voice to a truth that readers of the Gospel are sure to recognize: no one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. To serve something besides God's will is a recipe for anxiety and sorrow. Genuine happiness does not consist, as we are taught to believe today, in a successful career, or fame, or money, or even a satisfying family life or romantic relationship; it lies in God. Kierkegaardian resignation and Eckhartian detachment, thus, are equivalent gestures of self-surrender and self-renunciation by which we escape the dialectic of transient joy and perpetual despair and see this for ourselves. They are, to put it differently, the means by which we no longer have anxiety for tomorrow, but instead let the day's trouble be sufficient for the day.

Thus far, I have said a bit about the nature of detachment and resignation. Both, you will recall, were situated in the context of either/or, and this either/or in turn was situated in terms of willfulness. To choose God, and thus forsake creatures, is an act of will by which I submit my will to God's will. Correlatively, to choose 'or' is to cling to my own self-interest, to prioritize my own self-interest above God's will. To live according to my own will, as both Kierkegaard and Eckhart claim, only serves to cultivate anxiety, sorrow, and suffering. What,

[25] Colledge and McGinn, *The Essential Sermons*, 211.
[26] Ibid., 213.

then, does the choice of God entail? What kind of affectivity is at play in serving God's will rather than one's own?

Once again, let us begin with Eckhart. If serving one's own will is self-contradictory, and thus bound to lead to sorrow and desolation, the obverse, to choose to serve God's will, leads to joy and consolation. Indeed, when I have renounced my own self-will and possession of all created things, I receive God, according to Eckhart. As he puts it, 'Here God's ground is my ground, and my ground is God's ground'.[27] In this moment, the *unio mystica*, one neither looks to the past nor the future. Living in accord with God's will, and performing it without ceasing, there is neither 'suffering or the passage of time, but an unchanging eternity . . . Therefore nothing new will come to him out of future events or accidents, for he dwells always anew in a now without ceasing'.[28] In this inward poverty, deprived of my own self-will, I know God alone and will and want to know nothing but God's will. The consequence of all this, says Eckhart, is a special consolation. No longer subject to the bouts of joy and suffering that accompany a concern for transient goods, one is always completely consoled and joyful, at all times and under all circumstances.[29]As Eckhart explains, 'For truly, if anyone had denied himself and had wholly forsaken himself, nothing could be for him a cross or sorrow or suffering; it would be a delight to him, a happiness, a joy to his heart, and he would truly be coming to God and following him'.[30]

Why? Here Kierkegaard supplies a telling answer. The source of consolation and joy is due to this: whereas my own will certainly can—and, regrettably, it too often does—lead me to disaster and despair, when I do God's will, there is no possibility of despair or ruin. As Kierkegaard explains, 'But how could it ever be possible for me to harm myself in any way by obeying God's will, when His will is directed toward my true good? Since that is so, should not obedience always be joyful, should I pause for even a moment to consider whether or not

[27] Ibid., 183.
[28] Ibid., 179.
[29] Ibid., 217.
[30] Ibid., 230.

to be joyful, since what is being asked of me is for my own benefit?'[31] It is only by making the movement of resignation, as he explains, that we encounter the moment, that moment when eternity enters time. Finally having forsaken created things, past, and future, and all the self-induced anxieties they generate, I am, he writes, in truth finally present to myself. Present to myself, free from past and future, in that changeless eternity, I remain in God. Here sorrow is transfigured into joy, restlessness into rest, hell into paradise, and desolation into consolation. 'For if you remain in God', Kierkegaard says, 'whether you live or die, whether it goes well with you or badly, as long as you live and whether you die today or only after seventy years, and whether your death is in the ocean's deepest depths or you are blown into thin air, you are never outside God, you *remain*—that is, you are present to yourself, in God, and therefore even on the day of your death, you are today in paradise'.[32] Such a transfiguration is so glorious that, alas, it may seem equally fanciful (those so-called 'metaphysical solaces of the weak', as the blind choose to deride them). Yet, as Kierkegaard and Eckhart illustrate, despite the admitted difficulty of achieving it, doing so is hardly impossible; difficult because what stands in the way is what we often cherish most; possible because it is within our power to overcome what we cherish. Eckhart says, 'To the person who receives it grace is a confirmation, a configuration, or better, a transfiguration of the soul into and with God. Second, it makes one have one existence with God, something that is more than assimilation'.[33] Free of will and no longer victims of the transcendental illusion that our intentional powers and capacities originate in our own selves, the self in its ground—its transcendental affective life—experiences itself as engendered as a son of God in the unity of the Father and the Son. The self's works, activities, and actions are no longer its own, because they come from within, not outside, and are filled with divine life. This is the result of 'letting-go' of our own wills leaves the transcendental *ego* and care behind. I accede to my self when I

[31] Pattison, *Spiritual Writings*, 172.
[32] Ibid., 224.
[33] McGinn 2001, p. 129.

am dispossessed of the illusion that my life is my own: 'This above all else is needful: you must lay claim to nothing. Let go of yourself and let God act with you and in you as He will. This work is His, this Word is His, this birth is His, in fact every single thing that you are. For you have abandoned self and have gone out of your powers and their activities, and our personal nature'.[34] Or, to express it in a Kierkegaardian formulation, the self in this condition no longer lives in despair since it rests transparently in the power that established it.

At the outset, I promised that I'd conclude with some pointed remarks about onto-theology. I also said that doing so would allow me to juxtapose the Christian mystical tradition with onto-theology, and that this comparison would do well to underscore the perennial relevance of mystical texts.

Recall that I characterized onto-theology as a kind of thinking about God that attempts to place God at the beck and call of finite conceptual mastery. The inherent danger of onto-theology, it seems to me, is that when it poses questions about God, it fails to see the forest through the trees. Indeed, does not this quest for total intelligibility entail a posture toward God that elides what perhaps is of greatest importance?

Take, for example, the venerable question of God's very existence. Doubt would have us believe that the decision to live a life of faith is reasonable only if one has first given a proof of God's existence. This is onto-theology at its best (or, perhaps at its worst): something can only be taken to exist or to be intelligible if reason can render a sufficient account of it. Absent such an account, we are often told, doubt should win the day. This objection to faith, however, is misguided in at least two key respects. To begin with, the demand for 'proof' already contains a latent self-contradiction: for doubt's demand for proof fails to notice that such doubt doubts everything but itself. Doubt adopts a posture that makes an exception of itself: it demands an account from everything before it is to be believed or

[34] Eckhart 2009, p. 52.

trusted, but it conveniently exempts itself from its own standard. After all, one thing doubt does not doubt is that doubt itself is the Alpha and the Omega.

The tribunal of doubt demands that everything be submitted to its regal judgment before it can be believed with good reason. Yet, according to Kierkegaard—and I think he is right about this—the modern obsession to vet everything before the tribunal of doubt is a disposition rooted in our affective life, not our rational life. Put differently, it is not dispassionate ratiocination that explains why we moderns are so insistent that doubt should always have the first and final word about God. Such an attitude, rather, Kierkegaard claims, is actually a thinly veiled form of rebellion and defiance. By measuring the nature and question of God with human reason alone, we attempt to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps to the divine perspective. *We want* the final word about truth and how it is to be measured. And yet, this Promethean gambit misses the point. Just consider: suppose that one were to satiate doubt and provide it a satisfactory proof. What good would that do? The words of James remind us of the fact that this, far from resolving the issue would at most only reinforce the fact that it remained to be decided: 'You believe that there is one God; you do well: the demons also believe, and tremble'.[35] In sum, even if one could prove God's existence, *how* we react to such a fact would still be left undecided. One would still, in other words, face the very task that concerns both Eckhart and Kierkegaard: submitting one's own will to God's will. Hence onto-theology's ineluctable failure: the act of self-surrender is something that exceeds what it can possibly accomplish, regardless of whatever else it may well do.

This is why in the mystical tradition one rarely, if ever, comes across passages that purport to prove the existence of God much less even attempt such a proof. The whole hermeneutic structure of such texts is meant to help us come to understand and know God, and to come to do what he wishes us to do. This is what, I take it, Kierkegaard meant when he wrote that to be Spirit is a human being's invisible glory. And yet, he also observed that, in

[35] James 2:9.

the world of spirit, the only one who is fooled is the one who fools himself. I must say that one of the reasons mystical texts are refreshing and why they are still relevant—and will always remain so—is that they don't attempt to fool us, and they certainly don't attempt to aid and abet our own attempts to fool ourselves. What mystics like Eckhart and Kierkegaard give us to understand is that, regardless of whether one 'believes' in God or not, living a life in the absence of an experiential God-relationship is to live a life of despair. The good life, they wish to emphasize, is not one wherein I win worldly accolades and prestige, become rich and famous, powerful and respected. If the prevailing spirit of the times—an ethos of instrumental reason, consumerism, and ultimately nihilism—is to be believed, worldly treasures like fame, wealth, and power are anything but fool's gold. And yet, when the questions of what it means to be a human being and what it means to live a good life are both viewed from the theocentric perspective, as Eckhart and Kierkegaard do, worldly dainties lose much of their luster. Although our culture today saturates us with the message that these kinds of goals and achievements are something truly to be coveted, that they are the sure path to personal satisfaction and happiness, it seems to me they are not (a fact revealed by the prevalence of today's Prozac culture and the cult of self-esteem literature). Here again, Eckhart would agree. Having asked what life is, he answers succinctly: 'God's being is my life'.[36] This notion of life is a wager, of course, and, for all we know, it could be mistaken. But although this uncertainty might be too much to bear for onto-theology and its doubt, it needn't be too much of a concern for us. While the present age finds it fashionable and commonsensical to say that doubt deserves the pride of place it has been awarded, we needn't agree and give doubt the last word.

What does the rupture between the mystical tradition and onto-theology signify? Once again, the hermeneutic spirit of Kierkegaard's edifying discourses supplies a telling answer. Writing to the single individual, he always sought to remind his reader of the

[36] Colledge and McGinn, *The Essential Sermons*, 187.

importance of earnestness and inwardness, two virtues that he continually emphasized his age, like our own, had forgotten and forsaken. What food for thought does the enigmatic Dane—and, by extension, the mystical tradition writ large—thus give? I imagine that, today, as then, he would observe that, when all the worldly bustle and drama of life comes to an abrupt halt, and all there is to be heard is the echo of merciless silence and the pounding of your own heart, when you are at the end of your rope, because fate has callously devoured every last crumb of consolation that had formerly nourished you faithfully through thick and thin, when the curtain has been raised only to reveal a void of absurdity and monstrosity, when there is no hope—yes, when hope seems but an illusion now finally cruelly extinguished, when it seems as if the good will never triumph, because there was never any good to begin with, when you're lost in the blackest of abysses, mired in the apparent futility and despair of life, and all this makes you shudder, take heart! After all, though what little light and truth there is in this world is fleeting, for here on earth only the flux truly abides, there is nevertheless assuredly a rest to be had this day, yes, this very day. Ah, this rest that the world will never know can be your consolation and then, well, truly, nothing else shall matter to you, because you will have all you need! For in that secret place eternally concealed from the foundation of the world, in that mysterious haven which always patiently awaits your return, in that blessed place wherein the Spirit blows where it wishes, there you will need no longer labor, for you will have at last found rest. Is not this vision of the relation between God and humanity precisely what accounts for the mystical tradition's relevance for today? I would say so. After all, in opposition to onto-theology's penchant for introducing needless complications and obfuscations, the mystical tradition replies simply and straightforwardly by extolling the exigency of love: renounce your self-will, open yourself to the mystery, give yourself to the wonder, let both wholly envelop you in their eternal ebb and flow, and then today you shall be in paradise.

There is no prohibition—theoretical or otherwise—that today should forbid us from viewing God as the goal of a spiritual awakening in the pathos of life rather than a mere concept in a proof or disproof. The history of metaphysics, as Heidegger has reminded us, comprises the series of failed attempts to properly think the essence of man because it is in thinking about beings and beings alone that we fail to think the withdrawal of Being itself. If what belongs most properly to us consists in this relation to Being, then, as Heidegger thought, in this forgetting of Being, we remain alienated from what is most proper to us. For Heidegger, the task today is accordingly to take leave of beings, and so the history of metaphysics, and to begin thinking Being.

However, this will not do. In truth, metaphysics does not consist, as Heidegger says, in the forgetting of Being; it consists in turning away from God. Thought can pursue the task of thinking Being if it should so prefer, but it will not return man to what is most proper to him, as Heidegger hoped. The reason thought cannot presently deliver us from the uncanniness of existence, however, is not, as Heidegger believed, simply because we today still do not yet know how properly to think—as if thought somehow holds the promise of our salvation. Thought cannot take us home now, and it never will, because *man's essence does not lie in transcendence*. The thinking of Being is not, as Heidegger teaches, the first step beyond the end of metaphysics; it is that history's completion. The 'letting-go' proper to the meditation upon Being does not achieve the total self-renunciation it wishes to accomplish, for it still amounts to an exercise of ek-stasis and hence one of the self's imperial powers. In the end, because thought wishes to draw its power from itself and solely so, to 'let-go', by means of thought, is strictly speaking a contradiction. The thinking of Being will therefore no more return man to his home, and deliver him from uncanniness, than did the history of metaphysics that preceded it. What is needed is not renewed or deepened meditation upon the Being that recedes from us as we try to think it, and so leads us further and further away from our own selves. What is needed today is not, as Heidegger suggested, the arrival of some 'last god' that

only the history of Being might one day eventually dispense. *What is needed, instead, is the Living God who has already arrived*. The God, in short, who can be known by each one of us this very moment in the interiority of transcendental life accessible only in total 'unknowing', the place prior to all thought and therefore nearer to us and more immediate to us than anything within the ek-stasis of transcendence that thought might subsequently open or in turn discover.

Eckhart speaks of this inwardness in which the Living God comes to presence as one without image, likeness, or medium of any kind: 'The true word of eternity is spoken in solitude, where a man is a desert and alien to himself and multiplicity'.[37] This transfiguration in transcendental life takes place within the depths of the radical immanence of subjectivity and nowhere else. What is most proper to man is therefore not found in the exteriority of the world, nor its entities, nor any of the possibilities-of-being the two taken together supply, nor finally the ek-static horizon of the anonymous transcendence in which Being withdraws. Home, and hence what is most proper to us, lies in Life. It is the 'inapproachable light' of God, and the inwardness in which it is approached, that alone gives genuine rest—that very salvation metaphysics perpetually evades but can neither destroy nor replace.

References

Caputo, John. *The Mystical Element of Heidegger's Thought*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1986.

Colledge, Edmund, and Bernard McGinn, eds. and trans. *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981.

Cottingham, John, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, eds. and trans. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Descartes. *Oeuvres de Descartes*. Vol. 1. Edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1983.

Heidegger, Martin. *Identity and Difference*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

[37] 2009, p. 57.

Hong, Howard V., and Edna H. Hong, eds. and trans. *Søren Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling / Repetition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.

———, eds. and trans. *Søren Kierkegaard: Works of Love*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. For the original see: Hong, Howard V., and Edna H. Hong, eds. and trans. *Søren Kierkegaard: Works of Love*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Loemker, Leibniz *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers), 1989.

Malebranche, Nicholas. *Œuvres complètes de Malebranche*. Vol. 17. Edited by André Robinet. Paris: J. Vrin, 1958-67.

Marion, Jean-Luc. *On the Ego and on God: Further Cartesian Questions*. Translated by Christina M. Gschwandtner. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.McGinn, Bernard, ed. *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*. New York: Random House, 2006.

McGinn, Bernard. *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*. New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company.

Pattison, George, ed. and trans. *Kierkegaard: Spiritual Writings: A New Translation and Selection*. New York: Harper Collins, 2010.

Ruusbroec, Jan van. *Jan van Ruusbroec: Vanden blinkenden steen (The Sparkling Stone)*. Edited by H. Noë. In *Jan van Ruusbroec: Opera omnia*. Vol. 10, edited by G. de Baere, Th. Mertens, H. Noë, translated by A. Lefevere, 5-216. Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis 110. Turnhout: Brepols, 1991.

Walshe, Maurice, ed. and trans. *The Complete Works of Meister Eckhart*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

Painting the Invisible: Michel Henry on Kandinsky

Traditionally, phenomenology is said to investigate the modes of a thing's appearing. Where other inquiries investigate the *what* or *why* of entities, phenomenology investigates *how* they manifest themselves. This question of 'how' involves a twofold sense. In its first sense, 'how' concerns the descriptive facts involving that which appears; accordingly, phenomenology seeks an accurate description of that which shows itself as itself. In the second sense, the question of 'how' concerns that which enables something to thus show itself, or makes that showing possible. This is phenomenology's transcendental dimension: what are the conditions without which something could not appear, or show up, as it does? To question how something shows itself is not then only to investigate that which manifests itself as it manifests itself, but also the conditions themselves that make that very showing possible. In a word, phenomenology is at once a descriptive and transcendental task.

