For Ms Kennedy

Acknowledgements

Introduction
Grace, Novelty, Immanence and Actuality

1. God and Grace

If God exists, then it is imperative to think the nearness of his grace. If, however, God is dead, then the obligation to think the nearness of this grace does not dissolve. Rather, it becomes even more urgent because, whether or not God exists, life is more than animal only to the extent that grace palpably intervenes. As a result, the question of grace supervenes even the question of God's own existence. Theist or atheist, philosopher or theologian, it is a question that presses for our attention.

Following Alain Badiou, I want to pose the question of grace in what may be its most modest and general form: is it possible for something new to happen? Or must everything continue on as it already is, its course fixed by the world's progression from unavoidable cause to inevitable effect? If the world's course is typically determined by its conventionally linear movement from A to B (a kind of movement where, despite the succession, nothing new actually occurs), then grace is, most simply, the possibility of inducing an impossibly diagonal movement from A to B. Grace is an interruption of the predictable line that is time, an unforeseeable gap in the rails that sends the world careening down an oblique track to someplace other. Grace, as the possibility of something genuinely new, is the promise that things need not remain as they are. It is the promise that the future need not have already been decided by the past.

This conjunction of grace and novelty, spare and formal as it is, is deeply (though clearly not exclusively) Christian. Consistently, the kernel of Jesus' own message is the announcement that something new is near. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus summarizes this announcement when he says, 'The time is full and the kingdom of God is near; repent and believe the good news'

(Mark 1.15, translation mine). The word for time in this verse is the Greek word *kairos*. *Kairos,* unlike the word *chronos,* which is used to designate the humdrum run of everyday time, is a word that indicates the arrival of a turning point, the possibility of a temporal torsion. To say that the *kairos* is full is to say that an urgent and decisive moment is here. It names a pregnant time, an instant full of possibilities and novelties, a moment after which nothing will continue as it was. Jesus' name for this pregnant moment, for this event of grace, is the 'kingdom of God'. And, just as the *kairos* is 'full', the kingdom is 'near'.

   The nearness of this grace is not incidental to the message but is, rather, the substance of Jesus' proclamation. It is what he announces, what he attempts to think, and above all what he means to put into practice. What the kingdom of God offers, what becomes possible in light of the temporal rift that it opens, is repentance (*metanoia*). 'The kingdom of God is near; repent!' In the kairotic moment, time can be bent and its normal course interrupted. Despite the ways in which our 'sinful' pasts have set for us a fixed future, despite the suffocating weight of our personally and collectively shameful histories, something unforeseeable advenes. The chain of cause and effect can be broken by the invention of something new. To repent is to welcome the new and remain faithful to the future that it opens. To repent is to proceed diagonally in relation to one's past by virtue of grace.

   The practice by which Jesus proposes to interrupt the inevitability of sin and make the novelty of repentance possible is frighteningly simple: 'If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you' (Matthew 6:14).[1] The practice of forgiving others is meant to introduce into the normal economic circulation of debt and repayment a causal hiccup that will allow novel possibilities to emerge for both the forgiver and the forgiven. In order to be forgiven, in order to have our own debts cancelled out, we must be willing to cancel debt *per se*: yours, theirs, mine, everyone's. Forgiveness is not an isolated movement that occurs within time but a shift that diverts the whole of chronological time itself. It is not the cancellation of a specific transaction within the kingdom of economy but the cancellation in sum of that old kingdom. Rather than proceeding predictably from debt to repayment, the practice Jesus enacts

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

up-ends our expectations. It short-circuits time by inserting a non-sequitur, a kind of causeless effect that he names: forgiveness.

Jesus' description of how this practice of grace interrupts cycles of violence is especially helpful. 'You have heard that it was said, ''An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth''. But I say unto you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also' (Matthew 5:38–39). Again, this practice is designed precisely to contradict a causal economy in which every blow is bound to be repaid and where for every eye lost one is certain to be taken. The hoary weight of such a retributive temporality is crippling almost before the first blow has been landed. Only the irrationality of 'loving one's enemies' has the hope of introducing something new. Only an oblique move that evades reciprocity, that leaves empty a place in the expected line of episodes, can allow for the nearness of grace.

The result is that, in its nearness, the kingdom of God accomplishes a startling reversal. Its graciousness unfolds a surprise ending. In the sacred anarchy inaugurated by the kingdom, 'many who are first will be last, and the last will be first' (Mark 10:31). About this, Jesus is quite explicit: the kingdom belongs to the poor. There, those who are hungry will be fed, those who weep will laugh, and those who are persecuted will be revered.

2. Grace Without Transcendence

However, my concerns here are not principally practical. Rather, they are explicitly theoretical. My aim is to consider whether it is possible to *think*, in its most general form, the nearness of grace. More precisely I mean to ask: is it possible to think grace in conjunction with immanence? Or does the thought of an immanent grace necessarily dissolve in paradox and contradiction?

The primary difficulty is this: grace, as what is new, as what interrupts the stable order of the immanent world, must be something other than what is. This is why, traditionally, it is customary to think grace within the framework of a metaphysical dualism: there is the natural world (the immanent world or 'earth'), and there is another, supernatural world (the transcendent world or 'heaven'). On this model, the intervention of grace

occurs when the supernatural world impinges on our own. In these terms, grace is by definition transcendent. Grace, though it may have immanent effects, has a supernatural locus.

It may be possible, granted the model of a universe that is metaphysically grounded in a supernatural world, to think this transcendent grace as immanently near, but it will not be possible to think its nearness as the result of an immanence that is proper to grace itself. Furthermore, such a position makes impossible any attempt to respond to what I take to be the imperative of our contemporary situation: the need to think the nearness of grace with or without the existence of God. If grace can be thought as genuinely immanent, then it must be thinkable apart from a supernatural locus. As a result, we must begin by committing ourselves to the principle that what is thinkable for us will be thinkable without the invocation of a supernatural world beyond our own.

However, if a commitment to this principle is necessary, then the initial problem remains. If the world is all there is, then how can that which interrupts the world be immanent to it? Or, if the novelty of grace is immanent to the old world, then in what sense can this grace be considered genuinely 'new'? If grace does belong to the world, then how does its 'intervention' amount to anything other than a variation of the same?

An attempt to think grace as immanent must walk a razor's edge: it must avoid slipping off into either a dark night of obscurity (the result of assigning grace a supernatural locus) or the bland repetition of the world's banality (the result of straightforwardly grounding grace in this world). Grace must be novel without succumbing to obscurantism and it must be immanent without succumbing to banality. What is needed is a way to think about grace that is itself capable of moving diagonally, connecting novelty with immanence in a surprising constellation that sidesteps both obscurity and banality.

With this in mind, I want to return to a more careful consideration of the potential difficulties inherent in trying to *think* through the advent of an immanent grace. In particular, I'd like to return, by way of example, to Jesus' description of the kingdom of God as the site of a reversal where the last are made first and the first last.

If this description is to be of use in thinking grace as immanent, then it must avoid both of the difficulties indicated above.

First, it is necessary for the reversal to remain intelligible as an event of grace without the obscure invocation of a supernatural world. In order to do so, we must simply attempt to think its novelty as a reversal of positions that takes place *within* this world. However, in the moment that the kingdom's reversal of positions is limited to this world, the description of grace risks suggesting nothing more than a change in management. If those who are last simply come to occupy the place previously assigned to the first (and vice versa), then the fundamental structure of oppression remains intact. Someone is still last and they are still subject to the first; only the names and faces have changed.

If the advent of the kingdom does not involve both a reversal *and* a transformation of the hierarchical structure itself, then nothing new has happened. What is needed is a way to think about this reversal as a revolution of both position and structure or, better yet, a reversal of positions *for the sake of* revolutionizing the structure. Is it possible to rework the formula 'the last shall be first and the first last' in a way that allows it to uproot the stale hegemony of oppression, that does something other than repeat the same old story of priority and privilege? Is it possible to think Jesus' formula not as another move in the tired game of determining precedence but as the invention of a new game altogether?

3. Tout Autre

In *The Gift of Death*, Jacques Derrida suggests a simple and nearly tautological formula that, in my view, may be productively read as a contemporary translation of Jesus' own sayings about the nearness of grace. Derrida's formula, in French, is this: '*tout autre est tout autre*'.[2] Minimally, the sentence translates into English as 'every other is every other'. Or, alternatively, the sentence might be read much less austerely as saying 'every other is wholly other'. David Wills attempts to convey both the richness of the expression and its tautological flavour with his (necessarily awkward) rendition, 'every other (one) is every (bit) other'.[3]

What is arresting about Derrida's formula is the way that it

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[2] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 82.

[3] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 82.

works the intersection of immanence ('every other is every other') into the novelty of radical difference ('every other is wholly other'). What could be more immanent than the simple identification of A as A, of every object or person with itself? In this first sense, Derrida argues, the phrase 'doesn't signify anything that one doesn't already know, if by that one refers to the repetition of a subject in its complement'.[4] On the other hand, what could incite greater novelty than the declaration that every person is wholly other than every other, themselves included? The beauty of this formula is that it reverses the apparent identity of tautological immanence in order to simultaneously interrupt and produce that immanence.

As noted above, the difficulty in thinking grace as immanent by means of Jesus' saying that 'the last shall be first and the first last' is that it must either invoke a supernatural fulfilment or risk accomplishing nothing more than swapping roles between the oppressor and the oppressed. Read immanently, the straightforwardness of the inversion too strongly preserves the original hierarchy. Clearly, Jesus does not simply intend to install new leadership in the old kingdom; rather, he intends to initiate the arrival of an entirely new order that fractures the very meaning of 'hierarchy'.

The advantage, then, of Derrida's formula is that it is slippery. It does not simply invert the last and the first – it undermines the clarity of what it means to be either last or first by stating that everyone is, in a crucial sense, both. Derrida's expression simultaneously says that everyone last is last ('every other is every other') and that everyone last is first ('every other is wholly other'). Derrida's 'translation' shows how Jesus' saying can be set in motion so that the reversal of first and last can be read not as a single act but as a perpetual movement in which the business of inverting the positions is infinite and never comes to rest: the last and first now appear as continually sliding into each other, each reversal itself demanding to be endlessly reversed so that the very meanings of last and first are called into question. The instability of the formula itself allows it to conjoin immanence and novelty.

In this sense, the expression 'tout autre est tout autre' can be understood as a particularly compelling description of Derrida's overarching philosophical concerns. It is a cipher that encodes

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[4] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 82.

and enacts and what Derrida means by his celebrated neologism *différance*. Primarily, *différance* (a conjunction of the French words for difference and deferral) refers to the co-necessity of what might normally be understood as antithetical tendencies. For instance, Derrida wishes to point out with this term that what makes the production of meaning possible (the mutual depen-dence of terms on the phonetic and conceptual differences between them) also makes the *definitive* production of meaning impossible (every word's meaning is dependent on something outside of itself, on a string of differential relations that force the deferral of a final meaning from one word to the next).

The production of a provisional, finite meaning (or identity) is thus dependent on the infinite referral of that meaning to meanings that differ from it. The very threads out of which finite meanings are provisionally woven are the infinite differences between them. Or, to bring this back to '*tout autre est tout autre*', a kind of immanent slippage between identity and novelty neces-sarily persists because that out of which finite identities are made ('every other is every other') is infinite difference ('every other is wholly other').

Thus, Derrida offers us, in nuce, a model for the thought of an immanent grace that is able to account for novelty without invoking anything beyond the world of immanence, a model that reckons their co-implication. However, productive as it is in blazing a trail that largely avoids the dangers of both obscur-antism and banality, Derrida's approach to thinking the near-ness of the kingdom of God is not without its own weaknesses. These weaknesses become particularly clear when examined in light of the connection between grace and infinity. More nar-rowly, the problem is this: while Derrida's formula conjoins novelty and immanence, it does so at the cost of being able to describe the new as something other than a negative interrup-tion of positive identity. For Derrida, an immanent grace is immanent only insofar as it remains a *potentially* immanent grace.

4. Grace and Infinity

Grace, understood as novelty, is gracious because it re-opens that which is closed. If one name for what is closed is the finite, then one of the names proper to grace is infinity. Granted this name

for grace, it becomes possible to translate the problematic we have developed thus far in the following way (and much depends on the productivity of this translation): an attempt to think the novelty of grace as immanent is an attempt to rethink the relationship of the infinite to the finite.

The pairing of grace with infinity and immanence with finitude should come as no surprise. These identifications, particularly of infinity with the dimension of the divine, have long and complex histories that are both philosophical and theological. I will not attempt here to trace the whole of these histories, but it is necessary to touch on several of their most important facets. In particular, it is important to sketch the main features of: (1) the classically Greek conception of infinity, (2) the distinction between a potential infinity and an actual infinity, (3) the conjunction of the infinite with the divine, and (4) the secular case for an actual infinity.

For the ancient Greeks, infinity operates primarily as a negative concept. The Greek word for infinity, *apeiron*, literally means 'that which is without limit' or 'that which lacks a boundary'. To lack such a limit is disastrous in Greek ontology because the unity of every form is dependent on the definite limit that structures it. To be infinite and lack such a form is to be deprived of both being and intelligibility. Nothing can be said to properly exist until after it has risen above the chaotic infinity of pure potential to become one particular finite thing. Thus, according to Aristotle, 'being infinite is a privation, not a perfection'.[5] Infinity is, here, conceptually anathema because it marks the point at which the unity of a form breaks down. Because that which lacks definite limits cannot be represented in Greek thought as an intelligible totality, the infinite is seen as essentially unknowable and unthinkable as such.

Paolo Zellini neatly summarizes the difficulties involved when he notes that in Greek cosmologies infinity tends to emerge

> as an absolute metaphysical evil that operates in the cosmos as a seed of disorder and absurdity. There is nothing more dangerous than the loss of limits and measure. This is the error caused by the infinite: we lose sight of the meaning implicit in the relative perfection

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[5] Aristotle, *Physics*, III. 7.208a.

of what is concretely determined and formally complete, and so are led astray into the void or into a labyrinth with no exit.[6]

The result is that, for the Greeks, the word *apeiron* refers principally to what is indefinite, indefinable, or even absurd and refers only tangentially to what we tend to mean by infinity in contemporary discourse. Our generally positive conception of infinity is philosophically and theologically foreign to the Greek way of thinking.

In light of these dangers, Aristotle attempts to conceptually minimize the threat posed by the infinite. He advances a persuasive distinction that becomes extremely influential, both philosophically and mathematically, between two kinds of infinity. Aristotle argues that, for the sake of clarity and stability, the possibility of a 'potential' infinity must be distinguished from that of an 'actual' infinity. At root, Aristotle proposes this distinction for the sake of flatly denying the existence of anything like an actual infinity. Infinity, insofar as it can be said to exist, exists only potentially, either as the potential proper to an unending and incompletable operation (e.g. the succession of one positive integer by another or the perpetual subdivision of a distance) or the potential proper to that which does not yet have a fixed and finite form. Classically, then, the notion of an actual infinity amounts to a contradiction in terms because the actual is, by definition, the finite. As Rudy Rucker explains, 'Aristotle would say that the set of natural numbers [or positive integers] is potentially infinite, since there is no largest natural number, but he would deny that the set is actually infinite, since it does not exist as one finished thing'.[7] Insofar as infinity is manifest, it appears either as an incomplete but finite set to which more could always be added or as a negative disruption that threatens to dissolve the established order.

This negative treatment of infinity may be surprising in light of the extent to which, in a Judeo-Christian context, it has come to be so closely and positively associated with the divine. There is, however, even among the Greeks, some precedent for this association, though it comes with strings attached. In response to a question about how a privative conception of infinity could

[6] Paolo Zellini, *A Brief History of Infinity*, trans. David Marsh (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 1.
[7] Rudy Rucker, *Infinity and the Mind: The Science and Philosophy of the Infinite* (Boston: Birkhäuser, 1982), 3.

intersect for the Greeks with the divine, Zellini notes that
'Anaximander uses *apeiron* as a synonym of the divine (*to theion*);
but it has been observed that, unlike *theos* (God), *to theion* refers
to a neutral metaphysical principle which is quite compatible
with the idea of pure negativity denoted by *apeiron*'.[8] Thus, the
Greeks may allow for the intersection of infinity with the divine,
but they account for it by distinguishing a generic dimension of
divinity (*to theion*) from God proper (*theos*).

   Nonetheless, the door is open, and it will not be long before
philosophers begin to make at least one exception to Aristotle's
claim that infinity exists only as a potential infinity. If God is to
be described as infinite, then there must be at least one infinity
that is actual rather than merely potential. Rucker identifies
Plotinus as 'the first thinker after Plato to adopt the belief that at
least God, or the One, is [actually] infinite'.[9]

   From here, the genealogical line is not difficult to trace. Saint
Augustine fuses this neo-Platonic position with Christian scrip-
ture and naturally arrives at the conclusion that God is both
actually infinite and capable of thinking an actual infinity.
Augustine, arguing against those who would assert 'that God's
knowledge cannot comprehend things infinite', claims that 'it
only remains for them to affirm, in order that they may sound
the depths of their impiety, that God does not know all num-
bers'.[10] He continues,

> The infinity of number, though there be no numbering of infinite
> numbers, is yet not incomprehensible by Him whose understanding
> is infinite. And thus, if everything which is comprehended be
> defined or made finite by the comprehension of him who knows it,
> then all infinity is in some ineffable way made finite to God, for it is
> comprehensible by His knowledge.[11]

The key, here, is that though the comprehension of infinity may
be ineffable and appear paradoxical, God's own existence as an
actual infinity, coupled with his omniscience, demands that we
assent to his ability to 'actualize' the thought of an infinity. Later
medieval thinkers like St Thomas Aquinas (who is, of course,

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[8] Zellini, *A Brief History of Infinity*, 5.
[9] Rucker, *Infinity and the Mind*, 3.
[10] St Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), XII. 18.
[11] Augustine, *City of God*, XII. 18.

more faithfully Aristotelian) will retreat from this particular claim, but none will deny that God is himself actually infinite.

Contemporary mathematics, however, departs from classical philosophical thinking about the infinite with its claim to have developed techniques for conceptualizing and manipulating actual infinities. The key figure in the development of these techniques is the German mathematician and creator of set theory, Georg Cantor (1845–1918). Cantor's essential insight is that it may be possible to do precisely what Augustine describes God as accomplishing in the passage above: without, for instance, denying the fact that it is impossible to exhaustively enumerate every individual natural number (however far one has counted, it will always be possible to add one more), it may nonetheless be possible to coherently conceptualize natural numbers as a circumscribable set.

As a first approximation of how such a thought might proceed, allow me to introduce an example that at least indirectly models what is at stake. Take, for instance, the attempt by ancient geometers to 'square the circle'. Essentially, an attempt to 'square the circle' entails the effort to construct a square with the same area as a given circle. Antiphon, among others, argues that, because it is possible to produce a square with an area equal to that of any regular polygon, one could inscribe within a circle a regular polygon and then continually double the number of its sides until it has perfectly filled the area of the given circle. The argument is that 'the minimal arc of a circumference cannot be distinguished from the minimal segment of a straight line, and therefore a regular polygon with an infinite number of sides cannot be distinguished from a circumference'.[12] This argument, however, proves unpersuasive because, however many sides one's regular polygon has, it is always possible to conceive of a successive polygon with an even greater number of sides. Thus, however close one comes to measuring the circumference of a circle via a regular polygon, it is always possible to come closer.

At first glance, then, this particular example does not appear to model a technique for conceptualizing an actual infinity so much as it confirms the Aristotelian argument that every infinity is necessarily only potential. But, with a slight twist of

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[12] Zellini, *A Brief History of Infinity*, 18.

perspective, it may point us in exactly the direction we hope to go. Rather than thinking about the circle as the unattainable goal that an endless series of ever more subtle regular polygons will never be able to reach, it is necessary to consider the circle instead as the very limit of such an infinite series. As Zellini explains,

> The circumference [of the circle] is a limit that 'comprises' the unlimited series of polygons although it does not effectively constitute its final term. Still, it offers a solution to the indefinite potentiality of the series to develop, even though it lies *outside* the series. This means that it is possible to represent concretely [actually] the final solution of an unlimited process without denying its potential nature. The inexhaustibility of the unlimited remains an undeniable fact, but it does not force us to accept a mere approximation of what we are trying to attain.[13]

Treating the circle as that which ties off the endless operation into an actual infinity without denying that the process is itself inexhaustible allows for the concretion of what appeared essentially ungraspable.

The circle operates as a limit term that both belongs and does not belong to the infinite operation.

> The limit is not the final term of the series, and is therefore not merely an approximation of the result we are trying to obtain. We attain this limit by abandoning the indefinite analysis of the series that precedes it, and by adopting an external point of reference . . . [a] point of reference [that] remains invisible if we insist on the rigorous verification of its indefinite and unattainable distance.[14]

Cantor's insight into conceptualizing actual infinities pursues a tack analogous to the one described above. His aim is to abandon 'the indefinite analysis' of the given infinite series and leap to an 'external point of reference' from which the actuality of the inexhaustible series may be thought. The question, however, remains: how, for instance, could one possibly 'leap beyond' the set of natural numbers? What could mark, as the circle does for the series of regular polygons, an external point of reference in relation to them?

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[13] Zellini, *A Brief History of Infinity*, 20.
[14] Zellini, *A Brief History of Infinity*, 20.

In the sixteenth century, Galileo produced a curious result when he compared the set of natural numbers with the set of their squares. He found that it was possible to place each integer in a one-to-one correspondence with its square (pairing, for instance, 1 with 1, 2 with 4, 3 with 9, 4 with 16, etc.). The apparently counterintuitive result is that, despite the fact that the set of squares is a subset of all integers, from the perspective of infinity there are just as many squares as there are integers. One can prove it simply by pairing them up on into infinity. From the perspective of infinity, there is no point at which the size of the set of all integers will exceed the size of the set of their squares.

Cantor's innovation can be described as the construction of a set of numbers (the real numbers or the set of both rational and irrational numbers) that *cannot*, unlike the squares, be placed into a one-to-one correspondence with the set of natural numbers. Cantor uses a variety of arguments to produce this result, but in one version he constructs a table of numbers in which the patterns of numbers in each row are capable of together accounting for the set of all natural numbers. He then shows that it is possible to produce a number that the table's rows cannot account for by moving diagonally through each of the patterned rows. This diagonal number, external to the set of all natural numbers, marks both the impossibility of establishing a corresponding size of infinity for the real and natural numbers and the possibility of treating the set of natural numbers as an actual infinity concretized by that which exceeds it.

The result, then, is that Cantor is able to establish the existence of different orders of infinity. All sets of numbers that can be placed into a one-to-one correspondence with one another (as with the integers and their squares) belong, despite any apparent incongruities, to the same order of infinity and have essentially the same 'size'. However, those that cannot be placed into such a correspondence (as with the natural numbers and the real numbers) necessarily belong to a different order of infinity. And, if it is possible to distinguish different orders of infinity, then it is possible to 'actualize' each inexhaustible order by referring that infinity to the smallest term of the infinity that exceeds it.

5. Derrida's Potential Infinity

Even this rough sketch of the history of infinity can shed some additional light on the difficulties involved in thinking grace as immanent. If the question of grace is treated as the question of a novelty that belongs to this world, then it is necessary to find a way to think immanence itself as allowing for something more than, other than, the same. Jesus' sayings provide a place to begin because they show how to think grace as the intervention of the new. Following this path, it then becomes possible to supplement one of Jesus' concentrated formulas for novelty ('the last shall be first and the first last') with a contemporary translation that takes into account the aim of conjoining grace with immanence. Here, Derrida's expression '*tout autre est tout autre*' offers a model for how to translate Jesus' conception of the kingdom of God into a thought that can both connect the novelty of grace with the immanence of our world and avoid the trap of banality. In this regard, Derrida's work may be indispensable.

However, the primary weakness of Derrida's position becomes clear when we additionally align both grace and novelty with the thought of infinity. The intersection of all three concepts can be summarized in the following way: grace provokes novelty because it is infinite. Derrida is, of course, very clear about exactly this point. Grace, as the advent of what is other, hinges on every situation's immanent potential for infinite novelty and incessant recontextualization. It is, Derrida argues, structurally impossible for a situation's horizon to be definitively foreclosed because the very thing that makes possible the immanent identity of that horizon is itself what perpetually holds open its potential for transformation.

As with his formula '*tout autre est tout autre*', Derrida shows how identity and alterity are necessarily intertwined: because that which is 'wholly other' is the substance of 'every other', it is always possible for every other to once again become other than what it is. No finite identity can be definitive because the strings of differential relations that establish that identity are themselves infinite and never-ending. However settled and inevitable something appears to be, it is always possible that the addition of an unforeseen event will simultaneously interrupt the sense of everything that preceded it and divert it down an unexpected track.

Thus, for Derrida, grace is thought primarily as the unpredictable intervention of the infinite potential proper to – and inexhaustibly held in reserve by – 'every other' because it is 'wholly other'. In order to maintain this infinite reserve, Derrida is very careful always to speak of the grace of what he calls the 'messianic' as both a negative interruption of the positively constituted order and as something that never actually arrives. For Derrida, this is true to the extent that, as John Caputo points out in his definitive study of precisely this issue, 'the very idea of the Messiah would be destroyed were the Messiah, to everyone's embarrassment and consternation, to have the indiscretion to show up and actually become present'.[15] Here, the messianic, by virtue of its infinity, is always yet 'to come'.

The key, however, is to be fully aware of the conceptual constraints that determine Derrida's decision to describe the grace of the messianic as an unactualizable potential. Derrida's work has, to this point, proven so useful because it explicitly aims to think the novelty of grace without reference to a transcendent God. As a result, his work is shaped by a commitment to conceptual immanence: what is thinkable for us is thinkable in relation to this world. However, it is this commitment to thinking grace without reference to God that leads to his decision to conceptualize grace as purely potential.

The problem is this: if God traditionally embodies the only mode in which infinity may be conceived as actually existing, then bracketing the existence of God requires bracketing the thought of an actual infinity. Thus bracketed, an immanent thought of infinity will almost automatically, following Aristotle's phenomenologically oriented lead, invoke a whole train of classically appropriate associations. In my view, Derrida's conception of grace ends up precisely where it does because he accepts the Aristotelian line that infinity should only be conceived as potential. The result is that Derrida ends up faithfully transcribing the infinity of grace in terms of the Greek notion of *apeiron*: every actual existence is understood to be fundamentally finite, infinity is taken to exist only potentially, and, insofar as it intervenes in the finite world, infinity appears only as an interruption of the finite horizon, an indeterminate and unintelligible privation of form and being.

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[15] John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 78.

Ironically, the weakness of this Derridean/Aristotelian posi-
tion is that it treats the thought of infinity in a fashion that is too
rigidly binary: either infinity is thought as actual and therefore as
transcendently divine or it must be thought privatively as an
immanent potential. However, this dichotomy ignores the third,
transverse line of thought formalized by Cantor's work on set
theory. What if it were possible to think the infinity of grace as
both immanent and actual? Might we not construct a thought of
grace able to (1) connect novelty with immanence while avoid-
ing banality, as Derrida does, *and* (2) still connect immanent
novelty with actuality while avoiding transcendence?

6. Towards an Immanently Actual Grace

The thesis of this book is that it is possible to think grace as an
immanent novelty that is actually infinite. St Paul, Jean-Luc
Marion and Alain Badiou are crucial to the elaboration of this
thought because their texts offer a series of overlapping per-
spectives on the fundamental impasses involved and their
potential solutions. By working through each of their perspec-
tives, my aim is to sift out the common conceptual features
appropriate to my own more general project.

In many ways, Paul, Marion and Badiou make for an eclectic
group of thinkers whose concerns, methodologies and world-
views vary widely. Nonetheless, they discernibly share a common
commitment to the necessity of thinking the advent of grace and
to the importance of thinking this grace in terms of both
immanence and actuality. Their common commitment to this
theme will be underscored by the way that my reading will focus
on how their thinking unfolds when it is understood precisely as
an answer to the question that animates this project. Adopting of
this particular angle will, I think, open some surprisingly acces-
sible (and comparable) paths into their disparate and complex
texts.

Of the three, Paul is clearly the theoretical outlier. Marion and
Badiou, divergent as their philosophical aims and approaches
are, share with one another the world of twenty-first-century
French philosophy. Paul shares neither our world nor the need
to think the immanence of grace with or without the existence of
God. Nonetheless, Paul's work breaks ground for the thought of

an immanent grace because the resurrection of Jesus puts him in a peculiar conceptual position: unlike other 'messianic' thinkers, Paul's unique problem is that he must decide how to think about grace given the fact that the Messiah has *already* come and *actually* accomplished our redemption. As a result, though Paul's thought does not proceed without reference to a supernatural order beyond our own, he still must account for how God's grace can be both immanent (it is already here) and actually given (it is not simply latently potential) – all despite the fact that the world has not ended but continues on as if nothing has happened. In the context of my project, Paul's texts are central because they try to answer an entirely new kind of question. What does an actual (rather than promised) Messiah look like?

Marion's work is exceptional within the context of contemporary Continental thought because it dares forge a phenomenological path towards answering this same question. Though much of his philosophical milieu is dominated by a shared interest in thinking the conjunction of novelty and immanence (a general interest that Derrida exemplifies), Marion departs from the crowd in his aim to think grace as actually given rather than perpetually potential. It is no surprise that it is this departure that consistently attracts the bulk of the critical attention devoted to him and it is also no surprise that, as a result, he is often charged with trying to sneak God back into philosophy through a phenomenological backdoor. What, his critics ask, could an actual infinity amount to other than God? In general, Marion's interest in forestalling these critiques has led him to insist on scrupulously distinguishing phenomenological givenness and theological grace. However, because my own effort to think the immanence of grace is precisely an effort to efface this difference to the degree that immanence allows, I will consistently read Marion's treatment of givenness as a guide to thinking grace.

Marion's attempt at a phenomenological description of an actually immanent infinity is articulated in his notion of a 'saturated phenomenon'. Broadly, a saturated phenomenon is a phenomenon in which a given grace shatters our horizons by saturating them with its infinite actuality. While, for Derrida, grace is immanently 'impossible' because the infinity it promises must be thought as a potential infinity, for Marion, grace is 'impossible' because the infinity that it actually gives can never

be entirely received. This reversal of the Derridean position is both the strength and weakness of Marion's work. It is a strength in that his description of a phenomenon as 'saturated' with an actual infinity is what gives his account of grace its robust character and positive appeal. It is a weakness because the infinity that it describes, if in fact actual, is of such an order that it risks eliminating altogether the possibility of a description that remains genuinely *phenomenological.*

Badiou, however, while affirming the possibility of an actual infinity, decisively parts ways with Marion's treatment of it as a given intuition. On the contrary, Badiou frames his understanding of the actually infinite in the thoroughly non-phenomenological context of contemporary mathematics. Badiou returns explicitly to Cantor's invention of set theory as a way of coherently conceptualizing a hierarchy of actual infinities and argues that Cantor's success requires us to rethink philosophical treatments of infinity from the bottom up (Derrida and Marion included). Badiou thinks the intervention of grace in terms of the novelty of what he calls an 'event'. He deploys set theoretical concepts for the sake of developing a rigorously immanent ontology capable of eluding all of the traditional traps of transcendence and, then, he sets out to demonstrate how it remains possible to think the gracious advent of novelty in such a situation. Badiou's work, though dense in its formal complexity, offers a startlingly clear perspective on the impasses involved in any attempt to think the nearness of grace.

For the sake of both clarity and rigour, my analyses of Paul, Marion and Badiou will focus on offering a close reading of a narrow range of texts. The first chapter will be devoted to developing my own philosophically oriented reading of the first half of Paul's letter to the Romans, a reading that is indebted to but not identical with either Marion's or Badiou's readings of Paul. The second chapter will take up Marion's treatment of givenness in his seminal work *Being Given* and will draw on *God without Being* in order to clarify the Pauline parallels. The third chapter will treat Badiou's conception of the event as presented in his magnum opus, *Being and Event,* and will also refer to his slim volume *Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism* for the sake of aligning his work with both Paul's and Marion's own positions. The final chapter will gather up the key elements gleaned from these analyses and, in their light, will conclude by

proposing a theologically oriented model for how to coherently connect the novelty of grace with both immanence and actuality.

Chapter 1

The Righteousness of God:
A Theological Approach to an Immanent
Grace

1. Reading Paul Philosophically

In the end, my reading of Paul is shamelessly philosophical. Though I certainly intend to be sensitive to broader textual, historical and theological issues, my primary aim is to pose a philosophical question clearly shaped by very contemporary concerns: can the infinity of grace be thought as immanently actual rather than as transcendent or potential? Can we, today, think the nearness of grace?

Though, in general, Paul is clearly responding to an array of questions that resonate with my own, I do not claim that our interests are identical or that my reading precisely recovers Paul's original intention. My aim is to offer a reading of the first half of Paul's letter to the Romans that treats the letter *as if* its primary concern were my own contemporary question. In light of this particular question, how do the various elements of Paul's argument cohere? If their composition is guided by my own concerns, what configuration will the pieces take? In my estimation, the surprisingly rigorous cohesion produced by this reading of Paul's letter is persuasive in its own right. As a response to my question, the disparate pieces of Paul's thought snap together with a convincing fit.

Further, my reading of Romans is philosophical not only because it takes shape in response to a philosophical question but also because it rests on a clearly speculative, philosophical thesis. As with every speculation (the literal sense of 'speculation' referring to an attempt to see or observe), its warrant is what it allows to be seen and, in particular, what might not be seen without it. The speculative thesis I propose will be worth precisely whatever it manages to show.

Finally, though my reading will proceed roughly from the first chapter of Romans to the eighth in an attempt to follow the logic of Paul's own exposition, it will be appropriately selective in its areas of emphasis. I will not attempt to comment on every verse, and references to secondary scholarship will be minimal. My reading of Paul is broadly influenced by contemporary work in Pauline scholarship, but it owes an even greater debt to a series of philosophically informed engagements with Paul's letters that range from Martin Heidegger to Giorgio Agamben and Slavojiek, to Marion and Badiou. However, I will not here draw explicitly on any of these figures. Ultimately, insofar as such a thing is possible, this reading of Paul is my own and it takes its unique shape in light of my particular interests. As noted, I will use the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) as a base translation, but will frequently refer to the Greek text and will consistently modify translations for the sake of conceptual clarity. Thus, all of the citations owe a direct debt to the NRSV but many are emended.

