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Figuring Philosophy of Religion: Reflection on Art and Its Significance for Continental Philosophy of Religion

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ABSTRACT

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This study maintains that philosophical reflection on religion can avoid consigning the significance of religion to the secret of faith or sacrificing its significance at the threshold of intelligibility. Such reflection involves the unsettling of a traditionally respected heterogeneity between faith and knowledge—an unsettling announced by recent Continental philosophers yet still lacking rigorous exploration. Specifically in the context of the debates describing contemporary Continental philosophy of religion, an argument is needed to clear the space for thinking the interpenetration of faith and knowledge by becoming aware of the hyperbole that plagues these debates beholden to an inflated alterity. The task of this study, then, is to pull back from hyperbolic claims that have rendered the religious amazing in order to clear the space to think through this amazement as it finds expression.

The effort to witness this possibility inhering in the Continental reflection on religion finds motivation in the recent reconsiderations of the phenomenon of art. The engagement with the artwork as enigmatic, possessing significance beyond the confines of the philosophical discipline of aesthetics, presents a model for thinking through the
alterity of religious themes and phenomena. Pushing the philosophy of art to respond to the recent theological preoccupation with alterity offers a model for consideration of otherness in Continental philosophy of religion. Harnessing the kind of reflection suited to the artwork, I criticize and back away from the more enthusiastic, overstated, and indefensible claims of postmodern philosophy and theology—claims of either extracting the "pure and proper possibility" of religion or ones insisting upon a theological surpassing of critical or reductive philosophical thought.
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INTRODUCTION

Religious themes and phenomena have become amazing (thaumaston) again.¹ Thinkers working within the context of Continental thought not only have found the resources for and interest in encountering religious themes anew, but those themes are themselves encountered as disclosive phenomenological limit-experiences. Religion manifests itself in this philosophical approach as philosophically significant—able to “reorient philosophy,”² propose directions for fundamental questioning left unattended by philosophy, even direct thinking toward what would constitute first philosophy. The Continental philosopher of religion finds herself addressed by the themes under investigation—she is called to explore the enigma of religious phenomena. Indeed, the Continental reflection on religion appears less an investigation that takes religion as its object than a submission to the salutary shock of something different. In this approach, religion harbors an exteriority that becomes a source of amazement for thought stretched to its limit.

John Caputo, who has been instrumental in “reawakening” this sense of the religious, particularly in his reading of Jacques Derrida’s recent involvement with


religious themes, loves to tell of the scandal inflicted upon certain disciples of
deconstruction after Derrida’s "turn." A century that seemed to begin by dismissing
religious categories, ends with a renewed interest in their significance—a significance
that can even be retrieved in those earlier figures thought to be dismissive of religion.

Caputo writes of this amazement on the part of religion’s "cultured despisers":

". . . it seems that God is making a comeback. This is a fascinating
development, and one that sends shock waves through certain American
'postmodernist' writers who, however avant-garde they might be in their
own work on the question of God and religion remain deeply and
intractably modernist in protecting the rear guard of modernist critiques
of religion. Religion is one 'other' that these thinkers, who are otherwise
deeply persuaded about the power of the 'other,' do not want to hear
about. I have many friends who love to talk about exposing philosophy to
the 'other,' still better to the 'unconditionally' or 'wholly' other, but when I
mention religion, they turn pale. It turns out that by 'other' they mean
literature. So their unconditional, wholly other is constrained by several
conditions, and religion is just too, too other for them."

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3 Caputo uses this language in his "Apostles of the Impossible" in God, the Gift, and
Postmodernism, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University
Press, 1999). Like Friedrich Schleiermacher who, in the face of a prejudice that relegated religion
to the domain of the archaic, insisted that human beings have a passion for something beyond
themselves—an intuition of the Infinite—Caputo maintains that religion is a heuristic for
comprehending human existence. Caputo argues that religion functions as a Heideggerian
"existential," as a formal indication of something quasi-foundational to human reality. Whereas
Schleiermacher focuses on the idea of Gefühl, Caputo centers his argument on the constant
efficacy of the unexpected in the sense of the tout autre (see John Caputo, On Religion [London:
Routledge, 2001]).

4 John Caputo and Edith Wyschogrod, "Postmodernism and the Desire for God: An
Email Exchange" Cross Currents, Fall (1998). See also Deconstruction in a Nutshell: "... if there is
Figures such as Caputo, who seek to expose philosophy to the exteriority of the religious, take up the dominant obsession with otherness or difference that has gripped the Continental tradition in philosophy. This obsession, inaugurated in recent French thinking, turns thought (for example) toward the aporia of the gift or the enigma of the face thereby stretching the character of phenomenological inquiry. In the attempt to make thematic the encounter with the appearance of a phenomenon excessive of its very phenomenality, thought reaches its limits or is challenged by the logic of the claim.

This turn, of course, is inextricably linked to the question of ethics and the existence of the other person who “calls me into question” and places a demand of non-

one ‘other’ that is just too other, too, too tout autre for academics to swallow, it is religion!” (Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida [New York: Fordham University Press, 1997], 158). It is a source of amazement, Caputo maintains, for those Nietzschean admirers not to find in Derrida and deconstruction the completion of “Enlightenment secularism.” Caputo employs this kind of introduction to the provocation of religious alterity that traumatizes a self-satisfied secular thinking in other texts as well (see John Caputo, The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida [Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997]; “The Good News About Alterity: Derrida and Theology,” Faith and Philosophy 10, no. 4 (1993); and introductions to The Religious [Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002] and God, the Gift, and Postmodernism). In fact, this kind of entry into the significance of religion shows up prominently in many texts wishing to rethink theology or religion under the auspices of Continental thought. See the employment of such amazement in the introduction of Thomas Carlson’s Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) or Jeffery Kosky’s “Preface” of his Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001).

injury on me. It has not gone unnoticed, however, that this ethical engagement with alterity, can also be thought in terms of an engagement with the unconditioned as such. Recent Continental thought, it therefore can be maintained, lays hold of questions traditionally issuing from a theological perspective. With the figure of Levinas looming large in this discussion, a thinker such as Jacques Derrida, in his own way, has begun to approach the “impossible” site with reference to the religious and at times baldly in a theological idiom.6

Derrida’s reflection on religion attempts to articulate “non-dogmatic doublets” of religious faith, that is, a thematization of religion into a logic of concepts that can be abstracted from practical experience and studied or employed independently of the specific content of particular religious traditions. This repetition, for Derrida, of religious themes (most significantly the “messianic”) in the philosophical reflection of religion describes a distinctive philosophical move that takes stock of religion, uncovering its conditions, even as religion (at some level) is recognized to push or haunt philosophical questioning.

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Far from being the completion of a "modernist" reductive approach to religious themes and phenomena, recent Continental thought often finds itself involved in religious issues, repeating, affirming, or at times abiding by religious or theological claims. Extending this involvement, others (concerned with the very possibility of theology) have insisted that this turn toward alterity in Continental thought, in its delimiting the claims of Enlightenment rationality, includes delimiting Enlightenment secularism established and nurtured by that very modern rational thought. The postmodern, in this regard, must be considered post-secular, so that recent Continental thought offers an opportunity to re-imagine Christian theology.7

In his theological work, Jean-Luc Marion, insists that theology in its authentic, post-onto-theological guise is best suited for the expression of otherness as an order of giving beyond being. Theology putatively leaves behind the ontologizing, totalizing, or metaphysical tendencies of philosophy. The proper response to the claim made by the impossible event—an encounter recent Continental thought wishes to entertain—is best

7 The "secular demise of truth," for a theologian like John Milbank leads to a reinstatement of the centrality of the theological. He regards the postmodern as a re-turn to the pre-modern (with a difference). Even for Derrida nothing seems "more uncertain, more difficult to sustain, nothing seems here or there more imprudent than a self-assured discourse on the age of disenchantment, the era of secularization, the time of laicization, etc." (Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 65). Jean-Luc Marion also seeks to establish this crucial opening to the religious by condemning a "pigheaded refusal" to investigate religious phenomenon that repeats "the absurd denigration of which metaphysics and the question of Being' stubbornly insist: better to erase or disfigure the possibility of Revelation than to redefine the transcendental conditions of manifestation in order to admit the mere possibility of a phenomenon of revelation.... [I]s it necessary to confine the possibility of the appearing of God to the uninterrogated and supposedly untouchable limits of one or the other figure in philosophy and phenomenology, or should we broaden phenomenological possibility to the measure of the possibility of
expressed in terms of praise, faith, or prayer. Phenomenological rigor applied to this most uncanny event describes, therefore, the site where philosophical inquiry is silenced and the language of faith proceeds. On the heels of this theological exploration, Marion's "new phenomenology" (sketching the possibility of Continental philosophy of religion) proposes to take up the exemplarity of religious phenomena. In this way, philosophy is exposed to an originary, unconditioned, unnameable "pure givenness" it can only countenance as a possibility.

Yet this amazement in the face of religious themes and phenomena—bent as it is toward aporias, paradoxes, sites of saturation, "impossibilities" paradigmatically religious—also has its detractors. Taking up the theme of the gift or givenness (central to current reflection on religion dominated by the debates between Derrida and


8 As with many post-Heideggerian thinkers in France, Marion prizes a profound passivity—a subjectivity dispossessed of its ability to grasp meaning through predication and therefore open to a revelation before intending or comprehending. Marion therefore can argue for a privileging of the theological language of praise (open to the claim of alterity) over the philosophical language of predication (unable to properly approach alterity).

Marion\textsuperscript{10}, Adriaan Peperzak points to the dependence upon hyperbole in establishing the significance of this amazement.

Famously, the conditions of possibility of the gift—that it is completely free and that it is present, or identifiable \textit{as such}—are simultaneously its conditions of impossibility. No gift that is ever present is completely free, and if it is not present then we cannot know it as a gift. The gift structurally exemplifies what Derrida calls “the impossible,” where conditions of possibility meet with conditions of impossibility in an aporia. One aspect of this aporia is the requirement that \textit{ingratitude} constitute the proper response to the gift in order that it is not annulled by a return of the giving gesture in an economic exchange. To think the “pure gift” as such, ingratitude must be held as a condition. For Peperzak, such an “argument” relies at bottom on a “rhetorical device” characterized as hyperbolic.

“Even in a philosophical text, such rhetorical exaggerations can be appreciated if their irony is obvious and if they are not overworked. Some post-Levinasian philosophers have made a similar exaggeration the core of their reflections about the “impossibility” of giving, arguing that donation is inevitably trapped in the economy of mutually useful exchanges. Not only is giving destroyed by gratitude, it is already annulled by the self-satisfaction or anticipated self-satisfaction of the giver. The numerous

repetitions of this exaggeration have robbed it of its rhetorical charm and
impact, but they have hardly strengthened the idea (or the idée fixe)
contained in it. If the argument is right, it seems that one must choose
between complete cynicism and a fideistic leap to the impossible possibility
of generosity, giving, love, friendship and so on."¹¹

Although Peperzak does not go on to defend his inflammatory claims that
introduce his own reflection on givenness (so that he cannot escape the suspicion that
he is involved in a misrepresentation of recent thinking about the gift¹²), I propose to
give substance to the spirit of Peperzak's suspicion, expressed in different ways in the
work of Dominique Janicaud and Richard Kearney.¹³ Extending this suspicion, I wonder
if the recent amazement regarding religious themes and phenomena is not purchased at

¹¹ Peperzak, 162-163.

¹² The "post-Levinasian" he obviously has in mind is Derrida. Reflecting on this use of
hyperbole, Peperzak never mentions him by name nor does Peperzak cite Derrida's work.

¹³ Peperzak is, of course, not alone in this kind of criticism of recent Continental
thought's obsession with aporias or alterity as it relates to the ability to encounter amazement in
religious reflection. As a critic of what he calls the "theological turn" in phenomenology,
Dominique Janicaud sees phenomenology as "taken hostage" by the theological in the recent
phenomenological exploration exemplified by the work of Marion. For a figure like Marion,
phenomenology encounters its originary possibility as confusion in the face of "pure givenness"
that cannot manifest itself as such. Such an investigation of what cannot appear, for Janicaud
requires some kind of "fideistic leap" as thought is called to transcend the limits of
phenomenology. See Dominique Janicaud, "The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology"

Richard Kearney, with very different concerns in mind, also takes issue with the
"postmodern obsession with absolutist ideas of exteriority and otherness ... lest it lead to a new
idolatry: that of the immemorial, ineffable other" (Richard Kearney, Strangers, Gods and Monsters
[London: Routledge, 2003], 229). Kearney wishes to address what he sees as an ethical lacuna
opened up in the postmodern context in the inability to discriminate between good and evil,
between God and the nihilistic abyss. This "problem of discernment" that for Kearney leads to
the price of accepting a certain Kierkegaardian perspective: "either there is a paradox, that the single individual as the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute, or Abraham is lost."\textsuperscript{14} No thought can grasp the paradox of faith that "makes murder into a holy and God-pleasing act . . . because faith begins precisely where thought stops."\textsuperscript{15} Such a perspective seems committed to the prior significance of the religious as a site of extremity because thought cannot investigate it. In such a context philosophy of religion ("if there is one")\textsuperscript{16} becomes an "impossible" task, attempting to think through the source or site of amazement that is simply beyond such scrutiny.

ethical paralysis plagues those thinkers who have established a "postmodern sublimity" in an inflated and absolutized alterity.

\textsuperscript{14} Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 120. With Hegel in his sights, Kierkegaard claims that this "position cannot be mediated, for all mediation takes place only by virtue of the universal; it is and remains for all eternity a paradox, impervious to thought. And yet faith is this paradox . . . or else Abraham is lost" (Kierkegaard, 56).

\textsuperscript{15} Kierkegaard, 53. Compare this to Caputo's reading of Derrida's recent work as seeking out an alterity expressed religiously: " . . . deconstruction is structured like a religion. Like a prayer and tear for the coming of the wholly other (tout autre), for something impossible, like a messianic prayer in a messianic religion . . . Like a faith in the coming of something we cannot quite make out, a blind faith where knowledge fails and faith is what we have to go on, which even believes in ghosts or specters." Caputo then quotes from the final sentence of Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind,* "Il faut croire" (Caputo, "Introduction" in *God the Gift and Postmodernism*, 4). See a similar description in Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, xxi-xxvi.

\textsuperscript{16} Proposing the impossibility of philosophy of religion, Marion states: "The field of religion could simply be defined as what philosophy excludes or, in the best case, subjugates . . . ‘philosophy of religion,’ if there is one, would have to describe produce, and constitute phenomena, it would then find itself confronted with a disastrous alternative: either it would be a question of phenomena that are objectively definable but lose their religious specificity, or it would be a question of phenomena that are specifically religious but cannot be described objectively" (Jean-Luc Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," *Philosophy Today* 40 [1996], 103). Philosophy of religion either consigns religious phenomena to a faith that knows not of what it speaks or constitutes them as phenomenon simply known, unless, for Marion, a broader range of "phenomena" are given the right to appear.
Can reflection on religion avoid consigning the significance of religion to the secret of faith or sacrifice its significance at the threshold of intelligibility without reducing religion’s relation to thought as extremity? Is it possible to formulate an approach that does not merely “exclude” or “subjugate” religion—that does not leave religion to itself as a non-issue for philosophical thought, and yet retains an amazement without prizing a confusion beyond intelligibility?  

I contend in this study that such a possibility constitutes the novelty of the Continental reflection on religion. Indeed, I maintain that the unsettling of the heterogeneity between faith and knowledge has already been explicitly announced as a goal by key figures in the Continental tradition (even if it has not successfully been undergone). My project is to clear the space for thinking the interpenetration of faith and knowledge by becoming aware of the hyperbole that plagues the current philosophical debates beholden to the amazement in the face of an inflated alterity.

My task in this study, then, is to pull back from hyperbolic claims that have rightly rendered the religious amazing in order to clear the space to think through this amazement as it finds expression. The interpenetration of faith and knowledge, I

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17 While I can listen without indignation to these critics of “the postmodern obsession with absolute ideas of extremity and otherness,” and the ubiquitous use of hyperbole in order to make religion amazing again, I am unwilling to jettison the task of thinking through the amazement in terms of a philosophy of religion that seeks out the interpenetration of faith and knowledge. I can only employ these criticisms so far. Jancaud is not concerned with philosophy of religion and Kearney is driven to locate the narrative structure of discernment within a particular tradition in large part due to his misreading of undecidability as indecision.
argue—while possibly recognized as a demand by figures involved in the Continental philosophy of religion—has not been grasped as conditional for the project and so its significance has not been rigorously explored. This is due in large measure to the current debates that are prone to a "hyperbolic outbidding" of two directions for discerning the "pure' and proper possibility of religion." My task is not to violate the extremity of religious themes for thought, but neither can their amazement be left merely as an unknowable secret before which one stands in awe. I wish to offer a directive for philosophy of religion that exposes the amazement in the possibility of coming to terms with how religious traditions and theological forms of thought penetrate contemporary philosophical discourse and vice versa. Amazement can be found in the striving between faith and knowledge as an interplay between moments of appropriation and expropriation.

The effort to witness this possibility inhering in the Continental reflection on religion, to seek it out and hold fast to an interstitial space of interpenetration, finds motivation in the recent reconsideration of the phenomenon of art explored in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and especially Martin Heidegger. The turn toward the enigmatic encounter with alterity, apart from the question of ethics and religion, has been accompanied in Continental philosophy by a turn to the significance of art. This engagement with the artwork as enigmatic, possessing a significance beyond the


confines of the philosophical discipline of aesthetics,\textsuperscript{20} presents a model for thinking through the alterity of religious themes and phenomena. Pushing the philosophy of art, specifically Heidegger’s, to respond to the recent theological preoccupation with alterity offers a model for considerations of otherness in Continental philosophy of religion.

To this end, in an exploration of Nietzsche’s consideration of art specifically in \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, I introduce, in chapter one, the enigmatic character of art and the kind of thinking propelled by its investigation. The task of thinking the uniqueness of art, in Nietzsche’s text, requires one to avoid prizing either of the opposing interpretations of Nietzsche’s stance on art—art as disclosive of an \textit{urgrund} or involved in necessary creation of life-sustaining fictions. Yet in \textit{doubling} these interpretive efforts the space appears to witness an unsettling interpenetration between creative and destructive forces, constituting tragic art by a logic of excess. For Nietzsche, tragic art shows up for thinking as an enigmatic site that, in its shining forth as Apollinian visibility, denies itself in a disclosure of what prepares for its peculiar visibility.

In chapter two, I continue this investigation of the oddity of the artwork, this time, in the thought of Heidegger. Reflection once again locates a tense striving or

\textsuperscript{20} In a similar manner as religious themes and phenomena have languished under the tutelage of reductive or apologetic techniques (techniques putatively re-thought in recent Continental reflection on religion), Heidegger sees the artwork languishing under the concepts describing the field of aesthetics. Heidegger’s task is to think the artwork apart from aesthetics, whose analysis of the artwork either takes up the formative act of an artist or the enjoyment experienced by an aesthete. See Martin Heidegger, \textit{Nietzsche} vol. 1 (New York: Harper Collins
interpenetration of art's essential characteristics as constitutive of the artwork. In this case, the striving between world and earth opens up the enigma where the "artwork belongs, as work, uniquely within the realm that is opened up by itself." As the investigation of a site whose appearance issues from its own enigmatic origin, Heidegger's philosophy of art is arguably wrestling with the aporias to which Marion's theology is devoted when thinking the enigma of the icon. My analysis, in this chapter, opens up the artwork's possible theological significance and harnesses a productive exchange between Heidegger's artwork and Marion's icon. Insofar as icons and artworks offer an awareness of what transcends the all-too-familiar, they attest to a givenness, and describe sites from which humans are able to respond to the utterly foreign demand of revelation. Yet a thinking that responds to the enigma of the artwork—unlike a thinking that is devoted to Marion's icon—complicates the contemporary relation between philosophy and theology in the context of Continental thought.

It is this complication that introduces the challenge of thinking through the interpenetration of faith and knowledge to which I turn in chapter three. Derrida's recent consideration to the religious becomes my focus here. Religious phenomena are cracked open, by Derrida, such that a desertified faith propels philosophy as a "religious" passion. The professed novelty of Derrida's approach to religion resides in

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the challenge posed to the heterogeneity of faith and knowledge giving way to an awareness of an interpenetration between the philosophical and the religious. Reflection on religion does not expose religion as an inadequate account of experience in relation to the philosophical thought that investigates it, or as a worldview that forecloses on thought, but locates in religious phenomena a provocative engine of questioning. Exposing the untimely and ultimately impossible exclusion of faith that proves conditional and therefore inassimilable by thought, Derrida develops a philosophy of religion able to maintain the otherness of religious themes and hold open an awareness of the limits thought encounters when reflecting on religion.

For Derrida, however, the pure (philosophically significant) meaning of faith obtains when abstracting from determinable content so as to escape the need to prize the name of God. The desert abstraction, key to Derrida’s philosophical reflection on religion, “uproots” faith traditions by atheologizing them, "liberating universal rationality." This “universal rationality,” exposing the structure of the religious in terms of its ethical force, releases religion from its determinable content and exclusionary commitments. In Derrida’s passion to open up the religious to an exteriority determinate religion intends to profess as conditional, such a task ultimately culminates in a liberation from the very “faith-saving” intuition that gave it rise. In so far as this is true, Derrida’s approach to religion cannot avoid upholding a traditionally desired heterogeneity between faith and knowledge that he sought to unsettle.

In the final chapter, I take up the major aim of this project—clearing the space for thinking this interpenetration of philosophy and religion given expression in
Derrida's work. Focusing on the stakes of the debate between Marion and Derrida over the "'pure' and proper possibility" of religion for the Continental philosophy of religion, I show how the debate itself distracts thinking from the interpenetration between faith and knowledge. What is required is an argument that enables one to pull back from the significance of the relation between philosophy and religion that in the current literature relies heavily on hyperbole. Recent debates that dominate the literature, currently defining what matters for those engaged in the Continental philosophy of religion, are prone to hyperbolic formulations in the erection of "purely pure" desiderata. Harnessing the kind of reflection suited to the artwork, I criticize and back away from the more enthusiastic, overstated, and indefensible claims of postmodern philosophy and theology—claims of either extracting the "'pure' and proper possibility" of religion or ones insisting upon a theological surpassing of critical or reductive philosophical thought. Reflection on the artwork keeps thought tethered to the immanence of the phenomenal event that harbors transcendence. Modeling such a thinking can inform the philosophical reflection on religion such that it might prize as conditional the striving or interpenetration of faith and knowledge.
CHAPTER 1
Doubling Art's Uniqueness:
The Interpenetration of the Apollinian and Dionysian

Friedrich Nietzsche maintains that very "early in my life I took the question of the relation of art to truth seriously: even now I stand in holy dread in the face of this discordance."¹ For a commentator such as J. M. Bernstein, Nietzsche's holy dread is aroused when art, thought in its "autonomous post-Christian guise," appears "more truthful than knowledge conceived as the subsumption of particulars under concepts; more just than liberal justice; more valuable than morality or utility."² To understand what in this understanding of art inspires dread, it first of all for Bernstein, must be noted that art has irredeemably become "mere art"—characterized by the capricious, subjective categories of taste and style happily plagued by the ubiquity of perspectival fictions. The mereness of art in its autonomous guise describes art's appearance "outside" truth or morality, unhinged and standing apart from traditional categories. It

¹Friedrich Nietzsche quoted in J. M. Bernstein, The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 1. Martin Heidegger samples the same passage from the Nachlass (more than once) and finds not so much "that Nietzsche says 'truth' is error" but that the experience of dread recognized by Nietzsche opens up the question of the essence of truth and possibility that "art is worth more than truth" (Martin Heidegger, "The Will to Power as Art," in Nietzsche vol. 1 [New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1979], 149).

² Bernstein, 2.
is here, then, in its unimportance that art locates its ability to be more than truth or morality. "If art is taken as lying outside truth and reason then if art speaks in its own voice it does not speak truthfully or rationally; while if one defends art from within the confines of the language of truth-only cognition one belies the claim that art is more truthful than truth-only cognition."³ The dread is experienced, by Bernstein’s estimation, in the recognition that something that might appear “higher” than truth can at the same time in relation to truth appear worthless. Art’s mereness constitutes its surpassing of truth.

For Bernstein this “aporia” can only be made sense of if one continues to think the discordance or tension between art and truth. Dread only arises when the once hard-and-fast distinction between “autonomous art” and “truth-only cognition” is unsettled. Yet can or should there be another Nietzschean rendering of this aporia? In raising such a question, it is possible to understand Bernstein as unwittingly opening up the issue of art in Nietzsche’s thought in provocative fashion. The provocation centers on the impossibility, for Bernstein, of rendering the “truthfulness” of art unique. Taking up this question of whether art’s unique showing can be made thematic, the oddity of art becomes a challenge for thought.

What is the origin of this holy dread? Is the origin of dread something to be explored within the confines of art (Bernstein taken as a provocation) or is this origin (taking up Bernstein’s explicit argument) something engendered by the proximity of

³ Bernstein.
the porous spheres of art and "truth-only cognition" in the post-aesthetic thinking of art? Does dread arise in the face of a sublime self-subsistent presentation or is dread encountered in the recognition that truth as such is no longer possible? The quarrel between art and truth, the most salient themes in the history of the philosophy of art, is in Nietzsche (as with much to which he applies himself) made messier, more complicated.

Indeed, Nietzsche does take up the age-old quarrel between art and truth, unsettling their relation or the separation of what was once considered different categories. For if it is true that the intense categorial separation of art and truth is irrevocably modern, as Bernstein holds, then a critique of enlightened modernity and its will to truth could be located in such a muddling of the relation between art and truth.⁴

On this reading of Nietzsche there is a desire to describe him as connecting aesthetic notions of capricious taste or artistic style (the "artists' metaphysics" as

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⁴ Jürgen Habermas makes this claim of the categorial separation of art and truth in modernity (Jürgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, tr. Frederick Lawrence [Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988], 95). Such a separation, (demonstrated in Kant's formation of the separate sphere of aesthetics) culminates in Hegel with the "death of art" and art's being left to itself. Upon death, art is separated from its ability to adequately "tell the truth" and therefore is shut out from what would offer it any current relevance. In this way (once taste, style, art's sensuous show have been excluded from a presentation of truth adequate to itself) "value-neutral reason and universalistic morality" can be stabilized or solidified as the cognitive discovery of enlightened modernity and its "truth-only cognition" (Bernstein, 5). Yet art left to itself soon exceeds its constitution as standing outside truth. Its autonomous vocation becomes preparatory. When thinking art and its relation to truth anew, art's exclusivity is the condition for its ability to register a more primordial truth or at least present a complication to "value-neutral reason." The artistic phenomenon then exceeds its appearance as the "merely" aesthetic.
“arbitrary, idle, fantastic”) with the claims of truth, “with its absolute standards.” The denial of the separation of art and truth means the demise of the solidity of truth-only cognition when what is outside truth and morality – the merely aesthetic and non-cognitive – can have something to say about the formation of truth. In this scheme, the opposition between art and truth is not simply inverted. Art does not now tell the truth and truth lie. The task is to think through the character of art and truth when their categorial separation is unsettled. When art exceeds its initial subjugation and eventual exclusion from truth, exceeds its constitution (or dismissal) as something no longer able to tell the truth, the “merely” aesthetic does not loose its defining characteristics – capricious taste, individual style. The quarrel between art and truth in this estimation (a standing in relation of art and truth after art’s character as an outsider has been recognized) reveals the ubiquity of beautiful illusions or fictions.

Yet does Nietzsche’s reflection on art attempt to think more than the entwinement of art and truth? Does art simply stand in a critical relation to truth, demonstrating truth to be particular or in truth’s own parlance, illusory? The muddling of the distinction between art and truth merely describes truth in terms of art. Is there something unique about art itself—another significance? Does it stand apart from truth? Can art’s uniqueness be conceived of as something other than a supplanting of truth’s idolatry with the necessity of self-created value? Do art and

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truth enjoy a different kind of strife in Nietzsche; one in which art remains something wholly other than the character of truth?

These questions raise another issue; a quarrel within a quarrel. Is art for Nietzsche something disclosive of a “primordial reality” or is art to be construed as a necessary illusion vital for life? This quarrel, as an aspect of the discordance between art and truth, draws a line of contention between Nietzsche interpreters. For the most part all would agree that Nietzsche finds art to possess a unique value. The dispute, however, centers on whether art is to be recognized as a provider of illusions useful for life or whether art is to be valued for its unique disclosure of the reality. An understanding of art’s disclosive power is usually associated with The Birth of Tragedy. Art, in that work according to John Arras, “functions as a medium of truth.” Specifically, it is Dionysian art that “puts us in touch with the true world.”

The alternative view (the more popular it seems) put forward by thinkers such as Allan Megill, Bernard Yack, or Richard Schacht (among others), understands Nietzsche’s view of art as “a vehicle not of truth but of illusion.”

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6 Here the danger of thinking art as another metaphysical fixed idea is supposedly overcome.


in terms of its ability to transfigure or idealize existence through the production of beautiful illusions.

It may be true that those interpreters who understand art as disclosive—emphasizing Schopenhauer’s influence specifically in *The Birth of Tragedy*—can contribute little that would not contradict Nietzsche’s later understanding of art or truth. Silk and Stern, for example, insist that *The Birth of Tragedy* re-occupies a Schopenhauerian position that only makes sense if an ultimate ground of being, the *urgrund* is understood to lie behind ordinary reality.9 While it can be argued that Nietzsche, even in *The Birth*, successfully moves beyond Schopenhauer’s pessimism (affirming becoming, uttering a “yes” to the “will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility”) the “solution” for Nietzsche reflecting back on *The Birth* is still a “metaphysical” one.10 Nietzsche in his “Attempt at a Self-Criticism” admits that this work is caught in a romantic homesickness retaining the hope for a return home of the “estranged German genius.”11 This romantic conception of art opens up “the danger of dangers” in this early work, where the affirmation of a metaphysical world (the romantic longing for metaphysical comfort) will always and inevitably entail the denial

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10 “... a metaphysical comfort tears us momentarily from the bustle of the changing figures. We are really for a brief moment primordial being itself, feeling its raging desire for existence and joy in existence... we are the happy living beings, not as individuals, but as one living being, with whose creative joy we are united” (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 105, 17).

of this-world. Even Nietzsche cannot square this aspect of this early work with his later efforts to overcome the pessimistic stance of nihilism.

On the other hand, the interpretation of art as an illusion, as myth-making rather than a disclosure of a decidedly different truth, seems more congruous with Nietzsche's later thinking on art and particularly well-suited to fill the void left by truth's self-destruction. Yet is this understanding plagued by an inability to describe of the distinctiveness of art, such that art can stand—as it is presumed to—as the "countermovement" to truth? An unwillingness or inability to explore what makes art unique enough to warrant its professed ability to lead to an affirmation to life (to overcome the pessimism and no-saying of a worn-out truth in a nihilistic context) dams this interpretation to a more insidious trap. Bernstein's muddling of the separation between art and truth as a way of uncovering art's distinctive formation of illusion, insists on a description of art that cannot escape its servitude to nihilism, that harbors a pessimism in relation to this-world. Understanding art solely as the creation of life-sustaining illusions can only describe art's uniqueness in relation to its similarity with truth. A fleshing out of a superficiality that is "more than truth"—the aporia that for Bernstein's Nietzsche inspires dread—can only be adequately addressed when art finds its voice muddled with that of truth-only cognition. Prizing this approach to Nietzsche's reflection on art means that artistic creation's affirmation of life can only be attempted "in vain." The inability to bestow on art an adequate distinction from the will to truth, challenges art as an expression of the ascending life.
Testifying, therefore, to the perils (art’s “in vain-ness” or “art as metaphysical comfort”) of determining Nietzsche’s stance on this question, demonstrates how difficult it will be to think through Nietzsche’s wish, in his “Self-Criticism,” that an understanding of art overcome pessimism. It is difficult to argue that “to learn the art of this-worldly comfort” requires a Schopenhauerian (a romantic and therefore metaphysical) understanding of art that puts us in touch with the true world. Yet we have seen that the alternative interpretation of art as myth-making can be demonstrated to be equally fraught with “danger.”

In order to introduce the enigmatic phenomenon of art, with which Nietzsche is struggling, the main thrust of this chapter will take up a critical stance on the adequacy of this second and more popular interpretation of Nietzsche on art as myth-making. I sketch a possible Nietzschean argument directed at those interpreters of Nietzsche who think the consideration of art solely as the creation of necessary fictions is an adequate description of what Nietzsche meant by a “this-worldly comfort.” This mistaken interpretation stills the interpenetrating moments of appropriation and expropriation raging in artwork. Such interpenetrating moments constitute art’s unique ability, for Nietzsche, to offer a countermovement to the will to truth and overcome pessimism experienced in the context of a worn-out truth.

\[12\] Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 26, 7.
The task of thinking the uniqueness of art, it seems, requires one to steer clear of each of the opposing interpretations described above. Yet in doubling their efforts the space appears to take up Bernstein as a provocation and to think art's uniqueness as such. The denial, then, of art as a replacement for religion's dogmatic claim to a higher truth goes hand in hand with the denial of the description of art as dissolving dogmatic claims through life-sustaining illusions. Yet in coupling the two perspectives it is possible to take up a more nuanced position. It first of all becomes clear that for art's superficial lie to shine forth as the affirmation of life's inexhaustible becoming, art must stand apart from dogmatic claims. (Art cannot be disclosive of a higher metaphysical truth but exposes the ubiquity of illusion so that superficiality remains higher than truth). On the other hand, equally as important (and seemingly contradictory) art's beautiful superficial illusion must also be disclosive of that inexhaustible will to life. Art's peculiar self-reflexivity regarding the truthfulness of its own claims does not, in this way, stand in relation to the exhaustion and pessimism within the context of nihilism's last life-denying trap. For the creation of "life-giving" myths to accomplish the task of establishing a "countermovement" to the decadent forms of the will to

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13 "... you can call the whole artists' metaphysics arbitrary, idle, fantastic" yet in "truth, nothing could be more opposed to the purely aesthetic interpretation and justification of the world which are taught in ... the Christian teaching, which is, and wants to be, only moral and which relegates art, every art, to the realm of lies; with its absolute standards, beginning with the truthfulness of God, it negates, judges, and damns art. Behind this mode of thought and valuation, which must be hostile to art if it is at all genuine, I never failed to sense a hostility to life—a furious, vengeful antipathy to life itself: for all of life is based on semblance, art, deception, points of view, and the necessity of perspectives and error" (Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 23, "Attempt at Self-Criticism" 5).
truth—to establish “a splendid illusion that would cover dissonance with a veil of beauty... that at every moment make life worth living at all and prompt the desire to live on”\textsuperscript{14}—art must disclose in that creation the flux and becoming of life. This doubling of the efforts presented in these two perspectives on art describes, for Nietzsche, tragic art. Apollinian and Dionysian solutions appear “coupled with each other, and through this coupling ultimately generate... tragedy.”\textsuperscript{15}

Unpacking this possible Nietzschean argument (directed toward art’s mistaken character and the failure to adequately describe art’s countermovement to nihilism) will initially require a brief excursus on Nietzsche’s discussion of truth.

\textit{Truth}

In \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, the value of representational truth is a scourge on life and thought handed down by the philosopher Socrates. The value of mythic horizons within a tragic culture is devalued in a demand for consistency in the quest for knowledge of the “true world.” Such a quest cannot withstand such demands—contradictory attitudes cannot be sacrificed indefinitely on the altar of science. A theoretician’s drive for knowledge is self-vitiating, unraveling from within. Through progression and refinement, the will to truth comes to reject those seemingly stable values that spurred it forward. Being truthful eventually means forbidding oneself the

\textsuperscript{14} Nietzsche, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, 143, 25.

\textsuperscript{15} Nietzsche, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, 33, 1.
metaphysical ground needed to ensure the unquestionable solidity of truthfulness.

