The Extra-Phenomenal

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Abstract

Everything is phenomenon, everything is gift, or everything is given. This presupposition of phenomenology, which makes givenness (Gegebenheit) the starting point for phenomenality, is not altogether self-evident. It is not sufficient to look merely at the reverse of the gift (phenomenology of the night), but it is a matter of questioning the impossibility of even giving (the night of phenomenology). Questioning the strategies of the contemporary reappropriations of Kant—radicalization (Heidegger), disproportion (Ricœur), and inversion (Marion)—this text works under a fourth possibility, seldom examined and yet still envisaged by Kant: the “Extra-Phenomenal”, or in other words, the “Chaos”, the “pell-mell”, the “Cinnabar”, or the “melee of sensations”.

Keywords: phenomenology, donation, night, extra-phenomenal, Cinnabar, melee of sensations, madness, trauma, sickness.

We have, on the one hand, the “phenomenology of night” and, on the other, the “night of phenomenology”; there is an immense gulf, indeed an untraversable distance, between the two. To speak of the night of phenomenology is not to speak of non-appearance in the possible horizon of appearing but of the suppression of appearing itself—the very conditions of appearance. If the possibility of appearing itself were to disappear, then it is not “non-manifestation” which would be in question but, rather, the non-possibility of “manifesting.” In contrast to the possibility of the impossi-

bling of the phenomenon—the non-appearance of a phenomenon that could

1 ‘Appearing’ here translates the French apparoir. Typically used in a juridical context, the verb primarily means “to make oneself present” or, more colloquially, “to show up” (He appears before the court.). When used in conjunction with faire (faire apparoir), it means “to evidence,” “to indicate” (“The defendant’s self-contradictory testimony evidences his guilt.). Falque uses the verb apparoir instead of the verb apparaitre, which lacks the twofold juridical connotation, and the noun apparition, which would refer to appearances or phenomena in the ontic sense. Thus, “the suppression of appearing [apparoir]” does not denote the non-presence of possible phenomena but, more radically, the impossibility of “showing up” and, thus, of “evidencing” givenness—something which non-presence, or lack, can still do.
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appear or that remains withdrawn—there exists (or rather doesn’t) the impossibility of the possibility of the phenomenon. This impossibility is not the closed horizon of existence (death, for example) but the suppression of the possibility itself of a horizon within which something might still appear: the annihilation of all transcendental loci of appearing. Such suppression or annihilation could result, for example, from radical evil, trauma, or psychological disturbance broadly construed, each of which inflicts suffering to the point of numbness and ultimately leads to the disappearance of the possibility itself of feeling. Paradoxically, evil [mal] does the most harm [fait mal] when it no longer hurts [ne fait plus mal], or when the vital conditions by which I am affected are annulled as such.2

Thus, we cannot always be content to speak of phenomena (Husserl), appearance (Heidegger), epiphany (Levinas), givenness (Marion), speech (Chrétien), inexperience (Lacoste), which is nonetheless a mode of experience, or auto-affection (Henry), whose ownness [le propre] consists precisely in always being affected by itself.3 Put differently, the entire tradition of phenomenology (and not just in France) has been fixated—consciously or not—on “appearance” to such a degree that non-appearance has been understood solely as the privation of a phenomenon that could or should otherwise appear. Thus, if there is a “dark night of the soul”—to borrow John of the Cross’ spiritual term—then it consists merely in waiting for clarity, meaning that any darkness presupposes or is rendered possible by the light.4

However, can we truly say that all night, all darkness, is nothing but the privation of light or of some awaited phenomenon, as if phenomenality determined the horizon of all givens? Is there not some “other night,” to use Maurice Blanchot’s term—not the primordial night of all-encompassing darkness nor the romanticized night that falls upon us in the evening but the night in which “everything has disappeared,” the alien night that neither shelters us nor lifts upon dawns arrival. The night that casts us out. “This night is never pure night. It is essentially impure. It is not that beautiful diamond, the void, which Mallarmé contemplates,” says Blanchot. “In the night [the phenomenology of night],” he continues, “one can die; we reach oblivion, But this other night [the night of phenomenology] is the death no

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2 For more on this point, see my article “Mal et finitude. Dialogue avec Ricoeur et Levinas,” Etudes théologiques et religieuses, no. 2 (forthcoming): 413-431.

3 This point comes from René Descartes’ “Meditation II: Of the Nature of the Human Mind; and that it is more easily known than the Body” in his Meditations on First Philosophy: “...[I]t is at least quite certain that it seems to me that I see light, that I hear noise and that I feel heat. That cannot be false; properly speaking it is what is in me called feeling...” (The Philosophical Works of Descartes. Trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [1911], 10.). This passage of Descartes is analyzed by Michel Henry in his The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis, trans. Douglas Brick (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1993).

4 John of the Cross, Dark Night of the Soul, trans. Mirabai Starr (New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 2002), 13: “The emptiness of the dark night is a yielding emptiness. It is an emptiness that gives way to the fullness of all possibility...”
one dies, the forgetfulness which gets forgotten. In the heart of oblivion it is memory without rest.”5 Blanchot’s Thomas is “obscure,” then, in that he is nocturnal, or better, in that he himself is Darkness:

[O]utside himself there was something identical to his own thought which his glance or his hand could touch. Repulsive fantasy. Soon the night seemed to him gloomier and more terrible than any night, as if it had in fact issued from a wound of thought which had ceased to think, thought ironically taken as an object by something other than thought. It was night itself.6

In place of the night as lacking light (the night of obscurity), I would privilege, then, the night as denied light altogether (the darkness that is oblivious even to the possibility itself of being brought to light). Not only have apparitions disappeared but also the very possibility of appearing, the horizon as such—hence the extra-phenomenal.