It is a virtue of the phenomenological tradition, Plato notwithstanding, that it has always championed art as an essential complement to philosophy. As two commentators very recently well put it, to do philosophy in a way that is informed by art is to follow the example 'set by such influential figures as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre', and this is important because, as they note, it is in doing so that it becomes possible not only to simply 'illustrate an already-formed philosophical question or problem, but also to reconceive and reconstruct the particular questions themselves that are important within the enterprise of philosophy'.[1] However, as I shall show, classical phenomenology has itself long understood the work of art simply in terms of the world and hence the horizon of visibility. It is with this widespread assumption that Henry's phenomenology of life contests. One representative remark sums up that traditional view this way: 'visual art can help us understand more fundamentally the nature and content of human

[1] Parry and Wrathall 2011, p. 2.

perception that grounds philosophy as a study of the world in which we actually live'.[2] By explaining Henry's phenomenology of Kandinsky's abstract painting, I hope to show that philosophy should reconceive what the essence and function of art really is, for the life of subjectivity is ignored by too much of contemporary philosophy of art. Art, as Kandinsky and Henry show, is neither strictly nor exhaustively about the world. It concerns neither what conditions our openness to the world, nor what the world in turn reveals about our assignation within the world (Heidegger). Nor, for that matter, does art concern our engagement with the perceptual world, the horizon of visibility, opened by the lived body (Merleau-Ponty). Though for Heidegger art discloses a world and for Merleau-Ponty it reveals 'the sensible and opened world such as it is in our life and for our body', these traditional phenomenological views are incomplete. The essence of art, they have shown instead, expresses and exalts the invisible pathos of life.

To begin, let us ask a question that will sound as silly as its answer will seem assured: how do the painting and the invisible relate? Not at all, it would first appear. Despite the multiplicity of possible subject matters for a painting, despite the variety of techniques used to produce it, despite the innumerable theories that might inspire and guide it, a painting, we naturally think, depicts the visible—for what else, if not the visible, could it show? Nothing it seems. This is why classical phenomenology, for instance, to say nothing of the rest of philosophy, portrays the purpose of the work of art as one of inviting us to confront what Merleau-Ponty called the 'enigma of visibility'. A great painting, Merleau-Ponty thought, draws our attention to what we usually do not see when we are busy with the everyday dealings of life. By arresting our gaze and returning us to what we typically do not see, a painting reveals the perceived world otherwise and afresh.

This canonical conception of the work of art exemplified in Merleau-Ponty accords with the common sense of the natural attitude. The painting, we naturally think, depicts only

[2] (Parry and Wrathall 2011, p. 4.

the visible. Indeed, the very moment we pose the question of how the painting and its mode of phenomenality are related, the natural attitude passes a judgment that it considers hardly worth asserting: the work of art shows the visible and nothing but the visible.

It is this natural understanding of art that Henry's phenomenology of life challenges. It is the invisible, says Henry, not the visible, which is essentially entwined with the painting. The immediate question is obvious: if, as Henry says, life is an invisible pathos that experiences itself in the unworldly immediacy of feeling, if, in short, the pathos of subjectivity necessarily evades the light of the world's visibility, and if it is the task of art to express life's pathetic self-revelation, then are we not forced to admit as possible what first appeared impossible, even absurd? For on this view, it would follow that the painting's inner essence rests in its capacity to show the invisible. And according to Henry, this is precisely what does follow: inasmuch as art is itself ultimately a mode of life, it expresses life's invisible essence. Henry states the point this way: 'The goal of abstract painting is to give feeling to everything that can be felt and to give experience to everything that can be experienced'.[3] It is in the work of Kandinsky, by exalting and expressing the invisible pathos of life, that painting perfects itself, Henry claims. By liberating the form, content, and elements of art from the constraints of representation—the rules determining how entities must show up within the horizon of worldly visibility—the abstract painting of Kandinsky achieves what initially appeared contradictory: a Kandinsky expresses the invisibility of life. But how?

Abstract painting—at least the good ones—expresses the force of life by means of its impeccable and precise use of point, line, picture plane, and colour, marshalling, deploying, and stoking the essence of subjectivity in all of its unceasing perturbations, undulations, swells, ebbs, advances, and retreats. In evoking the tonalities in us that it does, a Kandinsky explores, provokes, and stirs the luxury of feeling. As an effect of life, such art works to reveal the same thing the phenomenology of life does: *the pathos of life itself*. The affective self-

[3] Henry 2009, p. 56.

revelation of life, as Henry explains, is precisely what classical phenomenology too often elides: 'In the case of Husserl, the central lacuna of his phenomenology is the fact that it misses in principle, and notably in the principle of principles, the transcendental life that nonetheless constituted its primary preoccupation'.[4] Phenomenology should not ignore life, but affirm it. For 'The theme of philosophy is the transcendental humanity of the human being; it alone is capable of founding a true humanism. The *humanitas* of the human being is the subjectivity taken back to the dimension of its radical immanance, to its original and own self-revelation, which is different from the revelation of the world. Philosophy is not life but one of its effects'.[5] And art itself, like a phenomenology of life, is no less one of life's effects since it allows life to grow, expand, and flourish.

Henry begins his study of abstract painting's ability to express life by quoting one of Kandinsky's own theoretical writings, *Point and Line to Plane*. It is a passage that simultaneously defines the purpose of Kandinsky's abstract painting and confirms Henry's own phenomenological thesis that true reality consists elsewhere than within the world and the field of visible objects arrayed in it. Kandinsky says,

> Every phenomenon can be experienced in two ways. These two ways are not random, but bound up with the phenomena—they are derived from the nature of the phenomena, from characteristics of the same: External/Internal.[6]

To explain what Kandinsky means, Henry appeals to the well-known distinction in phenomenological philosophy, one we owe to Husserl, between the body *as lived* and the body *as represented*: 'We constantly experience the fact that every phenomenon can be lived in two ways—externally and internally—with respect to one phenomenon that never leaves us, that is, our own body'.[7] On the one hand, I coincide with the exercise of my body's powers—not only do I see, hear, feel, or move my hands and eyes; I am this seeing, this hearing, this feeling, this movement, or this hunger. 'I fall completely into their pure subjectivity', as Henry

[4] 2015, p. 9.
[5] 2012, p. 130.
[6] Henry 2009, p. 5.
[7] Ibid.

says, 'to the point of being unable to differentiate myself from this hunger, this suffering etc'.[8] 'What is proper to a body such as ours […],' as Henry notes, 'is that it senses every object that is close to it; it perceives each of its qualities, it sees its colors, hears its sounds, breathes in a scent, determines the hardness of the soul with a foot, and the smoothness of a fabric with a hand. And it senses all of this, the qualities of these objects that make up its environment, it feels the world that presses on it from all sides, only because it feels its own feeling first, in the effort it exerts on to ascend the lane, and in the impression of pleasure that sums up the cool of the water or wind'.[9] To live is to take flesh: 'For our flesh is nothing other than what *feels itself, suffers itself, undergoes itself, and bears itself, and thus enjoys itself according to impresions that are always reborn* […] Incarnate beings are suffering beings, shot through with desire and fear, feeling all the impressions that are bound together with flesh because they are constitutive of its substance—which is thus an impressional substance, *beginning and ending with what it feels*'.[10] And yet, the flesh can also be understood externally as body: I am able to see it (in a mirror, for instance), touch it (with my own hands), or represent it (in, say, a photograph) 'as one represents an object, in general, as an external reality more or less analogous with other objects'.[11] As Henry notes, interiority and exteriority correspond to the way in which something manifests itself to us. Exteriority 'constitutes manifestation and visibility' because 'The exteriority in which every thing and every content becomes visible, becomes a phenomenon in terms of an external phenomenon, is the exteriority of the world. The world is the visible world, because the world means exteriority and because exteriority constitutes visibility'.[12] Furthermore, 'Like the External', he continues, 'the Internal does not refer to some particular thing that would be revealed inwardly; instead, interiority refers to the very

[8] Ibid.
[9] 2015, p. 4.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] 2009, p. 6.

fact of being revealed in this way'.[13] What way? Because life does not show itself in the world like or with objects, 'as something which can be seen because it is right there in front of us', it must reveal itself in some other way. This poses an immediate question: 'In what way', Henry asks, 'can the Internal be revealed, if it is not in or as a world?'[14]

Henry's answer, we just saw, is a neo-Kierkegaardian one: 'It is revealed in the way of life'.[15] Where the world manifests itself in distance—it stands against me, at a remove—life manifests itself immediately and completely since, as flesh, it *just is* the experience of itself. It remains invisible because its way of revealing itself does not obey the regime of distance. Henry therefore characterizes it this way: 'Life feels and experiences itself immediately such that it coincides with itself at each point of its being. Wholly immersed in itself and drawn from this feeling of itself, it is carried out as pathos'.[16] As a consequence, phenomenality includes another order of revelation aside from the regime of object intentionality. When an object shows up in the world it does so according to the conditions that determine its appearing: full and empty intentional fulfilment, the interplay between signification and intuition, the interplay between absence and presence, the horizonal structure of appresentation, the adumbrational and perspectival givenness of the object, etc. With subjectivity it is different: there is no absence, no delay, and no distance between how something manifests itself and that which manifests itself. For when as here it is a question of life itself, manifestation is equivalent to self-manifestation: to live is to experience and enjoy its own feeling of itself. Life therefore is a matter of transcendental self-affectivity, of pathos: 'Prior to and independently from every regard, affectivity is the "way" in which the Internal is revealed to itself, in which life lives itself, in which the impression immediately imprints itself and in which feeling affects itself'.[17] Henry thus formulates a thesis that pithily summarizes his

[13] Ibid.
[14] 2009, p. 7.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

own phenomenology of life and the theoretical insight that supports Kandinsky's art: *Internal = Interiority = life = invisible = pathos.*[18]

Kandinsky shows the invisible by a radically unprecedented use of point, line, colour, picture plane, and the infinite possibilities they supply when mobilized. Take, for instance, something as apparently banal as the point. Depending on where it is deployed on the picture plane's surface, the point either erupts from the surface that surrounds it, in turn hovering suspended above the plane beneath it (like the hull of a sinking ship), or else it burrows into the plane, thereby disclosing a depth beneath its surface that only the point's tear could reveal. In the case of either of these two extremes, or even in the mundane case in which the point simply recedes into the surface of the picture plane until it becomes just another indistinguishable part of it, the point itself is characterized by an unmistakable tonal tension. There is, as Henry observes, a 'tension of the point, which is to say the concentric force by which it refuses space and all movements towards it'.[19] A point on the plane is like a stone cast into the pond; it ripples.

As Henry next notes, it is the line, another basic pictorial element, which invades and combats the affective vortexes which the point establishes. The line, indeed, reconnoiters the point's terrain. As Henry recognizes, and as Kandinsky understood, the line functions as the force of life. 'The world of linear forms', says Henry, 'is identical to the world of the forces of the life that produces them'.[20] The line is therefore defined by two key features. 'First,' as Henry observes, 'the line is the immediate effect of a force; the line literally deploys this force and gives it direction. Second, against the specific tension of the point—a tension excluding movement—the line offers an opposing tension allied to and conveying itself through movement'.[21] The line is able to express life because life itself is a force, or a movement. Just as the various drives and forces of life crash, succeed, replace, stoke, perturb, and embellish

[18] 2009, p. 11.
[19] p. 50.
[20] 2009, p. 52.
[21] Ibid.

one another within us, so the ebb and flow of life's tonalities are expressed by the play between line and point.

Kandinsky's works, then, do not only deploy the elements of point and line to great effect. They also use the picture plane itself to unprecedented effect. The reason why is that Kandinsky saw in the picture plane a life of its own; a recognition that in turn opened up aesthetic possibilities that otherwise remain closed. It is, as we all know, tempting upon first glance or initial reflection to view the picture plane as nothing else than the material substrate that supports the painting that fills it in. It this piece of wood, or this piece of cloth canvass, or the concrete wall that shall soon support the mural. In short, it might seem as though the picture plane has no independent life of its own; it is merely the empty, material surface that delimits a space within which life comes alive when, and only when, the artist begins to work upon it.

According to Henry, the picture plane is divided into regions, each corresponding to a tonality that only life itself knows. On the one hand, just as subjectivity is equivalent to suffering and joy,[22] so the picture plane is governed by weight and light. As we say, one bears the weight of existence; and the picture plane's own vertical axis obeys the same logic, as we shall see in a moment. On the other hand, there is also the horizontal plane, this time governed by two opposing poles of its own: calm and frenzy.

Accordingly, there are four zones, or quadrants, that determine the tonal geography of the picture plane. The pathetic logic of life is mirrored by the affective coordinates of the picture plane. Thus, although from the objective point of view, there is no reason to place any particular element in a particular place rather than any other place, because all spaces are the same, this is not the case once the affective life of the picture plane is revealed. The elements—point, line, and even colour—belong where they do since they occupy the location

[22] This is why Henry, following Kierkegaard, chooses to characterizes it in terms of 'pathos' in the Greek sense.

the affective geography of the picture plane assigns them. First, a depiction of the Picture Plane when divided along the vertical axis:

Any analysis of Kandinsky's use of the pictorial elements would be incomplete without an account of colour. Kandinsky's visionary conception of colour can be put this way: 'each colour has its own affective tonality'.[23] This is a thesis that many are sure to recognize, probably due to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. But for Henry—and Kandinsky too—there is not merely an *association* between a visible colour and the experience it evokes in us. Instead, *the very essence of the colour is itself identical to the invisible modality of life it expresses*: 'With the pathos of life whose modalities are irreducible to any objective representation, it is a matter precisely of what is beyond words and of what we do not have any words for'.[24] It is precisely because we cannot express everything of life in words that we turn to the expressive power of painting. To paint is to show what words cannot say. It is to show the ineffable depths of life. The interplay between the colours of the work of art and its viewer, thus, occurs on the level of sensibility. Consequently, Henry can claim, contrary to received wisdom, that the genuine work of art is open to anyone, even non-sophisticates, because it traffics in what is essential to being human: 'It is popular in the sense that it leads to what is more essential in each human being: one's capacity, to feel, to suffer and to love'.[25] Let us turn to some examples that not only confirm Henry's thesis, but confirm it by showing the method by which Kandinsky achieves it.

Kandinsky exhibits the way in which shape, colour, line, and point can all be deployed without showing, as in figurative art, anything that displays itself within the ek-stasis of the world—that is, the visible. In the various traditions and movements of representational painting—Realism, Baroque, Impressionist, and Surrealist all alike—the subject of the work of art always remains the world itself and its objects, even when such works highlight the

[23] 2009, p. 70.
[24] 2009, p. 72.
[25] 2009, p. 73.

experience we have of them. Thus, even in the rare instances when representational painting tries not only to depict the visible world or our experience of it (as in Impressionism), but instead the inner life of that subjectivity itself, it has always done so by resorting to a form of symbolism that remains constrained by the limits of the same visibility it wishes to escape. For instance, Dutch *vanitas* paintings express, in exquisite fashion to be sure, the inescapability of death and the tragedy of life's transience, but its symbolism always depends upon what in principle lies before the gaze: a vase of flowers, a violin, a silver goblet, a platter of oysters. With Kandinsky, however, things are immediately noticeably different. There are still dots, lines, and shapes, to be sure, but we see them distilled to their pure sensibility. Instead of teacups, vases, or haystacks, there are circles, squares, or triangles; we view surfaces arrayed and mobilized in one particular formation of their infinite multiplicity. The painting below, thus, is indeed a case in point.

When one reflects upon what the essential elements of Kandinsky's painting—point, line, shape, and colour—achieve by being deployed as they are, in a fashion that expresses one possible configuration in which these elements might be arranged as a totality, it becomes clear that the uniqueness of Kandinsky's creative vision is its ability to convey an inner tension and movement within a work's total configuration. The whole, just as much as each of its elements, is organic. Accordingly, it is never in stasis but instead always in movement. A point, for example, does not naturally sit at rest on the canvas; it disrupts the surrounding plane with a tonal tension. The line attacks, probes, and sometimes retreats from a composition's array of points; thus, even when the point itself remains fixed, one of its key functions is to contribute the kind of spatial displacement it does necessary to express movement. The line therefore is not placed arbitrarily on a whim; it too expresses a force, one at work in direct communion with the life of the plane itself and the composition as a whole.

Take, for instance, Kandinsky's *On Points*. If the lines themselves express the force and movement of life (and those who are suitably attuned to the work of art will experience the

fact that they indeed do),[26] then here we experience the true power of that force. There is an expansion, a growth, of the force as it propels itself, and everything else in its way, upwards. The manifest power of each line is only accentuated by the heavy colours that lie arrayed atop the picture plane. Each, sustained as it is by the line that bears it, attests to the very same force that first ejected its line upward and now sustains it at heights which the colour alone could not. Black does not ascend to such heights by its own means, but by an extraneous force that propels it. And of course, the composition's yellow and orange only deepens the intensity of the impression the production is designed to effect in us. In a word, every element of the composition expresses the same thing: *ascent!* By coordinating the lines, shapes, and colours as he does, Kandinsky assigns elements to the precise place, expressing the pathos of flight, of freedom, of the ebullience that feeds ascent. The elements stand where they do then, not by accident, but for a reason: the power, flight, and force of the very life that propels to heights they otherwise would not ascend. In short, here the invisible power of pathos is on display.

