World Restructuring: Toward a Phenomenology of Parable

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Preface: On the Essence of the Parable

§1

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.””


To undertake a study of parable is perhaps to arouse confusion and skepticism. As a colleague once questioned, “parables, aren’t those a little outdated?” It seems as though parables are condemned to conjure up images of wise old sages, baffling disciples and apprentices with bizarre and generally unexplained stories. As Kafka writes, “Many complain that the words of the wise are always merely parables and of no use in daily life, which is the only life we have.”

Nonetheless, parables remain an integral tool of religious education, direction, and practice. Crossing ethnic, cultural, and religious bounds, these simple stories can be found in Christianity, Buddhism, Sufism, Kabbalism, Hassidism, and even the atheistic existentialism of Franz Kafka. Moreover, the importance of the parable within Christianity is further exaggerated by the primordial nature of these stories. As Robert Funk notes, “the parables are usually taken to be the most authentic material we have from the lips of Jesus.”

Yet, if parables can truly be found across religious and cultural bounds, and furthermore, if

1 NRSV.


the stories presented within these individual traditions are themselves varied and diverse, in what possible sense can we hope or expect to identify an “essence” of parable? Is it not possible that “parable” represents nothing more than a vague linguistic category into which a motley collection of otherwise unique stories are placed? To these concerns we must respond with Chrétien that, “to decree a phenomenon meaningless is to too easily dismiss having to think about its meaning, and first of all having to describe it such as it appears and gives itself.”4 Certainly, it cannot be denied that parables have appeared. We hear them spoken: we read them in our religious texts and in our poetry. As individuals, these works cannot be denied. More strongly, however, it is also the assertion of this investigation that these texts are bound together by more than mere convention. As Schelling argued in the opening of his infamous lectures on mythology, “there is something common and in agreement in all of them.”5

The founding intuition of our search for the essence of parable can be found in Ray L. Hart's unpublished essay, *Meister Eckhart: Nothing if not God; if God, Nothing; if Godhead, Nothingness Hyper-on*. There, Hart makes the assertion that “no proof of any kind is offered by scriptural parables or by a parabolic reading of scripture. Parables show, they do not prove.”6 Such an assertion merely begs the question, *what does the parable show, when it shows?* Although seemingly banal, an answer to this question is neither quickly nor easily ascertained. Nevertheless, this thesis does provide a single clue by which our investigation might find its genesis: specifically, the simple word “show.” If our investigation is to discover that which shows itself, that which appears or is manifest, then there seems a single route which might provide the appropriate methodological framework, that is, phenomenology.


As a side note, before we commence our proper investigation, certain key figures who will recur consistently throughout this work should be noted. First, Husserl and Heidegger, generally noted respectively as the founders of transcendental and existential phenomenology, will be engaged both positively and negatively throughout this investigation. Second, references to the “French phenomenologists” will be common, particularly in our opening discussion. This group, composed primarily of Levinas, Marion, Henry, Lacoste, and Chrétien, is noted for its “theological turn”; that is, the adoption of theological and religious content and methodology within a phenomenological framework. Of particular note is Michel Henry, who functions as one of the primary interlocutors of this work. Last, a great debt is owed to the Christian medieval mystical theologians whose insights have been greatly drawn upon. Of particular note is Meister Eckhart, who will make noteworthy appearances throughout the text.

§2

In order to clarify our project, it may be helpful to begin our investigation with a brief sketch of the origin and basic theses of phenomenology. Particularly, it may be helpful to examine the complex and often dialectical relationship within the thought of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.

A truly 20th century philosophy, phenomenology was founded by Husserl in his 1900/1901 *The Logical Investigations*. While the roots of phenomenology can be traced to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Rene Descartes' rationalism, Husserl's work represents a distinct philosophical development. Unhappy with the “idealistic” bent of European thought at the turn of the century, particularly as represented by Neo-Kantianism, Husserl sought to develop a philosophy which would permit a return to the fundamental objects of human experiences, the “things themselves” [der sachen selbst]. In this way, Husserl intended to found a science of human consciousness by which the objects of human experience—phenomena—could be studied as they show themselves, as they are given to the individual. In an early essay he writes, “Only an
originary social science can arrive at an explicit understanding and a real clarification of them [phenomena]; that is, a social science that brings social phenomena to direct givenness and investigates them according to their essence."\(^7\)

Beginning with his 1910-1911 lectures, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Husserl underwent a “transcendental turn.” This movement, cauterized in his *Ideas I*, takes the form of a rejection of pre-philosophical naïveté and an emphasis upon the immanent region of “pure consciousness.” He writes, “we shall therefore keep our regard fixed upon the sphere of consciousness and study what we find immanently within it.”\(^8\) This emphasis, alternately notated as the *epoché* (ἐποχή) or the *phenomenological* (or *transcendental*) *reduction*, results in a “bracketing” of all transcendent (external) Being. “I am exercising the “phenomenological” ἐποχή which also completely shuts me off from any judgment about spatiotemporal factual being.”\(^9\) It is precisely this transcendental turn which motivated Heidegger's counter-development of Existential Phenomenology.

Heidegger began his career as Husserl's brightest and most promising student, assisting him with many notable projects, including his Encyclopedia Britannica article “Phenomenology,” and the lectures on *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*. Nonetheless, beginning with *Being Time*, Heidegger can be seen to significantly diverge from Husserl's transcendental idealism. Fearing that Husserl's later work had, like its predecessors, lost touch with the living experience of reality, Heidegger sought to “reopen the brackets of Being”; that is to say, he rejected the phenomenological *epoché*. Instead, Heidegger developed his “Dasein analytic,” a theory which emphasizes being-in-the-world as the fundamental mode of human life. For Heidegger, the human experience can never be understood by bracketing the naive or non-reflective world; instead, it is

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\(^9\) Husserl, "The Basic Approach of Phenomenology": 65.
precisely this world which function's as the subject of philosophical (i.e. phenomenological) inquiry.

This distinction between Transcendental and Existential Phenomenology is essential to our investigation. While Husserl's thought will be rigorously engaged throughout this work, it is the presuppositions of Existential Phenomenology which will primarily guide our thought. Like Heidegger, parables and their authors are concerned solely with living individuals and their movement through the world. Therefore, the essence of parable will not be found through a bracketing or reduction of this experience, but precisely through an examination of the world of individual human life.

With these clarifications in mind, we are now in the position to begin the first movement of our investigation, an analysis of the relationship between phenomenology and theology. In particular, we will next consider the very possibility of phenomenological theology itself.
Chapter 1

Prolegomena to a Phenomenological Theology

I. Introduction

“What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians? Our instruction comes from “the porch of Solomon,” who had himself taught that “the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart.” Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief. For this is our palmary faith, that there is nothing which we ought to believe besides.”

- Tertullian

These rhetorical questions, proclaimed by Tertullian in the third century, have rung throughout the history of Christian theology. Even as early as St. Paul of Tarsus we find a similar condemnation of philosophy—“the wisdom of the world.” Yet, the history of Christian thought is saturated with philosophical perspectives, concepts, and methods. Could we even conceive of a Pseudo-Dionysius without Plotinus, Aquinas without Aristotle, Tillich without Heidegger? The histories of Christian theology and Western philosophy form such a tightly bound knot that it seems an impossible task to even consider delimiting them. Nonetheless, the question of the legitimacy of theological appropriation of philosophical method and content remains a principal concern among philosophers and theologians alike. Nowhere has this question become more pressing than within phenomenology. With the increasing popularity of such religiously disposed thinkers as Levinas and Marion, it has been left to phenomenology to sort out the precise limits of its own discourse: an increasingly difficult task, as Material and Radical Phenomenology continue to press the bounds of the discipline. Further complicating the issue, writers—whose individual projects bear marked


11 1st Corinthians 1.20.

12 Naturally, it must be recognized that this is by no means the one-way street that Kant envisioned in his Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason. On the contrary, the philosophical appropriation of theological concepts has become a deeply felt concern in the continental tradition, particularly within phenomenology and deconstruction. Immanuel Kant, “Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason’ in Religion and Rational Theology, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 62.
similarities in theological content—often self-identify in contradictory manners: e.g. Henry as solely a philosopher,\textsuperscript{13} Lacoste as simultaneously philosopher and theologian,\textsuperscript{14} and Marion as both, but at different times.\textsuperscript{15} Nonetheless, in such intentionally phenomenological texts as *Experience and the Absolute*, we see a convergence of phenomenology and theology to such an extent that “the supposed border between these two kinds of knowledge tends to disappear.”\textsuperscript{16} This merely begs the question: is a truly phenomenological theology legitimately possible, or in the words of Janicaud, “What is questionable, from the methodological point of view, is the status of phenomenology—and of the phenomenological—between a metaphysics that has been “overcome” (or challenged) and a theology that has been made possible (at once prepared and held in reserve).”\textsuperscript{17} Nonetheless, the emergence of this sort of self-questioning should present little surprise; for as Henry noted, phenomenology has, since its inception, been plagued by an “obsession with a radical self-awareness.”\textsuperscript{18} In the first chapter of our investigation, we will therefore examine this question, engaging three of its most relevant critiques. The first, found in the originators of phenomenology, Husserl and Heidegger, relies upon the distinction between transcendence and immanence. The second, formulated by Dominic Janicaud and Jacques Derrida, challenges the legitimacy of any “phenomenology of the invisible,” particularly as it has manifested in Levinas, Henry, and Marion. The third, offered by Marion himself, decisively splits phenomenology from theology through the dichotomy of “possibility” and “historicity” (i.e. facticity). Through


\textsuperscript{14} Jean-Yves Lacoste, "From Theology to Theological Thinking," Fall 2010 Richard Lecture Series University of Virginia, November 3-5 2010.


these examinations it will be shown that not only is phenomenological theology a possibility, but that it can be enacted both within the theological spirit and with full philosophical rigor. Let us now commence with an analysis of the origin of this complex relationship between theology and phenomenology as begun in the early 20th century.

II. Critiques of Phenomenological Theology

§1

Already, in the 1900 founding of Transcendental Phenomenology, the *Logical Investigations*, one can clearly perceive the suppression of theological inquiry. Such a position falls unquestionably from Husserl’s *epoché*. As we have briefly noted, the *epoché* (i.e. the phenomenological reduction) results in a bracketing of transcendence, that is to say, one no longer presupposes the existence of the object of thought. Perhaps best illustrated in an example drawn from perception, let us consider the act by which a table is perceived. A pseudo-Cartesian skeptic might argue that it is fully possible that a perceived table does not exist “in reality”: it is perhaps merely an illusion. Yet, following the *epoché* such an argument is essentially irrelevant. Whether the table exists in reality, or merely in illusion, the *act of perceiving as such* remains identical. Phenomenology, for which this reduction remains a foundational principle, is a science of conscious acts and must therefore hold the transcendent actuality of objects as fundamentally irrelevant. The theological consequences of such a position are easily identifiable. Traditionally defined as an “Absolutely Transcendent Being,” the question of the existence of God (arguably the theological question) must unquestionably fall under the blow of the *epoché*. That is not to say that God necessarily does not exist, but merely that the question of God’s existence is irrelevant to phenomenology: this may be termed *methodological agnosticism*. Husserl makes the claim

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20 This may be seen as a direct successor to Kant’s dismissal of any “proof of God’s existence” in the “Transcendental Dialectic” of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. “To get out of the way all opposed assertions, whether they be atheistic, deistic, or anthropomorphic; all this is very easy to do in such a critical treatment,
explicit in his Ideas, writing, “Upon this 'absolute' and 'transcendent' we naturally extend the phenomenological reduction. It [the transcendence of God] must remain excluded from the new field of study we have to create, insofar as this field must be a field of pure consciousness.”

