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God, the Gift, and Postmodernism

Edited by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon

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To Edmund J. Dobbin, O. S. A.

For his leadership and inspiration

For his interest and support

two

On the Gift

A Discussion between Jacques Derrida
and Jean-Luc Marion

Moderated by Richard Kearney

Introductory Remarks

Michael Scanlon. Villanova University is an Augustinian University, and I know the affection that Jacques Derrida has for Augustine. So, by way of introducing this afternoon's roundtable, I want to say just a word on Augustine and the gift. One of Augustine's favorite words for the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, is God's Gift, the *donum Dei*. Augustine puts it very nicely, "God gives us many gifts, but *Deus est qui Deum dat*" ("God is He Who gives God"). The highest gift of God, the gift of God that we call our salvation, is nothing less than God. I leave this to the profundity of Jacques Derrida. I thank all of you, participants and audience alike, for being here.

Richard Kearney. It is a great honor to be here among you all and in particular between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion. It is somewhat of a daunting and intimidating task to be asked to moderate this dialogue, but I will do my best. I see my own role as a very secondary one, to be—to use one of Jack Caputo's favorite phrases from Kierkegaard—a "supplementary clerk," serving in the background to supplement or intervene or translate or mediate, where

necessary, between our two interlocutors. Another metaphor I might use, to pick up on one of the signifiers that has been floating around here for the last two days, is that of a ghost (no doubt of an *unholy* one), between father and son, in a dialogue that has been going on for some fifteen to twenty years. Jacques Derrida, as most of you probably know, was a former teacher of Jean-Luc Marion's at Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. They have exchanged views on several occasions and in several very important texts since, principally on the theme of negative theology. I think on foot of the inaugural steps of a renewed debate on the subject, after Jean-Luc Marion's paper two nights ago, it is timely that we try to pursue that today.

In the last year in Ulster we have witnessed attempts to mediate between Unionists and Nationalists where the two parties would not even sit in the same room. So we had what were called "proximity talks," where the mediators would sit down with one group and they would tell them what they think, and then they would go into the next room and talk to the other group, and so on, back and forth. The whole purpose of such dialogues, which were extremely laborious, was to bridge gaps. If I can play a constructive role here today, it will be in trying to move in the opposite direction, that is, to acknowledge gaps between the two interlocutors, who are, as I am sure they would be the first to agree, largely in agreement on many philosophical issues. Time is too short to agree this afternoon, at least initially, although I hope we will end up with some sort of fusion of horizons. Lest they be too premature and too polite and too consensual, I suggest we begin by disqualifying the term "I agree" for the first hour and then work towards convergence.

So, I propose we cut to the chase and corner our quarry, which today is called the "gift," and without doing undue violence to the quarry, lay it out, cut it at the joints, then try to put it together again. Hermeneutic incision is required here. Jean-Luc Marion ended his talk the other night with the term "denomination," and Jacques Derrida took him up on this term. One of the senses of denomination that did not come out in that discussion is that of declension, division, differentiation, distinction; as when we speak of denominational schools, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and so on. Since two major themes of this conference are "gift" and "religion," I think it might be wise to start by asking the two interlocutors to identify the denominational nature of their discourses on the gift. As I see it, Jacques Derrida comes to this debate as a *quasi-atheistic*, quasi-Jewish deconstructor. Jean-Luc Marion comes to the debate as a *hyper-Christian*, hyper-Catholic phenomenologist. I use the term "*hyper*" in Jean-Luc's sense, as it was enunciated the other evening. Most of you are aware of Jacques Derrida's work on the gift over the last decade; since most of the texts are available in English—*Given Time*, *The Gift of Death*, and, of course, his recent writings on hospitality. Jean-Luc Marion has made two very important contributions to this debate: *Reduction et donation* and *Etant donné*; *Reduction et donation* has recently become available in English under the title *Reduction and Givenness*.¹

two On the Gift

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I would like to begin by asking Jean-Luc Marion to put his cards on the table with regard to the specifically religious and theological nature of gift, giving, and given-ness, particularly under the rubric of "donating intuition" and the "saturated phenomenon." I would ask Jean-Luc to bring us through some of the steps of the argument on these notions of giving, gift, and givenness before asking Jacques Derrida to respond.

Jean-Luc Marion. Thank you. Well, I shall disappoint you by saying that right now, at this stage of my work, I have to emphasize that I am not interested in the gift and I am not interested in the religious meaning of the gift.

Kearney. A great start! Right. And now, Prof. Jacques Derrida. (laughter)

Jacques Derrida. I told you it would be unpredictable.

Marion. In fact, I was interested in the gift when writing theology, some ten years ago or even more. But, with *Reduction and Givenness*, the question of the gift turned out to be profoundly modified for me by the discovery of the issue of givenness, *Gegebenheit*, in phenomenology, and by phenomenology I mean Husserl, and by Husserl I mean the early Husserl, the Husserl of the *Logical Investigations*. In Husserl, we discover that the most efficient and profound definition of the phenomenon was expressed in the language of "being given," in German, *Gegebensein*. Briefly, and this was occasioned by a discussion of a book by Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, for Husserl, who took up the traditional definition of the phenomenon by Kant, the phenomenon arises from the synthesis or conjunction of two different components: intuition, on one side, and, on the other side, intention — intentionality, concept, signification. I realized at that moment that Husserl did not simply assume the decision taken by Kant on intuition — that it has the philosophical role to give and deserves to be called the "giving intuition" — but he claimed boldly enough that even the signification has to be given, too, as such, and more: that the essences, the logical essences, truth and so forth had to be given, too. Everything, not only the intuition, is *gegeben*, or can be *gegeben*, or at least you can ask about every signification whether it is *gegeben* or not.

So then I tried to re-open some of the greatest issues in the history of phenomenology, mainly between Husserl and Heidegger, wondering whether it would be possible to re-read phenomenology as such as the science of the given. I found it possible to proceed in that direction. I do not have the opportunity here to explain this in detail, but many of you, for instance, are well aware of the fascinating doctrine that I endeavor to use as a concept, the *es gibt*, the *cela donne*, I would translate, in Heidegger. Other phenomenologists, Levinas, for instance, and Jacques Derrida, and Michel Henry, are interested in the fact that a phenomenon cannot be seen as only and always either an object (which was roughly the position of Kant and to some extent of Husserl) or a being (which was in the main the position of Heidegger). Rather something more genuine, or poorer and lower, perhaps more essential (if essence here is a good word, which I doubt) can appear as *gegeben*, as given. Let me emphasize this point. Starting with the achievement of the path of

thought, the *Denkweg*, of Heidegger, what has phenomenology achieved, when you consider the greatest phenomenologists, including Gadamer, Ricoeur, Levinas, Michel Henry, and others? They are interested in some very strange phenomena, insofar as you cannot say that they "are" — for instance, for Levinas, quite expressly and obviously, you cannot say that the other "is." To describe the other means not to refer to being, which would on the contrary forbid an access to its phenomenon. So, in fact, they are describing new phenomena, like the self-affection of the flesh, the ethics of the other, the historical event, narrative, *différance*, and so forth, which, of course, cannot be said to be in any way objects and should not be said to "be" at all. Of course you can say that the other is, but simply saying "is" does not describe it. To describe these phenomena concretely and precisely, we need another way of seeing them. My guess amounts to saying that the ultimate determination of the phenomenon implies not to be, but to appear as — given.