This progression—described in *Twilight of the Idols* “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable”—finds its nadir when the theoretician, wanting only what is true, realizes that the metaphysical foundation of truth lacks any evidence. The true-world that supports the will to truth can only be considered a lie “—consequently, a refuted idea: let us abolish it!”¹⁶ The intelligible world fails as an absolute standard when it is recognized to be less than ultimate. The modern ironic age is inaugurated where—with the impossibility of universal value—nothing is more valuable than anything else. The theoretical demand for consistency, attuned to an intelligibility trying to masquerade as universal, has culminated in the decadent spirit of modern European culture.¹⁷

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¹⁷ This genealogical analysis, within *The Genealogy of Morals*, is articulated in that text in relation to the Christian moral tradition. Here a universal system of rules, the basis for moral economies relying on the opposition of good and evil, covers over its own willful motor of resentment. Again such smooth economies unravel from within. In this case, a nihilistic existence represents the culmination of a morality prizing such profound weakness that man becomes sick of himself. For Nietzsche, not only has the Christian tradition worked its subterranean subterfuge convincing the world of its erroneous value, but in fact through its underhandedness slave morality has brought man to his own nihilistic disillusionment. The absolute triumph of the morality of pity is the point at which it denies life most violently—when it takes revenge not on a specific object but on life itself as suffering. A morality of pity places one in the midst of a predicament with no way out, no solution, for the very cessation of the will to life cannot even be willed without the instantiation of weariness. The highest values become devalued within an age marked by such sickness. With the collapse of what was considered the interpretation of existence, existence appears devoid of meaning once and for all. Universally valid truth, still hankered for, is rendered impossible as a result of “the logic of our great values and ideals, thought through to the end.” The modern age has led itself to this distressing nihilistic impasse.
For Nietzsche, intrinsic to and a consequence of the will to truth is the decline into the nihilism of a profound pessimism. Since it is the logic of a particular mode of evaluation thought through to its end—and not the disintegration or atrophy of such logic—it follows that nihilism cannot be overcome by a reinstatement of that same logic. Solutions that long for a re-establishment of universal value to relieve the profound pessimism find themselves propagating the same sickness they attempt to cure. In fact, in the midst of this nihilistic impasse any attempt to solve the problem of life's meaninglessness (a life weighed as worthlessness by those wishing to escape the predicament) can only be an instantiation of the sickness.

Art

Art or the artist locates a unique power in the face of the collapse of meaning giving structures once solidified as truth. The will to truth, Christianity, morality “opposed to the purely aesthetic interpretation and justification of the world” now is unable to successfully “relegate art, every art, to the realm of lies.”18 Once “absolute standards” are unsettled the “negation, judgment, and damnation of art” can itself be witnessed as a “deception,” an error.19

18 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 23, “Attempt at Self-Criticism” 5.

19 This deception is motivated by the worst kind of hatred, hostility, vengefulness directed toward life. Life held to the standard of a true world (the futile attempt to stamp becoming with the character of being) means that life “must continually and inevitably be in the wrong.” The true world represents the impoverishment of life, a craving for the nothing, for annihilation.
The artist is now free to value particular value, to prize the shining of surface over depth, to value appearance no longer beholden to a true world that once dictated or measured its worth. In fact, "salvation" can now only be found "in appearance."\textsuperscript{20} To take art seriously is to witness objects, values, meaning, unity, order, truth as art, as items constructed, not given—the world opens up for human action and creativity. In Bernstein's case, what has been considered superficial is now recognized to be more than truthful—the true-world itself shines as a lie. "For all of life is based on semblance, art, deception, points of view, and the necessity of perspectives and error."\textsuperscript{21} Although there is no truth or depth, Nietzsche also maintains that there are some fictions without which we could not survive.\textsuperscript{22}

"'Beauty' is for the artist something outside all orders of rank, because in beauty opposites are tamed; the highest sign of power, namely power over opposites . . . that is what delights the artist's will to power."\textsuperscript{23}

This turn toward artistic activity, which comes to light (once more) only after the internal decline and suicidal demise of Socrates' task, is of course much discussed by Nietzsche's interpreters. Specifically, it is their wish to understand Nietzsche's mature relation to art. With the collapse of measure-giving claims of objective truth

\textsuperscript{20} Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 22, "Attempt at Self-Criticism" 5.

\textsuperscript{21} Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 23.


\textsuperscript{23} Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 422, 803.
(inaugurating a horizon where one interpretation is as valid as any other24), the criteria for judgment are now aesthetic and this necessitates artistic self-creation. Relying on aesthetic criteria admits of no basis for judgments of value other than those rooted in the perspectivism of self-creation. From this position, after muddling the separation between art and truth, "the challenge that Nietzsche’s thought presents to us is to develop our own rich aesthetic vision conscious of the limits of our views . . . in a world where necessity may be found only in fictions."25

For these interpreters, Nietzsche relies on art for the creation of new mythic horizons—horizons that propose to remedy the sickness and decadence of modern European culture. Fictive horizons that escape the danger of idolatry, engage a culture in the task of renewal. Individuals are compelled to recognize their own health and strength when moving away from the weakness and sickness of the metaphysical judgment that life “must continually and inevitably be in the wrong.”

Yet to what extent does the health and strength of the artist in his indifference to the true-world leave behind his hatred of becoming, leave behind the will to the impoverishment of life? Does art’s superficial illusory character, now prized as higher than truth, provide the ability to take up the affirmation of error and perspectival fictions? Does the ubiquity of fictive horizons—where with the demise of the true-

24 "The most extreme form of nihilism would be the view that every belief, every considering-something-true, is necessarily false because there is no true world. Thus: a perspectival appearance whose origin lies in us (in so far as we continually need a narrower, abbreviated, simplified world)" (Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 15, 15).
world no value appears more valuable than any other—correspond to the affirmation of becoming?  

To phrase the question differently: in this construal of Nietzsche’s aesthetic turn, can a difference between art and truth be adequately expressed? Thinking art, for these interpreters, is essentially thinking of truth and morality as art. Concepts such as style, creativity, interpretation no longer describe art exclusively but now guide or structure all cognitive, ethical thinking. Yet this understanding of art still attempts to recognize and emphasize the uniqueness of art in the midst of the sickness of a will to truth reaching its end. While upholding the idea that “what is essential to art remains its perfection of existence, its production of perfection and plenitude,” it remains to be demonstrated whether art can also be upheld as “essentially affirmation, blessing, deification of existence.”  

Can art and its uniqueness be thought solely in terms of its ability to falsify or idealize experience and value surface while escaping the charge of pessimism?

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26 Heidegger commenting on aphorism 822 in *The Will to Power* (“We possess art lest we perish of the truth”) retains the promise of art’s illusion as the countermovement to nihilism when he states: “But we have art so that we do not perish from such supersensuous ‘truth,’ so that the supersensuous does not vitiate life to the point of general debility and ultimate collapse. With regard to the essential relation of art and truth . . . art is worth more than truth” (Heidegger, “The Will to Power as Art,” 75).

Art’s Uniqueness

The process by which art is creative of meaningful wholes describes the uniqueness of artistic production, in this scheme. Art makes life possible when creative of an order that attempts to solve the insoluble contradictions that Socrates wished to repress.\(^{28}\) What is unique about art, however, resides in its “will to illusion” rather than truth. The unsettling of the solidity of truth from the inside means that art, in order that we may live on, values without justification—no absolute basis for evaluation of a value’s value is possible after we have “unchained this earth from its sun.”\(^{29}\) Art is able to value a particular idealization of existence and at the same time remain indifferent to truth and the need to eternally justify that idealization. In this understanding we witness that what the will to truth undertook in idolatrous fashion, art attempts with an understanding of its limits or the impossibility of its creation ever reaching its goal of solving contradictions.

With the collapse of the true-world, health can find its feet in the robustness of life-enhancing mythic horizons, in beautiful illusions, in the transfiguration of reality,

\(^{28}\) For such a reading of Nietzsche, truth rendered transparent (as it is in Twilight of the Idols “Reason” in Philosophy”), clears the space for the ability of art to uniquely attempt its own fictions. In that aphorism we learn that reason causes us to create the lies of “unity, thinghood, substance, and permanence.” Reason creates the stability necessary for life out of a flux (the multiplicity, becoming, passing away evinced in our sense). The necessary lie of reason that attempts to enforce a position of permanence describes the same necessity out of which the “great stylists” will later spin their tales. The great stylists, however, will remember “that being is an empty fiction.” They will escape the sickness of truth—truth’s idolatrous concept worship that works to “mummify” concepts in order that they might gain some semblance of permanence. Yet as we will see in differentiating art and truth in such fashion, art only can be described in terms of the loss of what is permanent.
its idealization or perfection given form in the self-reflexivity of art. The idea of myth, illusion, or the prizing of surface indeed carries with it the understanding of its own deceit. In Bernard Yack’s formulation, the Nietzschean artist in setting up meaningful horizons must remember to forget their fictive character. The artist must be self-conscious of his need to forget that a self-created value is just that. Judgments of value recognized to be rooted in a single perspective can make no claim to an exclusive position of value.

Yet this description of art’s self-reflexivity that allows and insists on the character of illusion over truth is one that does not fully recognize the trap that nihilism poses. If the uniqueness of art comes into its own when truth must be abandoned in its service (or disservice) to life, then art carries out the function that truth once accomplished. The power of art to transfigure reality remains tied to and even emanates from the pessimism of a completed nihilism. Art only attains its self-reflexivity, its uniqueness within a horizon where any interpretation is as good as any other; where absolute truth no longer provides a measure. In this case, art is merely what we call truth in a completed nihilism where truth is unmasked as a lie. Art (or truth in a nihilism of self-reflection prepared for by the devaluing of the highest values) now appears to own up to that fact that its ultimate goal is futile. In this description, art can essentially be no different from truth when the nihilistic experience of the loss of


30 See Yack, The Longing for Total Revolution.
any standard is that which insists on a value’s self-reflexivity. This experience of the loss of the true-world, an aspect of the declining life inaugurated by the will to truth, is the event that describes art’s uniqueness. Stated simply, art’s uniqueness resides merely in its ability to make a truth claim without taking up a dogmatic position.

This is the conception of art given when moving from a position such as Bernstein’s and the muddling of the distinction between art and truth. Yet this muddling is not an eradication of the distinction (Bernstein’s aporia) so that art only finds its shines forth in relation to truth rendered transparent. The ubiquity of fictive horizons, the necessity of illusion that is now witnessed as the highest truth, is simply a description of completed nihilism. Art is thought within the context of truth.

The question of the essential difference between art and truth in this formulation remains an issue when art’s self-reflexivity that supposedly comprised its uniqueness is granted only with the experience of the loss of the highest values—a stage of nihilism. An interpretation that understands itself to be one interpretation among an equally valid multiplicity cannot adequately contain the uniqueness of art as it works to idealize and perfect existence through an affirmation of its becoming.

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31 “Such distress always permits a variety of interpretations. Rather: it is in one particular interpretation, the Christian-moral one, that nihilism is rooted” (Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 1). “Everything lacks meaning” (the untenability of one interpretation of the world, upon which a tremendous amount of energy has been lavished, awakens the suspicion that all interpretations of the world are false)” (Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 9). “This realization is a consequence of the cultivation of ‘truthfulness’” (Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 3).
Pessimism

Allowing surface to shine forth, art can only express the ascending life if it is
disclosive of becoming in its idealization of existence. If art is not witnessed as
radically different from truth, its unique creation comes to light and is lost in the
experience of the loss of the true-world. Artistic creation in this scenario is an
expression of homesickness in a radical form. Artistic creation is motivated out of the
conscious recognition (art’s self-reflexivity) of the impossibility of its goal to create or
“fix anything as it ought to be.”\textsuperscript{32} Art’s uniqueness related to nihilism’s last trap, can
only take up a position of pessimism in relation to this-world wholly and completely
described by the experience of the loss of the true-world.

Again in Yack’s formulation, art develops illusions that must remember to
forget their illusory quality. The desire (now rendered transparent and impossible) of
eternally justifying reality still motivates the artistic task. Only now art’s unique
creative ability—its mature self-reflexivity—is given in relation to a measureless
existence. The uniqueness of artistic creation remains conditioned by the impossibility
of perfecting or idealizing reality in order to justify it once and for all. Art in this
understanding continues to utter “no” to this world despite its prizing of surface.

Within this radical absence or lack of the highest truths, as a mode of
orientation, the nihilist judges “the world as it is [that it] ought not to be and the world

\textsuperscript{32} Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 318, 585.
as it ought to be [that it] does not exist.”

33 The pathos of “in vain” describes the artist who creates out of “hunger” rather than “superabundance.”

34 Artistic creation is “starved by life and must of necessity grab things, eat them out, and make them more meager.”

35 This understanding of art that prizes “destruction, change, becoming” only by equating becoming with a nihilistic horizon expressed in art’s self-reflexivity is “the expression of . . . the hatred of the ill-constituted, disinherit, underprivileged.”

While art, so conceived, is able to view the true-world as a lie and has no need of its justification, art’s self-reflexivity is still plagued the persistent assumption that without the true-world life can have no meaning. Art expresses a radical “homesickness” where the eradication of any hope for home renders every idealization or perfection of existence necessarily illusory. The value of art remains tied to truth. Artistic creation, rendered unique due to its self-professed impotence to complete its task, is a

33 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*.


36 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 519, 9. “. . . let us imagine the lawless roving of the artistic imagination, unchecked by any native myth; let us think of a culture that has no fixed and sacred primordial site but is doomed to exhaust all possibilities and to nourish itself wretchedly on all other cultures—there we have the present age, the result of that Socratism which is bent on the destruction of myth. And now the mythless man stands eternally hungry, surrounded by all past ages, and digs and grubs for roots, even if he has to dig for them among the remotest antiquities. The tremendous historical need of our unsatisfied modern culture, the assembling around one of countless other cultures . . . what does all this point to . . . if not the loss of the mythical home? Let us ask ourselves whether the feverish and uncanny excitement of this culture is anything but the greedy seizing and snatching at food of a hungry man” (*Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy*, 135-136, 23).
manifestation of the descending life. Art, by this thinking, contributes to the
impoveryishment of this-world.

Again, in this scheme art or truth simply describes the necessity of fictive
horizons; one term is set in relation to the true world the other to the loss of that
world—nihilism's last trap. If the difference between art and truth can only be
measured in terms of the stages within the will to truth then Nietzsche has failed in the
attempt to overcome the pessimistic stance of nihilism. Art does not posses the
uniqueness sufficient enough to reinstate the tragic and is thereby unable to constitute
an affirmative stance toward this-world.

Art's disclosive power

Nietzsche insists, however, "Art [is] the only superior counterforce to all will to
denial of life, as that which is anti-Christian, anti-Buddhist, antinihilist par excellence."38
This claim is restated in Nietzsche's "Attempt at Self-Criticism" as the stark contrast
between a purely aesthetic understanding and the Christian/Socratic vision of the
world. If we take this claim seriously, we must dare to think Nietzsche in a more
radical fashion that indeed heightens the risk in his struggle with metaphysics as the
will to truth. The danger in thinking the uniqueness of art, announced as a

37 Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 446, 846.

38 Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 452, 853.
"counterforce" to pessimism, comprises the "danger of all dangers"—setting up a "metaphysical comfort."

It must be admitted that this task to think art as the non-metaphysical affirmation of becoming, to think art as the counterforce to pessimism, is a task that even Nietzsche (at one point) thought could only fail. In *Human, All-too-human* Nietzsche argues that art merely fills the void left "when religions relax their hold."39 Here, it is understood that Schopenhauerian formulas had infiltrated Nietzsche's earlier thought. The intoxication of art, supplying other-worldly comfort for our ills, casts this-world as a drab impediment to the romantic longing for "rest, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves."40 Nietzsche struggles with this doubt regarding art's authentic countermovement in his unmistakably self-referential 1886 "Attempt at Self-Criticism" attached to republication of *The Birth of Tragedy*.

In the "Self-Criticism," Nietzsche regrets the influence of Schopenhauer and Kant in *The Birth*. For this early work, he contends, was "basically at odds with Kant's and Schopenhauer's spirit and taste."41 Tied to the unfortunate influence of modern romantic concerns, Nietzsche is disturbed by his "spoiling of the grandiose Greek

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39 Although the task of marking separate periods within movement of Nietzsche's thought is debatable, Julian Young claims Nietzsche to have four separate "accounts of the relation between art and life;" the fourth or last being a return to the account given in *The Birth of Tragedy* (Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 117).


problem.” Praise of “the German spirit” meant the appending of “hopes where there was no ground.”

Here the danger is the romantic conception of art as “resignation” in the face of life’s futility. In taking up the task of thinking the uniqueness of art’s countermovement to pessimism the danger is that art will become itself mired in a dogmatic disclosure of “primordial reality.” Any “reality” no matter how carefully described as “contradictory,” prizing becoming rather than being in an unstable dynamic process, in so far as it provides a comfort by affirming what lies behind our “ordinary reality” entails the denial of the ordinary.

Despite these reservations, Nietzsche in the “Self-Criticism” recognizes that the possibility of a “purely aesthetic understanding” of art was raised as a question in The Birth of Tragedy. Despite the lack of “an individual language” and “apart from all the

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42 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy.

43 “Dionysian art, too, wishes to convince us of the eternal joy of existence: only we are to seek this joy not in phenomena, but behind them. . . . a metaphysical comfort tears us momentarily from the bustle of the changing figures. We are really for a brief moment primordial being itself” (Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 104, 17). “How could one endure to perceive the echo of innumerable shouts of pleasure and woe in the ‘wide space of the world night,’ enclosed in the wretched glass capsule of the human individual, without inexorably fleeing toward his primordial home, as he hears his shepherd’s dance of metaphysics?” (Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 127, 21). Focusing separately on the Apollinian or Dionysian solutions to the wisdom of Silenus involves thinking of a metaphysical comfort in the face of the terror of individual existence. Yet it seems that the “coupling” or “fraternal union” of Apollo and Dionysus in tragic art provides for the possibility of thinking art non-metaphysically as a singular event. Art’s self-reflexivity, in this sense, stands in relation to the affirmation of a frenzied, overfull becoming. Art’s beautiful illusion, in its self-reflexive, non-dogmatic showing, discloses what is productive of art’s self-reflexivity. All great art is tragic for Nietzsche, such that if the work is perceived as constituted by this fraternal union “perceived as a whole, without denial of individual existence; if such creation could be created without smashing its creator—whence do we take the solution of such a contradiction?” (Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 127, 21).
hasty hopes . . . with which I spoiled my first book, there still remains the great
Dionysian question mark” that hovers over the ability to think art’s unique
presentation not in romantic terms trapped by pessimism. Far from denying the task of
thinking the unique affirmation of becoming in art, this question of art’s countermove
to nihilism remains an issue in his “Self-Criticism” even in Nietzsche’s wariness
regarding the thematization of art’s uniqueness.

Tragic Art

Already demonstrated is the trap prepared for those, who in their haste,
emphasize Nietzsche’s perspectivism. Prizing art as creative of fictive horizons solely
fails to adequately address the question of art’s uniqueness, taking that uniqueness for
granted. Without doubt the distinctiveness of art is still to be found in its “falsity, [its]
indifference to truth and utility.” The “childishness” of the artist and his willful and
violent idealization of existence must, however, be enriched such that art’s affirmation
of becoming as the countermovement to nihilism can be thought.

If art is to be differentiated from the will to truth such that its creation of useful
and beautiful myths can reflect the ascending life, then art in its myth-making must
retain a disclosive power. The difference between art and truth speaks to the difference
between the artist’s affirmation of becoming and the nihilist’s ability to recognize the


45 Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 432, 816.
futility of locating the truth. Art must be disclosive of becoming if we are to understand its self-reflexivity not in terms of the pessimism that lingers in the psychically sick experience beholden to the loss of the highest values but in terms of art’s creation out of the health and strength of the “overfullness” of a “frenzied” will. The necessary fictions art produces serve only to emphasize the idea that life is not worth living unless they are motivated by an overfullness that is both “revealed and concealed” in those fictions.\textsuperscript{46} Tragedy is born, for Nietzsche, in a rapturous overabundance of spirit that can affirm the worst life has to offer. Something like the argument for art’s disclosive power attempted in \textit{The Birth of Tragedy} must still inform a Nietzschean view of art as the creation of useful lies. Yet, at the same time that art’s disclosiveness avoids the pitfalls of art’s self-reflexivity considered in relation to nihilism, it must also avoid a description of a disclosive power that presents the reality of a true-world as metaphysical comfort.

We learn in \textit{The Birth of Tragedy} that the death of Attic tragedy is caused by the exclusion of the chorus in Euripides’ plays—tragedy’s Dionysian element. The Apollinian element—the “beautiful illusion of the dream worlds”\textsuperscript{47}—both pleasurable and illusory in its formation of self-identical individuals, when devoid of Dionysian intoxication, excess, frenzy, terror, self-loss cannot be considered tragic art. The feeling of “tragic joy,” rather, grabs the spectator of tragic art when

\textsuperscript{46} See Nietzsche, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, 139, 24.

\textsuperscript{47} Nietzsche, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, 34, 1.
“he beholds the transfigured world of the stage and nevertheless denies it. He sees the tragic hero before him in epic clearness and beauty, and nevertheless rejoices in his annihilation. ... He feels the actions of the hero to be justified, and is nevertheless still more elated when these actions annihilate their agent. He shudders at the sufferings which will befall the hero, and yet anticipates in them a higher, much more overpowering joy. ... How must we derive this curious internal bifurcation, this blunting of the Apollinian point, if not from the Dionysian magic that, though apparently exciting the Apollinian emotions to their highest pitch, still retains the power to force into its service his excess of Apollinian force?”

Focusing on the “fraternal union” of the Apollinian and Dionysian elements, reveals that tragic art’s illusory quality, its ability to perfect existence, goes hand in hand with the Dionysian desire to crush or overturn such creation of ideal individual form. The spectator understands that to the idealized form’s self-reflexivity belongs the desires that this illusion be taken into an overfullness that first prepared for its manifestation. If that which is an affirmation of becoming creates beyond itself, overcomes itself, then the perception of art’s idealization, as a stable self-identity, would only stunt such creative potential. It is only when what is disclosed in art’s visible appearance rises up as both a creative and destructive force does art attain a self-reflexivity that can affirm becoming. Creation from an overfullness, superabundance,

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48 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 131, 22.
or frenzy—ordered, idealized or brought “into the simple” ⁴⁹—becomes the condition for this idealization’s inability to fix its interpretation as anything but a fictive if clearly perceived shining. ⁵¹ Tragic art is a seeing that travels beyond all seeing. ⁵² Tragic art’s unique self-reflexivity stands in relation to and is disclosive of that which it can never identify in its shining forth yet what is constantly affirmed and overflowingly expressed (even if as a “negative sunspot”) in its beautiful illusion or dissimulation. ⁵³

⁴⁹ The “texture” of tragic art, for Nietzsche, can only come to thought if it is seen as “coming into being on the loom as the shuttle flies to and fro” between the Apollinian and Dionysian (Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 130, 21).

⁵⁰ In volume 1 of his Nietzsche, Heidegger emphasizes the role of frenzy (or rapture) in Nietzsche’s understanding of art. Creation out of frenzy is the recognition of the “decision” that constitutes the artwork in its idealization of existence. For Heidegger this is an instance of “true willing” where an “abundance and fullness has been brought under the law of the simple.” This comprises a disclosure and affirmation of what gives the peculiar consistency of the idealization: namely what cannot be mastered as orgiastic frenzy. True willing (and its affirmation of becoming) is not found in a reaction against what has not be conquered, but in the ordered-showing that discloses itself as a decision out of what has not been conquered. The overflow binds itself in the simple. So that art’s self-reflexive character disclosive of frenzy affirms in its idealization of existence the being of becoming.

⁵¹ “And thus the Apollinian illusion reveals itself as what it really is—the veiling during the performance of the tragedy of the real Dionysian effect... forcing the Apollinian drama itself into a sphere where it begins to speak with Dionysian wisdom and even denies itself and it Apollinian visibility (Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 130, 21).

⁵² See Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 141, 24.

⁵³ “We looked at the drama and with penetrating eye reached its inner world of motives—and yet we felt as if only a parable passed us by, whose most profound meaning we almost thought we could guess and that we wished to draw away like a curtain in order to behold the primordial image behind it. The brightest clarity of the image did not suffice us, for this seemed to wish just as much to reveal something as to conceal something. It revelation, being like a parable, seemed to summon us to tear the veil and to uncover the mysterious background; but at the same time this all-illumined total visibility cast a spell over the eyes and prevented them from penetrating deeper. Those who have never had the experience of having to see at the same time that they also longed to transcend all seeing will scarcely be able to
“Everything that comes to the surface in the Apollinian part of Greek tragedy, in the dialogue, looks simple, transparent, and beautiful. . . . But suppose we disregard [look away from, absehen von] the character of the hero as it comes to the surface, visibly—after all, it is in the last analysis nothing but a bright image projected on a dark wall, which means appearance through and through; suppose we penetrate into the myth that projects itself in these lucid reflections: then we suddenly experience a phenomenon that is just the opposite of a familiar optical phenomenon. When after a forceful attempt to gaze on the sun we turn away blinded, we see dark-colored spots before our eyes, as a cure, as it were. Conversely, the bright image projections of the Sophoclean hero—in short, the Apollinian aspect of the mask—are necessary effects of a glance into the inside and terrors of nature: as it were luminous spots to cure eyes damaged by gruesome night.”54

The doubling of the two perspectives of Nietzsche on art (art as disclosive/art as myth-making) discussed earlier can now be given substance. Art must be self-reflexive. It must show itself as a beautiful illusion, as a fictive idealization or perfection of existence. Art’s idealization of existence does not put us in touch with the true-world. It destroys all possibility of any such dogmatic portrayal, of any solid truth claim in its insistence on the ubiquity of illusion. Yet in describing art’s self-reflexivity solely in this manner, art’s uniqueness is left unthought. Art’s illusion presented as “more truthful than truth” is simply understood as a truth claim that need not be considered imagine how definitely and clearly these two processes coexist and are felt at the same time, as one contemplates the tragic myth” (Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 139-140, 24).

54 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 67, 9.
dogmatic. Here, the inability to think sufficiently the uniqueness of art renders art’s “countermovement” to nihilism impossible. Art’s self-reflexivity—intimately attached to its ability to idealize, perfect existence, to make beautiful illusions, value particular value—stands simply in relation to the non-existence of the “world as it ought to be.”

To counter this understanding that characterizes art to be the last gasp of nihilism’s will to nothingness, art’s peculiar and unique ability to perfect existence must be considered again. The challenge of thinking art’s unique countermove to nihilism (as we have seen) opens up the danger of reinscribing the thinking of art as metaphysical comfort. In doubling the two perspectives of Nietzsche on art, however, what comes to the fore is the realization that tragic art’s self-reflexivity must be given in relation to a frenzied becoming. The question to which tragic art is the answer, asks: “how it is possible for Apollinian images (art’s ordering and idealization of existence), seemingly contrary to their express intent, to subvert the solidity of self-identity?” The coupling of the Apollinian and Dionysian does not give way to a synthesis disclosive of a higher unity but rather gives way to “a logic of excess, of resounding excess, excess of shining.”55

55 John Sallis, Crossings: Nietzsche and the Space of Tragedy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 57. “Of this foundation of all existence—the Dionysian basic ground of the world—not one whit more may enter the consciousness of the human individual than can be overcome again by this Apollinian power of transfiguration” (Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 143, 25).
Tragic art's measured, determined beauty, its perfection is also a movement toward the excessive as it is disclosive of a frenzy descriptive of its self-reflexivity.\textsuperscript{56} In the "intricate relation of the Apollinian and the Dionysian" the interplay between the moments of appropriation and expropriation ("Dionysius speaks the language of Apollo; and Apollo, finally the language of Dionysius"\textsuperscript{57}) structures a "new transfigured illusion" that "at every moment make life worth living."\textsuperscript{58} Tragic art is expressive of an ascending life as it takes up and discloses in its showing a frenzied overfullness as the non-identifiable excess of its unique self-reflexivity.

\textsuperscript{56} "That striving for the infinite, the wing-beat of longing that accompanies the highest delight in clearly perceived reality, reminds us that in both states we must recognize a Dionysian phenomenon: again and again it reveals to us the playful construction and destruction of the individual world as the overflow of a primordial delight" (Nietzsche, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, 141-142, 24).

\textsuperscript{57} Nietzsche, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, 130, 21.

\textsuperscript{58} Nietzsche, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, 143, 25. This movement of seeing that travels beyond all seeing (a movement of appropriation and expropriation) as a transfiguration of the self identified and yet still "wanting-to-be-one-self" is unpacked by Heidegger. For Heidegger, Nietzsche successfully avoids the "dissatisfaction" with a deficient life that plagues Romantic art, as "wanting-to-be-away-from-one-self." Nietzsche takes up in tragic art a willing that wants to be oneself. "Of course, 'one-self' is never meant as what is at hand, existing just as it is. Willing proper does not go away from itself, but goes way beyond itself; in such surpassing itself the will captures the one who wills, absorbing and transforming him into and along with itself. . . . wherever superabundance and plenitude, that is, the revelation of the essence which unfolds of itself, brings themselves under the law of the simple, willing wills itself in its essence, and is will. [the will prevails] only where the simplicity of calm dominates, by which the antithetical is preserved, i.e., transfigured, in the unity of a yoke that sustains the tension of a bow" (Heidegger, "The Will to Power as Art," 136-137).
CHAPTER 2

Revelation, Enigmatic Sites, and the Continental Philosophy of Religion

Martin Heidegger takes seriously Nietzsche's struggle to think through the phenomenon of art without recourse to what Heidegger calls aesthetics. For Heidegger, Nietzsche prepares the way back to a pre-conceptual understanding of art and so for an overcoming of an aesthetical investigation of the artwork. To be sure, the insight into the "fraternal union" of the Apollinian and Dionysian, Nietzsche professes, was cleared by radically challenging the adequacy of foreign categories to think the uniqueness of art, particularly as art has been thought to exemplify a moral source. "[T]hose who would derive the effect of the tragic solely from these moral sources—which, to be sure, has been the custom in aesthetics all too long—should least of all believe that they have thus accomplished something for art, which above all must demand purity in its sphere."¹

For Heidegger, in "The Will to Power as Art"², however, Nietzsche even more profoundly pulls the consideration of art from the mire of an aesthetics that had become "psychology." Nietzsche is able to ask anew "the question of whether and how art is still known or willed as the definitive formation and preservation of beings as a

whole.”

This question had been definitively, if errantly answered and so covered over by the nineteenth century’s “discovery and investigation of mere developments in art history.” Art, for these “psychologists” and art historians, was taken as a cultural artifact—a marker of an age—that for Heidegger leads to Hegel’s pronouncement of the “death of art.” In Heidegger’s treatment, Nietzsche’s concern that art be a stimulant for life (in contrast to Hegel, a countermovement to nihilism) involves Nietzsche in an aesthetics reduced to “applied physiology.” Reducing aesthetics “to

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3 Heidegger, “The Will to Power as Art,” 89.

4 Heidegger, “The Will to Power as Art.”

5 “Historicism has today not only not been overcome, but is only now entering the stage of its expansion and entrenchment.” For Heidegger, the artwork like the thinking of early Greek thinkers can only be considered by historians as “sedimented stuff” such that historian’s “surveys...explain history without ever thinking it out, from the essence of history” (Martin Heidegger, Early Greek Thinking [New York: Harper & Row, 1975], 17).


Heidegger in his “The origin of the Work of Art,” specifically in the “Epilogue,” takes up the problem of aesthetics in thinking the uniqueness of art. Hegel appears there as a provocation for re-thinking the artwork and Heidegger restates the Nietzschean question as follows: “Is art still an essential and necessary way in which that truth happens which is decisive for our historical existence, or is art no longer of this character?” (Heidegger, “The origin of the Work of Art,” 205).
excitations of the nervous system, to bodily conditions”? Nietzsche approaches an understanding of art without the concepts aesthetics had traditionally deployed. “Here indeed the aesthetic inquiry into art in its ultimate consequences is thought to an end.”

Nietzsche’s reflections on art mark a point in the history of aesthetics where that process returns to its beginnings when, for Heidegger, the Pre-socratics dwelled in the midst of an “original and luminous knowledge” and hence had no need of aesthetics.

For Heidegger, aesthetics is a way of thinking about art that extends roughly from Plato up to (and including) Nietzsche. Its final phase, which came in vogue in

7 Heidegger, “The Will to Power as Art,” 91.

8 Heidegger, “The Will to Power as Art.” While Nietzsche thinks at the outer limits of aesthetics about art, Heidegger maintains that he has not overcome it (although he comes close in his “philosophy of grand style,” see Heidegger, “The Will to Power as Art,” 124-137). This overcoming might only be possible in Heidegger’s own work when a “decision” on the uniqueness of art “will be made, when it is made, from and about [the] truth of beings” (Heidegger, “The origin of the Work of Art,” 205). Nietzsche, however, does not “proceed from the work itself” and so shares many “prevalent opinions of aesthetics” (Heidegger, “The Will to Power as Art,” 117). For instance, one of Nietzsche’s most important assertions about art is that art should not be understood from the observer or recipient, but from the maker or creator, the artist. But for Heidegger it is clear that, in this way, one subjectivity is simply replaced with another. Heidegger even calls Nietzsche’s thinking about art the “most extreme aesthetics,” since Nietzsche founds art in the artist’s intoxication. Ultimately Nietzsche’s reflections on art uphold aesthetics and remain metaphysical in so far as they still represent an attempt to determine the being of beings. This of course, leads to Heidegger’s famous argument for Nietzsche as the last metaphysician, determining the being of beings through the belonging together of the eternal recurrence and the will to power.


10 For Heidegger, aesthetics as a discipline within philosophy began with Plato. Although the term “aesthetics” was not coined for two millennia (A. G. Baumgarten), philosophical meditations on the essence of art (and beauty) had always been attempted within the confines of aesthetics (see Heidegger, “The Will to Power as Art,” 79). For Heidegger, the “luminous state of knowing” possessed by early Greeks in their great art and thought came to an end with the development of philosophical inquiry and its taking the measure of art within
the eighteenth century, is characterised by Heidegger as an understanding of art in terms of an object that stands in relation to the state of mind of a creating or enjoying subject. Thus, according to Heidegger, aesthetics mirrors the model of thinking of later metaphysics that is subject-object thinking. For Heidegger, the era of aesthetics coincides with and is based on the era of Western metaphysics.

Thus, according to Heidegger, one of the two pillars by which aesthetics thinks art is the subject. This may be the observer who beholds or experiences the work of art, or the artist who creates it. It is especially the idea that art and beauty are based in feeling or experience that Heidegger rails against.

The discipline of aesthetics. The organization of philosophy by Plato and Aristotle and their schools “mark off the boundaries of all future inquiry into art” (Heidegger, “The Will to Power as Art,” 80). Heidegger calls attention specifically to the limiting boundary of the conceptual pair hyle-morphe.

Aesthetics in one way or another has always been tied to the “consideration of man’s state of feeling in its relation to the beautiful [that] . . . can pertain to either nature or art” (Heidegger, “The Will to Power as Art,” 78). Aesthetics, as a knowledge of the sensuous expression in objects or the feeling of beauty within a subject, explores the artwork in terms of what determines this feeling such that its meaning, not given in its sensuous display, becomes apparent. The significance accorded the artwork, within aesthetics, is given in relation to philosophical categories that judge the worth of art in terms of usefulness or art’s contribution to the good or the true (a manner of judgment that, for Heidegger or Nietzsche, remains alien to the unique claim of art). In Plato’s inaugural aesthetic vision, for example, the eidos insists the artwork be considered thrice removed from the idea, plagued by convention and yet, as a sensuous appeal, dangerous. Here the philosophic truth that measures this sensuous appeal is described by a super-sensuous, a priori cognition—a form of knowledge that subsumes particulars under concepts.

“The way in which man experiences art is supposed to give information about its essence. Lived experience is the source that is standard not only for art appreciation and enjoyment but also for artistic creation. Everything is an experience. Yet perhaps lived experience is the element in which art dies” (Heidegger, “The origin of the Work of Art,” 204).
The second pillar of aesthetics, according to Heidegger, is the assumption that the work of art or the bearer of beauty is an object. Whether an object is thought of as a substance with accidents, as the unity of sensory impressions, or as matter shaped into form, the art-object is conceived of as a closed being, without any reference to the being of its being. The artwork approached with specific reference to the matter-form framework can easily be incorporated in subject-object thinking. The subject then has the means to impose on matter a certain delineation, and through a process of making turns it into an object, thereby subjecting it to the subject's intention. In Heidegger's view, art unsettles this framework rooted in and supporting the human urge to control. Aesthetics constitutes a way of thinking about art that reproduces only Western metaphysics, precisely in the sense that this metaphysics completes itself in technology.

What the philosophy of art requires is therefore a thinking that leaves aside problematic aesthetic categories.

