



THINKING AT THE LIMITS

JACQUES DERRIDA AND JEAN-LUC MARION
IN DIALOGUE WITH RICHARD KEARNEY

John P. Manoussakis

The double encounter presented here, with arguably two of the most representative thinkers of contemporary French thought, took place in the wake of Richard Kearney's publication of *The God Who May Be* (Indiana University Press, 2001). Although only two years have lapsed since its publication, this volume has been the subject of numerous panels, symposia, and reviews (SPEP in Chicago, AAR in Toronto, ACPA in Cincinnati, The Irish Philosophical Society in Dublin, and the Canadian Association of Hermeneutics in Halifax, to name only few). There is one point, however, that finds all its readers and commentators unanimous: *The God Who May Be* bears eloquent witness to philosophy's much-discussed "turn to religion." This "turn" assumed unforeseeable implications the day America, and with her the entire world, experienced the horror of what we now call "the events of 9/11." In the two dialogues which follow there is much talk about the "unbearable" Event that blinds us, "saturated" as it is with information; about the "ground zero" of revelation, the desolate place of *khora*—unnamable, impossible and singular—questions that problematize the authority and authenticity of one's claim to divine Truth and Will. All these might ring in a strange and uncanny way to the reader who will notice that the dates of the dialogues recorded here fall within a month after September 11.

On September 11 what we call today "the return of religion" became dramatically visible in all its complexity. The event itself as-

sumed religious dimensions in its sublimity as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. It was immediately registered in terms of two religious idioms: Islamic fanaticism, which "provoked" and "justified" it, and Christian fundamentalism, which proclaimed that the West was under attack and vowed to protect it. As the name of God was invoked by politicians and common people alike, as "ground zero" became more and more a hallowed ground with interfaith services and memorials, gradually September 11 became less and less a political case, simply because such an impossible event could not be fully appropriated by political language. It called, in time, for a more philosophical discourse.

As the exchanges with Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion, and Richard Kearney unfold, the reader will notice the development of a tension between hermeneutics and phenomenology (in the dialogue with Marion) on the one hand, and between hermeneutics and deconstruction (in the discussion with Derrida) on the other. Situated in the middle, we see Richard Kearney (who throughout the pages of *The God Who May Be* never tires in advocating a third way) using art and skill as he ranges from a hermeneutics of suspicion (when it comes to a phenomenology of saturation and transcendence) to a hermeneutics of suspension (when it comes the aporetics of the impossible). Both dialogues operate at the limit of philosophy, attempting to re-think the boundary between the possible and the impossible. The debate is now open.



PHILOSOPHY TODAY





A DIALOGUE WITH JACQUES DERRIDA

New York City, 16th of October, 2001



Kearney: In your interview with Dominique Janicaud (*Heidegger en France*) you talk about deconstruction as being a preference for discontinuity over continuity, for difference over reconciliation and so on. These two traits are always at work in your thought. I was wondering, at the practical level, what this preference might mean in the current political situation. In the wake of September 11, there is much talk of the West versus “Islam.” In Northern Ireland, there was much negotiation over decommissioning of arms. And there are all these tensions between Pakistan and India and, of course, between Palestine and Israel. My instinct here is to ask: don’t we need reconciliation in these areas of the world? It is perhaps a naïve question but also a pragmatic one. What I am really saying is: where could the hermeneutics of reconciliation meet the deconstruction of difference on these issues—the issues of agreement, consensus, and reconciliation between enemies?

Derrida: It is a very good question. First the quick answer. Of course, politically and socially speaking, I have nothing against reconciliation and I think we should do whatever we can to reach a reconciliation worthy of that name, be it the end of war, the end of violence, and so on. And I think, since you gave us these examples of what is going on today in the world—with a war which is not a war in the classical sense, a terrorism which is not terrorism in the classical sense—all these forms of new violence which challenge the old concepts of war, terrorism, and even nation/state, given, then, the fact that you referred to these examples, of course my political choice will be toward reconciliation. But a reconciliation which would not be simply a compromise in which the other (as it is always the case) in this or that way loses his or her singularity, identity, desire, and so on. A reconciliation also that will not be simply a sort of “deal” in order to take advantage of the other. So, if there were a reconciliation that could be just, then, of

course I would be interested in reconciliation. Each time my choice will be on the side of life and not of death. Now, if we try to do justice, to both sides of all the examples you cite, I suppose, we would have to acknowledge that many think that they act for a just cause. Those who hijacked the airplanes on 9/11 or those who spread the anthrax, think probably that their actions were provoked by an act of terrorism from the opposite side, an act of state terrorism on the part of the United States. So, if there were a kind of reconciliation that would signal a stop which could bring violence to a halt and reach an agreement or a common conviction, then why not? But if reconciliation is just a pretext for a cease-fire so that tomorrow violence can start again, the violence of the one trying to prove that it is stronger than the other, then, I would be very reluctant. Since we cannot avoid the reference to September 11 and since I cannot start any public speech or discussion without reference to these unspeakable events that have been named after that date, I think that today, the type of violence is such that there will be no reconciliation before violence stops.

Kearney: Is that a precondition?

Derrida: Let me say that I do not find the United States innocent but, given what is going on, whatever the purpose might be, we cannot reach a reconciliation before this type of violence (either through military or the police agents) stops. But the terrain has changed. Assuming that we manage to identify the criminals behind these attacks, let’s say, Bin Laden or some of his followers—and capture them or kill them, this would not change the situation. The terrain of reconciliation requires a radical change in the world; I would say a revolution of some sort. Any reconciliation worthy of that name requires not only that someone stops the violence through military or police force, or, as they call them, the peacekeeping forces. It requires more—a political change in the minds of the strongest.

Kearney: But who is the strongest?



FOOTER TITLE



Derrida: In the present situation the strongest becomes the weakest, and the weakest the strongest. Take, for example the case of biological war, which, by the way, as we all know, was initially provided by the U.S. If you only read, among other sources, Chomsky's book on the Rogue States you will see that the United States provided Saddam Hussein with the skills as well as the substance. That's why some people are so nervous about Iraq, because they know that Saddam has the substance and the ability to create it. That's why I said that no one is innocent in this affair. Nevertheless, being myself on the side of democracy, democracy to come, I only wish one thing: that the process of radical reconciliation—implying a total transformation of the political situation—would start with a major cessation of all violence. Although I remain suspicious of American policies, I think today they cannot do anything else but protect themselves and try to destroy the source of this terrorism, a terrible but unavoidable thing. Now about reconciliation itself. For everything said so far was at the level of the current political situation. Now on a more, radical kind of reconciliation, beyond the political—the political is just a layer—I would not suspend every relation with the other for the sake of hope, salvation, or resurrection (I have been reading your admirable book these days on this subject). This is perhaps a difference between us: this indeterminacy of the messianic leaves you unsatisfied. To speak roughly, you, Richard, would not give up the hope of redemption, resurrection, and so forth; and I would not either. But I would argue that when one is not ready to suspend the determination of hope then our relation with the other becomes again economical . . .

Kearney: . . . because hope interprets this relation in terms of horizons of expectation, interpretation?

Derrida: My feeling is, and this is not political—when I am political, juridical, and perhaps ethical, I am with you—that when I try to think the most rigorous relation with the other I must be ready to give up the hope for a return to salvation, the hope for resurrection, or even reconciliation. In the pure act of giving and for-giving we should be free from any hope of reconciliation, I must forgive, if one forgives . . .

Kearney: . . . unconditionally. . .

Derrida: . . . Unconditionally, without the hope of re-constituting a healthy and peaceful community. That's where reconciliation is for me problematic. When I am for any kind of negotiating between these unconditional and absolute thoughts and the conditional, then I become juridical and political—then I am of course with the side of the best possible reconciliation—which is, nevertheless, always very difficult. Reconciliation is difficult. It has to be negotiated through transactions, analyses of contexts and times: unpredictability of all kinds. But at least we have the feeling of a possible compromise. That is what is happening in life.

Kearney: To come back to the conclusion you drew earlier and play devil's advocate. When you say we cannot have a genuine, radical reconciliation worthy of its name until we cease violence, this seems disturbingly reminiscent of certain phrases made, for example, by Sharon of Israel, refusing to speak with the Palestinians until we have peace; or the Unionists in Northern Ireland saying, "we cannot talk to Sinn Fein until they put away their guns." I can understand of course the logic behind that; but it seems like asking for the impossible *too soon*, and not accepting the mudiness and murkiness of political situations. The Palestinians are slow to abandon the gusher of arms unconditionally until they see what is going to happen, etc. Deconstruction's position is, as I understand it, that *nothing* is pure; everything is contaminated, mixed, ambiguous. And so we will never reach a point of pure non-violence where we can have reconciliation. Unless we compromise. Unless we accept some kind of negotiated settlement *before* we reach perfect peace and non-violence.