2. Background

Paul's letter to the Romans was likely written between 55 and 57 CE. Unlike a number of other letters included in the New Testament and commonly attributed to Paul, it is virtually certain that he personally authored this epistle. The letter is unique in the Pauline corpus for a number of reasons. First, it is the longest of the extant letters and was authored late in Paul's ministry. As a result, it embodies some of his most mature, careful and systematic thinking. Further, in contrast to the familiar and urgently personal tone of the letters Paul composed for many of the congregations he himself founded, Romans is a letter of introduction, written primarily to strangers in order to acquaint them with both himself as an 'apostle to the Gentiles' and the gospel he was preaching. The effect is an increase in clarity: Romans reads less elliptically than many of the other epistles where Paul is free to assume that his readers already have sufficient context for what the letter adds or attempts to clarify. Paul's letter to the Romans offers, then, a productive mix of substantial length, maturity, systematicity and relative clarity.

3. The Righteousness of God

The beating heart of Paul's theology is what he terms the 'righteousness of God' (*dikaiosynē theou*). Every crucial Pauline theme – grace, faith, sin, law, justification, flesh, Spirit, etc. – is sustained and defined by its relation to this concept. Reading Romans is an exercise in leading each key term back to the notion of the 'righteousness of God' in order to clarify the nature of their relationship to it and, thus, their relationship with each of the other key terms.

Kittel and Friedrich's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* summarizes Paul's understanding of the 'righteousness of God' in the following way: The righteousness of God 'is God's righteousness, into which we are set. It is a conjunction of judgment and grace which God demonstrates by showing righteousness, imparting it as forgiveness, and drawing us into his kingdom, as the last judgment will wholly manifest'. Though my approach to Paul will put a speculative spin on this description, the standard definition offers a productive point of initial orientation and each of the primary elements identified above will remain essential. For Paul, righteousness is centred in God and it is something 'into which we are set' by his grace. Righteousness is not something that, in Paul's vocabulary, can be earned or produced by human beings. Rather, righteousness is something that is 'demonstrated' by God's actions. It 'manifests' itself in the world for our sake and when it appears it does so as the 'conjunction of judgment and grace'. This appearance is meant to 'draw' us to God and 'impart' his forgiveness to us.

The primary sense of the righteousness of God is this: it refers to the quality of his relationship with the world. In particular, it refers to God's committed extension of grace and forgiveness to human beings, an extension of grace that is meant to draw us into 'right' relation with him. The righteousness of God is manifest in his unconditional fidelity to his relationship with us. Righteousness intersects with grace precisely in its 'unconditional' character. God is righteous because no set of conditions or circumstances can move him from keeping his word or fulfilling his promises. Once he has committed himself to a relationship, his commitment is unconditional. And, because it is unconditional, God's righteous fidelity to us necessarily shows up as an unmeritable grace. The result is that every question we

might pose about Paul's immanent conception of grace
becomes, in the end, a question about the immanent actuality of
the righteousness of God.

4. The Righteousness of God, the Wrath of God

The key verses for my reading are Romans 1.16–24. For the
moment, I would like to focus my attention on verses 16–18
which contain the core of my speculative thesis. These verses
immediately follow Paul's lengthy salutation (1.1–7) and open-
ing words of thanksgiving (1.8–15). In this respect, they repre-
sent Paul's first attempt to explicitly introduce the precise theme
of the letter. The verses read:

> For I am not ashamed of the good news because it is the power of
> God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also
> to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith
> to faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'
> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the
> ungodliness and unrighteousness of humans, humans who suppress
> the truth by their unrighteousness.   (1.16–18)

In this passage Paul speaks of two revelations: the revelation of
the righteousness of God ('the righteousness of God is revealed',
1.17) and the revelation of the wrath of God ('the wrath of God
is revealed', 1.18). The question at hand is how the first revela-
tion relates to the second. My thesis is that the key to reading
Paul's account of grace as both immanent and actual is to assert
that these two revelations are, in fact, one. The revelation of the
righteousness of God *is* the revelation of the wrath of God.

But if there is only one revelation, then what accounts for the
difference between them? What allows them to appear as two?
The difference between them is a question of appearance.
Whether the revelation is seen as 'good news' or as 'wrath'
depends on the disposition of the person to whom it appears.

In these three verses cited above, Paul has already identified
the two possible dispositions in relation to which the appearance
of the revelation will vary. These dispositions are 'faith' and
'shame'. As Paul describes it in verse 17, citing Habakkuk 2.4, a
faithful disposition takes up the revelation of God's right-
eousness as the very ground of its life ('the one who is righteous

will live by faith'). On the contrary, in verse 18, an unrighteous disposition mistakes the revelation of the righteousness of God as a source of shame that must be suppressed. They, the unrighteous, 'suppress the truth by their unrighteousness' (1.18) and thus fail to 'not [be] ashamed of the good news' (1.16). The revelation is plain – the issue is whether that revelation will be faithfully declared or shamefully suppressed.

Paul's way of framing salvation as a revelation will prove to be central to his elaboration of the gospel throughout the letter. Paul avoids talking about salvation as if it were something that takes place and *then* must be revealed. The revelation is not an unveiling of salvation so much as the revelation *is* the salvation. To suppress the revelation is to suppress salvation.

It follows that to declare the good news willingly is not an additional obligation that one bears upon reception of salvation, but salvation itself. In response to the unyielding fidelity of God's righteousness, we are called to faithfully echo his faithfulness. The revelation is given, as Paul puts it, 'out of faith to faith [*ek pisteōs eis pistin*]' (1.17). The revelation thus appears as the very thing that it requires of us: God's fidelity is revealed and is received in our mirroring of that fidelity back to him.

By speculatively identifying the revelation of God's righteousness with the revelation of God's wrath, the register in which all of the crucial salvific action takes place is shifted, for Paul, from the level of accomplishment to the level of recognition. It is not the case that God, at some point, was *not* perfectly faithful and that in Jesus' death and resurrection he accomplishes a righteousness that he previously lacked. Rather, God's righteousness is endless. As infinite, it has neither beginning nor end. However, in Jesus' death and resurrection, the righteousness of God is definitively revealed in a way that can no longer be ignored. What remains to be decided is whether it will be recognized as such or appear instead as a shame-inducing wrath. Salvation is a question of recognition and the act of receiving it will require a fundamental shift in perspective that reveals God's righteousness as a blessing rather than a curse. Being no respecter of persons, God offers the same thing to everyone, Jew or Greek: his righteousness. Only the reception varies.

5. Calls, Names, Designations

In Paul's lengthy and syntactically complex opening salutation (1.1–7) – all seven verses of which comprise a single sentence – he introduces several key terms that illuminate the thesis proposed above.

> Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, a called apostle, set apart in the joyful proclamation of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was designated the Son of God with power according to a spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship for the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, to all God's beloved in Rome who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.   (1.1–7)

Three times in this opening sentence Paul refers to how both he and the Christians in Rome have been 'called'. Paul, as a slave of the Messiah, is a 'called [*klētos*] apostle' (1.1), and the Romans are both the 'called-ones [*klētoi*] of Jesus Christ' (1.6) and the 'called [*klētois*] saints' (1.7). Paul's emphasis on being 'called' has, minimally, a two-fold significance.

First, it indicates that what is primarily at stake in the announcement of the good news is a certain kind of relationship. God is calling out *to us* through the event of Jesus' death and resurrection. The gospel is a public announcement of this event but the message is personal and centres in what God had 'promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures' (1.2). In the Christ-event, God is calling out, trying to reveal that he has been perfectly faithful to the promise he 'originally' made with us. God 'calls' out to us in order to call us back to our promised relationship with him. In this sense, God is calling for us to faithfully *recognize* his fidelity. Salvation is rooted in hearing this call.

Second, Paul's emphasis on being 'called' indicates that how something is *named* has far-reaching effects. What God accomplishes in the Christ-event is a naming or renaming of a truth that our unrighteousness had suppressed. What had been called 'wrath and shame' will now be called 'grace and peace' (cf. 1.16–

18, 1.7). Those who had been called 'ungodly and unrighteous' will now be called 'apostles and saints'. The new designation extended to us by what and how God calls us enables the necessary shift in disposition and perspective to take place. In one sense, nothing has changed (God has always been unconditionally righteous) but, in terms of our perspective, everything now appears radically different (we see his perfect righteousness as a gift rather than as a condemnation).

It is God's call that leads Paul to describe himself as 'set apart in [*aphōrismenos eis*] the joyful proclamation [*euangelion*] of God' (1.1). In this way, God's call manifests itself in marking a distinction: it designates or 'sets apart' what was previously undistinguished. What had previously failed to appear is now properly distinguished in light of what it has been called. It is also interesting in this verse how the disjunction of being set apart acquires an inclusive rather than exclusive sense: Paul is set apart 'into [*eis*]' the good news about God's righteousness. In other words, Paul is set apart into a new perspective proper to the joyful news, a perspective in which all are included in God's promise, Jew and Greek alike.

In this context, it becomes possible to appreciate the precision with which Paul describes Jesus as the subject of the gospel proclamation. Paul writes that the gospel into which he has been set apart is the gospel concerning God's Son, 'who was descended from the seed of David according to the flesh [*kata sarka*] and was designated [*oristhentos*] the Son of God in power according to a spirit of holiness [*kata pneuma hagiōsynes*] by resurrection from the dead' (1.3–4). The crucial shift from Jesus as the seed of David, as a son according to the flesh, to Jesus as the Son of God is accomplished by means of a designation or declaration. Jesus is 'born' a son of David but he is 'designated' as a Son of God. Being a Son of God is a question of calling, naming and designating. It is a question of that 'according to which [*kata*]' something is determined. Jesus, according to the spirit of holiness, is designated as a Son of God. The dimension in which such a call or designation can be issued is the dimension of the Spirit.

Finally, it is helpful to note the use of the phrase, 'to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name', in verse 5. The grace and apostleship received through Jesus Christ are given for the sake of his name. The

reception of this grace is intimately bound up with the reception of this name, with a willingness to heed the call of a new designation. The 'obedience of faith' is brought about in this way: faith is an unashamed response to the new name by which God calls and designates Jesus and, through him, everyone else.

6. Visibility, Invisibility and Truth

With this difference between the accomplished actuality of God's righteousness and its ongoing revelation in mind, we are ready to turn to a consideration of Romans 1.19–23.

> For what can be known about God appears among them, because God has manifested it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give thanks to him, but their reasoning became vain and their senseless hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.   (1.19–23)

The few verses that precede this passage (1.16–18) state that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel proclamation and that those who are unrighteous are unrighteous because they aim to suppress this truth. Verse 19 picks up, then, with a description of this truth, God's righteousness, as something that, despite the attempted suppression, plainly 'appears among them' (*phaneron en autois*). Indeed, those who are unrighteous would not be moved to suppress God's righteousness if it were not already manifest. And, further, in light of verse 20, we might translate verse 19 even more literally as saying that the truth of God's righteousness plainly 'appears *in* [*en*] them'. This equivocation about the site of truth's appearance whets the edge of the human incentive to suppress the truth. As unrighteous, we repress the truth because we find it shameful and we find it shameful because it is something that not only appears in the world around us but also is internally constitutive of us.

The language of constitution is appropriate here because verse 20 directly identifies the manifestation of God's

righteousness with the 'creation of the world' (*ktiseōs kosmou*). More literally, we might translate verse 20 as: 'For from the creation of the world, the invisible things [*aorata*] of him are clearly seen [*kathoratai*], both his eternal power and divinity, being intelligible in the things he made [*poiēmasin*]; so that they are without excuse.' The argument here is that those who suppress the truth are without excuse because God's righteousness has been manifest since the creation of the world. Its suppression is not accidental or coincidental and can only be accounted for in terms of an active movement against it. But why suppress it? It is suppressed because of the mode of its manifestation: God's righteousness, that out of which both his eternal power and divinity flow, appears in the 'things he has made'. In other words, his righteousness is manifest in the created world as a world that has been created.

It is important to attend in these verses to Paul's paradoxical description of this manifestation. The *invisible* things of God, we are told, are clearly *visible* in the things he has made. What is at stake in verse 20 is a description of the visible appearance of what which is invisible. While those things that are created are visible in the world, something of a different order, something invisible, is nonetheless apparent in their visibility. God's invisible righteousness is manifest in each visibly created thing not in terms of its being a 'thing' but in terms of its being 'created'. Each visible creature bears an invisible mark of createdness and, by extension, the mark of its relation to its Creator. Its createdness is not directly visible (*kathoratai*) but is nonetheless intelligible (*nooumena*). This is to say that, though it does not have a directly sensible manifestation, God's righteousness does manifest itself irrepressibly with a kind of formal intelligibility.

Our createdness is a manifestation of God's righteousness because it marks our relation to him. Or, conversely, the essence of God's righteousness is his unconditionally faithful commitment to his relationship to the things he has created. Thus, whatever manifests our createdness also manifests our relation to the Creator and whatever manifests our relation to the Creator also manifests his righteous commitment to that relationship. In this way, our createdness doubly indicates the fact that the righteousness of God is identical with God's grace (and, as we have seen and will see still more clearly, it is also identical with God's wrath). First, our createdness is a manifestation of God's

grace because it is unconditionally given. Not yet existing, there is little we could do to merit the gift of our existence.[1] Second, our creadedness is a manifestation of God's grace in that it implies our relationship to him and thus his unconditional commitment to that relationship. Nothing we can do will cause God no longer to be perfectly faithful to us. His righteousness is, by definition, unconditionally given.

In light of the above co-ordination of God's righteousness, his grace and our createdness, it is not difficult to trace the development of the verses that follow. Verse 21 picks up with an elaboration of why the unrighteous are without excuse in their attempted suppression of the truth: 'though they knew God, they did not glorify [*edoxasan*] him as [*hōs*] God or give thanks to him'. The human refusal of God centres in the 'as' of verse 21. Just as in the opening verses of Chapter 1 (1.1–7), the key to understanding the drama of salvation is not to be found in deciding whether God's grace is or will be actually accomplished. It is not an issue of accomplishment but recognition and the issue of recognition (of calling, naming, designation) turns on what something is recognized 'as'.

Human wickedness is not rooted in a lack of 'knowledge' about its createdness (and, hence, its Creator) – who could be in doubt about their failure to be self-created? – but in a refusal to recognize our createdness as such (and, hence, our refusal to recognize God as our Creator). 'Though they knew God, they did not glorify him *as* God nor thank him' (1.21). In this verse, the unwillingness to 'thank' God may be as telling as the unwillingness to 'glorify' him because gratitude is nothing other than an acknowledgement of grace. A denial of gratitude is a denial of grace. And, further, because a denial of grace is a denial of God's righteousness, the human refusal to thank God is precisely the mechanism by which the truth is suppressed. By refusing to acknowledge God as God, as the Creator on whom we are dependent for our very lives, we attempt to deny our own createdness. We suppress the truth through ingratitude and so hope to cover over our shame at the fact that we are dependent on some grace that exceeds us.

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[1] This initial grace, the free gift of life, is sometimes referred to as 'natural' grace and is thereby distinguished from an additional, 'supernatural' grace necessary for our ultimate salvation. Though this distinction is not without some value, one of my aims in this reading of Paul is to efface that difference entirely.

About this point it is important to be very clear. We are unrighteous because we suppress the truth. We suppress the truth because we are ashamed. And we are ashamed because of the grace that God has extended and does extend to us.

It is true that God's grace frees us from unrighteousness. But it is also true that God's grace is what initially motivates our unrighteous suppression of the truth about our createdness. This, then, brings me to a fuller explication of the speculative thesis (i.e. 'the revelation of God's righteousness *is* the revelation of God's wrath') with which I began. The issue is what God's grace is taken 'as'. Is it taken as a mark of his unconditional fidelity to what he has created or is it taken as a mark of an endlessly 'shameful' dependence on something outside of ourselves? In the first case we experience God's grace as a merciful gift. In the second case we experience God's grace as the wrathful imposition of an unpayable debt and an unseverable dependence.

'Claiming to be wise', wanting to be self-sufficiently knowledgeable, humans 'became fools and exchanged the glory [*doxan*] of the incorruptible God for images [*eikonos*] in the likeness of corruptible human beings or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles' (1.22–23). Cut off from the 'invisible' intelligibility of the world, cut off from the dimension of its createdness, 'their reasoning became vain and their senseless hearts were darkened' (1.21). The foolishness of unrighteousness is rooted in the vanity of an 'exchange': the wicked exchange the brilliant appearance (*doxan*) of God for the dull simulacra (*eikonos*) of mortal beings. In suppressing the brilliance of God, human beings end up also cutting themselves off from the created world. Without God's invisible glory shining intelligibly in the visible world, the world is itself reduced to being a mere shadow or 'likeness' (*homoiōmati*) of itself. Without God's grace, only a simulacrum remains, a vain image that will quickly deteriorate from a human image to that of a 'bird' to a 'four-footed animal' to a 'reptile'. 'Therefore God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts' (1.24). Refusing God's grace, the unrighteous are left alone with the lack that their incapacity for self-sufficiency marks. This lack fosters an aimless desire that, uncoupled from God, manifests itself in their pursuit of countless lusts and in the degradation of their bodies.

Verse 25 concisely summarizes all of the above. There, Paul

states that humans have 'exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator'. The truth about God is that we are dependent on his grace. The lie is that we are capable of self-sufficiency. With this lie, we turn from the Creator and the world itself threatens to collapse under the weight of each creature's vain self-regard.

7. Judgement

In the first chapter of Romans, Paul's primary effort is to lay the groundwork for an understanding of the human condition as riven with unrighteousness. This unrighteousness is described as an ashamed suppression of the truth about God's independent righteousness or, from the opposite angle, the truth about our dependent createdness. In the second chapter, Paul considers the meaning of 'judgement' in light of what the opening chapter has already established.

Paul begins the chapter by again repeating his point that 'you have no excuse, whoever you are', in light of the appearance (suppressed though it may be) of God's righteousness (2.1). However, following this introduction, Paul shifts gear and begins to unfold the connection between this act of suppression and the human practice of judgement. 'Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgement on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things' (2.1). Our willingness to pass judgement on others is, for Paul, clear evidence of the truth we are trying to cover up. Passing judgement on others amounts to self-condemnation because it shows that we *do* have some understanding of the grounds for judgement. The standard of God's invisible righteousness is intelligible in the visible world.

Moreover, our selective application of judgement, our failure to apply judgement impartially both to others and ourselves, indicates that a motive other than justice is in play. To be precise, it indicates that judgement has been co-opted as a mechanism for suppressing the truth about ourselves. Passing judgement on others allows us both to exaggerate their faults and use them as a diversion from our own. Passing selective judgement is a way of simulating a self-sufficient righteousness

that both denies the righteousness of God and (ironically) testifies, as an attempted dissimulation, to an awareness of our real situation.

Paul directly ties this use of judgement as a mechanism of suppression to the experience of profound shame that motivates it. 'Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgement of God? Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience?' (2.3–4). Our indulgence in selective judgement is motivated by a vain attempt to escape judgement ourselves. Moreover, it is an attempt to flee that is itself motivated by a 'scorn' for the endless kindness and forbearance (i.e. righteousness) of God. We lash out in judgement against others because we 'despise' God's infinite patience with them and with ourselves. We cannot bear that God's relentless commitment to us perpetually marks our dependent relation to him. The result is that we are on the run from the only thing that can save us: the riches of God's grace. We do 'not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead [us] to repentance' and so we are, by default, 'storing up wrath' for ourselves 'when God's righteous judgement will be revealed' (2.4–5).

Paul's declaration that 'you are storing up wrath for *yourself*' is not incidental to the point being made (2.5). The revelation of God's wrath, I have argued, is identical with the revelation of God's grace. The only reason to refuse his kindness is that his kindness has itself been mistaken for spite and wrath. In this way, Paul says,

> they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all. (2.15–16)

Though these verses do identify Jesus as the judge of our secret thoughts, it is nonetheless true that it is our *own* conflicted thoughts, our own recognition of God's righteousness as either grace or wrath, that will accuse or excuse us. As judge, Jesus need only confirm our own judgements about the meaning of God's righteousness. He need only assess our chosen relation to what is already written on our hearts and inscribed in our being: our dependent relatedness, our createdness. Depending on what

they take this createdness 'as', depending on the name that it answers to, Paul asks, 'will not their uncircumcision be regarded *as* circumcision' or their circumcision *as* uncircumcision (2.26, emphasis mine)?

8. Our Unrighteousness Confirms the Righteousness of God

In Romans 3, Paul draws two universal conclusions on the basis of the preceding chapters: (1) everyone is a sinner, and (2) the only path to salvation is through the grace revealed in Jesus Christ. Alternatively, we might summarize the same points in this way: (1) everyone is unrighteous, and (2) only God is righteous. This second summary has the advantage of drawing out how, for Paul, these conclusions are ultimately two sides of the same coin and in this chapter (as well as in numerous other places) he will work both to preserve their identity and stave off the false implications that might be deduced from their conjunction.

In the opening verses of Chapter 3, Paul delineates three such paired oppositions meant to characterize the relation of human beings to God: faithlessness vs. faithfulness (3.3), unrighteousness vs. righteousness (3.5) and falsehood vs. truthfulness (3.7). In response to a question about the effects of a Jewish infidelity to God, Paul replies, 'What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Although everyone is a liar, let God be proved true' (3.3–4). Human infidelity has no effect on the fidelity of God; God's commitment to his promised relationship is unconditional. It cannot be subverted by any external influence because his righteousness is independent of the world. Further, the independence of God's righteousness is a function of one factor in particular: his righteousness is creative rather than created. Thus, we can say both that God's righteousness is independent *of* the world (nothing in all of creation can change it) and that God's righteousness is independent *for* the world (because its independence does not indicate a solipsism but a certain way of relating to the createdness of his creation). What the 'independence' of God's righteousness says about the possibility of *human* fidelity, of the kind of fidelity proper to something created rather than creative, I will return to in a moment.

First, it is important to address the difficulty inherent in this approach, a difficulty that comes immediately to the fore in the

following verse when Paul claims that 'our unrighteousness serves to confirm [*synistēsin*] the righteousness of God' (3.5). Paul immediately recognizes the potential for misunderstanding in such a claim and, in fact, he appears to bring it up precisely for the sake of diffusing, in advance, any problems that may arise from it.

The simplest response to the apparent impropriety of this remark would be to deny that any such thing is the case and say, instead, that our unrighteousness does *not* confirm the righteousness of God. Paul, however, does not wish to back off this claim despite the potential for controversy and goes on to list several of the fallacious implications that might be drawn from it. 'What should we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us?' (3.5). Or, 'if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?' (3.7). Or, 'why not say (as some people slander us by saying that we say), "Let us do evil so that good may come?"' (3.8). Curiously, after having raised these questions himself, Paul does not respond to them directly. The sum of his immediate response is, 'Their condemnation is deserved!' (3.8). What this abrupt conclusion suggests, however, is that the bulk of what follows (in particular, the remainder of Chapter 3) is meant to show exactly where such thinking goes astray.

It will be important to follow in detail how the remainder of the chapter bears this suggestion out, but given what we have previously established it is already possible to sketch the logic informing Paul's extended, forthcoming response. The logic follows these lines. God's righteousness is unconditional because it is creative rather than created. It is not dependent on any factors external to God's own will. 'Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means!' (3.3). What is it, then, that serves to confirm God's righteousness? In what does God's faithfulness, invisible though it is, appear? God's righteousness appears in and is confirmed by the createdness of the world. It is manifest in the fact that the world is visibly marked by its invisible createdness, by its dependence on an incalculable and resolute grace that exceeds it.

It follows that, because the world is entirely dependent on God's independent righteousness, this very dependence makes it incapable of bearing any righteousness of its own. The world has no righteousness of its own because it is created and, as

conditioned by the anterior grace that exceeds and constitutes it, it is not independently capable of the unconditionality that characterizes God's own righteousness. In this sense, the dependent and conditioned createdness of the world is a striking confirmation of the independent and unconditioned righteousness upon which it relies. Thus, though the world may freely share in God's righteousness, it can do so only by admitting its own lack of righteousness. Such a confession of a lack of righteousness is, in the end, a double confession that also confesses and confirms the righteousness of God.

Though Paul does not introduce the phrase 'our unrighteousness serves to confirm the righteousness of God' in the context of a positive confession of our createdness, its sense ultimately rests on the same foundation. As Paul has shown in Chapter 2, even our attempts to suppress the truth about our created dependence clearly manifest what they are attempting to efface. Whether our lack of independent righteousness is faithfully confessed or ashamedly suppressed, it confirms the unwavering righteousness of God. Our createdness commends the Creator regardless of whether we inflect that createdness affirmatively or negatively. Affirmatively inflected, our createdness allows the glory of God's righteousness to appear in our own constitution. Negatively inflected, our createdness simply shows itself as lacking its own righteousness. That is to say, it shows itself as our *un*-righteousness.

Each of the fallacious misunderstandings of this principle that Paul lists in Romans 3.5–8 follows from the assumption that our lack of independent righteousness can only have a negative inflection. They each assume that such a lack can only produce a single, inevitable response: shame. Or, again, they begin by assuming the very thing that inevitably produces our misrelation to God: they assume that we *ought* to have been capable of an independent and uncreated righteousness. They assume that we ought to have been God. Thus the creature attempts to exchange places with the Creator and, in light of this exchange, its createdness appears as unrighteousness. Then we ask, bewildered, 'if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?' (3.7). But the truth, all along, is that our own misrelation to God is the result of a misunderstanding in which *we* take as a sight worthy of shameful condemnation our own failure to be independently

righteous. God does not condemn us for our createdness. We condemn ourselves in refusing to confess it.

9. Everyone is a Liar

What follows in Chapter 3 is a confirmation and elaboration of Paul's earlier claim that 'everyone is a liar' (3.4). In many ways, this claim is the essence of what Paul means by sin. To be 'under the power of sin [*hamartian*]' (3.9) is not to lack an independent claim to righteousness but to be 'under the power of a lie' in which we conceal this lack.

Paul makes it clear that 'all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin', and that, citing Psalm 14.1–3, 'there is no one who is righteous, not even one' (3.9–10). The ensuing verses (3.10–18) consist of a string of passages from the Psalms and Isaiah that clarify the basic connection between sin and deception. For instance, the declaration that 'there is no one who is righteous, not even one' comes paired with two parallel statements that illuminate its primary sense: 'there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God' (3.11). All are under the power of sin because no one 'understands' the nature of their relationship to God and no one understands this relationship because they refuse to 'seek God'. In fact, they are engaged both in a project of headlong flight from God and in an attempt to exchange places with God. The result is that, cut off from the Creator, 'they have become worthless' (3.12).

Further, it is said that 'their throats are opened graves; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of vipers is under their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness' (3.13–14). These verses, in particular, are remarkable as a description of sin because they so clearly focus on what Paul takes to be its root cause. Each of the images used in these verses repeats and extends the same motif: sin is a matter of the mouth. Sin is a function of our capacity for deception, a capacity that is itself a function of our ability to speak and represent. It is our power to represent the world 'as' being one way or another that opens the door to the lie that is sin. In other words, it is the primacy of calling, naming and designating in human experience that pushes the issues of recognition, confession and acknowledgement to the forefront. Humans are sinful because our

throats, tongues, lips and mouths all collude to produce veno-
mous lies motivated by our bitterness about the revelation of
God's righteousness. To sin is to curse the grace of our
createdness.

10. The Function of the Law

It will be necessary to approach Paul's conception of the law and
its relation to grace, sin and justification from a number of dif-
ferent perspectives in the next several chapters, particularly in
the context of Romans 7. However, in the final section of
Romans 3 (verses 19–27), Paul's descriptions of the place and
function of the law allow for an initial approach.

Note Paul's articulation of the relation of the law to sin in
3.19–20:

> Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are
> under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole
> world may be held accountable to God. For no flesh may be justified
> in his sight by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes
> a recognition of sin.   (3.19–20)

Paul's purpose has been to make plain that both Jew and Gentile
are under the power of sin. None are independently righteous
and everyone is a liar. Thus, the 'law' ought to be here under-
stood very broadly as that which allows the 'whole world' to be
held accountable to God and it should not be taken as a limited
description applicable only to the law of Moses.

When the law speaks, Paul says, 'it speaks to those who are
under the law' in order to accomplish one thing in particular: it
speaks 'so that every mouth may be silenced [*phragēi*]' (3.19). In
this way, Paul immediately ties the function of the law to the
work of regulating the domain of language and representation.
The purpose of the law is to regulate the 'mouth'. And, insofar as
every human mouth is an open tomb full of lies and dead letters,
the purpose of the law is to 'silence' them or, more literally, 'stop
them up'. The law is what reveals us as the liars that we are. Its
purpose is to put an end to our shameful suppression of the
truth about our createdness.

In addition, Paul is equally explicit about what the law cannot
do. 'No flesh may be justified [*dikaiothesetai*] in his sight by deeds

prescribed by the law' (3.20). Righteousness cannot be attained by adherence to the law because the function of the law is to reveal our createdness, our lack of autonomous righteousness. The law aims to uncover our relation to God, not render that relationship moot or unnecessary by supplying a sovereign means to our own righteousness. 'Through the law', Paul argues, 'comes a recognition of sin' (3.20). Through the law comes a recognition of the sinfulness of sin, an understanding of the misunderstanding that initially induced our shame and moved us to conceal our dependence.

In this respect, it is especially important to see that the law's task of revealing the sinfulness of sin is not a task assigned to it only in light of our wilful refusal of it. Bringing about a recognition of sin is not an accidental or secondary function of the law. Rather, it should be understood as the law's original, intended purpose. The temptation is to read Paul's account of the law in a way that is itself sinful, taking the law as an intended path to an independent righteousness that, in light of our inability to perfectly fulfil its requirements, defaults into simply and negatively indicating our sinful failure to do so. This reading of the law misses the fundamental orientation of Paul's entire approach to the issues of God's righteousness and human sinfulness.

Understood positively, the function of the law is identical with its negative manifestation. The function of the law is to reveal our createdness and testify to the fact that, because we are dependent on the grace of the Creator, the only possible righteousness is God's righteousness. In this context, the law's prescriptions (both moral and ritual) must be understood not as ways of generating righteousness but as ways of constantly confessing our own lack of autonomous righteousness. To perfectly fulfil the prescriptions of the law is to perfectly confess one's dependence on God. (For instance, Jesus' prayer in Matthew 6.10, 'thy will be done', then becomes the model for perfect obedience to the law not because it marks the point at which Jesus secures his own righteousness but because it marks the point at which he definitively disavows any such project.) Indeed, the better one is at *keeping* the law, the more clearly the law manifests one's own lack of righteousness because each prescription is itself a performative confession of our dependence. Thus, whether we keep it or not, whether we confess the truth

through adherence to the law or suppress the truth by refusing the law, the law brings about a recognition of precisely the same thing: our createdness.

11. Righteousness and Righteousification

The law, though important, must not be confused with the righteousness of God. They are related but not identical. Paul is clear that in relation to God's righteousness the law plays a very carefully defined role as witness or testator: 'But now, apart from [*chōris*] the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, and is attested [*martyroumenē*] by the law and the prophets' (3.21). The righteousness of God is disclosed apart from, outside of, or in excess of the law. It is something more than, other than, the law – though the function of the law is to testify to this excess. The law operates as what both differentiates Creator from creature and testifies to the nature of the relation between them. It simultaneously 'attests' to the righteousness of God and brings about a 'full recognition' of our lack of righteousness. The law is that in relation to which grace can become apparent as what it is. Grace is not a stop-gap measure to be called upon in light of the failure of the law. Rather, the confession of grace is the whole function of the law.

This brings us, then, to Paul's first description of how Jesus fits into the picture he has been carefully developing. The righteousness to which the law bears witness is, according to Paul, 'the righteousness of God [*dikaiosyné theou*] through faith in Jesus Christ for all who are faithful' (3.22). And, 'since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God [*doxēs tou theou*], they are justified [*dikaioumenoi*] freely by his grace through the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus' (3.23–24).

In the space of these few lines, a number of important concepts have come to the fore that now require closer inspection. First among them is Paul's notion of what it means for God to 'justify'. It must be noted that English translations unavoidably obscure a crucial connection that is, in Paul's use of Greek, perfectly obvious. Paul's word for 'righteousness' is *dikaiosynē*. His word for 'justify' is a verbal form of the noun 'righteousness': *dikaioō*. The problem is that in English there is no suitable verbal cognate of 'righteousness'. E.P. Sanders gamely suggests that we

might approximate the relationship between the two words in Greek by coining a new English verb: there is the 'righteousness' (*dikaiosynē*) of God and then there is the way that God 'righteouses' (*dikaioō*) – or, to take my own stab, 'righteousifies' – human beings.[2]

This semantic connection is important because it illuminates Paul's general rhetorical strategy in his use of the word 'righteousness'. The core of this strategy is Paul's consistent association of 'righteousness' with God. In fact, as initially noted, Paul uses the word 'righteousness' almost exclusively in the context of the 'righteousness *of God*' and avoids using it in any unmediated connection with human beings. This is no accident, but a decision that follows for sound theological reasons. For Paul, 'righteousness', as an unconditional expression of fidelity, is something that is by definition beyond the capacity of a creature whose existence is conditioned by its createdness. The infinity proper to righteousness centres in the Creator, not in his finite creations.

Moreover, when Paul employs the word 'righteousness' as a verb, he carefully distinguishes between its active and passive uses. Where an active, transitive construction is used ('X righteousifies Y'), God is the subject of the sentence and human beings are the object of his action. Where a passive construction is used ('Y *is* righteousified'), human beings are the subject of the sentence. Thus, for Paul, righteousness is something that God's character and activities 'actively' express and something that human beings 'passively' receive. It is possible for a human life to visibly manifest righteousness, but this righteousness is always the invisible righteousness of God. Conversely, the attempt to decentre this righteousness from God and centre it in ourselves is the essence of the lie that is sin.

In light of this strategy, it is possible to modify the translation of 3.22–24 offered above in order to more fully account for the complex of relationships at work in the Greek text. In this passage, the law testifies to the 'righteousness [*dikaiosynē*] of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all the faithful ones. For there is no difference, since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, they are righteousified [*dikaioumenoi*] freely by his grace through the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus' (3.22–24).

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[2] See, for instance, E.P. Sanders, *Paul: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), 54–7.

The righteousness of God can actively 'righteousify' those who respond with faith to the call extended through Jesus Christ. 'Faith' is the correct response to this call because God's unconditional fidelity together with our faithful mirroring of this fidelity are the very substance of the relationship between us. Necessarily, this 'righteousification' is something received as a 'grace' or a 'free gift' because the defining feature of God's righteousness is its unconditionality. God's grace fails to be conditioned by any distinctions among people because *all* people, as created, lack their own righteousness and, in their attempted suppression of this fact, all are sinners. Paul connects this sinful and universal suppression of the truth to the way that all 'have come short of the glory of God [*doxēs tou theou*]', where the 'glory' of God refers to the brilliance of his appearance (the literal meaning of *doxa* being simply 'appearance'). The sense is that, by suppressing the truth of God's righteousness, human beings have come short both of God's brilliant appearance to them and his brilliant appearance in them.

