"Love,'Gift,' and the Fragmentary Self: A Theological Engagement with Jean-Luc Marion and Søren Kierkegaard

MYKA SHEA HANSON LAHAIE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a sustained engagement with Jean-Luc Marion and Søren Kierkegaard, with an eye to contemporary problems that arise for a *theological* engagement with phenomenology. It assesses the theological reception of (post)modern thought as it pertains to the privileging of *kenosis* as a theme around which to organize a vision of love and selfhood—seen, for example, in common articulations of love as 'self-gift' or 'self-abandon.' I locate one reason for the recent popularity of such arguments in a response to the deconstruction of identity and problematizing of love in postmodern theory—attending specifically to the context of contemporary phenomenology. Engaging this context, I argue that we should not approach themes of love and selfhood in terms of *kenosis*, but that a theology of creation is a more fruitful starting point. While demonstrating this through engagement with Marion and Kierkegaard as my primary interlocutors, I also draw on several other sources from the Christian theological tradition to illumine the broader context of concerns pertaining to this argument. My secondary, more methodological aim, is that the cumulative result of this study will uncover new directions for considering how theology might best engage the insights of phenomenology without neglecting its own resources.

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By

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DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.[1]

STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT

NOTE TO THE READER:

Due, in part, to the Covid-19 pandemic and deadline constraints, there are some sources I have been unable to access and a few quotations/citations I have been unable to give a second check. This research engages the published works on Marion and Kierkegaard I was aware of at the end of 2019.

[1] One paragraph of Chapter 2 was originally part of an essay developed for a seminar assignment and there are but a few explanatory paragraphs from Chapter 4 with some similar wording to an M.A. thesis I completed engaging the same primary source—though making a different argument. I have not felt the need to provide citations to my own, unpublished work in this regard. The few explanatory paragraphs in Chapter 4 have been so thoroughly re-worked that their original form would now be unrecognizable. The paragraph revised for Chapter 2 was not submitted as part of my M.A. thesis.

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To Jeremy

and in memory of Jean and John

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

1.0) *Introduction*

This thesis offers a sustained engagement with Jean-Luc Marion and Søren Kierkegaard, with an eye to contemporary problems that arise for a *theological* engagement with phenomenology. It assesses the theological reception of (post)modern thought as it pertains to the privileging of *kenosis* as a theme around which to organize a vision of love and selfhood—seen, for example, in common articulations of love as 'self-gift' or 'self-abandon.' I locate one reason for the recent popularity of such arguments in a response to the deconstruction of identity and problematizing of love in postmodern theory—attending specifically to the context of contemporary phenomenology. Engaging this context, I argue that we should not approach themes of love and selfhood in terms of *kenosis*, but that a theology of creation is a more fruitful starting point. While demonstrating this through engagement with Marion and Kierkegaard as my primary interlocutors, I also draw on several other sources from the Christian theological tradition to illumine the broader context of concerns pertaining to this argument. My secondary, more methodological aim, is that the cumulative result of this study will uncover new directions for considering how theology might best engage the insights of phenomenology without neglecting its own resources.

While important work has been done to engage doctrinal concerns surrounding the theme of *kenosis* itself,[1] here my primary concern is with the theological and philosophical anthropology underlying various ways *kenosis* gets used to refer to the sacrificial dimension of Christian spiritual formation. It is not always explicit what references to 'kenotic' or 'self-giving' love exactly mean for an account of the self. We might wonder, for example, how to avoid an unhealthy emphasis on self-sacrifice for its own sake, and whether a notion of self-love fits into such a picture. These are not new questions; such concerns, repeatedly posed by feminist

[1] Especially influential as a backdrop for the considerations I put forth here is Kathryn Tanner's, "Incarnation, Cross, and Sacrifice: A Feminist-Inspired Reappraisal," *Anglican Theological Review* 86, no. 1 (2004): 35-56.

theologians, have arisen and evolved right alongside the various waves of feminism since 1960.[2] Therefore, the current study aims not *primarily* at the concerns or debates over arguments favoring a vision of what I will here refer to as the 'kenotic self.' Instead, I am interested in what I see as the diminished theological and philosophical anthropology underlying such a vision.[3] As will become apparent, recent articulations of the kenotic self often find their basis in and mirror philosophical arguments for the deconstruction of the modern, autonomous subject. Such mirroring reveals itself, for example, in the argument that we might embrace our *true* self when we acknowledge our total *lack* of autonomy, since the self is, after all, fragmentary, permeable, and always already open to external influences through its relatedness to that which is *other*. Such arguments are not only understood to find their basis in (post)modern thought but are also understood to better speak to our lived experiences of relationship and love. For these reasons, grappling with themes of love and selfhood in recent theology requires attending to the less explicit concerns underlying such articulations of the self—ones that arise at the intersection of theology and phenomenology. It is with this context as the backdrop of my analysis that I turn on Marion and Kierkegaard as my primary interlocutors.

While Marion's work is set directly within a (post)modern context, the nineteenth-century Dane at first seems an unlikely interlocutor for this project. However, both Marion and Kierkegaard provide a detailed engagement with the theme of love, and each thinker offers an account of the self formed *by* love. There are, nevertheless, critical differences between them, which fuel a productive comparison of their thought. Marion, for example, has often attempted to keep his phenomenological work separate from his theological work even while there are specific ways in

[2] See Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View." *The Journal of Religion* 40, No. 2 (April 1960): 100-112. Following Goldstein's classic essay, there have been numerous other—admittedly less gender-essentialist—feminist critiques.

[3] We see one recent iteration of this debate, for example, play out in the differing arguments put forth by Sarah Coakley and Linn Tonstad. See, for example, Sarah Coakley, "*Kenōsis* and Subversion: On the Repression of 'Vulnerability' in Christian Feminist Writing" in *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 3-39; Linn Tonstad, "Speaking 'Father' Rightly: Kenotic Reformation into Sonship in Sarah Coakley" in *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 98-137. While I will further engage their arguments in due course, the following paper is of particular influence on my thinking here: Tonstad, "Vulnerabilities, Not Vulnerability: Considering Some Differences," Presented at Centre for Catholic Studies conference on *Suffering*, *Diminishment and the Christian Life*, Durham University, January 9, 2018. Published to YouTube by Durham University, February 13, 2018 (48:26): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIHZTkS-tKk.

which a relation between the two projects becomes evident.[4] Kierkegaard, on the other hand, offers what we might interpret as a *theological* reflection on the self that informs later phenomenology, as seen, for example, in the likely influence of *The Sickness Unto Death* on Heidegger's account of 'being-toward-death' in *Being and Time.*[5] It is also the case that while Marion develops an account of love which directly *responds* to (post)modern concerns, Kierkegaard's account *anticipates* many of these same concerns. However, drawing *Works of Love* into conversation with his *Upbuilding Discourses*, I show how Kierkegaard anticipates these concerns through a direct reflection on a theology of creation. While many of his writings take shape *as* spiritual or theological reflections, intended for the purpose of edification, the (post)modern reception of Kierkegaard has often secularized his thought. For this reason, I focus on how Kierkegaard's theology of creation directly influences his accounts of love and selfhood, assessing points of similarity and divergence between Marion Kierkegaard on account of this.

The purpose of this thesis is three-fold. First, it introduces contemporary philosophical concerns that influence popularized visions of the kenotic self in recent theology, demonstrating the problems this raises for a theological anthropology. Second, it seeks to illuminate these issues while posing an alternative framework for addressing them theologically, accomplishing this through a sustained and constructive engagement with Jean-Luc Marion and Søren Kierkegaard. Finally, a result of the project is that it serves as a kind of theological experiment in ways of engaging phenomenology—to which end, the conclusion focuses on offering some final methodological considerations. In light of its overall aim, the structure of this thesis falls into two parts—centered on two distinct, but interrelated themes. Part 1 (forming chapters 2-3), engages concerns that arise for a theological *concept* of love in light of the problematizing of love in postmodern theory. Part 2 (consisting of the interlude and chapters 4-5), focuses on the theme of selfhood, attending to issues at play in approaches to the self in recent phenomenology following after the deconstruction of the modern subject.

[4] Questions of the relationship between theology and phenomenology in Marion's work have been the subject of much debate. Importantly, Marion has sought to explore this relationship more thoroughly, further clarifying his understanding of it in his more recent work, as is evident in his 2014 Gifford Lectures—published as *Givenness and Revelation*—and in some of his even more recent papers. My reading of Marion will give special weight to these most recent works.

[5] See, for example, Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). See especially, 116-135.

In the chapters that form Part 1, I situate my engagement with Marion and Kierkegaard within a context of debates that arise in postmodern theory—focusing on tensions these debates create for a theological *concept* of love. Part 2 sets out to illumine the significance of Marion's approach to the self *after* the deconstruction of the modern subject, along with the role this plays in his phenomenology of givenness. While not rejecting the basic tenants of Marion's phenomenology of givenness, it nevertheless shows how it is possible to bring Marion's philosophical anthropology into productive dialogue with Kierkegaard's robust *theological* reflections on the self in a way that need not negate Marion's overall project. Such engagement provides a way to explore themes of love and selfhood from the standpoint of concerns that arise within the context of both theology and phenomenology in a way that preserves the integrity of each discipline—nevertheless, admitting that maintaining the integrity of theology may very well involve recognizing its potential to concern itself with and uncover transdisciplinary implications.

While this study offers a sustained engagement with Marion and Kierkegaard, it also engages several other sources from the Christian theological tradition as well as such thinkers as Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas, and Michel Henry at key points—either to illumine various dimensions of Marion's thought or to introduce questions in contemporary phenomenology concerning an approach to the self or to love. For this reason, the project might be construed more broadly as a demonstration of how Kierkegaard remains a unique resource for engaging recent questions at the intersection of theology and phenomenology.

1.1) *The Relationship between Theology and Phenomenology, or the Question of Metaphysics: Engaging Jean-Luc Marion*

As will become apparent, the theological issues I wish to address here find their origin in the deconstruction of the modern subject and eventual re-thinking of the self—in (post)modern thought, more generally, but especially in contemporary phenomenology. For this reason, in addressing the explicit themes of love and selfhood, the analysis will also function as an interrogation of the relationship between theology and phenomenology. Toward this end, Jean-Luc Marion's thought will serve as an anchoring point from which to address the methodological questions that arise in this broader context. Importantly, then, a few preliminary issues need to be addressed pertaining not only to my reading of Marion but also to the question of theology and

metaphysics—given that the move toward theological engagement with phenomenology has often meant a move away from metaphysics, or metaphysical theology. To understand why this is the case, we must first turn to Heidegger's critique of metaphysics as "ontotheology," and then address Marion's response to it. Orienting the reader to this context will thereby allow me to introduce how this thesis serves as a kind of theological experiment in ways of relating theology and phenomenology.

a) *The Question of "Ontotheology"*

Heidegger is well known for charging the entire metaphysical tradition with overlooking the question of being (*Sein*), presupposing its meaning as somehow already understood. We begin to get a sense of what he means by turning to the common assertion that something *is* this or that. In such a case, whatever 'is' falls under the mastery of representational thought—assigned some presumed notion of what it means to 'be' this or that as represented by and for a subject.[6] Here, in Heidegger's view, the very question of being gets overlooked. We see this question arise in that the mode of existence, or *way* of being, pertaining to the human being differs from that of other entities or things existing in the world. And this mysterious difference—referred to as the ontological difference—remains impossible to *represent* as a merely categorizable difference amongst entities. In reflecting on my own being in terms of *what* I am, for example, I soon realize that something necessarily escapes any such mode of representation. The problem, in other words, is that in identifying my being with some clear concept—thought on the basis of a presumed commonality to all that 'is'—I necessarily overlook my unique mode of existing, which differs from all I represent *as* this or that. According to Heidegger, "When metaphysics thinks of beings with respect to the ground that is common to all beings as such, then it is logic as onto-logic. When metaphysics thinks of beings as such as a whole, that is, with respect to the highest being which accounts for everything, then it is logic as theo-logic."[7] The implication Heidegger sees this having for theology is that any approach to God as *causa sui*, or ground of all being, not only overlooks the very question of being—or the ontological difference—but

[6] See especially, Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 23-41.
[7] Ibid., 42-74; 70.

subjects God to the role of a foundation for some totalizing *conception* of being, determined through recourse to representational thought.

As we will see, this leads to a series of philosophical questions, focused on how to approach the human being and whether Heidegger's ontology—as put forth in *Being and Time*, for example—ends up repeating the very issue it criticizes. At this point, however, I will focus on Heidegger's critique insofar as it is directed at the history of theology—according to the assertion that God, too, has been overly-determined by a series of metaphysical concepts which impose a presupposed understanding of being onto the divine. There have, of course, been many theological responses to Heidegger's overly-generalized critique in this regard.[8] And while I will, later on in the thesis, introduce Marion's criticisms of Heidegger, it is first necessary to highlight how Heidegger's critique of onto-theology influences Marion's theological emphases.

While Marion is well known for his theological rejection of metaphysics, he understands metaphysics as ontotheology, narrowly defined. In commenting on the question of whether theology needs metaphysics, he clarifies that he does not wish to reject metaphysics insofar as it is more broadly understood to imply any mode of access to the transcendent.[9] Following Heidegger's account, Marion understands ontotheology as reducible to three characteristics, worth listing in full for the sake of clarity:

> (*a*)The 'God' must be inscribed explicitly in the metaphysical domain, that is, to allow itself to be determined by the historical determinations of being, inasmuch as it is entity, perhaps beginning with the concept of entity; (*b*) it must establish there a causal foundation [*Begründung*] of all the common entities for which it is the reason; (*c*) to achieve this, it must always assume the function and perhaps even the name of *causa sui*, that is, of supreme founding entity, because it was supremely founded by itself.[10]

[8] For an exemplary analysis and response to the question of "onto-theology" from a theological perspective, see David B. Burrell, Creater/Creatures Relation: 'The Distinction' vs. 'Onto-Theology,'" *Faith and Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (April 2008): 177-189.

[9] This clarification was made at a symposium with Rémi Brague and Jean-Luc Marion entitled, "Does Christianity Need Metaphysics?" at the University of Chicago, November 6, 2014. *YouTube* video, 1:13:04, November 11, 2014: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xlan-yjUcxA.

[10] Jean-Luc Marion, "Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theo-logy" in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, edited by Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 43. Another version of this essay was published in 2012 as the final chapter of the second English edition of *God Without Being*.

Marion's primary theological concern with regard to avoiding these characteristics of ontotheology is that they result in "[t]he production of a concept that makes a claim to equivalence with God."[11] While Marion makes use of Heidegger's definition of ontotheology to rule out the kind of approach he thinks subjects God to a 'system' of thought, in contrast to Heidegger, he sees the charge of ontotheology as relevant only in the case of some late medieval and early modern thinkers who move to apply a univocal concept of being both to created realities and to God. Marion is particularly focused on how this occurs in the modern metaphysics of Descartes, for whom God, as the supreme being, is modeled on the *ego cogito*.[12] That Marion's critique of metaphysics is to apply more narrowly in this way was not always clear. In his first publication of *God Without Being*/*Dieu sans l'etre* (1989), Marion suggests the thought of Thomas Aquinas might succumb to ontotheology, overlooking the precise ways in which Aquinas' transformation of metaphysical language and use of analogy function to preserve the Creator/creature distinction and affirm divine ineffability. Marion later publishes a retraction, acknowledging these very points in the essay, "Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theo-logy"/"Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théologie" (1995). Nevertheless, while he rightly highlights the importance of attending to the apophatic elements in the thought of St. Thomas, Marion seems to overlook the *positive* ways in which analogical language functions for Aquinas.[13]

Such positive use of analogical language, as David Burrell argues, finds its basis in the conviction "that whatever we find of perfection in our universe 'represents God and is like him,'" even while, of course, those perfections we attribute to the Creator based on our

[11] Jean-Luc Marion, *Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, translated by Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 13.

[12] For a further explanation of this, interpreting Marion's critique of ontotheology in terms of his criticism of Descartes, see Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 10-20. See also, Jean-Luc Marion, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-theo-logy in Cartesian Thought*, translated by Jeffrey A. Kosky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). As an international expert on Descartes, Marion recognizes various phases and conflicting instincts at work in Descartes corpus.

[13] While there are many critiques one could highlight here, my reading of these issues most closely follows the arguments put forth by David B. Burrell in response to Marion's, *God Without Being*. See David Burrell, "Reflections on 'Negative Theology' in the Light of a Recent Venture to Speak of 'God Without Being'" in *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy*, edited by Roman T. Ciapalo (Mishawaka, IN: American Maritain Association, 1997), 58-67. In my view, key aspects of this critique still apply even while others admittedly no longer hold—given clarifications Marion has since made to his project.

knowledge of creatures, only signify God imperfectly.[14] We might see this as the case since such perfections have God as their very source. It is against this background that "the distinction" between Creator and creatures becomes evident in light of creation *ex nihilo*: "As 'the source and goal of all things,' God cannot be one of those things, so we are less tempted to think of being as a generic term including creator and creature—the germ of any 'onto-theology.'"[15] In reference to the problem of ontotheology, in other words, creation *from nothing* implies that divine and creaturely existence are not ontologically continuous; we cannot derive a *concept* of the divine Being—or of the *way* God exists—from creaturely knowledge of our own *contingent* ways of existing. At the same time, however, creation *ex nihilo* implies that creation, however mysteriously, witnesses to the Creator as its very source, albeit not as a series of effects that would give us some univocal *concept* of a divine first cause, nor as an inevitable emanation of the divine Being. We might nevertheless affirm that since God is the source of all that exists, those perfections, such as goodness or wisdom, that we predicate of the Creator—along with our *creaturely* modes of knowing them—actually *mean* something when used of God.[16] This is the case even while any likeness we affirm between God and creatures must admit of a greater unlikeness since, returning to Aquinas, "we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not."[17]

In his essay on St. Thomas, Marion acknowledges the important way creation from nothing prevents our conceiving God's being (*esse*) as coterminous with created entities, or somehow comprehended according to their common being (*esse commune*). God, in other words, does not exist in the same way we do—as finite, temporal, and contingent beings. Marion's interpretation of Aquinas, however, stresses the ultimate unknowability of God—beyond being (*esse*)—while overlooking commentary on the positive ways our created contingency and creaturely modes of knowing, *themselves* bear witness to the creator as the very source of all that exists.[18] This is a

[14] David B. Burrell, "Analogy, Creation, and Theological Language" in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 77-98; 78.
[15] Ibid., 82.
[16] See Burrell, "Reflections on 'Negative Theology,'"61-62.
[17] Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, 1.3.0.
[18] See especially, Marion, "Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theo-logy," 65-67. While I cannot provide a full summary of Marion's interpretation of Aquinas here, in light of the following quote, we begin to see the direction his argumentation takes, and the way it overlooks questions concerning our positive knowledge of God on account of creation: "if God as act of being, transcends all real composition of *esse* and *essentia*, thus the whole of created entitativeness, and if in Him *esse* also transcends all concepts, thus if He remains essentially unknown . . . can we

point worth noting because Marion's emphases in interpreting Aquinas mirror the emphases of his own explicitly theological works. His concern is that we neither relegate God to the role of 'foundation' in some pre-established system of thought, nor that we approach the knowledge of God according to *our own* horizon of thought and experience. Marion, for this reason, seeks to utilize resources from the discipline of phenomenology in the service of theology—to re-think ways of speaking about the self-manifestation of God, beyond the limits of metaphysical categories or ontology. However, as this thesis will show, it may be that, at times, these very categories, or the logic following from a theology of creation, gets overlooked due to the specific set of emphases that shape Marion's overall project.

In referring to the *logic* following from a theology of creation, I have in mind what Josef Pieper recognized in considering the thought of Aquinas: "that the notion of creation determines and characterizes the interior structure of *nearly all* the basic concepts in St. Thomas's philosophy of Being."[19] One example of this is seen in what Pieper pointed to as the idea that existing things, interpreted in the light of creation, "are good precisely because they exist, and that this goodness is identical with the Being of things and is no mere property attached to them."[20] As we will see, an ontological vision such as this one is an example of what Marion's phenomenologically inflected theology tends to overlook. However, counter to some interpretations of Marion's project, [21] I neither read his phenomenology of givenness nor his account of revelation as

admit that it goes beyond any understanding of 'being'?" (Ibid., 65). We might consider David Burrell's following response to the arguments put forth in Marion's *God Without Being*: "Indeed the fruit of such a focus on *being*, concentrated in the act of existing (*esse*), is to allude to an activity constitutive of and present to all things" (Burrell, "Reflections on 'Negative Theology,'" 62). My analysis of Marion will attempt to draw out some ways he overlooks the implications of this point.

[19] Josef Pieper, *The Silence of Saint Thomas*, translated by John Murray, S.J., and Daniel O'Connor (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1957), 48. In relation to this point, see also, Burrell, "Reflections on 'Negative Theology,'" 63.

[20] Pieper, *The Silence of Saint Thomas*, 48-49.

[21] See, for example, John Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," *New Blackfriars* 76 no. 895 (July/August 1995): 325-353. Though this essay admittedly represents an early critique Milbank makes of Marion's thought, it nevertheless touches on key concerns we see in many of Milbank's more recent criticisms. His overall concern is whether Marion's phenomenology of givenness can approach finite being *according to* its analogical reference to God—via its very participation in the divine Being (*esse*). Here, he argues phenomenology tends to overlook "insisting on the 'subjectivity', in a Kierkegaardian sense, of reception: to receive one must be rightly attuned, one must judge aright, desire aright" (332). He rightly has in mind here the place for conjecture, judgements, and ontology—which he sees as having a unique legitimacy in light of a theology of creation. Unlike Milbank, however, I do not read Marion's phenomenology of givenness as *necessarily* ruling out the need for such conjecture and ontology. Furthermore, Milbank's criticisms in this regard are not always attentive to the context of concerns and questions informing the phenomenological tradition or to those shaping Marion's overall project. I

necessarily ruling out attention to such ontological concerns. Taking this into account, we could also note, following Brian Robinette, that Marion's phenomenology might be of use for describing the *experience* of structural sin, evil, or those inexplicable moments of sensing that things are not ultimately as they should be.[22] In engaging Marion's thought, then, I am interested in finding ways of highlighting its potential while illumining tensions that arise for any engagement between theology and phenomenology. My more critical engagement with Marion's phenomenological accounts of love and selfhood will focus on ways of better attending to the strong affirmation that the human being—on account of its very existing—shows signs of a creaturely orientation to the Creator of all things, albeit in a way that neither nullifies the divine mystery, nor the mystery inherent in our creaturely existence. As Burrell asserts, hinting at the *ontological* dimension of such mystery, "speaking of *good* is not adding anything to discourse about *being*, but rather calling attention to the *telos* inherent in that act of existing which creatures derive from their creator. To speak of 'the good,' then, is to call attention to the *eros* of being."[23]

In light of all this, a few preliminary points are now in order. Turning back to the question of 'metaphysics,' we might conclude, following the argument of Emmanuel Falque, that if ontotheology means "all immanence of being (*qua* being) . . . pertains to the transcendence of God (as the Super Being)," and if this is not actually the view of most metaphysical theology, '[m]etaphysics,' then, cannot and should not be radically eliminated in its end as well as in its content."[24] Falque, therefore, proposes a more dialogical—and potentially mutually enriching—engagement between theology/metaphysics and phenomenology. It is in a similar direction that I wish to push Marion's phenomenology as I engage it here. The working assumption of this thesis is that just as the logic and language of metaphysics is useful for responding to *some* theological

believe we might gain a greater appreciation for the limitations/dangers as well as the gifts of metaphysical reasoning—in the broadest possible sense of the term—by attending to Marion's project on its own terms.

[22] Brian Robinette, "A Gift to Theology? Jean-Luc Marion's 'Saturated Phenomenon' in Christological Perspective," *Heythrop Journal* 48, no. 1 (January 2007): 86-108. See also, Joseph Rivera's response to and development of this argument in "The Call and the Gifted in Christological Perspective: A Consideration of Brian Robinette's Critique of Jean-Luc Marion," *Hethrop Journal* 51, no. 6 (November 2010): 1053-1060.

[23] Burrell, "Reflections on 'Negative Theology,'" 60.

[24] Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology*, translated by Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 134.

questions, phenomenology is perhaps best suited for responding to others.[25] Such a working presupposition, of course, raises more methodological questions than it resolves, and it is not my aim to resolve them here. Instead, by directly exploring concerns pertaining to love and selfhood, arising at the intersection of theology and phenomenology, I hope to at least illumine some contours of what is at stake, methodologically, in considering the relationship between these two disciplines.

b) *Reading Marion*

My reading of and engagement with Marion's thought, then, has multiple aims. I will attempt to introduce his thought, and especially his phenomenology, focusing on its relevance for a theological context. In doing so, I hope to provide a lens through which to view the philosophical issues influencing recent *theological* articulations of the 'kenotic self.' Marion's work provides an easy route into this topic because, as I will show, his philosophical account of the self—developed in response to the (post)modern deconstruction of the subject—mirrors his theological account of the self, received in kenotic self-abandon. In addressing what I see as theologically problematic in Marion's approach to love and selfhood, however, the cumulative analysis of the thesis results not in a rejection of Marion's phenomenology of givenness, but with examples of how we might engage it differently—thereby highlighting a more dialogical approach to engaging phenomenology and theological metaphysics (defined in a broader sense).[26] It is through theological consideration of themes of love and selfhood that I wish to show the relevance of such dialogical engagement.

In this regard, my reading of Marion is most indebted to and builds on the interpretation of Christina Gschwandtner. Her commentary, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics*, provides a helpful introduction and overview of his thought, while responding to many of its detractors. Furthermore, my own reading builds on the arguments she puts forth for further

[25] It is in this regard that the tentative conclusions I reach concerning potential ways of construing the relationship between theology and phenomenology differ slightly from those of Emmanuel Falque, who more closely identifies philosophy with phenomenology and theology with metaphysics.

[26] In this respect, I am in agreement with a point made by John Betz. He suggests that given Marion's clarified interpretation of Aquinas and general affirmation of a doctrine of analogy, a more sympathetic understanding of the relation between Marion's phenomenology and metaphysics is possible—despite Marion's stated rejections. See John R. Betz, "After Heidegger and Marion: The Task of Christian Metaphysics Today," *Modern Theology* 34, no. 4 (October 2018): 565-597; see 592.

nuancing Marion's project while working with its basic tenants in *Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion*.[27] The importance of these works to my own engagement with Marion is that they, along with Marion's own recent clarifications of his project, allow me to consider further how Marion's phenomenology of givenness—and by extension, his account of revelation—need not preclude the need for conjecture, ontology, or metaphysical reasoning as part of the theological task. For those unfamiliar with Marion's thought, these issues pertaining to Marion's phenomenology will become clearer in Chapter 4. While my reading is also, of course, indebted to many others, for the sake of clarity I have found it best to highlight these debts in the course of commenting on the various aspects of Marion's thought. I will most often refer to the English translations of Marion's works, citing the French editions in brackets whenever particularly relevant to the interpretation. In the case that I give my own translation, I cite the French edition first.

Key to my reading of Marion's account of love and selfhood is reading it against the writings of Kierkegaard, who, as I will show, approaches these themes through reflection on a theology of creation.

1.2) *Reading Marion with Kierkegaard: Points of Convergence*

There is, thus far, not much work offering a sustained exploration of Marion and Kierkegaard's thought. Increasingly, however, scholars are noting points of convergence and potential for productive engagement between the two thinkers. Pia Søloft, for example, analyzes each thinker's approach to themes of love and erotic desire—noting significant points of similarity as well as some differences.[28] Still others have attended to similarities in philosophical or

[27] See Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007); *Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014).

[28] While not overlooking significant differences between the two thinkers, Søloft reads Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* in connection with *Either/OR,* arguing that, like Marion, Kierkegaard envisions a more positive role for erotic desire in love—contrary to the view of a rift or complete opposition between *eros* and *agape*, popularized by Anders Nygren. See Pia Søloft, "Erotic Love: Reading Kierkegaard with and without Marion," *Dialogue* 50, no. 1 (March 2011): 37-46.

theological sensibility.[29] In an essay providing a brief, point-by-point overview of the differences and potential convergence between Marion's and Kierkegaard's thought, Leo Stan highlights similarities in the apophatic tenor of their thought and compares the way each thinker utilizes paradox in approaching a doctrine of the incarnation.[30] Furthermore, Christopher Barnett utilizes Marion's phenomenology of the icon as a heuristic tool for illumining what he sees as the—often overlooked—theological aesthetics underlying Kierkegaard's thought.[31] In a similar vein, Brian Gregor compares this same aspect of Marion's phenomenology to Kierkegaard's assessment of visual art and the encounter with Christian truth.[32] A common thread running through many such assessments is that the works of Marion and Kierkegaard reveal a concern for exploring the hermeneutic, or interpretive, dimensions of the *way* we encounter whatever it is we encounter in lived experience.[33] As will become evident, this is not merely a point of commonality between

[29] Merold Westphal cites a passage from Marion's *God Without Being* as a way of explaining Kierkegaard's understanding of truth and the "Christian paradox." See *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1996), 122; see also, footnote 18. It is also interesting to note the similarities between Westphal's interpretation of Kierkegaard's view of truth and human subjectivity and Marion's philosophy (see especially, 114-133 and footnote 11 on 118). After briefly considering seeming points of similarity between them (see 144), George Pattison, on the other hand, emphasizes what he sees as the ultimate difference between Kierkegaard and Marion insofar as Marion's phenomenology of givenness would imply a philosophical system. See George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Chesham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2005), 143-145. While this study's focus is not a systematic comparison of Marion and Kierkegaard's overall thought, my reading of Kierkegaard and Marion in regards to this matter aligns more closely with that of Westphal.

[30] See Leo Stan, "Jean-Luc Marion: The Paradoxical Givenness of Love," in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Philosophy*, edited by Jon Stewart (London & New York: Routledge, 2012), 207-230. Stan's overview offers a critical comparison of the two figures centered around the following themes: "paradox, given selfhood, erotic love, and agape" (209). He focuses especially on the differences between Marion's *phenomenological* and Kierkegaard's more *theologically* inflected accounts. My own analysis follows some of the potential lines of questioning Stan's essay highlights. However, his account of the differences between Marion and Kierkegaard—especially as this concerns Marion's view of the relationship between theology and phenomenology—was published before some of Marion's own more recent clarifications. For that reason, I will not here deal with all aspects of his essay—though readers of it will notice critical differences in the way I interpret and situate the relationship between the two thinkers.

[31] See Christopher B. Barnett, *From Despair to Faith: The Spirituality of Søren Kierkegaard* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

[32] See Brian Gregor, "Thinking Through Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacus: Art, Imagination, and Imitation," *Heythrop Journal* 50, no. 3 (2009): 448-465.

[33] This observation forms a major difference between my comparison of Marion and Kierkegaard and that of Claudia Welz—who notes a divergence between each thinker in this regard. Cf. Welz, *Love's Transcendence and the Problem of Theodicy* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 327-374. While not its singular focus or overall purpose, this work does offer a comparison of Marion and Kierkegaard on issues relevant to phenomenology and theology—particularly surrounding questions of theodicy and divine presence. Importantly, it is critical of Marion's phenomenology for issues Marion has more recently offered further clarification. While Welz is right to notice moments in which Marion's project seems to overlook the hermeneutical dimensions of phenomenology, she greatly underestimates the extent to which Marion's phenomenology of givenness operates *as* a hermeneutical phenomenology. Welz also interprets Marion's project as putting forth an epistemological account of revelation—a view Marion's recent work on this topic explicitly rejects, and to which I turn in chapter 4. For these reasons, I

Marion and Kierkegaard, but also explains Kierkegaard's influence on Heidegger and the later tradition of French Phenomenology.

a) *Kierkegaard and Phenomenology*

Attention to the influence of Kierkegaard's reflections on the self, temporality, and various other dimensions of experience on post-Heideggerian phenomenology has led some scholars to mine Kierkegaard's works for new insight into contemporary issues in phenomenology.[34] Comparing his thought with early and more recent approaches to phenomenology, Claudia Welz, for example, argues that Kierkegaard's existential analyses could be likened to "a phenomenology of the religious life."[35] Such recent considerations, however, inevitably say as much about ones' vision of what the method of phenomenology *actually is* as they do about one's understanding of the nature and purpose of Kierkegaard's writings. My approach will be to read Kierkegaard's writings with a direct focus on their theological import; only then will I move to consider them in relation to the specific vision of phenomenology put forth by Marion.[36] Insofar as the second section of this thesis turns more specifically to questions of phenomenology, it focuses explicitly on the context informing Marion's phenomenology of givenness and the ways in which Kierkegaard's existential reflections might intervene at key points.

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situate the relationship between Marion and Kierkegaard much differently. For the sake of clarity, I here limit my engagement with this work to touching only on Welz's comparison of Marion and Kierkegaard (351-374) and her account of Kierkegaard's approach to 'gift' (99-110 and 327-374), a topic I turn to in Chapter 3.

[34] See, for example, *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist: An Experiment*, edited by Jeffrey Hanson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010). While I can only deal with selected essays from this volume, it comprises not only historical analyses of Kierkegaard's influence on phenomenology, but also constructive engagements with his thought in light of the context of questions that arise within the discipline of phenomenology. For a helpful summary of ways Kierkegaard scholarship has engaged various topics in phenomenology, see Claudia Welz, "Kierkegaard and Phenomenology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, edited by John Lippitt and George Pattison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 440-463.

[35] Welz, "Kierkegaard and Phenomenology," 457. See also, her argument for characterizing Kierkegaard's project as a "semiotic phenomenology of the invisible" (456-458).

[36] Following Welz, then, I also view Kierkegaard's theological and religious concerns as part of the horizon informing his interpretation of human experience. And this is one reason it is interesting to compare his existential reflections with key aspects of Marion's phenomenology (see footnote 33). Perhaps unlike Welz, I do not see the commitments of a hermeneutical phenomenology as necessarily precluding Marion's phenomenology of givenness, or the possibility of evidence that so imposes itself on my experience that it re-orients my prior horizon in a particular way. Connected with this, I would want to stress that there are often better or worse ways of *making sense* of our experience. It is for this reason that I am interested in drawing on Kierkegaard and Marion to demonstrate the merits of a more *dialogical* relationship between theology and phenomenology—as will become clearer by the conclusion of this analysis.

One might nevertheless wonder, if my interest is in the theological import of Kierkegaard's writings, why not instead engage a thinker who is more straightforwardly and less debatably a theologian? I contend that Kierkegaard's *way* of thinking and reflecting is pertinent to the specific theological questions I raise here. Jeffrey Bloechl argues that in Kierkegaard's writings, we do not witness a simple recourse to faith that obscures or covers over a more fundamental ontology—as Heidegger seemed to suggest. To see this as the case would involve the assumption that interrogations of religious existence cannot also disclose fundamental dimensions of human existence. Indeed, Bloechl argues that insofar as phenomenology attends to "phenomena that are at once intelligible in the world and yet signal somewhat more than their intelligibility," there is much it might learn from Kierkegaard.[37] He claims that while the *Upbuilding Discoures* disclose a way of being pertaining to the religious life, Kierkegaard's method of 'upbuilding' or 'edification' does not overlook or preclude the conditions of finite existence the human finds herself in, "the conditions that might appear closed or at least indifferent to the religious."[38] Instead, it "intervenes in order to augment the thinking found there, enhancing it with a new range of possibilities."[39] In this way, we can neither say that Kierkegaard's thinking is irrelevant to phenomenologists nor to theologians—though each will bring a different set of concerns to their engagement with his works.[40]

Building on Bloechl's analysis, we might add that Kierkegaard's writings demonstrate his propensity for engaging in different modes of thinking and reflecting that at once inform the same piece of work. Indeed, in the *Upbuilding Discourses* we see a reflection on lived experience that is, nevertheless, uniquely informed by certain metaphysical implications following from a presupposed theology of creation.[41] Yet, focusing on the writings themselves,

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[37] Jeffrey Bloechl, "Kierkegaard Between Fundamental Ontology and Theology: Phenomenological Approaches to Love of God," in *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist*, 23-35; 27. See also, his argument for how this is the case given Kierkegaard's way of attending to phenomena of "the paradoxical, the enigmatic, and the oblique" (33). His analysis focuses on Kierkegaard's account of the desire for and love of God in the specific discourse, "Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing" (see 23-35).
[38] Ibid., 29.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Of course, the exact way in which one understands this argument will depend on one's understanding of the discipline of phenomenology itself. For Bloechl's version of this argument, see especially, 26 and 33-34.
[41] With regard to my emphasis on a theology of creation at play in Kierkegaard's thought, my reading of Kierkegaard is particularly indebted to George Pattison, "Philosophy and Dogma: The Testimony of an Upbuilding Discourse," in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard*, Edited by Merold Westphal (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 155-162. Also of note is that the more theologically constructive suggestions I make in

the significance of this point might also be understood in the reverse direction: the writings not only witness to, but also provide one way of making sense of the contradictions or paradoxes inherent in the experience of finite existence.[42] In my view, it is precisely because of his unique mode of thinking and reflecting that Kierkegaard's writings prove relevant as a resource for uncovering points of dialogue between theology and phenomenology—and this is perhaps nowhere more evident than in his writing on themes of love and selfhood. It is for this reason, I contend, that an engagement with Marion and Kierkegaard sheds light on ways theology might best engage the concerns, methods, and insights of phenomenology.

b) *Reading Kierkegaard*

For reasons just noted, my reading focuses on Kierkegaard's writings themselves—drawing out the contemporary relevance to be found in certain patterns of thought or theological implications discernable within these writings. My reading of Kierkegaard then, while not overlooking relevant matters of historical context, takes a thematic approach to interpreting his writings.[43] Such an approach must still grapple with the puzzle of interpreting Kierkegaard's various pseudonyms, and conversely, with questions concerning the relevance of his non-pseudonymous writings to the larger corpus. In this regard, the underlying perspective guiding my reading of the pseudonyms is informed, to some extent, by Mark C. Taylor, who argues, "An effective study must walk the fine line between viewing the pseudonymous works as a chaotic array of perspectives and a strictly systematic whole."[44] Importantly, whereas Taylor argues such coherence should be sought primarily in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings, I focus on ways we might also recognize it by giving special attention to his non-pseudonymous *Upbuilding Discourses*. In this regard, my reading follows George Pattison's more general argument that the

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contrasting Marion and Kierkegaard depend on a reading that adopts Joshua Furnal's suggestion that "Kierkegaard's description of creation, redemption, and the historical character of divine teaching actually coheres with important contours of Thomist thought" (*Catholic Theology After Kierkegaard*, 57; see 13-66).

[42] This point will be important to my emphases in reading Kierkegaard throughout this study. See how it both relates to and builds on arguments made in Bloechl, "Kierkegaard Between Fundamental Ontology and Theology," 23-35.

[43] For an overview of the three common ways of interpreting Kierkegaard's works, including, "biographical-psychological, historical-comparative, and descriptive-thematic" methods, see Mark C. Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 26-36. As he explains, "The descriptive-thematic approach seeks to interpret Kierkegaard's writings on their own terms, rather than by an examination of the influence of his life upon his works or by a comparison of his arguments with other thinkers" (34).

[44] Ibid., 35. While I am influenced by this element of Taylor's argument for reading the pseudonyms, I will here limit my engagement with this text to "Part I: Methodological Considerations," 3-36.

Upbuilding Discourses should be given far more weight in the search for a certain continuity of thought, or purpose, underlying Kierkegaard's various writings.[45]

In the chapters to follow, I focus most explicitly on the *Upbuilding Discourses*, *Works of Love*, and other non-pseudonymous writings. In turning to relevant pseudonymous texts—especially *The Sickness Unto Death* and *The Concept of Anxiety*—I attend to points of thematic overlap or ways the non-pseudonymous works might inform the interpretation. I approach Kierkegaard's writings in this way not because it is the only way to read Kierkegaard, but because I think it is the best way to illumine the theological relevance of his thought for a (post)modern context—particularly in light of the issues with which this study is concerned. I will, of course, address relevant secondary literature and pertinent interpretive debates throughout, most often relegating more technical clarifications to the footnotes—thereby preserving the clarity of the broader theological argument.

As already indicated, my reading of Kierkegaard's writings focuses on elements of a theology of creation—and notably, the role of creation *ex nihilo*—underlying his reflections on love and selfhood. By engaging Kierkegaard's writings in this way, I am not proposing we turn to them for an exemplary, systematic theology of creation. For those unfamiliar with the basic tenants of such a theology—according to its more classical formulation in the Christian tradition—I suggest consulting the sources cited here.[46] My aim is instead to show how basic presuppositions of a theology of creation influence the *way* he interrogates finite human existence—comparing this with Marion's phenomenological descriptions of similar themes. While Kierkegaard was obviously not a systematic theologian and there is much debate as to the religious nature of his authorship, I give interpretive weight to his claim in *On My Work as an Author*, that "the authorship, regarded as a *totality*, is religious from first to last, something anyone who can see, if

[45] See especially, George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2002). While I accept Pattison's more general argument for the importance of these works, the reader will notice various points of difference in the focus of my approach to interpreting the *Upbuilding Discourses*.

[46] Simon Oliver, *Creation: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017); Ian A. McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014); Janet Soskice, "Why *Creatio ex nihilo* for Theology Today?" in *Creation ex nihilo: Origins, Development, and Contemporary Challenges*, edited by Gary A. Anderson and Markus Bockmuehl (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 37-54.

he wants to see, must also see."[47] There are, of course, multiple ways of interpreting whether this statement can be understood in a straightforward way; Kierkegaard's various writings present ideas from differing perspectives, seeking to provoke the reader through direct and indirect methods of communication. For this reason, debates persist concerning the religious dimensions of Kierkegaard's thought and its relation to theology.[48] Nevertheless, focusing especially on the *Upbuilding Discourses*, I will attempt to draw out those moments of implicit and explicit reflection on the implications—or logic—following from a theology of creation at play in Kierkegaard's writings.

Reading Kierkegaard's reflections on love and selfhood in this way, I hope to show how they offer a unique resource for grappling with questions that arise both in Marion's work and at the intersection of theology and phenomenology more broadly. By engaging Kierkegaard's writings in this limited way, I will not attempt to provide an overall portrait of his thought, as, by the end of the thesis, I will hope to have done for Marion's. The more methodological concerns of this project are admittedly influenced by a theological/philosophical context much different from Kierkegaard's own. For this reason, I am careful throughout to delineate between any direct engagement with Kierkegaard's writings and those points at which I operate in a more constructive mode by expanding on or applying their implications.

1.3) *Situating a Theological Engagement*

While we see one point of convergence between Marion and Kierkegaard through Kierkegaard's influence on Heidegger's thought and later phenomenology, this nevertheless leaves significant questions concerning a *theological* engagement with their works. The Lutheran Pietism

[47] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 6.
[48] For a summary of various interpretations regarding this topic, see Lee C. Barrett, "Kierkegaard as Theologian: A History of Countervailing Interpretations," *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 528-549. As my analysis is limited to touching on specific elements of Kierkegaard's writings, I will not venture into these debates to make any claims concerning the nature of Kierkegaard's intentions pertaining to the question of theology in his pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous authorship as a whole. Insofar as I assume there to be an at least recognizable theological nature to Kierkegaard's thought, my reading is particularly indebted to Pattison, "Philosophy and Dogma." See also, footnote 41.

informing Kierkegaard's religious thought in nineteenth-century Denmark[49] differs greatly from the theological context influencing Marion, a contemporary Catholic philosopher and theologian, influenced especially by the *nouvelle théologie* movement in France. [50] There are, therefore, many vantage points or perspectives from which one could assess the theological differences pervading their thought. While not overlooking such differences, my aim, as already indicated, is to narrow in on particular points of convergence between these two thinkers—points at which Kierkegaard's thought either anticipates or somehow intersects with Marion's. One perhaps unexpected way we might notice such convergence occurs on account of the subtle influence Kierkegaard's writings had on the *nouvelle théologie* movement—particularly through the work of Henri de Lubac, a theologian whose thought was deeply influential on Marion's own.[51] While I will address this theological context more explicitly in Chapter 3, at this point a few preliminary observations are in order, which will inform a preliminary sketch of Marion's possible reception of Kierkegaard's thought and highlight some uncanny points of convergence between their two projects. Toward this end, I briefly turn to *Philosophical Fragments.*

Attributed to Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, *Philosophical Fragments* considers—in a series of indirect and hypothetical deliberations—the question of *how* "the learner" might come to know the truth of Christianity, particularly if this truth involves the incomprehensible paradox of the incarnation: of the eternal entering time, and of the divine

[49] For more on this background, see Christopher B. Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (New York & London: Routledge, 2011). For a helpful biography of Kierkegaard's life, which also explores some of the key influences on his thought, see Stephen Backhouse, *Kierkegaard: A Single Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016).

[50] For an introduction to Marion's theology, which further delves into his various influences, see Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A* Theo-*Logical Introduction* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005). See also, Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology*.

[51] See, for example, Henri de Lubac, "Nietzsche and Kierkegaard" in *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, translated by Edith M. Riley and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1983), 102-103. Here de Lubac offers a largely positive engagement with *The Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, contrasting the thought of Kierkegaard with that of Nietzsche. See also, Christopher B. Barnett, Henri de Lubac: Locating Kierkegaard Amid the 'Drama' of Nietzschean Humanism," in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Tome III: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, edited by Jon Stewart (New York: Routledge, 2016), 97-110. For a more comprehensive analysis of the influence of Kierkegaard's writings on the thought of Henri de Lubac, see Joshua Furnal, *Catholic Theology After Kierkegaard* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016), 104-143. Furnal makes a convincing argument that such influence extends beyond de Lubac's explicit commentary on and references to Kierkegaard's writings, demonstrating the subtle ways these writings come to influence his fundamental theology and account of grace.

"planting himself in human life."[52] One of the important questions of *Fragments* thus concerns whether it argues that the truth of Christianity—because of its paradoxical nature—lies outside human understanding and in total opposition to reason. We receive a hint at a possible answer to this question from Climacus' own later explanation in *Postscript*. Here he comments on *Fragments*, arguing that its purpose was not to provide those already knowledgeable about Christian truth with more knowledge, but instead, to communicate to the knower by "taking away his knowledge," so that the content might once again become strange.[53] Importantly Climacus' *Fragments* is meant for the one who "is very knowledgeable," but whose knowledge "is meaningless or virtually meaningless to him."[54] In such a case, he draws the following analogy: "When a man has filled his mouth so full of food that for this reason he cannot eat and it must end with his dying of hunger, does giving food to him consist in stuffing his mouth even more or, instead, in taking a little away so that he can eat?" Climacus' concern, therefore, is with *how* the knower might "assimilate the knowledge."[55]

As Daniel Watts argues, the underlying purpose of *Fragments* is not to state that essential truth is ultimately outside of, or opposed to, human understanding. Instead, Watts sees Climacus as distinguishing between different styles of thinking, or modes of understanding.[56] Climacus is concerned with the accumulation of disinterested, abstract knowledge "in which propositional contents are in turn the objects of thoughts." [57] It seems, however, those truths most essential to us—those having to do with the meaning of our very existence—require our understanding

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[52] Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 107.
[53] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 275. See full note, which extends from 274-76, written in response to a review of *Fragments*.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid. See how Stephen Mulhall takes this point from *Postscript* as a key to interpreting *Fragments*: Stephen Mulhall, "God's Plagiarist: *The Philosophical Fragments* of Johannes Climacus," *Philosophical Investigations* 22, no. 1 (1999), 1-34; see especially, 4-6.
[56] Watts distinguishes between "aesthetic-intellectual thinking" and "ethico-religious thinking." I will go on to explain, in more general terms, the difference he sees between these two types of thinking, or what I will refer to for the sake of clarity as two *ways* of knowing. For his full argument, see Daniel Watts, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Thought," *Hegel Bulletin* 1 (2016): 82-105. See also, the way Joshua Furnal draws on and develops Watts' interpretation of *Fragments* to further illumine points of similarity between Kierkegaard's thought and de Lubac's fundamental theology in *Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard*, 118-126. Even if one is not convinced—as I am—by the basic tenets of Watts' interpretation, what matters more for my analysis is that Marion himself seems to read Kierkegaard in a similar way, as I will go on to show.
[57] Watts, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Thought," 19.

operate in a way that resists any such *singularly* disinterested way of knowing them. This latter mode of understanding is more self-involved, having to do with one's "own individual existence *in concreto.*"[58] One thing this does not mean, according to Watts, is that this latter sort of understanding rules out or cannot relate to the former sort, but only that we cannot know those truths which bear on our concrete existence by abstract thought *alone*. This is because the knowledge which bears on and involves our *concrete* existence operates in a negative manner, delimiting what can and cannot be known—or *directly* represented—in a singularly abstract way.[59] Climacus, it seems, is particularly concerned with *how* one relates to Christian truth so as not to exclude this self-involved *way* of knowing it—necessary if one is to, as Climacus himself explains, *assimilate the knowledge.* With this way of reading *Fragments* in mind, it is now possible to turn to how Kierkegaard's writings come to influence Henri de Lubac and, by extension, Marion—each of whom seems to intuitively read Kierkegaard along somewhat similar lines.

In *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, de Lubac offers a largely positive analysis of *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, contrasting the thought of Kierkegaard with that of Nietzsche. In commenting on *Fragments*, he asserts they present "the fact of the Incarnation, that supreme paradox of the incursion of God into history, or of the eternal into time," forming something like a "philosophy of dogma."[60] In reference to *Postscript*, he makes the following observation: "It sets out to show in what conditions the individual receives the mystery (Kierkegaard calls it the paradox) into himself without stripping it of its essentially mysterious quality," thereby offering "a philosophy of faith."[61] Beyond such explicit

[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 15-29. Cf. John Milbank, "The Sublime in Kierkegaard," *Heythrop Journal* 37, no. 3 (1996): 298-321. The underlying premise of Milbank's critique of Kierkegaard is that a "rupture is posed between his skepticism on the one hand and his fideism on the other," so that "where reason comes adrift, there belief is anchored" (301). Following Watts, I do not read Kierkegaard's thought as resulting in a mere recourse to fideism. In the section that follows, I will highlight other ways of seeing this more general aspect of Watts' argument at play throughout *Fragments.* While my reading of these issues is influenced by his interpretation, one will notice slight differences in what my reading emphasizes, as my focus is on drawing on those dimensions of Climacus' thought which anticipate Marion's. For Watts' full argument, see especially, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Thought," 15-29. It is also interesting to note how his overall interpretation of Kierkegaard—especially in regard to the way Kierkegaard's thought responds to Kant—bears striking resemblance to arguments Marion puts forth in *Negative Certainties*.
[60] See Henri de Lubac, "Nietzsche and Kierkegaard," 102-103.
[61] Ibid., 103.

commentary, however, Furnal convincingly demonstrates that the influence of Kierkegaard's writings extends to de Lubac's fundamental theology and theology of grace.

One aspect of this influence finds evidence in the perpetual role paradox plays in de Lubac's thought. In *Paradoxes of Faith*, de Lubac argues that a paradox is not a mere logical contradiction, but is instead "the provisional expression of a view which remains incomplete, but whose orientation is ever towards fullness."[62] The intellect, therefore, relates to any *true* paradox as a mystery, not yet fully comprehended. As de Lubac claims, "The higher life rises, the richer, the more interior it becomes, the more ground paradox gains."[63] For both Kierkegaard and de Lubac, then, paradox—or mystery—pervades and directs our thought without being fully comprehended or merely produced by it, and this is precisely so in the case of Christian truth. In *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, for example, de Lubac demonstrates a similar concern to that of Climacus in *Fragments*. He warns against those "forms of *gnosis* which seek to take possession of Christian truth, to embrace it, to 'seize' it, and in so doing betray it," further claiming, "Nothing more surely leads one to misinterpret Christianity than the claim to 'understand' it."[64] As Furnal argues, the influence of Kierkegaard on de Lubac's thought becomes evident in his development of a theological response to the following concern: "How can God pervade human thought without being a mere extension of it?"[65]

As we will see, such a problem is also a primary concern of Marion's project. And while de Lubac shows up as a constant influence in Marion's works, it is striking that Marion cites both de Lubac *and* Kierkegaard in further developing his own response to it.[66] But before I can pick out the distinctive way Kierkegaard's influence seems to reveal itself in Marion's works, it is first

[62] Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, translated by Ernest Beaumont (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1987), 9.
[63] Ibid., 10.
[64] Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, translated by Brother Richard Arnandez, F.S.C. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1984), 75-76.
[65] Furnal, *Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard*, 118. Furnal shows that this is the major concern of de Lubac's, *Discovery of God*, demonstrating how his response to it takes a similar shape to the one offered in *Fragments* and *Postscript* (see 118-126). For his comparison of Kierkegaard and de Lubac's view of paradox, see 115-117. While my brief summary draws on Furnal's much more comprehensive analysis, I here further develop specific points that will be relevant to our engagement with Marion's thought.
[66] See, for example, Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, translated by Stephen E. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 55-56. I will further comment on this in due course.

necessary to turn to section III of *Fragments.* Here I will highlight elements of Climacus' argumentation that show up in rather uncanny ways in Marion's overall project.[67]

Climacus argues that "the ultimate paradox of thought" is "to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think. This passion of thought is fundamentally present everywhere in thought."[68] While present everywhere *in thought*, this passion *of* thought, is at once, a passion for that which draws the thinker out of herself, beyond *her own* understanding. Climacus continues: "But what is this unknown against which the understanding in its paradoxical passion collides and which even disturbs man and his self-knowledge? It is the unknown."[69] It soon becomes clear that this 'unknown' is God, or 'the god'—according to this hypothetical deliberation. That the *collision* between the known and unknown involves the very paradox *of thought* seems to imply the collision itself influences the understanding in some way—even if such influence functions as a form of *unknowing*. While 'the god' may remain, by definition, 'the unknown,' in reference to this *unknown*, Cimacus asserts, "in its paradoxicality the understanding cannot stop reaching it and being engaged with it, because wanting to express its relation to it by saying that this unknown does not exist will not do, since just saying that involves a relation."[70] Any rejection of the unknown, in other words, will be the rejection of some *concept*—of something known—and therefore, necessarily *other than* this unknown. At the same time, "the paradox of the understanding" is further seen in that to therefore conclude that the unknown "is the unknown because we cannot know it . . . does not satisfy the passion [of thought], although it has correctly perceived the unknown as frontier."[71] As frontier, the unknown is not *comprehended* by

[67] Rather than breaching the many interpretive debates surrounding the work as a whole, I here merely sketch elements of argumentation in *Philosophical Fragments* that, if read accordingly, reveal some affinity with Marion's project. The interpretive emphases of my sketch closely follow and/or build on elements of more comprehensive analyses of *Fragments* offered by Watts (see footnote 56 & 59), Mulhall (see "God's Plagiarist"), and Furnal (see *Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard*, 46-57 & 118-120).

[68] Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 37. Climacus also refers to this *passion of thought* as a "passion of the understanding [*Forstand*]" (Ibid).

[69] Ibid., 39.

[70] Ibid., 44.

[71] Ibid. Marion makes similar points to these in *Negative Certainties*. In this text, he makes reference to *Fragments* as well as to an entry from one of Kierkegaard's journals. Both references indicate that Marion reads Kierkegaard's account of paradox, not in terms of an illogical contradiction, but as having a more productive relationship between thought and the unknown—so that this unknown might further influence the understanding in various ways. See especially, Marion, *Negative Certainties*, translated by Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 2015), 207 and 263-64, note 6.

the understanding, but we cannot *know* that we cannot know it; we also cannot conclude that it is completely separated from, or unable to touch thought.[72]

In light of this perpetual encounter between the understanding and mystery—which is *present everywhere in thought*—Climacus goes on to consider differing ways such an encounter might express itself. Again, the ultimate paradox Climacus has in mind throughout *Fragments* is, as de Lubac summarizes: "the fact of the Incarnation, that supreme paradox of the incursion of God into history, or of the eternal into time."[73] However, once the understanding claims *direct* comprehension of the paradox, according to a finite standpoint, the thinker ceases to relate to it as the actual mystery that it is, relating instead to a merely *imagined* possibility.[74] For this reason, Climacus goes on to consider how the understanding and the paradox might co-exist in relation to one another. We eventually learn that the proper relation "occurs when the understanding and the paradox happily encounter each other in the moment, when the understanding steps aside and the paradox gives itself."[75] And it here becomes clear that it is the theological virtue of faith which preserves the paradox in the understanding, allowing thought to relate to the paradox while acknowledging an ever-mysterious remainder, or inability to comprehend it *directly*. Faith, then, is the *condition* allowing such paradoxical mystery to persist in relation to the understanding without demanding that it *originate from* or be a direct *possession of* such understanding.[76] As will become clear in Chapter 4, this is also how Marion delineates the relationship between faith and rationality in response to revelation.

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[72] Related to this problem, see Mulhall's interpretation that Climacus' argumentation actually subverts itself to reveal that the "interpretation of the god's paradoxicality as something that thought cannot think, is driven by the perverseness of the understanding rather than the nature of the god" ("God's Plagiarist," 22; 13-22). For more on the significance of Climacus' reference to the unknown as 'frontier,' see Mulhall, "God's Plagiarist," 13-22; Of particular relevance to my reading, see Furnal, *Catholic Theology After Kierkegaard*, 52-54.

[73] Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, 102-103.

[74] While it is possible to see this argument at play in the text of *Fragments*, see the way Climacus makes this point in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 570-581. See also how Furnal reads this latter passage, and the more general question of the intelligibility of Christian truth in *Fragments*, in terms of the view that 'faith is always seeking understanding' (Furnal, *Catholic Theology After Kierkegaard,* 118-120; of particular relevance to my reading, see also, 52-54. Related to this, while Mulhall's focus is on showing how "the true challenge posed by the god is existential rather than intellectual" ("God's Plagiarist," 29), it is also possible to read *Fragments* as hinting at the way rationality and faith relate in the case of one's existential commitment to following Christ. For that reason, I here focus on how *Fragments* perpetually hints at insights concerning the relationship between rationality and faith in light of the various problems internal to Climacus' account of 'the ultimate paradox of thought.'

[75] Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 59.

[76] Furnal explains this in the following way: "we only come to know the unknown through the god making it known to us, and yet, if we do in fact come to know, we can only say *that* we know because—according to Christian theology—the condition to know has been gifted by the Triune God who is unknowable since God reveals Himself

Importantly, this is no mere recourse to fideism. Just as it is possible for the paradox and the understanding to happily "meet in the mutual understanding of their difference" through faith, so too might the understanding encounter the paradox in other ways. The understanding might, for example, assume it can master the paradox—stripping it of its mystery—or it might take offense at the very notion of the paradox, thereby rejecting it.[77] In such case, Climacus argues, this very *offense* experienced by the understanding nevertheless "*comes into existence* with the paradox."[78] He explains, "just as truth is *index sui et falsi* [the criterion of itself and of the false]," so also, "the offense is not the origination of the understanding."[79] For "the paradox itself is the originator who hands over all the splendor to understanding, even the glittering vices (*vitia splendida*)" so that "[w]hen the understanding cannot get the paradox into its head, this did not have its origin in the understanding, but in the paradox itself."[80] In this way, "[t]he one offended does not speak according to his own nature but according to the nature of the paradox, just as someone caricaturing another person does not originate anything himself but only copies the other in the wrong way."[81] Thought, in other words, cannot escape having some relation to those paradoxical mysteries which persist in touching our finite understanding in various ways—inviting us to contemplation.

We might see this demonstrated in Climacus' highlighting of an example of sorts, taken from everyday experience and referred to as "the paradox of erotic love." As he explains, "[s]elf-love is the ground or goes to the ground in all love," so that loving oneself is necessary for "loving the neighbor as oneself."[82] Yet, how exactly the two coincide, or "the paradox of self-love as love for another," is notoriously difficult to grasp by way of a simple concept. Such a paradox is certainly not something one can grasp by thinking about it in a detached or disinterested sort of

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as mystery." (*Catholic Theology After Kierkegaard*, 53). "[T]his relation to the unknown God," then, "manifests itself spontaneously as wonder—an immediate incongruity with the way things are supposed to go based on previous experience" (Ibid.).

[77] Ibid., 49. See also, 49-54.

[78] Ibid., 51.

[79] Ibid., 50-51.

[80] Ibid., 53.

[81] Ibid., 51.

[82] Ibid., 39. In *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus repeatedly highlights different dimensions of the seeming contradictions involved in erotic love as a kind of imperfect, everyday example of the paradox. See also, 25-26 and 47-49.

way—even while one may nevertheless witness to something of its reality in the very moment one loves or fails to do so. The understanding must, therefore, give itself over to the paradox of love in a self-involved way—by loving—since, as Climacus claims, "the lover is changed by this paradox of love so that he almost does not recognize himself any more."[83] In this way, we witness an example of how thought, to enter into a "mutual understanding" with the paradox, must relinquish *possessing* the paradox as a *directly* comprehended object of the understanding. We find further evidence for this interpretation in one of Kierkegaard's journal entries—an entry Marion himself cites in *Negative Certainties*:

> [I]f *human* science refuses to acknowledge that there is something it cannot understand, or, more accurately still, something such that it clearly understands that it cannot understand it, then everything is confused. For it is a task for human cognition to understand that there is something, and what it is, that it cannot understand. Human cognition is generally busily concerned to understand and understand, but if it would also take the trouble to understand itself it must straightaway posit the paradox. The paradox is not a concession but a category, an ontological qualification which expresses the relation between an existing cognitive spirit and the eternal truth."[84]

Here we see further evidence of the view that the understanding itself somehow relates to that which nevertheless escapes finite comprehension; a view which does not therefore mean thought is not influenced by its encounter with mystery. In this sense, by focusing on the theology of creation underpinning especially Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous writings, the study that follows will further show how, for Kierkegaard, the mysterious contradictions we seemingly encounter in our experience—both of ourselves and of love—quite coherently point to a vision of our created contingency as indelibly marked by its orientation to God as its source and final end.

While assessing the extent of Kierkegaard's influence on Marion's thought is not the overall purpose of this thesis, as the reader progresses on to later chapters (especially Chapter 3), it may be helpful to return to the above sketch of *Fragments*—as I have here sought to draw out concerns relevant to Marion's overall thought. For now, I will merely highlight how Marion

[83] Ibid., 39.
[84] Søren Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals: A Selection*, translated by Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 255. Marion refers to this journal entry in support of his own reading of Kierkegaard. See Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 207 & 263-64, note 6.

makes explicit use of *Fragments* in elucidating one of the primary contributions of his own thought: the notion of paradox as "counter-experience." This will allow me to further situate my theological engagement with the two thinkers.

For Marion, *counter-experience* involves an event that occurs by contradicting ones' expectations or exceeding various a priori conditions for making sense of such experience in terms of a finite set of concepts. Such experience does not forbid thought from contemplating it, while nevertheless exceeding one's ability to comprehend it completely. We might think here of the reference in *Philosophical Fragments* to *that unknown against which the understanding in its paradoxical passion collides*—that unknown which nevertheless permeates thought. Marion translates this point concerning the paradox to a consideration of the *experience* of various phenomena. For Marion, what matters is that paradox, or counter-experience, is always given to experience *as* something unknown—or not yet fully grasped—and will always *exceed* whatever objectifying knowledge I might possess of it.