The task for Heidegger is to think through the artwork, starting from artwork. Proceeding in this way, Heidegger finds the being of the artwork to be enigmatic. Possessing a peculiar self-subsistence such that its resists an intentional grasp, the artwork, for Heidegger, can only be understood from within the space of meaning that

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13 The origin and the development of modern aesthetics does not arise out of a reflection on the artwork as much as aesthetics, in this case, is determined by "the beginning of the modern age. Man and his unconstrained knowledge of himself, as of his position among beings, become the arena where the decision falls as to how beings are to be experienced, defined, and shaped" (Heidegger, "The Will to Power as Art," 83).

it itself opens up. In this way, the artwork issues a claim upon the intentional
consciousness. Heidegger’s "reflections are concerned with the riddle of art, the riddle
that art itself is. They are far from claiming to solve the riddle. The task is to see the
riddle."

I give this quick synopsis of Heidegger's complaint against aesthetics when
thinking the artwork, since in a similar manner, for Jean-Luc Marion, religious themes
and phenomena have also languished under the tutelage of metaphysical concepts—
"excluded" or "subjugated" by "transcendental conditions of manifestation."
Arguably, this desire on the part of Heidegger to expose the enigmatic appearance of
the artwork can be seen to mirror the thinking that explores the enigma of the icon in
the work of Marion.

In Marion's attempt to make thematic the encounter with religious phenomena
whose appearance are excessive of their very phenomenality, thought is also
challenged by the logic of the claim. In such an encounter, consciousness is claimed by
an excess or otherness even as consciousness seeks to comprehend the phenomenon
from out of its own resources. Turning away from Husserl and the centrality of the
intentional subject or Heidegger and his fundamental ontology, Marion's thinking
considers what properly cannot come to presence—what cannot be reduced to being,
appropriated by a cognitive grasp, or illuminated on a single horizon.

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Marion, insists (at the very least in his expressly theological work) that theology in its authentic, post-onto-theological guise is best suited for the exploration of otherness of phenomena such as the icon, where an order of giving beyond being is revealed. Post-phenomenological thought, which has recognized its theological destiny when exploring the most originary and saturated phenomena, putatively leaves behind the ontologizing, totalizing, or metaphysical tendencies of philosophy. The proper response to the claim made by the impossible event—an encounter recent Continental thought wishes to entertain—is best expressed in terms of praise, faith, or prayer. Phenomenological rigor applied to this most uncanny event describes, therefore, the site where philosophical inquiry is silenced and the language of faith proceeds. As with Heidegger’s struggle to open up a space for thinking the artwork, the question of the subject is an issue for Marion. In relation to this question, Marion prizes a profound passivity—a subjectivity dispossessed of its ability to grasp meaning through predication.\(^{16}\)

\(^{16}\) Developed in the early work *The Idol and Distance* as the “Christic mode” of subjectivity and later in *Being Given* as the “adonné,” Marion describes the subject as one who fundamentally receives before intending or comprehending. Marion therefore can argue for a privileging of the theological language of praise (open to the claim of alterity) over the philosophical language of predication (unable to properly approach alterity). For a description of the theological task eclipsing (or employing as a propadeutic) the philosophical as metaphysics, see “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” trans. Thomas Carlson, *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994) as well as the entirety of such works as *The Idol and Distance* and *God Without Being*. See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and the Distance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001); *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); and *God Without Being* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991).
Specifically for Marion, the attempt to engage radical alterity through the exploration of religious or "saturated phenomena" raises for thinking what he believes to be the essential matter at stake in theology—the question of revelation. The play between consciousness and the claim made on consciousness in the encounter with an enigmatic site repeats a classical understanding of what it means to be faithful. Faith does not discover its object, rather it is constituted by it; so that revelation must be construed as an unveiling or disclosure of an unconditioned self-manifestation. As such the disclosure cannot be initiated by human activity nor can that which is unveiled ever be comprehended but rather must remain absent or mysterious in its very self-presentation. For a postmodern theologian like Marion, the phenomenology of enigmatic sites as a struggle with the paradox of revelation becomes the only adequate basis for claims about God.

Yet in proposing to hold Heidegger and Marion together in this way, some questions begin to emerge. Can the traditional concept of revelation and the phenomenological exploration of the enigmatic site agree that the happening of the mysterious self-manifestation be nominated the God of a determinate tradition? Does the "appearance" of God, however mysterious or ineffable, in the enigmatic site remain a requirement held for reasons pertaining to phenomenological inquiry or for reasons of theological commitment? Can the unconditioned event of the gift—merely signaled within phenomenology—properly and surpassingly be explored through a determinate tradition without conditioning the unconditioned? Can a Christian theology, whose
language requires and insists upon a referent that is neither indeterminate nor dispensable, help but identify and determine its professed desideratum—expressed in postmodern theology as the wholly other, the utterly unnameable? Does the phenomenological discovery of the unconditioned in fact mark God’s disappearance, at least an explicitly Christian God? Said differently, does the bringing together of the concept of revelation and the enigmatic site make questionable the very idea of revelation expressed in the Christian tradition?

By taking up these questions I propose to think through the significance of Continental thought for elucidating Marion’s theology, specifically the concept of revelation. Such a task begins to mark the limits of a theology informed by Continental thought and the assertion currently ascendant among some postmodern representatives of Christian thought that theology in taking up the task of overcoming metaphysics properly moves beyond or subsumes philosophy.

Specifically my task, here, of determining the limits of a postmodern theology will proceed by setting Marion’s analysis of the icon in conversation with Heidegger’s phenomenology of the artwork, to which the icon bears a striking resemblance. Such an exchange pushes Heidegger’s consideration of the uniqueness of the artwork in a direction that responds to the challenge posed by recent post-phenomenological theological developments.\(^{17}\) A reading of Heidegger’s artwork as iconic narrows the

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\(^{17}\) This reading, pushing Heidegger to respond to the recent preoccupation with enigmatic sites, also has the effect of opening the possibility of viewing the recent turn toward the significance of the artwork in postmodernism as having novel implications for the ethical,
focus of this chapter, posing specific questions of Marion's attempt to render thematic
the logic of the claim by the icon. In questioning the iconic site, this chapter uncovers
and challenges the guiding assumption of a surpassing of philosophical thought by
post-phenomenological thought rendered theological.

*The Icon*

The theological effort to think unconditioned givenness, givenness as such, for
Marion, involves the exploration of "new paradoxes;" and these are gathered, indeed
belligerently protrude in the icon. In the opening chapters of his 1982 work, *God
Without Being*, Marion contrasts the idol that "depends on the gaze that it satisfies"\(^{18}\)
with the icon that does not come to appearance in the gaze but provokes it. The idol
invisibly mirrors an enworlded gaze, "returns the gaze to itself"\(^{19}\) while the icon
signifies from an infinite depth that saturates its visibility. In the visibility of the icon
the invisible is presented as invisible. The icon precedes the gaze that in the idol is
simply mirrored back, so that its unconditioned "appearance," its excessiveness cannot
be reduced to the aim or condition of subjectively constituted, enworlded experience.

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political, and religious consideration of otherness. Far from reckoning the so called "aesthetic
turn" in Continental thought as an irresponsible, narrow yet encompassing vision of philosophy
expressing the nihilism of postmodernism, thinking the artwork by an interrogation of Marion's
icon sheds new light on that "turn." Can this "weakening" of the true that happens in the
artwork lead, in Vattimo's words, "in a direction that might be seen as scandalous, in that it
'twists' weakness and nihilism into a sense totally different from the usual."

\(^{18}\) Marion, *God Without Being*, 10.

\(^{19}\) Marion, *God Without Being*, 12.
As such the icon calls into question the primacy of the gaze and the hegemony of the economy of being that is blind to what cannot appear on its horizon. The icon generally confounds conventional notions of manifestation—a “disclosive” confounding in which the structure of appearance discovers its prior possibility in an impossibility.

Thought can approach the icon, which accomplishes its enigmatic appearance beyond the order of knowing and being, only when remaining close to what, for Marion, constitutes a paradox inhering in unconditioned givenness. The inversion of the gaze that renders the icon, strictly speaking, invisible, requires the self-subsistence of the icon. In this brief description of the icon, its self-subsistence is the component I wish to emphasize.

The icon measures itself; “For, to give itself to be seen, the icon needs only itself.”20 The claim made by the “infinite excessiveness” of the icon on consciousness, exposing the limit of visibility, pushes the question of the origin of the icon’s shining out of reach for a logic of an enworlded gaze. The icon challenges the substantiality of its very appearance so that it must be thought as an event or moment of saturation to which we can bear witnesses but which can never be brought to presence. To approach the icon is to think its origin no longer in terms of artistic production or aesthetic experience. The icon rather “is defined by an origin without original.”21 To appear as an enigmatic site, whose manifestation disfigures the identity of any horizon, the icon


can depend on no horizon; it depends only on the giving that it gives, a donation its
givenness first bestows.

This double sense of givenness, that the self-subsistence of the icon requires, is
expressed by the French donation (or its English cognate). The character of a substantial
given is modified by the event of giving that the “presence” of the gift first renders
possible. “The icon lays out the material of wood and paint in such a way that there
appears in them the intention of a transpiercing gaze emanating from them.”22 Such a
gaze, of course, inheres in the icon itself. The icon is composed of two interconnected
constituting moments: the enigmatic appearance that regards the gaze finds its origin in
the activity of giving that the gift itself first has made possible.

The icon’s self-subsistence inverts the intentional structure of appearance.
Iconic givenness aims at the gaze, it “regards us, it concerns us,”23 engaging the logic of
the claim. The icon claims the gaze that would render it a phenomenon. The icon
saturated with invisibility, provoking our concern, forces the gaze into a responsive
rather than a constitutive role. Veneration describes this response as the recognition of
the “limits of our visibility,” the limits of predication and as such demands the priority
of the Good over Being. For Marion, this response is a surpassing of a thinking devoted
to the horizon of Being. In fact to think outside Being is no longer to think at all. Far
from being a dead end, the inability to think the beyond of Being engages a properly

22 Marion, God Without Being, 19.

23 Marion, God Without Being.
theological thinking. “One therefore must recognize that the impossibility, or at least the extreme difficulty, of thinking outside of ontological difference could, in some way, directly suit the impossibility—indisputable and definitive—of thinking God as such.”

*The Artwork*

According to Marion, the interrogation of the icon’s mode of appearance prepares thought for the challenge of revelation, for the appearance of God beyond the hegemony of Being’s horizon. As such, the icon challenges the ontological prejudice that plagues phenomenology. Marion, specifically, argues that Heidegger’s ontological difference (a major component in Heidegger’s effort to reawaken the forgotten question of Being) itself involves a forgetting that ties up Heidegger’s thought in a “more discrete . . . more threatening idolatry.”

This uncovering of an originary blindness on Heidegger’s part has the effect of trans-valuing the significance for theology of Heidegger’s development of onto-theology. Indeed, in terms of the critique of ontotheology, Heidegger’s thought is not

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24 Marion, *God Without Being*, 45. Compare this statement to a passage from Marion’s essay “The Saturated Phenomenon:” “The field of religion could simply be defined as what philosophy excludes or, in the best case, subjugates.” A discipline such as the philosophy of religion confronts “a disastrous alternative: either it would be a question of phenomena that are objectively definable but lose their religious specificity, or it would be a question of phenomena that are specifically religious but cannot be described objectively” (Jean-Luc Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” trans. Thomas Carlson, *Philosophy Today* 40 (1996): 103). In so far as a philosophical approach to religious phenomena cannot respect the specificity of those phenomena and remain philosophical, the philosophy of religion remains an impossibility. The issue of the relation between philosophy as phenomenology and the “religious phenomenon” or theology will be considered in the final section of this paper and again in the final chapter.
only employed by Marion but is indispensable for Marion’s subsequent argument.26 Rather than damning theology to metaphysical errancy, uncovering of the ontotheological constitution of metaphysics frees thought to encounter the radical alterity of God, naming idols developed in the history of philosophy and theology as such. In this way he attempts a trans-ontotheological understanding of theology, trumping yet putting to work Heidegger’s insistence that God (even as the highest being) as a being must appear on the horizon of Being on which all beings appear.

Despite Marion’s effort to harness and thereby move beyond Heidegger’s blindness through an analysis of the unique event of the icon, it is my contention that Marion’s exploration of the icon already echoes Heidegger’s movement of thought concerning the being of the artwork. Specifically, this chapter will rely on the series of lectures given by Heidegger in 1935-36, later published in 1945 in Holzwege as “Des Ursprung des Kunstwerkes.”27 Heidegger’s difficult essay attempts to move beyond aesthetic conceptions of the artwork to engage an andere Denken that might address the claim the artwork makes on consciousness. Exploring this claim, rendering enigmatic the site of the artwork, Heidegger arguably is wrestling with the aporias to which

25 Marion, God Without Being, 37.

26 Marion quotes liberally from Heidegger’s Identity and Difference: “The god-less thinking which must abandon the God of philosophy, God as causa sui, is thus perhaps closer to the divine God. Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to Him than ontotheologic would like to admit” (Marion, God Without Being, 35).
Marion’s thought is devoted. Both appear to struggle with an event that resists measurement by a cognitive grasp or an enworlded gaze, one that makes a claim on the self-identity of a familiar world.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes three kinds of being: the ready-to-hand, the present-at-hand, and Dasein. The being of Dasein characterized by existence defies the inscription of being in terms of “categories” that delineate those “entities we encounter in the world;”28 namely the present-at-hand and the ready-to-hand. Relying on the notion of regional ontology, Heidegger opens further the possibility of thinking the peculiar being of other beings. For instance Heidegger asks: is language “a kind of equipment ready-to-hand within-the-world, or has it Dasein’s kind of Being, or is it neither of these?”29 Are there other beings whose essence cannot be explored by in terms of category description? Are there beings that possess a “special status”?

“Signs” in *Being and Time* seem to possess a special status. “A sign is something ontically ready-to-hand, which functions both as this definite equipment and as something indicative of the ontological structure of the readiness-to-hand, of referential


totalities and of worldhood." Equipment, when functioning properly, becomes inconspicuous in its use. Its material is used up such that a world is opened where I become absorbed in my task. A fallenness is necessary if I want to build a house, let alone drive a nail. Signs, however, have a disclosive capacity to reveal the whole equipmental context that remains inaccessible in our ordinary concernful dealings with equipment. The role of the sign in Being and Time, as a piece of equipment that makes conspicuous what usually remains circumspectively undiscovered, can be understood as an anticipation of the character of the artwork in "The Origin of the Work of Art."  

30 Heidegger, Being and Time, 114. The special instances of the turn signal on a car or a knot tied in a handkerchief, although set into the in-order-to of practical involvements, are able to make conspicuous (in their referring) the totality of involvements.

31 A piece of equipment only shows itself in a conspicuous manner when it breaks. In this instance, it is really no longer itself, or it is a broken piece of equipment in need of repair. In the taken-for-grantedness of equipment characterized by production, there is a dissembling or a fallenness into ontic projects. And there equipment locates its essence—when it disappears into usefulness. "The production of equipment is finished when a material has been formed as to be ready to use. For equipment to be ready means that it is released beyond itself, to be used up in usefulness" (Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 190). In this sense the produced equipment is in relation to something outside itself. The "more handy a piece of equipment" becomes the better it fulfills its end and the less it "stands out." The better it is fixed into a world the more "inconspicuous" it becomes. When thinking its production a piece of equipment is recognized not to have a self-sufficient presencing—it does not seem to have taken shape by itself for its usefulness points beyond its own being to a prior purposiveness. The production of equipment is "controlled beforehand" according to its purposiveness and is therefore set in relation to the world—its use is measured by a world. If the artwork is thought in terms of the production of equipment, the attempt to comprehend the being of a work and its setting itself up and setting itself forth becomes impossible, when that which measures a world is measured by it.

32 To be sure, the special status of signs has ontological implications, yet signs are equipment and they function within the whole context of equipment. In other words, a sign, which operates by a "reference of showing" (rather than by "reference of serviceability") still is a meaningful entity only within the confines of a world already meaningful. Signs refer (in their special way) in the same fashion as all equipment and are established within a world. They are
In the 1930’s Heidegger begins to consider the possibility (despite its appearance as an entity in the world) that the artwork ought not to be explored in terms of category description (the ready-to-hand or the present-at-hand) but that it ought to be recognized, in the language of Being and Time, as possessing a “special status.” Its createdness cannot properly be measured by the world, by category description, for it measures the very world out of which such an attempt to explicate its appearance would originate. The artwork depends only on itself. Indeed, the double sense of donation, that in Marion’s thought accompanies the self-subsistence of the icon, echoes Heidegger’s description of the process by which the artwork establishes itself in a clearing that it holds open for itself.

33 Jacques Taminiaux, in Poetics, Speculation, and Judgment (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), devotes an essay titled “The Origin of The Origin of the Work of Art” to the development of the significance of the artwork in Heidegger’s thought and its role in the Kehre. Taminiaux traces this development through the 1933 Rectoral Address, Introduction to Metaphysics, and the earlier versions of the “Ursprung” essay documenting Heidegger’s gradual reconsideration of his initial abandonment of techne to the realm of inauthentic everydayness. By the time Holzwege is published, Heidegger further abandons an exploration of the artwork according to Dasein’s “basic stand” towards art and rather takes up the “riddle that art itself is” (Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 204) to expose its essential feature: “this ‘that it is’ [da es sei] of createdness” (Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 190).
To awaken our atrophied awareness of the artwork’s special status, Heidegger, in the “Ursprung” essay attacks the interpretive scheme of the category of equipment as it is used to investigate the appearance of the artwork. Equipment is meant for something in particular and is therefore always taken up into a world of doing, where that particularity finds its meaning in relation to projects. A piece of equipment shows itself and “thus is being” only when directed toward the in-order-to, the for-the-sake-of our ontic tasks and practical involvements. Thus the being of equipment is presented in usefulness; it has been produced to fulfill a useful end. Whatever is presented in the guise of a matter-form structure of equipment, realizing its essence in its usefulness, is “always the product of a process of making.” The production of equipment is “controlled beforehand” according to its purposiveness and is therefore set in relation to the world—its usefulness that determines its appearance is measured by a world.

For Heidegger the category of equipment has gained ascendancy in interpreting all beings and this dominance ensures that the artwork’s peculiar uselessness (which it shares with the inscrutability of the thing) will remain neglected, while its similarity with equipment (its production by human hands) will become the feature helpful in the comprehension of its being.34

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34 “Because equipment takes an intermediate place between mere thing and work, the suggestion is that nonequipmental beings—things and works and ultimately all beings—are to be comprehended with the help of the Being of equipment (matter-form structure)” (Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 155).
The work, then, is also unlike the being of a thing. A thing's sheer that-it-is remains inscrutable, having "taken shape by itself and [so] is self-contained." Self-sufficiency or uselessness, which the artwork does share with the thing, in the artwork, is present, however, by a process of making. The work's sheer that-it-is is presented (unlike the thing) in its createdness. The work is not characterized by a producedness either. In its self-sufficiency (unlike equipment) its "thingly substructure" is not used up in the in-order-to of equipment. From the perspective of being produced, the artwork is like equipment, and from the position of self-sufficiency, the artwork is like the thing.

The artwork, for Heidegger, is neither an object nor a product; to attempt to comprehend its appearance in such a manner is to miss "the enigma of art"—its origin, Ur-sprung, as primal leap or event. Specifically, an inquiry into the essence of the artwork by the category of equipment fails to appreciate the irreducible tension that exists within the artwork between these two characteristics—the artwork's uselessness and the artwork's having been produced.

Holding these two characteristics together entails that the "artwork belongs, as work, uniquely within the realm that is opened up by itself." The appearance of the artwork as useless can be given only as such within the clearing that is held open by the

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singular created artwork itself. The tension engendered here uniquely belongs to "the unity we seek when we ponder the self-subsistence [Insichstehen] of the work and try to tell of this closed, unitary repose of self-support."\textsuperscript{37} Equipmental categories resolve this tension, forgetting the work's self-subsistence and naming the artwork's uselessness as an aberration, an exception to the rule. As such, the artwork is forced to appear on a horizon measured by a productive circumspection, by the totality of involvements within a world. The tension, however, in the artwork that becomes the strife between world and earth challenges such a comprehension of its appearance. The work makes accessible the self-concealing of a sheer that-it-is in such a way (namely not within the circumspection of the in-order-to of equipment) that the art-work instigates the strife between world and earth. The leap of art's origin, its character as event, given form in its self-subsistence, entails that the measure of art remains for thought something forever un-mastered, something secret. The artwork cannot be exhausted by any "analogy with the experience that is already seen, objectivized, and comprehended"\textsuperscript{38} to borrow Marion's description of the saturated phenomenon.

Let us explore further that self-subsistence. The tension between the artwork's uselessness and its having been produced can be approached, for Heidegger, in a recognition of the constituting strife [Streit] between world and earth — revealing the

\textsuperscript{36} Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 167.

\textsuperscript{37} Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 171.

\textsuperscript{38} Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," 118.
artwork's two essential features. The first sets up the very world that renders the work accessible. The second shows itself in its createdness as the stubborn self-subsistent being it is—in its refusal to be defined or categorized exhaustively. The work, in setting up [Aufstellen] a world, sets forth [Herstellen] into the open its own self-concealing. The artwork is only a work, an enigmatic event, when this setting forth of the earth into the open is a setting up the setting forth has first achieved. Or in Heidegger's words: "In setting up a world, the work sets forth the earth."  

To be sure, the appearance of the artwork resists explication by analogy to "those entities we encounter in the world," specifically in terms of the categories of production (by audience or artist that have dominated the thinking of art throughout history as aesthetics). "Yet the shaking [Erschütterung] of this accustomed questioning approach to [the artwork] is not the essential point." 40 Even more than this, the artwork plays a constitutive role in relation to the world in which those categories initially gain their correctness.


Art and Truth

The work, in setting up a world, sets forth into the open (revealing) its own self-concealing.41 "Art is the setting-into-work of truth. In this proposition an essential ambiguity lies hidden, in which truth is at once the subject and the object of the setting."42 This strife constitutive of the artwork, for Heidegger, lays bare the structure of aletheia as the originary sense of truth as revealing/concealing. The happening of truth in the artwork reveals the primordial Greek experience of truth, as a letting something emerge as the thing that it is, allowing what is present to appear in this letting be.43

The strife that gives insight into the structure of originary truth is instigated in art’s distinctive position between the self-sufficiency of the thing and its coming-to-be by a process of making like equipment. The notion of createdness encompasses this essential and strange tension of the work setting up a world and setting forth the earth.

41 "The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through the world" (Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 174). Alternatively: "the bringing forth places this being in the open region in such a way that what is to be brought forth first clears the openness of the open region into which it comes forth" (Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 187). The earth is not simply a concealing, just as the world is not essentially an unconcealing force. The strife between the two can only be instigated in the particularity of the actual created work. "The earth cannot dispense with the open region of the world if it itself is to appear as earth in the liberated surge of its self-seclusion. The world in turn cannot soar out of the earth’s sight if, as the governing breadth and path of all essential destiny, it is to ground itself on something decisive" (Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 174). The idea of the rift design, as we will see, attempts to describe this complication.

The work's createdness resides in what Heidegger refers to as the rift being set back into the earth. This rift itself is distinguished by a tension that both differentiates and unites. The rift in drawing the line between two opponents also draws the two together in an intimacy where strife enjoys its unending conflict. The rift both divides and draws what has been divided into a union, drawing the opponents into a striving, where the figure then comes into vision. The artwork does indeed reveal this essential feature of the rift only when the rift does its work in the *created work*. For the rift only works in its curious dividing and uniting (the "fixing in place of the figure"), when it is concealed in its revealing in the created work. The rift composing itself in the figure lets the figure shine only when the rift as the "source" of the figure, is forgotten. Truth as the "composed rift" must appear in the created work that sets itself up and sets itself forth.

"Truth [as aletheia] establishes itself in a being in such a way, indeed, that this being itself takes possession of the open region of truth. This occupying, however, can happen only if what is to be brought forth, the rift, entrusts itself to the self-secluding element that juts into the open region. . . . As the earth takes the rift back into itself, the rift is first set

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43 Yet a question remains whether the artwork lays bare this strife as such. It seems the meaning of the claim the work makes on us in establishing a world is left for the philosopher to recognize or unpack—to recognize the claim the work makes on us as a claim.

44 "The openness of this open region, that is, truth, can be what it is, namely, this openness, only if and as long as it establishes itself within its open region. Hence there must always be some being in this open region" (Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 186).
forth into the open region and thus placed, that is, set, within that which
towers into the open region as self-secluding and sheltering.”46

The work’s createdness is what makes possible the fixing in place of the figure
when it is understood that the rift is able to be unconcealed only as it is set back into the
earth. The work is then able set it forth as it is—in its self-concealing.47 The rift in
becoming accessible in the created work can never be healed unless the strife that it
measures is forgotten in a dissembling of truth. The rift that holds together world and
earth in their apartness, itself is revealed out of concealment in the created work. This
insures the “uncanny” belligerence of the striving of world and earth.

The work-being lets the open take its stand, revealing the withdrawal or refusal
of the origin of the clearing and for Heidegger renders transparent how we are
continually transported into Being. Art describes our fundamental historicity. The
artwork “is the opening up of that into which human being as historical is already
cast.”48 Heidegger explores the artwork as a happening of truth, a revelatory event
setting up a world, indeed first giving “to things their look and to men their out look on

45 “Createdness of the work means truth’s being fixed in place in the figure. Figure is
the structure in whose shape the rift composes itself. This composed rift is the fugue of truth’s


47 “Createdness revealed itself as strife being fixed in place in the figure by means of the

48 Heidegger, Early Greek Thinking, 198.
themselves."⁴⁹ What is more, this world is set up and set forth in such a way that the "blessing and curse [that] keep us transported into Being" is rendered transparent in the artwork.

"Wherever those utterly essential decisions of our history are made, are taken up and abandoned by us, go unrecognized and are rediscovered by new inquiry, there the world worlds."⁵⁰ Yet where is the "there" (da) where the "world worlds?" In the artwork, it is revealed as the self-concealing that keeps us transported into Being and essentially historical. For Heidegger, art describes our fundamental historicity. The artwork is the opening up of that into which human being as historical is already cast.

The artwork that lets the open take its actual historical stand (a setting up that has a general significance for the unconcealment of beings as a whole) also reveals the withdrawal or refusal of the origin of the clearing in order for what appears in that opening to be given its very appearance. Exposed in the artwork's enigmatic setting up and setting forth is what remains excessive of what appears in its opening up. The artwork resists immanenizing its actual presentation, instead it offers its spectacle to be transgressed disclosing what must withdraw in order to prepare for that presentation.


⁵⁰ "The world worlds, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. World is the ever nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being. Wherever those utterly essential decisions of our history are made, are taken up and abandoned by us, go unrecognized and are rediscovered by new inquiry, there the world worlds" (Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 170).
As an event that lays bare the process by which what appears familiar gains its familiar appearance, the artwork can also be understood to challenge the primacy of any mode of inquiry exclusively devoted to what appears. The artwork, to borrow Marion’s language, challenges the primacy of an enworlded gaze, laying claim on that gaze by presenting what cannot come to presence by means of that gaze.

Great art, for Heidegger, makes a claim on our understanding of a historical world that leads to a “defamiliarization” of the world. The claim the artwork makes precedes the categories or visions that emerge from the world as the artwork first gives to things their look and to human being an outlook on itself. Art reveals the way in which measure is established and boundaries and directions are “decided” — the way the world gains its familiarity. As such the artwork challenges the enworlded gaze mirrored in the idol, laying bare the way we necessarily find ourselves exclusively preoccupied with and devoted to what is present. In the artwork the unsayable, the invisible is presented when the prevailing order’s idolatrous preoccupation with present intelligible beings is undermined in this defamiliarization. In Heidegger’s words art “brings out what is as yet undecided and measureless” in its disclosure of “the hidden necessity of measure and decisiveness.”

Art provokes a vision of an infinite depth to which consciousness must surrender its mastery. For Heidegger, to think transcendence traced within immanence itself, is to think the exemplary phenomenon of the artwork as that which disturbs or
unsettles the order of phenomenality, yet without being inseparable from phenomena.\textsuperscript{51} The poem, for example, as a “projective [entwerfende] saying is saying which, in preparing the sayable, simultaneously brings the unsayable as such into a world.”\textsuperscript{53} The artwork presents what must remain hidden as the unconditioned, what is invisible in the world it discloses. In its particular visibility (in its createdness), what cannot come to presence (in the form of a historically constituted truth or reduced to the limits of consciousness) is presented as such. Engaged in this reading of the artwork is a thinking of the gift that constitutes the propriety of thinking and yet can never be appropriated.

Furthermore, the claim issuing from the enigmatic site of the artwork calls us to be preservers [Bewahrenden] of that unique openness. In a move that anticipates Heidegger’s later development of thinking [Denken] as thanking [Danken], our response to the artwork must be understood as the taking up of a responsibility for the alterity revealed in the artwork by letting the artwork be in its peculiar appearance. Just as the icon demands our praise or veneration, inverting of the primacy of an enworlded gaze, so too does the artwork demand such passivity over predication or mastery.

\textsuperscript{51} Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 188.

\textsuperscript{52} The explicit outlook on things art offers in setting up of a world is established while simultaneously preserving and not dissembling “the naming power of the world” (Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 171).

\textsuperscript{53} Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 199.
The Artwork and the Icon

This reading of Heidegger's artwork with the enigma of the icon in mind brings the artwork near to the problem that Marion believes to be the essential matter at stake in theology—the play between intentionality or consciousness and revelation. Yet what does it mean to respond to the challenge of revelation, to encounter the invisible when presented in either the icon or the artwork? How is the exploration of the logic of the claim colored by an analysis of the icon or the artwork?

The artwork can be contrasted with the icon in this sense: the artwork appears within the contingency of a historical event, while the appearance of the icon is already understood to transcend its historic worldly confines.

The artwork is encountered as an artifact set within a specific context of meaning, possessing "a history in the extrinsic sense [äußerlichen Sinne] that in the course of time it appears along with many other things."\textsuperscript{54} It is only when thoughtfully inquiring into the origin of the artwork does the thinker step into the (hermeneutic) circle that attempts to see the riddle of art as a riddle; to attempt to gain an awareness of its enigma. Notably Heidegger begins the "Ursprung" essay in just such a fashion:

\textsuperscript{54} Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 202. Indeed the artwork can and will be approached by those projects (e.g. art historical study, connoisseurship) that grow up around its appearance in the world as an object that can be stored "like potatoes in a cellar." Yet the myopic fixation on this aspect of the artwork covers over what is extra-ordinary in the artwork's ordinary appearance—an extraordinary presence on which art's value as commodity rests. Art’s enigmatic appearance must, of course, be subsequently forgotten by those who take up these projects with great earnest.
“What art is should be inferable from the work. What the work of art is we come to know only from the essence of art. Anyone can easily see that we are moving in a circle. Ordinarily understanding demands that this circle be avoided because it violates logic. What art is can be gathered from a comparative examination of actual artworks. But how are we to be certain that we are indeed basing such an examination on artworks if we do not know before hand what art is? And the essence of art can no more be arrived at by the derivation from higher concepts than by a collection of characteristics of actual artworks. For such a derivation, too, already has in view the definition that must suffice to establish that what we in advance take to be an artwork is one in fact. But selecting characteristics from among given objects, and deriving concepts from principles, are equally impossible here, and where these procedures are practiced they are a self-deception.”

In this circle the limits of thought in terms of the cognitive appropriation of the artwork are brought to light. This circle that Heidegger steps into in order to begin his analysis of the artwork means that any thinking that endeavors to “circle in this circle” cannot initially name the essence of the artwork as a revelatory event, but can only inquire into its appearance as such; an appearance in which its essence is withheld. It is here in this circle, however, that an investigation of what appears in the realm of the familiar becomes “the feast of thought,” becomes the task for thinking. The familiar

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56 Although the artwork, as an entity we encounter in the world, remains unique in its transparent setting up and setting forth, even the thing and tool, entities once only defined in relation to Dasein’s productive circumspection by the categories of the presence-at-hand or the
is now engaged by a thinking that recognizes in this very everydayness a strangeness. Not only are most entities never really at our disposal, but their familiarity only masks their profound uncanniness. Those entities we encounter in the world possess a question-worthiness for "at bottom [im Grunde], the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extraordinary." And here is anticipated the development, in Heidegger's later essays ("Das Ding" for example), of the untranslatable *gering*. This word is called on to describe the primordiality of Heidegger's formulation of the mirrorplay of the "Fourfold" (of earth, heaven, divinity, and mortals) as well as the ease of that mirror play. Most significantly, however, for our discussion of the icon, *gering* describes the actual enigmatic appearance of the artwork to be insignificant, lightweight, of little account, negligible, unimportant.

This approach to phenomena that allows the extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary to shine forth also arises in the productive tension between corporeality and transcendence in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. The strains between immanence and transcendence protrude noticeably in his description of the human face as incarnating ethical imperatives. For Levinas, ethics in its primordial sense is not to be understood in terms of right conduct, determined in turn by a moral theory or social consensus, but rather the ethical arises in response to an imperative that issues from another human being in her or his specificity or singularity. Philosophy for Levinas must perform the readiness-to-hand, in the "Ursprung" essay, must be witnessed as important and enigmatic sites for thought as well.

difficult maneuver of demonstrating how the other can be the determinant of the ethical life without rendering the other as phenomenon, constituted by the sum of her or his properties apprehended by perceptual or cognitive consciousness. To apprehend the other cognitively destroys the “source” of the ethical claim obtaining in the insurmountable difference between self and other. Yet the failure to perceive the other as incarnate, as a corporeal being subject to suffering and death, reflects the inability to grasp the other’s vulnerability and destitution as the very source of her or his ethical appeal. For Levinas, in this case like Heidegger, in order to retain the transcendence of alterity and avoid the propensity for theory, he must have recourse to phenomena that erase their own phenomenality.\textsuperscript{58} In Heidegger’s terms, phenomena can be brought to awareness such that in the fullness of presencing the phenomena nevertheless show themselves invested with alterity, revealing an enabling refusal.

Marion attempts to manipulate these same strains between immanence and transcendence, to establish credence for his rather scholastic vision of the relation of philosophy and theology. Philosophy, for Marion, cannot entertain phenomena that

\textsuperscript{58} Essentially what is at stake here is the question of \textit{theory} and the development of an approach that does not determine the object investigated as \textit{known}—an approach that does not nullify but respects the alterity and transcendence of the phenomenon. Against John Caputo (\textit{Demythologizing Heidegger} [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993], 74) who claims that Heidegger persists in the violent attempt to grasp the “essential” character of entities in the factical life (missing, for one, the specificity of the ethical call of “the widow, the orphan, and the stranger”), I have argued that Heidegger’s analysis of the artwork’s sheer “that it is” unavailable for our disposal is an anticipation of Levinas’s critique of theory and conceptualization. Levinas considers conceptualization as a “mode of depriving the know being of its alterity” forcing it to appear within the sphere of the “same,” subject to the rules of appearance established by the ego. Although Marion is obviously attempting to carry forth this insight (an iconic God is
erase their very phenomenality for its approach to phenomena will always exclude the specificity or singularity that issues the claim. Instead, philosophy, in rendering the enigmatic phenomena intelligible or forcing it to measure up to the standard of phenomenality, for all intents and purposes, renders it dead or denies it the rights of phenomena.\textsuperscript{59} Therefore, in terms of the philosophical approach to the matter developed in phenomenology, only the possibility of enigmatic phenomena can be envisaged. What is needed is the “experience” of that which remains excessive of a horison of possibility—a donation that overwhelms conditions given in its specificity.

“The intuitive realization of the being-given [unconditioned donation or ‘God’] requires, more than phenomenological analysis, the real experience of its donation, which falls to revealed theology. Between phenomenology and theology, the border passes between revelation as possibility and revelation as historicity. There could be no danger of confusion between these two domains.”\textsuperscript{60}

The icon, for Marion, is just such a site where the singularity of an event gives way to a claim made on consciousness. The icon, embodying these strains between immanence and transcendence, is employed purposely by Marion as a phenomenon unlike any other due to its appearance inextricably tied to revelation as historicity. One can have a “real experience” of this donation as specific, historical and actual. Of

\textsuperscript{59} See Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” 103.

\textsuperscript{60} Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” 590.
course this rendering of the productive strains between immanence and transcendence is susceptible to the charge that what is really taking place is simply a reduction or determination of the unconditioned by a very particular religious expression.