12. Jesus: God's Righteousness Displayed

In the remaining verses of Romans 3, Paul gives an astonishingly precise account of how Jesus frees us from the power of sin. In particular, this account centres in verses 25–26. We know, Paul explains, that all have sinned, that all are 'righteousified' freely by God's grace, and that this grace comes

> through the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus, whom God publicly displayed [*proetheto*] as a propitiation by his blood, through faith. He did this to display [*eis endeixin*] his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; he did it to display [*endeixin*] in the present, pregnant moment [*nun kairōi*] his righteousness, and that he is upright [*dikaion*] and righteousifies [*dikaiounta*] the one who has faith in Jesus.   (3.24–26)

God's righteousness is not here established or accomplished by Jesus' blood. Rather, Paul is bluntly repetitive in his insistence that Jesus' sacrifice is redemptively effective because it 'publicly displays' God's always already given grace. Jesus' death and resurrection are the hinge on which human history turns because

they definitively manifest God's righteousness, his unconditional commitment to all of creation. Jesus demonstrates that God's commitment to us is infinite and that it holds nothing in reserve, not even the one who is designated by the Spirit as his own Son.

God, then, allows Jesus' blood to be spilt in order to display 'his righteousness' and his 'divine forbearance'. In Jesus, God's invisible glory once again visibly shines with an irrepressible brilliance. Our createdness appears in Jesus in its proper light as the site of fidelity rather than a source of shame. On this account, Jesus does not die to satisfy a debt or vicariously shoulder a retribution that properly belongs to us. On the contrary, the aim of Jesus' sacrifice is to demonstrate that the logic of debt is itself the logic of sin. We are sinfully engaged in the suppression of the truth about our dependence on God's grace because *we* mistook that grace for a debt. Jesus' death and resurrection accomplish a reversal in which the very thing we sinfully took to be the problem (our lack of autonomy) is revealed as the solution (our faithful dependence on God). The core of his atonement is this fundamental and revelatory shift in perspective. Only the sinner mistakes God's grace for a debt and only the sinner misapprehends God's righteousness as an expression of retributive wrath. The good news that Paul bears is that in Jesus God has revealed what appeared to be wrath as grace.

Further, Paul is explicit that God did this 'to display in the present, pregnant moment [*nun kairōi*] his righteousness' (3.26). For Paul, the revelation that Jesus embodies is directly connected with *kairos*, with the advent of a pregnant moment full of possibilities and novelties that is not bound by the linear strictures of chronological time. In the resurrection's temporal reversal of death into life, the kairotic nearness of God's grace is manifest because God's grace shows itself in the world as a break with the chronological economy of mundane time. God's grace does not need to wait for an appropriate moment to arrive; it is not deferred until the requisite preconditions have been met. God's grace intervenes now (*nun*), without delay, as already and actually accomplished because, as unconditional, its defining feature is its failure to submit to any preconditions. Jesus' death and resurrection display the possibility of a different temporality, an unconditional temporality, a kind of time that is experienced as an infinite gift rather than a finite debt. It is in this sense, first

and foremost, that deliverance comes through Jesus Christ to all those who are faithful to what he reveals.

13. Then What Becomes of Works?

Romans 3 concludes with a discussion that knots together the concepts of boasting, works, faith and the law. If grace is always already extended to all human beings, Paul asks, 'then what becomes of boasting?' (3.27). The answer is obvious, 'it is excluded' (3.27). Boasting is necessarily excluded because the logic of boasting is identical with the logic of selective judgement carefully analysed in Romans 2: boasting, like selective judgement, aims to compensate for and suppress the manifestation of a lack. Boasting is excluded because it is the form taken by the lie that sin tells.

In verses 27–31 Paul then invokes 'the law' as that which excludes such boasting. The reasons for this are clear because Paul has already identified the very function of the law to be what simultaneously attests to God's righteousness and our lack of autonomous righteousness. Of particular interest, though, is the way that Paul now introduces a distinction between what he calls the 'law of works' and the 'law of faith'. The law of works is defined by the fact that it does *not* exclude boasting. 'Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith.' (3.27). On the contrary, the law of faith is defined by the fact that it does exclude the possibility of boasting. What grounds are there for boasting when 'we hold that a person is righteousified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law' (3.28)?

The difference between the law of works and the law of faith should not be understood as a difference in prescription. This is to say that, in terms of prescriptive content, there is only one law. What distinguishes the law of works from the law of faith is the use to which these prescriptions are put. The law of works allows the prescribed actions to be subverted for the purpose of suppressing our lack through boasting. In short, the law of works takes righteousness to be something that can be autonomously fabricated by adherence to the law's prescriptions. The law of faith, on the other hand, strictly limits the prescribed actions to the function of testifying to God's righteousness and our

createdness. In this sense, the actions prescribed by the law operate as performative confessions of our faithful response to God's unconditional fidelity. As Paul makes clear, the performance of the works prescribed by the law does not righteousify the person who performs them; their performance simply testifies to the fact that they lack any autonomous righteousness (and the better one keeps the law, the more successful one has been in confessing this lack). Only God righteousifies and he does so, by definition, without condition.

The distinction between faith and works must be made with respect to boasting: where the law of works misunderstands the law as a path to autonomous righteousness and as a means to boasting, the law of faith recognizes the law as a way of performatively confessing a lack of such righteousness. Where works are defined by boasting, faith is defined by confession. 'Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.' (3.31). Unlike the law of works, the law of faith upholds rather than subverts the very meaning of the law and the meaning of this law extends beyond any particularly Jewish prescriptions such as circumcision. The meaning of the law – its attestation to our createdness – is manifest to Jew and Gentile alike. And, 'since God is one', he 'will righteousify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith' (3.30).

14. Father Abraham

Abraham is the Pauline paradigm of faithful confession and he has faith because he knows he has nothing to boast about.

> What then are we to say was discovered [*eurēkenai*] by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was righteousified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. What does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned [*elogisthē*] to him as righteousness.' (4.1–3)

Paul poses Abraham's righteousification as a 'discovery'. It was not the production of something previously inexistent, but the recognition, the uncovering, of something already there. Abraham discovers that, as the text from Genesis 15.6 states, if he faithfully confesses his dependence on God, then God will

'reckon' to him a righteousness that is not his own. In particular, the meaning of Abraham's relation to God hinges on the 'as' of this reckoning and his faith is decided by it: if he reckons God's grace as righteousness rather than wrath, then his life will appear as infused with God's invisible righteousness.

   In Abraham's story, everything turns on his discovery of the nature of his relationship to God. For Paul, the fact that Abraham's being reckoned as righteous precedes his circumcision indicates that righteousness is not grounded in circumcision or any other ramification of the law. Rather, 'the sign of circumcision', like all of the law's prescriptions, is received 'as a seal of the righteousness that he [Abraham] had by faith while he was still uncircumcised' (4.11). This is to say that circumcision, as an expression of the law, functions as a sealing witness or testator. As Paul has already explained, 'through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets' (3.20–21).

   Paul identifies what precedes the law as God's promise. Before everything, God created us and committed himself unconditionally to what he had created. The particular promises made to Abraham are grounded in his uncovering of God's original, creative promise. 'For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith' (4.13). As a result, Paul continues,

> For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations') – in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.   (4.16–17)

The promise revealed to Abraham is a promise guaranteed to all his descendants and to all those who share his faithful confession. The God in whom Abraham believed is, Paul specifies, 'the God who gives life to the dead' (4.17). Abraham's God is the one whom he recognized as his Creator, as the original source of life and the source of renewed life beyond death. Further, as the one 'who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that

do not exist' (4.17), Abraham's God is the one whose uncondi-
tional grace can interrupt the apparent inevitability of death.
More literally, Paul claims that God is capable of 'calling non-
beings as beings [*kalountos ta mē onta hōs onta*]' (4.17). What
appears to be dead or not to exist can appear from God's per-
spective as both living and being. He can designate non-being as
being or call death back into life because the promise in which
life is grounded precedes life itself.

With this in mind, it is clear why 'the wages of sin is death'
(6.23). Death is itself the inexorable effect of sin's deception: the
suppression of the truth of our createdness. Because it sup-
presses our createdness and refuses to recognize its Creator, sin
severs our connection to the source of life and condemns us to
degradation and dissolution. In this respect, sin is ironic: fearful
of our lack of autonomous existence, ashamed of our failure to
be independently self-sufficient and self-creating, we withdraw
from our relationship with the Creator in the hope of fabricating
a security and independence that inevitably results in the very
dissolution of life that our lack of autonomy originally caused us
to fear. The wages of sin are death because sin is itself a refusal of
the grace that life is.

Abraham is exemplary because he confesses life as an impos-
sible grace and because through him the glory of God's grace is
passed on in the lives of his uncountable descendants. Even in
his old age, knowing that God's unconditional righteousness can
bring about what present conditions disallow, Abraham trusts in
God's impossible promise of an heir. 'Hoping against hope,' he
believed in the promise of life and the gift of creation, 'he
believed that he would become "the father of many nations"'
(4.18). Moreover,

> he did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which
> was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old),
> or when he considered the deadness of Sarah's womb. No distrust
> made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong
> in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God
> was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith 'was
> reckoned to him as righteousness'.   (4.19–22)

Abraham's trial represents, for Paul, a test case. It represents the possibility of reversing the suppression of our createdness and the dominance of death. Sinful and ashamed, we treat the grace of life as a debt and a lack and so condemn ourselves to death. Abraham, finding himself under the power of sin, must treat his 'dead' body, a body 'which was already as good as dead' (4.19), as a body capable of life. Though his power to give life is 'not', he must trust that God can call 'what is not' into being. Even the 'deadness of Sarah's womb' must be confessed as a grace rather than a lack in order for life to intervene (4.19). In considering God's promise, Abraham does not waver and he refuses to be seduced by the apparent inevitability of death. Because Abraham faithfully reckons the world as a manifestation of God's endless fidelity, his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness and the promised child was given. Faithful to the righteousness of the Father, Abraham became a righteousified father.

Abraham's faithfulness, then, displays the righteousness of God in a way that mirrors Christ's own definitive display of that righteousness. Just as Abraham's faith reckoned lack as grace and death as life, 'so it will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our right- eousification' (4.24–5). Abraham's body, though good as dead, impossibly bestowed life. Jesus' body, though dead, was also impossibly returned to life and, like Abraham, the new life centred in Jesus extends to an endless posterity beyond him. Jesus, like Abraham, is only the first fruit of the resurrection.

15. Type and Antitype

Though unnamed as such, Abraham, as the father of the faith- ful, is the first of two individuals presented by Paul as 'types' of Christ. The second, explicitly discussed in Romans 5, is Adam.

Through his death and resurrection, by passing from death to life, Christ's sacrifice reverses the original confusion of life for death, of grace for lack, initiated by Adam.

> Therefore, just as sin came into the world through the one man, and
> death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have
> sinned … Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even

over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is
a type [*typos*] of the one who was to come.   (5.12–14)

Paul's development of Adam as a 'type' or prefiguration of
Christ provides an especially clear example of how the revelation
of God's righteousness and the revelation of God's wrath are, in
the end, a single revelation. Adam is a type of Christ in the same
way that God's wrath is a type of his righteousness. Adam and
Christ respectively embody the two different ways in which God's
grace may be reckoned.

   With Adam, this grace is reckoned as the mark of a personally
shameful lack. This reckoning proves so seductive that it quickly
'spreads' to dominate our whole understanding of the world and
our place in it. Thus, after Adam, 'death exercised dominion'
(5.14) and 'death spread to all because all have sinned' (5.12).
However, with Christ, the perspective is typologically reversed.
Where, for Adam, his lack of autonomy appears as a disastrous
void, Christ's faithful confession of complete dependence
transforms the meaning of this void and reveals it as what leaves
us profoundly open to direct contact with God.

   Adam and Christ, type and antitype – they converge on the
same phenomenon but with vastly different results. Paul
explains:

> For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more
> surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one
> man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not
> like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgement following one
> trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many
> trespasses brings righteousification. If, because of the one man's
> trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more
> surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift
> of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man,
> Jesus Christ.   (5.15–17)

Just as sin came into the world by one man (Adam), grace
likewise is displayed in the world by one man (Jesus). In this,
Adam and Jesus are identical and the divergent transformations
they each initiate pivot on the same issue of lack/grace. How-
ever, as Paul points out, despite the typological convergence, the
'free gift' revealed by Jesus 'is *not* like the effect of one man's sin'
insofar as the 'effects' of each are strikingly opposed (5.16,

emphasis mine). The effect that follows from Adam's trespass is a judgement of wrath and condemnation. The effect that follows from Jesus' free gift is righteousness. Where Adam attempts to exclude from the world any unconditional effects by positioning himself as master and creator, Jesus lifts the ban on what is unconditional through an affirmation of the grace that is displayed in him.

In this sense, the difference between the 'effects' of their actions is mirrored by the difference between chronological time (*chronos*) and kairotic time (*kairos*). The effect of sin is the foreclosure of time and possibilities in the figure of death. Death instantiates the inevitability of time's profoundly conditioned movement from cause to effect and the dissolution and degradation to which such a foreclosure leads. However, because it is free, the effect of Jesus' 'act of righteousness leads to righteousification and life for all' (5.18). As a gift, as a display of unconditional grace, it is not bound by the rules that typically govern the movement of time. Because it is unaccountably free, it interrupts and contradicts the predictable flow of death with the promise of life and, in particular, the promise of a new life. Here, the new life promised in Jesus' resurrection marks the advent of novelty. Within the scope of chronological time, what is more certain than death's constraint of possibility? But within the scope of kairotic time, nothing is more certain than the shattering of death's constraint by a life that is unforeseeably new.

Paul's account of grace is remarkable because it does not posit Adam and Christ as opposed forces. Its genius is that Adam is understood as identical with Christ. Sin and trespass are not simply opposed to righteousness. The lack in which sin is grounded *is* righteousness. Death is not simply opposed to life. The void of death *is* that which marks our enduring connection to the source of life. Adam is a type of Christ, a prefiguration, a shadow of what is to come, but the meaning of Adam's createdness and lack of autonomy (a meaning hidden from Adam himself by his own shame) is not revealed until Christ comes to display it as the righteousness of God. Only retroactively in light of what Christ displays does Adam's identity with Christ become clear. The righteousness of God is revealed only when chronology is bent, the history of the world is read in reverse, and events are combined out of their 'proper' sequence.

Thus, Paul's typological identification of Adam with Christ embodies a general strategy for theologically inducing the appearance of grace in the world. Typology is a mode of thinking appropriate to grace because it is a non-chronological and non-causal way of approaching temporal relations. In identifying one event as the type of a later event, typology produces a kind of temporal abridgement that re-orders time and reconfigures the governing set of temporal relationships. Where chronological time understands itself as a two-dimensional line of causality that moves only in one direction from A to B to C, typology understands time as supplemented by a third, non-causal dimension of grace that opens the possibility of folding time so that C is directly identified with A, B is elided, and time is diverted down a novel route. Here, time is bent so that Jesus' point on the line touches Adam's and their identification provokes a transformation. By folding time, typology aims to produce an unexpected temporal relation that can reset chains of causality in order to introduce something new, free and unconditioned.

16. Being Baptized 'into' Christ Jesus

Paul's typological identification of Adam with Christ is preliminary to his explanation in Romans 6 of baptism. In order to be delivered from the dominion of death and sin, we must identify Christ with Adam and recognize that the meaning of Adam's lack is to be found 'in' Christ's display of grace. Though the meaning of the creature's life does not centre in the creature but in the Creator, sin, nonetheless, is an attempt to independently locate the meaning of our lives in ourselves by identifying with ourselves. In this sense, salvation universally consists in becoming a type of Christ where, as a result, we recognize that the meaning of our lives must be (ex)centred in an identification with him. The significance, then, of Christian baptism is this: baptism is the general ritual mechanism for producing typological identifications with Christ.

In the opening verses of Chapter 6, Paul will use typologically resonant language in his explanation of baptism. In particular, this shows up his repeated descriptions of humans as being either 'in' sin or 'in' Christ, where the 'in' indicates the dimension of identification.

> What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that
> grace may abound? By no means! How can we who have died to sin
> go on living in [*en*] it? Do you not know that all of us who have been
> baptized into [*eis*] Christ Jesus were baptized into [*eis*] his death?
> Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into [*eis*] death,
> so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the
> Father, so we too might walk in [*en*] newness of life.   (6.1–4)

The aim of baptism is novelty: a 'newness of life'. But this novelty
is possible only insofar as we are no longer 'in' sin, 'under' its
dominion, or do not identify with its understanding of our lack
of autonomy as shameful. In order for the dominion of sin to be
broken, it is necessary to die. Or, we could say, it is necessary that
a reversal be accomplished in which we die to death itself. By
being baptized with Jesus into death (or, at least, into what sin
takes as being tantamount to death: an affirmation of our
dependence on God), we die to the world of death and are
resurrected with Jesus in a newness of life. Jesus is raised from
the dead 'by the glory of the Father' and we are likewise raised
from the dominion of death and into life by the brilliant
appearance of God's righteousness. Death and life swing like a
single door in either of two directions, their respective positions
dependent on the direction one is headed. From the perspective
of sin, life in God amounts to death, to the end of the fantasy of
autonomy. From the perspective of faith, life in sin amounts to
death and to the end of any connection with the source of life.
Passage through the door inverts the meanings of life and death
and determines the dominion in which one lives.
 Paul is very clear in this chapter about what he means by
'dominion'. The dominion in which we find ourselves is a pro-
duct of our chosen mode of presentation or reckoning.

> Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion [*basileuetō*] in your
> mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present
> [*paristanete*] your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but
> present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from
> death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of
> righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over [*kurieusei*] you,
> since you are not under the law but under grace.   (6.12–14)

The dominion or kingdom in which we find ourselves depends
on the Lord we have chosen, and we choose our Lord by

deciding what to present ourselves 'as': either as instruments of sin or as instruments of righteousness. Where sin exercises dominion over 'mortal bodies' (*thnētōi sōmati*), God exercises dominion over those 'who have been brought from death to life' (6.12, 13).

In this way, the issues of appearance and reckoning 'as' are themselves explicitly tied into one of Paul's most persistent themes: the proclamation that 'Jesus is Lord' (cf. Philippians 2.11). Lordship is a question of appearance and revelation. Strikingly, Paul makes plain that it is impossible to refuse the question of lordship. It is not possible simply to be 'free' from any dominion whatsoever. The idea that such an independence is possible is a product of sin's desire for autonomy. Indeed, sin is the fantasy that such an autonomy is possible, that the creature is not essentially related to and dependent on the Creator. We must either choose the truth of God's gracious Lordship or we must be condemned by fantasy to the tyranny of death and sin. In either case we are subjects and servants. Paul bluntly asks, 'Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves [*doulous*], you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?' (6.16). 'Speaking', Paul says, 'in human terms [*anthrōpinon legō*]', we are necessarily 'slaves' (6.19). The only question is that of our chosen master.

Baptism, then, is a way of ritually transferring our allegiance. When we are baptized, we are baptized 'into' Christ and into a typological identification with his display of God's righteousness, a display that mercifully interrupts sin's seamless cycle of shame and wrath. Baptism is a formal decision to refuse the dominion of sin and instead present our created members 'as' part of the body of Christ.

17. Apart from the Law Sin Lies Dead

Unsurprisingly, the issues of dominion, lordship and slavery discussed in the previous section return Paul's attention to a consideration of the role of the law. Romans 7 contains some of Paul's most difficult and penetrating reflections on the function and place of the law in relation to the joint problematic of sin/grace. Many of this chapter's most obscure statements become

clear when read in light of the speculative thesis that the revelation of God's wrath and the revelation of God's righteousness are one revelation.

Paul begins by developing an analogy meant to tie together the issues of life, death, dominion and law. The central idea is that, as in marriage, 'the law is binding on a person only during that person's lifetime' (7.1). Just as a woman is not bound by the law to live under the dominion of her husband after his death, so we are not bound by the law to the dominion of sin after having died with Christ in the waters of baptism. Death (or, depending on the perspective of presentation, resurrection) has a specifically legal function: it mediates the transfer of individuals from one dominion to another.

The question raised by this description is, however, an apparently difficult one: if the law is what testifies to the righteousness of God, then how is it possible for the law to bind us to the dominion of sin in the first place? Why is a legal transfer via death required if sin's dominion is fundamentally unrighteous and 'illegal'? Or, why is the function of the law so intimately bound up with the power of sin? Shouldn't the law depose, rather than uphold, sin?

On the face of it, the most puzzling statements in Romans 7 are those that explicitly describe the law as empowering sin. 'While we were living in the flesh,' Paul says, 'our sinful passions, through the law [*dia tou nomou*], were at work in our members to bear fruit for death' (7.5). Moreover, Paul asks,

> What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'. But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment [*aphormēn de labousa hē hamartian dia tēs entolēs*], produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.   (7.7–12)

In what sense does sin work 'through the law' (7.5)? Or, as Paul twice puts it in the above passage, in what way does sin 'seize an opportunity in the commandment' (7.8, 11)?

Paul is clear that the law is not itself sinful. 'Yet', he adds, the very possibility of sin is nonetheless intertwined with the function of the law. In the most obvious way, the law makes sin possible because it identifies sin as such. If the law did not identify sin as sinful, it would fail to appear. In this sense, the law judges modes of appearance as belonging to whatever dominion they appear 'in'.

But the relationship between law and sin is more complicated (and more fundamental) than this because, Paul points out, the law does not simply judge transgression: its prohibitions *incite* transgression. It is not until after the law prohibited coveting that 'the commandment produced in me all kinds of covetousness' (7.7). 'Without the law, sin lies dead' (7.8); it has no animating force or provocation. Here, the connection between law and sin centres in the law's capacity to provoke desire through prohibition. The commandment not to covet does itself carve out a negative space that desire rushes in to fill. Paul's choice of this particular commandment as an example is apt because the commandment not to covet is representative of what motivates the transgression of all of the law's other prohibitions, each of which draws a particular line beyond which desire ought not to proceed.

The heart of the difficulty, then, is that the law reveals to human beings what they are not and what they do not have. In other words, the law reveals to human beings their lack. Paraphrasing Paul's earlier description: through the law comes a full recognition of lack. Sin 'seizes an opportunity' in the lack thus revealed. Though the purpose of the law is to attest to the righteousness of God and our lack of autonomous righteousness and thereby invoke our affirmation of the grace thus extended, it can just as easily provoke the opposite reaction. 'Sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment,' in our recognition of the lack to which it testifies, 'deceived me and through it killed me' (7.11). The deception perpetrated by sin is summarized by its lie that God's grace is for us a source of shame. This lie, as we have already seen, cuts us off from the source of life and 'kills us'. Clearly, 'the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good' (7.12), but this does not prevent the law from inciting sin because sin's provocation *is* the revelation of the righteousness of God. The covetous lust that animates sin is born only out of the revelation that we are not God. Paul summarizes these

conclusions in 7.13: 'Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good.' God's goodness revealed by the law promises only life and grace and does not itself bring death. However, sin, as a necessarily secondary phenomenon rooted in shameful refusal, nonetheless works 'through what is good' in order to produce death. Law and sin are fundamentally intertwined because sin is a parasitic reaction that is only possible in relation to the grace that the law limns.

This is a point of broad significance and general importance. When reading Paul, the temptation is to begin from the wrong end. Grace is *not* a response to sin, sin is a response to grace. Grace is primary and original. Sin is secondary and derivative.

18. I Do Not Understand My Own Actions

'Sin,' Paul says, 'seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me' (7.11). Nonetheless, despite this 'death', we continue to live. 'Sold into slavery under sin' (7.14) and dead to our own createdness, we wander 'undead' – neither entirely lifeless nor obviously alive – through the dominion of sin, divided from both ourselves and God. This divided condition proper to the undead is, Paul states, a split produced by sin's deception. The lie sin tells splits the difference between life and death and divides us from the truth about ourselves and our relation to the Creator. We go on visibly living, but no invisible life shines through us. Sin renders us undead because it is a suppression of life.

The result, as Paul famously describes it in the remaining half of Romans 7, is that 'I do not understand my own actions' (7.15). Sin's deception can be carried off only if we are also capable of deceiving ourselves. Unsurprisingly, this process of self-deception and self-division leaves us broken, impotent and confused.

> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good that I want, but the evil that I do not want is what I do.   (7.15–19)

The irony of sin is that it wills what is good, but it wills it wrongly. Even an undead self will 'agree that the law', and the righteousness to which it attests, 'is good' (7.16). The problem of sin is that it treats its lack of autonomous righteousness as shameful and compensates by attempting to secure its own goodness independent of God. Thus, sin can 'will what is right', but it 'cannot do it' because the good that it wills can only be received by abandoning one's will to God (7.18). Sin aims at righteousness but it does so confusedly, wandering through the world coveting what it lacks because it fails to understand that this lack is itself a mark of God's righteousness and grace.

Undead, I know that 'nothing good dwells in me', but sin deceives me into thinking that I must correct this 'nothingness' rather than confess it. Thus, 'I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate' (7.15), because sin, dwelling in me, has divided me against myself and routed my every response to goodness and grace through the sentiment of shame. In this way, it is the 'I' that divides the self from both itself and God. 'I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand' (7.21). Insofar as 'I' want to do the good myself, independently and autonomously, then this very will to goodness manifests the nearness of evil. 'I' cannot do what is good because the centrality of this 'I' is itself a primary manifestation of sin.

In response to his complex description of this ironic problematic, Paul's climactic confession is particularly powerful. 'Wretched man that I am!' he cries, 'Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!' (7.24–25). In these verses, Paul compactly summarizes all of the elements crucial to his deliverance from sin and from the bondage of its 'I'. He confesses his lack of righteousness ('wretched man that I am!'), he recognizes that his redemption cannot be willed but only received as a free gift ('who will rescue me?'), he offers to God the gratitude the suppression of which defines the essence of sin ('thanks be to God!'), and he presents himself as belonging to the dominion of God ('Jesus Christ is Lord!'). Salvation is not won but received and it can be received only by abandoning the attempt to win it.

19. A Spirit of Adoption

The final passages I wish to consider are from Romans 8. In these passages, Paul attempts a revision of his description of us as either 'slaves to sin' or 'slaves to God'. His intention is to offer a description that is more faithful to the perspective we necessarily adopt once we find ourselves 'in' Christ. To speak of our relation to God simply in terms of slavery is to cede too much to the disposition of sin.

In the middle of his discussion of slavery in Romans 6, Paul pauses to explain his use of that language. 'I am speaking in human terms,' he says, 'because of the weakness of your flesh' (6.19). However, from the perspective of grace, the language of slavery is inadequate. The truth is that 'all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God' (8.14). Paul continues,

> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.   (8.15–17)

The difficulty with the language of slavery is that the spirit of slavery is fear. Becoming a slave to God does not produce a spirit of fear, but frees us from fear. Becoming a slave to God frees us from slavery itself. Fear is the engine of sin: it fuels the experience of shame and the drive for compensatory acquisition. A willingness to recognize God as God and confess our createdness in relation to him reveals that what had appeared to be a spirit of slavery from the perspective of sin is, in fact, a spirit of adoption. The Spirit, when he bears witness to us, moves us to cry out to God, 'Abba! Father!', because this cry is the epitome of a spiritually appropriate confession. It simultaneously recognizes our createdness and the indissolubly intimate nature of our relation to the Creator: the relation of a child to its father ('Abba!'). And if we are the children of God, then we are also his heirs and joint-heirs with Christ. His righteousness, if we will confess its display in Jesus Christ, is our inheritance and our createdness will be righteousified by the reception of it. Unafraid and willing to share his suffering with him, Christ shares the brilliant appearance of God's invisible grace in him with us. 'I reckon', Paul says,

'the sufferings of the present urgent moment [*nun kairou*] are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed in us' (8.18).

The effects of this cascading revelation of God's righteousness, from its display in Jesus to its manifestation in us, are far-reaching. The whole of the created world (*ktisis*) has yearned for release from the bondage imposed by the vanity of sin.

> For the creation waits with anxious longing for the eagerly expected revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to vanity [*mataiotēti*], not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole of creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we are saved. Now what is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (8.19–25)

The effect of human vanity, of its deception born out of shame at its subjection to God, has been to subject all of creation to futility. Our collective suppression of the truth of God's invisible glory extends beyond ourselves to everything over which we have dominion. In light of our vanity, the world itself shows up as vain and subject to death, degradation and decay. Nonetheless, both we and the created world 'groan inwardly' with labour pains. In the present and pregnant kairotic moment, something new is about to be born. Upon our adoption as children of God, we will ourselves (like father Abraham) give birth to an uncountable posterity. In the present moment, we hope for the display of what has already been conceived but is not yet universally visible. 'Hope that is seen is not hope', but we do not hope for what is seen (8.24). 'We hope for what we do not see', for what, despite its invisibility, promises to brilliantly appear nonetheless (8.25). We hope for the righteousness of God and we can 'wait for it with patience' because his grace, always already given, is sure (8.25).

20. Summary

Before attending to the larger implications of this reading of
Romans 1–8 for the whole of my project, it will be useful to
gather together in one place the disparate elements of Paul's
thinking as they appear in light of my speculative thesis.

The thesis is that the revelation of God's righteousness and
the revelation of his wrath are identical. This single revelation
appears as either grace or wrath depending on our disposition. If
we are faithful to what it reveals, then it appears as grace. If we
are ashamed of what it shows, then it appears as wrath. Every-
thing depends on what we call, name, or designate this revela-
tion 'as'. The dimension of spirit is this dimension of
designation.

Sin is a shameful response to God's grace, a disposition that
reckons its dependence on God as a fault or lack. On the basis of
this misapprehension of grace as a debt, sin suppresses the truth
about its createdness and its relation to the Creator and attempts
to install itself as its own autonomous ground. Sin suppresses the
truth by refusing the visible manifestation of God's invisible
relation to us in our createdness. Nonetheless, the relation of the
Creator to the creature is unconditional, and God's grace and
righteousness intersect with one another in his unconditional
commitment to us.

Our selective judgement of others reveals that we are know-
ingly engaged in deception, and this practice is a telling example
of the lie that sin is generally engaged in perpetuating. In sin,
everyone is a liar. The law exposes this lie because its dual
function is to reveal our lack of righteousness and attest to the
righteousness of God. Sin misunderstands the law in the same
way it systematically misunderstands everything else: it mistakes
the law as a means to an autonomous righteousness. The law,
however, even if perfectly upheld, is only ever a performative
confession of our lack of righteousness and our dependence on
God. The more perfect its performance, the more perfect our
confession of grace becomes. The law, perfectly upheld, is an
expression of fidelity to God's righteousness, not the production
of our own. If we are faithful to our createdness, God's right-
eousness can be received as the gracious gift he intended and
though this righteousness necessarily centres in his uncondi-
tional commitment to us we can nevertheless be righteousified

by it. In a world of sin defined by its suppression of this right-eousness, God designates Jesus as his Son and puts him forward as a display of his unconditional commitment: Jesus embodies God's willingness to give everything for us. In Jesus, God's invisible righteousness shines forth definitively and irrepressibly.

Abraham models the faithful reception of God's promised commitment to us and he, like Christ, is restored from death to life in order to give birth to an uncountable number of lives beyond his own. Further, Paul identifies Adam as a 'type' of Christ, the meaning of whose life and actions is revealed only retroactively in light of Christ's display of our lack as a grace. Through baptism we participate in this typological identification by being baptized 'into' Christ: we die to sin and come alive in Christ, thus marking our legal transfer from one dominion to another. We acknowledge Jesus as Lord and abandon the attempt to be our own god. We refuse to present ourselves 'as' slaves of sin and instead present ourselves 'as' slaves to God. Alive in Christ, no longer undead and split by self-deception, no longer attempting to secure for ourselves the good that we want, the law ceases to be an opportunity for sin. Its revelation of our lack of righteousness moves us to faith rather than shame. The result is that what had appeared to be slavery from the per-spective of sin (i.e. our dependence on God) now appears as the spirit of adoption in which we are heirs to the gift of God's righteousness, the very gift originally offered and in the face of which we originally withdrew in shame and fear. Faithfully affirming our createdness, all of creation again appears in the brilliant light of God's invisible glory.

21. Conclusions

As noted in the introduction, Paul's conception of grace addresses a unique set of circumstances. Paul aims to declare the Messiah as actual rather than promised, and his message describes the deliverance Jesus offers as immanently available rather than simply transcendentally secured. To do so, Paul must steer a conceptual path between two related obstacles: the world's continued recalcitrance and the promise of Jesus' return. First, he must account for the fact that, despite the definitive display of God's righteousness in the sacrifice and

resurrection of Jesus, the world has not ended but continues on as if nothing has happened. And, second, he must not allow the imminence of Jesus' supernaturally spectacular second coming to overshadow or mitigate the force of what his sacrifice and resurrection have already accomplished. Or, to frame these twin difficulties in terms of my overall project, Paul must find a way to think grace that avoids both banality (the world simply continuing on as if nothing has happened) and obscurantism (the possibility of grace, but not in this world and not yet).

Paul's radical solution is to invert our typical understanding of the relation between grace and sin. Grace must not be understood as God's derivative response to a human failure to be autonomously righteous. That is, grace must not be understood as a regrettable, stop-gap intervention that bandages the wound of sin. Such an approach faithfully adheres to sin's own perspective about what has priority: from sin's point of view, sin always comes first. Rather, sin must be understood as our derivative response to God's initial and unconditional extension of grace in the act of creating and faithfully relating himself to us. Sin is a parasitic phenomenon that follows from our shame about God's gift. Sin tries to lie about our dependence on God, but the truth of the created world is that grace is always anterior to sin.

Working to conceive God's grace as both immanent and actual, Paul is moved to shift the locus of this grace not simply from a future event – either from a promised Messiah or from the actual Messiah's promised return – to the event of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection, but from the event of Jesus' resurrection to the creation of the world itself. Grace is definitively displayed in Christ, but in order to account for its immanent actuality in a world that appears largely unmarked by this display, Paul identifies this grace as having always already been immanently constitutive of the world as it actually is. What may appear as the problem, Paul takes as the solution: the recalcitrance of sin does not indicate a failure of grace but its persistence. Paul achieves this shift in perspective by making the righteousness of God his central concept and by simultaneously tying this righteousness to the world's createdness (it invisibly shines in our visible lack of autonomy) and to what defines the essence of sin (our ashamed suppression of this righteousness). Our sinfulness is itself defined by the immanent actuality of God's grace and

righteousness. If it were not already immanent and actual, then there would be no such thing as sin. Jesus, then, is understood not as having accomplished a righteousness hitherto unrealized, but as manifesting an anterior righteousness that is, by definition, already infinite, eternal and unconditional.

If we ask: how can God's grace be actually immanent in a world that continues in sin? Paul answers: it has always already been here as the precondition for the possibility of sin.