Derrida: I totally agree with you. Perhaps what I said was over-simplified. That's why reconciliation in the political sense always occurs during some lasting violence. Now when I mention the fact that the Americans have to respond to the events of September 11, I did not exclude that they have already transformed the situation. On the one hand, they said that they were ready to help poor Afghans by dropping food and providing similar kinds of humanitarian aid; and, on the other hand, they are already discussing the prospect of a Palestinian state.





You remember, perhaps, Sharon saying, “we do not want to become the ‘Czechoslovakia’ of today.” Before World War II peace was made with Hitler at the expense of Czechoslovakia and Sharon is afraid that, if the Western coalition needs to expand to include more Arab states, this could happen at the expense of Israel. I do not judge anyone now. Perhaps the U.S. is making a terrible mistake in what they are doing. I cannot judge. Since television is under censorship we cannot really know. In fact what I say is simply that the U.S. could not remain immobile. They couldn’t say, “let’s wait and see.” They had to do something, whether we call it “retaliation” or just an attempt to stop the terror. At the same time, without waiting for the total destruction of the violent side, they have already, at least, promised that they would change their policy. I think they are trying to change, however indirectly, but their premises are very complicated. They ask: “why do they hate us?” They will have to try to understand these feelings of hatred and try to change them. I hope that the Europeans—because we will have to come back to Europe on this issue—the European allies should exercise a pressure on the United States, that not only the States but the whole western world should change its policy toward the Arabs. If only in order to demonstrate that they are right when they say that Bin Laden does not represent Islam or the Palestinians. If they want this to be true they have to take a number of steps. And I don’t mean that they will necessarily have to stop the violence, but even before that and at the same time with that, they will have to start changing their policy.

Kearney: Pursuing this question of the “Other” and the European as sort of a middleman, between the so called middle-east and America, I take it you are suggesting that because Europe has a much closer relationship with the Mediterranean world and Arab culture generally, it is more aware of all the different variations of Islam. And that Europe has, therefore, an obligation to try to communicate this understanding to America and to mediate between East and West, as it were. Since US citizens asking, “why they hate us,” they are asking for an answer. So we, in Europe, might be able to help “translate” between the two. I have been working on similar issues on my

book *On Stories* where there is a section on the construction of National Narratives. I try to explore how Rome was founded on the exclusion of the Etruscans; how the British and the Irish constituted themselves within a dialectic of otherness with each other; and then, how America founded its new world identity on the basis of its particular “Other”—starting with the native “Indians,” then going onto the slaves, emigrants and finally . . . “aliens” as the other (there is an obsession with aliens from outer space). After September 11, there was a front-page headline in *Newsweek*, “a Nation indivisible.” The other had struck. It seems to me that there was an immediate need to put a face on it, to situate it geographically, to identify enemies out there because to have enemies *within* was so disturbing. Perhaps that is why the scare on anthrax was so disturbing. Once the other is also located *within* the nation it is harder to project the other back “out there.” How do you see this dialectic playing out?

Derrida: There are at least two or three questions in what you have said. First, a vast problem, let’s call it “translation.” Can Europe help in translating? I think there are two ways to look into things, to estimate what is going on here. First there is the short one: to understand the premises of the Cold War. We are still paying the price of the Cold War because it is precisely for that reason—the reason of having an enemy—that the United States had to surround themselves with so many non-democratic countries (as allies). At the same time there was this polarity, and by means of this polarity, the United States had made a number of terrible mistakes in strategy that boomeranged. So now we face these consequences of the Cold War. We shouldn’t forget that Bin Laden was trained according to American models.

The longest way will be the study of the history and embodiment of Islam. How can we explain that this religion—one that is now in terms of demography the most powerful—this religion, and those nations which embody its beliefs, have missed something in history, something that it is not shared with Europe, namely, Enlightenment, science, economy, development? They are poor countries, even if some Arabs are extremely rich by virtue of the oil industry, they still have not the necessary infrastructure. What is, then, that which places





them economically on the “wrong” side? Is it the religion? Now, of course, I am oversimplifying. But it took some centuries during which Christianity and Judaism succeeded in associating with the techno-scientific-capitalistic development while the Arabic-Islamic world did not. They remained poor, attached to old models, repressive, even more phallogocentric than the Europeans (which is already something). So without an understanding of history, without a new kind of historical investigation about what happened with Islam during the last five centuries, we will not be able to understand what is going on today . . .

Kearney: You have several references in your work to monotheism as Judeo-Christian-Islamic. You always re-introduce this hyphen that many of us forget, and that complicates in a very refreshing way the scenario. You remind people that Islam shares a common monotheistic heritage in religion and philosophy (see for example the case of Avicenna). At its inception, Islam does not look so alien from ourselves . . .

Derrida: In my short essay “Faith and Knowledge” I ask the question of Islam in relation to the other religions. We have the Judeo-Christian couple as opposed to Islam but, on the other hand, we have the Judeo-Islamic couple as opposed to Christianity. The death of God is Christian, neither Jew nor Muslim would ever say that God is dead. There is, then, this confrontation between the three Abrahamic traditions. If we want seriously to understand what is happening today we have to go back to the origins and ask what has happened since the middle ages. Why—in spite of the fact that the Arabic world has incorporated western scholarship, science and culture—has it not developed socially, historically as Europe has? I do not have an answer to that. But if we do not go back to this period, to this question we cannot make sense of today’s situation.

Kearney: Does that statement include Buddhism, Hinduism? These religions did not seem to have such a problem.

Derrida: No. I’m not sure that we could call them strictly speaking “religion.” This is a point that I make in “Faith and Knowledge” about the “mondialatinisation” of the world “religion.”

Kearney: Maybe, it is because Islam, in its origins, is somehow more connected with us here in Europe. The departure from us (the West and Europe) came at a later point. The battle of Vienna, when the Islamic forces were defeated by the Germans and the Poles was in 1682. It is not long since Islam was in the heart of Europe. The Balkans, Spain, Greece. Islam was a part of us and we were a part of it.

Derrida: It is, without doubt, a great civilization, a great culture. Nevertheless, they did not articulate the possibility of what we define as power, as techno-science, capitalism.

Kearney: How do we raise this question of Islam while avoiding Huntington’s binary thesis of the good Western Empire against the Evil Islamic Empire?

Derrida: I think there is the expressed wish in Islam and among Muslims, among theologians, to dissociate Islam from a more violent form. I know that there is this desire to come back to an Islam that would be totally devoid of violence. These differences, however, within Islam cannot be developed efficiently without a development of the institution of the political, of the transformation of the *structures* of the society. Of course, we will always find an interesting Muslim scholar or theologian, who will say, “Islam is not Bin Laden.” But these people remain powerless because what has power is precisely *this* non-democratic, violent regime. It is a strange situation today. Well, I think Europe, not the old question of Europe, the spirit of Europe, Husserl’s Europe, Heidegger’s Europe, not even the European Community, or the Europe of Tony Blair, but perhaps there is something in Europe today, a possibility of taking a certain distance from both sides (the U.S. and Islam) even if there is an alliance in NATO, there is something in Europe which could or should avoid these theocratic struggles, the theocratic duel. In order to give some image of this schema, I would return to the question of the death penalty that, as you know, obsesses me. Imagine that they capture Bin Laden, they may treat him, if he is captured by the United States, they may capture him as a foreign soldier, or enemy. They could judge him, then, according to their own laws of justice, and probably, sentence him to death. Or, would he be transferred to an International Penal Court according to the new law of the





United Nations? In that case, he couldn't be sentenced to death, because the New International Penal Court has of course judged crimes against humanity, crimes of war but it cannot enforce death or pass the death sentence. This case locates the difference between, let's say, the spirit of Europe and the United States. The fact that the European Community has abolished the death penalty makes a difference. A real difference and a difference in principle.

Kearney: If, say, British forces took Bin Laden, they couldn't extradite him to the United States.