And if everything which appears has come unto us as given, one of the most decisive characters of any phenomenon establishes it as an event, which definitely happens. To happen makes us see in a most striking way that the happening phenomenon happens as given — given only to consciousness if you want, given to me, but in the end always given. So givenness achieves — it took me some time to realize this — first of all, a phenomenological determination. Starting from that phenomenological determination, of course, it becomes possible to go back to some types of phenomena expressed, explained, used, produced — if not produced, put into play — by what we used to name religious experience. Those phenomena seem given par excellence. The Eucharist, for instance, the Word which is given, forgiveness, life in the Spirit by the sacraments, and so forth, all this has to be described as given. Theological items could appear as phenomena, too, because they have at least something in common with all the other phenomena, at different degrees, viz., to appear as given. Now my real work will endeavor to explain what it implies that phenomena cannot appear, without appearing as given to me. In other words, does every given thing appear as a phenomenon? This point should not be confused with another one: Everything that appears has to appear as given. So, I want to focus my interest on the phenomenological dimension of givenness, first of all and in general. In that case, and perhaps we shall see this later, we could ask why and how far some phenomena appear as more given, or given to a larger and higher degree than others, and we may call them paradoxical or saturated phenomena.

Kearney. Thank you, Jean-Luc. Given that initial enunciation of the position, Jacques, do you think that there is such a thing as a theological donation? Do you think that there is a "saturated phenomenon" that is in fact divine and that is greater than language?

Derrida. Contrary to Jean-Luc, I am interested in Christianity and in the gift in the Christian sense, and I would be interested in drawing conclusions in this respect. I will start, of course, by saying how happy and proud I am to

have this discussion with Jean-Luc Marion. You recall, as a given, that he was my student long ago. I do not know how to interpret this. If I say, fortunately he was not my student, or unfortunately he was not my student, the given, the givenness, the fact that he was enrolled at the Ecole Normale Supérieure when I was teaching there becomes a problem. Unfortunately, he was not my student, although he was at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. That is the reason that he wrote such an important work, an original one, and fortunately he was not my student, because we do not agree on some essential issues. So was this givenness of Jean-Luc Marion as a student a gift? That is a problem. I would start with this distinction.

Before we go on to other points, I will try to speak as if there were no supposed knowledge of texts behind the discussion, in order to make things as clear as possible. I refer to what you just recalled. I am not convinced that between the use of Gegebenheit in phenomenology and the problem we're about to discuss, that is, the gift, there is a semantic continuity. I am not sure that when, of course, Husserl refers, extensively and constantly, to what is given to intuition, this given-ness, this Gegebenheit has an obvious and intelligible relationship to the gift, to being given as a gift. What we are going to discuss, that is the gift, perhaps is not homogenous with Gegebenheit. That is one of the problems with the connection to phenomenology. I will come back to this later on. Now, the way, the mediation or the transition, you made between Gegebenheit in phenomenology and the es gibt in Heidegger is also problematic to me. The way Heidegger refers to the Gabe in the es gibt is distinct from intuitive Gegebenheit. When Husserl says Gegebenheit, and when phenomenologists in the broad sense say Gegebenheit, something is given, they refer simply to the passivity of intuition. Something is there. We have, we meet something. It is there, but it is not a gift. So, one of my first questions would be, Are we authorized to go directly from the phenomenological concept of Gegebenheit, given-ness, to the problem of the gift that we are about to discuss? Now, what will make the discussion interesting and difficult at the same time, and I hope endless, has to do, not with this disagreement between us, but with a sort of chiasmus. Etant donné is a powerful book with a beautiful title. Jean-Luc Marion has a genius for titles. Dieu sans l'être was a tour de force as a title. I am not sure that the English translation God without Being does justice to what I find very interesting in the title, that is, not only God "without Being" but also God "without being God." Here we address the question of the name, of the name God. We will come upon this question again along our way. Donum dei. I will come back to this question. I am interested in Christian theology, of course, although I am totally incompetent. But I know that is the point that we are going to discuss. What is in a name? We are going to discuss the name gift and the name God. And we started to do this last night. What is the chiasmus, if I try to summarize it after having read this powerful book, within the title, which is more easily translated into English, Being Given? Is that correct? Etant donné: I want to praise what is beautiful in

this title: Being as Being Given. I came here to praise Jean-Luc Marion's genius. But then he wants to free the gift and givenness from being, in a way. We will come back to this. The chiasmus that I found in this book would be this, schematically summarized: Jean-Luc summarized in a very fair way what I said about the gift in Given Time, about all the aporias, the impossibilities. As soon as a gift — not a Gegebenheit, but a gift — as soon as a gift is identified as a gift, with the meaning of a gift, then it is canceled as a gift. It is reintroduced into the circle of an exchange and destroyed as a gift. As soon as the donee knows it is a gift, he already thanks the donator, and cancels the gift. As soon as the donator is conscious of giving, he himself thanks himself and again cancels the gift by re-inscribing it into a circle, an economic circle. So I want to reconstitute my text here and insist on what looks like an impossibility: for the gift to appear as such while remaining a gift, to appear as such on the side of the donator and on the side of the donee, the receiver, and the impossibility for a gift to be present, to be a being as being present. So I dissociate the gift from the present. Jean-Luc in a very fair way reconstituted this demonstration, but then he says that all these alleged objections or obstacles that I am supposed to have built against the gift, far from blocking the way, so to speak, far from preventing us from having access to the gift or a phenomenology of the gift, in fact, are a sort of springboard for what you try to do as a phenomenologist.

So, up to that point, we agree. Where we disagree, if we do disagree, is that after this stage, Jean-Luc says that I have problematized the gift in the horizon of economy, of ontology and economy, in the circle of exchange, the way Marcel Mauss has done, and we have to free the gift from this horizon of exchange and economy. Here, of course, I would disagree. I did exactly the opposite. I tried to precisely displace the problematic of the gift, to take it out of the circle of economy, of exchange, but not to conclude, from the impossibility for the gift to appear as such and to be determined as such, to its absolute impossibility. I said, to be very schematic and brief, that it is impossible for the gift to appear as such. So the gift does not exist as such, if by existence we understand being present and intuitively identified as such. So the gift does not exist and appear as such; it is impossible for the gift to exist and appear as such. But I never concluded that there is no gift. I went on to say that if there is a gift, through this impossibility, it must be the experience of this impossibility, and it should appear as impossible. The event called gift is totally heterogeneous to theoretical identification, to phenomenological identification. That is a point of disagreement. The gift is totally foreign to the horizon of economy, ontology, knowledge, constative statements, and theoretical determination and judgment. But in doing so, I did not intend to simply give up the task of accounting for the gift, for what one calls gift, not only in economy but even in Christian discourse. In The Gift of Death, I try to show the economy at work, the economic axiomatic at work, in some Christian texts. So I try to account for this and to say that this so-called circle, this economic circle, in

order to circulate, in order to be put in motion, must correspond to a movement, a motion, a desire—whatever the name—a thought of the gift, which would not be exhausted by a phenomenological determination, by a theoretical determination, by a scientific determination, by an economy. I would like this discussion not to be disagreement, and not to be too easily consensual, of course, but not to be polemical. I would like us to try to find some new opening. I would suggest that what this question of the gift compels us to do, perhaps, is to re-activate, while displacing, the famous distinction that Kant made between knowing and thinking, for instance. The gift, I would claim, I would argue, as such cannot be known; as soon as you know it, you destroy it. So the gift as such is impossible. I insist on the "as such." I will explain why in a moment. The gift as such cannot be known, but it can be thought of. We can think what we cannot know. Perhaps thinking is not the right word. But there is something in excess of knowledge. We have a relation to the gift beyond the circle, the economic circle, and beyond the theoretical and phenomenological determination. It is this thinking, this excess, which interests me. It is this excess which puts the circle into motion. Why is there economy? Why is there exchange, in Marcel Mauss's sense? Why are there return gifts with delay? Where does this circle come from? I never said—that is a misunderstanding which happens all the time in France—I never said that there is no gift. No. I said exactly the opposite. What are the conditions for us to say there is a gift, if we cannot determine it theoretically, phenomenologically? It is through the experience of the impossibility; that its possibility is possible as impossible. I will come back to that.