Initially, this claim appears incontrovertible, permanently closing the question of the relationship between phenomenology and theology. But this question, like phenomenology itself, has experienced significant subsequent revisions and reinterpretations throughout the previous century, perhaps most importantly in the work of phenomenology’s first son, Martin Heidegger.

Before considering his mature work, it may be helpful to recognize that Heidegger’s relationship to theology is itself in no way static. In his 1920-21 lectures on religion we find the bold assertion that “Only with phenomenological understanding, a new way for theology is opened up.”

Yet, as we will see, following his development of Existential Phenomenology, most notably in Being and Time, this position is completely reversed.

As we previously noted in our discussion of Heidegger's turn from Transcendental to Existential Phenomenology, perhaps the greatest contribution of Heidegger to phenomenology was the reintroduction of the question of “Being.” As he describes his project, “Our aim in the following treatise is to work out the question of Being and to do so concretely.” If phenomenology is solely understood as a science of conscious acts—acts by which a transcendental subject constitutes objects—than the reintroduction of Being becomes fundamentally nonsensical. Instead, what we see in Heidegger is an abandonment of the subject-object paradigm in toto. Against this perspective is posited a holistic understanding since the same grounds for considering human reason incapable of asserting the existence of such a being, when laid before our eyes, also suffice to prove the unsuitability of all counter-assertions.” Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998): 588.

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21 Husserl, Ideas on a Pure Phenomenology, §58, as cited in Janicaud, Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: 68.


of the human individual denominated as *Dasein*, that being whose mode-of-Being is Being-in-the-world. In connection with this distinction, phenomenology is no longer understood as a science of conscious acts but instead, more broadly, as the study of experience. In this way Heidegger retains the phenomenological preference for immanence over transcendence, but intimately ties these immanent experiences to the manifestation of Being. Nonetheless, throughout all of these changes, Heidegger’s relationship to theology remains essentially that of Husserl. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in his notorious claim that “a Christian Philosophy is a square circle and a misunderstanding.” Yet, it must be recognized that, like Husserl before him, this comment is primarily methodological. This position is clarified in his 1946 *Letter on Humanism* in which he refutes Jean-Paul Sartre’s assertion that existentialism is necessarily a correlate to atheism. Against this view he writes:

“The thinking that points toward the truth of Being as what is to be thought has in no way decided in favor of theism. It can be theistic as little as atheistic. Not, however, because of an indifferent attitude, but out of respect for the boundaries that have been set for thinking as such.”

Likewise, in what may be his clearest demarcation of phenomenology and theology, he is quoted as stating, “If I were to write a theology (as I am sometimes minded to) then the word “Being” would not be found there.”

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26 Marion, *God Without Being*: Coverpage.

27 It should be noted that these claims are further complicated by certain references found throughout his latter work: e.g. “only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought.” The precise role that the “holy” and the “sacred” play in his thought is in no way conclusive, but they seem to point to the fundamental ambiguity that encompasses religion throughout Heidegger’s thought, and perhaps phenomenology in general. For reference, one possible interpretation of Heidegger’s use of “Sacred” can be found in Jean-Yves Lacoste’s *Experience and the Absolute*, “We will say that in the field of experience the *Geviert* attempts to thematize, mortals become acquainted with an immanent sacred [deviennent familiers d’un sacré immanent], but not with a transcendent God.” Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*: 18.
§2

Before we can examine our second critique, that of the “phenomenology of the invisible,” it may be enlightening to briefly map out the trajectory of this notion in the history of French phenomenology. The earliest formulation of this thought can be found in the existential phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty’s *The Phenomenology of Perception*. This text remains absolutely fundamental to an understanding of the subsequent development of French phenomenological thought. In this work, Merleau-Ponty examines the *priority* of perception, a view which leads him to emphasize the importance of “embodiment” and the prevalence of invisibility in human experience. To quote, “therefore the body is not an object. For the same reason, my awareness of it is not a thought, that is to say, I cannot take it to pieces and reform it to make a clear idea. Its unity is always implicit and vague.”

This formulation recurs, without fail, throughout the entirety of the proceeding “theological turn.” In Levinas we find the un-objectifiable “Other” [l’autre]; in Henry “Life,” the invisible essence of phenomenality; in Marion the “Saturated Phenomena”: the Flesh, the Idol, the Icon, the Event, and Revelation; and lastly in Lacoste, the non-event of “Liturgy.” What distinguishes these experiences (or in Lacoste’s terminology “non-experiences”) from a fundamental lack is generally expressed through the distinction of intention and intuition, or in Kantian language concept and intuition. Due to an absence of conceptuality or intentionality these experiences are incapable of manifesting as a phenomenon in the traditional sense—that is, within the horizon of visibility. Nonetheless, these experiences are

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29 “For example, I see the next-door house from a certain angle, but it would be seen differently from the right bank of the Seine, or from the inside, or again from an aeroplane: the house *itself* is none of these appearances: it is, as Leibnitz said, the geometrized projection of these perspectives and of all possible perspectives, that is, the perspectiveless position from which all can be derived, the house seen from nowhere. But what do these words mean? Is not to see always to see from somewhere? To say the house itself is seen from nowhere is surely to say that it is invisible!”, Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 77.
still “given” [gegeben],\textsuperscript{30} in the sense that intuitive, hyletic, or affective data are still present to the recipient.

Although this discussion of the “phenomenology of the invisible [or unapparent]” may appear peripheral to our main purpose, Janicaud seems essentially accurate in his assertion that “on the contrary, it places us at the crux of the matter where everything is decided.”\textsuperscript{31} Only if it is permissible to talk of that which, by definition, cannot appear within the horizon of the world, can one even conceive of a phenomenological theology. It is for this reason that in his work to distinguish phenomenology and theology, Janicaud seeks this subject as the primary target of his critique.

Perhaps Janicaud’s critique may best be summed up with his simple question, directed towards Levinas, “what remains of it, deprived of everything empirical?”\textsuperscript{32} For Janicaud, having abandoned phenomena in search of their foundation, the “theological turn”\textsuperscript{33} has been “hijacked” by metaphysics. In more technical terms, Radical Phenomenology seeks to outline the \textit{structures} that ground experience. In order to discover these structures, it must seek evidence outside (or beyond) the strict phenomenological horizon of visibility. It is Janicaud’s claim that any methodology which moves beyond this horizon (i.e. towards the invisible) is no longer capable of speaking of the “things themselves” and has therefore moved out of the realm of valid phenomenological research.

This critique can similarly be found in Derrida, who in a discussion with Marion proclaims, “I am also for the suspension of the horizon, but, for that very reason, by saying so, I am not a phenomenologist anymore.” Furthermore, “it is difficult for me to understand how to describe something not as an object; as something other than an object, and to claim

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{30} See. Jean-Luc Marion, \textit{Being Given}, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Janicaud, \textit{Phenomenology and the ‘Theological Turn”}: 31.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Janicaud, \textit{Phenomenology and the ‘Theological Turn”}: 40.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} For the remainder of the paper, the “theological turn” and the “turn” will both refer to the group of phenomenologists whose work is noted for its heavy religious content. This group includes (but is not limited to) Levinas, Henry, Chretien, Marion, and Lacoste.
\end{itemize}
that we are still doing phenomenology... It is difficult for me to understand how an excess of intuition can be described phenomenologically.”

What we can see here is a fundamental disagreement concerning the nature of phenomenology itself. On the one hand, we find those for whom phenomenology's work is essentially tied to, or bound within, the horizon of visibility; any movement beyond this horizon, although potentially legitimate in its own right, does not bear the title “phenomenology.” On the other hand, we find those who argue that phenomenology's content must include everything that appears, even those phenomena whose mode of appearing is never that of an object. Before seeking an answer to this question, let us examine our final critique of phenomenological theology, one that comes from within the “turn” itself.

§3

In our discussion of the previous two arguments directed against phenomenological theology, Marion has primarily been identified as a “proponent”; that is to say, his project was identified as one which shows the possibility of the adoption of phenomenological means toward theological ends. As a matter of precision it must be recognized that this is principally an interpretation of Marion's project which he himself would not likely support. Quite to the contrary, Marion offers a clear example of our third critique.

This dichotomy is succinctly expressed in his essay *Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology* where he writes:

“Its [revelation's] phenomenological analysis therefore bears only on its representation, its “essence,” and not directly on its being-given. The intuitive realization of that being-given requires, more than phenomenological analysis, the real experience of its donation, which falls to revealed theology. Between


35 It should be noted, even if only in passing, that certain of Marion's claims seem to support our thesis. In his discussion with Derrida (previously cited), he admits, “In that precise sense, the distinction between the field of philosophy and the field of theology, the “limits” between them in the meanings of Kant and Fichte, could be bridged to some extent.” Yet, it is clear from his writings that, on the whole, he holds philosophy (phenomenology) and theology to be essentially methodologically distinct. Derrida and Marion, “On the Gift”: 39.
phenomenology and theology, the border passes between revelation as possibility and revelation as historicity. There could be no danger of confusion between these domains.”

This clear distinction between possibility and historicity (or in other instances “fact”) can be seen as operative in the background of Marion's entire œuvre. Not only does he fear that the introduction of historicity into his work would necessitate its designation as theological, but furthermore, that if this were the case his work as a whole would be compromised. He defends himself, writing, “I suggest that my proposal remains merely philosophical and without any theological presupposition or bias here. On the contrary, any theological bias and second thought would ruin my project.” Even in his explicitly religious examples, he goes to great length to emphasize that these are merely examples and absolutely nothing more.

This position appears to find support in Husserl's early claims regarding phenomenology. Of the phenomenological attitude he writes, “can we not attain an attitude of such a kind that the empirical, being the characteristic of the givenness of the natural attitude, remains completely disengaged, and indeed in such a way that also its essence as essence of nature remains disengaged.” Once again, our discussion hinges upon a particular interpretation of the role of the epoché. This interpretation argues that, through the “bracketing” of transcendence, we should achieve a phenomenological neutrality. If the object as transcendent is bracketed, then likewise its historical existence, its very facticity, must be bracketed. Therefore phenomenology, Marion argues, is primarily a study of the

36 Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology”: 590.


38 “If I therefore privilege the manifestation of Jesus Christ, as it is described in the New Testament (and in conformity with the paradigms of the theophanies of the Old), as an example of a phenomenon of revelation, I am nevertheless proceeding as a phenomenologist—describing a given phenomenological possibility—and as a philosopher—confronting the visible Christ with his possible conceptual role (as Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, or Schelling dared to do), with an eye toward establishing a paradigm.” Marion, Being Given: 236.

possibility that certain phenomena may appear and can in no instances refer to the actuality or historicity of phenomena. Furthermore, it appears indisputable that theology necessarily refers to historicity, or at least actuality. What form would a theology take if it refused to present itself as positing actuality? Would it even be recognized as a valid theology?  