Derrida: No, they couldn't and they shouldn't. Nor the French—they will never extradite someone to a country where the death penalty is accepted. Whether Bin Laden would be killed as a "soldier," as an "enemy," or judged him as a "terrorist." All these concepts are now shaken. To come back to the last part of your question about the re-foundation of a sovereign, single nation. I am struck by the new re-unification of this country. Speaking of assimilation, the African-Americans of this country are now fully Americans, at least for the moment. As long as they are against Bin Laden. Perhaps one day people will consider the September 11 as the re-foundation of the US. Because, precisely, the US was struck by an un-identified enemy, not a state, not an individual (it is not Bin Laden himself, alone). This attack has become the center for a new foundation of the nation. This aggression has re-built the nation; this terrible scar has provoked such a self-defence that it serves almost as a re-constitution, an economy, a sort of therapy, and so on. Americans are becoming reconciled with themselves. There is reconciliation with immigrants and other under-privileged groups of society. You have probably seen a TV advertisement where a number of people of various backgrounds and nationalities announce to the camera, "I am an American." It is amazing and it is true. You cannot but admire this wonderful thing going on, despite all the tragedy and all the hypocrisy, there is still an idea of democracy. No doubt. I remember when I was here in 1971, in Baltimore; the "war with blacks" was terrible. There were rebellions in prisons, terrible violence. I thought that there would be a real revo-

lution. And they succeeded through violence, because a number of black militants, leaders of the black community were killed. The despair was terrible. But after the depression they started with the act of integration, with the struggle for civil rights. There was progress. It is always not enough, of course. There is always a lot of hypocrisy: racism, for example, still exists. And yet, the idea of this progress cannot be denied.

Kearney: This polarization works. Much of the Islamic world seems to have forgot, on a popular level, a sort of a fraternity against the West. On the other hand, the Americans are certainly a reconciled, rejuvenated nation once again. In terms of these polar extremes—complementary enemies playing off against each other, both calling each other the "Evil Empire"—I would call the European position a middle one, a hermeneutics of mediation. But I suspect that you would be slow to use either of these terms: hermeneutics and mediation. That is what I would endorse. But your tendency is to focus more on the gaps and holes. This is an absolutely indispensable move. But not the whole story. I suppose, if there is a difference between us—I mention this in the fourth chapter of the *God Who May Be*—it is a difference of emphasis rather than of kind. Maybe it is because of the experience of Northern Ireland.

Derrida: We will need lots of time to make these traits more specific. I think that there is already an act of mediation in Europe. Although Europe is predominantly Christian, Europe as community is less theocratic than the United States. Europe is more secular and by being the ally of the States and being more attentive and respectful to difference than the States, it could, and I hope that it will, play a role of mediation. It should exercise some pressure on the United States. I agree with you on this level. Europe is not this factual, Christian Europe simply led by Christianity—this is something that needs to be re-elaborated. And here we come to the difference between you and me. It is easier to think of what I put under the word *khora* in Europe than in any other place in the world. Now, it may also happen in some parts of the United States, but this will be the dimension of "Europe" in the States. Something may happen in the United States thanks to some American thinkers. But it





would have to do with a way of freeing yourselves not from “a God-who-may-be” but rather from a God that is, in the direction of what I call *khora*. When I say *khora* I am not excluding anything but I am referring also to the politics of *khora*, the absolute indeterminacy, which is the only possible groundless ground for a universal, if not for reconciliation, at least for a universal politics beyond cosmopolitanism.

Kearney: I suppose I could see the God-who-may-be emerging from *khora*, from that space. If I had to try to locate it, this god, I would place it somewhere between the God of messianism and Being on the one hand and *khora* on the other. The God-Who-May-Be hovers and suffers between these two. It is not identical with *khora*. This is the sort of dialogue I develop throughout the book with you and Jack Caputo. I am aware of our differences on the issue of how does one speak about God. For me it is a hermeneutic problem: how do you speak, and name and identify a God without falling back to metaphysics and onto-theology and yet without saying “God is *khora*.”

Derrida: I never said that . . .

Kearney: I know you never said that but you see the problematic . . .

Derrida: I try to address these various issues by reading your book. The differences between us are so thin, that we cannot in a short discussion do justice to them. These thin and sometimes imperceptible differences or nuances could be translated into politics. But we cannot reduce them to that. I felt very close to everything you said in this book. Up to a certain moment where you yourself rigorously define the thinnest difference, that is, on resurrection. I am not against resurrection. I would share your hope for resurrection, reconciliation, and redemption. But I, I think I have a responsibility as someone who thinks deconstructively, even if I dream of redemption, I have the responsibility to acknowledge, to obey the necessity of the possibility that there is *khora* rather than a relationship with the anthropo-theologic God of Revelation. At some point, you, Richard, translate your faith into something determinable and then you have to keep the “name” of the resurrection. My own understanding of faith is that there is faith whenever one gives up not only any cer-

tainty but also any determined hope. If one says that resurrection is the horizon of one’s hope then one knows what one name when one says “resurrection”—faith is not pure faith. It is already knowledge. That’s why sometimes, you call me an atheist . . .

Kearney: . . . Someone who rightly pass for an atheist . . .

Derrida: Sometimes I would argue that you have to be an atheist of this sort in order to be true to faith, to pure faith. So it is a very complicated logic.

Kearney: In *The God Who May Be* I say that “where the religious so offends, I would call myself a seeker of love and justice *tout court*” (*The God Who May Be*, 6).

Derrida: Me too. A seeker of love and justice. It is not that I am happy with this. It is a suffering.

Kearney: For me this is the crux of the dialogue between hermeneutics and deconstruction. My diacritical hermeneutics are different from Gadamer’s and Heidegger’s, and even Ricoeur’s in certain respects. But what I have tried to explore and develop in *The God Who May Be* and *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, is the hermeneutic-deconstructive inter-face. One thing that I would like to mention here on the question of God is something you said in Villanova that I very much identified with. During the round table discussion, you said that “if I am interested in the God, it would be the god who is powerless . . .”

Derrida: Absolutely. First of all, I would like to tell you that I found your book powerful; it is powerful in its powerlessness. I was impressed and grateful to see what is happening with the history that we share, and we share twenty years now. Your book formalizes questions in a way that is absolutely wonderful. I read your book in agreement all the time with this tiny difference, on the question of the power. The “may-be.” There are two ways to understand the “may.” “I may” is the perhaps, it is also the “I am able to” or “I might.” The “perhaps” (*peut-être*) refers to the unconditional beyond sovereignty. It is an unconditional which is the desire of powerlessness rather than power. I think you are right to attempt to name God not as sovereign, as almighty, but as precisely the most powerless. Justice and love are precisely oriented to this





powerlessness. But *khora* is powerless too. Not powerlessness in the sense of poor or vulnerable. Powerlessness as simply no-power. No-power at all.

Kearney: Can we, then, kneel and pray before *khora*?

Derrida: No. No. This is precisely the difference. But, I would immediately add that if we are to pray, if I pray, I have at least to take into account that *khora* enables me to pray. That spacing, the fact that there is this spacing. A neutral indifferent, impassible spacing that enables me to pray. Without *khora* there would be no prayer. We should think that without *khora* there would be no God, no Other, no spacing. But you can address a prayer only to something or someone, not to *khora*. To come back to your question, I have nothing against all these things: reconciliation, prayer, redemption and so on, but I think that these things would not be possible, without this in-

different, impassible, neuter, interval spacing of *khora*. The “there is” beyond being.

Kearney: Which is prior to all differences and yet makes difference possible . . .

Derrida: Yes . . .

Kearney: And this can lead to a new politics, another kind of cosmopolitanism.

Derrida: *Beyond* cosmopolitanism, since cosmopolitanism implies a state, a citizen, the cosmos. *Khora* opens up a universality beyond cosmopolitanism. That’s where at some point I am planning to examine the political consequences of the thought of *khora* which I think are urgent today. And if, one day, there will be a reconciliation between the terrible enemies, it would be because of some space, of some *khora*. An empty mutual space that is not the cosmos, not the created world, not the nation, state, global dimension, but just that: *khora*.