A second distinction, and I will stop here, is available now through this question of the gift as a living thread. It is not only the distinction between knowing and thinking, but the distinction between knowing and doing, or the distinction between knowing and an event. An event as such, as well as the gift, cannot be known as an event, as a present event, and for the very same reason. So here is another place for the distinction between knowing and doing. A gift is something you do without knowing what you do, without knowing who gives the gift, who receives the gift, and so on.

Now, just a last statement, about phenomenology, of course. The virtual disagreement between us has to do with the fact that Jean-Luc Marion, after having left me on the curbstone, after having summarized me, says "he thinks the gift in the horizon of economy." That, I would say, is wrong. So Marion would try to account phenomenologically for the gift (which, again, I distinguish from *Gegebenheit*). But I doubt that there is a possibility of a phenomenology of the gift. That is exactly my thesis. Perhaps I am wrong, but if what I say is not totally meaningless, what is precisely challenged is the possibility of a phenomenology of the gift. I understand that Jean-Luc Marion, of course, has his own concept of phenomenology. But he cannot practice any phenomenology without at least keeping some axioms of what is called phenomenology—the phenomenon, the phenomenality, the appearance, the meaning,

intuition, if not intuition, at least the promise of the intuition, and so on. I do not say this against phenomenology. I do not say this even against religion or even against *donum Dei*. I try to think the possibility of this impossibility and also to think the possibility of *donum Dei*, or the possibility of phenomenology, but from a place which is not inside what I try to account for. I will stop here now.

Kearney. Thank you. Could I just try to put what Jacques has just said to you, Jean-Luc, in terms of two quick points? First, Jacques has pointed to a virtual disagreement between you on the interpretation of the phenomenology of the gift, and perhaps you might like to say something—but not too much, I hope—about that. Second, I suggest we push this virtual disagreement on the phenomenology of the gift towards a greater potential disagreement between you on the theology of the gift. Is there a Christian philosophy of the gift?

Marion. First, quickly, on the technical questions, I disagree with you on the point that givenness, *Gegebenheit*, would be restricted for Husserl to intuition. I would quote some texts and I stick to that. For him, even significations are given, without intuition. He assumes openly a "logical givenness."

Derrida. You know, I would agree with you. The point was, what is the gift?

Marion: This is a good point, and I emphasize it, because Paul Ricoeur asked me the same question and raised the same objection which I myself would sum up as such: Between the givenness, if any, in the phenomenological meaning of the word, and the gift, there is nothing but pure equivocity. I tried to demonstrate the contrary, because to assume this so-called equivocity as a starting point proves to impoverish both the question of the gift and that of givenness. Let me explain. I think of the gift as a kind of issue reaching to the most extreme limits, that should be described and be thought and neither explained nor comprehended, but simply thought—in a very radical way. I suggest that, in order to achieve description, if any is possible, of the gift, we can be led to open for the first time a new horizon, much wider than those of objectivity and being, the horizon of givenness. Through the issue of the gift, and we shall go back precisely to that issue, we may perhaps establish that a lot of phenomena immediately can be explained according to the pattern of the gift—the problem otherwise raised by Mauss and others. In fact, this is by no means a particular problem on the border of the mainstream, for through this problem a large number of other phenomena suddenly appear as gifts or as given themselves, even though previously we had no idea that they could turn out as given. So givenness perhaps opens the secret, the final result and the potentially lost analysis of the gift. I would disagree on that point with Paul Ricoeur and with Jacques Derrida, too.

But, now back to the issue of the gift itself. I said that the failure to explain the gift was due to the fact that the analysis remained in the horizon of the economy, and I concluded that the horizon of the economy makes the gift

D. challenges 'possib. of a phenomenology of gift.'
Gegebenheit

impossible, but in that case I was not referring to you. I think I never said that you thought that the gift was impossible. As you are suggesting right now, I too think that if we want to go on with the issue of the gift, we have to give up the hope of any explanation, that is, of any comprehension of it as an object. But you would add further—to give up any description, too. For myself, I assume that we can describe the gift, notwithstanding all its obvious and prima facie inescapable aporias according to economy. I disagree with you on some other points, but we share a common conviction: We cannot explain, and we have no access to the gift, so long as we keep it within the horizon of economy. This has been demonstrated for me and is taken for granted. Nevertheless, another question has to be asked: Is it possible to describe the gift, taking seriously the aporias on which we agree? If it proves to be possible, this is simply phenomenology, because phenomenology first of all means to see and to describe the phenomena. So, as long as such a description is possible, I think that we have to say that we remain in the field of phenomenology. So, how is it possible to describe the gift as a phenomenon? My demonstration—and I sum it up because it looks after all, very simple—amounts to saying that, even though the most abstract and common pattern of the gift implies a giver, an object to be given, and a receiver, you can nevertheless describe the gift, I would say the enacted phenomenon, the performative of the gift, by bracketing and putting aside, at least one and even from time to time two of those three features of the gift. And this is new: It makes clear that the gift is governed by rules that are completely different from those that are applied to the object or to the being.

First, for instance, you can perfectly well describe a fully achieved or given gift without implying any receiver. For example, if you give something to your enemy; this is given up and you will get nobody to receive it. So you have achieved an anonymous gift. And, as we give money to a humanitarian association, we do make a gift, a real gift, that is money, but that gift will go to nobody, at least nobody personally known by us. Nevertheless we have achieved a gift. We can even imagine—and here a religious description of the gift may take place—for instance, that one does not know now to whom one gives the gift. An example of such a situation can be found by Christ in the eschatological parables; when some have given something to poor people, in fact they have given it to Christ; but, until the end of the world, they have not been able ever to imagine that this was given directly to Christ. So, they gave their gift to an anonymous receiver, or even the really absent receiver. In my case, the eschatological status of the receiver makes it that we never meet him in this world. This absence of the receiver does not forbid describing the gift, but to some extent this absence allows the gift to appear as such. A gracious gift appears precisely because there is no response, no answer, no gratitude back, all of which is obvious because we can give without any receiver. You can imagine also a gift without any giver, which would nevertheless be absolutely achieved. Take the example of an inheritance, where the giver is by hypothesis no longer here, and perhaps has never met, never known the receiver. And

more: Why not imagine the case where we do not know if there is any giver at all? This is very well described in *Robinson Crusoe*, where he finds something on the sand, on the beach, a tool, for instance, something like that. He asked himself, is that given or not? Is there any giver at all—or mere good luck? And to that question, there is no plain answer. But the question has first to be raised and this is the important point. It is within the horizon of such absences that the possible phenomenon of the gift may appear, if it appears. So, of course, the absence of the giver does not simply imply that there is a giver. But it implies that we may ask that question, Is there a giver? which already opens us into the horizon of givenness. We could easily find other examples.

Let us now go quickly to the last point, the most striking in my opinion: We can describe a gift in a situation where nothing, no-thing, is given. Because we do know cases where no thing is given: When we give time, when we give our life, when we give death, properly and strictly speaking, we give no thing. Just consider this: When somebody is given power, for instance, when President Clinton was inaugurated as President of the United States of America, has he received anything? No, nothing, except perhaps for a sheet of paper, a handshake, or the secret number for some military advice.

Kearney. Could I intervene for just a moment on this, because we've only got about an hour left. You've given a number of examples, and very useful ones, President Clinton, *Robinson Crusoe*, the Scriptures. But I would like to suggest that in your analysis of the phenomenology of the gift as donation, there is a privileged example, a "highest" example, of the saturated phenomenon, and that is revelation.