Having examined these three critiques, we can now see the great difficulty that exists for phenomenological theology. Not only do these critiques arise from outside, but simultaneously from within the “turn.” In order to establish itself as a possibility, it will therefore be necessary for phenomenological theology to seriously engage these refutations and deeply consider the nature of both phenomenology and theology.

III. Theological and Phenomenological Responses

§1

Before we begin our refutation of these arguments it may be helpful to briefly recapitulate their basic structure. First, we were presented with the argument that theology deals necessarily with the transcendent, while phenomenology purely with the immanent. Second, that theology deals with what is, by definition, invisible, while phenomenology with the appearance of phenomena. Third, that theology works exclusively in the realm of actuality, while phenomenology's work is necessarily in terms of possibility. From here our response will take the form of four distinct moves. In the first three, these critiques will be examined and the strict dichotomies by which they are constructed will be questioned. Once complete, the final portion of this analysis will examine the consequences of these three analyses, synthesizing them in order to show one possible form that a legitimate phenomenological theology might take.

§2

It seems without question that the first critique of theology, developed by Husserl and Heidegger, possesses considerable strength. Many traditional theological methods,

40 This possibility will be engaged below.
41 It is also worth noting that, although it was not referenced to earlier, this argument can be found,
including at least Thomistic Scholasticism (Aristotelianism), would be rendered indefensible following the reduction to immanence. Nonetheless, the question must be asked, does this necessarily limit all forms of theological inquiry? The clearest alternative to the transcendental theological disposition, and that which has gained considerable attention within phenomenology, is the so-called “mystical” theological tradition. Among the major thinkers of the “theological turn,” mystical theologians have played an extremely prominent role. In Michel Henry's *Essence of Manifestation*—following a critique of Heidegger, Husserl, Hegel, and Fichte—Meister Eckhart is presented as a model by which the immanence of subjective life can be rightly understood. Similarly, in Marion's *In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of Negative Theology* Pseudo-Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* is proposed as a forerunner to Marion's conception of the “Saturated Phenomenon.” Even more recently, in the preface to *Experience and the Absolute*, Lacoste pays homage to Juan de la Cruz, of whom he writes, “I chose to use their notions freely.” Yet, the question remains, from a methodological standpoint, what can be gleaned from mystical thought?

The unifying methodology of mystical theology is perhaps best expressed by the commonly cited slogan, *Ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab interioribus ad superiora* [From the exterior to the interior, from the interior to the superior]. In this method's traditional form, the mystic is instructed to progressively remove consciousness of the external world until only the internal life of the mind remains. Once achieved, the wills and differentiations within the mind itself are similarly bracketed. It is believed that once a mind has completely detached itself from all will, knowledge, and sensation that it is in a position to achieve

likewise, in Janicaud. Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”*.  

42 Kant is similarly critiqued, in a portion of the manuscript that was edited out and later published separately as *Destruction Ontologique de la Critique Kantienne du Paralogisme de la Psychologie Rationnelle*.  

43 This is perhaps the correct place to emphasize that it is obviously true that these thinkers also drew from both mystical and non-mystical sources, it is merely the preeminence of the mystical that is being noted. [e.g. “their” in this quote actually refers to both Juan de la Cruz and Bonhoeffer] Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*: 3.
mystical union [unio mystica] with the Absolute. Nowhere can this emphasis upon a retreat from the external to the internal be seen more clearly than in the work of Meister Eckhart. Commenting upon this duality, Eckhart writes, “all this Scripture calls the old, the earthly, the outer, the hostile or the slavish man. The other person in us is the inner man, which Scripture calls the new, the heavenly, the young, the noble man, or the friend.”\(^4\) This suppression of the external and elevation of the internal is found, not only in mystical anthropology, but perhaps more importantly in mystical theories of God. Within traditional Neoplatonic thought, physical reality is conceived as the final act of creation (or emanation) and consequently, furthest removed from the source: God. Yet, the soul, or at least a specific region of the soul, is understood as intimately tied to (or in certain instances identical to\(^5\)) God. In this sense, God is more accurately understood as radically interior than exterior; the radically immanent is united with the radically transcendent. As Marion writes:

> "Husserl submits what he names “God” to the reduction only insofar as he defines it by transcendence (and insofar as he compares this particular transcendence with that, in fact quite different, of the object in the natural attitude); and yet in Revelation and theo-logy, God is likewise, indeed especially characterized by radical immanence to consciousness, and in this sense, would be confirmed by the reduction."\(^6\)

Conceived in this sense, phenomenological theology could best be seen to follow the advice of Eckhart, who directs, "one should not accept or esteem God as being outside oneself, but as one's own and as what is within one."\(^7\)

Our first critique, in which the content of phenomenology was posited as immanent and theology as transcendent, must therefore be recognized as a fundamental oversimplification. Just as philosophy has evolved to include a plethora of immanent and

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\(^5\) e.g. Eckhart's "Little Spark".

\(^6\) Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given*: 242.

transcendent methodologies, so to has the complex history of theology. Although one might challenge the content of such an immanent theology, and many have, these challenges must be made “theologically,” that is to say, the field itself cannot be dismissed outright; at least, it may not be dismissed on the grounds of the phenomenological epoché.

§3

In our second critique, it was shown that theology must reckon with the invisible, while phenomenology deals exclusively with the visible (phenomena in the traditional sense). Yet, once again, it must be argued that such an absolute claim oversimplifies the complexity of the field; although in this instance, it is phenomenology and not theology which has been misrepresented. Against this view, it will be shown that phenomenology has, since its founding, dealt with both visible and invisible phenomena.

As a point of clarification, it should be reminded that invisibility in this context is directly related to objectification; an object is invisible to the extent that it is impossible for it to manifest as a determinate object. Already we have seen this un-objectifiability played out in Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body. Yet, there is no need to advance even as far as the French Existentialists to discover this position. Recourse to the invisible can be identified even among the earliest phenomenologists, including, most notably, Heidegger.

In his magnum opus Being and Time, Heidegger seeks to elaborate precisely what it means to be Dasein (the human individual), a being which is always already in a world. In order for this analysis to even feign completion it is necessary that Heidegger explicate precisely what is meant by the term “world,” a task which he undertakes in §14-24, “The Worldhood of the World.” It is here that we discover an oddity in Heidegger's thought, he writes, “And we have formally defined 'phenomenon' in the phenomenological sense as that which shows itself as Being and as a structure of Being.”

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48 One need only examine the Bull “In agro Dominico” (1329), to find accusations of heresy directed towards these perspectives.

earlier definition of phenomena as anything which “shows itself.” Yet, it must be noted that, by including the “structures of Being,” Heidegger has concerned himself both with apparent phenomena and those phenomena which are essentially incapable of making such an appearance. For, if beings (objects) are those entities which show themselves within the world, than necessarily the world-itself cannot, by definition, appear within this horizon. Yet, the “world,” understood phenomenologically, cannot be understood as anything other than a structure of Being, i.e. a phenomenon. It is clear that Heidegger feels the weight of this aporia, as he writes, “thus, to give a phenomenological description of the 'world' will mean to exhibit the Being of those entities which are present-at-hand within the world.”

In order to understand that which by definition cannot appear, Heidegger finds that he must resort to an examination of that which can appear. In this sense, Heidegger's project bears a notable similarity to Kant's deductive project in the Critique of Pure Reason: the “structures of Being” are deduced purely from the relationships of entities manifest within these structures. In this sense, it may not be strictly necessary to argue that the “world” does not appear, but merely that it does not appear as an object, i.e., within the horizon of visibility which the world itself is. Heidegger appears to recognize this fact and express a certain level of openness to the variety of means by which phenomena might manifest themselves including, theoretically, those whose only manifestation is outside of any horizon; that is, the invisible.

In this way, we find ourselves in a position to affirm—with Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and the thinkers of the “turn”—that the horizon of the world is not the full extent of phenomenality, and consequently, neither is the object the only mode in which beings might manifest themselves. Of course, it is still possible that one might argue that phenomenology must deal exclusively with “objectifiable” beings, but in this instance the burden of proof seems to fall unequivocally upon the critic. The historical manifestations of phenomenology have in nearly every case acknowledged the necessity of engaging with the “transcendental”

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50 Heidegger, Being and Time: 91.
structures of consciousness (or Being), structures which cannot appear within the horizon, for they themselves precisely are this horizon. In the same way, phenomenological theology must therefore be permitted to engage in such inquiry.

§4

In regard to Marion's assertion of the incompatibility of phenomenology and theology, there appear to be two routes open by which we might offer a challenge. On the one hand, we might cite recent theological work, perhaps exemplified in Richard Kearney's *The God Who Might Be*. Here, theology has abandoned its safe-house of actuality and moved into the ambiguous landscape of possibility. God is no longer conceived as a being (or non-being) that is in some sense “real,” but instead, as the mere eschatological possibility of itself. In this way, Kearney has shown a route by which theology might ground itself upon possibility and that it is, therefore, in no way decided that theology's field of inquiry must remain directly tied to historicity (i.e. actuality, facticity).

Furthermore, if we examine Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology* we find the repeated assertion that Christian theology is only possible in the co-presence of the “universal” (possibility) and “concrete” (actuality).Positing Christ as the archetype of this simultaneity, Tillich writes, “In so far as he is absolutely concrete, the relation to him can be a completely existential concern. In so far as he is absolutely universal, the relation to him includes potentially all possible relations and can, therefore, be unconditional and infinite.”\(^{51}\) Yet, such a concern for the union of the universal and the concrete is not the unique property of Tillich or even theology as a whole. Instead, this concern is a direct product of the significant influence of Heidegger's *Being and Time* upon Tillich's theology.

For Heidegger, the question of Being is plagued by its tendency to become either reduced to the most meaningless universality or contracted into an absolutely un-

generalizable particular. It is for this reason that Heidegger seeks to ground every claim

regarding Being within a concrete entity. “If we are to arrive at the basic concept of 'Being' and to outline the ontological conceptions which it requires and the variations which it necessarily undergoes, we need a clue which is concrete [konkret].”

Here Heidegger appears to be responding to the question of Husserl, who writes,

“But if we really record experience as experience, i.e., regard it as positing individual being, then, although we may be certain that the range of such positing is a very wide one, we cannot be so completely certain whether, on the basis of such experience, something like an experiential science, as a real matter-of-fact-science, can be founded.”

In response to this concern, Heidegger appears to offer his Existential Phenomenology as a model by which one can perform work which is, on the one hand, methodologically (i.e. phenomenologically) legitimate, and on the other, directly connected to historical being. For Existential Phenomenology, every phenomenon is a historical (factual) phenomenon. To refuse to acknowledge this implicit historicality would be to return to the Transcendental Idealism of Husserl, an Idealism against which phenomenology has been in constant revolt since its earliest manifestations.