Yellow and orange, as *On Points* shows, are pregnant with confrontation, action, and the crescendo of hustle and bustle. They are aggressive and broad. Kandinsky time and again explores this invisible essence of colour in his compositions, bringing their inner life of the colour to bear on the picture plane and the viewer's sensibility. Blue, for example, as *Floating* attests, is lazy and calm. The composition's blue evokes an ethereal and ephemeral atmospheric quality, which is precisely why we experience it as calm and soothing. The overwhelming sense of calm that the painting evokes is not achieved only by means of its use of blue. The whole composition, along with each of its elements, contributes to the same purpose. Where in *On Points* the lines were straight and consequently produced the impression of an ascent that is as frenzied as it is unstoppable, here curved lines produce exactly the opposite impression. They are slow and languid. If, then, the lines in *On Points* remind us of a

[26] As Marion comments, albeit in a somewhat different context: 'To be sure, claiming to see is not sufficient to prove that one saw. Yet the fact or the pretense of not seeing does not prove that there is nothing to see' (2008, p. 124).

weekday commute—something purposeful and efficient but ultimately unthinking—those in *Floating* better belong to a lazy Sunday. They provoke in us a distinct sense of reverie, one reminiscent of thought's own perpetual ebb and flow, a reverie that sometimes can be as gentle as it is pleasant. Who can stand before this composition and sincerely claim to have no idea about what Kandinsky wishes to evoke in us? Our very own words would betray us the moment we try, for everyone knows what we mean—and what is at issue—when one says, 'I drifted away in thought', or 'I lost all sense of time'. In *Floating*, then, Kandinsky has not simply painted a tranquil scene, nor has he painted tranquility in a symbolism that only the clever will be able to decrypt. This is why he does not resort, where others would, to painting another idyllic landscape of Impressionism or a Surrealist enigma. Kandinsky's abstraction eliminates the need for any symbolic mediation between us and the peacefulness the work expresses, for he has eliminated all mediation or indication. He has simply painted *tranquility itself*.

It is in the Compositions, however, that the staggering ambition of Kandinsky's work is as unmistakable as it unforgettable. In these canvasses everything accedes to itself: point, line, shape, and colour dazzle to a degree which only the symphony can rival. One does not have to be an 'expert' to appreciate, and so understand, the brilliance of these paintings, because all one has to be is alive to the splendor they express. These are works that truly exalt life in infinite luxury of undulations and perturbations, achievements and triumphs, disappointments and sufferings. They are, in short, works of enthusiasm and wonder, which is precisely why it is neither embellishment nor exaggeration to say that a work like *Composition VII* is rapturous and operatic. To view a Kandinsky from this period is like listening to a Mahler symphony; it is to enjoy, for pure enjoyment's sake, the glory of life in all of its unceasing, unspeakable reverberations.

If Henry's phenomenology of life declares what Kandinsky's own art confirms, that art expresses the invisible pathos of subjectivity, we must face some important questions.

First, there is the question of the relation between art and phenomenology: how, if at all, are the two related to one other? On Henry's view, the answer I hope is by now clear. Art and phenomenology are both effects of life. In their own way, they recover and then express the invisible joy in which subjectivity suffers itself. That which inspires and sustains the creativity in the production of an artistic work is identical to that which does the reflective work of phenomenological thought. This is why each ultimately expresses the same thing: the invisible force of life's suffering and joy. In doing phenomenology, as in painting, the method and the matter of the work coincide. They coincide in life itself. In exalting life, they achieve the same thing: 'the self-realization of life through its self-growth and this growth in terms of all its possibilities'.[27]

The decisions that make Kandinsky's work so remarkable and so distinctive, such as the one to dismiss objective figure, consequently 'lead us back to what is in question and to what is only in question in painting: sensibility and its primary elements'.[28] Even the way he does so, by playing with possibilities, will be familiar to anyone who knows phenomenological philosophy since it is the artistic analogue of a key piece of phenomenological philosophy's own method. Kandinsky's method, it must be said, is a form of eidetic variation. As Henry notes, 'Kandinsky's analysis operates in the same way as does Husserl's eidetic analysis. It proscribes the foreign properties from the essence of art in order to perceive art in its purity. With the elimination of objective representation, the pure essence of painting is laid bare'. By eliminating the non-essential, Kandinsky's art expresses a range of the infinity of possibilities entailed by the pure form of aesthetic enjoyment and production that result when they are liberated from the constraints of visible representation. Art is no longer about painting apples or haystacks; it is about expressing hunger itself, or the pure enjoyment of seeing what one sees.

---

[27] 2009, p. 125.
[28] 2009, p. 42.

Kandinsky's art therefore reveals that there are non-essential characteristics in a work of art, those associated with the object, and its essential characteristics, which refer to its pure pictoriality. As Henry writes, 'The non-essential characteristics are the objective meanings constituted intentionally by consciousness; they are external, "transcendent" in the Husserlian sense. The essential characteristics, the pictorial and graphic forms, belong to sensibility, that is to say, as will be shown, to the absolute subjectivity and its Night'.[29] In other words, Kandinsky's work achieves for art what Husserl's phenomenology does for philosophy; by means of eidetic variation, they unveil and express the essential. What is essential to art, and what is not, is apparent when we turn to examine works of art that attempt, yet fail, to express what Kandinsky's art successfully does. They exhibit, as we shall see, the same weakness: what rises to visible presence before our gaze, however beautiful or technically impressive, disappoints the heart. What explains this disappointment?

Paul Signac's *The Pink Cloud* hangs in the corner of a wall in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts adjacent to Monet's acclaimed blue Rouen Cathedral paintings. When one enters the gallery and turns one's head to the right, one is pleasantly surprised by the sight of the famous Monet's. After all, for most of us, it is a real joy to see a Monet in its flesh. Many understandably walk over to these acclaimed, great canvasses for a better look at each of the famed works. And yet, it is neither the Monet's nor the way in which gallery-goers enjoy them that here is of interest. What is relevant is what occurs after one has finished looking at the row of Monet's. Everyone begins viewing the procession of blue cathedrals immediately from the right of the gallery door and proceeds left, so when one reaches the end of the wall and hence the corner, it is Signac's own painting that inevitably catches the gaze. For although the material canvas of the composition itself is relatively small, and though it is not nearly as famous a work as the Monet's that understandably dominate the attention of those who walk into the room, the work nevertheless makes an immediate and large impression. Thus, even if

[29] 2009, p. 41.

many who do see it do not choose to give it more attention (maybe simply because it is a Signac and not a Monet), they assuredly do see it. But why? How does it seize, and temporality transfix, one's gaze as it does?

The reason is not simply due to its placement in the corner. No doubt it is due to Signac's use of colour to such stunning effect. Pinks, blues, and reds are in themselves elemental and essential, and Signac here nearly liberates them to their full splendor. In *The Pink Cloud*, they create an impression that, though not fully saturating the gaze, still bedazzles to such a degree that it is almost impossible to bear. However, since the use of colour is not totally freed from the constraints that govern the modes of objective representation (the serial procession of an object's adumbrations, the play between empty and fulfilled intention, and so forth), its doctrines and assumptions of Pointillism and Neo-Impressionism demand that the painting use colour to convey what ultimately lies within the exteriority of worldly visibility. For instance, when Signac puts pink there, blue here, or red there, the decision to do so is in the end not decided by the inner life of the colour itself, but always instead by a fact extraneous to it. The use of colour eventually always corresponds to the colour of some objective figure; it is the blue of *the waterway*, the green of *the sail*, or the pink of *the cloud*. Hence, the colours do not obey their own autonomous rule of manifestation; in the last analysis, they always appeal, not to their own pathetic logic, but instead to an order of manifestation besides that of their own. Rather than appearing on their own initiative and thus in accordance with their own distinctive invisible essence, they are subordinated to the principle of visible manifestation Signac remains beholden to. For Signac, even if colour is indispensable to the tone and atmosphere of the composition, the true power of colour is nevertheless left unrealized, because it remains under the world's tutelage. If the pinks of Signac's sky and the blues of his water draw the eye, they ultimately disappoint it, precisely because they do not fully reveal the invisible mystery of the very colours that initially drew one's gaze. The reason why is straightforward. They momentarily evoke an exuberance which

they are unable to sustain; for although they prove initially pleasing to the eye, they ultimately disappoint the heart

It is here that an examination of Alexander Harrison's use of objective figure in *Solitude* explains why one inevitably finds a work like Signac's dissatisfying, or in a way somehow incomplete, despite its beauty and greatness. Harrison's *Solitude* attempts to signify, by evoking in us, the experience of solitude. For although the lone nude figure might represent solitude, *it is this inward experience itself*, not the solitary figure who indicates or symbolizes it, that is essential to the composition's *raison d' être*. One encounters, in the technical sense in which Husserlian philosophy has taught us, an *indication* of solitude but not an *expression* of it. When one looks at the canvas, it is clear that the circumstances are those commonly associated with solitude—for example, the figure is going for a dip alone rather than with a friend or a lover; the setting is mother nature and not the modern city; and most importantly, it is night but not day. But why should it matter, as it surely does, that the scene be set at night? It must be set at night, because the mood—*the lived experience of solitude itself*—that Harrison wishes to depict demands it not be day. Without a doubt, there is a kind of solitude possible at night time otherwise not, and Harrison has put this experiential fact to impeccable use. In any event, what matters is that the colours themselves of the composition demonstrate the non-essential role of the painting's figurative elements such as the person and the boat. For it is the dark blues and greens, not the nude figure or the boat, that express the painting's essence. Were, for instance, the figure and the rowboat, along with everything else objective about the composition to remain exactly identical, only yellows or reds took the respective place of the actual composition's blues and the greens, the work itself would be destroyed. It would no longer depict solitude.

Thus, were one to take things to their extreme conclusion, which is precisely what Kandinsky himself does, one could completely eliminate both the rowboat and the nude figure, yet the substance of the painting would remain unaffected. The essence of the piece

would nonetheless be retained, because what is crucial to solitude is not the figure, nor the rowboat, nor the placement of either of them when taken together, but instead the brooding and mysterious blues and greens that suspend the figurative elements.

That colour has the invisible life it does, a life totally independent of the exteriority of the world and the visibility of its objects, leads us to the next painting, one that does especially well to underscore this experiential fact. The painting in question is Alphonse Osbert's 1892 *Vision*, the circumstances of whose inspiration, production, and first presentation an accompanying plaque at the Orsay describes this way:

> This painting was presented at the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1892 before featuring the following year in the second Rose Croix Salon which brought together the elite of the Symbolist artists. A later presentation of the work, in 1899, provides more information about its subject: a vision of St Genevieve, the patron saint ofParis.

The piece itself, I think everyone will agree, is a triumph of Symbolist art. Every figurative element in the composition signifies something of import, usually of religious significance, and it signifies the elements that it does with as much precision as elegance. The symbolic touch is never heavy-handed or clumsy. The lamb, for instance, obviously designates Christ, but it is not a gratuitous symbol, since the role of the lamb suits the objective setting, a pastoral field, of the composition. Likewise, the halo clearly denotes the woman's saintly—or at least devout—status, yet there is an certain understatement about it that once again reflects the humble setting of the peasant's field; though she stands transfigured, there is nothing grandiose about her as is the case of the transfigured in a Rubens or a Raphael. Even the placement of her hands conveys something of importance as they are positioned in a circumspect, almost prayerful resignation, one that expresses the inward ecstasy of the state itself she's experiencing. The overall atmosphere of the painting is not at all difficult to discern; it is one of gentle reverence, peace, hope, calm, and wonder.

The thing most fascinating about this piece, however, is not that Osbert puts figures to the symbolic use he does, nor that the use of blue is essential to his doing so. Rather, the

most remarkable aspect of this piece is the very ambition of the subject matter itself. For here, Osbert has not chosen simply to depict St Genevieve in a field next to the lamb of Christ; he has tried to paint *the inner ecstatic state of the Saint herself*. Thus, Genevieve's 'vision' is precisely one that escapes the viewer's own visible vision!

The goal of the painting, thus, is to convey the inner thoughts and feelings of the transfigured saint with symbolic elements, 'an illustration of a soul state', and here the very use of blue itself is essential to this, since the invisible essence of blue itself is one of mystery, wonder, and calm. This is a hypothesis confirmed by Kandinsky's own theoretical views of colour: 'The deeper the blue becomes, the more strongly it calls man towards the infinite, awakening in him a desire for the pure and, finally, for the supernatural […] The brighter it becomes, the more it loses its sound, until it turns into silent stillness and becomes white'. The pointillist and symbolist techniques of *Vision*, in other words, try to express the invisibility of life itself. And although the painting's use of colour is as stunning as it is masterful, the true essence of colour has not yet been freed from the rules of visible representation just as it was not in the work of Signac or Harrison. So, while the blue creates an atmosphere that indicates the existence of the inner wonder and mystery Osbert wishes to express, the wonder itself remains only indicated. The contemplative ecstasy of St Genevieve's vision is present in its absence, but that is it. The symbolism references an invisibility that it only indicates but cannot show. In truth, the very title of the work testifies that the painting concerns a paradox of the first degree: the subject of the painting is a vision, in the sense of an inner ecstatic state, which eludes all visibility and hence all worldly vision. At issue, thus, is an invisible vision.

The ecstasies of religious sensibility, and the invisible self-affectivity of life more generally, however, is brought to the fullest expression representative painting will allow in in the work of Henry Ossawa Tanner. For it is in Tanner's work that the invisible reality of religious experience is made visible. Take, for example, 1898's *Christ and His Disciples on the*

Road to Bethany. In many ways, it is a relatively obscure work, one comparatively unknown and less celebrated than that same year's *The Annunciation*, for instance. And yet, it is here that Tanner perhaps best captures and expresses the inner reality of the experiential life he wishes to celebrate. As Tanner wrote, 'My effort has been to not only put the biblical incident in the original setting […] but at the same time give the human touch […] to try to convey [my] public the reverence and elevation these subjects impart to [me]'. This 'human touch' is something that exceeds the objective facts of historical analysis, say, just as much it does the phenomenality of the world's visibility.

For Tanner, indeed, the work of art is one that exalts and expresses the inner truth that inspired its production in the first place, and it is the job of the artist to evoke in the viewer the very same experience. Tanner's own creative efforts did not result only in a piece of art; they worked a transformation in his own character, in his own self, and in his own life. This is, of course, precisely what is at stake in the work of art according to Henry's own phenomenology of life, and this is why it is as interesting as it is important that an artist such as Tanner should confirm Henry's thesis. Tanner speaks of this change creating art is capable of producing in reference to his own work of painting *Daniel in the Lion's Den*. As he remarked to a friend: '[It] gave me a courage and a power for hard work, and also a hope I had never before possessed'. In short, the *work* of creating art had worked a change in the life of Tanner's own subjectivity.

But of course, as just mentioned, the work of art is not meant only to work a change in the artist who produces it; it should work, as Tanner, Kandinsky, and Henry would all agree, a change in the life of the viewer who views it. And as anyone who has seen *Christ and His Disciples on the Road to Bethany* in person in the Orsay will testify, Tanner achieves this goal. In one way, the painting depicts 'the biblical incident in the original setting', but that very setting itself refers to an inner sea of emotion the work itself attempts to express. As Tanner

says, it is this very inner truth that constitutes a work's 'human touch' and the subject that inspired his own reverence.

Consider, then, the work itself. Apparently at issue is a scene taken from the Biblical narrative: the events surrounding Christ's ministry in and around Bethany. In total, there are five times that Bethany is explicitly mentioned in the New Testament: during the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-46), just prior to Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Mark 11:1, Luke 19:29), in the description of the lodging of Jesus and his disciples in Bethany following that same Sunday (Matthew 21:17, Mark 11:11-12), in the events surrounding Simon the Leper (Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, John 12:1-8), and finally at the Ascension, which the scriptures report as having taken place at the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:50). Thus, Bethany is in a crucial respect the locus of *the dawn of the kingdom*. Tanner's painting, by selecting Bethany as the subject's 'original setting', consequently expresses the ambiguity of Jesus' own earthly ministry. Set between the events of an entrance into Jerusalem that initially appears wholly victorious and the eventual shame of being nailed to the Cross, the events that take place in Bethany at once signify that the Kingdom of God has in a way at last arrived, but that it has yet not been fully revealed.