In one of his more explicitly theological works, *Givenness and Revelation*, Marion relates this notion of counter-experience to the theological issues at play in an account of the divine self-manifestation of God in Christ. His primary concern is, as noted above, similar to that of de Lubac: How might we approach the revealed knowledge of God in a way that nevertheless preserves divine mystery? Furthermore, how is it that the event of the incarnation invites us to contemplate its meaning, giving us real knowledge of the God made manifest in immanent experience, without nullifying divine incomprehensibility or transcendence? To address these questions, Marion draws on and develops his account of paradox as counter-experience. In this context, he again makes reference to *Philosophical Fragments* in order to assert the following: "A paradox is not the same thing as a logical contradiction of a proposition (or non-sense), nor is it an (empirical) impossibility of knowledge, nor an obscurity (a confusion) in phenomenality."[85] Instead, the *event* of the incarnation—in its very paradoxicality—gives real meaning or significance that nevertheless *exceeds* whatever I might grasp or predict as a *mere* object of comprehended thought. As Leo Stan observes, for both Marion and Kierkegaard, Christ "exceeds the boundaries of mere visibility"; the event of the incarnation is "an absolute phenomenon

[85] Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 55.

which, albeit not of this world, fills every horizon with meaning."[86] While there is much more to say about Marion's theology of revelation, I here merely wish to situate our reading of Marion and Kierkegaard around this point of commonality between them. For each, paradox, or counter-experience, provides a way to consider how the revealed knowledge of God nevertheless retains an apophatic element—important for any theological consideration of how we properly know the incomprehensible God.

This brings us to the question of negative or apophatic theology. One might wonder, given their quite different theological backgrounds, whether there is any true convergence in the way Marion and Kierkegaard utilize paradox to preserve divine incomprehensibility. Consistently present in the background of Marion's thought is the influence of such thinkers as Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory of Nyssa, Nicholas of Cusa and others associated with the apophatic theological tradition. Such direct influence is clearly not *as* evident in the works of Kierkegaard. Nevertheless, scholars have noted elements of something like a negative or apophatic theology at play in Kierkegaard's writings.[87] And there is some evidence, as David Law documents, that Kierkegaard was familiar with the method of negative theology and some of the Patristic and early Christian sources that employed it.[88] The shape of what looks like a negative or apophatic theology at play in Kierkegaard's writings, however, would have also been influenced by a Lutheran doctrine of the 'hidden and revealed' knowledge of God, wherein emphasis is placed on our human *inability* to see or comprehend divine glory, for which reason, God must reveal Godself in and through the meek and lowly humanity of Christ.[89] Kierkegaard, however, seems

[86] Leo Stan, "The Paradoxical Givenness of Love," 214. For his overview comparing Marion and Kierkegaard's overall approaches to the topic of paradox, see especially 213-214. Importantly, since the publication of this essay, Marion has further clarified his project and delineated his own interpretation of Kierkegaard's view of paradox. Therefore, while I agree that there are interesting reasons for comparing the use of 'paradox' in Marion's phenomenology with Kierkegaard's theologically-inflected understanding and use of such a notion, the emphases of my own overview differ from that of Stan's (see footnote 30).

[87] See, for example, David Kangas, "Kierkegaard, the Apophatic Theologian," Enrahonar 29, (1998): 119-123; Peter Kline, *Passion for Nothing: Kierkegaard's Apophatic Theology* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2017); David R. Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), see especially 24-27. I will limit my engagement with these works to the interpretation put forth by Law.

[88] For Law's analysis of the potential influence of negative theology—especially by way of Patristic sources—on the implicit apophaticism in Kierkegaard's thought, see especially, Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 24-34.

[89] For his analysis of this, see Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 162-206. Law shows how Kierkegaard's view of *the revealed God* is such that divine revelation does not cancel, or merely dialectically counter, divine hiddenness.

to have transformed this doctrine in unique ways that potentially bring his thought closer to a more classical, apophatic approach.

First, in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Johannes Climacus turns to clarify the paradox of the incarnation, noting that some understand the paradox in terms of "the humiliation" of Christ's "coming in the humble form of a servant," believing that "this is the paradox in contrast to coming in glory."[90] Climacus rather abruptly refers to this as "[c]onfusion," arguing instead,

> The paradox is primarily that God, the eternal, has entered into time as an individual human being. Whether this individual human being is a servant or an emperor makes no difference. It is not more adequate for God to be a king than to be a beggar; it is not more humiliating for God to become a beggar than to become an emperor.[91]

This is not to say the distinctive form of life Christ—as prototype—takes doesn't matter. Instead, Climacus is here getting at what he refers to as the "infinite qualitative difference" between God and human beings. The eternal God does not exist as *created* beings do—according to a contingent, finite, and temporal existence. We will overlook the *true* paradox of the incarnation, therefore, if we merely understand it *in terms of* the comparisons we make *according to* our finite existence. Climacus continues, "If, however, childish orthodoxy insists upon this humiliation as the paradox, then it shows *eo ipso* that it is not aware of the paradox."[92] Again, if the paradox of the incarnation is merely that God reveals Godself in terms of that which we *understand*—in lowly humiliation rather than in the glory of an emperor—we have comprehended the paradox. By imagining some*thing* glorious entering into humiliation as we understand it, we cease to contemplate the incarnation as the *absolute*, incomprehensible paradox. It is here possible to see an example of how Climacus' thought, while making use of dialectics at key points, is not reducible to a dialectical theology.

We gain further support for such a view in turning to Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous works—especially his *Upbuilding Discourses*. Here it becomes clear that Kierkegaard is not opposed to the idea that we might witness God's glory in creation. As he himself claims, "God has not let

[90] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 596.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.

himself be without witness in anything created."[93] As will become apparent in our exploration of Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding Discourses*, God's *hiddenness* neither excludes recognition of God's glory in the human being nor that all creation somehow witnesses to its Creator. Likewise, the *revealed* knowledge of God in Christ does not imply some sort of *comprehension* of the divine—even one grasped dialectically. As Christopher Barnett has argued, Kierkegaard, like Marion, maintains that recognition of divine glory, while always everywhere present, nevertheless requires *eyes to see*. Both thinkers, in other words, hold the view that there is a hermeneutical or interpretive dimension to *the way* we see and encounter all that is created, influencing whether and how we recognize God in all things.[94]

In light of these notable elements of convergence, it is now possible to highlight a meaningful difference between Marion and Kierkegaard, relevant to the overall analysis of this thesis. We see this difference in the role classical doctrines, such as divine immutability or omnipotence, play in what we might loosely refer to as Kierkegaard's 'negative theology.' David Law highlights that for Kierkegaard, the affirmation of 'omnipotence,' for example, "does not help us grasp what God is, because the term omnipotence itself transcends our capacity to comprehend it."[95] In this way, we might see such metaphysical language functioning as a way of asserting divine transcendence and incomprehensibility—or what the author of *Fragments* refers to as *the infinite qualitative difference* between God and creation. At the same time, Law argues, Kierkegaard's affirmation of divine incomprehensibility does not, for him, preclude all knowledge of God—he instead acknowledges various ways of knowing what nevertheless remains beyond our finite grasp. [96] In contrast to Kierkegaard, Marion's engagement with apophatic theology often overlooks attention to the use of metaphysical language as a method for preserving divine ineffability. As we will see, he more often utilizes the resources of phenomenology for considering issues of transcendence and immanence, drawing on a notion of

[93] Søren Kierkegaard, *Ubuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 192.
[94] See especially, Barnett, *From Despair to Faith*, 63-85.
[95] Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 166.
[96] Law sees in Kierkegaard's thought a view equivalent to that of one affirming general and special revelation. In either case, knowledge of God is not equivalent to a "direct perception" of God and never vitiates the "essential incomprehensibility" of the divine (Law, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 173-181).

non-spacialized, infinite 'distance' between God and creatures.[97] The difference of approach between the two thinkers is expressed in the following way by Leo Stan:

> Despite the affinities which allow Marion and Kierkegaard to approach God 'insofar as unknown,' it remains a fact that Kierkegaard coevally speaks of God in terms of transcendence, creative ground, and actuality, which means that he is not fully innocent of the charge of perpetuating onto-theology.[98]

That Marion would actually charge Kierkegaard of ontotheology is unlikely and beside the point; what matters here is how this observation marks a decisive difference in theological tenor or method. I will show how such difference influences not only each thinker's implicit doctrine of God, but also the way each reflects on lived experience—particularly as such experience relates to a theological interpretation of love and selfhood.

In focusing on the specific context of theological overlap—and divergence—between Marion and Kierkegaard's thought, now outlined above, I in no way wish to dismiss the distinctly Lutheran tenor of Kierkegaard's theological reflections. Nevertheless, in engaging these two thinkers, I here focus on those elements of Kierkegaard's writings which are not, in my view, exclusively relevant for a Protestant theological context. In this sense, I am further indebted to Furnal's recent work, arguing that "the Lutheran structure of Kierkegaard's theology invites, rather than precludes ecumenical readings of Kierkegaard's writings."[99] As he demonstrates, "the coherence of Kierkegaard's theology of creation and redemption reveals a mystical character that shares an important heritage with Catholic thinkers."[100] Focusing on such elements of

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[97] For an account of this and the—sometimes problematic—ways in which Marion utilizes the metaphor of 'distance,' see Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A* Theo-*Logical Introduction*, 51-60. While, in my view, there are problematic aspects of Marion's attempt to move theology beyond 'metaphysics,' this is not to say that his overall project rejects engagement with classical doctrines or that his theological account of revelation *necessarily* precludes a place for more metaphysical speculation or ontology—as I will attempt to show in Chapter 4.

[98] Stan, "Jean-Luc Marion: The Paradoxical Givenness of Love," 228. Stan, however, sees Marion's project as different from Kierkegaard's insofar as it subjects God to an immanent frame. A close reading of Marion's more recent works reveals that this is, in fact, what Marion's approach to revelation expressly attempts to avoid. While my reading of Marion's approach to issues of transcendence and immanence differs from the one put forth in this essay, Stan raises significant questions for further considering the differences between Marion and Kierkegaard, particularly as this concerns the apophatic elements of each thinker's theology (see especially, 227-229). In this sense, I will raise questions to Marion's methodology along some similar lines—focusing in Chapter 5 on whether Marion's express aim of *not* reducing God to immanence fails with specific regard to his approach to love. See also, footnote 29.

[99] Furnal, *Catholicism After Kierkegaard*, 14.

[100] Ibid.

Kierkegaard's writings provides a lens through which to engage his thought alongside Marion's. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate further the ecumenical relevance of Kierkegaard's thought for specific issues in contemporary theology.

In a similar vein, the specific theological problems I here wish to address—concerning not only kenotic accounts of love and selfhood but also the relationship between theology and phenomenology—arise within the context of Christian theology more generally. In this regard, while I engage thinkers from two different backgrounds—one Catholic and one Protestant—my aim is that the arguments put forth here might find some relevance within both Catholic and Protestant theological contexts. While I am interested in possible analogues such arguments might have with other religious traditions, the work is, of course, limited—though certainly not out of a desire to exclude such potential consideration.

1.4) *Outline of the Argument*

Part 1 (chapters 2-3) situates an engagement with Marion and Kierkegaard within a context of debates that arise in postmodern theory—focusing on problems these debates raise for a theological *concept* of love. Chapter 2 introduces questions surrounding an approach to human otherness and difference, attending to a tension that arises for maintaining regard for human alterity while not overlooking the concrete particularity of human difference as it is encountered. It shows how this tension repeats itself in theology, with recent apophatic approaches to the *imago Dei.* While attending to this broader context of questions, the chapter also orients an engagement with Marion and Kierkegaard by attending to striking similarities, notable in the way each approaches the divine image. I attend mainly to the apophatic dimensions of their accounts by reading Marion's explicitly theological works alongside Kierkegaard's discourse, "How Glorious It is to Be a Human Being." With the theme of the *imago Dei* as its focal point, this chapter establishes a starting point for our study by allowing me to situate an engagement with Marion and Kierkegaard within the context of issues that arise for contemporary theological anthropology. Toward that end, the chapter introduces a series of questions upon which the analysis of later chapters builds.

Chapter 3 moves more explicitly to the question of a theological concept of love—attending to the already introduced concerns that arise in (post)modern thought more generally while giving special attention to gift-theory debates. I show how such discussions reveal a series of tensions or seeming contradictions for a theological *concept* of love. This leads to a common impasse in recent theology, between arguments that end in a univocal concept of love *as* kenotic self-donation, and those that end in a somewhat equivocal, or ambiguous notion of love. After assessing how this impasse influences the popularity of arguments such as Marion's, I show how Kierkegaard might reveal one way of moving beyond it. Here I show how Kierkegaard anticipates many of the concerns about love postmodern theory raises, but addresses them through reflection on a theology of creation. Drawing primarily on his non-pseudonymous *Works of Love* and *Upbuilding Discourses*, I show how a presupposed doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* shapes Kierkegaard's vision in a way that offers a corrective to Marion's phenomenological approach to love *as* kenotic 'self-abandon.' Rather than define love singularly in terms of *kenosis* or 'self-gift,' I argue that Kierkegaard's theology of creation affirms a God whose act of creating is not separate from that of knowing and loving. *We* love, however, by participation in God and are thus, spiritually formed *by* and *in* love through an ever-increasing embrace of our utter dependence on God. Following this line of reasoning, I show how it provides Kierkegaard with a framework for addressing the contradictions surrounding love, which remain relevant for our current context. In this sense, the chapter reveals some unexpected ways Kierkegaard's existential reflections might, rather uncannily, witness to the relevance of key tenants belonging to a classical theology of creation—tenants we might recognize, for example, in the theology of Thomas Aquinas.

Part 2 (consisting of the interlude and chapters 4-5) sets out to illumine the significance of Marion's approach to the self *after* the deconstruction of the modern subject, along with the role this plays in his phenomenology of givenness. While not rejecting the basic tenants of Marion's phenomenology of givenness, it nevertheless shows how it is possible to bring Marion's philosophical anthropology into productive dialogue with Kierkegaard's robust *theological* reflections on the self in a way that need not negate Marion's overall project. Such engagement provides a way to explore themes of love and selfhood from the standpoint of concerns that arise within *both* the context of theology *and* phenomenology in a way that preserves the integrity of

each discipline—nevertheless admitting that maintaining the integrity of theology may very well involve recognizing its potential to concern itself with and to uncover transdisciplinary implications.

Given the overall aim of Section 2, the interlude provides a transition from more general debates in postmodern theory to the specific context of issues involving an approach to the 'self' in phenomenology. As this will form the context of questions that arise in chapters 4 and 5, the interlude serves as a brief overview of how the deconstruction of the modern subject has come to influence emphases in contemporary theological anthropology. This is in no way a comprehensive overview, but merely highlights recent visions of the self in the work of influential Christian theologians, working with various creedal and confessional commitments and from a variety of traditions. In highlighting their articulations of the self, I focus on how the emphases at play in their theological anthropology map onto emphases following from the deconstruction of the modern subject. This sets the stage for a more detailed theological engagement with the sorts of concerns involved in an account of the self as they arise along with the brief history of phenomenology.

In Chapter 4, I turn to the more explicitly philosophical issues that arise in this context and inform Marion's phenomenology of givenness. I give special attention to Marion's account of the givenness of the self and the role this plays, both in his phenomenology and in his more explicitly theological account of revelation. I show how Marion's account of the utter givenness of the self paradoxically coincides with a notion of self-abandon. This sets the stage for assessing the implications of Marion's account of the givenness of the self for a theology of nature and grace, set within the context of the broader *nouvelle théologie* movement. Insofar as this chapter seeks to illumine issues in Marion's theological anthropology relating to his account of nature and grace, I assess his thought by contrasting it with that of Karl Rahner and Henri de Lubac. However, building on this assessment, the chapter concludes by turning to Kierkegaard's relevance for re-thinking problematic aspects of Marion's account of the self's formation, or becoming, by and in grace.

Finally, Chapter 5 consists of a more direct comparison of Marion and Kierkegaard, further considering accounts of the fragmentary self in phenomenology, only now moving from

questions of the self's givenness to questions of self's temporality. While recollecting the past or anticipating the future, we remain ever-unable to grasp ourselves; we experience ourselves as fragmented due to the continual flux of change over time. This reveals yet another tension for a theological account of selfhood. What is it, if anything, that remains constant—giving the self a sense of meaning or continuity despite all those things constantly passing away? Such questions, yet again, illuminate a series of overlapping concerns at the intersection of theology and phenomenology, allowing us to investigate the relationship between disciplines further. Toward that end, the chapter first highlights key *theological* dimensions of Kierkegaard's reflections on selfhood and temporality—focusing on specific themes found both in *The Sickness Unto Death* and in his *Upbuilding Discourses*. It then shows how Heidegger both draws on and secularizes these themes in developing his account of *authentic* selfhood, articulated according to his account of "being-toward-death." This sets the stage for exploring further dimensions of Marion's account of the kenotic self, developed in direct *response* to Heidegger's articulation of authentic selfhood. The aim of this brief tracing of themes—from Kierkegaard, through Heidegger, to Marion—is to arrive at an informed comparison of Marion and Kierkegaard's method of contemplating the self and interpreting its temporal experience. Here, we see the further relevance of the way Kierkegaard's reflections on selfhood presuppose a theology of creation. Connected with this, is that his discourses contemplating the self's experience of temporality are, at the same time, reflections on a doctrine of divine immutability and the eternity of God. I consider precise ways in which this difference of approach results in two divergent modes of contemplating the self. I then move to consider the implications of this difference, not only for how one reflects on the experience of temporality but also for a doctrine of God.

As already indicated, while this study interrogates themes of love and selfhood in recent theology, it functions simultaneously to analyze some of the puzzles involving the relationship between theology and phenomenology. In other words, while the explicit focus of our engagement with Marion and Kierkegaard is thematic, the underlying concern is methodological. Each chapter builds on the last, having its own, self-contained argument that is somehow related to our overarching themes. For this reason, I will use the final conclusion to draw these different

strands of argumentation together, attending to what the cumulative result of the analysis reveals for questions of theological method.

PART I

CHAPTER 2

ALERITY, DIFFERENCE, AND THE *IMAGO DEI*: MERITS AND QUESTIONS OF AN APOPHATIC APPROACH

"Christians fight not for humanity in general but for themselves and out of their love for concrete human beings."[1]

-James Cone

2.0) *Introduction*

Acutely aware of the forms of violence that proceed from the prejudicial categorization of human otherness or difference, Emmanuel Levinas argues that the Other remains "infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign."[2] A similar concern leads Jacques Derrida to uphold a notion of *absolute* alterity or otherness. If difference finds its basis in comparison, when applied to human identity, this reduces the human other to *my own* concept—or a categorizing of the other *in terms of* the self. For this reason, postmodern theory moves away from essentialist accounts of what constitutes our shared human nature, or an understanding of identity as underpinned by some fixed set of attributes. The affirmation of absolute alterity, however, raises significant theoretical questions; this is particularly seen in that such affirmation, *on its own*, fails to address a host of issues pertaining to the lived and embodied experience of difference. As Richard Kearney claims, "if every other is wholly other, does it still *matter* who or what exactly the other is?"[3] Questions such as this one lead to a series of debates surrounding how best to approach a notion of human 'identity.'[4] In what ways might we affirm the concrete particularity of human

[1] James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 163.
[2] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, translated by Alphonso Lingis. (London: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1992), 194.
[3] Richard Kearney, "Desire of God" in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, edited by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 124.
[4] Such concerns, for example, influence differing ways of construing human identity, whether approaching identity as performative or according to a narrative account. For an account of identity as performative, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990). For an example of a narrative approach to identity, see Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, translated by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

difference while acknowledging the irreducibility of that difference to a fixed set of concepts?[5] Furthermore, are there non-essentialist ways of attending to the shared commonality between human beings?

Over the years, the above context of concerns has, of course, presented a series of issues for theologians as well. Many have found a unique set of resources for engaging such issues in traditions of apophatic thought, as is, perhaps, nowhere more evident than in recent approaches to the *imago Dei*. Wishing to avoid an essentialist account of human nature—by understanding the divine image in terms of some fixed nature or essential trait that would somehow give us a concept of what it means to be human—many recent theologians have argued that human beings somehow image divine incomprehensibility.[6] One such example of this view is seen in Kathryn Tanner's argument that, in this case, "Like God who is incomprehensible because unlimited humans might have a nature that imitates God only by not having a clearly delimited nature."[7] There are, of course, many details surrounding such an account that I cannot get into here. But given the context of concerns that informs Marion's thought, it is of no surprise that he also adopts apophatic emphases for an approach to the *imago Dei*. Perhaps more surprising is that Søren Kierkegaard not only anticipates some of these same concerns—as I will go on to show in Chapter 3—but also that his reflections on the divine image anticipate elements of Marion's theological account of this theme, which will be the focus of the current chapter.

After highlighting how Marion's use of apophatic thought contributes to questions concerning the affirmation of alterity and difference, I move to some of the ways Kierkegaard's writings anticipate elements of Marion's approach. To that end, I focus on the discourse, "How Glorious it is to Be a Human Being." The primary aim of this chapter, then, is two-fold. First, I draw on

[5] For an argument along these lines as well as a critical analysis of the problem *absolute* alterity poses for recognition of *particular* difference, see Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

[6] For versions of this argument—made in different ways and applied to different theological concerns—see, for example, Kathryn Tanner, "The Image of the Invisible," in *Apophatic Bodies*: *Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, edited by Chris Boesel and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 117-136; Janet Martin Soskice, "Imago Dei" in *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 35-51; Ian A. McFarland, *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005). While I raise these as examples, I cannot engage with these works here.

[7] Tanner, "The Image of the Invisible," 121.

and develop Christopher Barnett's argument that there are decisive points of similarity in the theological aesthetics identifiable in Marion's and Kierkegaard's works. Expanding on this argument, I show how it relates to the way each thinker reflects on the theme of the *imago Dei.* Establishing this aspect of similarity will form the starting point of our study, setting the stage for our further theological engagement with their works, focused on themes of love and selfhood. Second, since I aim to situate this analysis within the context of its relevance for addressing contemporary debates in theological anthropology, my discussion of the *imago Dei* will orient the reader to a broader set of concerns informing the chapters still to follow. To that end, the final section of the chapter highlights a series of questions that arise for an apophatic account of the human being as irreducible to any fixed or finite nature. While assuming this basic position, I wish to highlight a series of tensions it reveals for various approaches to theological anthropology—a series of tensions I will explore in subsequent chapters.

2.1) *Marion on Love, Alterity, and the Question of the Gaze*

In a collection of early essays on love entitled *Prolegomena to Charity/Prolégomènes à la charité* (1986), Marion argues, "in order to produce a conceptual determination of love, it is not sufficient to qualify as love the access to rationality by representation."[8] In other words, love must not find its *basis* in my fixed *conception* of another's identity. However, Marion nevertheless goes on to claim, "it is only love that opens up knowledge of the other as such."[9] Accordingly, he will seek to locate the path toward loving recognition of the other's unique particularity with love itself. As a phenomenologist, Marion attempts to describe the ways we actually undergo the *experience* of knowing. He is particularly attentive to the fact that there are different *ways* of knowing—or modes of knowledge—required for knowing different sorts of things.

[8] Jean-Luc Marion, "What Love Knows" in *Prolegomena to Charity*, translated by Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 159-160.
[9] Ibid., 160.

In *The Erotic Phenomenon/Le phénomène érotique: Six méditations* (2003), Marion notes that desire is more primary than knowledge since the desire to know drives the very pursuit of knowledge. Likewise, he sees both the desire and the decision to love as informing the *way* one knows the one loved. As Pia Søloft explains, for Marion, "we are always-already placed in an erotic situation—in the broad, Greek sense of the term—whenever we attempt to comprehend something. Knowledge is driven by love."[10] In an essay that reads Kierkegaard's view of erotic love alongside *The Erotic Phenomenon*, she argues this is one point of commonality between Marion and Kierkegaard. Focusing mainly on the "Erotic Stages" in *Either/Or*, Søloft states that for Kierkegaard, while love finds its ultimate basis in God as its Source, it also has a basis in human nature.[11] It awakens first as a pre-conscious passion or immediate desire with no object, as a positive urge for life and for the yet *unknown*, or, in *Works of Love*, "as an essential need to love and to be loved."[12] For both Marion and Kierkegaard, then, love is prior to knowledge—at least in the case of the human experience of love. Without expounding on this point much further, Søloft's essay does also note that one difference between Marion and Kierkegaard is that, for Kierkegaard, love has an *ontological* basis. In many ways, the analysis of subsequent chapters might be read as further building on this observation and exploring its implications. Setting this point of dialogue between Marion and Kierkegaard to one side, for now, what matters is that throughout Marion's various works, he envisions an intimate link between desire, will, and intellect—so that the will, or decision, to love influences the *way* one knows or perceives the one loved. And as Jason Alvis has shown, for Marion, it is desire that precedes the decision to love, and reciprocally, this decision that further directs desire—now *as* the desire to love.[13]

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[10] Søloft, "Erotic Love: Reading Kierkegaard with and without Marion," 40.
[11] Ibid., 38-39.
[12] Ibid., 40. See also, 41-43. Søloft is describing what Kierkegaard refers to as the "sensual erotic," which he defines as occurring in three stages. She nevertheless interprets these stages as blending together—so that one isn't overcome upon moving to another (40-43). See also, Søloft's account of how this desire is based in both lack and excess (41). For his account of the "sensual erotic," see Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or Part I*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 45-135.
[13] For his more detailed account of this, see Jason W. Alvis, *Marion and Derrida on The Gift and Desire: Debating the Generosity of Things* (New York: Springer, 2016), 68-95. Adding to Alvis' analysis, it is also the case that Marion's theological works make clear that he sees both the desire and decision to love as enabled by grace—a point I will further elaborate in later chapters.

We begin to understand how all this relates to the question of alterity by reading Marion's approach in connection with Levinas, who describes the encounter with the face of the Other as initiating a primary call to responsibility for this Other. Here while the Other transcends my definitions and concepts, my encounter with this Other calls me to account. For Levinas, this implies that ethics is primary, coming before any ontology or conceptual grasp of the human Other. Marion, who's thought is deeply indebted to Levinas, nevertheless seeks to reformulate this because the ethic of responsibility for the Other is not capable of individualizing the *particular* Other in the way love would demand. [14] This is because while the ethic of responsibility arises in the same way in every encounter, love responds uniquely to each Other. Importanlty, while Marion does not see the *basis* of love in a conceptual knowledge of the other as such, he seeks to show how love *itself* initiates a unique way of seeing or encountering the other in her particularity. This may be attributed to his desire to uphold regard for the other's irreducible alterity while redefining the way it is understood by Levinas, or Derrida for that matter. [15]

Before moving to the theological resources Marion draws on to re-think a notion of alterity, it might first be helpful to get a clear picture of what exactly we are talking about, and why regard for alterity matters as more than just a trend of early (post)modernity. Some have criticized Marion's notion that love ought not *first* find its basis in a knowledge of the one loved.[16] Marion's concern, however, is with a categorizing sort of knowledge that would assume the ability to *comprehend* the other. If love has its *singular* basis in observable characteristics of similarity and difference between persons, this is a categorizing type of knowledge. To get at

[14] See Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 100-101. I will provide a more in-depth analysis and critique of *The Erotic Phenomenon* in later chapters.

[15] For an examination of this and other possible aspects of Marion's reformulation of Levinasian alterity, see James K. A. Smith, "Love, Selfhood, and the Gift of Community," in *The Hermeneutics of Charity*, edited by James K.A. Smith and Henry Isaac Venema (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 217-227. Smith briefly mentions the way Marion's interpretation of the icon spills over into his account of human otherness. I will develop this point in connection with some of Marion's more recent works, highlighting further implications of how his approach to the idol and icon—and use of apophatic theology—relate to the way he understands recognition or knowledge of the human other.

[16] See, for example, John Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror," in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, edited by Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 253-317. Milbank rightly views being as *itself* irreducible to the intentional aim—so that our knowledge of other human beings is always partial. See, for example, Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 382. However, in my view, this point is not—on its own—enough to deal with the real concern posed by arguments for alterity: the question of how to avoid *false* knowledge of the other or *basing* one's "love" on reductive categorization of the other in terms of the self.

why such knowledge cannot *on its own* form the basis of one's real love for another, it helps to see how the categorization of identity just as easily becomes a basis for prejudice, [17] and therefore, unhelpful if we are to understand love as that which *necessarily* counteracts prejudice.

Prejudice involves the operation of *both* a category and a dismissal—made in relation to a concept of another's identity. If I reduce another human being to a *category*, it is *first* a dismissal of her intrinsic, irreducible value as other. Next, my *dismissal* of the category with which I identify this other betrays a certain setting myself up as judge over whatever is associated with said category. This forces the irreducible other into a certain relationship to the category with which she has been identified, and a decision necessarily follows. She must now choose to identify (or not) with said category. If she identifies with the category in order to resist its unjust dismissal, she does not stand up for her irreducible otherness since the very nature of categorization is a reduction to the same. On the other hand, if she stands up for her irreducible otherness, she is forced to establish her distinctiveness by differentiating herself from this category. In this way, violence is done to the other not simply because of the original categorization and dismissal, but also because she herself is now forced into the original position of the judge, wrapped up in a perpetuation of the very problem causing her original offense. The way these conceptual categories of likeness or dissimilarity relate to prejudice demonstrate why love cannot find its *basis* in this very same form of conceptual categorization of identity.

Of course, this description overlooks a third option for resisting prejudice—or the original category and dismissal made in relation to a concept of identity. This third option would require upholding regard or respect for difference—in all its various lived and embodied manifestations—but in constant connection with a recognition of the other's irreducibility to this difference considered *as* a category reducible to representational thought. At first, it seems this option would require one to remain in a state of perpetual mental gymnastics when encountering another human being. It is, however, at this point that we might turn to the significance of Marion's use of apophatic thought for considering an approach not only to the mystery of the

[17] My account of 'prejudice' is only intended to describe some of its features. It is, of course, not intended to be a description of racism or xenophobia, for example—each of which demand consideration of numerous other issues including structural and systemic factors.

divine, but also to our encounter with human others. Important to this discussion will be the way he draws on apophatic thought to *reformulate* (post)modern assumptions that rationality is reducible to representation—thereby questioning whether all *ways* of knowing the other necessarily contradict the other's alterity.

2.2) *Marion's Use of Apophatic Theology for Envisioning the* Imago Dei

In *On the Making of Man*, Gregory of Nyssa says, "Let those tell us who consider the nature of God to be within their comprehension, whether they understand themselves—if they know the nature of their own mind."[18] In this same segment, he goes on to interpret what it means for humans to be created in the divine image, claiming, "since the nature of our mind, which is the likeness of the Creator, evades our knowledge, it has an accurate resemblance to the superior nature, figuring by its unknowableness the incomprehensible Nature."[19] Marion follows Gregory of Nyssa in conceiving human beings as created to image divine incomprehensibility. Just as the divine essence remains beyond any and all conceptual grasp, so too does our human nature.[20] While Marion understands Christ as the icon (εἰκὼν) of the invisible God, following Col. 1:15, he distinguishes this from *our* imaging of divine incomprehensibility in a particular way. From before all creation, Christ is the perfect, *eternal* icon: "Icon, thus visibility—of God, thus of the invisible. It is the eternal linking of the visible to the invisible as such, which remains invisible even in its manifestation."[21] We, on the other hand, image divine incomprehensibility in the following way: "as a necessarily inadequate image of the original infinite, humans first become incomprehensible because we receive its excess, then because we fall short of it."[22] We, therefore, exist in and through finite dependence on God, always following after or reflecting,

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[18] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* XI, translated by Henry Wace and Philip Schaff (Oxford: Parker and Co.; New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1982), 396.
[19] Ibid., 397.
[20] See Jean-Luc Marion, "The Formal Reason of the Infinite" in *Believing in Order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers*, translated by Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 38. This work is composed of separate essays, originally published in 2010 as *Le croire pour le voir: Réflexions diverses sur la rationalité de la révélation et l'irrationalité de quelques croyants*. For the sake of clarity, I will hereafter cite this work according to its chapter headings, as published in the recent English edition.
[21] Marion, "The Phenomenality of the Sacrament," 111. For more on this, see also, Jean-Luc Marion, "The Prototype and the Image" in *Crossing of the Visible*, translated by James K.A. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 66-87.
[22] Marion, "The Formal Reason of the Infinite," 39.

however imperfectly, an ever-greater divine incomprehensibility.[23] To see how this relates to the question of encountering the human other, we might turn to explore how Marion's vision of the *imago Dei* reflects his discussion of the difference between an icon and an idol in *God Without Being*.

The idol functions like a mirror for the gaze in that it reflects the preconditioned scope of the gaze. In other words, the idol freezes the gaze, and whatever is seen is precisely what is determined by the scope of the gaze. In this instance, a precise concept is established, admitting nothing beyond this concept. The icon functions differently. In the encounter with the icon, the gaze does not freeze in relation to a fixed concept or image, but it also does not function as the absence of concept. Rather, it serves to allow the encountering of the invisible in and through the medium of the visible. The icon interrupts or subverts the frozen gaze. While this indeed allows for concepts, it does not freeze the gaze in a way that would allow for a fixed identity between God and any one concept.[24] And it is in this way that Marion understands the revelation of God in Christ. The Son does not reveal the comprehensible identity of the Father, but he sees Christ as the true icon of the invisible God. However, this does not imply a total lack of knowledge or pure negativity in the encounter with the divine as is implied by the kind of *absolute* alterity represented in the thought of Derrida. Rather, the icon points to a different way of knowing. The encounter with the icon does not simply negate concepts but offers a certain way of engaging the conceptual.[25] As Gregory of Nyssa claims, "I know something which must be sought, yet to find it is to seek it for ever. For it is not one thing to seek, and another to find, but the reward of seeking is the actual seeking."[26]

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[23] See also, "Penser juste ou trahir le mystère: Notes Sur l'Elaboration Paristique du Dogme de l'Incarnation," *Résurrection* 30 (1969): 68-93.

[24] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, translated by Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 7-24. We should not here understand Marion's reference to 'the idol' according to the many different meanings this term can have in various religious contexts. Instead, Marion refers to these categories for speaking of the gaze according to different types of phenomenal appearance. Marion further develops his account of the idol and icon in other works. I will provide further explanation of this in Chapter 4.

[25] Some readers may be interested to note how this relates to Radde-Gallwitz' argument for the way Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa understand human knowledge of God in connection with a doctrine of divine simplicity. See Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14-18.

[26] Gregory of Nyssa, Hom. 7 in *Ecclesiastes,* translated by George Hall (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 118.

As *imago Dei*, the human other points to the same sort of irreducibility as one encounters in the case of the icon—inviting the invisible to play in the very materiality of what is there made visible to the gaze. As Marion argues, "the other, exactly like God, only becomes accessible to me as an exception to the objectification that is elsewhere always possible and is sometimes desirable."[27] It is this kind of attention, or non-reductive way of engaging knowledge, that Marion attributes to love. In subsequent chapters I will attend to Marion's account of love in more detail. What matters here is his view of the loving gaze. As he argues, "love purges our heart of any idol, for it alone is given and said as the name of God, and yet it alone is confirmed in the experience of this world."[28] For Marion, love does not predicate God in any way, but is the revelation of God. This need not negate a doctrine of analogy, however. While God's love is revealed in a way that allows recognition, Marion acknowledges that any similarity between our love and that of the divine is marked by an ever-greater dissimilarity and even opposition to our own finite attempts at loving.[29] Even so, I will return to some questions concerning Marion's account of love at key points in upcoming chapters.

For now, I will focus on establishing points of commonality between Marion and Kierkegaard, concerning the way each reflects on the theme of the divine image.

2.3) *"How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being": Kierkegaard on the Divine Image*

In *From Despair to Faith: The Spirituality of Søren Kierkegaard*, Christopher Barnett sets out to defend Kierkegaard against the criticism of Hans Urs von Balthasar, that his dialectical thought does away with any role or need for a theological aesthetics.[30] Countering such a claim, Barnett

[27] Marion, "The Formal Reason for the Infinite," 42.
[28] Marion, "Transcendence par Excellence," 121.
[29] Ibid., 120. In making this point, Marion may be wishing to clarify a point he makes toward the end of *The Erotic Phenomenon*, that divine and human love operate in the same way even while God loves infinitely more perfectly, an issue I will return to in later chapters.
[30] For Balthasar's critique of Kierkegaard, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological* Aesthetics, vol. 1, translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 49-51. For more on this issue, see Joseph Ballan, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: Persuasive Forms of Offensive Signs? Kierkegaard and the Problems of Theological Aesthetics," in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Tome III*: Catholic and Jewish Theology, edited by Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 3-24, and Christopher B. Barnett, "Erich Przywara, S. J.: Catholicism's Great Expositor of the 'Mystery' of Kierkegaard," in Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Tome III: Catholic and Jewish Theology, edited by Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 131-51.

points to discourses in which Kierkegaard himself asserts, "God has not let himself be without witness in anything created."[31] Kierkegaard does, in other words, see hints of the Creator in all that is created. Related to this is Barnett's argument that the particular version of theological aesthetics he sees implicit in some of Kierkegaard's writings anticipates elements of Marion's own theological aesthetics. Each thinker acknowledges the possibility of seeing our created existence as witnessing to its Creator *and* the possibility of not recognizing or of overlooking this witness. There is, in other words, a hermeneutical dimension to any theological aesthetics. Barnett makes this point, focusing on Marion's account of the idol and the icon. The *way* we look at things, the way we give ourselves over to them, matters for how and whether we see in created things that which directs our hearts to the Creator of all.[32]

Importantly, however, Kierkegaard makes a distinction between the way creation *witnesses* to the Creator and the way human beings *image* the divine. In his discourse entitled, "How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being," Kierkegaard makes the following assertion: "God created the human being in his image. Must it not be glorious to be clothed in this way! In praise of the lily, the Gospel declares that it surpasses Solomon in glory. Must it not be infinitely more glorious to resemble God!"[33] In further reflecting on the *imago Dei*, he moves to consider the counter-example of the mirror image of one's face reflected in a vast ocean: "When a person sees his image in the mirror of the ocean, he sees his own image, but the ocean is not his image, and when he departs the image disappears."[34] The ocean, therefore, "is not the image and cannot keep the image," just as a mirror reflects the presence of a finite thing so that once the thing is gone, the image is no longer there reflected.[35] The human being, therefore, does not image God as a mirror images a face for the very reason that whatever is reflected is, by its very nature, reducible to finite representation, and therefore, not omnipresent:

> The ocean is not the image and cannot keep the image. Why is this, except for the reason that the visible form by its very visibility is powerless (just as the physical presence

[31] Søren Kierkegaard, "How Glorious It is to Be a Human Being" in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 192.
[32] See especially, Barnett, *From Despair to Faith*, 63-129. In making his case, Barnett relies especially on Kierkegaard's three discourses, which come under the collective title, "What We Learn from the Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air."
[33] Kierkegaard, "How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being," 192.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

> makes it impossible to be omnipresent); therefore it cannot reproduce itself in another in such a way that the other keeps the image when the form departs.[36]

Here Kierkegaard makes an observation similar to the one Marion makes in realizing the very problem necessitating a theological reflection on the icon: "The Holy is never seen [*s'aperçoit*], since only the visible is seen, according to the measure of the sight granted to our reach."[37] As Kierkegaard's discourse continues, he goes on to claim, "But God is spirit, is invisible, and the image of invisibility, of course, is in turn invisibility. Thus the invisible Creator reproduces himself in the invisibility, which is the qualification of spirit, and the image of God is explicitly the invisible glory."[38] This need not negate the *visible* glory of the lily, which indeed witnesses to its Creator. It is, however, precisely through the invisible dimension of the human being—irreducible to any finite representation—that she mysteriously images the divine. The distinction, as Kierkegaard would have it, is thus: "The lily does not resemble God, precisely because the glory of the lily is visible," and while one may speak of the glory visible in all that is created, we might nevertheless distinguish this from that which mysteriously constitutes the *imago Dei*, or "the invisible God's creation of every human being in his image."[39]

Barnett sees in this discourse and others, a theological aesthetics similar to the one evident in Marion's account of the idol and the icon: just as it becomes possible to *see* the ways creation witnesses to its Creator when we attend to it in the right sort of vision, so also does the fact that humanity witnesses to the *invisible* glory of God require one to see beyond that which merely appears according to the objectifying gaze.[40] We might nevertheless add to this portrait. As I have shown, Marion's account of the icon overlaps with his apophatic approach to the *imago Dei.* And in this way, it becomes possible to see an even more profound point of connection between Marion and Kierkegaard, one that concerns their theological anthropology: For each thinker, the divine image is not reducible to any one attribute, power, or ability of the human.[41] It

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, translated by James K.A. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 273. First published in 1996.
[38] Kierkegaard, "How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being," 192.
[39] Ibid., 192-193.
[40] See Barnett, *From Despair to Faith*, 108-113.
[41] Of course, in highlighting this similarity, I in no way argue that their thought on this topic is identical. Here also, I momentarily set to one side interpretive questions concerning Kierkegaard's reference to the created 'human spirit,' to which I will return in Chapter 4.

is, instead, the *invisible* dimension of the human person—irreducible to those ever-shifting characteristics or attributes through which we most often identify ourselves—that further reflects the invisible God. As I will attempt to clarify in later chapters, there is a sense in which, for each thinker, the very experience we have of ourselves *as mystery* witnesses to the invisible Source of our existence. Lest this view of the divine image represent a dangerous version of anthropocentrism, we might note that for Kierkegaard, the divine image makes itself *visibly* manifest, not in our "playing the rulers in God's absence." As he argues, "To worship is not to rule, and yet worship is what makes the human being resemble God, and to be able truly to worship is the excellence of the invisible glory."[42]

Thus far, I have merely pointed to some points of convergence in Marion and Kierkegaard's reflections on the *imago Dei*. With these points of convergence in mind, it is now possible to begin situating a reading of their works within a broader context of contemporary debates.

2.4) *Questions of an Apophatic Approach*

As will become evident in the chapters to follow, there are significant differences that shape Marion and Kierkegaard's reflections on love and selfhood. I have, nevertheless, thus far sought to highlight a few ways Kierkegaard's reflection on the divine image anticipates some elements of Marion's approach to this same theme. In this way, it is evident that each thinker exemplifies aspects of an apophatic approach to the *imago Dei.* As already indicated, such approaches have become popular in recent theology due to the desire to avoid tying the human being to some fixed concept of what it is that defines our shared human nature. Importantly, I will not be questioning this basic apophatic approach to the divine image, nor a vision of the human being as irreducible to any fixed or finite nature. I instead wish to highlight some of the unresolved tensions and questions that arise in light of this view.

The tension I am interested in might find expression in the following way: Given our irreducibility to any fixed and finite nature, or individual set of characteristics, in what ways might we affirm the various dimensions of our created contingency—or concrete particularity—

[42] Kierkegaard, "How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being," 193.

as somehow mattering to *who* we are? It is here that we notice remaining questions for Marion's approach to the loving gaze. His account is useful for speaking about how love might *itself* mysteriously influence the way we *see* or *know* the other in a non-reductive way. However, Marion's focus centers on the problem of representational thought: how to avoid reducing human identity to some *concept.* But questions pertaining to the concrete, bodily experience of difference involve more than the mere problem of the gaze—or of how to approach the other in a non-reductive way. Likewise, an account of the divine image—as somehow speaking to the incomprehensibility of the human being, irreducible to any fixed or finite nature—leaves questions concerning how to affirm all those finite contingencies and quirks that somehow seem to speak to *who* we are. We might, for example, consider the make-up of our bodies, the neurological pathways we are working to train and re-train, various events we have experienced, and the sense we make of these events through the stories we tell ourselves. Given these examples, it seems that while we may indeed be irreducible to any listed series of characteristics, it does still seem that such contingencies speak to *who* we are in *some* way. It is here that the emphases of an apophatic approach to the *imago Dei* meet with those emphases of a theology of creation. From the standpoint of a theology of creation, it seems our created contingencies—our bodies, for example—should matter in a way that is more than merely fleeting or transitory. As Marcia Riggs argues, "The *imago Dei* in each of us must not be relegated to something essentially human nor to a way of relating to one another that is contingent on our ability to transcend or ignore our embodied differences."[43] Instead, drawing a theology of creation and redemption together so that "creation and reconciliation meet in Christ" she argues, "We, in all of our embodied differences, incarnate the *imago Dei.*"[44]

Just as this tension between affirming both the irreducibility *and* finite particularity of human difference arises with accounts of the *imago Dei*, in a somewhat similar vein, the (post)modern affirmation of *absolute* alterity opens itself up to questions concerning how to reckon with the way concrete contexts both matter and inform diverse bodily experiences of difference. Various aspects of racism or xenophobia, for example, demand consideration of numerous structural and

[43] Marcia Riggs, "Living as Religious Ethical Mediators," *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, edited by Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela D. Sims (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 22-34; 250.
[44] Ibid.

systemic factors. Clearly, any recognition of, or active resistance to, racism requires eyes to see *more* than the mere *absolute* otherness of each other. Recognizing *specific* differences in the lived and embodied experience of concrete human beings matters for grappling with distorted structural realities, such as white privilege, that operates, in part, by affording those privileged, with the ease of living in perpetual blindness to these very structural realities.

Of course, none of this negates the simultaneous need to affirm alterity. Addressing prejudice does still involve facing the human tendency toward categorizing others—which has obviously not gone away—and we continue to witness, in various debates over immigration policy, for example, a *reducing* of these identities to a series of prejudicial concepts and assumptions based in comparison and fear. Yet, with this very same example, a further tension expresses itself. One might note that any approach to *solidarity*, in such a case, requires careful attention to various dimensions of human difference *and* shared commonality—if one is to engage in thoughtful modes of joint action and resistance to exclusionary policies or unjust laws. The tension in which I am interested, in other words, might find expression in the following question: what ways might we consider our shared, human commonality without neglecting the irreducible mystery of each human being? One *could* say that engaging this very tension is one of the curious demands of love—or, at least, any theological account of love worth its weight.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to orient the reader to a context of issues that arise, not only within recent theological anthropology but also within the context of (post)modern thought. This context provides a lens through which to view my engagement with the works of Marion and Kierkegaard, and what I see as the significance of this engagement for considering questions that arise at the intersection of theology and phenomenology. As will become apparent in the chapters to follow, there are, of course, many nuances and important differences surrounding Marion's and Kierkegaard's differing reflections on love and selfhood. Furthermore, Kierkegaard's reflections inhabit a different theological and philosophical context than those of Marion, and I in no way wish to *equate* the concerns or intentions informing any similarity, observable in their works. I have, nevertheless, thus far sought to highlight points at which these

thinkers seem to converge, evident first, following the argument of Christopher Barnett, in their theological aesthetics. Expanding on Barnett's argument, I then moved to highlight ways in which Kierkegaard's reflections on the *imago Dei* anticipate emphases evident in Marion's own approach to this theme. This point of seeming convergence forms the basic starting point for the considerations to follow in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

As we have seen, Kierkegaard reflects on the divine image in ways that carry certain resonances with contemporary apophatic approaches to the *imago Dei*, as exemplified by Marion's own approach. After demonstrating why such an approach has become popular in recent theology, I went on to highlight some of the tensions remaining for such an approach. An account of the divine image—as somehow speaking to the incomprehensibility of the human being, irreducible to any fixed of finite nature—leaves questions concerning how to properly affirm the significance of our finite contingency or concrete particularity. When the concerns underlying the contemporary resourcing of apophatic thought for an approach to the divine image meet with those concerns underlying a theology of creation, an observable tension seems to arise. A theological affirmation of the human being *as created* seems to imply our created contingency matters in a unique way, raising questions concerning how best to affirm this given our ultimate irreducibility to any such finite contingency. I, in no way, intend the analysis of such tensions to imply the rejection of an apophatic approach to the *imago Dei*, nor should it be read to imply a questioning of the affirmation of each human being as irreducible to any fixed or finite nature. Instead, the above analysis is merely intended to clarify the context of tensions and questions that forms the starting point of the analysis that follows in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 will turn to the some of the questions this context raises for a theological concept of love.

CHAPTER 3

KIERKEGAARD AND GIFT: THE PROBLEM WITH 'KENOTIC LOVE' IN LIGHT OF KIERKEGAARD'S 'GIFT THEORY'

"But God does not love as we love. Our will is not the cause of the goodness in things, but is moved by their goodness as its object . . . . God's love, on the other hand, creates and infuses the goodness in things."[1]

–St. Thomas Aquinas

3.0) *Introduction*

Gift theory has become a popular lens through which to view numerous theological themes. One reason for this is that it provides new language and a set of conceptual tools one might apply to thinking about topics such as the relationship between nature and grace or divine and human agency. Gift theory itself explores practices of gift-exchange and has its origin in debates over whether the giving of a gift implies some form of reciprocation, or is necessarily unconditional in nature. While it may indeed be a useful tool for generating new ways of exploring old topics within theological discourse, there hasn't been much focus on the question of how gift theory itself has come to influence current theological assumptions about love. The issues surrounding a concept of gift are also relevant for a concept of love. Is love unconditional in nature, or does it imply some form of reciprocal relation? Recent theologians who engage this question are often also aware of the way postmodern theory problematizes a concept of love, and are seeking to respond to this issue as well. I will argue this line of questioning is one reason *kenosis* or a notion of 'self-gift' has become a popular focal point around which to organize a concept of love.

This chapter has three parts. First, it examines how concerns raised within (post)modern thought in general and gift theory in particular problematize a concept of love. It then explores how this impacts theological approaches to conceiving love in terms of *kenosis*. After assessing some of

[1] Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, 1.20.2. (Alternative translation by A. M. Fairweather, 1954).

the issues this raises, the chapter highlights an alternative approach to both love and 'gift' in the work of Søren Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard has an unsystematic approach to love, and clearly does not have an actual *theory* of 'the gift' in mind. However, I will seek to show that Kierkegaard anticipates some of the questions gift theory raises, but in a distinct way: his analysis of gift-exchange has a theological purpose from the start. For this reason, his approach attends to concerns that recent theological appropriations of gift theory might overlook. Kierkegaard conceives of *both* love and gift in a way that presupposes an underlying theology of creation. While there is much scholarly debate surrounding whether Kierkegaard held a particular understanding or doctrine of *kenosis*, here I am more interested in assessing the impact of his creation theology on his view of love. [2] Further, while the aim of this chapter is largely constructive, it does to some extent push against readings that would define Kierkegaard's understanding of love as purely kenotic or 'self-giving' in nature. While Kierkegaard is known for his comments connecting love and self-denial, I highlight a repeated pattern that emerges in his approach to the giving and receiving of love; this pattern centers around a presupposed notion of creation *ex nihilo.* Assessing the impact of creation *ex nihilo* on his articulation of love, I argue that rather than define love with a singular emphasis on *kenosis* or 'self-gift,' a theology of creation enables ways of distinguishing between God's love—which is one with the very act of creating—and our finite yet diverse ways of enacting love of neighbor.

3.1) *Gift Theory and the (Post)modern Problem of Love and Alterity*

Gift theory originates in debates surrounding the anthropological work of Marcel Mauss, who argues that across various cultural contexts and periods, gift-giving always involves norms and practices of reciprocation. A gift thus creates a bond with or obligation to the one who gives it.[3] While the topic of gift-exchange is later taken up and developed by thinkers interested in its

[2] For a fairly comprehensive overview of various interpretations regarding whether Kierkegaard held to a particular theological understanding of *kenosis,* see David R. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[3] This is most explicit in Mauss's explication of the potlatch, which is tied not only to the notion of consumption but also to a spiritual sense of obligation to reciprocate, coinciding with the gift itself. See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies,* translated by W.D. Halls (London and New York: Routledge, 1954/1990), 6-23.

implications for economic and anthropological theory, it ends up gaining unique significance for postmodern theory with the work of Jacques Derrida. Commenting on Mauss's analysis of gift-exchange, he argues that Mauss utilizes the term 'gift' in the context of a discourse on the economy, thereby annulling the very concept of the gift.[4] In *Given Time*, Derrida asserts, "For there to be gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter gift, or debt."[5] The issue is that Mauss conceives the gift not only in economic terms but as what ultimately drives the economy of exchange. For Derrida, the importance of the gift lies in its interruptive function. A gift must be able to interrupt the economy or the circle of exchange without being determined by it. In his own words,

> It must *keep* a relation of foreignness to the circle, a relation without relation of familiar foreignness. It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible. . . . It announces itself, gives itself to be thought as the impossible.[6]

Of particular importance here is that the notion of an unconditional gift persists in thought or concept, even though the very appearance or recognition of such a gift would annul it *as* gift.[7] This does not mean that the giving of a gift is impossible as an 'event' that might occur, disrupting the economy of exchange. Rather, it is the recognition of the gift as such that, for Derrida, *is* 'the impossible.' This is because any recognition of the gift necessarily implies some form of gratitude or a sense of indebtedness, canceling the gift's condition.[8] Again, for Derrida, this is because a true gift is one unilaterally given, with no strings attached. Derrida seeks to conserve these absolute conditions for a concept of gift. Maintaining the rigor of its concept enables 'the gift' to function as a concrete conceptual tool for critiquing the economy of exchange, and revealing those things that are improperly subsumed by it.

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[4] Jacques Derrida. Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money, translated by Peggy Kamuf (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 23-33.
[5] Ibid., 12.
[6] Ibid., 7.
[7] Ibid., 13-15.
[8] Ibid., 23. See also, Derrida's clarification of what he means by the gift's 'impossibility' in "On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion," moderated by Richard Kearney, in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, 54-78. For a detailed analysis of Derrida's approach to the gift's 'impossibility,' its relation to temporality, and other connected themes, see Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida and the Limits of Phenomenology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

While many thinkers respond to this with arguments in favor of reciprocity within gift-exchange, Derrida's concerns over the gift highlight an interesting set of issues when applied to the question of love. It seems that love ought to be unconditional in nature. Reciprocity, however, also seems to form an important aspect of love. And for this reason, a contradiction seems to appear, not just for the concepts we apply to thinking about love, but also in our experience of loving another person. Does love *depend* on reciprocity, or is it unconditional and unilaterally given?

To further complicate the issue, the question of love's reciprocity relates to an issue already introduced in Chapter 2, involving alterity, or the irreducibility of human difference. In an interview in which Derrida is asked to speak about love, he claims, "I have nothing to say about love in general."[9] After being pressed to say more, his problem becomes a bit clearer. He asks, "Does one love someone or does one love something about someone? . . . it appears one stops loving another not because of who they are, but because they are such and such."[10] In other words, Derrida views as problematic a love based on the categorization or supposed knowledge of the other as such. Even while Derrida's account of *absolute* alterity has come under critique due to a recognized need to uphold regard for the *particularity* of human difference, approaches to human identity within postmodern theory generally maintain the irreducibility of identity or difference to any *fixed* concept or series of attributes.[11] Furthermore, this is not just a theoretical problem, but clearly touches on human experience. It seems that love ought to be directed toward the unique particularity of another. However, once I establish some set of characteristics as the basis of my love for this other, I soon come to realize that these characteristics are fluid, might be attributed to any number of persons, and ultimately fail to get at the other's irreducible identity. As Jacques Lacan's analysis of transference love highlights, there are many ways I might project

[9] Re-published as Jacques Derrida, "Remarks on Love," in *Love and Forgiveness for a More Just World*, edited by Hent de Vries and Nils F. Schott (New York: Colombia University Press, 2015), 141. Originally obtained by de Vries and Schott from the transcript of an interview in the documentary film, *Derrida*, by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman and published as *Derrida: Screenplay and Essays on the Film* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 79-81.
[10] Ibid., 142.
[11] This is the case, for example, whether one understands identity as performative following Judith Butler, or engages a narrative account of human identity. For a critical analysis of the problem *absolute* alterity poses for love and recognition of another's particular difference, see Brian Treanor, "Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder," in *Love's Wisdom: Transforming Philosophy and Religion*, edited by Norman Wirzba and Bruce Ellis Benson (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 142-154.

my own imaginings or unfulfilled desires onto another's supposed identity, not actually loving this other apart from who she is to me.

3.2) *Theological Appropriations of (Post)modern Thought and Gift Theory*

These concerns associated with postmodern theory, and the fact that they create difficulties for maintaining a concept of love, seem to reinforce a resignation over love's ambiguity. However, there are, indeed, numerous theological resources one could turn to for developing a thoroughgoing approach to love, and recent theologians have been keen to show how it is possible to do so while responding to contemporary debates. This has nevertheless led to a common impasse in recent theological accounts of love. At this point, the question of whether one should conceive love in accordance with Derrida's pure, unconditional gift, or whether love necessarily implies reciprocity comes to the fore. I will now seek to demonstrate why conceiving love in terms of *kenosis* is seen to enable a direct response to contemporary debates, while alternative articulations of love—considered in terms of reciprocity—seem to result in reinforcing the ambiguity surrounding a concept of love. An example of why this is the case is perhaps best seen in a comparison of the work of Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank, as each thinker approaches the topic of love in direct engagement with gift theory.

While I have already highlighted elements of Marion's account of the loving gaze, I here turn to his approach to a concept of love. Marion is clearly concerned that such a concept not conflict with upholding alterity, leading him to argue that love must not find its *basis* in reciprocity or recognition of another's fixed identity. Instead, he construes love according to a particular understanding of kenotic self-donation. Marion's work is deeply engaged with Derrida's analysis of the gift. Again, while Derrida allows that there could be a moment or 'event' in which a gift is truly given, any recognition of or reflection on the gift *in time* is impossible as it implies a form of reciprocity—seen for example, in a sense of gratitude or indebtedness to the donor. Following Derrida, Marion maintains that a gift should not be defined in terms of reciprocity or exchange. However, rather than associating the gift with 'the impossible,' as Derrida does, he argues that it *is* possible both to recognize and describe the gift by bracketing aspects of reciprocity that need not pertain to the gift or the act of donation itself. In other words, Marion describes situations in

which a gift is given, but reciprocity does not occur, as in the case of an anonymous donor or recipient. Another, and perhaps more significant, example is seen in situations in which the gift given is not an object, as when one gives one's attention or time. Such gifts are much harder to quantify or assign a value in order to weigh an appropriate exchange.[12] The fact that a gift might appear without being equated with an exchange shows that its appearance is not *defined* by reciprocity. Instead, the gift appears according to its own logic, which it imposes. This is seen in the fact that the *gift* of a wedding ring is not itself the *object* possessed—the gold band along with its calculated value. The *gift* of the ring is only rendered *visible* by its reference to something invisible or other than its object.[13]

While I cannot here delineate the complete development of Marion's articulation of the gift or the important ways his gift theory relates to his phenomenology of givenness,[14] it is at least possible to highlight some of the ways his phenomenological approach to love corresponds with his account of the gift. Like the gift, Marion seeks to describe love apart from any dependence on reciprocity. In *The Erotic Phenomenon*, he attempts a phenomenological description of love as it is unilaterally given, claiming that "love is defined as it is deployed."[15] The decision to love first, regardless of one's own self-interest, is the repeated instance which enables any and all of love's manifestations. Toward the end of *The Erotic Phenomenon*, the important discovery is made that one's decision to love is always only enabled by a prior love already given. However, paradoxically, one only has a vision or *realization* of this already given love on account of one's decision to love first—without any assurance of return. In this way, Marion does account for a kind of mutuality without reciprocity. The gift of love, in other words, is only ever realized by love. As Marion claims, "Love is said and is given in only one, strictly univocal way."[16] This also aligns with his desire to bring notions of ἔρως and ἀγάπη together, arguing that we love in the same way God loves; the only difference is that God loves "infinitely better than do we."[17]

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[12] See especially, Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 71-118.
[13] Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 83-154. See especially, 112-14. See also how Marion develops the example of the ring: 132-27.
[14] For more on this, see Jean-Luc Marion, *The Reason of the Gift*, translated by Stephen E. Lewis (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011). See also Marion's developed articulation of the way the gift is made visible in its givenness through sacrifice and forgiveness in *Negative Certainties*, 115-54.
[15] Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 217.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 222.

This account of love, however, seems to imply a strictly negative valuation of human finitude—finitude is simply marked by a lesser ability to love. And at times, Marion's phenomenological description of love seems to overlook more positive attention to the finite conditions within which love is enabled and enacted as part of a good creation.[18] This might be the case because his focus is on describing, as far as possible, how love is revealed as it is unilaterally and unconditionally given. For this reason, his reference to finitude shows up in the negative moments when this is interrupted, or put to a halt. Marion finds a theological basis for his univocal/unilateral approach to love in the revelation of God's love in Christ. Referencing Hans Urs von Balthasar, he claims,

> Jesus gambles, upon the Cross, his Lordship. He gains it only in undertaking to lose it. This kenotic loss, going so far as death and, above all, the descent into hell, appears as the highest lordship—that, precisely, of love without reserve, universal and hence all-powerful.[19]

While love is here depicted in terms of unilateral donation and sacrifice, importantly Marion would oppose the idea that sacrifice is necessarily linked with destruction, or that self-donation implies an actual *loss* of self. This is because the self's very realization is opposed to any self-*possession*—whatever can be possessed can also be lost, and is therefore not necessary to the true self.[20] Instead, the 'lover' is given to herself, becomes herself, as she gives. The paradoxical dimension of this is that the *gift* of the self is realized not in its *possession,* but in its *donation*; the lover only realizes herself as a lover through the one she loves, the one who has made her a lover, and therefore has given her to herself *as* a lover.[21] However, a vision of love that places a singular stress on a notion of self-abandonment risks a diminished account of selfhood—a point I will further explore in the final chapter of this thesis. Beyond this, such an approach to love takes insufficient account of the necessary boundaries, needs, and contexts which shape the way love is enacted.[22]

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[18] John Milbank makes a similar point in "The Gift and the Mirror," 217.
[19] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, 193.
[20] Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 115-54.
[21] Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 212-15.
[22] Christina M. Gschwandtner stresses the importance of attending to the role hermeneutics plays when it comes to love. Love requires interpretation, discernment and attention to various contexts both for its recognition and its deployment. Her critique of Marion emphasizes the potential violence associated with a view of love which asserts

At this point, it is possible to highlight a few of the reasons kenotic approaches to love, such as Marion's, respond to concerns about love and alterity. Marion's approach avoids reducing the alterity of the other because, on his account, love does not find its *basis* in recognition of a fixed set of traits or characteristics of the one loved. This is in keeping with his desire to avoid an understanding of love *based* on reciprocity; loving the other according to *who* they are to me, in other words, implies some form of reciprocity. But when a concept of love is so closely tied to 'gift,' it becomes evident why approaches to modeling human love after Christ's example focus on the sacrificial element in his work: sacrifice seems to be the ultimate demonstration of love *as* unconditional gift.[23] It is now possible to turn to an alternative approach to love which emphasizes love's reciprocity, seen in John Milbank's approach to love and gift theory.