In this way, to question not simply the given but givenness itself—even in its lack, which simply reiterates its presence—is to interrogate the possibility itself of signification. Phenomenology and hermeneutics have, unsurprisingly given their connectedness, both fallen prey to this fixation on appearance in their mutual presupposing of signification. To maintain the well-known Husserlian formula that “all consciousness is consciousness of something” or even Ricoeur’s claim that “[t]he most fundamental phenomenological presupposition of a philosophy of interpretation is that every question concerning any sort of ‘being’ [étant] is a question about the meaning of that ‘being’” is de facto to situate all lived experience and understanding within the paradigm of signification, albeit this paradigm is denied from time to time and the mystery of obscurity is injected therein.7 In overemphasizing openness (Dasein), we fail to see that its negation is not merely closure. What does or would it mean for a door to shut once and for all, to reach a true im-passe because one has forgotten what “getting through it” even means? Better, the issue presented by such an impasse, or dead-end, is precisely that one becomes issueless to oneself, one’s case seems closed, regardless of whether one should or could, in reality, “get through” it. In short, how does

the extra-phenomenal differ from the non-phenomenal? Such is the question signaled by Blanchot’s “outside,” Levinas’ Il y a, Nietzsche’s “chaos,” and Bataille’s “heterogeneity.” They all refer to the erasure of the horizon of phenomenology, which means that immanence is neither leapt beyond through apophatism (Marion), nor burrowed beneath through Khôra (Derrida), nor identified with its frame (Deleuze), nor reduced to pathos (Henry), but obstructed and transformed into radically “alien”:

The reality of heterogeneous elements is not of the same order as that of homogenous elements. Homogenous reality presents itself with the abstract and neutral aspect of strictly defined and identified objects (basically, it is the specific reality of solid objects). Heterogeneous reality is that off a force or shock... [I]t is identical to the structure of the unconscious.8

This heterogeneity, this mode of “resistance,” which is precisely a subtraction of “significance,” poses the question of the limit of phenomenality, even of the act of philosophizing itself. Nevertheless, significance is a constant for all phenomenological thinkers, like a transcendental structure of the given—albeit overturned and even denied from time to time. For this reason, any response to the question thus posed must pass through Kant. Perhaps surprisingly, the Critique of Pure Reason is the starting point for any strategy or method of treating the given. Heidegger, for example, reduces the given to finitude and restricts it to the paradigm of space and time as a priori forms of sensibility. This reduction to finitude, in the eyes of Ricoeur, reveals our fallibility, that is, the limits of our knowledge, the impotence of our will, our fragility. Marion’s saturated phenomenon, however, reverses this move—a reversal which I contest—and inverses rather than surpasses the Kantian categories. However, behind these three different positions vis-à-vis Kant—radicalization (Heidegger), disproportion (Ricoeur), and inversion (Marion)—lies not exactly a fourth possibility but, more precisely, an impossible possibility or, rather, an impossibility of the possible: that which renders null, indeed unimaginable, the possibility itself of “imagining” either the limit, or disproportionality, or the revealed. Kant glimpses such an impossibility in his passage on cinnabar or the “melee of sensations”:

If cinnabar were now red, now black, now light, now heavy, if a human being were now changed into this animal shape, now into that one, if on the longest day the land were covered now with fruit, now with ice and snow, then my empirical imagination would never even get the opportunity to think of heavy cinnabar on the occasion of the representation of the color red.9

Here, we see that an event, a trauma, or a pure hypothesis *ab absurdo* (interpreting Kant strictly) could render impossible the possibility of synthesizing. A “melee of sensations” (Klossowski’s French translation)—rather than an “crowd of phenomena” (Tremsaygues-Pascaud’s French translation) or a “mass of phenomena” (Renaut’s French translation)—could disrupt the transcendental horizon of appearance or phenomenality to the point of disintegrating it as such, thereby blocking appearance altogether—nullifying its limits, the disproportion it signals, or that which overflows it. “Unity of synthesis,” explains Kant, “according to empirical concepts, would be purely accidental...unless these were founded on a transcendental ground of unity, a [melee of sensations] might rush into our soul, without ever forming real experience.”

Pandora’s Box

The extra-experiential—neither the sub-experiential (*Khôra*) nor the super-experiential (Revelation)—is precisely what Heidegger seemed to have seen while treating Nietzsche’s notion of chaos in his Freiburg lecture course from the second semester of 1940. However, he could not afford to plunge into such depths, that is, to see that chaos cannot not be seen because it is itself the impossibility of seeing. In other words, Heidegger peeked inside Pandora’s Box with Kant’s notion of the melee of sensations but chose to reseal it at once because it radically contradicted his fixation on appearance and the presupposition of meaning to which it remained bound:

Kant even speaks of the “melee of sensations,” meaning by that the chaos, the jumble, that crowds us, keeps us occupied, concerns us, washes over us and tunnels through us—one says, with apparently even greater precision, through “our bodies”—not only in the moment of perceiving this blackboard [which bears the chaotic mass of trace markings] but constantly and everywhere.