Marion. I shall try to answer you. Indeed, I think that it is possible to describe, in the horizon of the phenomenology of givenness, what I would call the empty and just possible figure of revelation, which makes sense as a possibility within phenomenology. I suggest that revelation—of course, for me, the revelation of Christ, but also any kind of revelation, if there are other claims to revelation—can acquire phenomenological status and match other kinds of phenomena. In that precise sense, the distinction between the field of philosophy and the field of theology, the "limits" between them in the meanings of Kant and Fichte, could be bridged to some extent. Let us go on, using my former example. The gift does not always imply that something is given. Now this remains true, not only in daily life, but in the most important and meaningful experiences of human life. We know that, to some extent, if the gift is really unique, makes a real difference, cannot be repeated, then in such a case, the gift does not appear as something that could shift from one owner to another owner. Each genuine gift happens without any objective counterpart. When we give ourselves, our life, our time, when we give our word, not only do we give no thing, but we give much more. Here is my point: We can describe the gift outside of the horizon of economy in such a way that new phenomenological rules appear. For instance, the gift or the given phenomenon has no cause and does not need any. It would sound absurd to ask what

gift is without any
" Cause
" Sufficient Reason.

is the cause of the gift, precisely because givenness implies the unexpected, the unforeseeable and the pure surge of novelty. And also the gift cannot be repeated as *the* same gift. So we discover with the gift, and to let it display its visibility according to its own logic, we have an experience of a kind of phenomenon that cannot be described anymore as an object or as a being. Here is the reason why, if I agree with Derrida to go beyond economy, I disagree with him on another point: This description of the gift can be made, but only in a very particular way. For we cannot make this description, which brackets one or perhaps two of the elements of the so-called economical gift, if we have not previously, in pragmatic experience, enacted by ourselves a gift without a receiver, or a gift without a giver, or a gift without anything given. And indeed this is not a neutral description: We have to commit ourselves by achieving the gift by ourselves, in such a way that we become able to describe it. But, nevertheless, I think that this description goes far beyond that of the gift by Marcel Mauss. The gift, that is, the phenomenon as given, is also, I would say, a dimension of the experience of the world including the possibility of revelation too.

Kearney. If we could pick up on the last sentence, where Jean-Luc finally touches on the connection between the phenomenology of the gift and the revealed word. I appreciate that one has to come at these things tangentially, obliquely and piecemeal, but given the limits of time and given that this is not, strictly speaking, a phenomenology seminar on givenness but a conference on religion and postmodernity, do you think, Jacques, that it is possible to conduct a phenomenology of religious donation? Is it possible, to quote Jean-Luc Marion in "Metaphysics and Theology," to have a rational thought of God which philosophy cannot forget without losing its dignity or its mere possibility?

Derrida. But by asking me this question, you are recontextualizing and authorizing me to go backwards, not to start from the last sentence, his last sentence or your last sentence. I will try not to avoid your question, but I would like to come back to something.

Kearney. I give up!

Derrida. No, no. But we do not want to be too framed. The reference to the gift which gives nothing is exactly something I thematized. Now, as to phenomenology, I will try to answer the question. Since you agree that the gift, according to the logic which is virtually at work in the name gift (I will come back to the name), does not imply necessarily the presence of a receiver, the presence of a giver, or of a given thing, then my question is this: What would be the theme of such a phenomenology? What would phenomenological analysis describe if not the experience of the giver, the experience of the receiver, the thing which is presently given, or the intention? As you know, phenomenological analysis has as its main theme intentional experience. Now if, as one says in English, you "economize on" the intentional experience of giving, what is left for phenomenology? If you do not have the receiver, the

donator, or the thing given, what remains for the "as such"? Allow me to quote something you have said at some point after having summarized my problematic. You say that what is left is to give up the economic horizon of exchange in order to interpret the gift à *partir*, starting from, the horizon of donation itself. What remains to be described, you say, is donation, not anymore after what it rejects, but as such, *en tant que telle*. Then you add, with a scruple that I would like you to comment upon—*si une telle en tant que telle convient encore*, if such an as such still fits. That is my question. I think that phenomenology, as well as ontology, as well as philosophy, implies the *als Stuktur*, the as such. Now, if the event of the gift, for me, excludes the presence of the as such—of the giver, of the receiver, of the given thing, of the present thing, and of the intention—then what is left for the "as such?" That is my problem.

Kearney. Could I interrupt for just a moment and then we will go on? Could I ask Jean-Luc to comment on that "as such"?

Marion. The answer is that of course you cannot describe the gift without all three elements of the gift at the same moment. In that case nothing remains at all and there is neither an *as such* nor any possibility even to question givenness. What I have emphasized is something quite different—that we can at least describe a phenomenon with two of the elements, not with the three. Thus a gift could still achieve itself with a gift, a receiver, but without any giver; or, in another solution, with a giver, a gift, but no receiver; or, in a third figure, with a giver, a receiver but no *thing* which is given. And if we know all three terms, there is no question. So what raises my interest is that we can always give up at least one of them and perhaps two, and nevertheless keep a genuine and thorough phenomenon. Even in the most abstract cases, the interest of such a description lies in our getting something which can still be described although it does not amount to an object and not a being either. Previously you asked me the question why I have added the "as such": I can tell you that I have added the as such because I was thinking exactly of you and your terrible critics. But, it was why I have added, "if such an 'as such' still fits givenness."

Derrida. Thank you. It is a gift.

Marion. The final answer could be that as the "gift" remains equivocal, that is, has two different structures, so it is possible that there could be no "as such" in that case, and it is perhaps necessary. Because in a situation which is precisely a shift within the definition of the phenomenon, when something is given or received without any cause, in that case, the exigencies for a phenomenological sense of the as such, in Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, cannot be satisfied anymore. So I think that there is no "as such" in our case. But it is not so easy to reach a place which you can describe as free of any "as such."

Derrida. Of course. That is exactly my problem. I think what you describe . . .

Marion. There is no "as such" in a structure which is by definition open, not closed, which admits no cause, no repetition, and so on, which cannot appear but as an event. As the late François Furet said,³ *en passant*, where he

'Historical event' without cause

Forst

described the starting moment of the World War I, by this absolutely magnificent statement, "*Plus un événement est lourd de conséquences, moins il est possible de le penser à partir de causes.*" I would add that even any sort of historical event never has any exclusive sufficient cause. I think that when we reach the territory, I would say, of the given phenomenon, described not according to the method of economy, but according to the essential lack of one or perhaps two of the three terms, at that moment we have already gone within the horizon where the event without cause, where something, appears insofar as it is given, as it gives itself.

Derrida. The question is whether you can describe the event itself as such phenomenologically. You say it is not easy to reach. That is what I am saying. It is not easy to think the gift and to describe the gift. But what you describe phenomenologically, when, even if there is a giver without a receiver at the same time and so on, what you are describing under the authority of the phenomenological as such, is precisely the process of the destruction of the gift.

Marion. I do not recognize the "as such" as mine. What I have said, precisely in that horizon, is that the question of the claim to the "as such" has no right to be made.

Derrida. Then would you dissociate what you call phenomenology from the authority of the as such? If you do that, it would be the first heresy in phenomenology. Phenomenology without as such!

Marion. Not my first, no! I said to Levinas some years ago that in fact the last step for a real phenomenology would be to give up the concept of horizon. Levinas answered me immediately: "Without horizon there is no phenomenology." And I boldly assume he was wrong.

