Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology

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I

The question of God certainly does not begin with metaphysics. But it seems—or at least it was able to appear—that since metaphysics was coming to an end, being completed, and disappearing, 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. Everything also happened as if, in order to keep the question of God open so as to permit a “rational worship” of him (Rom. 12:1), it was absolutely necessary to stick to the strictly metaphysical meaning of all philosophy.

Relief here corresponds to the French noun relève, a term that is difficult to translate, especially when it occurs, as it often does, in connection with the preposition de [of, from]. In the present essay, I translate the noun relève as relief and the verb relever as relieve. In Marion’s use of them, the terms display two primary meanings. On the one hand, they can indicate relief, in the sense of release or delivery, from metaphysics and the conceptual framework within which it has traditionally thought God. On the other hand, they can indicate a lifting up of, in the sense of aid or assistance given to, metaphysics and its conceptual resources. Often both sets of meanings are operative simultaneously. The common usage of relève to indicate a relief in the sense of a relief team, relief troops, or a relief guard, includes both the sense of replacement (and thus removal or release) and the sense of preservation (and thus assistance). Along these lines, one should note that Jacques Derrida uses relève to translate the Hegelian Aufhebung. For some helpful remarks on these terms and their translation or nontranslation, see Alan Bass’s notes in Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1982), pp. 20, 43, 88, 121.—Trans.
But could one not and therefore should one not also pose, in an opposite direction, an entirely different preliminary question: Is philosophy equivalent to metaphysics? In order to remain rational, must the question concerning God necessarily and exclusively take the paths that lead to the “God of the philosophers and the scholars” because those paths issue necessarily from the decisions of metaphysics?¹ Such a reversal of the question can surprise and disturb or, on the contrary, seem to dodge the radicality of this century’s philosophical situation. It seems to me nevertheless inevitable, in that only such a reversal still leaves truly open the possibility of taking into proper account at least three questions, which I will evoke here without claiming to answer them explicitly. (a) At least according to its historical destiny, did metaphysics not reach its end—positively with Hegel and negatively with Nietzsche? (b) Did philosophy not devote itself throughout an entire century to overcoming that end by assuming nonmetaphysical forms, of which the most powerful (I am not saying the only) remains phenomenology? (c) Does Christian speculative theology, understood in its exemplary figures (and here I am obviously thinking first of Saint Thomas Aquinas), belong to metaphysics taken in the strict sense, or has it responded to the peculiar conceptual demands of the Revelation that prompted it?

In succession, then, we will examine the metaphysical figure of philosophy and the thought of God that it actualizes, and then the phenomenological figure of philosophy and the possibility that it keeps in store for God.


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The mere evocation of the concept of an “end of metaphysics” gives rise to controversy. That controversy could undoubtedly be avoided if care were taken first to agree on a precise and verifiable concept of “metaphysics” itself. And this holds all the more insofar as, historically, that concept can be defined in an almost univocal manner. In fact it appears only relatively late, but with a clear definition. One of the first to accept it (which does not imply that he made it his own, since he hardly uses it except in commentary on Aristotle and elsewhere with caution), Aquinas establishes its theoretical field precisely: “Metaphysica simul determinat de ente in communi et de ente primo, quod est a materia separatum” [“Metaphysics simultaneously determines (how things stand) concerning being in general and concerning the first being which is separated from matter”]. Despite some decisive modifications concerning, among other things, the meaning of being in general as an objective concept of being, this dual definition is sanctioned by Francisco Suarez as early as the opening of his Disputationes Metaphysicae, a work that itself definitively imposes on modern philosophy the concept and the word metaphysics:

Abstrahit enim haec scientia a sensibilibus, seu materialibus rebus . . . , et res divinas et materia separatas, et communes rationes entis, quae absque materia existere possunt, contemplatur [This science abstracts from sensible and from material things . . . , and it contemplates, on the one hand, the things that are divine and separated from matter and, on the other hand, the common reason of being, which (both) can exist without matter].

This duality of one and the same science that treats simultaneously of beings par excellence and of being in general will lead, with the “scholastic metaphysics” [Schulmetaphysik] of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to the canonical scheme of “metaphysics” as divided into metaphysica generalis (sive ontologia) and metaphysica specialis (theologia rationalis, psychologia rationalis, cosmologia rationalis). Kant’s critique stands entirely within this arrangement, since the threefold refutation of special


metaphysics in the “Transcendental Dialectic” of the *Critique of Pure Reason* rests, as is often forgotten, on the rejection in the “Analytic of Principles” of the “proud name of . . . ontology.” Thus, within a simple history of concepts, *metaphysics* is defined as follows: the system of philosophy from Suarez to Kant as a single science bearing at one and the same time on the universal of common being and on the being (or the beings) par excellence. This textual fact seems hard to contest.