Unlike the trifle that the artwork can be when set within the world, the “most ordinary” icon qua icon carries with it an authority from on high passed down and now imbedded, indeed constitutive, of its initial or ordinary appearance. The appearance of the icon as an actual and historical yet revelatory phenomenon depends on the understanding that, as an icon, it already transcends its historic worldly confines. As Marion sates: “Renewed from the Hebrew by the New Testament and theorized by patristic and Byzantine thought,”61 the icon necessarily appears as venerable. In other words, the icon appears already determined or conditioned theologically: “The icon has a theological status, the reference of the visible face to the intention that envisages, culminating in the reference of the Christ to the Father.”62 This theological significance (the icon by definition points beyond its appearance in paint and wood) is recognized and established prior to any phenomenological analysis developing an awareness of its unconditioned, enigmatic presence. Put differently, can it be any wonder—is it the least bit surprising—that the icon issues a claim.63 The icon ties up a thinking of its

61 Marion, God Without Being, 7.

62 Marion, God Without Being, 23.

63 Of course, one of the hallmarks, of an encounter with the unconditioned would be its unexpected character, its absolute surprise as something unforeseeable. The enigma would also resist iteration and therefore remain intensely singular and unnamable.
essence (or for Marion, its intention) prior to that attempt to disclose its theological significance. The icon’s special revelatory function has already been solidified prior to a phenomenological engagement with the icon.

This raises at least two problems for a post-ontotheological Christian rendering of revelation or of an expression indebted to a phenomenological consideration of the enigma of the icon. First, the special site of the icon, relying on the foregone significance of its other worldly relation, may well vitiate Marion’s claim of surpassing the trap of ontotheology. The decision to use the icon as the site for a thinking of unconditioned givenness as such may reveal a mood within God Without Being that turns away (at least initially) from the significance of the familiar, or the everyday.64 The presence of such an underlying mood opens the text up to a Nietzschean critique, as this mistrust of the familiar world is the hallmark of the nihilism of Christian thought.

Second, does a thinking of the icon necessarily already have “in view the definitions that must suffice to establish that what we in advance take to be an [icon] is one in fact”?65 Is it possible to encounter the icon as a site of enigmatic alterity, as an entity standing-in-itself—purely of itself and starting from itself, which does not subject its possibility to any preliminary determination? Would the invisible, the unconditioned, the impossible that putatively saturates the visibility of the icon be

64 I will take up this issue in my discussion of Marion’s “new phenomenology” in chapter four.
allowed to present itself in the icon without, in fact, destroying the icon as such?

Would the unconditioned call into question the traditional theological component that first gives the icon its status as enigma—render mute the theology that in advance theorizes or determines the icon?

This second group of questions raises the specter of an “internal rebellion” existing within Marion’s naming of its proper desideratum as the radical otherness of recent postmodern thought. The logic of the claim seems to render “impossible” the exploration of radical alterity by a determinate religious tradition or at least any discussion of such a possibility.

If Marion seeks to liberate God from conditions of Being or thought—for Marion, from conditions altogether—this is only possible by a gesture that submits God to the anteriority of iconic givenness or love. The “real experience” of donation in events such as an icon or the mass—the enabling condition of the phenomenon “par excellence” that gives itself in excess of one’s intentional grasp—actually renders such experience impossible. If the icon (always already determined theologically) is a site saturated by an excess of meaning, paradoxically it could never appear as such. And this is not a statement supporting the excessive bedazzlement of “abandon,” in Marion’s sense of the word.\textsuperscript{66} The determinate tradition that imbues the actual icon

\begin{footnotesize}
\item[	extsuperscript{65}] Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 144.

\item[	extsuperscript{66}] In so far as the conditions of phenomenality are over-turned in the saturated phenomenon, the event is always in jeopardy of being completely over-looked, given \textit{(donné)} to the point of abandonment \textit{(aban-donné)} (See Marion, \textit{Being Given}).
\end{footnotesize}
with its status as enigma is itself called into question by the very indeterminate
otherness it desires.

Laid bare here is the problem of moving from the determinate content of a
specific religious tradition to an unconditioned, indeterminate mystery as a problem
both inspiring and rupturing the postmodern theological task. Far from surpassing the
limits of philosophy to arrive at a presentation of the unconditioned as such, the icon
must be understood as only appearing enigmatic by a prior determination of its
appearance. The limits of postmodern theology in relation to the doctrine of Christian
revelation have been encountered.

If at the intersection of Continental thought and religion we are to persist in
describing the desire that circles around the “impossible” as religious (and this
description touches both the theological and philosophical) then, in the encounter with
this limit that is both motivational and prohibitive, is it possible to point toward a
recasting of the debate regarding the theological proximity to otherness within
postmodern theology and the Continental philosophy of religion? It is precisely the
relation between these two (philosophy and theology) that now becomes the issue.

Employing an insight from the reflection on art, this impasse seems to call for a
“binding together” of the theological desire to name the unconditioned by a
determinate religious tradition and the philosophical strictures against such an
endeavor. As such the approach proposed here expressly backs away from the more
enthusiastic, overstated, even indefensible claims of postmodern theology—claims
insisting upon a theological surpassing of critical or reductive philosophical thought,
claims that inevitably misfire in a theological determination or fetishizing of a 
professed otherness. Challenged is the understanding of postmodern theology as 
devoted exclusively to a purified theism. The God of phenomenology in the hands of 
thology becomes a form of violence not only visited theologically on the forms of 
religion generally but even subjects a specifically Christian expression to a kind of 
thological colonialism.

Inspired by the model of the artwork, the approach sketched here is not able to 
abandon the singular yet actual, specific event as the enabling condition of the claim's 
enigmatic grasp on consciousness. This approach is positioned between the 
“philosophical” that abandons the actual and singular event and the “theological” that 
despite its claims of surpassing the dangers of ontotheology reduces and determines its 
desideratum.⁶⁷ In the hasty abandonment of determinant theological content or 
religious identity (in either case), the event to which it yields, finds its enigmatic, 
excessive showing already determined. The religious event, here informed by the 
artwork, risks remaining in a state of abandon (in Marion’s sense of the word) both due 
to its excessive saturation of the intentional gaze but most importantly to the 
ordinariness or unimportance of its presentation. This approach, still entertaining the 
enigmatic site, would attempt to do justice to the transcendence of the factual 
experience of the religious event.

⁶⁷ These are the issues to which I will turn in the next two chapters in a closer study of 
Marion and especially Derrida’s reflections on religion.
I explore, in the following chapter, whether the recognition of postmodern theology's "internal rebellion" must yield to a Derridean reading of the issues, occupying a position that delineates the philosophical strictures against these hyperbolic theological claims. Yet the model of the artwork, insisting upon the logic of binding together theology and philosophy—immanence and transcendence—exposes the possibility of an imperialism also plaguing Derrida's philosophy of religion, at least a certain reading of a "religion without religion." If "deconstruction is itself faith," a "faith without faith," it arguably hankers after a radically open yet pure form of faith. This faith is, of course, purged of the violence obtaining in the fixed boundaries proper to an actual determinate religious expression. A purely philosophical, formal, or abstract approach to otherness within the Continental philosophy of religion forecloses on the enigma of the ordinary, even determining the significance of the tradition by recent Continental thought now exposed as a faith. Against this I am proposing an approach that would facilitate the interpenetration of philosophy and theology, one that still looks to Derrida and attempts to prize a relation of an "irreducibly double inclusion: the including and the included regularly exchange places in this strange topography of edges."

Chapter 3

Derrida and Religious Reflection in the Continental Tradition

In this chapter I take up the significance of the prior reflections on art and the initial engagement with Marion’s theological investigation of the icon for reconsidering the Continental philosophy of religion. With those insights in mind, I turn now to a sketch of how key figures in the Continental tradition have approached the issues of religion. I begin by characterizing the Continental tradition’s general orientation towards philosophy of religion. I believe it is possible, reading Kant with the aid of Derrida and vice versa, to develop a rudimentary sketch of this philosophical approach. After delineating some guiding themes, I turn explicitly to Derrida. Following the provocation announced at the conclusion of the previous chapter regarding the interpenetration of faith and knowledge, I consider the ways his recent reflection on religion remains beholden to this legacy as well as the ways he attempts to think through this approach and even challenge some of its foundational assumptions.

Traveling through Derrida’s analyses of justice (in “Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority,”\(^1\)) and the messianic emancipatory promise (in Specters of

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Marx and "Faith and Knowledge"), I hope to highlight the complexities Derrida
uncovers in the midst of this Continental philosophy of religion—complexities to which
Derrida himself, I will argue, may be unable to do justice. It will be the task of the final
chapter to harness the insight of the preceding discourse on the artwork in addressing
the issue of the philosophical reflection of religion raised in this chapter.

*The Kantian legacy of the Continental philosophy of religion*

The tradition of Continental reflection on religion has historically placed special
emphasis on a foundational, transcendental interrogation of religion — "What is
religion and how is it possible?" At the heart of this kind of questioning obtains a
tension between the epistemological and the critical tasks. On the one hand, the
philosopher tightens reason's grasp on religion by exposing its conceptual pre-
conditions. On the other, the philosopher must reign in reason's tendency to deduce
more than it should from its conceptual resources. This tension is the animating force
behind Kant's refection on religion. Key to Kant's project is the question of how to
elucidate the underlying structures of religion and at the same time avoid the hubris of
maintaining speculative reason's ability to adjudicate matters of faith. Indeed, reason,
for Kant, provides only problematic concepts of numinous things like God and
freedom. When reflecting on religion the philosopher must acknowledge the limits of

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International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994) and Jacques Derrida, "Faith and
speculative analysis, and turn instead to an account of the practical necessity of the problematic concepts at issue. The result, for Kant, is "Natural Religion," the pure practical "hypothesis of all religion" that "gives weight to all our concepts of virtue and uprightness."4

This Kantian emphasis on transcendental questioning, the limits of speculative analysis (and the resulting importance of practical reason) have taken various and often conflicting forms since Kant, yet their continuing influence on the tradition has been pervasive.5 Derrida, for instance, locates the animus of Kant's reflection on religion in a variety of subsequent thinkers' reflections on religion or in their entanglements with the issue of religion. A Kantian "logic" is apparent, Derrida maintains, in the work of


3 "We now have sufficient insight to tell that we will be satisfied from a practical standpoint, but from a speculative standpoint our reason will find little satisfaction" (Immanuel Kant, Lectures on Philosophical Theology, trans. Wood and Clark [Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1978], 27).

4 Kant, Lectures on Philosophical Theology, 26.

5 Kant, of course, is not the Continental tradition's only (or seminal) statement on the issue of speculative reason's limits with respect to religious reflection. This insight, it can be argued, is already alive and well in the work of Leibniz or Lessing. In fact, it is possible to locate in Lessing's work the presence of a number of issues I am unpacking with the help of Kant. Lessing relied on the formulation of a natural religion in order to found and evaluate the tradition-laden claims of positive religion. In so doing, he like Kant, began to consider religion primarily in terms of morality or in relation to its practical value. The use of Kant in this section is simply heuristic since Derrida specifically ties his own work to the legacy of Kant's reflection on religion. Derrida notes, opening his own consideration of religion: "Kant thus defines a 'reflecting (reflektierende) faith,' which is to say, a concept whose possibility might well open the space of our own discussion. Because it does not depend essentially upon any historical revelation and thus agrees with the rationality of purely practical reason, reflecting faith favors good will beyond all knowledge. It is opposed to 'dogmatic (dogmatische) faith.' If it breaks with this 'dogmatic
Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx, Heidegger, Levinas, Patocka, Ricoeur, Marion to name a few figures in an ever expanding list. According to Derrida, what these accounts share, despite their differences and complexities, is a commitment to articulating "non-dogmatic doublets" of religious faith, that is, a thematization of religion into a logic of concepts that can be abstracted from practical experience and studied or employed independently of the specific content of particular religious traditions. This repetition, for Derrida, of religious themes in the philosophical reflection of religion describes the distinctive philosophical move that takes stock of religion, uncovering its conditions, even as religion (at some level) is recognized to surpass philosophical categories.

_Derrida, Kant and the Continental philosophy of religion_

The following sections of this chapter give substance to Derrida's understanding of the Continental tradition. The Kantian tension between the critical and epistemological tasks repeats religious motifs and develops non-dogmatic doublets of those religious themes. This insight, implicit in much of Derrida's recent work, is made explicit in _The Gift of Death_. The philosophical task of understanding the significance and meaning of religious themes, linking these themes one to another embodies a "logic" that, for Derrida:

"has no need of the event of revelation or the revelation of an event. It needs to think the possibility of such an event but not the event itself. This is the faith," it is in so far as the latter claims to know and thereby ignores the difference between faith and knowledge" (Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 10).
major point of difference, permitting such discourse to be developed without reference to religion as institutional dogma, and proposing a genealogy of thinking concerning the possibility and essence of the religious that doesn’t amount to an article of faith. If one takes into account certain differences, the same can be said for many discourses that seek in our day to be religious—discourses of a philosophical type if not philosophies themselves—without putting forth theses or theologems that would by their very structure teach something corresponding to the dogma of a given religion. The difference is subtle and unstable, and it would call for careful and vigilant analyses. In different respects and with difference results, the discourses of Levinas or Marion, perhaps of Ricoeur also, are in the same situation as Patocka. But in the final analysis this list has no clear limit and it can be said, once again taking into account the differences, that a certain Kant and a certain Hegel, Kierkegaard of course, and I might even dare to say for provocative effect, Heidegger also, belong to this tradition that consists of proposing a nondogmatic doublet of dogma, a philosophical and metaphysical doublet, in any case a thinking that ‘repeats’ the possibility of religion without religion.”

This passage is set within Derrida’s analysis of the “Christian philosopher” Jan Patoka’s work Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History. Derrida invokes the notion of

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“heresy”s to describe the kind of logic deployed by Patocka—a logic that formulates possible positions outside or contrary to those stipulated in the history of Christian thought, liberating or uncovering hidden possibilities.

“The fact that Christian themes are identifiable does not mean that the text is, down to its last word and in its final signature, an essentially Christian one, even if Patocka himself could be said to be. It matters little in the end . . . . The alternative between these two hypotheses (Christian text or not, Patocka as a Christian thinker or not) is of limited pertinence. If it does involve Christianity, it is at the same time a heretical and hyperbolic form thereof. Patocka speaks and thinks in the places where Christianity has not yet thought or spoken of what it should have been and is not yet.”

With the help of Heidegger, Patocka “ontologizes” Christian themes in order to redirect or correct certain Platonic propensities within Christianity. Patocka’s heretical thought, according to Derrida, engages a kind of Kantian “reflecting faith” and exemplifies the Continental tradition’s devotion to developing non-dogmatic doublets of dogma.

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8 Reflecting on this term, it could be argued that the Continental tradition’s reflection on religion “lives out” Peter Berger’s “Heretical Imperative.” Since in its pre-modern guise, as conceived by many Enlightenment thinkers, Christian authority was rooted in tradition as dogma, the modern imperative to authorize religion through reason demands a practical deduction or sometimes-subjective appropriation (and thus interrogation) of the truth religious categories might bear. Where heresy (the questioning of traditional authority and its dogmatic content) is an option in the pre-modern world, in the modern it becomes an imperative. Derrida wishes to radicalize this modern insight, such that the reflection on religion propels thought beyond a calculation that sediment the religious insight into dogmatic formulations, unsettling any comfortable relation between knowledge and faith.

9 Derrida, The Gift of Death, 48 and 49.
This same stance might be of help understanding the debates that rage over how much Levinas-the-philosopher owes to Jewish sources or whether Marion is engaging in theology or phenomenology, and the attempt to translate, in one way or another, religious notions into a philosophical idiom (that is, without recourse to the authority of a tradition). Kierkegaard (who Derrida relies on in The Gift of Death to supplement his reading of Patocka on responsibility) also embraces such a logic. Wishing to expound in non-traditional ways the relevance of Christianity, Kierkegaard, for Derrida, at the same time signals an awareness of the profound limits of such a task.

Derrida notes that the critiques of religion developed by figures such as Marx, Hegel, or "for provocative effect, Heidegger" also engage unawares in the thinking of religion by developing non-dogmatic doublets. These figures are particularly prone to

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11 Note Kierkegaard's account of the "leap-of-faith" and the "becoming subjective" of religious experience. See Kierkegaard (Johannes Climacus), Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments, Volume I, trans. Hong and Hong (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992), 72-188.
a "temptation" that lingers in this Kantian logic as the effort to imagine "religion within the limits of reason alone." Indeed, many of the Continental tradition’s most influential thinkers have maintained a division of labor between the theological and philosophical reflection on religion. The result of such a division has often meant that theological inquiry (put mildly) is secondary to the more fundamental philosophical task of elucidating a conceptual logic of "the religious," the founding structure that underlies particular faith traditions and their content. The putative ability to adequately describe the very structure of religion "tempts" the philosopher to ignore or dismiss the Kantian emphasis on the limits of "speculative analysis."

Yet these limits on thought are, for Derrida, part and parcel of the logic that develops religious insight in philosophically meaningful or poignant ways. Thinking through the philosophical analyses of religion that claim to eclipse such limits and finding what is unthought in them becomes a way of recalling the kind of "extremity" thought encounters when reflecting on religion. For Derrida, these limits reveal themselves in the very process that attempts to purge philosophical thought of religious contamination—a purgation necessary to claim complete knowledge.

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12 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge.” 15. In his “Post-scriptum” to his spoken remarks at the conference on Capri, Derrida expounds on this temptation as follows: “As always, recourse to knowledge is temptation itself. . . . The temptation of knowing, the temptation of knowledge, is to believe not only that one knows what one knows (which wouldn't be too serious), but also that one knows what knowledge is, that is, free, structurally, of belief or of faith. . . .” (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 30-31).
Knowledge as Temptation

In a brief remark on Hegel, Derrida maintains that a Hegelian ontotheology "determines absolute knowledge as the truth of religion" and thereby "destroys" religion as such. This destruction that becomes a liberation for thought is actually prepared for by religion in so far as the "feeling that 'God Himself is Dead,'" is a feeling "upon which the religion of more recent times rests."\(^{13}\) Religion, in this scenario, loses its self-subsistence and becomes a moment (completely explicable) within spirit's ongoing self-awareness. Yet, for Derrida, this destruction harbors a "paradox" in so far as it also "informs, on the contrary, the theological and ecclesiastical, even religious, development of faith."\(^{14}\) Figures such as Marx or Hegel "exclude as much as they explain, they demand perhaps more than ever this recourse to religion, to the principle

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\(^{14}\) Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 15. In this regard, Derrida might also have witnessed in Hegel a similar instability that conditions Patocka's thought. The articulation in and through speculative philosophy of Christian doctrine remains haunted by what it is thought to articulate philosophically, so that attaining the concept of spirit as an object for itself remains conditioned by the event of a particular religious tradition. Specifically in the case of Patocka, "How does such thinking elaborate, in the style of a genealogy, a reply to the question concerning what conditions render responsibility possible? . . . Everything *comes to pass* as though only the analysis of the concept of responsibility were ultimately capable of producing Christianity, or more precisely the possibility of Christianity. One might well conclude, conversely, that this concept of responsibility is Christian through and through and is produced by the event of Christianity." Derrida goes on to expound the undecidability at issue here that I will discuss in greater detail below: "There is no choice to be made here between a logical deduction, or one that is related to the event, and the reference to a revelatory event. One implies the other" (Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 50).
of faith, even if it is only that of a radically fiduciary form of the ‘reflecting faith’ already mentioned.”

This temptation of knowledge (considering the religious to be completely explicable by philosophical thought) also finds different expression in Derrida’s slightly more developed discussion of Heidegger. Derrida calls attention to a number of concepts uniquely developed by Heidegger (conscience [Gewissen], guilt [Schuldgeist], resoluteness [Entschlossenheit], and others) that can be seen as ontological repetitions of Christian themes “de-Christianized.” Focusing on one of the Heideggerian concepts Derrida refers to, let me unpack the notion of falleness as an instructive example of a non-dogmatic doublet of a Christian theme within Derrida’s scheme.

Heidegger states in Being and Time: “...our existential-ontological Interpretation makes no ontical assertion about the ‘corruption of human Nature’, not because the


16 Derrida travels further with his analysis of Heidegger’s development of non-dogmatic doublets and the “Heideggerian” form of temptation. See Derrida, The Gift of Death, 23, 32, and 49; Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 12, 59-65 and Derrida, Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1989), 129 ff. It is important to point out that naming knowledge as a “temptation” allows Derrida to set his own reflection on religion alongside and draw from figures like Hegel, Marx, or Heidegger who might otherwise, taken at face value, by construed as “anti-religious.”

17 “... does not Heidegger proceed, from Sein und Zeit on, with an ontologico-existential repetition and rehearsal of Christian motifs that at the same time are hollowed out and reduced to their originary possibility?” (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 15). Derrida’s insistence that Heidegger’s mature thought remains tied to Christian theology or Christian themes is not novel. He references essays by Jean-François Courtine and Françoise Dastrup. In English, the work of Theodore Kisiel, John van Buren, John Caputo, and Thomas Sheehan bolster Derrida’s more general claims regarding the Christian influence upon Heidegger’s philosophical work.
necessary evidence is lacking, but because the problematic of this Interpretation is prior to any assertion about corruption or incorruption...[W]e have not decided whether man is 'drunk with sin'...or whether he finds himself in...the *status gratiae*. But in so far as any faith or 'world view', makes any such assertions...it must come back to the...structures which we have set forth, provided that its assertions are to make a claim to conceptual understanding."\textsuperscript{18}

Despite Heidegger's insistence that fallenness "in principle has nothing to do with theology,"\textsuperscript{19} Derrida understands this analysis, like many of Heidegger's existential analyses, to repeat religious themes albeit without commitment to a tradition's authority. Indeed Heidegger, as this passage demonstrates, is aware of the Christian resonance of his concept. He is aware of a relation between falling (an existential-ontological Interpretation) and sin (an ontic stipulation of a believer's worldview). This relation, however, is reckoned in terms of an ontologico-existential repetition of religious themes reduced to their originary possibility. It is here where Heidegger succumbs to the "temptation of knowledge" according to Derrida. Dasein's

\textsuperscript{18} Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Macquarrie and Robinson (New York, Harper and Row, 1962), 224. See also "Phenomenology and Religion" where Heidegger states: "A theological concept necessarily contains that understanding of Being which is constitutive of human Dasein, insofar as it exists at all. Thus, for example, sin is manifest only through faith, and only a believer can factually exist as a sinner. But if sin, which is the phenomenon contrary to faith as rebirth and hence a phenomenon of existence, is to be interpreted in theological concepts, then the *content itself* of the concepts, and not just any philosophical preference, calls for a return to the concept of guilt. And guilt is an ontological determination of Dasein." (Martin Heidegger, "Phenomenology and Religion" in *The Piety of Thinking* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976], 18-19).
ontological tendency towards “falling” is a conceptual precondition of any account of sin. The meaning of religious concerns or faith commitments is revealed in light of the most basic structures of human existence. Heidegger’s thought demands, for Derrida, that a “revelability (Offenbarkeit) be allowed to reveal itself, with a light that would manifest (itself) moreoriginarily than all revelation (Offenbarung).”20 Philosophical thought expounds the necessary conditions that enable particular, ontic faith commitments to be held as meaningful. In fact, the irrefragable Christian theme of sin becomes an ontic concern that prevents thought from the ontological recovery of its very precondition, namely falleness.21

For Derrida however, this relation travels in more than one direction. Indeed, caught in the odd relation described as the non-dogmatic repetition of dogma,


21 Philosophy as radical (fundamental) questioning requires methodological atheism. The worldview of the believer (or the positive science of theology) supplies answers too soon. “Anyone for whom the Bible is divine revelation and truth has the answer to the question “Why are there essents rather than nothing?” even before it is asked: everything that is, except God himself, has been created by Him. . . . One who holds to such faith . . . cannot really question without ceasing to be a believer . . . ” (Martin Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics [New Haven, Yale University Press, 1959], 7). The relation between philosophy and theology or religion in Heidegger’s thought is complicated. Besides Derrida’s consideration of the issue, which I will touch on below, it stretches back into 30 years of scholarship—work that is not necessarily contrary to Derrida’s insights. See for example only a sample of work on this topic: Joseph Kockelmanns, “Heidegger on Theology,” The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy 4, No. 3 (1973): 85-107; Thomas O’Meara, “Heidegger’s Origins: Theological Perspectives” Theological Studies 47 (1986): 205-26; Frank Schalow, “A Pre-Theological Phenomenology” International Philosophical Quarterly XVIII, no. 4 (1988): 393-401; James Smith “The Art of Christian Atheism: Faith and
Heidegger engages in thinking the originary conditions of ontical possibility, according to Derrida, in the hopes that he might extirpate “Christian vestiges” from philosophy. This is a “strategy all the more involuted and necessary for a Heidegger who seems unable to stop either settling accounts with Christianity or distancing himself from it with all the more violence in so far as it is already too late, perhaps, for him to deny certain proto-Christian motifs in the ontological repetition and existential analytics.”

Even as Heidegger attempts to server the tie that calls upon the religious as resource, he demonstrates his own inability to accomplish such cutting. Is it the case, Derrida asks, that revealability is more originary than revelation and hence independent of the religious?

“In its most abstract form, then, the aporia within which we are struggling would perhaps be the following: is revealability (Offenbarkeit) more originary than revelation (Offenbarung), and hence independent of religion? Independent in the structures of its experience and in the analytics relating to them? Is this not the place in which ‘reflecting faith’ at least originates if not this faith itself? Or rather, inversely, would the event of revelation have consisted in revealing revealability itself, and the origin of light, the originary light, the very invisibility of visibility?”

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23 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 16. See also Derrida’s 1997 debate with Marion where he speaks to his desire “to think otherwise the possibility of these two possibilities:” *Offenbarung* and *Offenbarkeit* (Richard Kearney, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion, “On the Gift: A Discussion Between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion,” in *God, the Gift and...*
In so far as the relation remains a repetition, this Heideggerian analysis will always be too late to definitively claim the religious as merely ontic in its scope. This "ordeal of undecidable origins" resides at the heart of this relation as repetition. The related term can never be excluded, subsumed, nor wholly explicated. It is this bind that Derrida hopes to highlight by employing phrases such as non-dogmatic doublets of dogma and religion without religion.

Derrida maintains that it "would be easy" to multiply the references "to all those who, before and after all the Enlightenments in the world, believed in the independence of critical reason, of knowledge, technics, philosophy and thought with respect to religion and even to all faith." Derrida privileges, however, the example of Heidegger's "naïve" effort to uncover originary sources of religion because "of what it tells us, in these times, about a certain 'extremity'".

Derrida is not so much concerned with misinterpretation regarding the religious themes Heidegger renders meaningful by recourse to their ontological conditions, but rather with what it is that Heidegger cannot adequately account for in his analyses—an "exteriority" that in fact becomes conditional for his entire project. Derrida's goal is to


24 Derrida maintains that "undecidability is the condition of all deconstruction: in the sense of the condition of possibility" (Derrida, Memories: For Paul de Man [New York: Columbia University Press, 1986], 135). In the case of the Continental reflection on religion to which Derrida claims to be heir, the issue of the "ordeal of undecidable origins" regarding the event of revelation or such an event's sheer possibility must be seen as conditional.

demonstrate how Heidegger's thought remains haunted\textsuperscript{27} by what his "ontologico-existential reduction" of religious motifs claims to saturate.\textsuperscript{28}

Derrida calls attention to an early essay, in which Heidegger insists that philosophy remain "atheistic" in order for thought to engage fundamental questions of ontology. Derrida cites Heidegger's famous remark that Christian philosophy makes as much sense as a "square circle."\textsuperscript{29} The heterogeneity of philosophy and theology, integral to the destruction of ontotheological claims, leads Heidegger to make a bold and, for Derrida, mistaken assertion that "belief in general has no place in the

\textsuperscript{26} Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge."

\textsuperscript{27} Derrida is, of course, fond of disrupting a professed ability to bring phenomena to presence, employing tropes such as the supplement, the parergon, or the polysemic "saut." For a description of ghosts and hauntings see Derrida, Specters of Marx.

\textsuperscript{28} Derrida's understanding of the difficulty of or tension involved when reflecting on religion, which is beginning to take shape here, echoes the kind of logic of negative theology Derrida set out to unpack in On the Name (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). The unity and logic of negative theology, in that text, is challenged not by a posited exteriority, a dialectical other, but by its own desire that describes a movement of "internal rebellion." Negative theology (like speech and prayer), for Derrida, is enabled and disabled by that which it attempts to name and relegate to its own margin. From two opposite directions, it seems negative theology and philosophy of religion both attempt to develop a "religion without religion." This might offer some insight into the undecidability proposed between Khora and God in On the Name, the "closeness" both Marion and Derrida have professed for the other's thinking, as well as the debates that rage over the relation between deconstruction and (negative) theology. See for example, chapter six of Thomas Carlson's Indiscretion or Arthur Bradley, "God Sans Being: Derrida, Marion and 'A Paradoxical Writing of the Word Without'" Literature and Theology 14, no. 3 (2000): 299-312.

\textsuperscript{29} Heidegger, "Phenomenology and Religion," 21; see also Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 59. A similar position is described in Heidegger's An Introduction to Metaphysics. "Phenomenology and Religion" was republished in 1970 in Wegmarken.
experience or the act of thinking in general.”

30 Such a denial merely covers over a deep resonance in Heidegger’s thought between “faith in general” and Heidegger’s originary concepts such as Zusage (accord, trust) or Bezeugung (attestation). The “point of departure of Sein und Zeit resides in a situation that cannot be radically alien to what is called faith.”

31 That which Heidegger attempts to fix ontically haunts his work in the form of a faith that disturbs and unsettles his thinking even as this faith belongs in an originary way to the piety of thought as questioning—a questioning that he maintained could only be fundamental in so far as it avoided the contamination of faith or theology. 32 Not only is the philosophical recovery of the structures of religion in terms

30 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 60. This is a paraphrase of Heidegger’s remarks in “The Anaximander Fragment” in Early Greek Thinking (San Francisco, Harper, 1984), 57.

31 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 61. “That the movement proper to this faith does not constitute a religion is all too evident. Is it, however, untouched by all religiosity? Perhaps. But by all ‘belief,’ by that ‘belief’ that would have ‘no place in thinking’? This seems less certain” (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 62). Derrida offers an explanation for how it might be that Heidegger can reject so “energetically” belief and yet rely so fundamentally upon “one of the possibilities of the ‘religious.’” Derrida, throughout his essay, makes a distinction between two sources of religion: the experience of sacredness and the experience of belief. Heidegger, according to Derrida, conceives of and thinks through religion solely as it finds expression within the latter—linked, as it is for Heidegger, to dogmaticism and ontotheological grounding. Heidegger is unaware, due to his “Graeco-Holderlinian or even archeo-Christian” proclivities, of the way his thought is involved in the first source.

32 Derrida insists “it is the Zusage that constitutes the most proper movement of thinking, and that without it (although Heidegger does not state it in this form) the question itself world not emerge. This recall to a sort of faith, this recall to the trust of the Zusage [happens] ‘before’ all questioning, thus ‘before’ all knowledge, all philosophy etc. . . .” (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 60-61). See also Of Spirit: “It remains to find out whether this Versprechen is not the promise which, opening every speaking, makes possible the very question and therefore precedes it without belonging to it: the dissymmetry of an affirmation, of a yes before all opposition of yes and no. . . . Language is always, before any question, and in the very question, comes down to the promise. This would also be a promise of spirit” (Jacques Derrida, Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989], 94).
of the originary status of revealability never completely adequate but reliance on
revealability keeps Heidegger’s thought tethered to commitments it must resist.
Invoking the Kantian legacy of the Continental reflection on religion, a position such as
Heidegger’s does not escape the kind of limits Kant viewed as crucial for any reflection
on religion. Indeed for Derrida, the limit thought encounters, in the case of Heidegger,
radicalizes Kant’s position exposing in the process an alterity that resists presentation.

_Derrida and Religious Exteriority_

Philosophical reflection on religion is a task racked by questioning, not one
confident in its abilities to fix or pin down its ‘object.’ The task of speaking of religion is
filled with “fear and trembling” for thought is faced with that which ultimately resists
interrogation, or remains excessive of any capacity to know.

“. . . to believe that one knows of what one speaks, would be to begin by
no longer understanding anything at all: as though religion, the question
of religion was what succeeds in returning, that which all of a sudden
would come as a surprise to what one believes one knows: man, the earth,
the world, history falling thus under the rubric of anthropology, of history
or of every other form of human science or of philosophy, even the
‘philosophy of religion’. . . . If there is a question of religion, it ought no
longer to be a ‘question-of-religion’. Nor simply a response to this
question. We shall see why and wherein the question of religion is first of
all the question of the question. Of the origins and the borders of the
question—as of the response. ‘The thing’ tends thus to drop out of sight as
soon as one believes oneself able to master it under the title of a discipline,
a knowledge or a philosophy. And yet, despite the impossibility of the task, a demand is addressed to us. . ." 33

Philosophy of religion, caught up in the "question of the question," assumes responsibility for an impossible task of engaging "the other" at the limits of its reflective power. For Kant, "the other" was given expression in terms of noumenality, where regulative ideals chasten speculative reason, but remain accessible as necessary postulates of practical reason. 34 For Kant's "modern" construal, "the other," though initially a barrier, is eventually rendered presentable in the necessary postulates of practical reason.

In Derrida's work, like many contemporary Continentalists, 35 by contrast, there is an increasing sensitivity to the profound difficulty of attempting to present "the other." For Derrida, thinking religion "at the limits of reason" 36 is not a task that seeks (in one


35 See for example: Jean-François Lyotard: "the postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable" (Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Bennington and Massumi [Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984], 81).

36 I have noted that title of Derrida’s essay "Faith and Knowledge" intentionally evokes three works on religion within the Continental tradition. It is also critically important to note one alteration: Derrida replaces Kant's "Within" with his own "at." Instead of Reason Within the Limits of Reason Alone, Derrida engages "'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone."
way or another) deliverance beyond speculation. Thinking religion, rather, is aporetic. It gives way to an experience of “the other” as a limit that not only defies presentation, but also “presents” itself (paradoxically) as unpresentable, in this case, as a haunting. This is the kind of exteriority that Derrida finds lurking in the thought of Heidegger—an alterity that resists knowledge, disrupts its completeness and yet funds its task. At bottom, Heidegger’s thinking of religion, for Derrida, becomes “maddeningly unstable.”

Yet the emphasis on the “idea” of limits of knowledge that, in this case, bind Kant and Derrida together, establishing a point of agreement, must be qualified. In fact, to resist the temptation of knowledge in his own reflection on religion, Derrida must distance himself from a Kantian ‘reflecting faith’ in so far as such reflection remains committed to Christian content as authoritative. For Kant, “the Christian religion would be the only truly ‘moral’ religion; a mission would thus be reserved exclusively for it and for it alone: that of liberating a ‘reflecting faith.’ It necessarily follows therefore that pure morality and Christianity are indissociable in their essence and their concept.”37 This reflecting faith is simply not radical enough for Derrida and smacks of the mistake of taking faith for knowledge. Kant’s analysis does not seek out

the desert (or the intense abstraction of the desert within a desert) that for Derrida puts into question any such commitment.\textsuperscript{38}

Directly related to this desert abstraction, or on the flip side of the same coin, Derrida must also distance himself from the Kantian position that seeks avoid the “transcendental illusion” and the rather modern description of the problem of the limits of knowledge. Again for Derrida, Kant is not radical enough, in this instance, when positing the noumenal realm as limit. Despite limits of theoretical reason, religious phenomena (namely God) nevertheless appear as necessary postulates of practical reason.\textsuperscript{39} As I will argue below, for all of Kant’s insistence on limits, he nevertheless succumbs to the temptation of knowledge—a temptation Derrida wishes to expose in the philosophical analyses of Hegel and Heidegger. Indeed, this temptation may be endemic to the Continental approach to religion Derrida sketches—a tradition to which Derrida remains tied.

\textsuperscript{38} In fact, the authoritative Christian content, Derrida reveals in Kant, demonstrates that the same “maddening instability” found in Heidegger can be located at the heart of Kant’s position. Proto-Hegelian in its form, Derrida argues that Kant’s reflecting faith requires a world abandoned by God. Kant must announce and recall the idea that “Christianity is the death of God” (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 12). See page 123 of Kant’s Lectures on Philosophical Theology for corroboration of Derrida’s Hegelian reading of Kant.