In this sense, Paul's approach deftly deploys the insight previously gleaned from Derrida's expression '*tout autre est tout autre*'. Derrida's formula proves valuable in an attempt to think the immanence of grace because it posits alterity as the very stuff out of which identity is constituted. Every other is itself because it is always more than or other than itself. There is no immanent identity without an excess that punctures the stability of this identity. Grace may fail to be conditioned by the constraints of identity but it appears nonetheless as a constitutive trace or birthmark in the manifestation of that identity. Or, in Pauline terms, we might say: grace is the mark of God's unconditional gift of creation that, despite its invisibility, appears nonetheless in the createdness of each created thing. Thus, Paul conceives of the grace displayed by Christ's resurrection as immanent because he locates that grace's most fundamental manifestation in the very constitution of the immanent world. The new life Christ offers is new only relative to sin: the life he offers is a re-extension of the life already given but suppressed by sin's refusal of the Creator.

The novelty of the new life that is displayed in Christ's resurrection is rooted in the unconditionality of the grace that infuses it. Because sin refuses the unconditionality of grace, ashamed that it should receive anything over which it cannot claim sovereign control, it is left with a world that appears only in light of its given conditions. The world of sin is the world reduced to the 'controllable' conditions of causal continuity. There, time appears strictly chronological. However, if our createdness is confessed rather than suppressed, then the unconditionality of God's righteousness is once again manifest, and it is displayed, in particular, in an alternative experience of time as kairotic. The kairotic moment is the urgent, pregnant moment of the 'now' in which it is possible for something to instantaneously occur without needing to submit to any previous conditions. The

kairotic moment suspends the conditions of an ordinary, causal temporality with the display of an unconditioned and unconditional gift. This gift is the gift of life and the gift of a new life, though these gifts converge in the unconditional grace that gives them both and can give either one only insofar as it gives each as the other. The gift of life is the gift of novelty, and vice versa. This figure of an unconditioned temporality, of time unbound by the rules of causal chronology, is the figure appropriate to a typological temporality. Events unconnected by causal sequence are unconditionally identified on the basis of the grace that invisibly shines through them. Christ is Adam and we are in Christ for the sake of the unconditionally new lives and new beginnings that such identifications and chronological disruptions make possible. By identifying Christ with Adam, Paul shows that in light of God's righteousness his grace has always already been immanent and actual in the world and that it still (and newly) is.

The key features, then, of Paul's conception of an immanently actual grace are: (1) the constitutive anteriority of grace, (2) the unconditional, because conditioning, character of this grace, (3) the immanent visibility of this invisible grace in the world's createdness, and (4) the novel manifestation of this already immanent grace in the unconditioned event of Christ's actually accomplished sacrifice and resurrection.

However, as productive as it is in providing a potently developed template for thinking grace immanently, Paul's perspective does not directly address the difficulty uncovered in my initial examination of Derrida's position. It remains an open question whether it is possible to think this grace as both immanent and actual if God's actuality is not assumed as an anchor for the actuality of grace. Has Paul's work opened a path beyond an immanent and actual grace as a gift necessarily tied to the transcendence of its Giver? Or, in the absence of the Giver, is the thought of grace unavoidably restricted to the domain of immanent potentiality?

Chapter 2

Givenness and Saturation:
A Phenomenological Approach to an
Immanent Grace

1. Phenomenology and Immanence

The aim of phenomenology is immanence. As a philosophical
methodology, phenomenology is literally an attempt to 'say what
appears' and to describe the modes proper to these appear-
ances. In order faithfully to describe what appears, phenomen-
ology strictly refuses to speculate about what may be 'behind' or
'responsible for' the appearance; rather its attention is devoted
entirely to the immanence of what shows itself. This is to say that
phenomenology is born of a methodologically principled refusal
of metaphysics. The degree to which phenomenology is faithful
to its task is the degree to which it has excluded metaphysical
appeals to what transcends the immanence of the phenomenon.

   This commitment to the immanence of what appears is car-
ried out in the practice of a 'phenomenological reduction'. The
reduction reduces the scope of philosophical concern to the
sphere of what appears and, as a consequence, it brackets all of
our common and scientific assumptions about why these parti-
cular phenomena appear and what these phenomena are. By
putting all of these assumptions out of play, phenomenology
attempts to wipe the philosophical slate clean and thereby to
provide an unbiased starting point for its consideration of the
phenomena themselves. The irony of the phenomenological
reduction is that it does not reduce phenomena to pale shadows
of themselves but, instead, by liberating them from the con-
straining influence of our assumptions about them (i.e. by
reducing their metaphysical back-story) the reduction allows
phenomena to appear in brilliant relief.

   Phenomenology, then, is a philosophical methodology
appropriate to an attempt to think the novelty of grace as

immanent. Difficulties remain, however, because the immanent 'appearance' of grace, insofar as such a thing may be possible, will necessarily be unlike the appearance of other 'common' phenomena – or, better, it will unfold only obliquely in connection with the appearance of even the most common phenomena. Jean-Luc Marion's work on a 'phenomenology of givenness' is of particular importance not just because he means faithfully to describe the appearance of grace but because he claims that in the absence of every appeal to metaphysical transcendence this grace appears all the more gracious. In other words, Marion's basic claim is that if we phenomenologically bracket any assumption of a transcendent Giver of grace, then grace will not cease to appear but will appear all the more. Without an assignable Giver, the graciousness of grace shines more brightly.

However, as I noted in the Introduction, my reading of Marion proceeds slightly against the grain of his own explicit intentions. Marion is adamant that his account of the 'givenness' of phenomena is strictly philosophical and does not depend on any religious claims about the nature and meaning of grace. For Marion, whatever similarities there may be, 'grace' is a word proper to religious and theological discourses, discourses that need not be shy about invoking transcendence in the context of faith. Givenness, on the other hand, is a word proper to phenomenology in the context of a rigorous commitment to immanence. Marion may have reason to insist on this distinction, but his reasons are not my own. Because my intention is to think grace immanently without reference to transcendence, the principle capable of distinguishing grace from givenness (transcendence) dissolves and grace collapses into givenness. Here, whatever can be immanently and phenomenologically thought of grace will be thinkable in terms of givenness.

The great strength of Marion's position is that it presents powerful arguments for collapsing *its own* intended distinction between grace and givenness. Marion's critics are wary of such a collapse, fearing the injection of a religious transcendence into phenomenology. But Marion's arguments work to precisely the opposite end: rather than collapsing givenness into grace in order to imbue givenness with the aura of a supernatural transcendence, they collapse grace into givenness in order to strip grace of its transcendence. Marion's work plays a pivotal

part in my own project because it so clearly demonstrates that the reduction of grace to immanence is to the benefit of grace itself. Indeed, the upshot of Marion's position is that grace is gracious only to the degree that it is immanent. Grace is not lost without transcendence, but found.

For the sake of clarity, I will, in what follows, restrict my treatment of Marion to a reading of relevant portions of his seminal work, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness.* I will focus in particular on (1) his description of givenness as fundamental to the immanence of phenomenality as such, (2) his argument that givenness should be understood on the non-economic model of the gift, and (3) his development of the notion of an infinite or 'saturated' phenomenon as that which exemplifies givenness in general. Then, in order to gather together Marion's work with my reading of Paul, I will briefly examine a few important passages from *God Without Being* in which Marion himself comments on and analyzes several key Pauline texts. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Marion's position in light of the aims of my own project.

2. Phenomenology Contra Metaphysics

The need for phenomenology, for a philosophical method able to 'say what appears', is not immediately evident. After all, doesn't what appears *already* appear? What could be more obvious than the visible? This question is useful, but it fails to recognize that phenomena generally do not appear precisely to the extent that they *are* obvious. As Marion puts it, 'most of the time, we want to get an idea of things without having any intention of seeing them'.[1] For the most part, we fail to see what appears because we are looking beyond or around or through the appearance for the sake of something else. This tendency couldn't be more natural and it is the essence of what is referred to in phenomenology as the 'natural attitude'. Phenomenology gets underway to the extent that this natural tendency *not* to see phenomena has been suspended and it succeeds to the extent

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[1] Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 201. Hereafter referred to as BG. *Étant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 283. Hereafter referred to as ED.

that our gaze has been redirected to the 'obviousness' of what appears.

Marion's description of this natural tendency also works well as a shorthand account of what is, in his eyes, the fundamental problem with metaphysics: metaphysics is interested in seeing what appears only to the extent that the appearance allows it to 'get an idea of things'. It aims right through the phenomenon at the idea behind it, the essence that forms it, or the cause that is responsible for it. The general rule is that, 'in the metaphysical realm, the possibility of appearing never belongs to what appears, nor its phenomenality to the phenomenon' (BG, 183/ ED, 255). The appearance is only ever treated as a double, a stand-in, an avatar, for the truth of whatever transcends it. The phenomenon never appears as itself, in the first-person, without need for any secondary justification. The result is that phenomena generally fail to appear – or, at least, they generally fail to appear 'as themselves'.

Metaphysics, then, is a theoretical elaboration of the natural attitude. Just as the sensible gaze must be redirected back to the phenomena themselves, so must the theoretical impulse be reduced back to a strict consideration of what is given. Rather than attempting to supply chains of absent, transcendent reasons for an appearance, phenomenology describes each phenomenon insofar as it appears in light of its own immanent reason. Here, each phenomenon shows up as it gives itself and on the terms that it sets for itself. In metaphysics 'it is a question of proving', but in phenomenology 'it is a question of showing' (BG, 7/ED, 13). The impulse to 'prove' a phenomenon, to justify it by tracking down its anterior causes and hidden reasons, already manifests a breakdown in our attention to and faith in the phenomenon itself. Rather than simply describing what gives itself, metaphysics assumes the inadequacy of the appearance and begins by looking elsewhere. It assumes the appearance as a lack and sets about the task of trying to compensate for the implied deficiency. In this way, metaphysics, before it has even begun, has already lost sight of the phenomenon.

In order to avoid this trap, phenomenology begins with a 'reduction'. Everything that appears is reduced to the immanence of its appearance and everything that fails to be immanent is bracketed by the reduction unless it appears in its own right. Strictly speaking, Marion says, 'the reduction does nothing; it

lets manifestation manifest itself' (BG, 10/ED, 17). The reduction is not an imposition on phenomena, but a methodology for clearing from the field of appearance that which perpetually attempts to impose itself on the phenomena. The reduction does not reduce phenomena, but reduces that which would reduce phenomena to an inferior status. In short, the reduction brackets transcendence for the sake of immanence. There is an exact correspondence between the success of the reduction and the degree to which phenomena are free to give themselves as they wish. They are given to our gaze only to the degree that we no longer look beyond them. The rule, for Marion, is this: 'the more reduction, the more givenness' (BG, 14/ED, 24).

Marion distinguishes his own practice of phenomenology from others with the claim to have more rigorously adhered to the necessity of this reduction than any of his phenomenological predecessors. While deeply indebted to Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, Marion argues in detail and at length that the phenomenological vision of both Husserl and Heidegger remains clouded by attenuated but unsuccessfully reduced metaphysical impulses.[2] According to Marion, in Husserl, this obfuscating impulse shows up particularly in his tendency to use transcendental language and in his general insistence on taking the horizon of 'objectness' as the horizon of phenomenology itself. In Heidegger, this impulse is manifest in his restriction of phenomena to the field of being. It is neither possible nor desirable to assess Marion's critique of Husserl and Heidegger here, but it is important to see that Marion understands his own work as a radicalization of their approaches. Where Husserl's work is understood as a phenomenological reduction of what gives itself to the horizon of objectness and Heidegger's as a further reduction of the given appearance to the horizon of being, Marion claims to clear the phenomenal field of every restriction except that of givenness itself. Whatever gives itself to appearance – whether or not it is an object or a being – is allowed to appear. This is not to say that objects and beings do not appear, but that not everything that is given to appear is an object or being. 'Objectness and beingness', Marion concludes, 'could thus be thought as mere variations, legitimate but limited,

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[2] See, for example, *Being Given*, 27–70, and the whole of Marion's *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998).

quite exactly as horizons, which are outlined by and against the background of givenness' (BG, 39/ED, 60). The reduction to the immanence of givenness is understood as the definitive phenomenological reduction.

   Thus, phenomenology is carried out as an inversion of metaphysics. What metaphysics takes to be illegitimate and inadequate (the appearance of the phenomenon itself), phenomenology takes as the whole of its subject matter. Where metaphysics aims beyond the immanence of what is given, phenomenology relentlessly leads thought back from transcendence to the immanence of what appears. 'What metaphysics rules out as an exception . . . phenomenology here takes for its norm' (BG, 227/ED, 316). This to say that phenomenology allows for the appearance of what had heretofore been invisible exceptions. 'If it were only a question of seeing already visible phenomena, we would have no need for phenomenology. By contrast, phenomenology earns its legitimacy by finally making visible phenomena that, without it, would remain inaccessible' (BG, 68/ED, 100). Phenomenology, by freeing neglected appearances from the obscurity assigned to them by their 'obviousness', makes possible the visibility of what, while always manifest, had gone invisible under the gaze of metaphysics. In this sense, phenomenology intends to steer a course between transcendence and banality by revealing how the appearance of the banal, insofar as it gives itself on the basis of itself, is anything but obvious. 'Between magic and scandal, another way opens – that givenness rationally articulates the concepts that say the phenomenon such as it manifests *itself*' (BG, 19/ED, 31).

3. Givenness

'What *shows itself*,' Marion writes, 'first *gives itself* – this is my one and only theme' (BG, 5/ED, 10). This coincidence of 'showing' and 'giving' is, for Marion, the fundamental phenomenological insight. Showing corresponds with giving because no phenomena can appear for us unless it first gives itself to us. The first-person quality of the phenomenon's 'itself' is attested by the fact that it is not constituted or produced or deduced or taken – but, instead, *given*. If the phenomenon does not give itself on its own

terms, then the reduction has failed to suspend the obfuscating conditions imposed by the natural attitude.

The coincidence of showing and giving leads Marion to claim that the phenomenologically essential element of any appearance is not the appearance itself but the trace of its givenness. The paradox is that the necessity of attending to the givenness of the given phenomenon does not obscure the appearance or render it second class; rather, givenness is the very thing that prevents any such demotion and demonstrates the independence of the appearance. Every appearance shows itself precisely to the extent that its givenness also appears. Givenness is the mark of phenomenality as such. No phenomenon phenomenalizes without it.

Nonetheless, givenness *per se* can never appear directly because it is manifest only to the extent that the given phenomenon does itself appear directly and in person. If givenness were to take centre stage, then its defining characteristic (its attestation of the phenomenon's direct appearance) would evaporate because it, rather than the given appearance, would be directly given. Necessarily, then, 'givenness can only appear indirectly, in the fold of the given' (BG, 39/ED, 60). Givenness does not name a 'thing' that appears. It is not something beyond or other than an appearance that shows up in or together with a phenomenon. Givenness names, instead, the 'act' of a phenomenon's self-giving. It designates a phenomenon's freedom from the conditions imposed by the natural attitude. Where givenness is obscured by these conditions, 'what is missing is the ascent into visibility itself, the entry of the unseen through the pictorial frame into sight, in short the appearing and its process in the raw' (BG, 49/ED, 73). Givenness is a name for the phenomenon's ascent into visibility and it shows up in the phenomenon as a raw, fresh, unfinished and unanticipated quality. 'On the surface of such a purely given phenomenon,' Marion writes, 'givenness itself would appear as a repercussion' that is felt in the phenomenon's act of giving itself to be felt (BG, 39/ED, 61). Givenness, though indirectly manifest, is experienced as a kind of phenomenal resonance produced by the reverberating weight of a phenomenon's having crashed – on its own terms – through invisibility and into the horizon of manifestation.

Taking the phenomenality of a painting as an example, Marion describes givenness as the 'upsurge' of a phenomenon: 'to

the ontic visibility of the painting is added as a super-visibility, ontically indescribable – its upsurge. This exceptional visibility adds nothing real to the ordinary visibility, but it imposes it as such' (BG, 47/ED, 71). As an upsurge of visibility, givenness is not something in addition to the immanence of the appearance but that which attests to the arrival *in immanence* of the phenomenon itself. Givenness is not the phenomenon or something other than the phenomenon but the halo of 'super-visibility' that marks the arrival of a phenomenon as itself. The key is to understand appearing as an event, 'an event whose happening stems not so much from a form or from real (therefore imitable) colors as from an upsurging, a coming-up, an arising – in short, an effect' (BG, 49/ED, 73).

This last may be Marion's most useful description of givenness: givenness is the repercussive 'effect' of a phenomenon's having given itself. When the reduction is properly carried through, then the essence of appearance is revealed as this 'effect' of phenomenality. Here, 'its phenomenality is reduced – beyond its beingness, its subsistence, and its utility – to this effect' (BG, 51/ED, 76). Or, as Marion concludes, the reduction to givenness makes clear that it is 'this invisible effect which alone makes visible' (BG, 52/ED, 77).

4. Givenness and Correlation

Phenomenology does not bear the burden of needing to rationally justify the correlation of human consciousness with the 'external' appearance of a phenomenon because, if a phenomenon is indeed given, then it requires no other justification for this appearance than the appearance itself. Givenness is self-authorizing. Phenomenology takes as primordially given the fundamental 'correlation' (or co-relation) of consciousness and given phenomena. Typically in phenomenology, this correlation is described as the correlation of 'intentionality' (i.e. the directedness of consciousness towards given phenomena) with 'intuition' (i.e. the sensible and/or categorical 'data' given to consciousness).

It is Marion's contention that, insofar as the natural attitude persists, the co-givenness of intentionality and intuition (and thus givenness itself) will be obscured. For both Husserl and

Heidegger, he argues, givenness remains obscure because they continue to privilege intentionality over intuition (either as 'transcendental ego' or as '*Dasein*'). To the degree that intentionality is privileged over intuition, the natural attitude remains intact: intentionality will fail to be correlated with the actuality of what gives itself in appearance because it will intend more than what appears, aiming at whatever is behind or responsible for the appearance. Rather than attending to what is given, it will intend what it expects on the basis of its own ideas about what ought to show up. Phenomena fail to give themselves as themselves to the extent that intentionality is privileged as the arbiter of what can and cannot appear. Conversely, when the co-givenness of intention and intuition is manifest, it becomes clear that

> givenness does not play only one particular role in the correlation; rather it invests all the terms because it is one with the correlation itself, whose name it takes and which it alone makes possible. The correlation between the two sides of the phenomenon does not use givenness – it deploys it, accomplishes it, is nothing other than givenness itself. (BG, 22/ED, 35)

Properly understood, givenness is that which animates and gives the correlation itself. In fact, we can say that givenness *is* the correlation of intention and intuition because phenomena are marked as given only if the correlation takes place.

If, however, one were to recognize a certain 'weighting' of givenness, it would need to be in favour of intuition rather than intentionality. Favouring the pole of intuition merely guarantees the co-givenness of the intentional correlation itself. 'To manifest itself as well as give itself,' Marion explains, 'it is first necessary that the "self" with which the phenomenon is deployed attest itself as such. It does this only by appropriating the gravitational center of phenomenality, therefore by assuming the origin of its own event' (BG, 248/ED, 343). Marion acknowledges this 'gravitational' imbalance by saying that when the phenomenon appears 'in person without a stuntman, double or any other representative standing in for it,' then 'this advance is named, from the point of view of the one who knows, intentionality; from the point of view of the thing-itself, it is called givenness' (BG, 69/ED, 101). Or, in an even more provocative formulation, Marion proposes that we might refer to givenness not simply as the upsurge of the phenomenon from the point of

view of the given intuition but as 'the intentionality of the thing itself' (BG, 7–8/ED, 14). Givenness, in this sense, will involve the experience of a 'counter-intentionality' that delimits the pre-sumptive intentionality of the natural attitude.

Further, it is important to recognize that while Marion miti-gates the natural privilege of intentionality by granting addi-tional weight to the pole of the given intuition, it is ultimately the case that he is equally interested in delimiting the privilege of intuition itself in light of the priority of givenness. Intuition, for the sake of givenness, is privileged over intentionality, but intuition must not be mistaken as synonymous with givenness. Givenness gives both intentionality and intuition and neither is able to span its immensity. 'It is not', Marion says, 'a question of privileging intuition as such, but of following in it (indeed eventually without and against it) givenness in its widest possible scope' (BG, 199/ED, 279). In particular, Marion means to open the possibility of bringing to light phenomena that may be given without any intuition. When intentionality is no longer privi-leged and metaphysics no longer polices what kind of phe-nomena may be given, then intuition does itself appear as a potentially artificial horizon. 'If the privilege of intuition stems from its character of givenness', then 'how are we to explain that givenness is often accomplished without intuition?' (BG, 245/ED, 340). Marion's answer is that 'when givenness no longer gives an object or a being, but rather a pure given, it is no longer carried out by intuition' (BG, 245/ED, 340). There are no phenomena without givenness, but givenness is not restricted to giving intuition.

This is a controversial claim and Marion's success in defending it will ultimately determine the success of his project. How could a phenomenon be given without any intuition and what mode of appearance would be proper to it? Marion argues that 'when intuition is considered strictly on the basis of givenness, whose rule it most often secures, it could indeed take on new shapes, at once paradoxical and more powerful' (BG, 199/ED, 279). In the end, the appearance of these new and paradoxical shapes depends on understanding givenness more rigorously as a 'gift'.

5. Givenness as an Immanent Gift

Marion's usefulness in relation to my larger project hinges on the extent to which it is true that 'the staging of the phenomenon is played out as the handing over of a gift' (BG, 27/ED, 42). Only if givenness is thinkable on the model of the gift will it provide access to an immanent conception of the actuality of grace. The basis for Marion's claim that givenness plays out as the giving of a gift is that givenness, in order to appear on its own terms and escape the ego-centric orbit assigned to it by the natural attitude, must, like a gift, be unconditionally given. Gifts give themselves without regard for our desire for them or our readiness to receive them and they are all the more gracious for our not having anticipated them or calculated their cost. Gifts manifest grace to the degree that they abandon themselves to us without terms, conditions, or debt. 'Givenness', Marion says, 'gives and gives itself, therefore confirms itself, not because it possesses itself, but because it abandons and abandons itself, does not hold itself back and does not hold back' (BG, 60/ED, 88–89).

As with a gift, givenness is manifest to the degree that it exceeds economy and rational calculation. Giving everything, withholding nothing, abandoning itself entirely to the immanence of its reception, it bears no metaphysical calling card that might identify its cause or justify its abandonment. If phenomenology is an inversion of the causal economy naturally proper to metaphysics, then it will succeed in reducing metaphysics only to the extent that it trumps economy with the gift. For this reason, Marion says, 'why not suppose that the gift – therefore exchange, the circulation of the given between giver and givee, return and response, loss and gain – can, once purified of its empirical blossoming, provide at least the outline of a noncausal, nonefficient, and finally nonmetaphysical model of givenness?' (BG, 74/ED, 108). From Marion's point of view, the very possibility of phenomenology depends on the validity of this supposition.

Marion's elaboration of givenness in terms of the gift is deeply indebted to Derrida's work on the problem of the gift.[3] However, in order to make use of Derrida's analysis, Marion must

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[3] See especially Derrida's *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

effect a re-orientation of Derrida's claim that the gift is impossible. For Derrida, the problem is this: a gift that is recognized as such will fail to be a genuine gift because its recognition will inevitably re-inscribe it in the cycle of debt and economy. Thus, the very appearance of a gift as a gift serves to disqualify it as a gift. Or, in classically Derridean language, the very thing that makes the gift possible (its appearance as a gift) simultaneously makes it impossible. The gift can only be given by not appearing as a given gift. Marion summarizes the Derridean problematic as follows:

> A twofold aporia closes this path: either the gift presents itself in presence, in which case it disappears from givenness in order to be inscribed in the economic system of exchange, or else the gift does not present itself, but then it no longer appears at all, thereby again closing off all phenomenality of givenness. If it appears in the present, the gift erases givenness by economy; if it does not appear, it closes any and all phenomenality to givenness.   (BG, 78/ED, 114)

As identified here, the two sides of this impasse articulate the two most important objections to Marion's development of a phenomenology of givenness. The first objection – i.e. 'if it appears in the present, the gift erases givenness by economy' – encapsulates the critique that Dominique Janicaud (among others) levels against Marion.[4] Givenness, were it to appear, would be something other than givenness. The second objection – i.e. 'if it does not appear, it closes any and all phenomenality to givenness' – encapsulates the critique that Derrida himself explicitly makes of Marion's position.[5] Though these two objections are two sides of the same coin, Derrida favours the second formulation because he intends to preserve the gift from the bastardization of phenomenality. As examined in the Introduction, Derrida (like Marion) valorizes the gift of grace but (unlike Marion) he believes that it is only possible to be faithful to this grace by treating its arrival as infinitely postponed and indefinitely deferred. The gift can, at best, have only the quality of an infinite potential harboured by every situation. The essentially

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[4] See especially Dominique Janicaud's 'The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology', in *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate,* trans. Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 50–66.

[5] See 'On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion', in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism,* ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 54–78.

conditioned finitude of an immanently phenomenal site necessarily precludes this gift from ever actually being given.

This line of critique is formidable and Marion recognizes it as such. Marion's argument, however, is that, if seen from another angle, the aporia that appears to ruin the possibility of givenness may, instead, show up as the key to its accomplishment. Recall for a moment the earlier example of the Greek attempt to square the circle. There, it is possible to treat the circle not as that which testifies to the impossibility of completing the infinite series of successively subtler polygons but instead as that which concretely represents 'the final solution of an unlimited process'.[6] Here, the notion of the 'gift' may analogously function as that which, though it cannot belong to the cycle of economic succession, may nonetheless be thinkable as an 'external point of reference' from which the immanent actuality of the inexhaustible series can be conceived as such.

Marion is more than willing to grant that givenness cannot be thought on the model of the gift within the framework of a finite economy, but he counters that such an attempt has already missed the opening provided by givenness. The critiques offered by Janicaud and Derrida establish 'the conditions under which what one names as a *gift* becomes impossible'; however, they in no way 'establish that what thus becomes impossible still deserves the name *gift*' (BG, 81/ED, 118). As an inversion of metaphysics, phenomenology cannot be thought from the economic perspective of the natural attitude; rather, if there is any hope of success, economy must instead be thought from the perspective of givenness itself.

> In thus disappearing as permanently present, the gift is not lost as given; it loses only its way of being – subsistence, exchange, economy – that contradicts its possibility of giving itself as such. In losing presence, the gift does not lose *itself*; it loses what is not suited to it: returning *to itself*. Or rather, it does indeed *lose* itself, but in the sense that it disentangles itself from itself, as the loss of self, but not as pure loss.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(BG, 79/ED, 115–16)

In this sense, Marion contends, 'the impasse becomes a breakthrough' (BG, 80/ED, 116). Where metaphysics perpetually contaminates the immanence of phenomena with deferred

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[6] Zellini, *A Brief History of Infinity*, 20.

transcendence and speculative chains of causality, only the rigorous reduction of this economizing back-story allows the immanence of phenomena to be manifest as such. This shift in perspective that takes the impasse as a breakthrough does not re-implicate phenomenology in transcendence but liberates immanence for the very first time. If we assume economy as the norm of phenomenality, then givenness can never appear. But if we bracket this assumption and allow what is given to appear as given – if we start from givenness itself – then phenomenology becomes possible. 'The gift can never again be envisaged within the system of exchange' because 'the gift appears when it begins to be lost, and it is lost so long as it continues to be recovered' (BG, 81, 83/ED, 119, 121). The difficulty now is to demonstrate that the thought of givenness as 'an external point of reference' beyond economy is, in fact, like the excess of Cantor's diagonal number, possible.

6. The Reduction of the Gift

In order to show that givenness can appear in excess of economy, as the very thing that actualizes the possibility of an economy, Marion engages in a phenomenological reduction of the gift itself. He demonstrates the independence of the gift from the field of economy by successively severing each of its transcendent anchors. As Marion explains,

> reducing the gift to givenness and givenness to itself therefore means: thinking the gift while abstracting from the threefold transcendence that affected it heretofore – by the successive bracketing of the transcendence of the givee, the transcendence of the giver, and finally the transcendence of the object exchanged. (BG, 84/ED, 122)

If givee, giver and gift-object are each bracketed by the reduction, then what is left to appear? We will take each in turn.

In the first case, the reduction of the givee does not ruin the phenomenon of the gift. On the contrary, this reduction enhances the brilliance of its appearance: 'not only does the bracketing of the givee not invalidate the givenness of the gift, but it characterizes it intrinsically' (BG, 85/ED, 124). Because the givenness of the gift appears only to the degree that it exceeds the reciprocity of economy and successive exchange,

bracketing the givee as one pole of the economic process liberates the gift from entanglement. For instance, a gift is all the more a gift if one does not know to whom one gives. By leaving a gift for whomever, for some anonymous recipient, the possibility that such a gift could come back to me is reduced. The gift no longer belongs to a speculative chain in which I foresee some transcendent return on my investment but is instead characterized by an abandonment to the immanent actuality of whatever it happens to give itself as, to whomever receives it. This same analysis applies, Marion proposes, to gifts given to our enemies or to ingrates. To give to one's enemy is to abandon a gift to someone from whom a positive return is unexpected. In this sense, to give to one's enemies may be the mark of grace itself. Or, in the case of the ingrate, 'a gift refused still remains a gift in the full sense of the word' (BG, 89/ED, 130). Indeed, because it is refused, it may be a gift all the more. Though 'the ingrate misses the gift because he does not want to admit the upsurge by which this gift itself decides on its own to lose itself without return and, consequently, to break self-identity', nonetheless, 'he proves that this gift is perfectly accomplished without the givee's consent' (BG, 91/ED, 131). In this way, 'the ingrate lays bare the pure immanence of the gift' by demonstrating that the reduction of the givee does not exclude its givenness (BG, 91/ED, 131).

Likewise, in the second case, the reduction of the giver does not ruin the possibility of the gift. For instance, a gift is all the more gracious if one does not know from whom it comes. If the giver is bracketed, then to whom would I return the favour? Whom would I repay with gratitude? The absent pole of the giver also blocks economy and reciprocity. Gifts can, of course, be received from anonymous givers. Or, a gift might be received from someone known, but dead. Or, gifts might be received from no one at all, as in the case of one's unconscious: something is given to us, but not from 'anyone', not from any conscious, constitutable other capable of receiving something in return. In these situations, 'if the giver is lacking, the givee is charged with the full burden of givenness' because 'it falls to him to constitute this gift as an official phenomenon' (BG, 100/ED, 144). This 'constitution' of the gift as a gift is paradoxically accomplished only 'by the admission that the arising of the gift does not belong to me' (BG, 100/ED, 144). In other words, it is

accomplished by acknowledging that I did not accomplish it. The gift comes from someone else, from somewhere else, and its givenness is more apparent for my not knowing who or where. This acknowledgement is tantamount to a suspension of the natural attitude because, as Marion continues, 'to suspend this principle is equivalent to nothing less than renouncing the self's equality with itself, therefore to renouncing the model *par excellence* of subjectivity' (BG, 101/ED, 145). By acknowledging that the arising of the gift does not belong to me, the privilege of intentionality is suspended.

The third reduction may be the most difficult to grasp. Is it possible to think the givenness of a gift if no gift-object is actually given? If nothing is transferred from giver to givee, then in what sense does givenness persist? Marion suggests that the less a gift is an object, the more gracious that gift becomes. Take for example the gift of a promise, an act of reconciliation, or an expression of love. In such instances no gift-object is transferred from one party to another, but a gift has been given nonetheless. This means that 'the indisputable gift is not identified with an object or with its transfer; it is accomplished solely on the occasion of its own happening, indeed without object and transfer' (BG, 103/ED, 148). This characterization of the gift pins down the precise difference between phenomenological and metaphysical treatments of the gift: in metaphysics, gifts are objects; in phenomenology, gifts are 'occasions' or 'happenings'. Here, the register of the gift shifts from thing to event. To the degree that gifts (even gifts that involve the transfer of objects) are primarily treated as gift-objects, they will fail to appear as gifts. Gifts are first and foremost the event of their being given. Posterior identifications of gift-objects, givees, and givers may follow with some justification from the event, but they are not themselves constitutive of that event. Another way to say this is that 'the gift does not consist in a transferred object, but in its *givability*' (BG, 107/ED, 154). Gifts rise to givenness in that they impose themselves as givable. Or, considered from the pole of the givee, gifts are characterized primarily by their acceptability or receivability. Givability and receivability are essential aspects of the gift that characterize it insofar as giver, givee, and gift-object do not themselves actively determine the gift as such. The gift does not passively await its completion as a potential held in reserve; it actively imposes itself as such. Gifts escape economy

exactly to the extent they are no longer passive pawns in a suc-
cessive game of quid pro quo but give themselves as that which
unconditionally imposes its own set of rules. The gift must be
understood as the active element around whose event of hap-
pening the actuality of each of the other elements unfolds. Giver
and givee recognize but are not responsible for the givability and
receivability of the gift. Rather, 'the insistent power of givenness
makes the gift decide *itself* as gift through the twofold consent of
the givee and the giver, less actors of the gift than acted given-
ness' (BG, 112/ED, 161).

The result is this: givenness does not refer to the impossible
vanishing point of an 'itself's' transcendence. On the contrary,
the 'itself' of the gift, the necessity of the gift's determining itself
as a gift, gives and establishes the very immanence of what is
given to us. Understanding given phenomena in terms of the gift
'accomplishes immanence, rather than threatening it' because
every other mode of understanding re-entangles the phenomena
in transcendent, economic assumptions that are not themselves
given to appear (BG, 117/ED, 166). 'The reconduction of the
gift to givenness goes hand-in-hand with the reduction of
transcendencies' (BG, 114/ED, 163). And 'the exclusion of
exchange and the reduction of transcendencies finally define
the gift as purely immanent' (BG, 115/ED, 164). Gifts are not
impossibly transcendent; they are the paradigm for immanence
itself and, thus, the paradigm for phenomenology. 'The analysis
of givenness', Marion concludes, has, then, 'already established
the following: first, that the transcendent relations of exchange
and commerce, such as they stage the gift and abolish it in
metaphysical economy, should fall beneath the blow of the
reduction', and, more importantly, 'that the gift thus reduced,
far from disappearing, finally appears as such' (BG, 122/ED,
172).

7. Phenomena as Gifts

The correlation of immanence and givenness via the model of
the gift opens a path to describing with some precision the
characteristics proper to phenomena when seen in light of the
reduction. If we follow the thread of Marion's contention that
'givenness does not colonize from the outside the givens of the

given', but instead 'is inscribed therein as its irreparable character, the articulation of its coming forward, inseparable from its immanence to itself', then what features will generally dominate our descriptions of such phenomena (BG, 64/ED, 95)?