But the fact remains to be interpreted. The historically narrow sense of *metaphysics* follows from its strict definition; but, precisely, can we confirm this notion conceptually? Can we read in it anything more than a scholastic, or even pedagogical, nomenclature that is without any authentically speculative scope and that is, in any case, incapable of bringing us to the heart of the question of metaphysics? This suspicion would be a serious threat if we did not have at our disposal a conceptual elaboration of this common notion of “metaphysics”—the elaboration furnished by Heidegger in the section of *Identity and Difference* entitled “The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics.” Here we will focus on only one thesis from that decisive text. Indeed, the principal difficulty of metaphysical science does stem from the problematic character of its unity. How can one and the same [*una et eadem*] science treat at the same time [*simul*] of common being (and therefore of no one being in particular) and of the being par excellence (and therefore of a supremely particular being)? To be sure, it is a question in both cases of an abstraction, but taken in two opposite senses: in one case, an abstraction toward all real being and thus an abstraction only of reason; in the other case, an abstraction with a view to the being that is all the more concrete insofar as no

5. Such is the scope of the famous declaration, whose radicality and complexity are nevertheless often underestimated: “And the proud name of an ontology that claims to supply, in a systematic doctrine, an a priori knowledge of things in general [*überhaupt or in commun*] (for example the principle of causality), must give place to the modest name of a simple analytic of pure understanding” (Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 2d ed., vol. 3 of *Kants Werke* [1787; Berlin 1968], p. 207 [A247/B304]; trans. mod. Norman Kemp Smith, under the title *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* [London, 1964], p. 264). See also p. 546 [A845/B873]; p. 661. Of course, it would remain to be known whether *ontologia*, in its historical acception (from Godenius to Johann Clauberg), ever claimed to accomplish anything more and anything other than a “simple analytic of pure understanding,” since it never claimed being as its object, but only the cogitabile (see the documents gathered in Courtine, *Suarez et le système de la métaphysique*, pp. 246–93, 422–35). Has the hypothesis ever been taken seriously that “ontology,” understood historically, never dared to confront being as such? Wouldn’t this fact have to call into question the immediate possibility of a science of being as being that would not, first, be a science of being as thinkable and therefore a submission of the *ens in quantum ens* to representation? Wouldn’t one have to be amazed that the very term *ontologia* remained unknown to Aristotle and the medieval and was established only by the moderns, in a situation that was explicitly assumed as Cartesian? See Johann Clauberg, *Metaphysica de ente, Quae rectius Ontosophia* (1664), in *Opera Omnia Philosophica*, ed. Johann Schalbruch, 2 vols. (1691; Hildesheim, 1968), 1:283–340, esp. sec. 8, p. 283 n.c.
materiality affects it and thus a real abstraction. Now Heidegger goes beyond this superficial but traditional opposition by proposing to read the relation between the two functions of the same “metaphysics” as the relation of two intersecting and reciprocal foundations:

Being [das Sein] shows itself in the unconcealing overcoming as that which allows whatever arrives to lie before us, as the grounding [Gründen] in the manifold ways in which beings are brought about before us. Beings [das Seiende] as such, [namely, as] the arrival that keeps itself concealed in unconcealedness, is the grounded [Gegründete], which, as grounded and thus effected [Erwirktes], grounds in its way, namely, effects, and therefore causes [gründet, nämlich wirkt, d.h. verursacht]. The conciliation of the grounding and the grounded [von Gründenden und Gegründetem] as such does not hold them one outside of the other, but one for the other.6

The inner unity of “metaphysics,” which allows it not to fall apart into two unconnected sciences, stems from the fact that, between the science of being in general and the science of the being par excellence, the single institution of the ground is at work in modes that are intrinsically conciliated. Common Being grounds beings, even the beings par excellence; in return, the being par excellence, in the mode of causality, grounds common Being: “Being grounds beings, and beings, as what is most of all, cause Being” [“gründet Sein das Seiende, begründet das Seiende als das Seiendste das Sein”] (ID, p. 68; p. 69). In and beyond the scholastic notion of “metaphysics,” the onto-theo-logical constitution thus brings out the ultimate concept of “metaphysics” by recognizing its unity in the intersecting conciliation of the ground (by beings as such) with the ground in the mode of causality (by the supreme being). We admit to having at our disposal no other rigorous determination of “metaphysics,” that is, no other determination that is historically confirmed and conceptually operative. Because the determination remains precise it renders thinkable the possibility of “metaphysics” as also its impossibility. And for this reason, too, the determination eventually renders intelligible the relief that goes beyond metaphysics and takes it up again in a higher figure.

The definition that renders metaphysics intelligible also allows the thought that “metaphysics” might become impossible. The delimitation


Throughout Marion’s essay I use the capitalized Being to indicate the infinitival form of the noun [Être, das Sein] as distinct from the participial form [l’étant, das Seiende], which I render as being or beings.—TRANS.
of the possible necessarily implies both these postulations, with equal right. The reciprocal foundation of onto-theo-logy offers a working hypothesis—in my eyes the most powerful—for the historian of philosophy. It also allows us to understand how it was possible to speak of an “end of metaphysics.” Nietzsche’s critique of philosophy as a Platonism to be inverted and subverted is in fact perfectly in line with the Heideggerian hypothesis. For that critique amounts first of all to a critique of the concept of being in general, reduced to the undistinguished level of one of the “highest concepts,” which means the most general, the emptiest concepts, the last smoke of evaporating reality.” Nietzsche here contests the legitimacy of an abstraction in general from matter and from the sensible, and thus the traditional condition of possibility for a science of being in general [metaphysica generalis]. Reciprocally, Nietzsche denies that any being par excellence might, from an imperceptible otherworld, exercise over common being the function of foundation (and, within his problematic, of “vengeance”). Neither as logical principle, nor as universal cause, nor as “moral God,” is the least causa sui any longer admissible. Why would beings as such, that is, as sensible, necessitate that another being overdetermine them as their ground? Why, then, would that which is furthermore have to be grounded—instead of answering for itself by itself alone? The original function of the science of the being par excellence [metaphysica specialis] is thus called into question. This double disqualification is finally unified in the single identification between becoming (common being, metaphysica generalis) and Being (the being par excellence, metaphysica specialis): “To impose the seal of Being on becoming . . . —the height of speculation!” Nothing can ground since nothing calls for or necessitates a ground. Metaphysics no longer has grounds for being, nor Being a metaphysical ground. Nietzsche therefore confirms negatively the Heideggerian definition of metaphysics as the onto-theo-logical system of reciprocal foundation between the being par excellence and common being.