In this way, Kant directs us towards what Heidegger calls “the region of what can no longer be said.” Right away, though, Heidegger adds the following so as not to tend towards the extra-phenomenal, which would destabilize his paradigm:

To know this thing as a blackboard, we must already have ascertained what we encounter as a “thing”... Must we not also *take back* this invasion by what we encounter through the words in which we have taken hold

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10 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, “Preliminary Explanation of the Possibility of the Categories as Knowledge a priori.”

of what was encountered, in order to possess what is purely encountered, to let it be encountered?¹²

That passage marks Heidegger’s closure of Pandora’s Box, so to speak, or the covering-over of his dis-cover-ery. Heidegger’s thought never moves from presupposed meaning to non-meaning or to the absence of meaning—in fact, anxiety before death raises and arises from the question of meaning. Heidegger always conducts the phenomenon by way of language in order to reach its “true meaning”; he always situates it within thought or poetry and thereby relentlessly pursues meaningfulness. Both death and thought, rather than marking a suppression of the horizon, are precisely the opposite: they constitute the openness or ek-stasis of Dasein by which meaning is given or received even as it withdraws, always ready to manifest itself. Like a rodent laying low in its den, meaning does not stir until a pursuant approach; hence, the phenomenologist is something of a foxhound in that he brings the beast out of hiding without being able to capture or master it. There is, then, a certain passivity in the phenomenologist’s pro-vocation of meaning, as its manifestation often overflows, even overwhels, him. In this way, the phenomenologist himself is put on trial by the phenomenon, as it forces him to admit the fundamental incompetence and incapacity of his “vision,” that is, his ability to find words and attitudes to put in service of the given. Hence, the phenomenologist’s diakonia towards a given phenomenon often results in a neglect of those moments when the possibility of meaningfulness itself is torn asunder, when the very horizon of appearing is wiped away. The abyss, chaos, the void—or, better still, “the extra-phenomenal,” to say it in (non) transcendental terms—has therefore never been treated within phenomenology (though Levinas is close with his Il y a) because the entire tradition conceives phenomenality as necessarily consisting of a constituted and a constituter, even in moments of excess when the former takes precedence over the latter and the categories are reversed. In short, in absence of these criteria, nothing can be given.

In Greek mythology, Zeus prohibited the goddess of “all gifts” [Pandora] from unleashing her box upon the world, as it contained all the evils of humanity (old age, sickness, war, hunger, misery, death, vice, etc.); however, to open it here and thus to face the destruction of all horizons and the blockage of future givens is not to condemn us to such a fate. To open Pandora’s Box is simply to recognize that the rift precedes the revealed. In other words, there is a primordial void that denies the possibility of manifesting—particularly evident in psychoses (depression, obsession, and schizophrenia), which leave us stupefied. Let us follow, then, and radicalize, this remark from Henri Maldiney’s Penser l’homme et la folie:

¹² Heidegger, 78–79.
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This void, the void does not result from numerous and repeated fissures. It is primordial... The moment of collapse cannot be placed. It has always already taken place, but its place cannot be placed psychically. It is nowhere. Something took place that “has no place.” The subject responds in himself and in history to this dimension of absence.13

To be sure, Kant did open the horizon of finitude; he did reveal the basis of human fallibility; and he did break ground for the saturated phenomenon. Ultimately, though, he made a bet and immediately folded his hand, so to speak, and it is up to us to play it out—no small task. Properly speaking, Kant glimpsed the extra-phenomenal but renounced it at once. To conclude his passage on cinnabar, he claims, “There must therefore be something that itself makes possible this reproduction of the appearances by being the a priori ground of a necessary synthetic unity of them.”14 Kant’s claim here resembles the famous turning point in Descartes’ Meditations on First Philosophy: “Such people are insane, and I would be thought equally mad if I modelled myself on them.”15

I set my goal modestly, then, as the “opening of a field” or as the deployment of “contemporary strategies” to recover this notion of chaos, or the extra-phenomenal, because such a recovery consists precisely in a certain reticence. Put differently, my contribution has perhaps the most difficult possible task of pointing to that which is precisely not there. Evidently, much work has already been done to interrogate Kant’s “melee of sensations”—the only true example of this rift or void, this extra- or Il y a—and the category of phenomenality (thinking back to Heidegger’s finitude, Ricoeur’s fallibility and disproportion, and Marion’s saturated phenomenon), but, thankfully, the philosophical task is never complete.