\textsuperscript{39} The man of Enlightenment “needs no speculative proofs for God’s existence. He is convinced of it with certainty, because otherwise he would have to reject the necessary laws of morality which are grounded in the nature of his being. Thus he derives theology from morality, yet not from speculative but from practical evidence . . .” (Kant, Lectures on Philosophical Theology, 42).
In relation to the twofold temptation of knowledge (located either in the
certainty of religious dogmaticism or in philosophical analysis\(^{40}\)), Derrida asks: "How
then to think – within the limits of reason alone – a religion which, without again
becoming a 'natural religion', would today be effectively universal? And which, for
that matter, would no longer be restricted to a paradigm that was Christian or even
Abrahamic?"\(^{41}\)

Entertaining the question what it means "to think religion?" "how is it
possible?" or "What is religion?" Derrida finds his own interrogations repulsed, as
"though such a project would not dissolve the very question in advance."\(^{42}\) With the
"maddening instability" that he maintains founds any position that would claim to

\(^{40}\) Although I have emphasized the kind of temptation accruing to the philosophical
reflection on religion as a reductive, Derrida in good Enlightenment fashion criticizes dogmatic
faith as a temptation of knowledge as well. Compare Derrida's description of each kind of
"temptation:" Dogmatic faith "claims to know and thereby ignores the difference between faith
and knowledge" while the philosopher is tempted "to believe not only that one knows what one
knows... but also that one knows what knowledge is, that is, free, structurally, of belief or of
faith" (Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 10 and 31). Henri Bergson names the reduction of two
opposite positions to a single mistake "recoupage."


\(^{42}\) Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 41. It is important to note how the ordeal of
undecidable origins begins between a religious event or its sheer possibility—an inability to locate a
position of stability in any case—opens up this exteriority. Derrida's prizing of undecidability
means that a certain faith belongs already at the "source" not only of religious phenomena but
of his own reflection on religion (as well as any social bond, technoscientific critique, radical
questioning, etc.). This ambiguity allows an interpreter such as Caputo to speak of Derrida's
religion or deconstruction as a religion (without religion) (see John Caputo, The Prayers and Tears
of Jacques Derrida [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997]). This is evident in Derrida's
analysis of the promise. Although taken up in various texts, within "Faith and Knowledge"
Derrida admits that his own attempt to think religion rests upon or better performs a
faithfulness that is already religious and so already in question. In this way, philosophy of
"know" how to begin, reflection on religion is propelled by and remains tied to the originary ambiguity between revelation and revealability. This "hyperbolic outbidding of two originaries, the order of the 'revealed' and the order of the 'revealable', is this not . . . the chance . . . of another 'reflecting faith.'"43 From what Derrida calls a "third place" there emanates a "[n]octurnal light, therefore more and more obscure. . . . a third place that could well have been more than archi-originary, the most anarchic and anarchivable place possible . . . a certain desert [that] makes possible, opens, hollows or infinitizes the other."44

Thinking the "interconnectedness" of faith and knowledge (rather than their heterogeneity), Derrida encounters an "alliance, holy or not, of the calculable and the incalculable."45 Radicalizing the Kantian insight, Derrida argues that in the midst of

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religion never stands apart from the religious as resource despite the claims of certain Enlightenment figures (see Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 30 and 44-46).


44 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 16. With the phrase "Nocturnal light" Derrida describes his difficult relation to the legacy of the Enlightenment's reflection on religion. Derrida stresses that deconstruction seeks to unsettle Enlightenment certainties "in order to think them better and especially to translate and transform them better in the light of what should be the Enlightenment of our time" (Derrida, Points . . . Interviews, 1974-1994 [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995], 428).

45 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 54. While Derrida seems to prize a certain Kantian insight and to find in Hegel a certain hubris, his essay harnesses the insights of each. Although Derrida is not interested in "reconciling" faith and knowledge, the heterogeneity between the two in the work of Kant (which for Hegel belies the "feeling that God Himself is dead") must be rethought. Derrida, like Hegel, recognizes this heterogeneity as conditional for a certain philosophy of religion that remains unaware of its proper task. This condition must be challenged in order to understand "the religion of more recent times" (Hegel, Faith and Knowledge, 190). Derrida meditates: "I also told myself, silently, that one would blind oneself to the phenomenon called 'of religion' or of the 'return of the religious' today if one continued to
this Continental approach to religious reflection, thought encounters as originary a
radical exteriority.

Derrida invokes two sites or “tracks that are still invisible in the desert” that his
work has taken in reflecting on religion. One of those directions Derrida names
“provisionally” as the messianic and the other khora. In the remainder of this chapter I
attend to the former. My aim is to give a sense of not only how Derrida’s reading of the
Continental reflection on religion but Derrida’s own reflection on religion remains heir
to a Kantian legacy. If Derrida is revealing a novel directive for the philosophy of
religion in his reading of the tradition, then the contours of this approach will be
uncovered in his own reflection on religion. Derrida’s “Force of Law” provides a
framework for understanding how he approaches the heightened sense of the other’s
unpresentability in order to understand the consequence of this radical exteriority for
religious reflection. I eventually link this discussion to Derrida’s own development of a
non-dogmatic doublet of dogma when I consider his notion of the “messianic” in
Specters of Marx. Throughout my discussion, I highlight the theme of justice in order
that I may use it to uncover possible exclusions that persist in Derrida’s approach to
religion.

oppose so naively Reason and Religion, Critique or Science and Religion, technoscientific
Modernity and Religion. Supposing that what was at stake was to understand, would one
understand anything about ‘what’s-going-on-today-in-the-world-with-religion’ . . . if one
continues to believe in this opposition, even in this incompatibility, which is to say, if one
remains within a certain tradition of the Enlightenment, one of the many Enlightenments of the
past three centuries . . . which traverses like a single ray a certain critical and anti-religious
vigilance . . . a certain filiation ‘Voltaire-Feuerbach-Marx-Nietzsche-Freud-(and even)-
In his opening remarks of “Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority” Derrida highlights the difficulty of imaging a conjunction between deconstruction and justice. “Do the so called deconstructionists have anything to say about justice, anything to do with it?” The posture of this rhetorical question raises the stakes of any such a dialogue, calling attention to the significance of forging and profound difficulty in thinking an explicit link between deconstruction and justice. Indeed, Derrida admits deconstruction’s apparent reticence regarding the issue of justice. Yet deconstruction’s alleged silence on matters of ethics and justice and the active unsettling of any standard of judgment ought not to be seen as an abdication of responsibility. In fact, Derrida argues just the opposite. This obliquity is deference not indifference to justice—a sensitivity to the fact that one cannot thematize justice without immediately betraying it. Derrida’s consideration of justice, in this essay,

Heidegger?’” (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 28). It is significant that Hegel is left off this list.


47 The stakes are further “elevated” in the provocative fashion Derrida eventually conjoins the two: “Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructable. No more then deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice” (Derrida, “Force of Law,” 14-15).

hinges on this deferral of speech, for it allows him to preserve the possibility of a justice that cannot be rendered present in any law. 49

Derrida’s insistence that justice be distinguished from law out of deference motivates his attempt to conjoin justice and deconstruction, revealing something about justice in the process. Derrida argues, that law is essentially deconstructible. In so far as law is constructed on unfounded and therefore “infinitely transformable textual strata,” it is always open to interpretation and revision. 50 The deconstructibility of law is “not bad news” in the sense of encountering some nihilistic impasse. Indeed an openness to revision is a “stroke of luck” given the many injustices that arise in legislating and upholding laws. What is more, this analysis rendering unstable the self-authorizing structure of law reveals a paradox through which the possibility of justice is glimpsed. It is precisely in the possibility of engaging in deconstruction (opened by the deconstructible structure of law) that the infinite demand of justice resides. If we experience justice at all, Derrida maintains, we experience it only in the “interval that

49 “. . . for I want to insist right away on reserving the possibility of a justice, indeed of a law that not only exceeds or contradicts ‘law’ (droit) but also, perhaps, has no relation to law, or maintains such a strange relation to it that it may just as well command the ‘droit’ that excludes it” (Derrida, “Force of Law,” 5-6).

50 Law gains its authority in so far as it is enforceable. Enforceability is no simple supplement to law—for Derrida, “there is no law without enforceability” (Derrida, “Force of Law,” 6). Enforceability is made possible by force, and force is essentially self-authorizing in that itHe finds the very standard that legitimizes judgment, namely law. Since the authority of law necessarily rests on its own authority, violence constitutes its origin. In this scenario, there is no clear criterion for distinguishing the arbitrary violence that founds law from the allegedly justified violence that enforces it. Every law is at bottom unjust or unjustified in its claim of authority. Laws “are neither legal nor illegal in their founding moment” (Derrida, “Force of Law,” 14).
separates the undeconstructibility of justice from the destructibility of droit”—an interval that separates the revision of one unjust law from its recalculation into another. “In short, for a decision to be just and responsible, it must, in its proper moment if there is one, be both regulated and without regulation: it must conserve the law and also destroy it or suspend it enough to have to reinvent it in each case.”

Following the lead of Montaigne and Pascal, the authority of laws, Derrida insists, requires a “mystical foundation,” that is, a founding moment of decision that could not be dictated or justified by the system it founds. A ground, then, that is itself groundless. In itself neither justified nor unjustified, neither true nor untrue, not yet guided by or subject to any knowledge or law, every such instituting decision would prove “mystical,” tied in its very structure to an alterity beyond comprehension. The experience of justice is an “experience of the impossible” mystical source in so far as the demands of justice are infinite and our resources for realizing these demands deconstructible. Justice would not be a call, desire, demand for justice if not for its aporetic showing. What this “experience of the impossible” impresses upon us,

54 Justice, for Derrida, involves an “experience that we are not able to experience. . . . [Yet] there is no justice without this experience, however impossible it may be, of aporia. Justice is an experience of the impossible. A will, a desire, a demand for justice whose structure wouldn’t be an experience of aporia would have no chance to be what it is, namely, a call for justice” (Derrida, “Force of Law,” 16).
Derrida claims, is a sense of infinite responsibility before an infinite idea of justice:

"This 'idea of justice' seems to be irreducible in its affirmative character, in its demand of gift without exchange, without circulation, without recognition or gratitude, without economic circularity, without calculation and without rules, without reason and without rationality."\textsuperscript{55}

In the name of this incalculable justice, deconstruction constantly disrupts and re-evaluates the dominant network of concepts that determines the possibilities and the limits, the inclusions and the exclusions, of any inherited determination of justice.\textsuperscript{56} Deconstruction takes up "a responsibility before the very concept of responsibility that regulates the justice and appropriateness of our behavior, of our theoretical, practical, and ethico-political decisions."\textsuperscript{57} This "responsibility before the very concept of responsibility" requires the critique of the good conscience that dogmatically and

\textsuperscript{55} Derrida, "Force of Law," 25. In an effort to conjoin deconstruction and justice, Derrida here demonstrates how recourse to an alterity that escapes calculation permeates his work. For Derrida, a kind of faith or trust proves indispensable for any system of authority. The explicit link between this essay ("Force of Law") and "Faith and Knowledge" can be found in his discussion of modern, rational techno-science. Derrida maintains that a faith lies at the heart of any use of technology whose ground remains incomprehensible. Derrida argues that our everyday experience of techno-science takes on an increasingly mystical quality as the technological and scientific systems we inhabit and navigate reach a scale and complexity that would set those systems beyond our actual comprehension and control. In making use of those systems, then, we inevitably exercise a kind of faith or trust in powers for which we cannot actually account in terms of our own knowledge or understanding (see Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 56).

\textsuperscript{56} Derrida, "Force of Law," 19-20.

\textsuperscript{57} Derrida, "Force of Law," 20.
irresponsibly settles on limited commonsense notions of responsibility. In this way, while deconstruction’s interrogation of the dominant network of concepts determining responsibility appears to be a move toward irresponsibility, it is in fact a hyperbolic rising of the stakes of responsibility, what Derrida calls “a mad desire” for justice.

This responsibility before the concept of responsibility itself, in the space of my argument, can be seen as that which obligates Derrida (specifically in “Faith and Knowledge,” and The Gift of Death) to revisit past philosophers’ “non-dogmatic doublets of dogma” in search of their inevitable conceptual exclusions and betrayals-inpresentation of the unpresentable. The excavation of these betrayals, we have seen, exposes thought to an exteriority that profoundly complicates any reflection on religion. What is more, so effective is deconstruction at exposing the conceptual

58 This “responsibility without limits” or “infinite demand for justice” that verges on madness becomes associated with the religious in The Gift of Death where Derrida reads Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling in light of Levinas’s religious ethos. Two divergent “non-dogmatic doublets of dogma,” developed by Kierkegaard and Levinas, yield a third as Derrida attempts to demonstrate that Abraham’s radical responsibility before God rings true for each person before every other. Derrida purges Kierkegaard of the vestiges of a Christian commitment making the scandal universal by claiming that “every other is wholly other.” Conceptualizing the religious in terms of an absolute and singular responsibility before a wholly other God, Kierkegaard in a formal sense lays bare the paradox of responsibility that informs our more commonplace dealings with others. Sacrifice and responsibility go hand in hand: “As soon as I enter into a relation with the other I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is, by sacrificing whatever obliges me to respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all others” (Derrida, The Gift of Death, 68). As with his analysis of justice, Derrida claims that responsible commitment to the other (like Abraham’s sacrifice) remains at bottom unjustifiable and only accomplished in an act of faith.

59 Derrida, “Force and Law,” 25. Deconstruction, Derrida maintains, “hyperbolically raises the stakes of exacting justice; it is sensitivity to a sort of essential disproportion that must inscribe excess and inadequation in itself and that strives to denounce not only theoretical limits
exclusions that perforate any discussion of religion, one can scarcely avoid the
collection that Derrida's own work is similarly vulnerable. To engage such a
possibility let me turn next to Derrida's consideration of the messianic and his own
explicit development of a non-dogmatic doublet of dogma.

Messianicity: Derrida's dogmatic doublet

Derrida claims, in retrospect, that a commitment to responsibility before "the
other" has been the animus of his work from the beginning. What transformations one
can locate in recent texts like "Force of Law," The Gift of Death, and "Faith and
Knowledge," it can be argued, simply involve an emphasis on the ethical and religious
significance of this commitment.60 With such an emphasis in mind, Derrida's passion
for an incalculable, indeed impossible justice, his emphasis on the aporia of otherness,
and the disruptive force of the incomprehensible and ineffable on all self-satisfied or
closed systems has brought his work, for example, into dialogue with the tradition of
negative theology.61

but also concrete injustices, with the most palpable effects, in the good conscience that
dogmatically stops before any inherited determination of justice" (Derrida, "Force of Law," 20).

60 Caputo comments: "I do not think there is anything like a 'reversal' or massive
transformation in Derrida's thought, of the sort one finds in Heidegger, say, anything like
Derrida I and Derrida II. But I do not think there is a progression in which this originally ethical
and political motif in his work, deeply Levinasian in tone, has worked its way more and more to
the front of his concerns in the writings of the 1980's and 1990's" (John Caputo, Deconstruction in

John Leavey, in On the Name (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). Apart from these
As deconstruction became described as a “passion for the impossible,” inflicted as a “movement of transcendence,” Derrida himself began to speak of his thought as analogous to a faith—a “messianic” faith whose basic trait is a desire for a justice always yet to come. This faith is motivated by a desideratum that remains radically unforeseeable and incalculable. Such a desire exceeds and unsettles every established horizon of human expectation including the “religions of the book” that profess a content-laden and therefore deconstructable expression of that desire.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida, again attentive to heightened sense of the other’s unpresentability, turns to the promise of emancipation that requires “an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise as promise: as promise and not as onto-theological or teleo-eschatalogical program or design.” This messianic desire for unprogramable emancipation in *Specters of Marx* repeats the yearning for an undeconstructible justice in “Force of Law” in so far as it is the impulse behind deconstruction. It stands to reason then, in typical Derridean fashion, the faith in a future-to-come is subject to an impossibility as it condition.

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62 “... deconstruction, as a movement of transcendence, means excess, the exceeding of the stable borders of the presently possible” (Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, xix).

63 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 75.
Specifically, Derrida entertains "a certain" Marx and Marx's neglected importance for a contemporary reconsideration of an emancipatory promise informing the political. Yet in claiming Marx as resource, Derrida recognizes that his own philosophical discourse is imbricated in a historically determined and very particular emancipatory thrust, what he calls a "messianism." Within the confines of determinate "messianisms" (including Marxism) an emancipatory promise inevitably means the justice of a particular ideology and hence violence for those excluded. Derrida attempts to formalize the structure of determinate messianisms, producing the non-dogmatic "messianic in general." This messianic justice (the formal structure of any messianism) is described as "a spirit of Marxism which I will never be ready to renounce . . . a certain emancipatory and messianic affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any messianism."\(^{64}\) The result is a "universal structure" of an empty messianic justice, a justice that is absolutely future, without a determinable horizon.

*Specers of Marx* reveals how Derrida is driven by the same Kantian impulse that, in his reading of others, he maintains has motivated a decidedly Continental approach to religion. Derrida unabashedly assumes an Enlightenment posture, one committed to revealing the general, abstract, and conceptually valid structure of religion—a stance that seems to wring dry specific historical "exemplifications" of that

\(^{64}\) Derrida, *Specers of Marx*, 89.
structure. Indeed, "the formal structure" of messianic eschatology deconstruction reveals, "exceeds and precedes" determinable messianisms such as Marxism or Judaism. Yet he tempers this demand by retaining the messianic as a theme that ultimately resists reduction to a philosophical category. In this way, he remains true (in explicit fashion) to his insight that this Kantian impulse necessarily involves the formulation of non-dogmatic doublets of dogma. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida engages in the development of a "religion without religion." Emphasizing the "spirit of Marxism" Derrida insists (despite many denials) that a "Marxist ontology" involves a " messianic eschatology:"

"In saying that, we will not claim that this messianic eschatology common both to the religions it criticizes and to the Marxist critique must be simply deconstructed. While it is common to both of them, with the exception of the content [but none of them can accept, of course, this *epokhē* of the content, whereas we hold it here to be essential to the messianic in general, as thinking of the other and of the event to come], it is also the case that its formal structure of promise exceeds and precedes them. Well, what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice. . ." 65

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65 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 59. Derrida goes on to explicitly link this discussion of eschatological promise to his analysis of justice in "Force of Law." Again, Derrida is well aware of the bind in which deconstruction is placed when uncovering its own condition as irreducibly religious even as it seeks to abstract from religious themes.
It is essential to understand that buried in this repetition, is a keen awareness of the problem of exemplarity and the ordeal of undecidable origins. The "logic of exemplarism" or "of the sans," Derrida maintains, is the condition for the possibility and impossibility of the Continental reflection on religion as repetition. As I attempted to make clear earlier in this chapter, Derrida recognizes that such a logic prevents knowledge from completing its task—reflection on religion remains haunted by an exteriority it can never encompass or exclude.

The word "without," Derrida maintains, does not mean negativity, even less annihilation. Rather, the "without" effects a certain abstraction at the same time that it accounts for the necessary effects of abstraction. "Religion without religion" can therefore be used to designate the expression of a religious impulse or theme (in this case the messianic) unrelated to any particular expression yet still residing in the realm of faith, irreducible to knowledge. The "logic of the sans" entails a fundamental inability to maintain that the philosophical task of revealing the structures of religion

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66 In On the Name, Derrida links these two logics of "exemplarity" and "without." "The logic of this junction or of this joining (conjunction-disjunction) permits and forbids at once what could be called exemplarism. Each thing, each being, you, me, the other, each X, each name, and each name of God can become the example of other substitutable X’s" (Derrida, On the Name, 76).

67 While connoting the distance of abstraction, a leaving-behind, an elimination or purgation, "without" also establishes as indispensable the otherness of religious themes for a philosophy of religion that would not be in business "without" such inexhaustible themes. This does not establish a causal link between faith and thought, only one of indispensability that sustains the ordeal obtaining in the relation. See Edith Wyschogrod’s essay "Without Why, Without Whom: Thinking Otherwise With John D. Caputo" for an elucidation of this polysemy inherent in "without" (Mark Dooley ed., A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in Focus (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 303-304.)
can ever purge itself of the religious impulse or supplant as originary the specific content of particular religious traditions. Philosophical reflection on religion in Specters of Marx brings to awareness the undeconstructible theme of promise or justice beyond philosophical categories, as irreducibly religious, requiring faith. Just as Derrida cracked open Heidegger’s thought to expose an exteriority (resisted by yet conditional for that very thinking), so Derrida in his own work renders this process explicit.

Derrida, then, in developing his notion of messianicity does not seek to eliminate religion but to reinscribe it even as he speaks of extracting through a process of “desert abstraction” its essential structure. Derrida sketches a formal “desert religion” (akin to Kant’s Natural Religion but with a greater awareness of the effects of such abstraction) that gleans the philosophical, ethical, political poignancy from determinate religious traditions in order to preserve or “save” what isproperly religious in those faiths—namely a prophetic ethical passion for a justice to come. In Enlightenment fashion, the ethical impulse that drives the religious can be expounded by a philosophical, universalized repetition of that impulse. The determinate content, dogma, history, tradition that shackles and defines particular “religions of the Book” often provides reason to wage endless war and to spill the blood of “others,” anointing a particular group God’s chosen all in the name of justice.68 Derrida seeks to repeat the

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68 “As soon as you reduce the messianic structure to [a historical] messianism, then you are reducing the universality and this has important political consequences. Then you are accrediting one tradition among others and a notion of an elected people, of a given literal language, a given fundamentalism” (Jacques Derrida, “Deconstruction and Tradition” in
religious without sectarian closure. Devoid of any determinate content, without the
closure of self-identity, Derrida's religion without religion seeks to challenge the
complacency of the present. A complacency that forsakes faith in what must remain
"wholly other" (tout autre), in an exteriority that can never be present but functions as a
breach of the present. His repetition of the religious engages an expectation of what we
cannot know but only believe.

In this way, Derrida attempts to counter the contemporary and historical
imbrication of determinate religious traditions and real violence and injustice (bound
up with the temptation of knowledge as religious dogmaticism). At the same time he
wishes to unsettle the "imprudent . . . self-assured discourse on the age of
disenchantment, the era of secularization, the time of laicization . . ."69 that yields its
own violent exclusions in its "trust" of knowledge devoid of faith and the self-
sufficiency of reason (the temptation of knowledge as philosophical reductionism).70

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70 This kind of violent exclusion embedded in a mistaken reliance on knowledge that
deconstruction has always sought to expose is given an ethical thrust in "Force of Law," Specters
of Marx, and "Faith and Knowledge." In these texts, the link between emancipation and the
"faith" implicit to the "messianic structure of language" is motivated by a concern to allow the
"motif of emancipation" to grow out of something other than justification, the inadequate
ground imported into ethics from modern epistemology. Indeed, the ground of such
emancipatory promise resists theoretical fixing. In "Remarks on Deconstruction and
Pragmatism," (a passage that repeats the consideration of faith, promise, and testimony as
"quasi-transcendental" conditions in "Faith and Knowledge," 63-65), Derrida is still more
explicit about the necessity in ethics to link emancipation to faith, and about his ongoing
commitment to emancipation: "There is no language without the performative dimension of the
promise. Even if I say that 'I don't believe in truth' or whatever, the minute I open my mouth
In an important way Derrida extends Kant’s seminal effort to imagine a “religion within the limits of reason alone” through the figure of “messianicity” not dependant on any one determinate religious “messianism.” The “messianic without messianism” attempts to foster to awareness the irreducible ambiguity of a term that is, on the one hand, arbitrary yet useful — invoking a familiar Judeo-Christian symbol — and on the other, impossible to extricate from its religious meaning imbedded in a long history devoted to one determinate religious revelation. Why not simply abandon a reliance on the “messianic” in describing the universal structure of emancipatory promise or infinite justice, or better demonstrate that any historical messianism is only possible given the universal condition of justice? Why “save” the name messianic, which inevitably links the supposed universal structure to several particular, historic religious traditions? Asking the question of which came first and conditions the other,

there is a ‘believe me’ at work. Even when I lie, and perhaps especially when I lie, there is a ‘believe me’ in play. And this ‘I promise you that I am speaking the truth’ is a messianic apriori, a promise which, even if it is not kept...takes place and qua promise is messianic. And from this point of view, I do not see how one can pose the question of ethics if one renounces the motifs of emancipation and the messianic. Emancipation is once again a vast question today and I must say that I have no tolerance for those who—deconstructionist or not—are ironical with regard to the grand discourse of emancipation. This attitude has always distressed and irritated me. I do not want to renounce this discourse” (see Deconstruction and Pragmatism, ed. Chantal Mouffe [London, Routledge, 1996], 83). See the work of C. Stephen Evans and J. A. K. Smith for a mistaken reading of the Kantian legacy in Derrida’s reflection on religion that ultimately turns on this question of “justification” (C. Stephen Evans “Kierkegaard on the Problem of Religious Authority” Faith and Philosophy 17, no. 1, (2000) and J. A. K. Smith, “Re-Kanting Postmodernism?: Derrida’s Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone,” Faith and Philosophy 17, no. 4, (2000), 567). As I will argue below, it is not a lack of insight into the difficult relation or interpretation of faith and knowledge that Derrida’s reflection on religion falters.
Derrida encounters an inability to decide between the originary status of either the
“messianicity without messianism” or the determinate historical figure of messianism.\textsuperscript{71}

Derrida, like those Continental thinkers whose thought he exposes, encounters
the “ordeal of undecidable origins”—a situation in which he cannot finally decide
between the founding and the founded, the conditioned and the condition. In this case,
Derrida cannot definitively state whether the determinate “religions of the book” are
specific examples dependant on the originary condition of his general structure of
religion as a passion for the impossible, or whether determinate religious content is the
enabling condition of the intelligibility or indeed possibility of Derrida’s own unveiling
of that formal structure.\textsuperscript{72} The attempt to clarify the ways and forms of the

\textsuperscript{71} “The question remains open, and with it that of knowing whether this desert can be
thought and left to announce itself ‘before’ the desert that we know (that of the revelations and
retreats, of the lives and deaths of God, of all the figures of kenosis or of transcendence, of religio
or of historical ‘religions’); or whether, ‘on the contrary’, it is ‘from’ this last desert that we can
glimpse that which precedes the first, what I call the desert in the desert. This indecisive
oscillation, that reticence (epoché or Verhaltenheit) already alluded to above (between revelation
and revealability, Offenbarung and Offenbarkeit, between event and possibility or virtuality of the
event), must it not be respected for itself?” (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 21). He clarifies
the ordeal in an interview as follows: “This problem remains for me . . . an enigma—whether the
religions of the Book are but specific examples of this general structure of messianicity” or
whether “the events of revelation, the biblical traditions, the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic
traditions, have been absolute events, irreducible events which have unveiled this messianicity”
(Derrida, “Deconstruction and Tradition,” 23). See Caputo’s analysis of this problem in The
Prayers and Tears of Jacque Derrida, 134-159.

\textsuperscript{72} Not surprisingly this analysis of emancipatory promise is mirrored in Derrida’s
analysis of responsibility. In The Gift of Death, when inquiring into the conditions for the
possibility of responsibility by working through the work of the Christian thinker Patocka,
Derrida encounters the same ordeal of undecidability. Asking the question how can a “logical
or philosophical deduction of religious themes” help to formulate a “reply to the question
concerning what conditions render responsibility possible,” Derrida encounters two directions.
“Everything comes to pass as though only the analysis of the concept of responsibility were
ultimately capable of producing Christianity, or more precisely the possibility of Christianity.
“interconnection” or interpenetration of faith and knowledge is without solution. Thought remains caught in an irreducible “double inclusion [where] the including and the included regularly exchange places in this strange topography of edges.”

Although “messianicity without messianism” cannot be reduced to a determinate religion committed to a traditional content or rational foundation, it can never be severed from such content. Such a desire for justice, by definition, is not “certain of anything, either through knowledge, consciousness, conscience, foreseeability or any kind of programme as such. This abstract messianicity belongs from the very beginning to the experience of faith, of believing, of a credit that is irreducible to knowledge and a trust that ‘founds’ all relation to the other in testimony.” Derrida insists that we remain in a gap between an infinite promise of incalculable justice and the determined yet necessary, at times perversely calculated and therefore inadequate forms of what must be measured against this promise. Derrida must draw upon particular messianisms while ever also disrupting them—repeating their own inner logic of openness to the future in order thus to prevent the closure through which orthodoxy can exercise its violence.

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One might well conclude conversely, that this concept of responsibility is Christian through and through and is produced by the event of Christianity.” Derrida concludes that there is “no choice to be made here between a logical deduction, or one that is not related to the event, and the reference to a revelatory event” (Derrida, The Gift of Death, 50).


From Derrida's perspective, to entertain the philosophical significance of religious desire for the emancipatory promise, it is not necessary to rely on authentic religious experience or the authority of religious tradition. As I have noted, religious reflection need only depend on the possibility of an event of revelation, or the revelation of an event—a possibility deconstruction has continually tried to bring to awareness. Yet his philosophical reflection on religion, exposing the meaning of religious desire without losing sight of what is religious in that desire, necessarily draws an analogy between the philosophical and religious teloi in order that philosophy which is a stranger to actual religious experience or historical faiths can reveal this meaning. Continental philosophy, making sense of the religious through the formulation of "non-dogmatic doublets of dogma," does not annihilate the religious character of that desire but preserves it in order to expose what is at stake in deconstruction's consideration of the emancipatory promise.

Again, as in the case of Derrida's reading of Kant or Heidegger, such a distinction always remains "maddeningly unstable." On the one hand, while claiming to be purely formal and seeking to illuminate the structure of the religious as such, the discourse of "religion without religion" would always already be shaped by some particular, determinate religious content. On the other hand, the significance, or even possibility, of such determinate religious content would always already imply—for its explanation, recognition, or establishment—some more formal discourse that exceeds the bounds of determinate faith thereby unsettling the sufficiency or adequacy of such faith's particular self definition. This bind means that the construction of a "universal
discourse” on religion Derrida professes must not let the religious fall into the
irrationality of an assent to dogma or tradition (temptation of dogmaticism). Such a
discourse must come to the aid of religious or theological thought in order to articulate
its significance. Yet it can do so only by rendering the faith that it saves as universal all
the more radical and other to avoid the temptation knowledge.\textsuperscript{75} This tension speaks to
the impossibility of abandoning religion as a surd for thought and therefore beyond
question (mysticism) or of reducing religion to a sphere of immanence where
philosophical investigation might finally solve the mystery of faith (reason).\textsuperscript{76} Such
religious reflection is able to countenance religious transcendence.

\textit{Repeating Kant: Derrida’s faith-saving and emancipatory aims}

My description of the complexities Derrida reveals in Continental philosophy’s
reflection on religion is meant to highlight a tension at the heart of the task. Simply

\textsuperscript{75} Emphasizing such a tension is the only way to make sense of Derrida’s professed
desire for a “universalizable culture of singularities” that can be envisioned upon reflection on
religion. “This justice, which I distinguish from right, alone allows the hope, beyond all
‘messianisms’, of a universalizable culture of singularities, a culture in which the abstract
possibility of the impossible translation could nevertheless be announced. This justice inscribes
itself in advance in the promise, in the act of faith or in the appeal to faith that inhabits every act
of language and every address to the other. The universalizable culture of this faith, and not of
another or before all others, alone permits a ‘rational’ and universal discourse on the subject of
‘religion.’ This messianicity, stripped of everything, as it should, this faith without dogma
which makes its way through the risks of absolute night, cannot be contained in any traditional
opposition, for example the between reason and mysticism. It is announced wherever, reflecting
without flinching, a purely rational analysis brings the following paradox to light: that the
foundation of law . . . is a ‘performative’ event that cannot belong to the set that founds,
inaugurates, or justifies. Such an event is unjustifiable within the logic of what it will have
opened” (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 18).
put, the heterogeneity of faith and knowledge must be both maintained and overcome. This tension may make impossible demands on the philosopher of religion, demands that are therefore not always met. This tension and the debates that it has sparked, in the final chapter, I argue can be approached anew by harnessing the kind of thinking engendered in reflecting on the artwork. In the remainder of this chapter, I explore further the Kantian legacy in Derrida’s reflection on religion in order to emphasize the difficulty this tension presents particularly for Derrida.

Derrida, as I have argued, expresses this tension succinctly by the phrase “religion without religion.” Within the confines of a Kantian framework, the struggle between two seemingly opposed yet intertwined drives, constitutive of the Continental philosophy of religion, can be expressed as “faith saving” and “emancipatory.” These two aims are motivated by the critical and epistemological tasks laid out in the beginning of this chapter.

Derrida’s consideration of justice and the emancipatory promise, inextricably tied to his reflection on religion, divulges insights that may profoundly re-shape or at least unsettle political or ethical commitments, countering the “distressing” renunciation of “the grand discourse of emancipation.”

His reflection on religion also has an important critical employment within the discourses on religion that Derrida admittedly inhabits. This philosophical reflection on religion, in John Caputo’s words,

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77 Deconstruction and Pragmatism, 83.
“put[s] us on the alert to the way things can turn around and reverse themselves, by a secret operation, so that they produce effects diametrically opposed to what they intend.” For example, the contemporary and historical imbrication of determinate religious traditions (which may speak of an emancipatory promise) and real violence at times perpetrated (in the name of such emancipation) can be countered.

In this way, Derrida’s reflection on religion does not shy away from the Kantian language of the “faith saving project” made possible through a “liberation” of religion from certain strictures misapplied. The desert abstraction, key to Derrida’s philosophical reflection on religion, “uproots” faith traditions by atheologizing them, “liberating universal rationality.” This “universal rationality,” exposing the structure of the religious in terms of its ethical force, releases religion from its determinable content and exclusionary commitments, universalizing its intent as engaging an infinite justice or responsibility to an unspecified other.

At the same time, such reflection does not leave the religious for the proper understanding of philosophy. Such reflection is not necessarily a call for atheism; rather, this “abstraction . . . liberates a universal rationality . . . without denying faith,” and so does not lose sight of what remains religious in such a rational endeavor. Abstraction, in this case, is not an enemy of religion in so far as Derrida eschews the reduction of the religious to knowledge to categories that might contain the significance

78 Caputo, The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida, 220.

of religion for thought. Indeed, the reflection on religion itself inhabits the promise as its condition and so already moves within or performs the logic of faith it proposes to reveal. In this way, Derrida’s reflection turns to face (or saves) an exteriority that he insists obtains in the legacy of Continental philosophy’s reflection on religion.

Whereas the legacy of the continental reflection on religion may often be too quick to pretend to see through religion and dismiss its insights as given more substantial and adequate form in philosophical thought, Derrida like Kant seeks to save religion. Derrida seeks to “save” religion and expose an exteriority that prevents his reflection from becoming reductive, unsettling any temptation of knowledge.⁸⁰ In the

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⁸⁰ The postmodern has given birth to a literature insisting that the postmodern must be witnessed as post-secular (Radical Orthodoxy). Delimiting the claims of Enlightenment rationality includes delimiting Enlightenment secularism established and nurtured by that very modern rational thought. In this regard, it would seem that Derrida when reflecting on religion is in agreement with this thesis. For Derrida nothing seems “more uncertain, more difficult to sustain, nothing seems here or there more imprudent than a self-assured discourse on the age of disenchantment, the era of secularization, the time of laicization, etc” (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 65). Derrida’s reflection on religion, in this way, is at odds with the numerous post-Kantian, post-Hegelian thinkers of secularization (Nietzsche, Feuerbach, Eliade, Durkheim, Freud, Altizer) who bleed from religion this alterity or operate under this assumption and in any case treat religion as fully conditioned by, confined or reduced to some kind of immanent regime or discourse. In such a scheme, religion can be approached, for example, as a socio-culture phenomenon solely. Derrida, it can be argued, is also at odds with his early interpreters who (as Caputo is fond of pointing out) simplistically linked deconstruction and atheism or even with his French contemporaries. A figure such as Jean-Luc Nancy, can be set into the legacy of a reductive mode that Derrida attempts to unsettle when he states: “Yet just as we must not think that community is “lost,” so it would be foolish to comment upon and to deplore the “loss” of the sacred only then to advocate its return as a remedy for the evils of our society (something Bataille never did, following in this Nietzsche’s most profound exigency—nor did Benjamin, nor Heidegger nor Blanchot, in spite of certain appearances to the contrary here and there). What has disappeared from the sacred—and this means finally all of the sacred, engulfed in the “immense failure”—reveals rather that community itself now occupies the place of the sacred. For the sacred—the separated, the set apart—no longer proves to be the haunting idea of an unattainable communion, but is rather made up of nothing other than the sharing of
spirit of a new Enlightenment, Derrida’s purges determinate religion of its dogmatic formulations, or “injurious mysticism” and yet allows an infinite justice, a hope without expectation, a responsibility before the very idea of responsibility to emerge in his reflection—themes that remain tethered to a mystical ground (“force of Law”), messianic hope (*Specters of Marx*), and sacrifice before God (*Gift of Death*).