What must be concluded from this? First, something obvious: the definition of metaphysics that is most pertinent, both historically and conceptually, also allows one to challenge it. The thought of the ground, precisely because it can account for beings as a whole, can also be denied as ground. For if the ground imposes itself metaphysically through its


9. La métaphysique n’a plus lieu d’être, ni l’être de lieu métaphysique.—Trans.
universal capacity to respond to the question, Why a being rather than
nothing? it exposes itself to the nihilistic refutation that asks, Why a rea-
son rather than nothing? The ground ensures the legitimacy of meta-
physics but not of itself. Now, the self-evidence of the question, Why?
can—and undoubtedly must—always become blurred when faced with
the violence of the question that asks, Why ask why? And if metaphysics
is indeed defined as the thought of a universal foundation, it cannot not
founder when the self-evidence of the obligation of a foundation of being
is called into question. This limitation of “metaphysics” is all the stronger,
first, insofar as it results directly from its definition, which is maintained
but turned back against itself, and, next, insofar as a mere suspicion (why
ask why?) and not even a demonstration is enough for metaphysics to be
invalidated in point of fact. The “end of metaphysics” is thus in no way
an optional opinion; it is a fact of reason. Whether we accept it or not, it
inevitably holds sway over us as an event that has arisen. The very fact
that one can deny it and that, in order to do this, one must argue against
it and therefore acknowledge it, confirms it sufficiently. 10 It is a question
of a fact, and of a fact that is in some way neutral, admitting and affecting
equally all the theoretical options. To refuse the fact of the “end of meta-
physics,” moreover, seems even less defensible insofar as it is a matter of
a transitive concept. Its transitivity is formulated as follows: just as the
onto-theo-logical definition of metaphysics directly implies at least the
possibility of the “end of metaphysics,” so the “end of metaphysics” directly
implies the possibility of the “end of the end of metaphysics.” 11 There is
no paradox in this: as soon as “metaphysics” admits of a concept that is
precise, historically verifiable, and theoretically operative, it follows that
this concept can undergo a critique proportionate to its limits but also
offer, thanks to those very limits, the possible horizon of its overcoming.
It is, on the contrary, as long as the concept of “metaphysics” is lacking
that the question, beyond its crisis, also remains closed concerning the
philosophy to come and thus present philosophy. The “end” [Ende], Hei-
degger suggested, remains fundamentally a “place” [Ort]. If the concept

10. There are several ways to deny the “end of metaphysics.” It can be a matter
of postulating that “metaphysics” remains identical with itself, without any real history. But
then one runs the risk either of repeating the presuppositions of nihilism without recogniz-
ing them (thus Blondel, with the philosophy of will, and Schopenhauer) or of producing
ahistorically a philosophy that was never professed (thus Maritain inserting an “intuition of
Being” into the texts of Aquinas for the needs of the current existentialism; thus Cohen
and Natorp for the “return to Kant”). Or, more positively, one runs the risk of having to
reconstruct an author against the unanimous tradition that claims him as its own by de-
forming him (Gilson for St. Thomas). Or, on the contrary, it can be a matter of attempts at
“overcoming” metaphysics that reproduce without knowing it (or without wanting to know
it) metaphysics’s most classic theses and aporias—thus Carnap and the first logical positiv-
ism rediscovering the difficulties of empiricism.

11. Jean-Luc Marion, “La Fin de la fin de la métaphysique,” Laval théologique et philo-
sophique 42 (Feb. 1986): 23–43.
of “metaphysics” fixes its limits and thus sets its end, that end itself remains fertile with a still-intact purpose for philosophy. The transitivity of “metaphysics” leads not only to its “end” but also to its own overcoming—more than a metaphysics at its limit, a meta-metaphysics.

At the point where we still stand, it remains that the “end of metaphysics” exerts itself most visibly on one privileged point—the being par excellence. Indeed, if the figure of the foundation no longer allows us in general to legitimate the concept of “metaphysics,” it follows in particular that the assimilation of God with the function of ultimate ground becomes (or can become) illegitimate. This identification runs through the entire course of philosophy and its metaphysical figure; but it always interprets this ground on the basis of effectivity or actuality: “ἡ οὐσία ὧν ἐνέργεια” according to Aristotle; “purus actus non habens aliens de potentialitate” for Aquinas; “causa sui” following Descartes; “sufficient Reason for the universe” with Leibniz. By “God,” metaphysics therefore means the being par excellence that operates as and through efficiency such that, in the metaphysica specialis, it can thereby ensure a ground for every common being. The “end of metaphysics” provokes the “death” of this “God.” But, against the aggressive or resigned commonplaces that seize upon this theoretical event, one must also measure its true scope. It is not a matter of denying the least greatness to this determination of the divine by the efficiency of the ground, nor is it a matter of underestimating its theoretical fecundity. It is simply a matter of honestly posing this question: Does the effectivity of the ground allow to be thought truly the way in which God is God, even in philosophy? Even for the “God of the philosophers and the scholars,” do “causa sui,” “sufficient Reason,” “purus actus,” or “ἐνέργεια” offer a name that is sufficiently divine to make God appear? At the very least, it is impossible today not to admit if only the possibility of a suspicion. Now, it is this simple possibility that suffices to recognize, in the “end of metaphysics,” the “death of God.” For the divinity of God should not be capable of lacking. If therefore it is lacking, if only imperceptibly, then God is already no longer at issue—but rather “God,” who by his quotation marks is stigmatized as an idol.