In light of this development, Marion's critique must be seen as an outdated, or at least minority, view. To unilaterally declare that phenomenology deals only in possibility, against the consistent examples to the contrary throughout the history of phenomenology, seems to unnecessarily limit this field. Similarly, as Kearney illustrates, theology need not be necessarily pigeonholed within pure actuality, but may be equally built upon the possibility and the fecundity of God. In light of these two responses, we can see that the unambiguous relegation of theology to the historical and phenomenology to the possible betrays both studies. Against this we will posit phenomenology, theology, and any convergence of the two

52 Heidegger, Being and Time: 63.


54 The earliest manifestation of the backlash against Husserl's “Transcendental Turn” can be seen in the large number of students who abandoned Husserl after his publication of Ideen, as well as published responses by Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (to name only a few).
as a study which is equally concerned with both the actual and the possible.

In light of our preceding investigations, let us now attempt a synthesis of our conclusions by which we might generate a working model of a phenomenological theology.

§5

In his previously cited *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”* Janicaud writes, “We have not had any other design than to draw out these several traits and to recall an insurmountable difference: phenomenology and theology make two.”55 Against this assertion, we might draw up two objections. First, phenomenology and theology do not make two, because each is not merely one. Having engaged these three critiques, it has become clear that the fields of phenomenology and theology are fundamentally ambiguous. The sharp variance of opinion generated within these two domains leaves the claims of these critiques fundamentally untenable. In each circumstance it was shown that, although the critique holds significant weight against a certain “style” of phenomenology or theology, it was in no way broad enough to encompass the fields in their entirety. This leads to our second objection, phenomenology and theology are not two, because in certain circumstances they may be one. If these two fields are truly as diverse and ambiguous as we have indicated, then there is no reason to presuppose the impossibility of their convergence. It is this convergence that we have called phenomenological theology, and it is this convergence which will ground our proceeding investigation into the essence of parable.

But, before we continue, it may be helpful to clearly delineate the form of our phenomenological-theological methodology.

1.) The field of study for phenomenological theology, like phenomenological philosophy, is immanence; perhaps even radical immanence.

2.) Phenomenological theology is concerned with the multiplicity of manifestations of Being; both those within and without the horizon of the world, both the visible and the invisible.

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55 Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”*: 103.
3.) Phenomenological theology is concerned with both the possible and the historical, the universal and the concrete.

With these stipulations in mind, we can now see a path by which a phenomenological theology might remain true to its dual identity: both a rigorous phenomenology and a vigorous theology. It is by way of this path that we will conduct our investigation of the phenomenon of parable.
Chapter 2

The Manifold Senses of Time in the Parable

I. Introduction

“Time must be brought to light—and genuinely conceived—as the horizon for all understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it.”
-Heidegger

A discussion of the phenomenon of parable's relationship to temporality may appear an unlikely direction for our investigation. Moreover, it has been the explicit project among proponents of the value of parable to de-emphasize this relationship, emphasizing instead the universality, the “timeless” character of the parable. While this perspective will be substantially addressed, a full abstraction from the questions of time and history is by no means in the interest of our discussion. On the contrary, as time has played a major role throughout the development of continental philosophy and in particular phenomenology, a failure to address these questions would leave our discussion of this complex phenomenon severely inhibited. As Heidegger writes, “Whenever Dasein tacitly understands and interprets something like Being, it does so with time as its standpoint.” In this sense, time will function for us as a starting point, or perhaps more accurately as a foundation, for the remainder of our investigation.

Furthermore, the question of time is of particular necessity within an investigation of the nature of parable—for the parable is a phenomenon whose temporal ambiguity resists any clear demarcation. On the one hand, the parable appears, first of all, as the product of a historical event. Like any text it must find itself situated in the larger complex of objective world-historical time. Yet, the parable also manifests temporal complexity, for as a narrative it inevitably constitutes an internal temporality. Furthermore, as we have already noted, there is a definite sense

56 Heidegger, Being and Time: 39.
57 Division 2, Part IV.
58 Heidegger, Being and Time: 39.
in which the parable appears to manifest itself as “timeless,” as the vehicle of universal truth. In light of these various senses of temporality—which remain in perpetual internal struggle, simultaneously defining the essence of parable and participating in its meaning—our discussion of time will take the form of three distinct movements. First, we will begin with the temporality most easily recognized within the parable: the objective, the world-historical. Second, we will move to consider the way in which the parable, as a story, enacts the internal temporality of an “in that time...” Lastly, we will engage that dimension of the parable which appears to transgress the strict bounds of temporality as it is normally construed: the universal or eternal nature of the parable.

II. The Parable as Past

§1

As we have seen, our line of questioning cannot help but find itself in reference to temporality. Nonetheless, for phenomenology, particularly in its existentialist manifestations, temporality has remained primarily future-oriented. Perhaps due to Heidegger's emphasis upon projection, the question of time as past has remained consistently peripheral. Yet, in the words of Friedrich Nietzsche, "The unhistorical and historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture.”59 We must therefore step backwards, recognizing that the parables as we now possess them were written at a concrete time, by a concrete individual, in a concrete context. In short, proper parable interpretation necessitates historical criticism. Nonetheless, what precisely is intended by “historical criticism” remains, as yet, unclarified.

Hegel's historiography, epitomized in his infamous Phenomenology of Spirit, appears as an obvious choice of historical framework. In this construal of history, we find history understood as essentially teleological: history as the movement and self-manifestation of

Geist.\textsuperscript{60} Within this movement, a clear progression of self-understanding can be traced, climaxing at Calvary,\textsuperscript{61} and resulting in the full revelation of the Absolute as \textit{Absolute Knowing}. Although a powerful and influential conception of historiography, this teleological understanding of history is not our aim, nor shall its dialectic be our method. A brief consideration of the use of history will reveal that every historiography, Hegel's included, is designed for a specific purpose and in response to specific questions. As an example, we might recognize individuals (e.g. politicians) who, often citing identical historical incidents, draw out dramatically differing understandings of the lessons which can be derived from this past. That is to say, for any single historical event one can find countless interpretations, interpretations which might serve any number of distinct or even diametrically opposed purposes. Returning to our question concerning Hegelian dialectics, we discover within Hegel's work an essentially \textit{constructive} understanding of history. Hegel's project remains fundamentally an attempt to express the means by which “reason is the law of the world and that, therefore, in world history, things have come about rationally.”\textsuperscript{62} This project appears as the epitome of metaphysical totalization, and therefore falls counter to the explicit project of existential phenomenology. More specifically, we are not seeking to place the parable within the larger framework of the movement of history, if such a movement is even objectifiable. Instead, we are merely seeking a means of access by which we might better understand the existential conditions in which these texts were composed: our project is \textit{descriptive}, not constructive.

Following an explicitly phenomenological course, one might suppose that it should therefore be our intention to dispose of every hermeneutic lens, to view history in its purity,


its neutrality. For as Husserl emphasizes countless times, phenomenology, as exemplified in
the *epoché*, is the elimination of naïveté: the attainment of a pure, presuppositionless
perspective. Yet, the possible attainment of this “pure perspective” appears to be mythical, a
Kantian Ideal, forever deferred. Furthermore, even if such a purity were possible, by what
possible means would we be capable of identifying it? It is for this reason that, instead of
pursuing this “objective” purity, we will merely seek to clearly expose our methodological
intentions as best as we are able.

For phenomenology, the principal problematic is the question of access; how are we to
gain access to the material which we might take as evidence? For Husserl, the repeatedly
referenced *epoché* unambiguously provides this means-of-access. Yet, this new “region of
being” provides access to the conscious acts of the individual alone; that is to say, it is
methodologically solipsistic. Against this solipsistic tendency, what we seek is a means by
which we might better understand the social-historical context in which the parables were
constructed, as well as the psychological experience recorded therein. Yet, it must be
remembered that we are not merely performing phenomenology, but phenomenological
*theology*. In light of this fact it must be asked, is there a theological benefit to such an
examination? Is it not possible that the parables can simply speak for themselves? Given the
common appraisal, that the content of the parables is universal (viz. intended to speak beyond
the time and place of composition), this seems an entirely plausible possibility. In order to
avoid dismissing this perspective without due attention, let us turn to a work in which the
distinction between the universal and the historical can be seen in its most exaggerated form:
the theology of Michel Henry.

§2

Although theological themes can be found throughout Michel Henry's work, his most

extensive engagement with explicitly theological material can be found in *I am the Truth:*

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63 Edmund Husserl, "Phenomenology as Transcendental Philosophy" in *The Essential Husserl: Basic
Toward a Philosophy of Christianity. The principal focus of this work is an explication of Life. Dualistic in many important senses, one of Henry's principal distinctions falls between the “Truth of the World” and the “Truth According to Christianity.”

Drawing upon Husserl's conception of time as described in his lectures on The Phenomenology of Time Consciousness, Derrida's philosophy of difference, and Heidegger's conception of “the world,” Henry explicitly conflates the horizon of visibility, the world, Time, history, consciousness, and language under an Inbegriff aller Vorstellungen: the Truth of the World. Unlike the domain of Life (accessed by the Truth According to Christianity), this world is essentially the domain of death. Here, objects are merely representations manifested to consciousness, always different from what they hope to represent. These objects arrive to consciousness, but just as quickly fade into memory and nonbeing. It is a world of uncertainty and ambiguity, forever beyond our grasp.

Against this world, Henry posits the self-affectivity of Life as lived. Here, one directly—that is, without mediation or distance—experiences the embrace of Life through such phenomena as joy, love, anxiety, pain, and pleasure: essentially, pathos in its most positive sense. It is this domain which is engaged through the Truth According to Christianity, the Christian message in its most essential form.

In his emphasis upon the internal truth of Christianity, Henry appears to be invoking Christian mystical thought—in particular Meister Eckhart, who writes that “the inner eye of the soul is the one which perceives being and receives its own being directly from God.”

In this thought, reality is internal and access to this truth requires the progressive abandonment of both the physical and willful attachments to multiplicity. “There are three things that prevent us from hearing the eternal Word. The first is corporeality, the second is multiplicity and the third is temporality. If only we could transcend these three, we would dwell in

eternity, in the Spirit, in unity and in the desert, and there we would hear the eternal Word.\textsuperscript{65}

It takes no significant effort to identify the clear connection between this sentiment and Henry's truth of the world/Christianity dichotomy.\textsuperscript{66}

It is within this dichotomy that the repression of historicality reveals itself. Having fully distinguished the world as it is understood historically from the truth of Christianity (i.e. theology), Henry is forced to propose theology as absolutely distinct from any historical or textual analysis. Henry writes, “What the answer depends upon, the truth of Christianity, has precisely no relation whatsoever to the truth that arises from the analysis of texts or their historical study.”\textsuperscript{67} Furthermore, "It [the Truth According to Christianity] relates to a reality other than that of the text itself, in such a way that the reality targeted in this text is never posited through it.”\textsuperscript{68} Here we find the previous assertion brought to bear in its fullest terms. Not only is theology absolutely unconcerned with history, but the very texts themselves are incapable of speaking to the truth of Christianity, a truth which is only possible through an examination of the immanence of the internal Life.