Derrida. I am also for the suspension of the horizon, but, for that very reason, by saying so, I am not a phenomenologist anymore. I am very true to phenomenology, but when I agree on the necessity of suspending the horizon, then I am no longer a phenomenologist. So the problem remains if you give up the as such, what is the use that you can make of the word phenomenology? That is the problem for me. I would like not to forget Richard's question about revelation. I want to speak not about what I am doing but about what you are doing. My hypothesis concerns the fact that you use or credit the word *Gegebenheit* with gift, with the meaning of gift, and this has to do with—I will not call this theological or religious—the deepest ambition of your thought. For you, everything that is given in the phenomenological sense, *gegeben, donné, Gegebenheit*, everything that is given to us in perception, in memory, in a phenomenological perception, is finally a gift to a finite creature, and it is finally a gift of God. That is the condition for you to redefine *Gegebenheit* as a gift. This is, at least, a hypothesis and a question to you. The logic of *Etant donné*, finally, to me, is to reinterpret as a gift everything that a phenomenologist—or anyone, a scientist—says is given, is a given, a fact, something that we meet in perception, given to my intuition. I perceive this; it is a given. I

Is this question to M.!

did not produce this. I did not create this, which is what Kant would call *intuitus derivativus*. The finite subject does not create its object, it receives it, receptively. Receptivity is interpreted as precisely the situation of the created being, the creature, which receives everything in the world as something created. So it is a gift. Everything is a gift. Is that not the condition for the extraordinary extension that you propose of *Gegebenheit* and of the category of the gift? Just one more thing. I would like to come back at some point to the question of the event, and the reason why I am interested in the gift.

Finally, we have the word gift in our culture. We received it; it functions in the Western lexicon, Western culture, in religion, in economics, and so on. I try to struggle with the aporias which are located in this heritage. I try to account for this difference between knowing and thinking that I was referring to a moment ago. But at some point I am ready to give up the word. Since this word finally is self-contradictory, I am ready to give up this word at some point. I would simply like to understand what the event of the gift and the event in general is. I try in *Given Time* and in other texts to account for, to interpret, the anthropo-theological reappropriation of the meaning of the gift as the meaning of the event on the groundless ground of what I call *khora*, the groundless ground of a "there is," "it takes place," the place of the taking place, which is prior to and totally indifferent to this anthropo-theologization, this history of religions and of revelations. I do not say this against revelation, against religion. I say that without the indifferent, non-giving structure of the space of the *khora*, of what makes place for taking place, without this totally indifferent space which does not give place to what takes place, there would not be this extraordinary movement or desire for giving, for receiving, for appropriating, for *Ereignis* as event and appropriation. That is why religion is interesting to me. I do not say anything against it, but I try to go back to a place or a taking place where the event as a process of reappropriation of an impossible gift becomes possible. One last word on this point, because it is a question of the event, no doubt. It is a question of the name, the noun, God, gift, and a question of what happens. I would say in French, *arrive*, comes, arrives, happens. I agree with what you said about the happening, the event, but at some point, although I agree with the fact that the event must be unique, singular, as well as that the comer, the newcomer must be unique, singular, and so on, I am not sure that I would subscribe to what you said about what should not be repeated. I would associate the singularity of the gift as an event with the necessity for it or the promise for it to be repeated. When I give something to someone, in the classical semantic of the gift—be it money, a book, or be it simply a promise or a word—I already promise to confirm it, to repeat it, even if I do not repeat it. The repetition is part of the singularity. That is what makes the event, the structure of the event, so difficult to describe, because it is at the same time absolutely singular and unique while carrying in itself the promise of repetition. It is in this promise that all the questions we are discussing get complicated.

Is critical summary of his religious signification of Gegebenheit / gift

Kearney. Would you not say, Jean-Luc, that you part company with Jacques Derrida on the route to the *khora*?

Marion. On the last part, no.

Kearney. Not on the point of the event per se, but on the relationship between the event and revelation. Jacques seems to go towards the *khora* and you seem to go towards *revelation*.

Marion. Not necessarily. I disagree with his interpretation of what I am supposed to say about the relation of gift and givenness. This is a point where we really disagree. As Derrida said, he is not interested in the gift as such but in the profound structure of something which from time to time may be named the gift and appears as possible. On the contrary, I say that we have to go back from the gift to givenness, and there is such a way to reach it. But, to be brief, the event is unique and cannot be repeated, and for Derrida it is unique, but has to be repeated. I agree. It has to be repeated, of course. For instance, I give my word, I have to repeat it and go on; but I cannot repeat it as an identical act; the repetition is never identical (just refer to Kierkegaard, Heidegger, or even Deleuze). As to the question of whether what I am doing, or what Derrida is doing, is within phenomenology or beyond, it does not seem to me very important. Let me just quote here a famous sentence of Heidegger, "We are not interested in phenomenology, but in the things phenomenology is interested in." Whether *Etant donné* is still phenomenology we shall see ten years later. But now it is not very important. I claim that I am still faithful to phenomenology and I guess that you are more inside the field of phenomenology than you admit. But this will be an issue, if any, for our successors.

Kearney. It is easier to get Unionists and Nationalists in Ulster to talk about peace than it is to get you two to talk about God! We have less than half an hour left. I want to put a straight question to you both. I think that these issues of the phenomenology of givenness and of the event are absolutely crucial and indispensable, and it is a great privilege for us to hear you address them. I know that they are basic work for getting on to higher things. But I want to rush you a little now towards those "higher things" and pursue the relationship between gift and grace, which you touched on, Jean-Luc, in the conclusion to your talk the other night on negative theology. In the last paragraphs of that talk, you spoke about (1) a difference between deconstruction and your view of negative theology and (2) a "third way" that it opens up. One of the phrases that you used was, "if there is not an intuition of grace, or of revelation, of some kind, if there is not an intuition of this exemplary hyper-essential saturated phenomenon, then there is no difference between negative theology and deconstruction." You seemed to be holding out for some kind of distance between the two positions. What is it and how do you defend it?

Marion. I think that the difference between negative theology in my way of thinking and deconstruction, at least as it is currently accepted, which is not necessarily the view of Derrida, is this: In negative theology the difficulty is not that we lack intuitions concerning God (we are overwhelmed by them), but

that we lack concepts fitting God. What we share in common, Derrida and myself, is that the concepts have to be criticized even in theology, as they are deconstructed in deconstruction. But it is for opposite reasons. In theology—and I am *not* referring now to my work on givenness—we receive an amount of experiences through prayer, liturgy, life in the community, fraternity, etc. The difficulty lies in that we have an utmost experience without the words, the significations, and the concepts able to utter it, to explain it, and to articulate it. One of the best examples, for instance, and I do refer here to theology, may be found in the transfiguration of Christ. The disciples witness the transfiguration and they say nothing but "Let us make three tabernacles. For he [Peter] knew not what to say" (Mark 9:5–6). The gospel emphasizes that they say that because they have nothing more to say; that is, no concept matching their intuitions. Or let us add the example of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, listening to Christ explaining, in what should have been an outstanding lesson of exegesis, all the Scriptures referring to him, but making no mention of his name, all the while remaining anonymous. After they have recognized Christ, they say, we remember that "our hearts burn[ed] within us, while he talked with us" (Luke 24:32). That is to say, the experience was so intense that they were overwhelmed and that no concept could grasp anything of that experience. In philosophical language, there was an excess of intuition over the concept or the signification. So, we have deconstruction in that sense, that the most fundamental concepts of theology before Christ—Son of God, Messiah, Isaiah, Elijah, the prophet, and so on—all these concepts which nevertheless remain meaningful for us in theology now, were rejected as meaningless, not because they were criticized as such, but because they were devaluated by the excess of intuition. This is the very special situation in the so-called negative theology. This is also the reason why it is not a good choice of words to describe it as "negative theology"—as it seems much more an excessively positive theology. Concepts are negative and, by the way, put out of play only because they do not match the excess of intuition. This is the reason why in theology, in fact, pluralism is implied in the very notion of revelation. If there is a real revelation, no concept could achieve to say and to make intelligible in its own way the excess of intuition. Pluralism is implied at the inner core of revelation. There are four gospels and an infinite number of spiritualities within the same experience of the Church. I conclude that deconstruction and the so-called negative theology have something very much in common; that is, the fact that no concept is able to give us the presence of what is at stake, and that presence not only is impossible but cannot be claimed. If there could be any revelation, I would say that no heart, no mind, and no word would be wide enough to host that revelation. The presence of any self-revealed event remains impossible in our world. That is the reason why Christ has to come again—because now we could not receive him yet, nor have enough room for him (John 1:10–11).