4

If the “death of God” in philosophy belongs essentially to the “end of metaphysics,” if the latter follows essentially from the concept of “meta-

physics,” then the overcoming of onto-theology becomes the condition for surpassing the naming of “God” in philosophy as efficient ground.

It remains to be decided whether philosophy itself can escape its metaphysical figure and thus its metaphysical destiny. To be sure, Heidegger postulated a strict equivalence between “metaphysics” and “philosophy,” to the advantage of “thought.” But besides the fact that, in certain decisive periods even after 1927 he himself claimed “metaphysics” as that into which thought had to introduce itself, his first step back out of “metaphysics,” Being and Time, remains strictly philosophical. How can it do so? By presupposing phenomenology as the method for ontology (taken in a sense radically renewed by ontological difference). In this way, he limited himself simply to repeating the gesture of Husserl, who with the Ideas of 1913 posited the equivalence between phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy. Despite the hesitations of the two greatest phenomenologists, one therefore could not speak of an ambiguous or undecided relation between phenomenology and metaphysics. One can simply grant that the radical innovation that phenomenology accomplishes in (and for) philosophy has perhaps not yet been measured fully in its most decisive meaning. We must therefore sketch it out, if only in broad strokes.

Phenomenology is instituted by a tautological principle, the “principle of non-presupposition,” which is formulated as early as 1900 in the opening of the second volume of the Logical Investigations: “strict exclusion of all statements not permitting of a comprehensive phenomenological realization.”13 The tautology is real but nevertheless meaningful. There is phenomenology when and only when a statement gives a phenomenon to be seen; what does not appear in one fashion or another does not enter into consideration. To understand is ultimately to see. To speak is to speak in order to render visible—to speak in order to see. Otherwise, to speak means nothing. But how are we to see? How does the statement make itself seen, taking on the status of a phenomenon? Husserl will respond more explicitly to this second question in the opening of the Ideas of 1913, where he posits the “principle of principles,” which states “that every originarily donating intuition is a source of right for cognition, that everything that offers itself [sich darbietet] to us in originary ‘intuition’ (so to speak, in its fleshly actuality) must be received exactly as it gives itself out to be [als was es sich (da) gibt].”14 To be realized as a phenomenon signifies being given in an actuality without reserve,

a “fleshly [leibhaft] actuality.” For a statement, to appear phenomenally amounts to assuming flesh; the phenomenon shows the flesh of the discourse. How does the statement obtain this phenomenal flesh? Through intuition [Anschauung or Intuition, equally]. One intuition, whatever it may be, is sufficient for the phenomenon, the flesh of the discourse, to occur. Indeed, intuition operates an absolutely indisputable hold, and it operates an ultimate cognition, since only another intuition can contradict a first intuition, so that in the last instance there always remains an intuition. Of all the acts of cognition, intuition accomplishes the most fleshly. The flesh of the discourse appears to the flesh of the mind—the phenomenon to intuition. Phenomenology calls this encounter a donation: intuition gives the phenomenon, the phenomenon gives itself through intuition. To be sure, this donation can always be examined; it can always be authenticated or not; it can always admit limits—but it can never be questioned or denied, except by the authority of another intuitive donation. This confirms the universal validity of the “principle of principles.”

Though it is often underestimated, one could not meditate too much on the scope of this principle. (a) The “principle of principles,” setting intuition to work as the ultimate instance of donation, gives rise to the extension of intuition beyond the Kantian prohibition. To sensible intuition are added the intuition of essences and categorial intuition. (b) Since intuition gives in the flesh, the Kantian caesura between the (solely sensible) phenomenon and the thing-in-itself must disappear. This is accomplished through intentionality. (c) Since intuition alone gives, the “I,” even the transcendental and constituting “I,” must remain held by and therefore in an intuition. The “originary impression” temporally precedes consciousness precisely insofar as the latter remains pure, and it imposes on consciousness a facticity that is not at all derivative, but originary. (d) These doctrinal decisions, as determinative as they may be (and none of the later phenomenologists has called them into question), must not divert our attention from their source. The “principle of principles” posits that in the beginning (of philosophy and, first, of experience), there is only intuition; but insofar as it gives every phenomenon and initiates phenomenality in general, intuition is at work prior to any a priori as an originary a posteriori. Hence this essential paradox: in phe-


Source de droit [source of right or rightful, legitimate source] is the French rendering here of Husserl’s German Rechtsquelle, which Gibson gives as “source of authority” and which Kersten translates as “legitimizing source.”—TRANS.