The ambiguity of the events that take place in Bethany is further underscored in Tanner's painting by the fact that the viewer has no way of being certain *which* trip to Bethany is being depicted. Are the disciples accompanying Christ to Bethany after having just previously entered Jerusalem (and hence before the crucifixion and subsequent resurrection), or are they accompanying Christ after the crucifixion and the resurrection and hence just immediately before the Ascension? There is no way to tell which, if either, Tanner had in mind. And indeed, there is good reason to think that he intentionally left things ambiguous. The painting, after all, is meant to evoke a sense of wonder and mystery, and the fact that the visible event depicted does not correspond to any identifiable 'original setting', but instead remains indeterminate, only reinforces that the genuine subject matter of the painting is the

inner emotion anyway. And once again, it is the effect of colour that chiefly produces this impression: the soft blue evokes an atmosphere of deep wonder, searching introspection, and pregnant possibility.

When standing before the work, one is ushered into the wonder of what it would be like to have walked and talked with Christ. The colour and anonymity of the figures evokes that state of indefinition; one can only imagine, but not fully comprehend, what it would be like to have actually walked along this twilight lit road to Bethany before Christ was nailed to the Cross, or ascended into Heaven. And yet, we are not left totally without understanding: it is that experiential tonality itself of reverie that allows any subsequent imaginative association. If Bethany is the objective setting where the dawning of the kingdom crucially unfolds and eventually completes itself in the Ascension, then unsurprisingly Tanner selects it as the objective icon for the experiential theme he tries to express: *it is always darkest before the dawn*. Here the dawning of the kingdom, which marks the dispersal of sin's darkness due to the arrival of light into the world, is depicted in a serenity that only surreal blue can accomplish. This is a work of anticipation and hence only blue proves fitting.

A final painting, this time Post-Impressionist, demonstrates that representational painting's genuine theme is in effect the invisible, but that it fails to fully express the invisible because representational painting obeys the rules of object manifestation. The painting in question is Manet's *Monk in Prayer*. The point of the painting, presumably, is to show the prayerful life of the monk. However, the very subjectivity of the prayer itself remains concealed from us. It is only present in its absence because it is indicated, yet not expressed. One sees a monk in prayer, but nothing about the composition reveals the inner essence of the prayer itself. Instead, one is left to speculate about what the content of the prayer might actually concern—the skull in the foreground beneath the kneeling monk is an intriguing clue that the prayer might concern the monk's own mortality, or perhaps the inescapability of death for all of us. There is no proof exactly. In a way, then, whether incidentally or

intentionally, Manet has disclosed the inherent limitations of figurative and representative painting. While the theme of the work is prayer, the prayer itself is never expressed directly in the composition; the viewer encounters it only by means of its conspicuous absence. Or, if you prefer, the proper theme of the painting, which is the prayer, is accessible only in its inaccessibility. But it is this inner subjectivity to which the prayer belongs that Kandinsky opens to us: what once was only capable of mere indication accedes to expression; what was once only absent is brought into full invisible presence. Rather than paint a figure in prayer, the method of Kandinsky's abstract art would allow one to paint *prayer itself*.

If the work of art is thus a matter of expressing life, it is Kandinsky above all who shows us how this is possible. One can now paint ascent, tranquility, rapture, reverie, solitude, and their contraries too. Kandinsky has opened the life of subjectivity, in totally unparalleled fashion, to artistic expression.

In the Epilogue written to 'The Origin of the Work of Art', for instance, Heidegger says this about the essence of art: 'Western art is no more intelligible in terms of beauty taken for itself than it is in terms of lived experience'.[30] Art, for Heidegger, is not a function of showing lived experience. Art, or the work of art more exactly, essentially has nothing to do with lived experience, he says, because art is an historical phenomenon, and to be historical is to be world-constituting, not life revealing. Art, says Heidegger, discloses a world as it reveals the truth of Being: the way in which an historical age attempts to understand what it means for entities to be what they are by organizing things into various social practices. To be a work of art, thus, is to be intimately situated within the historical form of life to which it belongs. As with everything else in the Heideggerian philosophy, then, the work of art in the last analysis is understood in sole reference to the world.

As Heidegger asserts, the work of art is a work of *transcendence*: 'The origin of the work of art—that is, the origin of both the creators and the preservers, which is to say of a people's

[30] 1993, p. 206.

historical existence—is art. This is so because art is in its essence an origin: a distinctive way in which truth comes into being, that is, becomes historical'.[31] The origin of the work of art, its essence, is a function of transcendence and hence exteriority. Not only is the interiority of life's subjectivity—what Heidegger, following Husserl, prefers to call 'lived experience'—ignored on this conception of art, it is expressly intended to forbid subjectivity from taking the centre stage it does in a Kandinsky. This Heideggerian portrayal of art negates the pathos of life, subordinating life's unworldly affective self-revelation to an historical age's form of life—in short, for Heidegger, the work of art is understood in such a way that the subjectivity of life is eliminated since life is said to unfurl within the exteriority of social practice.

It is this conceptualization of the work of art that underpins a predictable set of objections to Henry's contrasting view of art. The main objection is this: because the self is said to be a function of intentionality, there is no place for the radical immanence of subjectivity. The work of art does not reveal life; instead it is just another, albeit privileged, way in which the world discloses itself.

This characterization of the work of art is hardly surprising: in Heidegger's thought everything is always exteriorized, including subjectivity. In truth, it is the Heideggerian philosophy's characterization of subjectivity as inextricably entwined with intentional transcendence that demands it understand the work of art in the way it does. The antecedent presupposition that the self is a function of transcendence delimits the work of art as something reducible to the horizon of exteriority. According to Heidegger, the self exhibits a fundamental transcendence: 'But what is originally transcendent, what *does the transcending*, is not things as over against the Dasein; rather, it is the Dasein itself which is transcendent in the strict sense. *Transcendence is a fundamental determination of the ontological structure of the Dasein*'.[32] To say that we are beings-in-the-world with Heidegger would thus in part be to say that we are

[31] Heidegger 1993, p. 202.
[32] Heidegger 1982, p. 162.

assigned to the exteriority of visibility and it alone. When the self is said to be essentially characterized by transcendence, by its openness unto the world, the way the work of art itself must be understood is thereby decided.

Art is said to reveal the nexus of intelligible relations—the 'worldhood' of the world—that allows beings to manifest themselves as useful within the horizon of intelligibility. This relation between the disclosive power of the work of art and the world itself it is said to reveal reduces the work of art to little more than something that portrays the practices of a given age. It simply shows what underpins an historical form of life's possibility. On Heidegger's conception of the work of art, the paintings of Vermeer, Cézanne, and Klee therefore prove especially telling since they draw our attention to these practices.

The Vermeer depicts the exteriority of the visible and practical world, the one we plunge into when we take up one or other practical identity that our familiar form of life affords: 'The more we look at the painting, the more the network of relations widens, and the more it widens, the higher our awareness becomes. The milkmaid appears as the focal point of a potentially infinite set of relations which cannot themselves be depicted but which my projective understanding of her activity and posture makes me sensitive to'.[33] Hence, in an encounter with a painting such as the *The Milkmaid*, I see the equipmental totality that constitutes the worldhood of the world. I see the relations that allow entities to show up as they are. When these relations determining a form of life's practices, bread making or pouring milk, are in turn unconcealed, the further background horizon from which they draw their own intelligibility comes into view. When broadened far enough, we confront the full scope of the historical backdrop that stages a particular form of life's practices.

It is the historical form of life, the one of everyday seventeenth century Holland, say, we come to see, that no longer exists. Though available on the canvas, it is lost to us. It is no longer accessible to us in the way it was to the figures who inhabit the painting. This

[33] Han-Pile 2011, p. 150.

recognition that the painting's world is now a bygone form of life, yet one not totally unlike our own, elicits a disquieting realization. It reminds us what it means to be situated, as we are, within a historical and thus totally contingent form of life: 'The way in which the figures belongs to their world intensifies our own sense of homelessness. Beyond this, our inability to deploy their world emphasises its fragility, and by extension the transience of all worlds. It is not a vast jump to see from the precariousness of that lost world that one day ours will be lost too'.[34] Summarizing the crux of the Heideggerian conception of art, Han-Pile consequently concludes: 'Thus whereas Cézanne's and Klee's work show us how worlds emerge out of chaos, the Vermeer paintings point towards the inherent fragility not just of the Dutch golden age, but of *all* worlds, towards their dependence on historical practices that may become less prominent or even cease to exist'.[35]

However, on this view of art, all a painting does is remind us that worlds emerge only to eventually collapse. This might be true, but the very fact of world emergence and destruction lies beyond the expressive power of a traditional representative painting whose supposed purpose is to reveal it! For a Vermeer might represent the form of life that made seventeenth-century Dutch living the unique form of life it was, it might even elicit in us the realization that the world is something inherently fragile since our own is no less transient than the milkmaid's was, but it cannot do justice to the life of subjectivity that in the final analysis is always at stake in a work of art. A Vermeer only accomplishes what it does by invoking an experience in us that reverberates within the radical immanence of life that such a painting itself indicates but cannot express. In seeing a Vermeer, I might upon reflection be unsettled, but the work itself does not express this unsettlement; it does not paint *apprehension itself*, *dread itself*, *transience itself*, or *fragility itself*. The painting might portray some state of affairs which, upon reflection, leads us to register that the form of the world is passing away, but it

[34] Han-Pile 2011, p. 156.
[35] Ibid.

cannot for all that reveal the reality that constitutes this realization since *the reality in which this realization manifests itself lies nowhere else than within the subjectivity of life itself*. So, even when attempting to exteriorize the subject matter of the work of art, the Heideggerian conception of art in the end tacitly invokes the very interiority of life it attempts to ignore. The work of art only discloses a truth, whatever that truth might be, within the invisible pathos of the life that feels it. Art accomplishes itself in pure sensibility, not in the anonymous exteriority that a traditional painting portrays. The Heideggerian philosophy of art is therefore fundamentally inconsistent: by portraying life as if it were essentially a function of worldly practices, it ultimately indicates the unworldly self-revelation of life it downplays.

This identical blindness to the life of subjectivity defines Merleau-Ponty's own philosophy of art. The prejudice is immediately apparent in his characterization of art as something whose principle is to reveal 'the sensible and opened world such as it is in our life and for our body'.[36] For Merleau-Ponty, just like Heidegger, the essence of subjectivity is always understood in terms of intentionality and thus the exteriority of the world and the visibility of objects. As Merleau-Ponty writes: 'In the work of Cézanne, Juan Gris, Braque and Picasso [objects] do not pass quickly before our eyes in the guise of objects we "know well" but, on the contrary, hold our gaze, ask questions of it, convey to it in a bizarre fashion the very secret of their substance, the very mode of their material existence and which, so to speak, stand "bleeding" before us. This was how painting led us back to a vision of things themselves'.[37] For Merleau-Ponty, a painting captures our pre-objective perceptual encounter with the world, one we typically do not notice when we are busy going about our everyday dealings within it. The work of art, according to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, is said to be a meditation on the 'enigma of visibility'; its sole preoccupation is the world and the

[36] 1964, p. 57.
[37] 2009, p. 69-70.

objects revealed within the horizon of visibility. High art, he concludes, discloses the pre-objective world of perception—the visible 'things themselves'—that otherwise remains veiled.

There is no point in denying this: as anyone who has seen a Cézanne or a Monet will know, great art can do that. But this is the only function for art that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology recognizes. The point is not to deny that such art reveals some of 'the things themselves'; the point is to emphasize that, in remaining confined to the horizon of visibility, it remains incomplete. For Merleau-Ponty, since life is strictly determined by intentionality and hence the world, art itself proves to be nothing more than the representation of our perceptual experience of the visible. While it is true that the art of a Cézanne masterfully depicts a landscape, or a table, or a house, revealing them as they are genuinely revealed in pre-objective perceptual experience*,* it does not express the pathos of the *perceiving itself*. It draws attention to the experiential texture of the world of perception, but remains oblivious to the invisibility of life. A Cézanne shows entities but not the invisible sensibility of life that sustains the visible horizon in which they appear. It remains completely transfixed by the objects that appear within the light of the world. Thus, when Merleau-Ponty approvingly describes Cézanne's work as a 'drive to rediscover the world as we apprehend it in lived experience', he does not identify the truth of art. To the contrary, Merleau-Ponty inadvertently highlights the inherent limitations of art's traditional undertaking, limitations immediately obvious the moment one compares it with those of a Kandinsky. A Cézanne captures things that manifests themselves to us in the perceived world, but it does not reveal the *invisible pathos of the life itself* in which those impressions are experienced. It can paint what appears visibly before the eyes, but not the life of the gaze itself. A Cézanne, in short, shows us what we see, but only a Kandinsky shows us the *feeling* of seeing.

We thus now have a satisfying answer to why Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's view of art is initially compelling despite being ultimately misleading. By insisting that life be reduced to worldly transcendence, it overlooks the invisibility of life's affective self-revelation.

This unquestioned presupposition that life is revealed in and as a world disfigures the essence of the work of art; this classical phenomenology, by treating life as little more than an opening unto the world, by consigning itself to the 'enigma of visibility', elides life. Just as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty portray the self as a function of worldly exteriority, so they mischaracterize the work of art. This demands a decision to at once reverse and renew phenomenology. Henry explains the renewal this reversal accomplishes this way: 'By opposing a more originary mode of manifestation (the immanent self-revelation of life in its invisible pathos) to the ek-static appearance of the world, which governs the development of western thought from Greece, the phenomenology of life offers entirely new tasks for investigation'. Key among the many tasks the new phenomenology has opened is a renewed examination of the work of art. Art, it has shown, does not disclose a world; it exalts life. Why is art continually said to concern the visibility of the world when in point of fact its essence is to show the invisible?

As for the work itself, it cannot speak, because it is not allowed to. It is reduced to silence because it can only speak when one stands willing to receive, in one's sensibility, the impression it wishes to make. As Marion comments: 'A painting is distinguished from other visible (objects) in that no signification can comprehend it or do away with our encountering its intuition […] One always has to go see a painting; the *only* thing one has to do is *see* it, without any other "exceptional" intuition besides that of simply, but truly, seeing it'. [38] If one is insensible and hence no longer wishes to feel, the work is rendered mute. And little wonder this is increasingly the case today: If art is a mode of life, and for this reason, a way of life, and if 'life is never present [in true art] in terms of what we see or seem to see in a painting but only in terms of what we feel within ourselves when this seeing happens',[39] then many will have no use for the work of art that tries to express this very life, precisely because *they have*

[38] 2008, p. 128.
[39] 2009, p. 121.

lost the ability to feel or experience anything anyway. Kandinsky himself puts the point of art this way: 'Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the harmonies, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul'. But if his painting demonstrates that the goal of art is to awaken in the subjectivity of its spectator 'these new pathetic modalities and this temporality of growth with which aesthetic experience begins and ends',[40] then if one's own power of sensibility is dead, how can the life the work of art attempts to express be experienced? Predictably, it will not.

Those who have no use for art will often say that it is art itself that is useless, or that it 'just isn't for them'; sometimes they claim to have no use for it, because they claim to know what is comparatively more important, and that this is why they feel no need to bother with art which is less so. But this is all untrue, of course. They have no use for art not because art is useless (they just fail to appreciate it), and the things they *do* spend their time on are hardly serious (reality television, Internet blogs, Netflix, work or family gossip, etc.). Why, then, do they feel no need to enjoy art? The answer is as straightforward as it is dismaying: they do not know how to confront, experience, and enjoy the pathos of their own subjectivity. As Henry wrote, indeed predicted, some thirty years ago: 'The information age will be the age of idiots'.[41] There is no 'use' for art for a simple reason. Art might force the negated self to confront what lies beneath its worldly veneer, and so it flees true art just as it does anything else that might lead it back to what it cannot stand most of all: its own singular individuality. If, then, as Henry says, 'Painting is truly the exaltation of life',[42] it accordingly falls to phenomenology to do what it can to help awaken people to this life. In an age of positivism, consumerism, materialism, and frivolity, that alone is difficult enough. But it is important. Important, however, not only because it would exhort others to learn to view and enjoy art as it deserves to be enjoyed and viewed. For the issue here is not simply one of extolling the

[40] 2009, p. 39.
[41] 2012, p. 51.
[42] Ibid.

virtue of cultivating a capacity for aesthetic experience. Instead, it is a matter of encouraging others to reawaken and retrieve the life of their very own subjectivity—and so themselves. By demonstrating that the pathos of subjectivity is the inner truth of both philosophy and art, Henry and Kandinsky have reminded us of this truth's enduring power: though culture might be dead, the Individual lives.

References

Bate, M. (1974). 'The Phenomenologist as Art Critic: Merleau-Ponty and Cézanne'. *British Journal of Aesthetics,* 14 (4): 344-350.

Crowell, S. (2011). 'Phenomenology and Aesthetics; or, Why Art Matters'. In *Art and Phenomenology*, (eds.) Joseph D. Parry. New York: Routledge, pp. 31-53.

Crowther, P. (1982). 'Merleau–Ponty: Perception into Art'. *British Journal of Aesthetics,* 22 (2): 138-149.

Han-Pile, B. (2011). 'Describing Reality or Disclosing Worlhood?: Vermeer and Heidegger'. In *Art and Phenomenology*, (eds.) Joseph D. Parry. New York: Routledge, pp. 138-161.