Milbank opposes Derrida's and Marion's notion of the unilaterally given gift. Instead, he sees gift-exchange as having two requirements: there must be a delay of any counter-gift, and the return-gift must be non-identical to the one given first.[24] These requirements preserve an element of gratuitousness over the mere transfer of goods. In this way, Milbank sees 'the gift,' like love, as involving 'unilateral exchange.' Because all action is ultimately a response to the divine, unilateral gift of creation *ex nihilo*, our acts of gift-exchange are merely a sharing in a mutual indebtedness to God, who creates our capacity to give and receive love. This implies that a consideration of love should not bracket reciprocity: reciprocity is viewed positively, as that which initiates and sustains relationships. The mutuality of love is important to Milbank because a simple act of volition to give to the other ignores the importance of *attention* to the other's particularity, and the need to give out of a response that is *appropriate* to this other.[25]

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itself unilaterally and unconditionally. See Christina M. Gschwandtner, "Love and Violence," in *Degrees of Givenness*, 100-123.

[23] While John 15:13, for example, expresses such a theme, the question remains whether a willingness to sacrifice out of love *for* a particular end should be distinguished from a notion of love itself *as* a continual act of self-sacrifice or abandonment.

[24] John Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* 11, no. 1 (January 1995): 119-61, 125. While this aspect of Milbank's argument is indebted to Pierre Bourdieu, he rejects Bourdieu's notion that gift-exchange is nothing more than economic exchange. For Bourdieu's account of gift-exchange, see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice,* translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

[25] Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," 119-61. For a succinct sketch of Milbank's key concerns relating to gift theory, see John Milbank, "The Gift and the Given," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 2-3 (2006): 444-47. Milbank offers a critique of Marion's *The Erotic Phenomenon,* relating his own work on 'gift' to the topic of love in "The Gift and the Mirror," 253-317. A version of his more general critique of

In addition to this, Milbank rejects Marion's univocal approach to love, arguing that it contradicts divine simplicity. Because simplicity implies that God's action and attributes are one, divine love is no more separable from God's other attributes than from God's very existence. The result is that love's mysterious plentitude exceeds any conceptual grasp and that finite human love only participates in this love in analogous ways. While this is a significant point on its own, when combined with his argument that human love necessarily involves reciprocity, Milbank not only asserts the mystery of divine love but the further *ambiguity* of human love, as he himself claims: "love is incurably vague and elusive."[26] This elusiveness is seen in that, for Milbank, human love is not reducible to any one element, has many forms, and need not necessarily be unconditional. While on his account, numerous forms of human love analogically participate in divine unconditional love, this leaves no way to specify what it is that makes any particular action or attitude particularly loving.[27] Conversely, we are left wondering how to discern what, if anything, is *not* properly loving. The problem might lie with a need first to distinguish and then more carefully relate the metaphysical affirmation that our entire existence is mutually *indebted to*, and therefore a *sharing in*, divine love on the one hand, and, on the other, an existential/phenomenological analysis of what it is that distinguishes human loving action/attention from those actions, attitudes, or perceptions that are not properly loving on account of sin.[28] Loving relationships are, of course, better off when they involve reciprocity. Nevertheless, the lack of any distinctive marker to differentiate what, in fact, we should not consider loving behavior contributes not only to the reason love's ambiguity poses a problem, but also to the reason arguments for 'kenotic love' have become a popular alternative.

This desire to provide more content for understanding the concrete and consistent ways of enacting love might be seen in the example of Graham Ward's claim that "The distinctive nature

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kenosis is found in "The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice," *First Things* 91 (1999): 33-38. See also, his arguments pertaining to these issues in John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003). I am grateful to Christiane Alpers for correspondence and discussion regarding Milbank's approach to love in connection with various other aspects of his thought.

[26] Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror," 304.

[27] This is especially seen, for example, in light of Milbank's argument that there is a "co-mingling" of various forms of love, which leads him to conclude a "love of things" is not completely distinguishable from a "love of persons." See, "The Gift and the Mirror," 276-84 and 292-300.

[28] See also, Medi Volpe's analysis of Milbank's inadequate delineation of sin in Medi Ann Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity: Doctrine and Discipleship* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 129-30.

of love is to gift—a continual act of self-abandonment."[29] Again, this direct association of love with self-gift, or even 'self-abandonment,' avoids reducing the identity of the one toward whom I direct my love because, in some ways, it overlooks the question of the other's identity altogether. Additionally, such an approach further coincides with a (post)modern deconstruction of false assumptions about the nature of identity as self-constituted.[30] However, approaches that draw on *kenosis* as the primary category around which to organize a concept of love might end up emphasizing the wrong thing. While it is true that neither Ward nor Marion understands Christ's *kenosis* as a giving up of divine properties, a danger lingers in that a definition of love thought primarily in terms of *kenosis* may still tend toward a singular emphasis on *my own* act of self-giving as opposed to any real attention to the other. If this is the case, it creates further difficulty for navigating the various contexts and boundaries that any loving attention ought to recognize. Here the impasse involved when considering 'love' in connection with questions of alterity and gift-theory begins to become clear. In contrast to Milbank's approach, Ward and Marion achieve a distinct concept of love while upholding a similar vision of alterity.

This way of avoiding love's ambiguity by reducing it to a kenotic element, evident in the thought of Ward and Marion, may be traced to Balthasar, whose approach to *kenosis* has been broadly influential.[31] Balthasar's approach is often seen as providing an alternative way to link divine revelation with *kenosis* while avoiding arguments for divine passibility seen, for example, in the work of Jürgen Moltmann. While an analysis of Ward and Marion's differing debts to Balthasar

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[29] Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 201. While Ward does not wish to de-couple giving from reception, or see self-giving as a 'giving-up' love is itself, most closely associated with this act of giving. He claims, "It is this giving-in-through-and-beyond-reception that *is* the kenotic economy: grace" (202).

[30] That Ward's vision of the kenotic self relates to his concern to deconstruct modern presuppositions of a self-constituting *ego* is further exemplified by the way he draws on Levinas to describe the self's true mode of becoming *before* death: "*Post-mortem* one is given the personhood one always knows is possible; *ante-mortem* is a process of becoming through obedience, humility and descent. *Ante-mortem* is time for realizing our dispossession, our secondariness; realizing, what Emmanuel Levinas describes as our position as accusative in a transcendental grammar" (188). For a fairly comprehensive analysis and critique of Ward's approach to *kenosis*, see Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 58-97. Tonstad also touches on the way Ward's approach to *kenosis* relates to his response to various postmodern concerns and his desire to develop a non-reductive approach to 'difference.'

[31] Ward develops his account of *kenosis* through explicit engagement with Balthasar. See Ward, *Christ and Culture,* 183-218. While *The Erotic Phenomenon* is an attempt at an explicitly phenomenological approach to love, this phenomenological description coincides with Marion's more explicitly theological work, which has been influenced by Balthasar in numerous ways. Marion draws on and develops, for example, specific aspects of Balthasar's approach to divine transcendence and human participation in 'trinitarian distance.' See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, translated by Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 1977/2001). Related themes are evident in Marion's early essay, "Distance et louange: Du concept de Réquisit (aitia) au statut trinitaire du langage théologique selon Denys le Mystique," *Résurrection* 38 (1971): 89-118. See especially, 100.

is beyond the scope of this essay, I here simply wish to highlight a common thread running through their approaches to love. For Balthasar, while there are many dimensions to the way we may experience love, the revelation of divine love allows us to reduce love to a singular or core theme. In speaking of Christ's death and experience of forsakenness, Balthasar claims,

> Love in all its diversity and multiplicity must be simplified and reduced to its essentials in this one unifying point, so that in streaming out from this point it may have an eternal supply from which to spring. For this reason there is no togetherness in faith on earth that could not have come from the ultimate loneliness of the death on the Cross.[32]

Based on the context of this passage from *The Moment of Christian Witness,* sacrifice becomes a central, 'unifying point' from which all of love's various manifestations flow. In *Love Alone: The Way of Revelation,* Balthasar goes so far as to argue, "For it is precisely in the Kenosis of Christ (and nowhere else) that the *inner* majesty of God's love appears."[33] It is perhaps this link between the revelation of divine love and *kenosis* that seems to promise clarity to the ambiguity we seem to experience when considering the meaning of love. However, as Karen Kilby has recently shown, Balthasar's articulation of divine love incorporates a necessary dimension of suffering, setting aside the *privatio boni* tradition. The problem here lies with the notion that love *requires* something like loss or sacrifice. In such case, as Kilby argues, suffering is given ontological status and—when linked with divine love itself—eternal significance.[34] Further, Linn Tonstad has offered an important critique not only of Balthasar, but also of more recent approaches to *kenosis.* Of significance for our current discussion is her argument that when self-dispossession is considered a good on its own, the logic of possession and competition between finite entities is extended to the goodness of created finitude itself."[35] She argues that while we must still account for the logic of sin, the goodness of created difference and a positive valuation of finitude is not ultimately realized in sacrifice, but in *dependence* on God so that emphasis is placed on the work of Christ *for us.*[36]

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[32] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, translated by Richard Beckley (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994), 30-31.
[33] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way of Revelation*, translated by Alexander Dru (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 71.
[34] Karen E. Kilby, "Julian of Norwich, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and the Status of Suffering in Christian Theology," *New Blackfriars* 99, no. 1081 (2018): 298-311.
[35] Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference,* see especially, 241. For her engagement with Balthasar, see 27-57.
[36] Ibid. See especially, 241-44; 289. Tonstad follows Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard in stressing that dependence on God is distinct from any form of dependence established in relationships between human beings. She highlights that for Kierkegaard dependence on God is a "resting tranquility in the power that established us" which "permits

At this point, it is clear that a reduction of the multiplicity of love's manifestations to a single common theme—as in the case of kenotic love—while attractive for reasons mentioned above, carries with it a risk that one might settle for an insufficient or improper concept of love. Following Marion, it may indeed be the case that a common thread runs through all expressions of love in a way that unites notions of ἔρως and ἀγάπη. However, the danger of an approach that reduces love to 'self-gift' is that this quickly tends toward a diminishment of the self, and could end up leading one to overlook the diverse ways love is revealed or enacted in various contexts.[37] At the same time, while Milbank emphasizes the need to account for the contexts within which reciprocal love is enacted, his claim that "love is incurably vague and elusive" leaves one wondering what difference 'love' makes for theological reflection. When reciprocity is understood as in some way *necessary* to love, this reinforces the problem of love's ambiguity. It seems that something other than reciprocity would need to characterize love if, in a more pragmatic register, it is to refer to something I might extend not only to my friend but also to my 'enemy.' Finally, while it is clear that love should respond to the other's particularity, as emphasized in Milbank's account, we are left with questions concerning how exactly to avoid *basing* our love on false conceptions of the other's identity.

The above analysis simply sketches how the problematizing of love in postmodern theory has led to a common impasse in recent theological accounts of love. While love is often referred to ambiguously, the desire to avoid this ambiguity demonstrates one of the reasons arguments for 'kenotic love' form a popular, albeit problematic, response. In light of this context, Kierkegaard's work on love offers a unique resource. My analysis will focus specifically on how Kierkegaard's deliberations on love anticipate concerns raised within postmodern theory. Interestingly, he poses questions relating to the irreducible nature of human identity as well as questions regarding the nature of gift-exchange. However, while Kierkegaard anticipates some of

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free giving" (80). Tonstad in other words, sees this form of dependence as opposed to self-diminishment. In what follows, I will expand on why Kierkegaard's view of dependence is so important for understanding his vision of selfhood as it relates to love.

[37] This point relates to Milbank's concerns regarding *kenosis*. However, in opposition to Marion's view of love as unilateral self-donation, or Milbank's argument that love necessarily involves reciprocity, Christina Gschwandtner stresses the importance of attending to the role of hermeneutics plays in any act of loving another person. See Gschwandtner, "Love and Violence," in *Degrees of Givenness*, 100-23.

the questions postmodern theory raises, he locates the *reason* for such questions within a theological context. This leads him to make unique moves in approaching the theme of love. While Kierkegaard's thought had an influence on Heidegger, and later postmodern thinkers, such appropriations have often left theological aspects of his work by the wayside. For this reason, I will focus on how Kierkegaard's theology of creation influences his understanding of both love and gift in a way that offers a unique contribution to our current context.

3.3) *Kierkegaard: An Unlikely Interlocutor?*

First, I must note that Kierkegaard is clearly not the obvious source to turn to for an argument that resists a notion of 'kenotic love.' His *Works of Love* is known for its rigorous and uncompromising description of unconditional neighbor-love, purified of self-interest. As he himself claims, "Christian love [*Kjerlighed*] is self-denial's love."[38] Kierkegaard is also known for upholding a distinction between unconditional 'neighbor-love' and what he refers to as 'preferential love,' based on commonalities or filial connections. Some scholars have criticized *Works of Love* due to the view that Kierkegaard prioritizes neighbor-love at the expense of providing a proper account of love's reciprocity.[39] It is, however, perhaps for this very reason that I find this work an interesting case worth examining. I am interested in questioning not only how much interpretive weight we ought to give Kierkegaard's claims regarding self-denial, but more specifically, how we might re-interpret such claims by considering the direct impact of his creation theology on his view of love.

One might read the arguments I make here in close connection with M. Jamie Ferreira's positive account of Kierkegaardian love. Her important commentary on *Works of Love* takes, as a hermeneutical key, Kierkegaard's deliberation on loving the neighbor *as oneself.* Here Kierkegaard claims, "To love yourself in the right way and to love the neighbor correspond perfectly to one another; fundamentally they are one and the same thing."[40] Stressing his

[38] Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 52.
[39] For what is, perhaps, the most notorious of these critiques see, Theodor W. Adorno, "On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love," in *Søren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* Vol. II, edited by Daniel W. Conway (London: Routledge, 2002), 7-21. First published in 1939.
[40] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* 22. See also, 17-24.

affirmation of proper self-love, Ferreira also highlights that for Kierkegaard, God's gift of creation from nothing is bestowed on all, implying an equality from which one might conclude that care for the other necessarily coincides with concern for oneself. All this entails limits to self-sacrifice. Beyond this, Ferreira reads Kierkegaard's comments concerning both our *shared need* for and indebtedness to divine love as supporting a kind of mutuality in love. In this way, love should not be understood as totally disinterested, thought singularly in terms of self-denial.[41] Such arguments, however, have sparked recent debate within Kierkegaard scholarship.

Sharon Krishek has argued that while Kierkegaard does affirm a *kind* of self-love, Ferreira's account fails to take seriously Kierkegaard's assertion that "Christian love is self-denial's love." For this reason, she argues that Kierkegaard's attempt to uphold a notion of self-love ultimately fails. The reason for such failure, Krishek argues, is that his emphasis on neighbor-love, which she reads as primarily self-sacrificial, overlooks the needs and desires associated with preferential manifestations of love—evident, for example, in the case of romantic love and friendship.[42] However, John Lippitt rightly argues that Krishek draws too neat a distinction between neighbor-love and preferential manifestations of love. He shows how various types of love speak to aspects of our desire/need *and* require a willingness to see beyond pure self-interest. In this way, Lippitt views Kierkegaard's description of neighbor-love to be about much more than self-denial, nevertheless admitting that Kierkegaard's account of self-love may need to be made more robust.[43] Concerns such as these fuel continued debate over how to interpret Kierkegaard's view of the relation between neighbor-love, self-love, and preferential expressions of love.

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[41] M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's Works of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). See especially, 210.

[42] Krishek goes on to link a proper account of self-love with an affirmation of the needs and desires associated with preferential forms of love, seeing possibilities for developing such an account in connection with arguments put forth in *Fear and Trembling*. See Sharon Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For her constructive proposal engaging *Fear and Trembling*, see 138-189. I am sympathetic to Krishek's desire to account for a more positive vision of preferential love in Kierkegaard's writings (and I draw on some important elements of her argument in Chapter 4). Still, I think it is possible to see this—at least to some extent—by attending to the theology of creation which frames Kierkegaard's arguments within *Works of Love* itself. Following John Lippitt, I also think it is possible to do so without envisioning a division between 'neighbor love' and preferential expressions of love.

[43] See John Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Much of the debate surrounds how Kierkegaard construes the relation between neighbor-love and other 'preferential' dimensions of love, particularly in light of his somewhat ambiguous use of the Danish term '*Kjerlighed*.' As Ferreira observes, Kierkegaard uses this term to refer to "(1) *God as love,* (2) *the love placed in us by God,* as well as (3) *the neighbor-love we are commanded to express.*"[44] While I cannot touch on every aspect of this debate,[45] John Davenport has offered a recent proposal for how we might interpret neighbor-love and preferential-love as having a more positive connection or relationship. He views Kierkegaard's account of neighbor-love as functioning in a very similar way to a standard Lutheran notion of *agape*. However, he argues that, for Kierkegaard, "all human forms of love at least have some potential relation to *Kjerlighed* and ultimately to God's creative love as their source."[46] Among his reasons for this argument is Kierkegaard's following claim: "Christianity, however, knows only one kind of love, the spirit's love, but this can lie at the base of and be present in every other expression of love."[47] Because Kierkegaard depicts God as the source of all love (WL, 9-10), Davenport interprets Kierkegaard as *at times* envisioning something like an "agapic infusion" of various forms or expressions of preferential love. In light of Kierkegaard's references to neighbor-love as the "foundation" for *particular* expressions of special love (WL, 140-10), he argues,

> Kierkegaard's language suggests that agapic love can operate within and transform all the natural forms of preferential love, so that erotic love, friendship, love of children, and even natural self-love are enhanced in their modes of special attention by awareness of the other person's transcendence and participation in divinity.[48]

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[44] M. Jamie Ferreira, "The Problematic Agapeistic Ideal—Again," in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: Philosophical Engagements,* edited by Edward F. Mooney (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 93-110; 207 (emphasis in the original). She sees 'Kjerlighed' as genuine love, prior to any preference, and makes an argument that the preference involved in erotic love and friendship need not exclude this genuine love. She sees 'Kjerlighed' as 'paradigmatic of love,' and prior to any preference. However, this does not mean that the preference involved in erotic love and friendship cannot be permeated by 'neighbor love.'

[45] See especially, Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love,* 109-37 and Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love*, 63-95. See also M. Jamie Ferreira, "Review of Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*," Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews (January 21, 2010): https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/kierkegaard-on-faith-and-love/. John Lippitt, "Kierkegaard and the Problem of Special RElationsh9ips: Ferreira, Krishek, and the 'God Filter,'" *International Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 72 (2012): 177-97. Sharon Krishek, "In Defense of a Faith-Like Model of Love: A Reply to John Lippitt's 'Kierkegaard and the Problem of Special Relationships: Ferreira, Krishek, and the 'God Filter,'" *International Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 75 (2014): 155-66.

[46] John J. Davenport, "The Integration of Neighbor-Love and Special Loves in Kierkegaard and von Hildebrand," in *Kierkegaard's God and the Good Life,* edited by Stephen Minister, J. Aaron Simmons, and Michael Strawser (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 46-77; 57. See also, 52.

[47] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 146.

[48] Davenport, "The Integration of Neighbor-Love and Special Loves in Kierkegaard and von Hildebrand," 58.

This would imply that the grace-filled *volition* involved in loving someone for her own sake need not compete with, but might instead permeate and transform the natural desire, attraction, or self-interest involved in mutual relationships. The observation that Kierkegaard may—at times, at least—point to such a notion, opens up promising new ways of accounting for some of the tensions at play in his reflections on love; it also allows us to move away from interpreting Kierkegaard's thought along the lines of the unhelpful dichotomy between *eros* and *agape*, popularized by Andres Nygren.[49] However, whereas Davenport moves from this argument into a detailed analysis of what properly belongs to the two separate volitions involved in 'neighbor-love' and 'preferential love,' I am here more interested in Kierkegaard's rather ambiguous holding of such notions in light of his idea that all true expressions of love, in some way, have God as their source. Accordingly, I seek to draw more generally on Davenport's initial observation, following its implications down a slightly different path.

The arguments I put forth here will attend to what I see as a common thread running through Kierkegaard's reflections on diverse expressions of true love (*Kjerlighed*)—including any 'natural' affection enhanced by 'neighbor-love' with divine love as its source. While I do not wish to defend every one of Kierkegaard's emphases or depictions of love, my arguments might also be seen to supplement Ferreira's positive account of *Works of Love* while, at the same time, resisting Krishek's identification of self-denial and non-preferentiality as ultimately, the most fundamental way Kierkegaard characterizes love.[50] I hope to show why this is the case by highlighting a pattern of thought that occurs in Kierkegaard's articulations of 'love' and 'gift'—a pattern that points to an underlying theology of creation, implicit in key passages of his non-pseudonymous works. I will then argue that this enables a further emphasis on the way we as creatures love in *finite dependence* on a love already given, thereby providing further support to Ferreira's claim that Kierkegaard's approach to love implies limits to self-sacrifice. Regardless of whether one accepts everything Kierkegaard has to say about love, it is at least possible to recognize a shift in emphasis that occurs when we interpret his view of love as organized around a theology of creation as opposed to a notion of *kenosis* or self-denial on its own. My primary

[49] For an analysis of the more positive role erotic desire plays in Kierkegaard's account of love and an argument against reading his view of love in terms of Andres Nygren's famous distinction between *eros* and *agape*, see Pia Søloft, "Erotic Love, Reading Kierkegaard with and without Marion," 37-46.
[50] See, for example, Krishek, "Kierkegaard on Faith and Love," 124.

concern is to show how such a shift in emphasis might prove exemplary within the context of recent *theological* debates concerning the nature of love. With that context in mind, I will now turn to Kierkegaard's account of 'gift.'

3.4) *Kierkegaard and Gift*

Clearly, Kierkegaard does not have a systematic gift *theory,* but it is worth noticing how his comments on gift-exchange relate to a pattern which presupposes a theology of creation. He often explores the various implications surrounding a vision of creation itself as God's *gift*. Jamie Ferreira and George Pattison, among others, have related his considerations of the topic of 'gift' to recent gift theory debates.[51] Pattison argues that in light of Kierkegaard's theology of creation, rather than viewing gratitude as an annulment of the gift as Derrida does, he sees the ability to enter into gratitude as one of the most significant aspects of the gift. As Pattison claims, "To be able to be grateful to God is to be able to bring my life in its entirety into the compass of the God-relationship."[52] Both Pattison and Ferreira highlight that for Kierkegaard, gratitude does not annul the gift. Ferreira focuses on the way Kierkegaard understands 'gift' in connection with love, giving special attention to Kierkegaard's claim, "*Love does not seek its own; it rather gives in such a way that the gift looks as if it were the recipient's property.*"[53] She recognizes that such

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[51] David Kangas, for example, considers Kierkegaard's account of divine goodness *as* gift in relation to Neoplatonic theology. See David Kangas, "The Logic of Gift in Kierkegaard's *Four Upbuilding Discourses* (1843)," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 200* (2000/2010): 100-20. Claudia Welz assesses questions gift theory raises for debates concerning 'metaphysics of presence' and the relationship between phenomenology and theology. She engages such debates, drawing on Kierkegaard's account of both the transcendence of divine love and love as *gift* of divine presence—stressing that human reception of this gift is enabled pneumatologically and by faith, which then informs one's horizon of perception. See Claudia Welz, *Love's Transcendence and the Problem of Theodicy*, 89-181 and 343-87. Mark Dooley considers the relation between Derrida and Kierkegaard, examining themes such as 'love,' 'gift,' and 'alterity.' See, for example, Mark Dooley, "The Politics of Exodus: Derrida, Kierkegaard, and Levinas on 'Hospitality,' in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Works of Love* Vol. 16, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 167-92. Whereas Dooley explores positive aspects of Derrida's view of alterity, as well as commonalities between Derrida and Kierkegaard, I will here focus on what makes Kierkegaard's thought distinct in light of problems I see in Derrida's approach to love and alterity. I cannot here delineate and respond to all of the arguments made by these and other scholars as my current aim is to highlight a pattern of thought that emerges in connection with Kierkegaard's reflection on the condition of a *perfect gift* as that which fills a *perfect need.*

[52] Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 144. See 143-48 for Pattison's engagement with Kierkegaard on the topic of 'gift' and gift-theory—especially as it relates to gratitude and self-understanding. In many ways, the reading I put forth here builds on Pattison's interpretation of the theological emphases underlying Kierkegaard's reflections on 'gift.' To examine various points of similarity and difference, see Pattison, "Philosophy and Dogma" and *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, 122-132; see especially, 127-129.

[53] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 274 (emphasis in the original).

a claim could lead to Derrida's notion that any realization of the gift annuls it, but she instead reads Kierkegaard's intention here as absorbed with a more practical concern: One should not give *so that* the neighbor feels obliged, indebted, or dependent on the giver. Stressing that self-denial is not *in itself* the goal of gift-giving, Ferreira extrapolates two conditions she thinks are, in Kierkegaard's view, necessary for a true gift: a gift must benefit the other, and it must be given in a way that is loving.[54] Furthermore, these two conditions are met while we are empowered to give out of a love that is already unconditionally given. Humanity is created with a need for love as well as a need to express love. As Ferreira claims, "God's gift of love was the gift of a need."[55] In this way the command to love the neighbor speaks to an already present capacity and desire to express love latent within the created human being.

I will seek to build on these claims, exploring slightly different territory. While Ferreira's consideration of gift focuses on *Works of Love*, I will attend to a particular discussion of gift-exchange in the *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* and then read it alongside key passages in *Works of Love* to highlight a pattern of thought that emerges from both of these non-pseudonymous works when considered side-by-side. I will argue that this repeated pattern has to do with the structuring of Kierkegaard's thought around a notion of creation *ex nihilo,* which, in turn, has important implications for the way we consider the relation between divine and human love.

Like Derrida, Kierkegaard addresses the problem of gift-exchange, but in a distinct way and with a different underlying aim. I will first focus on one of his discourses entitled, "Every Good Gift and Every Perfect Gift is From Above," in which Kierkegaard circles around a particular issue we face when attempting to give a *perfect* gift. For Kierkegaard, the condition for any good gift is that it is fitting. A gift should be appropriate—not just unilaterally given.[56] A perfect gift must fulfill a perfect need. This, however, leads to a problem. While I may attempt, and indeed, come close to giving a gift that is fitting and useful to my neighbor, I will never *know* that this is the case. For Kierkegaard, the problem of the gift relates to human finitude—my knowledge of the

[54] Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 158-59, and 66.
[55] Ibid., 40-41.
[56] This point is raised in later gift theory debates and is also made by John Milbank. See Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror," 302.

other's need is never perfect, and always finite. According to Kierkegaard, "a person may know how to give good gifts, but he cannot know whether he is giving a good gift."[57] This is because the one giving the gift will never fully know if it is fitting, appropriately addressing another's need, which *is* the condition of the gift. Similarly, I will never know exactly how another will receive the gift I give. Kierkegaard moves to distinguish this from the way God's knowledge coincides with God's perfection in giving. He claims that divine knowing "does not take leave of the gift and abandon it to itself but is at all times a co-knowledge with the gift and thus also in the moment it is received."[58] Here, Kierkegaard focuses on the problem faced for giving a perfect gift because it highlights something about the nature of created finitude. [59] The gaps or contradictions we experience in our finite attempts at giving say something about the orientation of our creaturely reality to a prior givenness.

It here becomes clear that Kierkegaard approaches *gift* in terms of a theology of creation so that all that is good is a created gift from God, who is *uncreated* goodness itself. For Kierkegaard, "a human being, insofar as he participates in the good, does so through God."[60] He draws out the unique implications of this through further deliberation on the gift, again, exploring the coinciding perfection of the gift with the way it meets a need. Even if my gift to another does happen to meet this other's need perfectly, this is still no perfect gift because such a gift only meets a particular, finite need.[61] Once more, Kierkegaard utilizes an example from finite creaturely experience to illumine another aspect of our prior orientation to and dependence on a primary givenness. Since the condition of a perfect gift is such that it meets a perfect need, Kierkegaard argues, "God is the only one who gives in such a way that he gives the condition along with the gift, the only one who in giving already has given."[62] In other words, God gives

[57] Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 131.
[58] Ibid., 133.
[59] Cf. Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, 128-129. While Pattison focusses on Kierkegaard's use of language, as I will show, stressing Kierkegaard's attention to the *experience* of created finitude may provide another way of seeing what Pattison refers to as 'a point of analogy' or 'point of contact' involved in Kierkegaard's affirmation of both a likeness and ultimate dissimilarity between God and creation.
[60] Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 134.
[61] Ibid., 136.
[62] Ibid., 134. Both Kangas and Welz rightly highlight that for Kierkegaard, the condition for *receiving* all as gift is itself a gift of the divine (see, EUD 39). As Welz asserts, God is "not only the origin of what is but also the 'medium' through which we can receive this gift" (Welz, *Love's Transcendence and the Problem of Theodicy*, 99; see also, 335). However, Kierkegaard also refers to the condition of a perfect gift as that which fills a perfect need.

both the gift of the good *and* the corresponding *need* to be sustained in this good *through* God as the source of all good. At this point, however, it becomes important to understand just what Kierkegaard is getting at with his reference to 'need':

> Earthly need is no perfection but rather an imperfection. Therefore, even though a person's gift were able to satisfy it completely, the gift would still be an imperfect gift because the need was imperfect. But to need the good and perfect gift from God is a perfection; therefore, the gift, which is intrinsically perfect, is also a perfect gift because the need is perfect.[63]

Perfect need is different from finite needs in that perfect need refers to a positive capacity built into the very nature of created finitude. For Kierkegaard, this fact is not simply a reality based on St. Paul's claim that in God 'we live and move and have our being,' though, as he argues, it certainly is as much. It might also be said that Kierkegaard sees the awakening recognition of this perfect need as an important aspect of a spiritual formation. Indeed, in commenting on this increased recognition of one's need for God, Joshua Furnal boldly refers to it as "Kierkegaard's account of human nature's path toward perfection."[64] Toward the conclusion of the discourse, Kierkegaard further clarifies the unique form of need which he refers to as 'perfect' and distinct from finite 'earthly need.' Perfect need is demonstrated through the realization of the entirety of one's self as gift.[65] In other words, *perfect need* is reserved for speaking of the self's finite creaturely orientation to the Creator of all things.[66] We here see a positive account of creaturely finitude in Kierkegaard's claim, "to need the Holy Spirit is a perfection in a human being" and according to his view that this "need itself is a good and a perfect gift from God."[67]

As I will show, sustained attention to his reflection on 'need' illumines a unique set of implications both for Kierkegaard's approach to gift and for his theological anthropology.

[63] Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 136.

[64] Furnal, *Catholic Theology After Kierkegaard*, 32. See also, footnote 66.

[65] Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 134-37.

[66] This 'perfect need' that I here refer to as a *positive capacity* is also what Kierkegaard calls "the condition" for receiving the good and perfect gift from God—a gift which we soon learn is the Holy Spirit. It might be interesting to relate this to Joshua Furnal's argument that "this creaturely condition of being toward the good . . . which is not an earthly need or gift . . . comes from God as infused gift (EUD 136)" (32). In commenting on some of the same passages as I do here, Furnal demonstrates how Kierkegaard articulates something like a theology of nature and grace, highlighting points of commonality between the theological anthropology of Kierkegaard and that of Thomas Aquinas. See, Furnal, *Catholic Theology After Kierkegaard*, 31-44. My reading of Kierkegaard's theological anthropology, and some of the more constructive proposals I make in Chapters 4 and 5, can be read as building on this vision—especially as I proceed to compare Kierkegaard's theological anthropology with that of Marion's. Concerning Kierkegaard's articulation of the gift of a human *capacity* to participate in the good *through* God, see also, Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, 129 and "Philosophy and Dogma," 159-160.

[67] Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 139.

To summarize, Kierkegaard sees all that is good as gift, emphasizing that this is no metaphor. His problematizing of the concept of gift serves to highlight a distinctive implication of creation *ex nihilo*—all created goodness subsists through a shared indebtedness to and participation in God's uncreated goodness. This goodness coinheres with God's giving, and we must say that our giving is *not like* that of the Creator of all things. Finally, Kierkegaard's concept of 'perfect need' speaks to our creaturely orientation to and dependence on the divine—so that it is not only that all created goods are gifts, but that this very orientation is *itself* a gift. Of course, one may wish to emphasize the *inherent* goodness of the created order, but in this case, it is at least possible to follow Kierkegaard's account insofar as all that is good is what it is, as it is both created and sustained by God. As George Pattison claims, "To be a recipient of God's good gifts . . . is the very condition of human existence. The condition by which creation is maintained in being."[68] He makes this point in connection with an argument that there are resonances in Kierkegaard's thought with a more classical theological structure in which creation and redemption, while not equivalent, are brought into a closer, corresponding relationship.[69] In light of all this, I will now turn to Kierkegaard's account of love, showing how, in it, one notices key elements of his account of 'gift,' revealing a pattern that demonstrates an implicit theology of creation influencing each account.

3.5) *Love, Alterity, and Creation* Ex Nihilo

Again, while Kierkegaard is known for his comments concerning love and self-denial, I here contend that his framework for contemplating the theme of love opens space for many other considerations. First, it is worth noting that Kierkegaard often relies on 1 Corinthians 13, a passage which provides a detailed description of the practices and behaviors associated with love. This means that instead of seeking to locate and describe the content of love based on the brief and somewhat ambiguous reference to *kenosis* in Philippians 2:5-11, he describes more

[68] Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 149.
[69] Ibid. See also, his articulation of this argument in Pattison, "Philosophy and Dogma," 160. Here Pattison points to how a theology of creation, evident in the *Upbuilding Discourses*, forms a theological context for interpreting Climacus's Christological emphases and theology of redemption in *Philosophical Fragments.* He argues, "the 'high' theology of redemption found in the Fragments—Kierkegaard's 'dogmatic' tendency—does not exclude such a theology of creation, but rather presupposes it" (161). Related to this, see also, footnote 52.

concretely the outward actions and inward attunements involved in loving. With this in mind, it is now possible to move to how considering Kierkegaard's reflections on creation might further nuance an interpretation of his approach to love.

As I move into further discussion of Kierkegaard's approach to love, it is important to note that while the *Upbuilding Discourses* contain numerous references to creation from nothing, it is at first less obvious whether such a theology is present in *Works of Love.* And of course, there is plenty of ambiguity concerning Kierkegaard's theology in general, since his works in no way put forth any sort of systematic theology. He does, however, mention creation 'out of nothing' at key points in *Works of Love*, and, on my reading, such references serve a purpose in his thought. In his deliberation entitled, "Love is a Matter of Conscience," Kierkegaard claims, "You begin your history with the beginning of love and end at a grave. But that eternal love-history has begun much earlier; it began with your beginning, when you came into existence *out of nothing*, and, just as surely as you do not become nothing, it does not end at a grave."[70] This theme is echoed in a later deliberation in which Kierkegaard states the following: "This is the unfathomable goodness in God's goodness . . . that he who creates *out of nothing* yet creates distinctiveness, so that the creature in relation to God does not become nothing."[71] In light of these references, I will turn to how creation *ex nihilo* relates to Kierkegaard's vision of love.

First, in the preface to *Works of love*, Kierkegaard clarifies that his deliberations are "not about *love* but about *works of love*," stressing the mystery and inexhaustibility of love itself. Slightly later on, he refers to 'love's fruit.' Ferreira highlights an important distinction between 'love's works' and 'love's fruit,' noting that love's fruit is not necessarily external, visible action. In this way, works matter, but they are also subject to scrutiny since internal motivations and the *way* one performs works of love matter for whether or not one is actually loving.[72] Kierkegaard claims that the "hidden life of love" is at once unfathomable and "*recognizable* by its fruits."[73] As he argues,

[70] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* 150 (my emphasis).
[71] Ibid., 271 (my emphasis).
[72] Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving,* 24-26.
[73] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* 10.

> Love's hidden life is in the innermost being, unfathomable, and then in turn is in an unfathomable connectedness with all existence. Just as the quiet lake originates deep down in hidden springs no eye has seen, so also does a person's love originate even more deeply in God's love. . . . Just as the quiet lake invites you to contemplate it but by the reflected image of darkness prevents you from seeing through it, so also the mysterious origin of love in God's love prevents you from seeing its ground.[74]

When we read this passage in connection with his references to creation *ex nihilo*, it seems we might conclude that for Kierkegaard, while creation comes into existence *out of nothing*, there is an eternal dimension to love, which has its origin in the divine. Furthermore, there is something of an apophatic approach to love at play here. We might find some support for such an underlying vision when read alongside the following claim made by the author of *The Concept of Anxiety*:

> Whoever loves can hardly find joy and satisfaction, not to mention growth, in preoccupation with a definition of what love properly is. Whoever lives in daily and festive communion with the thought that there is a God could hardly wish to spoil this for himself, or see it spoiled, by piecing together a definition of what God is.[75]

That Kierkegaard maintains this apophatic dimension to love need not imply the total ambiguity or indeterminacy of human love, since love bears a recognizable presence in its fruit, and is revealed through concrete practices and attunements Kierkegaard goes on to describe. At the same time, love's plentitude and origin in God's love prevents any narrowed *definition* of love itself—whether defined as unilateral gift, or in relation to some version of *kenosis*.[76] As Kierkegaard later argues, "just as love itself is invisible and therefore we have to believe in it, so also is it not unconditionally and directly to be known by any particular expression of it."[77] This

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[74] Ibid., 9-10.
[75] Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 147.
[76] See Ferreira's interpretation of this passage in terms of the 'hidden and revealed' nature of love. Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 21-24. While Krishek offers a slightly different interpretation, she also comments on this passage, acknowledging that one cannot define love (*Kjerlighed*) in itself, but that "we can inquire only into its manifestations" (110). Interpreting love's fruit as the *result* of love's works—in contrast to Ferreira—she thus argues "the focus of our investigation should be the *works of love* (rather than the hidden power of love or its recognizable fruits)" (111; see also, 109-112). Krishek then organizes the possible works or manifestations of love according to preferential and non-preferential expressions of love, interpreting *Works of Love* as ultimately promoting self-denial and non-preferentiality as what most fundamentally characterizes *true* love—thereby leading to contradictions in Kierkegaard's attempt to integrate the two. In my view, however, this overlooks the full implications of Kierkegaard's point that we cannot know what love *essentially is* by the works we perform in the name of love alone (see Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving,* 24-26). Giving more interpretive weight to Kierkegaard's assertion that love is ultimately unfathomable allows us to contextualize both his comments concerning the works through which love is revealed and those comments concerning what it is that characterizes authentic love.
[77] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 13.

has important implications for the way we understand what the cross reveals about love. But before turning to this, it is first necessary to see what, for Kierkegaard, a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* uniquely reveals about love. Interestingly, it is through a creation theology that he anticipates and addresses the problem of love and alterity later raised within postmodern theory.

In the section of *Works of Love* entitled, "Love Does not Seek Its Own," Kierkegaard examines how love relates to the problem of conceiving another's identity. Reflecting on a notion of creation 'out of nothing,' he speaks of human beings utilizing the poetic metaphor of flowers in a meadow. In speaking of divine love, Kierkegaard highlights what seems to be a contradiction from the standpoint of a finite, human conception of love. The seeming contradiction is that God makes absolutely no distinction in loving all that is created. At the same time—and even while there are notable commonalities among them—God's love infinitely distinguishes each meadow flower. God's act of creating and loving, in other words, does not merely set things in motion but remains a sustaining presence to each existing thing in its distinctive contingency. Considering the most insignificant flower in a meadow, Kierkegaard claims,

> it is as if this, too, had said to love: Let me become something in myself, something distinctive. And then love has helped it to become its own distinctiveness, but far more beautiful than the poor little flower had ever dared to hope for. What love! First, it makes no distinction, none at all; next . . . it infinitely distinguishes itself in loving the diverse.[78]

Here unique difference finds its source in a loving creation *ex nihilo*, evidenced by Kierkegaard's later statement: "This is the unfathomable fountain of goodness . . . that he who creates *out of nothing* yet creates distinctiveness, so that the creature in relation to God does not become nothing."[79] In light of this imagery, we might consider the following conclusion Kierkegaard draws about love: "only true love loves every human being according to the person's infinite distinctiveness."[80] As we progress through the deliberation, it becomes clear that only divine love coincides with perfect knowledge of each person's unique distinctiveness because God's love is the source of and present to the various vicissitudes of this distinctiveness—created *ex nihilo*. The fact that divine love and knowledge perfectly coincide in a way that is unique to the

[78] Ibid., 270.
[79] Ibid., 271. (My emphasis).
[80] Ibid., 270.

Creator of all things does not lead Kierkegaard to say more about what love *is*, but instead leads him to an observation about love from the standpoint of creaturely finitude. A finite, created human being will never fully recognize the infinite distinctiveness of each other *because* she approaches love from a finite, created standpoint. While not equating their perspectives on love, we might note some striking similarities between this point Kierkegaard makes and an analogy Thomas Aquinas draws concerning the difference between God's knowledge and ours: "For the knowledge of God is to all creatures what the knowledge of the artificer is to things made by his art."[81] And for this reason, "Natural things are midway between the knowledge of God and our knowledge: for we receive knowledge from natural things, of which God is the cause by His knowledge."[82] Of course, we should not understand this point—either as expressed by Aquinas or differently, by Kierkegaard—as implying some form of occasionalism. God's primary act of creation does not, in other words, imply a divine imposition of our unique contingency *from without,* as it were. Instead, God remains the sustaining presence to creatures ever becoming who we are in exercising our own creaturely agency and causal powers.[83] The main point I wish to draw here is merely that *as Creator*, God's intimate knowledge of creatures is not like ours.

Returning to Kierkegaard's deliberations, it becomes clear he sees a significant series of implications following from the view that God's knowledge of each human being differs qualitatively from that of our own. We see this in the way he describes the person who seeks to evaluate the distinctiveness of either herself or others as falling into one of two blunders. The

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[81] Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, 1.14.8. See David Burrell's further interpretation of what, for Aquinas, such 'practical knowing' entails for conceiving God's intimate relatedness to the world in *Knowing the Unknowable God*: *Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). See especially, 71-108.

[82] Ibid., 1.14.8.3. That such knowledge need not negate creaturely freedom involves, for Aquinas, that God's knowledge is not like a foreknowledge of *future* events—since God is eternal. Interestingly, this is another point around which we might see some commonality between Kierkegaard—influenced as he was by Boethius—and St. Thomas, an argument I will return to in Chapter 5. For now, I will focus on the import of Kierkegaard's reflections on the Creator's intimate knowledge of creatures, acknowledging its rather poetic and theologically unsystematic nature. Those interested in how the arguments I make here might be taken up and considered alongside the relevant concerns of a more systematic theological approach may wish to note ways of relating the points I make here with reference to Kierkegaard and the arguments put forth by David Burrell in *Knowing the Unknowable God*: *Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). See, especially, the points of similarity between my reading of Kierkegaard's reflections on God's love and knowledge of human distinctiveness and Burrell's interpretation of Thomas Aquinas in Chapter 5: "God's Knowledge of Particulars" (71-91). I am so grateful to Joshua Furnal for directing me to these points of similarity after reading an earlier version of this chapter.

[83] For a brief overview of the rise of occasionalism, the problems it poses for an understanding of creation, and the differing view held by Thomas Aquinas, see Oliver, *Creation: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 116-124. For a helpful explanation of Kierkegaard's noncompetitive view of the relation between God and creatures, construed along the lines of a more classical *exitus-reditus* model, see Barnett, *From Despair to Faith*, 26-31.

first is the tendency to comprehend the other in terms of the self. In this instance, I might imagine I have a keen understanding of another person, yet this is because I imagine the other in reference to myself, and according to my own likeness. The second blunder is seen in that, on occasion, I might make more of an effort to love another according to her own unique difference from me. This betrays yet another problem. In this instance, I imagine a concrete difference and end up reducing the other's infinite distinctiveness because I measure her difference, yet again, in reference to my own finite standpoint.[84]

Similar blunders to these motivate Derrida to emphasize the importance of upholding *absolute* otherness. However, while Kierkegaard anticipates Derrida's concerns, he locates the problem theologically. Rather than simply emphasizing absolute otherness or difference, as Derrida does, he sees human distinctiveness as irreducible or, in one sense, *infinitely* distinct, while remaining *finitely* dependent on a Creator. [85] Categories of 'finite' and 'infinite' then, function as somewhat relative terms, utilized for speaking about the contradictions we experience according to our *creaturely* reality in light of creation *ex nihilo*. Kierkegaard's reference to 'the infinite,' in other words, does not predicate anything of God. In this way, one might note a real distinction—or, 'infinite qualitative difference'—between divine Otherness and the created distinctiveness of the human being.[86] All this reveals not only why I cannot master the gaze of another from my own finite point of view. It also speaks to the problem of self-reflexivity: I cannot even master knowledge of myself since my unique distinctiveness is also a gift. Here the unique differences between self and other are, of course, recognized, but in a way that simultaneously points to an irreducibility never fully apprehended. For this reason, Kierkegaard sees recognition of the *true* distinctiveness of both self and other as inextricably intertwined and always believed because never fully grasped. Further, in this same section, Kierkegaard refers to the idea that one is truly

[84] Ibid., 270-74. These blunders are linked with Kierkegaard's caricature of the 'rigid and domineering person.' He goes on to describe another caricature: the 'small-minded person.' 'Small-mindedness' does not *believe* in the distinctiveness of itself or anyone else, and therefore, "The small-minded person has clung to a very specific shape and form that he calls his own; he seeks only that, can love only that" (Ibid., 272).

[85] Brian Treanor makes a similar point to this, arguing that alterity may not be spoken of in a way that ignores aspects of similitude if we are to recognize the particularity of the other. See Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

[86] For further explanation of this, see page 170. One might interpret the significance of this point along the lines of Linn Tonstad's critique of a notion of absolute difference, which is univocal between human beings and the divine: "the difference between God and creation means that there is no ontological continuum between humans and God, any more than there is an ontological binary or gap between them" (Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 289).

one's self *before God* "since this is the source and origin of all distinctiveness."[87] In his view, there is an intimate connection between self and other due to a shared indebtedness to creative love. While the human being has difficulty because it cannot love in the same way as the God whose loving is one with the very act of creating, recognition of our shared implication in created dependence enables a way toward loving regard for both the other *and* the self. According to Kierkegaard, "To have distinctiveness is to believe in the distinctiveness of everyone else, because distinctiveness is not mine but is God's gift by which he gives being to me, and he indeed gives to all, gives being to all."[88] Here, alterity is recognized, but in a uniquely interconnected and theological way. And while elsewhere in *Works of Love* Kierkegaard makes comments about a 'common likeness' each human being shares with others, I do not read this as negating his concern to recognize both the particularity and irreducibility of human difference as it is encountered.[89]

At this point, I can begin to articulate the pattern in Kierkegaard's thought on love and 'gift' in which I am interested. His exploration of the contradictions and difficulties we face in our attempts at loving and giving highlight aspects of our created, finite standpoint to demonstrate the way this finitude points to a fulfillment beyond itself**.** It is also the case that only a Creator who creates 'out of nothing' offers the paradigm for a loving and giving that extends to the

[87] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 271.
[88] Ibid., 271.
[89] Kierkegaard considers the importance of overlooking differences that separate and exclude, referring instead to "that essential other, which is common to all, the eternal resemblance, the likeness," or later, "the common watermark" on all humanity (WL, 88-9). In commenting on Kierkegaard's seemingly contradictory comments concerning 'concrete differences' between human beings, Ferreira argues that Kierkegaard's remarks must be read according to two different rhetorical contexts: the commandment to love the neighbor *and* the working out of this commandment's fulfillment. While "concrete differences" between persons are valued as part of the *fulfillment* of the command to love the neighbor, the context of Kierkegaard's comments about overlooking differences should be interpreted according to the contextual point being made: exclusion based on distinctions is against the love commandment. Both rhetorical contexts have to do with a "moral vision" of the other. For her full account of this issue, see Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 99-116. See especially, 113-114. Building on Ferreira's point regarding the *moral vision* Kierkegaard has in mind, it might be added that in the passage I am here examining, love is depicted as leading one to attempt a *vision* of divinely created distinctiveness—such a vision implies recognition of the other's difference as *both* beloved and irreducible. However, when Kierkegaard reflects on division based on difference, such vision is depicted as tainted by self-imposed, prejudicial categorizations. This is supported by the fact that just before his comment on the "common watermark," Kierkegaard critiques patronizing forms of charity as opposed to true inclusion, making a distinction between "seeing the poor and the lowly" vs. "seeing the neighbor in the poor and the lowly" (WL, 81-84). While the material needs of one's concrete existence matter, to see the neighbor implies seeing in a way that cuts through prejudice. I am grateful to an anonymous commentator for pressing me to consider these tensions present in *Works of Love.*

absolute depth of all that we are and need. God gives the gift *and* the corresponding need; God's love *and* knowledge perfectly coincide in the act of creating distinctiveness. Of course, for a theological perspective, this should not be taken in a way that would reduce God to some *concept* of the infinite, thought in contrast to our own creaturely finitude—as this would negate a doctrine of analogy. However, for Kierkegaard, the focus seems to be on how the limits of our creatureliness say something about our prior orientation to that which is beyond our own finite nature to attain. For this reason, embrace of our dependence on God is an embrace of *who* we are in our very creatureliness. Kierkegaard's aim is not to point out the *impossibility* of our loving or gift-giving by exploring the limits we bump up against in such attempts. Rather, he seems to be interested in a full-out grappling with and final embrace of this finitude. For example, the realization that in my giving, I will never meet another's *perfect* need demonstrates that I should give with an awareness of all that has already been given. And the fact that I will never know another person's true identity in full implies that I must *believe* in the created distinctiveness of each other *in order to* view this other in a non-reductive and loving way. Our finite attempts at giving and loving, in other words, are accomplished best with the recognition of our finitude, because only in this way do we accomplish them appropriately as created beings. I do not love another person very well when I think I already understand her perfectly. And I do not give in the best way when I presume to be the one fulfilling *all* of another's needs. In this way, we are created to reflect love through *dependence* on a love already given, and this requires a positive embrace of our finite capacities.

We see further evidence for such a reading in another passage in the *Upbuilding Discourses* in which Kierkegaard directly connects a notion of love with the embrace of creaturely finitude. While, as we have seen, he is interested in how our love faces various contradictions and difficulties on account of our finitude, Kierkegaard also claims that the created human being might display a particular type of perfection in love. It is already clear from *Works of Love* that our love reflects divine love in a unique way, which for Kierkegaard, is to 'remain in love's debt.' Gratitude becomes a recognition that fuels human love in its response to divine love, and in turn, frees us to view the neighbor in an altogether different way. While this point may seem simple enough, gratitude requires an immense rigor in light of creation *ex nihilo* because our finite gratitude will never correspond to our givenness, which extends to all that we are and will

become—a point repeatedly highlighted in the *Upbuilding Discourses.* Here Kierkegaard sharpens the distinction between what we might affirm of divine love and any human reflection of it. He asks the question, "Have thought and language any higher expression for loving than always to give thanks?"[90] From here, he goes on to claim that love does indeed have "a lower, a humbler expression."[91] Kierkegaard explains,

> Even the person who is always willing to give thanks nevertheless loves according to his own perfection, and a person can truly love God only when he loves him according to his own imperfection. Which love is this? It is the love that is born of repentance, which is more beautiful than any other love, for in it you love God. it is more faithful and more fervent than all other love, for in repentance it is God who loves you. In repentance, you receive everything from God, even the thanksgiving that you bring.[92]

Here it becomes clear that perfect finite love for God is expressed in perfect dependence. Because Kierkegaard does not, according to the passages I have focused on here, seem to have an extrincisist view of grace, the human being is so close to grace that she does not always recognize her complete dependence on God—a dependence extending not only to her very created existence, but also to the possibility of a redeemed one. For this reason, it is not only gratitude, but also repentance that carries a unique function in relation to love. Repentance is not *simply* a recognition of sin, but a turning from it. It seems that for Kierkegaard, such a turning is *itself* not enabled by mere recognition of sin, but by recognition of God's gratuitous love in the face of sin. Support for this is seen in that, for Kierkegaard, some people have no difficulty at all with recognizing they are sorry. As the forms of despair described in *The Sickness Unto Death* make clear, repentance must ultimately coincide with self-acceptance 'before God'—otherwise, one would fall into despair and not actually be in a state of true repentance.[93] Repentance enables a deepening recognition of the fact that created goodness, including the entirety of the self, is such that it participates in, and is continually re-created through, relation to grace. It is for this reason that repentance coincides so well with a finite creaturely love for the Creator.

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[90] Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 45. From the second of his *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, originally published in 1843: "Every Good and Perfect Gift is From Above."
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., 45-46.
[93] See especially Kierkegaard's description of despair in relation to both sin and forgiveness in *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 105-31.

Finally, we might shift to focus on how all this relates to the love of neighbor, returning once again to *Works of Love.* As already mentioned, Kierkegaard clearly highlights the importance of recognizing the selfish motives or tendencies that could lead to a reductionistic view of the neighbor or a mistaken view of love. However, in contrast to thinkers such as Ward or Marion, while he might describe characteristics of love's fruit, he avoids identifying love *itself* with any one action, definition, or manifestation. Furthermore, Kierkegaard's view of love certainly does not coincide with a total forgetting of the self, but with his notion of the self 'before God': "since this is the source and origin of all distinctiveness."[94] As John Lippitt claims, "Kierkegaard commends proper self-love in part because of his view that creation is a *gift.* To fail to value the self would amount to refusing this gift."[95] Of course, that the self is viewed as gift need not negate Kierkegaard's important emphasis on the role of 'becoming a self'—a point I will further explore in Chapter 4 through a more sustained engagement with the works of both Kierkegaard and Jean-Luc Marion.

Furthermore, as George Pattison highlights, Kierkegaard's language concerning the self's 'need' for and dependence on God is not concerned with an "ascetic programme of self-denial," but with "how the self understands itself in its existence": it is the 'God-relationship' which enables understanding of the self through which one might come to true self-acceptance.[96] It is, therefore, the recognition of our shared implication in creaturely dependence, or 'remaining in love's debt,' that fuels the love of neighbor.[97] If Davenport's point is correct that Kierkegaard may not wish his account of neighbor-love to compete with 'preferential love,' but serve to enhance it, it is possible to see how there may be a wide variety of love's manifestations with this common thread running through each. Further, Kierkegaard's exploration of the contradictions involved in human attempts at loving and gift-giving in light of creation *ex nihilo* sharpens our understanding of this human dependence to include an embrace of our finite limits as part of the work involved

[94] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 271. See also, Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 140-41.
[95] Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love*, 133.
[96] Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 140-41.
[97] Kierkegaard seems to make a distinction between love of God and love of neighbor, regarding conscious love of God as the way toward love of neighbor; there is some question as to whether he would allow that this might also be reversed. I would wish to argue that the love of neighbor or care for creation might also form a more implicit mode of loving God. What matters for my current argument is simply that when considering human love, we must also recognize our finite creatureliness as part of what informs our unique ways of reflecting divine love—according to various diverse contexts.

in loving. Embrace of such limits does not mean the impossibility of enacting love, but simply that our love flourishes in *diverse* ways and in relation to *specific* contexts. Of further importance to Kierkegaard, is the distinction he makes between our loving dependence on God and the kind of relationship we foster with the neighbor; his emphasis on awakening to our *perfect* dependence is reserved for speaking of our shared dependence on the Creator of all things. In fact, Kierkegaard argues that I love my neighbor best by taking care to prevent the neighbor from becoming dependent on me in the wrong sort of way. This again highlights the fact that neighbor-love must navigate the boundaries and contexts within which love comes to be expressed in diverse ways.[98] With all this in mind, it is now possible to conclude by highlighting a few contributions Kierkegaard's work on love might make to theological engagements with gift theory.

3.6) *Contributions to Gift Theory and a Theology of Love*

It is first interesting to note how the differing assumptions Marion and Kierkegaard bring to a concept of gift reflect some aspects of each thinker's approach to love. Marion's approach to gift responds directly to Derrida, focusing more narrowly on the gift as unilaterally and unconditionally given. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, incorporates concern for the gift's appropriateness, and whether it is received as fitting according to a particular context. This means he can explore other dimensions of the gift that Marion tends to overlook. Even while Kierkegaard admits that our gift-exchange practices are imperfect, his description of gift-exchange assumes the importance of attempting to give the appropriate gift in the appropriate context. Significantly, his descriptions of love reflect this concern for appropriateness and context. We see examples of this in the way he refrains from defining love, preferring to describe the ways it is enacted in various situations, or in his account of how love ought to attend to the other without enabling unhealthy forms of dependence. While there are significant similarities with regard to some of the ways Kierkegaard and Marion speak of love, the current analysis serves to highlight a key difference. When a theological approach to love is framed by a specific debate—such as whether love is unilaterally or reciprocally given—significant theological

[98] See Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 274-79. See also, Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 93; 156-57.

considerations may fall by the wayside. For this reason, as initially *theological* reflections, Kierkegaard's analysis of gift-exchange and the human being's 'infinite distinctiveness' form an interesting counter-example to some more recent theological approaches directly engaged with and responding to (post)modern thought.

As shown above, Kierkegaard anticipates two key concerns postmodern theory raises—the possibility of the gift and the possibility of love. He addresses each issue theologically. For example, while Derrida sees the possibility of pure gift-giving as an aporia, Kierkegaard finds this very aporia interesting for theological reasons. Here our inability to give the perfect gift leads first to a reflection on our created finitude, and then to a consideration of a prior givenness organizing our creaturely existence—a givenness which speaks to our ultimate orientation to the Creator. Kierkegaard's reflection on gift mirrors his discussion of love and identity—further themes problematized within postmodern theory. While Kierkegaard anticipates the postmodern concern to uphold the irreducible nature of Otherness or difference, he again locates the reason for our inability to fully grasp another's identity with our created and finite existence. His exploration of creaturely finitude, however, does not cast this finitude in a negative light. As noted above, our shared finitude implies that even while we strive toward expressing love unconditionally, what this looks like will differ greatly depending on circumstances. Even a love that is unconditional ought to attend to various boundaries, contexts, and needs, for the *mutual* flourishing of self and other. Similarly, while attention to and desire for the good of the other for the other's sake may be a distinctive test or marker of love's fruit, such attention need not exclude attention to the self. A shared implication in created finitude means that my good and the good of the other are often intertwined in complex ways.

Further, the fact that Kierkegaard maintains an apophatic dimension to love, abstaining from identifying it with any one manifestation does not mean that love's recognition is impossible. Instead, he describes various practices and ways to assess whether we are putting love to work in our lives, as the mark of one's love—one's willingness to embrace and reflect the divine love always everywhere present—is one's fruit. It is here that we might mark a difference between Milbank's and Kierkegaard's account of love. While neither thinker defines love, and both uphold a theological notion of something like 'remaining in love's debt,' this does not prevent

Kierkegaard from arguing that our own love ought to be unconditional, marked by an attention to the other *for the other's sake.* While Kierkegaard sees love as enacted in many different ways, an emphasis on distinctive markers of love's manifestation enables one to orient oneself in ways that are *more* loving. And, of course, Kierkegaard also places a distinctive emphasis on the way love is enabled through *dependence* on the Holy Spirit. All this points to the fact that we cannot separate his account of love from an account of spiritual formation.

Finally, the notion that love leads to a willingness to sacrifice in certain contexts need not imply that love *is essentially* self-abandonment. Kierkegaard's reflections avoid an overly simplistic focus on 'self-sacrifice' as an end in itself; such emphasis has the tendency to lead to a patronizing of the other or a diminishment of the self. Instead, remaining in love's debt means that we orient ourselves toward a recognition of mutual indebtedness to creative, divine love. A few constructive points might be drawn from this. God's creative love is a gift of divine plentitude. Creation *ex nihilo* implies that our love, however it is made manifest, depends on and is enabled by divine love. This offers an alternative to conceiving love singularly in terms of kenotic self-giving. Promoters of *kenosis* as a model of love often see Christ as providing a unique example of how human beings are to love. This, however, easily overlooks two key points. The fact that Christ serves as example should not lead to an overly-simplistic understanding of what love looks like. First, Jesus enacted love in many diverse ways throughout his life in response to specific needs and contexts—Jesus slept, he became angry, and he chose to spend more time with some people than others, but in all this he loved. Second, while we may indeed be called to lay down certain wants, or make sacrifices in the case of love, Christ's death is part of a larger work which encompasses *both* incarnation *and* resurrection. St. Augustine, to name but one example, sees the work of Christ as having a certain continuity with the continued work of creation itself.[99] In this way, the redemptive work of Christ continues to be the loving work of the *Uncreated One*, and the purpose of this work is new life through the continued creation of all things. Simplistic stress on love as kenotic self-abandonment lacks a proper

[99] Augustine describes creation in accordance with Christ as the Co-Eternal Word: "Accordingly, where scripture states, *God said, Let it be made*, we should understand an incorporeal utterance of God in the substance of his co-eternal Word, calling back to himself the imperfection of the creation, so that it should not be formless, but should be formed." Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, in *On Genesis*, translated by Edmund Hill, O.P., edited by John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (New York: New City Press, 2002), 171.

account of the practices and attunements involved in orienting the self to embrace its finite dependence on a love already given. Embracing such limits may, in fact, be part of what it means to be formed in and by love since "to need the Holy Spirit is a perfection in a human being."[100]

CONCLUSION

While Chapter 2 sought to highlight the more general series of concerns and tensions postmodern theory raises for theological anthropology—also introducing the relevance of Marion and Kierkegaard's approach to the *imago Dei* in light of this context—the current chapter focused, more narrowly, on tensions this context raises for a theological *concept* of love. I first showed how both the problematizing of presupposed notions of human identity and debates in gift-theory reveal seeming contradictions for a concept of love (3.1). I then demonstrated how this leads to a common impasse in recent theology, between arguments for a concept of love *as* kenotic self-donation and those that end in a somewhat equivocal or ambiguous notion of love (3.2). As exemplified by the thought of Marion and others, increasing resignation over the ambiguity of love further influences the recent popularity of arguments for kenotic love as an alternative—despite the problematic implications such a solution poses.

While this chapter briefly introduced Marion's approach to love within the philosophical and theological context of gift-theory debates, it then moved to provide a more comprehensive analysis of Kierkegaard's thought and its, perhaps unexpected (3.4), relevance to this specific context.

Kierkegaard anticipates many of the concerns about love postmodern theory raises but addresses them through reflection on a theology of creation. Drawing primarily on his non-pseudonymous *Works of Love* and *Upbuilding Discourses*, we saw how a presupposed doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* shapes his vision in a way that offers a corrective to Marion's phenomenological approach to love defined *as* kenotic 'self-abandon.' Whereas Marion's description of kenotic love seeks to provide a coherent account of the seeming contradictions and tensions involved in love (3.2), Kierkegaard roots his reflection on these same tensions in a theology of creation *ex nihilo.* In this

[100] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 139.

way, whereas Kierkegaard certainly attends to various dimensions of the lived experience of love, his thought, perhaps inadvertently, demonstrates the continued relevance of an approach informed by more metaphysical considerations from the very beginning. We see, for example, that such an approach leads Kierkegaard to a more apophatic account of love, one that nevertheless attends to the concrete practices and attunements which encourage the flourishing of our own love in all its diverse manifestations (3.5 & 3.6).