So in the process of the desert abstraction, just when it appears that philosophical investigation that abandons faith for knowledge might liberate a “universal rationality” from determinate religion, Derrida must undertake faith more radically than ever in order to glimpse what has been “saved” in the name of such liberation. Abstracted from determinate religion, the universal structure of religion (ethically significant for both Derrida and Kant) is nevertheless only “known” through faith.\(^{81}\)

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community” (Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* [Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991], 34-35).

Yet, deconstruction is not an apologetic for faith commitments or a certain technique that brings what is hyper-essential to presence allowing for some communion with the sacred. Deconstruction also avoids the subsuming experience of the sacred as described by Bataille or Levinas’s Buber and Otto as a naïve desire for immanence as union. So just as Derrida unsettles the approach that seeks to confine the religious in an immanent sphere, reducing the sacred to the finite, he is equally concerned with the mistake of subsuming the sacred in the immanent. Deconstruction as a “movement of transcendency” insinuates itself into the immanent, cracking open the present, calling attention to an excess that haunts the supposed stable border of the possible.

\(^{81}\) One way to understand how Derrida can claim to *liberate* a universal rationality from “religions of the Book” and by such abstraction *save* religion from a reduction to knowledge is to think of this process as Kantian in form and Levinasian in content. Ever vigilant regarding the limits of knowledge and a tendency to overreach those limits, we must deny knowledge to make room for a faith even beyond the strictures of practical reason. In this case, *la religion* is *la response*. Derrida’s is a hyperbolic faith; one Kant would never have permitted. The dynamic between the faith saving and emancipatory aims that permits Kant to maintain that Christianity
The professed novelty of Derrida’s approach to religion, as I have argued it, resides in the challenge posed to the heterogeneity of faith and knowledge giving way to an awareness of an interpenetration between the philosophical and the religious. Religious phenomena are not so much explained as harnessed or cracked open such that a desertified faith or messianic hope propels philosophy as a “religious” passion. Reflection on religion does not expose religion as an inadequate account of experience in relation to philosophical thought that investigates it, or as a worldview that forecloses on thought, but locates in religious phenomena an engine of questioning, of provocations, of thinking beyond totalizing discourse. Exposing the untimely and ultimately impossible exclusion of faith that proves conditional and therefore inassimilable by thought, Derrida develops a philosophy of religion able to maintain the otherness of religious themes and hold open an awareness of the limits thought encounters when reflecting on religion.

The “Good News” of Deconstruction

This atheologizing abstraction that uproots traditions in order to liberate a radical “faith that inhabits every act of language and every address to the other” or a justice “beyond all ‘messianisms’, of a universal culture of singularities” can be instructive, according to Derrida, for those very traditions. “I felt that deconstruction,  

is the only true “moral religion” and that “pure morality” as a concept is essentially Christian is for Derrida radicalized, exposing and dissembling religion’s ethical universality (see Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 10).
from the very beginning, could be considered as a good strategic level for theologians.”

This “strategic level,” it is maintained, does not provide a corrective for theological or religious thinking, nor does this perspective delineate the boundaries beyond which religion would lose itself. Derrida professes that the matter is quite the

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82 Jacques Derrida, “The Becoming Possible of the Impossible: An Interview with Jacques Derrida” in Mark Dooley, ed., A Passion of the Impossible (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 24. In another interview with the question of Christianity specifically at issue, Derrida offers a theological application of deconstruction as the liberation of a spiritual authenticity: “The point would seem to be to liberate theology from what has been grafted onto it, to free it from its metaphysico-philosophical super ego, so as to uncover an authenticity of the “gospel,” of the evangelical message. And thus from the perspective of faith, deconstruction can at least be a very useful technique when Aristotelianism or Thomism are to be criticized or, even from an institutional perspective, when what needs to be criticized is a whole theological institution which supposedly has covered over, dissimulated an authentic Christian message. And [the point would also seem to be] a real possibility for faith both at the margins and very close to Scripture, a faith lived in a venturous, dangerous, free way” (James Creech, Peggy Kamuf, and Jane Todd, “Deconstruction in America: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” Critical Exchange 17 (1985): 12). See also passages from “Faith and Knowledge” where this approach is evident: “…the gap between the opening of this possibility (as a universal structure) and the determinate necessity of this or that religion will always remain irreducible; and sometimes it operates within each religion, between on the one hand that which keeps it closest to its ‘pure’ and proper possibility, and on the other, its own historically determined necessities or authorities. Thus, one can always criticize, reject or combat this or that form of sacredness or of belief, even of religious authority, in the name of the most originary possibility (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 58-59). Derrida straightforwardly maintains, in the same essay, that he is attempting to think otherwise than “ontotheology [that] encrypts faith” (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 66).

83 Derrida’s desire to avoid policing “the borders of the possible” (which Caputo attributes to Kant) is again subtly expressed in the alteration Derrida makes in his use of Kant’s famous work Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone which informs the title of his own essay “Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone.” This alteration puts the reader on alert that a “new Enlightenment” will be concerned with questions at the limit of thought. In any case, Derrida would maintain that deconstruction does not bring clarity to what theology has made opaque, unpacking the meaning of religion within a particular horizon.

Yet when Derrida is read in his turn to religion, both by critics and commentators, as making possible a kenosis, formalization or generalization of religion—that in a certain guise,
reverse. This “level” opens and continually unsettles boundaries that might properly
determine religious discourse. Recalling the “reversibility” Caputo spoke of,
deconstruction calls into question the ability to identify certain discourses as
encompassing or solidifying the religious and others as devoid of or indemnified from
religious influence or expression. Deconstruction opens up the religious to a faith
determinate religion intends to profess as conditional—a faith that cannot be reduced to
knowledge. From this standpoint, then, Derrida’s “non-dogmatic” faith can nurture
and deepen a questioning of the responsibilities that bind a person to a particular faith
tradition.

_The “good news” deconstruction has for religious faith is vigilant critique of “good
conscience.”_ As an interrogation of the complacency that can beset sophisticated
theological discourse, deconstruction intends to incite those ensconced in regimes of
presence (mistaking faith for knowledge) to treat faith as a passion, a decision made in
the midst of undecidability. On this “level,” religious thought is prevented from
selling itself short. Apart from the more academic dangers of onto-theology, Derrida’s
strategy can also “remind” religiously committed persons, who believe their faith lives
are in good order and their duties are discharged, of an infinite justice or a hyperbolic

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deconstruction is a “religion without religion”—this can mire his thought in distinctions
between specificity and generality, content and form, determinate and universal, the very
divisions Derrida seeks to make difficult. Derrida is not merely repeating Kant’s formalization
of religion, but is attempting to problematize the developments of “non-dogmatic doublets of
dogma” prevalent in the Continental thought’s consideration of religion.
responsibility that haunts any religious discourse. On this reading (a reading that has become enfranchised among disciples and critics alike who employ Derrida’s thought), deconstruction’s call to responsibility as ultimately sacrificial is a “salutary admonition” of the religious, awakening a thinker or a person to “the contingency of dogmatic formulations.”

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84 See Derrida, Gift of Death. “Our faith is not assured, because faith can never be, it must never be a certainty. . . . Such is the secret truth of faith as absolute responsibility and as absolute passion. . . .” (Derrida, Gift of Death, 80).

85 John Caputo, “The Good News About Alterity: Derrida and Theology,” Faith and Philosophy 10, no. 4, (1993): 467. Since the publication of this essay, Caputo has pushed relentlessly a “certain” reading of Derrida’s work, a reading that has helped to promote and shape the debate surrounding Derrida’s “turn to religion.” Caputo’s major work on this subject, The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida, continues the thrust of this “good news” as does On Religion (London: Routledge, 2001). It is also possible to witness the formulation of this good news in earlier works such as Radical Hermeneutics (272). As a result of Caputo’s provocative reading, the value of a deconstructive approach to religion has become enfranchised among many employing Derrida’s thought in religious studies and theology as a critique of idolatry in the form of onto-theology.

Merold Westphal, for example, has endorsed a similar version of this reading in his review of “Force of Law” entitled “Derrida as Natural Law Theorist” (International Philosophical Quarterly XXXIV (1994): 247-252). Westphal has further developed this approach in an essay “Overcoming Ontotheology” (in John Caputo and Michael Scanlon, eds., God, the Gift and Postmodernism [Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999]) and a book by the same name (Overcoming Ontotheology [The Bronx, Fordham University Press, 2002]). The good news shows up also in Kevin Hart’s account of how deconstruction can be read in an explicitly religious or theological context, so that certain developments in apophatic theology can be seen to operate deconstructively. This insight means that deconstruction might serve to liberate a misguided understanding of that tradition from metaphysical forces (see Kevin Hart, Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, theology, and Philosophy [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989]). Richard Kearney, who has become extremely critical of the hyperbolic formulations in postmodern thought that make practical ethical discernment all but impossible, concedes that deconstruction succeeds all to well in unsettling positions or communities that grant discernment. Based on this concession, he continues to maintain that deconstruction does provide a useful “strategy” for “purging” a tradition of its dogmatism and dangerous triumphalism. (See Richard Kearney, Strangers, Gods and Monsters [London: Routledge, 2003] and The God Who May Be [Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001]). In a discussion of Derrida’s significance for theology at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 2000, an analogy was draw between the usefulness of Derrida’s work and the experience of a soccer team. In a league of competing
Yet does this position that speaks the "good news" that unsettles dogmatic faith, a dogmatism "which claims to know and thereby ignores the difference between faith and knowledge" belie a loyalty to one side of the divide between faith and knowledge? Is there an unwillingness on Derrida's part to reverse the reversibility Caputo speaks of—an unwillingness that gives way to a settled, defined space, that avoids the "strange topography of edges," and leads to a mechanism for avoiding "bad" good conscience, developing the kind of good conscience it sets out to unsettle? When emphasizing the "good news" of the deconstructive approach, is one direction distinguished in this tension between faith and knowledge, such that the prizing of a true interpenetration between the two spheres is covered over? Is Derrida's approach to religion ultimately a repetition of a traditionally desired heterogeneity between faith teams (determinate traditions) there exists an all-star team (deconstruction) that never joins the league but prefers instead to scrimmage, eagerly taking on any challenger. This seems a fitting analogy for the thrust of Kearney's direction.) The biblical theology of Brian Ingraffia is indebted as well to emancipatory thrust of the postmodern critique of ontotheology (see Brian Ingraffia, *Postmodern Theology and Biblical Theology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995]). Even Bruce Ellis Benson's recent book (*Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida and Marion on Modern Idolatry*), published by Intervarsity Press and intended for a conservative Christian reader, argues the value of the deconstructive approach for the committed Christian. Fear not, argues Benson, the reductive and threatening tendencies of philosophical thought and rather harness such thought for its emancipatory thrust.

What all these accounts share is an agreement regarding the correctness of Derrida's explicit Kantianism (a Kantianism that can become implicit in so far as Derrida is employed per se). Philosophical reflection "saves" religion by "liberating" religion, theology, faith from a metaphysical or onto-theological tendency that too quickly abandons the uniquely religious for the strictures of a discourse ill-suited to the religious. This list of luminary authors above is, of course, only a partial list of those thinking with Derrida. Indeed the many essays in the many volumes that have recently appeared as well as the many papers and the many conferences recently given on Derrida and religion have helped to enfranchise this value of deconstruction for reflection on religion among those defending, criticizing, or otherwise employing Derrida's thought in religious studies and theology.
and knowledge? Does he suffer from a peril of deconstruction: "falling back within what is being deconstructed." In this case does he fall back into the hard and fast distinction between faith and knowledge?

Some, owning certain Christian commitments, have argued that Derrida’s deconstructive position calls into question its own commitments, such that Derrida may also be in need of a wake-up call informing him of the "deeply historical and textual character" of his own approach to religion and to "the contingency of [its] dogmatic formulations." Generally, this criticism finds reason to suspect that despite Derrida’s

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89 These criticisms, for the most part, are motivated by a concern to ‘save’ determinable religious traditions (namely Christian) as viable avenues for engendering justice and pursuing an emancipatory aim. These essays challenge what seems to be the necessary link for Derrida between determinate religion and violence or dogmatic exclusion. This is accomplished by demonstrating that Derrida’s prizing of religion’s universal structure cannot be maintained deconstructively. Derrida’s position carries no critical ethical weight if it foregoes universality and recognizes its own determinate conditions, and yet if the messianic is a transcendental condition for determinate messianisms, Derrida is involved in a deconstructive heresy. This kind of criticism, however, fails to treat the movement of thought within which universal structures help Derrida in seeking out interstitial spaces of undecidability that first make traditions lively options. Derrida’s description of how the religious becomes an aporetic site depends heavily on an analysis of the kind of thinking in which Christians such as Patocka and Kierkegaard were engaged. In fact, the kind of thinking involved in the self-reflexivity of a
“critical aim” to save faith beyond the strictures of knowledge—revealing an aporetic or pure faith—his religious reflection still involves a reduction of religious phenomena as such in so far as religious themes are properly saved as liberated.

This suspicion that Derrida persists in privileging the philosophical in relation to the religious, which must simply welcome the admonishment of deconstruction’s "good news," haunts Derrida’s penchant for the purity of a structural religion—a structure resistant to contamination of determinate content.\(^9\) When Derrida extols the ability of deconstruction to liberate and then save as a faith what is properly religious, has that saved exteriority in its purity been indemnified from the philosophical reflection that brought it exposure? Has Derrida’s faith-saving aim decided the ordeal

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\(^9\) As Derrida articulates the deconstructive thrust as a passion for “the impossible”—an approach to that which engenders thought, speech, desire, etc. but remains unattainable by thought, speech, and desire—his penchant for phases such as “pure morality,” “purely pure experience of prayer,” “pure gift,” “pure hospitality,” “pure forgiveness,” the “purely other” also grows. In bringing to awareness the suspicion surrounding Derrida’s use of purity in relation to the undecidability of the founding and the founded in the philosophy of religion, I am not concerned here with the debates that rage over Derrida’s utopianism or disabling telos linked to his hyperbolic formulations that for some critics consign us to despair or the status quo through an indecision regarding acts of justice.
of undecidability between the founding and the founded, between the originary position of either the messianic or messianisms?  

With this suspicion in mind, Derrida can be seen as caught up in the tension between the “faith-saving” and “emancipatory” aims that eventually unsettles Kant’s approach to religion. On the one hand, Kant’s concern is to shut down the religious skeptic, or, more famously, “to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith” or, for Derrida, in order to properly entertain the emancipatory promise distinguished from law, pushing beyond all messianisms. This move is necessitated, in Kant’s view, by the threats posed to religion and morality in “materialism,” “fatalism,” and “atheism,” dogmatic speculative positions that he saw as becoming increasingly emboldened by modern science. For Derrida, this move is necessitated by a dogmatic fidelity to a “magisterial suspicion” of value enfranchised in the work of Nietzsche and its reception that has given way to a renunciation of or ironical approach to any discourse on emancipation. The “inestimable benefit,” for Kant, of his critical strategy

\[91\text{ See J. A. K. Smith, “Re-Kanting Postmodernism.” For Smith, Derrida, it seems, takes a decidedly reductive approach to religious faith, philosophy is the condition, and the undecidability at issue is merely an indecisiveness that hides his own committed position that he would attempt to unsettle in others.}\]

\[92\text{ Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 29 (B xxx).}\]

\[93\text{ Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 32 (B xxxv).}\]

\[94\text{ See Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 18. “There is no language without the performatve dimension of the promise. Even if I say that ‘I don’t believe in truth’ or whatever, the minute I open my mouth there is a ‘believe me’ at work. Even when I lie, and perhaps especially when I lie, there is a ‘believe me’ in play. And this ‘I promise you that I am speaking the truth’ is a messianic apriori, a promise which, even if it is not kept takes place and qua}\]
is that “all objections to morality and religion will be forever silenced, and this in Socratic fashion, namely, by the clearest proof of the ignorance of the objectors.” In this “faith-saving” mode, then, Derrida’s forceful exposure of thought to the claims of an unassailable alterity corresponds to Kant’s aim to defend religion and morality by demonstrating the inability of reason ever to disprove the articles of faith upon which they depend.

On the other hand, Kant is also concerned to hold in check the equally “injurious” flights of metaphysical fancy represented in religious “fanaticism” and “superstition” or in Derrida’s case the dangers of mindless fundamentalism and “the forms of evil perpetrated at the four corners of the world ‘in the name of religion.’” Kant is quite unwilling, in fact, to grant reflection on religion any credence whatsoever beyond the presuppositions of natural religion, the minimum practical requirements sufficient to ground morality. For Derrida, responsibility, justice, emancipatory promise find their pure expression in a non-dogmatic repetition of dogma, in a deconstructive religion without religion—“La religion, c’est la response.” Kant and Derrida seek to deliver our commitments from the “state of immaturity” or complacency when “a book promise is messianic. And from this point of view, I do not see how one can pose the question of ethics if one renounces the motifs of emancipation and the messianic. Emancipation is once again a vast question today and I must say that I have no tolerance for those who—deconstructionist or not—are ironical with regard to the grand discourse of emancipation. This attitude has always distressed and irritated me. I do not want to renounce this discourse” (Deconstruction and Pragmatism, 83).

95 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 30 (B xxxi).

96 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 32 (B xxxv).
takes the place of understanding, a spiritual director takes the place of conscience”\textsuperscript{98} or a sense of justice becomes metaphysically grounded.

For Kant, the possibility of a genuine encounter with exteriority through religious faith is foreclosed insofar as religion’s proper employment extends only as far as the practical necessity to ground the moral sense within. Philosophers after Kant can take two legitimate stances towards religion: they can strive to account for its significance practically, or in any case, without appeal to any genuine experience of exteriority; and they can strive to liberate existing faith narratives from any residual pre-critical tendencies towards fanaticism and superstition (for example, the temptation to prize any one “revelation” or rely on God as a basis of the speculative endeavor—the mistake of onto-theology).

Derrida cannot shake the legacy of this Continental tradition and succumbs to the temptation that philosophical reflection properly liberates the practical/ethical purity of the religious. As “pure moral religion” for Kant depends on practical reason alone, so Derrida’s “pure morality” is formed as a response to an alterity uncontaminated by religious commitments. The philosophical significance of any messianism, despite Derrida’s hyperbolic formulations, remains a poignant expression of a desire for emancipatory justice in so far as it is purged of religious contamination, in so far as it is rendered pure. This “saved” purity is liberated from but not

\textsuperscript{97} Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 13.

\textsuperscript{98} Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”
countenanced by religious or theological thinking. The attempt to save the appearances of religion "at the limits of reason" in order to liberate thinking from heretofore hidden obstacles (philosophical and religious or theological) is taken up by a philosophical reflection about religion. In this scenario, the "emancipatory" trajectory of Derrida's project (the emphasis on the good news of deconstruction) ultimately culminates in a liberation from the very "faith-saving" intuition that gave it rise.99

It could be argued, however, that evidence of this failure to maintain the interpenetration of faith an knowledge in Derrida's reflection on religion is not proof positive of his failed attempt to re-think the religious in non-reductive fashion. This failure instead might be seen as a testament to the difficulty of this reflection on religion and, in this way, a reflection of Derrida's inability, in this instance, to philosophically stomach his own motivating interstitial space of undecidability. Derrida, himself, in the name of an incalculable justice or in his responsibility to responsibility itself, reads

99 For all of Derrida's efforts to purge his work of the philosophical propensity to purge thought of religious contamination, he seems to succumb to a similar forgetfulness he himself witnessed in Heidegger's struggle with the religious. In a recent interview with Richard Kearney, Derrida maintains "that there is faith whenever one gives up not only any certainty but also any determined hope. If one says that resurrection is the horizon of one's hope then—since one knows what one names when one says 'resurrection'—faith is not pure faith. It is already knowledge... That is why you have to be an atheist of this sort (someone who 'rightly passes for an atheist') in order to be true to faith" (Jacques Derrida, "Terror, God and the New Politics: An Interview with Derrida" in Traversing the Imaginary, ed. John Manoussakis and P. Gratton [New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2004]). Derrida's comments here mirror Heidegger's insistence that philosophy must be "methodologically atheistic" in order to gain a proper understanding of what is "most basic" in religious phenomena—"in order to be true to faith." A privileged status cannot be reserved to religious experiences as phenomena in their own right. Faith, if it is to be considered in its purity, presupposes a "founding disclosure." Determinable faith "gives answers too soon" forsaking faith in its purity for faith dissembled as knowledge.
(disrupts, re-evaluates) in an ethically urgent way the dominant network of concepts that determines the possibilities and the limits, the inclusions and the exclusions of any past or present discourse. Indeed, as I have stated, Derrida finds himself obliged to continually re-visit the inaugural texts of past philosophers and their "non-dogmatic doublets of dogma" in search of their inevitable conceptual exclusions and betrayals-in-presentation of the unpresentable.

In this chapter, I attempted to sketch the contours of a distinctively contemporary Continental approach to religion, harnessing Derrida’s recent contribution. Such a sketch provides the context in which one might gain a perspective on the Continental philosophy of religion beyond the myopic vision that fixates on the question of deconstruction’s "good news" for religion and the theological response. When such myopia dominates the debate, battles lines are drawn between those who cherish such critical leverage and those who question “why the project should be carried out at all.” Highlighting the movement of thought behind Derrida’s insight that the heterogeneity of faith and knowledge is what must be overcome to think religion today, the “good news” of a deconstructive approach to religion, I maintain, iterates the Kantian mistake that liberates thought from the very faith saving operation that motivated its reflection. Derrida’s failure to follow through on his descriptive

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Pure faith is countenanced by the radical questioning that brings such considerations to the brink of the abyss.

100 Smith, “Re-Kanting Postmodernism,” 568.
analysis of the kind of interpenetration involved in the Continental philosophy of
religion, I have argued, can be seen to perform the kind of difficulty endemic to such
reflection on religion, a difficulty Derrida has done well to point out. Such an approach
to this failure demands that one continue to think further the interpenetration of faith
and knowledge, rather than assume a conservative or dismissive stance on the matter.
CHAPTER 4

A Spurious Undecidability Between Faith and Knowledge

Inspired by Nietzsche and Heidegger's reflection on art and the striving they describe as constitutive of that domain of inquiry, my study of Derrida's reflection on religion in the previous chapter emphasized the demand and challenge of thinking such striving within philosophy of religion. Calling attention to Derrida's attempt to unsettle the heterogeneity between faith and knowledge, I meant to emphasize how Continental philosophy of religion might be seen as pregnant with the possibility of prizing as its enabling condition the ambiguity of the genitive in the philosophy of religion—recognizing the debt philosophy and religion owe each other. This philosophical model constantly moves between the religious and the philosophical thereby destabilizing any fixed or final distinction between the two. Following such a model would mean traveling always in at least two directions, such that the philosophy of religion might become a powerful tool by which to explore the broader philosophical significance of religious or theological ideas or events and at the same time the religious or theological significance of philosophies—although not explicitly religious—simply, patently, even erroneously thought to be free of religion. If philosophy itself comes to have religious significance, it cannot ignore the importance of alternative modes of
thought engaged within theology or religious practice to which it must be seen as indebted. Likewise, if religious expression is always potentially philosophical, the modes of philosophical thought cannot be excluded. As philosophy about religion, philosophy of religion can challenge the beliefs or ways of knowing that constitute the religious life. As religious philosophy, philosophy of religion challenges philosophy with alternative models of thinking that complicate the philosophical task. In this guise, philosophy of religion is engaged across permeable boundaries not exclusionary ones.

As evidence of the significant challenge this kind of interpenetration of faith and knowledge posses for a philosophical reflection on religion, I argued that Derrida himself is unable to resist the “temptation of knowledge” even as he sets out to disrupt the heterogeneity between faith and knowledge—a heterogeneity that is this temptation’s necessary prerequisite. In this final chapter, I intend to harness the reflection on the artwork that has made possible a reading of Derrida’s emphasis on the interpenetration of faith and knowledge in order to attempt to alter the direction of Continental philosophy of religion currently fixated on what I will call a “spurious undecidability” between faith and knowledge that putatively challenges their heterogeneity. Exposing such a fixation opens the possibility of developing another kind of thinking that might better meet the challenge of this interpenetration—a thinking that occupies a space “between” more familiar positions, an interstitial space

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1 See Robert S. Gall “Danger: Philosophy of Religion,” Philosophy Today 42, no. 4 (Winter
whose boundary is difficult to fix or pin down, a boundary that is constantly open to alteration or is itself permeable.

I begin by briefly considering the relation of faith and knowledge traditionally conceived in order to highlight the twin poles of reductionism and apologetics. This is a dual scheme that has recently and forcefully if inadvertently been re-imagined by the current and pressing issue of ontotheology within the Continental reflection of religion. In so far as these two poles find expression in the recent debates in the Continental philosophy of religion—debates focused on the work of Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida—it is possible to locate a desire for a theological or philosophical purity, in this case, expressed in the desire to avoid the trap of ontotheology. I argue that if religious reflection is to better realize and think through the interpenetration of faith and knowledge, announced as a possibility by Continental philosophy of religion, then the current unproductive debate that rallies around this “spurious undecidability” between two purities in the form of unconditioned or “impossible” desiderata must be countered. Such a debate, epitomized in the exchanges between Marion and Derrida and their commentators continues to hold philosophy of religion, in a radical and pernicious fashion, hostage to the historical division between reductive and apologetic approaches to thinking philosophically about religion.

Ambiguity of the genitive in the philosophy of religion

The phrase “philosophy of religion” relies on a compound or relation. It describes a mode of awareness that implicitly moves away from practicing religion or thinking theologically as a self-contained discipline or confession. It also seeks to avoid the effort of merely describing, without penetration, certain ideas or particular practices of a religious tradition. Highlighted is the need for the philosopher of religion to be a hybrid, to be versed in two languages and then to bring these two together—relating, comparing, criticizing, rendering insights not available except through this relation. The hybrid constitution of the field, and by extension the requirement to place philosophy and religion in relation, is clear and it could be argued, for the most part, not debated. How the two are related, however, (and not simply the fact of relation) has been and continues to be a contentious issue if this tension is read back into the history of philosophy and theology. In fact, it seems, the proper relation between philosophy and religion (or philosophy and theology) depends on who you are considering and to which side of the genitive that thinker pledges their allegiance—philosophy or religion.

Given the possibility of this kind of debate, it must be recognized that at the heart of the philosophy of religion lies an originary ambiguity. If this ambiguity is properly constitutive of the discipline it will resist definitive resolution such that the debate over the proper relation of philosophy and theology will also remain. As the enabling condition of the discipline this ambiguity will never be put to rest. Indeed, when focusing on the ambiguity of the genitive in the “philosophy of religion” the interstitial “space” between the two striving terms might clear the space for recalling
the stakes of the debate that arguably constitutes the philosophy of religion, posing a
threat both to accepted notions of philosophy and religion.

Broadly speaking, then, the “philosophy of religion” tends to travel in one of
two possible directions, roughly corresponding to the objective and subjective senses of
the genitive. Either philosophy takes religion as its object, exposing the structures that
make sense of its practices and beliefs, thereby possibly reducing religion to something
other than itself (for example, exposing latent meaning in a tradition’s manifest
content). Or philosophy is “put to work” forming rational arguments in support or
denial of beliefs or doctrines in need of such help or scrutiny (theistic proofs or
theodicy for example). The reductive technique is roughly expressed by one facet of
Derrida’s “temptation of knowledge” and, as he proposed, exemplified by a number of
philosophers such as Hegel or Heidegger. This possible direction for approaching
religion, enabled by the ambiguity in question, emphasizes the philosophical ability to
recognize in a more adequate conceptual form the truth religious categories bare. On
the other end of the spectrum, for a figure like St. Thomas Aquinas, philosophy
prepares the way for faith. Philosophy is a propadeutic for revealed theology and
religion’s handmaiden. Philosophizing about religion in this way, it can be argued,

2 These philosophers are tempted “to believe not only that one knows what one knows. .
. but also that one knows what knowledge is, that is, free, structurally, of belief or of faith”
(Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 31).

3 See for example Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 1a. 1.2: “Even as regards those truths
about God which human reason can investigate, it was necessary that man be taught by a divine
inevitably leads for Derrida to a consideration of certain aspects of faith that "claims to know and thereby ignores the difference between faith and knowledge."  

These two approaches, although very different (one tending toward reduction the other apologetics), nevertheless share a similar weakness that benefits each separately. Each direction takes part in a kind of repression or avoidance of the threat posed by the ambiguity residing at the heart of the philosophy of religion. These two techniques describe ways of ignoring possible debts each might owe to the other, deciding what will be placed in relation and how it will be related. On the one hand, the philosopher does not want to be suspected of having been or actually become seduced by particular desires and of practicing theology in disguise—such a practice threatens to contaminate the objectivity of philosophy with the taint of indefensible personal bias or delimit the radically questioning that is philosophy's very nature. On the other hand, the religious thinker does not care to entertain the intrusion from "outsiders" and their discourse about religion—such an intrusion threatens the sanctity or even possibility of religious belief by foisting foreign categories (to which philosophy is committed) onto religion.

When responding to Tertullian's famous question "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens" (what does religion have to do with philosophy and why the desire to explore one or employ the other), the question of one's residence has historically been

revealed. .... It was therefore necessary that, besides the philosophical sciences investigated by reason, there should be a sacred science by way of revelation."

crucial—in which city, Athens or Jerusalem do you pay taxes? Yet to properly respond to the issue of the relation between these two spheres and engage in the “philosophy of religion” one must cultivate a more nomadic lifestyle. I want to insist that a way between, a way that embraces the ambiguity in the relation between philosophy and religion, accepting and cherishing this possibly threatening, unsettling no-person’s-land ought to be recognized as the very condition of the discipline itself. Can we push the philosophy of religion in a direction no longer determined by apologetic and reductive techniques? Can we elaborate a new approach that might occupy an interstitial space neither here nor there; a space whose boundaries are difficult to fix or pin down, boundaries that are constantly open to alteration or are themselves permeable? Such a position would always remains uncomfortable, awkward, tension-filled in so far as it remains open and welcoming, lacking the resources to properly exclude alternative insights of other perspectives.5

5 In the previous chapter, Derrida was employed to emphasize both the possibility of forging a novel directive for the Continental philosophy of religion and the profound difficulty of engaging such a directive. Thinking through the heterogeneous between faith and knowledge might also be approached through another of Derrida’s themes, that of hospitality—the boundary-transgressive act of welcoming the other, the stranger, in its difference. Boundaries, with their perimeters and barriers, restrain even as they enable openness. Derrida acknowledges this in speaking of hospitality as a gesture given from the standpoint of an owner of a house who extends a welcome to a guest (see Jacques Derrida, Of Hospitality [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000]; “Hostipitality,” in Acts of Religion, [New York: Routledge, 2001], 358-420; and On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness, [New York: Routledge, 2002]). Ownership means that the extension of hospitality is (despite the most gracious of gestures) inevitably qualified and conditional, a calculated endeavor. If one is “at-home,” one cannot help but decide who is invited, selecting those who are either by law or status fit somehow to receive the right of visitation. For precisely as host, the owner refuses to abandon sovereign mastery of the house, which indicates a refusal to be utterly unsettled or disrupted. Accordingly, the owner reduces the guest to a figure of his or her own conventions and expectations. The guest
This insight into the interpenetration of philosophy and religion is intended to provide a directive for religious reflection within the context of Continental thought. Bringing this directive or corrective into focus (corrective, in so far as this approach seeks to think more thoroughly the interpenetration between faith and knowledge already announced) requires that a misguided fixation on purity prevalent in both radical proponents and respected in cautious critics of a Continental approach to religion be challenged. "In our age, everyone is unwilling to stop with [knowledge] but goes further"\(^6\) Reflection on the artwork opens up a critical perspective on a pervasive

is not received as foreign, strange and truly other, but rather identified, welcomed, and granted asylum (or perhaps shunned) according to the authoritative order of the house.

But the logic of identity, of owning a house, also has an excessive or unconditional element that subjects the convention-bound act of hospitality to radical extension, pushing it beyond its limitations. A house always has opening points, windows and doors, which make its boundaries permeable. It is a residence, a familiar place of dwelling, only insofar as it is already exposed to the outside and unfamiliar. It is an identity different from itself, not one with itself. This makes it hospitable in nature. And this also places the owner in an irresolvable tension between identity and difference. Every provisional act of hospitality displays this tension. Thus, eventually Derrida will claim that the owner of a residence is never completely "at home" without simultaneously opening up and "giving place" to the other. In fact, "Hospitality is the deconstruction of the at-home" (Derrida, "Hostipitality," 364). Thus, eventually Derrida will claim that the owner of a residence is never completely "at home" without simultaneously opening up and "giving place" to the other. In fact, "Hospitality is the deconstruction of the at-home" (Derrida, "Hostipitality," 364). It is "as if the stranger or foreigner held the keys," the master a prisoner needing liberation from one who has been invited in, who is in fact a kind of god (Derrida, Of Hospitality, 123). "We thus enter from the inside: the master of the house is at home, but nonetheless he comes to enter his home through the guest—who comes from the outside. The master thus enters from the inside as if he came from the outside. He enters his home thanks to the visitor, by the grace of the visitor" (Derrida, Of Hospitality, 123). Harnessing Derrida's consideration of hospitality for imagining religious reflection rooted in the ambiguity of the genitive, such an approach ought to be recognized as neither having an outside nor an inside in so far as it is neither wholly inside or outside philosophy or religion.

\(^6\) See Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 7. Although I believe that a Kierkegaardian reading of the debates in contemporary Continental reflection on religion is detrimental for the directive sketched here, I wish to harness, by inverting, Kierkegaard's provocative criticism of what was for him a prevalent
reliance on what has been called a "general apophatics." The approach to religious
reflection tends to leave knowledge behind as a path toward purity is forged,
perpetuating a thinking about religion that prizes a heterogeneity between faith and
knowledge Continental philosophy of religion seeks to unsettle. I take it that my aim
(harnessing the perspective provided by reflection on the artwork) to get behind this
popular "resolution" of the tension between faith and knowledge is the major
accomplishment of this work. A perspective seeking to prize the interstitial space of
interpenetration, one that pulls back from more hyperbolic formulations and retrieves
what has been thought yet left behind, can only appear as a novel directive for
Continental philosophy of religion, by first unsettling a dominant perspective that
proposes to go further.

Ontotheology and the proper names of Marion and Derrida

The trope of ontotheology, famously developed by Heidegger in his essay "The
Onto-Theological Constitution of Metaphysics," has played a key role in recent efforts
approach to religious matters with which he struggled. Of course, for Kierkegaard the issue
involved an unwillingness to stop with "faith." As I discussed in the introduction, religion has
become "amazing again" so that now everyone wants to go further than knowledge or reason as
if that were easy. "In our age, everyone is unwilling to stop with faith but goes further. It
perhaps would be rash to ask where they are going, whereas it is a sign of urbanity and culture
for me to assume that everyone has faith, since otherwise it certainly would be odd to speak of
going further."

7 See for example the work of John Caputo Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

to approach religious themes in terms of their alterity and so beyond the confines of apologetic or reductive thought. The importance of the analysis of ontotheology for contemporary Continental philosophy of religion is profound\(^9\) and shows up specifically in the discipline-defining work of Derrida and Marion.

Intended by Heidegger to inspire and open up another thinking of the question of Being beyond those posited in the tradition of metaphysics harnessing the God of philosophy, the problem of ontotheology has become the issue for any thinker navigating the interstices of philosophy and religion on the contemporary Continental scene. Within the current debates, escaping, overcoming, or otherwise thinking against ontotheology has become the mantra of both postmodern theologians (or Continental philosophers sympathetic to the insights of the religious) and many Continental philosophers operating by a methodical atheism. Ontotheology (linked to the issue of metaphysics generally\(^{10}\) is the danger of all dangers when attempting to crack open,

\(^9\) According to Caputo, Continental philosophers of religion have as a group taken a stand in opposition “to the ontotheological tradition . . . The objectifying tendencies, the preoccupation with cognitive certainty, the confusion of religious life with assenting to certain propositions, prove to be almost completely irrelevant to anyone with the least experience of religious matters, which beg to be treated differently and on their own terms. The God of the traditional philosophy of religion is a philosopher’s God explicating a philosopher’s faith . . . This philosopher’s God is a creature of scholastic, modernist, and Enlightenment modes of thinking that deserve nothing so much as a decent burial” (John Caputo, “Introduction: Who Comes After the God of Metaphysics?” in *The Religious*, ed. John Caputo [Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002], 2-3).