Finitude and Radicalization

Heidegger’s reading of Critique of Pure Reason does have the merit of remaining faithful to Kant’s aim of finding a starting point for metaphysics: space and time as “a priori forms of sensibility,” which Heidegger will rename finitude. “We have undertaken the present interpretation of the Critique of Pure Reason,” explains Heidegger near the end of Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, “in order to bring to light the necessity, insofar as a laying of the foundation of metaphysics is concerned, of posing the

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14 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A 101.
15 Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy. “First Meditation: On what can be called into doubt.” So as not to rehash the Foucault-Derrida debate here, see my reorientation of this passage—in terms of embodiment rather than rationality—“Le fou désincarné” in Descartes et la phénoménologie, ed. Riquier and Pradelle (Paris: Hermann, forthcoming).
fundamental problem of the finitude in man.”¹⁶ The originality of _Kantbuch_ lies, at least partially, in its insistence on finite intuition, hence the importance accorded to the exegesis of the first formula from “Transcendental Aesthetic”: “In whatsoever mode, or by whatsoever means, our knowledge may relate to objects, it is at least quite clear that the only manner in which it immediately relates to them is by means of an intuition.”¹⁷ Put differently, this “crucial sentence” which, according to Heidegger, we must “hammer home,” demands that we always stick to the finite horizon of our existence. Let us not forget that Heidegger considered the _Kantbuch_ (1929) a further development of the second section of _Being and Time_ concerning “Dasein and temporality” (1927).¹⁸ Moreover, he thought one could be sure _in advance_ and _independently_ of an object’s givenness that nothing could be known or perceived outside of the horizon of space and time. Hence, the Kantian notion that noumena, or things in themselves (God, freedom, the beginning of the world, or immortality), could be thought wholly outside the category of “phenomena,” not even as “bracketed” or “suspended,” marks an aspect of Kantianism which Heidegger never found a way to incorporate given his desire to remain within “pure phenomenality.”

Nonetheless, Heidegger’s interpretation of Kant is more complex than a strict respect for the horizon of finitude, as he does not simply reiterate the Kantian categories of space and time as “a priori forms of sensibility” but extends them to a transcendental schema. In Heidegger own words, “As pure intuition, time is that which furnishes an aspect (Anblick) prior to all experience. This is why the pure aspect…which presents itself in such pure intuition must be termed a pure image.” He continues, citing the _Critique of Pure Reason_, “Kant himself states: ‘The pure image of…all objects of the senses in general [is] time.’”¹⁹ We see, then, that Heidegger is interested less in the categories themselves, which is likewise the case for Ricoeur and Marion, than in their figuration or “concretization” enacted by linking the understanding to sensibility via the imagination as the nexus of space and time. The problem, then, is not (or not yet) the lack or excess of the phenomenon with respect to its recipient—a Husserlian, even pseudo-Cartesian, question that would have led Kant astray from his originary radical finitude. On the contrary, the problem is how to maintain a “pure respect” for phenomenality in terms of an insurmountable

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¹⁸ Heidegger, _Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics_. “Preface to the First Edition”: “The analysis of the _Critique of Pure Reason_ proposed here traces back to the second part of _Sein und Zeit_.”

¹⁹ Heidegger, 107, citing _Critique of Pure Reason_, A 142/B 182.
“finitude of transcendence” (or openness). “Far from being ‘confused’, the chapter on schematism is perfectly clear in its construction... This only becomes evident, however, when the finitude of transcendence is comprehended as the ground of the intrinsic possibility (i.e., of the necessity) of metaphysics...”20

On this point, Heidegger’s reading is all but incontrovertible. His radicalization of both Kant’s “a priori forms of sensibility” (the “Transcendental Aesthetic”) and his “schematism” (the “Transcendental Analytic”) as “finitude” is uncompromisingly rigorous. Heidegger takes the Critique of Pure Reason to its logical end on the basis of its own grounding in the a priori horizon of space and time. In other words, he resists overemphasizing the “Transcendental Dialectic” that could either serve to offset the given (the antinomy of pure reason) or lead one to believe that it could be surpassed (the ideal of pure reason). Reading Being and Time retrospectively in light of Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, then, allows us to understand better the attacks—justified in this case—launched by Dominique Janicaud in his Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: “[O]ver the last thirty or so years...[the] trait that distinguishes [French phenomenology] decisively from the time of its first reception...is...the rupture with immanent phenomenality.”21 Heidegger only concerns himself with the relation between horizontal immanence and vertical transcendence—with the exception of denouncing the objectification of the divine as a Super Being according to a so-called “onto-theo-logic”—when it comes to the relation between finitude (horizontal immanence) and Dasein (transcendental openness), hence the expression “finitude of transcendence,” which appears first in Kantbuch. “Transcendental finitude” and “limited openness” are synonyms in that space and time—even within Heideggerian thought—denote a priori structures of phenomenality. The fourfold [Geviert] of his later thought, which is brought together under the title of “the thing [das Ding],” is no exception to this rule.

Since Heidegger’s radicalization proved to be so fruitful, let us continue down his path and radicalize his radicalization in pursuit of what I have called “strategies to recover” chaos, the melee of sensations, or the extra-phenomenal. To do so requires a single question: If, as I have argued, Heidegger chose to reseal Pandora’s Box, so to speak, when he encountered Kant’s melee of sensations in his commentary on Nietzsche’s chaos (1940), then might he have already anticipated this problem in Kantbuch (1929)? This question is not merely a textual-historical matter; it has high stakes for phenomenology as well. Though the extra-phenomenal is identifiable with neither a radicalization (Heidegger), nor a disproportion (Ricoeur), nor an inversion (Marion) of Kantian categories, might Heidegger’s reading...

20 Heidegger, 116–117.

of Kant nonetheless trace, or at least point to, the path I wish to lead here? Our first clue comes not from Kantbuch but from Contributions to Philosophy (1936): “The interpretation of Kant’s thought can here gain essential clarity and can then lead us to see that, even with this position of the subject, philosophical thinking does not escape an encounter with the abysses (schematism and transcendental imagination).”