In the end, this chapter argues that rather than *define* love with a singular emphasis on *kenosis* or 'self-gift,' a theology of creation enables necessary ways of affirming that, as Creator of all things, God's knowing and loving of creatures is transcendent to ours. The very transcendence of divine love nevertheless implies divine immanence, evident in Kierkegaard's account of the way divine love is the very source, enabling all our finite yet diverse ways of enacting love of neighbor. This shift in emphasis supports a vision of love that avoids an unhealthy or improper focus on self-sacrifice or self-diminishment, creating space for recognizing our finite limits and the contexts which inform the shape and enactment of love in any given circumstance (3.6).

PART II

INTERLUDE

KENOSIS AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE MODERN SUBJECT: QUESTIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

". . . what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"

-Psalm 8.3-4, *NRSV*

0.0) *The Deconstruction of the Transcendental Subject*

If Descartes establishes the *ego cogito* as the unquestioned foundation for all other knowledge, Heidegger's principal concern is to think outside of this horizon. We begin to see this, for example, in his critique of Kant, for whom "[t]he term 'existence' means both the objective presence of consciousness and the objective presence of things."[1] Heidegger argues that in this case, "The 'I' is a bare consciousness that accompanies all concepts. In the I, nothing more is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts."[2] The "I" is thus "an *isolated* subject that accompanies representations."[3] On Heidegger's read, this overlooks the ways our being and our various modes of understanding are always already embedded in relatedness to the world: "a mere subject without a world 'is' not initially and is also never given."[4] The *way* we exist, in other words—relating to others and imbedded in various communities—shapes our diverse pre-understandings, concerns, and the way we give attention to some things and not others. And for this reason, "this very phenomenon of the world also determines the constitution of being of the I."[5] I will further introduce Heidegger's specific analysis in the coming chapter. What matters here is that Heidegger's turn to questions of ontology undermines the transcendental subject as an "objective presence of consciousness" because it overlooks the question of being. We are, in other words, unable to get at a more *fundamental* understanding of the world and of being

[1] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 189.
[2] Ibid., 294.
[3] Ibid., 295-296.
[4] Ibid., 109.
[5] Ibid., 295.

through neutral or detached observation. Such a critique clearly comes to influence the emphases of later 'postmodern' thought.

However, thinkers like Levinas, Derrida, and now Marion seek to prioritize alterity or otherness as prior to or *beyond* any ontological account of the human being. For Levinas, any ontology, including Heidegger's fundamental ontology, approaches "the Other" starting from the priority of "the I-Other conjuncture," involving "the inevitable *orientation* of being 'starting from oneself' toward 'the Other.'"[6] This means that the *thinking* of 'being' involves approaching and comprehending all otherness from the standpoint of the self—in terms of *my own* horizon and account of existence. Such an approach, then, ends up reducing *the Other* to "the Same." As already indicated in Chapter 3, it is for this reason, Levinas claims, "The Other is neither initially nor ultimately what we grasp or what we thematize."[7] He is thus particularly interested in describing an encounter with alterity or otherness that is not first *determined by* the self or thought *according to* any other ontological account. Instead, "the Other faces me and puts me in question."[8] As Levinas argues,

> *In the welcoming of the face the will opens to reason.* Language is not limited to the maieutic awakening of thoughts common to beings. It does not accelerate the inward maturation of a reason common to all; it teaches and introduces the new into a thought. The introduction of the new into a thought, the idea of infinity, is the very work of reason.[9]

In this way, reason need not arise initially or only *as* conditioned a priori by an *I*. Instead, it might arise through my *response* to what comes upon me as unknown. Levinas thus seeks to resist the autarchy of the subject by prioritizing *responsiveness* to what is exterior to the self and its immanent horizon of expectations. As we will see, a consideration of such responsiveness is important for Marion's approach to phenomenology, and for his account of the self—given the

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[6] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 215. Levinas develops his account, explicitly focusing on the problem of ontology in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1981). There are, of course, interpretive questions surrounding the polemic between Levinas and Heidegger. Some scholars wonder whether, in the end, it is possible to see more continuity between them. See, for example, Simon Critchley, "Prolegomena to Any Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity," in *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, edited by Simon Critchley and Peter Dews (New York: State University of New York Press,1996), 13-45.
[7] Ibid., 172.
[8] Ibid., 207.
[9] Ibid., 219.

question of "who comes after the modern subject?"[10] Before turning to Marion, however, I first wish to highlight ways the (post)modern deconstruction of the subject has come to influence contemporary approaches to the self in recent theology.

While I will return to more of the philosophical complexities and debates concerning an account of the self in phenomenology—focusing on the specific context of Marion's approach—this interlude is merely intended to introduce the impact of this more generalized deconstruction of the modern subject—given its many permutations—on contemporary theological accounts of selfhood. In this way, our interlude frames the theological concerns I bring to the analysis of chapters 4 and 5.

0.1) *The 'Kenotic Self' in Contemporary Theology*

In accounts of the 'kenotic self' in recent theology, we often witness a *mirroring* of those emphases evident in various post-Heideggerian accounts of the de-centered subject. Many such accounts then establish a *linkage* between such emphases and some vision of kenotic selfhood understood in relation to the persons of the Trinity. We might see in many such accounts an example of what Karen Kilby has called a "creative projectionism," wherein the persons of Trinity are overly-determined *in terms of* some popular, contemporary view of human personhood.[11] In light of this criticism, and given the narrow focus of this study, I here attend more directly to the philosophical anthropology *underlying* recent accounts of the kenotic self rather than providing a comprehensive summary of how such philosophical anthropology fits into the overall theological vision of each theologian here represented. I will, in other words, focus on the element of *creative projectionism* itself, rather than on the precise way each thinker applies such projections to a doctrine of the Trinity.

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[10] This is the title of an edited volume to which Marion contributes an essay. The volume represents many of the key philosophers and accounts of the self that have come to influence the recent emphases in theological anthropology with which this project is concerned. See *Who Comes After the Subject?* Edited by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York & London: Routledge, 1991).

[11] See Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity," *New Blackfriars* 81, no. 956 (October 2000): 432-445. See also, Karen Kilby, "Is an Apophatic Trinitarianism Possible?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 1 (January 2010): 65-77; Karen Kilby, "The Trinity and Politics: An apophatic Approach," in *Advancing Trinitarian Theology: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, edited by Oliver D. Crisp (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 75-93.

a) *Otherness, Difference, and Self-Sacrifice*

Importantly, we recognize the adoption of emphases following after the deconstruction of the modern subject in the work of prominent theologians from various Christian traditions. Examples of this begin to become evident—albeit, in different ways—in John Zizioulas' *Communion and Otherness* and Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity and Otherness.* Each of these works demonstrates a concern to provide an account of how we might construe *relationship* in a way that does not negate *otherness.* In highlighting these works, I merely wish to highlight how each proposes a reformulated model of the 'self' for dealing with the concern of how to safeguard otherness and difference.

Critical of the rationally determined 'self' of modernity, which would categorize and therefore negate otherness, Zizioulas moves away from the language of 'selfhood,' preferring instead a relational ontology of 'personhood': "In personhood there is no 'self', for in it every 'self' exists only in being affirmed as 'other' by an 'other, not by *contrasting* itself with some 'other.'"[12] Zizioulas understands otherness as an absolute uniqueness, which is only constituted in relationship. This leads him to argue that we must re-think a concept of love. In speaking of love, he argues,

> It is a *gift* coming from the 'other' as an affirmation of one's uniqueness in an indispensable relation through which one's particularity is secured ontologically. Love is the assertion that one exists as 'other', that is, particular and unique, *in relation to* some 'other' who affirms him or her as 'other'. In love, relation generates otherness; it does not threaten it.[13]

Accordingly, Zizioulas emphasizes that the *self* does not constitute itself, and is instead, a *gift* of the other; identity is thus constituted relationally. He praises postmodern thought for the reason that "any attempt to question the idea of Self at a philosophical level should be applauded, together with the rejection of substantialist ontology that supports it."[14] "Difference," Zizioulas

[12] John D. Zizioulas. *Communion & Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the* Church, edited by Paul McPartlan (New York & London: T&T Clark, 2006), 55.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 52.

argues, "is what determines existence. Unity and closure, involving a sustantialist ontology, are the characteristic ideas of modernity to be avoided."[15]

Responding to Levinas' prioritizing of otherness over any ontology, Zizioulas wishes to expose how the priority of otherness is *actually* best maintained through a *relational* ontology: "The human being is *defined* through otherness. It is a being whose identity emerges only in relation to other beings."[16] Such a vision of human personhood is then modeled after the Trinitarian relations: "Both in the case of God and in that of human beings the identity of a person is recognized and posited clearly and unequivocally, but this is so only in and through a *relationship*, and not through an objective ontology in which this identity would be *isolated*, pointed at and described in itself."[17] In this view, a relational ontology can avoid the pitfalls of a substantialist one because some fixed characteristic or essential nature does not conceptually define the other. However, by reversing the primacy of the autonomous self, or thinking *ego*, so that the *person* is now constituted in and through relation to the other, the picture is now, as Zizioulas states, one of "the Other as having primacy over the Self."[18] He explains, "Ascetic life aims not at the 'spiritual development' of the subject but at the giving up of the self to the Other, at the erotic ecstasis of the I, that is, at *love*."[19] It is not always clear how this account of love is to play out in the context of day-to-day relationships, but that Zizioulas views love terms of a reversal involving the priority of the Other *over* the self is evident: "Both the negative aspect of ascetic life, that is the uprooting of self-love, and its positive goal, which consist in the attainment of virtues and *theosis*, involve the priority of the Other over the Self."[20]

Miroslav Volf is perhaps more sensitive to nuances surrounding identity formation. He wishes to account for the fluidity and complexity of identity, moving beyond a simplistic dichotomy that would force a decision between viewing identity as *either* "self-constructed" on the one hand *or*

[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 39.
[17] Zizioulas grounds this relational ontology in the view that our participation in God depends on the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures of Christ so that through union with Christ, humanity is drawn into union with the Triune God.
[18] Ibid., 84.
[19] Ibid., 84.
[20] Ibid.

merely "imposed" by external factors on the other.[21] Many things influence the formation of identity, and for this reason, we must learn to be "flexible" with ourselves and others. Self-sacrifice nevertheless comes to play an essential role in recognition of the other's alterity and in 'the creation of space' to relate to the other. To that end, Volf proposes a 'decentering' of the self, which he clarifies does not involve the self's obliteration, but is necessary for its 're-centering' on Christ, implying, for him, that "[a]t the center of the self lies self-giving love."[22] Volf goes on to explain, "For Christians, this 'de-centered center' of self-giving love—most firmly centered and most radically open—is the doorkeeper deciding about the fate of otherness at the doorstep of the self."[23] Since the self is constituted dialogically, in relation to the other, the logic of self-giving love involves embracing the other, allowing this embrace to shape the self's identity; this runs counter to the tendency to establish identity in *opposition* to the other.[24] Volf wishes to maintain the mutual alterity of self and other through his account of embrace. The metaphor of 'embrace,' therefore, involves a *recognition* of otherness, no longer based on power-relations that would reduce or dominate otherness.

Volf further draws on Levinas' articulation of a certain asymmetry, sustained through any relationship of reciprocity; Levinas understands this asymmetry as safeguarding alterity because it prevents me from *merely* viewing the other in terms of *my own* needs and desires.[25] He then relates this notion of 'asymmetry' to Christ's self-sacrifice, claiming, "The equality and reciprocity that are at the heart of embrace can be reached only through self-sacrifice."[26] Christ's passion is thus the revelation of God's love itself. In this way, embracing the other follows a pattern of Trinitarian relations in which "the life of God is a life of self-giving and other-receiving love."[27] Volf clarifies that while self-sacrifice may not be a 'good' on its own, it is "a necessary *via dolorosa* in a world of enmity and indifference toward the joy of reciprocal embrace."[28] This argument then relies on the presupposition that without self-sacrifice, mutual

[21] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 165.
[22] Ibid., 71.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., see especially, 69 and 91-92.
[25] See, for example, Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 84.
[26] Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 146.
[27] Ibid., 127.
[28] Ibid., 146-147.

recognition of self and other would be an impossibility—since we inhabit an existence, perpetually tied up in the struggle of oppositional power relations.

Just as Zizioulas' vision of the kenotic self is developed in response to a notion of identity as 'self-determined' or 'self-enclosed,' Volf formulates his version of the kenotic self as a solution to the human tendency to exclude through constructing identities in opposition to the *other*. In both cases, a concept of love is given a counter-logic and proposed as a solution to the problems each theologian wishes to address. But since posed as a counter-logic, it is difficult to see what 'self-giving love' means when considered in a context other than the one it is drawn on to address.[29] Further, both theologians relate Levinas' questioning of assumptions surrounding the primacy of the self-constituting *ego* to Christ's sacrifice and death. We might wonder why these things are equated. If we are truly considering ways to re-think the formation of the self—after the deconstruction of presupposed notions of the self-constituting subject—this topic would seem to apply more specifically to the earthly life and ministry of Christ.

b) Kenosis *and the Role of Desire in the Self's Formation*

Another series of questions that influence recent accounts of the kenotic self surround the theme of human desire or *eros*. In what ways might our desire for the good positively motivate our actions, and in what ways might our desire become a force driving our consumption and manipulation of the world we inhabit? Questions about erotic desire—broadly construed—are questions involving what it is that draws us out of ourselves, motivates us, or drives us to do the things that we do. I practice the piano, for example, not merely because I think it is the right thing to do, but because I *desire* to participate in the festive making of music. For this reason, an account of human desire relates to the question of *how* the self is formed—and what it is that drives the self to engage with the world in a particular way.

If autonomous rationality loosely characterizes a modern view of the subject, such emphases pertaining to the *thinking* subject tend to overlook the primary role of desire in motivating the

[29] In this sense, while perhaps more excusable, we see a similar pattern of *creative projection* occurring in theological approaches to the mysteries of love and selfhood as Kilby observes in social trinitarian approaches to the Trinity. For her response to Volf in this regard, see Kilby, "The Trinity and Politics," 75-93.

self to think, act, and behave in a particular way. A consideration of erotic desire, then, disrupts the modern, presupposed notion of identity as self-constituted. The reason for this is that desire depends on or is directed toward something *other than* the self, while nevertheless driving the self to attain various goals or achieve forms of knowledge, not yet possessed. For reasons such as these, we see renewed consideration of the role of desire in motivating, or forming, the self—an interest that already had roots in ancient times, as is particularly apparent in a reading of Plato's *Symposium.* More recent Psychoanalytic theory adds to the complexities and questions surrounding desire, evident in considering what Jaques Lacan refers to as "the desire of the Other." We see the functioning of such desire, for example, in the ways we often unconsciously take on the desires of others; we desire what we unwittingly assume others desire or expect of us, leading to a fragmented sense of ourselves and difficulty identifying the various desires pulling us in different directions.[30] I might, for example, attempt to achieve success at a specific career because I think it is what my parents desire of me—all the while remaining unable to discern the direction I should actually take. Furthermore, it is possible to project our own unmet desires and wants onto others. In such a case, I might view another in terms of the kind of person, or friend, I want her to be for me, overlooking her true alterity.

Concerns such as these inform recent proposals for the kenotic self, exemplified—albeit in quite different ways—in the works of Graham Ward and Sarah Coakley. Recently, Linn Tonstad has offered a sustained engagement and critique of their differing approaches to *kenosis*, and of how each approach ends up problematically valorizing notions of loss, suffering, and vulnerability.[31] Here, I merely wish to focus more narrowly on Ward and Coakley's engagement with psychoanalytic theory in approaching themes of desire and selfhood,[32] highlighting specific aspects of each account that will inform the analysis in upcoming chapters.

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[30] See especially, Lacan, Jacques. "The Mainspring of Love: A Commentary on Plato's Symposium." In *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan.* Book VIII. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Bruce Fink. (Malden, MA & Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 19-163. For a detailed analysis and interpretation of Lacan's understanding of love and 'transference' see, Bruce Fink, *Lacan on Love: An Exploration of Lacan's Seminar VIII, Transference*, (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016).

[31] Separate, detailed analyses of each thinker are provided in chapters 2 and 3 of Linn Tonstad's, *God and Difference*, 58-79, and 98-118.

[32] In this regard, my analysis—particularly of Coakley's account of desire—benefited greatly from conversations with Marcus Pound.

Focusing on themes of the self's desire and fundamental relationality, Ward seeks to subvert a modern tendency to place the autonomous, reflecting *ego* at the center of a presupposed notion of identity. This is in keeping with his concern that for Descartes, "to reflect is always to grasp one's own knowing (*cogito ergo sum*), to recognize it as such. Reflection conceptualizes and therefore represents certain states and conditions to itself."[33] He opposes this to contemplation wherein one transcends "the circularities of reflection": "it is a movement toward the other. . . . It is to be drawn to the other, who is drawn to you."[34] He develops this vision of the self's intersubjective constitution, turning to Luce Irigaray. Irigaray speaks of an ecstatic outgoing of the self in love toward the other, but also of a return to the inwardness of the self, necessary for safeguarding mutual difference. Through this dynamic, difference is constituted in relation: "In this dimension of ourselves where Being still quivers, identity is never definitively constituted, nor defined beforehand. It is elaborated in relation-with, each one giving to the other and receiving from the other what is necessary for becoming."[35] Ward draws on Irigaray's account, explaining that "it is not that subjectivity is dissolved," but instead, that subjects "are always being called beyond themselves. They live beyond autonomy because of desire of the other (both subjective and objective genitive)."[36] As Ward explains, "The I is always moving in the orbit of the you, creating a space for a 'we' that is neither the dissolution of the I and the you nor a transcendental identity as such."[37] While his non-essentialist approach to sexual difference departs from Irigaray, it is her account of intersubjective constitution he finds compelling, relating it to his depiction of the kenotic self.

Under the influence of Balthasar's approach to love, Ward's account of desire stresses a continual outgoing of the self—as already indicated in Chapter 3. This outgoing of the self in desire involves the "endless giving" and "endless reception," according to what is likened to Balthasar's articulation of the Trinity, evident in the following prayer:

[33] Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 75.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, translated by Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček (London & New York: Continuum, 2002), 93.
[36] Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 148.
[37] Ibid.

> You, Father, give your entire being as God to the Son; you are Father only inasmuch as you give yourself; you, Son, receive everything from the Father and before Him you want nothing other than one receiving and giving back, the one representing, glorifying the Father in loving obedience; you, Spirit, are the unity of these two mutually meeting, self-givings, their We as a new I that royally, divinely rules them both.[38]

For Balthasar, the Father is understood as *source* through an eternal giving over of divinity to the Son, and the Son exists through an eternal receiving and simultaneous giving over of himself to the Father, as both remain *one* through the Spirit.[39] Drawing on Balthasar, Ward claims: "Kenosis is the disposition of love within the Trinitarian community."[40] This helps us begin to understand what he has in mind when he speaks of love *as* 'self-abandonment,' but we might begin to wonder whether it is appropriate to model our own, *human* love after a particular construal of the interrelatedness of the Trinity. Ward justifies this in the following way: "insofar as Christ's humanity is true humanity and true image of God, the kenosis of incarnation defines the human condition."[41] Although he clarifies that our act of self-abandon is not the same as Christ's act of *kenosis*, "[w]e live analogously" through "a secondary Yes of consent" made possible by Christ.[42] Ward sees the link between kenosis and incarnation in the following way: "the doctrine of kenosis makes inseparable from the incarnation the descent into death. The ultimate descent into non-being and non-identity is part of, though not the end of, the kenotic trajectory. Dispossession lies at the centre incarnation."[43] Importantly, Ward relates this to our own self-representation and *lack* of stable identity. Here we begin to see that his emphasis remains set on *dispossession* as opposed to *reception* or *possession.* As Ward argues,

> Only *post-mortem* is identification possible. . . . *Post-mortem* one is given the personhood one always knows is possible; *ante-mortem* is a process of becoming through obedience, humility and descent. *Ante-mortem* is a time of realising our dispossession, our secondariness; realising, what Emmanuel Levinas describes as our position as accusative in a transcendental grammar.[44]

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[38] Hans Urs von Balthasar in *The Von Balthasar Reader*, edited by Medard Kehl and Werner Löser and translated by Robert J. Daly and Fed Lawrence (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 428-429.
[39] See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol. 4: The Action*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 317-388; see especially, 325.
[40] Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 199.
[41] Ibid., 188.
[42] Ibid., 200.
[43] Ibid., 187.
[44] Ibid., 188.

Ward clarifies that such *dispossession* is "lived within the horizon of *post-mortem* hopes."[45] But his approach to selfhood in the here and now stresses "secondariness," "obedience," and "dispossession" *as* the very modes of the self's *becoming*. Elsewhere, he refers to love as incarnating "the very logic of sacrifice as the endless giving (which is also a giving-up, a kenosis) and the endless reception (which is also an opening-up towards the other to be filled."[46] This fits well with Ward's approach to negotiating difference and alterity. Again, on his account, the "endless giving" or ecstatic outgoing of the self relates to the self's reception in part, because difference—of both self and other—is always produced and negotiated *in relation.*

Since it is the 'self-enclosed' subject of modernity that Ward is concerned to do away with, he does not attend to those dimensions of self-reflexivity which do not simply go away upon emphasizing the relational elements of a new model of subjectivity. It is likely for this same reason that, in approaching an account of desire, he emphasizes the notion that subjects "live beyond autonomy because of desire of the other." While emphasizing this, however, Ward does not carefully attend to the *problem* of those unconscious dimensions of the 'desire of the other,' which lead to a sense of self-fragmentation—a major concern of psychoanalytic theory with a direct impact on various approaches to therapy. Again, we see examples of such *desire of the other* in our inability to recognize the ways we are driven by various societal expectations, or what we think those we wish to please desire of us. Considering this issue now for a *theological*—not therapeutic—context, the point is not that we should be impermeable to the desires and concerns of others, but that recognizing such unconscious influences can, at times, have an important place in discerning whether our desires align with a vision of the common good. It is in this sense that Sarah Coakley, considering themes of desire and selfhood, perhaps gives more attention to practices of formation and cultivation of one's inner life, so that emphasis is not placed merely on *intersubjective* constitution through perpetual self-abandon.
Before moving to highlight what is similar in Ward and Coakley's vision of desire and selfhood, it is important to note that Coakley has a very particular version of *kenosis* in mind. She provides a subtle analysis that traces the development of various models of *kenosis*, first surveying interpretations of Philippians 2 by New Testament scholars. She argues that a plausible

[45] Ibid., 188.
[46] Ibid., 262.

interpretation of this famous biblical reference to *kenosis* is that Christ chose not to have "(false and worldly) forms of power—forms sometimes wrongly construed as 'divine.'"[47] She then relates this biblical interpretation to a doctrinal account of a 'two-natures' Christology so that, while Christ is fully divine and human, kenotic self-emptying applies to his human nature alone. Christ does not give up or abandon divine power; instead, Christ's human vulnerability becomes the site of divine power.[48] Coakley argues that we are all to inhabit this subversive power in kenotic self-emptying. In referring to "Gethsemane and Golgotha," she makes the following suggestion:

> But what, we may ask, if the frailty, vulnerability and 'self-effacement' of these narratives *is* what shows us 'perfect humanity'? The resistance to such a possibility is itself, I suggest, one shot through with gender implications; for to admit such would be to start to cut away the ground on which the 'man of reason' stands.[49]

Coakley is here responding to what she sees as "masculinist" presuppositions concerning the nature of "power," implicit in feminist critiques of *kenosis*.[50] A point we might extrapolate from many such critiques is the general warning against elevating self-abnegation and the giving-up of power as a template for all to follow. The problem with this is that while those in a place to abuse power may need to hear a message emphasizing a relinquishing of manipulative control, this message does not mean the same thing to those facing oppression, and wishing to resist unjust power structures. Important for Coakley's response to such a critique is that *kenosis* does not entail Christ's giving up or loss of divine power, but instead, Christ's decision, according to his human nature, not to grasp at false forms of power. She sees the "power-in-vulnerability" displayed by Christ as having the potential to unmask counterfeit versions of power, which would promote manipulative grasping for control or domination.

We might nevertheless wonder *how* this leads to her suggestion that we might see a vision of "perfect humanity" through the "frailty" and "self-effacement" experienced at Golgotha? While Coakley engages a paradoxical notion of power *in* "non-grasping" vulnerability, throughout her

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[47] Coakley, Sarah, "Kenōsis and Subversion," 11.
[48] Ibid., 38. Here Coakley explains she adopts emphases of an Antiochene Christology.
[49] Ibid., 30.
[50] A few examples of such critiques, which Coakley engages most directly, include arguments made in the following works: Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

works, emphases *seems* to fall on a kind of destabilizing of the self necessary for this *real* power to reveal itself.[51] We further realize this emphasis in turning to her analysis of the role desire plays in forming the self. Before I can get at why this is, it is first necessary to turn to her approach to the problem of love and alterity, which, by now, we should see as a common thread running throughout our entire analysis up to this point.

In her essay, "Kenosis: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations," Coakley argues that the topic of *kenosis* "involves a discussion of the deep difficulties of recognizing 'otherness' without swallowing the other into a preconceived category or an item of personal need."[52] Like Ward, Coakley relates her vision of *kenosis* to Irigaray's articulation of the ecstatic outgoing of the self, arguing, "The moral integrity of the 'other' is only maintained by a *deliberate* act of space-making, or perhaps—as Irigaray will have it—of mutual 'ecstasy', which waits on the other's difference without demand for egotistical control."[53] Here again, kenotic 'ecstasy,' or outgoing of the self is posed as a solution for how to attend to the *particularity* of the other. Like Ward, Coakley is concerned with the tendency to view the other as an extension of the *ego*'s projected needs and desires.[54] It is perhaps for this reason that she emphasizes the need to make a "deliberate" effort to "wait on the other's difference," actively ceding "egotistical control." In line with her understanding of *kenosis*, sketched above, she does not model human personhood after the persons of the Trinity. Instead, "ecstatic human love" relates to divine love through its transformation in the Spirit, which is linked with surrender and "self-emptying."

Elsewhere, Coakley speaks of the ascetic practices such kenotic *self-emptying* entails. In speaking specifically of "attending to the otherness of the 'other,'" She argues, "little attention has been payed to the intentional and embodied practices that might enable such attention."[55] The significance of such attention is seen as follows:

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[51] Linn Tonstad argues that these emphases end up leading to a contrastive account of divine and human agency, even while this is something Coakley wishes to avoid. See Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 110-113. See, also, the analysis of Coakley's emphasis on self-sacrifice and dispossession in Chapter 3 (98-132).
[52] Coakley, "Kenosis: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, edited by John Polkinghorne, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 192-210; 209.
[53] Ibid.
[54] This concern for renouncing egotistical control is expressed in the context of reflecting on a central thesis in psychoanalytic theory: The child recognizing its difference from its mother, no longer perceiving the mother as an extension of itself. It is in this way that Coakley, like Ward, views otherness and difference as constituted in relation.
[55] Ibid., 48.

> The moral and epistemic stripping that is endemic to the act of contemplation is a vital key here: its practiced self-emptying inculcates an attentiveness that is beyond merely good political intentions. Its practice is more discomforting, more destabilizing to settled presumptions, than a simple intention *design* on empathy.[56]

For this reason, Coakley views "ascetic practices of attention" as key to giving "*true* attentiveness to the despised or marginalized 'other'."[57] These practices of attention involve the *training* of our human desire. We see a further delineation of this argument in *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, where she highlights a tension she sees in various texts of Scripture, evident in "the fundamental religious desire to 'see God' . . . yet constantly to have that desire chastened and corrected." And in light of this tension, "the chastening of fallen desire" becomes an ever-present task, for which she proposes "practices of un-mastery."[58] Such *un-mastery* is necessary to root out, for example, "the idolatrous desire to know," "the imperious desire to dominate," or "the 'phallocentric' desire to conquer."[59] The problem is not that such desire, in the case of the examples given, is directed toward the wrong end, but that such desire is *itself* "*unredeemed* desire." Coakley goes on to claim that "to bring different desires into true 'alignment' in God cannot be done without painful spiritual purgation and transformation."[60] While acknowledging a joy in such transformation, enabled by grace, she nevertheless highlights the *necessarily* "painful" work of bringing desires into alignment with God.

One possible influence informing these emphases is that, following her engagement with psychoanalytic theory, Coakley is attuned to the role unconscious desire easily plays in eschewing the relation between self and other. In countering such a problem, she emphasizes the *recognition* and *submission* of our desires, necessary to view the other as more than "an item of personal need."[61] We see further evidence of this in *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God.* Here, Coakley considers how we might positively channel our various human desires in a way that avoids the false dichotomy between repression and libertinism as ways of relating to our desires. To this end, she picks up on the later Freud's account of "sublimation" as

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 47.
[58] See Coakley, *God Sexuality and the Self*, 21. See also, 51.
[59] Ibid., 51.
[60] Ibid., 300.
[61] Coakley, "Kenosis: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations," 209.

a "*positive*, and seemingly non-repressive, 're-channeling' of psychic energy."[62] Drawing on such a vision, Coakley wishes to articulate a positive view of desire and of its role in our transformation as we align our desire to God. In God, desire is increased rather than diminished or constrained.[63] In psychoanalytic theory, it is possible to see the productive channeling of desire as one way the self moves out of the fragmentation caused by the unconscious pull of conflicting desires, mentioned above. Coakley's articulation of *how* we perform this channeling of desire is, however, perhaps where her engagement with psychoanalytic theory comes to a halt.

Coakley not only sees desire as something drawing the human being to the divine but also attributes desire to God—albeit a desire that does not spring from lack. Human desire then, must align itself with divine desire. However, this becomes a difficult task since "much of the manipulation of our desires is effected unconsciously," an observation, she explains, we owe to Freud and later psychoanalytic accounts.[64] Given this problem of unconscious desire, we must constantly *train* our desires, aligning them with divine desire. As Coakley asserts, "the current crisis is about the failure, in this Web-induced culture of instantly commodified desire, to submit all our desires to the test of divine longing."[65] She thus argues, we must "re-imagine theologically the whole project of our human sorting, taming and purifying of desires within the crucible of *divine* desire."[66] Returning to *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, we begin to see the vision underlying Coakley's emphasis on *recognition* and *submission* of our human desires; the need "constantly to have desire chastened and corrected." Informed, in part, by a vision of 'unconscious desire' from psychoanalytic theory, Coakley interprets its significance theologically—in terms of our fallen state—and proposes a way to *recognize* and *deal with* these unconscious desires through a specific interpretation of ascetic practices.

Importantly, the focus is not here given to a theological vision of the good with the power to attract us toward it, but to *our* project of "sorting, taming and purifying" our desire. By exploring the *practices* of attention that form the self in its relation to others, Coakley attends to

[62] Coakley, Sarah. *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God.* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 44.
[63] Ibid., 7.
[64] Ibid., 9.
[65] Ibid., 141.
[66] Ibid., 53.

dimensions of the self's formation and cultivation of an inner-life that Ward's account, at times, seems to overlook. Nevertheless, Coakley's *emphases* in doing so fall squarely on defining such practices *negatively*—in terms of a kenotic self-emptying that is "discomforting" and "destabilizing to settled presumptions." I am not arguing that these are Coakley's *only* emphases. But we are nevertheless left wondering whether the grace-enabled elevation of desire might arise more spontaneously as we are *drawn* to and by the good? We might see an example of this latter emphasis in considering the role practices like prayer play in forming the self in Andrew Prevot's following articulation: "prayer lets desire speak to the full extent that it can and thereby enables us to envision maximally desirable possibilities for thought and life that both include and transcend what we have the capacity to achieve on our own."[67] Such an articulation demonstrates a different primary focus to that of "the chastening of fallen desire," as if this is itself the primary aim. Coakley would certainly not see such chastening as the final aim. But if, indeed, the aim is God—the very source of our existence—it might be that the *recognition* of God in all things, like the awakening of our desire for truth and goodness, occurs in far more subtle and surprising ways. And if, following Henri de Lubac, we affirm something like a "natural desire for the supernatural," we might also affirm that the driving force aligning our desire to God depends not on a *necessarily* "painful spiritual purgation."

In the end, like Ward, Coakley's vision of the kenotic self utilizes a notion of "self-emptying" as a way of *countering* modern emphases on autonomy and individualism that would neglect attention to otherness and difference. They prioritize the role of desire in forming the self as a reaction *against* the modern prioritizing of autonomous rationality. Likewise, Coakley sees practices of *un-mastery* as necessary for rooting out the desire for egotistical control or domination, so that our desire might be purified and increased. While such practices are said to unsettle the desire to *possess* the other, enabling recognition of alterity, we might nevertheless wonder whether, on this account, the positive role of desire in drawing one's loving attention to the other seems to collapse in on itself as *attention* is perpetually turned in on itself to the *checking* of one's desire.

[67] Andrew Prevot, *Thinking Prayer: Theology and Spirituality Amid the Crises of Modernity*, (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2015), 328.

While this brief interlude has focused on the *problems* with various accounts of the kenotic self, I should clarify that each of the above theologians is interested in exploring the dimensions of a paradox we repeatedly witness in Christian Scripture: "those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16.25); "unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 18:3-5); or "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).[68] I neither wish to overlook such an account nor argue that we should not embrace ascetic practices. My concern is instead with the lens through which we read such passages.

0.3) *Re-thinking an Approach to the Self through Engagement with Phenomenology: Steps Along the Way*

In the theological accounts of the kenotic self just considered, we witness a mirroring of contemporary philosophical accounts of the de-centered subject. Furthermore, a series of value-laden emphases seem to follow from a mere *rejection* of the modern emphasis on autonomy and rationality. Importantly, however, Levinas' account of otherness is, in part, significant because of its function as a critique of a very specific series of philosophical assumptions. Likewise, various accounts of desire in psychoanalytic theory relate to a context of concerns surrounding developing an approach to therapy. It seems that, at times, in translating the *theological* import of, for example, the deconstruction of the subject, the context of various discussions gets lost. Theologians should, of course, learn from and engage with such contexts. But with every interdisciplinary engagement, there is always a danger losing something in translation. My argument is that, in the case of many recent theological engagements with contemporary philosophical anthropology, there has been a tendency to overlook those implications that follow from a theology of creation. By organizing a theological account of selfhood around notions of de-centering, self-emptying, chastening, and abandoning, there is a tendency to neglect affirmation of the inherent dignity or goodness of the self.

Such neglect, however, has its reasons. There are a series of tensions or problems that arise for affirming the integrity or goodness of the self. One such issue is the very elusiveness of what it is

[68] *NRSV*.

we mean when referring to human beings as 'selves.' In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor reflects on the term, "self," observing, "there is a sense of the term where we speak of people as selves, meaning that they are beings of the requisite depth and complexity to have an identity . . . (or to be struggling to find one)."[69] While the various shifts in understandings of selfhood or identity are culturally conditioned, "[w]hat I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me."[70] Taylor convincingly aims to show that even with the historical transition to various modern, secular outlooks, one's sense of self is not so easily separated from qualitative distinctions concerning the good: "selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes."[71] 'Identity,' for Taylor, involves one's making sense of one's self in relation to *some* notion of the good. Such *sense-making* necessarily involves narrative, or the stories with which we make sense of our lives. While the bulk of the work is descriptive and only arrives at any such argumentation more tentatively, at one point, Taylor does assert: "To ask what a person is, in abstraction from his or her self-interpretations, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there couldn't in principle be an answer."[72] My main interest in highlighting this quotation, however, is in how just such a narrative account of identity *reveals* the elusive nature of the self. We might also think here of Alasdair MacIntyre's account of the human being as "essentially a story-telling animal."[73] Insofar as there is any truth to this claim, it *also* witnesses to the elusive nature of the self, since the stories I tell myself change right along with my fading memories. So too, do my ways of making sense of the good over the course of my life. My various self-narrations may even function as a way of *avoiding* certain memories or events—things about myself—I wish to forget. The problem, of course, is that *who* I am always differs from any accounting I may offer of myself. Of course, the point Taylor is making is that this just is how selves are—perpetually making sense of things in relation to the ever-shifting contexts in which it finds itself. I merely wish to highlight what we might refer to as the *phenomenological* questions that arise alongside narrative accounts of identity. This is not to say that narratives are unimportant for an account of

[69] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 32.
[70] Ibid., 34.
[71] Ibid., 3.
[72] Ibid., 34.
[73] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral* Theory (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 216.

identity-formation or deny the observation that human beings tend to incline themselves toward some notion of the good in a way that undermines nihilism. I do, however, wish to stress that we should not ignore the elusive nature of that which escapes narration: those unconscious or unrealized dimensions of ourselves we might nevertheless wish to affirm. The very fact of this inescapable elusivity, in other words, has a certain import for contemplating the self.

Issues such as this one—and those introduced above, concerning accounts of the kenotic self—bring to light a series of tensions for a theological consideration of selfhood. Such tensions gain precision when analyzed at the intersection of theology and phenomenology. This is not to ignore the many ways one might approach topics in theological anthropology: one could consider the historical use of language for the 'soul' and the relevance of such language for a contemporary retrieval, or one could consider selfhood from the standpoint of various ethical and philosophical traditions of thought. By turning to concerns raised in the phenomenological tradition, I in no way wish to suggest a move away from these other considerations or approaches. Instead, I aim to focus on specific questions that are perhaps best realized and addressed at the intersection of theology and phenomenology.

In the chapters that follow, I wish to further highlight what is at the root of some of the philosophical concerns underlying accounts of the self *after* the deconstruction of the modern subject, focusing on Marion's as one recent representative of such an approach to the self in phenomenology. Turning to Marion's account of the self will also allow me to introduce the series of relevant philosophical concerns and recent historical context surrounding an approach to the self. Only then will I turn to consider how Marion's vision of selfhood—as articulated in the context of his phenomenology of givenness—impacts his theological anthropology. From here, the analysis will draw Marion's thought into conversation with Kierkegaard's theological reflections on the self, highlighting ways of better attending to the concerns at play for a theological engagement with phenomenology.

CHAPTER 4

VESTIGES OF THE SELF: THE SELF *AS* 'GIFT' AND THE QUESTION OF NATURE AND GRACE

". . . redemption graces the order of creation—precisely this creation—with itself, laying creation open to itself in all its dimensions and potentialities and giving to everything in it an ultimately supernatural meaning, but at the same time confirming it in its true and permanent naturalness and seeking to heal it wherever it is damaged."[1]

–Karl Rahner

4.0) *Introduction*

Thus far, I have shown how arguments for *kenosis* or 'kenotic love' are often utilized to refer to an existential dimension of Christian spiritual formation. In this context, *kenosis* gets articulated in conjunction with a series of paradoxes depicted in Scripture: "those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16.25); "unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 18:3-5); or "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).[2] For Christians, these passages seem to say something about what it means to respond to the gospel, allowing it to shape one's life. There are, however, multiple ways to interpret this paradoxical *losing* and *gaining* of one's life. As I briefly sought to demonstrate in the interlude, in recent theology, the meaning of the above passages often gets conflated with arguments for the deconstruction of the subject. Again, the argument goes something like this: We receive our *true* self by abandoning prideful self-reliance and autonomy—realizing that we are not self-enclosed subjects, but are always already open to and influenced by that which is other. In this way, the true self is *gift*—since one only ever *receives* her true identity through relation to that which is *other*.

Rather than ignore the philosophical concerns that have influenced recent arguments for the 'kenotic self,' this chapter seeks to examine such matters through a sustained engagement with

[1] *The Christian Commitment: Essays in Pastoral Theology*, translated by Cecily Hastings (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 49.
[2] *NRSV*.

Jean-Luc Marion. There are, of course, different sorts of contemporary philosophical projects with different visions of what *kenosis* is understood to imply.[3] By attending to Marion's thought, I am explicitly focusing on the phenomenological tradition and the set of questions that arise within this context. Marion's work provides an interesting case study in this regard. Whereas many recent philosophers find ways to re-appropriate various Christian themes, as both a philosopher *and* theologian, Marion's overall project is far more attentive than some to the contexts and doctrinal concerns which originally shape such themes. Further, as I will show, it is possible to see in Marion's overall corpus, a mirroring between his theological reflections on the self his *phenomenological* account of "the self that comes after the subject." It is this mirroring I wish to interrogate, focusing primarily on the questions it raises for theological anthropology.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: First, by exploring the context of concerns Marion engages, I wish to demonstrate the value of his overall project by illuminating potential new avenues of exploration it opens to theology. While I provide a brief overview of his phenomenology and the philosophical context that shapes it, the reader will notice that this overview is geared toward introducing the significance of Marion's work for a *theological* context.[4] Second, through this analysis, I wish to get at what exactly is problematic in any straightforward theological adoption of arguments for deconstructing modern subjectivity, particularly in light of the set of emphases such adoption ends up importing into a theological context. I demonstrate this through attention to Marion's vision of the *givenness* of the self and its further *realization* through kenotic self-donation. Focusing mainly on how his phenomenology of givenness mirrors his theology of grace, I argue that the implications of a theology of creation—and more specifically, a theology of nature and grace—might resist some aspects of Marion's vision of the self.

[3] For example, '*kenosis*' is *also* popular in some (post)modern contexts, primarily because it is seen as signaling the death of the 'metaphysical God.' For this reason, it becomes the basis for arguments made both by proponents of 'weak thought,' such as Gianni Vattimo or John Caputo, and by proponents of materialist theology, such as Slavoj Žižek.

[4] For an excellent analysis, which also responds to the philosophical criticisms of Marion's phenomenology, see Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 2007.

By making this argument, I do not wish to ignore the concerns Marion's phenomenology of givenness raises—as if we could simply divorce theological matters from philosophical ones. For this reason, I dedicate the bulk of the chapter to outlining the philosophical context that informs Marion's account of the self, considering the potential implications this context may very well have for theology. Accordingly, one should not read my argument as a full-blown critique of Marion's phenomenology of givenness or of *all* aspects of the way he makes use of phenomenology for a theological context. Instead, I wish to argue that a more nuanced *interpretation* of the "self as gift" is an ongoing theological task—one which need not negate, but may very well imply certain adjustments to Marion's phenomenology of givenness. To demonstrate this point, the final section of the chapter contrasts Marion's account with the theological vision of the self that arises in some of Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding* and *Christian Discourses*. Both Marion and Kierkegaard—albeit in very different ways—uphold a notion of the self as 'gift.' The self does not *merely* constitute itself but continually realizes itself through relation to that which is other.[5] However, I will argue that the particular concerns/emphases that shape how each thinker describes such a vision inspire differences in the theological anthropology of each. Such differences, in turn, concern how each articulates the paradox of Matthew 16: "those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

4.1) *Beyond Solipsism: Marion's Phenomenology of Givenness in Context*

Marion develops an account of the self's givenness out of a concern to articulate an alternative vision of the self that succeeds the 'subject' of modernity. In an important essay entitled, "L'Interloqué," Marion claims, "Phenomenology has perhaps never had a more pressing task to confront than the determination of what—or possibly who—succeeds the subject."[6] Throughout his works, Marion develops such a vision of the self. The self is ever unable to recuperate itself or constitute its identity reflexively, which, for Marion, demonstrates the priority of the

[5] To this extent, my reading of Kierkegaard's account of the self follows Merold Westphal's. See *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1996). See also, Merold Westphal, "Divine Givenness and Self-Givenness in Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist.*

[6] Jean-Luc Marion, "L'Interloqué," in *Who Comes After the Subject?* edited by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 236-245. A later revised version of this essay is published as "The Final Appeal of the Subject," in *Deconstructive* Subjectivities, 85-104. From now on, I will refer to the latter version of this essay as Marion adds a full section to this later revised version.

givenness of the self over any self-constitution. The self is thus irreducible to representational thought. As Marion claims, "when I think and thus spontaneously know, I know all the more and better that I think that which differs from me."[7] Instead, *who* I am is lived in *response* to a prior givenness. Prime examples of this are evident in the event of my birth or the first call of my name; these are events I did not determine, control, or understand, and yet, who I am is evoked over time by my *response* to these initial events that give me to myself.

Before further exploring Marion's vision of the self and its implications for theological anthropology, I will first introduce Marion's phenomenology of givenness. Marion prioritizes not only the *givenness* of the self but also the givenness of things or phenomena. As he claims, "No being, no actuality, no appearance, no concept, and no sensation could reach us, or even concern us, if it did not first give [itself] to us."[8] At this point, it is crucial to understand what exactly Marion *means* by givenness. He does not intend to refer to a mere empirical given—as if what is given in our sense experience is given in an unmediated sort of way. Such a view associated with empiricism is precisely what Wilfrid Sellars famously criticized as "the myth of the given."[9] That my experience is always mediated is evident, for example, by the fact that I might think I spot a friend in a crowd, but upon approaching her, I realize it is not, in fact, the person I know. This example not only demonstrates how it is possible to be fooled by sense experience. It also serves to highlight how *both* recognition *and* misrecognition of my friend are mediated by a horizon of previous experiences and memories, without which I could never have familiarized myself with this friend in the first place. Unlike empiricism, the tradition of phenomenology turns to question *how* we experience various things (or phenomena) according to *the way* they appear within lived experience. While Marion does not deny that what we encounter in our experience is always mediated in some way, he envisions a *mutual conditioning* between the self and any given phenomenon, influencing whether and how this phenomenon appears. Whereas Kant claims that "understanding is required for all experience and for its

[7] Jean-Luc Marion, *Negative Certainties*, translated by Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 9.
[8] Marion, *Being Given*, 54.
[9] See Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). For an excellent explanation of Marion's phenomenology of givenness in light of this distinction between empiricism and recent phenomenology, see Joseph Rivera, "The Myth of the Given? The Future of Phenomenology's Theological Turn," *Philosophy Today* 62, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 181-197.

possibility,"[10] Marion attempts to show how phenomena are given to our experiencing them in ways that might surprise us, exceeding any prior determination by *our own* concepts or pre-established horizon. His concern is to challenge the solipsism and autarchy of the self;[11] the self is not merely a transcendental subject, determining its perception of an 'external' reality. Instead, like the phenomena given to experience, the self too is continually given over to itself in its *response* to being surprised, influenced, and affected by that which is *other*. As Marion claims, "No phenomenon can appear without coming upon me, arriving to me, affecting me as an event that modifies my field (of vision, of knowledge, of life, it matters little here)."[12] In this way, the realization of given phenomena may involve a *re-orientation* of the self along with its prior horizon.

In light of these emphases of his project, I will now briefly sketch the context of issues that shape Marion's phenomenology of givenness. Marion's three major works of phenomenology are *Reduction and Donation/Réduction et donation* (1989), *Being Given/ Étant donné* (1997), and *In Excess/De surcroît* (2001). He also offers further developments and clarifications of his project in other key works. Rather than providing a comprehensive summary of any single work, I will highlight the central tenants of his approach to phenomenology, drawing on significant points and examples throughout his corpus. Importantly, Marion offers a detailed engagement with Husserl and Heidegger, and his articulation of and arguments for a phenomenology of givenness involve moments of positive appropriation and critique of each thinker. I will focus on briefly sketching his main criticisms of each thinker, arriving rather quickly at a summary of Marion's contributions to phenomenology before turning to his theology. Those readers less interested in this more technical discussion of phenomenology may wish to skip this section and pick back up at 4.2.

Broadly put, Marion's critique of Husserl and Heidegger is that each thinker—albeit in very different ways—limits or conditions the phenomena that are permitted to appear as a legitimate

[10] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 225.
[11] This is a major theme of Gschwandtner's *Reading Jean-Luc Marion.* She shows how Marion's work on Descartes relates to his overall phenomenological project involving the overcoming of the solipsism and autarchy of the self, following Descartes. See especially, 181-224.
[12] Marion, *Being Given*, 125.

focus of phenomenology. While Husserl's thought went through various stages, central to his approach is his method of "phenomenological reduction." This is the process by which one brackets or sets aside scientific theories, prior beliefs, and speculation *about* the world in order to attend to "the things themselves" as they appear in the experience of consciousness. This is not to discredit scientific theories, for example, but to say that such theories operate against an often uninterrogated background—the lived experience of consciousness. Husserl saw his method of bracketing or setting aside assumptions *about* the world as a method for getting at the more fundamental dimensions of the subjective experience of the world, attending to, as Husserl put it, "the world as it exists for me."[13] In *Cartesian Meditations*, he explains that this involves a reduction to "transcendental-phenomenological self-experience"[14] by which one brackets anything that would hinder "the Ego's sole remaining interest" to describe what it sees "purely as seen, as what is seen and seen in such and such a manner."[15]

For Husserl, consciousness is always "consciousness of something." And like Kant, he sees a correlation in consciousness between an intention (conceptual aim or act of perceiving) and its fulfillment in intuition (sense data or object perceived). There are, however, some major differences between Kant and Husserl on this score. Whereas for Kant, an object of intuition is constituted only when a conceptual aim finds its fulfillment in sense data (I intend a chair that is present in front of me), for Husserl, the fulfillment of a conceptual aim is not limited to the sense data of physical objects but might include objects aimed at in the memory or imagination (I might *intend* a mountain view and then visualize it in my imagination, for example).[16] Beyond this, for Kant, an object of intuition must conform to *a priori* conditions of all knowledge and experience; in addition to space and time, these a priori conditions include categories of quantity, quality, relation, and modality.[17] The categories of the understanding structure or "give unity to

[13] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, translated by Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1999), 26.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 35.
[16] For a further explanation of this, see, for example, Dermot Moran, "Husserl's *Logical Investigations*" in his *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 91-123; see especially, 119-120.
[17] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 112. As Kant further argues, "Indeed, it is because it contains these concepts that it is called pure understanding; for by them alone can it understand anything in the manifold of intuition, that is, think an object of intuition" (Ibid, 114). My brief explanation of Kant assumes a reading of his *Critique of Pure Reason* in terms of a "strong conceptualism." For more on this, see Corijn van Mazijk, "Kant and Husserl on the Contents of Perception," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 54, no. 2 (June, 2016): 267-285.

the various representations *in a judgment*" as well as to the "synthesis of various representations *in an intuition*"; it is this unity or synthesis that makes all understanding and experience *possible*.[18] What matters here is that Husserl sets such *a priori* conditions aside with his formulation of the "principle of all principles." We see this *principle of principles*—which will become a focal point of Marion's analysis—in Husserl's assertion, against "absurd theories," that:

> *[E]very originarily giving intuition* is *a source of right for cognition*—that *everything* that offers itself *originarily* to us *in intuition* (in its fleshly actuality, so to speak) *must simply be received for what it gives itself,* but without *passing beyond the limits in which it gives itself*.[19]

According to Marion, this principle "liberates phenomenality from the frame and the limits of the Kantian analytic by imposing on intuition no conceptual a priori nor even any pure form."[20] An aim of Marion's phenomenology of givenness will be to follow this through, developing an approach that does not set prior limits or *a priori* conditions on phenomena given to appearing. Of particular significance to Marion, are key texts in which Husserl prioritizes the *givenness* [*Gegebenheit*] [21] of phenomena, as in the case of Husserl's 1907 text, *The Idea of Phenomenology:* "*the givenness* [*die Gegebenheit*] *of any reduced phenomenon is an absolute and indubitable givenness."*[22] Marion argues that by prioritizing whatever first *gives* itself to appearing, a phenomenon would no longer be said to appear "as a 'given *of* consciousness,' but indeed as the givenness *to* consciousness (or even *through* consciousness) of the thing itself."[23] Prioritizing the givenness of phenomena would thus allow one to attend to the phenomenal appearing of whatever appears *as* it appears—*without first* establishing limits or rules for such appearing. However, Marion argues Husserl ultimately remains unable to achieve such an aim

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[18] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 112.
[19] Husserl, *Ideen I*, §24; Hau. III, 52. Ctd. in *Being Given,* 12 [20]. [Eng. Trans., §24, 44; mod.]. (Italics in original). For comparison, see Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy (First Book)*, translated by F. Kersten. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 44.
[20] Marion, *Being Given*, 12.
[21] Marion translates Husserl's references to "*Gegebenheit*" as "*donation*" in French and as "givenness" in the English editions of his works of phenomenology.
[22] "die Gegebenheit eines reduzierten Phänomens überhaupt ist eine absolute und zweifellose." Husserl, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie, Hau*, II. (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950), 50. Ctd. in Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, translated by Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press)*,* 33 [60]. [Eng. Trans., 39-40; mod.]. See footnote 21.
[23] Marion, *Reduction and Givenness,* 32. For Marion's engagement with Husserl and explanation of what he sees as the promise and problem of Husserl's 'principle of all principles,' see especially, *Reduction and Givenness*, 4-39; *Being Given*, 7-39; *In Excess*, 13-27.

since, in Husserl's phenomenology, whatever is given to appearing remains governed by transcendental subjectivity. While Husserl does not set the same a priori conditions on intuition as does Kant, he still assumes a necessary correlation between an intuition and an intentional aim. As Marion argues, "intuition always has as its function to fulfill an aim or an intentionality directed at an object."[24] This means that appearing phenomena are always determined by a thinking subject—realized as objects of a prior intentional gaze. The problem, as Marion sees it, is that this not only limits the sorts of phenomena phenomenology might legitimately investigate; such a vision also implies that whatever appears remains determined by *my own* intentionality or conceptual aim.

Heidegger, on the other hand, deconstructs many of the Cartesian and Kantian presuppositions latent in Husserl's phenomenology. We see this in the way he highlights the unquestioned meaning of *being*. The human being is often said to *be* or *exist*, for example, in the same way one might refer to a table or chair as existing—as something objectively present. As Heidegger argues, for Kant, "The term 'existence' means both the objective presence of consciousness and the objective presence of things."[25] In opposition to such a view, Heidegger emphasizes that the human being clearly exists in a way that is distinct from how other beings or objects exist in the world. He sees human existence—what he refers to as *Dasein*—as unique in that "in its being this being is concerned *about* its very being."[26] And further, "*Understanding of being is itself a determination of being of Da-sein.*"[27] By this, Heidegger does not mean that the human being is always engaged in theoretical speculation or ontology. Rather, *Dasein* is "pre-ontological," in the sense that it "has always already *understood itself.*"[28] This pre-understanding is based on its primordial relation to the world and subject to the "manner of being of *Dasein* at any given time."[29] In other words, *before* any theoretical speculation, *Dasein* exists as "thrown," always already immersed in relation to the world, and understanding its existence in some way—based on this relatedness.

[24] Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 13.
[25] Heidegger, *Being and* Time, 189.
[26] Ibid., 10.
[27] Ibid., 10.
[28] Ibid., 289.
[29] Ibid., 14. See also, 15.

We see one famous example of this from *Being and Time*, wherein Heidegger highlights how one might experience a hammer or tool *as* "ready-to-hand." In taking up a hammer for a task, one approaches it according to a prior horizon of utility: "A totality of useful things is always already discovered *before* the individual useful thing."[30] As Heidegger claims, "No matter how keenly we just *look at* the 'outward appearance' of things constituted in one way or another, we cannot discover handiness. When we just look at things 'theoretically,' we lack an understanding of handiness."[31] Accordingly, "being-in-the-world" involves a pre-thematic absorption in a world of references with which we take up a particular relation.[32] We see this, for example, in how a carpenter takes up the right tool for the job, even though, in performing her task, she pays little attention to the tool itself; this is because the tool appears *as* useful for a given task *according to* a larger network of references the selected tool shares with all the others. Absorbed in her project, the carpenter is, perhaps, not even *consciously aware* of the networks of references that inform her choice to pick up a claw hammer rather than a mallet. Instead, the right tool simply appears *as* or in terms of *what it is for.* As Heidegger explains, it is often not until a given task gets interrupted because a tool stops working or breaks down that one begins to pay attention to it—only *now* viewing it as an object of one's conscious awareness. Such an example challenges Husserl's phenomenology insofar as his approach would focus only on those phenomena that appear according to an intentional aim directed at objects present to consciousness (whether real or ideal). Because understanding is always already embedded *in* relatedness to the world, Heidegger sees his existential analytic of *Dasein*—including his analysis of various moods and attunements which characterize the modes of being of *Dasein*—as necessary for getting at the way various phenomena are most primordially given to appearing. Heidegger claims, "Da-sein initially finds 'itself' in *what* it does, needs, expects, has charge of, in the things at hand which it initially *takes care of* in the surrounding world."[33] Such a vision begins to challenge presupposed notions of the self as an isolated subject. As Heidegger claims, "a mere subject without a world 'is' not initially and is also never given."[34]

[30] Ibid., 64.
[31] Ibid., 65.
[32] Ibid., 71.
[33] Ibid., 112.
[34] Ibid., 109.

Marion sees Heidegger's turn to the being of *Dasein* as important for the way it illuminates the unquestioned role of the transcendental subject, seen, for example, in Husserl's phenomenology. Nevertheless, Marion will argue that a function similar to that of the transcendental *ego* remains evident in *Being and Time.* One way of getting at this is to turn to Heidegger's consideration of the Greek term, ἀλήθεια, often translated "truth." Heidegger interprets this term according to its ancient Greek context, as "unconcealment" (*Unverborgenheit*) or "discoveredness" (*Entdecktheit*), thus understanding the discovery of truth in terms of the following aim: "to let beings be seen in their unconcealment (discoveredness), taking them out of their concealment."[35] In other words, Heidegger sees ἀλήθεια as signaling a return to "the 'things themselves,' that which shows itself, *beings in the how of their discoveredness.*"[36] It is not this interpretation of truth that Marion takes issue with. Instead, he is concerned with the *way* Heidegger understands truth, or "unconcealment," in connection with the analytic of *Dasein*. As Heidegger explains, "truth as disclosedness and disclosing" is no "mere explanation of words, but grows out of the analysis of the relations of Da-sein . . . . Being true as discovering is a manner of being of Da-sein.'"[37] And further, "only with the disclosedness of Da-sein is the *most primordial* [*ursprünglichste*] phenomenon of truth attained."[38] We saw how, for Heidegger, our *way* of existing in the world is *already* a disclosing of the world; our *way* of caring about things, engaging in projects, or projecting ourselves into future possibilities, for example, conditions *how* and *what* this disclosing reveals. In Division II of *Being and Time*, it becomes clear that such *disclosing* becomes authentic in the anticipatory resoluteness of "being-towards-death," a theme I will turn to in the final chapter. What matters, for now, is simply that Marion sees all this to imply that the uncovering of "the things themselves" is ultimately determined first by the interrogation of *Dasein* and according to its horizon. This, in turn, limits what might appear in advance, as evidenced in Heidegger's following claim: "Truth in the most primordial sense is the disclosedness of Da-sein to which belongs the discoveredness of innerworldly beings."[39]

[35] Ibid., 202 [*Sein und Zeit*, 219].
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 202 [220].
[38] Ibid., 203 [220-221].
[39] Ibid., 205.

Significantly, Marion highlights certain points at which Heidegger gestures toward a primary givenness of *Dasein*,[40] arguing this would have had the potential to eliminate such prioritizing of a pre-established horizon. This is because if givenness—of both the self and all other phenomena—is established *prior* to any conceptual scheme of a *thinking I*, it would undo the primacy of any one scheme as *the* foundational horizon for all appearing. Marion argues, however, that such a prioritizing of givenness is ultimately never fully accomplished. This is because, as he explains, *Dasein* ultimately determines "the way of Being of the other beings, because it itself, in advance and according to its privilege, determines itself to be according to its own way of Being."[41] In other words, Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein* ends up displaying an un-identical repetition of the transcendental *ego,* seen in that it performs a similar function.

In sum, whereas Marion understands Husserl's phenomenological reduction to limit the appearing of phenomena to objects of consciousness, he reads Heidegger as performing his own sort of reduction—a reduction "of all beings to the Being of beings," ultimately interpreted *according to* the analytic of *Dasein*.[42] For Marion, this means that both Husserl and Heidegger—in different ways—end up conditioning or determining what is given *in advance*, according to the horizon of an *I*. Importantly, Marion does not wish to abolish the notion that a particular horizon influences interpretation; we all have certain presuppositions and dispositions that impact the *way* we respond to and interpret various phenomena. Further, Marion does not deny that phenomena might appear to us as objects (Husserl) or as tools ready to hand (Heidegger).[43] His problem is that each approach limits what is given to experience *in advance*, according to a pre-established horizon of appearing. What Marion wishes to question then, is the primacy of any such pre-established horizon that would determine or necessarily condition the appearing of

[40] Marion highlights, for example, passages such as the following from *Being and Time*: "Only as long as the truth is does 'it give' Being—not beings; and truth *is* only insofar as and as long as Dasein is" (*Sein und Zeit,* 230. Ctd. in *Being Given,* 33 [57-58]). In passages like this one, Marion translates the German, '*es gibt*' as '*cela donne*' (it gives) rather than as '*il y a*' (there is). For Marion's explanation of Heidegger's momentary recourse to the givenness of *Dasein* in *Being and Time*, see especially, *Being Given*, 33-39. See also Jean-Luc Marion, *Figures de Phénoménologie*: *Husserl*, *Heidegger*, *Levinas*, *Henry, Derrida,* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. VRIN, 2015), 45-58.

[41] Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 93. For his analysis of Dasein's transcendental function, see especially, 77-107.

[42] Ibid., 76.

[43] As Marion explains, "Objectness and beingness could thus be thought as mere variations, legitimate but limited, quite exactly as horizons, which are outlined by and against the background of givenness" (*Being Given*, 39).

phenomena, thus eliminating the possibility of phenomena that might shock or even contradict our prior horizons.

Beyond a phenomenological reduction to objects of consciousness, or to beings determined by *Dasein*, Marion proposes a third reduction: to the givenness of whatever "appears as given in the effect that it gives."[44] For Marion, the reduction to givenness operates by actively questioning the validity of prior constraints limiting *what* or *how* any given thing, or phenomenon, might appear. Again, Marion is ultimately attempting to demonstrate the possibility of things given to experience—and most properly appearing—by subverting any of *our own* prior horizons. We see a helpful example of this in Marion's description of the way one encounters a painting. I might look at a painting, but it does not truly appear *as* a painting when I observe it as a subsisting object or a ready-to-hand tool. I best *see* the painting when I allow it to produce an effect that invades my conscious gaze. The painting thus "appears as given in the effect that it gives."[45] Furthermore, I might return to view a painting often because each time it produces a *different* effect, encountering it thus invites new concepts and interpretations.[46] Again, this does not rule out the possibility of things appearing as objects or in terms of Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein*. Marion merely challenges the notion that things must *necessarily*—or most primordially—reveal themselves in this way. Instead, what is given *may* impose its own meaning or significance on me in a way that invites *new* concepts, thus re-orienting my prior horizon.

4.2) *The Priority of Givenness*

As Marion sees it, "No being, no actuality, no appearance, no concept, and no sensation could reach us, or even concern us, if it did not first give [itself] to us."[47] And further, "Every fact, every problem, and every consciousness begins with immediate givens, with the immediacy of a given. Nothing arises that is not given."[48] Again, this is not a mere recourse to an un-mediated 'given.' Instead, Marion envisions a process of "reciprocal" or "mutual" conditioning between

[44] Marion, *Being Given*, 52.
[45] Ibid., 52. See also, 48-53.
[46] See Marion, *In Excess*, 54-81.
[47] Ibid. 54.
[48] Ibid., 54.

the self and the *appearing* of whatever is given to appear. He explains this as analogous to Hans-Georg Gadamer's "fusion of horizons," wherein while the past *already* conditions the assumptions of my current horizon, interpreting the meaning of a text, for example, is an ongoing reciprocal process—like a dialogue—between the horizon of the past and the current horizon. Likewise, Marion envisions such a reciprocal or dialogical relationship between whatever is *given* to experience and the *way* it is seen or understood. While the self enables what is given to appear—mediated through sensations/prior concepts/contextual concerns—the self is also influenced or affected in responding to a given phenomenon.[49] When I experience something that *exceeds* my prior horizon of expectation, for example, this demands a *reorientation* of my previous expectations if my understanding or interpretation is to 'catch-up.'