\(^{10}\) Derrida finds in Heidegger the ability to recognize the inauguration of a “metaphysics of presence” in Aristotle, such that philosophy has invariably thought the Being of beings in terms of presence. “This privilege is the ether of metaphysics . . . We can only de-limit such a closure today by evoking this import of presence, which Heidegger has shown to be the onto-
transgress, or think beyond the totalizing, comprehensive gaze of metaphysical or ontological systems.\textsuperscript{11} An ontotheologic cuts thinking short by selling it short and so always involves thought's betrayal. Such a logic, descriptive of the general theological operation of the logos of Western thought, hankers after definitive closure or certainty of grounds and so contaminates fundamental questioning, whether investigating justice beyond law or God without being. Thinking against ontotheology then reveals the "good news" of deconstruction for religion (discussed in the previous chapter), in so far as it liberates religious reflection from the philosophically authoritative imposition of intelligibility. The critique of ontotheology offers the possibility of opening up the "'pure' and proper possibility"\textsuperscript{12} of religion.

In his early work, Derrida considers Heidegger's thought of the ontotheological constitution of metaphysics in his effort to further advance a critique of Western metaphysics. In \textit{Of Grammatology} for example, Derrida harnesses Heidegger's undermining of ontotheology (witnessed by Derrida as a struggle with "the metaphysics of presence") in order to radicalize Heidegger's ontological difference to

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\textsuperscript{11} For this reason, "ontotheology" has suffered the fate of other overused terms. It has become a catchword for all that is to be avoided on the postmodern scene. The God of metaphysics, part and parcel of this ontotheological analysis, perverts a thinking striving to move beyond the transcendental signified or the idolatry of conceptual certainty. As a result, ontotheology as a key term in current debates has received little critical scrutiny and this lack of scrutiny shows up as a "glaring exegetical lacuna" in scholarship otherwise devoted to the possibility of Heidegger's thought (see Iain Thomson, "Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger's \textit{Destruktion} of Metaphysics," \textit{International Journal of Philosophical Studies} 8, no. 3: 297-327).
which the development of ontotheology is heir. Famously in his essay “Différence,” the task of “destroying the securities of ontotheology”\textsuperscript{13} requires a difference more fundamental or “older” than Heidegger’s ontico-ontological difference. “Not only is différance irreducible to every ontological or theological—onto-theological—reappropriation, but it opens up the very space in which ontotheology—philosophy—produces its system and its history. It thus encompasses and irrevocably surpasses onto-theology or philosophy.”\textsuperscript{14} Although insistent on Heidegger’s failure to ultimately escape the confines of logocentricism or the transcendental signified—a failure that is the last word in the metaphysics of presence in this early work\textsuperscript{15}—Derrida is equally

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\item[\textsuperscript{12}] Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 58.
\item[\textsuperscript{13}] Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 22.
\item[\textsuperscript{14}] Derrida, “Différence,” 134-35. See also Of Grammatology; “Différence by itself would be more ‘originary’, but one would no longer be able to call it ‘origin’ or ‘ground’, those notions belonging essentially to the history of onto-theology” (Derrida, Of Grammatology, 23).
\item[\textsuperscript{15}] See Of Grammatology for Derrida’s discussion of the logocentric “call” of being and the issue of erasure: “deletion is the final writing of an epoch. Under its strokes the presence of the transcendental signified is effaced while still remaining legible.” Or earlier in the same text: “To the extent that such a logocentrism is not totally absent from Heidegger’s thought, perhaps it still holds that thought within the epoch of onto-theology, within the philosophy of presence, that is to say within philosophy itself” (Derrida, Of Grammatology, 23 and 12 respectively).
\end{itemize}
adamant that Heidegger’s project cannot be passed over but must be thought first and through before *différance* can be countenanced.\(^{16}\)

Cultivating a keen awareness of the persistence of metaphysical predilections in philosophical and theological thought or later as “betrayals in presentation of the unpresentable,” Derrida engages a mode of thinking that purifies Heidegger’s project. While in Derrida’s earlier work this seems to involve an announcement of the “closure” of the “historico-metaphysical epoch,” he later takes up a “style of questioning” that re-traces Heidegger’s work in order to abide by the aporias of thought.\(^{17}\) So understood, the struggle with ontotheology need not be understood simply as an undoing of theology. What may be required, rather, when paying attention to Derrida’s later work,\(^{18}\) is a meditation on religious themes. Such a meditation liberates a pure irreducible faith from precisely an ontotheological foreclosure of exteriority, expressed

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\(^{16}\) This is clear in *Of Grammatology* and “Différance” where he employs the work of Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Saussure, and Levinas but reserves for Heidegger’s thought a place of privilege; the site where *différance* is most “radical and purposive.” Indeed, Derrida’s development of the non-phenomenality of difference as difference depends heavily on his reading Heidegger’s 1946 essay “The Anaximander Fragment” in *Early Greek Thinking* (San Francisco: Harper, 1985).

\(^{17}\) In the later work *Aporias*, Derrida claims that his reading of Heidegger does not give way to a passage “toward a more radical, originary, or fundamental thought . . . . On the contrary, based on the example of Heidegger . . . . my discourse was aimed at suggesting that this fundamentalist dimension is untenable” (Jacques Derrida, *Aporias* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993], 79).

\(^{18}\) In *Specters of Marx*, for example, a religious messianic desire, Derrida wishes to retrieve, haunts Marx’s work. As an exteriority in the midst of Marx’s atheistic thought, this desire remains “irreducible, and first of all to everything it makes possible: ontology, theology, positive or negative onto-theology” (Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* [New York: Routledge, 1994], 51).
in "Faith and Knowledge" as the "temptation of knowledge." For Derrida, cracking open regimes of presence can be an attempt to think otherwise than "ontotheology [that] encrypts faith."19

Marion echoes the demand that taking religion seriously requires that one travel through Heidegger’s formulation of the ontotheological constitution of metaphysics, even as Marion’s critique of ontotheology ultimately turns against Heidegger’s formulation. In God Without Being, Marion builds on Heidegger’s analysis, considering the causa sui a conceptual idol. Defined according to what the limits of thought can contain, such a God is idolatrously beholden to the dictates of philosophical strictures.20 This appropriation of Heidegger is the necessary first step in an advance of theological thinking beyond the ontotheological and "the emergence of a God who is free from onto-theology."21 Yet for Marion (as discussed in chapter 2) Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology is itself caught up in idolatry. This "second idolatry" for Marion takes the form of an "unquestioned horizon of Being as supposedly the sole frame of presence"

19 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 66

20 For Marion, the common destiny of metaphysics and God at the end of metaphysics means "the question of God was coming to a close. Throughout the century that is now ending, everything happened as if the question of God could do nothing other than make common cause, positively or negatively, with the destiny of metaphysics" (Jean-Luc Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology," Critical Inquiry 20, no. 4 [summer 1994]: 572). Taking seriously the "death of God" means thinking through the history of metaphysics and the "conceptual idol" of God. "The 'death of God' exclusively concerns the failure of the metaphysical concepts of 'God'; in taking its distance from all metaphysics, it therefore allows the emergence of a God who is free from onto-theology; in short, the 'death of God' immediately implies the death of the 'death of God'" (Marion, God Without Being, xxii). This, of course, is a liberation of theology from philosophy as metaphysics.
and so retains a set of conditions God must meet in order to be thought.\textsuperscript{22} The attempt to "advance outside of onto-theology"\textsuperscript{23} in the face of this second idolatry requires one to think a pure phenomenon—to think Heidegger's "divine God" announced at the conclusion of "The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics," "without any conditions, not even that of Being, hence to think God without pretending to inscribe him or to describe him as a being."\textsuperscript{21} While Heidegger sought to expose the ontotheological constitution of metaphysics in order to recover ways of understanding Being otherwise than through the static ontotheological ground of beings, Marion proposes to go further "to give pure giving to be thought."\textsuperscript{25}

Yet, that which has arguably liberated "andere Denken" (pregnant with the possibility of thinking religion without limiting metaphysical conditions or theological presuppositions) has also tended to aid and abet the persistent heterogeneity between faith and knowledge and thereby vitiate the possibility of taking up their interpenetration as a novel directive of Continental philosophy of religion. The problem of ontotheology imbricates the current Continental reflection on religion in the issue of contamination and purity apparent in the history of the relation of philosophy

\textsuperscript{21} Marion, \textit{God Without Being}, xxi.

\textsuperscript{22} See Marion, \textit{God Without Being}, 61-68.

\textsuperscript{23} Jean-Luc Marion, \textit{Idol and the Distance} (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 37.

\textsuperscript{24} Marion, \textit{God Without Being}, 45.

\textsuperscript{25} Marion, \textit{God Without Being}, xxv.
and theology. Operating under the persistent threat of ontotheological closure, theology and philosophy each seek to purge their respective domains of ontotheological corruption in relation to what, for each, calls for "pure" expression. According to the structure of ontotheology, approaching an unpresentable exteriority, beyond the confines of ontotheology, can be accomplished only when either theology or philosophy is purified of the strictures belonging to the other. It is in the belonging together of philosophy and theology as ontotheology that each discipline loses its way: faith is confused with knowledge or knowledge usurps the priority of faith. 26 Indeed, the heterogeneity at issue here, endemic to the way the ontotheological problematic has been received, legitimates the two separate directions, described by Derrida and Marion, which in turn exemplifies the ambiguity that resides at the heart of the philosophy of religion. Each direction appears to be a legitimate attempt to think within philosophy of religion without recourse to totalizing discourse. 27 To clarify this issue, I turn briefly to Heidegger's analysis of ontotheology.

For Heidegger, metaphysics grounds the intelligibility of a historical epoch, in which "what is" as the "totality of beings" shows up. In his later work and specifically

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26 With the problem of ontotheology so described, Derrida's project, as I understand it, seeks to challenge ontotheology and entertain a novel approach to philosophy of religion expressly by navigating between these twin perils ("temptations of knowledge"). Yet, in so far as he hankers for pure exteriority he succumbs to a prizing of knowledge and so reinstates a heterogeneity between faith and knowledge that he set out to unsettle. Once again, liberating the "pure and proper possibility" of religion becomes self-defeating when it means to save the significance of religion for philosophy.
in *Identity and Difference*, an epochal constellation of intelligibility is demonstrated to be grounded in the intertwining of ontology and theology. Metaphysics as ontology is concerned with the general ground of beings, what is shared in common (*essentia*). Metaphysics is theology when it simultaneously thinks beings “with respect to the highest being which accounts for everything” that is grounded (*existentialia*). God enters into philosophy as the supreme all-founding being. Simultaneously metaphysics “thinks of the Being of beings both in the ground-giving unity of what is most general, what is indifferently valid everywhere, and also in the unity of the all that accounts for the ground, that is, of the All-Highest.” As a “grounding ground” metaphysics acquires a self-sufficiency that masks, in “an oblivion . . . concealed as perdurance,” the

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27 These issues, I ought to emphasize, become manifest as a certain appropriation of ontotheology within the particular debates that dominate Continental philosophy of religion.


29 Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 70.

30 For Heidegger, God grounds philosophy as metaphysics in a twofold fashion. Not satisfied with identifying the highest or supreme being, metaphysics inquires into the being of God. As the first or highest being (*ens realissimum*), God functions in relation to beings as their source (*causa sui*). Yet in so far as God grounds Being, the highest entity becomes the ground of Being. Being has its foundation in a particular being so that metaphysics accounts for the existence of the highest being.


32 “Being of beings is thus thought of in advance as the grounding ground. . . . This means: the Being of beings reveals itself as the ground that [ontologically] gives its self ground and accounts [theologically] for itself.” Finally, in a convoluted description that further drives home the oddity and inadequacy of this metaphysical self-grounding as the mutual support ontology and theology each receive from the other, Heidegger states: “Therefore all metaphysics is at bottom, and from the ground up, what grounds, what gives account of the ground, what is
unthought unity or belonging together of onto-logic and theo-logic. Indeed, directly prior to Heidegger's pronouncement on the inability of dancing before the *causa sui* and therefore the need for a godless thinking in order to come closer to the "divine God," Heidegger culminates his argument that the thinking together of the ontological and the theological is inadequate if one is to countenance another possibility for thinking—"Being thought in terms of the difference." The "step back" from metaphysics as the "oblivion of difference"—thinking differently, possibly beyond or without limiting conditions, thinking pure exteriority for Marion or Derrida—requires that the unthought unity of ontology and theology become an issue worthy of question.

Read as an outgrowth of Heidegger's thinking of the relation between faith and knowledge in "Theology and Phenomenology," awareness of the trap of ontotheology requires focused attention on the intertwining of two separate discourses as the essential constitution of metaphysics. Within the confines of metaphysical thinking each discourse provides what is lacking in the other when considering beings as such and as a whole. Even as being is the horizon on which God is thought as supreme exemplar of being, God provides the ground from which all beings issue. By this unthought belonging together each provides completion for the other, so that the called to account by the ground, and finally what calls the ground to account" (Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 57 and 58).

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33 Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 62. "Only as this step [back] gains for us greater distance does what is near give itself as such, does the nearness achieve it first radiance. By the step back, we set the matter of thinking, Being as difference, free to enter a position face to face, which may well remain wholly without an object" (Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 61).
danger of ontotheology resides in the supplementary *interpenetration* of ontology and theology.

Thinking without the “co-contamination” of philosophy and theology would then liberate each domain to claim this “other thinking” for its own—simultaneously releasing both philosophy to explore fundamental questions of ontology and theology, a God that need not enter philosophy in terms of metaphysics. 34 Indeed, any serious consideration of the question “What becomes of God and of religious faith after the onto-theo-logical ‘first cause’ has been sent packing?” requires that “we” first take “our stand with the equally traditional objection to the ontotheological tradition, voiced in the prophetic counter-tradition that stretches from Paul to Pascal and Luther, and from Kierkegaard to the present, with honorary headquarters in a Jerusalem that is constitutionally wary of visitors from Athens [whose ideas] prove to be almost completely irrelevant to anyone with the least experience of religious matters . . .” 35 Heidegger, in “Theology and Phenomenology,” whose goal in advocating a separation between theology and philosophy is diametrically opposed to Caputo’s rendering of

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34 Metaphysics as ontotheology perverts a thinking that seeks to accomplish the step back “out of the oblivion of the difference as such into the destiny of the withdrawing concealment of perdurance” (Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 73). Metaphysics as ontotheology also insists theology approach God “only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines that and how the deity enters into philosophy” and so is open to thought (Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 56). It ought to be emphasized, however, that Heidegger focuses on the unity of this twofold constitution of metaphysics: “The problem here is obviously not a union of two independent disciplines of metaphysics, but the unity of what is in question, and in thought, in the ontologic and theologic: beings as such in the universal and primal at one with beings as such in the highest and ultimate” (Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 59).
the ambiguous legitimating possibility, employs the same theological wisdom as Caputo. Heidegger asks, will “Christian theology make up its mind to take seriously the word of the Apostle and thus also the conception of philosophy as foolishness?”

So understood the interpenetration of faith and knowledge as expressed in the ontotheological constitution of metaphysics corrupts and dissembles a proper self-understanding of the religious and philosophical tasks. The problem of ontotheology, as it has been received, places a demand on contemporary thinkers wishing to advance beyond metaphysical or idolatrous, stable or grounded economies of thought. The demand states that this advance is only possible when a heterogeneity between faith and knowledge is in some way respected.


36 “While Heidegger always had a healthy, even Pauline respect for the ‘foolish,’ he also held . . . that ‘fundamental ontology’ (or later the ‘thought of Being’) was the ultimate ‘corrective’ to theology that in the end enclosed the experience of faith within its borders” (Caputo, “Introduction: Who Comes After the God of Metaphysics?” 3).


38 With this demand in mind, Caputo’s suggestion that philosophy prevents the opening up to what comes after the God of metaphysics finds more vehement expression in others such as John Milbank (and proponents of radical orthodoxy), Jean-Luc Marion (who in On Descartes Metaphysical Prism invokes Pascal to the same effect), and Brian Ingraffia who similarly following “in the tradition of Paul, Pascal, Luther, Kierkegaard, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and more recently, Jürgen Moltmann, [seeks] to separate the God of the Bible from the god of the philosophers, for it is the confusion between these two Gods which has caused Christianity to be uncritically equated with ontotheology” (Ingraffia, Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology, 14). See John Milbank, The Word Made Strange (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) and Jean-Luc Marion, On Descartes Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-theo-logy in Cartesian Thought (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
Thinking against ontotheology then, within philosophy of religion, demands (depending on your commitments\textsuperscript{39}) either that one treat philosophical categories as heuristics at whose limits is cultivated an area of concern fulfilled by the religious or deny the constraint of dogmatic faith as a way of disclosing the significance that a philosophical consideration of the religious can have for thinking as a whole. In either case, philosophy and religion remain linked, for within the philosophy of religion one is required to touch that from which, in this scenario, one then seeks indemnification.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{39} The question of commitment (that I will address further below) might be said to involve a decision as to whether awareness of the ontotheologic problematic fundamentally motivates a liberation of philosophy from the all-founding metaphysical God or theology from its fixation on the question of God’s existence beholden to the unquestioned horizon of Being (\textit{ens supremum}) that has linked God’s fate to that of metaphysics as the “death of God.”

\textsuperscript{40} Within the philosophy of religion, the borderline that demarcates two ostensibly different modes of thinking or thinking desirous of different ends is emphasized. Yet within this specific task, the two are also kept in a relation of striving. A direct criticism of “new phenomenology” by a figure such as Dominique Janicaud (concerned with a theological hijacking of phenomenology properly conceived) can simply leave such tension behind. Unlike Derrida, Janicaud, for example, need not seriously address the claim that beyond the limits of phenomenology, thought encounters “confusion” as a site of undecidability between profusion or vacuity. See Dominique Janicaud, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology” in \textit{Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn:” The French Debate}, ed. Dominique Janicaud, et al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000). On the other hand, it is wrong, of course, to imagine (as John Milbank rightly remarks regarding the difference between he and Marion) that Marion would insist theology “must entirely evacuate philosophy, which is metaphysics” (John Milbank, \textit{The Word Made Strange} [Oxford: Blackwell, 1997], 50). Marion’s re-thinking of phenomenology as a radical investigation of givenness at once preserves the possibility of a “new theology” and gives it a philosophical sophistication, not in terms of ground, but one able to liberate theological thinking from uncritical dependence on foreign systems (see Carlson’s argument that Marion’s phenomenology depends on his theology and vice versa [\textit{Indiscretion}, 190-238]).

For both Marion and Derrida there is something philosophically poignant about religion and yet philosophy does not merely stand completely in awe of its education, dumbfounded; philosophy also instructs religion regarding its task. In these two figures (unlike Janicaud or Milbank benefiting from the “ease” found in the bold separation of spheres heard in Heidegger’s “Phenomenology and Theology” or Paul’s epistles) the demand for authentic
Yet it seems impossible that reflection on religion, in this case motivated by the challenge of thinking against or advancing beyond ontotheology, can think both approaches at once. The co-contamination of theology and philosophy is, of course, detrimental to each. So the relation invariably is engaged by prizing one direction over the other. More specifically, what is demanded is either that one’s thinking about religion move beyond the philosophical restriction that describes the conditions of possibility for objects or beings or beyond actual events to the emptiness of religion’s possibility. The former has been taken up by Marion’s audacious attempt to think givenness itself—an attempt subsequent yet indebted to the logic of the claim interpenetration is felt in so far as both attempt to fashion a philosophical approach open to the self-subsistence of religious themes as such without leaving that self-subsistence to itself. This is the provocation announced in the initial paragraph of Marion’s essay “The Saturated Phenomenon.” For Derrida and Marion, phenomenology altered or stretched to its limit attempts to avoid either consigning religious phenomena to a faith that knows not of what it speaks or constituting them as phenomenon simply known. The argument that follows, flows from this tension between philosophy and theology.

41 See John Caputo’s reading of the Villanova debate and the distinction between the paths Derrida and Marion take in their reflections on religion in his “Apostles of the Impossible; On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion,” in God the Gift and Postmodernism, 185-222.

discussed in relation to the icon in chapter 2. The latter direction, equally wary of the kind of trap ontotheology lays for thinking, is described in the previous chapter by Derrida’s consideration of the “pure and proper possibility” of religion in a desertified form.

Indeed, the proper names of “Marion” and “Derrida” have been employed by numerous commentators to mark two separate paths by which to challenge ontotheological thinking and “denominate” the pure and proper form of religion. The tension between “Derrida” and “Marion” itself becomes a heuristic device by which to expose the stakes of the current debate in the Continental philosophy of religion.

43 In Reduction and Givenness, the first in Marion’s trilogy on phenomenology, he stills employs the language of the call, seen in God Without Being. In Being Given and In Excess he describes a third reduction to sheer givenness. Yet in the preface to Being Given, Marion explicitly links that work to God Without Being. The “unquestioned horizon of Being as supposedly the sole frame of presence” is criticized in both texts “within the field of philosophy” yet the “constructive side” —that is, an investigation of the gift—is accomplished in God Without Being only by recourse to theology. “What was lacking was a nonmetaphysical method of philosophy.” Alerting readers to contrasts through comparison, however, raises suspicion regarding Marion’s claim that “Etant donné, with the inventory of saturated phenomena, completes, in the particular case the phenomenon of Revelation, a sketch of what Dieu sans l’être bluntly intended through direct discourse to theology” (Marion, Being Given, x).

44 See Marion’s essay “In the Name,” in God, the Gift, and Postmodernism, 28. The use of this term marks one of the “agreements” between Marion and Derrida that I will address below. In this case, denomination involves the effort to “shield” or keep God “safe” from conceptual thinking. For Derrida, Marion’s development of denomination takes up the “question of the name and of the name of God, as the proper name that is never proper” (Marion, “In the Name,” 45).

45 See Caputo’s introduction to and essay in God, the Gift, and Postmodernism: “Is the impossible lodged in a givenness that can never be intended or in an intention that can never be given? Depending on the answer, the transgression of the old Enlightenment, the movement beyond the constraints imposed by modernity’s conditions of possibility, the apology for the impossible, will take either of two very different forms which bear the proper names Marion and Derrida” (John Caputo, God, the Gift, and Postmodernism, 7-8). For a few examples of
specifically as the critique of ontotheology putatively opens new directions for religious reflection.\textsuperscript{46}

\textit{Marion's pure and proper possibility}

In unpacking this tension, let me first turn to Marion's recent work, where the radical possibility for phenomenology involves an originary determination of phenomena in terms of givenness. Such an investigation, for Marion, is provoked by the phenomenon \textit{par excellence}—the saturated phenomenon.\textsuperscript{47} Phenomenology must stretch to account for its "unconditioned" givenness, so that beyond the "classic operation of the reduction . . . dedicated only to securing objects (as in Husserl) or

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\textsuperscript{46} See note 35 in the previous chapter regarding the "good news" of deconstruction for religion.

\textsuperscript{47} See Jean-Luc Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," \textit{Philosophy Today} 40, no. 1 (spring 1996): 103-124. Marion's treatment of the saturated phenomenon is further developed in his trilogy of texts cited above. For Marion, paying attention first and foremost to sites of saturation pushes phenomenology to recognize that "phenomenality is calibrated first in terms of givenness, such that the phenomenon no longer gives itself in the measure to which it shows itself, but shows itself in the measure (or, eventually, lack of measure) to which it gives itself." An emphasis upon the priority and transparency of "poor" or "common-law" phenomenon (in which the intention always overreaches the measure of givenness) in the philosophical tradition has stymied an awareness of originary givenness. "My entire project, by contrast, aims to think the common-law phenomenon, and through it the poor phenomenon, on the basis of the paradigm of the saturated phenomenon, of which the former two offer only weakened variants . . . To be sure, not all phenomena get classified as saturated phenomena, but all saturated phenomena accomplish the one and only paradigm of phenomenality" (Marion, \textit{Being Given}, 226-27).
disclosing beings (as for Heidegger).”\textsuperscript{48} Marion must locate a third reduction. This reduction restores to certain excessive phenomena the “right to appear” by radically engaging Husserl’s “principle of principles.”\textsuperscript{49} The more rigorous this reduction is undertaken the more profound and unconditional the field of givenness (“so much reduction, so much givenness”).

Such rigor demands that thought move beyond the “transcendental reduction” of the subjective contribution where objects of experience are given as such. Eclipsed as well is the “existential reduction,” which for Marion is witnessed in Heidegger’s development of the privileged position of \textit{Dasein}. Even as it allows a richer field to emerge, the “existential reduction” remains beholden to a measured horizon. As the “I is excepted from the reduction (because it carries it out)”\textsuperscript{50} in Husserl’s thought, \textit{Dasein} is retained, even in Heidegger’s break with Husserl, as an essential constitutive component of a horizon on which phenomena appear. In Marion’s third reduction the transcendental and existential subjects are reduced, such that what gives itself is unconditionally given as saturated. What would occur, Marion asks,

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\textsuperscript{48} Marion, \textit{Being Given}, ix. See Marion, \textit{Reduction Givenness}, 203-205.

\textsuperscript{49} The principle of principles states “that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimating source of cognition, that everything originary (so to speak, in its ‘personal’ actuality) offered to us in ‘intuition’ is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being \textit{[als was es sich gibt]}, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there \textit{[aber auch nur in den Schranken, in denen es sich da gibt]}” (Edmund Husserl, \textit{Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book} [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983], 44).

\textsuperscript{50} Marion, \textit{Reduction and Givenness}, 161.
"as concerns phenomenality, if an intuitive donation were accomplished that was absolutely unconditioned (without the limits of a horizon) and absolutely irreducible (to a constituting I)? Can we not envisage a type of phenomenon that would reverse the condition of the a horizon (by surpassing it, instead of being inscribed within it) and that would reverse the reduction (by leading the I back to itself, instead of being reduced to the I)?"

Reduced to the "gifted" or "interlocuted," the one whose openness to the pure givenness of a saturated phenomenon is constituted as radically responsive to the claim of the unconditioned. The first reduction discloses objectivity, the second Being and the third an originary unconditioned givenness in the figure of the pure and undetermined form of the call.

Phenomenology reaches its extremity in the bedazzlement and confusion provoked by such a saturating phenomenon. Indeed, more than posing a question for phenomenological investigation, such saturation poses the question of phenomenology itself; exposing its limits and the possibility of determining or giving sense to phenomena at all. An "immature" phenomenology is challenged by its incapacity to respect all forms of phenomenality, to do "justice to a heretofore repressed or denied type: the paradox, or the saturated phenomenon, including even its most complex figure, the phenomenon of revelation." Investigating "certain exceptional phenomena, ones that previous metaphysics and phenomenology had ignored or

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excluded,\textsuperscript{53} phenomenology, for Marion, is lead back to its fundamental insight, pregnant but undeveloped in the work of Husserl—the unconditioned primacy of the givenness of phenomena. Thus purified, phenomenology unabashedly becomes a “method of revelation.”

Attention to a givenness beyond the horizon orientated by the perspective of the subject, for Marion, opens philosophy’s eyes not only to finding a positive place for religious experience, but to locating the “paradigm” of such radical givenness in the revelation that occurs specifically in Christ.\textsuperscript{54} Doubling the religious resonance, Christ

\textsuperscript{52} Marion, \textit{Being Given}, 246.

\textsuperscript{53} Marion, \textit{Being Given}, 5. See Book 4 of the same work—drawing from Marion’s earlier essay “The Saturated Phenomena”—for a detailed account of the education phenomenology receives at the hands of phenomena that render the “transcendental” or “existential” reductions obsolete. “[M]y entire project has been directed to liberating possibility in phenomenality, to unbinding the phenomenon from the supposed equivalences that limit its deployment (the object, the being, common-law adequation, poverty of intuition)” (Marion, \textit{Being Given}, 234).

\textsuperscript{54} See Marion, \textit{Being Given}, § 24. The matter of the relation of phenomenology and theology is a complex one in Marion. Indeed, Marion has done much to contribute to such “complexity.” This section of \textit{Being Given}, where the relation is again entertained, is no exception: “With the question of a phenomenon taking saturation to its maximum, it is not straightforward or always a question of debating the status of the theological in phenomenology, but at the outset and in the first place of a possible figure of phenomenality itself” (Marion, \textit{Being given}, 234). Marion proposes a correlation between theological thinking and radical phenomenological investigation even as he pulls back from the correlation proposed. Regarding the specific reference to the paradigm of Christ for phenomenality, Marion concedes the particularity of this Christic paradigm, only to let Christ, as “the saturation of saturation” become the thrust for a thinking that leaves behind such particularity as it aims toward phenomenality as such. “If I therefore privilege the manifestation of Jesus Christ, as it is described in the New Testament . . . as an example of a phenomenon of revelation, I am nevertheless proceeding as a phenomenologist—describing a given phenomenological possibility—and as a philosopher—confronting the visible Christ with his possible conceptual role . . . with an eye toward establishing it as a paradigm” (Marion, \textit{Being Given}, 236).

Although, he takes pains to differentiate his strictly phenomenological work from his theological, he nonetheless persists in using theological terms in his professed
becomes the “paradigm of the phenomenon of revelation”—a revelation that Marion’s radical extension of phenomenology seeks as originary.

For Derrida, pure, unconditioned givenness (beyond the horizons of objectivity or being) simply cannot be investigated phenomenologically. Famously and succinctly, Derrida maintains that the “pure gift” cannot be described as such with out destroying it. The conditions of possibility of the pure gift—that it is completely free and that it is present, or identified as such—are simultaneously its conditions of impossibility. The radical givenness Marion wishes to explore, devoid of intuitions, may be possible conceptually—but as a concept impossible to experience or know. The only way, Derrida contends, to make sense of Marion’s claims of describing pure givenness is within the context of a theological commitment.

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55 See for one Jacques Derrida, Given Time. 1. Counterfeit Money (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992). In relation to revelation, Derrida straightforwardly states: “if there could be any revelation, I would say that no heart, no mind, and no word would be wide enough to host that revelation. The presence of any self-revealed event remains impossible in our world” (Derrida, On the Name, 26).

56 Derrida goes so far as to maintain that Marion is a “phenomenological heretic,” for Marion seeks to investigate phenomenon without a horizon. Marion claims that the practice of philosophical “orthodoxy” prevents novelty in an approach to the issue of givenness. By focusing on the gift that is not given to a constituting I, one misses the originary givenness within which l’adonné is called. If phenomenology persists in its “pigheaded refusals” to investigate the phenomenon of revelation, “it will repeat the absurd denegation of which metaphysics and the ‘question of Being’ stubbornly insist: better to erase or disfigure the possibility of Revelation than to redefine the transcendental conditions of manifestation in order
“My hypothesis concerns the fact that you use or credit the word Gegebenheit with gift, with the meaning of gift, and this has to do with—I will not call this theological or religious—the deepest ambition of your thought. For you, everything that is given in the phenomenological sense, gegeben, donné, Gegebenheit, everything that is given to us in perception, in memory, in a phenomenological perception, is finally a gift to a finite creature, and it is finally a gift of God.”

Expressed in stronger or weaker terms throughout Marion’s work, there is a correlation between the “possibility” witnessed at the limits of phenomenological investigation and the “actuality” identified theologically as God. Whereas phenomenology can only countenance pure givenness as a possibility, theology offers unconditioned givenness actuality. Although it might be argued that Marion avoids “some sort of theologization of phenomenality” by insisting that such an investigation to admit the mere possibility of a phenomenon of revelation. . . . [I]s it necessary to confine the possibility of the appearing of God to the uninterrogated and supposedly untouchable limits of one or the other figure in philosophy and phenomenology, or should we broaden phenomenological possibility to the measure of the possibility of manifestation demanded by the question of God?” (Marion, Being Given, 242).

57 God, the Gift and Postmodernism, 66. See also Given Time where Derrida, pulling from Reduction and Givenness asks: “Having declared that it [the call] excludes any determinable content, why does Marion determine ‘the pure form of the call’ (and therefore of the gift) as call ‘in the name of the Father’?” (Derrida, Given Time, 52).

58 Examples of this kind of correlation are numerous. For instance, the saturated phenomenon would not fail to appear because of a lack of givenness, but because of an excess that bedazzles the intentional aim. A saturated phenomenon then, countenanced as a possibility philosophically, is “saturated to the point that the world could not accept it. Having come among its own, they did not recognize it—having come into phenomenality, the absolutely saturated phenomenon could find no room there for its display” (Marion, “Saturated Phenomenon,” 118). Of course, the resonance of Christ coming into the world is obvious.

59 Marion, Being Given, 243.
only requires the possibility of revelation and is not in need of its historical event,\footnote{See among other places Being Given where he state that the “hypothesis that there was historically no such revelation would change nothing in the phenomenological task of offering an account of the fact, itself contestable, that it has been thinkable, discussible, and even describable” (Marion, Being Given, 4-5).} it is equally reasonable to read Marion as asserting that in the arena of theology one can countenance pure givenness in a more adequate fashion. The phenomena of revealed theology, specifically God, could not not be an issue for a phenomenology wishing to purify itself of a “pigheaded,” “ideological” commitment to the philosophical tradition’s limiting (metaphysical) conditions.\footnote{See Marion, Being Given, 234. Marion responds to the charge that if actual religious phenomena are paradigmatic of pure givenness then the suspicion can arise that a theological prejudice has entered philosophy. For Marion, it is simply good phenomenological procedure not to reject religious phenomenon’s right to appear. “Every phenomenon must be describable, and every exclusion must on principle be reversed, in phenomenology as elsewhere … the very concept of Revelation belongs by right to phenomenaity, and even to contest it, it is appropriate to see it” (Marion, Being Given, 4-5). Phenomenology simply engages this possibility and if engaged finds itself challenged in accounting for this kind of manifestation. “But phenomenology, which owes it to phenomenology to go this far, does not go beyond and should never pretend to decide the fact of Revelation, its historicity, its actuality, or its meaning. … it does not have the means to do so.” In this way, while avoiding the charge of a theological directive in his phenomenological work, Marion also prevents the promotion of a philosophical reduction of theological themes by cordonning off the actuality of revealed theology from philosophical scrutiny (see Marion, Being Given, 367 n90).} Phenomenology’s originary possibility is purely given theologically even if the religious phenomena, phenomena par excellence, remain in the realm of possibility and therefore purely formal.\footnote{If the sheer possibility of “the Revelation of God as showing himself starting from himself alone can in fact ever take place, phenomenology must redefine its own limits and learn to pass beyond them following clear-cut and rigorous procedures” (Marion, Being Given, 242).}

Indeed, Marion claims that the further clarification of this call, giving it sense (Sinngebung), allows theology to supplement phenomenology. Here, it is possible to
see Marion putting on the mantle of apologetics. Philosophically the argument is made that while phenomenology can point to the possibility of the saturated phenomenon, the “intuitive realization of that being-given [God of phenomenology] requires, more than phenomenological analysis, the real experience of its donation, which falls to revealed theology.” Marion distinguished as heterogeneous faith and philosophy (given the differing evidence for revelation as possibility or as historicity) so that “there could be no danger of confusion between these two domains” only to maintain that they are both ultimately concerned with the phenomenon of revelation. What is more, the field of originary possibilities that will liberate this philosophical task from its

63 Caputo, in his introduction to the series of papers delivered at the Villanova conference in 1997, maintains that “[p]roducing an apology for the impossible is a particularly apt way to describe the debate between Derrida and Marion.” The conference as a whole was assembled “for the express purpose of restoring the good name of the impossible, of what the old Enlightenment declared impossible; to make it respectable, to give it its day in court, to defend it, to produce in short an apology for the impossible” (Caputo, God, the Gift and Postmodernism, 3). Caputo highlights the prejudice of reason in the modern epoch—the trust in its sufficiency that allows secularism pride of place—as a motivation for thinking religion anew. Indeed, Christian apologetics ascends to new heights in a climate of an alleged neutrality that putatively knows for certain how God may or may not enter philosophy. Apologists wish to outflank such self-sufficient thinking, conceding the difference between philosophy and religion, then presenting an argument for the reasonableness of faith that even one without faith could not refute. Of course, for Marion, Heidegger's ghettoizing of theology and contesting of Christian philosophy becomes the occasion for the liberation of the properly religious as originary even for philosophy.

64 Jean-Luc Marion “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” Critical Inquiry 20 (1994): 590. In this essay, Marion understands phenomenology to offer a relève from having to treat God as a metaphysical entity. Phenomenologically speaking God shows up rather as the being-given.