Here, we find ourselves at an interpretive crossroads, one side of which has yet to be explored. Readings of the Critique of Pure Reason have historically tended towards idealism, which is unfaithful to the work’s initial project, and it is a safe bet that (French) phenomenological interpretations—specifically those associated with the theological turn—have made the same mistake. They have emphasized idealism when they should have held fast to space and time as a priori forms of sensibility. To be sure, as I have already said, fixating on the “Transcendental Dialectic,” which can lead to either a contradiction or an over-idealization of pure reason, results in a neglect of the “Transcendental Aesthetic” (space and time) and of the “Transcendental Analytic” (schematism and imagination). Such neglect ultimately results in a certain Cartesian interpretation of Kant, which takes one far afield from Kant’s original project. What I have elsewhere called “the preemption of the infinite over the finite” or the “Cartesianism of French phenomenology” is rooted, in fact, in this debate over Kant. \footnote{Emmanuel Falque, The Metamorphosis of Finitude, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012). § 5.}

Fallibility and Disproportion

Ricoeur’s thought takes us one step closer to chaos, that is, to the destruction of all horizons and thus to the extra-phenomenal. He is instrumental for our purposes not because he principally deals with evil, suffering, and tragedy—in deep contrast to Heidegger, who is haunted by death-anxiety and the question of meaning—but, more precisely, because he treats them symbolically, and, as he says, “symbols give rise to thought.” \footnote{Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Harper & Row: New York, 1967), 19.} In other words, unthinkable evil can and must happen in the horizon of the thinkable; hence, it is “un-thinkable” mostly as a matter of speech, and its so-called


\footnote{Heidegger, Contributions to Philosophy, 249.}
unthinkability consists not only of excess (it overwhelms us) but also of lack (we cannot bring ourselves to understand it). However, as with all phenomena, evil remains bound to the horizon of thought in that it does not destroy thinkability as such, which refers not simply to some thought content but the horizon of thinking itself. Being unable to conceive of an evil act because it is “unthinkable” in the sense that it overwhelms or underwhelms our horizon of thought is not the same as being unable to conceive an evil deed because the evil act destroys the very possibility of thinking. One is stupefied by traumatic situations; one no longer thinks or, perhaps more accurately put, one thinks that one is no longer able to think. In this way, trauma plunges one into thoughtlessness, into oblivion. The thing to which evil “gives rise,” then, is the impossibility of one’s “giving rise” to anything at all (thought included); in this way, the supposed requisites of givenness are rendered null.26

Looking now to the conclusion of Fallible Man, Ricoeur sees fit—like Marion later on—to base his analysis on Kantian categories: “Our guide in this deduction of the categories of fallibility will be the Kantian triad of the categories of quality: reality, negation, limitation.”27 As with Heidegger’s “finitude” and Marion’s “saturated phenomenon”—by radicalization and inversion, respectively—Ricoeur’s “fallibility” comes from a certain interpretation, or appropriation, of the Critique of Pure Reason. In each case, the Kantian horizon remains—and we will likely never escape it entirely—but none of the three adequately treats the “melee of sensations.” They fail to recognize that it is not a matter of a fourth “synthesis”—as if there could have been a third or fourth “reduction”—but of a destruction or an annihilation of all syntheses as a result of which finitude, fallibility, and saturation become unthinkable, indeed unviable. In such cases, thought stops, and one is rendered speechless. Thus, perhaps Blanchot’s “silence of darkness” (the other night) from Thomas the Obscure is no less philosophical than Pseudo-Dionysius’ “dazzling obscurity of Silence” (the primordial night) from Mystical Theology. Furthermore, it makes no sense to say that one is spiritual and the other not, for the mystical is not only a matter of elevation but also of descent and kenosis, at least in Christianity. The Lofty God of Judaism bears a deep contrast to the Lowly God of Christianity; such a lesson can be drawn from this essay even if its aim (the extra-phenomenal) is principally philosophical.28

28 For more on this lofty-lowly distinction, see “Khôra or the Great Bifurcation” and “A Phenomenology of the Underground” (especially § 13 ) in The Loving Struggle, trans. Lucas McCracken and Bradley B. Onishi (Baltimore: Rowman and Littlefield, forthcoming).
Returning to Ricoeur, or rather to Kant, the “Table of Categories”—specifically the “triad of quality”—designates, strictly speaking, what makes “synthesis” possible, which Critique of Pure Reason defines as “the action of putting different representations together with each other and comprehending their manifoldness in one cognition.” Thus, as is clear, the synthesis of a given manifold in and through the concept makes possible representation as such. However, with the “Table of Categories,” or the “pure concepts of understanding,” we are still far from the transcendental schematism, or the “a priori principles of the possibility of experience,” which is worth noting since whoever sticks to the “Table of Judgments” or categories has yet to arrive at the “Table of Principles.” In effect, abstractly conceiving “reality, negation, and limitation” (the triad of quality) or “quantity, quality, relation, and modality” (the structures of the “Table of Judgments”), like Ricoeur and Marion respectively, is not the same as putting them in play with the “Table of Principles” (axioms of intuition, anticipations of perception, analogies of experience, or postulates of empirical thought in general) as does Heidegger. The latter case raises the issue of what Kant calls “The Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding,” which consists of the following “concrete” problem: “applying pure concepts of the understanding to appearances.” “[I]t is clear,” Kant continues, “that there must be a third thing, which must stand in homogeneity with the category on the one hand and the appearance on the other, and makes possible the application of the former to the latter.” In other words, one’s choice to emphasize the categories over the schematism or vice-versa will determine one’s entire understanding of Kant. However, what is most crucial to the schematism is not what complies with it but what resists it. Precisely in the schematism of the imagination, the “melee of sensations” frustrates synthesis—which grounds even the possibility of all experience (as that which the reproducibility of the appearances necessarily presupposes)—and in so doing causes no-thing to appear.