So let us sum it up: Deconstruction and mystical theology—I definitely

prefer to speak of mystical theology rather than of negative theology—share the same conviction, that we have no concept, therefore that we never reach such a thing as the presence of meaning, of signification, of science. But in mystical theology, this fails always by an excess. I do not want to claim that deconstruction is opposed to all this, but I assume that deconstruction cannot say it deconstructs because of an excess of the gift. But clearly mystical theology has to claim that it is because of an excess of intuition that there could never be such a thing as a final and unified theology.

May I make a last point in answer to a question of Jacques Derrida: I am not trying to reduce every phenomenon to a gift and then to say that, after that, since this is a gift, and given to a finite mind, then there is perhaps a giver behind it all. This was said by many critics, unable or unwilling to understand my project. My project attempts, on the contrary, to reduce the gift to givenness, and to establish the phenomenon as given.

Derrida. Now, if you . . .

Marion. No, please, let me go on. I really think that this point has to be emphasized and its misunderstanding worries me more than I dare say. In *Reduction and Givenness*, but more at length in *Etant donné*, I made it my goal to establish that givenness remains an immanent structure of any kind of phenomenality, whether immanent or transcendent. We can imagine and say that something is given and appears as given without referring it to another thing or being or object that would be the cause of its givenness. It is very important to understand that you can describe a phenomenon as given without asking any question about the giver. And in most of the cases, there is absolutely no giver at all. I am not interested in assigning a giver to a given phenomenon. I am interested in saying that our deepest and most genuine experience of the phenomenon does not deal with any object that we could master, produce, or constitute, no more than with any being which belongs to the horizon of Being, where onto-theology is possible, and where God can for the first time and in the first place play the role of the first cause. Rather, there are many situations where phenomena appear as given, that is, without any cause or giver. When they appear to us as given, of course, we have to receive them, but this does not imply that we should claim God as the cause of what we receive. Notice that in philosophy and phenomenology we have already the experience that subjectivity is not the actor, but the receiver, so that such an original passivity of subjectivity is a way, I think a radical way, to deconstruct the transcendental ambition of the ego. So, I suggest that my proposal remains merely philosophical and without any theological presupposition or bias here. On the contrary, any theological bias and second thought would ruin my project and it is perhaps that some do their best to put by force such bias into my work. I think the difficulty for phenomenology now is to become more fair to some phenomena which cannot be described either as object or as being. We all try to make sense out of those phenomena—the gift, the *khora*, the other, the flesh and others that we cannot describe either as an object or as

being. So, my hypothesis as a phenomenologist is that we should not try to constitute them, but accept them—in any sense of accept—as given and that is all.

Kearney. Jacques, do you think that brings Jean-Luc Marion closer to your position or further away?

Derrida. It is difficult for me to understand how to describe something not as an object; as something other than an object, and to claim that we are still doing phenomenology. What I was interested in with this problem of the gift, among other things, was precisely to check the limits and possibility of phenomenology. It is difficult for me to understand how an excess of intuition can be described phenomenologically. If deconstruction—I do not want to use this word and to speak as if I were speaking deconstruction—is interested in the excess, I was mentioning a moment ago, in some excess, it is not an excess of intuition, of phenomenality, of fullness, of more than fullness. The excess, the structure, in which I am interested, is not an excess of intuition. When you say, for instance, protesting against my prior hypothesis about the reason why you interpret everything, every *Gegebenheit* as gift . . .

Marion. Every gift as *Gegebenheit*.

Derrida. You said the immanent structure of phenomenality is *Gegebenheit*. There are two hypotheses. Either you equate *Gegebenheit* with gift and then that is my hypothesis: Everything is a gift, a gift from God, from whom-ever. Or you dissociate or mark a gap between a *Gegebenheit* and a gift; then you cannot transfer your point on *Gegebenheit* to the problem of a gift. But if you say the immanent structure of phenomenality is *Gegebenheit*, and if by *Gegebenheit* you refer to something given, to some common root, then every phenomenon is a gift. Even if you do not determine the giver as God, it is a gift. I am not sure that this is reconcilable or congruent with what I know under the name of phenomenology.

Marion. But why?

Derrida. Because what I understand as phenomenology, the principle of all principles, which you have recalled here, implies finally intuition, that is, the fullness of the intuition, the presence of something. When there is a gap between intuition and intention, there is a crisis, there is a symbolic structure. But the principle of all principles is intuition. If you agree, as I think you agree, about the impossibility of equating the gift to a present, then you cannot define every phenomenon as a gift. That is what puzzles me.

I wanted to make another point referring to your book. At some point you refer to something I say, in translation, "Let us go to the limit." I am smiling at some of the typos in your book, in which my book *Donner le temps* is transformed a number of times into *Penser le temps*.⁴ That is interesting. Allow me to quote myself, "Let us go to the limit. The truth of the gift . . . suffices to annul the gift. The truth of the gift is equivalent to the non-gift or the non-truth of the gift" (*Given Time*, 27). That is what I say, then you comment, in a long footnote:

Formally, one could distinguish two meanings in this formula. a) If "or" has conjunctive value, one obtains "non-gift" = "non-truth," then, by canceling the double negation, "gift = truth." b) If "or" has disjunctive value, one will have "non-truth" or "non-gift," hence, "either gift or truth." Thus the formula is able to be understood either as an equivalence between gift and truth, or as their mutual exclusion. If one had to choose, Jacques Derrida would probably hold for the second interpretation; and we would do the same, while the first remains conceivable. But the strange thing is elsewhere, that, in both cases, the gift keeps a privileged relation to the truth." (*Etant donné*, 117 n.1)

I would say that, in fact, if I had to choose, it would not be so simple. When I say, "the truth of the gift is equivalent to the non-gift or the non-truth of the gift," I am referring to a traditional concept of truth, that is, an ontological-phenomenological concept of truth, as revelation or unveiling or adequation. From that point of view, I would say that there is no truth of the gift, but I do not give up truth in general. I am looking for another possible experience of truth, through the event of the gift, with all these conditions of impossibility. What I am interested in—and I often repeat that the deconstruction I try to practice is impossible, is *the impossible*—is precisely this experience of *the impossible*. This is not simply an impossible experience. The experience of *the impossible*. What happens in the experience of *the impossible*, which would not be simply a non-experience. That is what I try to do. What does the word "possible" mean? At some point, when I said that the conditions of possibility are conditions of impossibility, you replied that this is not enough and you criticized my use of the word "condition." But I am interested in precisely in thinking otherwise about the concept of condition and the concept of possibility or impossibility. I will refer here to what Richard Kearney has said about "possibility" in theology, where *Möglichkeit* does not simply mean possible or real as opposed to impossible. But in German, in *A Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger uses *mögen* as desire. What I am interested in is the experience of the desire for the impossible. That is, the impossible as the condition of desire. Desire is not perhaps the best word. I mean this quest in which we want to give, even when we realize, when we agree, if we agree, that the gift, that giving, is impossible, that it is a process of reappropriation and self-destruction. Nevertheless, we do not give up the dream of the pure gift, in the same way that we do not give up the idea of pure hospitality. Even if we know it is impossible and that it can be perverse, which is what we said the other night. If we try to draw a politics of hospitality from the dream of unconditional hospitality, not only will that be impossible but it will have perverse consequences. So despite this perversion, despite this impossibility, we go on dreaming or thinking of pure hospitality, of pure gift, having given up the idea of the subject, of a subject-giver and a subject-receiver, and of thing given, object given. We continue to desire, to dream, through the impossible. The impossible for me is not a negative concept. That is why I would like, in order not simply to give up the

(*)
Gift =
desire
for
impossible
hospitality

idea of truth, to measure it or to proportion it to this problematic of the impossible.