In light of a reduction to givenness, phenomena are fundamentally characterized by the fact that they give themselves from themselves and as themselves. The further we have come in this engagement with Marion's notion of givenness, the more central the idea of the phenomenon's 'self' has become. Clearly, as Marion stresses, this self 'would in no way be equivalent to the *in itself* of the object or the thing' (BG, 159/ED, 225). It is only in the context of a metaphysical economy that the 'self' of what appears is unavoidably re-assigned to the dimension of what is noumenal or inaccessibly transcendent. In phenomenology, the self of the phenomenon marks the immanence of what is given: the phenomenon is simply allowed to appear as itself, on its own terms, as the appearance that it is. Emphasizing the self of the phenomenon is important because it de-emphasizes the role of the intentional self to which it appears. It emphasizes that what appears to us is *not* us, not reducible to us, not constructed or controlled by us. It appears to us, here, in the flesh, but we receive the impact of its immediate arrival as the reverberation of its having come from elsewhere. The key is to avoid reading this 'elsewhere' metaphysically: 'phenomenologically, this ''elsewhere'' and the *self* reinforce each other, while in the natural attitude they contradict one another' (BG, 123/ED, 174). The 'elsewhere' of the self does not indicate the priority of a hidden transcendence but the independence of the phenomenon *from* any such transcendence by virtue of its having given itself to us right here and now.

This independence of the given phenomenon leads Marion to describe its appearance as essentially anamorphic. To say that anamorphosis characterizes givenness is literally to say that givenness requires a 're-formation' of its recipient. Typically, images or paintings are designated as anamorphic when, in order for the image to appear, a particular line of sight must be adopted. The image only shows up when approached from the angle dictated to the viewer by the image's own set of conditions. In this sense, the viewer must 're-form' their perspective to match the perspective demanded by the image. We are not free to approach the image as we wish; the image is free to assign us a

perspective proper to itself. To accede to the anamorphic requirements of a given phenomenon, Marion says,

> not only must a gaze know how to become curious, available, and enacted, but above all it must know how to submit to the demands of the figure to be seen: find the unique point of view from which the second level form will appear, therefore make numerous and frequently fruitless attempts, above all admit that it would be necessary to alter one's position (either in space or in thought), change one's point of view – in short, renounce organizing visibility on the basis of free choice or the proper site of a disengaged spectator, in favor of letting visibility be dictated by the phenomenon itself, in itself.(BG, 124/ED, 176)

Anamorphosis, then, describes the freedom of the phenomenon to give itself as it wishes and it measures the extent to which this freedom turns the tables on the one to whom it appears.

To receive a phenomenon as it wishes to give itself is to yield control and suspend our own timetables and preconditions in order to be faithful to the conditions set by what gives itself. 'Rather than arrivals, we must therefore speak of the unpredictable landings of phenomenon, according to discontinuous rhythms, in fits and starts, unexpectedly, by surprise' (BG, 132/ ED, 186). The natural attitude has been reduced when phenomena no longer arrive according to our own schedules. The reduction allows phenomena to burst in on us any time of day or night and appear to us only on condition that we re-form our expectations to meet what they wish to give. Their arrival is not a matter of debate or an item for future consideration but something that is accomplished, in its unpredictability, as an actual *fait accompli* that we can never be fully prepared to receive or fully able to construct. Summarizing these characteristics, Marion says: 'the phenomenon, insofar as given, rises to the visible by itself, according to its anamorphosis'; it 'is individuated in its unpredictable landing'; it 'is imposed irrevocably by its *fait accompli*'; and it 'resists complete construction by arising as pure incident' (BG, 159/ED, 225).

All of this is to say that 'the *self* of the phenomenon is marked in its determination as event' and that it is marked as an event – an occurrence, a happening – by its evasion of causality (BG, 159/ED, 226). Phenomena are events in that they appear without submitting to the foreseeable horizons set for them by the

determinable causes that precede them. They appear without cause, or with insufficient cause, as a gift or grace. Marion suggests that

> phenomena as such, namely as given, not only do not satisfy this demand [i.e. the demand imposed by the metaphysical precondition of causality], but far from paying for their refusal with their unintelligibility, appear and let themselves be understood all the better as they slip from the sway of cause and the status of effect. The less they let themselves be inscribed in causality, the more they show themselves and render themselves intelligible as such. Such phenomena are named events.   (BG, 162/ED, 229)

We have already noted the way in which givenness, as the phenomenality of a given phenomenon, is manifest as 'an upsurging, a coming-up, an arising – in short, an effect', but if givenness is to be understood as an effect, then it must be thought as an effect that is not dominated and conditioned by any identifiable causes that precede it (BG, 49/ED, 73). Givenness, as an effect, must be thought as a gift: a pure effect or an effect given, at least initially, as a 'causeless' effect.

Where, classically, the economic relation between cause and effect is conceived as necessarily entropic, the effect of a phenomenological event instead exceeds rather than devolves from its cause. Here, it is no longer the case that every effect bears only as much (and often less) force and reality as the cause that preceded it. Rather, in light of the reduction, 'the effect contains always as much, often more, reality' than its putative cause (BG, 163/ED, 231). The priority of the gift contradicts both Descartes' entropic argument for the existence of God (i.e. if I am finite but have an idea of infinity, then the idea of infinity can only have come from something that is itself actually infinite) and every classical 'argument from design' for the existence of God (i.e. the effect of a design can only result from an antecedent and superior cause or Designer). The end result of such causal, metaphysical arguments is the exclusion of grace. The legitimacy of an event is not determined by the reasons or causes that can be named by way of explanation or justification. Events are legitimated as events by the fact that, whatever the status of their 'rationality', they *happened*, they took place, and, in so doing, took their place for themselves. '*The event does not have an adequate cause* and cannot have one. Only in this way can it

advance on the wings of a dove: unforeseen, unexpected, unheard of, and unseen' (BG, 167/ED, 235).

The privilege assigned by the natural attitude to the cause is, in givenness, re-assigned to the effect. In the relation of cause and effect, 'the effect shows a massive privilege over the cause' because every phenomenon's 'phenomenality begins with the effect' (BG, 164/ED, 231). Only the effect 'arrives' and it 'alone initiates a new anamorphosis' (BG, 164/ED, 232). The result of this inversion is that, rather than seeing the effect as an effect of the cause, the cause must itself be thought as an effect of the effect. Arriving unconditionally, unpredictably, and indisputably, the event gives itself first and foremost as a phenomenal effect. Any conceptual work that follows from this arrival, any thought that attempts to assign the event a place in a causal chain, is itself an effect of our having been affected by the event. 'The cause remains an effect of meaning', Marion says, 'assigned to the effect by the will to know, or rather, imposed on the event to compensate for its exorbitant privilege' (BG, 166/ED, 234). Only the event as a *fait accompli* 'prompts the inquiry into causes and crystallizes the whole phenomenal field on its basis' (BG, 168/ED, 237). Phenomenologically, causes are only given weakly and retroactively: they appear only in light of the event that brings them to manifestation as causes. In phenomenology, the economy of causality may remain intelligible, but it will be thinkable only secondarily and in relation to the priority of the gift. Economy may come to light in terms of the gift, but the gift cannot come to light in terms of economy.

As a consequence of the priority of the event, of the excess of its effect over any retroactively assignable causes, givenness induces a new relation to time and incites new temporal sequences. Rather than being characterized by a smooth, successive synthesis, time is given as an interruption, in fits and starts, by the necessities of anamorphic discontinuity.

A new temporal sequence – at the moment of the distribution (givenness), time begins again, or rather, in ordinary time, a limit is imposed that marks a new time, that of the ordeal. This time within time, like the social neutralization that makes it possible, designates the givens. But these givens would never arise as such without the arising – givenness. Givenness is not added as an ambiguous background; it simply marks the happening that offers it to itself. (BG, 64/ED, 93)

Givenness gives time and it gives time again and again. Refusing to submit to preconditions, imposing its conditions on us as a *fait accompli*, it gives time as the new time of an 'ordeal' that requires our transformation and reformation. Givenness, as an anamorphic event, contravenes the banality of our expectations and graces us with the novelty of a new temporal sequence not because it escapes into transcendence but precisely because it is abandoned in immanence.

8. Saturated Phenomena

Having redefined the phenomenological reduction in terms of givenness, having proposed the coincidence of immanence and givenness in the figure of the gift, and having sketched the general, anti-metaphysical features of givenness that follow from such a reduction to immanence, Marion is now in a position to propose a basic taxonomy of phenomena. He delineates three basic categories: (1) phenomena that are poor in intuition (e.g. mathematics), (2) common law phenomena (e.g. objects, beings), and (3) saturated phenomena. Of the three, Marion is primarily concerned with saturated phenomena. His argument is that saturated phenomena, rather than being exceptions or aberrations, are, instead, a paradigm for the givenness of every kind of phenomena, whether saturated, common, or poor. They deserve this privilege because in a saturated phenomenon the givenness that necessarily characterizes every appearance finds its highest manifestation. 'Not all phenomena get classified as saturated phenomena, but all saturated phenomena accomplish the one and only paradigm of phenomenality' (BG, 227/ED, 316). Traditional phenomenological approaches fail to do justice to the givenness of all phenomena because they generally take as their paradigm poor or common phenomena in which givenness tends to be obscured by the persistence of the natural attitude. Offering detailed descriptions of saturated phenomena is important, then, both in its own right and in relation to the general task of phenomenology.

In what sense can a phenomenon be spoken of as saturated? As a first approach, we can say that a phenomenon is saturated when the given intuition overwhelms our capacity for reception. Our capacity to receive phenomena is delimited by the scope of

our intentionality, by the radius of our intentional horizons. We are prepared to receive whatever we are capable of intending in advance, even if but generally. In poor and common law phenomena, that which is given can be accommodated by the intentionality that rises to meet, assess and categorize them. In such phenomena, intuition flows meekly within the banks of intentionality. In a saturated phenomenon, however, an excess of unforeseeable intuition floods our intentional horizons, fills them, saturates them, and overflows their limits. More is given than can be received. Adopting Kantian language, Marion says that, for a saturated phenomenon, 'it is no longer a question of the nonadequation of (lacking) intuition leaving a (given) concept empty. It is inversely a question of a deficiency of the (lacking) concept, which leaves the (superabundantly given) intuition blind' (BG, 198/ED, 227–278).

The central difficulty that Marion encounters in describing saturated phenomena turns on the issue of whether an excess of intuition over intentionality can be meaningfully described as a phenomenon. If appearance depends on the adequate correlation of intention and intuition, then what happens when this correlation is apparently swept aside by the force of an excessive intuition? Wouldn't the result simply be a failure of phenomenality or an imposition of 'blindness'? Marion delicately replies: yes and no.

Marion proposes a counter-question. Might we not 'imagine phenomena such that they would invert limit (by exceeding the horizon, instead of being inscribed within it) and condition (by reconducting the I to itself, instead of being reduced to it)?' (BG, 189/ED, 264). Clearly, a limit that marks the potential correlation of intention and intuition must remain in play. Saturated phenomena do not dispense with the need for the limit of an intentional horizon. However, by virtue of the excess, they do accomplish a kind of 'inversion' of this limit.

> Limits of course remain on principle indestructible and no doubt indispensable. It does not follow, however, that what contradicts them cannot still be deployed paradoxically as a phenomenon. Quite to the contrary, certain phenomena could appear only by playing at the limits of phenomenality – indeed by making sport of them.(BG, 189/ED, 264)

Saturated phenomena do appear in relation to the horizon, but

rather than appearing as what bows to the conditions set by the limits of intentionality, they appear as a contradiction or con-testation of those horizons. Or, as indicated earlier, we might describe this contestation of the intentional horizon as the experience of a 'counter-intentionality' that demonstrates our insufficiency. This counter-intentionality questions the horizon in order to make room for what the phenomenon intends to give over and beyond what we intended to receive. In this sense, saturated phenomena literally show up as a 'para-dox' or coun-ter-appearance. As Marion puts it, 'the visibility of the appear-ance thus arises against the flow of the intention – whence the paradox, the counter-appearance, the visibility running counter to the aim' (BG, 225/ED, 315).

We might also take up this same issue in terms of the finite character of our intentional horizons. Essentially, what Marion is proposing with his notion of a saturated phenomenon is a phenomenon that gives itself unconditionally and in the flesh as actually infinite. But what sense does it make to say that an infinite intuition could be correlated with a finite horizon? Isn't it the case, 'in order that every phenomenon might be inscribed within a horizon (find its condition and possibility therein), [that] this horizon must be delimited (such is its definition), and therefore the phenomenon must remain finite' (BG, 196/ED, 276)? Again, Marion's response is both yes and no. It is true that the finitude of our horizons precludes the possibility of ade-quately receiving the infinity of a saturated phenomenon. However, this does not mean that the infinity was not actually given – it simply means that it was not wholly received. The saturation and endless contestation of the finite horizon simul-taneously testify both to the finitude of the intention and the infinity of the intuition. This testimony is then registered as the intervention of a paradox. Thus, Marion claims, 'finitude does not pose an obstacle to intuitive excess; it does justice to it according to the paradox' (BG, 313/ED, 430).

9. Saturated Phenomena as Kantian Inversions

The merit of Marion's work is that it does not simply stop with a quasi-mystical invocation of 'paradox'. The notion of a saturated phenomenon will be of little use if it is not possible to offer

rigorous and detailed descriptions of how such paradoxical phenomena give themselves to appearance. Marion proposes such descriptions through an engagement with Kant. In order to describe more concretely the way that saturated phenomena give themselves as a contestation of our intentional horizons, Marion shows how an excess of givenness can invert the Kantian categories of quantity, quality, relation and modality.

First, Marion contends that saturated phenomena can be 'invisible' according to quantity. These phenomena cannot be aimed at as appraisable objects. Our gaze cannot predict their appearance or take their measure. This lack of foreseeable measure, however, does not amount to a lack of quantity. Rather, 'its giving intuition ensures it a quantity, but such that it cannot be foreseen' (BG, 199/ED, 280). The result is that such phenomena should 'be called incommensurable, not measurable (immense), unmeasured' (BG, 200/ED, 281). This lack of measure may manifest itself in terms of a sheer 'enormity', but 'it is most often marked by the simple impossibility of our applying a successive synthesis to it, permitting an aggregate to be foreseen on the basis of the finite sum of its finite parts' (BG, 200/ED, 281). This failure to apply a successive synthesis successfully to the given intuition is the primary mark of its excessive quantity: we simply cannot master with sufficient speed the bulk of what is given. Instead, Marion suggests,

> as the saturated phenomenon passes beyond all summation of parts – which often cannot be enumerated anyway – the successive synthesis must be abandoned in favor of what I will call an instantaneous synthesis whose representation precedes and surpasses that of the eventual components, instead of resulting from it according to foresight. (BG, 200/ED, 281)

Here, an intentionally organized successive synthesis is preempted by an instantaneously given synthesis. This instantaneous synthesis is not a synthesis worked out on intentionality's own terms and applied as the result of an adequate foresight. An instantaneous synthesis does not count and enumerate the parts and components in order to measure their sum. Instead, an instantaneous synthesis abruptly drops the task of successive enumeration in order produce a 'representation' that 'precedes and surpasses that of the eventual components'. A saturated phenomenon is not given at an even, measurable pace, but all at

once, instantaneously, from a point of view that 'surpasses' its components. It is the gift of an infinity that could never be given or received one element at a time. Such a saturated phenomenon cannot be counted or measured, but this does not rule out the intelligibility of its actually being given.

In the second case, saturated phenomena are unbearable according to quality. Here, the intensity of the intuition is such that the intentional gaze cannot bear the burden of what is given. The result of this inability is bedazzlement: 'when the gaze cannot bear what it sees, it suffers bedazzlement' (BG, 203/ED, 285). The key point, again, is that bedazzlement is not a failure of phenomenality but an excess of success. Though the appearance may be paradoxical, it remains an appearance. 'Not bearing is not simply equivalent to not seeing: one must first perceive, if not clearly see, in order to undergo what one cannot bear' (BG, 203/ED, 285). Where the extent of the intuition is immeasurable and its intensity is unbearable, the saturated phenomenon does not give itself as something that falls under our gaze but as something that we undergo. We discover it as unbearable in being required to bear it. 'Even if it cannot be defined universally, for each gaze and in each case, there is always a maximum, a threshold of tolerance beyond which what is seen is no longer constituted as an object within a finite horizon' (BG, 206/ED, 288). Beyond this threshold, finite objects cease to be constituted and infinite phenomena paradoxically appear.

Further, a saturated phenomenon may be absolute according to relation. To say that it is absolute according to relation is to say that 'it evades any analogy of experience' and thus negates the possibility of comparison (BG, 206/ED, 289). Every attempt to bring this intuition into relation with other phenomena through contrast or comparison is repelled by its absolute singularity. This does not mean that the saturated phenomenon fails to be meaningful. On the contrary, it means that it is all the more significant. It may be that such phenomena 'happen without being inscribed, at least at first, in the relational network that assures experience in its unity, and that they matter precisely because one could not assign them any substratum, any cause, or any commerce' (BG, 207/ED, 290). As an unassimilated singularity, our attention – despite the magnitude and intensity of what is given – is drawn to the excess and we are

moved to bear the unbearable weight of what we cannot account for or relate to.

Finally, according to modality, the saturated phenomenon is irregardable. For Kant, 'the categories of modality' are 'the operators of the fundamental epistemological relation to the I' (BG, 212/ED, 296–7). To say that a saturated phenomenon is irregardable is to say that 'a phenomenon did *not* ''agree with'' or ''correspond to'' the power of the knowing I' (BG, 213/ED, 298). This general failure of correspondence indicates the operation of a counter-intentionality that contests the power of the 'I' to know and that arrives as a 'counter-experience' that 'is not equivalent to non-experience' (BG, 215/ED, 300). What does Marion mean by a counter-experience? He means the instantaneous synthesis of all of the horizons of the 'I' as inadequate in relation to a point of reference that exceeds those same horizons. The measure of the 'I' is instantly taken by the unbearable phenomenon and a report of this measurement is returned back to the 'I' itself. Here, Marion says, 'the eye does not see an exterior spectacle so much as it sees the reified traces of its own powerlessness to constitute whatever it might be into an object' (BG, 216/ED, 301). However, Marion continues, in addition to this reflexive experience of powerlessness, a phenomenon is also given. Despite the inadequacy of the 'I', 'the intuition of the phenomenon is nevertheless seen, but as blurred by the too narrow aperture, the too short lens, the too cramped frame, that receives it – or rather that cannot receive it as such' (BG, 215/ED, 301).

Corresponding to these four categories, Marion identifies four types of saturated phenomena that attest to each of the inversions: the event, the idol, the flesh and the icon. The invisibility of a saturated phenomenon according to quantity 'is attested first in the figure of the historical phenomenon, or the event carried to its apex' (BG, 228/ED, 318). The historical event, as an event, takes us by surprise and cannot be accounted for on the basis of the temporal sequences that preceded it. It cannot be successively synthesized with what has come before or with our expectations about what should have followed. Rather, it instantaneously inaugurates a new temporality in relation to which history will need to be reread and re-examined. Second, the idol attests to the intense quality of the saturated phenomena as unbearable and bedazzling. 'Its splendor stops

intentionality for the first time; and this first visible fills it, stops it, and even blocks it' (BG, 229/ED, 320). Third, saturated phenomena appear in the givenness of the flesh as absolute and without relation. 'Flesh is defined as the identity of what touches with the medium where this touching takes place' (BG, 231/ED, 321). This identity is manifest in 'the immediacy of [an] auto-affection' that 'blocks the space where the ecstasy of an intentionality would become possible' (BG, 231/ED, 322). Without this ecstasy, the immediacy of the flesh is given as singularly absolute and without relation apart from its self-relation. Fourth, the icon attests to the saturated phenomenon as irregardable according to modality. The icon confounds the sufficiency of the 'I' with a counter-intentionality that calls the whole of 'I' into question. By so doing, the icon 'gathers together the particular characteristics of the three preceding types of saturated phenomena' (BG, 233/ED, 324). Marion summarizes the confluence of these characteristics in the following way:

> Like the historical event, it demands a summation of horizons and narrations, since the Other cannot be constituted objectively and since it happens without assignable end; the icon therefore opens a teleology. Like the idol, it begs to be seen and reseen, though in the mode of unconditioned endurance; like it, the icon therefore exercises (but in a more radical mode) an individuation over the gaze that confronts it. Like the flesh finally, it accomplishes this individuation by affecting the I so originally that it loses its function as transcendental pole; and the originality of this affection brings it close, even tangentially, to auto-affection.   (BG, 233/ED, 324–325)

However, despite its pre-eminence among the four types of saturated phenomena, Marion will risk the identification of an additional saturated phenomenon, a supplemental plus-one, that exceeds even the gathered saturation of the icon. Beyond event, idol, flesh and icon, Marion names the possibility of a super-saturating phenomenon: revelation.

10. Revelation and Super-Saturation

Marion's elaboration of 'revelation' as not only a saturated phenomenon but also as the paradigm for all saturated phenomena (and, thus, as *the* paradigm for givenness in general) is

easily the most controversial element of his work. His critics fear that the whole analysis to this point has simply been a cover for re-introducing theological themes in a phenomenologically legitimating guise. As a result, they argue that the whole project is ill-founded. What's more, Marion's supporters generally fear the same and often view the introduction of 'revelation' as a mis-step that potentially ruins all of the preceding work. Both critics and supporters are right to recognize this moment as key: here, with his notion of revelation, Marion presses givenness as far as it can go and, in so pressing, he clarifies the logic necessary for the thought of an immanent grace and locates (perhaps despite himself) the point at which this logic potentially outstrips the capacities of a phenomenological methodology. However, before approaching these larger issues, it is necessary to reflect first on what Marion's notion of revelation entails.

Leaving aside the explicitly Christian dimensions of Marion's articulation of revelation as a saturated phenomenon, the formal elements of the phenomenological description must take centre stage. Marion's basic claim is that the phenomenon of revelation 'saturates phenomenality to the second degree, by saturation of saturation' (BG, 235/ED, 327). Revelation occurs as a kind of super-saturation in which our intentional horizons are induced to hold more than they are capable of holding.

In an effort to delineate revelation from the other kinds of saturated phenomena, Marion proposes three figures of satura-tion. In the first figure of saturation,

> intuition, by dint of pressure, attains the common limits of concept and horizon; it does not cross them, however, and running up against them, it reverberates, returns toward the finite field, blurs it, and renders it in the end invisible by excess.(BG, 209–210/ED, 293)

In this case, saturation occurs as the reverberation of an ade-quation: the measure of the horizon is taken by the intuition that fills it without remainder. However, in the second figure of saturation,

> having attained the limits of its concept of signification as far as *adaequatio,* then having fulfilled all its horizon and the halo of the not yet known, the phenomenon saturated with intuition can – in contrast with the preceding case – pass beyond all horizonal deli-mitation. This situation does not imply doing away with the horizon

altogether, but articulating several together in order to welcome one and the same saturated phenomenon.   (BG, 210/ED, 293–4)

The primary difference between the first and second figures is that, in the second figure, the excess of givenness is such that it overflows the adequation of a given concept or horizon and ends up saturating multiple horizons of intentionality. The phenomenon passes 'beyond' the limit of the horizon not into a mystically horizonless no-man's land but into neighbouring horizons. Such a phenomenon requires 'articulating several [horizons] together in order to welcome one and the same saturated phenomenon'. By conjoining multiple horizons, room is made for some semblance of adequation.

The third figure of saturation, 'the rare but inevitable' figure proper to revelation, is a saturation of saturation that raises the second figure to the power of the first or 'redoubles the first two cases by lumping them together' (BG, 211/ED, 295). In this case,

> if the hermeneutic of an infinite plurality of horizons is by chance not enough to decline an essentially and absolutely saturated phenomenon, it could be that each perspective, already saturated in a single horizon (bedazzlement), is blurred once again by spilling over the others – in short, that the hermeneutic adds the bedazzlements in each horizon, instead of combining them.   (BG, 211/ED, 295)

Revelation is marked out as a super-saturation because, rather than saturating a single horizon or even multiple horizons, it saturates every available horizon. There is here no possibility of successively 'combining' horizons in order to make extra room. There is only the instantaneous 'addition' of one bedazzlement to the next, each on top of the other. Without warning, the whole of intentionality is flooded without remainder.

Another way to describe the phenomenon of revelation is to say that, if the scope of an intentional horizon is defined by the possible phenomena that it can foresee, then a saturated phenomenon, and revelation in particular, will take place as the imposition of an impossibility. The phenomenon of revelation, Marion says, could be defined 'as the possibility of impossibility – on condition of no longer understanding impossibility confiscating possibility (being towards death), but possibility assimilating impossibility (incident, *fait accompli*)' (BG, 236/ED, 328).

In the case of revelation, impossibility must be understood as an event, as an incident that has happened despite what was projected as possible. It is the givenness of an impossible intuition to the intentional horizon of possibilities. The key is that such a revelatory event must be understood as passing 'directly from impossibility (in the concept, according to essence) to the *fait accompli* (holding the place of existence and the effect) without passing through phenomenological possibility'(BG, 173/ED, 243). This is to say that, rather than being mediated by the horizon's work of successive, synthetic assimilation, the impossibly given intuition passes directly, immediately, and instantaneously to the status of *fait accompli.*

Revelation, as super-saturating phenomenon, is the pitch of instantaneous synthesis. A revelation actualizes the infinity of the given intuition by instantaneously synthesizing not just a single horizon or the conjunction of multiple horizons but the whole of intentionality. The result is that rather than being synthesized by intentionality, revelation synthesizes intentionality itself. Revelation produces and reproduces, gives and returns to give again, intentionality to itself.

Now, having pressed givenness to the limit of impossibility, Marion must confess – in a gesture that indicates both the point at which a phenomenological approach is spent and potentially the point at which it may be surpassed – that this supreme excess of givenness is an excess that renders the difference between a surplus of intuition and an utter lack of intuition undecidable. Why? The problem is that, 'if saturation gives too much intuition, it therefore gives even less objectivity' (BG, 244/ED, 338). The more intuition that is given, the more intentionality fails to constitute what is given on the scale of a manageable object. Amidst the flood of givenness, the lack of identifiable and categorizable phenomena can appear simply as a *lack* of intuition. Saturation can appear 'as a lack of intuition' because it 'can be perfectly translated by the (at least provisional) impossibility of seeing some *thing*' (BG, 243/ED, 338). Ironically, then, a super-saturating phenomenon teeters on the edge of phenomenality and appears undecidably as both an excess and a lack of intuition. The difference between pure intuition and pure formality is rendered fragile and porous. Overwhelmed, we may have been given everything or nothing.

For the sake of phenomenology, Marion decides in favour of

intuition and excess. On the other hand, Derrida, as we have seen, takes the undecidability of the question as sufficient indication in its own right that what is at stake in terms of a super-saturated phenomenon escapes the field of phenomenology itself. For Derrida, the gift of grace can only be immanently conceived as an infinitely deferred potential and never as a phenomenally given actuality. Badiou, as we will see, will likewise decide against Marion and in favour of the pure formality of the void, but he will do so, contra Derrida, for the sake of thinking the event of grace as actual rather than potential.

Marion gives an additional indication of this undecidability in an opening riposte against those who might object 'on principle' to his elaboration of anything like a phenomenon of revelation. Outlining the conditions under which he views such an elaboration as legitimate, Marion notes that, '*here*, I am not broaching revelation in its theological pretension to the truth, something faith alone can dare to do. I am outlining it as a possibility' (BG, 5/ED, 10). As a possibility,

> the hypothesis that there was historically no such revelation would change nothing in the phenomenological task of offering an account of the fact, itself incontestable, that it has been thinkable, discussable, and even describable. This description therefore does not make an exception to the principle of the reduction to immanence. Here it is perhaps a case of something like the phenomena that Husserl thought could be described only by imaginative variations – imaginary or not, they appear, and their mere possibility merits analysis. (BG, 5/ED, 10)

In this passage, Marion's caveat is telling.[7] The phenomenon of revelation does not make an exception to the principle of immanence, Marion contends, because 'it is perhaps a case of something like the phenomena that Husserl thought could be described by imaginative variations'. Clearly, Marion takes 'revelatory' phenomena seriously. However, his willingness to suggest that they may be treated formally as imaginative variations is, in the end, conditioned by more than an attempt to be delicate and polite in the company of non-believers. Rather, this

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[7] I am indebted to John D. Caputo's substantial analysis of this caveat in a paper entitled 'Being Given: Marion, Derrida and the New Phenomenology' (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 12–14, 2006).

concession that revelation may be treated as an 'imaginative variation' circles back to the problem described above: there is something about the phenomena themselves, something necessarily destabilizing and undecidable, that renders this concession not only polite but conceptually necessary. The phenomena themselves, as they give themselves in super-saturation, are undecidable as the reception of an absolute surplus or utter lack of intuition. They may point to an excess of intuition or they may simply indicate a barren formality.

11. The Subject as Witness

Before considering the parallels between Marion's work and my reading of Paul, the final task is to trace the logic of Marion's treatment of subjectivity in light of the priority of givenness. If givenness has priority and intuition is excessive, then what becomes of the 'I' or the 'subject'?

Marion is dissatisfied with traditional treatments of subjectivity because of their 'continually confirmed powerlessness to do justice to the most patent characteristics of [their] own phenomenon' (BG, 252/ED, 348). Subjectivity must be reconceived simply because previous attempts have failed to reach the subject as it is actually given. This failure, though, is no surprise: nothing comes more naturally to the subject than an over-valuation of its own importance. Setting oneself centre-stage is the essence of the natural attitude. A proper phenomenological description of subjectivity can only be accomplished by suspending transcendence (even the transcendence of the subject) and by reducing the phenomenon to its givenness.

Many of the essential elements of this description have already been indicated above. In light of givenness – and especially in light of the paradigmatic case of a saturated phenomenon – subjectivity no longer appears as that which actively and transcendentally constitutes phenomena according to the categories, concepts, and horizons that it itself imposes. On the contrary, subjectivity is given to itself only by the phenomena that it receives. The subject is 'subject' to givenness and appears as servant or recipient rather than as lord or master.

Of course, no phenomenon has been given if it has not been given to 'me', but 'this type of phenomenon comes upon itself

(appears) only to the degree that ... it no longer arrives to me merely as spectator (not even a transcendental spectator), but rather employs me as an associated actor' (BG, 127/ED, 180). Givenness presses subjectivity into service as an associate. Grammatically, acceptance of this vocation means that subjectivity appears primarily in the accusative case as an associated 'me' rather than in the nominative case as an autonomous 'I'. This grammatical shift indicates that the subject, in service of givenness, functions as a 'witness' of what is given. As a 'constituted witness, the subject is still the worker of truth, but he cannot claim to be its producer' (BG, 216–217/ED, 302). In this sense, the subject, even inflected as accusative, continues to play a constituting role in the phenomenalization of what is given – so long as 'constituting does not equal constructing or synthesizing, but rather giving-a-meaning, or more exactly, recognizing the meaning that the phenomenon itself gives from itself and to itself' (BG, 9/ED, 16).

Marion compares the role of the subject in phenomenality to that of a screen upon which appearances project themselves. Or, he proposes, the subject, like the tungsten wire in a light bulb, is what offers the minimal resistance necessary in order for the unseen energy of what is given to be phenomenalized in a burst of heat and light. This second image is particularly useful because it illustrates the dependence of the subject on the light of givenness both for the appearance of what is given and for the appearance of itself. The light from the wire makes both the phenomenon and the wire visible. A subject can be given to itself only by receiving a phenomenon that is other than itself. As Marion says:

> The receiver does not precede what it forms by means of its prism – it results from it. The filter is deployed first as a screen. Before the not yet phenomenalized given gives itself, no filter awaits it. Only the impact of what gives itself brings about the arising, with one and the same shock, of the flash with which its first visibility bursts and the very screen on which it crashes. (BG, 265/ED, 365)

The subject, as witness, may be a co-worker in the business of phenomenalization, but it remains a co-worker that is given to itself only by receiving the givenness of what is given to it.

We might describe this same dependence of the subject on givenness in terms of the 'call'. In the case of a saturated

phenomenon, Marion says, the impact of what is given 'will be radicalized into a *call*, and the receiver into *the gifted*' (BG, 266/ ED, 366). The subject arises into phenomenality as a gift because the saturated phenomenon calls it out as such. Here, the primacy of the 'call' that summons the subject to itself as a site for what is given recalls the dimension of counter-intentionality that is constitutive of every saturated phenomenon. The call is a manifestation of the counter-intentionality that contests the adequacy of our horizons. In overwhelming these horizons with its immeasurable excess, the saturated phenomenon takes their measure and returns this measure to the subject as the gift of itself. Whatever else the call 'says', it calls the subject to itself as 'gifted', as given to itself by a givenness that exceeds it.

Strictly speaking, this call, as a manifestation of givenness, is never directly given. It appears only indirectly in the 'fold' of what is given or in the 'repercussive' effect of its impact. Only the response of the called-subject 'converts what gives itself into what shows itself' (BG, 305/ED, 420). Or, again: 'the call gives itself phenomenologically only by first showing itself in a response. The response that gives itself after the call nevertheless is the first to show it' (BG, 285/ED, 393). However, despite the necessity of a 'response', the priority of the call over its reception must be maintained. It may be true that 'the responsal sees nothing before naming the call', but, 'properly speaking, it does not know what is says beyond saying it, as it sees nothing before giving itself over to it' (BG, 304/ED, 419). The subject gives itself over to the call by 'naming' it. In venturing a name, the subject may not 'know what it says beyond saying it', but this 'not knowing' allows it to be all the more faithful to the givenness of what appears. In its ignorance, the subject, rather than offering its own judgement on what appears, must simply relay the raw givenness of the phenomenon.

Thus, as with the phenomenological reversal of cause and effect – a reversal in which the cause must itself be understood as secondary to the effect of givenness – it is also necessary, in naming, to reverse the relation of cognition and recognition. In order for any cognition to occur, the subject must first phenomenalize what is given to it by recognizing and naming its appearance. Recognition enables cognition. The subject names what is given without knowing its name or the meaning of that name beyond having given voice to it. Voicing a name, the

subject allows what gives itself to show itself even if, at least at first, a grasp of this name exceeds it. If the name is first mediated and synthesized by the subject's own cognitive powers and intentional horizons, then givenness is obscured. Givenness recedes in the face of the successive syntheses of our cognitive powers. Such syntheses may follow from what is given (as the identification of a cause may follow from the effect of givenness), but they cannot be phenomenologically primary without re-introducing transcendence. Before cognition, an instantaneous synthesis must occur in which the phenomenon is given and, simultaneously, the subject is given to itself as what may engage in cognition. In this sense, because the initial act of naming or recognition cannot be phenomenologically conditioned by the mediation of cognition, the name amounts to an instantaneous gift that short-circuits intentionality with counter-intentionality, thereby jump-starting intentionality itself. In this sense, 'those who take this call upon themselves (therefore the gifteds) name it strictly to the extent that they are named by it' (BG, 298/ED, 411).