Such a reorientation of the self to receive what appears is involved in what Marion refers to as "anamorphosis." *Anamorphosis* is that which appears by touching me "so as then to affect me (act on me, modify me)."[50] As Marion argues, "the I must fall into alignment if it is to receive an appearing—all that defines one of the essential characteristics of the given phenomenon, its anamorphosis."[51] In a footnote, he highlights the example of viewing the painting, *The Two Ambassadors* by Hans Holbein the Younger (National Gallery). This painting may *appear* according to two different phenomenalities. I might first view the painting according to the frontal image it presents, but it is not until I move to view it from a particular angle, that a skull-and-crossbones becomes visible, thereby enabling a new interpretation of the painting. Likewise, in the case of any given phenomenon, one *may* need to "alter one's position (either in space or in thought), change one's point of view—in short, renounce organizing visibility on the basis of free choice or the proper site of a disengaged spectator, in favor of letting visibility be dictated by the phenomenon itself, in itself."[52] Accordingly, various phenomena might appear in more or less appropriate ways depending on *how* or *whether* I give my attention to them *according to*

[49] Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Hermeneutics*, translated by Jean-Pierre Lafouge (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2012), 43-47. Marion argues that the method of phenomenological reduction he envisions does not function as a *transcendental* reduction, but as a reciprocal (or back-and-forth) process of unfolding between *given* phenomena and 'the gifted' (or the self who receives and responds to what is given). For this argument, see Jean-Luc Marion, "The Question of the Reduction," translated by Steve G. Lofts, in *Breached Horizons: The Philosophy of Jean-Luc* Marion, edited by Rachel Bath, Antonio Calcagno, Kathryn Lawson, and Steve G. Lofts (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield Int., 2018), 27-47. See especially, 39-44.
[50] Marion, *Being Given*, 125.
[51] Ibid., 123.
[52] Ibid., 124.

what is there *given* to be seen.

Elsewhere, Marion utilizes more mundane examples to demonstrate the reduction to givenness as a process of mutual influence between the self and the appearing of whatever is given to appear. He considers especially the way some phenomena are only realized *over time* through engagement in certain *practices*. If I am not accustomed to taking a taxi, for example, I may not notice it as it passes by—viewing it as just another car on the road. In this way, I do not recognize it according to its everyday utility. Once I become *habituated* to depending on taxis, I develop an impulse, so that immediately upon seeing one, I wave for the driver's attention—only *now* viewing this taxi *as* my potential ride home. This process of habituating oneself to various phenomena through certain practices over time, is for Marion, just another example of anamorphosis. In this way, my understanding of the *significance* of a taxi involves *giving myself over to it*, to the norm or practice of trusting it to get me to where I need to go. Accordingly, even mundane phenomena—including those which involve my being socialized into them—impose themselves on me, guiding my interpretation of their significance *according to* how and whether I give myself over to them (or not).[53]

The above example has clear resonances with Heidegger's description of the way we experience a tool *as* "ready-to-hand" through our absorbed way of engaging in a project. A significant *difference* is simply Marion's emphasis on the primacy of givenness governing the *way* phenomena appear. This will enable him to speak of a broader range of phenomena, *now* no longer limited by a horizon imposed by a *thinking I*. Again rather than *beginning* with a transcendental *ego* (Husserl), or *Dasein* (Heidegger), Marion envisions the self as given *along with,* and therefore influenced by, all the other phenomena it encounters. While my agency is involved in whether I recognize certain phenomena, the "self-showing" of a given phenomenon might also impose itself on me with its own sort of agency, thereby guiding my interpretive

[53] Ibid., 129-130. Cf. Andrew C. Rawnsley, "Practice and Givenness: The Problem of 'Reduction' in the work of Jean-Luc Marion," *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1018 (November 2007): 690-708. In critiquing Marion's method of reduction, Rawnsley does not take into account the various ways his method of reduction might operate in connection with what Marion refers to in *Being Given* as "habitual phenomena," exemplified by the above example. Phenomena that involve my being *habituated into them* might mean that understanding them requires engaging in various norms or practices of a community, for example. In contrast to the critique put forth by Rawnsley, this is precisely one way Marion would understand the interpretation of certain religious phenomena.

response over time. In this way, Marion attempts to get beyond the solipsism and autarchy of modern subjectivity.

With this brief sketch of Marion's phenomenology of givenness now in mind, we can turn to how exactly he re-envisions the 'self' after the deconstruction of the modern subject and the import this has for his approach to phenomenology.

4.3) *Givenness and 'the Self' After the Deconstruction of the Subject*

Marion's phenomenology of givenness hangs on his argument for the givenness of the self. In a fairly early essay, he suggests that rather than claiming to abolish the subject (as in the case of Nietzsche), or delineating a new articulation of the self that nevertheless repeats a similar function as the subject (as in the case of Heidegger), phenomenology might offer a path forward for considering "what or who succeeds the subject."[54] Marion proceeds to provide a possible vision of the self, which he later develops in *Being Given.* Critical to Marion's approach to the self is his adoption of an overarching call-and-response structure, articulated by Jean-Louis Chrétien: "The call that comes from beyond being constitutes every being as what responds to it but never corresponds to it."[55] This is because, for Chrétien, "the call actually creates the respondent."[56] On this view, the call-and-response structure de-centers the primacy of the subject; the self is now seen as, first and foremost, *responsive*. Marion describes this phenomenologically, drawing on the following examples: I live my entire life in perpetual *response* to the original and immemorial givenness of my birth. Language is not first understood and then spoken; it is acquired through my responsiveness to words first uttered *to me* by another. My identity is not fixed or final but is *given* over time in my *response* to the first and repeated *call* of my name. Finally, of most fundamental significance for Marion's phenomenology of givenness, is that even the very experience of my *flesh* is *given* to me; I cannot, for example, produce, control, or anticipate the pain and pleasure given to me in my flesh.

[54] Marion, "The Final Appeal of the Subject," 85.
[55] Chrétien, Jean-Louis. *The Call and Response*, translated by Anne A. Davenport (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 16. First published 1992.
[56] Ibid.

While all the above examples serve as indicators of the primary givenness of the self, we see one of Marion's key innovations in his articulation of the givenness of the "flesh." A traditional question in phenomenology surrounds the self's *individuation*. What is it, in other words, that allows me to maintain a sense of singularity or "mineness"? What is it that enables me to experience a sense of myself as separate from all those things I experience as *other than* me—as existing "out there" in the world? How is it that I maintain this sense of separateness with a certain continuity throughout my various lived experiences *over time*? The fact that *I think*, and that this thinking seems to accompany all my experiences could offer one way to account for my individuation. However, this leads to an *aporia* involved in the very experience of self-reflexivity: When I reflect on myself, I am split between a transcendental *I* and an empirical *me,* leaving my most primordial individuation a mystery. Marion will follow many (post)modern thinkers in arguing that this contradiction arises because the self's individuation is not based on the self's thinking or self-awareness. The more I attempt to form a *concept* of myself, the more I recognize that I clearly differ from any such *idea* I have of myself.[57] This contradiction is precisely what Marion's account of the receiving or responsive self attempts to address. He first follows Michel Henry in arguing that, more primordial to the individuation of the self than the fact that "I think," is that "I am affected." My sense of individuation occurs in that *in my flesh* I experience at once "the felt with what feels . . . the seen and the seeing, or the heard and the hearing."[58] In other words, before any self-reflection, I already experience my sense of individuation in my flesh—or in the experience of an identity of "the affected with the affecting." In contrast to Henry, however, Marion understands the *flesh* in terms of the call-and-response structure, so that even the flesh is first and continually subject to a more primary givenness.[59] This allows Marion to move from the *aporia* of the subject—split between a

[57] See, for example, Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 8-50. Here Marion argues that in reflecting on the question of the self, we can only be *certain* that the self remains a mystery to itself.
[58] Marion, *In Excess*, 231. One should not read Marion's reference to individuation in terms of the *flesh* as doing away with the mystery implied in the self's individuation as he also speaks of this individuation in terms of the *soul*.
[59] In this way, Marion attempts to overcome a key problem of Henry's vision of individuation. While Henry avoids conceiving individuation in terms of transcendental subjectivity, he ends up repeating—only now, according to immanence—a new version of self-enclosed subjectivity or autarchy of the self. We see this in the new dichotomy he creates between flesh and body, of which Marion is critical. For Marion's critique, see, for example, "La réduction et 'le quatrième principe'" in Jean-Luc Marion, *Reprise du donn*é (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2016), 19-58. See also, Marion, "The Question of Reduction," 27-48.

transcendental "I" and an empirical "me"—to a new vision of the self which is most primordially, a *receiving* self:

> As a result, the me who feels by 'feeling' loses its constituting spontaneity (I, ego) only in order to regain receptivity vis-à-vis the manifestation of what shows itself ('me,' 'to whom/which'). The receiver, who alone is put in the situation of feeling and impassioned affection, suffers the very flesh of the phenomenon in a state of manifestation.[60]

If even the flesh—as what individuates me foremost—is first *given*, this indicates that the entire flux of my lived experiences, including my impressions, concepts, and the stances that I take, all fall under a more primary givenness. In opposition to a transcendental *ego* that would in some way condition or determine the limits of givenness *in advance*—according to an intentional aim—Marion asserts the following: "The receiver, in and through the receptivity of 'feeling,' transforms givenness into manifestation, or more exactly, he lets what gives itself through intuition show itself."[61] The receiver "does not only receive what gives itself—it allows the given to show itself insofar as it gives itself."[62] Accordingly, "To receive, for the receiver, therefore means nothing less than to accomplish givenness by transforming it into manifestation, by according what gives itself that it show itself on its own basis."[63] Importantly, in speaking of the move from the subject to "the receiver," Marion offers a vision of the self, "proceeding from the phenomenon, without coming before it or producing it."[64] At the same time, the self has an active role in making phenomena appear to visibility. As Marion explains, "[t]he receiver answers for what shows itself because he answers to what is given—first by receiving itself from it."[65]

A clearer picture of this receptivity of the self and its active role in making various sorts of phenomena visible will become possible through an exploration of another of Marion's contributions to phenomenology: his account of "saturated phenomena."

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[60] Marion, *Being Given*, 264.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 249.
[65] Ibid., 266.

4.4) *Saturated Phenomena*

Marion clarifies that some phenomena are poor in intuition. I may, for example, have concepts that match up with and perfectly explain what is given to my intuition; this is the case with a geometrical figure—wherein the square I see drawn on a chalkboard aligns with my concept of the rules governing the dimensions of a square. "Saturated phenomena," on the other hand, include those phenomena given to experience in ways that I cannot—at least initially—predict or explain by concepts. In the experience of a saturated phenomenon, Marion explains, "The intention (the concept or the signification) can never reach adequation with the intuition (fulfillment), not because the latter is lacking but because it exceeds what the concept can receive, expose, and comprehend."[66] What is given, in other words, *saturates* or *exceeds* all our prior concepts. As Marion explains, this is more often the case than not in our day-to-day experience. When I eat a piece of pie, for example, I cannot fully predict how it will taste in that moment, and afterwards, I cannot adequately describe the experience by using rules or concepts in the way I would for a geometrical shape.[67] In describing various sorts of saturated phenomena, Marion's aim is to show how things are given to our experience with a significance or meaning that might, at least initially, exceed our conceptual aim or prior horizon of understanding.

We begin to see the relation between saturated phenomena and Marion's account of the self by returning to his notion of "the call." He identifies *the call* with anything that comes *from elsewhere*, countering or subverting the self's intentional aim. Again, characteristic of intentionality is that it "arises from the I in order to aim at or posit an object."[68] However, in developing his account of saturated phenomena, Marion draws on Levinas' articulation of "counter-intentionality," wherein my gaze meets the face of another who not only transcends my conceptual grasp but calls me into question and makes me responsible. In this way, I am *called* out beyond and even counter to my own intentional aim. Marion develops Levinas' notion of "counter-intentionality," applying it to all saturated phenomena—not just the encounter with the

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[66] Jean-Luc Marion "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of Negative Theology," in *God the Gift and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 39.

[67] Marion highlights the more banal example of consuming food and drink as an example of saturated phenomena in an interview with Donald Wallenfang. See "Jean-Luc Marion Interview with Donald Wallenfang on the Saturated Phenomenon," at the University of Chicago Divinity School, May 2017. *YouTube* video, 6:15. July 18, 2019: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4FHB9zsNf4.

[68] Marion, *Being Given*, 266.

face of the other.[69] As with Marion's example of the painting, in encountering any saturated phenomenon "I find *myself* summoned" to see *more* than what I can initially—or even possibly—conceive. In this way, Marion identifies the call with any saturated phenomenon, "characterized as such by the excess of intuition" so that "[t]he visibility of the appearing now arises against the flow of the intention—following a para-dox, a counter-appearance, a visibility counter to the aim."[70] Again, while Marion often utilizes the metaphor of visibility, he means to refer to any given phenomenon that exceeds or contradicts our prior concepts.

Importantly, in encountering the excessive givenness of some saturated phenomena, I might nevertheless overlook or fail to notice them; I might also notice something astonishing without recognizing what it is or rendering an interpretation. This leads to Marion's account of the *responsive* self as "*l'adonn*é," translated in the English edition of *Being Given,* as "the gifted."[71] The *adonn*é is the one who responds to the unknown and unrecognizable call or summons of an excessive givenness. Because the call surprises or shocks the one who witnesses it—running counter to any prior conceptual aim—the *adonn*é "must surrender [*s'y render*] to it," renouncing "the autarchy of self-positing and self-actualizing."[72] As Marion argues, "It is therefore the saturated phenomenon as such that inverts intentionality and submits the receiver to the presence of the call."[73] The self, or *adonn*é, thus *gives itself over to* the saturated phenomenon, allowing the given to make itself manifest by responding to it—thereby rendering visibility to whatever appears.[74] In this way, the call is heard—or the givenness made manifest—in the active responsiveness of the *adonn*é, who then renders an interpretation. The interpretive delay involved in any response, however, leads *back to* and is *directed by* the primary givenness of the saturated phenomenon, thereby re-orienting the self's prior horizons of understanding (*anamorphosis*). As Marion argues, "what is given (the call) succeeds in showing itself as a phenomenon only on the screen and according to the prism that the gifted (the responsal) alone offers it."[75]

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[69] For her helpful explanation of this, see Gschwandtner, "Reading Jean-Luc Marion," 211.
[70] Ibid., 267.
[71] As the past participle of the pronominal verb, (s') adonner: "to devote oneself," *l'adonné* can mean, "the devoted" or "given over to."
[72] Marion, *Being Given*, 268.
[73] Ibid., 267.
[74] Ibid., 282-283.
[75] Ibid., 293-294.

We might consider, for example, one saturated phenomenon Marion himself mentions: climate change. We are *already* caught up in the event of climate change, but have been and still are unable to *anticipate* the full meaning, impact, or significance of this event. Further, any response to this threat demands interpreting its meaning according to many different horizons: One might consider climate change from within the field of environmental biology, from a socio-economic or geopolitical perspective, or ethically—according to the responsibility implied by the disproportional impact it is already having on under-resourced populations, and those least responsible for its effects. A complete account of the meaning or significance of climate change is not only something we cannot fully anticipate in advance, but it is also not visible according to any one horizon; multiple horizons are required to render an account of the potential implications of its impact. Finally, and this is important for Marion's argument, I might experience the impact of climate change—its evidence might be given to be seen—without my recognizing it as such. This is the case for more than one reason. First, the evidence may appear so great, so close to me, and according to so many different horizons that I can only see its meaning in a limited way. Second, I may not recognize this evidence at all if I do not *respond* to it by *willing* or *desiring* to see it—thus allowing the given evidence to call my comfortable way of life into question.[76]

Marion explicates four main types of saturated phenomena to demonstrate the possibility of experience that would *exceed* or *subvert* the categories of the understanding Kant deems necessary for all possible experience (again, these include categories of quantity, quality, relation, and modality). He explains that for Kant, "The phenomenon is possible strictly to the extent that it agrees with the formal conditions of experience, therefore with the power of knowing that fixes them, therefore finally with the transcendental I itself."[77] By providing

[76] Marion explains that the realization or knowledge of some phenomena do not allow one to remain neutral because the phenomenon itself calls my own way of thinking or living into question. He highlights climate change as an example of this. See, for example, Marion's lecture, "On a Possible Epistemology of Revelation," presented at the University of Chicago on May 6, 2015. *YouTube* video, 1:17:14. Published by the Lumen Christi Institute, May 30, 2015: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaQ_DjwL2Zg&t=93s. Christina Gschwandtner also explores climate change as an example of a saturated phenomenon. See *Degrees of Givenness*, 82-83 and 87. I here develop this example in specific ways to highlight key elements of Marion's account of saturated phenomena relevant to our discussion.

[77] Ibid., 212. For an in-depth summary and analysis of both Marion's critique and use of Kant, see Claudia Serban, "Jean-Luc Marion als Leser Kants," in *Jean-Luc Marion: Studien zum Wer*k, edited by Gerl-Falkovitz and Hanna-Barbara (Dresden: Text & Dialog, 2013), 199-215.

examples of phenomena that cannot be *foreseen* or *aimed at* in advance according to one or more of these categories, Marion sets out to demonstrate that in the experience of such phenomena, "the I of intentionality can neither constitute nor synthesize the intuition into an object defined by a horizon."[78] Importantly, he clarifies that it is not a matter of "dispensing with a horizon altogether since this would no doubt forbid any and all manifestation."[79] Rather, it is a matter of allowing whatever is given in excess to reorient one's horizon of expectation—thus giving oneself over to it by surrendering the priority of one's intentional aim.[80] A brief outline of these four types of saturated phenomena will lead us to Marion's explication of a *possible* fifth type: revelation.

a) *The Event*

The first example, or type, of saturated phenomenon Marion highlights, is "the event," which overflows the singularities of space and time because its significance or the understanding of its effects reverberates in new ways throughout each historical epoch.[81] In speaking of the event, Marion highlights the example of a battle. The event of a battle is confused and disorienting for all those involved. Further, its significance will never be fully understood or articulated by any one person or according to any singular horizon in time. This is seen, for example, in that the history of such an event is 'always being written' because its significance is realized *over time,* demanding multiple perspectives from numerous different vantage points. Because there are an indefinite number of interpretations of a historical event such as a battle, it is a phenomenon that cannot be foreseen or even finally accounted for *according to* a quantifiable aggregate, thus exceeding the Kantian category of quantity.[82]

[78] Marion, *Being Given*, 226. Importantly, Marion acknowledges that Kant's reference to "the sublime" could serve as an example of a saturated phenomenon. Rather than seeing such phenomena as an exception to the rule, he wishes to focus specifically on our *way* of knowing or relating to excessive phenomena.
[79] Ibid., 209.
[80] According to Marion, saturated phenomena might disrupt our prior horizons in different ways. Robyn Horner summarizes this well: "Marion is at pains to point out that the saturated phenomenon maintains some sort of connection to the horizon. It does this either by becoming its own horizon, which dazzles the recipient, but in which case it cannot be contextualized so that it is hard to call it a horizon at all, or by being able to be seen against an infinite number of horizons, or by doing both" (342). See Robyn Horner, "Jean-Luc Marion and the Possibility of Theology," *Culture, Theory and Critique* 52, no. 2-3 (2011): 335-350.
[81] Marion, *Being Given*, 228-229.
[82] Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," 198; See also, *Being Given*, 228-229.

b) *The Idol*

Marion characterizes the second type of saturated phenomenon as "the idol," or that which paradoxically *appears* "under the aspect of the unbearable and bedazzlement."[83] As Marion explains, "Not bearing does not amount to not seeing; for one must first perceive, if not see, in order to experience this incapacity to bear."[84] We might understand this experience of the *incapacity to bear* certain phenomena in the following way: "Because the saturated phenomenon, due to the excess of intuition in it, cannot be borne by any gaze that would measure up to it ('objectively'), it is perceived ('subjectively') by the gaze only in the negative mode of an impossible perception, the mode of bedazzlement."[85] While any reference to 'idol' tends to have religious connotations, Marion uses this reference to describe a type of phenomenal appearing. The idol appears in terms of "bedazzlement," wherein what appears fills the gaze in such a way that "intuition always surpasses the concept or the concepts proposed to welcome it," thus becoming unbearable according to quality.[86] This is also seen, for example, in the experience of a painting—according to the way a painter attempts to make visible that which exceeds representation. The purpose of painting is not merely to reproduce a recognizable image, and one's response to a painting is not merely to determine an adequate *concept* of whatever is there represented. Instead, I return to view a painting, not to gain new *information*, but to allow this painting to affect me or speak to me once more, according to *my own*, ever-shifting horizon. For this reason, Marion speaks of this sort of phenomenal experience functioning as a mirror of the self, giving much to see without a determinate concept, and therefore, as I gaze at the painting, this gaze reflects back on me and speaks to me according to my particular horizon.[87]

c) *The Flesh*

The third type of a saturated phenomenon is "the flesh," which Marion highlights as an example

[83] Marion, *Being Given*, 229.
[84] Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," 200.
[85] Ibid., 201.
[86] Marion, *Being Given*, 229-230.
[87] See *Being Given*, 229-231. Marion develops his description of "the idol" and painting in *In Excess.* See *In Excess,* 54-81. Importantly, Marion uses examples of different paintings to speak of different types of phenomenal appearing. In other words, they do not all exemplify the exact same type of phenomenality.

of that which is "absolute according to relation."[88] Again, Marion understands *flesh* in terms of the paradoxical coinciding of sensing with what is sensed, and therefore, more primordial to the self's individuation than self-reflexive intentionality or representational thought. The significance of "the flesh" as an example of saturated phenomenon is seen in Marion's following claim: "Carnally, I am affected by an intuition—for example, pain—which invades me without ceasing even before I know its meaning."[89] As Christina Gschwandtner explains, "the experience of the flesh is one of utter immediacy."[90] In other words, the *understanding* I have of pain—in terms of cause and effect relations or according to the connection between sensations—follows *after* the immediate impression, and the *reason* or cause I attribute to it. Further, my experience of pain or pleasure is never fully captured by the *reason* or *cause* I attribute to them. Accordingly, the flesh serves as yet another example of a saturated phenomenon; in this case, because the givenness of intuition subverts the Kantian category of relation.

d) *The Icon*

Marion highlights "the icon" as an example of a fourth type of saturated phenomenon, and describes it as "incapable of being looked at according to modality."[91] For Marion, this means I do not encounter its phenomenality according to my "power of knowing." In contrast to "the idol," the icon does not function as a mirror, offering a visibility that would reflect back my own horizon. Instead, this example refers to those phenomena that are "irregardable and irreducible, insofar as they are free from all reference to the I."[92] As Marion explains, the icon "no longer offers any spectacle to the gaze and tolerates no gaze from any spectator, but rather exerts its own gaze over that which meets it."[93] When I gaze at an icon in the moment of contemplation or prayer, for example, I there envision a return gaze. Accordingly, rather than encountering the icon in the mode of representational thought, I encounter it in the experience of *being beheld* by another—according to a counter-gaze. Marion likens this to *any* encounter with the face or return-gaze of another person. Further, he sees the icon as incorporating aspects of the other

[88] Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," 202. Marion explains that for Kant, an experience is made possible because of a unity of perceptions represented in the understanding (Ibid., 203). The experience of an impression, affecting me in my flesh, subverts this because of its immediacy.
[89] Marion, *In Excess*, 99.
[90] Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion,* 81.
[91] Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," 208.
[92] Marion, *Being Given*, 232.
[93] Ibid., 232.

three types of saturated phenomena. Like the event, the encounter with the icon or another person for that matter, cannot be summed up according to one horizon or narration; "the icon therefore opens a teleology" so that my interpretation never comes to a close.[94] The gaze never stops at viewing the icon as an object, but the encounter invites ever-new interpretations that never grasp the thing in itself. Like the idol, "it begs to be seen and reseen."[95] Like the flesh, it affects the I in a way that subverts "its function as transcendental pole."[96] In this way, in encountering the other's gaze, I am individuated as one beheld by another.

Importantly, Marion does not see all saturated phenomena as necessarily fitting into any *one* fixed type, or example, listed above. Instead, he thinks it possible to describe all sorts of varied saturated phenomena—both ordinary and extraordinary—with somewhat loose or mixed reference to these differing types, and as Christina Gschwandtner has emphasized, according to varying *degrees* of intuitive givenness.[97] In *Being Given*, Marion goes on to explore the possibility of a phenomenon that would exemplify within itself, all four variations of saturated phenomena at once—thus saturated to a "second degree."[98] He refers to this fifth type of saturated phenomenon as "revelation." Marion highlights the incarnation as a *possible* example of such a phenomenon. He clarifies that phenomenology has no place assessing or deciding the theological status of revelation, or of the incarnation for that matter. Instead, he simply describes how—if one *were* to assume a doctrine of the incarnation—it would exemplify an exceeding of *all* Kant's categories of the understanding.[99]

While he carefully distinguishes between them, Marion sees the possibility of an inevitable overlap or relationship between theology and phenomenology. His articulation of this relationship has evolved throughout his various works, according to numerous different concerns. However, beyond his explicit articulations of the relationship, one might also observe a

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[94] Ibid., 233.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] For further explanation of this, see Marion, "The Banality of Saturation," translated by Jeffery L. Kosky. In *Counter-Experiences,* 383-418. For her explanation of how Marion's work might be developed by emphasizing his account of the 'degrees of givenness,' see Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*, 193-203.
[98] While Marion's articulation of this possible type of saturated phenomenon paves the way for his theological reflections on revelation, it does not form a rule for *how* revelation—which he understands as divine self-manifestation—occurs in the theological sense.
[99] See Marion, *Being Given*, 234-245.

more implicit connection between his works of phenomenology and his more explicitly theological work. Keeping his account of saturated phenomena and phenomenology of givenness in mind, it is now possible to turn to Marion's theology. The rest of this chapter turns to analysis of how exactly Marion's theology and phenomenology overlap. I will focus specifically on how Marion's theology of grace mirrors his phenomenological account of the self's givenness, already explored, attending to how such mirroring impacts Marion's theological anthropology and articulation of the kenotic self. After assessing this impact, the chapter concludes by briefly turning to Kierkegaard to uncover an alternative theological articulation of the giving and receiving self.

4.5) *Givenness, Revelation, and the Relation between Phenomenology and Theology*

As noted above, in the context of his phenomenology, Marion introduces 'revelation' as a hypothetical possibility: the possibility of a phenomenon that would exceed *all* a priori conditions so that it would in no way be determined by the transcendental *ego* in advance. Here Marion defines revelation as "what gives itself in the measure to which it reveals itself" and highlights ways in which the incarnation *could* serve as an example of such a saturated phenomenon.[100] This, however, leads to several debates over the implications of Marion's account of revelation and construal of the relation between theology and phenomenology. Such debates involve those claiming that his *phenomenology* is corrupted by theological concerns,[101] and from the perspective of those focused on the *theological* implications of his account.[102] It

[100] *Being Given*, 246.

[101] For the most famous critique of the so-called 'theological turn' in phenomenology, see Dominique Janicaud, "The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology," translated by Bernard G. Prusak in *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 16-87. First published in 1991. Since the publication of this essay, there have been many responses to Janicaud's critique. For one particularly helpful response, see Merold Westphal, "Vision and Voice: Phenomenology and Theology in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion," *International Journal for Philosophy of* Religion 60, no. 1/3, (December 2006): 117-137. Westphal attempts to respond to critiques of Marion's work—both theological and those focused on his phenomenology—arguing that Marion provides a hermeneutical phenomenology that might be put to use in service of theology.

[102] See, for example, Kathryn Tanner, "Theology at the Limits of Phenomenology" in *Counter-Experiences,* 201-229. Tanner wonders if Marion's approach to revelation—contrary to his explicit aim—ends up re-instating limits or conditions on divine revelation. A key concern is whether the givenness of revelation implies a "univocity of givenness" so that "God gives Himself fundamentally in the same way any phenomenon gives itself, with a simple difference of kind (type)" (206). Graham Ward sees problems for Marion's theology in its inability to deal with ontological concerns. He also argues that Marion's account of revelation leads to a theology that becomes a self-authenticating discourse; in which case, theology remains too restricted to the interpretation of biblical revelation and the authority of the Church. See Graham Ward, "The Theological Project of Jean-Luc Marion" in *Post-Secular*

should be noted that many of the significant criticisms of Marion's account of revelation were composed before his Gifford Lectures, published as *Givenness and Revelation* in 2016. Both here and in some of his most recent work, yet to be completed, [103] Marion develops and further clarifies his approach from an explicitly theological perspective. Further clarifications of his understanding of the relationship between theology and phenomenology are also possible in light of a collection of essays only recently published in English as *Believing in Order to See/ Le croire pour le voir* (2010). For this reason, in summarizing Marion's account of revelation, I will utilize the footnotes to highlight relevant debates as well as ways this most recent work might respond to *some* of the most significant theological critiques. While I do see questions and tensions remaining for Marion's theology of revelation, [104] I cannot address these here as my primary aim is twofold. First, focusing on the theological concerns he seeks to address, I will highlight the positive significance of what, on my reading, is Marion's theological use of phenomenology. I will then move to the primary focus of this chapter: assessing how Marion's phenomenological vision of the self's givenness impacts his account of revelation and, ultimately, his theological anthropology.

In the final chapter of *In Excess*, we begin to get more of an indication of the way Marion's phenomenology may be of use to theology.[105] Aware of the theological commitments involved in the traditions of apophatic or mystical theology, and with particular focus on the thought of Dionysius the Areopagite, Marion puts his account of saturated phenomena to work for answering the following question: If we are to accede that God reveals Godself, how might we understand this according to the commitments of an apophatic theology? Put another way, what sort of knowledge of God is given by divine revelation if we are to maintain a commitment to

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Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology, edited by Philip Blond (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 121-126. Joseph Rivera, on the other hand, argues that Marion's account of revelation does not pay *enough* attention to the role of doctrine, focusing specifically on Marion's work on the Trinity. See Joseph Rivera, "The Myth of the Given? The Future of Phenomenology's Theological Turn," *Philosophy Today* 62, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 181-197. For a fairly comprehensive summary and response to various debates over Marion's approach to revelation, see Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion,* 130-177. For her summary that includes Marion's more recent *Gifford Lectures*, see Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology*, 119-140.

[103] Marion is currently in the process of further developing the account he provides in *Givenness and Revelation*, so my analysis will also engage important recent lectures on this topic.

[104] While I explore some of these tensions as we progress through the chapter, see Chapter 1 (1.1) for my response to Marion's criticisms of 'metaphysical' theology.

[105] This chapter first appears as the essay, "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology,'" translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. In *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, 20-53.

divine incomprehensibility? Exploring how phenomenology might provide a way to consider a response to this question, Marion turns to the "three ways" in apophatic or mystical theology: affirmation/*kataphasis*, negation/*apophasis*, and the third way of praise. First, Marion sees *kataphasis* or the positive affirmations we make of God as corresponding with those moments in which our conceptual aim or "intention finds itself confirmed at least partially, by the intuition."[106] For example, when affirming the goodness of God as creator, our concept of goodness is not without evidence in the created order—in what we sense and see. In no way, however, do we *really* have an idea of all that divine goodness entails. God is *not* created; God is not reducible to any*thing* given in immanent experience. This leads to apophasis, or the second way of negation, which, as Marion explains, "proceeds by negating the concept because of an insufficiency in intuition."[107] Importantly, Marion argues this does not merely imply a simple oscillation between affirmations and negations, in which case, we would not escape "a horizon of predication"; this would imply a simple never-ending negation of whatever is first affirmed. Instead, Marion explores how affirmation and negation functions by leading to the *third* way in apophatic or mystical theology. He likens this third way to the encounter with saturated phenomena, in which case, "the impossibility of attaining knowledge of an object, comprehension in the strict sense does not come from a deficiency in the giving intuition, but from its *excess,* which neither concept nor signification nor intention can foresee, organize, or contain."[108] In this way, Marion draws on phenomenology to show how the third way need not imply a simple dissolving of all concepts into irrationality or complete equivocity. Instead, it fully involves numerous conceptualizations, albeit according to a *kind* of knowledge that never ends or solidifies around a final *concept* of the divine. [109] As Marion argues, "God remains incomprehensible, not imperceptible—without adequate concept, not without giving

[106] Marion, *In Excess,* 159.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid. Here Marion engages the apophatic tradition, and especially Dionysius the Areopagite to argue that mystical theology involves more than a simple oscillation between affirmations and denials as seen, for example, in his following citation of Denys: "car le Réquisit parfait et unifié de toutes choses est au-dessus de toute thèse [ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν θέσιν], comme es aussi [χαὶ] au-dessus de toute négation [ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ἀφαίρεσιν] ce qui surpasse la suppression totale de toutes choses et ce qui se trouve au-delà de leur totalité — ἐπεχείνα τῶν ὅλων" (*La Théologie mystique* V, 1048b. Incorrectly cited in *De surcroît,* 170 as 1004b. This translation from the Greek is Marion's own). See also, *In Excess,* 135.
[109] For reasons related to this point, Tamsin Jones has argued that Marion's apophaticism is perhaps more indebted to Gregory of Nyssa than Dionysius the Areopagite. See Tamsin Jones, *A Genealogy of Marion's Philosophy of Religion: Apparent Darkness* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011).

intuition."[110] Clearly, God cannot be compared with anything in our human experience, but this does not mean that God is far off or absent from our lived experience; maintaining such a notion would be to reduce God to a finite *concept* of transcendence. Marion's concern is to account for divine immanence while upholding a doctrine of analogy so that "between Creator and creature no similitude can be expressed without implying a greater dissimilitude."[111]

Accordingly, as Christina Gschwandtner has shown, one of Marion's key concerns involves the following question: How are we to understand revelation (as the self-manifestation of God) in a way that would avoid a univocal knowledge of God, while at the same time, recognizing the right of such manifestation to touch human experience and rationality beyond the limit of complete equivocity?[112] In this way too, we see how Marion's thought responds to Derrida's deconstructionist approach, whereby our signifiers/concepts relate to and are guided by nothing other than further signifiers.[113] When applied to the knowledge of God, this could be taken to imply a complete equivocity—according to a constant deferral of meaning.[114] Instead, by applying his articulation of saturated phenomena to the question of our knowledge of God, Marion is demonstrating how such *unknowing* does not imply the total absence of all knowledge or concepts. The givenness of impressions or intuitions one receives in looking at the stars, enjoying a dinner party, or sharing the peace during the liturgy—to name but a few examples—

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[110] Marion, *In Excess,* 160.

[111] Fourth Lateran Council (1215) in Denzinger, Heinrich. *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, §806. 43 ed, edited by Peter Hünermann, Robert Fastiggi, and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), 269. For Marion's reference to this statement, see *In Excess*, 158 [*De surcroît*, 198]. In the same footnote referencing the Fourth Lateran Council, Marion cites Erich Przywara's, *Analogia entis*, indicating that he considers Przywara's approach to maintaining the doctrine of analogy exemplary.

[112] See Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion,* 153-154. Gschwandtner's account of the way a doctrine of analogy functions in Marion's work plays a key role in her overall response to some of the criticisms that Marion's theology is in some way tainted by his phenomenological concerns. For her full account, see 130-177. Cf. Tanner, "Theology at the Limits of Phenomenology," 206. Whereas Tanner is concerned over a "univocity of givenness" in Marion's work, it may be that, as Gschwandtner has shown, his account is an attempt to deal with this theological concern in light of what it would mean from the standpoint of phenomenology. See also, Marion's response to Tanner's criticism in *The Visible and the Revealed*, 142, footnote 53.

[113] Some could argue that this is an unfair characterization of Derrida's view due to the role paradox plays in his thought. However, while the paradoxes involved in his notion of 'forgiveness' or 'justice' play a critical role in maintaining an aspirational aim in thought, any realization of such aspirations is always *deferred.* This is due to the impossibility of a relationship between the *absolute concept* and any *realizable* manifestation of something like forgiveness, for example. In contrast, I see Marion's approach as better accounting for key theological concerns of an apophatic approach to theology. Cf. John D Caputo, "The Hyperbolization of Phenomenology," in *Counter-Experiences*, 67-93.

[114] See, for example, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, edited by Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 73-142.

might inform one's knowledge of God in various positive ways that do not lead to *mere* equivocity.

In his 2014 Gifford Lectures, published as *Givenness and Revelation,* Marion approaches the question of revelation, and the relation between theology and phenomenology, from a more explicitly theological perspective. In considering the distinction between our natural knowledge of God and the knowledge we have by way of *revealed* theology (*sacra doctrina*), Marion attempts to challenge common assumptions surrounding what is *meant* by 'knowledge' or 'rationality' in each case—aiming mainly at the modern neo-scholasticism represented by Suárez and the subsequent influence of this thought on theology. Here Marion's principal concern is to move away from an epistemological or propositional understanding of revelation. Instead, following the emphases of *Dei Verbum,* he understands revelation as divine self-manifestation. Revelation as *divine* manifestation, then, implies that what is made known of God is not *understood* according to an *objectifying* knowledge—the sort of knowledge I have in the case of logical propositions or "bits of information" I might accrue. Again, Marion defines an *object* as anything that conforms to the concept I have of a thing; the object, as opposed to the thing*,* is determined singularly by my intentional aim. We see an example of this in mathematics, which operates by *abstracting out* anything that cannot be known *as* a clear and distinct concept.[115] However, as Marion explains, many of the most significant things we know and experience in life are not known in this way—by abstraction. One might consider what it means to be a parent, for example, or to be accepted by a community, the implications of small and large decisions one makes, or all those things that are in some way experienced along with embodied moods and sensations. Accordingly, as is the case for the knowledge we have of all sorts of things, the knowledge we have of God is not the objectifying sort.

In speaking of Scripture in terms of manifestation, one might consider the prophetic utterances and theophanies of the Hebrew Bible or the parables of Jesus in the New Testament—all of which *give* or manifest more than our prior concepts can organize or aim at in advance. One

[115] For this explanation of the object and example of objectifying knowledge, see Lecture 2 of Marion's Gifford Lectures: "Understanding Revelation: A Phenomenological Re-Appropriation," presented at Glasgow University, 2014. *YouTube* video, 1:45:43. Published by University of Glasgow, December 1, 2014: https://www.giffordlectures.org/lectures/givenness-and-revelation.

might also consider scriptural passages over which there is little interpretive debate: "Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker" (Prov. 14:31). This refrain may give *real* concepts, informing our perspective of divine Goodness, for example; but insofar as it, in some way, points to the divine, it also witnesses to a certain *invisibility*—or excess beyond concept. Marion sees the development of the biblical narratives as well as the formation of Christian Scripture and the tradition of doctrines as inspired by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the meaning/significance of *events* or manifestations—and ultimately, the self-manifestation of God in Christ.[116] In relation to this vision, we might see *one* of the possible aims of theology, then, is performing an "endless hermeneutics of revelation."[117] And in my view, there is nothing that would preclude considering ways of relating Marion's account of revelation to an understanding of the *development* of doctrine.

With this in mind, we might return to Marion's following concern: If we are to affirm divine incomprehensibility, what sort of knowledge of God *can* we have by way of revelation? Essential for addressing this question, is his notion that revelation always already contaminates what one might refer to, particularly from the standpoint of the Catholic theological tradition, as our *natural* knowledge of God. As Marion argues, "knowledge of God on the basis of creation, even if it is exercised (perhaps) through the 'natural light of human reason' alone, does not precede revelation (which is thus called 'supernatural'); instead, it finds itself preceded by and comprised in it."[118] And further, "Revelation encompasses all 'natural' knowledge and, in every sense, comprehends it."[119] In support of this point, he cites the interpretation of Romans 1:18-20

[116] See especially, *Givenness and Revelation*, 30-60. Marion develops his articulation of Scripture as revelation with reference to the Christian tradition. While he does highlight the example of theophanies in the Hebrew Bible, these considerations of Scripture would clearly look differently, considered from various Jewish religious perspectives. Importantly, it may be that Marion's phenomenology of givenness is not helpful in this regard. However, one might consider whether his phenomenology could be utilized as a heuristic tool for describing and understanding differences between various religious traditions concerning themes of Scripture and revelation.
[117] This is a reference to an argument made by David Tracy, who thinks Marion's thought is too often read incorrectly: "either as a philosophy that is a covert theology or as a proposal to control theology by philosophy" (57). Instead, Tracy reads Marion's understanding of theology as an *endless hermeneutics of revelation*, and helpfully supplements Marion's account by adding that such "endless hermeneutic" might involve moments of retrieval, critique, and suspicion. See David Tracy, "Jean-Luc Marion: Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Theology," in *Counter-Experiences*, 57-65. Cf. Ward, "The Theological Project of Jean-Luc Marion," 121-126. Tracy's proposed developments to Marion's view provide a way to counter elements of Ward's critique (see footnote 102), and would allow further consideration of how to relate Marion's account of revelation to an understanding of the development of doctrine.
[118] Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 28.
[119] Ibid., 29.

put forth by William of Saint-Thierry: "For God, who so created them that they might have within themselves the means of recognizing God naturally, has revealed Himself to them."[120] In light of this, Marion draws the following conclusion concerning the revealed knowledge of God: "we are required, at the very least, not to think of it through reference to that which it cannot become . . . that is, a complement to or a substitute for knowledge, at least knowledge understood as a science."[121] In other words, a doctrine of divine incomprehensibility demands that we not view revelation as simply providing further information adding up to an objectifying knowledge of the divine. At the same time, that God is *revealed* or made *manifest* implies this manifestation *really does* involve our knowledge. To clarify what is at stake here, Marion wishes to avoid two pitfalls: fideism, wherein knowledge of God depends on faith in a way that sets faith and reason in opposition; and further, he wishes to avoid defending a version of rationality or reason that, when applied to revelation, would result in idolatrous claims about the sort of knowledge we have of the divine. On account of this dual concern, Marion draws on phenomenology as a tool for opening up new ways of more carefully describing what we *mean* when we speak of the revealed *knowledge* of God.

We have already seen how Marion's differing examples of saturated phenomena demonstrate the possibility of phenomena given in ways that exceed any a priori conditions of experience, wherein what we experience would *depend on* what our rationality can anticipate and synthesize in advance. Further, we have also explored that for Marion, our will or *desire* to see may, at times, influence how and whether we recognize certain phenomena. As seen in the above example of climate change, or the recent cultural phenomenon surrounding the question of "fake news," evidence of an event might be all around us, but seeing it—at least in some cases—involves our *desiring* to see it, thus shifting our gaze *according to* the evidence it presents or imposes on us. Accordingly, Marion conceives of rationality as not *always* separate from things like desire, will, and love—which may come to play a role in the *way* we know or realize certain phenomena. Returning to *Givenness and Revelation,* this point is then applied to Marion's dual *theological* concern to avoid fideism on the one hand and an idolatrous conception of the

[120] William of Saint Thierry, *The Nature and Dignity of Love,* translated by Thomas X. Davis (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1982), 203. Cited in *Givenness and Revelation*, 29.
[121] Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 29.

revealed knowledge of God on the other. Upholding this twofold concern for Marion, means that in the case of God: "knowledge holds only if comprehension ceases."[122] Such knowledge then, is only possible by and in love.

We might explore how all this relates to the final lecture of *Givenness and Revelation*, in which Marion considers questions involved in upholding a doctrine of the Trinity. Here he highlights Karl Rahner's famous assertion that "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity," wondering how to preserve this formula in a way that would retain a commitment to divine incomprehensibility. In other words, the question now becomes: How might we affirm that the manifestation of God in Christ touches our knowledge/experience in some way, as a real self-communication of the divine, while maintaining the utter incomprehensibility of the Immanent Trinity? Seeking to avoid a social model of the Trinity—which would base an understanding of the triune persons on a prior understanding of *our own* human personhood[123]—Marion instead proposes an iconic model of the Trinity, drawing on Augustine and especially Basil of Caesarea. Utilizing the example of the conversion of the gaze before the icon, he proposes that "this model describe our access to the uncovering of what by right remains nevertheless inaccessible to us."[124] Accordingly, the function of the icon is seen following the formulation of Irenaeus: "the Father is the invisible of the Son, the Son the visible of the Father."[125] Finally, the Holy Spirit enables the *anamorphosis* of the gaze—thus, the Spirit accomplishes the continual *givenness* of charity, so that love perpetually guides and converts our knowledge. In this way, following Basil of Caesarea: "The path of the knowledge of God lies *from* One Spirit *through* the One Son *to* the One Father."[126]

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[122] Marion, "In the Name," 37.

[123] It is possible to raise questions concerning whether Marion successfully accomplishes this expressed aim in a recent article in which he attempts to deal with the doctrinal concerns surrounding an account of the Trinity and *kenosis*. See Jean-Luc Marion, "Kenose und Trinität," *Communio, Internationale Katholishche Zeitschrift* 45, (März-April, 2016): 161-174. I cannot, however, deal with the doctrinal concerns pertaining to the potentially helpful/problematic aspects of this essay here.

[124] Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 101.

[125] Irenaeus of Lyon, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers. Justine Martyr. Irenaeus.,* translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. 469. Cited in *Givenness and Revelation*, 104.

[126] Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit,* XVIII, 47, PG 32, 153b; and *Traite sur le Saint-Esprit,* p. 412. Cited in *Givenness and Revelation*, 115. (Italics added).

Just as all saturated phenomena exceed the objectifying gaze in some way, this is even more so the case for the knowledge we have by way of revelation. Here again, Marion describes a type of knowledge/experience that welcomes many concepts, but never stops with one. We might consider here, how participating in communal practices of prayer or receiving the Eucharist might influence the way one *interprets* various theological aspects of the Christian faith; yet, insofar as these are also modes of God's self-manifestation, they offer no *objectifying* knowledge of the divine, but instead, serve to lead us further into divine mystery.[127] Again, for Marion, this does not mean that knowledge or concepts cease *or* that what is made manifest does not give its own distinct *mode of recognition*. For Marion, the revelation of God in Christ, for example, so imposes its own logic on us that its *recognition*—involves the *anamorphosis* of one's gaze through the response of faith.[128] But because God is love and is thus made manifest in and by love, such faith only *is* insofar as it is also love—a love given and enabled by the Spirit.

I have so far focused on the *theological aims* underlying Marion's use of phenomenology, particularly, his account of saturated phenomena. However, while Marion has been careful to explicitly delineate potential ways of understanding the relationship between theology and phenomenology, there is also a more implicit relationship between his two projects. As I will show, this becomes evident in the way his account of the self as *l'adonne*—key for his phenomenology of givenness—directly overlaps with his theological account of the self. I will argue that in this, the primary aims of his phenomenology of givenness end up over-determining his theological anthropology. Because Marion develops an account of the self with the explicit objective of overcoming solipsism in phenomenology, this then shapes his understanding of what it means to overcome idolatry within theology. The result is that his account of the self overlooks significant theological concerns relating to a consideration of selfhood.

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[127] Cf. Joseph Rivera, "The Myth of the Given? The Future of Phenomenology's Theological Turn," 191-197. Rivera argues that Marion's account of the Trinity does not show a sensitivity to the way doctrines or communal practices inform a theology of the Trinity. Rivera does raise significant concerns that Marion does not completely address. However, as I have attempted to show, Marion does not wish to deny that doctrine and communal practices have a role in informing theological interpretation (see also, footnotes 53 and 117). Instead, in the context of this work, I read Marion as utilizing phenomenology as a resource for addressing a specific *theological* question concerning how to conceptually approach a doctrine of the Trinity according to a model that does not obfuscate divine mystery—a concern he would not deny is itself informed by a history and tradition of doctrines.

[128] See also, Marion's further development of these themes in *Believing in Order to See*, 3-30.

4.6) *Marion's (Theological) Account of the Self*

Significantly, *both* Marion's phenomenological account of *l'adonne* and his theological articulation of the self, proceed according to the overarching call-and-response structure detailed above. Again, from the standpoint of phenomenology, we might describe this in many ways. My life is a *response* to the original and immemorial givenness of my birth. My identity (or rather, *ipseity*), is *given* through my continual *response* to the first and repeated *call* of my name. Finally, my flesh, or 'the affect with its affecting,' is first *given* to me; I cannot produce, control, or anticipate the pain or pleasure I experience in my flesh. All these examples speak to a primordial givenness of the self, and my very agency is lived out in *response* to this primary givenness.

I will now turn to the repetition of this vision in Marion's theological works. In his, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine,* Marion offers a theological/phenomenological reading of Augustine's *Confessions*. Here he describes the self as paradoxically *given* in its *response* to God. In the description of Augustine's confession of faith, one finds a depiction of the self, *realized* in *responding* to a call that already instituted it. For Marion, the confession functions in a unique way: "Making the *ego* appear by leading it back (reduction) to itself, the *confessio* makes it appear in and through (its) relation to God, whom it confesses as the other of reference."[129] Marion goes on to make a distinction between the *ego* and the self. The *ego,* when associated with the *thinking I*, is unable to attain its essence—thus, remaining a question to itself. Marion locates the reason for this in that it is not *thought*, but *desire* that more fundamentally defines the self. Commenting on this with reference to Augustine's *Confessions*, Marion argues,

> But this *self* of desire, the *ego* can aim at it only paradoxically, in the negative mode of what it cannot perform by itself, cannot know by itself, nor, or course, appropriate by itself. Nothing better signals the gap between the *ego* and *self* than the desire for beatitude, which defines the *self* precisely as what the *ego* cannot attain by itself, still less have in itself.[130]

[129] Marion, Jean-Luc. *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 308.
[130] Ibid., 309.

For Marion, the fact that I am defined by what I desire, and yet this desire depends on what I cannot attain *on my own,* signals a *displacement* or "gap" between the *ego* and the self—for what I desire is *other* than me. Of further importance for Marion is the *decision* that drives and directs the self's desire.[131] The self must make a *decision*; this decision matters because "[a]lways loving, I often love another thing besides the truth."[132] Deciding what it loves not only determines the direction of the self's desire but, ultimately, the *place* of the self. As Marion explains, "Place is defined by the ascent of the *ego* toward that which it loves and which defines it more intimately than the most intimate in it."[133] In this way, the *ego,* in willing to love, finds its ultimate orientation by grace. And further, as Marion argues, "I am what I love, since I put in this place all that I am, what I love offers me in return the self's place. And if I succeed in loving nothing of myself but God, God will appear to the *ego* the self's place."[134] This ultimately leads back to Marion's argument for the incomprehensibility of the self—already explored in Chapter 1: "Therefore, my place in God that I love will be accomplished *unto the image (ad imaginem)* endlessly referred to the infinite, endlessly liberated from all ties so as to freely advance in the infinite that nothing binds."[135] In this way, the *ego* (now defined as the will to love) never catches up to the *self,* but rather, through an infinite advance, finds its place in God. As Marion argues, "I become myself (oneself) only in going toward another and by finding in it my first place."[136]

Here, as in the case of Marion's phenomenology of givenness,[137] the call-and-response framework implies the paradox of the self, *given* in journeying beyond itself according to self-abandon. In this way, the self is *given* in its *response* to a givenness that is *other,* and *beyond* its

[131] See Alvis, *Marion and Derrida on The Gift and Desire*, 68-95. Focusing on *The Erotic Phenomenon,* Alvis relates Marion's account of desire to that of Jacques Lacan, arguing that for Marion, desire precedes the decision to love; this decision nevertheless plays an important role in *directing* desire—now as a desire to love. See also, his account of how Marion's vision of the self's "individualization" depends on the decision to love (84-86 and 93).
[132] Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 309.
[133] Ibid., 311.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 284.
[137] Recognizing this influence of Augustine on Marion's phenomenology of givenness, Felix Ó Murchadha explains, "The 'gifted' *(l'adonné*) ego, which is understood as the potential recipient of grace, displaces the capable ego" (65). For his further account of this Augustinian influence, see Felix Ó Murchadha, "Givenness, Grace, and Marion's Augustinianism," in *Breached Horizons: The Philosophy of Jean-Luc Marion*, edited by Rachel Bath, Antonio Calcagno, Kathryn Lawson, and Steve G. Lofts (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018), 65-78.

expectations or control. While admittedly, there are rather beautiful moments in Marion's description of finding one's place in God, we might still wonder, what of our created, embodied particularity speaks to *who* we are? It is perhaps telling that Marion speaks positively of "loving nothing of myself but God." From a theological standpoint, we might consider whether the singular notion of a self-abandoning journey *beyond oneself* overlooks the concrete, embodied goodness of the self *as* created. We might think here of *both* the experience of self-reflexivity, which for many, does not simply go away upon perpetual self-abandon, but *also* of the organic body—my neurons and biological functions that elude my awareness of them. This latter dimension of the self is a particular concern of Emmanuel Falque, who, in reflecting on Marion's phenomenology, wonders whether Marion's project overlooks the bodily and finite dimensions of our created existence.[138]

With these concerns in mind, it is at this point possible to see how Marion's theological anthropology mirrors his phenomenological account of the self as *l'adonné* or "the gifted." We might again consider *Givenness and Revelation* here. Because Marion's focus is on describing how revelation is given *beyond* any prior determination of the subject, he continually emphasizes the way it *shocks* the one who becomes a witness of its manifestation. For this very reason, he draws on the notion of *anamorphosis*—a key concept for his phenomenology of givenness—to speak of our response to revelation. To briefly summarize then, Marion's account of the self as it relates to revelation has the following result: Revelation contradicts, shocks, and surprises the self so that as *adonné,* the realization of the self occurs through the conversion of the gaze (*anamorphosis*). The self must, therefore, will to see—*giving itself over* to receive and interpret that which *subverts* its prior conceptual aim.[139] In this way, Marion's theology of revelation closely mirrors, or draws on, emphases of his phenomenology of givenness.

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[138] Emmanuel Falque, "Phénoménologie de l'extraordinaire," Philosophy 78, (June 2003): 52-76. Falque is by no means the only commentator to worry about the issue of Marion's account of finitude. See also, for example, Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings?,* 84-86. Unlike Schrijvers, however, I do not see Marion's failure to account for finitude as a result of his failure to escape metaphysics. Nor do I see the solution in terms of the need to liberate "finite being from the clutches of its participation in the Infinite" (218; see also, 211-238). Importantly, Schrijvers analysis neither attends to the *analogia entis* more generally nor to the specific way, Marion's approach to 'the Infinite' coincides with his desire to uphold a doctrine of analogy.

[139] For more on these emphases, see Thomas A. Carlson, "Blindness and the Decision to See," *In-Excess*, 153-179; relevant to the focus of the current discussion, see especially, 169. Carlson highlights potential issues with Marion's emphasis on the will, or decision, to see—and the guilt involved in not seeing—in the face of the excessive givenness of revelation.

From a theological standpoint, Marion's aims to demonstrate how we might experience the divine in a way that avoids anthropomorphizing God—projecting our own experience or concepts onto the divine mystery. In this regard, one might see in Marion's project resonances with Henri de Lubac's argument that "it is not the supernatural which is explained by nature, at least as something postulated by it: it is, on the contrary, nature which is explained in the eyes of faith by the supernatural, as a required for it."[140] At the same time, it has been noted that Marion "in many ways is a Catholic Barthian,"[141] given his emphasis on the way revelation *counters* or *subverts* our prior concepts and expectations. Nevertheless, Marion's insistence that love maintains a connection with a *kind* of rationality—*both* in the case of divine revelation *and* in that of our more mundane human experience—implies that our created capacity for knowledge is at least not completely contradicted in the face of divine revelation.[142] Instead, like de Lubac and Rahner, Marion sees the human being as itself, already immersed in and responding to divine mystery. In this sense, his project offers a new response to de Lubac's criticism that "[p]eople frequently reason as though all the mystery were on God's side, and there was nothing in man that eludes the grasp of common experience or natural reasoning."[143] It might be said that Marion seeks to follow this point through to its end—by reconsidering the scope and meaning of human "rationality." And his accounts of saturated phenomena demonstrate how we are unable to separate mystery out from even our most mundane, everyday human experiences.

With all this in mind, it remains the case that Marion's account of the *givenness* of the self continually emphasizes the self's realization by way of *dispossession* and responsiveness to that

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[140] Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, translated by Rosemary Reed (New York: The Crossroad Publishing CO., 1998), 95. Because Marion sees faith and love as enabling a kind of rationality, it is possible to follow this logic through to its final conclusion so that phenomenology ultimately opens up to theology, and serves it.

[141] John R. Betz, "After Heidegger and Marion: The Task of Christian Metaphysics Today," 582. In a footnote, Betz explains that Marion understands revelation in a way similar to Barth, in which case "God, who is the *subject* of revelation and never the object, gives himself to be known free of all creaturely analogy" (182). Betz is not incorrect in noting the resonance between Barth and Marion. However, it may be that this resonance is slightly overstated in light of Marion's arguments that love and rationality are linked—*both* in the case of divine revelation *and* in the case of our more mundane human experience.

[142] Cf. Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology*, 120-124. Gschwandtner similarly recognizes a positive relationship between faith and reason in her reading of Marion's Gifford Lectures; also of relevance, see, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 176-177. While Marion has articulated his difference from Barth in various ways, his most recent articulation of this can be found in *Givenness and Revelation*, 57-60.

[143] Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the supernatural,* 209.

which shocks and re-orients the self—re-defining this self, according to whatever it *is not*. I have thus far shown how this vision of the self coincides with Marion's aim of overcoming solipsism in phenomenology. I will now demonstrate how, at the root of his account of the self's givenness, we discover Marion's theology of nature and grace. Focusing on the specific concerns that shape his reformulated approach to such a theology, I will attempt to extrapolate the theological anthropology underlying Marion's entire project.

4.7) *Desire, Gift, and the Question of Nature & Grace*

Deeply impactful on Marion's theology of grace is Henri de Lubac's famous argument that human beings have "a natural desire for the supernatural." Since this innate desire for God is incapable of finding satisfaction through anything but divine grace, de Lubac argues that our 'nature' is itself, always already open to grace. There is no "pure nature," somehow separated or cut off from grace—a grace that is also the uncreated presence of the divine. This view, associated with the *nouvelle théologie* movement and its return to early Patristic theological sources, is extremely influential on Marion's thought. Recently, Felix Ó Murchadha has shown how the so-called 'theological turn' in French phenomenology—with which Marion's work is associated—mirrors emphases of the *nouvelle théologie.* We see this in that recent French phenomenology demonstrates more willingness to attend to the experience of transcendence, thereby rejecting the notion that any reference to the 'transcendent' necessarily involves recourse to metaphysics and is thus out-of-bounds for phenomenology. Such a view depends on understanding the self as open to experiencing that which is beyond the anticipated horizon of a self-enclosed subject, a view reflected in the *nouvelle théologie,* with its vision of the self's openness to grace. Accordingly, Ó Murchadha demonstrates how each movement is a turn away from the autonomous subject of modernity.[144] In assessing Marion's theological anthropology, I in no way wish to question the value or necessity of either of these two movements. I do, however, want to explore some of the remaining questions that arise for theological anthropology in their wake. To illumine this broader context of concerns, I will focus on the specific example

[144] See Felix Ó Murchadha, "The Passion of Grace: Love, Beauty, and the Theological Re-turn," *Philosophy Today* 62, no. 1 (Winter 2018), 119-136. I cannot here summarize the arguments of this essay or the detailed way in which it establishes a link between the *nouvelle théologie* and current approaches to phenomenology. I here merely highlight a key element of the link relevant to our current study.

of overlap between Marion's phenomenology of givenness and his theological account of the self's relation to grace.

Marion dedicates an important chapter of his *Cartesian Questions* to de Lubac, indicating in a footnote that the work is meant as "a marginal note" to the works, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* and *Augustinianism in Modern Theology*; in each of these works, de Lubac develops his famous argument that we have a natural desire for the supernatural. Throughout the chapter, Marion provides a historical analysis demonstrating how the meaning of the Latin term *capax* (capacity), initially understood as a *receptivity,* goes through a shift in the works of Descartes so that with modernity, capacity/*capacitas* ends up referring to a "power" or "capability." Set within this historical analysis is a brief theological excurses, entitled, "The Paradox of Man *Capax Dei.*" Here Marion draws on Augustine and Thomas Aquinas to show how the phrase, *capax Dei*—a reference to the human capacity for God—originally implies a human *receptivity* of the divine. He then shows how a shift away from this emphasis on *receptivity* toward a modern understanding of "capacity" as a capability or power, comes to influence the neo-scholastic theology of *natura pura*—or arguments for a "pure nature" of the human, somehow distinct from grace. We see such a view, for example, in the theology of Suárez, in which case, *nature* is drawn to a good end appropriate to its natural *capability,* while *grace* enables an altogether different end above any natural *capability* (i.e., the beatific vision). Such a clear distinction between a natural and supernatural end, evident in a neo-scholastic theology of pure nature, is precisely what Marion, following de Lubac and the *nouvelle théologie* movement, wishes to reject. [145] However, as theological categories, the distinction between

[145] Cf. Felix Ó Murchadha, "Givenness, Grace, and Marion's Augustinianism." In this essay, Ó Murchadha focuses on Chapter 4 of *Cartesian Meditations,* which outlines a theology of pure nature in the work of Descartes. However, he seems to misread the significance of the brief theological excurses in the middle of this chapter entitled, "The Paradox of Man *Capax Dei*." Here Marion emphasizes the *receptivity* implied in the use of the phrase "*capax Dei"* by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. In light of this argument, the rest of the chapter should be read as a historical analysis of the link between a theology of pure nature and the later understanding of capacity/*capacitas* as a power (see, for example, *Cartesian Meditations*, 95). Ó Murchadha however, reads Marion as attempting to maintain—against de Lubac—the integrity of nature by proposing that the human being has two ends: one natural, "achieved by a person's own volition," and "one supernatural, which requires divine aid" (66). As I will show, Marion does qualify aspects of de Lubac's account, but he follows de Lubac in rejecting a doctrine of two ends. See also, Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion,* 189-191. Gschwandtner briefly summarizes Marion's argument for the medieval receptivity of *capax Dei* in contrast to the modern shift its understanding undergoes following Descartes. She also sees this argument as important to Marion's later philosophical and theological works on the self. I will develop this claim by highlighting some of the concerns that arise in connection with this text.

nature and grace functions as one way to preserve the supernatural gratuity of grace; 'grace,' in other words, refers to the elevation of our nature *beyond* whatever is of our finite created powers to attain. The distinction serves to affirm the integrity of the created order, while at the same time, establishing the human being's utter dependence on grace for its final beatitude and *supernatural* end in God—thus avoiding Pelagianism. For this reason, an argument that grace and nature are inseparably intertwined requires further distinctions if one wishes to avoid certain theological pitfalls. While de Lubac has his own (albeit, sometimes still debated)[146] approach to these issues, Marion wants to delineate some clarifications of his own. He expresses a particular concern to further demonstrate how asserting a continuity between nature and grace need not result in either Pelagiansim or Jansenism. For Marion, this means finding a way to affirm that our movement toward God remains entirely dependent on grace while upholding the *possibility* of rejecting such grace and movement toward final beatitude.