Now let us go back to the problem of revelation, since Richard Kearney wants us to speak about religion.

Richard Kearney. Enfin!

Jacques Derrida. What I really do not know, and I confess I do not know, is whether what I am analyzing or trying to think is prior to my own culture, our own culture, that is, to the Judeo-Christian, Greek heritage of the gift. If I am interested in the *khora*, I am trying to reach a structure which is not the *khora* as interpreted by Plato, but by myself against Plato. I do not know if this structure is really prior to what comes under the name of revealed religion or even of philosophy, or whether it is through philosophy or the revealed religions, the religions of the book, or any other experience of revelation, that retrospectively we think what I try to think. I must confess, I cannot make the choice between these two hypotheses. Translated into Heidegger's discourse, which is addressing the same difficulty, this is the distinction between *Offenbarung* and *Offenbarkeit*, revelation and revealability. Heidegger said, this is his position, that there would be no revelation or *Offenbarung* without the prior structure of *Offenbarkeit*, without the possibility of revelation and the possibility of manifestation. That is Heidegger's position. I am not sure. Perhaps it is through *Offenbarung* that *Offenbarkeit* becomes thinkable, historically. That is why I am constantly really hesitating. That is part of—what can I call this here?—let us say, my cross. Since it is impossible for me to choose between these two hypotheses, my last hypothesis is that the question is not well posed, that we should displace the question, not to have an answer, but to think otherwise the possibility of these two possibilities.

Kearney. This will be our last question because the time is short. I would like to pick up on what Jacques said earlier and put a question to you, Jean-Luc. On the whole issue of *thinking religion*, Jacques invoked the Kantian distinction between *thinking* and *knowing* in relation to the gift and by implication to the desire of God, which we spoke of two days ago, which opens on to the "impossible." He implied that even if we cannot *know* these things, because we reach a limit, we still should *think* them. Arguably, that is what his thought about the messianic is and what he has just said about revelation. Even though it is an apocalypse without apocalypse, a messianicity without messianism, a religion without religion, without vision, without truth, without revelation, it is still a *mode of thinking*. Now what I would like to ask you, finally, Jean-Luc, is this: Surely you go some way along the same path, you share that same crux. In the conclusion to your negative theology paper the other night, you talked about an encounter with revelation which fills us with incomprehensibility, which infuses us with terror and stupor. There seems to be there, too, an encounter with what we might call the "monstrous," the utterly other, that fills us with fear and trembling, the *mysterium fascinans*. What, for you, is the religious thinking that is appropriate to that particular limit? You speak, as I

khora = before
impossible

Marion: rationally impossible

mentioned earlier, about "a rational thought of God which philosophy cannot forget without losing its dignity or even its possibility." What would you say, in conclusion, that might help us get more of a fix on the religious nature of such thinking?

Marion. As Jacques Derrida just said, the question now is to think impossibility, the impossible as such. That was exactly my point in *Etant donné* and I shall try to make it right here. One may sum up modern philosophy by saying it was, and perhaps it still is, a transcendental enterprise by which something is taken for granted a priori, which is the I, ego, subjectivity, in order, starting from it, to establish the limits of the possible, of any kind of possibility. To think amounts to foreseeing the possible, and to construct objects within the horizon of the possible. The result, as is well known, is that some effective experiences cannot be reconstructed within the limits of the possible. In a transcendental philosophy, the question of revelation is always looked on as a question of its impossibility, or at least partial impossibility, within the limits of reason alone — according to the title of books by Kant and Fichte, which inquire into the "limits of any possible revelation." As pointed out, Heidegger, and also Hegel, make a distinction between *Offenbarung* (revelation) and what is supposed to be understood and revealed within the revelation, within *Offenbarkeit*. In the end, only within the limits of the concept does it become possible for the impossible to come to thought. I think that what we can glimpse here and aim at may still be called phenomenology, and implies a complete reverse of the former situation. That is to say, we now admit that we do have an experience of the impossible. The definition of such an impossible can no more arise within metaphysics. In metaphysics, the impossible simply contradicts the possible, which is already known and has, afterwards, to be fulfilled or not. But the impossible now is no longer what cannot be thought, but whose fact has to be thought. So the question is, how is it possible to remain rational and to have a discourse dealing with the impossible? There are different strategies. We may first distinguish between a strong intelligibility and a weak intelligibility. We may also say that we should face what I call the excess of intuition or, more exactly, the excess of the given, which achieves a kind of impossibility. More generally, we have to ask ourselves, how it is that we say that something may seem impossible (that is, contradict the a priori conditions of experience) and nevertheless could happen as an event, which takes place within our experience? To think it, we have to deconstruct, first, all the concepts according to which the effective experience is supposed to appear from time to time impossible and irrational. That is the first step. We have to deconstruct or criticize our concepts, even in philosophy, perhaps more than ever in philosophy. At that point, mystical theology and philosophy agree with deconstruction. We all were at least once led to describe a real situation in which we were confronted with excess, what was both impossible and nevertheless effective. To achieve this, we have to take seriously the fact that we cannot have an experience of the impossible in the same way that we have an experience of the

impossible
On the Gift

possible. To have an experience of the impossible means to have an experience of impossibility *prima facie*, which I call the "counter-experience" of be-dazzlement, of astonishment or *Bewunderung*. This counter-experience has to do with the fact that we can see, but cannot designate as an object or a being, an event that we cannot comprehend but nevertheless we have to see. This counter-experience is, in fact, the correct and consistent kind of experience appropriate to every decisive evidence in our life — death, birth, love, poverty, illness, joy, pleasure, and so on. We see them but we know our inability to see them in a clear manner; and nevertheless, these impossible and unintelligible evidences play the most important role for us. So, if we cannot, at the moment, reach a conceptual definition of those evidences, of those phenomena, then we have to take the counter-experience seriously, which exemplifies our not being able to reduce them to objectivity, which result, I think, is from time to time the only one we can hope to achieve. Such a counter-experience of the impossible is not nothing, but a new kind of modality. As Jacques Derrida explains it very well, if the possible, in this moment of philosophy, that is, after the end of metaphysics, is precisely the experience of the impossible, then the only rationality able to match the impossible as such will be the experience of the counter-experience. We take seriously the fact that our experience, the more that it is decisive and unquestionable, de facto, nevertheless cannot be an experience of objectivation. To know without knowing in the mode of objectivation, it is *incomprehensibiliter comprehendere incomprehensibile*, as Augustine said. But this comprehension of and by the incomprehensible is not nothing. In fact, we already have this kind of counter-experience when we deal with an historical event, a painting, the self-affection of the flesh, and the experience of the other. All those are experiences of the impossible which I call paradoxes and we cannot make sense of them in an objective way. Nevertheless, we have those experiences. The incomprehensible, the excess, the impossible, are part and parcel of our experience. We have to learn how to get a concept of experience which should not and will not be univocal again.

Kearney. Thank you, Jean-Luc. A final word from Jacques Derrida.

Derrida. Just one more word about phenomenology, because this is the point. When Levinas refers to the excess of the infinitely other, he says that the other, the face, precisely does not appear as such. He says many times that he wants to find within phenomenology the injunction to go beyond phenomenology. There are many places where he says that we have to go phenomenologically beyond phenomenology. That is what I am trying to do, also. I remain and I want to remain a rationalist, a phenomenologist.