A DIALOGUE WITH JEAN LUC MARION

Boston College, 2 October 2001

Kearney: They are many similarities between your work, Jean-Luc, and mine: we both owe a great deal of our philosophical formation to the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger; we have both engaged ourselves in close dialogue with Levinas, Ricoeur, and Derrida. Given these evident similarities, it would be more fruitful and interesting, it seems to me, if we take a look here into some of the differences in our respective positions in regards to the phenomenology of God. One question that I would like to put to you, Jean Luc, and which, in fact, I have put in a more elaborate form on page 33 of *The God Who May Be* is the question of the hermeneutical status of the saturated phenomenon. It seems to me that if there is a difference between us, given all our common readings and assumptions, it is this: I would pass from phenomenology to hermeneutics more rapidly than you would. It strikes me that your approach is more strictly phenomenological since for you the “saturated phenomenon” is fundamentally *irrégradable*, a pure event without horizon or context, without “I” or agent. As such it appears to *defy* interpretation. You do of course make some concessions to hermeneutics, as when you say—on the very last page of your essay “The Saturated Phenomenon”—that this phenomenon is communal and communicable and historic. Here you do seem to acknowledge the possibility of a hermeneutic response, but my suspicion, and please correct me if I’m mistaken, is that the example you privilege—Revelation—requires a *pure phenomenology of the pure event*. Whereas I would argue that there is no pure phenomenon as such, that appearing—not matter how iconic or saturated it may be—always already involves an interpretation of some kind. Phenomenological description and intuition, in my account, always implies some degree of hermeneutic reading, albeit that of a pre-reflective pre-understanding or pre-conscious affection for the most part. My question, then, would be: how do we

interpret—and by extension, how do we judge—the saturated phenomenon without betraying it?

Marion: This is an old question. The first version of *The Saturated Phenomenon* was written as a paper just after *Reduction and Givenness*; then a more elaborate version followed as it is now found in *Étant Donne*. The first to raise this question was Jean Grondin, a Gadamer specialist at the University of Montreal; after him Jean Greisch asked me the same question and although I am stubborn and narrow-minded, I am not completely closed to critical remarks! Let us put aside for a moment the question of Christian revelation which is not directly related to the saturated phenomenon. The saturated phenomenon is a kind of phenomenon that is characterized by a deficit in *concept vis-à-vis intuition*: such phenomena included the *event*, the *idol*, the *flesh*, and the *other*. In all these cases, there is a surplus of intuition over intention. It is precisely because of this surplus of intuition, I have argued, that we need hermeneutics. Why? Because hermeneutics is always an inquiry for further concepts: hermeneutics is generated when we witness an excess of information rather than its lack. In *Étant Donne* where I discuss the four types of saturated phenomena I say that the icon is “the icon of endless hermeneutics.” Why an endless hermeneutics? Precisely because there is there a conceptual deficit. I have learned my hermeneutics with Ricoeur and Ricoeur is very clear on this: if we are to have hermeneutics it has to be an endless hermeneutics. There, where the need of hermeneutics arises, it is completely impossible to imagine that we may get at any moment an adequate, final concept. Subjectivity, history, and the question of God—the question of history is very important for our discussion here, for the historical event is the most simple kind of saturated phenomenon—in all these cases, the question of hermeneutics is totally unavoidable. Hermeneutical investigation never completes its mission. It is never finished and should never be finished, and that

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is why there cannot be a hermeneutics of what I call the *common range* phenomenon. It is why, for example, the history of mathematics is not a part of mathematics, why the history of science in general is not *science*. Because, in the case of pure mathematics or pure science there is no deficit of phenomenality, there is no saturated phenomenon, and thus, no need of hermeneutics.

Kearney: In two of your texts, the *De Surcroît* and *Étant Donne*, you delineated the four types of saturated phenomena, all of them characterized by a super-abundance of intuition over intention. As you say, they do not necessarily point towards a theological turn—actually, they could be quite a-theological—but you have also written of the saturated phenomenon as a theological event. Since we are focusing our discussion here on the phenomenology and hermeneutics of God, let me come back to this theme and ask: Can we have a hermeneutics of God *qua* saturated phenomenon? For example, in some texts, you speak of the saturated phenomenon in terms of a super-abundance that surpasses all narration and predication and fills us with a certain stupor and terror whose very “incomprehensibility imposes on us.” Regarding this notion of incomprehensibility, you would seem to suggest an *absence of hermeneutics* and point to a theology of absence where the role of narratives and images and even conceptual interpretations appears to be a betrayal, in some sense, of the very unconditional absoluteness of the religious event. In *God Without Being* you actually speak of a “eucharistic hermeneutics”; but here again, we are faced with what you call the “unspeakable word,” which seems to mean that we find the Word already given, gained, and available. In addition to that, there is the question of the theologian who, by definition, ultimately has the *last word* of interpretation. Such a view seems to me to delimit the notion of an endless hermeneutics. Moreover, those that do not participate in the praxis of the Eucharistic phenomenon seem to be excluded not only from its experience but also from its interpretation.

Marion: Let us go back, then, to the theological character of the saturated phenomenon. My final position on that is that the four types of saturated phenomena mentioned

above could all be recapitulated in the field of a phenomenology of revelation. Nevertheless, if we are allowed to take revelation—a theological concept—as a phenomenological question then, I think, it should be done to the degree that revelation can be described as the combination of the four types of saturated phenomena. I refer here to the Judeo-Christian Revelation; to describe it you would need to employ the type of the (1) *event*—since it always occurs as an even—(2) the *idol*—since it bedazzles us with its appearance, when it appears—(3) the *flesh*—since it is always an appearance that has to appeal to our senses; and finally, (4) the *other*, that is, the otherness of the other. Revelation combines and recapitulates in itself all of the four types; it is, we might say, a phenomenon saturated to the square. The kind of hermeneutics that we would need to employ vis-à-vis Revelation is already at work on each of these kinds of saturated phenomena. I would say that revelation is a rather good paradigmatic case of what I call the saturated phenomenon. What is given in revelation is precisely what surpasses any expectation. The fact that we face something beyond any expectation and any final conception solicits an endless hermeneutics. That is why the field of hermeneutics is absolutely and widely open to any possible direction and to any level of interpretation. Take for example, the Creed, the Apostolic *credo*. Strictly speaking it is a document that reveals a set of doctrines shared in common by all the churches and all the theologians, on the other hand, however, it is open to different interpretations which are not always consistent with each other, even within the same church or the same tradition. I see these differences of interpretation as many different hermeneutic possibilities. I would also say that the Jesuit spirituality, for example, is another example of a possible interpretation, of another type of hermeneutics within the tradition of Catholic spirituality.

Kearney: Would you, then, admit to a comparative phenomenology of the religious along the lines of someone like Mircea Eliade? Do you think that the phenomenon of God can be experienced outside a specifically monotheistic context? Is there something in the notion of Revelation as an absolute saturated phenomenon that requires a Judeo-Christian theology?





It is not just *any* God that appears in revelation, is it? And how can we tell the difference?

Marion: I think that the “game,” so to speak, is completely open to anyone who has to do what he can do and as much as his abilities allow. What happens at the moment of the Revelation is like a tremendous explosion: it affects everyone, from those at the “ground zero” to those at the remotest periphery, but no matter where we stand, or how much or how little of intuition we receive, each one of us has to take that much and make out if it whatever we can. And this is an on-going process; it is a story that never reaches its end.

Kearney: So one could have a Buddhist or Hindu hermeneutics of the phenomenon of God?

Marion: I do think that the question of God is so great that, to some extent, we have to admit that all the different traditions, including those that are apparently foreign to the Biblical heritage, are needed in order to say something about God. Buddhism is a way of living the experience of the infinite prior or beside the phenomenon of revelation; Buddhism concerns itself with what we would call “natural revelation.” And this too is needed. It is like putting the question of revelation in a different way: what would have happened if no Revelation had happened?

Kearney: You say “different” as negative to positive or as different to same?

Marion: It cannot be completely different because what is at stake here, i.e., the human being, is the same, in the sense that it *us* who raise the question of revelation. It can be raised differently but it is always raised within the common structures of human experience. The experience of the infinite, with or without revelation, does not compel us to choose this or that tradition.

Kearney: Why do you say “without revelation”? Are there not kinds of revelations and epiphanies—as well as all kinds of saturated phenomena—that do *not* presuppose any theological or monotheistic given . . .

Marion: Yes . . .

Kearney: . . . and which are surely available to non-monotheistic traditions . . .

Marion: There could be . . .

Kearney: . . . whether it is a work of art or an icon or a sacred moment in some Eastern religion or simply an act of love or justice, giving a cup of cold water to a thirsty person.

Marion: Yes . . . I have no authority to decide whether the Buddhist, for example, would or should use this or that interpretation of his experience of the infinite. . . My point regarding the relation of the saturated phenomenon to revelation is an old issue between theology and metaphysics.