In light of this aim, Marion first establishes that, in the case of Augustine, the use of *capacitas* to refer to the human capacity for the divine "ought to be understood as a clearly passive receptivity—not because of impotence, but because only by abandoning oneself in God can one receive him (*non par impuissance, mais parce que seul l'abandon à Dieu permet la disponibilité d'un accueil*)."[147] On Marion's reading, everything hangs on the primary givenness of the self, which determines its very 'nature':

> *Capax* not only implies the possibility of a gift generally, but also indicates to humans that their own nature originates with a gift, evidenced by their very constitution. Hence, second, the fundamental instability introduced in man: Originating as a gift, he discovers himself to be tied to the giving that provides him with the only subsistence he will ever be able to claim—'inquietum est cor nostrum.'[148]

[146] There are a number of debates over whether de Lubac's account successfully deals with all of the concerns at play for a theology of nature and grace. See, for example, Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and his Interpreters* (Naples, Florida: Sapientia Press, 2010), 295-395. See also, Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura* (New York: Fordham University Press), 2010. Whereas Feingold and Long critique de Lubac's account of nature and grace, for a response to these recent criticisms, see David Grumett, "De Lubac, Grace, and the Pure Nature Debate," *Modern Theology* 31, no. 1 (2014): 123-146.
[147] Jean-Luc Marion, "What is the *Ego* Capable of? Divinization and Domination: *Capable/Capax*" in *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics*, translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press), 85 [135-136].
[148] Ibid., 86 [136].

Marion further argues, "If nature constitutes the first grace that man receives from God, this same nature finds itself ordered [*ordonnée*] to all grace."[149] At this point, I should note that this *identification* of nature with grace is not the necessary result of a rejection of 'pure nature' arguments; as I will show, Marion's identification of the two is a result of his particular approach to avoiding Pelagianism in light of this rejection. While de Lubac, for example, envisions nature and grace as intimately intertwined, he is, perhaps, more careful than Marion to avoid *identifying* the two, or utilizing the language of 'grace' to speak of the gift of our 'nature' itself.[150]

Returning to Marion's account, in speaking of the category of human 'nature,' he proceeds to claim the following: "Nature, defined by the receptivity of grace, thus opens itself, by means of the gift that creates it, to the perpetual creation of future gifts: *capax* becomes complete in *participatio.*"[151] And further,

> The unique and objectively demonstrable greatness of human nature stems from the gap between its *potentia* (finite) and its *capacitas* (infinite), whereby it cannot possess blessedness in itself, but is constrained to receive it from another. The very *failure of his powers* places man at the limit, where the objective lack of satisfaction of subjective desire summons him to a silent meeting with the absolutely other. This weakness of domination in fact opens up the field of participation.[152]

Crucial for Marion, is not only that our 'nature' is *itself* defined by the receptivity of grace, but also that our further participation in grace depends on our *expanded capacity* for further *receptivity* of grace, which always surpasses any *potentia* (ability or power). As first *constituted by* grace, the human *capacity for* grace "does not exercise any power of possession: rather, it awaits a gift."[153] Importantly, Marion emphasizes one final point, reflecting on Augustine's account of participation in the divine: the human capacity for the divine expands *according to* "the infinity of desire, which only God can create."[154] Herein lies Marion's approach to avoiding Pelagianism. At every stage, the use of our finite abilities and powers, our desire for the divine, and our further participation in God all *depend on* the receptivity of grace.

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[149] Ibid., [136-137] 86. (My translation).
[150] See, for example, de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, 41-47.
[151] Marion, *Cartesian Questions*, 86 [137].
[152] Ibid., 89 [141]. (Final italics are my own).
[153] Ibid., 88 [140].
[154] Ibid., 87 [138].

At this point, we might begin to wonder what role, if any, Marion sees for our 'nature' or finite powers—the gift of which he also seems to *equate* with the gift of grace. It is here that we might begin to uncover the reason Marion so emphasizes the notion of "abandoning oneself in God." Based on his re-organizing of theological categories, it is the only way he sees to account for *both* the gratuity of grace *and* the possibility of rejecting it. By not abandoning myself to God, I am free to reject the workings of grace. In speaking of our participation in the divine, then, Marion argues: "Here capacity is all the more oriented toward supernatural blessedness as it *renounces* the notion of conquering it, as a good that it would have the power [*pouvoir*] to acquire."[155] While, in many ways, he flattens the distinction between nature and grace, it seems Marion understands himself to retain the necessary function of the category of 'nature' by speaking of that in us which freely *responds* to grace by *abandoning* any possession of all that is given as gift. Such abandonment then, *corresponds with* the graced reception of a greater desire that further expands our capacity for uncreated grace. I should note that rather than focusing on Marion's interpretation of Augustine or Aquinas here, I have instead focused on outlining the theological vision he develops according to the key concerns he wishes to address. And it is here that we uncover the theological underpinnings of Marion's account of *l'adonné*—according to which, the givenness or *becoming* of the self is paradoxically realized by way of self-abandon.[156] Marion's theology of grace both mirrors and helps to make sense of his phenomenological account of the givenness of the self: the human capacity for grace expands with the self's renunciation of its *own* ability to attain the good as a *possession*—accordingly, grace is realized as gift. Beyond this, the self, too, is realized *as* gift—given by way of its response to otherness in opposition to any self-subsistence. The self's realization, or becoming, thus accords with its continual *dispossession.*

However, by so stressing the role of self-abandon or renunciation as what *enables* an *expanded capacity* for grace, Marion seems to be setting up a competitive sort of relation between divine

[155] Ibid., 88 [140]. (My italics).
[156] While it may seem controversial to draw conclusions about Marion's theology of nature and grace from this brief chapter, my reading is supported by the fact that many of the points he makes here are already evident in one of his early articles published in the theological journal, *Résurrection* entitled, "Distance et béatitude: sur le mot capacitas chez Saint Augustin." Vol. 29. (1968): 58-80. Furthermore, key themes of Marion's later theological anthropology are already evident in this early article.

and human agency. A non-competitive account would imply that our human powers and abilities need not be abandoned or diminished for grace to work through them for good—since first caused by God, whose creative agency and relation to our secondary, created causal powers absolutely transcends any finite oppositions we encounter in the created order.[157] Contrary to such a vision, Marion makes the following claim in speaking of our participation in the divine: "It is a matter here of identifying an inner locus, to 'annihilate,' as some would later say, any occupation and occupant that would prevent God from offering himself 'to be taken.'"[158] And further, "In this investment of himself, man's only task is to let God occur, by offering him the largest possible capacity."[159] Marion rightly wishes to stress a vision of the human permeated by and dependent on grace as well as the transformative significance of recognizing and embracing this grace. However, aspects of his account not only seem to assert a contrastive view of divine and human agency but could also lead to a rather negative view of our finite, created powers and abilities. By so focusing on the category of *gift*, it may be that Marion overlooks key distinctions, important for a theology of nature and grace.

Returning to Marion's construal of the 'natural' desire for God, we see that, in the end, while this desire is elicited by grace, its increase *depends on* self-abandon: "only by abandoning oneself in God can one receive him." While in Marion's phenomenology the meaning of many of his references to 'self-abandon' remain somewhat ambiguous or vague, in this text we begin to get a better picture of the theological anthropology underlying such references. First, a rather negative view of *any* finite human power or self-assertion begins to surface. It is in the "failure" of human powers and "lack of satisfaction of subjective desire" that our desire for God is increased, so that this "weakness of domination in fact opens up the field of participation."[160] We see in this formula an account of human transformation rather strictly conceived in terms of a *desire* for the Infinite. Experiencing the *failure* of *finite* powers is good because *relinquishing* these powers as a *possession* increases a further desire for the Infinite, thus expanding one's capacity for grace.

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[157] See Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998). For a similar point in reference to Sarah Coakley's account of the kenotic self, see Tonstad, *God and Difference,* 98-132. While the reading I am putting forth resists some of Tanner's critique of Marion's approach to revelation, she rightly highlights problematic dimensions of Marion's competitive account of giving and receiving in terms of self-abandon. See Tanner, "Theology at the Limits of Phenomenology," 22-226.
[158] Marion, *Cartesian Questions*, 86-87 [137].
[159] Ibid., 87 [137].
[160] Ibid., 89 [141].

With this formula in mind, we begin to see its implications elsewhere in Marion's thought. In a more recent unpublished lecture entitled, "Phenomenology and the Common Good," Marion argues that one can only legitimately desire the common good by *abandoning* desiring according to one's *own* will "in order to desire otherwise and from elsewhere"—thereby "displacing" one's will and "desiring the will of another."[161] On this account, desire is not drawn to and by the good *until* I abandon *my own*—singularly self-interested will—and *receive* the desire for the will of another. Such a vision would imply that self-interest and a desire for the common good cannot be intertwined, albeit in complex ways.[162] While one of the major concerns of Marion's overall project is to respond to nihilism, this view of finite human power may, in the end, accede too much to Nietzsche.

As briefly pointed out in the interlude (0.1, b), one reason for the turn to 'kenotic' accounts of selfhood in recent theology involves growing awareness of the unconscious and potentially manipulative sway of desire; given the self-interested attachment to power or material possessions driving the economy, the human desire for the infinite is upheld as a way to loosen one's attachment to finite ends that drives our desire to consume and possess. While such concerns are legitimate, a theological anthropology must also account for the potentially positive dimension of our finite powers, abilities, and desires. It might also consider the positive role our desire for finite goods might play in ultimately orienting a desire for God.

To clarify this point, we might further assess Marion's theology of nature and grace by contrasting it with another approach. Recently, scholars have given attention to uncanny similarities in the theological aims orienting the projects of Marion and Karl Rahner,[163] and there have now been attempts to compare-and-contrast the overall thought of these two thinkers.[164]

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[161] Jean-Luc Marion, "Phenomenology and the Common Good." Keynote address for the conference, "The Common Good as Common Project," Notre Dame University, March 26-28, 2017. *YouTube* video, 1:33:49. Published by NanovicND, April 25, 2017: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBNdOJGWoQI. Of relevance to my considerations of this lecture is also the question and answer session that follows it.

[162] John Milbank makes a similar point in reference to Marion's account of love in *The Erotic Phenomenon*. See Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror."

[163] See Peter Joseph Fritz, "Karl Rahner Repeated in Jean-Luc Marion?" *Theological Studies* 73, (2012): 318-337. Further, Cyril O'Regan mentions that in Marion's project, one might discern a certain "nonidentical repetition of Rahner" (128). See Cyril O'Regan, "Crossing Hegel*"* in *Counter-Experiences,* 95-150.

[164] See Ryan G. Duns, SJ, "Beneath the Shadow of the Cross: A Rahnerian Rejoinder to Jean-Luc Marion," *Philosophy & Theology* 28, no. 2 (2016): 351-372. While I cannot engage all of his arguments here, my reading of

However, I here wish to stress a key difference between these two thinkers to locate what I see as a potential problem of Marion's theological anthropology. For both Marion and Rahner, the human being is graced with a desire for the infinite, and is, therefore, not *defined* by any fixed or finite nature. Further, both view this desire that exceeds any finite or 'natural' fulfillment as an indication that the human being is always already related to grace.[165] For Rahner, uncreated grace "enfolds" the human being as the "very sphere of existence which he can never escape from."[166] Elsewhere, Rahner argues that our natural existence has not only "an inner openness to grace," but also, "a real crying need for grace" and is, in its *true* expression, always "more than purely natural."[167] At the same time, whereas Marion rejects any notion of a 'pure nature,' Rahner saw a reason for not so quickly dismissing it—understanding it as one way to affirm, in perhaps a more pragmatic register, that the gift of grace always gives something *more* than the gift of our nature. We see this in that for Rahner, the desire for God does not come from our nature *itself*; rather, the created human 'spirit' has an openness to uncreated grace, which orients the human being to God as its final end.[168] In this way, "our creation, which was a free act of God, not due to us, and the free gift of grace to the already existing creature, are not one and the same gift of God's freedom."[169] The *gift* of our 'nature' then, has a certain integrity of its own—

Marion differs from that of Duns, whose article does not engage Marion's more recent, explicitly theological works. See also, Peter Joseph Fritz, "Karl Rahner's Theological Logic, Phenomenology, and Anticipation," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2019): 57-78. Fritz's recent article provides an excellent analysis highlighting points of similarity and difference between Marion and Rahner. While I agree with his analysis, whereas Fritz, in the end, emphasizes the overall similarity of their aims, I will further explore what I see as the deeper significance pertaining to the difference in each thinker's theology of nature and grace.

[165] See Karl Rahner, "Nature and Grace," in *Nature and Grace: and Other Essays*, translated by Dinah Wharton. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 10. This essay is a later development of "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace" in *Foundations of the Christian Faith.* For a more detailed account of these and other resonances between Marion and Rahner, see Fritz, "Karl Rahner Repeated in Jean-Luc Marion?" 318-337.

[166] Rahner, *Nature and Grace*, 32.

[167] Rahner, *The Christian Commitment*, 51. Any reference to the *need* for grace is based on the concrete relation between the order of redemption and that of creation—both of which, while concretely related, also remain distinct.

[168] "The 'definition' of the created spirit is its openness to infinite being; it is a creature because of its openness to the fullness of reality; it is a spirit because it is open to reality *as such,* infinite reality" (Rahner, "Nature and Grace," 36). This is one articulation of Rahner's "supernatural existential." As Lawrence Feingold argues, Rahner is aware that if the realization of our final desire for salvation and beatitude is gratuitous, it must not be an innate desire of our nature alone. For this reason, he sees the human spirit's openness to grace as something "supernaturally added to it," so that the *orientation* of the natural to the supernatural is fully dependent on grace (see Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas and His Interpreters,* 329-339). While it is the case, as Karen Kilby argues, that Rahner gives very different accounts of the "supernatural existential" across his various works, she also notes that one thing these accounts have in common is that he sees 'nature' as maintaining a certain integrity. See Karen E. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Philosophy and Theology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), 49-69. I am also indebted to an unpublished paper by Thomas Sharp, entitled "John Milbank's Use of Karl Rahner in *Theology and Social Theory*," in considering some of the complexities surrounding Rahner's account.

[169] Rahner, "Nature and Grace," 39-40.

one that is not, however, independent of grace. And while Rahner maintains that any final, divine fulfillment of our nature is at once uncompelled *and* completely dependent on grace, [170] uncreated grace elevates, and even permeates our nature in uncounted mysterious ways. In fact, Rahner sees grace as so subtly intertwined with our nature that we may have trouble distinguishing them—even when reflecting on the experience of our nature through the lens of faith. In light of such a vision, he nevertheless argues that "in spite of the difficulty in distinguishing what is 'nature' and what isn't, nature is not thereby overthrown." [171] Again, this implies that while enfolded by grace, our nature maintains a certain integrity or dignity—as part of a good creation. The implication is as follows: Grace remains gratuitous in bestowing that which is beyond our nature to attain *without* the need for negating or belittling our 'natural,' finite powers. Meanwhile, since Marion does not maintain the same pragmatic distinction between nature and grace, for grace to be gratuitous (always *more* than what is of our nature to attain), 'nature' ends up functioning as a mere receptacle of grace: "Nature, defined by the receptivity of grace, thus opens itself, by means of the gift that creates it, to the perpetual creation of future gifts—*capax* becomes complete in *participatio.*"[172] And further, to avoid Pelagianism, grace must be shown to *win out* over and against the 'natural' inclination of the will in *any* movement toward *any* good end. We already saw that for Marion, desiring the common good requires *abandoning* one's own will in order to *receive* the desire of a will that is not one's own. In contrast, whereas Rahner argues that "man can only be free in regard to the finite good

[170] In other words, Rahner's account also avoids Jansenism and Pelagianism. However, for Rahner, the Incarnation implies a "quasi-formal causal communication of God himself" ("Nature and Grace," 20-21). In this way, while uncreated grace might orient the human being toward God, such orientation is not an efficient causality. Further, in an argument that at first sounds similar to Marion's, Rahner explains that this grace is a "free act of God's love which man can 'dispose' of *only* in the measure in which he himself is at this love's disposal" (25). While this sounds very similar to Marion's account of the human response to grace, Rahner's account allows for a more subtle working of love in the human will, so that, as Rahner here acknowledges, the influence of grace may even go completely unnoticed.

[171] Ibid., 36.

[172] Marion, *Cartesian Questions,* 86. While Marion's theology is clearly more indebted to Augustine, he also briefly offers an interpretation of Thomas Aquinas here. In doing so, he again emphasizes human receptivity, now according to a 'natural capacity' and a 'supernatural capacity.' Insofar as God bestows blessedness according to our 'natural' capacity, it is "always defective," thus witnessing to our greater desire for supernatural blessedness. In this way, while Marion clearly does not deny the gift of 'natural' finite powers, his overall account construes them as a gift—in a way that conflates 'gift' and 'grace.' Further, he envisions our participation in the divine according to the *relinquishing* of any *possession* of these powers (See *Cartesian Questions*, 89-91).

in virtue of his dynamic orientation to the infinite good," he is also able to maintain a more positive role for the human will, elevated by grace.[173]

One implication we might draw from this is that our 'natural' desire for finite goods might take on a *graced* orientation to the divine good without *first* needing to be abandoned or displaced. [174] Of course, desiring the common good *may* very well require sacrifice, and I may also need to become aware of the potentially negative self-interests impeding my desire for the good. In other words, we still need an account of sin. The point here is that there are important reasons for affirming *both* our 'natural' inclination toward finite goods *and* the graced role this might play in orienting our desire for the infinite. My hunger, for example, serves a purpose—or has a natural function—and allows me to experience a certain satisfaction as I enjoy eating a batch of strawberries. We should not see this natural desire as plagued with negative self-interest, but as participating in a larger story—a story about a God who creates all that is good and in whom we hope for our final fulfillment. From a theological perspective, the point is not becoming too obsessed with the strawberries on the one hand, nor overlooking their intrinsic significance on the other. It may be that there is a necessary tension involved in an account of the human desire for God. One side of this tension is seen in that, echoing Ecclesiastes, we should not ignore the pain and sense of meaninglessness we experience at continually running up against the sense of a *lack* of ultimate fulfillment. In other words, perhaps there is not *necessarily* something wrong when we *can't* enjoy eating the strawberries—are frustrated with our daily routine, unsatisfied or bored in our communities, or realizing that much of what we invest ourselves in is all just a bit unimportant in the grand scheme of things. In some such cases, it *might* be possible, following

[173] Karl Rahner, Theological Investigations Vol. 1, translated by Cornelius Ernst, O.P. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd LTD, 1991), 361. In his deliberation on grace and concupiscence, the 'spontaneous act of desire' might be inclined toward evil or good. Grace enables alignment of the 'spontaneous act of desire' with the decision or will in our movement toward the good, thus avoiding a strictly negative function of the will, sometimes evident in Marion's account. While I see Rahner's approach to nature and grace as particularly helpful in contrast to Marion's, I do not wish to imply that what is problematic in Marion's account is necessarily the result of *any* rejection of 'pure nature' arguments. As exemplified by de Lubac, there are, of course, other ways of adjusting one's language for grace to address the doctrinal commitments with which Marion is here concerned. My arguments do, however, resist the view that *any* affirmation of 'pure nature' *necessarily* leads either to Pelagianism or to grace compelling the will. Cf. John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 51.

[174] In his discussions of nature and grace, Rahner does not himself seem very interested in making this point. I draw on his work here because I do not see his approach as necessarily precluding such an account. This is because, in speaking of the human spirit's openness to grace, he argues that such openness "does not of itself *require* this absolute and unsurpassable fulfillment and has a meaning without it" ("Nature and Grace," 36).

C.S. Lewis, to speak of this unsatisfied desire as an indicator that "the human soul was made to enjoy some object that is never fully given—nay, cannot even be imagined as given—in our present mode of subjective and spatio-temporal experience."[175] At the same time, if in embracing this desire for 'the Infinite,' I become utterly unconcerned with the material needs and desires of myself or my neighbor, this *may* indicate that I have lost my way in an idolatrous version of asceticism—one in which my desire is not *actually* oriented to a God who loves and embraces the finite, material realities of my embodied existence. In this way, our desire for finite goods not only has a decisive, *natural* role in the created order; it might simultaneously have a *graced* role in orienting us to the hope of a final fulfillment in a way that avoids the desire to abandon or despise our created finitude. In affirming a *distinction* between nature and grace, I do not suggest that we can define or determine what precisely this 'nature' is from a finite, created standpoint. I do want to suggest that both Rahner and de Lubac—albeit in different ways throughout their various works—might together provide a set of resources for further envisioning a nature permeated by grace which, nevertheless has a mysterious integrity or dignity *as created.*

Bringing these points to bear on a notion of the self *as gift* then will have specific implications: we might say that there are two aspects or dimensions of the self's giftedness. First, we might speak of the self as *created*, as imbued with a certain integrity or dignity, and as having certain finite needs and desires. Second, we might speak of this self as graced with a desire for the divine, which exceeds any satisfaction we experience as finite creatures. Creation as gift implies that the embodied particularities of our finite existence matter. Grace as gift points to the irreducibility of our identity to any finite particularity or 'nature' so that one's true identity remains somewhat of a mystery, "hidden with Christ in God."[176] Affirming both of these realities does not mean they are entirely separable; instead, they are perhaps more like two dimensions of a bigger truth—thus, reflecting something of a paradox, or mystery, at play in contemplating the self in light of a theology of nature and grace, or of creation and redemption.[177] Further, the

[175] C.S. Lewis, Preface to third edition of *The Pilgrim's Regress* (London: J. M. Dent, 1943).
[176] Col. 3:3, *NRSV*.
[177] For an argument for this paradoxical dimension of nature and grace, see Karen Kilby, "Catholicism, Protestantism and the Theological Location of Paradox: Nature, Grace, Sin." Presented at the Leuven Encounters in Systematic Theology (LEST XI) conference. Published by KULeuvenThologie, October 19, 2017 (38:23): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wk_O4hsRwW0. My considerations of this topic were particularly influenced by a version of this paper presented at the symposium, "Reading Paul Today: Grace and Gift for Protestant and

inseparability of this dual account of giftedness—one's concrete, embodied particularity *and* one's irreducibility to any fixed or finite nature—might also witness to the following: Having a sense of self is necessary for realizing I am *more than* or irreducible to this sense of self.

In light of these points concerning the role nature and grace might play in an account of the self as *gift*, the final section of this chapter draws on these concerns, returning to questions surrounding the coinciding paradox of self-gift and self-abandon, which has thus far been our focus in assessing Marion's thought. In considering the philosophical and theological concerns at play in such an account, the concluding portion of this chapter briefly compares emphases of Marion's reflection on the self with those of Kierkegaard, whose writings might help us re-consider the following paradox: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."[178]

4.8) *The Self* as *'Gift' and the Question of 'Self-Donation': Reading Marion with Kierkegaard*

In turning to Kierkegaard here, I in no way mean to imply that he provides some sort of exemplary systematic account of nature and grace; first, because I do not wish to overlook the distinctly Lutheran aspects of his thought and, second, because he was clearly not concerned with setting forth a systematic theology. However, it *is* the case that Kierkegaard's thought develops in response to a wide variety of theological influences. As already indicated, recent scholars have noted the implications of something like a theology of nature and grace evident in Kierkegaard's writings. Lee Barrett sees this as, in part, a result of the unique influence of the Roman Catholic mystic Johannes Tauler on Kierkegaard's thought.[179] Joshua Furnal has not only shown how Kierkegaard's writings potentially influenced the *nouvelle théologie* movement (see Chapter 1, 1.3), he has also indicated points of resonance between Kierkegaard's theological anthropology and Thomas Aquinas' account of nature and grace.[180] It may be due to the

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Catholic Theology," Durham University, 2018. Here Kilby considered this paradox in terms of distinguishing the gift of nature from that of grace.

[178] Matthew 16:25, *NRSV*.

[179] Lee C. Barrett, "Kierkegaard and Johannes Tauler on Faith, Love, and Natural Desire for God: A Way Beyond a Catholic/Protestant Impasse," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 25-43.

[180] See Furnal, *Catholic Theology After Kierkegaard*, 29-44. In this regard, see also, Barnett, *From Despair to Faith*, 26-31.

confluence of influences that came to shape Kierkegaard's theological imagination—including medieval mystics and Patristic authors—coupled with the fact that his aim was not to provide a straightforward, systematic theology, that theologians from numerous traditions have been able to make productive use of Kierkegaard's thought.[181] Bringing Marion and Kierkegaard into conversation, then, I here simply wish to focus on how *some* aspects of Kierkegaard's account of the self as gift may very well fit with a theological anthropology affirming two dimensions of the self's giftedness: the gift of self's createdness and the gift of the self's *becoming* in relation to the divine. In light of this, I will argue that Kierkegaard's works might help us re-imagine some possibilities for approaching such notions as 'surrender' or 'sacrifice' as they pertain to Christian spiritual formation.

As I began to point out in Chapter 2 of this thesis, because he views all as gift, gratitude is a major theme of Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding Discourses*. He describes the *practice* of gratitude as resulting in a slow-going, subtle turning of one's attention, enabling an ever-greater recognition of the Creator. Kierkegaard's depiction of the progressive realizations that occur in practicing gratitude and prayer find some resonance with the Ignatian practice of "finding God in all things." In his account, gratitude functions not only as praise but also as a highly self-reflective process. It enables *new interpretations* of the self and its relation to the divine amid various life circumstances. As Christopher Barnett explains, "From God the human being receives the entire field of being and becoming as a gift. To go forth in the world as a free creature is precisely to realize that gift."[182] He further notes that it is for this reason Kierkegaard sees the fullest realization of creaturely freedom as the recognition of creaturely dependence. And as already explored in Chapter 2, it might be said that practices of gratitude and repentance work to foster this more profound recognition of freedom through dependence.

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[181] C. Stephen Evans makes a similar point in reflecting on what he sees as largely convincing arguments for a kind of nature and grace operative in Kierkegaard's writings. See, "Kierkegaard's Relation to Catholic Theology and the Broader Christian World," in *Toronto Journal of Theology* 32, no. 1 (March 2016): 45-50.

[182] Christopher B. Barnett, *From Despair to Faith*, 29. For more on this double dimension of the receptivity and freedom involved in the self's *becoming* in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous texts, see Edward Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Resolve: Kierkegaard's Moral-Religious Psychology from Either/Or to Sickness Unto Death* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 11-26. For an exploration of the self's giftedness and becoming, focusing specifically on Kierkegaard's theological anthropology, see Furnal, *Catholic Theology After Kierkegaard,* 29-44. See especially, 32.

With Kierkegaard's reflections on gratitude in mind, we might now turn to consider the third in a collection of discourses entitled, "What We Learn from the Lilies in the Field and from the Birds of the Air." In an opening prayer in the preface of these three discourses, a request is made for the one who is worried—that this individual might "learn from the divinely appointed teachers: the lilies of the field and the birds of the air!"[183] These three discourses make continual reference to Matthew 6, in which the reader is exhorted not to worry about one's life, but to instead, "[l]ook at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." And further, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin" yet "even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these."[184] Kierkegaard takes this exhortation seriously, yet as he considers the lilies and the birds, it becomes clear that his theological reflections are not merely about *not* worrying. Instead, they strike at what Kierkegaard sees as the root of human worry, focusing on the role of human desire as it relates to *both* temporal, visible realities *and* those realities that are eternal and invisible. We see this by the way Kierkegaard seems to protest against the plain meaning of the Matthew 6 passage, noting a difference between created nature—the lily and the bird—and the human being reflecting on this nature:

> There is indeed beauty and youthfulness and loveliness in nature, there is indeed multifarious and teeming life, and there is rapture and jubilation. But there is also something akin to profound, unfathomable cares of which none of those out there has any inkling, and precisely this, that none has any inkling, is the sadness in the human being.[185]

In comparison with the lilies and the birds, this "sadness in the human being" is based on the awareness of a tension, evident in the created order; this tension, it seems, the human being is in a unique position to find particularly disturbing:

> Is it life or death? Is it life, which, eternally young, renews itself, or is it decay, which perfidiously conceals itself in order not to be seen for what it is, the decay that deceives with the loveliness of the lily and the field, with the carefreeness of the bird, while underneath the decay itself is perfidiously only waiting to reap the deception. Such is the

[183] Preface: "What We Learn from the Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air: Three Discourses." In *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 157.
[184] *NRSV*.
[185] Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 202.

> life of nature: short, full of song, flowering, but at every moment death's prey, and death is the stronger.[186]

The seeming futility and decay we see in nature appear to be a complete legitimation of the worry and despair we face as human beings. The grass withers, the flowers fade, and sparrows are sold for a penny. Yet, unlike the lily or the bird, the human being is bothered by this fact in a unique way; bothered not simply by the *fact* of death, but by an awareness of the coinciding of such beauty with its inevitable decay. Is beauty reducible to its final nullity and, for that reason, a mere deception?

Given this question, Kierkegaard understands as good news the stringent demand of the Gospel: "No one can serve two masters." Contemplating this, he claims, "Nature does not serve two masters; there is no vacillating or double-mindedness in nature" as we notice in observing the lily and the bird.[187] Nevertheless for Kierkegaard, while the lily and the bird reveal God's glory, they do not serve God, as is the choice and freedom [*Frihed*] of the human being. The lily and the bird do not demand to be anything in themselves: "there is no vacillating or double-mindedness in nature."[188] And further, "[t]he bird is not seeking anything. However far it flies, it is not seeking: it is migrating and is drawn, and its longest flight is a migration. But the person in whose soul the eternal is implanted seeks and aspires."[189] Kierkegaard attributes the unique restlessness of the human being to the desire for the eternal implanted in the human soul that "seeks and aspires." The human being thus faces a decision concerning the following command: "Seek first God's kingdom—'*which is within you*.'"[190] Kierkegaard explains,

> If the visible does not deceive him, as the person is deceived who grasps the shadow instead of the form, if temporality does not deceive him, as the person is deceived who is continually waiting for tomorrow, if the temporary does not deceive him, as the person is deceived who procrastinates along the way—if this does not happen, then the world does not quiet his longing.[191]

[186] Ibid., 203.
[187] Ibid., 205.
[188] Ibid., 205.
[189] Ibid., 209.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.

Here we see depicted something similar to Marion's account of the human desire for the Infinite—or ultimately, for God. Kierkegaard, nevertheless, interprets and describes this desire *as a reason for* a discontented conflict we *already feel* in reflecting on the created order. And his account does not end with a mere prescribed self-abandon and overcoming of self-interest. Instead, he carries on with this reflection as a way of responding to the question of *how* and *why* this gospel might speak to the discontented self; the one who no longer knows how to interpret the beauty she sees in nature and is left wondering whether such beauty is a mere deception:

> Seek *first* God's kingdom. This is the sequence, but it is also the sequence of inversion, because that which first offers itself to a person is everything that is visible and corruptible, which temps and draws him, yes, will entrap him in such a way that he begins last, or perhaps never, to seek God's kingdom. But the proper beginning begins with seeking God's kingdom first; thus it begins expressly by letting a world perish. What a difficult beginning![192]

Such a depiction at first seems to assert a rather stark dichotomy between the desires associated with our finite, embodied existence and those associated with "the kingdom of God"—the very same dichotomy I have so far been attempting to reject. However, as the discourse continues, it becomes clear that Kierkegaard's emphasis is on returning to a lost beginning in order to orient oneself *from the beginning,* so that this new beginning, or starting point, might free the self for a renewed relationship with all else—including all the various gifts encountered in this life. We see this more clearly in light of the final focus of Kierkegaard's discourse: "But if a person seeks God's kingdom first—'*then all these things will be added to him*.'"[193] He continues, "They will be *added* to him since there is only one thing that is to be *sought*: God's kingdom. Neither wealth's thousands nor poverty's penny is to be sought; this will be added to you."[194] Finally, in speaking of the rest that will be added to one, Kierkegaard continues, "Oh, what blessed happiness God's kingdom must be! If you take everything the bird and the lily have, every glorious thing that nature has, and think of all this together, it is all contained in the word: the rest, all these things."[195]

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[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid., 211.
[194] Ibid., 211-212.
[195] Ibid., 212.

Emphasis is not here placed on a *prescribed* form of sacrifice or even on the act of self-abandon, but rather, on the freedom that comes through the gift of investing oneself in one's ultimate desire which is, by faith, not so easily subject to decay and not quite so quick to vanish. That this is his emphasis is evident in that Kierkegaard begins his reflection with an analysis of the unsettling awareness of death, and with such awareness, the gnawing question of whether we can appreciate beauty in light of its inevitable decay. Is such beauty a mere fleeting deception? The Gospel becomes good news in this context precisely because it is not merely comforting but rather because it is unsettling enough to reorient our desires as we respond to its call. This reorientation of our desire does not provide easy answers to the real devastating questions we face concerning the death and decay all around us. It *does,* however, perhaps allow glimpses of a hope that investing ourselves in the love that created us might bring *eternal* significance to our embrace of all the various dimensions of our finite, temporal existence. This does not mean that we must reconcile beauty with death and decay, or see something necessarily good in it. Instead, we are freed for enjoying the beauty we experience in the temporal as we now no longer view it *in terms of* death as its final meaning.

Coinciding with such a vision is a theme expressed in one of Kierkegaard's *Christian Discourses* entitled, "The Joy of It: That When I 'Gain Everything' I Lose Nothing at All":

> When the 'everything' I gain is in truth everything, then that which in another sense is called everything, the everything that I lose, must be the false everything; but when I lose the false everything, I indeed lose nothing. Therefore, when I lose the false everything, I lose nothing; and when I gain the true everything, I indeed lose the false everything—so I indeed lose nothing.[196]

The account Kierkegaard gives of loss or sacrifice in this context, especially when read alongside the previous discourse just explored, reveals an emphasis, not on any particular gain or loss, but on freedom from marrying oneself to the 'false everything.' We might see, in this emphasis, certain resonances with the practice of Ignatian detachment, wherein I am freed to truly enjoy the gifts of creation because I am not attached to them in an unhealthy sort of way.[197] For

[196] Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 145.
[197] This is perhaps another way of articulating—albeit, with slightly different emphases—elements of what Sharon Krishek refers to as "the double movement of love," wherein the movement of renunciation is "coupled with the paradoxical return to the world, to finitude, and to the self" (*Kierkegaard on Faith and* Love, 151; see also 138-165).

Kierkegaard, such detachment would be enabled by the freeing recognition and embrace of a desire for what we are to *seek first*. As he claims, "In order to have the power to understand that the false everything is nothing, one must have the true everything as an aid; otherwise the false everything takes all the power away from one."[198]

There are a few points we might draw from these discourses. First, Kierkegaard's account of the *giving up* involved in the self's *becoming* centers on the self, gaining its proper orientation rather than on any essential loss of self—or any other particular thing for that matter.[199] Second, because his attention is on *describing* what might be liberating about the reorientation of the self's desire, his account does not overlook the process of the self's own reflection on its experience, offering an account of how the working of grace in our lives might further inform such *self*-reflection. It is not by placing one's *attention* on a prescribed version of sacrifice, pain, or loss involved in a particular method of detachment, but rather, by the freeing *recognition* of the real source of the self's desire that transformation takes place. As I will show in the next chapter, Kierkegaard describes such recognition occurring in diverse and subtle ways, given our utter closeness to God as the very source of our existence. In light of this closeness, Kierkegaard is concerned with *the way* we experience and relate to created gifts; he sees in our painful experience of miss-relation to these gifts a sign that we are made for and oriented to something more than these gifts. Accordingly, his is not merely an argument for abandoning oneself over to an ever-greater desire for the Infinite; it is instead, perhaps, more attentive than Marion's to how the desire for the divine might orient both one's experience of finitude and one's sense of self—so that even in the process of self-reflection, we begin to see hints of our orientation to the divine. Reflecting on the experience of our finitude *itself* bears witness to this. Interestingly, such a vision perhaps does more justice to the notion that grace does not destroy our 'nature'—or the finite, embodied ways we currently experience ourselves—but rather transforms, heals, and perfects it.

We might consider *why* Marion's theological anthropology tends to overlook our experience of created finitude, as well as a description of how grace might more subtly influence or transform

[198] Ibid.
[199] In *this* sense, there is no difference in comparison with Marion's account.

aspects of our created state as we currently experience it. Marion's emphasis on the self's givenness—a self paradoxically realized according to its continual self-abandon—does not deny, but also does not sufficiently affirm those dimensions of the self that are *already there* as a gift of our createdness. Instead, he emphasizes the self's perpetual conversion. As Marion himself claims, "conversion never ends."[200] I do not wish to reject such a vision—with roots in the Franciscan tradition—of life as a 'continual conversion,' but do aim to qualify it. Marion's reference to conversion attests to a particular emphasis running through his entire project, one which may fail to affirm the more subtle working of grace in our lives—as in the gradual and possibly unnoticeable turning of the will, drawn by love. Marion comes close to such a vision in his recent essay, "The Phenomenon of Beauty." Here Marion acknowledges a connection between truth and the beauty that *attracts* us to it, but stresses that we might also stand convicted by the truth, and thus, not recognize its beauty. This brings us very close to Kierkegaard's view (see Chapter 1, 1.3). However, Marion goes on to stress that in the face of the truth that accuses/convicts, we inevitably respond by *either* hating or loving it; we *either* desire and cling to a lesser or false good—and thus "refuse to proceed from a lesser to a truer phenomenon of the beautiful"—*or* abandon possessing it, thus recognizing, because loving, the truth as what is *truly* beautiful.[201] According to the account of desire Kierkegaard provides in the discourse just explored, the human "seeks and aspires" *because* the eternal is *always already* implanted in the human soul—whether we recognize the source of this desire or not. Hints of the ultimate object of desire are, in other words, *already there*, even in the misplaced, restless, never-quite satisfied experience of desire.[202] We might see such a vision as allowing for more subtle and diverse accounts of the ways *recognition* of truth occurs.

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[200] Marion, *Believing in Order to See,* 63.

[201] Jean-Luc Marion, "The Phenomenon of Beauty," *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 5, no. 2 (November 2018): 85-97; see especially, 94. While Marion here relies on Augustine, his account reflects his more recent articulation of a distinction between the phenomenon of truth as "disclosure" (*alêtheia*), and truth as "uncovering" or "revelation" (*apocalypse*). The case of revelation as divine self-manifestation *always* involves the latter form of truth—it *always* confronts/convicts the self, demanding a re-orientation of the self to recognize it. Marion clarifies this further in his recent lecture, "What Do We Mean when we Speak of Revelation?" the University of Chicago, January 16, 2019. *YouTube* video, 1:13:10. Published by the Lumen Christi Institute, January 25, 19: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mj87iRta-4Q.

[202] For a more comprehensive look at Kierkegaard's view of desire as it relates to this particular point concerning a theology of nature and grace, see especially, Lee C. Barrett, "Augustine's Restless Heart and Kierkegaard's Desire for an Eternal Happiness" in his, *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 65-112; particularly relevant to this study are the points he makes on 391.

One reason for the emphases guiding Marion's theological account of the self may have to do with the way they overlap with his philosophical concern to overcome the solipsism and autarchy of the subject. His challenge to solipsism *is* his convincing demonstration of the priority of givenness—not only the givenness of things but also of the self. By prioritizing its givenness, the self is no longer seen as a self-enclosed subject, dominating whatever it encounters by its autonomous, rational gaze. Instead, the self is continually being given over to itself *along with* the phenomena it encounters—as it further *gives itself over in response* to each new encounter. Given these emphases, my argument is not, following Joeri Schrijvers or Shane Mackinlay, that Marion merely performs an inversion of the modern subject—so that the active *ego* is now passive and receptive.[203] Marion's account of givenness does still attend to both passive/receptive and active/interpretive dimensions of the self's response to givenness.[204] It is nevertheless true that Marion stresses those dimensions of the self that offer a set of counter-emphases to those of autonomous rationality. As this chapter has attempted to show, these counter-emphases do not provide a full theological portrait of the created self.

Much contemporary thought emphasizes the openness, inter-subjectivity, and malleability of the self—a self shaped continuously by external realities and forces—and it is also difficult to deny this *not so new* realization that the self is not a self-enclosed, self-constituted whole. However, Tamsin Jones has recently argued that such descriptions of the self, including Marion's, are very similar to the description of trauma. [205] While admitting the essential difference between actual trauma described by those living with its effects and the concerns at play in contemporary Continental philosophy, she argues that insights from trauma theory might nevertheless inform new ways of considering themes currently being overlooked in recent accounts of the

[203] For this argument by Mackinlay, see especially, *Interpreting Excess*, 30-34; 67-69; 217. See also, Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings? The Decentering of the Modern Subject in Recent French Phenomenology*, 51-80. John Milbank also seems to make a somewhat similar point to this one of Mackinlay and Schrijvers. See Milbank, "Only Ontology Overcomes Metaphysics," 328.

[204] In this regard, my response to the critique of Shrijvers and Mackinlay follows that of Christina Gschwandtner. While she acknowledges the relevance of some of their more general concerns, for her response to their criticisms just noted, see *Degrees of Givenness*, 18-24.

[205] Tamsin Jones, "Traumatized Subjects: Continental Philosophy of Religion and the Ethics of Alterity," *The Journal of Religion* 94, no. 2 (April, 2014): 143-160. By relating Marion's description of the givenness of the self to trauma, Jones simply wishes to challenge what she reads as an "'either/or' alternative between a total subjection of the self before the givenness of the phenomena, and the reassertion of the self through an act of 'contempt' for the Other" (156).

deconstructed subject. Considering this point, we see how the theological temptation to make arguments that *mirror* those for deconstructing the subject—now in a theological register and through recourse to the 'kenotic self' (see Interlude)—remains insufficient for a theological anthropology.[206] This chapter has demonstrated how, all too often, Marion's theological account of the self, perpetuates what we might now read, following Jones, as a rather traumatic depiction of the self's givenness; a givenness which shocks, displaces and de-centers the self. Kierkegaard's emphasis is different.[207] In some ways, Kierkegaard presupposes the traumatic situation the self is *already* in, and his theological reflection on the self's *becoming* responds to it. While I have thus far only hinted at this by pointing to a few key discourses, the final chapter of the thesis will provide more support to this claim.

CONCLUSION

While Chapters 1 and 2 were an attempt to explicate the importance of taking stock of our created finitude for an account of love, this chapter returned to a similar concern, now focused on a theological vision of the self. The overall focus of this chapter has been to show what is at stake in Marion's account of the self's givenness—both philosophically, in terms of his desire to avoid solipsism, and theologically, in terms of his account of grace. I have attempted to highlight some new avenues that Marion's work might open for moving away from an epistemological interpretation of revelation—one that would view revelation as a mere series of propositions. Further, I have shown how his project of a phenomenology of givenness is significant for the way it questions both philosophical and popular assumptions; assumptions concerning not only what may or may not be *known*, but also concerning what, in fact, *counts* as 'knowledge' or 'rationality' in the first place. While I have defended Marion's phenomenology of givenness insofar as I see it opening new possibilities for potential theological engagement with

[206] Linn Tonstad makes a similar point in a paper which both outlines and critiques the theological appropriation of popular critiques of the autonomous, modern subject. While already cited, again, see Tonstad, "Vulnerabilities, Not Vulnerability: Considering Some Differences."

[207] Cf. Jones, "Traumatized Subjects," 144 and footnote 3. Whereas Jones includes Kierkegaard as an early example in a line of thinkers (including Levinas and Marion) who depict religious experience in a way that has resonances with current accounts of the 'traumatized subject,' I am here arguing that, at least in many of his writings, Kierkegaard offers a more complex and sensitive vision of the self than does Marion—one we might draw on in constructive ways for addressing current issues in theological anthropology.

phenomenology, I have also attempted to highlight potential problems that arise with Marion's theological anthropology.

My argument is that Marion's *theological* account of the self's givenness overlooks significant concerns to which a more robust theology of nature and grace might attend; I have sought to demonstrate this may be the result of Marion's rather singular focus on overcoming the solipsism and autarchy of the modern subject. As I have shown, for Marion, this overcoming of solipsism *depends* on his account of the self's givenness. However, there is a mirroring, or overlap, between his phenomenological and theological account of the self's givenness (4.6), resulting in the conflation of nature and grace—all is subject to a prior givenness and all simply *is* grace (4.7). Assessing Marion's theology within the context of the *nouvelle théologie* movement, I have argued—following both Rahner and de Lubac—that certain theological distinctions remain relevant in contemplating the relationship between the *gift* of creation and that of grace. In this way, the created order maintains a certain—albeit mysterious—integrity in relation to the grace that enfolds it. This point is analogous to the argument that one must first *have* some *sense* of self—and of its inherent dignity—if the notion that one is also *more than* or *irreducible to* this sense of self is to have any meaning.

In light of these concerns, the final section of the chapter moved to questions surrounding themes of 'self as gift' and 'self-donation,' now contrasting Marion's reflections on these themes with those of Søren Kierkegaard (4.8). The focus of this final section was addressing a concern relevant to a wider context of recent theological debates. If we are to avoid a simple importation of emphases relating to the deconstruction of modern subjectivity into a theological context, we might still wonder how to address Scriptural passages such as Matthew 16: "those who lose their life for my sake will find it." As already explored in the interlude, the meaning of passages like this one are often conflated with arguments for the deconstruction of the subject in Continental philosophy. This question also brings us full circle then, to the broader question of how to relate the concerns of a philosophical anthropology with those at play for a theological account of selfhood? While the final chapter will further engage these questions, this chapter began to address them through comparison of Marion and Kierkegaard.

Both Marion and Kierkegaard—albeit in very different ways—uphold a notion of the *givenness* of the self. The self is not simply constituted by itself, but is given through a relation to that which is other. Further, it is possible to say that Marion and Kierkegaard would both share the same essential view articulated by Augustine that *our hearts are restless until they rest in God*.[208] While both thinkers attend to the human being's desire for God, and the way this desire might re-orient the self, Marion's emphasis is placed on *abandoning* one's *own* desire to further *receive* an increased desire for the divine. I have shown how this vision of self-gift and self-abandon corresponds with Marion's emphasis on overcoming solipsism and autarchy of the self. Because Kierkegaard, on the other hand, already seems to assume a self, *becoming* through its relations and misrelations—to itself, to the lilies and the birds, and ultimately, to its final end in God—his emphasis is on the *freedom* that comes through investing oneself in one's *ultimate* desire. Clearly, one will find a notion of self-sacrifice evident throughout Kierkegaard's writings. However, as I thus far attempted to show, this does not imply a negation of the important role of one's own relation to oneself, self-love, or self-reflection. Further, following the emphases of Kierkegaard, the affirmation of one's life as a "living sacrifice" is not a reference to any one prescribed action or demeanor, and need not negate the call to positive moments of self-assertion. Following the discourses just explored, we might say the gospel involves the hopeful realization that I no longer live *for the sake of* myself alone, but discover myself caught up with something of eternal significance—the concrete manifestation of the love of God.

The arguments I put forth here need not imply a rejection of Marion's phenomenology of givenness. Instead, my argument is that a more nuanced *interpretation* of the self *as* 'gift' should be an ongoing theological task—one that involves engaging with numerous disciplines or fields of study, and includes consideration of the self's embodied particularity and various approaches to identity. Such a task need not negate, but may very well imply certain adjustments to the *emphases* of Marion's phenomenology of givenness.[209] With this in mind, the final chapter of

[208] For a comparison of Augustine and Kierkegaard's articulation of a restless desire for God, see Barrett, Lee C. "Augustine's Restless Heart and Kierkegaard's Desire for an Eternal Happiness," in *Eros and Self-Emptying*, 65-112.

[209] This is a task I see as already accomplished by Christiana Gschwandtner. See *Degrees of* Givenness, 193-203. As Gschwandtner argues, if we further account for the *degrees* of givenness (for which Marion's project allows), this means not everything is given to experience *absolutely*, allowing more of a place *and need* for conjecture or metaphysical speculation, for example, in response to the given (see especially, 193-203). On my reading, the same would be true of the givenness of the self. Emphasizing degrees of givenness would also allow for emphasizing

this thesis will further experiment with the relationship between theology and contemporary philosophical anthropology—focusing on themes of selfhood, temporality, and the question of sacrifice through a more sustained engagement between Marion and Kierkegaard.

more subtle realizations—not all is realized through shock and surprise, thereby demanding a complete reorientation of the self, for example. Marion's phenomenology of givenness allows for this but simply does not emphasize it. Developing Marion's project, emphasizing the potential *degrees* of givenness, could also imply a more dialogical relationship between phenomenology and theology/metaphysics—perhaps closer to the kind of relationship for which Emmanuel Falque has argued. In light of such potential adjustments to his project, my critique centers on the particular *way* emphases of Marion's phenomenology and theology overlap to inform his account of the self.

CHAPTER 5

TEMPORALITY AND "GOD'S ETERNITY": CONTEMPLATING A SELF, EVER *ON THE WAY* TO BECOMING ITSELF

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realize now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying

on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

-R.S. Thomas, "The Bright Field"

5.0) *Introduction*

In the previous chapter, I explored a similarity between the *nouvelle théologie* movement — which envisions our nature as always already open to grace—and Marion's phenomenological vision of the self—as ever-incomplete and perpetually *given* to itself in relation to that which is *other.* I wanted to show why these emphases were a necessary response to modernity while demonstrating how they leave us with questions regarding how we might *also* affirm a certain integrity to the human person. Put another way, I wanted to gesture toward the importance of affirming the self's embodied particularity, needs and desires, and all those things that go hand in hand with our creaturely finitude. Such dimensions of our creaturely finitude are often overlooked when a focus is placed on the self's continued transformation by way of *self-abandon*. At the same time, I argued that affirming our finitude need not imply a rejection of the ultimate mystery we face when contemplating the self. A tension admittedly remains in this dual affirmation of our finite, embodied particularity *and* the ever-changing, mysterious nature of *who*

we are as creatures always *becoming*—ever unable to grasp ourselves. And much of this thesis has been dedicated to exploring the various contours of this tension. Chapter 1 introduced striking similarities between Marion's and Kierkegaard's reflections on the *imago Dei*—demonstrating how such reflections fit well with the emphases of Gregory of Nyssa, who affirmed our *ever-greater* transformation in the divine. In light of such a vision of the *imago Dei*, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 demonstrated specific ways Kierkegaard remains more attentive to those dimensions of our finitude we cannot simply abandon or overlook in this process of transformation—as we now experience it. But these very reminders of our finitude are also reminders that our ultimate fulfillment will coincide with perfect *dependence* on God—a dependence we might begin to find ways of expressing here and now.[1]

This chapter takes these underlying concerns and runs with them a bit further, now focusing on questions surrounding the experience of temporality and the eschatological dimensions of an account of selfhood. What is it, for example, that gives the self a sense of continuity or purpose *over time*? Any experience we have of ourselves is utterly fragmented due to our perpetual subjection to change. While recollecting or anticipating various experiences, we remain ever-unable to grasp ourselves. What is it, if anything, that remains constant—giving the self a sense of meaning or significance despite all those things constantly passing away? Such questions not only matter for an account of selfhood but also illuminate overlapping concerns at the intersection of theology and phenomenology—thereby allowing us to investigate the relationship between these two disciplines further.

Toward this end, the current chapter first highlights key *theological* dimensions of Kierkegaard's reflections on selfhood and temporality—focusing on specific themes found both in *The Sickness Unto Death* and in his *Upbuilding Discourses*. It then shows how Heidegger both draws on and

[1] Cf. Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference.* As already noted, this dimension of my argument is indebted to the work of Linn Tonstad, especially her critique of kenotic accounts of the self. However, one way my approach to proceeding differs from her critique is that rather than turning to a doctrine of the Trinity for developing a solution, I have instead sought to focus on the philosophical anthropology underlying kenotic accounts of the self. In this way, I am attempting to show the merits of addressing these issues through the framework of a theology of creation—bringing the implications of such a theology into dialogue with questions in phenomenology. Through this lens, I also wish to remain with the *tension* revealed in affirming a vision such as Gregory of Nyssa's, of an ever-greater transformation in God while *also* affirming *who* we are here and now—as creatures that are, nevertheless, always ever-becoming. This tension will be the focus of the current chapter.

secularizes these themes in developing his account of *authentic* selfhood, articulated according to his account of "being-toward-death." This sets the stage for exploring further dimensions of Marion's phenomenological account of the self, which he develops in direct *response* to Heidegger's articulation of authentic selfhood. The aim of this brief tracing of themes—from Kierkegaard, through Heidegger, to Marion—is to arrive at an informed comparison of Marion and Kierkegaard's method of contemplating the self and interpreting its temporal experience.

It is well documented that Heidegger's account of authentic selfhood as being-towards-death is, in part, a secularization of key themes found in Kierkegaard's thought.[2] In one of the three footnotes in *Being and Time*, which refer to Kierkegaard*,* Heidegger argues that "more is to be learned philosophically from his 'edifying' [*erbaulichen*] writings than from his theoretical work—with the exception of the treatise on the concept of *Angst*."[3] This treatise on *Angst* to which Heidegger refers is Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*. We are left with some question then as to whether *The Sickness Unto Death* had any direct influence on *Being and Time,* though many have noted uncanny similarities between the two works.[4] Dan Magurshak argues that, in referencing Kierkegaard's "edifying writings," Heidegger may have intended this to include more than Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding Discourses,* especially given that the preface of *The Sickness Unto Death* states its purpose is "for upbuilding (edification) and awakening."[5] Even if one does not accept this argument, it is the case that themes present in this work also appear in Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous, edifying writings. Rather than provide a full summary of *The Sickness Unto Death* then, I will attend to key themes relevant to our current analysis, focusing on how they emerge—albeit differently—in Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous, edifying

[2] While I cannot deal with this essay here, for a helpful overview of the various dimensions of Kierkegaard's thought which seem to have influenced Heidegger's early and later works, see Clare Carlisle, "Kierkegaard and Heidegger," *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard,* edited by John Lippitt and George Pattison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 421-439.
[3] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 407, endnote 6; [*Sein und Zeit*, 235].
[4] See, for example, Hubert. L. Dreyfus and Jane Rubin. "Appendix: Kierkegaard, Division II, and Later Heidegger." In Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I.* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 283-340; Dan Magurshak. "Despair and Everydayness: Kierkegaard's Corrective Contribution to Heidegger's Notion of Fallen Everydayness." In *International Kierkegaard Commentary Vol 19: The Sickness Unto Death.* Ed. Robert L. Perkins. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 209-237; Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology*, 84-89, 96-97, & 125-135.
[5] See Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death, "*Preface." Cited in Magurshak, "Despair and Everydayness: Kierkegaard's Corrective Contribution to Heidegger's Notion of Fallen Everydayness," 210.

writings.[6] After providing a brief summary of Heidegger's apparent inheritance of Kierkegaard's thought, I turn to how this might impact a reading of Marion's, *The Erotic Phenomenon*.

In turning to *The Erotic* Phenomenon, I focus on how this work forms an implicit critique of Heidegger's account of authentic selfhood, put forth in *Being and Time*.[7] I argue that in this respect, *The Erotic Phenomenon* goes further than any of Marion's other works in developing an account of the intersubjective constitution of the self. Attending to a comparison between this specific text and Kierkegaard's reflections on the self demonstrates the following: Kierkegaard influences the very dimension of Heidegger's thought to which Marion's account of selfhood responds. And in light of this, one might observe numerous similarities and differences in each thinker's vision of the self. Kierkegaard's reflections on selfhood, however, presuppose a theology of creation, and the discourses in which he contemplates the self's experience of temporality are also reflections on a doctrine of divine changelessness or immutability. *The Erotic Phenomenon*, on the other hand, aims at a strictly phenomenological approach to themes of selfhood and temporality. In the end, Marion's approach nevertheless arrives at—or at least, opens up to—a notion of 'the eternal,' and eventually draws some more overtly *theological* conclusions. The aim of my comparison, then, is two-fold: I will first consider the precise points at which this difference of approach results in two very different modes of contemplating the self, and of reflecting on the experience of temporality. I will then move to a consideration of theological method, examining specific pressure points at which Marion's phenomenology seems to run aground. I show how these points of potential failure in his phenomenological descriptions directly coincide with how his more overtly *theological* conclusions fail to affirm—in the way Kierkegaard's do—commitments specific to an apophatic approach.

5.1) *Kierkegaard on the Self* and *the Paradoxes Constituent of Human Existence*

[6] For this reason, I cannot address all of the significant debates surrounding Kierkegaard's construal of temporality in his non-pseudonymous works. For a summary of the topic of time and history as it pertains to Kierkegaard's thought, see Arne Grøn, "Time and History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard,* edited by John Lippitt and George Pattison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 273-291.

[7] As with the previous chapter, I here limit my analysis to *Being and Time*. This is in keeping with my aim to provide an analysis of Marion and Kierkegaard surrounding the key themes Marion takes up in *The Erotic Phenomenon.*

In his work, *From Despair to Faith: The Spirituality of Søren Kierkegaard,* Christopher Barnett argues that "Kierkegaard's anthropology is, at bottom, a theological anthropology, which situates the human self in ultimate relationship with the divine."[8] Exploring key pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous works*,* Barnett shows how Kierkegaard structures his account of the human self around a vision of the self, ever on a journey toward completion or *becoming*. In *The Sickness Unto Death*, this is depicted through diverse accounts of a fragmented self, finding its ultimate resolution or rest in God. [9] This emphasis will guide my reading of Kierkegaard in this chapter, and particularly, of *The Sickness Unto Death*—to which we will now turn. While I cannot provide a full summary of this text here, I wish to highlight key themes that will resurface in our discussion of Heidegger's account of being-toward-death—themes Heidegger seems to take over from Kierkegaard's thought and secularize.

The pseudonymous author of *The Sickness Unto Death*, Anti-Climacus, describes the *self*, or 'spirit' as "a relation that relates itself to itself." [10] The *human being*—more generally—is "a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity."[11] The spirit or self, then, is always taking up various ways of understanding or relating to itself by relating to these paradoxical tensions constituent of human existence. Importantly, Anti-Climacus does not *merely* emphasize this self-reflexive dimension of the self; the self is not a solipsistic or self-enclosed subject. We first see this according to the argument of Anti-Climacus that the self has not "established itself," but was "established by another."[12] As Merold Westphal explains it, the self is "given to itself as self-relating" in a way that nevertheless preserves and involves the self's "other-relatedness." As *self-relating*, the self is never perfectly *present* to itself but is always already receiving itself *as* self-relating *through* its relation to that which is other. [13] In other words, since first *established by* another, as Anti-

[8] Barnett, *From Despair to Faith*, 26.
[9] Ibid., see especially, 25-61.
[10] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 13. See also, David Burrell, "Kierkegaard: Language of Spirit" in his *Exercises in Religious Understanding* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 143-181. Burrell here provides an excellent analysis of how Kierkegaard utilizes the language of 'spirit,' substituting "the category of *relation* for that of *substance*" (164).
[11] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 13.
[12] Ibid., 13-14.
[13] I here draw on arguments put forth in two different works by Merold Westphal. See Westphal, "Divine Givenness and Self-Givenness in Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist*, 39-56; see especially, 45-47. Here he

Climacus goes on to claim, the self, "in relating itself to itself, relates itself to another."[14] The text will eventually make clear that this *other* who first establishes the self is God. Importantly though, we do not actually *relate* to this divine other as to some other *thing* in the world, and while *Works of Love* certainly portrays a uniquely interconnected relationship between the self and the neighbor, such a vision is not the sort of 'relation' the self has to the divine. Instead, as Edward Mooney argues, "The idea of receiving one's self depends for Kierkegaard on the idea of a divinity, a Source, conferring or bestowing selves and the grounds that nourish them."[15] Such a vision is reflected in Anti-Climacus' depiction of the self "before God." While its origin is *in* God, as self-relating, the self voyages through various forms of self-delusion and self-evasion as part of its journey unto God, until "in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it."[16]

Coming to rest in the power that established oneself is, like willing to be oneself, a difficult and self-involved task. There are many ways one might avoid facing up to oneself, and many delusions in which one might seek comfort. This is especially the case in light of the various paradoxical tensions constituent of human existence; we find these tensions depicted in Anti-Climacus' account of numerous forms of "despair" (*fortvivlelse*).[17] *Despair* is here articulated as "the misrelation in the relation of a synthesis that relates itself to itself."[18] While Part II considers such expressions of *misrelation* as sin and in contrast to faith, I will here focus on Part I—attending to the forms of despair articulated in terms of the constituents of the self *as* a synthesis. In considering Anti-Climacus' reference to 'despair,' we should not here think of what we would

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provides an account of the various, interrelated dimensions of the self's givenness. See also, Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Psychology and Unconscious Despair," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary* (Vol. 19): *The Sickness Unto Death*. Ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), 39-66; see especially, 45-46.

[14] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 13-14.

[15] Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Resolve*, 21. For his account of "self-reception" and the question of "self-choice" in Kierkegaard's thought, see 20-21. David Burrell makes a similar point, highlighting how *The Sickness Unto Death* avoids anthropomorphizing the 'relation' between God and the human being. I will return to his essay later on in the chapter. See, David B. Burrell, "Articulating Transcendence," in *Exercises in Religious Understanding* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 80-140; see, 111-12.

[16] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 14. See also, Barnett, *From Despair to Faith*, 46-61. In emphasizing this connection between "despair" and self-evasion, I follow Dan Magurshak (see footnote 62).

[17] For a brief etymology of '*fortvivlelse*,' and an analysis of the ways it is used throughout Kierkegaard's works, see Beabout, Gregory R. *Freedom and Its Misuses: Kierkegaard on Anxiety and Despair* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009), 83-93. While I cannot further engage with the rest of this work here, Beabout also offers an interpretation of *The Sickness Unto Death* that is in many ways illuminating. My account of 'the self' presented in *The Sickness Unto Death*, however, follows Westphal's interpretation.

[18] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 15.

today understand as clinical depression, but instead, of the self's tendency toward misrelating to itself as synthesis. We see one example of this in the problems that arise for the human being as "a synthesis of the infinite and the finite." As Merold Westphal explains, in speaking of the 'finite' and 'infinite,' Kierkegaard "applies the two categories simultaneously to the human self (without any intention of lessening the ontological gap between the human and divine)."[19] *The Sickness Unto Death* defines the self's despairing relation to this synthesis dialectically, as the following subtitles suggest: "*Infinitude's Despair Is to Lack Finitude*," and "*Finitude's Despair Is to Lack Infinitude*."