Yet, does the trans/a-historical message of Christianity truly necessitate such a startlingly stark distinction? Even within the mystical sources from which Henry heavily borrows we do not find such an intense rejection of the biblical material as textual. It is true that Meister Eckhart, in his commentary upon Genesis, clearly marks the distinction between worldly knowledge and mystical knowledge, that is, historical knowledge and eternal knowledge. But, in the earlier portion of the work, \textit{The Commentary on the Book of Genesis},

\textsuperscript{65} [Emphasis our own] Eckhart, \textit{Selected Writings}: 175.

\textsuperscript{66} It should also be noted that this emphasis on the message of Christianity over and above the "world" should not be misunderstood as a uniquely mystical phenomenon. Such a disposition can be equally found in the earliest Christian texts, for instance, "Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." (James 4.4) and "Do not love the world, neither the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the Father's love is not in him." (1 John 2:15).


\textsuperscript{68} Henry, \textit{I am the Truth}: 7.
Eckhart engages in traditional exegetical work, carefully dissecting the text's surface reading in a common manner. It is only after this work is complete that Eckhart understands himself to be in a position to begin *The Book of the Parables of Genesis*, his explicitly mystical analysis of the “internal meaning” of the text. He describes this difference writing, “I do this to arouse the more skilled readers to seek a better and richer explanations of theological, natural and moral truths hidden beneath the form and surface of the literal sense.” In this methodology, Eckhart does not dismiss the value of a literary and historical analysis, fully enveloping it within his mystical thought. Instead, he sees the mystical analysis as a furthering of the work already begun within the exegetical reading. For Eckhart, the historical and the universal are both independently valuable, if for no reason more than that “the external face must be beautiful in order to attract.”

In order to provide a reading of parable by which this phenomenon can be seen in its fullest clarity, it is therefore necessary for us to incorporate both the historical/critical reading of the text and an analysis of its universal content. A failure to incorporate this concrete perspective would leave an analysis ungrounded, open to unbounded speculation. In our attempt to provide such a historical grounding for our analysis we must turn, once again, to Heidegger.

§3

The Heidegger with whom we seek kinship is not the later Heidegger for whom theology and phenomenology must remain fundamentally distinct. Instead, we look to some of Heidegger's earliest work, a series of lectures concerning religion given in 1920-1921. Although still an assistant to Edmund Husserl, one can already sense the existential concerns that will later dominate his philosophy and sharply distinguish his work from Husserl's.

Perhaps nowhere is this distinction more clearly marked than in his consistent recourse to

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history. As we have already noted, within Husserl’s Transcendental Phenomenology, the role of historical analysis is ambiguous at best. Yet, in these lectures we find the historical presented as fundamental to phenomenological work. But, it must be asked, if the principal question of phenomenology concerns the means of access, what access is granted by historical consciousness?

“The historical,” Heidegger argues, “through the distancing from a particular, present, world-orienting standpoint, opens the eyes to other life-forms and cultural ages.”[71] Heidegger appears to insist that, although phenomenology must in all circumstances remain the study of experience, it need not remain solipsistic, even methodologically. Instead, through the analysis of historical texts, we gain access to phenomena spatially and temporally beyond the initial grasp of our life-world. Moreover, Heidegger insists that not only is this access a possibility, but that it is a necessity for theological research. “Characteristic of the phenomenological-religious understanding is gaining an advance understanding for an original way of access. One must work the religious-historical method into it, and indeed in such a way that one examines it critically.”[72] It must be emphasized that although this historical analysis is in no way phenomenology proper, it nevertheless sets the stage for phenomenological research. As Heidegger writes, it is done “already from out of phenomenological motives.”[73]

Once this historical analysis is completed, one is in the position to “empathize” with the historical character. That is not to say that one ever achieves a position within which one might be fully subsumed into a historical situation: we can never truly walk in another’s shoes.[74] But simply that, just as we possess the capacity to experience the emotional or

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intentional states of those with whom we interact at present (spatial distance), we can similarly enact such empathic interaction across historical (temporal) distance. Heidegger provides a clear example of this project in his analysis of Paul's letters. Narrating this transition from historical analysis to empathic (phenomenological) analysis he writes, “Now we no longer observe the object-historical complex, but rather see the situation such that we write the letter along with Paul. We perform the letter-writing, or its dictation, with him.”

Such an approach is in no way foreign to the tradition of parable interpretation. Historically, parable interpretation has fallen primarily into two camps: the diachronic and the synchronic approach. The latter, epitomized in 20th century structuralism, argues that the meaning of a parabolic text can be extracted from the “deep structure” of the material. This approach is fundamentally a-historical and perhaps more congruent with Henry's notion of theology as absolutely distinct from the temporal/historical world. The former, diachronic method emphasizes the interconnection between meaning and historical context.

“The meaning of a parabolic text is mediated by an extra-linguistic, socio-historical matrix to which the textual subject matter belongs and to which the subject matter mimetically or analogically points. By reading the parabolic text diachronically, according to the unfolding of the story-line, this historical orientation contends that the logic of the narrative plot will put one in tune with the meaning called forth by the extra-linguistic context.”

It is through the recognition of this matrix—in its multifaceted manifestations: social, historical, economic, religious, cultural, etc.—that we can attain the necessary foreconception by which we can interpret the internal narrative of the material. We must therefore turn to this internal narrative where we will find the parables second mode of temporality, the parable as present.


III. The Parable as Present

§1

"Well, perhaps we ought to make use of this fiction a little more, if we are going to clear up the question at issue satisfactorily."
- Plato

Regarding the question of “deep structure” within mythology, Paul Ricoeur writes, "First of all, the myth is a form of narration: it recounts the events of the beginning and the end inside a fundamental time – "In those times..." This referential time adds a new dimension to the historicity which charges the symbolic meaning and so must be treated as a specific problem." Such a concern is equally applicable to an analysis of parable, and it is precisely this “In those times...” that will be the focus of our next movement.

Theological material can be transmitted by any number of means—treatise, song, visual art, poetry, etc. Yet, the parable nonetheless appears uniquely positioned, a medium in which “timeless” truth is offered within a strictly narrative form. What Ricoeur seems to identify in the preceding passage is the necessity of engaging this dimension of historicity, the necessity of treating the dramatic within myth, or in our case, within parable. If the narrative form is understood as an essential component of the parable, just as the myth, then a failure to treat it as such would be to misconstrue the meaning of the text itself. That is to say, the narrative format of the parable is an irreducible element of its essence.

It might be tempting to follow traditional parabolic interpretive techniques which seek a direct allegorical meaning within the text. This allegorical hermeneutic remained the undisputed method of interpretation throughout Christian history, even as early as the Gospel according to Mark. But such an interpretation diminishes the necessity of internal


79 e.g. Mark 4.10-20.
temporality: the text need no longer take the form of a story but might be just as easily rendered by a collection of determinate facts. The question must therefore be asked; is there something unique to narrative that cannot be expressed through static text? If the answer to this question is “no,” then what role has parable in the work of theology and religion? Is it merely aesthetic or didactic, a beautiful, though inessential method of transmitting religious doctrine?

This appears to be precisely the role that has been granted to parable by traditional interpretive methods. Within this hermeneutic the parable of the “Good Samaritan,” for example, is nothing more than the commandment “love thy neighbor.” Yet, if our previous assertion is correct, such a translation of the parabolic content into “mere fact” may be essentially untenable. Perhaps instead there is a fundamental instability within the parable which must be experienced as a “becoming.” Perhaps the parable can only be understood when it has been vicariously or empathically lived by a reader, a reader who is drawn into the story as a child. Understood in this sense, the parable appears to bear a closer affinity to drama and literature than to rationalistic theological doctrine. And perhaps rightly so, as Nietzsche writes:

"If the value of a drama lay solely in its conclusion, the drama itself would be merely the most wearisome and indirect way possible of reaching this goal... but that its value will be seen in its taking of a familiar, perhaps commonplace theme, an everyday melody, and composing inspired variations on it, enhancing it, elevating it to a comprehensive symbol, and thus disclosing in the original theme a whole world of profundity, power and beauty."  

§2

Nietzsche's analogy provides a powerful insight into the structure of the parable. The subject of the parable appears, initially at least, to be the mundane, the “familiar, perhaps commonplace theme.” It may be this single fact, more than any other, which distinguishes the myth and the parable. Whether the creation of the world in the carcass of a great beast,
the heroic tales of a demi-god, or the perilous journey home from Troy, myths are essentially otherworldly. Within the battles of gods and time-before-time, we find characters who, although they may resemble everyday humanity in many important aspects, nonetheless live outside of the world of common experience. These figures reside in their own reality, what Schelling calls the “world of the gods.” This distance speaks volumes, for myths are ambitious. They explain the natural order: they tell us why the sun rises, why the just suffer, and the nature of eternity. Through their grandeur they allow the individual to experience the divine, the dramatically transcendent. In comparison, the parable appears almost pathetically humble. It speaks of common themes and of mundane life. We find no demi-gods, only farmers; no great abysses, only dusty roads. Yet, this is precisely the strength of the parabolic narrative. Unlike the great myths, it takes no significant work to empathize with these tales and their familiar characters. It is not necessary to explain the distress of a mugging victim, of a disappointed father. In most parables, this empathy arises naturally. We intuitively recognize the implied context of the narrative whether it be social, economic, political, or natural.

Nonetheless, not all parabolic circumstances are so clear. Like any narrative of interest, parabolic stories are riddled with aesthetically minor, though interpretively essential, details. Not simply arbitrary facts, in many instances an understanding of these historical particulars fundamentally rewrites the stories in which they are found. For one who is unfamiliar with the cultural context of 1st century Judea, the rescue of a Jew by a Samaritan may seem in itself insubstantial. Yet, if one recognizes the deeply rooted social, cultural, and ethnic stigma separating these Jewish and Samarian neighbors, the radical nature of this story becomes undeniable. It is in this sense that our previous concern, historical criticism, is essentially and indisputably tied to an understanding of parable as narrative. To assert, as Henry has, that the theological message can be uncritically abstracted from its social-

historical context, is to fall victim to one’s un-reflective hermeneutic. Although it is true that
the content of parables is drawn from the mundane world, it is not drawn from our mundane
world. Just as Heidegger is unable to interpret Paul's letter to the Galatians without first
recognizing the existing conflict between the Jewish and Greek Christians, we cannot
expect to follow the unfolding parabolic narratives without a prior basis in historical analysis.

This emphasis upon historicity, it might be argued, implies that the parable is nothing
more than a bit of nostalgia, a quaint story of a time gone by. The parable appears to be a
snapshot, uncritically representing its contextual location. Yet, from the structure of the
parable itself we find a rebuttal. In the words of Robert Funk, “Distortions of everydayness,
exaggerated realism, distended concreteness, incompatible elements—often subtly drawn—
are what prohibit the parable from coming to rest in the literal sense; yet these very factors
call attention to the literal all the more.” It is the servant with a comically large debt, the
shepherd abandoning his flock, which alert us to the fact that the world represented in these
stories is a “ruptured” world, subtly surreal, as a Vonnegut novel or a Greenaway film.

§3

"Therefore, his diary is not historically accurate or strictly narrative;
it is not indicative but subjunctive."
-Kierkegaard

Just as Kierkegaard's Seducer's Diary, the parabolic texts are not historical narratives,
they do not tell us what did happen; nor are they myths, telling us why things are as they are.