The call itself, however, as what calls me to myself and to the task of naming what is given, is anonymous. Because the call contests my intentional horizons only to the extent that it is a surprise, it necessarily catches me without a name for the call itself. It calls me because it is anonymous (I have no name pre-pared for it) and it contests me to the degree that this anonymity persists. 'To find *myself* summoned would lack all rigor if surprise did not deprive *me*, at least for awhile and sometimes definitively, of knowing, in the instant of the summons, by what and by whom the call is exercised' (BG, 299/ED, 413). Because the call calls me only by surprising me, the gap between my instantaneous experience of surprise and the return of some semblance of self-possession can never be definitively overcome. The delay attests to givenness itself. Givenness is manifest in the effect of this temporal fold, in this gap or space of delay that testifies to the inadequacy of my horizons.

The subject 'can never, even by proliferating indefinitely, do justice to the anonymity of the call' and it 'will always be sus-pected of having poorly or partially identified the call' (BG, 303/ED, 417). No finite response, even if indefinitely unspooled, can be adequate to the infinity of what was actually and instanta-neously given. Even an indefinite succession of names cannot

compensate for the excess of givenness. There is, then, as Derrida remarks, an essential delay in the subject's response to the surprise of the call, but this does not, from Marion's perspective, indicate any deferral of the call's actual givenness. In fact, the longer the delay, the more fully confirmed the immanent actuality of the excess of givenness becomes.

12. Marion Reading Paul

In *God Without Being*, Marion presents an argument that, though expressly theological, runs parallel to the phenomenological analysis of givenness that he articulates in *Being Given*. Strikingly, the argument he offers in *God Without Being* hinges on a close reading of several Pauline passages. By tracing the formal parallels between his reading of Paul and his description of givenness, it will be possible to make explicit many of the already obvious points of contact between my reading of Paul and Marion's own project.

Broadly, *God Without Being* and *Being Given* mirror one another in the following way: if in *Being Given* the aim is to establish the coincidence of givenness and immanence in the contestation of a subject's horizons, then in *God Without Being* Marion's aim is to establish the impropriety of declaring that God, in order to give himself, must submit to our horizons and, in particular, to the horizon of being. God and givenness formally intersect with one another in novelty. God is not givenness and givenness is not God but, insofar as God gives himself to us in an act of grace, it is no surprise that the analyses converge in their descriptions of how these novelties appear as such.

Of all that might be said about *God Without Being*, I will limit myself to an examination of the text's key moment. Having elaborated the theological difference between an idol and an icon and having argued that Heidegger's work constrains God within the idolatrous limits of being, Marion must show that it is possible to think God's gift of himself as crossing – but not submitting to – being. At precisely this point, Marion turns to an analysis of Paul that begins with Romans 4.17. Citing the verse, he refers to it as describing

the faith of the first believer, Abraham; according to the Apostle Paul, he is made 'the father of us all, as it is written, "I have made you

the father of many nations,'' facing Him in whom he believed, the God who gives life to the dead and who calls the nonbeings as beings.'[8]

This Pauline text is important to Marion's argument because it asserts the non-coincidence of novelty and being. God can give the novelty of life to what is dead. Moreover, God can contest the priority of being by calling nonbeings as beings because the claim of his call is anterior to any claim that being can assert. If God wishes to give a gift to nonbeings and call them as beings, then being must yield to the novelty of what God gives.

Here, Marion says, 'Paul speaks like the philosophers of a transition between *ta mē onta* and (*ta*) *onta*, the nonbeings and the beings' (GB, 87/DE, 129). The question, as always, is a question about how such a spectacularly novel 'transition' could be accomplished. From the point of view of being, the gap between being and nonbeing is fixed and unbridgeable: something never comes from nothing. For instance, it is well known 'that Aristotle doubts that such a change could ever really come about, since a "matter" always remains as a substratum' (GB, 87/ DE, 129). The very structure of an Aristotelian metaphysics stresses this element of continuity and, as we examined in the Introduction, it is this commitment to successive continuity and finitude that leads Aristotle to rule out the possibility of something as unpredictably novel as an actual infinity. Marion's comments on Aristotle's position resonate with precisely this issue: the 'extreme form of change that leads from the non-extant [unfinished *ousia*] to the extant [finished *ousia*]' is unthinkable for Aristotle because it would involve the treatment of an unfinishable infinity as finished (GB, 87/DE, 129, brackets in original). Clearly it is possible in Aristotelian thought for something infinite or indefinite to acquire the definite form of the actually finite. Note, however, that this is not exactly the scenario that Paul describes. Paul does not describe God as transforming indefinite nonbeings into actual beings; rather, in Romans 4.17 God crosses being by calling nonbeings *as* beings. 'The nonbeings appear, by virtue of the call, as if they were' (GB, 88/DE, 130). God does not transform the infinite into the finite,

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[8] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 86. Hereafter referred to as GB. *Dieu Sans L'être: Hors-texte* (Paris: Communio/Fayard, 1982), 128. Hereafter referred to as DE.

he treats infinity (impossibly) as if it were already finished. Because the rule of being is finitude, Aristotle is right to say that the novelty of such a transformation is unthinkable according to being. Marion's aim, however, is to show that the finitude of being cannot circumscribe the infinity of what may be actually given.

What, then, allows for the appearance of what exceeds being? The nonbeings subject to God's call 'do not dispose here of any "principle of change within themselves," of any intrinsic potentiality that would require or prepare its [i.e. the change's] completion' (GB, 87/DE, 129). If the transformation depended on a potential intrinsic to what is finite, then the possibility of a radical transformation is precluded. Nonbeings cannot call themselves as beings. But according to Paul, as a call, 'the transition befalls them from the outside; the transition from nonbeing to being goes right through them' (GB, 87/DE, 129). 'From elsewhere than the world', God himself 'lodges an appeal' (GB, 87/DE, 130). This nomination, and the novelty that it accomplishes, are only possible because they diagonally cross the called subject without aligning with that subject's intentional axis. The call accomplishes the transition because it comes from 'elsewhere' as an eccentric surprise, as an event that befalls the nonbeings as a *fait accompli.*

Marion then turns to 1 Corinthians 1.27–28 for an amplification of Paul's statement in Romans 4.17. Marion renders these verses as follows: 'God chose the ignoble things of the world . . . and the contemptible things, and also the non-beings, in order to annul the beings (*kai ta mē onta, hina ta onta katargēsē*) – in order that no flesh should glorify itself before God' (GB, 89/DE, 132). These verses are particularly useful because they clarify the general sense of what Paul means by nonbeings. Here, because Paul is applying the term to Christians in Corinth, the term 'nonbeing' obviously refers to something that is, in fact, already a 'being'. Paul names them as 'nonbeings' not because they do not exist but because this is how they appear if one approaches them 'not as what they are in themselves – namely, beings, as everything and anything – but as what, in fact, they are "according to the flesh"' (GB, 92/DE, 136). According to the flesh and in the eyes of the world, the Christians appear as nothing at all. They are entirely insignificant to the world's own aims. The world does not recognize them as

humans, but only as 'less than nothing'; less than nothing, below the threshold of recognition, where alterity appears other because it still presents a minimum of recognizable reality. This less than nothing, this degree less than zero, to which 'the world' no longer even gives a name, because in it the world sees nothing proper and nothing common (with itself), Paul names, *in the name of the* '*world,*' non-beings. (GB, 92/DE, 136)

The issue is one of appearance. The Christians are clearly given and even give themselves as beings, but they are not received as such. The world refuses to anamorphically accede to their givenness and stridently maintains the priority of its own horizons.

Phenomenally, Christians are 'less than nothing', a 'degree less than zero'. They cannot clear the bar of phenomenality set for them by the world and are reduced to nothing by the world's natural attitude. Paul is clear about the reason for this exclusion: the world excludes them in order to glorify itself before God. As a result, the natural attitude dissimulates what is given in a double sense: (1) it excludes from appearance everything that does not fall within the grasp of its own, finite intentionality, and (2) it covers over the anterior dependence of its own intentionality on what has been given to it. Thus, the phenomenal distortion that excludes Christians as nonbeings is not something that Paul himself enacts. Rather, Paul's use of the term 'nonbeings' is meant to bring 'to light a distortion that is characteristic of the ''world''' and its natural attitude (GB, 94/DE, 138). The world's attitude is not given, but is a distortion of what is given, a distortion that shamefully attempts to suppress the excess of what it cannot control or receive. 'The ''world'' by itself distorts the usage of *ta onta/ta mē onta* in naming ''less than nothing'' not the nothing that absolutely is not but that on which it cannot found itself in order to glorify itself' (GB, 93–94/DE, 138). It does so because 'the foundation of the discourse of the ''world'' does not consist in the calm management of beingness but in the acquisition of funds' to be used against God (GB, 94/DE, 138).

In this way, the world's naming of Christians as 'less than nothing' masks the fact that they appear according to the world as nonbeings only because they are in excess of what the world is prepared to receive. What appears as a phenomenal deficiency to the world marks, in truth, an excess of givenness. What lies

below the zero point of the subject's natural, finite horizon is an actual infinity that gives the horizon to the subject and the subject to itself.

In order to saturate the world with the invisibility that its horizon had excluded, it will be insufficient to shift from the natural attitude's dissimulation of being to 'the calm management of beingness'. Such 'management' always devolves back into a dissimulation of the excess. In order for the difference between beings and nonbeings to appear without distortion, a non-ontological difference must hold sway. As long as being has priority over givenness, both givenness and being will remain distorted by the natural attitude. Only givenness can give being as itself.

It follows, then, that, 'for Christ, that which is does not appear as a being, but rather that which believes in the call, and that which is not does not disappear as nonbeing, but rather that which believes itself able to found itself on its own funding' (GB, 95/DE, 139). Christ calls the world according to its givenness, naming it as a gift. That which responds to the call as a gift appears as what it is. That which refuses the call in order 'to found itself on its own funding' loses both itself and what is given to it. 'We now see, then, how being and nonbeing can be divided according to something other than Being' and, further, how beings can be given as such only by being divided by the givenness that gives them as themselves (GB, 95/DE, 140). It is true that 'the gift crosses Being/being: it meets it, strikes it out with a mark', but in doing so it 'finally opens it, as a window casement opens', onto the novelty of what is given (GB, 101/ DE, 147).

13. Conclusion

Paul's description of the novel transformation that God's grace impossibly accomplishes provides a template for Marion's argument in *God Without Being*, and this argument, in turn, reflects the logic of givenness in *Being Given*. Formally, the line follows from God to grace to givenness. In order to summarize this homology, it is useful to enumerate the points shared by my reading of Romans and Marion's analysis of givenness. To do so, I will briefly return to what I identified at the conclusion of the

preceding chapter as the key features of Paul's conception of an immanently actual grace.

First, *the constitutive anteriority of grace.* For Paul, this constitutive anteriority is manifest primarily in the invisible 'createdness' of the world that establishes the world as always already in relation to the grace of God's righteous commitment to it. For Marion, this constitutive anteriority is manifest in the priority of the invisible fold of givenness as what gives the very possibility of phenomenality.

Second, *the unconditional, because conditioning, character of this grace.* God's righteousness is defined, for Paul, by its unconditional character and it converges with his notion of grace in this unconditionality. Because God committed himself to the world before its creation and because this commitment shines through each created thing as its createdness, the grace of this commitment conditions both the confession of faith and the dissimulation of sin. For Marion, givenness, as that which gives both phenomena and, in so doing, gives the subject to itself as capable of receiving these phenomena, operates unconditionally. The phenomenological reduction is successful to the extent that it has stripped away the conditions imposed by the natural attitude in order to reveal the unconditioned excess of givenness that conditions every appearance.

Third, *the immanent visibility of this invisible grace in the world's createdness.* If grace is not immanent, then Paul's account of sin and his declaration of Christ's resurrection are both without force. Sin cannot be described as a refusal of grace and Christ's resurrection cannot be described as a display of God's always accomplished righteousness, if grace is not already immanent to this world. Likewise, for Marion, immanence is the key to givenness itself. The possibility of givenness is co-extensive with immanence, and one arrives at givenness through the strict reduction of every transcendence.

Fourth, *the novel manifestation of this already immanent grace in the unconditioned event of Christ's actually accomplished resurrection.* The event of Christ's resurrection demonstrates that God's righteous commitment to the world is, in fact, unconditional: he has withheld nothing from us, giving even his Son. God has given himself to the world and the Christ-event definitively establishes that he will, without condition, continue to give himself anew. For Marion, the very figure of givenness is the event: causeless

effect, unconditioned happening. Givenness cannot be accounted for in terms of what preceded it. The excess of its novelty overflows the bounds of our horizons and gives itself again and, newly, again.

This much, however, only codifies the primary features of the clearly parallel movements being made by Paul and Marion and it leaves untouched the question with which my reading of Paul concluded. Is it possible to think grace as both immanent and actual if God's actuality is not assumed as an anchor for the actuality of grace? Is the grace of this gift necessarily tied to the transcendence of its Giver?

I take the most important result of Marion's work to be its answer to this question. If for no other reason than this, Marion is indispensable to this project. *Being Given* establishes not only that grace and immanence are not incompatible but that grace and immanence are strictly correlative. Not only is it possible to think grace untethered from the transcendence of its Giver, but an untethered grace appears all the more gracious in light of that Giver's absence. Rewriting Husserl, Marion pithily formulates the relationship between the phenomenological reduction and givenness as 'so much reduction, so much givenness'. But, for my purposes, an additional modification of this formula is appropriate. Marion's crucial advance might be summarized instead as 'so much immanence, so much givenness' – or, again, '*so much immanence, so much grace*'. Far from blocking the appearance of grace, the immanence of givenness frees the gift to be freely received as such. The transcendence of the Giver may anchor the gift, but in the end it risks anchoring the gift to economy and, even if inadvertently, it may shackle it to causality. Imposing on the gift the precondition of a giver obscures the unconditionality necessary to it. Only if the transcendence of the giver, the givee, and the gift-object can be bracketed and only if the gift is thereby reduced to the immanence of its givability can grace shine unconditionally in what is given. The surprising result is that, insofar as the intervention of grace constitutes the core of religious experience, the constant aim of every religious movement ought to be a reduction of transcendence coupled with an unswerving dedication to immanence. Let metaphysics and science pursue the elaboration of transcendent, causal economies; the domain of religion is immanence and, more precisely, the immanence of what is actually given as a gift.

Religious thinking will be religious in character precisely to the extent that it is capable of faithfully thinking immanence. Religion, for the sake of grace, forsakes transcendence.

Despite this result – or, rather, because of it – it remains necessary to consider the degree to which phenomenology proves itself a discourse suitable to immanence. To what extent does phenomenology necessarily entail transcendence?

I have already noted on several occasions the fundamental difficulty that Marion faces in claiming that saturated phenomena are, indeed, phenomenal. Even from Marion's own perspective we must admit the persistence of an undecidability in our reception of them: does the saturated phenomenon contest our horizons as an overwhelming and excessive intuition or as a formal void that is barren of intuition? Here, an excess of phenomenality and a lack of phenomenality coincide. In light of this undecidable coincidence, what would authorize us to say that in a saturated phenomenon something phenomenologically articulatable has actually occurred?

This oscillation between excess and lack results from the phenomenological necessity of correlating, at least minimally, intentionality and intuition. Givenness is necessary to every act of phenomenalization because it is what gives this correlation, marking the phenomenon as given and constituting the subject as subject to the given phenomenon. Givenness establishes the immanence of their co-ordination: neither is given without the other and both receive themselves only insofar as they give themselves to the other. However, this immanence can be obscured when transcendence comes to characterize either end of the correlation.

Phenomenology is born, for instance, out of the insight that the transcendence of what is given (e.g. the given object) must be suspended in order to allow its immanent appearance to shine forth. A perpetual concern not for the appearance but for the 'reality' behind the appearance (for the mythical and noumenal 'thing-in-itself') must be suspended in order for the phenomenon to appear in its own right. To this end, Husserl inaugurates the reduction of every phenomenon to the immanence of its correlation with intentionality. Within the immanent transparency of the transcendental subject, the transcendence of the object is bracketed and the given appearance is valorized.

Marion is right, however, to object that Husserl's reduction is

only half a reduction: it has bracketed the transcendence of the object but has left the transcendence of the transcendental subject intact. Phenomena are not yet immanent to their own self-giving; they are immanent only to the conditions set for their appearance by the horizon of intentionality. What has been missed, Marion argues, is that the subject cannot ultimately have any transcendental priority over what is given because the subject is not, in fact, transparently immanent to itself. Such transparency is fantasy. Subjectivity bears within itself an original opacity that unavoidably results from its having been given to itself by that which is other than itself. Subjectivity cannot be immanent to itself because it is not immanently self-founded. In order for givenness to be given full sway in the appearance of the phenomenon, the priority of the subject must itself be reduced to reveal its own givenness. Only givenness gives – in immanence – the phenomenon. So much immanence, so much givenness.

Now, as I have indicated, the critique often levelled against Marion is that the radical immanence proper to givenness (an immanence manifest paradigmatically in saturated phenomena) cannot be phenomenal. Givenness is *too* immanent for phenomenality.[9] Phenomenality requires a minimum of transcendence. As Dominique Janicaud puts it, either givenness must submit to the conditions necessary for a subject to receive what is given (in which case it is not unconditionally immanent) or, 'slimmed down to its *a priori* sheathe', it will be 'too pure to dare pass itself off as phenomenological'.[10] Marion's reduction is too radical because it too thoroughly reduces the transcendence of the subject.

Marlène Zarader frames the issue neatly when she argues that Marion's radical reduction of subjectivity in favour of an absolutely unconditioned phenomenon amounts to dispensing with subjectivity altogether. 'Subjectivity may well be redefined,' Zarader tells us, 'but it remains the living nerve of every *phenomenological* project. If one attempts to slice through this nerve, the whole strategy crumbles.'[11] If an intentional horizon is a necessary condition for phenomenality, then it is simply not possible to dispense with the transcendence of this horizon in

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[9] I initially framed the following line of argument in 'Reduction of Subtraction: Jean-Luc Marion, Alain Badiou and the Recuperation of Truth', in *Philosophy Today*, forthcoming.
[10] Janicaud, 'The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology', 63.
[11] Marlène Zarader, 'Phenomenality and Transcendence', in *Transcendence in Philosophy and Religion*, ed. James E. Faulconer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 114.

favour of a purely unconditioned excess of immanent givenness. The anterior excess of givenness can intervene, but only negatively. It 'can function only, in phenomenological discourse, as a *critical*, and never positive possibility'.[12] With this critique, we are set squarely back within an Aristotelian framework where the classical notion of infinity is decisive. Infinity may appear as the negative interruption of our finitude, it may show up as a potential for this particular finitude to be more than or other than what it is, but it cannot be actually and positively given in its own right. This critique of Marion's position might just as easily be summarized in terms of banality and obscurantism. Either the phenomenon is manifest within the fundamentally banal horizons of intentional expectation or it fails to be manifest as anything other than the obfuscation of that finite horizon.

Here, I take Marion's critics to be essentially correct. In an attempt to describe the immanence of grace as actually given, Marion has pressed the discourse of phenomenology to the limit of what it can articulate and, unwilling to compromise the elements necessary to an articulation of its unconditional excess, he has outstripped the resources of that discourse. But this does not simply amount to a total loss. By way of recuperation we might say: Marion's articulation of an immanent grace does not fail outright so much as it simply fails to be phenomenological. In crucial respects, Marion has succeeded. The strict coincidence of grace and immanence must be maintained. The necessity of thinking grace as an actually given infinity must be elaborated. And, as Marion himself (working against the grain of his own intention) leads us to reckon, these two priorities can only be upheld if we abandon the phenomenological necessity of a finite subject. What if, as Zarader suggests, we *were* to slice through the cord that binds givenness to the transcendent horizon of the subject and, instead, pressed through to the thought of a purely immanent grace? What might such a thought look like?

Chapter 3

Events and Truth Procedures:
A Subtractive Approach to an Immanent Grace

1. Immanence without Intuition

My aim is to pursue, as far as is possible, the thought of an immanently actual grace. Unfolding Paul's letter to the Romans, we were able to develop a rigorous conception of why, for Paul, grace must be understood as already and actually given in the righteousness of God. Following Marion's treatment of givenness, we were able to establish that immanence ramifies rather than diminishes grace so that we might legitimately say: so much immanence, so much grace. The question that must now be addressed is this: is it possible to simultaneously preserve Paul's account of an actual grace and extend Marion's correlation of grace and immanence beyond not only the transcendence of Paul's divine Giver but also beyond the phenomenological transcendence of an intentional subject?

I understand Badiou's work as a direct response to this question. It is explicitly grounded in an attempt to 'tear the lexicon of grace . . . away from its religious confinement' in the obscurity of transcendence.[1] Badiou concurs with Marion that the event of grace is characterized by a fundamental undecidability and he agrees that this undecidability is a necessary result of its infinity. However, where Marion's conception of grace wavers on the brink of phenomenality between intuitive excess and the void of pure formality, Badiou asserts without hesitation that it will only be possible to conceive of grace as an immanently actual infinity if we abandon intuition altogether. Marion is right to see that an event of grace must be thought in terms of a synthesis that

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[1] Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 66. Hereafter referred to as SP. *Saint Paul: La foundation de l'universalisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 70. Hereafter referred to as P.

instantaneously exceeds the reach of any possible successive
combination of elements, but his insight burns through all of
the available phenomenological resources before securing the
intelligibility of this actual infinity. As long as the thought of this
infinity is tied to the finitude of the intentional subject and the
minimal transcendence of its phenomenological correlation, the
immanent thought of an actual infinity will be blocked. If grace
is gracious to the degree that it has been abandoned to imma-
nence, then in order to think the gift without reference to
transcendence it will be necessary to abandon not only the
horizons of objectivity and being but the intentional horizon of
the subject as well.

As a result, Badiou abandons phenomenology for the sake of
thinking infinity. He proposes to replace the primacy of phe-
nomenal *presence* (however reduced or contested such presence
may be) with the intelligibility of a pure *presentation*. Rather than
reducing transcendence for the sake of givenness, he formally
subtracts ontology from phenomenology and, in turn, the event
of grace from ontology itself. In order to do so, Badiou employs
a discourse appropriate to the articulation of infinity as both
actual and multiple: Georg Cantor's set theory. For reasons that
will be discussed in detail below, set theory models a conception
of ontology that avoids appeals to transcendence, and it provides
the resources necessary for an understanding of how grace may
both evade and remain immanent to being. Badiou's claim is
that contemporary philosophy remains woefully ignorant of our
epoch's most important advances in articulating infinity. For the
past hundred years philosophy has circled around and around
the same impasses in its attempt to think infinity (from Witt-
genstein to Heidegger to Derrida to Marion) without clearly
recognizing that Cantor had fundamentally altered the rules of
the game. The classical conception of infinity as negative, inde-
finite, and, at best, potential has been superseded by tools that
allow for its treatment as a plurality of clearly defined sets of
actual infinities.

Badiou's use of set theory, however, particularly in his mag-
num opus *Being and Event*, is daunting in its formal, mathema-
tical complexity. Yet even without any serious training in
mathematics (a lack that I confess), I believe that Badiou is
correct when he says that the arguments presented there are
accessible to anyone equipped with attention and patience. In

any respect, my aim in what follows is relatively limited. I wish only to faithfully display enough of Badiou's approach to indicate how it addresses many of the problems that vex Marion's project and, more generally, how it may advance our attempt to think the nearness of grace. I will abandon Badiou's use of mathematical formulas and, bearing the consequences of an inevitable loss of precision, will confine myself to what can be said about infinity with an exposition of the argument's general logic, a judicious use of analogies, and references to Badiou's own detailed treatment of Paul. My effort will be aided by the Pauline illustrations that Badiou provides for many of his key concepts and by the opportunity that these illustrations afford to compare Badiou's approach with my own reading of Paul and my analysis of Marion. To be sure, the Christ-event is, for Badiou, 'a fable' from which he means 'to extract a formal, wholly secularized conception of grace', but this should not, in itself, pose a problem (SP, 4, 66/P, 5, 70). Marion has already given us reason to believe that such an approach may cause the graciousness of an immanent gift to shine all the more brightly.

2. Infinity without Unity or Totality

Transcendence, Badiou argues, is the inevitable correlate of unity. Immanence, on the contrary, is multiple. A reduction of transcendence is a reduction of unity to multiplicity and a completely successful reduction will deliver only the inconsistency of the purely multiple.

For Badiou, at least as much as for Marion, grace can only be thought as infinite to the extent that it is thought as immanent. Further, as Marion recognizes, this immanence becomes intelligible in its own right only to the degree that the finite horizon of the subject has been challenged by an infinite and uncountable excess. The problem in phenomenology is that, though the finite unity of the intentional horizon can be challenged and contested, ultimately it cannot be overruled. The excess, in order to appear, must always submit to the essentially finite rule of adequation and phenomenal unity. Infinity may appear within the space of this rule as an indistinct and deferred potential, but never as actually given. For infinity and immanence to be thought conjointly, both must be subtracted from the natural

delimitation of the 'one' and, consequently, both must be sub-
tracted from the phenomenological domain. Abandoning unity,
thought must decide in favour of pure multiplicity and such
multiplicity is only formally – never intuitively – intelligible.

Badiou's entire project is founded on his decision in favour of
pure multiplicity for the sake of immanence and infinity. In
order to address multiplicity (and, by extension, infinity) in its
own right, it is necessary to avoid the rule of any 'one', whether
this 'one' takes the form of a 'micro-one' or a 'macro-one'. To
prevent its subordination to unity, multiplicity must not be
founded on an original atom or unfolded into an ultimate
totality. The problem is that, intuitively, we persistently under-
stand the 'many' in opposition to the 'one' and the 'part' in
opposition to the 'whole'. To proceed otherwise, multiplicity
must be addressed in a way that evades the dominance of the
many by the one and the part by the whole. Is such a thing
possible?

For a long time, Galileo's demonstration that it is possible to
infinitely pair each natural number with its square (e.g. 2 with 4,
3 with 9, 4 with 16, and so on) was taken as definitive con-
firmation that infinity is unintelligible as such. It is simply
incoherent to claim that the set of all integers is, in relation to
infinity, equivalent to the set of their squares when the set of
squares is itself a subset of the set of natural numbers. How could
the part be as numerous as the whole? The very thought defies
the ordered, successive unity that characterizes our intuitive
understanding of quantity.

Cantor, however, turns this problem on its head. 'Cantor had
the brilliant idea of treating positively the remarks of Galileo'
about the impossibility of an infinite number.[2] 'As often hap-
pens', Badiou notes, 'the invention consisted in turning a
paradox into a concept' (BE, 267/EE, 295). Rather than treating
the one-to-one correspondence of sets of numbers as that which
proves the incoherence of the notion of an infinite set, Cantor
takes one-to-one correspondence as the key to coherently com-
paring different orders of infinity. (Here, Cantor's logic is
homologous with Marion's inversion of the relationship between
gift and economy – 'the impasse becomes a breakthrough',

[2] Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005), 267. Here-
after referred to as BE. *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988), 295. Hereafter referred
to as EE.

Marion says.) On one hand, sets of numbers that can be placed into complete correspondence with one another belong to the same order of infinity (have the same 'cardinality'), regardless of whether one is a subset of the other. On the other hand, the impossibility of such a correspondence marks the difference between one order of infinity and the order of infinity that exceeds it. As will be discussed in more detail, the possibility for marking such differences is also the key to articulating the thought of an actual infinity. Lower orders of infinity can be actualized as sets through their relation to a higher order of infinity.

The point at hand, however, has to do with the indifference of infinity to the whole/part relation. The whole/part distinction operates effectively in relation to finite quantities but, in relation to infinite sets, it must be suspended because the rule of one-to-one correspondence is the condition of possibility for an intelligible articulation of infinity. One-to-one correspondence works well as a measure of both finite and infinite sets, but the whole/part distinction works only as a measure of the finite. Any attempt to tie infinity to the rule of finitude reduces infinity once again to negative obscurity. In this sense, set theory opens the door to a diagonalization of the one/many and whole/part categories. Starting from the infinite, set theory shows that multiplicity can be intelligibly discerned without being grounded in a finite one and that infinite parts can be distinguished and compared without reference to any exhaustible or totalizable whole. Parts and multiples can be gathered together in a way that evades unity and totality. And, because a reduction of the 'one' is a reduction of transcendence, it is this abrogation of the transcendence of the 'one' that simultaneously frees infinity for immanence. In this way, Badiou enacts a set theoretical subtraction from transcendence by bracketing the natural priority of the 'one'.

Moreover, bracketing the 'one' also amounts to bracketing intuition because 'neither intuition nor language are capable of supporting the pure multiple' (BE, 43/EE, 54). The finitude of phenomenality and the imprecision of everyday language are insufficient to the task. The unbound multiplicity of the infinite, 'if trusted to natural language and intuition, produces an undivided pseudo-presentation ... because it does not clearly separate itself from the presumption of the one' (BE, 43/EE,

54–5). With this assessment, Marion's critics would agree. Infinity cannot be positively grasped as an intuition, no matter how saturated, and even a poetic use of language will fail to make the fine, sharp distinctions that are necessary. For the sake of immanence, it is necessary to employ set theory because 'there is *no* infra-mathematical conception of infinity, only vague images of the ''very large''' (BE, 145/EE, 164). Spare, formal and abstract, Badiou means to shift registers from a discourse appropriate to the richness of 'presence' and its manifold of particularities to a discourse of pure 'presentation' that does not directly consider the finitude of individual beings but the infinity of being-*qua*-being. In this context, 'presence is the exact contrary of presentation' in the same way that finitude is opposed to infinity (BE, 27/EE, 35). If an infinite ontology is possible, then ontology must be described as 'the situation of the pure multiple, of the multiple ''in-itself''' (BE, 28/EE, 36). Ontology must be a bare exposition of the pure multiplicity proper to a 'presentation of presentation' and not a description of what is given to presence (BE, 28/EE, 36).

It is important, however, to avoid misunderstanding Badiou's ontological decision in favour of infinity. He understands this decision *as* a decision and he recognizes that it represents an ultimately unjustifiable wager on infinite multiplicity over the finitude of the one. Badiou's argument, though, is that *either* choice is ultimately unjustifiable: ontology begins only with an axiomatic decision that wagers on infinity or finitude. The justification for either choice can only be worked out subsequent to an elaboration of its consequences. Thus, for the sake of infinity, Badiou must wager that ontology = mathematics; otherwise, infinity is ineffable. This equation, Badiou is clear, is 'not a thesis about the world but about discourse' (BE, 8/EE, 14). It simply 'affirms that mathematics, through the entirety of its historical becoming, pronounces what is expressible of being *qua* being' (BE, 8/EE, 14). Further, it is also important to keep in mind that, insofar as ontology = mathematics, Badiou's aim is not to do ontology *per se*. The goal of *Being and Event* is to provide ontological 'schemas' appropriate to an infinite ontology that can then supply the context for a rigorous conception of an event of grace. In this sense, Badiou is not doing ontology but 'meta-ontology' and his goal is to establish the

meta-ontological thesis that mathematics is the historicity of the discourse of being *qua* being. And the goal of this goal is to assign philosophy to the thinkable articulation of two discourses (and practices) which *are not it*: mathematics, science of being, and the intervening doctrines of the event, which precisely, designate 'that-which-is-not-being-*qua*-being.' (BE, 13/EE, 20)

As this passage makes clear, assigning mathematics to ontology simultaneously re-assigns philosophy to a non-ontological task. The work of philosophy is to conceptualize the intersection of 'being' with a doctrine of the 'event'. Philosophy remains essentially related to ontology, but its primary concern is 'the care of truths' that may follow from a grace (BE, 4/EE, 10). Badiou's project necessarily implicates mathematics, but it is itself philosophical rather than mathematical. 'Mathematical fragments' are employed, but always according to philosophical rules (BE, 13/EE, 20).

3. Ontology without Ontotheology

An ontology of presentation capable of articulating an infinite multiplicity would be, according to Badiou, the first ontology that does not amount to an ontology of presence. It would likewise be the first ontology to break with ontotheology successfully. Marion's project is animated by the desire to accomplish this same break. With Badiou, Marion recognizes that the rule of ontotheology excludes the immanent infinity of grace.

Commenting on 1 Corinthians 1.27–28 (in which God calls nonbeings to annul beings), Badiou argues that 'one must, in Paul's logic, go so far as to say that *the Christ-event testifies that God is not the god of Being, is not Being*' (SP, 47/P, 50). In these verses, he continues, Paul 'prescribes an anticipatory critique of what Heidegger calls onto-theology, wherein God is thought as supreme being, and hence as the measure for what being as such is capable of' (SP, 47/P, 50). Marion obviously agrees. In *God Without Being*, he goes so far as to take up Paul's 'anticipatory critique' as a basis for his own attempt to 'cross' being and step beyond the conceptual idolatry of ontotheology. From Badiou's perspective, however, attempts such as Marion's are bound to fail (or, at best, remain 'anticipatory') because they cannot avoid the mechanism of finitude that continually re-imposes an

ontotheological framework of causality and economy. The problem is two-fold. Ontotheology is unavoidable to the extent that: (1) being is understood as essentially finite, and (2) God's infinity is treated as an ineffable negativity. Ontotheology is an inevitable side effect of any ontology incapable of articulating as such the infinite multiplicity proper to being-*qua*-being.

We must recognize that 'Christian monotheism, despite its designation of God as infinite, does not immediately and radically rupture with Greek finitism' (BE, 142/EE, 161). Rather, there is a basic compatibility between ontological finitude and divine infinity insofar as the priority of the world's finitude ensures that God's infinity is magnificently incomprehensible. Grafted onto a finite Greek ontology, God, as absolute, 'is thought as a supreme infinite being, thus as transmathematical, in-numerable, as a form of the one so radical that no multiple can consist therein' (BE, 42/EE, 53). But, thus conceived, God's infinity does not break with the world's finitude so much as measure and ensure it. Here, 'divine infinity solely designates the transcendent ''region'' of being-in-totality wherein *we no longer know* in what sense the essential finitude of being is manifested' (BE, 142/EE, 161). God's infinity preserves finitude by indicating 'the punctual limit to the exercise of *our* thought of finite-being' (BE, 142/EE, 161). As a transcendent *causa sui*, 'God' is a name for what legitimates the uninterrupted run of the world's finite, causal economy. As transcendent, 'God' ironically subverts grace.