That being said, Ricoeur certainly does not ignore the transcendental schematism in Fallible Man (1960). In fact, he grounds human fragility in the “blind but indispensable” function of imagination or consciousness. However, he sees it merely as “the synthesis as effected outside” that allows “the thing [to show] itself and [to] be expressed”:

Here, consciousness is nothing else than that which stipulates that a thing is a thing only if it is in accordance with this synthetic constitution, if it can appear and be expressed, if it can affect me in my finitude and lend

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29 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A 77.
30 Kant, A 138.
31 Kant, A 101–102.
32 Kant, A 78.
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itself to the discourse of any rational being... [I] prefer to say that the synthesis is primarily one of meaning and appearance.\textsuperscript{33}

We see, then, that meaning and self-showing remain the horizon of synthesis. One is tempted to think that Ricoeur somehow missed or ignored Kant’s passages on cinnabar and the melee of sensations, which are at the very heart of the synthesis of imagination, but his quality as a reader makes such an hypothesis untenable. It is more likely that he saw chaos or the extra-phenomenal all too clearly and chose to exclude it, like Heidegger (“Must we not also take back this invasion by what we encounter through the words in which we have taken hold of what was encounter...?”) and Kant before him (“There must therefore be something that itself makes possible this reproduction of the appearances...”). Immediately after insisting upon the twofold necessity of the phenomenon and signification, Ricoeur adds the following:

An appearance which could in no way be express, which would exclude itself from the realm of discourse, and which would not allow itself to be anticipated in any “sense” would literally be the fleeting appearance that Plato compares to the statues of Daedalus, which nothing can tie down.\textsuperscript{34}

What does it mean to be excluded from the realm of discourse, which is to say from the realm of meaning and, thus, from phenomenality? Does the difference between traumatism and fragility, or vulnerability, consist precisely in that exclusion from meaning? These are the questions Ricoeur leaves unanswered, either failing to see them or, more likely, not daring to plumb their depths. I would say that the question of evil constitutes the heart of Ricoeur’s thought, and the tragic is thoroughly treated therein, to be sure. His contributions on that point are immense. However, interpreting “finitude” in terms of “fallibility,” or intentionally fusing “limits” and “limitation” to the point of claiming that “the initial guiding concept of... an anthropology is and cannot be that of finitude” does not and cannot reveal the extra-phenomenal, which has been danced around by so many thinkers. In Ricoeur’s thought, finitude exists simply to be overcome; it is open to being transcended—albeit in and through insufficiency itself. He refuses the unconditional horizontality of immanence, finitude’s choretic resistance, and anything that is non-transcendentally external to it, such as the extra-phenomenal. In \textit{Fallible Man}, finitude tends towards its own “transgression,” and herein lies Ricoeur’s (irenic?) disproportion that constitutes our humanity. According to Ricoeur, because finitude is only expressed via “discourse,” which is to say in and through meaning, the

\textsuperscript{33} Ricoeur, \textit{Fallible Man}, 37–42.
\textsuperscript{34} Ricoeur, 38. Emphasis added.
necessity of “infinitude,” then, must be imprinted upon finitude itself. This claim issues from a presupposition that, in my eyes, is far from self-evident—despite being consist among a number of discourses—and derives from a postulate of spirituality:

In order for human finitude to be seen and expressed, a moment that surpasses it must be inherent in the situation, condition, or state of being finite. This means that every description of finitude is abstract, i.e., separated and incomplete, if it neglects to account for the transgression that makes discourse on finitude possible. The complete discourse on finitude is a discourse on the finitude and the infinitude of man.35

Ricoeur’s reference to the Kantian triad takes “limitation” and not “limit” as its third term. The former, from the “Transcendental Analytic,” signals an expectation of something else, something beyond, whereas the latter, from the “Transcendental Aesthetic,” would have represented a strict adherence to the immanent horizon of space and time. “[T]he triad of reality, negation, and limitation,” he explains, “may be expressed in the following three terms: originating affirmation, existential difference, human mediation.” It is precisely the third term (human mediation) that creates the gap between one’s finite self and one’s constant desire to overcome or to transcend finitude: “Not just any limitation constitutes the possibility of failing, but that specific limitation which consists, for human reality, in not coinciding with itself.”36 This incompatibility or non-coincidence of oneself with oneself—in a movement that goes from Descartes’ “generosity” to Maurice Blondel’s “willing vs. willed will”—Ricoeur will name “vulnerability” or “fragility.” “The ‘disproportion’ whose exegesis we have been pursuing through knowing, acting, and feeling,” specifies Ricoeur, “takes on the name of fragility in the affective order.”37