Heidegger, M. (1982). *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans: Albert Hofstadtr. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1993). 'The Origin of the Work of Art'. In *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*. Trans: David Krell. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers.

Henry, M. (2012). *Barbarism*. Trans: Scott Davidson. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Henry, M. (1996). 'Art and the Phenomenology of Life'. In *Prétentaine*, trans: Michael Tweed.

Henry, M. (2015). 'The Four Principles of Phenomenology'. Trans: Joseph Riveria and George E. Faithful. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 48 (1), 1-21.

Henry, M. (2003). *I am the Truth: Towards a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans: Susan Emanuel. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Henry, M. (2015). *Incarnation: A Philosophy of the Flesh*, trans. Karl Hefty. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University.

Henry, M. (2009). *Seeing the Invisible: on Kandinsky*, trans: Scott Davidson. London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Marion, J-L. (2008). *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans: Christina M. Gshwandtner. New York: Fordham University Press.

Marion, J-L. (2001). *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans: Robyn Horner and Vincent Berrand. New York: Fordham University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2009). *The World of Perception*, trans: Oliver Davis. New York: Routledge.

Wrathall, M. (2011). 'The Phenomenological Relevance of Art'. In *Art and Phenomenology*, (eds.) Joseph D. Parry. New York: Routledge, pp. 9-30.

Metaphysics and Immortality

[A] speculative thinker has finished on paper and mistakes this for existence.
—Kierkegaard

The question of the immortality of the soul, whoever knows the history of philosophy can attest, is one as venerable as it is vexed. Indeed, its difficulty assigns it to the highest order of metaphysical problems, proving so great and daunting in fact that even its proper formulation, much less a satisfying answer to it, is so demanding a task that no less a metaphysician as ambitious and brilliant as Descartes found it so intractable that it is best simply to set it aside. For although the 1641 first edition of *The Meditations* proclaims that the goal of the treatise is the demonstration of both the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, it offers no such argument for the soul's immortality. Descartes, as Mersenne was to note then just as readers still do today, passes over the immortality of the soul in complete silence. But why?

The answer lies in the inherent limitations, and hence the very essence, of modern metaphysics. Descartes's reticence regarding the immortality of the soul, we shall see, is an inescapable consequence of the history of philosophy's own metaphysical presuppositions. As Mersenne noted and Descartes himself conceded, even if the *Meditations* do establish the 'real distinction' between the soul and the body, allowing that the soul might persist beyond the destruction of the body, this would nevertheless still not demonstrate the immortality of the soul. For that conclusion, it would be necessary to somehow show that the soul is necessarily indestructible. But to do that, as Descartes acknowledged, would require one establish 'that God could not annihilate the soul', a task which itself would in turn require 'an account of the whole of physics'.[1] Understandably, this is an undertaking Descartes never seriously undertook. Much to his credit, Descartes recognized the limitation of metaphysics since it was

[1] Letter to Mersenne of 24 December 1640, in J. Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, eds. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, vol. III: Correspondence*, (ÔCMSKÕ) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 163.

he, perhaps more so than anyone else, who thought metaphysics to its outer extremities and fullest capacity.

Thus, if the knowledge of one's own immortality is not deducible by means of a chain of arid ratiocination, it therefore remains a knot that metaphysics cannot untie. Metaphysics traffics in concepts, definitions, and an inferential web of rules and implicatures that constitute its logic; in short, metaphysics concerns the conceptual space opened up by, and thus simultaneously delimited in virtue of, the way in which the finitude of thought can organize and measure that which would remain thinkable for it. And yet it is for this very reason, namely, that metaphysics trades exclusively only in that which remains thinkable, that immortality eludes it. The immortality that metaphysics knows—the term that figures in its demonstrations and proofs—is in fact little more than a conceptual but empty signification of that which it tries to represent but cannot. Metaphysics only knows immortality in the mode of knowing that it does not know it adequately; for immortality itself exceeds the representative means of the conceptual signification by which metaphysics attempts to fix and determine it. Immortality, in short, is a saturated phenomenon and therefore escapes metaphysics.

Hence, knowledge of the immortality of the soul is not a question, one to be resolved when reason deploys itself at its best, for it simply defies that very line of advance. Just as metaphysics treats God as a mere term in a demonstration, so it similarly treats immortality as conceptual node in a putative proof or disproof. The error of metaphysics, therefore, lies not in the fact that its ambition to prove the immortality of the soul meets with inevitable failure; the truth is that, even if any of its attempts to do so were valid and sound, the very notion of immortality they manipulate on paper is a conceptual idol anyway.

This abyss lying between immortality itself and that which metaphysics represents it as is important for at least one reason. If the history of metaphysics has proved incapable of demonstrating the immortality of the soul, it nevertheless remains possible in principle, if not

first apparent in fact, that one could for all that still know that one's self is immortal. To know so would only require a different approach than the traditional one which has broached it, as the history of metaphysics has preferred, by means of the concept. In other words, even if philosophical arguments of the kind metaphysics deploys do not establish the immortality of the soul, nothing of consequence follows from this about immortality itself. The inadequacy of metaphysics simply teaches us that if we are to know anything about the nature of immortality, such knowledge will not be won by the exercise of objective demonstrations. What, then, is the alternative? How else might immortality give itself?

Immortality is not given in the concept that would represent it since, to begin with, it does not concern the transcendence of thought. Rather than revealing itself in the form of an empty signification, immortality instead reveals itself experientially in the immanence of subjectivity's own pathetic self-revelation. That is to say, though there is no concept adequate to the intuition of immortality precisely because immortality outstrips any concept that would attempt to tame it; far from this proving that we cannot decide whether or not we are immortal, it shows that, if we are to know, it will be by means other than that of metaphysical thought.

Why do philosophical demonstrations of the immorality of the soul fail to completely convince us, even when, supposing they sometimes do, appear logically flawless? That arguments, even apparently sound ones, fail to persuade us is not simply a consequence of today's nihilism, inanity, or cynicism. As Plato tells us, this same doubt plagued both Cebes and Simmias, persisting even when they understood the arguments themselves to be faultless: 'I myself', Simmias confides to Socrates, 'have no remaining grounds for doubt after what has been said; nevertheless, in view of the importance of [immortality] and my low opinion of human weakness, I am bound still to have some private misgivings about what we have said'.[2] In short, even when an argument for the immortality of the soul is convincing, we still remain

[2] *Phaedo*, 107a.

less than totally convinced. Why? And in light of this fact, how then, if not by thought, might we instead approach immortality? What could provide us the assurance that metaphysical thought does not?

As strong as this objection initially appears, its strength is only apparent. If clarifying the precise means by which metaphysics proceeds seems hopelessly daunting, it is comparatively easy, indeed perfectly possible in practice, to identify how we relate to the question of immortality when in the natural attitude. It is not necessary to accede to an exhaustive comprehension of how the concept of immortality is deployed in every instance within the history of metaphysics, because we already have unfettered access to the source from which metaphysical thought itself draws upon for that conception. Before metaphysics delimits immortality in the concept, the natural attitude has already responded to immortality itself. Thus, since metaphysics itself merely reproduces in thought, however elegantly or technically sophisticatedly so, what the natural attitude enshrines and sediments in routine practice, prejudice, and expedience, let us turn to the natural attitude. How do we relate to immortality when in the mode of the natural attitude?

In the natural attitude, we simply ignore the question of immortality altogether. In the everyday routine of modern society, we negotiate immortality as something we wish to avoid confronting. *It is given, and only given, in the mode of our not wanting it to be given*. Ignoring immortality is essential to society's illusory collective conviction that what only matters are the daily preoccupations of life—one's job, the daily 'news', the next thing ones wants to buy, the next meal one must Instigram, the next vacation one hopes to take, etc. The illusory importance of these trivialities sustains itself, is reinforced to point of being considered normal, by silencing immortality. If one stands amidst the hustle and bustle of one of modern society's streets only to temporarily observe it rather than participate unthinkingly, what is the operative presupposition that sustains what one sees? You see people who have come to believe that the point of life lies in nothing else than shopping, eating, drinking, sex,

and entertainment. In order for this illusion to be reinforced, immortality must be ignored. This is why, in the increasingly rare moments when the topic of immortality is even broached, it is treated as little more than an impractical question for the philosophers to handle (when the so-called 'common man' says this, he does not suspect that even the philosophers themselves long ago abandoned the questions of God, death, and immortality too).

An example torn from the pages of everyday life illustrates, albeit only indirectly at first, how this is so and the indispensable role diversion plays in silencing immortality. It is necessary to recall it if only because the epicycle of diversion and fresh distraction that we live in might have caused us to forget the Internet sensation that captivated us for a short time. The example comes in the form of asking a question that once mattered: is 'the dress' blue and black, or is it gold and white? For a time, social media and the blogosphere erupted in hot debate over the question. Votes were cast, arguments exchanged and heard, Facebook 'likes' went showered and withheld, all on a whim. A *Guardian* article dated 27 February 2015 describes the temporary craze that epitomizes the shallowness we have come to accept as normal:

> Would you like to have an argument with your colleagues this fine Friday? Just ask them what colour the dress above is. Some people say white and gold, whereas others claim it's clearly blue and black. This rift in opinions has caused many people to doubt the sanity of themselves and their friends.

The dress, having served its purpose, was no longer useful as it no longer could command our attention. It had given us something to talk about and debate. But its days were numbered from the beginning, and now its time had passed. Having mattered for the three days it had, it now served no purpose. The purpose obeys a principle. What principle exactly? It is the very same rule that stages and deploys nearly everything that today passes as important: *at stake for us today is nothing more and nothing less than diversion.* We crave that sweet relief only the diversion from ourselves can supply. The words of Michel Henry, penned three decades ago during television's heyday, are perhaps relevant now more so with the advent of Internet culture. The

dress had diverted us from ourselves, it had given us the illusion of solidarity and community, but now it could no longer keep up the appearance of importance. It had been a welcome diversion from ourselves, yet as the allure of the debate steadily waned, that nagging sense of ourselves began to stir. We needed a fresh distraction, and of course we found one, because diversions and distractions are hardly in short supply. On the contrary, our daily routine is predicated on them. The *modus operandi* of things is to indefinitely sustain distraction so as to perpetually defer any confrontation with ourselves.

The 'reality' produced and marketed by media is central to sustaining this illusion. The mass media age and the sea of images it circulates, is a fabricated elixir of life. In presenting us an image of what life is and should be, it really only provides us an unabashed escape from it. It relieves us of ourselves. And thus still better, it delivers us from the boredom and discontent that otherwise would assail us were we deprived of the myriad diversions that we've crafted to avoid them. Thus, as Henry rightly concludes, the monstrous anonymous transcendence that the papers and magazines, then television, and now the Internet, have opened is a place of death. To state that today's culture is a culture of death is neither metaphorical embellishment nor rhetorical flourish. It is neither, because it is the simple consequence of acknowledging the incontestable phenomenological rule of manifestation modern society exhibits. The anonymous transcendence that we are programmed to call 'reality' is in fact little more than a space opened within the exteriorization, and hence negation, of subjectivity.

Because this impersonal transcendence is the negation of subjectivity, it is also the negation of life as life itself resides precisely nowhere else than within the immediate, pathetic, invisible self-revelation of subjectivity in which I first experience myself as myself. In the exteriority of the world there is no subjectivity, and there is no subjectivity because there, in the world, life is not deployed; instead, life is stifled, elided, derided, at best merely represented. Culture today is the mimetic creation and circulation of a life that has itself been

shoved underground. In the shine of the advertised image and the various 'lifestyles' it peddles, in the televised 'event' which really counts for nothing, in the stale rhetoric of corrupt politicians who promise everything in empty slogans which the proles are taught to parrot ('Change we can believe in!'), we see a culture stupefied by its single-minded devotion to money, power, and celebrity. The day's diversions offer us a simulacrum of life, but they are in truth actually just a grotesque substitute of the very life they continually murder. The space that it has opened, one which is ultimately really a nowhere, is where in turn the pointless events of the day are paraded one after the next.

As children we are not only trained to expect it, but even to accept it. There is a time in everyone's life, even in the lives of those who later as adults pretend not to know the experience because they long ago decided to try to forget it, when one realizes that there is something fundamentally wrong with the world; that it is not the locus of truth or place of justice that one naively thought it was or wished it would be. One indeed learns what is perhaps the greatest evil of all: to become a 'practical' adult, one must not mention or draw attention to the fact that the everyday routine of worldly people is a charade. It is a charade in the sense Kierkegaard noted when he wrote so polemically against the rise of the 'public', that is, in the same sense as when Romano soberly diagnoses the banality of today's 'journalistic event'. Everyday life, we by no means wish to deny, is replete with beauty and wonder and joy so long as it is taken up with the proper sense of thanksgiving and innocence. And indeed, that is precisely what motivates our diagnosing so much of what passes as normal today for a charade: the mass entertainment culture and careerism of late modern life, boiling over with its rampant greed and insatiable lusts, are a hollow shell that mesmerize so many, distracting its captive audiences from the pure beauty of Creation. No doubt many would line up to see a nature documentary at an IMAX theater, but how many look at the sunset outside their kitchen window, or enjoy the sound of the leaves flutter with the sway of the wind, or spy on the finches perched atop their telephone wires? There is so much to be experienced, but so

little of it ever is when, as so often today is the case, one is instead sucked into the vortex of petty worldly affairs. It is in that respect, and precisely in that respect alone, that we mean to say that the routine of everyday commercialized life remains a charade. Overcome by a lust with only a view to materialistic things and self-aggrandizing exploits and current media events, there are those who do not know the peace and joy of simply living—they have become dead to themselves because they have become stupefied, past feeling the humbling realization that happens when one is overwhelmed by the full mystery and joy of what it is to be alive at all. They are alive, but alienated from life, and hence themselves and the One who is trying to call them back to themselves.

The rule that stages the procession is this: the negation of subjectivity. This is why we witness and discuss the 'issue' or the 'story' for a time until it recedes from the horizon of gossip, replaced by the next item. Amidst the flux of serial images and pseudo-events there is only one fixed constant: those who remain glued to the radio, the Internet, the television, or the newspaper always remain *nowhere*. At the restaurant table with friends who are slowly becoming strangers to us, alone in a black apartment, or reduced to some substitutable cog-in-a-machine while standing next to others in commuter rail that may as well be empty, we are strangers to ourselves, alienated from our own subjectivity. The realm of objectivism's spectacle, with its blogs and reality television, its celebrity gossip and hackneyed journalism, its farcical political 'debate' and manufactured foreign policy crises, not to mention the surveillance state and ideologies of positivistic scientism and techno-fascism that ultimately fuel this bread and circus, is a death zone. From the perspective of the natural attitude, there is so much to discuss because there is so much taking place. In reality, in the subjectivity of life itself, nothing has happened.

This is our today, one the ephemeral saga of the dress confirms should anyone for some reason care to deny it. In the final analysis, the dress was banished to oblivion, unceremoniously buried, replaced without a grand farewell by the next Internet sensation—

and for that matter, can anyone remember what the next 'big story' was? I can't. The dress, thus, left the scene without even a perfunctory *bon voyage*; it performed its function, and we all moved on. Washed-up and old-hat in just three days: the fate of the dress is just one representative instance among countless others of the never-ending diversion-epicycle that rules us. The great dress debate of 2015, then, is a sign of the wider times.

When we are willing to be honest with ourselves, what shall we say is the substance of today? What is really of concern to us? The truth is sad indeed: shopping, eating, entertainment, exercise regimes and diets that encourage its adherents to deny the reality of their mortality. It is a strange thing to hear so many today, when confronted with the Word they prefer to ignore, deride the scriptures as 'antiquated myth' or 'bronze-age superstition', when in fact its words describe the modern condition better than any others: 'For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame, who mind earthly thing' (Philippians 3:18-19). When we are not futilely busy trying to master death (as if we could ever vanquish it) with nutrition, exercise, or the cult of cosmetic surgery, we spend the rest of our daily routine seizing finite goods as if that somehow altered their transience. We behave as if our idolizing them could somehow transform them into more than they really are. We want them to abide, to supply us a sense of assurance and confidence, even though deep down we know that they cannot. What a strange thing to hear modern man, the hapless magician, scoff at the 'superstition' of the Cross!

This is why the things that we choose to care about simply come and they go; that is the way transient things are, and maybe that is the way we like them. To be sure, there is plenty of controversy and discussion about this or that, but nothing changes. And this should come as no surprise, for the truth of the matter is that *nothing really happens* anyway, so little wonder that nothing changes. Bruce Jenner's gender-identity crisis, Taylor Swift's newest boyfriend, Apple's newest Iphone, some scripted joke of Obama's at the Press

Correspondence Dinner, the umpteenth Buzzfeed list you've read this afternoon at work, these are things that presumably matter—this is, after all, what we choose to spend our time concerned with. At the very least they are the things that typically interest us, even if we are understandably ashamed to admit it. Our guilt, nor our better judgment, prevails because we keep returning for another helping of the same.