In the first case, the misrelation in the self which "lacks finitude" is expressed in the self's desire to "become infinite." Of itself, this desire is part of what constitutes human existence, but when such a desire *lacks* the right relation to finitude, the self "becomes fantastic," leaving behind the concrete possibilities or responsibilities of its *finite* existence. The self thus gets carried away by the infinite.[20] As Anti-Climacus explains, "The fantastic, of course, is most closely related to the imagination [*Phantasie*], but the imagination in turn is related to feeling, knowing, and willing; therefore a person can have *imaginary* feeling, knowing, and willing."[21] In this situation, the self is carried further and further away from its concrete situation, only relating to itself in "the abstract"—actively "plunging headlong into fantasy" or by simply "being carried away."[22] We might consider the example of becoming so caught up in an ideal conception of ourselves in the *abstract*, that we overlook the specific, *concrete* steps we might take to effect *real* change in relation to this ideal. I might, for example, become so engrossed with *being the kind of person* who never uses plastic straws for environmental reasons, that I fail to realize the daily smoothie I order—and drink with my non-plastic straw—is served in a plastic cup! Anti-Climacus is particularly attentive to ways the self's loss of finitude applies to a religious context. In this case, we might consider the example of one consumed by a love and desire for God *in the abstract*, all the while failing to connect this imagined love to concrete actions of love toward the neighbor. These are examples of what is meant by *losing oneself* in the infinite. Everything remains

[19] Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Psychology and Unconscious Despair," 58.
[20] While I do believe it is possible to describe Kierkegaard's account of the self as a synthesis between 'finite' and 'infinite' without delineating how he is both engaging with and critiquing the thought of Hegel, for an account of this, see Westfall, "Kierkegaard's Psychology and Unconscious Despair," 58-61.
[21] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 30. (my italics)
[22] Ibid., 32.

abstract because the self lacks a relation to the *concrete* situation one is in: "The self, then, leads a fantasized existence in abstract infinitizing or in abstract isolation, continually lacking its self, from which it only moves further and further away."[23]

The situation, however, might also be completely reversed so that a person becomes so engrossed in finite immediacy that she loses her relation to the infinite. According to Anti-Climacus, "To lack infinitude is despairing reductionism, narrowness."[24] In this way, "whereas one kind of despair plunges wildly into the infinite and loses itself, another kind of despair seems to permit itself to be tricked out of its self by 'the others.'"[25] Rather than losing oneself in abstract ideals, the sort of despair which *lacks the infinite* is evidenced by a person's losing oneself in immediate day-to-day concerns or the opinions of others. In this case, a person "forgets himself . . . does not dare to believe in himself, finds it too hazardous to be himself and far easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, a mass man."[26] Such a person gains "an increasing capacity for going along superbly in business and social life, indeed, for making a great success in the world."[27] This way of life—one lost in the finite and lacking in self-reflection—is, of course, not thought of as despair. This is because such a life is "cozy and comfortable," and one may very well go on to be "publicly acclaimed, honored, and esteemed." Lost in the concerns of a finite existence, the self forgets its relation to the *eternal* because "absorbed in all the temporal goals," one "can very well live on in temporality."[28]

We might liken such a vision of the self—lost in the finite—to an account Kierkegaard gives in one of his *Upbuilding Discourses,* entitled, "To Need God is a Human Being's Highest Perfection." Here he speaks of a type of "self-knowledge" that is "altogether vague" because it only involves "the relation between a dubious self and a dubious something else."[29] As he goes on to explain, "This something else could be changed, so that someone else became the stronger, the more handsome, the richer; and this self could be changed, so that he himself became poor,

[23] Ibid., 32.
[24] Ibid., 33.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 33-34.
[27] Ibid., 34.
[28] Ibid., 34-35.
[29] Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 313.

ugly, powerless; and this change could come at any moment."[30] Here, the mystery of the self is seen—a mystery attested to in the experience of self-reflexivity: The self fails to locate or understand its own significance due to the very nature of its existence, which, as finite and temporal, is always subject to change. Just as the self loses itself in identification with finite things, so too, the self loses itself in 'the temporal'—in all those things that are transitory, and therefore, unable to give the self any real sense of unique significance *over time*.

With this summary of the tension between the existential categories of finite and infinite in mind, and before turning to some uncanny similarities between *The Sickness Unto Death* and Heidegger's *Being and Time*, it will first be necessary to highlight one other related tension in which the self finds itself: the tension between 'possibility' and 'necessity.' As Anti-Climacus argues, "a self that has no possibility is in despair, and likewise a self that has no necessity."[31] "Just as finitude is the limiting aspect in relation to infinitude, so also necessity is the constraint in relation to possibility."[32] Here, we might imagine times we have become so caught up in future possibilities that we miss taking hold of the concrete possibilities as they present themselves. We might consider the more specific example of an art student, so lost in considering all the possibilities of becoming an artist that she cannot narrow her interests, developing her own unique style according to her *specific* set of skills. When possibility lacks necessity, "everything becomes possible." Thus, the self "flounders in possibility until exhausted but neither moves from the place where it is nor arrives anywhere" so that "more and more it becomes possible because nothing becomes actual."[33] As Anti-Climacus argues, "The mirror of possibility is no ordinary mirror; it must be used with extreme caution."[34] The reason for this is that, while the self is always *becoming*—existing *as* potentiality—it evades itself in merely abstract possibility: "Therefore, the question is how the necessity of this particular self defines it more specifically."[35] In other words, the self is always creatively relating itself to possibility *and* necessity—it must bring possibility into *concrete* contexts, or the specific place in which it might come to have an influence.

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 35.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 36-37.
[34] Ibid., 37.
[35] Ibid.

Conversely, Anti-Climacus describes dialectically a form of despair which "lacks possibility." We might initially consider the case of becoming overly-reliant on a daily routine. A routine provides something constant around which to structure my work and relationships, but if I begin to *live for* my routine, I lack a healthy relation to possibility. By maintaining a relation to possibility, I can be more open to whatever comes my way, finding hope in considering new options when I feel stuck-in-a-rut. Anti-Climacus sees this more basic understanding of the self's relation to possibility, however, as presenting a particular difficulty. Because the self's finite, temporal existence is subject to change or flux, the *possibilities* we most typically cling to cannot provide the self with anything stable or constant to which it might relate. Anti-Climacus explains: "Generally it is thought that there is a certain age that is especially rich in hope, or we say that at a certain time, at a particular moment of life, one is or was so rich in hope and possibility."[36] This, however, is not "authentic hope" since it fluctuates with the seasons—according to one's age, abilities, or potential. The continual fracturing of the self's relation to possibility leads one to either "despair of possibility" or evade the reality of future hardship—so that one becomes "completely wrapped up in *probability*."[37] In the latter case, a person avoids facing up to negative possibilities, trusting "only that this and that probably, most likely, etc. will not happen to him." However, "[i]f it does happen, it will be his downfall."[38] In contrast to despairing of possibility on the one hand, or clinging to mere probabilities that hardship will not strike on the other, Anti-Climacus sees a third option, realizable by way of one's *response* to the following declaration: "What is decisive is that with God everything is possible. This is eternally true and consequently true at every moment."[39] In delineating the implications of this statement, two points will be pertinent for getting at Division II of Heidegger's *Being and Time.*

First, what is meant by 'possibility'—considered here, in reference to God—is not any one *particular* possibility or *imagined* outcome. The point Anti-Climacus wants to make is that if one's hope is *in* God, it is invested in the *eternal* source of all possibility. Hope understood as mere wishful thinking or as the anticipation of a specific*, imagined* outcome—whether probable

[36] Ibid., 38.
[37] Ibid., 41. (My italics)
[38] Ibid., 39.
[39] Ibid., 38.

or fantastic—cannot enable a stabilizing relation to possibility throughout all of life's changing circumstances. This is because such imagined possibilities are considered according to one's finite, temporal existence and, therefore, subject to change. Investing one's hope in the *merely temporal* does not provide the self with *constancy*—or a consistent place to invest one's anticipation *over time*.[40] As various possibilities come and go with shifting life-circumstances, by faith, one might invest one's hope in no mere temporal possibility, but in a God who is love. Investing oneself in that which is "*eternally* true and consequently true at every moment"[41] enables one to maintain a hope that does not dissolve with the changes of life, but might instead, shape one's engagement with each new situation.

Second, Anti-Climacus understands *faith* to involve a relation to possibility which does not merely *evade* one's concrete situation. Hope, in the *true* sense, must not find its basis in a merely *probable* avoidance of hardship, downfall, or collapse; instead, a clear-eyed facing-up-to the real possibility of hardship attests to the fact that one's hope is not equivalent to wishful thinking. This is the case, as Anti-Climacus argues, for the one whose hope is in God. Such a person "sees and understands his downfall, humanly speaking (in what has happened to him, or in what he has ventured), but he believes."[42] Anti-Climacus is quick to follow this claim with the statement that the person who has faith "leaves it entirely to God how he is to be helped, but he believes that for God everything is possible."[43] Again, belief or faith is not trust in an imagined outcome: "to believe is indeed to lose the understanding in order to gain God."[44] We need not, however, read this as implying a mere fideism—since the account we have thus far been exploring views the very structure of our finite, temporal existence as pointing to the very orientation of our creaturely existence to God.[45] What matters here is that, by faith, the object of hope is no longer

[40] As we will further see, and as Dreyfus and Rubin explain, "Under the influence of both Kierkegaard and the philosophical tradition, Heidegger holds that the self requires some sort of *continuity*. Kierkegaard's dogmatic Christian claim that the self must achieve eternity in time becomes in Heidegger's secularized version the claim that the authentic self must achieve 'constancy'" ("Kierkegaard, Division II, and Later Heidegger," 323).
[41] Ibid. (My italics)
[42] Ibid., 39.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 38. For Christians, this need not be taken to imply that the content of faith—or specific beliefs—do not matter. But insofar as one's faith is ultimately in God, it involves trust rather than comprehension. We might also recall the introductory points related to *Fragments* in Chapter 1—concerning the way *Fragments* hints at a certain relationship at play between faith and rationality.
[45] George Pattison makes a similar point, albeit in a slightly different way. See *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 133-136.

an imagined outcome, subject to change, nor does this hope allow one to evade the *real* possibilities of one's concrete situation. Such hope thereby gives the self a relation to *the possible* that simultaneously orients one's proper relation to *the necessary*—or all those specific possibilities one faces within a finite, temporal existence. Furthermore, hope that is *in God* authentically orients one's hopeful relation to all other possibilities; by never overly attaching oneself to a single outcome, one is able to be flexible, relating to *specific* possibilities without overly *identifying* oneself with any one of them.[46]

With the above two points in mind, a final one is worth noting. While the vision just presented—of the participation of temporality in the eternal—is shaped by an explicitly Christian theological perspective, there may be *some* elements of this account that resonate with persons of various other religious and non-religious backgrounds. This is particularly the case if we read *The Sickness Unto Death* in connection with the following argument Kierkegaard makes in *Works of love*: "What is it, namely, that connects the temporal and eternity, what else but love, which for that very reason is before everything and remains after everything is gone."[47] As I will show, Heidegger's account of the self replaces the role of 'the eternal' in Kierkegaard's account of the self with his own account of 'death.' While some see this secularization of Kierkegaard's thought as a universalizing of his insights,[48] my own analysis will follow on from the argument that love, rather than the anticipation of death, is a better starting point for developing an account of authentic selfhood.[49] While the overall focus of this thesis is limited to an exploration of specific issues in Christian theology, I in no way wish this to imply there are no points of

[46] See how these points relate to specific elements of Dreyfus and Rubin's reading of Heidegger's account of authentic selfhood—which they read as a secularization of Kierkegaard's Religiousness A. Cf. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Jane Rubin, "Kierkegaard, Division II, and Later Heidegger," 283-340; see particularly, 320-329. My reading of the implications of Kierkegaard's view of faith—and hope—is here set up in contrast to their interpretation. This is the first in a series of distinctions I will make between my comparison of Heidegger and Kierkegaard and the one they put forth. Of relevance to my reading is John Lippitt's argument that while hope, "as relating oneself expectantly to the possibility of the good. . . . could be interpreted in a 'finite' or eschatological sense. . . . Kierkegaard is committed to both" (*Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self* –Love, 149). See 147-155. Also of relevance, see section 4.8 of Chapter 3.

[47] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*. Ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 6.

[48] See, for example, Dreyfus and Rubin, "Kierkegaard, Division II, and Later Heidegger," 283-340. Dreyfus and Rubin nevertheless acknowledge a certain incongruity in the account Heidegger puts forth (see 336-340).

[49] While my analysis will focus on engaging with Jean-Luc Marion on this point, for related criticisms of Heidegger's account of being-toward-death, see for example, Critchley, "Originary Inauthenticity—On Heidegger's *Sein Und Zeit*," in Critchley, Simon and Reiner Schürmann. *On Heidegger's Being and Time.* Ed. Steven Levine. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 132-151. See also Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology*, 134-135.

commonality or potential dialogue in considering such themes as authentic selfhood across different faith traditions. While I will engage with various critiques of Heidegger then, I merely wish to follow others in indicating why love, rather than death, may very well be a better starting point for such dialogue.

Finally, those familiar with *The Sickness Unto Death* will know that I have merely highlighted a few key themes of this work[50]—themes particularly relevant for the rest of this chapter's engagement with Heidegger and Marion. I will return to flesh-out some of these themes in relation to Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous works later on in the chapter. My reading, thus far, has focused on some of the paradoxical tensions constituent of our finite, temporal existence and on highlighting but a few of the diverse forms of self-evasion or despair, described according to the tensions constituent of our existence. For Anti-Climacus, facing up to these tensions will ultimately mean facing up to our *inability* to strike the perfect balance between them ourselves. This is because, while self-relating, the self did not create itself—and for this reason, its most perfect expression of freedom is discovered when the self, by faith, "rests transparently in the power that established it."[51]

With this brief sketch in mind, it is now possible to turn to what, it seems, Heidegger reformulates of this vision, as well as the consequences of such reformulation.

5.2) *"Being-Toward-Death": Heidegger's Secularizing of Kierkegaard's Thought*

We might recall, at this point, Heidegger's ontological account of the human being—or *Dasein*—in *Being and Time*: "Da-sein is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned *about* its very

[50] More specifically, I have only provided a sketch of the forms of despair considered "without regard to its being conscious or not" (SUD, 29-42). I have not touched on the forms of despair "defined by consciousness" (SUD, 42-74), nor those considered "before God" (SUD, Part II).

[51] As Barnett explains it, "since the self comes from God, it cannot properly harmonize its contrary features without reference to its origin and its end" (*From Despair to* Faith, 48). In light of this, see how he frames "the complete flowering of [human] freedom" in terms of the "journey back to God" (38): 25-61; see especially, 51. Related to this, see also, 103-108.

being."[52] As "thrown," Dasein is always already related to the world and interpreting its existence in some way, based on this relatedness. We might also recall that for Heidegger, not *essence*, but "existence determines the being of Da-sein." And for this reason, he understands the human being "as a potentiality of being, a potentiality that understands and is concerned about its own being."[53] Here we arrive at what is, perhaps, one of the most striking similarities between *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Being and Time*: While Heidegger's account focuses on the question of being, each work depicts the human as always already relating to its existence in some way—whether authentically or in-authentically—by relating to itself *as* possibility. For Heidegger, "Da-sein *is* always its possibility. It does not 'have' that possibility only as a mere attribute of something objectively present."[54]

In Division II, Heidegger further clarifies "this *potentiality-of-being* that is always *mine* is free for authenticity or inauthenticity."[55] Dasein's *authentic* potentiality-of-being is, however, most often covered over by inauthentic modes of being-in-the-world. Existing *as* care (*Sorge*), "Da-sein understands itself initially and for the most part . . . in terms of *what* it is accustomed to take care of."[56] In this way, it "already understands itself factically in definite existentiell possibilities, even if its projects arise only from the common sense of the they."[57] For Heidegger, the "they-self" (*Man-selbst*) refers to the *inauthentic* self—absorbed in *given* understandings of itself, based on cultural norms, parental expectations, or day-to-day tasks with which it concerns itself. Absorbed with such everyday concerns, *Dasein* "*flees* from itself to the they."[58] As Heidegger puts it,

> Loosing itself in the publicness of the they and its idle talk, it *fails to hear* its own self in listening to the they-self. If Da-sein is to be brought back from this lostness of failing to hear itself, and if this is to be done through itself, it must first be able to find itself, to find itself as something that has failed to hear itself and continues to do so in *listening* to the they.[59]

[52] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 10.
[53] Ibid., 214-215.
[54] Ibid., 40.
[55] Ibid., 215.
[56] Ibid., 223.
[57] Ibid., 288.
[58] Ibid., 296.
[59] Ibid., 250.

In this way, "the everyday interpretation of the self has the tendency to understand itself in terms of the 'world' taken care of."[60] But while "Entangled being-together-with-the-'world' initially taken care of" provides us with an "everyday interpretation of Da-sein," this covers over "the authentic being of Da-sein," or what Heidegger will refer to as selfhood (*Selbstheit*).[61] Heidegger's account of "everydayness," or *inauthentic* being-in-the-world, is most similar to what *The Sickness Unto Death* refers to as "finitude's despairing lack of infinitude."[62] We might recall that for Anti-Climacus, this form of despair is described as a type of self-evasion, wherein, lost in identification with others, one evades becoming oneself; in this case, the self finds it "easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, a mass man."[63]

In light of Heidegger's account of the inauthentic "they-self," one focus of Division II is to provide an account of authentic selfhood. Since part of Heidegger's project in *Being and Time* is to move away from a presupposed notion of the self as a subsisting subject, the *constancy* and *individuation* of the self must be re-established existentially; Heidegger will take this up in connection with his account of the way Dasein understands itself in terms of "temporality." *Temporality*, for Heidegger, is not equivalent to the everyday understanding of time as a linear occurring of events; instead, the human being exists *as* temporality. In other words, temporality has to do with the *way* Dasein relates to or reflects on the possibilities of its thrown existence. Even before I *intentionally* reflect on my existence, as *thrown*, I am *already* understanding it in some way. And while I may project myself onto various possibilities yet to be actualized, these possibilities are, in turn, most often realized according to the way I relate myself to possibilities "already *having-been*."[64] As *already having been,* these possibilities are most often already determined by 'the they': "Inauthentic *understanding* projects itself upon what can be taken care

[60] Ibid., 296.
[61] Ibid., 287. For Heidegger's account of care and selfhood, see §64, 292-297 [316-323]. Again, Heidegger interprets Da-sein existing *as* care (*Sorge*). In the section of *Being and Time* in which he discusses selfhood, Heidegger further considers care *as* temporality. Against this background, he will contrast inauthentic everydayness with authentic selfhood as being-toward-death.
[62] For an in-depth comparison of Kierkegaard and Heidegger on this point of similarity, see Dan Magurshak,"Despair and Everydayness: Kierkegaard's Corrective Contribution to Heidegger's Notion of Fallen Everydayness," 215-237. Magurshak argues that Kierkegaard provides a more nuanced and multifaceted account of the many *diverse* forms of self-evasion than does Heidegger's account of everydayness.
[63] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 34.
[64] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 301.

of, what can be done, what is urgent or indispensable in the business of everyday activity."[65] Accordingly, "Primordially constituted by care, Da-sein is always already ahead of itself. Existing, it has always already projected itself upon definite possibilities of its existence."[66] In this way, while existing *as* potentiality, Dasein continually evades its *ownmost* potentiality of being.

In light of this continual tendency toward inauthenticity, the self's individuation from 'the they' requires "anticipatory resoluteness," involving "*being toward* one's ownmost, eminent potentiality-of-being,"[67] which, for Heidegger, is ultimately "death." Heidegger understands *death* existentially, as "the possibility of the *im*possibility of existence."[68] Anticipation of death *individualizes* Dasein from 'the they,' bringing it face-to-face with a possibility all its *own*—the possibility of its impossibility, or of its own non-existence. *As possibility,* death is both "certain" and "indefinite." Facing death *as certain* does not involve acknowledging it as a mere fact one might evade—as something that will happen in the distant future—but instead, resolutely "[h]olding oneself in this truth," anticipating death as one's *ownmost* possibility.[69] Furthermore, *as indefinite*, death is "possible at any moment."[70] Accordingly, "[i]n *Angst,* Da-sein finds itself *faced* with the nothingness of the possible impossibility of its existence."[71] As possibility, one's own non-existence cannot be imagined or understood; it is not something that can "be actualized" like an everyday goal or task. Because never actualized or "objectively present," death always *remains possible*—as the self's ownmost, *constant possibility*.[72] Since death is the only possibility consistently bearing on all the other possibilities of one's existence, only *this* possibility enables the *self-constancy* of one's anticipation over time—thereby establishing existentially, the *constancy of the self*.[73] Rather than covering over one's ownmost potentiality of being, succumbing to the everyday interpretation of time as an endless "succession of nows," in

[65] Ibid., 310.
[66] Ibid., 291.
[67] Ibid., 299.
[68] Ibid., 283. For Heidegger's summary of being-toward-death, see especially, §46-§53.
[69] Ibid., 244-245. See also, §52 & §62. Heidegger develops his account of death as a possibility that is *certain* in connection with his account of *resoluteness* in §62.
[70] Ibid., 239.
[71] Ibid., 245.
[72] For Heidegger's account of death *as* 'possibility,' see §52; for his development of this account in connection to *anticipatory resoluteness*, see §62.
[73] See especially, §61-§66.

being-toward-death, Dasein anticipates its authentic future "*as finite*."[74] Facing up to the finitude of one's existence involves coming "toward *oneself,* existing as the possibility of a nullity not-to-be-bypassed."[75] In this way, Dasein becomes resolute, "all the more authentically 'there' for the disclosed situation in the 'Moment' [Augen*blick*]."[76]

First, self-constancy—whether maintained in hope or in anticipatory resoluteness—requires one's relation to a possibility that does not dissolve into something realized, and therefore, passing away. We might recall that for Anti-Climacus because the self's finite, temporal existence is subject to change or flux, the *possibilities* in which it typically invests itself—as mere probabilities which, even if realized, will ultimately *come to pass*—can not provide the self with a stable or constant relation to possibility *over time*. Faith that "with God everything is possible" implies the object of one's hope need not reside in a specific possibility that, once actualized, no longer exercises one's hope or anticipation. And we might say, from the standpoint of faith, that insofar as one's hope is invested in the Source of all possibility, its object is "*eternally* true and consequently true at every moment."[77] This gives the self a steadfast relation of openness to possibility *each moment* regardless of all those possibilities which come and go according to our temporal existence. In this way, the self does not invest its hope—and therefore, itself—in a mere probability, it might imagine, predict, or foresee. Instead, by faith, hope that is *in* God maintains that however unimaginable, possibility remains regardless of outcomes.[78] We might recognize some similarities here in Heidegger's vision of authentic selfhood and existential account of the attainment of self-constancy. Death provides the self with

[74] Ibid., 302-303.
[75] Ibid., 303.
[76] Ibid., 302. Heidegger understands the "Moment," "in the active sense as an ecstasy," involving Dasein's "coming-toward-itself," and taking over its "ownmost *thrown* potentiality-of-being" (Ibid., 310-311). This brief summary has focused on specific themes relevant for my consideration of Heidegger and Kierkegaard. For a more comprehensive summary of being-toward-death—including an account of "guilt" (*Schuld*) and "dread" (*Angst*) see Chapter 6 of Wolfe, Judith. *Heidegger's Eschatology,* 216-135. The elements of being-toward-death I highlight here can be contextualized within her broader account (see especially, 133).
[77] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death,* 38. (My italics) Pattison makes a similar point, arguing that the self of *The Sickness Unto Death* "does have a certain continuity. . . . It is the eternal, as the power of what is not-self in and at the basis of self, that grounds this possibility and not the autonomous will (258). See George Pattison, "Kierkegaard: The Eternal Gift of Time," in his *Eternal God/Saving Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 247-287. My engagement with this work is limited to Pattison's chapter on Kierkegaard.
[78] On this point, Dreyfus and Rubin would disagree. Cf. Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Jane Rubin. "Kierkegaard, Division II, and Later Heidegger," 320-328. For their reading of the difference between Kierkegaard and Heidegger's account of 'self-constancy,' see especially, 322. For more on the difference between Dreyfus and Rubin's reading of these themes and my own, see footnotes 46 and 85.

an ever-constant possibility—the possibility of its own non-existence. Heidegger argues that in "being-toward-death, this possibility must not be weakened, it must be understood *as possibility*, cultivated *as possibility*, and *endured as possibility* in our relation to it."[79] As with Anti-Climacus' vision of hope that is *in* God, on Heidegger's account of being-toward-death, the self maintains a constant relation to possibility. This is because, as long as one is existing, death is a possibility. Furthermore, death is not something that can *be actualized* within our finite, temporal existence; for this reason, it always *remains* possible. As the self's *authentic* and *ever-constant* possibility, death thereby enables the potential self-constancy of anticipatory resoluteness in the face of the perpetual tendency toward an inauthentic, everyday understanding of time as an endless "succession of nows."

We might also consider one reason Heidegger understands being-toward-death as freeing the self for authenticity. In facing its authentic future as finite, the self is no longer carried along by possibilities as if they were endless—thereby evading an authentic *choosing* of the concrete possibilities one faces. As he explains, "Becoming free *for* one's own death in anticipation frees one from one's lostness in chance possibilities urging themselves upon us," or from "getting over-taken" by the possibilities "of others."[80] The self thus becomes free to understand and choose the concrete, "factical possibilities," lying before its end.[81] Furthermore, the anticipatory resoluteness of being-toward-death does not "stem from 'idealistic' expectations soaring above existence and its possibilities; but arises from the sober understanding of the basic factical possibilities of Da-sein."[82] It thus, "brings one without illusions to the resoluteness of 'acting.'"[83] In other words, being-toward-death gives the self—using Anti-Climacus' terminology—its proper relation to *necessity*. We might recall that for Anti-Climacus, the self—as a synthesis between possibility and necessity—might imagine numerous possibilities for itself, but by losing itself in "abstract possibility," the self fails to take hold of the "actual." Rather than bringing "possibility back into necessity," this self "chases after possibility," failing to relate itself to the concrete, particular context within which it finds itself.[84] For Anti-Climacus, this problem also

[79] Ibid., 241.
[80] Ibid., 243-244.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., 286.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*. 35-37.

forms the reason one must not cling to false hopes, or to the mere *probability* of avoiding hardship. If hope is to avoid deception, one must come face-to-face with the real possibility of downfall. The *true* object of hope is, furthermore, whatever *remains* in-spite-of this downfall. Finally, while for Heidegger, the possibility of death orients one's authentic relationship to all other possibilities, the same might be said for Anti-Climacus' account of hope that is *in* God: In never overly attaching oneself to a single outcome, one is able to be flexible, relating to *concrete* possibilities without overly *identifying* oneself with any one of them—as in the case of Heidegger's depiction of the self, lost in 'the they' and defined by the possibilities of others.[85]

While there are many other uncanny similarities one could assess in exploring Heidegger's possible reception of Kierkegaard's thought, my focus was here limited to a few specific aspects of being-toward-death—as this will open up another avenue for getting at the thought of Jean-Luc Marion, and the concerns which shape his own account of the self. Before turning in this direction, a final point is in order which will orient the remaining analysis of this chapter.

As Judith Wolfe argues, "Heidegger's account of human existence in *Being and Time* is 'eschatological' because it envisions the possibility of authentic existence as dependent on a certain (existential) relation to one's future."[86] Her reading of Heidegger offers an implicit critique of the notion that eschatology finds its basis in a mere evasion of death, and so has no import for considerations of *authentic* human existence. Wolfe counters such a view by highlighting something like an eschatology—or eschatological implications—underlying Heidegger's phenomenological account of authenticity. She first considers Heidegger's account

[85] Cf. Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Jane Rubin. "Kierkegaard, Division II, and Later Heidegger," 283-340. My reading of this differs from that of Dreyfus and Rubin, in part, because they read the vision of faith in God articulated in *The Sickness Unto Death* as having the same implications as the acceptance of *any* "world-defining commitment." They interpret such commitment as making one vulnerable to change because lacking the flexibility to engage the diverse possibilities that arise in light of whatever concrete situation one happens to find oneself in. Heidegger is then interpreted as seeking to provide a corrective to Kierkegaard in exactly this regard. However, one of the problems of this interpretation is that it does not account for Kierkegaard's vision of the way faith transforms hope—as a mode of anticipation—influencing one's relation to all the concrete possibilities of one's finite existence. I read this as having more in common with 'anticipatory resoluteness' than Dreyfus and Rubin acknowledge. Further related to these issues, we might consider Judith Wolfe's analysis. She interprets Kierkegaard's vision of faith as "relating oneself absolutely to the absolute precisely by relating relatively to all relative things" (Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology*, 132). Wolfe then reads Heidegger as performing an "eschatological reformulation, against the horizon of Nothingness, of Kierkegaard's definition of faith" (Ibid.).

[86] Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology*, 118.

of possibility "as a permanent structural constituent of human existence."[87] Division II is then read as further deepening Heidegger's analysis through its account of authenticity as "an existential acknowledgement that possibility is always futurity, and that that future's horizon is death."[88] As Heidegger claims, "Da-sein, *as existing*, always already comes toward itself, that is, is futural in its being in general."[89] Yet, as we have seen, *authentic* "coming-toward-oneself" is ultimately revealed in "existing as the possibility of a nullity not-to-be-bypassed."[90] Wolfe reads Heidegger's account as indicating that, *as futural*, Dasein's authentic being-toward-death implies both the *desire* for fulfillment and yet, a facing up to the finitude and incompleteness of an existence, ever-unable to attain it.[91] In this way, Heidegger's project in *Being and Time* points to a vision of "the human" "as most vitally defined by the tension between ineluctable finitude and the equally persistent desire to transcend it."[92] In light of this, Wolfe argues, "If human existence teaches us that we can never attain fulfilment but also that we seek it, that we can never find our ground but also that we crave it, then the phenomenological conclusion cannot *simply* be a denial of the object."[93] Moving on from this particular point, I will highlight two ways of engaging its implications; two ways, in other words, of moving beyond Heidegger's contradictory conclusion regarding the self's *desire* to transcend finitude and the *denial* of any object or reason for such desire.[94] Jean-Luc Marion's thought will exemplify the first, and we will see the second in resourcing Kierkegaard's thought.

In Chapter 3, I attempted to show how, by pushing the discipline of phenomenology to its limits, Marion opens the discipline up to new horizons of exploration; I also attempted to show how this illumines new ways in which we might see phenomenology as a resource for theology. However,

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., 120.
[89] Ibid., 299.
[90] Ibid., 303.
[91] Ibid., 131-133. See also, 133-135. Wolfe further articulates this in connection with Heidegger's analysis of guilt and 'the call of conscience.' For this account, see 125-131.
[92] Ibid., 133.
[93] Ibid., 135.
[94] My own analysis following on from this point is informed by a consideration of points Wolfe makes in the conclusion of *Heidegger's Eschatology* (see 136-161), and also, by a recent presentation in which she considers the relation between phenomenology and theological metaphysics. See Judith Wolfe, "Eschatological Being," presented at The New Trinitarian Ontologies conference, Panel 2: "Challenges to Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," University of Cambridge, September 13-15, 2019. *YouTube* video, 1.29.32. Published by New Trinitarian Ontologies, Cambridge, September 13, 2019: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0sRGKEP_Hs.

I also wanted to highlight points at which Marion's phenomenological account of selfhood overlooks or creates problems for a theological one; this became evident according to the precise way in which his phenomenological and theological accounts of selfhood overlap in a mutually reinforcing way. The analysis that follows will move down this same path of argumentation, now focusing not on Marion's phenomenology of givenness, but singularly on a work that extends his account of the self: *The Erotic Phenomenon*. As I have shown, Marion does not wish to conflate disciplines of theology and phenomenology. At the same time, his more recent work shows how we might envision a more productive relationship between theology and phenomenology. Pushing his thought in the direction of a more productive dialogue, I will argue that Marion may, at times, fail to recognize the *theological* significance of the precise points at which phenomenology has nothing more to say. In what follows, I will seek to show how some of the problematic dimensions of Marion's account—points at which his phenomenological approach runs aground—coincide with points at which Kierkegaard's reflections on the self might offer a corrective. The result of the analysis, then, will be to show how a phenomenological account of the self opens on to fundamental questions that are, by their very nature, difficult or impossible to address through the method of phenomenology alone—uncovering surprising ways in which a theological metaphysics reveals its significance afresh.

5.3) *Beyond Heidegger: The Temporal and the Eternal*

In his introduction to *The Erotic Phenomenon/Le phénomène érotique: Six meditations* (2003), Marion claims: "Theology knows what love is all about," but also that "it knows it too well."[95] His concern is that while theology imposes a vision of love offered by revelation, the phenomenality of love may remain unrecognized and overlooked without taking time to describe the *way* this love is felt and expressed, decided upon, and lived. As we have already seen, Marion's work oftentimes shows that phenomenology, as a discipline, has much to offer theology. Questions remain, however, concerning the various *ways* such an interdisciplinary relationship is best put to work; this will be one of the underlying concerns of the analysis to follow. We already began exploring *The Erotic Phenomenon* in Chapter 2—based on the issues

[95] Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 1.

it raises for a theology of love. I here turn more specifically to one of the underlying aims of *The Erotic Phenomenon*, which is to offer a phenomenological account of the self, able to render a response—or implicit critique—of Heidegger's account of authentic selfhood, put forth in *Being and Time*. Focusing on this dimension of Marion's thought will further an understanding of the concerns underlying his account of selfhood—thus building on the portrait I began to assemble in Chapter 3.

In turning to how Marion's vision of the self responds to Heidegger's, we might first review some key tenants of Heidegger's account of being-toward-death, as he himself sets them forth in the following formulation:

> What is characteristic about authentic, existentially projected being-toward-death can be summarized as follows: *Anticipation reveals to Da-sein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility to be itself, primarily unsupported by concern taking care of things, but to be itself in passionate anxious freedom toward death which is free of the illusions of the they, factical, and certain of itself.*[96]

Again, because Heidegger deconstructs an understanding of human *being* in terms of essence—or of the self as a subsisting subject—he must establish the *constancy* of the self existentially. In other words, since the self is not some sort of "objective presence," Heidegger seeks to address what it is that gives the self a sense of individuation and self-constancy over time. While *inauthentic* Dasein understands itself in terms of its pre-given relatedness to the world, in being-toward-death, "[r]esoluteness brings Da-sein back to its ownmost potentiality-of-being-a-self."[97] In facing up to the finitude of its existence, Dasein "comes toward itself," no longer projecting itself onto inauthentic possibilities already determined by 'the they.' Instead, Dasein chooses or engages with the various possibilities of its existence—now *authentically* chosen because decided upon in the light of one's ownmost possibility: the possibility of no longer existing.

In *Being Given*, Marion interprets this point made by Heidegger as a re-assertion of the autarchy of the self, still mirroring the modern subject. He takes particular issue with the fact that for Heidegger, the self is individuated through the self-constancy of anticipatory resoluteness, in

[96] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 245.
[97] Ibid., 283.

which case, Dasein "relates itself to nothing other than itself."[98] Marion explains, "since in 'Being-towards-death, Dasein comports itself *towards itself* as a distinctive potentiality-for-being,' it must be concluded that it relates itself to nothing other than itself, therefore to nothing of beings, to the nothing/nothingness."[99] Marion admits that in projecting itself upon its own nullity, the self may very well take up a new *way* of existing, thus taking hold of its *own* existence *as* possibility. He goes on to argue, however, that in the anticipatory resoluteness of being-toward-death, the self becomes *resolute* about nothing other than its own existence.[100] We see this especially in light of Heidegger's argument that since no one else can face *my own* death, it remains the self's ownmost "non-relational" possibility; the anticipation of death, therefore, individuates Dasein from 'the they.'[101] Marion's concern is that, while in Division I, Dasein's existing *as* care involves its thrown relatedness to the world, in Division II, authentic selfhood is realized by the self extricating itself from this very relatedness, projecting itself upon its ownmost "non-relational possibility." Accordingly, as Marion argues, "selfhood is deployed in the self-constancy of the self," and therefore, "care leads back to a sort of self-identity."[102] In this way, while "the ecstasy of care . . . radicalizes the destruction of the transcendental 'subject' (Descartes, Kant, and Husserl)" in the end, the care of *authentic selfhood* "mimics the subject by reestablishing an autarchy of Dasein to the point that its individuated selfhood is stabilized in auto-positing itself."[103]

In light of this critique, one might read *The Erotic Phenomenon* as forming a more concerted *response* or counter-proposal to Heidegger's vision of authentic selfhood. As we have seen, for Marion—in opposition to Heidegger—the self is individuated according to "the flesh"—receiving the experience of its individuation along with the receiving of various impressions, sensations, and all that comes to affect the self in some way (see Chapter 4, 4.3). In this context, Marion further develops his account of *the flesh*, considering it in connection with a

[98] Marion, *Being Given*, 259.
[99] Ibid.
[100] "Dasein therefore exists insofar as itself, and its resolution resolves nothing because there is nothing it has to resolve, since for Dasein it was only a matter of risking itself in its own Being. Selfhood has to do with it alone" (Ibid., 260).
[101] Ibid., 243. For this argument in context, see §53.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.

phenomenological account of intersubjectivity.[104] We might read the entire work then, as setting out to demonstrate how the true *individuation* or unique *ipseity* of the self is—counter to Heidegger's view—given in and through one's decision/response to love. I will here focus on the *way* Marion formulates this vision in direct response to Heidegger's account of authentic selfhood, and in turn, what this reveals for a comparison of Marion and Kierkegaard's thought.

While the entirety of *The Erotic Phenomenon* arrives at its arguments by way of phenomenological description—utilizing no footnotes or direct references—it is clear from the beginning, that Marion is especially concerned with highlighting the insufficiency of *either* Cartesian *or* later Heideggerian presuppositions concerning the self. He begins by reflecting on questions concerning the *certainty* of the self, arriving at the following point: Even if I know *that* I exist, this is not enough to keep me from continuing to *doubt myself* in an altogether different way; I doubt my abilities and talents, but most of all, I doubt whether I am able to take hold of what matters in life. The self, therefore, continues to doubt its own meaning or significance. Marion describes the experience of finding one's significance in attaining various goals or levels of success, only to realize the elusive and fading nature of all such endeavors toward attaining significance. This reveals how establishing the *certainty* of one's existence—and certainty in general—neither speaks to a more fundamental doubt nor answers a more elemental and pressing question: "What's the use?" This question better approaches the self by speaking to its *real* concern. As Marion argues, "I can very certainly recognize 'I think, therefore I am'—only immediately to annul this certainty by asking myself, 'What's the use?' The certainty of my

[104] We see this in Marion's description of the "crossed-flesh." While his account reflects on the context of a committed relationship between lovers, he intends his phenomenological account to indicate how *all* love is univocally revealed. In considering the *crossed-flesh,* for example, he reflects not only on the sexual encounter between lovers but also, on the shared speech between friends. Rather than summarizing this material, I will focus on the underlying aim of the work and on the way it forms a response to Heidegger's account of authentic selfhood—focusing specifically on the question of self-constancy and anticipatory resoluteness. Again, for an excellent summary and critique of *The Erotic Phenomenon*, see Gschwandtner, "Love and Violence." Her criticism focuses on how stress on 'the lover's soul initiative' in the will, or decision, to love is extremely problematic. Furthermore, I should note that *The Erotic Phenomenon* is easily misinterpreted if one overlooks the precise way in which the method of phenomenological reduction functions throughout the text. While I cannot here give much attention to this important dimension of the work, for a helpful explanation of this, see Romano, Claude. "Love in Its Concept: Jean-Luc Marion's *The Erotic Phenomenon*," in *Counter-Experiences*, 319-335. Finally, I am here unable to focus on some of the highly problematic aspects of this text, which should nevertheless not go ignored. For an account of the heteronormative and sexist dimensions of *The Erotic Phenomenon*, which also call into question aspects of Marion's phenomenological account as it pertains to this text, see J. Leavitt Pearl, "Jean-Luc Marion: The Reinscription of Heteronormativity into Postmodern Theology," *Theology & Sexuality* 23, no. 1-2 (July 2017), 144-63.

existence is never enough to make it just, or good, or beautiful, or desirable—in short, it is never enough to assure it."[105] In other words, assurance against the vanity or meaninglessness of my existence concerns me more intimately than any sort of Cartesian certainty *that* I exist.[106]

Furthermore, Marion will argue that any certainty of the self is unable to reach the *true* self because "I am not according to the measure of my actuality, but rather of my possibility."[107] Like Kierkegaard and Heidegger, Marion also construes human existence as defined by possibility, and describes the self's *becoming* according to the *way* the self relates *to* possibility:

> [I]f I had to remain in the actual state in which I am for a long time, I would of course be what I am, but it would be right to consider me as 'dead'; in order to be the one that I am, it is instead necessary for me to open a possibility to become other than I am, to postpone myself into the future, *not* to persist in my present state of being, but to alter myself into another state of being; in short, in order to be the one that I am (and not an object or a being of the world), I must be a possibility, and thus as the possibility of being *otherwise.*[108]

Distinct from Heidegger's view, however, Marion will argue that the self cannot attain assurance that its existence (as possibility) is not in vain by relating itself to just *any* possibility in general—as in the case of being-toward-death, wherein what matters is merely that one authentically takes hold of various possibilities, *now realized as one's own*. Instead, the self only attains assurance against vanity in relation to one, *specific* possibility: "the possibility that someone loves me or could love me."[109] And nothing less than love provides the assurance the self seeks most deeply. As Claude Romano explains, Marion's prioritizing of love *over* being implies "only love *gives a meaning* to being, which otherwise sinks into insignificance and into complete vanity."[110]

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[105] Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 22.
[106] The above summary focuses especially on §1 & §2 (11-19).
[107] Ibid., 20.
[108] Ibid. Later on in the text, Marion further argues, "for an *ego,* being does not consist merely in prolonging its actuality, but first in remaining open to and by a possibility, not in persisting in acquired presence, but in projecting itself into the unforeseeable future" (Ibid., 49). This is almost certainly a reference to Heidegger's being-toward-death as Marion understands it. However, that he here references the "ego" demonstrates his belief that Heidegger's account of authentic selfhood reasserts a vision of an autarchic subject. In other words, this account of being has yet to transform itself into an account of how the self attains its *true* individuation or ipseity.
[109] Ibid., 21. See §3.
[110] Romano, "Love in Its Concept," 333.

For this reason, Marion sees the question, "What's the use?" as leading to another question, ultimately underlying the first: "Does anyone out there love me?" Only love assures the self in the face of vanity—a love that can only come "from elsewhere." Marion considers the contradictions the self faces in attempting to love itself, exploring why such assurance of love can only come from somewhere *besides* the insular self. While the self may try to assure itself, the very fact that it continues to need such assurance attests to the fact that the self, *as finite,* "cannot become an other than itself, in order to give itself an assurance that responds to the question 'Does anyone out there love me?'"[111] Furthermore, "If I had, strangely, to lay claim to loving myself, I would thus have to assure myself by myself of an authority who surpasses, by far, my own expectation and my own lack, so as not only to give me assurance, but above all to reassure that very assurance."[112] In other words, since it is the assurance of love that I seek, only a love given from beyond myself, beyond my finite self-assurance will suffice:

> I proclaim my self-love precisely because I cannot accomplish it alone. I claim it loudly precisely in order to hide from myself that I have not attained it. In proclaiming that I love myself infinitely, I prove that I do not love myself infinitely, I attest to the gap between the love that I ask for and my incapacity to obtain it.[113]

This point is almost certainly made in subtle reference to *Being and Time,* and Heidegger's account of the inauthentic self: "The they-self keeps on saying I most loudly and frequently because at bottom it is not authentically itself and evades its authentic potentiality-of-being."[114] However, for Marion, it is not in *being toward* one's ownmost potentiality of being—in being-toward-death—that we locate the self's irreplaceable individuation or *ipseity*. As we will see, such individuation is instead, only realized in and through love. At this point, Marion is attempting to show, beyond the certainty of the self (Descartes), or its authentic being-toward-death (Heidegger), that only love can assure the self of its meaning or significance, thereby responding to its *ownmost* concern. In this way, the *desire* for assurance against the vanity of one's existence points beyond the solipsistic or autarchic self-relation—as such assurance can only be given *from elsewhere*.

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[111] Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 45.
[112] Ibid., 46.
[113] Ibid., 54.
[114] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 54. See also, the rest of §64 in *Being and Time*. In reading Marion's description alongside the entirety of §64, the likelihood that Marion is intentionally echoing Heidegger here becomes even clearer.

That "I am only assured of myself beginning from elsewhere," for Marion, attests to the following: "I am neither the principle, nor at the origin, of myself."[115] This begins to sound very much like Anti-Climacus' account of the self's inability to *become itself* through the insularity of the self-relation. Again, because the self did not *establish itself*, for Anti-Climacus, becoming oneself involves the self's resting in the power that established this very self. For both Marion and Kierkegaard, the self is not its own origin, but is *given* to itself; likewise, the self does not *become* itself on its own or in isolation.

In this way, the question, "Does anyone out there love me?" reveals the insufficiency of the insular self to provide *itself* with the assurance of a love that could only come *from elsewhere*. However, while the question of whether or not *I am loved* is all but natural, Marion sees it as insufficient for the initiation of love; this is because the demand *for* love cannot initiate a love *directed to* the other.[116] This then leads one from the question, "Does anyone out there love me?" to a third and final question: "Can I love first?" As already explained in Chapter 2, Marion sees all the various phenomena of love—including dimensions of both ἔρως and ἀγάπη—as issuing from this question or *decision* to love first and unconditionally. What matters for our current analysis is the way Marion develops an account of intersubjectivity in connection with this decision to love—and in direct response to Heidegger's account of authentic selfhood.

We see this especially in section §37 of *The Erotic Phenomenon*, entitled, "The Ultimate Anticipatory Resolution." Here Marion makes the following argument: Being-toward-death cannot speak to the authenticity or uniqueness of the self—it cannot give the self its true ipseity. While Marion admits that "being toward death (the possibility of impossibility) does open my being to me as possibility," he contests "that this possibility still depends on my free resolution."[117] As we will see, for Marion, any account of ipseity must involve the free resolution of the will. In being-toward-death however, "I agree and acquiesce to what I will not in any way be able to avoid—death. Without a doubt, I ratify my possible being by resolving myself to the

[115] Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 42.
[116] See Romano's further analysis of this point in "Love in its Concept," 325.
[117] Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 192.

possibility of my impossibility, but I do not determine this (im)possibility and I decide nothing about it."[118] While in being-toward-death, I may adopt "a change of style, a freer way to approach possible death" Marion argues, "this anticipation changes nothing, neither my death nor my ipseity, nor my future."[119] The point here is that death is not something *I choose*; it is something *everyone* faces, and one's attitude toward it—whether authentic or inauthentic—changes nothing *in the end*. Neither my mere existing *as* possibility nor my authentic taking hold of various possibilities *as my own* can stave off the threat of nihilism if these possibilities I take hold of do not *mean* something to me. And as we have seen, one cannot secure assurance of one's sense of mattering *on one's own*. For these reasons, of itself, being-toward-death gives the self nothing to *meaningfully resolve*, nothing that would define this self in a truly unique way, assuring it that its existence is not in vain.

For Marion, it is instead through the *constancy* of the *repeated* decision to love that one gains true anticipatory resoluteness. He defines "the lover" (*l'amant*) as one who, in deciding to love advances without the assurance of reciprocity, and thus anticipates loving in the future.[120] No one begins loving another with the plan that this love will end or stop at a certain point, and further, I can continue loving another person even after she dies. For this reason, when two lovers anticipate the future resolve of their love, "anticipation clearly anticipates possibility, but a possibility that no longer plays within the limits of being, because it transgresses the limits of death."[121] In this way, contrary to being-toward-death, which merely opens the possibility of *being*—realized in facing up to the counter-possibility of no longer existing—in the continued decision to love, "anticipatory resolution opens a measureless possibility—a possibility that being, and therefore death, never limits."[122] Marion argues,

> Not only is love right to desire eternity, but its meaning is already found there. Thus does the lover attain a real anticipation, one that is free and truly decided—he no longer anticipates within the possibility of (the) impossibility (of the future), but in the impossibility of its impossibility. The lover, from the beginning of his advance, anticipates

[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid., 193. For his phenomenological account of "the oath," see §21.
[121] Ibid., 193.
[122] Ibid. This argument will end up furthering Marion's critique of Heidegger in *Being Given*, since the possibility to love is not a "non-relational possibility" and, as he will argue, it certainly has a bearing on more than *my own* existence.

eternity.[123]

This opens onto a shift in one's experience of temporality. In referencing the 'eternal,' Marion does not have in mind the everyday notion of time—what Heidegger would refer to as a mere *succession of nows*. Instead, as in the case of being-toward-death, love transforms "the instant."[124] This is because the lover loves in this very instant *as if* it were the last—as if she "no longer had any other [instant] in which to love, ever."[125] The lovers must *repeat* the decision to love because the failure to love remains *possible at any moment*. They must choose to love "each instant as for eternity."[126] In this way, "The lovers do not promise one another eternity, they provoke it and give it and give it to one another starting now."[127] As one progresses through Marion's phenomenological account, it becomes clear that even if one momentarily fails at or stops loving another, this cannot negate the significance of the moments in which one *does* love; this is because anytime or "instant" one loves, she *wills eternity in time*. In this way, she does not merely become resolute in relation to *the possibility of her own being*, but in relation to that which *gives* her being eternal significance: "Love willed eternity in time, and from the first instant; and it obtains it here, because it anticipates it and provokes it."[128]

We here reach what Marion sees as the paradox of the self—a paradox Heidegger's account of authentic selfhood overlooks. We already saw how, for Marion, any account of ipseity must involve the free resolution of the will; such an account must also demonstrate paradoxically the self's *givenness*. Marion explains, "I am accomplished as lover, because I am able (and this depends on me) to love at each instant as for eternity."[129] While this seems to be Marion's account

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[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid., 208-209. This summary brings together themes from sections §37 & §40.
[125] Ibid. Marion's reference to the 'instant' [*instant*] here functions in a way that carries resonances with the way Heidegger understands the 'Moment' [*Augenblick*]. Again, Heidegger understands the Moment "in the active sense as an ecstasy" involving Dasein's "coming-toward-itself" and taking over its "ownmost *thrown* potentiality-of-being" (Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 310-311) [337-339]. For an account of how Heidegger adopts this from Kierkegaard's existential interpretation of the 'moment' [*øjeblik*], see Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology*, 84-89. Wolfe focuses on *The Concept of Anxiety*, but this theme functions in various ways in Kierkegaard's edifying works as well.
[126] Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 209.
[127] Ibid., 209.
[128] Ibid; see also, 206-212. As Marion argues, "It is a matter of anticipating the very actuality of this possibility: in effect, I love at each instant (possibility) as if this instant were to prove itself to be the final instance for making love (actuality)" (Ibid., 208). We are here reminded of Kierkegaard's discussion of possibility and necessity in *The Sickness Unto Death*, summarized above.
[129] Ibid.

of how the self attains *self-constancy*—through its resolve over the *repeated* decision to love—we must note how such a vision relates to his overall articulation of the givenness of the self.
To formulate his vision of intersubjectivity against Heidegger's autarchic self, Marion will need to show how such ipseity is also, paradoxically, given *from elsewhere*. In moving toward such a vision, Marion first explains, "the anticipatory resolution would have no importance if it did not allow me, in principle and in the end, to accede to my ipseity."[130] He then goes on to delineate how the self cannot attain its true ipseity from what it thinks—others might have similar thoughts as mine, and my thoughts are not always even subject to my will. Furthermore, the ipseity of self does not reside in its being, as this being, Marion claims, "remains the being of all beings."[131] And contrary to Heidegger, even if, in being-toward-death, I take hold of my existence *as* possibility, this still does not individuate me, since others could very well take on a similar mode of authentic existence. Counter to all this, Marion asserts the following: "I know perfectly well what of me can never pass to another individual and remain indissolubly mine, more inward to me than myself: all those that I have loved as a lover."[132] Accordingly, the lover only becomes *who* she is "by being altered, and is only altered by the other," and this other is, therefore, "the ultimate guardian" of the self's "proper ipseity."[133]

In this way, the constancy of the repeated decision to love is not merely a *self*-constancy, but a *continual* self-donation or abandon through which the self paradoxically receives its genuine uniqueness—from the other. As it is here made evident, Marion redefines ipseity as *gift* from elsewhere. This section of *The Erotic Phenomenon* then, culminates in the following claim: "Who am I? To this question, being has nothing to respond, nor does the being in me. Because I am insofar as I love and someone loves me, only others will be able to answer."[134] In this way, Marion wants to indicate that I *experience* my individuation as *given* to me in my flesh—as I am altered or affected by the other. And further, I realize my ultimate uniqueness or ipseity through *willing* to love *particular* others, and according to the *way* these others, in turn, speak to me of who I am; my very ipseity "without the other, remains inaccessible to me."[135] Problems arise here in that

[130] Ibid., 193.
[131] Ibid., 194.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid., 195 [325-326].
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

Marion is not merely speaking of the *experience* or phenomenon of individuation, but of *who* the self truly is in its uniqueness. Are we really to assert that our *being* has nothing to say in this regard? The danger we run up against is one of overlooking all the various dimensions not only of our lived experience but also of our *bodily* existence, which it seems should *also* speak to *who* we are in some way.[136] In the end, just as it is only the other who makes me a lover, "[l]oving oneself henceforward signifies that insofar as I discover myself to be a lover, and thus lovable, I will be able to end up by *loving even myself*."[137] And this self-love, as with my uniqueness, has nothing to do with my own reflection or my created contingency, but only with the way the *other* makes me and assures me of myself as a lover. Before returning to this point, I must highlight two final aspects of Marion's account, relevant for a comparison of Marion and Kierkegaard's differing ways of contemplating the self.

First, as we have seen, Marion eventually arrives at a consideration of 'the eternal' by way of a phenomenological approach. Through the mutual decision between persons to give of themselves in love—the lovers individuate one another, witnessing to each other's love, and therefore, to each other's unique *ipseity.* Again, through this *repeated* decision to love, the lovers anticipate the eternal, or will the eternal in time. However, in the end, the finitude of their existence points to their *finite* ability—and eventual inability—to witness to each other's love; this leads to the point that *ultimately*, there can be no third and final witness to their love, but God, who is the *eternal* witness to who they are as lovers. We might read this as an indication that, in the final instance, love points in the direction of faith and is fed by it. We see an indication of this in that, even from the beginning, to love, I must *believe* or presuppose *that I am loved*, even as I, nevertheless, choose to love *without the certainty of a return.*[138] Again, this means that, while the

[136] This is a common critique of *The Erotic Phenomenon* and concern about Marion's work more generally, often noted in secondary literature. For differing analyses which, nevertheless, speak to this concern in some way, see, for example, Falque, "*Lavaratus pro Deo*," 181-199; Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror, 253-317; Romano, "Love in its Concept," 319-335. While I have attempted to show how Marion's phenomenology of givenness, if appropriated, need not *necessarily* overlook ontological concerns or the significance of the body (see especially, Chapter 4, footnote 59), *The Erotic Phenomenon* is, perhaps, the most problematic of his works in this respect.
[137] Ibid., 213; see §41.
[138] Compare, for example, Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 86-89 and Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* 219. As Claude Romano highlights, this dimension of Marion's argument—that love must proceed by presupposing love in others—is indeed one view Marion and Kierkegaard share. See Claude Romano, "Love in Its Concept," 323-324. In regards to how to read the opening up of Marion's phenomenological account onto more explicitly theological claims toward the end of *The Erotic Phenomenon*, I here give but one reading. For an account of the different ways one might read this final invocation of God toward the end of his phenomenological account of love, see Robyn Horner,

full realization of love requires *my* anticipatory resoluteness, it ultimately *depends on* a love given *from elsewhere.*

Finally, as already pointed out in Chapter 2, not until the conclusion of *The Erotic Phenomenon*, is it revealed that the lover's decision to love was always already enabled by a love that had gone before—a love given before one was ever able to recognize it. The *realization* of this, however, is made paradoxically, *only after* I have succeeded in *becoming* a lover through *my own* repeated decision to love. This is in keeping with Marion's argument that "[l]ove is defined as it is deployed" and is thus, only ever realized "in one way": according to self-donation.[139] And for this reason, we are told, "God loves in the same way as we do," only "infinitely better than do we."[140]

With this overview now in mind, it becomes clear that hints of a retrieval of Kierkegaard's thought are evident at key points throughout *The Erotic Phenomenon*; this is especially the case with Marion's reflections on the self's relation to possibility, and the desire of the self, in spite of its temporal, finite existence, to relate itself—in anticipation—to something of eternal significance. Again, we might recall Kierkegaard's claim: "What is it namely, that connects the temporal and eternity, what else but love."[141] The similarities between these two thinkers make the differences in the *way* each arrives at a vision of selfhood all the more illuminating. One methodological difference is that Marion develops his account of the self in *response* to Heidegger; likewise, his consideration of temporality arrives at a notion of the 'eternal' by way of a strictly phenomenological approach. Kierkegaard's reflections on the self, especially in the *Upbuilding Discourses*, follow on from contemplating a theology of creation. Similarly, he reflects on the self's temporal experience in the context of affirming the eternity of God and a doctrine of divine immutability; against this background, he moves to consider and interpret various dimensions of lived human experience. A comparison of these two approaches then—where they meet and where they differ—will focus on the implications of each, both for a *theological* vision of selfhood and

"The Weight of Love," in *Counter-Experiences*, 235-251; see particularly, 245-246. Horner's essay also provides a reading of the various phenomenological issues with which Marion engages—especially concerning how and whether love informs a type of *knowledge* of the other. See also her criticism of Marion's emphasis on the *will* to love (125), particularly as it relates to the 'individualization of the other' (see also, Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 145).

[139] Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 217.

[140] Ibid., 222. For these arguments, see §42.

[141] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 6.

for a doctrine of God. The upshot of the analysis is that it will provide a way to better get at questions concerning the relationship between theology and phenomenology.

I have already demonstrated the problematic elements of Marion's account of love as kenotic self-abandon (see Chapter 3). Keeping this criticism in mind, I will now consider an underlying difference in Marion and Kierkegaard's account of the givenness of the self, a discussion I began in Chapter 4, and continue here with a focus on *The Sickness Unto Death* and *The Erotic Phenomenon.* I will then turn to a more explicit consideration of theological method, focusing especially on Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding Discourses* to demonstrate how the starting point of a theology of creation inspires a different set of implications, both for reflecting on the human self and on the eternity of God. This will allow us to get at how Kierkegaard's theological anthropology might offer a corrective to the one implied by *The Erotic Phenomenon.* Toward that end, I will highlight precise ways in which Kierkegaard's reflections on the self are not only more conducive for relating to the concerns of a theology of creation but also—perhaps ironically, given Marion's own emphases—to the doctrinal concerns of an apophatic approach to God.

5.4) *The 'Self' of The Erotic Phenomenon vs. The Sickness Unto Death*

Throughout *The Erotic Phenomenon*, and following the emphases of his other works, Marion continually stresses the role of self-abandon and the self's paradoxical reception in and through its donation. Through this emphasis, he attempts to respond to the various tensions and contradictions that arise with the *experience* of self-reflexivity. We see this, for example, in his analysis of the contradictions involved in the question of ipseity. That I cannot *locate* my true sense of unique identity by reflecting on myself, for Marion, leads to a proposed *reversal* of the self's attention and love outward, toward the other. Only *in this way* does the self realize its true ipseity—as someone *other than* me affirms my unique individuation and assures me that my existence is not in vain. In his way too, Marion's account of intersubjectivity is put forth as a *response to* or pathway *out of* the tensions involved in the self's inability to grasp at or locate its un-substitutable uniqueness.

With Kierkegaard's account of selfhood, we might note a real difference of aim. Again, as Westphal argues, for Kierkegaard, "the self is given to itself as other-relating, but not as if its self-relating and its other-relating were two atomic realities externally juxtaposed."[142] He further explains, "the other is the middle term between the self and itself. It is never *merely* present to itself, just as, in its incompleteness, it is never *wholly* present to itself."[143] While Westphal denies Kierkegaard's account implies a solispsistic or autarchic vision of the self as a self-enclosed subject, he also argues it would be a mistake to understand Kierkegaard's vision of "the way in which the self is given to itself as culminating simply in the claim that subjectivity is always intersubjectivity."[144] This is because "the self is given to itself as a task."[145] Such a task involves cultivating attentive awareness to oneself, so that a mere prescriptive abandoning of oneself to the other cannot capture the nuances and complexities involved in the self's becoming. We might say that even in the very realization that we are never *present* to ourselves, we are nevertheless becoming aware of ourselves as in the mode of contemplating a mystery, thereby relating to ourselves in ways so mysteriously complex that all this remains irreducible to any strict model of intersubjective constitution. In the end, we might affirm that the way we relate to others factors into the way we relate to ourselves and then add that the reverse is also true (this was already seen in our consideration of *Works of Love* in Chapter 2).[146]

A key similarity between Marion and Kierkegaard's accounts, then, involves what *The Sickness Unto Death* refers to as "the self's inability to arrive at or be in equilibrium and rest by itself."[147] On this account, however, such inability to be at equilibrium by oneself is an indication of the self's createdness, and the reflections that follow, flow out of this primary concern. Theologically, Marion would clearly not deny such a notion. However, unlike Kierkegaard, he develops his vision of the self's givenness in *direct response* to Heidegger's account of anticipatory resoluteness; he aims to develop an account of the intersubjective constitution of the self, set *in contrast* to what he

[142] Westphal, "Divine Givenness and Self-Givenness in Kierkegaard," 47.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] See also, John Lippitt's exploration of this theme in *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love.* While I cannot further engage this essay here, for more on the "self-relating" dimension of Kierkegaard's account of the self and its significance for current debates in phenomenology, see Arne Grøn, "Self-Givenness and Self-Understanding: Kierkegaard and the Question of Phenomenology," in *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist*, 79-97.
[147] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death,* 14.

sees as Heidegger's autarchic vision of selfhood. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, is not actually attempting to develop an *account* of the self or respond to the problem of the autarchic subject; he is not seeking to *establish* an argument for the self's individuation or *locate* its uniqueness. Instead, Kierkegaard assumes the self's uniqueness as an implication of its very *createdness*—an assumption which does not, however, mean this uniqueness is reducible to a set of static characteristics, disconnected from the perpetual task of *becoming* oneself. Furthermore, while Marion is continually seeking to demonstrate the self's inability to establish itself, Kierkegaard's reflections simply begin with this as the underlying premise and move on to consider what this says about the self's orientation to the one who established the self as its Source.

For these reasons, Kierkegaard's reflections attend to describing the numerous and diverse ways our experience, might nevertheless point *beyond experience* to the power that created and sustains the self. For Marion, on the other hand, it is only through the experience of a particular phenomenon—only through the *one-way,* univocal expression of love—that the self comes to realize its unique ipseity. Only through one's unilateral self-donation does one finally realize she herself is also loved. The *realization* that *I am loved* cannot occur in the process of contemplating the self, and it never arrives as a moment of total surprise, but only ever according to *one way*—by first loving the other. We cannot chalk this difference up to one of mere focus or starting point. Instead, we might consider the *way* this difference is articulated and felt, precisely within the context of reflecting on a spiritual formation.