15. The French here is au principe. Playing on the biblical “in principio,” the passage refers to Husserl’s discussion in Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, sec. 24, of the “genuine sense” of principium.—TRANS.
nomenology the sole legitimate a priori becomes the a posteriori itself. The formula “principle of all principles” must not lead us astray. The principle here is that there is not any principle at all, if at least by principle we mean that which precedes, “that starting from which.”  

Or, in other words, what takes the place of a principle, namely intuition as donation, always precedes the consciousness of it that we receive as after the fact. The reduplication of the “principle” displayed by the “principle of principles” therefore must especially not be understood as the statement of another principle (after those of identity or of sufficient reason) that would be more essentially a priori than the preceding ones but rather, in the manner of a superlative, as the (non)principle that surpasses all the previous principles insofar as it states that in the beginning there is no (transcendental) a priori principle but indeed an intuitive a posteriori: donation precedes all and always. Unambiguously, therefore, phenomenology goes beyond metaphysics in the strict measure that it gets rid of any a priori principle in order to admit donation, which is originary precisely insofar as it is a posteriori for the one who receives it. Phenomenology goes beyond metaphysics insofar as it gives up the transcendental project in order to allow the development of an empiricism that is finally radical—finally radical because it no longer limits itself to sensible intuition but admits all originally donating intuition.

This reversal of the a priori principle in favor of the a posteriori immediately entails two determinative theses concerning ontologia and ground, respectively. The first follows directly from donation: the appearance of phenomena is operative without having recourse (at least necessarily and in the first instance) to Being. Indeed, here it is a matter of any “intuition” whatsoever, of the fact of its “giving itself,” and of “fleshy presence.” These three terms suffice to define the perfect phe-nomenality of a phenomenon without in any way having recourse, for all that, to Being, to beings, and even less to an “objective concept of being.” One might legitimately ask whether every phenomenon, inasmuch as appearing, does not at least initially dispense with Being—a phenomenon without Being. Consequently, phenomenology could free itself absolutely not only from all metaphysica generalis (ontologia), 17 but also from the ques-


17. I willingly take up a formula that Emmanuel Levinas advances only with reservation: “Phenomenology is only a radical mode of experience” (Emmanuel Levinas, Le Temps et l’autre [Paris, 1983], p. 34).

tion of Being [Seinsfrage].19 The relief of the metaphysical and ontological concepts by phenomenology is marked by clearly identifiable transpositions. Let us cite the principal ones. (a) Henceforth, actuality is replaced by possibility, in the sense that Heidegger—“Higher than actuality stands possibility”—reverses Aristotle’s fundamental thesis “actuality [ἐνέργεια] is thus prior to potentiality [δύναμις] according to genesis and time,” as well as according to ὄσια.20 (b) Certitude as the privileged mode of truth is replaced by donation. What the ego defines according to the limits of what it sees [certus, cernere] is replaced by the fact of the donation of the phenomenon by itself, according to its own requirements. (c) ὄσια, as the privileged sense of being, which is thus the owner of its own goods (according to the primary—landowning—sense of the Greek term), is replaced by the given of Being, which straightaway defines every being as a being-given.21 The being-given designates being such that, for it, its Being does not first amount to possessing its own funds (ὄσια) but to receiving itself in Being, to receiving Being, or, rather, to receiving the opportunity to be [recevoir d’être]. In all of these cases, one would have to extend to every being-given the status of a beyond of beingness [ἐπέκεινα τῆς ὄσιας], which Plato reserved solely for the ἴδεα “τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ.”22 General metaphysics, as ontologia, thus would have to yield to a general phenomenology of the donation of all being-given, of which the Seinsfrage could eventually constitute but a simple region or a particular case. The relief of metaphysics (here, of general metaphysics) by phenomenology goes all the way to this point of radicality.

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Thus we come to the second of the theses that follow from the “principle of principles.” This one concerns the metaphysica specialis in its more specifically theological function. Following Heidegger but also the facts

19. See also my Réduction et donation, pp. 280–89.
21. “The given of Being” [le donné d’être] defines every being as “a being-given” [un étant-donné]. With the hyphenation of étant-donné, which we translate as being-given, Marion creates a single term that resonates on several levels. On the one hand, one can read the simple construction wherein a noun, l’étant or un étant, is modified by an adjective, donné, thus yielding the given being or a given being. On the other hand, one can also read the common French locution “étant donné (que),” which in its normal usage means “being given (that)” or “seeing that.” Phenomenology allows one to think the being-given in every given being, and thus the precedence of donation over beings and their Being. The term donation itself can convey at least three interrelated senses: giving, givenness, and the given.—Trans.
of the history of philosophy, we admitted that in metaphysics “God” has in essence the function of ultimate ground, of “highest Reason,” of \textit{causa sui}. It is not a matter here of arguing whether this interpretation of the divine function is suitable nor even whether it offers, with the ground, a sufficiently divine figure of God according to a renewed problematic of the divine names. It is simply a matter of asking whether the connection between “God” and all other beings, or—what amounts to the same thing—with being in general, can be understood and realized as a ground, or even according to an efficient causality, from the moment that the “principle of all principles” has overdetermined the fact and the effect of being by the most original intuitive donation such that being in effect (and thus calling for a grounding cause) is replaced by the being-given (being inasmuch as given). If intuition of itself and by itself alone offers not only the fact of the being-given but above all its “source of right,” why would this phenomenon still ask for the rights of its occurrence \textit{[fait]} from a cause, which would interpret it as an effect? Moreover, would donation have to be thought starting from the effect or, on the contrary, would the effect have to be received as an (impoverished) figure of donation? Precisely inasmuch as being-given, the phenomenon itself does not have any Why? and therefore does not call for any. In phenomenology, the ground is not so much criticized or refuted (as is essentially still the case in Nietzsche, who undoubtedly never truly reaches his “third metamorphosis”), \textsuperscript{23} as stricken with theoretical uselessness. “God” could not be thought as the ground of being as soon as the originary donation delivers (sends, gives) being as a being-given and therefore delivers (frees) it of any requirement of a ground. Consequently, no longer capable of being thought \textit{ad extra} under the figure of the ground, “God” could also no longer be thought \textit{ad intra} under the figure of the \textit{causa sui}. Thus the relief of the \textit{metaphysica generalis} of being as grounded effect by the phenomenological donation of the being-given inevitably entails the relief of the \textit{metaphysica specialis} of the foundation by the phenomenological “source of right” recognized in the being-given.