The corresponding question to ask is plainly obvious: how could the question of my immortality seriously arise here and now when today designates nothing less than the negation of subjectivity? A philosophical argument, after all, is only as powerful—and hence persuasive—as the context in which it is tendered will permit. How then can an age like ours, one predicated upon the negation of life, be at all hospitable to the question of immortality? It is not, and it cannot be. Immortality, consequently, as our review of the history of metaphysics will attest, remains an enigma which the objective demonstrations of mere thought cannot resolve. But why precisely do they fail to persuade, and by what other means, if not by metaphysical thought, might we approach immortality? Let us turn to Plato, Aquinas, and Descartes for a leading clue.

Traditional philosophical demonstrations of the immortality of the soul fail. But why? They fail, not necessarily due to any shortcoming in their logic, but because they do not convince us, even when the logic seems otherwise impeccable. When an argument's reasoning appears valid, or even when we have no particularly compelling reason to contest any one of its premises, somehow we remain unconvinced. The conclusion that the soul is immortal can perhaps follow logically, but the result does not assure us. Why do they not assure us? The reason is simple even if metaphysics will not admit it: traditional demonstrations of immortality do not concern, and hence cannot assure, *me*. They traffic in the ideality of the concept—the ego *qua* substance or the rational intellect—but not the immediate radical immanence in which the singular self who I am is revealed in the self-revelation of transcendental affectivity. The arguments have no purchase on me (and thus provide no

assurance), because they abstract from precisely what should be at stake in immortality: I myself. Their sophistication, ingenuity, and erudition notwithstanding, metaphysical demonstrations of immortality are less than persuasive. And little wonder why: how could demonstrations which do not even investigate the experiential reality in which life itself unfurls have anything useful to say about eternal life?

By alienating itself from life's subjectivity's in the abstraction of thought, by elevating the concept above the life it purports to signify, the history of metaphysics has been unable to prove immortality. Plato's *Phaedo* provides the first notable case in point. The dialogue offers an argument for immortality that proceeds in two divisible but complementary steps. In the first stage—itself consisting of the 'cyclical argument', the 'argument from recollection', and the 'affinity argument'—Plato's Socrates suggests that the soul transcends the body, or, as Descartes was later to put it, that the soul is distinct from the body. Between body and soul, Socrates says, there is a real distinction. The cyclical argument and the affinity argument, appreciated together, aim to demonstrate that the soul can survive the destruction of the body; and indeed, the argument from recollection purports to show that it already has before! As the commentators have noted, supposing as Socrates does that substance dualism is true, the arguments are not obviously invalid. Since the soul is distinct from the body, and since nothing comes from nothing, we should posit reincarnation. Similarly, since the soul is distinct from the body, and since it is capable of contemplating the forms, but because it is impossible to explain how the soul can contemplate the forms *after* it is joined to a body, it follows that it must have known the forms *before* becoming incarnate. And finally, if, as the affinity argument contends, the soul is imperceptible, invariable, and indivisible, this only lends further support to the conclusion that the soul and body are in fact distinct. And yet, the argument for immortality is still incomplete.

Though the cyclical argument might well prove the prenatal existence of all souls, and even the *postmortem* existence of some, it does not demonstrate the immortality of every

current incarnate soul. It does show that *I* am immortal. The same holds for the recollection and affinity arguments: to show that the soul is distinct from the body, or even to show that it is eternal, does not demonstrate that it is immortal. As has been observed: 'The three main parts of the dialogue may be taken to correspond to distinctions we drew earlier: [Socrates' initial defence] maintains that the soul *is capable of* existing when the body is destroyed; the three initial arguments maintain that it *does* in fact do so, through repeated cycles of incarnation (unless liberated from those cycles through devotion to philosophy); and the prenatal argument (*FA*) maintains that the soul *necessarily* exists when the body is destroyed, because by no process of change in nature can the soul go out of existence.'[3] Hence, by the time the initial tripartite argument for the real distinction between the soul and body, along with the soul's eternality, has been unveiled, the demonstration of immortality still requires additional argument.

For immortality to follow, it must not only be shown that the soul can survive the destruction of the body, but that it will necessarily so. In reply to the challenge, Plato deploys the second and final half of the dialogue which has come to be called the 'final argument'. Not only can the soul survive the destruction of the body, says Plato, but it necessarily does because the soul itself is indestructible. The soul, he argues, is the principle of life; it is what enlivens the body. It does so, he further says, because the soul itself participates in the Form of Life. The essence of the soul, thus, is to live. Hence, it cannot admit of death since that would require it to cease to be what it is. No thing can be other than what it is, so the soul, as principle of life, does not admit of death; it is indestructible. There is, however, a fatal aporia that plagues this account, the very same one that plagues Aquinas too as we shall see. As one commentator explains the problem: 'This "Socratic" criticism can also be formulated in Kantian terms, for it is this very knowledge, which seems to transcend the realm of our experience, of which Plato tries to convince us in his proof: that there is something in us

[3] Pakaluk 2003, p. 23.

which is a unity in itself, an immaterial entity which can be separated from the body and survives this separation in integrity and preservation of its faculties, an immortal soul.'[4] But to be assured of this, the commentator righty continues, would require us to possess 'direct knowledge of the causes of our generation and destruction in the way desired by Socrates in his discussion of the notion of cause (95 e-99 d), namely if we possessed knowledge of the fate of our soul before and after death; but Plato himself was aware that of this he could not give us an exact account but only a mythical description, the "likely story" with which Socrates concludes his talk (cf. 108 d)'.[5] In short, since metaphysics lacks any insight into the 'causes of our generation and destruction', we have no assurance that we shall survive death. In the last analysis, we are strangers to the essence of life even this side of death, so we can have no assurance whether life shall overcome death.

If Plato's 'final argument' fails to prove the immortality of the soul because it does not establish that the essence of the soul ineluctably excludes destruction, it is Aquinas who attempts to complete the argument. Yet it is only in addressing the aporia of the soul's indestructability that metaphysics only deepens it. The whole man, as Aquinas declares, is a composite of body and soul, yet the soul itself, he argues, is intellectual. In section I. 75. 2 of the *Summa* he thus writes:

> It must necessarily be allowed that the principle of intellectual operation which we call the soul, is a principle both incorporeal and subsistent […] Therefore the intellectual principle which we call the mind or the intellect has an operation *per se* apart from the body. Now only that which subsists can have an operation *per se*. For nothing can operate but what is actual: wherefore a thing operates according as it is; for which reason we do into say that heat imparts heat, but that what is hot gives heat. We must conclude, therefore, that the human soul, which is called the intellect or the mind, is something incorporeal and subsistent.

It knows all things due to the power of intellection, a power which itself is un-bodily. Says Aquinas: 'Now there can be no contrariety in the intellectual soul; for it receives according to the manner of its existence, and those things which it receives are without contrariety; for the

[4] Frede 1978, p. 39.
[5] Frede 1978, p. 40.

notions even of contraries are not themselves contrary, since contraries belong to the same knowledge'.[6] Not only, then, does the seat of the soul consist in immaterial intellection, it is hence the seat of life itself: 'To seek the nature of the soul, we must premise that the soul is defined as the first principle of life in those things which love: for we call living things animate, and those things which no life, inanimate'.[7] Intellectual, immaterial principle of life that it is, the soul, Aquinas concludes, is pure form. And because form is act, the intellectual soul is *per se* subsistent: it is an existing substance that contains within itself no tendency toward non-being. The soul, that is to say, does not tend toward dissolution or destruction; it endures even despite the body's own inherent tendency toward dissolution. The rational soul, says Aquinas, is therefore incorruptible:

> We must assert that the intellectual principle which we call the human soul is incorruptible. For a thing may be corrupted in two ways—*per se*, and accidently. Now it is impossible for any substance to be generated or corrupted accidently, that is, by the generation or corruption of something else.[8]

Not only does the 'real distinction' between the intellectual soul and the body ensure that the soul will subsist beyond death at its separation from the body, it must, in strict accordance with its own incorruptible nature, continue to persist. For a form cannot be separated from itself since that would require a thing to be separated from itself. That is impossible, of course, so inasmuch as the intellectual soul is pure form and hence cannot be separated from itself *per accidens*, it will not perish at death. Indeed, as Aquinas argues, a substance such as the soul could only be destroyed *per se*. The separation of the soul from the body, thus, might destroy the whole man *per accidens* by disjoining the two, but it leaves the soul intact. And the rational soul itself cannot be destroyed *per se* by natural means either, since that would require it be separated from itself, an (almost) pure impossibility.

And yet, there is a serious problem with the argument, as Aquinas's version is essentially a recycled version of Plato's 'affinity argument' and 'final argument'. Just like Plato

[6] (I, 75, 6).
[7] (I, 75, 1).
[8] (I, 75, 6).

before him and Descartes after, the argument will only convince those who already concede that there exists something about the soul that is immaterial. But of course many deny this, and arguments for non-materialism are held in even lower regard today than they were during the nascent 'natural philosophy' of Plato's age. To convince someone that there is a dimension of their being that is not reducible to the body is difficult enough; to convince others that such a remainder is an immaterial, immortal substance even more so.

But suppose that, for whatever reason, the arguments for the real distinction between the soul and body did happen to convince us. Aquinas nevertheless concedes that, for all we know, God can destroy the soul if He wants. This admission ensures that there is no certainty involved in the proofs for the indestructability of the soul after all: just as Descartes admitted to Mersenne, there is no way to establish with metaphysical reason that the soul cannot be destroyed; for at the very least, God can. The objection this concession invites is one as obvious as it is decisive: by whatever means God could destroy the soul, why not simply conclude that this is precisely what death itself accomplishes?

To follow the argument's procession from Plato, to Aquinas, and finally to Descartes, is to be thrown back on hope. For even if one accepts that the human being has an immaterial, invisible, indivisible soul, and even if one accepts that such a substance is consequently distinct from the body, and even if one accepts that it is possible—indeed even *likely*—that such a substance shall survive the destruction of the body, metaphysics cannot prove with certainty that it is necessarily indestructible. Hence, immortality is not proved.

To see it, recall again Descartes's *Meditations*, perhaps the most famous of all unsuccessful attempts to prove the immortality of the soul by objective demonstration. On the opening page of the 'First Meditation', Descartes states that one must 'demolish everything completely' by doubting everything so that one might as a result 'establish anything

at all in the sciences' that shall be 'stable' and 'likely to last'.[9] This aim, however important it might be, is not the underlying motivation behind the *Meditations*. The *Meditations* are not, as the common reading today suggests, a venture in refuting skepticism to supply a foundation for the empirical sciences. To the contrary, in the dedicatory letter to the Sorbonne that prefaces them, Descartes announces that at stake is something else, something even more ambitious, than first philosophy's establishment of the natural sciences. He writes that once the 'most learned and distinguished men' of the Faculty of Theology understand the text's true undertaking, they surely 'will give it their protection'.[10] What explains Descartes's assurance that the *Meditations* will indeed prove worthy of the Sorbonne's protection?

It is a treatise sure to be protected, as Descartes justifies the hope, precisely because the central issue at stake is a possession as prized as it has long eluded the theologians. This prize that directs the entire line of thinking which Descartes initiates in the *Meditations*, the one announced in his dedicatory letter to his readers at the Sorbonne, is this: the demonstrations of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. It is immortality and the existence of God, not the foundations of the new natural science, which lie at the heart of the Cartesian metaphysics.

In fact, Descartes contends that knowledge of God and the immortality of the soul are themselves the indispensable bedrock for any certainty in the sciences. For without knowledge of immortality and God, whatever confidence we place in the putative truths of natural science remains in fact misplaced. He says so explicitly: 'Perhaps there may be some who would prefer to deny the existence of so powerful a God rather than believe that everything else is uncertain'.[11] The *Meditations* are thus in a way a pure exercise in natural theology.[12] Before empirical science can proceed with assurance, and even before first

[9] 18.
[10] 1986, p. 3.
[11] 1986, p. 14.
[12] For instance, the Second Meditation, which famously attempts to demonstrate that the mind is better known than the body, is meant to supply the key premise for an argument for the immortality of the soul

philosophy supplies reason for that justification, theological matters must be settled. For as Descartes himself readily confesses, although the *Meditations* do intend to proceed by a chain of impeccably indubitable reasoning—a task itself already ambitious enough!—it equally intends to do so by means of reasoning that is expressly and strictly natural, not revealed, in nature. In short, Descartes aims to deduce what are ultimately theological results by means of natural reason alone. The fundamental goal of the exercise, then, though achieved methodologically by the use of mere reason alone, is nevertheless for all that substantively theological. At stake ultimately in Descartes's *Meditations*, thus, is a prize that he knows his peers at the Sorbonne cannot possibly resist, because it is one that is as theologically ambitious as it is venerable: the demonstration of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul.

What happens when the text is accordingly read as it should be? When the *Meditations* are read in the fashion that the dedicatory letter itself demands—it is not at all here a question of whether Descartes wrote what he did in full sincerity, since the possibility of reading the *Meditations* as an exercise in natural theology would still remain as perfectly a legitimate hermeneutic possibility as ever, one entirely up to our discretion to take up, even if Descartes himself didn't really mean for us to—they emerge as a clear example of the longstanding attempt to deduce theological truths from natural reason alone. As Descartes himself explains, inasmuch as he produces the demonstrations he does, in many respects his own contribution to the questions of God and immortality is hardly novel. The fact that his own arguments are not particularly novel is a fact due as much to the traditional assumptions they preserve as the original method by which they are deployed: 'I have noticed both that you and all other theologians assert that the existence of God is capable of proof by natural reason, and also that the inference from Holy Scripture is that the knowledge of God is easier to

since, by having established that the mind and body are independent from one another, the soul can indeed survive the destruction of the body.

acquire than the knowledge we have of many created things—so easy, indeed, that those who do not acquire it are at fault'.[13] If knowledge of God lies within unaided natural reason's ken, it should thus be demonstrable by any rational mind that proceeds carefully. This conviction that key theological truths are demonstrable by natural reason therefore entails a censure for those who would claim neither to know God nor immortality: those who purport not to see the existence of God, or claim that such knowledge is impossible either because there is no God to be known or that we cannot know that there is a God even supposing there is, are mistaken, and gravely so at that. The passages that Descartes bears in mind when he says this are sure to spring immediately to the mind of anyone who has taken the time to read the scriptures, and indeed Descartes's own remarks in the very next line of dedicatory letter confirm the reader's expectation. He invokes the words of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans 'that [they who are unbelievers] are 'without excuse'. Indeed, according to Descartes, when it is a question of excuse, unbelievers have none precisely because the existence of God and the immortality of the soul 'can be demonstrated by reasoning which has no other source but our own mind'.[14] Though Descartes himself does not explicitly state the inference waiting here to be drawn, we can: if to be human is to be a thinking thing, then the refusal to accept the existence of God or the immortality of the soul, which are themselves propositions knowable by the right exercise of our rational thinking, is tantamount to a transcendental castration of one's own humanity. Just as thinking determines, limits, and conditions the essence of the human for Descartes, so a denial of the two greatest deliverances most essential to its proper exercise is inexcusable. The inexcusability of denying the immortality of the soul or the existence of God does not merely consist in the vice of sloppy thinking; the very moment one consecrates them, one does not only negate a proposition one entertains before the mind. Instead, the negation involved concerns the very essence of the human being himself who

[13] 1986, p.3.
[14] Ibid.

maintains it. To deny the existence of God or the immortality of the soul is to deny one's own humanity. The thinker who avows that there is no God, or who denies the immortality of his own soul, does so by performing an operation of reason that turns against reason itself and hence his own self. In denying God, the poor thinker negates himself.

If the abuse of reason entails such weighty consequences as these, little wonder that according to Descartes its proper use should entail equally great ones: 'once the arguments [in the *Meditations*] proving that God exists and that the mind is distinct from the body have been brought, as I am sure they can be, to such a pitch of clarity that they are fit to be regarded as very exact demonstrations', Descartes recommends that the Sorbonne make a public declaration, informing the people that the controversy surrounding the existence of God and the immortality of the soul has at last been settled to the satisfaction of the learned.[15] When done, this, he predicts, shall in turn ensure that 'everyone else will confidently go along with so many declarations of assent, and there will be no one left in the world who will dare to call into doubt either the existence of God or the real distinction between the human soul and the body'.[16] By Descartes's own forthright admission, then, the *Meditations* are published with the aim of being a bold, potent treatise indeed: should they produce the effect for which they were crafted, they would eradicate unbelief from the landscape of both the educated and lay world.