To conclude this section, I wish to clarify that it is not the “disproportion of oneself to oneself” per se which is my precise concern. More specifically, the issue is Ricoeur’s negligence of chaos or his failure to treat the extra-phenomenal in his development of it, especially given that “disproportion” derives from a certain reading of the Kantian categories of quality and deals with infinitude and vulnerability. The most likely conclusion is that Ricoeur saw but opted not to explore the extra-phenomenal. He did not altogether omit the schematism—and therefore the concrete application of the categories to experience—but took it as a given because of its sensible nature without interrogating the possibility of the impossibility of givenness within the categories (the supra-phenomenal) or, more precisely, the impossibility

35 Ricoeur, 25.
36 Ricoeur, 135, 133.
37 Ricoeur, 125.
of the possibility of givenness outside the categories (the extra-phenomenal). This same line of critique will allow us to step beyond Marion’s “saturated phenomenon,” which fails to exit the Kantian categories—unlike Kant’s own passages on cinnabar and the melee of sensations—but merely “inverts” them and thus depends upon them entirely.

Saturation and Inversion

The tirade of French actor and playwright Sacha Guitry—“Women, I am against them...totally against them”—is well known, at least among the French, and although I certainly do not mean to endorse the potentially chauvinistic quality of the letter, I do wish to reflect on its logic in a certain way. To inverse Kant’s categories and, therefore, to privilege “saturation” (the sublime) over “limitation” (the categorical Kantian phenomenon or the common-law phenomenon), is this not in fact to remain within the categories and, thus, to depend upon them? If, in the same way Ricoeur developed his notions of disproportion, desire, and vulnerability, Marion formulated “saturation” vis-à-vis Kantian categories to show how an excess of intuition overwhelms intention, then does he not make the same oversight as Ricoeur, not to mention Heidegger before him? In short, does Marion not also ignore the extra-phenomenal, which is precisely not an excess of phenomenality that overflows its horizon but a shocking event or trauma that shatters the horizon itself?

Paradoxically, though in keeping with Marion’s unacknowledged reproachment to Ricoeur, which is perhaps surprising to many, the two thinkers share the same starting point with respect to Kant. As previously cited, Ricoeur says, “Our guide in this deduction of the categories of fallibility will be the Kantian triad of the categories of quality: reality, negation, limitation.” Nearly identically, Marion states the following in Being Given: “I will sketch a description of the saturated phenomenon by following the lead of the categories of the understanding defined by Kant”; the two starting points differ only in that Marion’s analysis

38 Sacha Guitry, “Don’t listen, women, I’m talking to men,” Les lettres d’amour (1941) in the National Library of France archives: “I’ve said it once, I’m saying it now, and I’ll say it again: women, I am against them...totally against them. Why? Because one must keep one’s friends close and one’s enemies even closer. Women have been my greatest enemies, the most implacable and the most adorable. I cannot give them up, for a woman is the most violent and costly drug. But they are so adorable, charming, and desirable, especially those who make you miss them after the fact. Oh men, you big bumbling, feeble children, I speak on your behalf. Thankfully, there are some exceptions, but I cannot but be against them, totally against them, and I pray to the heavens always to remain so.”

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deals with the category of “the understanding.” In this way, Marion’s saturated phenomenon is to the category of the understanding what Ricoeur’s fallibility is to the categories of quality—which themselves belong to the same category of the understanding in Kant. The starting point is the same even if it plays out in radically different ways for each thinker—the disproportion of “limitation” to “reality” and “negation” for Ricoeur and the inversion of the categories of understanding (quantity, quality, relation, and modality) for Marion:

[T]he saturated phenomenon exceeds these categories..., since in it intuition passes beyond the concept. I will therefore follow them by inverting them. The saturated phenomenon will be described as invisible according to quantity, unbearable according to quality, absolute according to relation, irregardable according to modality.

Here, one could level Heidegger’s critique of Nietzsche against Marion, and perhaps also against Ricoeur: to invert [Umkehrung] any logic in an effort to overcome it [Überwindung] is merely to perfect it [Vollendung]. That is to say, one does not overcome metaphysics by inverting it or, with respect to Heidegger’s original critique, Nietzsche cannot get rid of the soul by replacing it with the body: “The fundamental metaphysical position expresses the way in which the one who poses the guiding question remains enmeshed in the structures of that question, which is not explicitly unfolded...” Put differently, with help from Jean Beaufret’s expert commentary, “Does Nietzsche’s reversal of Platonism not respond, from within the Platonic paradigm, to something Platonic, which then becomes all the more visible in light of that reversal?” Thinking “against” always risks becoming “totally against” such that one actually comes to depends upon that which one is attempting to surpass.