What, on Marion's account, for example, is to keep the self from falling into one of the forms of self-evasion Anti-Climacus describes? It could be possible, in other words, to read some aspects of Marion's description of "the lover" in *The Erotic Phenomenon* in terms of one of Anti-Climacus' forms of despair. Again, due to the various paradoxical tensions that constitute human existence, despair may take on many diverse forms—and we may or may not be conscious of it. Nevertheless, the underlying "formula for all despair," according to Anti-Climacus, is "to will to be rid of oneself."[148] And as we have already seen, this can take the form of evading oneself by

[148] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 20. While Anti-Climacus also describes the situation in which one may despairingly "will to be oneself," he claims this boils down to the following: "The self that he despairingly wants to be is a self that he is not" (Ibid., 20).

losing oneself in the *concerns of* or even *care for* others. Importantly, we might note that when one's *care for* another becomes a form of self-evasion—and therefore, a *using* of the other to evade oneself—this care is often not coupled with an ability to attend to the other in the right sort of way. Here, we might think of a parent who, unable to face her own lost possibilities, invests her own sense of self-worth in her child's accomplishments. Or we might consider a caregiver who only feels loved or significant on account of caregiving; for this reason, she may overlook the importance of setting healthy boundaries and expectations, not only for her own sake but also for the sake of her clients. In either case, a failure to attend to oneself—a refusal to become self-reflective—directly influences the character of one's love, negatively impacting the other.[149] Kierkegaard grapples with the diverse forms such self-evasion can take due to the many tensions constituent of our finite, temporal existence. By contrast, in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, Marion attempts a linear, fail-proof path able to cut through these tensions to a univocal account of love, a path which also, as we have seen, accounts for the intersubjective constitution of the self. We might, however, wonder if the tensions Kierkegaard so aptly describes do more to witness to an irresolvable mystery we run up against in contemplating the self—a mystery not so easily elucidated by way of a phenomenological account, but one of which a theology of creation already speaks.

5.5) *The Problem of Ipseity: Theology, Phenomenology, and the Question of Meaning*

For Marion, the meaning and unique ipseity of the self is only ever realized through self-abandoning love toward another, and according to his specific account of intersubjective self-constitution. Again, in responding to the question, "Who am I?" Marion claims: "To this question, being has nothing to respond, nor does the being in me. Because I am insofar as I love and someone loves me, only others will be able to answer." [150] This leads to a decisive point for considering Marion's methodology: A *phenomenological* account of the self's individuation

[149] A *refusal* to become self-reflective implies one already experiences self-reflexivity. Importantly, however, this experience of self-reflexivity does not apply in the same way to all, nor is it what defines human uniqueness—and I hope the arguments I make in this section concerning our *inability* to *locate* the mysterious ipseity of the self, help to clarify this. I do not, in other words, intend the above comments to apply in the same way universally. I only wish to say that those who both enjoy and suffer the experience of self-reflection must not ignore this dimension of their experience or the impact it has on the way they relate to others.
[150] Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 195.

differs from a *theological* reflection on the meaning, or unique significance of the self. We might also say, from the standpoint of phenomenology itself, that the question of *how* the self *experiences* its sense of individuation differs from the question of *where to locate* this self's true uniqueness or significance. In other words, I receive my sense of individuation from other objects in the experience of my flesh—through what is given to my senses, I receive impressions of *that which is not me.* The paradox is that in my sensing of all that is not me, I also receive a sense of individuation or separateness from all those things I sense. However, this phenomenological response to the question of the self's individuation differs from the question of what *defines* the self in its inherent uniqueness. And this latter question is precisely the one Marion attempts to address by way of *The Erotic Phenomenon*. We might nevertheless wonder whether we *can* address this latter question from a strictly phenomenological approach due to the very nature of the inquiry.

While we may, in many ways, continually become *who* we are according to where we invest our love, Marion's account of the self's uniqueness raises significant theological questions. First, because the *realization* of the self's ultimate uniqueness or ipseity depends singularly on the *will* or perpetual *decision* to love, Marion's account may result in downplaying the status of all the other dimensions of our lived and embodied existence. Contrary to Marion's arguments, it seems that our bodies, thoughts, memories, and even those significant experiences we have forgotten, should not be excluded from somehow speaking to *who* we are—however mysteriously, imperfectly, or incompletely. If this is the case, it may be that our very *inability* to *locate* this mysterious ipseity with *any one* aspect of the self—or any one intersubjective phenomenon—matters from a theological standpoint. Throughout this thesis, I have been attempting to highlight the points at which phenomenology has nothing more to say. And while it may be the case, following Marion, that phenomenology has much more to say than initially imagined; we might also consider that *at the precise points at which it fails,* phenomenology nevertheless has something more to say, uniquely to those engaged with theology.

In this instance, for example, it is possible to see the very inability to *locate* the unique *ipseity* of the self—and the contradictions we face in attempting to do so—as significant for *theological* reasons. We are faced with the persistent sense, for example, that all the various dimensions of

our concrete particularity—even while ever-changing—ought, in some way, speak to *who* we are. While it seems this is something we ought to affirm, at the same time, any thorough consideration of such affirmation leads to numerous contradictions that seem provide more evidence that any sense one has of oneself remains indelibly marked by a sense of fragmentation. The contradictions I have in mind here become evident in considering how the experience of time informs the way I reflect on myself. The ideas I once held as transformative, for example, may seem to me now quite misguided; the mentors, and even saints, I currently model my life after, might, in the future, fail to garner my same respect or fascination. My body continues to age, and my joints no longer allow me to move in all the ways I once did. I will never know anything about most of my ancestors; their stories are lost to me. The stories I tell myself in attempting to understand myself, change every other year. True, I may very well experience my own sense of individuation *in my flesh*—I recognize myself as the one continually receiving various impressions and sensations—but beyond this, I am unable to locate or validate my own sense of *unique mattering*, which always seems subject to change and flux. Why, in my awareness of all this, do I nevertheless protest? Why do I continue to rehearse the reasons for changing the ideas I once held—persistently seeking to locate some continuity of thought, despite my changing ideas over time? Why, in spite of the pain it causes my joints, do I persist in attempting to run the same distance I could more easily master five years ago? Why do I still search for my ancestors, or tell myself stories about my life and of how it fits into a larger narrative with a meaning that will continue to matter after I am gone? [151]

Phenomenology is a discipline well-suited to revealing these complex and unanswerable contradictions I encounter in seeking to establish or *locate* my unique ipseity. It offers itself as an apt aid in describing, as Marion so often does, the numerous contradictions we experience in attempting to grasp ourselves. However, rather than seeking to resolve the contradictions concerning the self's uniqueness from the standpoint of phenomenology—as Marion does—we might instead see the contradictions as *themselves* indicators of something that could only gain

[151] Cf. Marion, *Negative Certainties*, 8-50. The examples I provide in the above description certainly align with Marion's argument that the self is ultimately unable to grasp or know itself (see Chapter 1 of *Negative Certainties*, entitled, "The Undefinable, Or the Face of Man"). However, I am trying to demonstrate that even while we remain irreducible to any of our contingent particularities, these dimensions of ourselves still seem to matter to *who* we are in some way.

clarity from the standpoint of a theology of creation. That we sense a need to affirm our unique ipseity *and* the impossibility of doing so points to its created contingency as mysteriously known and sustained in God. Furthermore, the fact that any attempt to *locate* our uniqueness with any one dimension of our finite particularity, from this perspective, serves as an indication that our uniqueness lies in the *entirety* of who we are *as created beings*—even while we are simultaneously unable to grasp this mystery *according to* a temporal, creaturely perspective. And we might read a theological affirmation of the resurrection of the *body* as further attesting to the legitimacy of this paradox. [152]

In this way, we might affirm all those dimensions of our contingent particularity as somehow mattering—as part of God's good creation—even while perfect knowledge of *who* we are belongs to the Creator. One could say, in other words, that the entirety of our being and becoming speaks to our uniqueness, but exactly *how* it does so is not for us to piece together, but remains a mystery "not yet revealed" (1 John 3) or, "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3.3). With this in mind, we are reminded of Anti-Climacus' reflections on the self's inability to grasp itself, its inability "to arrive at or to be in equilibrium and rest by itself." [153] These reflections presuppose a theological vision of a contingent self, whose being and becoming witness to its created existence as oriented to because always *already in* God. The concluding section of this chapter turns to the *Upbuilding Discourses* to further see how *beginning* with such createdness as one's starting point enables fresh ways of contemplating the self, resulting in different interpretations of its lived experience.

The following analysis then, read against the backdrop of *The Erotic Phenomenon*, will illumine how Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding Discourses* pose a dual corrective to Marion's phenomenological approach to the self. Both dimensions of this corrective pertain to methodology. The first is seen in how Kierkegaard's vision of the self differs from Marion's *because* it begins with a presupposed

[152] I do not read the entirety of Marion's corpus as necessarily contradicting such an affirmation. The problem with *The Erotic Phenomenon* is precisely that it operates according to Marion's method of reduction to arrive at the precise point at which the self realizes its ipseity, locating this with "all those I have loved as a lover" (*The Erotic Phenomenon*, 194). However, there may be potential for developing a more nuanced account in connection with Marion's following essay: "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen: Nicholas of Cusa's Contribution in *De vision Dei*," translated by Stephen E. Lewis, *The Journal of Religion* 96, no. 3 (July 2016): 305-331. On this account, we might say that the self *experiences* its irreducibly unique sense of mattering in the experience of *seeing itself seen* by God.
[153] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 14.

theology of creation. The final section of the chapter will then move to explore how such a vision of the self, in contrast to Marion's strictly phenomenological account, makes use of a properly apophatic approach to the eternity of God. As with Chapter 3, my analysis is not meant as a total rejection of Marion's phenomenology of givenness. Instead, it picks up with Kierkegaard's theological reflections on the self at the precise points at which, at least in my view, Marion's phenomenological approach runs aground by all too quickly arriving at *phenomenological* conclusions to the contradictions it nevertheless rightly illumines.[154] I wish to show how these contradictions might, themselves, open onto a mode of reflection that, we might even say, takes up and utilizes the language of metaphysics—albeit in a negative mode.

5.6) *The Self's Contingency, and Participation in the Eternity of God*

Like Marion, Kierkegaard is also interested in the tensions and contradictions involved in our inability to grasp ourselves. Throughout the *Upbuilding Discourses*, he frequently returns to the theme of the self's inability to attain a sense of continuity in light of its perpetual subjection to change over time. Craig A. Hefner highlights that Kierkegaard considers the self's fragmentation over time alongside a doctrine of divine immutability, so that "God's immutability functions as a condition to preserve the existential integrity of the human creature across the vicissitudes of time

[154] Returning to my reading of *Givenness and Revelation* put forth in Chapter 3, I there wished to stress how we might read Marion's arguments put forth in *Givenness and Revelation* in connection with a notion of the development of doctrine. As Marion admits, what is given may lead us to recognize (or prevent us from recognizing) phenomena irreducible to any *one right way* of interpreting them, therefore demanding an infinite hermeneutic. Considering this in connection with a doctrine of God, we might say this led and leads to *rules for language* about God, ways of speaking—affirmations and denials—that prevent us from saying what we must not say if we are to affirm divine transcendence and immanence. This very way of proceeding *theologically*, however, may reveal more about the self and its created contingency than Marion's strictly *phenomenological* approach allows. The issue is that this phenomenological approach then overlaps with a theological one—so that Marion overlooks key dimensions of what a theological approach might uniquely yield for a consideration of selfhood. I should note that I clearly do not read Kierkegaard as having any sort of sophisticated apophatic theological method. What is interesting is that, at *certain points* in his discourses, Kierkegaard's reflections on lived experience presuppose key doctrines that function to preserve divine incomprehensibility. In showing how this is the case, those interested in underlying methodological concerns related to my analysis—including constructive theological concerns that would extend beyond my interpretation or appropriation of Kierkegaard's thought—may wish to consider David Burrell's, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). I, of course, in no way wish to equate the concerns of Burrell's work with what Kierkegaard *intends* to accomplish by way of his reflections on the self. I merely wish to highlight coincidental *moments* of overlap, which may prove useful for those wishing to relate the *specific* arguments I make here to a broader context of concerns regarding a theological methodology.

and change."[155] Drawing on Hefner's analysis, in commenting on these texts, I will nevertheless take a slightly different tack. I do not read Kierkegaard's reflections as speaking of the "existential integrity" of the human, or as envisioning the self's task in terms of "the self's progress towards coherence through time."[156] Instead, the incomprehensible transcendence entailed by affirming God's eternity necessitates affirmation of divine immanence in such a way that enables Kierkegaard to speak of a God present to the human in all she has been and will become *as* a creature ever becoming. In other words, the divine perfection itself entails affirming that God's knowing *who* we are is *not like* the knowing we have of ourselves—fragmented and imperfect as it is, because limited by our experience of temporality.[157] The upshot is that rather than reading Kierkegaard as putting forth an "existentialist doctrine"—understanding *it* from the standpoint of experience—the logic of the doctrine itself functions to enable Kierkegaard to reflect on experience in a specific way. This will become clearer as we progress through to the final section of the chapter. In no way is this a wholesale rejection of Hefner's excellent analysis to which my own consideration is indebted. I here merely wish to shift the focus to more precise questions of methodology. In this respect, I want to lay stress on specific examples from Kierkegaard's edifying works in which he does not merely interpret Christian doctrine on the basis of experience, but interprets experience *in light of* doctrine—or according to certain metaphysical presuppositions. We might say that Kierkegaard takes a reverse approach to that of Marion in *The Erotic Phenomenon*—which eventually arrives at a notion of the 'eternal' by way of a strictly phenomenological approach. Exploring this difference, then, will prove fruitful for considering

[155] Craig A. Hefner, "'In God's Changelessness There Is Rest': The Existential Doctrine of God's Immutability in Augustine and Kierkegaard." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 20, no. 1 (January 2018): 65-83; 65.
[156] Ibid., 67.
[157] In this respect, my reading also resists the argument put forth by George Pattison, that Kierkegaard's account of divine changelessness admits of an understanding of God *in* time. Cf. George Pattison, "Kierkegaard: The Eternal Gift of Time," 247-287. Because my focus is on the theological undertones of Kierkegaard's reflections on our temporality in light of the eternity of God, I here limit my analysis to his non-pseudonymous writings. I cannot address all of the scholarly debates over how/whether Kierkegaard construes a relation between the temporal and the eternal—particularly as this question pertains to his pseudonymous works. For an important account of this, see, for example, Louis Dupré, "Of Time and Eternity in Kierkegaard's Concept of Anxiety," *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (April 1984): 160-76. While it is not the focus of his argument, Dupré admits that Kierkegaard's reflections on the temporal and the eternal seem puzzling and somewhat contradictory throughout his pseudonymous writings. To the extent that this is so—or at least, appears to be the case—we might discover one reason for such ambiguity in turning to Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous texts. I will argue that here, Kierkegaard does not put forth any real *concept* of the eternity of God or of divine changelessness. He instead draws out the logic of these doctrines in a surprisingly nuanced apophatic manner, to speak of our creaturely orientation to a transcendent God who is intimately present to each human being. To demonstrate this, the next two sections bring Kierkegaard's thought into dialogue with the theology of David Burrell. Readers interested in this will find that, at points, I utilize the footnotes to make this dialogue more explicit.

questions of the relation between theology and phenomenology, to which we will turn at the conclusion of the chapter.

Accordingly, I will show how Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding Discourses*, when read against the backdrop of *The Erotic Phenomenon*, pose a dual corrective to Marion's phenomenological approach to the self. Both dimensions of this corrective pertain to methodology. The first is seen in the way Kierkegaard's vision of the self differs from Marion's *because* it begins with a presupposed theology of creation. The final section of the chapter will then move to explore how such a vision of the self, in contrast to Marion's strictly phenomenological account, makes use of a properly apophatic approach to the eternity of God.

We first turn to the discourse, "Patience in Expectancy." Here we notice similar themes to those already highlighted in *The Sickness Unto Death*—themes which re-emerge in Heidegger's account of authentic selfhood, and, therefore also, in Marion's response to it. Kierkegaard begins this discourse by reflecting on how we move through life, continually awaiting the actualization of various possibilities: "Every human being is tried this way in the active service of expectancy."[158] Kierkegaard goes on to describe the self's experience of perpetually looking forward to various happenings until, finally, the expectation reaches a point of fulfillment. For a short time, one is relieved, only to pick back up again, now expecting something new. Kierkegaard continues: "And while human life goes on this way in very diverse expectancy, expecting very different things according to different times and occasions and in different frames of mind, all life is again one nightwatch of expectancy."[159] In light of this assessment of our everyday, temporal experience, he asserts the following:

> [L]et no one dare, sagaciously or foolishly, to lose himself and finish out his service in piecemeal expectancy, lest in his security or in his busyness, in his joy or in his discouragement, he forget the eternal, which is waiting every moment and at the end of time, inasmuch as this is one and the same.[160]

How is it that each moment and the end of time are the same thing? It becomes clear that this

[158] Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses,* 206.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.

cannot be *understood* according to "the earthly and temporal mind."[161] We might gain some help interpreting this by turning to a claim made in *The Concept of Anxiety*: "the temporal is permeated by and preserved in the eternal."[162] The context within which this affirmation is made *also* makes clear that the eternal is not something we can *understand* according to our finite, temporal experience. We know that Kierkegaard was certainly familiar with the famous treatise of Boethius, in which Lady Philosophy chides those who would assume they might understand the eternal God—and the Divine Intellect—as akin to human, time-bound thought and experience.[163] If we tentatively conclude Kierkegaard affirms such inability to understand *God's eternity*[164] from our *temporal* experience, we nevertheless begin to see, in the context of "Patience in Expectancy," a portrayal of how one might orient oneself to its reality even while remaining ever-unable to apprehend it.

Kierkegaard turns to Anna, whose life is referred to in the Gospel of Luke, as an example—reflecting on her many years waiting in the Temple for the coming messiah. He distinguishes her expectancy from that everyday sort we experience as life's series of hoped-for possibilities arrive and eventually come to pass. While numerous possibilities came and went, and while she endured various forms of loss and grief, one expectation oriented Anna's interior life more than any of those other, temporal possibilities ever could. She could neither imagine nor conceive of the fulfillment of this expectation orienting her life; nevertheless, "because her expectancy was *in* God," so also was she "always equally close to the fulfillment."[165] And while she "received no enlightenment, and while the days passed and added years to her age until she was very aged, she nevertheless was always just as close to the fulfillment."[166] Here, Kierkegaard affirms a reality so close to us that we are unable to see it or delineate it *in terms of* our finite, temporal experience.

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[161] Ibid.
[162] Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, translated by Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 154.
[163] In the Interlude to *Philosophical Fragments*, Johannes Climacus makes reference to Boethius and seems to expand on an argument made in Book V of *The Consolation of Philosophy*. See Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 80 and supplement, 182 and 211.
[164] I here intentionally refer to an argument made by David Burrell. See Burrell, "God's Eternity," *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 4 (October, 1984), 389-406. While I in no way intend to claim Kierkegaard had in mind the same context or arguments that inform this essay, my reasons for using the language of "God's eternity" in reference to Kierkegaard's reflections will become clear in due course.
[165] Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses,* 222. (My italics).
[166] Ibid., 223.

Yet, for this very reason, he can read the contingency and temporality of our existence as itself indicating or pointing to its participation in God's eternity.

As with his reflections on the self's relation to possibility in *The Sickness Unto Death,* Kierkegaard here explains that the truly expectant person "cannot feed and satisfy his expectancy with probabilities and calculations."[167] This would be to rely on one's everyday relation to possibility, wherein one seeks comfort in the temporal, according to the *probability* of evading hardship. In this case, one finds comfort in the probability that all will be well with one's life until it is not. Kierkegaard establishes the following test for whether one is orienting one's expectancy in a fruitful way: "[T]rue expectancy is such that it pertains to a person essentially and does not leave it up to his own power to bring about the fulfillment."[168] For this reason, a sign of true expectancy is *patience*, and patience "leaves its expectancy up to God and in this way is always equally close to the fulfillment, however foolish this may seem to the earthly understanding."[169] Such a vision could be detrimental if taken to imply we must never hope for *specific* outcomes or become disappointed when they do not materialize. What Kierkegaard seems to be getting at here, however, is more like a reminder to orient one's life—one's desires, projects, and sense of significance—not around that which is fleeting or transitory, but to instead cultivate an awareness of God in all things. This, for Kierkegaard, is what we might see in the life of Anna, who cultivated the place in her heart for an expectancy independent of changing outcomes, emotional states, or life circumstances. And it happened that Anna was blessed to witness the fulfillment of her expectancy *in time*. But could time ever separate Anna from an Eternal God, eternally present to each moment of her life? And so, if Anna had not witnessed the fulfillment of her expectancy within her lifetime, and if she went on with her expectancy even while seeing no indication of its

[167] Ibid., 221. Again, in *The Sickness Unto Death*, Anti-Climacus speaks of the self's need to relate to possibility—but not to possibility insofar as it is reducible to mere *probability*: "In order for a person to become aware of his self and of God, imagination must raise him higher than the miasma of probability, it must tear him out of this and teach him to hope and to fear—or to fear and to hope—by rendering possible that which surpasses the *quantum satis* [sufficient amount] of any experience" (Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 41).
[168] Ibid. Cf. Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon,* 106-112 & 190-195. Marion's articulation of the self's anticipation of love mirrors this same concern. Again, for Marion, anticipating the possibility of no longer existing—thereby embracing the possibility *that* I exist—can not give the self anything to meaningfully resolve, nor can it assure the self that its existence is not in vain. Instead, Marion sees the *possibility* of love as involving my own *desire for* and *decision to* love, while nevertheless *depending* on the other's free decision to love me. *Only the other* can bring about love's fulfillment, thus individuating the self.
[169] Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses,* 221.

fulfillment *because* her expectancy was *in* God, she would have nevertheless remained "*always* just as close to the fulfillment."[170]

Unlike Heidegger's vision of authentic selfhood, on this account, any *constancy* in Anna's life was revealed not through the anticipation of her *ownmost* potentiality of being. In other words, while by faith, Anna's expectancy oriented her life, such orientation came not from Anna's taking hold of the various possibilities of *her own* existence. And in this way, the meaning or significance of her life's orientation was not something she could secure herself.[171] A further difference between Heidegger and Kierkegaard is seen in that, for Kierkegaard, the *object* of one's anticipation or expectancy matters. According to Kierkegaard, "the object of expectancy, the more glorious and precious it is, form[s] the expectant person in its own likeness, because a person resembles what he loves with his whole soul."[172] In all this, we see that in the very ways Kierkegaard's contemplation of the self differs from Heidegger's, it also anticipates the criticisms of Heidegger Marion will make—to the extent that we might even wonder if this discourse was on Marion's mind while composing *The Erotic Phenomenon*. One of the most striking similarities is that for Marion—against Heidegger—the *possibility* of love orients and *defines* the self in a way that the possibility of death cannot. [173] Before assuming, however, that Kierkegaard's vision coincides more closely with Marion's, we must see how it would be impossible to arrive at important aspects

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[170] Ibid., 223. (My italics). See also, 224-226. Cf. Hefner, "In God's Changelessness There is Rest," 65-83. In his essay delineating Kierkegaard's "existential doctrine" of God's immutability, Hefner rightly highlights the important role of the incarnation in Kierkegaard's thought. Drawing Augustine and Kierkegaard's works into dialogue, he highlights the similar way in which each sees in the incarnation, a meeting point between the temporal and the eternal. In making this point, his essay focuses on *Practice in Christianity* and other key discourses, but does not consider "Patience in Expectancy." We are now in a position to see how this discourse might add a significant point for considering Kierkegaard's thought on divine changelessness and the incarnation. That Anna is *always just as close to the fulfillment* even while it had not yet come *in time*, provides evidence that Kierkegaard is not merely putting forth an "existential doctrine." We might, in other words, read Kierkegaard's affirmation of Anna's closeness to the fulfillment—regardless of *when* it comes *in time*—as simply following from a specific understanding of what a doctrine of divine immutability entails: The Incarnation does not imply any real change or variation in God. We might say that while its *actually occurring* matters, whatever more the Incarnation *reveals* of God *in time* implies no real change in God's eternity—or, by implication, in *who* God is as the God immanently and eternally present to Anna as she turns to God in hopeful expectation. Cf. George Pattison, "Kierkegaard: The Eternal Gift of Time," 267.

[171] In referring to Kierkegaard's use of Biblical figures such as Anna, Pattison makes a similar point: "[t]o find our meaning outside ourselves, in God, is to find a possible focus of continuity and constancy" in the midst of the various fluctuations in life (*Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, 62).

[172] Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses,* 219.

[173] Again, for Marion, when two lovers anticipate the future resolve of their love, "anticipation clearly anticipates possibility, but a possibility that no longer plays within the limits of being, because it transgresses the limits of death" (Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 193).

of Kierkegaard's vision of the self by way of Marion's strictly phenomenological approach. *The Erotic Phenomenon* slowly works its way from an account of the self-abandoning decision to love, to eventually arriving at an account of two lovers who, through their commitment, *will eternity in time.* Kierkegaard's reflections, on the other hand, presuppose the *createdness* of our temporal existence and, as I will further show, a doctrine of divine changelessness or immutability. This carries implications for reflecting on *all* aspects of the human being. As Anthony Rudd claims, "although the self is essentially temporal for Kierkegaard, it is also essentially such as to participate in eternity."[174] While Marion would certainly not deny the orientation of our finite, temporal existence to the divine, Kierkegaard reflects on *all* the various dimensions of our experience with this starting point. The result is a different account of the self, as will become clear by the conclusion of the chapter.

First, it is worth noting how Kierkegaard, like Marion, finds merit in contemplating the vanity or meaninglessness we tend to experience upon investing our significance in transitory, finite ends. We see this, especially in the discourse entitled, "Think about Your Creator." In contrast to "Patience in Expectancy," this discourse explores the question of the self's continuity, focusing now on *recollection* rather than on anticipation. The beginning of the discourse references Ecclesiastes 12.1: "Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them.'"[175] Kierkegaard repeatedly returns to this passage as the center-point around which to interpret the vanity and meaninglessness depicted in *Ecclesiastes*, according to the experience of change over time.

According to Kierkegaard, in the admonition to *think about your Creator,* the author "does not speak as if this thought were a thought only for youth, which nevertheless must eventually become a thing of the past."[176] Furthermore,

> he does not speak of it as if it were something past that once had meaning, something past that most desirably had had meaning once—no, the meaning of youth is precisely the

[174] Rudd, Anthony. "Kierkegaard on Patience and the Temporality of the Self: The Virtues of a Being in Time," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 36, no. 3 (September 2008): 491-509. Rudd sees the implications of Kierkegaard's reflection on the self's temporality and its participation in the eternal as central to his reflection on the virtue of patience, considering this in connection with implications for virtue ethics.
[175] *NRSV*.
[176] Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses,* 237.

> meaning of this thought, and precisely by means of this thought youth will be secured against being vanity, secured against seeming to be vanity at some time.[177]

Kierkegaard continues, "If one wanted to be built up by the thought of old age, but in a special way so that youth could not be built up by the same thought, then the upbuilding itself would be untrue."[178] As one matures, the glory of youth fades, and the desires of youth most often seem baseless. As one continues to age, the question of meaninglessness arises more acutely—as more and more, one's life is laid open to the question of its meaning. Kierkegaard is thus interested in a thought that would reveal the significance or meaning in youth and old age; such a thought must, therefore, speak to young and old alike. Furthermore, if it is to respond to vanity, this thought must find resonance with the single individual, speaking to her in and through her unique context and life circumstances. Such a thought is a "concerned truth" in that it will speak differently to each individual at different times while having meaning for all at all times. As one recollects such a thought, it will not become meaningless over time.

Kierkegaard sees an example of such a *concerned truth* in "youths' thought of the Creator." Admittedly, "youth does not have many thoughts," and it "does not think about the evil days."[179] Because youth is most often full of playful hope and easily satisfied, the thought of the Creator occurs "most naturally in youth."[180] In light of this, Kierkegaard continues, "It is hard, people say, to separate those who are inwardly united, but how much harder it is when the Creator and youth's thought about the Creator are separated."[181] Kierkegaard goes on to describe diverse ways in which one might overlook or lose the *thought* of the Creator, many of which mirror descriptions of the various ways one might evade oneself in *The Sickness Unto Death.*[182] After describing some possible reasons one might lose the thought of the Creator—becoming distracted by differing concerns or goals, or losing oneself in various diversions—Kierkegaard stresses that only the single individual can know for herself how and why such forgetting occurs. Nevertheless, in facing up to whatever transitory ends one thought would give life meaning, it becomes possible to recognize the vanity revealed by these ends. This may very well inspire one to once more retreat

[177] Ibid., 237-238.
[178] Ibid., 239.
[179] Ibid., 239 & 244.
[180] Ibid., 240.
[181] Ibid., 246.
[182] See for example, 247-248.

to the thought of her Creator:

> Therefore think of your Creator in the days of your youth, think about this for the sake of the retreat. Even though the moment it is to begin is ever so terrible, even though a person in self-hatred has destroyed ever so much of what lay behind him, just a recollection of this thought will always be of some help to him.[183]

Kierkegaard clarifies, "We do not extol the retreat as if this alone were life's meaning, as if recollection were everything in life."[184] Furthermore, "We are not so presumptuous as to speak triflingly of the truth that more mature human wisdom fathoms or of the beauty that human art produces; even less do we disparage the honest work of adulthood."[185] Instead, Kierkegaard is simply concerned to show how in recollection, as in expectancy, one might come to recognize the God ever-present, as the self's Creator and final end—the contemplation of whom reveals the meaning of one's youth, uniting it with the meaning to be found in old age:

> Let a person's work, then, take from him what belongs to it, his time, his diligence, but in the advancing years, O God, preserve a recollection of youth that preserves youth's thought of the Creator. Woe to him who separates what God has joined together; woe to him who separates adulthood from its youth.[186]

As with Kierkegaard's reflections on expectancy, we here see in this discourse on recollection a concern for the question of life's continuity. And while it may at first seem that the right sort of recollection is *itself* the key to attaining a continuity to one's life, Kierkegaard goes on to describe the one who was never young, or who finds no consolation in recalling her youth. In this way, he returns to the sense of fragmentation which marks the journey from youth to adulthood. At this point, we are reminded that the discourse is about a separation of the Creator and one's *thought* of the Creator—not about any *real* separation. And so, regardless of how well one preserves youth's thought of the Creator, Kierkegaard affirms the subtle desire to recall this thought, or even still, the sadness at the lack of such desire. Even there, God is present: "Spiritually, the fulfillment is always in the wish, the calming of the concern in the concern, just as God is even in the sorrowful longing that is for him."[187]

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[183] Ibid., 248.
[184] Ibid., 249.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid., 249-250.
[187] Ibid., 250.

By the end of the discourse, we arrive at a recollection which reveals the significance of each life in the midst of the *seeming* vanity or meaninglessness experienced in running its course:

> '[F]or charm is deceptive, and beauty is vain' (Proverbs 31:30), and the fickle mind dashes away with fleeting hope, and the dance ends, and the joke is forgotten, and strength vanishes, and youth is past, and its place knows it no more; but youth's thought of the Creator is a rosebud that does not wither, because it does not know the time of the year or of the years, and it is the child's most beautiful ornament, and the bride's most beautiful jewel, and the dying person's best garment.[188]

In the end, this discourse witnesses to the value of contemplating the vanity entailed in the all too pervasive tendency to invest our significance in that which is merely transitory. But it need not imply, as is argued in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, that our being—including all we experience in our finite, temporal contingency—cannot somehow speak to the uniqueness of *who* we are. One might here wonder why it is that Kierkegaard, following Ecclesiastes, sees the thought of the *Creator* as specifically comforting, assuring the self against the *seeming* vanity or meaninglessness of existence? The very personal sort of recollection Kierkegaard has in mind in this discourse, and the fact that he refers to it as a "concerned truth" should remind us that the discourse is not merely an exhortation to think about God but to recollect the thought of *your Creator.* It is possible to conclude that this very thought *implies* an affirmation of the *entirety* of one's existence—as created and sustained by a God who *is* love. And it is here that we might note a contrast between Kierkegaard and Marion's reflections on vanity. While Marion sees our finite temporal *being* as unable to speak to our true uniqueness,[189] with the discourses just explored we might argue that for Kierkegaard, our inability to grasp our uniqueness involves the fact that it is too intimately imbedded with the *entirety* of who we are *as* created beings ever-becoming by and in love. And while we can only reflect on ourselves according to our fragmented experience *in time*, and for this reason, cannot fully grasp or experience our finality, we might, nevertheless, recall the one in whom we live, move and have our being, finding moments of faith, moments of *willing to be ourselves* by resting transparently in our Creator.

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[188] Ibid., 250-251.

[189] Again, for Marion, I only realize myself as lovable "*insofar* as I discover myself to be a lover" (see Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 213-214). (My italics).

Thus far, I have attempted to show that by affirming God's eternity, Kierkegaard emphasizes a God ever-present to the self in all its changing contingency. This emphasis leads him to examine *diverse* ways the self might awaken to this reality in the very midst of its fragmented, temporal experience. Whether we realize this in anticipation or through recollection, the point is that God is eternally present to the entirety of who we are, so that *at each moment*, there is the possibility of turning to such a hope, that it might, once again, orient our lives—despite the ongoing fragmented experience we have of ourselves. I will now turn to assess one final difference between Marion and Kierkegaard's approach to the self: the divergent path each takes to articulating the God-human 'relation.' This will allow us to read, once more, Kierkegaard's reflections on the self against the grain of Marion's, as developed in *The Erotic Phenomenon.* I will focus on Kierkegaard's use of language, highlighting some examples of the precise way in which he reflects on experience and doctrine in formulating his vision of the self, and then turn to how this relates to his use of language in speaking of eternity, and of God.

5.7) *Divine Immutability and God's Presence to Creatures: Merits of a Negative Approach*

Marion's argument that "God loves in the same way as we do" reveals a subtle tendency in his thought toward equating what is said about interpersonal relationships with an account of the way we as human beings relate to the divine. In reading *The Erotic Phenomenon* in connection with the rest of his corpus, we further see the prevalence of Marion's *model* of intersubjectivity—conceived according to his account of paradoxical self-donation and reception. This prevalence is not only evident in his works of phenomenology, but equally so in his works of theology; in Chapter 3 for example, I showed how Marion's model of intersubjectivity informs his account of the relationship between nature and grace.[190] While I already demonstrated in Chapter 2 how Marion's univocal approach to love can nevertheless uphold a doctrine of analogy,[191] we might still wonder whether Marion reinforces a rigidly anthropomorphized *conception* of the *way* we relate to God. The question, in other words, is whether Marion's approach to the 'relation' between God and humans remains properly apophatic.

[190] As we saw in Chapter 3, Marion's phenomenological account of selfhood and approach to nature and grace mirror one another, both relying on Marion's vision of the 'kenotic self.'
[191] See page 45, and footnote 29.

We might contrast Marion's vision—somewhat ironically, for readers of *God Without Being*—with that of Thomas Aquinas, who argues: "Now a relation of God to creatures, is not a reality in God, but in the creature."[192] Aquinas makes this claim in the context of affirming the *supreme* goodness of God, which is *not like* the goodness creatures have by way of participation in God—our goodness, in other words, neither contrasts with nor adds anything to God's goodness. As David Burrell explains, when Aquinas argues that the *reality* of God's relatedness to creatures exists only in creatures rather than in God, the sort of *real relation* he has in mind is a causal one.[193] The claim, in other words, should not be taken to imply that God is not compassionate or attentive to each *individual* life. Rather than seeing Aquinas as putting forth a vision of a God who is somehow distant, or opposed to real intimacy with creatures, Burrell reminds us that God's transcendence and immanence to all of creation implies an altogether different mode by which God, as source of all things, is intimately present to creatures. In light of all this, we must ultimately deny that our relation to God is the same sort we have to others. But this very denial nevertheless functions as an *affirmation* of God's *closeness* to the self, as we begin to glimpse in St. Thomas' claim that "All things, by desiring their own perfection, desire God Himself."[194] Or, as Burrell puts it, "coming into touch with my own self means touching God's own creation."[195]

Burrell highlights similar elements of this view of the God-human 'relation' in Kierkegaard's thought. In an essay focusing on *The Sickness Unto Death*, he attends to Kierkegaard's creative use of language for speaking of the human self or 'spirit,' exploring how this language is put to work and what it accomplishes from a theological standpoint. We first see this in Kierkegaard's reference to the self as a "relating-relation," which functions as an implicit denial of any such notion of an already-complete or "achieved self"; Kierkegaard thereby affirms a view of the self as always ever-becoming. Burrell goes on to highlight the fact that for Kierkegaard, this self which "relates itself to itself," did not *establish itself,* and for this very reason, *in* "relating itself to itself," the self "relates itself to another."[196] He reads this to imply 'relating to God' "is not something else

[192] Aquinas, *ST*, 1.6.2.
[193] Burrell, David. "Articulating Transcendence," in *Exercises in Religious Understanding* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 111.
[194] Aquinas, *ST*, 1.6.1.
[195] Ibid., 111-112; this brief summary draws on emphases throughout Burrell's essay (see also, 80-140).
[196] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 13-14.

one is called upon to do, over and above the inbuilt task of becoming oneself."[197] Furthermore, within Kierkegaard's account of the self, "The 'God-relation' *could* not be formulated since it is a transcendent one; and what is more, it *need* not be formulated because there really is no 'relation' between God and man."[198] This is because language referencing a distinct relation is incapable of expressing the utter dependency of the self on God as its very source.[199] Burrell explains the significance of this for how one understands herself within the context of prayer: "Religiously this says that one does not need to 'reach out' to God." Instead, prayer "is attentiveness to the shape of the inbuilt task. It is the very transcendence of God as the 'source of all things' which guarantees his utter immanence to everything."[200] Such a vision is then further reflected in the fact that Kierkegaard's formula for the self, when its self-evasive tendencies are rooted out, speaks not of *how* the self relates to God, but of the following: "in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it."[201] Burrell goes on to note that while this is also the definition of faith, such faith is not equivalent to an 'achieved self': "for one is ever *becoming* as a believer as well."[202]

We might say then, that the transcendence an affirmation of *God as Creator* implies also helps us to realize we always *already are* relating to God—even in our very relation to ourselves. And by becoming ever-more aware of this, learning to embrace the love ever-present to our becoming, we might also say that "love *forms* the heart," as Kierkegaard claims in *Works of Love.*[203] So, if Kierkegaard avoids delineating a univocally conceived way of relating to God as to other others, this is because the Creator of all is *too* present to all that exists, and the workings of grace too intimately intertwined with our lives to be distilled and articulated according to a model of intersubjectivity. It is possible to see, however, that the divine transcendence this preserves simultaneously affirms God's ever-present immanence to creatures, implied by this very

[197] David Burrell, "Kierkegaard: Language of Spirit," in *Exercises in Religious Understanding* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 143-181; see, 167-168.
[198] Ibid., 168.
[199] Ibid., 167.
[200] Ibid., 168. For Burrell's account of how divine Changelessness need not imply God is not *responsive* to us in prayer, see David Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 105.
[201] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 14.
[202] Ibid., 168.
[203] Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 12.

transcendence.[204]

We see this in turning to what Kierkegaard *does* say about the self's transformation or becoming, within the context of a theological reflection on divine changelessness and the eternity of God. This marks yet another difference between Marion and Kierkegaard. While *The Erotic Phenomenon* arrives at a notion of 'the eternal' toward the end of a phenomenological account of the self, many of Kierkegaard's reflections on the self are also reflections on the eternity of God, presupposing a doctrine of divine immutability or changelessness.[205] Such a doctrine is incomprehensible from the standpoint of human experience and gains no further clarification from it. We might wonder, therefore, why Kierkegaard's reflections on the experience of self-fragmentation and time circle around and around this doctrine. In the final publication before his death, entitled "The Changelessness of God," Kierkegaard states: "Now change takes place around us, and the shadow of variation slides changingly over us; now the changing light from the surrounding world falls upon us, while we ourselves in all this are in turn changed within ourselves. But God is changeless."[206] As we move through this text, I will focus on Kierkegaard's use of language for God, and on how this language is appropriate, both for reflecting on various dimensions of lived experience and for affirming a God somehow *known* to us in the midst of this experience—albeit, known in such a way that never diminishes divine incomprehensibility.

In light of the change we constantly face as beings *always becoming*, Kierkegaard understands an

[204] Burrell further develops this theological point in many of his other theological works—especially in connection with a doctrine of divine changelessness and the eternity of God—though he does not explore these themes further in connection with Kierkegaard. In what follows, I wish to show how Kierkegaard's own reflections on divine changelessness might be read as operating in a negative mode. While they admittedly focus on various 'existential' dimensions of the self, offering up insights for a theological anthropology, they do so in a way that—extending Burrell's interpretation—avoids *comprehending* the God-human 'relation.' In reading Kierkegaard this way, I clearly do not wish to equate Kierkegaard's intended aims or concerns with all those underlying Burrell's apophatic theology. I will, however, highlight ways in which the logic of the doctrines Kierkegaard held functions to influence his theological reflection on the self in ways that might offer up fruitful points of comparison. Those interested in such a comparison will notice that *some* of the elements I highlight in reading Kierkegaard's approach to divine changelessness also reflect elements of Burrell's apophatic approach to this doctrine. See especially, Burrell, "God's Eternity," *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 4 (October, 1984), 389-406; Burrell, "Articulating Transcendence," 80-140; Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God,* 92-108. I am not the first to note unexpected points of resonance in this regard. See, for example, Joshua Furnal, *Catholic Theology After Kierkegaard*, 41n, and 196.

[205] We already saw this, to a certain extent, in "Patience in Expectancy" and "Think about Your Creator in the Days of Your Youth." I here hope to show how "The Changelessness of God" further illumines these dimensions of the other two discourses.

[206] Søren Kierkegaard, "The Changelessness of God," in *The Moment and Late Writings,* trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 272.

affirmation of divine changelessness as consoling. Paradoxically, however, it is also an affirmation that, if taken to heart, sparks earnestness. Why earnestness? In speaking of the human heart, Kierkegaard claims, "There lie buried, buried in forgetfulness, the promises, the intentions, the resolutions, complete plans and fragments of plans, and God knows what—yes, that is how we human beings talk, for we seldom think about what we say; we say: There lies God knows what."[207] In delineating how God knows this human heart, we are told that it is not in the way we know or reflect on ourselves: God "does not recollect" the various dimensions of *who* we are "as if they were something past."[208] God knows all those secret dimensions of *who* we are "as if it were today."[209] The subtlety of Kierkegaard's language use is here seen in that to *recollect* would imply a knowledge limited by temporality, and so must be denied of God. To the eternity of God, it is as if all that we are—our being and becoming—is at once present.[210] God's knowing is *not like* ours, limited to time. And in this we note a distinction between the earlier discourses, attending to the human recognition of God according to *anticipation* and *recollection*—thus, according to the experience of temporality. Because here attending to God's knowing us, Kierkegaard's reflections operate by way of denial.

God's knowing of the human heart then, ought to provoke earnestness in us. Such earnestness, however, does not have the character of an everyday sort of earnestness, based on the self-importance one might gain from attaining a *specific* goal or amount of success *in time*. It is not an earnestness provoked by locating one's significance with anything measurable by way of external comparisons. Instead, just as God sees to the core of *who* we are by a knowledge *not like* ours—limited to temporality—so also, "for God nothing is significant and nothing is insignificant."[211] For the eternal God, we might say "the significant is insignificant," but so too might we say, "even the least insignificance is something infinitely significant."[212] This, of course, should not be taken to imply one ought not *choose* to take on a concrete task or dedicate one's life to making certain possibilities actualities. Instead, all such activity—whether of great impact or seeming

[207] Ibid., 277.
[208] Ibid., 277.
[209] Ibid.
[210] This interpretation finds further support according to our reading of the anticipation of Anna, who, "because her expectancy was in God . . . was always equally close to the fulfillment" (Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 222).
[211] Ibid., 275.
[212] Ibid., 275-276.

insignificance—finds its ultimate meaning through its orientation to the Source and final fulfillment of all things. For Kierkegaard, this is the God of love, present to all that we are *as* creatures continually becoming. The earnestness or sense of urgency this provokes is that, rather than imagining an accounting of one's life at its very end, God—who is present to us *this* moment as one present to *all* our temporal moments—is this accounting.[213] So too, in each moment, one might come to rest in God's changeless love by faith:

> [W]hen you, weary form all this human, all this temporal and earthly changefulness and alteration, weary of your own instability, could wish for a place where you could rest your weary head, your weary thoughts, your weary mind, in order to rest, to have a good rest—ah, in God's changelessness there is rest![214]

Later on in the discourse, Kierkegaard considers the experience of one wandering in a desert and coming upon a cool spring, drawing on this imagery to affirm divine changelessness. God's changelessness is like this cool spring, but one that is ever-cool at each moment one turns to drink. Importantly, Kierkegaard changes tack. Just as the changelessness of God is not to be identified with our *experience* of God—or of changelessness—he moves to consider one's returning to the spring and no longer finding it because it has dried up: "No, I will not take back a word of what I said in your praise . . . . if I praised your delicious coolness while you were, O beloved spring, then let me also praise it now when you have vanished."[215] After affirming the legitimacy of praising the coolness of the spring, whether experiencing it or not, Kierkegaard then turns to negate the analogy: "No one, either in life or in death, travels so far away that you are not to be found, that you are not there; you are indeed everywhere—this is not the way springs are on this earth, springs are only in special places."[216] As he continues, we see that Kierkegaard's language functions to reveal God's transcendence to creatures; all he affirms of the divine in light of a doctrine of divine changelessness, must, therefore, endure a perpetual series of negations.[217] And these negations

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[213] Ibid., 277-278. That God knows or is present to us in all our moments need not imply God's determining our future. In this regard, there is evidence of Kierkegaard holding a more classical view. For an account of Kierkegaard's non-competitive view of divine and human agency, see Barnett, *From Despair to Faith,* 26-31; Furnal, *Catholicism After Kierkegaard*, 54; also of relevance, see 29-57.
[214] Ibid., 279.
[215] Ibid., 280.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Cf. George Pattison, "Kierkegaard: The Eternal Gift of Time," 274-284. While his overall argument is somewhat complex, Pattison reads this discourse to imply that God is somehow *in* time. I instead read it with a focus on Kierkegaard's perpetual denials, attending to the precise way in which these denials function within the text. This allows us to see, not that God is *in* time, but that divine changelessness is not an *attribute* of a divine mode of being

deny whatever in the attribution cannot affirm the God who is transcendent, and as a consequence of this very transcendence, intimately present to creatures. Kierkegaard thus avoids—at least here, in his only discourse dedicated to a doctrine of divine changelessness—ever attributing a singular *concept* of changelessness to God:

> Moreover—what overwhelming secularity!—you do not remain on the spot like a spring; you travel along. No one strays so far away that he cannot find his way back to you, you who are not only like a spring that lets itself be found—what a poor description of your being!—you who are like a spring that even searches for the thirsting, the straying, something unheard of about any spring. Thus you are unchanged and everywhere to be found.[218]

In the end, we realize these affirmations and negations function as pointers to the way divine changelessness reveals itself in, through and as the constancy of divine love—a love ever-present to *who* we are becoming, and to the subtle turning of our attention to its *numerous* ways of appearing according to *our* perpetually changing, temporal existence.[219] This gives us yet another angle from which to challenge Marion's argument that *love is defined as it is deployed.* We might wonder if it is instead, so thoroughly deployed *as* the very act of creation that it is often too close to spot, and irreducible to our spotting it in *one way*? And as we have seen, the same might be said about the way we, as creatures, 'relate' to the Creator. While caught up in the eschatological tensions of our existence, as selves always ever-becoming, we might nevertheless find rest in recalling our Creator. And there is a very real sense in which we might, for a time at least, make a home in this mystery here and now, as "coming into touch with my own self means touching God's own creation."

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we might, somehow, wrap our minds around. While Pattison would affirm this latter point, my argument is that, reminiscent of a more apophatic approach, this text does not seem to accept the dichotomy between viewing God as *either* in time *or* as somehow static and unable to respond to creatures. Either view construes the question of God's eternity *in terms of* our *temporal* existence. If this reading is right, we might recognize what Kierkegaard *does* affirm in "The Changelessness of God" as having striking points of resonance with David Burrell's—admittedly much more systematic—consideration of the theological logic underlying these questions. See, for example, David B. Burrell, "God's Eternity," *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 4 (October 1984), 389-406.

[218] Ibid., 280-281.

[219] Of course, for Kierkegaard, this love is *revealed* in an important way in the Incarnation, but as I indicated above, the Incarnation need not imply any real change in God's eternity**.** In light of his method of reflection in "The Changelessness of God," we might also note that what the Incarnation *reveals* is not the divine essence or any way of *comprehending* divine changelessness. For an account of *Philosophical Fragments* that highlights the limitations of human knowledge in comprehending what is, for us, the paradox of the Incarnation, see Merold Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, 114-133.

CONCLUSION

This chapter traced the inheritance and transformation of themes—from Kierkegaard, through Heidegger, to Marion—concerning the self and its temporal existence. My underlying aim was to consider intersecting questions pertaining both to the *experience* of temporality and to a *theological* interpretation of the self's created contingency and eschatological orientation.

Heidegger's account of authentic selfhood formed the point from which to assess not only Kierkegaard's lasting influence but also Marion's vision of intersubjectivity—developed in direct response to Heidegger's account of being-toward-death (5.2). Against this background, I showed how we might read *The Erotic Phenomenon* as a sustained response to Heidegger. And in this response, Marion seems to retrieve key elements of Kierkegaard's vision of selfhood (5.3). A comparison of the two nevertheless reveals differences relevant not only for a consideration of theological anthropology but also for assessing concerns surrounding the relationship between phenomenology and theology. Marion and Kierkegaard both consider the fragmented experience we have of ourselves in light of our perpetual subjection to change; each concludes that in recollecting or anticipating various experiences, we remain ever-unable to grasp ourselves. So too, each thinker reflects on the experience of vanity and meaninglessness that seems to ensue on account of our experience of temporality.

However, in light of these issues, *The Erotic Phenomenon* aims at a strictly phenomenological approach to the self, resulting in Marion's account of the intersubjective constitution of the self, explored above. In the end, the lover only realizes herself as a lover through the one she loves, the one who has made her a lover, and therefore has given her to herself. [220] Furthermore, it is only insofar as the self loves that it receives its unique ipseity, and only *through* the other is it assured that its existence is not in vain. Again, such assurance cannot come by way of contemplating oneself; the self's created contingency or particularity has nothing to say regarding *who* the self is, and is unrelated to its unique significance or ipseity.

[220] Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 212-15.

In this respect, I argued Marion's phenomenological approach runs aground; it all too quickly attempts to provide *phenomenological* solutions to the very phenomenological contradictions which we might instead see as opening up to a *theology* of creation (5.4 & 5.5). This was first seen by contrasting Marion's vision with that of Anti-Climacus' reflections on the self's inability to grasp itself, its inability "to arrive at or to be in equilibrium and rest by itself."[221] These reflections presuppose a theological vision of a contingent self, whose being and becoming witness to its created existence as oriented to because always *already in* God. In this way, we might affirm all those dimensions of our contingent particularity as somehow mattering, as part of God's good creation, even while perfect knowledge of *who* we are belongs to the Creator. We could say, in other words, that the entirety of our being and becoming speaks to our uniqueness, but exactly *how* it does so is not for us to piece together, but remains a mystery "not yet revealed" (1 John 3) or, "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3.3).

In light of this, the final sections of the chapter (5.6 & 5.7) turned to Kierkegaard's edifying works. My aim was to pick up with Kierkegaard's *theological* reflections on the self at the precise points at which, at least in my view, Marion's phenomenological approach runs aground by all too quickly arriving at supposed *phenomenological* solutions to the contradictions his approach nevertheless rightly illumines. Kierkegaard's reflections on the various contradictions we face in our inability to grasp ourselves presuppose a theology of creation, and the discourses in which he contemplates the self's experience of temporality are also reflections on a doctrine of divine changelessness or immutability. I first considered the precise ways in which this results in a very different mode of contemplating the self from that of Marion (5.6). I then moved to highlight how, in contrast to Marion's approach, Kierkegaard's theological use of language functions to preserve certain apophatic commitments pertaining to a doctrine of God (5.7). Through this analysis, my underlying methodological concern was to show how the very contradictions phenomenology reveals concerning the self—its inability to locate the self's unique significance—might themselves, open onto a mode of reflection that, we might even say, productively takes up and utilizes the logic of metaphysics—albeit here in a negative mode.

[221] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 14.

As noted above, my critique of *The Erotic Phenomenon*—and of Marion's approach to the self—is not intended as a full-fledged critique of Marion's overall phenomenology of givenness. However, by reading Kierkegaard's works against the backdrop of *The Erotic Phenomenon*, I was able to further highlight concerns not only for theological anthropology but also regarding the relationship between theology and phenomenology. In turning to the final conclusion of this thesis, it is now possible to draw out the cumulative results of this analysis, together with its relation to those provided in each of the other chapters.

FINAL CONCLUSION

In considering what constitutes our shared human nature, or what makes up the unique particularity of an individual self, the most laborious efforts of thought seem to end in resignation over a mystery. Still, I have sought to show how we might engage the resources of phenomenology to uncover a series of tensions this line of questioning raises. It seems that what it is that constitutes our shared human commonality is more than our perpetually changing nature, and likewise, that concrete and embodied human difference has a significance that cannot be gotten at through a mere recourse to absolute alterity. Nevertheless, any attempt to establish some *concept* of what constitutes this difference—or shared commonality—ends up demonstrating not only the dangers of such an endeavor but also the sheer powerlessness of any such concept to do justice to the task (Chapter 2). We sense that our love should direct itself to what we know of the ones we love—to their unique particularity—even while what constitutes this uniqueness remains perpetually beyond our grasp (Chapter 3). Tensions such as these repeat themselves in turning to consider our very selves. It seems we ought to affirm the significance of our finite contingencies, the capabilities and powers we cultivate, and even those uncultivated, unconscious inner-workings of our bodies as somehow mattering to *who* we are. Even still, it is possible to experience a desire to transcend the finite limits we perceive ourselves having in these very regards (Chapter 4). This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the desire to weave together something that makes sense—some sort of eternal significance—out of the often incoherent, fragmented, and forgotten moments we experience over the course of a life (Chapter 5).

In light of these well-attested contradictions we run up against in the attempt to make sense of ourselves, it seems safe to conclude, following Jean-Luc Marion, that the one point about which we might gain *certainty*—from the standpoint of a phenomenological approach—is that the self remains a question to itself. Yet, considering this theologically, it is worth pausing to reflect on a point Sartre sees as coherently following from an atheist position: "there is no human nature since there is no God to conceive of it." [1] Without assuming a strong atheist stance,

[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, translated by Carol Macomber (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 22.

phenomenology operates by bracketing notions of God and of anything like a shared 'human nature,' while nevertheless witnessing to the above series of contradictions we confront in attempting to reflect on, or give an account of, the self. However, returning to Sartre's claim, Joseph Pieper has shown how Thomas Aquinas might unexpectedly attest to its having a certain coherence. The commonality, he sees, underlying the thought of Sartre and St. Thomas is that "things have an essential nature only in so far as they are fashioned by thought." [2] And in the case of Aquinas, "the reality and character of things *consist* in their being creatively thought by the Creator." [3] But before jumping all too quickly to a theological confidence in what this shared human nature essentially *is*, we might take a lesson, not only from phenomenology but also from what Pieper sees as the implications following from this view: "our quest for knowledge, when it is directed toward the essences of things, even of the lowest and 'simplest' order, must move along a pathway to which there is, in principle, no end." It is *because* "things are *creaturae*, that the inner lucidity of Being has its ultimate and exemplary source in the boundless radiance of Divine Knowledge."[4] The paradox that follows is that things are both knowable *and* utterly mysterious from a finite point of view.[5] Drawing on this basic insight, we begin to see its relevance within the context of our current study insofar as it might enable a way to affirm the complex web of things that constitute the *inherent* goodness and significance of the self—as knowable because already known by God. An account of this *complex web* might include our embodied, performative acts, the ways we make sense of ourselves through narrative, and all those unconscious, bodily dimensions of our finite particularity, which, even while ever-changing, do not lose their significance when held in the eternity of God. At the same time, this strong affirmation of the human being and of its unique contingency must coincide with a recognition that divine knowledge is, of course, not like ours. One could say that whatever knowledge we do have of ourselves remains necessarily provisional because, following the emphases of Kierkegaard, it is the self-involved sort of knowledge one has when journeying into a mystery—in this case, the mystery of ever becoming *who* we are in God. We might here recall

[2] Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas*, 52. He sees this as a primary principle underlying the thought of Aquinas, highlighting assertions such as the following one: "For in the fact that a creature has a modified and finite nature, proves that it proceeds from a principle" (*ST*, 1.93.6).
[3] Ibid., 61.
[4] Ibid., 63.
[5] Ibid., see Pieper's argument for how "things can be known because they are created" and how things are simultaneously "unfathomable because they are created" (53-71). With reference to the significance of affirming a human nature, see Betz, "After Heidegger and Marion," 581-582 note 50.

the assertion made by Gregory of Nyssa: "I know something which must be sought, yet to find it is to seek it for ever. For it is not one thing to seek, and another to find, but the reward of seeking is the actual seeking."[6]

Throughout this thesis, I have tried to show that, for Kierkegaard, the tensions and seeming contradictions we endure in experiencing and reflecting on ourselves point in the direction of our orientation to the one *in whom we live and move and have our being.* And this somewhat coherently follows from his presupposing a God of love who is also Creator of all things—*ex nihilo*. I have argued that such an affirmation provides a better scaffolding from which to construct a theological vision of love and selfhood, and I here wish to claim that it might better inform a *theological* engagement with phenomenology as well.

As we have seen, Marion's phenomenological account of the self neatly overlaps with his theological one, perhaps *because* it overlooks some of the logic *following from* a theology of creation. In making this claim, I am not arguing that phenomenology and theology necessarily oppose one another or result in fundamentally incongruous accounts of the way we experience certain phenomena. Instead, by considering arguments made in Chapters 3-5, it is possible to see how at the precise points Marion's *phenomenological* descriptions run aground, or fail, Kierkegaard's theological descriptions of similar themes become particularly relevant or interesting. Whereas Marion seeks to offer a coherent description of the tensions involved in loving toward the aim of arriving at a univocal concept of love, Kierkegaard roots his reflection on these same tensions in a theology of creation *ex nihilo.* Such an approach, as I argued in Chapter 3, leads Kierkegaard to a more apophatic account of love, one that nevertheless attends to the concrete practices and attunements which encourage the flourishing of love in all its diverse manifestations. I also considered the problems involved in developing a phenomenological account of the self after the deconstruction of the subject. As demonstrated in the interlude, theologians have, at times, assumed emphases derived from this philosophical context, arguing for some notion of the kenotic self, while neglecting a more robust theological reflection on selfhood—one that considers all those things we might also affirm of selfhood

[6] Gregory of Nyssa, Hom. 7 in *Ecclesiastes,* translated by George Hall (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 118.

when we affirm a loving *Creator*. Returning to the specific context of overlap between Marion's phenomenological and theological account of the self then, it is not only that his theological account suffers, even while showing how and why this is the case has been my primary focus (Chapters 4-5). While I do not wish to reject Marion's more general account of the givenness of the self, I have argued that his phenomenology often overlooks attending to the non-traumatic dimensions of the self's experience—those dimensions of our experience informed by what we already anticipate or the things we already know.

This is not to say that we should set aside the unmined theological resource of Marion's phenomenology of givenness. For in pushing phenomenology to its limits, he reveals precisely those points at which productive dialogue between theology and phenomenology might, in fact, take place. And on my reading, Marion's phenomenology of givenness does not, of itself, preclude the possibility of a more dialogical engagement between theology and phenomenology, the reasons for which I will turn to in a moment. Importantly, my argument is not that we should conflate the disciplines of theology and phenomenology, but that theology remains a better dialogue partner when it does not neglect its own resources. In this way, the cumulative result of the study perhaps provides one way of seeing a more general argument put forth by Emmanuel Falque, that theology and phenomenology might enter into a more dialogical and mutually enriching relationship. [7] As Falque argues—and as I have tried to show through comparison of Marion and Kierkegaard—one of the ways this might occur is seen in that "theology as such (not its objects alone) sometimes brings to light, in a rare flash, the limits of phenomenology." [8] Beyond providing some new ways of demonstrating such a point, the aim of this study was also to show how theologians might learn from and more carefully engage the insights of phenomenology. While Marion opens a path for further exploration of the ways phenomenology might become a resource for theology, Kierkegaard reminds us that, at times, the background assumptions from which we describe certain aspects of our experience—and faithfulness to a particular starting point—matters for a theological account.

[7] While throughout, I have engaged Emmanuel Falque's broader argument in *Crossing the Rubicon* for a more dialogical relationship between theology and theology, in focusing on issues pertaining to the use of metaphysical language and the logic following from a theology of creation, I have attended to a very different series of questions from those evident, for example, in Falque's recent work, *The Loving Struggle: Phenomenological and Theological Debates* (2014/2018), a work which have not been able to engage here.
[8] Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 21.

I will now consider how it would be possible to bring all this to bear on future theological engagements with Marion's phenomenology. As already indicated, Marion's phenomenology of givenness does not preclude an account of the horizons that inform the way we come to understand and interpret given phenomena. It also does not preclude the possibility of *degrees* of givenness, so that some things are known by conjecture, only partially given to our experience of them, even while others, as in the case of some saturated phenomena, give so much to intuition that even an infinite hermeneutic would remain unable to account for them. Again, while Christina Gschwandtner stresses these points, she also shows how Marion perpetually emphasizes the overwhelming givenness of saturated phenomena, which *shock* and *subvert* our prior concepts and expectations in response. She demonstrates that, at times, this constant emphasis is to the detriment of his own phenomenological descriptions of certain phenomena. For this reason, Gschwandtner argues that we might amend Marion's emphases by stressing his account of potential degrees of givenness. [9] This would enable a greater variety of possibilities for considering, not only our ways of coming to know, but also our modes of knowing various things. I now wish to draw on the relevance of this point for considering the *theological* concerns I have thus far expressed. In turning to the impact of Marion's phenomenology of givenness on his theology of revelation (see 4.4-4.7), it is possible to see how we might amend his emphases to better account for the self-manifestation of God, always already *present to* the subtle turning of our awareness and *encountered in* the more mundane dimensions of our thoughts and lives.

Perhaps surprisingly, I have attempted to show how it is possible to glimpse such a vision in Kierkegaard's reflections on the eternity of God (5.6-5.7), who, as the very Source and Creator of the self, remains the ever-present power establishing the self in its very becoming (4.8). For Kierkegaard, we might recognize divine mystery in the subtlest turning of our attention, since "God is even in the sorrowful longing that is for him."[10] Even as the untold glories of the self fade, "and the fickle mind dashes away with fleeting hope, and the dance ends, and the joke is forgotten, and strength vanishes, and youth is past, and its place knows it no more," even still, "youth's thought of the Creator is a rosebud that does not wither, because it does not know the

[9] See, especially, Christina Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*, 193-203.
[10] Ibid., 250.

time of the year or of the years, and it is the child's most beautiful ornament, and the bride's most beautiful jewel, and the dying person's best garment."[11]

[11] Ibid., 250-251.

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