The textual facts themselves evince so unambiguously. As he writes in the synopsis to the *Meditations*, 'the first and most important prerequisite for knowledge of the immortality of the soul is for us to form a concept of the soul which is as clear and distinct from every concept of body'[17]—this is precisely what the second Mediation purports to do. But even if this argument shows that 'the decay of the body does not imply the destruction of the mind, and are hence enough to give mortals the hope of an after-life […] the premises which lead to

[15] 1986, p. 6.
[16] Ibid.
[17] 1986, p. 12.

the conclusion that the soul is immortal depend on an account of the whole of physics'.[18] For as he continues: 'we need to know that absolutely all substances, or things which must be created by God in order to exist, are by their nature incorruptible and cannot ever cease to exist unless they are reduced to nothingness by God's denying his concurrence to them'.[19] And this is the fatal blow to metaphysics: there is no way to demonstrate by reason that God will not annihilate the soul. Without such a proof, there is no right to conclude that we know by thought, with certainty, that the soul is necessarily indestructible. Indeed, to the contrary, the long procession of metaphysical arguments that aim to show the indestructability of the soul ultimately end in an aporia that reveals the opposite: the soul is not necessarily indestructible if only because God might always destroy it.

Thus, with metaphysics we must disagree: the 'first and most important prerequisite for knowledge of the immortality of the soul' is not a proper *concept* of the soul. Instead, the prerequisite is to free immortality from the concept altogether, so that it is no longer reduced to a conceptual item, a mere idol. To do that, we must not turn to metaphysics. Instead, we must attack the problem at its source, the natural attitude itself which underpins metaphysics. Only by identifying how we attempt to keep immortality at arm's length in the natural attitude we will not in turn be led to raise immortality to the concept. Only by neutralizing the natural attitude's habitual disinterest in immortality, and the subsequent conceptual re-articulation of that very disinterest in discursive thought, will immortality truly claim us.

Dismaying as a result this may be for metaphysics, an alternative hypothesis emerges immediately once thought's impotence to prove immortality is acknowledged: does the question of immortality even reside in thought in the first place? If not, far from thought's inability to decide the question of immortality showing that the question is undecidable,

[18] 1986, p. 10.
[19] 1986, p. 10.

perhaps it simply instead indicates another way forward was possible all along. To rise into presence, immortality is seized not in the concept but in inwardness.

This alternative presents itself the moment we see that metaphysical demonstrations enshrine a concept of immortality inherited from the natural attitude of everyday life. They fail to assure us because they simply rearticulate the experiential mode in which we encounter immortality while in the natural attitude. But in the natural attitude, we essentially ignore immortality. And thus, the immortality that metaphysics in turn brings to conceptual clarity is impoverished. The daily routine of modern society—and the practical identities, instrumentalities, and exigencies to which it gives rise—concerns itself with the immediacy of the routines—job, family, hobbies, entertainment, etc.—that preoccupy us during the time that leads to death. We banish the reality of death, much less the possibility that something might follow it. And as a consequence, the question of one's own immortality is suppressed or ignored in the hustle and bustle of our daily concern. The concept is only as strong as what it conceptualizes; since metaphysics articulates precisely what we ignore in everyday life—the radical immanence of life's transcendental self-revelation—it proves inadequate.

In short, when metaphysics delimits immortality in the concept, it reflects the low regard with which the natural attitude holds immortality. Just as the natural attitude holds immortality at arm's length within a form of life that consists in little more than a series of diversions, so metaphysics itself keeps immortality at bay by relegating it to a mere signitive concept. In short, where the natural attitude attempts to banish the thought of immortality from consciousness entirely, metaphysics confines it to thought alone. Metaphysics, therefore, does not pose the question of immortality seriously and soberly; to the contrary, by assigning immortality to the realm of the concept alone, it consummates the natural attitude's decision to indefinitely defer any serious encounter with immortality. To think immortality in the mere concept, as metaphysics does, is a continuation of the natural attitude's antecedent decision to silence the exigency of immortality's claim on us.

The failure of metaphysics to demonstrate the immortality of the soul is not explicable as a mere consequence of what thought does—or does not—decide in the space of reasons. For the failure precedes whatever line of defense or attack of immortality mere metaphysical reason chooses to deploy. These arguments fail to persuade, in this age at least, not because they turn on an identifiable flaw in the logic; they prove unpersuasive as they do because those who should care about their own immortality do not. They are not even suitably attuned to the issue metaphysical debate attempts to decide, so no wonder that metaphysics proves unable to decide the question. Moving from the natural attitude and then to metaphysical discursivity, the one who questions in this fashion never really cares. The question becomes a game.

If, then, today most of us don't even care about immortality—we are happy to busy ourselves with seemingly everything and anything save that—then of course arguments, in the rare instances in which we give them the time of day, prove unconvincing. Traditional metaphysical attempts to demonstrate the immortality of the soul are therefore in a way useless. They are useless because whatever persuasive force they ascribe to the power of reason itself always presupposes an interlocutor who is really willing to take the question seriously and hence follow the argument. The appreciation of such arguments requires an exigency that only the passion of subjectivity itself can supply. In point of fact if not by definition, then, those who *need* an argument for immortality *lack* that very passion. For if they indeed possessed the passion, they would have no need for the argument. Metaphysical arguments, consequently, fall upon deaf ears. But why? What does it mean to lack the requisite passion to face up to immortality in truth?

Here, it would of course be an oversimplification to lay the frivolity, cynicism, and escapism of today solely at the feet of the craze that technology has unfurled upon us. Technology is an essential contributor to the wasteland of today, but it is not the principal cause that has ushered in subjectivity's destruction. Soulless technology, empty-headed

consumerism, and inane media aside, none explains *why* subjectivity is in such rapid decline. To the contrary, the instruments by which life is murdered do not explain why, because they all presuppose some deeper culprit who wields them.

Immortality hence is not a topic of demonstration but a task: 'Immortality is precisely the intensification and highest development of the developed subjectivity […] The very moment I am conscious of my immortality I am absolutely subjective'. That Kierkegaard's anti-metaphysical portrayal of immortality in principle excludes a rational demonstration of immortality, far from being irrational, is paradoxically the pique of reason. By assigning the question of immortality its proper place, as the absolute unconditional end of my existence, it allows the question to accede to itself. And what is irrational about that?

To declare, as Kierkegaard does, that we are immortal is therefore not to tender a thesis that deserves to be subjected to the tribunal of metaphysical reason. It is something to be tested by each and every singular self inwardly. If a desire for eternal happiness is the calling card of genuine subjectivity, knowledge of immortality accordingly obeys a strictly Socratic regime of disclosure: to know that I am immortal I must know myself; but to know myself, I must first become a genuine subject in inwardness. Those who consign the question of immortality to mere thought betray a fundamental *self*-misunderstanding. By approaching the question of immortality as they would any other question, as something that belongs to the game of giving and asking for reasons, in remaining objective as they do, they know neither the desire for eternal happiness concealed within the depths of inward pathos beneath the veneer of mundane subjectivity they occupy. Knowing not themselves, neither do they know immortality: for if truth dwells in subjectivity, how could they?

The immortality of the natural attitude and discursive thought is a game. It does not turn on my concern for eternal happiness as my absolute concern. The natural attitude consigns immortality to oblivion, metaphysics circulates it on paper. Immortality, which in truth should be a task worked out in fear and trembling, is reduced at best to a conceptual

idol. The reduction is accomplished by diversion. In suppressing the singular individuality of my existence which consists in an inwardness that neither the natural attitude nor metaphysics knows, immortality is approached without passion. Yet without passion, as Kierkegaard explains, it is not approached at all. The inability of objective thought to prove immortality does not entail that the question is therefore a dead end. To the contrary, a recognition of thought's own limitations is an indispensable condition for finally broaching the question sincerely. At least two related reasons explain why.

First, the objective demonstrations of metaphysics are in the one instance unpersuasive, and in the other otiose. Unconvincing because those who refuse to return to the depths in which their own subjectivity phenomenalises itself—in the self-affective interiority of life's self-revelation—lack any acquaintance with the desire for eternal happiness. But without such a desire, they will never find objective proofs persuasive. For such proofs presume to draw a conclusion that in fact presupposes an exigency they presuppose but cannot themselves deploy. If I am unwilling to face up to my immortality, no argument will change my mind.

This leads to the second reason. Such arguments, if not unpersuasive, at best remain superfluous. Superfluous because those who *do* live inwardly already have no need to be shown something that supposedly still stands in need of being shown. What metaphysics assumes can only remain a matter of rational demonstrations is, for those who know immortality in its truth, as a task, on the contrary already experiential truth. The question of immortality, then, is not determined or decided by thought; it is resolved in the depths of life's subjectivity. Neither the would-be imperialism of the syllogism, nor the shrewdness of the 'empirically minded', nor even the life of diversion of today's distracted selves, decides a thing. They can ignore immortality, but immortality does not care. Neither the banality of the natural attitude nor the gamesmanship of metaphysics changes that.

Immortality is not first nor simply a question to be pondered; it is a duty to be faced. We find corroboration of this alternative way of thinking, if we so choose, in these words we have read in the pages of Kierkegaard. Of course, the reminder that immortality is an existential task, not an intellectual puzzle, will convince no one but those who already agree. Have we not then reached a dialectical stalemate between the champion of subjectivity and the warden of objective thought? What more, in short, can one possibly say in response to those who, even upon encounter with the word of subjectivity, would still deny the distinction between objective thinking and inwardness, or those who plead ignorance of what the distinction means, or those who at least acknowledge the existence of inwardness but assert not to have discerned any desire for eternal happiness after having consulted it, or those who simply allege to be completely indifferent about the question of eternal happiness? Only this, it would seem: one can attempt to remind others that such a thing as inwardness exists, and one may even exhort them to return within their own subjectivity to retrieve it, but nothing one can say will necessarily oblige them to do it. I can invite you to think about your existence afresh, that is it.

No doubt Kierkegaard knew this much, which is why he adhered to subjective thinking's principal tenet—that one's duty as an existing subject is not merely to abstractly entertain P or ~P, but to *live existingly in it*. To pose the question of immortality in earnestness, not absentmindedly and abstractly, is the only way it can rightly be broached. When, as here, the dispute concerns something as ineluctably intimate as the enigma of immortality, one can champion subjectivity all one pleases, and still nothing may well come of it, this especially so today when subjectivity is dismissed with a wave of the hand or a shrug of the shoulders. So when, as here, it is an issue of righting the question of immortality, and thus accordingly an issue of awakening subjectivity, one may at most to be a gadfly, nothing more. To prove immortality, Kierkegaard would remind us, is to play a game:

> In that way the proving of immortality becomes a sort of game. And when this game is long continued and becomes very popular, it is like an assault when a discourse, assuming immortality as a thing most certain, comes as close as possible to one, when instead of proving it (for that is to put I at a distance from one and hold it there), it comes out bluntly with the consequence which follow from it. Instead of beseeching thee to lend it thine attention and to listen tranquilly while it proves immortality, it assaults thee somewhat in this fashion: "Nothing is more certain than immortality; thou shalt not be concerned about it, not waste thy time upon it, nor seek evasions by wanting to prove it, or wishing it proved—fear it, it is all-too-certain, do not doubt whether thou art immortal, but tremble, for thou art immortal.[20]

In truth, who could deny that what metaphysics has said about immortality is, if not a blunder, at best a game? Even if I should somehow establish the immortality of the soul with reason, that would not decide how, or even whether, *I* respond to what that fact entails. The task, then, is to face up to immortality rather than using abstract thought as a shrewd way to suppress the responsibility that accompanies it: 'There must be no question about immortality, as to whether it is; but the question must be whether I live as my immortality requires me to live. There must be no talk about immortality, as to whether it is, but about what my immortality requires of me, about my immense responsibility in being immortal'.[21] By relegating the question of immortality to thought, I maintain it at a distance: 'If there was deceit in him, he was accordingly just the contrary of what he said he was, he was afraid of immortality—hence he so eagerly desired to have it *proved*, because he obscurely understood that immortality, by becoming an object of proof, is cast down from the throne, deposed, a poor impotent figure which men can jeer at, as the Philistines jeered at Samson their prisoner'.[22]

As those who have seized this way of 'radical unknowing' know, it is in inwardness that the Word of eternity is spoken, and with it, the promise of immortality. No doubt those who come to know what metaphysics had assumed was nothing more than a term in a

[20] 1939, p. 211.
[21] 1939, p. 213.
[22] 1939, p. 220.

demonstration or the conclusion of a deduction will be told that they have been persuaded into believing a bit of foolishness, or that they have succumbed to the seductions of an arbitrary wisdom-saying. So be it: those who have heard that to which metaphysics remains deaf can be confident that the Life that has spoken in them is more reliable, and infinitely so, than the logic metaphysics extolls. Thus, for those who have tested what metaphysics says of immortality only to find it wanting, it is the words of Life that stand higher than those of any empty syllogism ever did or could.

This is why, patiently and assured, they await the fulfillment of a promise that rests securely in the power of an authority who far exceeds anything the finitude of thought might supply or delimit; they have confidence in what the fullness of time will eventually one day reveal just as they already have every reason to trust that which today guarantees it. For they stand exactly where the self who relies strictly on the powers of its own reason or the myopia of its worldly ambitions never will. In short, they have 'let-go' and tasted immortality, which is why, in inwardness, they are able to stand joyfully as they do: 'In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began' (Titus 1:2).

References

Appolini, D. 'Plato's Affinity Argument for the Immortality of the Soul'. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 34 (1), 5-32, 1996.

Aquinas, T. (1947). *Summa Theologica Vol 1*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. London: Burns & Oates.

Descartes, R. (1986). *Mediations on First Philosophy*, trans. J. Cottingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Frede, D. 'The Final Proof the Soul's Immortality in Phaedo 102a-107a'. *Phronesis*, 23 (1), 27-41, 1978

Gallop, D. 'Plato's "Cyclical Argument" Recycled'. *Phronesis* 27 (3), 207-222, 1982.

Henry, M. (2012). *Barbarism*, trans. S. Davidson. London and New York: Continuum International Publishing.

Kierkegaard, S. (1939). *Christian Discourses*, trans. W. Lowrie. London: University of Oxford Press.

Pakaluk, M. 'Degrees of Separation in the Phaedo'. *Phronesis* 48 (2), 89-115, 2003.

Pascal, B. (1995). *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer. Penguin Books.

Plato. *Phaedo*. (1997). In *Plato's Complete Works*, trans. J. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Postscript

'Why', Michel Henry's phenomenology of life enjoins us to ask, 'do you say "me" in speaking of yourself, and what do you have in mind when you say that and think of yourself?'[1] When 'put like this', he notes, 'no one is capable of answering it. No doubt this is why it is dismissed with a shrug. As for philosophers, they know hardly any more'.[2] Despite (or rather precisely because) the philosophical landscape is indeed languishing in the sad state of affairs that gave rise to Henry's critical remark concerning it, today it falls to phenomenology to take up and renew the question of subjectivity—a task that it has always done in letter, if not always in truth of spirit. In point of fact, the primacy of the 'question of the subject' was consecrated the very moment its authority was first perhaps most directly challenged within phenomenology itself. When, in the history of philosophy, did this demotion take place? When was the transcendental self-affectivity of life, having been brought momentarily into partial relief, only buried beneath a set of problems and assumptions that once again obscured it? No doubt Heidegger's decision to subjugate affectivity to the role it performs within the care-structure's constitution of worldly transcendence will here come to mind, yet the moment we have in view precedes anything Heidegger contributes to its death, since his own existential analytic, in this key respect at least, simply finalized a decision he had inherited from elsewhere. What decision?

The setting is the turn of last century, the moment of phenomenology's inception. There, in transcendental phenomenology's founding text, we read a statement as authoritative for the tradition it unfurls as it is telling, because it inaugurates the procession of all successive phenomenological philosophies that follow it, each of which, their differences notwithstanding, all fail to thematise subjectivity adequately. The fateful words belong to Husserl, appearing in section §85 of *Ideen I*:

---

[1] 2003, p. 133.
[2] Ibid.

> Phenomenological reflexions and analyses which specially concern the material may be called *hyletically phenomenological*, as, on the other side, those that relate to noetic phases may be referred to as *noetically phenomenological*. The incomparably more important and fruitful analyses belong to the noetical side.[3]

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this decision. What does it signify? Husserl's decision to privilege intentionality, the noetic acts of consciousness and their noematic correlates, over the hyletic matter of pure sensibility inaugurates a line of phenomenological inquiry that at each step simply reenacts the same mistake that defined the very metaphysical tradition that phenomenology had wished to escape. What mistake precisely? It is one adversaries and disciples of the Husserlian phenomenology will all equally fell prey to: *the decision to set aside subjectivity and hence transcendental life itself*. The life of subjectivity comes to be understood only in reference to the phenomenality of the world and the intentionality that opens it.