Kearney: To clarify, when you say “revelation” do you mean “Revelation”—with a capital “R”—that is, a monotheistic Revelation, or you mean “revelation” in the phenomenological sense, which is obviously more inclusive?

Marion: My answer will have to be a long one. An old question that concerned me for some time was why metaphysics since the sixteenth century became so interested in explaining the very notion of natural revelation—not a terribly consistent concept anyway. When, in modern times, philosophy was understood as the doctrine of the *a priori* it became immediately apparent that if there are *a priori*, then any possible experience must be limited and admitted by them. Within this context, very roughly sketched here, the question of revelation needed to be addressed because, in the mode of revelation, the limitations of our experience are supposed to be given by revelation itself, or by the One revealed through revelation and not controlled by the modalities of the transcendental apparatuses. The conflict between these two horizons was an unavoidable one and the final conclusion reached, in different ways by both Fichte and Kant was the limitation of religion “within the limits of reason alone.” Let us recall here Fichte’s criticism of any possible concept of revelation, Christian or non Christian alike, and the answer that Hegel gave, where the Concept allows revelation to happen but, at the end, it is the Concept itself that *is* the truth of revelation. The moral of this story was that philosophy *alone* is responsible for deciding what is acceptable as “revelation” and what is not. With the advent of the crisis in metaphysics, however, what we know today as “the end of metaphysics,” the picture changes. The question that led metaphysics into crisis was precisely the one that





questioned the role of metaphysics as the ultimate authority that decides which kind of phenomena are admissible to philosophical discourse and which are not, which questions the legitimacy of metaphysics and, along with all this, the question of the possibility of revelation. Together with the crisis in metaphysics, or as a consequence of this very crisis, the question of revelation per se was re-opened. Under this light, the experience of a Buddhist, for example, faces the same problem and the same critique as the question of experience of the (Judeo-Christian) revelation. Neither can be taken as “rational” by the standards of philosophical and scientific rationality. On the other hand, Buddhists as well as Christians think that they have the right to be taken as reasonable and capable of performing sound reasoning and philosophical questioning, regardless of their faith. Obviously, a broader and less rigid concept of rationality is in order here. If you want to focus on the inter-religious discourse (understood not in the sense of ecumenism but as the question of what constitutes, or not, revelation), such a matter can only be addressed when you assume that revelation nullifies any natural experience. But to assume that you must already know what revelation is or does is the same as saying that the hermeneutics of revelation is now over, that revelation has nothing to reveal any more, and thus, by definition, that there is no revelation. If we speak of revelation, then, we have to accept that hermeneutics is still going on, that revelation is open as history is still in the making. There is no contradiction in saying that everything was fully revealed and achieved but that, even today, we don’t know, we can’t know, how far it reaches.

Kearney: Would you at this point in your work revise your position in the *God Without Being* regarding the hermeneutics of the text as being conditioned by the community itself? How do you feel now, for example, about the passage that you wrote: “Hermeneutic of the text by the community, thanks to the service of the theologian, but on the condition that the community itself be interpreted by the Word and assimilated to the place where theological interpretation can be exercised, thanks to the liturgical service of the theologian par excellence, the bishop,” for it is “only the bishop

that merits in its full sense the title of theologian”? (152–53). The *God Without Being* is undoubtedly inscribed within a monotheistic tradition. Is this theological position one which you would still defend? Or do you think that the brackets have to be opened again to a more “interfaith” phenomenon of revelation?

Marion: I would like to say this. When I said that “only the bishop merits the title of the theologian” I was not, of course, taking sides in the present-day differences between, say, bishops and theologians, I was referring back to the tradition where most of our great theologians were, at the same time, bishops in their communities. I am thinking here of examples such as the two Gregorys, Basil the Great, or John the Chrysostom. For a long time in the common tradition of the Church, the *place* to teach theology was the pulpit from which the bishop, during the liturgy, had to explain the Gospel. All of our great Patristic books were, in fact, connected to these homiletic practices.

Kearney: But some of these books were burned by the bishops. Master Eckhart was on the Index, and John Scotus Eruigena. Even Aquinas at one point! These were great teachers and hermeneuts. But none of them were Bishops!

Marion: But this very situation was the symptom of a corruption of what I am trying to explain here. It is difficult for us to think today about how theology was originally not supposed to be the outcome of intellectual curiosity, logical dexterity, or academic career. Theology grew out of the task of commenting on the Scriptures. Not because you chose to be a professional exegete of the Scriptures but because that was an essential part of the liturgy, of the Eucharistic gathering of the faithful. In this sense, theology was a communal event. It was the theology of a community and not the solitary research task of a theologian. The great theologians of the tradition were not writing books because they wished to get published but because they needed to address specific question that there were of importance in their communities. Their theology was built in direct relation to their pastoral service. With the advent of the universities we are in a new, terrible situation where you have on the one side the Bishop who has administrative power (and often a rather low level of scholarship)





and on the other side, the university professor who has a high level of scholarship but who is removed from the believing community and its act of celebration. The result is that each one uses his old weapons to get rid of the other in the struggle over the monopoly of truth. The academic claims that the Bishop is deeply involved in politics and thus unable to do serious theology while the Bishop says that we should not take seriously all these uncommitted professors and researchers. Things have radically changed.

Rome, The Feast of the Epiphany, 2002.

Manoussakis: We meet here, in Rome, in order to continue the conversation that you held with Richard Kearney a few months ago in Boston. I would like to start, then, by asking: how can we think of God today and what language should we employ to address the phenomenon of God?

Marion: For a long time, one could actually say since the times of Plato, philosophy has been thinking of God in terms of “beingness,” of the *ousia* that grounds or is grounded by the highest being. And for a good reason, being is our ultimate concern: the being we have or the being we lack. But when translated and projected as God, being becomes an idol and perhaps the most resistant idol of God. That is why I have been trying to speak of God *without* Being or in terms that are *otherwise* than Being, such as the event, the icon, the other. I was happy to see that I am not alone in this effort. Richard Kearney’s recent book, *The God Who May Be*, signals a new way of thinking of God or, better still, as a call that provokes us to think of the phenomenon of God in new ways. First, a remark on the title: *The God Who May Be*. This title may be to some extent, or to some people, upsetting because it seems as if the actual being of God may be discussed and questioned. This is true. We have to remind ourselves that “the God who may be” is a way to translate or express the very classical name of God as it is found in the Bible, that is the name of God in Exodus 3:14. The God of the Exodus is not the God who “is” but rather the God “who may be.” This formula is not the actual future tense but rather an incomplete tense which indicates that God’s way of being is to come. This is a very strong feature of the

Judeo-Christian God that sees divine existence as a process of opening and revealing His glory. God does not stay what He is, but He is insofar He will come. In the New Testament one of the technical titles of Christ that points to His divinity is that of the one “who comes,” *ho erxomenos*. The time of Christ is “the hour to come and behold it is now.” Christ is the one who “comes into the world and the world receives Him not” and the one who is “to come again,” etc. This is the name of the God who may be.

My second point is that the title chosen by Richard Kearney, regardless of its biblical connections, is also provocative insofar it may suggest that “to be” or “being” itself is not enough to give us access to God. The crux of philosophy is always the question of the validity of being in general and in particular the validity of being as an attribute of God. There is, however, the possibility of a deeper way for God to reveal the richness and the glory of His divinity, and this way, following Kearney’s breakthrough, might be none other than the experience of “possibility” itself. I completely agree with Richard Kearney in embracing the axiom that possibility stands higher than actuality. This, as you know, is a statement that Heidegger makes about being in paragraph 7 of *Being and Time* but it might be truer about God. In any case, we should remind ourselves of another fact, closely connected to Richard’s own intellectual history; Richard started his philosophical work by writing his thesis, *La Poétique du Possible*, under the direction of Ricoeur, in Paris. To a large extent, then, I read *The God Who May Be* as a fuller realization of his first intuition on the significance of possibility. His thought is reaching its maturity as he is returning . . .

Manoussakis: . . . full circle, one could say, to the very beginnings of his philosophical insights . . .