Marion. You are!

Derrida. A man of the Enlightenment, and so on and so forth. I would like to remain phenomenological in what I say against phenomenology. Finally, what leads me in this matter about the non-phenomenality of the gift is also the non-phenomenality of the "other" as such, which is something I learned from Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*. Husserl says that in the case of the alter

ego we cannot have pure intuition, an originary perception of the other; we have to go through appresentation. That is a limit of phenomenology that appears within phenomenology. That is the place where I work also.

One last word. When I referred a moment ago to *Offenbarkeit* and *Offenbarung*, I was sincere but at the same time I am also perplexed. I am also perplexed without a guide in this respect. The discourse of *Offenbarung* and *Offenbarkeit*, in Heidegger or anywhere else in this context, implies the historicity of *Dasein*, of man and God, the historicity of revelation, historicity in the Christian or European sense. My problem is that when I refer to *khora*, I refer to some event, the possibility of taking place, which is not historical, to something non-historical that resists historicity. In other words, there might be something that is excluded by this problematic, however complex it may be, of revelation, of *Offenbarung* and *Offenbarkeit*, whether in Heidegger or out of Heidegger. That is why I refer to what I call the "desert in the desert." There is a biblical desert, there is an historical desert. But what I call a "desert in the desert" is this place which resists historicization, which is, I will not say "before," because that is chronological, but which remains irreducible to historicization, humanization, anthropo-theologization of revelation. This resists even *Offenbarkeit*, which is not revealed and cannot be revealed, not because it is obscure, but because it has nothing to do with the gift, with revelation or with anything we are discussing here. That is what I point to when I refer to *khora*. But this place of resistance, this absolute heterogeneity to philosophy and the Judeo-Christian history of revelation, even to the concept of history, which is a Christian concept, is not simply at war with what it resists. It is also, if I may use this terrible word, a condition of possibility which makes history possible by resisting it. It is also a place of non-gift which makes the gift possible by resisting it. It is the place of non-desire. The *khora* does not desire anything, does not give anything. It is what makes taking place or an event possible. But the *khora* does not happen, does not give, does not desire. It is a spacing and absolutely indifferent. Why do I insist on this, on this perplexity? Why, for instance, in *Sauf le nom*, do I try to articulate this with the problem of negative theology and phenomenology? If you read this small essay, you will see that I try to point to a strange affinity between negative theology and phenomenology. I think that this reference to what I call *khora*, the absolutely universal place, so to speak, is what is irreducible to what we call revelation, revealability, history, religion, philosophy, Bible, Europe, and so forth. I think the reference to this place of resistance is also the condition for a universal politics, for the possibility of crossing the borders of our common context—European, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and philosophical. I think this reference to this non-history and non-revelation, this negativity has heavy and serious political implications. I use the problematic of deconstruction and negative theology as a threshold to the definition of a new politics. I am not saying this against Europe, against Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. I am trying to find a place where a new discourse and a new politics could be possible. This place is the

place of resistance—perhaps resistance is not the best word—but this non-something within something, this non-revelation within revelation, this non-history within history, this non-desire within desire, this impossibility. I would like to translate the experience of this impossibility into what we could call ethics or politics. Perhaps, and this is my hypothesis, if not a hope, what I am saying here can be retranslated after the fact into Jewish discourse or Christian discourse or Muslim discourse, if they can integrate the terrible things I am suggesting now. Just to underline, it is not a war machine that I am locating here but another type, another place for questions, in fact, the question of the place.

Kearney. I would like to say a few words of thanks. One of the nice things about the gift is that it gives you the opportunity to express gratitude for the gift, even if you betray the gift in doing so.

Derrida. No one knows who is thanking whom for what.

Kearney. I am going to put a few names on it, nonetheless. I would like to thank Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion for giving us their thoughts on the phenomenology of the gift, and all of you for coming here. I would also like to thank Mike Scanlon and Jack Caputo for coming up with the idea of this conference and, even at this eleventh hour, I would like to invite Jack Caputo to offer us some concluding thoughts on this conference.

John D. Caputo. This has been a marvelous moment for us all and we are all very grateful to Richard Kearney for leading this exciting conversation so genially and so deftly. I would like to make three brief points.

I have the sense that Marion and Derrida are answering the question of the gift differently because they have different problems. I think that Marion's problematic of the gift is very Heideggerian and that he wants to move the question of the gift out of the economy of causality, out of the horizon of onto-theologic, and to take up the "gifting of gift," the emerging of a gift as what has been released from onto-theological and causal constraints, so that it becomes excess. I do not think that this is exactly Derrida's concern. My sense is that the question of the gift for Derrida has to do primarily with the economy of credit and debt, and that Derrida wants the recipient not to contract a debt and the giver not to acquire acclaim for such generosity. I think that in *Etant donné* Marion removes the gift from the sphere of causality but my question is whether it is removed from debt. Do we not come into a universal indebtedness to God the giver, even though the gift has been released from a causal economy? Economy for Marion means causality. Economy for Derrida means credit and debt. I worry whether we do not end up in debt in Marion. But is not for-giving the highest moment of the gift? Should anyone end up in debt from a gift? Should we be in debt to God for the gift of creation? If creation is a gift, then it is not a debt but something we affirm and celebrate.

The second thing I would say is that I now appreciate Marion's position better. I took Marion to be criticizing Derrida more than he now says he is criticizing him. When Derrida says that the gift is impossible, I thought

Marion took him to be saying that it is *simply* impossible and that for Derrida the gift remains forever stuck within economy, and that Marion was going to show how this very impossibility is what makes it possible—which is of course Derrida's position in the first place. But Marion said today that he did not mean Derrida when he made this criticism, although I did not know who else he could have meant. So now it seems to me that they are both saying very much the same thing on this question of the impossible and that the round-table today has very much clarified this point.

The last point concerns the saturated phenomenon. I find this analysis very beautiful, but if, as Marion says, the saturated phenomenon falls into confusion or bedazzlement, I do not know how to distinguish the confusion of bedazzlement or of excess from the confusion of defect. How do we know that we have been visited by a supereminent excess and not just simply invaded by *khôra*? How do we know that the source of the confusion is God, not *khôra*?

Marion. I shall answer you at the next conference.

Caputo. Jacques Derrida, Richard Kearney, Jean-Luc Marion, thank you all so much.

NOTES

1. Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas Carlson (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1998). *Etant donné* is currently being translated by Jeff Kosky.

2. Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 59.

3. François Furet, *Le passé d'une illusion* (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1995), 49.

4. Jean-Luc Marion, *Etant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997), 14, n.1–2, 116 n.1, 117 n.2.

*lost and
fisher of heretics.*

Loose Canons

Augustine and Derrida on Their Selves

Robert Dodaro

It is fitting and just that I, too, excuse myself in advance of daring to speak about a man and his work which I can never completely understand, but for whom I confess an enormous respect, if for no other reason than because of the courage with which he now dares to expose the most private parts of himself, and for such a serious purpose.¹ So I confess the inadequate preparation of my reading, of my thoughts and of my words in this moment;² and in grateful recognition of your patience with my abuse of your generosity, I ask that you place no importance on what I say, but that you allow my words to suggest to you what one Augustinian has received from another.³

Jacques Derrida's *Circumfession* will now change the way we shall read Augustine's *Confessions*, and, thus, the way we shall read Augustine. To make this claim is no mere *captatio benevolentiae*, though it is also and obviously that, too. For Professor Derrida has shown us that we need not fear Augustine as we otherwise might have done, as do those who read in him the arrogance of the "hammer of heretics,"⁴ who consider his certainty about himself, assured through confession, as the canon, the cane, with which he beats down the unwarranted certainty of his adversaries—those too proud to acknowledge