The denunciation—more virulent than argued—of a supposed transposition of special metaphysics into phenomenology, even of a theo-

logical highjacking of phenomenology, betrays above all a deviation that is finally rather positivistic in its approach to the phenomenological method itself. But it conveys, without thematizing it, a fundamental error concerning phenomenology. To stigmatize a return of special metaphysics in phenomenology presupposes that such a return is phenomenologically possible, but it proves to be, by definition, impossible where the requirement of the ground is in principle no longer operative. One might respond, perhaps, that this transposition has in fact taken place, thus proving that certain supposed phenomenologists no longer merit the title—which is precisely what one wanted to show. But this reasoning, in its turn, is open to several objections. First, it implies that an essential and often eminent part of what has always been recognized as belonging to the domain of phenomenological method has in fact not ceased to betray it. This remains to be demonstrated conceptually and in detail—an immense and delicate task. But that undertaking would quickly become dogmatic, since it would presuppose not only that there is a phenomenological method that is unique and that precedes all doctrines but further that that method has not evolved since the idealist and constitutive moment of Husserl, between 1913 and 1929, all the way up to the present. None of these points is self-evident, especially insofar as it belongs essentially to phenomenology that the a posteriori render it possible and therefore that no a priori prohibition predetermine it. If there is a philosophy that works with an open method and bare thought, it is phenomenology. Against metaphysics, it won the right to make use for itself of the “Return to the things themselves!”—which one might gloss with “Prohibiting is prohibited!” The sole criterion in phenomenology issues from the fact—from the phenomena that an analysis manages to display, from what the analysis renders visible. That which shows itself justifies itself by that very fact.

But if a reestablishment of the metaphysica specialis in phenomenology appears to be a pure contradiction methodologically, that nevertheless does not imply that phenomenology remains unfamiliar with what the metaphysica specialis treated at the metaphysical level. Could not the already-established relief of the metaphysica generalis by phenomenology also be repeated with respect to what the metaphysica specialis treated in

24. This slogan, moreover, could also translate the “Prinzip der Voraussetzunglosigkeit.” On this debate, see the arguments of Jean-Louis Chrétien, L’Appel et la réponse (Paris, 1992), and of Michel Henry, “Parole et religion: La Parole de Dieu,” Phénoménologie et théologie, ed. Courtine (Paris, 1992), pp. 129–60. On the question of phenomenological method, we take as our own this remark of Didier Franck:

Such a method goes beyond the strict framework of descriptive phenomenology, all the while finding support in it. But was this not already the case with the Husserlian analyses of time, of the other, and of the body, and is not phenomenology, from turn to turn, characterized by the fact that it does not cease to distance itself from itself and that these distances end up in a certain way belonging to it? [Didier Franck, “Le Corps de la différence,” Philosophie, no. 34 (Apr. 1992): 86]
the onto-theo-logical mode? This question does not aim at any restoration—the absurdity of which we have just highlighted—but a relief: to return to the things themselves, and eventually to the same things, in order to let them appear no longer according to the figure of ground but according to that of donation, no longer—in this case—according to efficiency (being effect, *causa sui*) but according to the being-given. For the three beings that were privileged by the *metaphysica specialis*, namely, the world [*cosmologia rationalis*], the finite mind [*psychologia rationalis*], and “God” [*theologia rationalis*] demand, in the capacity of “thing itself,” that we test the possibility (or impossibility) of their phenomenal apparition and therefore of the intuition that could (or could not) inscribe them in the being-given. This requirement could not in any case be challenged, since it results directly from the phenomenological reduction—to suspend all transcendence precisely in order to measure what is thus given in immanence. Moreover, the phenomenological relief of that which was treated by the *metaphysica specialis* already has a long history going back to Husserl. A few results confront us today as established facts. First concerning the world: it is the early Husserl, in fact, who relieves the classical metaphysical aporia (Descartes, Kant) of the necessity, indeed of the impossibility, of demonstrating the existence of the external “world.” Intentionality (and then Heidegger’s *In-der-Welt-sein*) directly sets consciousness ecstatically in the world without the screen of representation; it finds the world always already given because, more essentially, it is given originally to the world. The relation of constitution between consciousness and its objects will exploit intentionality as far as to put it in danger, but the late Husserl will bring the noetico-noematic relation back under the firm control of the “principle of correlation.” In this way, the question of the world definitively quits the horizon of objectivation for that of the being-given—the first being-given that occurs to me. Next, concerning the finite mind: the obsession of the Cartesian ego still keeps Husserl and even Heidegger from giving up its interpretation, which is, if not still theoretical, at least still constituting, if only through “anticipatory resoluteness.” From this followed the disappearance of ethics or its subordination to theory. It is the definitive merit of Emmanuel Levinas to have established in an extraordinary Copernican revolution that ontology, even fundamental ontology, was able not to reach the ground because that ground did not belong to the domain of theoretical philosophy but of ethics. Not only did ethics thus become *philosophia prima*—which, by itself, would still remain an arrangement of metaphysics—but it centered the ego toward the always already open, offered, and abandoned face of the other [*d’autrui*] and thus toward the being-given of the other. The ego no longer ensures any foundation by representing (itself); it