83 Robert W. Funk, "The Parable as Metaphor" in Funk on Parables: Collected Essays (Santa Rosa:
84 Matthew 18.25-35.
85 Matthew 18.10-14.
86 Funk, "The Parable as Metaphor": 48.
304.
Instead they possess and embody an amorphous “maybe,” so elegantly described by Kierkegaard in the previous quote. It is this quality—the subjunctive, that which might be—which is suffused within the parabolic text and expressed through exaggeration, comedy, and subtle surrealism.

In this sense, the parable forms an internal dialectic. On the one hand, we find the parable marked by humble realism, and on the other by surrealistic exaggeration and other-worldliness. It is precisely this tension which motivated the existential interpretation of parable which arose in the middle of the 20th century. This thought—popularized by Funk, Perrin, et al.—emphasizes this tension, this “rupture,” as the essential moment of the parable. Funk describes this moment as a fracture in which the one can peer “through” the everyday world and glimpse something other, yet “strangely familiar.”

"One experiences existential disclosure in hearing/reading a text at the point at which continuity is ruptured by discontinuity. This rupture usually occurs at the point at which the hearer/reader, having been invited to participate in one world of a story, a world familiar to him/her, is suddenly challenged by the possibility of a radically different world—a world he/she must affirm or deny.”

It is this “radically different world” which forms the true content of the parable. Furthermore, it is the nature of this content—the presentation of a world—which necessitates its formulation as a narrative. Contrary to Wittgenstein's claim that “the world is a totality of facts,” the world is equally a world of inexpressible experienced content—e.g. the affectivity of emotions, artwork, the other, and all that we have designated as the “invisible.” It is for this reason that the parable must be empathically lived by its audience, and it is for this reason that it cannot be reduced to a series of non-metaphorical, de-

88 Funk, "Parable as Metaphor": 48.

89 Weeden, "Recovering the Parabolic intent in the Parable of the Sower.”: 107.


91 Jean-Luc Marion presents a theory of this unexpressibility as "Saturated Phenomena" in his Being Given. This theory is derived from the earlier work of Merleau-Ponty and Michel Henry, in which the totality of phenomena are divided into those which are objectifiable and those which are not.
allegorized terms.

Yet, in order to fully defend this thesis, we must clarify precisely what is meant by “world” in this context, a clarification which we will substantially pursue in later sections [Division 3]. First, we must anticipate this discussion with the presentation of our third mode-of-temporality, the parable as universal. Here we will establish the precise topology within which the remainder of our discussion will be located.

IV. The Parable as Eternal

§1

"I call 'the suprahistorical' the powers which lead the eye away from becoming towards that which bestows upon existence the character of the eternal and stable, towards art and religion."

-Nietzsche

In our previous analyses we have found the parable, and its interpretation, inescapably tied to temporality. As a composition, it is developed within a definite point in the temporality of history. Furthermore, as a narrative, it operates within its own time, drawing the reader forward in the movement of the “In that time...,” enveloping its audience within an internal temporality. Although analysis of these temporalities provides invaluable assistance in the interpretation of parable, it remains unclear whether these temporalities exhaust the meaning of the parabolic text. If we might speak more strongly, it seems that an analysis of the parable's relationship to time, past and present, fails to engage the location in which the parable primarily finds its meaning. In this sense, our proceeding investigations, although essential to proper interpretation, remain essentially propaedeutic. Yet, if we are to boldly claim that the essential meaning of the parable has not been exposed in its historical composition nor in its narrative structure, then we must uncover an alternate location in which such content might be identified—we must discover the topology in which the parable finds its meaning.

92 Nietzsche, The Use and Abuse of History for Life: 120
In order to determine this content and its topology, it may be helpful to begin by asking ourselves the simple question, “to whom is the parable written?” For certainly, engaging our previously defended historical-critical method, we should be able to identify a rough outline of its audience: what language they spoke, when and where they lived, their familiarity with the Jewish scriptures and Greek philosophy. Yet, if these historical peoples fully encompass the audience of the parable, then for what reason are these texts still read? Surely a modern embrace of the parable text transgresses the proper limits of history, applying texts which are by definition “other than our own” to undoubtedly modern problems. We are in no way citizens of the 1st century Mediterranean world, nor the shepherds and peasants for whom these texts were initially created and to whom they were transmitted. This is not to say we must abstain from all inquiry into historical documents, but merely that such research seems the appropriate domain of classical studies, the sole property of historians and philologists. Yet, within church pews, from the pulpit, and among theologians we find these parables taught, preached, and proclaimed as truth, and moreover, as universal truth.

It is possible that we might merely end our discussion here, declaring such use “strictly anachronistic?” We might simply dismiss the parable as an outdated form, and the particular parables of Jesus as traces of a temporally and physically distant world. Yet, is it possible that those who identify a universal meaning within parablic texts are not, strictly speaking, wrong? Certainly we must be clear that all historical texts offer a meaning to the present, but this meaning is as a historical text. What we are seeking to clarify is the extent to which the parable, as a “universal text,” not only speaks beyond its explicit context, but speaks across all temporalities including our own. As Perrin writes:

“In the message of Jesus there is a very real tension between the Kingdom as present and the Kingdom as future, between the power of God as known in the present and the power of God to be known in the future”... The question to be raised, however, is not whether this consensus is correct, but rather whether it is legitimate to think of Jesus' use of the Kingdom of God in terms of “present” and
“future” at all.”

Here, it seems, we are on the verge of contradicting ourselves. For, earlier we noted that we would be engaging three distinct modes of temporality: the past, the present, and the eternal. Yet, is it possible to speak of an eternal, a universal, which is not identical to the a-temporal? Are we not, through recourse to the universal, abandoning our strictly temporal project? It is precisely this ambiguity which saturates our subject: the eternal. In order to clarify this issue, we must examine two distinct understandings of the eternal.

The status of this concept—the eternal, the universal—has remained a constant source of tension, reinterpretation, and paradox throughout the Western theological and philosophical tradition. Perhaps its earliest extensive treatment can be found in *The Poem of Parmenides*. Here Parmenides develops his strict ontological monism, arguing that there is but one existent being, that is, Being-itself. Having divorced Being from any possibility of change, growth, or development, he writes, “it [Being] is immovable in the bonds of mighty chains, without beginning and without end; since coming into being and passing away have been driven afar, and true belief has cast them away.” This understanding of the universal, as that which stands in contradistinction to temporality, is pervasive in ancient thought.

Drawing upon this Parmenidean conception, Plato developed a similar a-temporal interpretation of the universal.

“Therefore it is necessary, as it seems, that each thing that is in time and partakes of time be the same age as itself and, at the same time, come to be both older and younger than itself.”—“It looks that way.”—“But the one surely had no share of any of that.”—“No, it didn't.”—“Therefore, it has no share of time, nor is it in any time.”

This clear demarcation between the universal and temporality has remained a standard

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feature of metaphysics beyond Ancient Greece and into the 20th century through such influential thinkers as Husserl. Against this perspective there remains a minority view, perhaps most clearly epitomized by Eckhart's conception of the Now-moment.

As is the case with the majority of his most important concepts, the precise understanding of Eckhart's “Now,” or Now-moment, is thoroughly ambiguous. As Eckhart speaks primarily through imagery and metaphor, our first step will entail establishing a relative relationship between his terminology. We must first identify a coincidence between the terms “Now,” “God's Day,” and “Eternity.” Establishing a dichotomy, Eckhart opposes these terms to a second concept generally designated as “the Soul's day” or “time.” On the one hand, it might be easy to conflate this dichotomy with the classical Parmenidean position; for Eckhart appears to retain the primary distinction: eternity vs. time. Nonetheless, a close reading of the associated passages reveals an essential complexity in Eckhart's thought. Eckhart repeatedly insists upon a direct relationship between temporality and eternity writing, “all time is contained in the present Now-moment,” “God's day, however, is the complete day, comprising both day and night,” and “time that has been past for a thousand years is as present and near to God as the time that now is.” What appears to underlie Eckhart's “Now” is not an eternity forever separate from temporality, but instead eternity as an inclusive concept, enveloping and containing all time within itself. Here in the Now-moment, past, present, and future are united in an absolute identity. Just as in Kierkegaard's “moment,” eternity has broken into and participated in the essence of time itself.

96 Particularly in his theories of Universals and Essences, developed in his Logical Investigations and Ideas.


98 As he writes: "it all happens beyond time, in the day of Eternity." Eckhart, "Get beyond time!": 212.

99 Eckhart, "Get beyond time!": 212-214.
Furthermore, Eckhart identifies the eternity of the Now-moment as the singular location of creation, “God created the world and everything in it in the one present Now.” In this sense, not only does the Now function as the totality of time, but perhaps more importantly, as the source or genesis of time. If we are to take Eckhart’s conception of eternity and universality as our model, then we are no longer forced to set ourselves “against time.” Instead, we are left to seek out a “beyond” to time, a τόπος in which all modalities of temporality are absorbed and united—we must perform our work within the source of time itself.

§2

The true extent to which our investigation is bound to temporality has now been fully exposed. Not only are the historic and narrative temporalities of parable unavoidable aspects of interpretation, but we can now clearly see that, in order to uncover the most important contents of the parable, we must recognize its connection to the essence of temporality itself, what Eckhart calls the Now-moment. But what particularly is this Now-moment?

As early as 18th Century German Idealism, continental theories of temporality have been essentially tied to the structure of the I. In the celebrated “Transcendental Aesthetic” of the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant attempts to explicate the two pure intuitions: Space and Time. Noting the inability of one to abstract from these intuitions, Kant posits these two structures as a priori components of the structure of consciousness itself. Furthermore, although he begins his discussion of these two with an analysis of Space, it is Time which takes clear priority. For, although Space reigns over all that is external, “All representations, whether or not they have outer things as their object, nevertheless as determinations of the mind themselves belong to the inner state [i.e. Time].” In light of the radical inclusivity of

100 Eckhart, "Get beyond time!": 214.

Time, Kant immediately dissolves any clear distinction between the I (the cogito) and temporality, denoting Time as “inner sense” and positing it as the means by which “the mind intuits itself.”

Almost at its inception, this perspective can be found within phenomenology. In 1928 Husserl published *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*. This work opens with the fundamental differentiation of “objective time” and “time-consciousness,” that is, “clock-time” and the subjective experience of temporality. As transcendent, objective time is necessarily bracketed from phenomenological investigation by the *epoché*, instead the individual experience of (immanent) time alone is analyzed. What arises from this analysis is the constitutive power of temporality; that is to say, it is only to the extent that one exists temporally that one may constitute objects, particularly objects comprising a whole of parts; “everything which includes the comparison of several elements and expresses the relation between them – can be conceived only as a product of a temporally comprehensive act of cognition.”

The mind, as that within which cognitions are manifest, is therefore intimately tied to its own temporality, and it is only as temporal that anything resembling a conscious mind could possibly exist.

Heavily influenced by the preceding lectures, Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein in *Being and Time* further solidified this tradition. He writes, “in analysing the historicality of Dasein we shall try to show that this entity is not 'temporal' because it 'stands in history', but that, on the contrary, it exists historically and can so exist only because it is temporal in the very basis of its Being.”