Further, because ontotheology anchors the finitude of being in God's ineffable infinity, every finite ontology tends towards 'negative theology'. Even if explicitly atheological, secular discourses will continue to reproduce the metaphysical place assigned to God as long as they fail to render infinity immanently intelligible. The re-implication of ontotheology (and, thus, theology) will be unavoidable because finite ontologies preserve the place of infinity as a negative indication of transcendence. For Badiou, the postmodern commitment to both the transcendent infinity of the Other and the finitude of being renders its much-commented-upon 'theological turn' practically inescapable for friends and foes alike.

The only way to cross ontotheology is to adopt 'the thesis of the infinity of being' and then to deploy this ontology with tools capable of positively articulating the structures and

characteristics of an infinite multiplicity (BE, 143/EE, 162). The breakthrough is accomplished not by introducing the notion of an actual infinity *per se* – the theologians had already done this by naming God as actually infinite – but in 'ex-centering the use of this concept, in redirecting it from its function of distributing the regions of being in totality towards a characterization of beings-*qua*-being' (BE, 143/EE, 162). 'The concept of infinity was only revolutionary in thought once it was declared to apply to Nature' because only then does infinity join immanence and break with transcendence (BE, 144/EE, 163). The grip of ontotheology on religious and secular discourses alike is ensured by a negative treatment of infinity and, in turn, the persistence of ontotheology ensures the continued marginalization of grace. If the novelty of grace is to be thinkable, Badiou commends, then we must decide in favour of immanence and hold that infinity is not itself divine; infinite multiplicity is simply and immanently *what there is.*

4. Inconsistent Multiplicity

Obviously, an ontology that cannot account for how beings are 'presented *as* one', however adept at addressing multiplicity, is not viable. Badiou, though, does not deny that multiples can be counted as one; he denies that multiples *are* 'one'. He does not deny that infinite parts can be distinguished and arranged hierarchically; he denies that these parts are fundamentally determined by some totalizable 'whole'. As indicated above, the set theoretical strategy for articulating infinity in terms of one-to-one correspondence turns on this same distinction. It may be possible to account for some relations of unity in terms of multiplicity, but multiplicity itself cannot be understood on the finite basis of the one. Parts and multiples are susceptible to unity but their infinity evades explanation in terms of either atoms or totalities. There can be no unifying 'essence' that internally determines a multiple as a distinguishable being. Unity and oneness are always an extrinsic function of variable relations. Within the context of infinity, unity is always extensive rather than intensive. It is true that 'there is oneness'. But it is false to say that 'the one is' (BE, 53/EE, 66).

  Another way to say this is that, for Badiou, unity is always the

result of an operation. Multiples may be counted or gathered into sets by functions or operations capable of grouping them, but their multiplicity is always identifiably anterior to the effect of unity that is produced. And because no multiple is an atom or a totality, every multiple is a multiple of multiples. Multiplicity goes all the way down. The fact of the operation (that *there is* an operation of counting) is what allows for an identification of the multiple as anterior to the count. If an operation is necessary in order for a being to be counted as one (as *a* being), then there must have been something anterior to the operation. The operation must have counted 'something' and this something must have been other than 'one' in order to need the unifying effect.

It is in relation to this operation of counting that Badiou distinguishes two kinds of multiplicity: (1) 'consistent' multiplicity, which acquires consistency as a result of the count, as a result of being presented as counted, and (2) 'inconsistent' multiplicity, which is inferred as having been anterior to the produced consistency. Strictly speaking (and *contra* Marion), it is impossible to have any 'intuitive' contact with this anterior inconsistent multiplicity. Multiplicity is always already structured as consistent and inconsistency is an 'inferential' excess rather than an intuitive excess. Nonetheless, 'insofar as the one is a result, by necessity ''something'' of the multiple does not coincide with the result' (BE, 53/EE, 66). That which does not coincide with the consistency of what is presented is inconsistent multiplicity, a multiplicity that is never presented but persistently indicated by the logical 'presupposition that prior to the count the one is not' (BE, 52/EE, 65).

'There is another way of putting this', Badiou says. 'The multiple is the inertia which can be retroactively discerned starting from the fact that the operation of the count-as-one must effectively operate in order for there to be Oneness' (BE, 25/EE, 33). Inconsistent multiplicity can be discerned as a kind of ontological 'inertia'. It imposes itself as a logical phantom of the count's consistency, haunting its unity with the possibility of inconsistency. Inevitably, the impossibility of completely purging this implication 'causes the structured presentation to waver towards the phantom of inconsistency' (BE, 53/EE, 66). It produces this tremor because the presupposition of inconsistency marks the operation of the count as an extrinsic operation and

persists in the presentation as a trace of its contingency. Ultimately, for Badiou, the importance of this ontological 'waver' towards inconsistency is difficult to overestimate. Articulating the possibility of an event of grace will depend on what unfolds ontologically in relation to it.

Inconsistency, then, like unity, is an effect of the operation of the count – though inconsistency is a retroactively discernible implication rather than the object of the operation. Whereas unity is the positive aspect of the count, inconsistency is its subtractive face. So, just as it is true to say that 'there is oneness' and false to say that 'the one is', we can also accurately say that 'inconsistency is nothing' even as we are barred from saying that 'inconsistency is not' (BE, 53–4/EE, 66–7). Inconsistency is not 'something' presented by the operation of the count because presentation always entails a minimal unity or consistency. Nonetheless, inconsistency persists as an implication and, more precisely, it persists as an implication of 'nothing'. This inconsistency or '"nothing" is', Badiou says, 'what names the unperceivable gap, cancelled then renewed ... between the one as result and the one as operation' (BE, 54/EE, 67). Inconsistency marks the gap between multiplicity and its presentation as a consistent multiple. This nothing is both 'cancelled' by the operation that produces a presented consistency out of inconsistency and then 'renewed' as a presupposition of the operation's own success. This gap, though 'unperceivable', will prove potentially immense.

5. Axiomatic Set Theory

Set theory, as developed by Cantor's successors, is axiomatic. It is this very quality that suits it for treating the multiplicity appropriate to infinity and, by extension, to the thought of an immanent grace. At its most basic, set theory depends on two primitive assertions and nine basic axioms that organize the elaboration of these assertions. For the moment, it will be sufficient to sketch the importance of its two primitive assumptions: (1) a 'founding' set exists and this set is empty or void, and (2) there is an operation of 'belonging' that can group multiples into sets of multiples. These two assertions are essential to treating multiplicity as such because they affirm that unity is

always the result of an extrinsic operation. Both block any thought of multiplicity that would begin with a 'one'. Unity is not inherent in any multiple. The founding, empty set has 'nothing' inherent in it and the fact that unity is the product of an operation also shows that this unity is not the result of any internally essential predicate. There are no original, determinative qualities or characteristics. There is only the empty set and the operation that counts it as such.

An axiomatic framework is essential here because it allows for a starting point to be posited by fiat without justification or definition. Axioms allow set theory to be indifferent to every predicate except for the predicate of belonging to another multiple. To be appropriate to infinity, 'what is required is that the operational structure of ontology discern the multiple without having to make a one out of it, and therefore without possessing a definition of the multiple' (BE, 29/EE, 37). Set theory avoids relying on any intuitive or given definitions of multiplicity because it simply begins by formally asserting without definition the existence of a multiple. It does also assert that there is a law that operates on this undefined multiplicity, a law that can count and organize and elaborate relations of belonging, but this law is extrinsic to the multiples and the founding multiple is itself empty of predicates. 'What is a law whose objects are implicit? A prescription which does not name – in its very operation – that alone to which it tolerates application? It is evidently a system of axioms' (BE, 29/EE, 37–8). Only the pure prescription of an axiom can 'name' without defining what it names. If set theory were not axiomatic, it would inevitably re-entangle itself with the finitude of the one and thereby fail to think infinity as such. Because ontology begins with an unjustifiable decision in favour of infinity, it begins with an axiomatic assertion of the conditions conducive to infinity's articulation.

6. The Void

The starting point, then, is the empty set or what Badiou refers to as its 'void'. The void, he claims, is the proper name of being-*qua*-being because pure multiplicity is the object of an infinite ontology. The void, as an inconsistent multiplicity without any unifying predicate, is appropriate to ontology insofar as ontology

considers the being of beings without reference to their ontic predicates.

Alternatively, we might say: if beings are what is presented, then ontology is concerned with the presentation of presentation. Because the act of presentation is the operation of belonging that produces consistency, an ontological presentation of presentation amounts to an articulation of consistency in its own right. Thus, ontology is what shows the operation of the count *as such*, that is to say, as an operation. Ontology dispels the essentialism of apparently intensive properties (the illusion of an original, essential one) to reveal both the contingency of the operation and, as a result, its implication of inconsistent multiplicity as what must have preceded the operation. Ontology indicates inconsistency as the consistency of consistency, as the being of being-*qua*-being. Or, to borrow a Derridean formulation: ontology indicates that the substance of 'every other' is 'wholly other'. *Tout autre est tout autre.*

Because the void is the underside of the count, a presentation of the count itself also always indirectly presents the void. 'Every structured presentation', Badiou concludes, 'unpresents ''its'' void' and it does so 'in the mode of this non-one which is merely the subtractive face of the count' (BE, 55/EE, 68). In this sense, 'it comes down to exactly the same thing to say that the nothing *is* the operation of the count – which, as source of the one, is not itself counted – and to say that the nothing is the pure multiple upon which the count operates' (BE, 55/EE, 68, italics mine). Badiou even proposes that we might better understand how the void *is* the operation of the count if we invert our understanding of what the operation accomplishes. Rather than saying that the operation positively produces consistency, we could say that the void 'sutures' being to presentation by *subtracting* its inconsistency. Thus, to present presentation itself is to present what a presentation leaves unpresented. Or, what amounts to the same thing: to present presentation itself is to present what accomplishes this presentation by unpresenting itself. An infinite ontology, an ontology of immanence and multiplicity in relation to which grace will be thinkable, must begin with the void.

A more obviously philosophical analogy may be welcome at this point. While examining Aristotle's treatment of the 'void', Badiou notes that for Aristotle 'the void may be another name for matter conceived as matter' (BE, 70/EE, 85). To say that the

void amounts to matter-*qua*-matter is to say that trying to think about the void is like trying to think about matter subtracted from every unifying form. The void is like absolutely formless matter. If it *is* anything for Aristotle, formless matter would be 'an undetermined ontological virtuality' (BE, 71/EE, 85–6). That Aristotle connects the indeterminacy of matter-*qua*-matter with the virtuality of infinity should come as no surprise. 'For Aristotle there is an *intrinsic* connection between the void and infinity' (BE, 73/EE, 88). Here, infinity 'is the negation of presentation itself, because what-presents-itself affirms its being within the strict disposition of its limit' or form (BE, 74/EE, 89). So, despite the fact that matter can never be presented as such, it is unavoidably implied by the presentation of every form. Its inconsistency cannot be presented, but this inconsistency persists in what is presented as 'the latent errancy of the being of presentation' or as the trace of contingency borne by every actualized form (BE, 76/EE, 91). This is why, Badiou will maintain, every materialist ontology must begin with the void. Otherwise, it will inevitably be co-opted by some permutation of the one (e.g. idealism). Only an infinite ontology can be a materialist ontology. Additionally, the Aristotelian example is useful because it distinguishes Aristotle's situation from our own. For Aristotle, matter-*qua*-matter as infinite *is* hopelessly unintelligible and he rightly excludes it as such. For Badiou, however, the void of matter-*qua*-matter can be taken as a starting point in light of a set theoretical articulation of infinity.

7. Belonging and Inclusion

In addition to the primitive assertion of the empty set as an initially existing set, set theory also assumes a single primitive relation: belonging. As has been discussed, Badiou closely aligns the empty set's void of inconsistent multiplicity with the operation of belonging itself: the void is the subtractive face of this operation. Every multiple arranged as consistent by the operation of belonging simultaneously implicates the void whose subtraction makes its presented consistency possible.

Belonging is the fundamental operation of set theory because it defines a set as a set: a set is composed of all of the elements (or multiples) that belong to it (i.e. that are counted or

presented by it). Ultimately, 'set' is just another name for a consistent multiple because every multiple is itself a set that groups other multiples. All multiples are multiples of multiples. Existence in set theory is defined in terms of belonging: to *be* a multiple is to *belong* to a set. To exist, a multiple must belong to or be presented as consistent by another multiple or set.

In addition to this primitive relation, set theory distinguishes the operation of 'inclusion' as a variation of belonging. Multiples are said to be included in a set when they are composed of 'sub-multiples' of that set. These sub-multiples can be referred to as 'parts'. A part is a multiple composed from the elements that belong to a set. Parts 'generate compositions out of the very multiplicities that the structure composes under the sign of the one' (BE, 96/EE, 112). Essentially, this means that the parts of a set represent ways of recombining the elements of that set into new subsets. If, for instance, we had a set {1, 2, 3}, then the multiples that *belong* to this set are 1, 2, and 3. However, the multiples *included* in this set (the multiples that are its parts) would be subsets or variable groupings of those three elements such as {2}, {1, 3}, {1, 2, 3}, etc. The number of included parts is limited only by the possible groupings of multiples that belong to the initial set.

Because the parts of a set consist of all possible ways of grouping the 'individual' elements of the set, the included parts will always be in excess of the elements that belong. This excess of parts over elements, of possible 'groupings of multiples' over 'multiples', is also extremely important to Badiou's project and to the articulation of an immanent grace. The only thing that differentiates inclusion from belonging is the excess of parts over elements. If the parts were not more numerous than the elements, then belonging and inclusion would be indistinguishable. Another way to describe this excess is in terms of a set's 'powerset'. A powerset is composed of the set of parts included in an initial set. The powerset is necessarily larger than the initial set because it gathers together all of that set's parts.

8. Situations and States of Situations

With these definitions in hand, it is now possible to elaborate in more detail Badiou's understanding of how set theory provides

an ontological schema that will eventually allow for a precise conceptualization of an event of grace. The basic ontological schema is organized in relation to the void and according to the difference between sets and powersets.

The collection of multiples into a single set by an operation of belonging presents these multiples as consistent. Having been counted, they exist. Badiou names any such collection a 'situation'. A situation is 'any presented multiplicity' or structured presentation (BE, 24/EE, 32). Situations are basic to ontology. Consistency, however, cannot be 'guaranteed' by the situation's count-as-one because something always escapes it. The operation of counting necessarily fails to count itself.

> The 'there is Oneness' is a pure operational result, which transparently reveals the very operation from which the result results. It is thus possible that, subtracted from the count, and by consequence a-structured, the structure itself be the point where the void is given.   (BE, 93/EE, 109)

The danger is that the very operation of consistency may itself re-introduce inconsistency through its implication of the void. Each situation, insofar as it is transparently the result of an operation, is haunted by the anterior remainder whose subtraction makes its consistency possible. In one sense, to say that the count itself escapes being counted is simply to re-affirm that, because the void *is* the subtractive face of the count, the operation will by definition be unable to count itself. The spectre of the void is dangerous because it causes the consistency of the situation to 'waver' toward inconsistency. The contingency of the collection – unavoidable because the unifying effect is always extrinsic – renders the situation fragile and unstable.

This instability can be addressed by marshalling the included parts of the situation into a verifying 're-count' or 're-presentation' of what had been initially presented. Badiou names this re-counting of multiples through their parts the 'state of the situation' – political resonances intended. Threatened by the void's lack of structure, the structure of the situation must itself be structured. The state is a meta-structure that counts-as-one the situation's own count. It is a powerset to the set of the situation. And, because all of a situation's elements are also included in the state as parts, the state is able to re-secure their belonging and beat back the void.

Say, by way of analogy, we were to consider the set of human beings. The elements that belong to this situation would be individual human beings. The state of the situation would be that which re-counts each individual as part of various 'groups' and, as a 'meta-set', the state aims to collect together all of the possible ways of grouping individuals (e.g. race, occupation, gender, citizenship, religion, etc.). The state deals with 'the gigantic, infinite network of the situation's subsets' (BE, 107/EE, 124). Here, if the situation consists of individuals, then the state consists of groups, organizations, institutions, congregations, bureaucracies, etc., that re-count individuals as belonging to them. What's more, individuals are not simply re-counted once by the state, but re-counted as many times as they can be collected together again with a newly distinguishable group. The state re-counts the elements of the situation again and again in an immense series of collective cross-listings. In this way, through a massive apparatus of representations, the state means to secure presentation from inconsistency.

However, in protecting the situation from inconsistent multiplicity, the state does not eliminate the void so much as relocate the point at which its inconsistency may persist. (One could not, after all, eliminate the void altogether: the empty set is the founding term of set theory and every count implicates the inconsistency of what it counts.) The void, displaced from presentation, persists in the difference that allows a situation to be distinguished from its state. The state is distinguishable from the situation because the powerset of parts is necessarily larger than the set of elements. The number of ways in which elements can be grouped and re-grouped is clearly in excess of the number of elements themselves. If the state did not include collections beyond those presented in the situation, then the state would be identical with the situation and it would not constitute a separate, protective meta-count.

The state, though, is unable to banish the void entirely because the difference that allows for its distinction from the situation – the difference that constitutes its own presentation as a *re*-presentation of the situation's elements – does itself implicate the void. In finite situations, there is a gap between the state and the situation because the state is 'more numerous'. But in an infinite situation (and, Badiou contends, all human situations are infinite) the gap between state and situation is literally

immeasurable. If the situation is itself an infinite set, then the powerset belongs to another order of infinity altogether. I will return to this particular issue shortly, but to say that the powerset belongs to a larger order of infinity than the infinity of the situation is to say that the excess of the state cannot be placed into one-to-one correspondence with the situation. Peter Hallward offers a rough but useful analogy meant to illustrate the immensity of this gap between a situation and its state.[3] If we were to say that a situation consisted of the letters of the alphabet (despite the fact that the alphabet is obviously not infinite), then the state would consist of every possible combination of letters. In this vein, the excess of the state over the situation would be like the immeasurable excess of everything that ever has been or could be said over the alphabet. And this infinite excess, as Hallward points out, is – incredibly – immanent to the collection of letters themselves.

Thus, the basic ontological schema of situation/state is founded on and circles back to the inconsistency of the void. The presentation of a set is the subtraction of inconsistency and the persistent implication of this inconsistency is what motivates a meta-structuring of the situation's own structure. The state, however, rather than eliminating the void displaces it to the point of difference between itself and the state: the immeasurable excess of the powerset over the set. The state displaces the ontological gap between consistency and inconsistency to the gap between the state and its situation. As a result, this gap between state and situation is, Badiou says, 'the point in which the impasse of being resides' (BE, 83/EE, 97). In relation to an infinite ontology, the event of grace will be tied directly to the invocation of this point of impasse, this point at which the inconsistency of being – which is void or 'nothing' – can be implicated.

That the void should come to be 'located' in the gap between state and situation is no surprise. Empty of predicates, a multiple to which nothing belongs, the void has some peculiar properties. Though nothing 'belongs' to the void, this does not prevent the void from 'including' subsets. It is possible to 'count' as a part the set that the empty set is. The empty set may be empty, but it is a set nonetheless and as a set it includes at least one part: the

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[3] Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 89.

'whole' part of the set that it is. The first peculiar effect, then, of the situation/state distinction is that the void must be recognized as a subset of itself. In addition to this peculiarity, the void must also be universally included in every set as a part. Because sets are constructed extensively rather than according to any intensive properties, they include every multiple that does not contradict the rule of their count. The void, lacking any distinguishing commitment to the multiples that belong to it (because none do), can never be blocked from inclusion as a part. 'The void, to which nothing belongs, is by this very fact included in everything' (BE, 86/EE, 100). The void is both a subset of itself and a subset of every multiple.

This peculiar connection between the void and the state might also be seen from another angle. The void, Badiou explains, 'can be neither local nor global' (BE, 95/EE, 111). The void cannot be a particular local term 'since it is the Idea of what is subtracted from the count' of particular terms (BE, 95/EE, 111–12). And the void cannot be the global whole because 'it is precisely the nothing of this whole' (BE, 95/EE, 112). The void is both empty of particular local terms and the very thing whose primitive assertion prevents the introduction of any totalizable whole.

> What is there, being neither local nor global, which could delimit the domain of operation for the second and supreme count-as-one, the count that defines the state of the situation? Intuitively, one would respond that there are *parts* of a situation, being neither points nor the whole. (BE, 96/EE, 112)

'In short,' Badiou concludes, 'if it is neither a one-term, nor the whole, the void would seem to have its place amongst the submultiples or ''parts'' ' (BE, 97/EE, 113). Neither an atom nor a totality, the void as a part evades the transcendence of the 'one'.

Prompted by the inconsistent and unpresented remainder of the original situation, the state counts out the excess of a situation's parts, classifying and organizing their possible relations into groups. But, gathering together the infinity of these parts, the powerset also inaugurates a higher order of infinity in whose immeasurable excess over the situation the implication of the void continues to persist as an errant and un-excludable part. Parts, Badiou says, 'are the very place in which a multiple of nothing can err, just as the nothing itself errs within the all' (BE, 86/EE, 101).

9. A Typology of Possible Situation/State Relations

In an ontological schema appropriate to the articulation of an actual infinity, the crucial distinction is the difference between a situation and its state (i.e. between belonging and inclusion or between elements and parts). It is possible, because 'the degree of connection between the native structure of a situation and its statist metastructure is variable', for relations between situation and state to be configured in any of three ways: (1) as normal, (2) as an excrescence, or (3) as a singularity (BE, 99/EE, 115). These three configurations provide a basic typology of ways that the relation between situation and state may be inflected. Badiou sketches their descriptions as follows: 'I will call *normal* a term which is both presented and represented. I will call *excrescence* a term which is represented but not presented. Finally, I will term *singular* a term which is presented but not represented' (BE, 99/ EE, 115).

Normal terms are terms whose belonging has been success-fully correlated with their inclusion. With normality, the fit between situation and state is tight and clean. On the other hand, both excrescences and singularities are variations on the 'gap' between belonging and inclusion. In the first case, 'an excrescence is a one of the state that is not a one of the native structure, an existent of the state which in-exists in the situation of which the state is a state' (BE, 100/EE, 116). The possibility of an excrescence is what distinguishes the state from the situation. Some parts represented by the state will also have been pre-sented as elements in the situation. Such terms are normal. However, if all terms were normal then the state would not be in excess of the situation. Parts or configurations of multiples grouped together by the state that do not simply reproduce terms that belong to the situation are excrescences. In relation to individuals, an excrescence would be a social body like a school or church that groups individuals into novel sets which are not themselves individuals that belong to the situation.

A singular term represents the opposite possibility where a term may belong to a situation but go uncounted as such by the state. 'Singular terms are subject to the one-effect, but they cannot be grasped as parts because they are composed, as mul-tiples, of elements which are not accepted by the count' (BE, 99/ EE, 116). Singularities cannot be represented as parts because

'the necessary and sufficient condition for a multiple to be both presented and represented is that all of its terms, in turn, be presented' (BE, 174/EE, 194). An analogy offered by Badiou is that of a family in the context of a social situation. The family belongs to the situation because it is presented therein. It would be represented as a part by the state if, for instance, all members of the family were registered as citizens. But if some members of the family never go out, are never socially presented, and thus are not registered as citizens, etc., then the family is a singularity that cannot be represented by the state *as a family* because the state only grasps some of that family's members as socially presented. Because the state cannot grasp all of the individual elements out of which a singularity is composed, singularities are said to be 'indecomposable'. A multiple is indecomposable when it is at least partly composed of multiples 'not presented anywhere in the situation *in a separate manner*' because this prevents its elements from being *re*-composable by the state as members of other parts (BE, 99/EE, 116).

With this typology in mind, Badiou proposes a distinction between 'natural' situations and 'historical' situations. In terms of ontology, a natural situation is a situation composed entirely of normal terms. Nature names the 'stable and homogeneous form of the standing-there of the multiple', a form characterized by transitivity and hierarchy (BE, 173/193). Historical situations, on the other hand, are marked by instability. This instability results from the presence of singularities. Where the only founding term of a natural situation is the empty set, historical situations contain singularities that, as indecomposable, also play a foundational role.

> We will thus allow that a stable natural situation is ontologically reflected as a multiple whose historical or foundational term is the name of the void, and that a historical situation is reflected by a multiple which possesses in any case *other* founding terms, non-void terms.   (BE, 188/EE, 209)

In this way, 'a set formalizes a historical situation if at least one Other multiple belongs to it *which is not the name of the void*' (BE, 189/EE, 210–11). The instability that results from singularities is proper to history. Where nature runs its ordered course, history is instead the domain of unpredictable events. And, as Badiou makes clear, the possibility of an event is always connected to the

presentation of a singularity that evades the control of the state. An event's evasion of the state is what marks both its radical immanence and its graciousness.

10. Other/Others

The final piece of the ontological puzzle necessary to an articulation of infinity – and, then, to an articulation of grace in relation to the infinity of being – is Badiou's description how set theory, 'besides abolishing the one-infinite, also abolishes the unicity of infinity' and thereby opens 'the vertigo of an infinity of infinities distinguishable within their common opposition to the finite' (BE, 145–6/EE, 164–5).

   An ontology of infinity requires three elements: (1) the primitive assertion of an already existent multiple, (2) an operation or rule that can generate an orderly succession of multiples from the initial multiple, and (3) the invariant report of still more multiples yet to be traversed by the rule. Taken together, these three elements are sufficient to generate an infinite succession of numbers according to a rule that ensures, no matter how high one has gone, there always remains a number yet to be counted. However, in order to abolish the vague and intuitive rule of the 'one-infinite', it will be necessary to axiomatically assert a fourth condition because the three conditions described above only define a potential infinity. Though they demonstrate that 'one more' can be endlessly added to the series, the actual series will itself only be finite at any given juncture. To 'actualize' infinity an additional condition is required: (4) we must assert the existence of a second multiple that cannot be inferred from the initial multiple or from the rule of succession. The axiomatic assertion of this fourth condition is an ontological assertion of infinity over finitude.

   This second multiple cannot be inferred from the preceding conditions because it exceeds the reach of the rule of succession. Indeed, 'the rule will not present this multiple since it is by failing to completely traverse it that the rule qualifies as infinite' (BE, 147/EE, 166). The excess of this second multiple indicates the beginning of a higher order of infinity that cannot be reached by succession but that, as a result, 'actualizes' the infinity of the endless series it exceeds. This second multiple is

'diagonal' to the sequence because it cannot be placed into one-to-one correspondence with the successive elements of the rule. As in an attempt to 'square the circle', the relationship of this second multiple to the infinite sequence is analogous to the relationship of the circle to the infinite series of ever-subtler regular polygons. The circle is the limit that, no matter how many sides the polygon has, will always remain out of reach but that, as a consequence, concretely actualizes that towards which the whole sequence infinitely tends.

Badiou refers to this second multiple as an 'Other' and to the sequence of successive multiples as 'others'. 'The wager of infinity turns on this discontinuity' (BE, 154/EE, 173). The continuity of successor ordinals (others) must be punctured and actualized by the demonstration of a non-successive multiple or limit ordinal (an Other). The discontinuity of a limit ordinal fulfils a double function in relation to the sameness of the others. The Other is both a multiple in its own right and a rule for the others. The subtraction of the Other from the grasp of the rule's consistency is what verifies the infinite consistency of that rule.

> The Other is, on the one hand, in position of place for the other-sames; it is the domain of both the rule's exercise and its impotence. On the other hand, it is what none of these others are, what the rule does not allow to traverse; it is therefore *the* multiple subtracted from the rule, and it is also what, if reached by the rule, would interrupt its exercise. It is clearly in the position of *limit* for the rule. (BE, 147/EE, 166)

The Other is a 'place' for the others, but it is also an 'elsewhere' that situates and confirms their own place. The entire sequence of others 'unfolds itself ''inside'' that limit ordinal, in the sense that all the terms of the sequence belong to the latter', though the Other does not belong to it (BE, 154–5/EE, 174). Actualizing the infinity of the sequence, 'a limit ordinal is what stamps into ek-sistence, beyond the existence of each term of the sequence, the passage itself' (BE, 155/EE, 175).

11. The Event

In relation to this ontological framework it is possible to define with some precision an event of grace. Fundamentally, for an event to occur, 'a dysfunction of the count is required' (BE, 56/ EE, 69). Such a dysfunction is possible only in historical situations. Historical situations are open to events because, unlike natural situations where a hierarchy of succession reigns, they contain singularities. 'It is rational to think the ab-normal or the anti-natural, that is, history, as an omnipresence of singularity – just as we have thought nature as an omnipresence of normality' (BE, 174/EE, 194). Singularities, because they are presented but cannot be represented, may cause dysfunctions of the count. The structure of a singularity prevents the state from entirely resecuring its presentation and, as a result, the presence of a singularity may implicate the void.

Nonetheless, singularities in themselves are insufficient for an event. For an event to be possible, a particular kind of singularity is needed. Badiou refers to these exceptional singularities as 'evental sites'. A term is singular when some multiples of which it is composed are not independently presented elsewhere in the situation. A term is an evental site when *none* of the multiples that compose it are presented. 'I will term *evental site* an entirely abnormal multiple; that is, a multiple such that none of its elements are presented in the situation. The site, itself, is presented, but ''beneath'' it nothing from which it is composed is presented' (BE, 175/EE, 195). Also, because the state's inability to recompose the elements of the site is a result of the site's indecomposability, an evental site is foundational for the situation to which it belongs. Thus, Badiou continues, 'I will also say of such a multiple that it is *on the edge of the void, or foundational*' (BE, 175/EE, 195). An evental site is 'on the edge of the void' because it marks an unstructured point of a situation, a point at which the situation touches on an inconsistency in excess of what its rule can consistently present or count. 'The border effect in which this multiple touches upon the void originates in its consistency (its one-multiple) being composed solely from what, with respect to the situation, in-consists' (BE, 175/EE, 195).

What distinguishes Badiou's position from Marion's is that one never 'experiences' the event *per se*. The event is logical rather than phenomenological, an austere implication rather

than a saturating intuition. An event draws, from presentation itself, the implication of the void that the state attempts to forbid. It results from a dysfunction of the count that allows the subtractive face of that count to be exposed. The evental site, touching on the void because it consists entirely of what inconsists in relation to the situation, exposes the situation to the predicateless inconsistency of its bare being-*qua*-being. In this way, an event is a kind of 'localization' of the void that brings the void to bear on the specificity of the situation. 'For the void to become localizable at the level of the presentation, and thus for a certain type of intrasituational assumption of being-*qua*-being to occur, a dysfunction of the count is required, which results from an excess-of-one' (BE, 56/EE, 69). An event does not expose a situation to the void in the sense that it destroys its count and reduces it to the primal chaos of a pure inconsistency. Rather, an event makes it possible for a situation's consistency to bear with its inconsistency, for the situation's count to be traversed by an 'assumption' of its generic being-*qua*-being.

The event does not directly present this inconsistency but, instead, wagers itself as the basis on which 'the void of a situation is retroactively discernible' (BE, 56/EE, 69). The event opens the possibility of a situation's holding together its count with the retroactive implication of its inconsistent being. It is this retroactive quality that renders the occurrence of an event 'undecidable'. One must decide in favour of an event's occurrence because, bare of intuition, an event's implications must be actively pursued, tested and extended in order for the event to have existed. Initially, an event 'is' only for those who have decided its existence.

Though undecidable, the event is grounded in immanence by its evental site. This immanent grounding is essential because a genuine event is always composed of both the evental site *and* itself. 'I term event of the site X a multiple such that it is composed of, on the one hand, elements of the site, and on the other hand, itself' (BE, 179/EE, 200). This conjunction is essential to an articulation of grace as immanent, but it is also important that the event not be conflated with its site. No matter how disruptive to a situation's count, an evental site can never positively constitute an event. The evental site may negatively interrupt the smooth functioning of the state, but an event has occurred only if *something additional* mobilizes the terms of the

site by adding 'its own presentation to the mix' (BE, 182/EE, 203). To the empty anonymity of the elements of the evental site, the event must add itself as the presentation of that anonymity.

Despite this mobilization, it is always possible, from the perspective of the situation, to deny the 'addition' of the event to the evental site and thereby reduce the event to an unintelligible glitch in the system. Any event can be denied by scattering the terms (initially, the terms of the evental site) that the event attempts to gather under its name. As an example, Badiou proposes the event of the French Revolution. Historians can enumerate 'everything delivered by the epoch as traces and facts', they can 'inventory all of the elements of the [evental] site', but this 'may well lead to the one of the event being undone to the point of being no more than the forever infinite numbering of the gestures, things and words that co-existed with it' (BE, 180/ EE, 201). This is to say that the endless process of historical inventory can never reach the actual excess of the event. It cannot reach the event as what 'stamps into ek-sistence', beyond the diffusion of an endless sequence, the revolutionary 'passage itself' (BE, 155/EE, 175). Only an axiomatic decision in favour of the event, a decision that leaps beyond the incessant succession of facts to take the event's own perspective as its rule, can recognize the event as such. 'The halting point' for the situation's dissemination of evental terms 'is *the mode in which the Revolution is a central term of the Revolution itself*' (BE, 180/EE, 201). An event wagers itself as the consistency of the evental site's manifold inconsistency. In order to do so, the event 'both presents the infinite multiple of the sequence of facts' that composes its evental site and, moreover, 'it presents itself as an immanent résumé and one-mark of its own multiple' (BE, 180/ 201).

In the end, only the imposition of itself separates the event from the pure inconsistency of the void. Only the addition of its name as an 'ultra-one' in excess of the situation's count prevents it from being nothing other than 'nothing'. Without the addition of the event as the coherent mobilization of the elements of the evental site, those elements will simply continue to in-consist. However, the twist peculiar to an event is that, in order to present the elements of the site as belonging to it, the event must present itself as belonging to itself. With the event, we must count 'the same thing as one *twice*: once as a presented multiple,

and once as a multiple presented in its own presentation' (BE, 182/EE, 203). Or, we might describe 'the belonging to itself of the event' as 'the belonging of the signifier of the event to its signification' because, in the case of the event, the event is what produces itself by the addition of itself to the revolution that it names (BE, 189/EE, 211). The event is its self-signification. Like the French Revolution, it takes its declaration of itself to be constitutive of the event that it is.

The difficulty is that self-belonging is forbidden. In order to exist, a multiple must belong to *another* multiple. In set theory, being is belonging. Further, the 'natural', successive, hier-archical structure of these relations of belonging is produced by the requirement that every set belong to another set. The event, as self-belonging, is illegal. No founded set can belong to itself. In order to belong to itself, an event would have to be an unfounded set, a set without any absolutely determinable Other to which it belongs. As illegal and unfounded, the event's self-signification threatens to ruin – through its indifference – the situation's hierarchy. Indifferent, the event causes the state to waver. Advancing as an unconditional grace, it flouts the state's determination to recondition everything that is immanent to the situation.