25. *Aux choses mêmes, et éventuellement aux mêmes choses.*—TRANS.
finds itself always already preceded by the being-given of the other, whose unobjectifiable counterintentionality it suffers. Along this line, the passage from the ego to what I call the “interloqué” offers no difficulty: one need simply generalize the reversed intentionality to other being-givens.26 According to the rule of donation, the ego thus attains a secondariness27 that is nevertheless more phenomenal than any representational primacy.

There remains the question of “God,” which for obvious reasons has remained the question least approached by phenomenology. These obvious reasons spring from different but convergent reservations on the part of Husserl and of Heidegger. Husserl clearly indicated (and without returning to the matter, even in his last texts) that the assumption of any “God” at all fell under the blow of the reduction, that “God,” transcendent in every sense, therefore did not appear.28 When Heidegger marks God with the seal of the “causa sui” (ID, pp. 57, 70; pp. 60, 72), he is always and explicitly dealing with the “God” of metaphysics. Can phenomenology not go further than these denials or these warnings?29 Some would like to leave a choice only between philosophical silence and faith without reason. It is clear that such an alternative most often has the sole intention of dwelling serenely in silence while confiscating reason. But outside of revealed theology there is no reason to prohibit reason—here, philosophy in its phenomenological bearing—from pushing reason to its end, that is, to itself, without admitting any other limits than those of phenomenality. The question then becomes, What phenomenal face can the “God of the philosophers and the scholars” assume—if he ever assumes one? More precisely, what phenomenon could claim to offer a luminous shadow of this “God” so as to correspond to the relief of being by the being-given? Does one not, perhaps inevitably, have to answer the being-given with a giver, indeed a being-giver [étant-donateur]? And in that case, how could one distinguish that being-giver from a founding


27. Marion is here using the psychological term secondarité, which “is said of persons in whom present circumstances do not immediately provoke any reactions and who constantly refer to their past and to their future” (Robert).—TRANS.


being or causa sui,\textsuperscript{30} and how then could one not stigmatize in this long operation a simple restoration of the most metaphysical theologia rationalis?

As lucid as it may be, this objection remains convincing only if one ignores two arguments. (a) In the hypothesis where a giver would indeed correspond to the being-given, the giver would be equivalent to a (metaphysical) ground only if it kept the status of a being and only if the donation of the being-given made by the giver were still comprehended within the horizon of causality understood as efficiency. But neither of these assumptions is self-evident. It could be, on the contrary, that donation can arise only once causality has been radically surpassed, in a mode whose own rationality causality does not even suspect. It could be that donation obeys requirements that are infinitely more complex and powerful than the resources of efficient causality. Moreover, even in the history of metaphysics, the sudden appearance of efficient causality in the field of “God” marks more the decline than the consecration of theologia rationalis—Leibniz was the equally lucid and powerless witness of this. The objection thus betrays that it depends on metaphysics much more than does the thesis that it contests, since it cannot prevent itself from understanding that thesis hastily and from the start in a metaphysical fashion. (b) A second argument, however, renders these precautions useless. For the answer to the being-given does not assume the figure of the giver but that of the being-given par excellence. If the world can be defined as what appears as the being-given in its totality, if the “I/me” can be designated as what appears as the closest being-given, then “God” would be determined as the being-given par excellence. That excellence indicates neither sufficiency, nor efficiency, nor principality, but the fact that he gives himself and allows to be given more than any other being-given. In short, with “God” it is a question of the being-abandoned.\textsuperscript{31}

The phenomenological figure of “God” as the being-given par excellence can be outlined by following the guiding thread of donation itself. (a) That he is the given par excellence implies that “God” is given without restriction, without reserve, without restraint. “God” is given not at all partially, following this or that outline, like a constituted object that nevertheless offers to the intentional gaze only a specific side of its sensible visibility, leaving to apprehension the duty of giving further that which does not give itself, but absolutely, without the reserve of any outline, with every side open, in the manner of the objects whose dimensions cubist painting caused to explode, in order that all aspects might be juxtaposed, despite the constraints of perspective. “God” is found given with-

\textsuperscript{30} F. Laruelle suggests that we could hardly avoid this conclusion in his remarks, in other respects pertinent and constructive, from “L’Appel et le phénomène,” Revue de métaphysique et de morale 96 (Jan.–Mar. 1991): 27–41.