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104 And, notably, their editor.

temporality. The I is not temporal merely because it has been dropped (factically) into an existing time-stream, because it participates in objective time, but because the very structure of its Being\textsuperscript{106} is such that it exists as constantly projecting itself into its own future. Furthermore, like Husserl, Heidegger understands time to function as a constitutive structure, as the “horizon of Being.” It is therefore only to the extent that Being is manifest within the temporality of Dasein that it can bear “meaning”: not “meaning” in a conceptual sense, but in the primordial relationship that exists between Dasein and all beings.

If we are to follow this continental tradition, then we must recognize that our topology cannot be found outside of the individual, but is in fact the very internal structure by which every object of thought, every traditional experience, is constituted. Yet, in common language, as well as in the phenomenological tradition, there is a second name by which this constitutive structure is designated, a second name for “that 'wherein' a factual Dasein as such is said to 'live',” that is, the world. As Michel Henry argues, “It so happens that this self-externalization of the externality where the horizon of visibility of the world is formed, its “outside,” has another name that we know still better: it is called time. *Time and the world are identical*: they designate that single process in which the “outside” is constantly self-externalized.”\textsuperscript{107}

§3

Just as with our earlier investigation of the narrative element of parable, we have once again found ourselves driven towards this connection between parable and world. Earlier, we asserted that the parable opens itself as a “radically different world,” distinct from the so-called “world of everydayness;” we argued that this world forms the true content of the parable, or perhaps more accurately, the parable appears to take the form of this world. As

\textsuperscript{106} The care structure.

Funk writes, “The parable communicates in a non-ordinary sense because the knowledge involved in the parable is pre-conceptual: it is knowledge of unsegmented reality, of a undifferentiated nexus, of a seamless world.” Yet, as we have seen, if it is our intention to examine the sense in which the parable is eternal (that is, universal), then we must examine its role within the phenomenon of conscious life itself. In order to examine the non-historic nature of parable, the sense in which it transcends any particular individual and concerns itself to all individuals, then it appears a fundamental necessity that we move our discussion beyond the merely historical and engage the common internal structures of all persons, the structures of the “I.”

Nevertheless, before we can examine the precise relationship which bears between parable and world we must undertake the promised, and as of yet unfulfilled, task of clarifying the phenomenological conception of the world. Towards this purpose we will spend the following section examining the development of this concept within the founders of phenomenology, Husserl and Heidegger, as well as its further development in French phenomenology.

108 Funk, "The Good Samaritan as Metaphor": 86.
Chapter 3

The World, the Parable, and Restructuring

I: Introduction

Throughout our discussion, the term “world” has recurred repeatedly and in a variety of contexts. Yet, world, as a concept, bears a significant quantity of philosophical baggage. World is a term which finds itself easily situated in a philosophical debate, a scientific journal, a historical study, a theological discussion, or common (i.e. non-technical) language. In light of this sheer diversity of use, it is essential that the precise concept borne by this term be clarified; for, in no way can it be presumed, or moreover it seems quite impossible, that these varied fields intend a single, interchangeable meaning. Without delimiting our specific use of “world,” we will be unable to avoid equivocating about this particularly fecund term.

In certain instances, the difference between distinct usages of world is easily identifiable. When a historian discusses the “Roman world” or the “1st century world,” it can be unproblematically inferred that the focus of this discussion is fully distinct from the use of this term by an astrophysicist. Yet, in many—if not most—uses of world, there remains a fundamental, and generally unrecognized, ambiguity. When the author of The First Epistle of John commands “Do not love the world [κόσμος] or the things in the world,” does this usage correlate to the spatial-physical world of physics, the epochal/geographical world of the historian, or does it maintain its own distinct usage? In light of this significant difficulty, we will not be served by an attempt at a comprehensive development of each individual meaning. Instead, we will attempt to focus our attention upon a clarification of the way in which this term has developed within phenomenology. It is this understanding of world which will provide a significant touchstone for our analysis of parable.

109 NRSV 1 John 2.15.
II. The Phenomenological World

§ 1

The earliest explicitly phenomenological engagement with the concept of world can be found in Husserl's 1910-1913 period, which we earlier designated as his “transcendental turn.”\(^{110}\) Seeking to develop a precise methodology for his burgeoning phenomenology, the most important product of this period is undoubtedly Husserl's distinction between the “natural attitude” and the “phenomenological attitude.” Already, we have extensively discussed Husserl's *epoché*, the reduction by which all transcendent Being is “bracketed.” Through this reduction, Husserl believed that one could attain a phenomenological purity in which the contents of investigation would be “‘necessary,” absolutely indubitable.’\(^{111}\) That is to say, even if the object found before oneself were not “really” there (e.g. in hallucination), one can remain absolutely certain that the “conscious experience” of the object is phenomenologically valid.

Nonetheless, Husserl does not believe that one “lives” within this phenomenologically pure realm: this is explicitly and intentionally a philosophical attitude, separate from the world of everyday experience. On the contrary, it is within the non-philosophical “natural attitude” that we necessarily find ourselves “at all times, and without ever being able to alter the fact.”\(^{112}\)

Throughout Husserl's description of the natural attitude we find a precise description, even perhaps (ironically) a precise phenomenology, of what he terms the “world.” In *Ideas I* he writes:

“I am conscious of a world endlessly spread out in space, endlessly becoming and having endlessly become in time. I am conscious of it: that signifies, above all, that intuitively I find it immediately, that I experience it. By my seeing, touching, hearing, and so forth, and in the different modes of sensuous perception, corporeal physical things with some spatial distribution or other are

\(^{110}\) The period during which he published his *Lectures on Internal Time-Consciousness*, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, and *Ideas I*.

\(^{111}\) Husserl, "The Basic Approach of Phenomenology": 79.

\(^{112}\) Ibid.: 61.
simply there for me, “on hand” in the literal or the figurative sense.”

Already, the phenomenological concept of the world has begun to bear the specific descriptive traits by which later phenomenologists will seek to define and clarify this reality. The world appears spatially infinite, pulling away at all sides; the world is inherently temporal, a perpetual and unavoidable “flux” in which objects arise without warning and fade into the oblivion of memory; the world is defined by its sensuality, it is a “felt” world. This final point is of particular importance, for it distinguishes the phenomenological concept of the world from the positivistic conception primarily employed by the natural sciences. Specifically, the world is not merely a location of physical “things”: energy, matter, and so forth. But, as Husserl writes, “moreover, this world is there for me not only as a world of mere things, but also with the same immediacy as a world of objects with values, a world of goods, a practical world.”

This is to say that, in the phenomenological world, the experience of a table, a fear, a number, or an artwork all appear with equal validity, necessity, and indubitability.

It is this practicality, the importance of the individual human project, which grounds Heidegger’s “existential” turn from Husserl. Unlike Husserl, who provided an invaluable description of the phenomenal world but sought to overcome it through his epoché, Heidegger elevates this concept as a principal constituent of his phenomenological project in *Being and Time*. In his attempt to articulate a precise conception of the “worldhood of the world,” Heidegger articulates the following description: “‘World’ can be understood in another ontical sense—not, however, as those entities within-the-world, but rather as that ‘wherein’ a factual Dasein as such can be said to ‘live’. 'World' has here a pre-ontological existentiell signification.”

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113 Ibid.: 60.
114 Ibid.: 61.
115 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 93.
to “live,” which is of fundamental concern for us. For, the direction of phenomenology is always toward practical life, toward a description and analysis of life as lived. It is precisely this directionality that differentiates phenomenology from the natural sciences. For, there is, as Husserl writes, “a sharp cleavage between the universal but mythico-practical attitude and the “theoretical”[attitude].”

This understanding of the world is further developed within the French phenomenological tradition. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty repeatedly attempts to defend his thesis that, “because we are in the world, we are condemned to meaning.” In a certain sense, this is merely a repetition of Husserl's earliest claim regarding the world, that it is “a world of objects with value.” The sounds I perceive are not merely vibrations of air, but music; the gun in my sight is not merely an abstract sensation of silver, but (in the hands of an other) something to be feared.

Nonetheless, this designation of the world—as that wherein one lives, as the horizon of life itself—leaves us with a significant and unanswered question, articulated most clearly in *Being and Time*. “World,” Heidegger states, “may stand for the 'public' we-world, or one's 'own' closest (domestic) environment.” In what sense are we to speak of the phenomenological world? In what sense can it be understood as subjective, as objective, as individual, or as communal? Let us turn here turn to this essential question of subjectivity.

§ 2

For those who are awake there is a single, common universe, whereas in sleep each person turns away into [one's] own, private [universe].

-Heraclitus

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118 Heidegger, *Being and Time*: 93.

For Heraclitus, as for the Greeks in general, the commonality of the world was an unchallenged fact. Heraclitus' formulation ἕνα καὶ κοινὸν κόσμον [a single common world] perfectly captures the underlying Greek cosmology, what we will call mono-cosmism. This conception is not relegated solely to the ancient world, but remains the norm throughout the majority of pre-modern, Western thought. Yet, even in Heraclitus, we find the ἵον κόσμον [one's own world], an individual and subjective world. Certainly, the context of this claim must be recognized; for Heraclitus, the subjective world ἵον κόσμον was the world of dreams and of sleep, an inescapably unreal world. This correlation—subjective=unreal, objective=real—remains the implicit principle underlying the standard critiques of phenomenology and its predecessor, idealism. Yet, it is precisely this underlying assumption which is challenged by Kant, the German Idealists (particularly Fichte), and phenomenology.

Husserl's challenge to this position takes the form of an imperative (voire d'un cri)\textsuperscript{120}, "zu der Sachen selbst!" [to the things themselves!], which Henry designates as one of the four founding principles of phenomenology. Against the standard position that subjectivity is unreal or in some substantial sense less real, phenomenology argues for the absolute legitimacy of the subjective experience as a source of knowledge. In his "principle of principles," Husserl writes, "that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originary (so to speak, in its "personal" actuality) offered to us in 'intuition' is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there."\textsuperscript{121} In this sense, phenomenology inverts the traditional epistemological presupposition; phenomena are not longer subject to ontology, but on the contrary, ontology is subject to phenomenology. "It is only to the extent that appearing


\textsuperscript{121} Edmund Husserl, Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy — First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology, trans. F. Kersten. (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982): 44.
appears and for this reason that being “is,” it is because appearing deploys its reign that being also deploys its own.” This complex relationship between ontology and phenomenology will be more substantially revisited at a later point [Chapter 3, Section IV].

Through phenomenology's resistance to the traditional hierarchy—of ontology over phenomenology—the subjective world need no longer find itself critiqued as lacking rigor, or as essentially unreal. On the contrary, the subjective world is elevated as the principal modality in which philosophical and theological truth may present itself. This is evidenced by Husserl's *epoché*, by the priority of the Dasein analytic in *Being and Time*, and by Henry's recourse to the radical subjectivity of pathetic life.