Marion: . . . to possibility as the best way to think of God. Now I would like to consider a last point with regard to *The God Who May Be*. When we think and speak about God we risk a great deal of danger but, it seems to me, that the real threat is not that we may go astray in formulating unorthodox positions about God. There is yet another danger, hidden but no less threatening, namely, to narrow our approach to

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God, treating God as if He were part of our objective reality, part of our language, part of our experience of the world. The surprising connection that Richard Kearney attempts between God and history makes clear that if we believe that God has created our world, then, by definition, God stands beyond creation; hence the need to direct back to God every experience of the world, without exception. In that context, the use of a deconstructive critique of the limitations of metaphysical patterns, and the attempt to use either literary expressions or apophatic phrases in reference to God, are all perfectly acceptable because everything available to us should be directed back to God who is beyond creation and by whom creation was made possible. God, then, should be seen as overcoming and trespassing all the conditions of our understanding. Apophatic language, deconstruction, and the critique of metaphysics are precisely to the point here since the transcendence of God cannot be expressed insofar we remain within the limitations of our metaphysical view of the word. In all these respects, Richard Kearney's work is not only very useful, it is also very "fair" to God.

Manoussakis: It seems to me that both you and Kearney see in the possible, in the thinking of God as one who is not yet but who may be, an element that *safeguards* God's otherness. If being became an idol after all that was because being was too static and immutable. If the difference between God and us is understood only in terms of being then it is a difference of degree and not of kind. The inexhaustible possibilities of the possible, on the other hand, open our thinking to an *otherwise* and to an *elsewhere*.

Marion: The question of the otherness of the other is a very important one for both Kearney and me. Could I ever, though, perceive the otherness of the other if first I am not myself different from myself? Here there is something very well known in modern philosophy: the lack of a strict identity of the self. For everything else but me, "to be" is to stay and to endure in the same condition that it is. In my case, however, (and before anything else I am aware of myself) to remain what I am and stay always the same—if this were ever possible which I doubt—would amount to the definition of

someone who is dead. Unfortunately, we know many people who are exactly what they are with no change, no improvement, not even decay, for years after years; what we all know about them is that they are dead, although they are still living. To be alive as a human being does not always mean to live in a better way, or in a more exciting way, and so on; what to be means is rather the process of becoming not what you are but what you are *not*. That is why our existence is historical; the historical is made possible because our being is first of all in its deepest root possibility rather than actuality. Only when we die for the first time are we what we are, equal to ourselves, without change . . .

Manoussakis: . . . but for those people who are dead before they die, those people who remain unchanged because they grasp what they are without letting it go . . .

Marion: . . . for them this is an anticipation of physical death . . .

Manoussakis: . . . maybe for them, a God-without-being or a God-who-may-be could signal a very uncomfortable imperative for change . . .

Marion: Yes, indeed. I'm saying that if you imagine God remaining exactly what He is supposed to be forever, then, there is something idolatrous about this imagination; and what makes it idolatrous is the mirroring, the duplication of our own apprehension of ourselves because that is *our* dream to be without limit or end. That is the desire that we project onto God, as so-called eternity. But that which hides behind it is nothing less than what we really hope for *ourselves*.

Manoussakis: It is a kind of conceptual anthropomorphism then: the projection of our desire onto God . . .

Marion: Yes, our lack of desire.

Manoussakis: . . . or desire's lack.

DUBLIN, 11 JANUARY 2003.

Jean-Luc Marion: I take the opportunity of this seminar to answer a comment made by Richard Kearney, which is very fruitful, and which is a very good example of how far the concept of the saturated phenomenon can be applied.

If we consider, as Kearney does in his hermeneutic reading of Exodus 3:14 in Chapter 2





of *The God Who May Be*, it is very fascinating, because there are three possible interpretations. The first interpretation is the *kataphatic*: we take “I am who I am” as I am, I am an *ousia*, and more than that, I am Being itself, and so on. Then you have the negative or *apophatic* interpretation: “I am who I am, and you will never know who I am”—which is a very old and traditional interpretation too. And there is a third one, which is beyond both affirmation and negation, namely the hyperbolic one, where the two previous readings are both surpassed and assumed—“I am the one who shall be. Forever.” Shall be what? He who can say “Here I am,” because “Here I am” is the name under which the encounter between God and man is made, throughout all Revelation. So, “I will be the one always able to answer or to call.” And so, with the same words of Exodus 3:14, the same intuition, to some extent, we have three possible significations, and we need at least those three. This is mystical theology. It is also a saturated phenomenon. And it is, finally, this is also the possibility of an endless hermeneutic. The Exodic revelation may be repeated for other *logia*. I think we Richard and I agree on this issue.

Richard Kearney: Yes are in agreement here. But I would like to expand a little further. In the *God Who May Be* I tried to explore how Meister Eckhart revisits certain metaphysical terms—*sum, ego, qui est*, etc.—and reinterprets them in a way that opens them up to a post-metaphysical, eschatological interpretation. And I think we could apply this move more generally to a variety of post-metaphysical movements in contemporary philosophy and theology. Maybe this is slight difference of emphasis I have with Jean-Luc Marion, Heidegger, and Derrida. Rather than affirming “the metaphysics of presence,” or ontotheology, which from Aristotle to Husserl is caught up in a metaphysics of “conceptual idolatry,” what I try to advance with my notion of “diacritical hermeneutics,” is the suggestion that, in spite of the language of cause, substance, ground, *essentia, esse*, which easily lends itself to conceptual idolatry, there is also within metaphysics a metaphysical desire to understand, to conceptualize, to reason with, to reckon with, to make sense of, to debate with, questions of the ultimate. That meta-

physical desire, it seems to me, is utterly respectable, and it can be recognized in most of the great metaphysicians. There are two ways of approaching Plato, for example. On the one hand, there is Plato as onto-theology and the metaphysics of presence. But on the other hand there is Plato—as Levinas revisits him—as the exponent of a metaphysics of eros, of desire. In that sense, when Levinas speaks of metaphysical desire in *Totality and Infinity*, he is not saying we should return to Aristotelian or Scholastic metaphysics qua speculative system. He’s saying that there is some drive within all metaphysical attempts to name the unnamable, which is retrievable and which can be re-read eschatologically. That’s not just true of Plato: it’s true of Augustine, where there is this restless desire for God; and it is true of Descartes too. As Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion have both pointed out, Descartes’ “idea of the Infinite” is something that comes through metaphysics, but it can’t be contained within metaphysics.

So, I would make that differentiation. Does this bring us close to something like Process theology? As a metaphysical desire for God, yes. But not as a need to form a system, with grounds and causes and reasons and concepts that tend towards a “pantheism,” where there’s a beginning, middle, and end, and a Master Narrative which reduces God to an immanent, historical process. I don’t have any quarrel with the description of God as an immanent, historical process up to a point; but I think it is only half of the story. It’s the story of us responding to the call of God and trying to work towards the kingdom. But there’s another side to the story, which I don’t really see recognized in Hartshorne or Whitehead, and that relates how historical becoming is a *response* to a call that comes from *beyond* history. So the question is: is there a notion in process theology of God as radical transcendence, exteriority, alterity? Does process theology sufficiently acknowledge the *difference* between immanence and transcendence . . .

Marion: There is no contradiction between Eckhart’s saying *Gott wirt und Gott entwirt* and the saturated phenomenon. The very experience of the *excess* of intuition over signification, makes clear that the excess may be felt and expressed as a disappointment. The experi-





rience of disappointment means that I make an experience which I cannot understand, because I have no concept for it. So the excess and the disappointment can come together. The saturated phenomenon doesn't mean that we never have the experience of being in the desert. The reverse is the case: the desertification is an excess, in some way. The experience of something that is unconditional is, for me, something occasioned by the fact that I am disappointed, that I am in the situation of encountering something without having the possibility to understand it. This is not nothing. This is a very important figure of phenomenality.

And so back to desire now. I would not be so optimistic about desire as some are. Indeed, in philosophy, from the beginning, there is something that is not purely conceptual, working "behind," being the secret energy of the system, the desire of knowing things. Desire of knowing. There are two possibilities opened up here: first, desire is quite different from knowledge itself—"All men desire to know," as Aristotle says. Secondly, desire is finally incorporated into the knowledge itself. To some extent this is done with Hegel, where knowledge—rooted in the dialectic—includes in itself the desire to know. And so at that moment desire is recalled and recollected, confirmed within metaphysics. Or you may argue—and I think it was part of Levinas' point about Plato—that the desire is prior to the philosophical intention to know and has to be taken seriously as such. So you may try to focus your attention on desire "as such." This can explain an aspect of neo-Platonism, for instance, regarding desire "as such." But the question is whether desire does not claim far more than mere philosophy understood as a theory of knowledge. Perhaps the question of desire is too serious to be explained within the same horizons as the question of knowledge. Perhaps the question of desire can not only not be answered but not even be asked in the horizon of Being. So this is a reason why I think desire is the "backstage" of metaphysics, something never enlightened by metaphysics (which is unable to do so). And so we have now perhaps to open a new horizon where the question of desire may be taken seriously. And it is not taken seriously, for instance, in psychoanalysis, because psycho-analysis can consider and

describe desire, but it takes desire as simply a drive, an unconscious drive; it is nothing more than a drive, largely and maybe for ever. But there is perhaps a deep rationality and consciousness of desire which is other than and goes far beyond mere unconsciousness. To open this new horizon we have to get rid of the horizon of Being, which is, at the end of metaphysics, quite unable because not broad enough to do justice to desire.