The insistent prejudice on the part of transcendental philosophy that life be understood in terms of the world begins with Kant. The Kantian philosophy takes selfhood as one of its cornerstones of its inquiry, yet it does so by understanding it only in terms of exteriority and transcendence; it portrays subjectivity as that which supplies the conditions for the possibility of objectivity, or the source of object constitution, or the opening of a world. In short, for the Kantian philosophy, and as classical phenomenology repeats, subjectivity is understood only in terms of the world and the objects that intentionality constitutes. The precedent was set by Kant himself in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: 'I entitle *transcendental* all knowledge that is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge'.[4] Hence, following the lead of Kant, transcendental philosophy has typically understood the self as the indispensable condition for the constitution of a meaningful world of entities—and only that. This assumption, that the task of transcendental philosophy is to examine the

[3] 1962, p. 230.
[4] (A11-12/B 25).

constitutive achievements of subjectivity that allow for the disclosure of entities, is one classic phenomenology inherits.

Take for example Husserl's conception of transcendental subjectivity which locates the self strictly in terms of the *a priori* correlation between the noetic acts of consciousness and the horizon of the world's transcendence that stands in relation to them: 'When Husserl speaks about *transcendental* subjectivity, he simply refers to the experiencing subjectivity as a condition of possibility for the appearance of the world'; on such a view, one that is wholly world-obsessed, 'to understand the exact manner in which the world is constituted in the experiential life of subjectivity is an open question and task for phenomenology'.[5] Classical phenomenology, by its own practitioners' admission, is a mode of inquiry whose task is nothing besides the investigation and elaboration of how consciousness opens a world of intentional objects and objectivity: 'Therefore, I conceive of transcendental philosophy as a theory that philosophically elaborates on the subjective accomplishments that are involved in the experience of objectivity, while, at the same time, it holds on to the simplicity of our experience of a world of objects and of the world as objective'.[6] On this picture, subjectivity itself—and the phenomenology that would reflect upon it—is mobilized solely at the behest of the intentional objects that are bestowed by means of its constitutive performances. This is not a criticism I have to prove since the commentators repeatedly say so themselves as if it were a virtue: '[The transcendental attitude] addresses the world as a correlate of our first-person perspective. From this point of view, our experience is not understood as a process that occurs within the world but as the process in which the world presents itself to us, and the subjective correlate of the world as it appears from the experiential first-person point of view. Experience and the subject are thus understood as correlated to the 'being there' of the world, not as something that belongs to the world that is there for us'.[7] As Husserl taught, and

[5] Pulkkinen 2014, p. 107
[6] Loidolt 2014, p. 191
[7] Obsieger 2014, p. 61.

as all of the commentators who follow his lead accept, the phenomenological reduction is solely a matter of thematising the correlation between the noetic act of consciousness and its noematic correlate: 'Thus, the main function of the reduction is to enable the explication of the constitutive operations that are responsible for the sense and comprehensibility of the world'.[8] Since the correlate of the 'natural attitude' is the world, and as Husserl's discovery of intentionality is said to in turn reveal that 'we cannot think of experience without intentional objects', the fact remains that it is only when we deploy the phenomenological reduction that 'We do not focus principally on our awareness of the world but rather on the manifold ways in which things in the world and the world itself appear to us'.[9] Accordingly, because subjectivity is understood only in terms of its correlation to the world—as Backman remarks, 'for Husserl, the "transcendentality" of subjectivity is related precisely to its capacity for constituting the world'[10]—it falls to phenomenology 'not to describe the empirical particularities of our experiences but to examine the transcendental structures of sense constituting our experience of the world'.[11] For Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, the truth of subjectivity is nothing besides a function of how intentionality opens a world.

As a consequence, not only did they overlook, in slightly different ways and for different reasons, the essence of self-affectivity. They in turn remained equally oblivious to the vanity that cuts to the heart of the life that marshals itself solely to plunge headlong into the world. For when life is lived this way—in denial of its greatest need—it loses any sense of genuine direction or purpose. The resulting life is sometimes punctuated by the vanity it strives to chase away. Those rare moments of clarity, however, usually do not dissuade those possessed by the world to change their ways. To experience vanity, if only in the form of its fleeting trace, is to encounter the first reverberations of the divine love that would be theirs if

[8] Heinamaa, Hartimo, and Mietinen 2014, p. 3
[9] Cobb-Stevens 2014, p. 247.
[10] 2014, p. 280
[11] Westerlund 2014, p. 260

only they would follow it back, in inwardness, to the source from whence it originates. But rather than turning inwardly to find Life, they turn back to the world, convincing themselves that what they momentarily experienced was just an illusion.

Here, the example of Heidegger's philosophy will do. That the self qua *Dasein* must deploy its abilities-to-be within the world's exteriority, and only there, follows immediately from Heidegger's decision to characterize subjectivity in terms of intentionality and the being-in-the-world that underpins it: 'We cannot decide anything about intentionality starting from a concept of the subject because intentionality is the essential though not the most original structure of the subject itself'.[12] Heidegger was wrong: for when the self is characterized strictly in terms of transcendence, it ends up enslaved to a call of Being from which only the blow of vanity can free it. The self, we saw, is free to deploy its abilities-to-be in the vain attempt to resolve the enigma of what it means to be what it is, but it will never be able to do so successfully that way. As there is no final end, no true destiny, no real satisfaction, possible within the world's exteriority, but instead only relative ones, *Dasein's* existence is futile. As Marion has reminded us: '*Dasein* knows itself authentically only by recognizing itself as an undecided and all the more uncertain stake, which will never and must never be rendered certain'.[13] Why continue plunging into the world when Life beckons? Absurdly, the existential analytic tells us to do exactly that: ignore life, it says, and choose the world.

As a result, the only certitude for *Dasein* is that nothing at stake for it truly matters, because nothing at stake for it within the world of practical identity supplies it the assurance we need. The life that owns up to the fact that the world is a veneer, we have seen, takes love as its ultimate measure since love alone meets vanity on its own battlefield. It is perhaps above all to Pascal and Kierkegaard that we owe the reminder that the only form of life that truly bests the vanity of a strictly worldly existence is the one that acknowledges love is its measure.

---

[12] (1982, p. 65).
[13] (1998, p. 95).

Such a life, it turns out, as they both insist, is the life lived *coram Deo*. There are many in the phenomenological tradition, the greats and the commentators alike, who would appeal to any number of convenient slogans and tenets—the methodological atheism of fundamental ontology, the implicit positivism of intentional correlationism, the meta-narratives associated with the vicissitudes of Being and its destiny—to avoid having to face the challenge taking God seriously would require them to endure. They have attempted to justify, supposedly *a priori*, the dismissal of the question of God from the field of phenomenological vision. The question of God, they insist, is at best a question reserved for theology alone.

However, the traditional distinction between phenomenology and theology is itself only apparent. This traditional but facile distinction between the two, inasmuch as it collapses the truth of self-manifestation into world manifestation, predictably concludes that the question of God is at best an item of pure speculation. Of course, there are many within phenomenological circles who will argue that phenomenological inquiry demands a kind of metaphysical neutrality that forbids us from deducing theological conclusions, much less helping ourselves to theological presuppositions. Yet such an objection, put powerfully by Dominique Janicaud for one, simply begs the question. For part of the crucial point at issue is whether the traditional distinction between nature and the supernatural that this objection presupposes is still tenable in light of the new phenomenology's developments. Everyone agrees that the spirit of phenomenology demands that one adopt a neutrality toward the things themselves, one that in turn lets them give themselves as they are, but I see no reason at all to conclude that one is somehow less entitled to suppose God and the supernatural are respectable topics of phenomenological inquiry than to suppose otherwise. Indeed, it is difficult to see on what principled grounds the methodological atheist would be entitled to stipulate that they are not. How might one plausibly justify the exclusion of God and the supernatural *from the very outset of phenomenological inquiry*, but by a wholly un-phenomenological

fiat that they must be excluded at all cost? One, I suppose, is free to do so, but what if the cost should prove to be the very things themselves?

The methodological atheism that we find in Janicaud and elsewhere is turns back on itself:: by stipulating as it does that theology has no place in phenomenology, it naively helps itself to the very theological resources it wishes to dispense with. For not only does it unknowingly avail itself of theological resources by invoking a distinction between nature and the supernatural; even worse, in doing so, it helps itself to the very outmoded metaphysical figure of thinking that Marion, Henry, Lacoste, and other critics of methodological atheism have themselves already moved beyond. Janicaud, then, offers what amounts to a bad objection to what is anyway a non-issue. It is a non-issue because though it claims to be an objection that speaks in phenomenology's name, in truth it is little more than a refusal to plumb the inwardness of subjectivity. It is not at all interested in restoring phenomenology to its purported true promise as it claims, and we know so because it pays subjectivity lip service, and that is all.

It is with this prejudice in mind that it is instructive to recall what Husserl himself thought about the matter. At the end of his life, when assessing the difficulties that plagued the commitments of his own transcendental phenomenology, he said the key mistake of his religious philosophy had been its decision to seek God without God.[14] The question of God, he conceded, cannot be dismissed by a methodological fiat. For those who would today still do the same despite Husserl's own advice against it, the 'death of God' is anyway really little more than a convenient slogan to justify their unwillingness to face the facts they would prefer not to face. As Henry has reminded us: 'The death of God', a dramatic leitmotif of modern thought attributed to some audacious philosophical breakthrough and parroted by our contemporaries, is just the declaration of intent of the modern mind and its flat positivism'.[15]

[14] Forest 1968, p. 300.
[15] 2003, p. 265.

It has taken a new generation to liberate phenomenological philosophy from this tempting lure. That work has already begun, but as there are sure to be those who for whatever reason will prefer to ignore or oppose it, so it remains the great task of this century's new phenomenology to establish the essential advances it is capable of achieving. When it concerns the question of self, this phenomenology's defining conviction is that a life of love is truest, not only because it overcomes the vanity of a strictly worldly existence where no other form of life can, but because love accomplishes what it does precisely and only because it allows the self to accede to its genuine place. Love, it would remind us, is the self's true measure. Of course, the notion of life's having a true measure, or a final destiny, or an ultimate purpose, or a reality beyond the time that leads to death, will ring hollow to many. Are not these ideas, the sophisticates shall say, simply the antiquated, naïve metaphysical consolations of the weak?

Far from it! For here, when the things themselves concern what it means to exist at all, of what it means to occupy a place in the time that leads to death, how could one conceivably claim to have taken them seriously apart from the question of whether there is any absolute point to existence? That to take life seriously is to take seriously death and hence the possibility that death itself is not the end—this might as well be an analytic truth. Who could seriously deny that the life lived with a conviction that there is an absolute end to existence will be one led quite differently than the one lived on the supposition that there exists only relative ends? There is something alarming—Pascal would say *even monstrous*—about someone who claims to be totally indifferent to the question of whether there is any ultimate purpose to life. It is indeed something as alarming as it is disheartening to witness selves totally indifferent to, even wholly contemptuous toward, the mere suggestion that life might have an ultimate purpose. For these 'last men', hope is the antithesis of virtue. Hope, they tell themselves and anyone else who will listen, is precisely that which they neither miss nor feel a need to replace. They have consigned themselves, and contentedly so at that they tell us, to

nothing more than to the time that will lead to their death. In this life of immediacy that results, which is really already hence a life of death, they try in vain to escape that occasional nagging, dread-inducing, sometimes all-encompassing terror they prefer to forget but nonetheless inevitably surfaces. A ghastly fate, though they know quite not what, awaits; the visceral creature fear was always there, they see in these fleeting but powerful moments of lucidity.

Having exteriorized themselves completely as they have, for them, the facts of life straightforwardly entail an entropic *fait accompli*, and thus one in the face of which they shrewdly assume a self can at best merely resign itself. For them, the facts of fate are as plain as they are thus cause for silent dejection: time will inevitably bring the complete annihilation of one's own existence and, with it, the eradication of everything one now knows and holds dear. How, in the face of this horror, do these men of the world remain as outwardly seemingly unfeeling and apathetic as they do? We know why: they have abandoned hope with alacrity, almost as if they never had any need for it to begin with. The words of Kierkegaard would cut to the heart of these men of the world had they not already hardened theirs to stone: 'Truly, if it is weak to fear death, then if is prinked-up courage that fancies itself not afraid of death when the same person fears life; it is an indulgent lethargy that wants to go to bed—that is, indulgently wants to sleep itself into consolation, indulgently wants to sleep itself away from suffering'.[16] These are today's selves, the 'last men'—selves of the world—who, alienated from the inwardness of their own transcendental life, no longer have the slightest clue about the depths which reside in them nor the unparalleled power that deploys it; selves without hope because they have no inwardness; selves without inwardness because all they know is the spectacle of a transient world and the masquerade of practical identity. Selves, in short, without love. This today is the norm.

[16] 1993, p. 81.

What then, if not a being-in-the-world, is it to be one of the living? We have the answer: to live is to be the singular self that I am. Crushed against itself, I receive my singular living, the life within me that makes me *me*, prior to any worldly ek-stasis opened in intentional action or thought. This living, this life within me that I experience, receives its own experience of itself in the experience of the living God who quickens it: I must receive myself within the radical immanence of subjectivity before I can ever deploy that subjectivity in the world. I am this *me* that I am, and am able to experience myself as myself, in short, I am this unique, irreplaceable, singular *me* that I inescapably am, only because the life within me receives itself in the experience of God's Life. It is nowhere else but here, in this divine Life that pathetically engenders me, that the life of my subjectivity embraces itself as itself in its radical, immediate singularity. In transcendental Life, revealed in the invisible immediacy of subjectivity's own exuberant self-embrace, I experience myself as myself.

Finally adopted by the living God who lives in me, I experience the rapturous reality of life: to be one of the living is the glory it is only because, as much as I used to hate it, as badly as I tried to ignore it, as much as my prodigality rebelled against it, I live within Him. Within the depths of this radical immanence that the world cannot know, one it does not want to know, I experience no separation, no alterity, no alienation. Engendered by Life's own power infinitely exceeding any of my own, I experience myself, my very own self itself, as something completely received. Given to myself, I experience my own self-givenness for the sheer gift it is. In Life, I am born.

Prior to the reflective exercises of discursive thought, and hence prior to all the acts of thought which gives rise to today's theories and ideologies that prefer to deny God after they have already forgotten or ignored Him, there is the primal experience of oneself as oneself engendered in the revelation of Life. In short, prior to any theorization or thematization on the part of thought, and thus prior to both phenomenology and theology, Revelation is at work. As Henry, following the insight of Eckhart and Kierkegaard, puts it at

the conclusion of *Incarnation*: 'Before thought, before phenomenology and even before theology (before philosophy and other theoretical disciplines as well), a Revelation is at work'.[17]

Hence, the issue of self is truly addressed, not in being held at a distance by the questioning of reflective interrogation, but instead only when one has decided to come clean by seriously enduring, rather than continuing to evade, the radical immanence of life in which one experiences the suffering and enjoyment that makes of each of us the individual one is. For it is only then, within this inwardness in which one is given, that the question looming over us above all else at last emerges: will one stand, or not, in the presence of the God who loves and engenders us? In that presence, in a place concealed from the foundations of a world that does not know it, in a reality lying beneath and beyond the world's darkness, I receive myself in the rapturous peace and comfort of a living love whose singular truth passes all knowledge. In these depths, swept up into the undulations and perturbations of life's radical pathos, I experience myself begotten as a son of glory, as engendered and sustained by the power of the living God, who gives freely to those who are willing to hear the secret. There, in Life, I live: 'crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me' (Galatians 2:20). As for those who choose to embrace it, and in turn are submerged within it, no doubt this is why each invariably speaks of the same transfiguration it accomplishes: a transcendental birth within the depths of a life now found; a life, they know, that is now no longer one of despair, but victory.

References

Chrétien, J-L. (2015). *Under the Gaze of the Bible*, trans. J. Marson Dunaway. New York: Fordham University Press.

Forest, A. (1968). 'St. Anselm's Argument in Reflexive Philosophy'. In *The Many-Faced Argument: Recent Studies on the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God*, (eds.) J. Hick and A.C. McGill. London and Melbourne: Macmillan.

[17] Rivera 2011, p. 215.

Heidegger, M (1982). *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. A. Hofstadter. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. San Francisco: Harpers Collins Publishers.

Henry, M. (2003). *I am the Truth: Towards a Philosophy of Christianity*. Trans: S. Emanuel. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Husserl, E. (1962). *Ideas I: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson. New York: MacMillian Publishing Company.

Janicaud, D. (2001). *French Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': the French Debate*, (eds.) D. Janicaud and J.F Coutine. New York: Fordham University Press.

Kierkegaard, S. (1992). *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard and Edna Wong. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kierkegaard, S. 1980. *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kierkegaard, S. 1980. 1993. *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Marion, J.-L. (2002). *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. J. Kosky. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Marion, J.-L. (2012). *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey Kosky. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Milbank, J. (2005). *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural*. London: SCM Press.

Pascal, B. (1996). *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer. London: Penguin Books.

Schopenhauer, A. (2004). *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books.

Heinamaa, Hartimo, and Mietinen (eds). (2014). *Phenomenology and the Transcendental*. New York: Routledge.

Rivera, J. 'Generation, interiority and the phenomenology of Christianity in Michel Henry'. *Continental Philosophy Review* 44(2) pp. 205-235, 2011.