\textsuperscript{31} L’étant-abandonné. Here as elsewhere, Marion appeals to the resonance of the given [donné], in the abandoned [abandonné].—TRANS.
out reserve or restraint. His evidence displays itself in the atonal tonality of bedazzlement. It follows that God diffuses—what he diffuses remains himself: the Good diffuses itself and therefore what it diffuses still remains itself, perhaps in the way that the modes in which the Spinozist substantia expresses itself still remain that substantia itself. The donation par excellence implies an ecstasy outside of self where the ecstatic self remains all the more itself. While the causa sui can only fold efficiency back upon itself, the donation that "God" accomplishes can remain equal to itself (donation as action) only by standing out ecstatically into that which it gives (donation as gift). If the "God" of metaphysics, according to Malebranche, acts only for himself, then the "God" of phenomenology, exactly on the contrary, acts only for what does not remain (in) him. (b) This donation par excellence entails another consequence: the absolute mode of presence that follows from it saturates every horizon, all horizons, with a dazzling evidence. Now, such a presence without limits (without horizon), which alone precisely suits donation without reserve, cannot present itself as an object, which is necessarily limited. Consequently, it occupies no space, fixes no attention, draws no look. In his very bedazzlement, "God" shines by his absence. Evidence evoids—\(^{32}\) it voids the saturated horizons of any definable visible thing. The absence or unknowability of "God" does not contradict his donation but on the contrary attests to the excellence of that donation. "God" becomes invisible not in spite of his donation but by virtue of that donation. One needs a rather weak estimation of transcendence, or even an already militant refusal, to be scandalized by its invisibility. If we saw it, then it would not be "God." (c) Donation par excellence can thus turn immediately into donation by abandon. The being-given that is absolutely without restraint exerts a phenomenality of such a sort that, according to its intrinsic invisibility, its status as phenomenon might never be acknowledged. The phenomenon par excellence exposes itself, for that very excellence, to not appearing—to remaining in a state of abandon. Indeed, most other phenomena become available to the look that sees them, delimits them, and manipulates them. Here, on the contrary, a radical unavailability follows from radical donation. Donation can thus pass for abandon. And we confirm it.

6

Of course, even if it is decidedly opposed to the metaphysical figure of a causa sui "God," the figure of "God" in phenomenology that we have

\(^{32}\) In this context, the obsolete English term to evoid (to clear out, empty out, remove), in conjunction with the common to void, nicely translates the French évider (to hollow out) in its relation to vider (to empty, vacate, void).—TRAN.
just outlined nevertheless still concerns the “God of the philosophers and the scholars” and in no way the “God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.” But one could again object that the figure of “God” in phenomenology is hardly distinguished from this latter. The being-given par excellence in fact bears the characteristics of a very precise type of manifestation—that of the saturated phenomenon or, more precisely, of the saturated phenomenon typical of revelation. Can one not here again fear a confusion between phenomenology and revealed theology? It seems to me that such a confusion can be avoided through two clear distinctions. (a) Of itself, phenomenology can identify the saturated phenomenon of the being-given par excellence only as a possibility—not only as a possibility as opposed to actuality but above all a possibility of donation itself. The characteristics of the being-given imply that it gives itself without prevision, without measure, without analogy, without repetition; in short, it remains unavailable. Its phenomenological analysis therefore bears only on its re-presentation, its “essence,” and not directly on its being-given. The intuitive realization of that being-given 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 domains. (b) To be sure, phenomenology can describe and construct the being-given and even the being-given par excellence, but it certainly does not fall to phenomenology to approach the donation that is identified with and in a face. Or, rather, even if it can in a strict sense make the face one of its privileged themes, it cannot and must not understand that face as a face of charity; when the being-given turns to charity (the loved or loving being, the lover in the strict sense), phenomenology yields to revealed

35. This distinction was very shrewdly noted by Derrida in a text dedicated to Jan Patočka but above all to Christian “logic”:

It needs to think the possibility of such an event [revelation], but not the event itself. A major difference which allows one to hold such a discourse without reference to religion as an established dogmatics and to propose a thinking genealogy of the possibility and of the essence of the religious that is not an article of faith. . . . The difference here is subtle and unstable, and it would require shrewd and vigilant analyses. On several accounts and in diverse senses, the discourses of Levinas and Marion, and perhaps that of Ricoeur, share this situation with that of Patočka; [namely, of offering a] non-dogmatic doublet of dogma . . . , in any case thinking, which “repeats” without religion the possibility of religion. [Derrida, “Donner la mort,” in L’Éthique du don: Jacques Derrida et la pensée du don, ed. Jean-Marie Rábate and Michael Wetzel (Paris, 1992), pp. 52–55]

Our only disagreement has to do with the identification of this “doublet” indifferently as “philosophical, metaphysical”; when it is a matter of thinking the possibility, and especially the radical possibility, of the impossible itself, phenomenology alone is suitable—and not at all metaphysics, which is a thought of actuality par excellence.
theology exactly as the second order, according to Pascal, yields to the third. Here again, no confusion could creep in.

Quite obviously, these theses could not here be given an entirely adequate development. They nevertheless will suffice to indicate what new path phenomenology shows, beyond the metaphysics that it relieves, to philosophy—and without returning to the *metaphysica specialis*. And on that path, the rational thought of God, which philosophy cannot forget without losing its own dignity, or even its mere possibility, finds at least a certain coherence.