Kearney: Perhaps we could link the notions of "desert" and "desire." Take Eckhart's notion of *Abgescheidenheit* as the abandonment of desire, the experience of releasement and dispossession. This is not incompatible with the experience of the saturated phenomenon but may actually be concomitant with it. I think there are two ways of approaching the divine, saturated, phenomenon. One is ecstasy—the traditional beatific vision of the fusion with the God, mystical *jouissance*. But there is also *Abgescheidenheit*, the sense of being disinherited, disinvested—John of the Cross's dark night of the soul. Sometimes the saturated phenomenon seems closer to Augustine's or Dante's beatific vision; sometimes it approximates more to the experience of the desert, devastation, the void. Other times again, it can be both together.

In the transfiguration of Christ, for example, if we can take that as a divine saturated phenomenon, we witness an extraordinary fascination with the *whiteness* of the event, but also an experience of fear, such that the voice from the clouds has to say, "Do not be afraid." There is fascination but also recoil. Jesus cautions his disciples to keep a distance from the event, not to say anything to anyone about it, not to construct a monument or memorial. All these are ways, it seems to me, of acknowledging the importance of *Abgescheidenheit*. One is very close to something that could burn us up. We need a distance, and to be faithful to it, we need to be cautious, discreet, and diffident. So I think it's a complex double move of ecstasy and *Abgescheidenheit*, of attraction and disappropriation.

Relating this back to desire, I think it's important to distinguish between two different kinds—ontological and eschatological. Ontological desire comes from lack, which is, I think, the Hegelian and Lacanian definition of





desire, but it also goes back, in fact, to Plato. One interpretation of Plato in *The Symposium* is that *eros* is the offspring of Poros and Penia, of fullness and lack, and therefore is a lack striving to be fulfilled. This *ontological* notion of desire strives for possession, fusion, atonement, and appropriation. I would oppose this to *eschatological* desire, which doesn't issue from lack, but from superabundance, excess, and surplus. This latter is also operative in Plato. But it's most emphatically evident, I think, in a biblical text like the Song of Songs, where there's a sort of theo-erotic drama between the divine and the human.

Marion: If I may comment about that. You know the formulation in the commentary on the Song of Songs by Gregory of Nyssa: What is eternity in paradise? It is the fulfillment of pleasure, where each fulfillment is a new *arche*, without end. That is exactly the reverse of our experience of biological desire, which cannot survive its fulfillment. And in that non-biological, non-ontical desire, which is not based on lack, the reverse is true: the more it is fulfilled, the more there is a rebirth of desire, without end. This kind of desire—which is nourished by excess, not destroyed by it—is quite different. When we feel that kind of desire, it's very clear that the original Platonic model, which is, I think, ruling all of metaphysics up to Lacan, is quite insufficient and cannot match the requirement of what is beyond even the way of knowledge. This is true for the question of will also. Because will, according to metaphysics, as will of will, will for knowledge, will for power, is quite different from the will involved in the question of meeting the other person, the question of love. So there is a real equivocity about concepts like will, desire, and so on. And that equivocity is further evidence that there is really some limitation to metaphysics.

Kearney: Taking up Gregory of Nyssa's point, we might mention his notion of *perichoresis* to describe the love between the three persons of the Trinity. This is a telling analogy because what you've got here in the Three Persons, is a love, a desire, a loving desire, that cedes the place (*cedere*), that gives room. But it is also a movement of attraction *towards* the other (*sedere*), a movement of immanence. Father to Son, Son to Spirit and so on

in an endless circle. Hence the ambivalence of the double Latin translation as both *circum-in-Cessio* and *circum-in-Sessio*. But what is this movement that both yields and attracts? What does the *peri* or *circum* refer to? Around what?—*khora*, an empty space, a space of detachment, and distance, and disappropriation. The immanent movement in the free play of each person towards the other is accompanied by a movement of desire which is also a granting or ceding of a place to the other. And it's that double move of ecstasy-*Abgescheidenheit* that you find within the very play of divine desire, which then translates into human-divine desire.

Just a comment on Hegel. Where I would have a difference with Hegel is on the question of the "Ruse of Reason." Whether Hegel's desire is an ontological drive or an eschatological one is open to interpretation. But certainly in the *Phenomenology* it seems to me that it's still caught in a kind of metaphysical totality. The movement is there, and the energy and dynamism is there, within the dialectic. But in the final analysis, there's a Cunning of Reason that has rigged the game. All the stakes are already set. Where I have a big problem with Hegel is not just with the definition of God as Absolute consciousness—a God who has really decided everything before the play has even begun—but also with his notion of evil. It's the question of theodicy, where everything is ultimately justified within the System. In contrast to Hegel, I propose a dia-critical hermeneutics which approaches the problem of evil in a less extreme, more tolerant way, a way that allows for greater understanding. This is a very undogmatic claim, an hypothesis, a wager. It is a suggestion that this is a better way of doing things, as a description and as an interpretation. But the only way it can be shown to be better (or worse), because I'm just part of a dialogue that others have begun long before me and will continue long after me—the only evidence is actually the inter-subjective community of dialogue. In other words, it works if people are persuaded by this as an accurate description. As Merleau-Ponty says about the evidence of phenomenology, you read Husserl, you read Heidegger, and either you're persuaded by their descriptions or you're not. There are no extra-phenomenological or ex-





tra-hermeneutical criteria that you can appeal to, as a metaphysical foundation, or ground, or cause, that proves you right and the others wrong. So in that sense it is always tentative. Indeed, it seems to me that the virtue of philosophy is this tentativeness—which doesn't mean being relativist or uncommitted. We all operate from beliefs, faiths and commitments; all our philosophizing is preceded and followed by conviction. Before we enter the realm of philosophy we are already hermeneutically engaged. We come out the other end—no one being able to live by philosophy alone—we recommit to our convictions, our beliefs, and so on. But the important point is that one acknowledges when one goes into the philosophical debate that these are one's hermeneutical presuppositions, prejudices, and prejudgments—temporally and methodologically suspended for the sake of the conversation. Maybe when you come back to your commitments again, you do so with a greater sensitivity to a plurality of interpretations. This is not relativism; it is a democracy of thought.

Marion: Yes, may I repeat that point in another way. There is no other argument to choose between different interpretations of the same data than the power of one interpretation in front of the other. This is a very fair battle, where the winner, posited at the end, is the one able to produce more rationality than the other, and you are convinced simply by the *idea vera index sui et fallacia*. The hypothesis that produces more rationality than the other is the winner. And it is why it is a weakness in philosophy always to stick to a narrow interpretation of a situation, which is unable to make sense out of large parts of experience and to say, "well, you have no right to go beyond that limit." For me, it is the defeat of reason, of philosophy, when a philosopher says, "you have no right to make sense of that part of experience; this is meaningless, and should remain meaningless." It is an improvement in philosophy, when a new field, which was taken to be meaningless, suddenly makes sense. . . . For instance, you begin with a situation where everyone has an even chance. Everyone can say, "This sunset is a question of biology," or of aesthetics, or of religion. Everyone has his possible interpretation, his constitution of the

phenomenon. And everyone tries to go as far as they can. The result and the conviction which is gained, or not, is the result only of the power of that interpretation. Let us take the example of Levinas. The question of the Other remained a puzzling issue until the move made by Levinas, considering that in the case of the phenomenon of the Other, we cannot understand it unless we *reverse the intention*. In that case, we no longer have an intention coming from me to the Other as the objective, the object, but there is a reverse intentionality, and we have to reconstruct all of the phenomenon that way. By saying that, suddenly a large range of phenomena were available, I would say for the first time in the history of philosophy. There is no other demonstration than the simple visibility of the phenomenon of the Other.