12. Truth Procedures

The primary advantage of Badiou's approach to the infinity of an event is that it allows him to develop a clear (though general) procedure for extending the consequences of an event. Distin-guishing the evental site from the necessary addition of the event itself, his approach allows for the articulation of an event *as a truth*.

Badiou defines 'truth' in strict opposition to 'knowledge'. By knowledge Badiou means all of the information that is at the disposal of the situation and its state. Everything that is coun-table, relatable, orderable, and constructible according to the rules of the situation falls under the category of knowledge. Knowledge is fundamentally conservative and Badiou often refers to it as an 'encyclopedia'. 'Knowledge, with its moderated rule, its policed immanence to situations and its transmissibility, is the ordinary regime of the relation to being under

circumstances in which it is not time for a new temporal foundation' (BE, 294/EE, 325).

'A truth', on the contrary, 'is always that which makes a hole in knowledge' (BE, 327/EE, 361). Linked essentially to the illegality of an event, a truth mobilizes unpresented elements for the sake of inaugurating 'a new temporal foundation' for knowledge. In this sense, barren of intuition, 'truth is a process, and not an illumination' (SP, 15/P, 16). Fundamentally, a truth procedure is the means by which the novelty of an event may contest and even come to supplant the state of the situation. It can contest the state because 'a truth is always, according to the dominant law of the count, subtracted from the count' (SP, 11/P, 11). Thus subtracted, 'every truth procedure breaks with the axiomatic principle that governs the situation and organizes its repetitive series' (SP, 11/P, 11). A truth procedure diagonally traverses the order of the state. Summarizing its characteristics, Badiou describes a truth procedure as the

> coming to light of an indiscernible of the times, which, as such, is neither a known or recognized multiple, nor an ineffable singularity, but that which detains in its multiple-being all the common traits of the collective in question: in this sense, it is the truth of the collective's being.   (BE, 17/EE, 23–4)

A truth, whether it be political, scientific, artistic or amorous, is the introduction of a revolutionary difference drawn from the evental site's exposure of the situation's common being.

The introduction of a truth procedure's revolutionary difference begins with what Badiou calls an 'intervention'. 'I term *intervention* any procedure by which a multiple is recognized as an event' (BE, 202/EE, 224). An intervention marks an initial decision to declare that, though undecidable and unprovable, an event *has happened.* Such a decision is always required because the very thing that makes an event 'evental' is that it evades the order of proof: 'there is no proof of the event; nor is the event a proof' (SP, 49/P, 52). On the contrary, this initial intervention is purely 'of the order of declaration' (SP, 14/P, 15). It does not declare the meaning of an event, but it does simply and emphatically declare the fact of its having happened: there is an event, it has consequences, and these consequences need to be faithfully elaborated in relation to the status quo that has been interrupted. It is through this initial declaration that the event

interposes itself between the situation and the inconsistency of its void.

Thus, an intervention in favour of an event initially takes the form of a hypothesis. The event is affirmed as having happened and the consequences of this affirmation need to be systematically tested and extended. To this end, the intervention hypothetically supplements the situation with the name of event and thereby invents an experimental, 'fictive situation' (BE, 245/EE, 273). This (at least temporarily) 'fictive' structure is unavoidable because a truth procedure cannot draw out the consequences of an event if it begins from the perspective of what the situation considers to be legitimate knowledge. Knowledge requires one to set out 'from deduced propositions via deduced propositions towards the proposition that it has set out to establish' (BE, 251/EE, 279). These constraints, however, ensure the impossibility of producing anything abruptly novel. For the sake of an event's novelty, an intervention 'immediately installs the fiction of a situation' that axiomatically assumes the legitimate addition of the event (BE, 251/EE, 279). The necessity of this groundless declaration is what signals the gap between the conservative *laws* of presentation and the militant *strategies* of an intervention.

Badiou refers to the difficult process of testing and extending the hypothesis as a 'fidelity'. Fidelity supplies a truth procedure with consistency. Fidelity is not 'a capacity, a subjective quality, or a virtue' but 'a functional relation to an event' (BE, 233/EE, 258). As a function, fidelity must address the question of how the event connects with the immanence of its situation. 'The key to the problem is the mode in which the procedure of fidelity *traverses* existent knowledge' (BE, 327/EE, 361). Because truths do not simply ruin knowledge, procedures of fidelity must work out how a truth may open up and reconfigure the state of the situation. Basically, a fidelity accomplishes this by being an 'apparatus which separates out, within the set of presented multiples, those which depend upon an event' (BE, 232/EE, 257). A fidelity is able to separate out those multiples that connect positively with an event because it designates *another* mode of discernment that is informed by the event's proximity to the inconsistency of the void rather than by any correspondence with the established canons of knowledge.

Fidelity composes a new multiple, beginning with the

unpresented elements of the evental site, from parts of multiples scattered throughout the situation. In composing this new multiple, it 'weaves a diagonal to the situation' out of that which 'is already part of the encyclopedia's repertory' (BE, 332/EE, 367). Further, it is crucial to note that because the procedure of fidelity is grouping multiples according to a novel rule, its operation directly contests the hegemony of the state of the situation.

> Since a fidelity discerns and groups together presented multiples, it counts the parts of a situation. The result of faithful procedures is *included* in the situation. Consequently, fidelity operates in a certain sense on the terrain of the *state* of the situation. A fidelity can appear, according to the nature of its operations, like a counter-state, or a sub-state.   (BE, 233/EE, 258)

Fidelity, like the state, has an institutional quality. Its work is to gather a novel part that the situation has failed to include. It builds 'a kind of *other* situation, obtained by the division in two of the primitive situation' according to what connects with the extension of the event and what does not (BE, 238/EE, 263). Nonetheless, from the perspective of the state, the new part composed by a fidelity is always reducible to knowledge because the situation disqualifies the self-belonging of the event as purely (rather than strategically) fictional. The procedure of fidelity is infinite, but at any given moment the part that it has composed will be finite. 'Thought in its being ... a fidelity is a finite element of the state, a representation; thought in its non-being – as operation – a fidelity is an infinite procedure adjacent to presentation' (BE, 235/EE, 260). Whether finitude or infinity prevails depends on the decision that is made in relation to the event. Only an intervention, by declaring the existence of the event, is able to decide in favour of infinity.

13. The Generic

In connection with an event, a truth procedure composes a part that is indiscernible to the classifications of the state. This part, because it evades knowledge, is properly referred to as 'generic'. Every procedure of fidelity produces a truth only to the extent that it produces a generic part. Such a part is generic because 'it

is a multiplicity that no particular predicate can circumscribe' (BE, xiii). This is not to say that the elements of the part cannot have assignable predicates or that they are not elsewhere presented as consistent, but it is to say that *as a group* the situation is unable to assign a single predicate to gather them all. They are indiscernible as an intelligible part. The key to the indiscernibility of this part is its generic eclecticism. 'We shall say that a finite part *avoids* an encyclopedic determinant if it contains multiples which belong to this determinant *and* others which belong to the contrary determinant' (BE, 335/EE, 369). A part is generic when its collection of multiples jointly avoids *all* of a situation's determinable categories in order to be compositely indiscernible. In this respect, 'generic' and 'indiscernible' are practically equivalent terms. Indiscernibility negatively defines the part as what is subtracted from exact nomination. 'The term ''generic'' positively designates that what does not allow itself to be discerned is in reality the general truth of a situation, the truth of its being, as considered as the foundation of all knowledge to come' (BE, 327/EE, 361).

A truth, then, is 'an indiscernible *inclusion*' or 'an immutable excrescence whose entire being resides in regrouping presented terms' (BE, 338, 396/EE, 373, 434). But it is an excrescence that, through its proximity to the void, bears a peculiar relation to belonging. It is indiscernible because it is generic and it is generic because 'it has no other ''property'' than that of referring to *belonging*' (BE, 339/EE, 373). Indiscernibility results from the fact that a procedure of fidelity composes a part entirely on the basis of belonging itself. Such bare, predicateless belonging *is* being-*qua*-being. A generic part composes *within* the state of the situation a 'predicateless' multiple.

> The indiscernible part, by definition, solely possesses the 'properties' of any part whatsoever. It is rightfully declared *generic,* because, if one wishes to qualify it, all one can say is that its elements *are.* The part thus belongs to the supreme genre, the genre of the being of the situation as such. (BE, 339/EE, 373)

It is only because an event interposes itself between the situation and its void, taking the inconsistency of the void as its rule for positively constructing a generic, predicateless part, that a truth procedure is able 'to force the situation itself to confess its own void' (BE, 183/EE, 204).

The excrescent indiscernibility of a generic truth is indifferent to the categories employed by the state because it diagonally traverses them all and, in the process, composes a 'one-more' that could not be constructed without the apparently illegal hypothesis of the event. Indiscernible to the state, truths are non-constructible parts that cannot be successively deduced. Thus, the indifference of a truth calls into question the legitimacy of the state because it demonstrates the state's failure to completely secure the situation against the spectre of its void.

In 'the ordinary regime of the relation to being under circumstances in which it is not time for a new temporal foundation', the excess of the state's parts over the situations elements (the excess of representation over presentation) is constructed as measured and minimal (BE, 294/EE, 325). To the extent that it is able, the state normalizes its relation to the situation so that it appears as 'natural' and inevitable as possible. The degree to which it succeeds is the degree to which the void has been exorcised. Nonetheless, we know that, unavoidably, the state continues to harbour the void in the excessive gap between its parts and the elements of the situation. The state polices the gap between a presented situation and the operation of that situation's presentation only by displacing that gap to the point of its own excess. The composition of an unconstructible, indiscernible part contests the hegemony of the state by demonstrating a generic 'one-more' that is in absolute excess of the state's control.

> The un-measure of the state causes an errancy in quantity on the part of the very instance from which we expected – precisely – the guarantee and fixity of situations. The operator of the banishment of the void: we find it here letting the void reappear at the very jointure between itself (the capture of the parts) and the situation. (BE, 280/ EE, 309)

The generic part re-exposes the immeasurable immensity of the gap between parts and elements. It takes advantage of the errancy of the state's excess to produce an errant part that is indiscernible to the state. Though the state rules the axiomatic declaration of any event to be illegal, the generic part takes the state's own errancy as authorization for arbitrarily deciding the undecidability of the event.

14. Subjectivity

For Badiou, the subject is rare. Subjectivity must not be confused with the banality of what makes individual human beings the individuals that they are. Subjectivity must be understood as the logical correlate of an infinite truth rather than as the phenomenological correlate of a finite intuition. Redefining subjectivity in relation to the rarity of an event, Badiou defines subjectivity as an immanent consequence of an unconditional grace.

In describing Badiou's conception of subjectivity, it is best to begin as he does by saying what the subject is not. Subjectivity, like the truth that it serves, is defined by its subtraction from the determinable categories of knowledge. So subtracted, a subject is not: (1) a substance, consistency, or presented multiple, (2) a transcendental function or horizon of intentionality that organizes our experiences or the presentation of the world, (3) an apperception, or (4) a result or an origin. Rather, 'the contemporary subject is void, cleaved, a-substantial, and ir-reflexive' (BE, 3/EE, 9).

Positively, we can say that 'the subject *is* subjectivation' (SP, 81/P, 85). As a result, 'one can only suppose its existence in the context of particular processes [of truth] whose conditions are rigorous' (BE, 3/EE, 9). The coming to be of a subject depends on an intervention that declares the existence of an event. Or, more precisely, the subjectivation of the subject *is* the declaration that an event has happened. The subject is constituted as subject to a truth by its faithful declaration of the event. Further, by conceiving of themselves as subjects of an event whose truth is subtracted from presentation, subjectivity is not only other than the 'individual' but an active contestation of what normally constitutes one's individual identity. The subject is de-centred in relation to individual identity because subjectivation can happen only to those already de-centred from themselves by an event. Subjectivation occurs at precisely the point where the finitude of an imaginary identity dissolves in the indifference of a generic infinity.

In relation to the truth procedure as a whole, we can say that a subject is the localization of that procedure. 'I term *subject* any local configuration of a generic procedure from which a truth is supported' (BE, 391/EE, 429). Subjects are a truth procedure's

boots on the ground and subjectivation takes place as the local deployment of 'a *special count*, distinct from the count-as-one which orders presentation, just as it is from the state's reduplication' (BE, 393/EE, 431). A truth procedure, then, connects with locally presented multiples via the subject. Whatever multiples the subject bumps into can be tested for compatibility with the event. If compatible, they are included in the generic part. The path taken by the composition of a generic truth depends on the haphazard weave of its subjects through the presented situation.

However, though subject to an event of truth, the subject is itself never the master of that which is being assembled through it. 'It is absolutely necessary to abandon any definition of the subject which supposes that it knows the truth, or that it is adjusted to the truth' (BE, 396/EE, 434–5). On the contrary, as the local configuration of a truth, the subject must declare the truth's operational infinity while only grasping the incompletion of its finite being. Subjectivation,

> aporetic knot of a name in excess and an un-known operation, is what *traces*, in the situation, the becoming multiple of the true, starting from the non-existent point in which the event convokes the void and interposes itself between the void and itself.(BE, 394/EE, 432)

It is through the eye of the subject that a truth procedure threads its way through a situation, composing a generic part that evades determination by the state. Through the subject, a situation is forced to confess its own inconsistency. While it is true that 'the subject, which is the forcing production of an indiscernible included in the situation, cannot ruin the situation', a subject can, nonetheless, 'generate veridical statements that were previously undecidable' by the situation (BE, 417/EE, 456). This capacity defines subjectivity as the point at which the novelty of a grace inventively intervenes in a situation.

15. Paul's Universalism

Before concluding, it will be beneficial, both by way of example and comparison, to consider Badiou's approach to Paul. His treatment of Paul substantially illustrates many of his central

ideas and the relative familiarity of its Pauline terminology productively counter-balances the rarified formality of *Being and Event*. In what follows, I will focus on the aspects of Badiou's reading that throw light on what he means by situation, state, evental site, event, intervention and subjectivity.

Badiou recognizes that the situation addressed by Paul is rich in cultural, political and ethnic complexities. Even so, Paul's epistles consistently identify the state of his situation as dominated by the rule of two related but distinguishable 'regimes of discourse': Jewish discourse and Greek discourse. Jewish discourse orders the parts of the situation prophetically around the transcendent exception of divine signs. Greek discourse is philosophical and organizes the cosmos 'within the reason of a natural totality' (SP, 41/P, 44). Both discourses give priority to the 'one' – here, the dialectic of ontotheology plays out the exception of divine transcendence as a measure that reinforces the Greek verdict about the cosmos as a finite totality – and both, as regimes of representation, are characterized by the priority of law. 'Paul's project is to show that a universal logic of salvation cannot be reconciled with any law, be it one that ties thought to the cosmos, or one that fixes the effects of an exceptional election' (SP, 42/P, 45). On the contrary, the key to salvation is the illegality of Christ's resurrection.

For Badiou, the central Pauline problem is the intersection of law (Jewish or Greek) with sin. Law, inflected by sin, is death. 'What is sin exactly?', Badiou asks. 'It is the automatism of repetition' (SP, 79/P, 83). It is in this automatism that sin intersects with death and the policed banality of the state and its law. 'The law *fixes* the object of desire, binding desire to it regardless of the subject's "will"' (SP, 79/P, 83). Sin is subjection to a thoughtless succession of undeclared but imposed desires that follow the lines laid down by the dominant regimes of discourse. It is in this sense that the law 'mortifies the subject insofar as it separates his thought from all power' (SP, 83/P, 87). Thought and power are sundered by sin. Under sin, we are puppets of the law, doing what we do not want and wanting what we do not will. Sin is not a description of individual fault but 'living thought's inability to prescribe action' (SP, 83/P, 87).

Because sin severs thought and action, we cannot save ourselves from its domination. If we were capable of saving

ourselves, we would not be in sin. An event must intervene in order for the oppressive automatism of the law to be interrupted. However, if such an event were transcendent, then it would simply duplicate the Jewish logic of divine exception and leave the measure of the law intact. The event must be immanent and, to be so, it must have an immanent evental site that 'enters into the composition of the event itself, addressing itself to *this* singular situation, rather than another' (SP, 70/P, 74). Badiou understands Christ's death as constitutive of the site's immanent singularity. 'Through Christ's death, God renounces his transcendent separation; he unseparates himself through filiation' and he thereby '*sets up an immanentization of the spirit*' (SP, 70, 69/ P, 74, 73).

Christ's impossible resurrection is the event that must supplement the evental site of his death. Resurrection is purely gratuitous. 'This event is ''grace'' (*kharis*). Thus, it is neither a bequest, nor a tradition, nor a teaching. It is supernumerary relative to all this and presents itself as pure givenness' (SP, 63/ P, 67). This supernumerary event of grace has no positively countable status in the situation and, therefore, it has no directly verifiable ontological place. Indeed, an event is a grace only insofar as it is a break with the state of 'what is'. To borrow language from Marion, we might say: insofar as Christ's resurrection is an event, God is never more *without* being than in this resurrection. As a result, Badiou maintains that, even for Paul, it is nonsense to speak of the 'fact' of Christ's resurrection because the resurrection is simply not 'falsifiable or demonstrable. It is pure event, opening of an epoch, transformation of the relations between the possible and the impossible' (SP, 45/P, 47).

To say that, for Paul, the resurrection is not an actual, historical event may be going too far, but it remains true that the 'fact' of Christ's resurrection is important only in light of the declarable consequences that can be drawn from it with universal pertinence. Christ's resurrection is doubtless good news *for him* but it becomes salvific *for all* only insofar as its declaration can universally contest the dull hegemony of sin. What matters is that a subjective declaration of the 'good news' can widen and extend the event's initial breach in the dominion of sin. Only a collective intervention that imposes a name between event and void and that then works to draw out the implications of that name can prevent the Christ-event from devolving into

obscurantism. Resurrection is salvific only insofar as it initiates a truth procedure because salvation from sin is accomplished only in the reunion of thought and power. 'There is salvation when the divided figure of the subject maintains thought in the power of doing. This is what, for my part, I call a truth procedure' (SP, 84/P, 88).

For Badiou, the strength of Paul's position is his daring reduction of the Christian message to a subjective declaration that breaks with what is objectively possible. 'It is to its element of fabulation [*point de fable*] alone that Paul reduces the Christian narrative, with the strength of one who knows that in holding fast to this point as real, one is unburdened of all the imaginary that surrounds it' (SP, 4–5/P, 5, brackets in original). The declaration, as a result of its connection through the event to the real of the void, has an aura of absurdity that allows it to disrupt the status quo. The necessity of this absurdity is what leads Paul to claim without embarrassment that Christian discourse is 'foolishness' (1 Corinthians 1.21). 'It is through the invention of language wherein folly, scandal, and weakness supplant knowing reason, order, and power, and wherein nonbeing is the only legitimizable affirmation of being, that Christian discourse is articulated' (SP, 47/P, 50). If the Christian declaration is other than an unjustifiable 'wager' on an undecidable event, if it succumbs to a desire for signs, proofs and tangible triumphs, then it will have abandoned the weakness that, in relation to the state, is its only strength. Grace does not contest the powers-that-be through an effective show of verifiable strength but through a persistent and subversive recoding of how one defines what strength and weakness are. It does not simply contest the strength of the state but, more fundamentally, it contests the state's determination of what strength is. For this reason, 'Paul is profoundly convinced that weakness will not be relieved through a hidden force' because the power of a truth is only 'fulfilled in weakness itself' (SP, 52/P, 55).

If truths lack objective strength, then their substance must be provided by the subjective persistence of fidelity. The substance of truth is faith. Badiou endorses Paul's insistence that a Christian must not flinch from but remain faithful to the unguarded weakness of its declaration. 'Fidelity to the declaration is crucial, for truth is a process, and not an illumination' (SP, 15/P, 16). Everything depends on faith because Christianity is nothing

other than the deployment of a truth procedure suspended from an impossible event. To be faithful to an event is to declare it. Fidelity and declaration coincide because 'the real of faith *is* an effective declaration' (SP, 88/P, 93, italics mine). Or, better: 'faith is the declared thought of a possible power of thought' (SP, 88–9/P, 93). The faithful declaration of an event does in itself contest sin because such a declaration enacts the coincidence of thought and power that sin prevents. In its declaration, the subject of faith *is* its subjectivation and its subjectivation *is* the signifying of its declaration. The event is and has power only insofar as it is thought and declared.

Christianity, as a truth procedure initiated by the event of the resurrection, undertakes the composition of a generic counter-state. As a truth, it must be indifferent to the situation's categories of identity and particularity. No preconstituted subset of the situation (Jewish or Greek) can support a declaration of the resurrection. Truth can be deployed only as a generic part that collects members from every subset in direct defiance of what the state prescribes as intelligible. Through its composition of this generic part – gathering converts from every locale, ethnicity, social class, and gender – the Christian declaration institutes a universal difference that re-divides the situation in relation to the Christ-event. A division is produced between those individuals who connect positively with the event and those who do not. However, this division is not simply partisan because Christians, as a generic collection, are 'for all'. 'Through their commensurability with a truth' these anonymous individuals are 'transformed into vectors of humanity as a whole' (SP, 20/P, 21). Every Christian subject will be anonymous and indifferent to the particularity of its situational predicates because,

> if a truth is to surge eventally, it must be nondenumerable, impredicable, uncontrollable. This is precisely what Paul calls grace: that which occurs without being couched in any predicate, that which is translegal, that which happens to everyone without assignable reason.   (SP, 76–7/P, 80–1)

It is only in its lack of predicates that a truth becomes truthful and those who declare the truth become subjects of that truth only to the extent that their own predicates are indifferently traversed by the truth that they bear. In relation to the singularity of the evental site and as a generic exception to the

categories of the situation, the Christian body is a 'universal singularity'. The novel truth that follows from its event will necessarily be 'diagonal relative to every communitarian subset' (SP, 14/P, 15). Infinite but not obscure, immanent but not banal, novel but not transcendent, Badiou reads Paul as modelling the nearness of grace.

Chapter 4

Conclusion: Towards an Immanent Theology

1. An Immanent Theology

I am proposing the possibility of an immanent theology that traverses both theism and atheism for the sake of grace. Such a theology takes the immanence of grace as its sole object and persists in its commitment to the nearness of this grace despite the fragility of its occasion and the perpetual lure of transcendence. In its commitment both to immanence and grace, it distinguishes itself from more familiar modes of theology and, especially, from those with some pretension to immanence.

For instance, an immanent theology is certainly not a 'natural' theology and it evades pantheism (the identification of God with the totality of the material universe), panentheism (the position that God is definitively 'in' the world while still transcending its totality), and every kind of fundamentalism (the position that identifies the transcendence of God's word with the immanence of the material texts at our disposal). Each of these approaches, though oriented by an immanence, subverts the immanence of grace. Natural theology, like panentheism, reads the trace of God's transcendence in the finite constitution of the world but, in so doing, it assigns grace to transcendence. Pantheism, by tightly identifying God with the totality of what immanently is, leaves no space for the novelty of grace. And fundamentalism, by reducing the grace of God's word to the letter of the text – to its immanent literality – ungraciously renders that grace 'present' and manipulable.

All of these positions fail because they are unable to think the novelty of grace as a difference internal to immanence itself. In each case, transcendence is either collapsed into a homogeneous immanence or difference is maintained only through the invocation of an infinite transcendence. The novelty of grace either has no place or is no place near. Grace, subverted, is banal or obscure.

This, I've argued, is precisely the problem we face if we attempt to read Jesus' proclamation of the 'nearness of the kingdom of God' as declaring an immanent grace rather than invoking the imposition of an obscure transcendence. If we take Jesus' saying that 'the last shall be first and the first last' as a formulation of how the novelty of an immanent grace may be enacted, we immediately run into the same problems as above. As it stands, the formula either only accomplishes an inversion of places while leaving the banality of the hierarchy intact or it must posit a transcendent fulfilment that will in some ineffable way manage to do something novel. For an immanent theology to be possible, the novel difference produced by grace must be thinkable as a difference proper to immanence itself.

Derrida's formula '*tout autre est tout autre*' (every other is wholly other) is valuable as a translation of Jesus' saying because it pronounces the novelty of difference as internally constitutive of immanence itself. Derrida reads the infinity of grace as a difference immanent to the finitude of identity because the condition of possibility for any assignable meaning is the impossibility of excluding its endlessly novel recontextualization. My project, however, is prompted by the inability of this approach to positively articulate the novelty of grace as other than an indefinitely deferred potential. To support an immanent theology, the novelty of grace must be thinkable as other than a negative interruption of economic succession. An immanent grace may be connected with the negativity of the void, but it must also be distinguishable from the void. Deconstruction identifies the immanence of the void as an infinite potential for interruption, but it cannot distinguish grace from the void because it cannot name the infinity of the void as an actual infinity. While it is certainly true that an immanent theology must bear some relation to 'negative' theology, it must not be dominated by it because the extent to which negative theology bluntly designates the infinity of grace as ineffable is the extent to which ontotheology remains in force. God's transcendent infinity, though exceptional, serves only negatively and idolatrously to ensure the measure of the world's inescapable finitude. An immanent theology, on the contrary, must be able to give some positive account of grace as an immanent difference that is both actual and infinite.

2. The Impasse Becomes a Breakthrough

Paul, Marion and Badiou are remarkable in that they each attempt positively to distinguish grace from the void. All admit, as Derrida also maintains, that, in relation to the finitude of economic succession, grace can only immanently appear as a negation or lack. However, they each propose positively to articulate the infinity of the void by turning this impasse into a breakthrough. What appeared to exclude the possibility of grace must instead be taken as the rule that confirms its actuality. Rather than viewing the void from the perspective of the situation, they contend, we must cede our perspective and confess the void as the point from which the situation itself must be seen. Only by adding our confession of the void as a grace can we enact the minimal difference necessary for grace to be distinguished from the 'nothing' of the void. From the perspective of the situation, grace only appears as a lack. But when declared as the rule rather than as an exception to the rule, this lack appears as an infinite excess.

Paul, Marion and Badiou each make this same move. For Paul, conceiving God's grace as already and actually given depends entirely on the addition of a declaration. We must supplement our manifest lack of autonomy with a declarative confession of this lack as the very thing that confirms both the righteousness of God and the createdness of the world; otherwise, sin reigns. For sin, God's grace can never appear as other than a mark of our lack. The dominion of sin, in light of its rule of autonomy, can only ever read its lack of autonomy (i.e. its dependence on God) as a shameful void that it must deceitfully suppress. This void may perpetually 'interrupt' the smooth functioning of sin's dominion, but such interruptions will never amount to grace unless the lack of autonomy is itself taken as the rule proper to our representation of ourselves and the world. Then, in this light, what had been our lack appears as the mark of God's excessive grace.

For Marion, a phenomenological approach to givenness is only possible if the metaphysical rule of transcendence and economy is suspended. The natural attitude will always miss the grace of givenness because it can only read the excess of a saturated phenomenon as an empty exception in which nothing (no object) is given. The aim of the phenomenological reduction is to reverse this expectation and take the empty

metaphysical exception as the phenomenological rule. Phenomena must be understood as they give themselves and their givenness becomes apparent only to the degree that intentionality confesses itself unable to receive both the excess of what is given and what is given to itself by this same excess. The rule of economy excludes the gift, but this does not of itself exclude the gift from being the phenomenological rule.

For Badiou, the novelty of grace requires an immanent distinction between actual orders of infinity. Grace cannot be thought as infinite when infinity is nothing but an ineffable exception to finitude. Actual infinities become intelligible only in relation to one another. Infinity must take as its rule what initially appeared to confirm its lack of sense: the rule of one-to-one correspondence. Similarly, in relation to the nomination of an event, we would say that an intervention must name as an event that which the situation can only present as an inconsistent void. With the addition of this name, a truth procedure takes as its generic rule the void's evasion of every discernible category and composes under the infinity of this rule an actually generic part. Grace is concretely manifest in this generic part.

In each case, the inversion is homologous. Grace is not a response to sin; sin is an ashamed response to the excess of grace. Givenness is not phenomenologically exceptional; it is the mark of phenomenality *per se*. Infinity is not a potentially endless extension of the finite; finitude is derived from the pure multiplicity proper to infinity. The possibility of an immanent theology is inaugurated by the intelligibility of these inversions.

3. From Paul through Marion to Badiou

However, for the sake of an immanent theology, the points at which Paul, Marion and Badiou part ways are perhaps as important as the points at which they converge. Each articulates an inversion that aims to render intelligible, beyond the limits of a Derridean approach, the actuality of an immanent grace. But the impasses peculiar to each of their projects are immensely instructive. In light of these impasses, it becomes possible to prescribe more clearly the minimal conditions for an immanent theology that would finally be capable of treating the immanent novelty of grace as both infinite and actual.

As we have seen, Paul, in order to present God's grace as already accomplished in the event of Christ's resurrection, argues that the grace displayed by the Christ-event has always already been immanently constitutive of the world. In its lack of autonomy, each creature bears the mark of a grace whose unconditioned excess presents it as the contingent creature that it is. The primary difficulty, however, from the perspective of my project, is that Paul has no reason to think the immanence of this grace apart from the transcendence of its divine Giver. Paul's approach, while modelling the thought of an immanent grace, is incomplete as an immanent theology because it does not care indifferently to traverse the difference between theism and atheism.

The abiding contribution of Marion's work is that it demonstrates the compatibility of grace and immanence in the absence of a divine Giver. In fact, it argues that grace flourishes as gracious precisely to the degree that the transcendence of the giver is bracketed. Marion carries through the Pauline co-ordination of grace and immanence by showing that the phenomenological reduction of transcendence to immanence is simultaneously a reduction of economy to grace. In order to arrive at the immanence of givenness, one must arrive at the graciousness of the gift. Pursuing this path, Marion also shows that the unconditionality of the gift (what Paul names the unconditionality of the righteousness of God) is only intelligible when conceived as an 'instantaneously synthesized' infinity that simultaneously contests and bestows the local conditions of finite limits. Crucially, Marion's advance holds that grace is immanently intelligible only to the degree that it gives an actual infinity because, as a potential infinity, grace can only be invoked as the ineffable transcendence of what cannot be successively synthesized.

Marion correctly arrives at this result and he is faithful to the necessity of maintaining the coincidence of immanence, infinity and grace. Nonetheless, Marion's phenomenological framework proves incompatible with his insight. In order to affirm the infinity of grace, it is insufficient simply to reduce phenomenological transcendence to a bare minimum. As long as the correlation of a transcendent horizon remains necessary – and such a horizon must remain in play in order to be doing phenomenology – then the finitude of the subject's intentional horizon will prevent the intelligible articulation of infinity proper to

grace. Marion provides an immanent theology with its most basic maxim – so much immanence, so much grace – but the finitude of phenomenology proves inadequate to the actual infinity of an event of grace.

In order to articulate grace as an actual infinity, an immanent theology must hold with Badiou that infinity is not divine; rather, infinity is simply *what there is.* Here, an infinite ontology is necessary. Such an ontology is thinkable only if we move beyond a phenomenological reduction of transcendence to the formal subtraction of an immanent multiplicity from the transcendence of every unified, finite form. An immanent theology requires a rigorous abrogation of the 'one'. In addition to Marion's co-ordination of grace with immanence and infinity, Badiou demonstrates the necessity of co-ordinating immanence and infinity with pure multiplicity. Subtracted from atoms and totalities, from the domination of the many by the one and of parts by the whole, Badiou unfolds multiplicity into an endless plurality of actual infinities. It is in this context that it becomes possible to formulate concisely the immanence of grace in connection with the measureless excess of an infinite set's parts over its elements. This immanent difference is constitutive of infinity itself and it is in relation to this difference that the evental provocation of a truth procedure is possible.

The clarity introduced by Badiou's subtraction of immanence from the priority of unity is especially beneficial when it comes to deciding the status of an event. Marion's analysis waffles between a description of the event as an intuitive excess and as a formal void. In order to preserve the phenomenological 'actuality' of the event, Marion decides in favour of intuitive saturation. However, by committing himself to phenomenology, Marion blocks the successful elaboration of an actual infinity because the infinity of his event must now remain tied (even if as a contestation) to the finitude of the subject's intentional horizon. Marion does argue that the called subject must respond to the excess of what is given to it with a proper name that borders, at least initially, on formal anonymity in order for the event to be constituted as other than empty of significance, but his emphasis on the dimension of intuition obscures this insight.

Badiou's analysis, on the other hand, makes absolutely clear that the status of the event itself is formal and logical rather than intuitive and phenomenological. Every operation of

presentation logically presupposes the void, but the void is never given. An event depends on a formal implication of the void's inconsistency through its relation to the immanent singularity of an eventaI site but, in order to be differentiated from the void, the supplement of an axiomatic affirmation of its having taken place is necessary. The event adds itself to the elements of the evental site as a formal or 'fictive' supplement whose status as a novel truth can be determined only by testing and extending the hypothesis of its addition. In this sense, Badiou sides with Derrida against Marion: no intuition, no matter how saturating, is adequate to the infinity of the event. Even the saturating glory of Christ's resurrection connects with the infinity of an event of grace only through its formal, universal declaration. However, unlike Derrida, Badiou does not name the formality of the event as that which necessarily defers its infinity to the domain of potentiality. Rather, Badiou argues for its formality as a confirmation of its actual infinity. Thus, while Marion attempts to anchor the actuality of an event's infinity in the phenomenon's intuitive saturation, Badiou instead anchors its actual infinity in the necessity of a truth procedure. Actuality is not a function of an actually infinite saturation but of an actually infinite truth procedure. Truth, Badiou maintains, is an arduous procedure suspended from the name of an event, not a saturating moment of intuitive illumination. An immanent theology, for the sake of an actual infinity, must hold that the event is formal rather than intuitive and that the actuality of its infinity rests in the truth procedure that follows from an event rather than in any initial 'saturation'.

Finally, Badiou's position makes possible an additional distinction that is essential to an immanent theology. Badiou's most important and original contribution to the lexicon of grace may be his use of the term 'generic' to designate precisely the result that follows from taking the unconditioned inconsistency of the void as a rule for collecting together a novel and 'universal' part of a situation. It is true that a generic part is indiscernible according to the categories at the disposal of the situation, but it is distinguishable from what is simply ineffable or obscure by its verifiably consistent evasion of the situation's consistency. Badiou's notion of the generic renders precisely intelligible the inversion necessary for the thought of an immanent grace: it demonstrates how inconsistency can be taken as the rule of a

truth procedure's consistency. It positively displays the actual results of an axiomatic procedure.

Though an immanent theology begins with the maxim 'so much immanence, so much grace', the intelligibility of this maxim depends on whether a generic part can display infinity as intelligible rather than ineffable. It is in Badiou's notion of the generic that a path opens to the thought of a grace that is able to diagonally connect both immanence with novelty while evading banality and an immanent novelty with actuality while avoiding transcendence.

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