65 “Of course, even if it is decidedly opposed to the metaphysical figure of the causa sui ‘God,’ the figure of ‘God’ in phenomenology that we have just outlined nevertheless still concerns the ‘God of the scholars’ and in no way the ‘God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Jacob.’ But
metaphysical commitments are those “experiences” over which phenomenology has no
providence.⁶⁶ This field remains irreducible to that over which phenomenology can
decide—the significance of pure unconditioned givenness for phenomenology is thus
decided by revealed theology.⁶⁷

Derrida’s pure and proper possibility

The desired purity that for Derrida remains inextricably tied to expressions of
religious longing are countenanced differently in his work. In the battle over the
“pure’ and proper possibility” of religion, instead of exposing how thought is
overwhelmed by the excess of a properly religious phenomenon, Derrida highlights the
way thought is interrupted by the emptiness of the desert. Religious phenomena are
not so much encountered as cracked open such that a desertified faith propels
philosophy as a “religious” passion. Deconstruction as a “movement of

one could again object that the figure of ‘God’ in phenomenology is hardly distinguished from
the latter” (Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology,” 590).

⁶⁶ “If revelation there must be (and phenomenology has no authority to decide this),
then it will assume, assumes, or assumed the figure of paradox of paradoxes. . . .” (Marion, Being
Given, 235). Marion’s use of this conditional “if” seems to place him in agreement with Derrida
on the issue of alterity of religious themes. I will return to this in a footnote below.

⁶⁷ What is more, even if it is granted that revelation’s actuality and possibility is kept
absolutely separate in Marion’s work, if one takes up a neutral position that suspends the
question of a religious phenomenon’s actuality then phenomenology investigates the most
crucial phenomenon that reveal pure givenness without investigating any phenomenon as such.
A methodical return to “the things themselves” becomes the positing of an explanatory
formalism. Said differently, Marion seeks a purity by reducing phenomenon to being given
rather than being visible or appearance, so that Marion’s project takes on the character of being-
true. Investigating the “how” of appearance is forsaken for the priority of a “what.”
transcendence” insinuates itself into the immanent, calling attention to an excess that haunts the supposed stable border of religious discourse.

For Derrida, as I attempted to demonstrate in the previous chapter, the pure (philosophically significant) meaning of faith obtains when abstracting from determinable content so as to escape the need to prize the name of God. “Faith is not pure faith” if it is contaminated by determinable content; it “is already knowledge . . . That is why you have to be an atheist of this sort (someone who ‘rightly passes for an atheists’) in order to be true to faith.”

68 The desert abstraction, key to Derrida’s philosophical reflection on religion, “uproots” faith traditions by atheologizing them, “liberating universal rationality.” This “universal rationality,” exposing the structure of the religious in terms of its ethical force, releases religion from its determinable content and exclusionary commitments, universalizing its intent by engaging an infinite justice or responsibility to an unspecified other. 69

68 Jacques Derrida, “Terror, God and the New Politics: An Interview with Derrida” in Traversing the Imaginary, ed. John Manoussakis and P. Gratton [New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2004]). See also the Gift of Death: “Our faith is not assured, because faith can never be, it must never be a certainty. . . . Such is the secret truth of faith as absolute responsibility and as absolute passion . . .” (Derrida, Gift of Death, 80).

69 “. . . the gap between the opening of this possibility (as a universal structure) and the determinate necessity of this or that religion will always remain irreducible; and sometimes <it operates> within each religion, between on the one hand that which keeps it closest to its ‘pure’ and proper possibility, and on the other, its own historically determined necessities or authorities. Thus, one can always criticize, reject or combat this or that form of sacredness or of belief, even of religious authority, in the name of the most originary possibility (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 58-59). Thinking the “‘pure’ and proper possibility” of religion requires one to think otherwise than “ontotheology [that] encrypts faith” (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 66).
Yet I also argued that in Derrida’s passion to open up the religious to an exteriority determinate religion intends to profess as conditional, such a task ultimately culminates in a liberation from the very “faith-saving” intuition that gave it rise. In so far as this is true, Derrida’s approach to religion cannot avoid upholding a traditionally desired heterogeneity between faith and knowledge that he sought to unsettle. Derrida persists in privileging the philosophical in relation to the theological, which must simply welcome without response the admonishment of deconstruction’s “good news.” Derrida’s penchant for the purity of a structural religion—liberated and yet indemnified from the contamination of determinate content—reformulates a reductive approach to religion. Contrary to Marion’s apologetic assessment of the tension between faith and knowledge, the “pure and proper possibility” of religion is liberated from but not countenanced by religious or theological thinking. “In order to be true to faith,” to understand what is “most basic” in religious phenomena (in their purity), a “founding disclosure” is necessary.

In short, Derrida ultimately cannot shake in all instances the legacy of this tradition and succumbs to the temptation that philosophical reflection properly liberates the practical or ethical purity of the religious. The attempt to save the appearances of religion “at the limits of reason” in order to liberate thinking from heretofore “hidden obstacles” (philosophical and religious or theological) is taken up by a philosophical reflection about religion.
Spurious Undecidability

Guided by the previous sketch of the apologetic and reductive poles operative in the tense relation between faith and knowledge and the extension of the heterogeneity between faith and knowledge in terms of the ontotheological problematic, it is possible to witness in the work of Marion and Derrida two modes for avoiding of the ambiguity that lies at the heart of philosophy of religion. In the final analysis, each prizes either the objective or subjective senses of the genitive and so privileges the disclosive power of a single direction in their reflection on religion. Engaged in thinking unconditioned givenness, which gives way to a pure (theological) address, Marion prizes religious phenomena as originary. For Marion, awareness of the ontotheologic problematic provides the space for liberating theology from the stranglehold of limiting philosophical categories that destroy the purity of givenness. Derrida, on the other hand, rightly “rightly passes for an atheist.” He rigorously thinks the purity of undeconstructible philosophemes through a process of a desertified abstraction of religious themes, purging them of determinable theological conditions or naming.

To be sure, the issue is complex. I have attempted to navigate this complexity in order to discern a propensity in each figure (on which others have also commented) regarding the issue of purity or indemnification. It should not be forgotten, however, that in these two figures the demand for authentic interpenetration between theology and philosophy is also a struggle (especially in Derrida’s recent reflection on religion I
explored in the previous chapter). Yet this demand is often eclipsed by the more profound demand to avoid the trap of ontotheology maintaining a heterogeneity between faith and knowledge as a requirement for purity of thought. Within the motivating confines of the ontotheological problematic, the "maddening instability" between the originary status of either faith or knowledge demands a solution even more powerfully, it seems, than the counter-demand to forego such a definitive solution. Indeed, as the thought of Marion and Derrida become synonymous with separate discursive directions for reflection on religion, both Marion and Derrida (supplemented by arguments of commentators), seek to expose the other's thought to an alterity or transcendence the other putatively determines or excludes. Such a debate is explicitly centered on the task of out-thinking ontotheology or the metaphysics of presence from two separate and mutually exclusive perspectives. Each attempts to outflank the other by demonstrating the lingering ontotheological commitments in the midst of the other's respective project.

I do not wish to navigate further the specifics of this debate or consider how each reads Husserl's "breakthrough." In fact, it has been argued that Continental

\footnote{See note 40 above.}

\footnote{Marion distills their debate documented in God, the Gift and Postmodernism: "In short, can Christian theology as a theology evoked by Revelation remove itself in principle, if not in actual accomplishment, from the 'metaphysics of presence' — or is it, in the final analysis, reducible to this metaphysics?" (Marion, "In the Name," 23).}

\footnote{Sorting out the debate in a rigorous way by addressing the attempt of each to extend or radicalize Husserl would, of course, require an exploration of Derrida's analysis of Husserl in}
philosophy of religion is given proper expression when highlighting an insoluble
tension between these two approaches to religion. Ultimately, these two alternatives
for thinking against ontotheology, within philosophy of religion, would seem to
necessarily resist definitive resolution, owing to the discipline’s constitutive ambiguity.
Therefore the debate between Derrida and Marion itself has become the site where
thinking about religion is considered most productive. 

at least *Speech and Phenomena*. Such a task is beyond the scope of my project here. Yet it can be
stated briefly that, whereas Derrida reads Husserl as caught in the metaphysics of presence,
Marion maintains that Husserl’s thought is pregnant with an awareness of givenness that can
propel thought beyond an obsession with presence and even deconstruction itself (see Jacques
Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973], 4-5 and Marion,
*Reduction and Givenness*, 32-36).

73 See Carlson, *Indiscrétion*; Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift*; Caputo, *God, the Gift and
Postmodernism*; Benson, *Graven Ideologies*; and Bradley, “God Sans Being: Derrida, Marion and ‘A
Paradoxical Writing of the Word Without.’” This kind of an approach to rethinking the
heterogeneity of faith and knowledge is given expression in Caputo’s development of a
“generalized apophatics” or in an exploration of Levinas’ professed undecidability between *il y
a* and *illeity* that forms the basis of Jeffery Kosky’s explication of Levinas’ importance for
philosophy of religion (see Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida; Against Ethics*
[Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993] and Jeffery Kosky, *Levinas and the Philosophy of
Religion* [Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001]). It is possible to see the influence of
Caputo’s work, more generally, in shaping the terms of this debate and thinking through the
philosophical approach to religion. Apart from *Prayer and Tears*, in an exploration of Levinas in
*Against Ethics*, Caputo (like Kosky) concludes that philosophically one cannot determine who
calls *il* or *il y a*. Or in *Radical Hermeneutics*, either Nietzsche or Kierkegaard is right
philosophically, such a decision is left for faith. Caputo claims to take Nietzsche seriously and the
cold Dionysian realization that the proper response to reality is not a spirit of transformation
built on faith in a loving God but simply the love of fate. Although he might grant the
possibility of an abyssal reality, he without fail takes a leap of faith, embracing a vision of loving
eyes looking back out of the abyss (see *Against Ethics* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press,
1993] and *Radical Hermeneutics* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987]).
An eagerly professed and welcomed inability to adjudicate the debate, proposing a “negative agreement”\(^7\) between the two directions, is precisely for many commentators and even for Derrida and Marion themselves\(^5\) where a “(re)solution” might be entertained—one that unsettles the heterogeneity between faith and knowledge that founds the debate.\(^6\) Within the space of this argument, tension between the proper names of Marion and Derrida can be seen as productive in so far as it embodies the demand that the philosophy of religion involve an interpenetration between faith and knowledge. Heterogeneity between faith and knowledge, apparent in each, ultimately becomes unsettled in the very attempt on the part of each to radically stretch either their theological or philosophical investigations of alterity. In each attempt to render their respective investigations pure—indemnified from the

\(^7\) One way to mark such an agreement is the failure of an ontotheologic to think the gift or givenness absolutely or unconditionally.

\(^5\) Derrida maintains that “Marion’s thought is both very close and extremely distant; others might say opposed” even as Marion insists that he “remains close to Derrida” (Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” in Languages of the Unsayable, S. Budick and W. Iser eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 65n. and Marion, God Without Being, xx1). Each seeks to transgress “the old” Enlightenment and so move beyond the constraints imposed by traditional philosophical considerations of religion, so that the “apology for the impossible is a particularly apt way to describe the debate between Derrida and Marion.” I will discuss further the significance of the “formal” points of agreement between Marion and Derrida below.

\(^6\) One commentator maintains “that it is impossible to choose between Derrida and Marion’s arguments about deconstruction, negative theology and the relationship between them because both positions are enabled and disabled by the aporia of the ‘paradoxical writing of the word ‘without’. If Marion’s negative theology is (de-)constituted by being without Derrida’s deconstruction of negative theology, then Derrida’s deconstruction of negative theology is (de)constituted by being without Marion’s negative theology. Each is subject and object of the other, absolutely itself and its absolutely heterogeneous other . . .” Bradley witnesses the
other—a tense solution presents itself (it has been proposed) in terms of an undecidability between the radical desiderata that propel these investigations of religion at the limits of thought.

Frequent translator of Marion’s work, Thomas Carlson, in his influential book Indiscretion, insists that given our postmodern proclivities the opportunity afforded philosophers and theologians alike by a certain Derrida-inspired obsession with “the impossible” allows for a productive exchange between the theological and the “thanatological”—between the mystical theology and Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian analyses of death and finitude. He is not content with simply describing an isomorphism between the movement of thought structuring both mystical theology and a recent discourse on finitude. Carlson’s project, rather, engages the possibility of an analogy between those “final terms” (philosophical and theological) that trope what remains “outside of ‘truth’.” His is an analogy between the indeterminate desiderata of philosophy and theology, inspiring an impossible yet shared task that strains “asymptotically toward, a term that it never attains, and never can attain, ‘as such’.” He sketches the analogy in terms of a relation between unknown or irreducible “referents” (death or God) that remain indistinguishable “in-themselves.” By this

interpenetration between philosophy and theology as “Derrida and Marion are without each other” (Bradley, “God Sans Being” 310 and 311).

77 Carlson, Indiscretion, 247.

78 Carlson employs the counter-productive yet telling language of noumenality and boundary limits throughout his description of the analogy in question. An attentive reader begins to suspect that the analogy he proposes is dependant on the presence of something beyond
analogy, Carlson exposes an inability to either identify or distinguish a theological desire for a sustaining super-plenitude and a philosophical analysis of death that circles around an equally unknowable, unnameable emptiness. An indiscretion, therefore, "grounds the groundless analogy" between theological presence and philosophical absence.

What he calls the "apophatic analogy" is elaborated by specifically turning to the contemporary postmodern scene and the debate between Marion and Derrida regarding the philosophical and theological status of the gift. Carlson's goal in laying hold of the positions of Marion (representative of a postmodern mystical theology) and Derrida (concerned with the emptiness issuing from an analysis of finitude) is to give voice to an unsettling approach that neither Marion nor Derrida can appreciate independently.\(^7\) Holding the two together in tension offers the outlines of what it would mean to remain faithful to a more extreme position of unknowing—an unknowing obtaining, Carlson argues, in a discourse devoted to any "figure" of the "impossible."

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the limits of thought especially when he refers to the indeterminate "figures of the impossible" in terms of whatness. "[O]ur thought and language ever remain on 'this side' of a boundary or limit beyond which our thought and language cannot pass" (Carlson, *Indiscretion*, 247, see the concluding chapter, specifically 243-262).

\(^7\) Marion "tends toward a thought of fullness or presence despite his assertion that a saturation of presence amounts to absence, while Derrida (or Taylor) tends toward a thought of lack or absence, despite his insistence on undecidability. Could not the thought of excess shared by all these thinkers finally call these tendencies into question?" (Carlson, *Indiscretion*, 247-248 n.4)
Although indebted to Derrida’s own formulation of the ordeal of undecidability, the ordeal that thought encounters in Carlson’s unpacking of the debate between Marion and Derrida speaks to the very condition of the debate itself and therefore putatively speaks prior to Derrida’s ordeal. Carlson seeks to expand and radicalize that ordeal in the process of describing the apophatic analogy. Even as he places theological claims under the philosophical strictures formulated by Derrida, Carlson points out Derrida’s indebtedness to an approach that travels much deeper than Derrida might be willing to admit when describing the onto-theological character of the apophatic traditions. Just as in Marion’s analysis of givenness Marion cannot philosophically maintain a strictly theological referent, Derrida cannot “decide” that his thought will not engage a mystical unknowing of God. For Carlson, then, in the midst of the simple assertion of heterogeneity between negative theology and deconstruction, there arises the question as to “whether this kind of denial of negative theology might not itself belong (without belonging) to negative theology”?  


The work turns on the question of properly distinguishing the teloi of philosophical and theological discourses. The analogy Carlson engages is raised, maintained, and cashed in only in so far as this question remains a question, namely: whether or not it is a "misguided effort to baptize the abysses of a fragmented but purely human, linguistic existence with the name of apophatic theology’s mystically unknowable and thus unnameable God."\textsuperscript{82} Described as the “apophatic analogy” between two figures of the unknowable or ineffable, the analogy never permits of resolution or confirmation. Yet by this inability the analogy initially, abidingly, and unavoidably becomes an issue for thought “precisely because the final term in each relation can be neither identified with nor distinguished from the final term of the other.”\textsuperscript{83} The possibility of the proposed analogy, therefore, paradoxically resides in its unjustifiability or indefensibility—its groundlessness “according to the excess of ‘the impossible,’ which stands outside of actual knowledge and its language.”\textsuperscript{84}

By such an analogy, Carlson is able to open up avenues for religious reflection in this “‘post-’ age” even as he criticizes and expressly backs away from the more enthusiastic, overstated, and indefensible claims of postmodern theology—claims insisting upon a theological surpassing of critical or reductive philosophical thought.

\textsuperscript{82} Carlson, \textit{Indiscretion}, 4.

\textsuperscript{83} Carlson, \textit{Indiscretion}, 17.

\textsuperscript{84} Carlson, \textit{Indiscretion}, 247.
These claims inevitably misfire in a theological determination of a professed otherness, which Carlson unsettles by retaining the philosophical desideratum.

Carlson renders the relation between philosophy and theology less clear and fixed, attempting to unsettle their heterogeneous relation in the debate between Marion and Derrida. Yet this mode of adjudicating the debate and introducing novelty in a philosophical reflection on religion must be seen as inadequate, relying on a spurious undecidability. The condition for the tense union or “apophatic analogy” between the purely indeterminate desiderata drawing forth the work of Derrida and Marion remains the heterogeneity of faith and knowledge, expressed on the contemporary scene as an attempt to escape the trap of ontotheology.

The spurious character of this undecidability between the philosophical and theological in terms of their desiderata can be witnessed as well when focusing on a “commitedness” to one side of the divide marked by the genitive in the philosophy of religion.85 Approaching the Continental philosophy of religion by emphasizing the

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85 On this issue, I think an exchange between Richard Kearney and Jacques Derrida is again worthy of note. On the topic of the “kingdom of resurrection” Derrida states: “I am not against resurrection. I would share your hope for resurrection, reconciliation and redemption. But I think I have a responsibility as someone who thinks deconstructively to obey the necessity—the necessity of the possibility—that there is khora rather than a relationship with the anthropo-theological God of revelation” (Derrida, “Terror, God and the New Politics”). In a similar fashion, when Marion responds directly to Derrida’s objections regarding his theological bent when considering “negative theology,” Marion claims that theology need not be “obsessed with presence.” The demonstration of this requires a “responsibility” to another “necessity,” a commitment to the name of God even as and because that name “serves to shield God from presence . . . and offers him precisely as an exception to presence” (Marion, “In the Name,” 37).

In his “Apostles of the Impossible: On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion,” Caputo seems to recognize the fundamental issue of commitment but only with regard to Marion in his dispute with Derrida. Caputo does not “reverse” this possibility in the case of Derrida. Caputo
proper names of “Marion” and “Derrida,” thinking is held in the undecidable space between two properly unnamable desiderata—one theologically orientated the other philosophically. In vying for the soul of a distinctly Continental approach to religious phenomena or themes, it is a special irony that the dispute between Derrida and Marion so clarified comes down to that which would render such dispute impossible. The dispute involves that which passes beyond or destroys all forms of predication, such that the thinker is left with a “purely pragmatic” discourse.\(^{66}\) With “no ground, no essence, no presence”\(^{67}\) the dispute tied to such a discourse becomes a constant negotiation of commitments refined and confirmed. One “who rightly passes for an atheist” is analogous to an orthodox theologian because at bottom their differences can be marked and maintained only by prior commitments either to philosophy or

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argues that Marion’s commitment to the givenness of God implies a commitment to God’s ultimate, if not conceptual, presence. “We have contended that Marion and Derrida are agreed in regarding the ‘intention’ or the ‘concept’ as an ‘arrow’ which is aimed at the heart of God from which God must be ‘shielded’ ... or kept ‘safe.’ For Marion, ... this is because the arrow of intentionality is too weak and narrow to penetrate or comprehend the infinite givenness of God; it would compromise the infinite incomprehensibility of God who has utterly saturated the intention ‘God’ in a plenitude of givenness. But for Derrida, ... the arrow takes aim at God and never reaches God precisely because the name of God is the name of what we love and desire, ... something *tout autre* which is not ‘present,’ not only in the narrow conceptual sense of conceptual presentation advanced by Marion, but also not given” (Caputo, *God, the Gift and Postmodernism*, 199).

\(^{66}\) Marion develops this notion in “In the Name.” Regarding Marion’s “purely pragmatic” discourse, Derrida insists that this marks one of the sites where Derrida “feels very close to” Marion (*God, the Gift and Postmodernism*, 45).

\(^{67}\) Marion, “In the Name,” 37.
theology. The fundamental agreement or analogy between the two is maintained, on the other hand, where it really matters—in a space of unknowing.\footnote{\textit{It is my argument that the question of God and the question of the gift come from the same aporetic space, that it is not only possible to think God as gift, but highly appropriate to do so (Horner, \textit{Rethinking God as Gift}, 246).}}

Another of Marion’s translators, Robyn Horner exemplifies this issue of committedness by fashioning the debate between Marion and Derrida as a problem for hermeneutics. She finds the space to think through the debate by taking a cue form Marion himself that theology can be viewed as a hermeneutical supplement to the philosophical awareness of the saturated phenomenon as possibility. If it is maintained theologically that God is “experienced” as a saturated phenomenon (and for Marion this is never in question), one can only maintain this (due to a lack of an object) in a confession that affirms that experience \textit{as such}.\footnote{\textit{See Marion, \textit{In Excess}, 123-127, 160, related material in his earlier essay “In the Name,” and \textit{Being Given}, 211, and 243-247. This is a larger problem for Marion. For in claiming that philosophy brings forth the possibility of the saturated phenomenon, and theology its actualization, Marion must also maintain that givenness specified theologically is not equivalent to presence. If God is given in such a way that intuition is saturated, this must involve both the excessiveness of the event and the inability to know whether or not that excessiveness even refers us to God due to a lack of an object. This necessary undecidability between excess and shortage in the phenomenon of revelation means that “an excess of intuition is redoubled in a paradox of paradoxes,” and so Marion must name, therefore, the phenomenon of revelation “the abandoned \textit{[l’abandonné]}” (Marion, \textit{Being Given}, 244 and 246). Yet does Marion abide in this undecidability? The “danger” that this phenomenon “the world could not accept” will never show up “results less from the saturated phenomenon itself than from its misrecognition” (Marion, \textit{Being Given}, 211). Hence there is need for a hermeneutical supplement not only to refer to such an event as God’s givenness, but importantly for the priority of faith, to be able to even recognize the phenomenon of revelation. In this way, the naming of God is not immune from the play of \textit{différence}. In an discussion of divine names, Marion states: “The Infinite proliferation of names does indeed suggest that they are still there, but it also flags as insufficient that concepts they put into play and thereby does justice to what constantly subverts them” (Marion, \textit{In Excess}, 160). In similar fashion, this becomes an issue for Marion’s discussion of Christ as a}
always and already interpreted (as Revelation) . . . It is one thing to admit that the
object of theology cannot be made an object, and that God overwhelms the
understanding. But it is another to allow—really to allow—that there are no
theological givens that are purely given. It is humbling thing to admit that truth
depends on a judgment and not a ‘fact.’” Horner pursues this hermeneutical necessity
further, insisting that Derrida, while not writing theology, in his thinking of the aporia
of the gift nonetheless leaves room in his thought (and necessarily so since he cannot
exclude the possibility) for faith and a decision to approach God or revelation as gift.
Likewise, Marion’s thinking can give way to familiar Derridean positions. “Do
Marion and Derrida speak the same language after all, even if they resist the
[ontotheological] language of the same?” Indeed, in this rendering of the debate, the
“importance of the disagreement between Marion and Derrida over the precise limits
of onto-theology seems finally to diminish in light of this more fundamental point of
agreement. . . .”

paradigm for phenomenality that I discussed earlier: “It follows that the saturated phenomenon
of Christ assumes the paradox of the flesh by always subverting the supposedly unique horizon
of phenomenality, thereby demanding a never definite plurality of horizons . . . none of which
says his essence. . . . [in] summoning an infinity of nominative horizons in order to denominate
he who saturates not only each horizon, but the incommensurable sum of the horizons”
(Marion, Being Given, 239 and 240).

Horner, Rethinking God as Gift, 242.

Marion “lays his bets on the Name, but ‘his’ Name gives—from the outside at least—
no more than Derrida’s” (Horner, Rethinking God as Gift, 246).

Horner, Rethinking God as Gift, 246.

Carlson, Indiscretion, 261.
By an inability to definitively name alterity excessive or aporetic (prompting the risk of faith), the differing commitments of Marion and Derrida are exposed for what they are. In this way, each “protagonist,” for Horner, can be brought very close to one another in so far as Derrida or Marion approach and countenance the enigma of religious phenomena with certain ineradicable commitments that necessarily permit the recuperation of the theological “horizon” within the philosophical and vice versa. Of course, Derrida may detect repeated references to the paradigmatic function of the Father or baptism in Marion’s work and claim that such reference conditions Marion’s pragmatic discourse that aims to shield God from presence. To Derrida’s tastes and philosophical commitments such a discourse lacks the requisite formality and abstraction to ensure that thought not loose itself idolatrously. Marion, whose penchant for mystical theology is no secret, may contend that Derrida is dogmatical in his imposition of traditional conditions on the right of saturated phenomenon to appear and so precludes exposure to the possibility of the impossible—an alterity with which both agree each struggles.94

To be sure, those who focus on the undecidable desiderata of theology and philosophy seek out the interpenetration of faith and knowledge as a fundamental

94 As Horner’s approach to the debate can attest, it is possible to read the exchange between Marion and Derrida, specifically recorded in God, the Gift and Postmodernism, as one recognizing “general agreement” on a wide variety of contentious points and admitting that each is working in a shared problematic. Yet these matters of agreement quickly become “too formal” and so each figure finds it necessary to mark their differences on a pragmatic level, arguing that missteps there prevent either Marion or Derrida from properly thinking through that on which they agree.
possibility for Continental philosophy of religion.\textsuperscript{55} Hanging tenaciously to a painful if liberating undecidability, the heterogeneity between faith and knowledge is raised as an issue in so far as neither a reductive or apologetic position can be said to properly determine the approach to religion. "The 'philosophy of religion' in this context would have not to avoid or resolve but rather to explore and exploit the incalculable ambiguities that would mark the indiscriminate interplay of two fields which, via the apophatic analogy, remain neither wholly distinct nor ever yet identical."\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{55} This originary undecidability has motivated certain thinkers, reacting to philosophy of religion so conceived, to follow another path of thinking philosophically and hermeneutically about religious traditions. For a figure such as Richard Kearney (indebted to Paul Ricoeur), this reaction involves an effort to address an ethical lacuna opened up in the postmodern context as the inability to discriminate between good and evil, between God and the nihilistic abyss. This "problem of discernment" for Kearney corresponds directly to the inability to distinguish between the call (for example) of Illeity and the anonymity of the il y a—the very inability that is prized in these debates. Starting from what Kearney calls the "postmodern sublimity" of absolute alterity, this kind of thinking prizes undecidability as conditional even for ethics. See the work of Richard Kearney, specifically his recent trilogy of books: Strangers, Gods and Monsters (London: Routledge, 2003); On Stories (London: Routledge, 2001); and The God Who May Be (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001). For figures such as J. A. K. Smith or Bruce Benson, the hermeneutical necessity in all knowing is the context within which a specifically Christian philosophy might be developed, conserving the value of a single tradition through a radical philosophical turn (See citations to Smith's work throughout and Benson's Graven Ideologies). In any case, I share the desire to pull back from the hyperbole that renders significant the inability to mark a difference between these indiscriminate desiderata. For these figures, however, the entire project of philosophy of religion in question here may be bankrupt. In my estimation, the interpenetration faith and knowledge that Continental philosophy of religion might engage still demands rigorous thinking.

\textsuperscript{96} Carlson, Indiscretion, 261-262. Kosky who considers the character of Continental philosophy of religion by exploiting the undecidability between "God or the anonymous menace of some other" reckons "this undecidability, not at all a reassuring point at which to arrive but one rich with possibility" (Kosky, Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion, xxiv). For Carlson this richness "allows those who are theologically committed to reassess very traditional thinking about God, and it allows those who remain uncommitted theologically to approach in contemporary terms the possible significance of God" (Carlson, Indiscretion, 19). This richness inhering in the apophatic analogy opens up new directions for further study of deconstructive
Yet the "maddening instability" between the originary status of faith and
knowledge is thought here in a sanitized or purified form—one that allows for the
continued indemnification of each discipline from the demands of other on "this side of
truth." Such an apophatic analogy can highlight committedness to either a reductive or
apologetic approach to religion—legitimated by the ambiguity inhering in religious
reflection—and so reveal the ambiguity as constitutive of philosophy of religion. But it
cannot unsettle the heterogeneity. It cannot think both directions at once nor does it
recognize the need for such an interpenetration on this side of truth.

The heterogeneity between faith and knowledge, in this scenario, is putatively
unsettled in an "agreement" countenanced in a space of unknowing where a decision
between two figures of noumenality becomes impossible. Theological and
philosophical desiderata only appear or can be maintained as heterogeneous on "this
side of truth." The "indiscrete interplay" occurs beyond the limits of knowledge
rendering philosophy of religion ("if there is one") without reason.

thought and philosophy stretched to its limit as well as considerations of theology, specifically
mystical theology. Carlson also finds that such analogy can reveal certain prejudices in the
academic domain of religious studies and its unquestioned drive for a sense of security in an
objectivity or neutrality. Carlson points out the methodological blindness or forgetfulness of
this approach to religion, challenging the descriptive and normative task of religious studies
allegedly untouched by the theological or religious that it claims to treat (Carlson, Indiscretion,
261-262). Finally, by "exploiting points of indiscretion between negative theology and negative
anthropology, between the historical and the contemporary, we might open new fields of
discussion—bringing together, on the one hand, traditionalists who may have thought they had
nothing to learn from postmodern negativities and, on the other, postmoderns who may have
decided too quickly that they were at an end with the naming of God" (Carlson, Indiscretion, 20).

97 Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," 103.
Such a *rapprochement* between desiderata is plagued by a lingering and fundamental inability to consider the heart of the matter. The space of prior pragmatic commitment as the site of difference is not where philosophy of religion properly engages the "incalculable ambiguities" constitutive of its task. The movement of thought, whether philosophical or theological, that "strains asymptotically toward a term that it never attains, and never can attain, 'as such'"98 remains untouched by the complimentary approach. Said differently, the interpenetration of faith and knowledge only occurs after thinking has rallied around a purified desideratum (the pure and proper possibility of religion) and so has ceased to be underway. In fact, the analogy is rooted in the *inability* of the thinker, paying special attention to one direction, ever to gain access to the other and vice versa. The interesting and productive ways philosophy and theology might become entangled is shrouded in an impenetrable mystery; inscribed in a space of unknowing; countenanced only as an afterthought.

This analogy, which seems to "split the difference" between reductive and apologetic directions and so maintains an engagement with the strange relation of philosophy and theology, must be seen rather as a way to avoid the difficulty of such interpenetration. Focusing on the spurious undecidability of desiderata in the thinned out exchange and rarefied air of dueling abstract purities, philosophy of religion avoids the unsettling ambiguity when philosophy and religion are bound together in a striving on "this side of truth." Religious reflection enfranchised through the current debates,

understands this ambiguity in an agreement over "what" is irreducible to
knowledge.\textsuperscript{99} Enamored with a Kierkegaardian reading of the problematic, thought
has nothing to offer when the interpenetration of faith and knowledge is engaged.
Leaving unquestioned the rhetoric of purity and faith's irreducibility to knowledge,
philosophy of religion seeks immunity from the complexity and messiness of where the
interpenetration is an issue for thought.

What clues are there to find way of resisting the temptation to "go further" and
so pull back from this hyperbolic place of unknowing agreement between purities?
Harnessing insight from the reflection on art, a demand can be entertained: taking up
the interpenetration of faith and knowledge must involve thinking through the
extraordinary muddle of immanence. Reflection on the artwork involves the rigorous
attempt to witness the ordinary, the "mere appearance [of the] visible and
intelligible"\textsuperscript{101} as the enabling condition of the extraordinary. The haunting of
phenomena by an exteriority happens on this side of truth and is not preserved for

\textsuperscript{99} See notes 67 and 78 above.

\textsuperscript{100} In this regard, Carlson's clarification of his use of analogy is noteworthy: unlike
Caputo's analogy in The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought, which clearly indicates "that
'value is related in each case is quite different' (i.e., Being is not 'really' God, or vice versa), I find
myself prohibited, by the very terms of the analogy, not only from identifying those terms but
also from distinguishing them . . . The similarity of relation can be established, on my view,
precisely because the final term in each relation can be neither identified with nor distinguished
from the final term in the other" (Carlson, Indiscretion, 17).

\textsuperscript{101} Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 139, 24. Heidegger, reflecting on the site where art
finds its expression in Nietzsche's texts, states: "The will to such 'true beings' is in truth a no-
saying to our present world, precisely the one in which art is at home" (Martin Heidegger, "The
irreducible referents rigorously shrouded in a more inscrutable space of unknowing.

For Heidegger, to think transcendence traced within immanence itself, is to think the exemplary phenomenon as that which disturbs or unsettles the order of phenomenality, yet without being inseparable from phenomena.

Thought not driven to countenance pure transcendence, does not care to be done with contentious matters once and for all (as does agreement dreaming of purity), but savors the "feast for thought" when mired in the oddity of the everyday. Such thinking is continually underway in order that something new might be ushered in. Unlike the stasis of "incalculable ambiguities," the model of thinking through art informs a philosophy of religion that acknowledges its condition in a necessary impurity. The co-contamination of fields or approaches to religious phenomena constitutive of philosophy of religion, preserves the interminability of its task. Philosophy of religion conditioned by its constituting ambiguity can never extract itself from the site it contests. Yet it is precisely for this reason that it strives to upset and think differently that site of contest foundational for its task.

That said, is the inability to know the desiderata "as such" or "in themselves" the same as the inability to know anything at all? Thinking both reductive and apologetic directions at once would engage the ambiguity as a tension on "this side of truth." In the previous chapter, I entertained Derrida’s struggle to think both directions

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102 As Heidegger reflects in his "Epilogue" to "The Origin and the Work of Art": the "forgoing reflections are concerned with the riddle of art, the riddle that art itself is. They are
at once through the adoption and radicalizing of Kant's (ultimately inadequate) deployment of emancipatory and faith-saving aims. This mixed message of Kant's reflection on religion works toward a philosophical approach to religion as open and porous yet critical and admonishing of religion. The dual task of gaining access to the ethical significance and contemporary relevance of something like messianic emancipation—exemplary for all thought—is made possible, oddly enough, by the thinker who challenges this exemplarity by thinking through them philosophically. Without such critical scrutiny, the appropriation of exemplarity of religious themes can reinstate the violence those themes seek to overcome. Figuring the site of interpenetration between faith and knowledge, faith remains significant only in so far as it is not piously regarded as irreducible to thought.

Openness to the significance of the extremity of faith, whereby the thinker suffers an expropriation yielding to phenomena whose significance may already haunt his thinking, is appropriated within philosophy of religion that first prepares for the openness. This ambiguous interplay between the moments of appropriation and expropriation that structures philosophy of religion, is one Derrida “strains towards asymptotically” as the tense site where the significance of faith is held open as disrupting even as it is disrupted. Religious phenomena as paradigmatic or exemplary must be open to exploration in order for such exemplarity to become philosophically significant even as this exemplary significance disrupts such exploration. If philosophy far from claiming to solve the riddle. The task is to see the riddle” (Heidegger, “The Origin of
of religion is to take up the provocation of abiding in its enabling ambiguity and avoid a prizing of either the reductive and apologetic techniques it must think through the “fold”\textsuperscript{103} between faith and knowledge.

The spurious undecidability of the apophatic analogy leaves unquestioned the notion of purity that within the current debates conspires to maintain a heterogeneity between philosophy and religion and so remains complicit in the avoidance of the ambiguity that lies at the heart of the philosophy of religion. Pulling back from the hyperbolic formulations motivating the drive for the pure and proper possibility of religion (and the equally hyperbolic exploitive “resolution” in an apophatic analogy) does not entail a return to the manageable theological task of sorting though a particular tradition as the site from which judgment is assured. The philosophy of art, rather, helps to emphasize the site where faith and knowledge meet, such that the relation of and interpenetration between philosophy and theology takes precedence over what can be witnessed as the unproductive concern over their respective natures. The enigma of the everyday marks the site where an authentic interpenetration between faith and knowledge might be engaged. Philosophy of religion initially and continually abiding by the ambiguity becomes more difficult yet possibly more productive in so far as this ambiguity cannot be “resolved” or “exploited” in an

agreement without decision. In this guise philosophy of religion remains in perpetual crisis, involved in an infinite perturbation that founds its very task.
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