Kearney: I agree. I don't think that the different hermeneutics have to be seen as conflicting or competitive or incompatible. If that were the case then you'd have to say "My hermeneutic is right, the saturated phenomenon is God and Heideggereans are wrong to call it *Ereignis* and deconstructionists are wrong to call it *khora*." That's not what it's about. I would rather use the term *equi-primordial* here. For example, say you are depressed. You go to a Heideggerian philosopher and s/he will tell you this is *Angst*, it's an existential experience of your being-towards-death. You go to a psycho-pharmaceutical therapist and s/he will give you Prozac. The thing is, it's not a question of saying one is right and one is wrong. Here, I think, Julia Kristeva is quite right. If you're to be more fully responsive to the pain of the sufferer, it is not a debate as to whether this is a bio-chemical crisis or an existential one. It can be both. And you can be helped at both levels. But it is not a matter of saying they're the same thing. They're operating at different levels. I think that's important, to recognize the different claims, interests and levels of interpretation.

(. . .)

Marion: The question of love is also very crucial. For instance: to fall in love implies a very special type of reduction, a self-reduction, but at the level of an erotic reduction, and it is very true that the experience of the Other in love is the experience of the saturated phenom-





enon *par excellence*. It's absolutely clear that you will "see" the other before knowing him or her. . . . On the other hand, "blessed are those who believe without seeing." What does that mean exactly? It may be to some extent the distinction between philosophy and theology, simply that. Because in philosophy we have to "see" to believe. What does that mean to believe? For us, because we start from a philosophical point of view, we spontaneously think that to believe is to take for true, to assume something as if it were true, without any proof. This is our interpretation of belief. In that case, it is either belief or seeing. But is this the real meaning of belief? In fact, belief is also to commit yourself, and, in that case, it is also, perhaps, a theoretical attitude. Because, by committing yourself to somebody else, you open a field of experience. And so it's not only a substitute for not knowing, it is an act which makes a new kind of experience possible. It is because I believe that I will see, and not as a compensation. It's the very fact that you believe which makes you see new things, which would not be seen if you did not believe. It's the *credo ut intelligam*. So, all this makes clear that what is at stake with the end of metaphysics, and with phenomenology, is that the distinction between the theoretical attitude and the practical attitude should be questioned. At the end of metaphysics, both theory and practical situations are quite different. But I think there are practical or ethical requirements even in a theoretical point of view. There is no pure theoretical point of view. You assume a complete attitude towards the world. And this has to be questioned. It is why questions about what is given, and what you believe, of love, are perhaps the unavoidable issues now.

Kearney: On this question of seeing, I think it's important to recognize hermeneutically that there is a plurality of seeing. We can see in different ways. The empiricist sees the burning bush as a fact. John Locke would probably describe it in terms of impressions, and John Searle would probably start cooking sausages. That is a certain approach: a positivist, materialist, pragmatist approach. By contrast, Husserl or Heidegger, for example, might see it as a manifestation, a *Lichtung*, or disclosure of Being. For Husserl, it would be a kind of categorial seeing: we're not just looking at the

fire as it burns us, as it lights up, we're also looking at the *being* of the fire. Heidegger would deepen this ontological seeing. But then we could add a third mode of seeing, with a third reduction, which would be an eschatological seeing, where you hear the voice and you see the fire as a manifestation of the divine. Either you see it or you don't. And it doesn't mean, philosophically, that one is right and one is wrong. John Locke and the empiricists would come to Mount Horeb to describe the impression of a fire. Unlike Moses who came with a burning question: how do I liberate my people from bondage in Egypt? Moses is lost, he is disoriented, his people are enslaved; he's looking for liberty, for hope. He comes with the desire for a promise, the desire for revelation. And so Moses sees something that the empiricist is not going to see. There are different modes of seeing. They're not incompatible: maybe Moses initially saw the fire empirically (you have to, to even approach it); but then he hears the voice. And that hearing and seeing *otherwise* is what trips the hermeneutic switch. Belief and desire are indispensable to interpretation.

As you know yourselves, when you're talking to someone about a difficult concept—love, beauty, the sublime, Being, God—you tend, even colloquially, to say "Do you see what I mean?" Now it's that "seeing-as," that "Do you see it *as* I see it?" that signals a different mode of seeing. In all modes of seeing, there is a "seeing-as," and therefore a belief, a presupposition, a reading (no matter how spontaneous or pre-reflective). In the case of Moses, there is what we might call a theological-eschatological "seeing-as:" he sees the burning bush *as* a manifestation of God. For Moses and for subsequent believers that is what it is, that is how it strikes them. But for someone who doesn't come with that faith, they're not going to see it that way.

Marion: Is that "seeing-as" simply the application of the same phenomenological "as-structure" in Heidegger, in *Sein und Zeit*?

Kearney: Yes, although not at exactly the same level. It would be confessional rather than purely existential.

Marion: You suggest that the case of seeing-as according to faith is a variation of *die Als-Struktur*?

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Kearney: Yes, but you will interpret the seeing, eschatologically, as a seeing of something that precedes you and overwhelms you and exceeds you . . .

Marion: What is very important to make clear against Barth's or Bultmann's way of thinking is that there is some continuity between the general structure of hermeneutics and the case of faith, which is not irrational. This is my point. There is a deep rationality in the operations of faith, understanding, interpretation, which cannot be reduced to the usual rules of hermeneutics and phenomenology. But there is a connection. I think we are no longer in a situation where you have "reason or faith." Reason is a construct. It is not optional, it is done. I would say that the difficulty for Christian theology now is perhaps that Christian theology assumes too much of the former figure of metaphysics and philosophy, which is already deconstructed. And this opens, I think, new fields for creative theology. But many theologians, if I may say so, have not taken quite seriously the end of metaphysics, and deconstruction, and so they miss open opportunities. It is perhaps surprising that philosophers are maybe more aware of new possibilities open to theology than theologians (or at least some them).

Kearney: An afterthought on the question of the hermeneutic "as." I would say the everyday way of seeing the world is always inscribed by an "as." We see everything "as." Wittgenstein, of course, makes the same point. Seeing is always seeing as. But when we go to practice philosophical hermeneutics, we bring the everyday "as" of pre-reflective lived experience (what Heidegger calls our pre-understanding/*Vor-verstandnis*) to a level of conscious clarification and critical reflection. I think we then switch the hermeneutic "as" into an "as if." There we enter into a position where we pretend we don't have our belief structures, we act "as if" we were free of convictions or presuppositions. It is a version of methodological bracketing or suspension. We put our every lived beliefs into parenthesis. Not to renounce them, not to disown them, but to see them all the better. We go into a methodological laboratory of possibilities where our faith commitments and convictions—and it doesn't

have to be religious faith, it can be political or cultural faith, etc.—become certain ones amongst others. The so-called "neutrality" of philosophical hermeneutics is therefore strategic, artificial, contrived—but very helpful as a pull toward common understanding or consensus. I acknowledge the *seeing as* of my everyday pre-understanding, I put that on the table, and then I act *as if* I'm now open to empathizing with and listening to, with an open mind, these other perspectives. Then, finally of course, one returns after the thought experiment of the hermeneutic "as if" to the former convictions of one's lived world. After the detour of methodological suspension one returns to one's primordial *seeing as*—but hopefully with a more enlarged, amplified and attentive attitude. An attitude more sensitive and open to other parts of view.

(. . .)

Marion: We should emphasize, before concluding, that there is also a *temporality* in the experience of the saturated phenomenon. We may be in quite different situations in front of the saturated phenomenon. Some saturated phenomena will, after a certain time, perhaps be reduced to average objects. Perhaps after more information, other concepts, we shall be able to constitute them as objects. So there are some states—like admiration, according to Descartes—which change. Some admiration should disappear after time: when there is no surprise any more, complete understanding, no admiration left. We have that possibility. But there is the other possibility with saturated phenomena that the more we understand them, the more they keep appearing *as* saturated phenomena. For example, the saturated phenomena of the *ur*-impression of time: it is always renewed. Or the experience of living and knowing the Other, when it is successful: the more you know the Other the more it remains a saturated phenomenon. And you may perhaps assume the same about the historical event: the more you study the historical event, the more it appears again and again as a non-objective phenomenon, a saturated phenomenon. So I think there are a lot of different epistemological situations. The saturated phenomenon does not stop epistemological enquiry, it makes it quite different.