However, as a loyal disciple of Heidegger, this critique is not lost on Marion, and his deliberate effort to think “outside” of metaphysics means no longer depending “upon” it. Marion sees that it does not suffice to inverse the Kantian categories, which risks remaining in them through that very inversion; instead, he aims to escape them altogether:

Here finally it is necessary that we no longer define the saturated phenomenon simply by the inversion of the determinations of the com-

41 Marion, Being Given, 199. Emphasis added.
mon-law phenomenon. With the phenomenon of revelation, we come
to the point where it is necessary to free ourselves not only from these
(metaphysical or phenomenological) determinations, but even from their destruction.44

Marion’s move here is crucial. Having had some time between the “first”
and “second” versions of the saturated phenomenon, he sees the trap set
by inversion and is able to avoid it. In Being Given, the “Revealed” no lon-
ger belongs to a fourth type of saturated phenomena, which classification
would mean remaining on the level of a simple inversion, as everything in
that case would be developed in relation to the categories. However, since
Revelation is not reduced to a fourth type of saturation, it marks a move-
ment beyond the categories, one that therefore alleges neither to belong to
nor to depend upon them:

This first study (“The Saturated Phenomenon” [1992]) included Revelation
directly among the saturated phenomena by numbering it in fourth posi-
tion, whereas the later study (Being Given [1997]) takes the precaution of
distinguishing the four types of saturated phenomena (event, idol, flesh,
and icon, thus established in their specificity) from “the phenomenon of
revelation,” which “concentrates the four types of saturated phenomena”
in a “fifth type.”45

Although Ricoeur and Marion share a starting point, they set out in
opposing directions. The former thinks from within metaphysical categories
(hence disproportion), whereas the latter seeks to overcome them (hence the
move from inversion to liberation). The fact that Marion does not cite Ricoeur
attests to this divergence. If we continue down this path in pursuit of the
impossibility of the possibility of the phenomenon, then we must address not the
“counter-experiential” but the “extra-experiential.” Far from a “fifth type” of
saturation—called “phenomenality to the second degree,” the “paradox to
the second degree,” or the “saturation of saturation” by Being Given, whose
paradigm of saturation is articulated solely in terms of significance, albeit an
overwhelming and unbearable significance—, the extra-phenomenal overturns
the very possibility of appearing and thus of significance, indeed of givenness
itself.46 Rather than maintaining that “[the nonobject]…appear[s], since it
must appear in the measure of the excess of giving intuition in it” and, thus,
that “[c]ounter-experience is not equivalent to a nonexperience, but to the
experience of a phenomenon that…resists the conditions of objectification,”
I wish to interrogate the (non)significance of the impossibility of appearing

44 Marion, Being Given, 245. Emphasis added.
45 Marion, The Visible and the Revealed, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York:
235.
46 Marion, Being Given, 236–247.
itself that marks the destruction of the horizon of appearing. In short, the issue is not the givenness of the phenomenon of non-givenness (a phenomenology of night); rather, it is the non-givenness of givenness itself—neither by privation nor by excess but by abnegation (the night of phenomenology). Kant’s cinnabar or his “melee of sensations” is not merely a “fourth synthesis”; instead, as Gilles Deleuze saw, it is a “vanishing point,” the “the empty space that ceases even to be a sign of lack,” a “line of flight that wanders so much the line itself disappears, whose wandering leads to madness.”

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There is therefore something more radical than showing the givenness of things or that things can be given even in their abandon, which itself becomes an a priori criterion of givenness, since precisely no-thing is given therein. That is to say, there are forms of darkness, like in Blanchot’s Thomas the Obscure or Levinas’ Il y a, in the midst of which we can only be-there (Da-sein but without openness or closure)—a being-there that can only be characterized as “stupefied,” to use Ludwig Binswanger’s term, or “afraid,” to use Romano’s (inherited from Maldiney):

I would go to the doctor and wait in an adjoining room. Through my own sobbing, I would hear horrible moans (from my husband). The doctor told him he had a small wound in his bladder, but he turned around to me with a look so frightening and so devoid of hope that I remained frozen in terror, mouth agape.

To be sure, there is the un-thinkable, which is always given in and through thought even though it overflows it (counter-experience), but there is also the un-thinkable, which destroys the possibility itself of thought. It is precisely the latter which we must paradoxically think, at the limits of a discursivity of the extra-experiential whose possibility Kant glimpsed:

48 Arnaud Villani, La guêpe de l’orchidée, Essai sur Gilles Deleuze (Paris: Belin, 2000), 118–119. For more on this point, see Jean-Clet Martin’s remarkable articulation of Deleuze’s rereading or deconstruction—really an ex-construction —of Kant: La philosophie de Gilles Deleuze (originally titled Variations, La philosophie de Gilles Deleuze [1993]), (Paris: Payot-Rivages, 2005). See in particular pages 38–66: “L’empirisme transcendental” and the perspective of the “Dehors” [exteriority, outside, extra—], which is inherited from Blanchot and Foucault and developed by Deleuze himself in Foucault (Paris: Editions de Minuit [2004]. 93: “Thinking does not depend on a tidy interior wherein the visible is united language but results from the intrusion of an exteriority [un dehors] that closes the supposed gap between inside and outside by force and dismembers the interior.”)
If one were to suppose that nothing preceded an occurrence that it must follow in accordance with a rule..., [then] we would have only a play of representations that would not be related to any object at all, i.e., by means of our perception no appearance would be distinguished from any other as far as the temporal relation is concerned.

This land [of the understanding]... is an island, and enclosed in unalterable boundaries by nature itself. It is the land of truth (a charming name), surrounded by a broad and stormy ocean, the true seat of illusion, where many a fog bank and rapidly melting iceberg pretend to be new lands and, ceaseless deceiving with empty hopes the voyager looking around for new discoveries, entwine him in adventures from which he can never escape and yet also never bring to an end.50

References


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