Yet, here, it must be recognized that the concept of the subjective world has becoming thoroughly enmeshed with Husserl's concept of the “horizon of visibility.” Whereas for Husserl the world remains a posited transcendence, wholly distinct from the horizon of visibility—that is, the horizon by which the I receives intuitive data—throughout the further development of phenomenological thought these two terms become fully interchangeable, to the point of absolute identity. This convergence can be identified as early as Heidegger, but is fully consolidated in later thought where we read, “the world is not the set of things, of beings, but the horizon of light where things show themselves in their quality as phenomena.” It is through this equivalence of the horizon of visibility and the world that our question can be brought to a close. The phenomenological conception of the world, like Husserl's horizon, is essentially and necessarily a subjective world.

In light of this elevation of subjective phenomena above the supposed objectivity of traditional ontology, the topology of phenomenology must remain bound to this subjective world. In this sense, phenomenology remains fundamentally solipsistic—not in the common,

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123 As Davidson and Emanuel, Henry's *pathétique* is rendered as "pathetic." This notion is connected to the Greek *pathos*, and should not be understood in the common, derogatory English sense.

derogatory sense, but instead as Heidegger writes:

“This existential 'solipsism' is so far from the displacement of putting a isolated subject-Thing into the innocuous emptiness of a worldless occurring, that in an extreme sense what it does is precisely to bring Dasein face to face with its world as world, and thus bring it face to face with itself as Being-in-the-world.”

Before we are able to reincorporate our findings into our larger phenomenology of parable, there is a final question regarding the nature of the world which must be examined. Particularly, what precise relationship does the world, as horizon, bear upon the objects found therein?

§ 3

"What must we suppose it to be? This above all: it is a receptacle of all becoming—its wetnurse, as it were.”

-Plato

Throughout our analysis, we have primarily relied upon a Heideggerian conception of the world: the world as that “wherein” one can be said to live. On the one hand, this analysis seems fundamentally accurate, revealing the nature of the world in some significant sense. Nonetheless, if we are to make a more careful analysis of the world, we might recognize that the role of the world in the generation of phenomena is more complex than this strict “wherein” may imply.

Throughout his later thought, Heidegger develops the concept of the Lichtung, the “clearing.” Examining this concept, which primarily seems to function as a correlate or development of the world, we might position ourselves to clarify and critique this Heideggerian perspective. In The Origin of the Work of Art, and in a voice more reminiscent of Boehme than Husserl, Heidegger writes:

“And yet—beyond beings, not away from them but before them, there is still

125 Heidegger, Being and Time: 233.


127 It is important to note the root "licht," light, within "lichtung." This clearing is a void, a space of light in which beings, phenomena, can receive their light, that is, can appear.
something else that happens. In the midst of beings as a whole an open place
occurs. There is a clearing. Thought of in reference to beings, this clearing is
more in being than are beings. This open center is therefore not surrounded by
beings; rather, the clearing center itself encircles all that is, as does the nothing,
which we scarcely know. Beings can be as beings only if they stand within and
stand out [ek-sist] within what is cleared in this clearing.”

The world, here construed as a clearing, retains its principal function as a “wherein.”

Although more intimately tied to Being than individual beings, this clearing nevertheless
appears fully passive in regards to those beings which arise or reveal themselves within it.
Such passivity is an essential feature of the “late” Heideggerian human, one whose primary
function is “letting beings be.” This passivity arises out of Heidegger's distinct concern
that the world is regularly and systematically falsified by the positivism and mathematization
of “technological thinking.” Against this, Heidegger argues for a “meditative thinking,” an
openness to the multiplicity and unpredictability of Being. Yet, is there not a sense in which
the positing of the world (the clearing) as absolutely passive, might be misleading or at least
incomplete?

Following Robert Funk, we explicitly reject this reductive claim. Instead, it must be
recognized that “worlds enter into and shape one's experience of reality.” The world is not
merely the passive, Heideggerian “wherein,” but, on the contrary, the world functions as an
active constituent of reality itself. Citing Ray Hart, Funk writes, “it is the shift in horizons
that prompts one to “perceive a cow as so many pounds of beef rather than as something to
be worshiped.” By this, Funk has identified a key aspect of the essence of the world: that
is, its function as the center-point of a relationship. Specifically, the world, this nexus of
relationality, is precisely that place through which subject meets object, Dasein meets beings.

128 Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” in Basic Writings ed. David Farrell Krell (New

129 Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth” in Basic Writings ed. David Farrell Krell (New York:


131 Robert Funk, "The Leaven" in Funk on Parables: Collected Essays (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press,
Yet, understanding the world as the nexus of relationality, it is easy to fall back into the “Heideggerian clearing.” It is easy to return to a notion of world in which the world is a fundamentally passive link between the individual and the objects or beings with which it interacts. But it must be reemphasized: the world, understood as nexus, is not merely a passive concept.

As an analogy, let us consider the artistic composition. In the creation of a work of art, one must choose his/her medium with the utmost particularity. The perception of a composition, arranged on a canvas, framed, and placed in a museum is absolutely different from the same composition spray painted upon the side of a building. The exaggeration of this essential difference has become an explicit concern and project across 20th century art. Andy Warhol re-deposits the mundane images of daily life within the gallery; the British street artist Banksy paints and plasters urban centers across the Western world with his provocative art, simply stating “This'll look nice when its framed [sic].”

Yet, stepping aside from these particularly extreme examples, this difference can be recognized even among seemingly subtle changes of medium. Performed on a viola, a piece written for violin bears an indisputable change in quality; for the audiophile, no digital file, regardless of quality, can compare to the “pure” experience of vinyl. In light of these phenomena, it must be recognized that the artistic medium is not passive, but instead functions as a radically active ingredient of the artistic experience.

Analogically, the world functions as a horizon within which conscious experiences are composed. Just as the framed canvas of an artistic composition is simultaneously that wherein a work is composed and an essential determining factor of the composition itself, the world is not only that wherein one lives (although it is precisely this), but is furthermore an essential determining factor of the experiences of life. The world is not merely a clearing in which phenomena might be said to appear, but moreover bears the implicit responsibility of

132 Quotation drawn from an untitled “Banksy” work, San Fransisco 2010.
determining the precise manner by which phenomena may appear. This conception of the world can therefore be designated as a constructive world.

At this point, let us attempt an integration of this theory of the constructive world with our previous analysis of the parable as world-presenting. Specifically, it is now our task to expose the precise meaning of our earlier assertion regarding the parable, that the content of the parable is not an individual object, state-of-affairs, or being, but instead, the totality of a world itself.

III. The Parable as World-Presentation

§ 1

Already [Division 2], we have begun the process of analyzing the content of the parable as the offering of a “world.” Particularly, we have examined the way in which the composer of the parable makes use of surrealism, hyperbole, and misdirection in order to present a world that is simultaneously both familiar and decidedly other. At that time, our investigation stalled in the face of an ambiguity, specifically, the ambiguity regarding the term “world.” Having worked through the treatment of this term throughout the history of phenomenology, we have now distinguished the phenomenological concept of the world from its conceptual counterparts. Building upon this concept of the world—as the subjective environment both wherein and by which an individual experiences objective phenomena—we are now in a position to clarify precisely what it means to present a world as content, what existentialist interpreters intend by the claim that the parable permits one “a glimpse of another world.”

§ 2

To assert that the parable allows one to glimpse a world is, in a phenomenological sense, to grant that the parable allows one to see nothing. Nothing, here, is not intended in the derogatory sense, as one might argue that a hallucination “shows nothing,” but in the

133 Funk, "The Parable as Metaphor": 48.
sense given to nothing by Heidegger, and later brought to the forefront within French Existentialism. Here, nothing might better be rendered as no-thing, that is to say, the parable manifests as a phenomenon whose content is no particular, unified, or distinct object. This notion of nothing is captured by Heidegger who, describing anxiety, writes, “in that in the face of which one has anxiety, the 'It is nothing and nowhere' becomes manifest. The obstinacy of the “nothing and nowhere within-the-world” means as a phenomenon that the world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety.”

What we find in this no-thing is precisely that realm of phenomena which we earlier designated under the title of “invisible”—that region of Being which appears within the context of experienced life, yet evades any attempted objectification or unambiguous determination. Such an indeterminacy seems unavoidable within the context of the world for the simple fact that it is only “within” the world that objects as such can be constituted. Once again, this is not to say one cannot experience a phenomenon that is manifested outside of the horizon of the world, but merely that such a phenomenon is not experienced as an object.

Nonetheless, even if such a region of phenomenality is granted, it is still unclear in what specific sense the parable can be understood to present no-thing. For certainly parables speak of determinate objects and peoples; this farmer, that roadway, this sheep, that seed. In what meaningful sense can a “mustard seed,” for instance, be possibly understood as phenomenologically indeterminate?

In response to this, we must ask: is the mustard seed the true content of the parable? More generally, that is to ask: does the mere presentation of these determinate realities (objects, people, places, etc.) exhaust the meaning of the parable. To this we must respond, unambiguously, that it is not the case. This is not to maintain a sort of “hermeneutic gnosticism” by which we fully abandon the flesh of the text in exchange for a deeper esoteric.
meaning—to do so would be to fall into the anti-historic bias of Henry against which we earlier argued. Instead, we must propose a more nuanced possibility: that the meaning does not reside within these individual objects because it resides solely within the relationship/s determined between them. Just as a melody resides neither in its individual notes nor in the totality of these notes; nor a poem, within the collected words therein; the content of a parable, its essence, lies solely in the relationship that exists between its respective elements.

It is because these relationships are explicitly contradictory to the “pre-parabolic-world,” the world of the listener or reader, that the parable manifests as ruptured, surreal, or in the most basic sense different. In a parable, the audience is approached by a world that is composed of familiar elements—locations, people, and objects—yet the relationship between these elements is distorted in compromising ways, ways which shake the very core of the elements themselves. A Samaritan and a Jew come into contact on a road, a familiar scene composed of expected characters. But the relationship between them is manifestly distinct from the expectations of the audience. On the one hand, one might merely examine the content of specific objective acts: the Samaritan carries the Jew, the Samaritan pays for his health, the Samaritan promises to return. Yet this analysis does not break into the truly revolutionary core of the parabolic structure. The parable does not simply express actions devoid of meaning. Read in light of its implicit message, the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” has been misnamed. The Samaritan's actions toward the Jew are not merely “good”; he is not simply acting out of the overflow of his heart. The Samaritan's very relationship to the Jew—and implicitly the relationship between human beings in general—has been radically rewritten. An absolute, and seemingly unquestioned, responsibility is expressed through the acts of the Samaritan. It is therefore this distinction—between elements and relationships—that allows us to hold the seemingly paradoxical claim that the parabolic world is simultaneously foreign and familiar, everyday and radically reconstructed. As Funk writes, "metaphor seeks to rupture the grip of tradition on one's apprehension of the
world in order to permit a glimpse of another world, *which is not really different* but a strangely familiar world."\(^{135}\)

\section*{§3}

In *The Parable as Metaphor*, Funk seeks to articulate the totality of the parabloc content, writing, “the “field” which the parable thus conjures up is not merely this or that isolated piece of earthiness, but the very tissue of reality, the nexus of relations, which constitutes the arena of human existence where life is won or lost.”\(^{136}\) Already, we have recognized the primacy of relationality in the phenomenological conception of the world: the world is precisely that middle term, binding the individual to beings or objects. If, as we have just argued, the parable presents recognizable elements bound together in unanticipated relationships, then at last we might clarify precisely what is understood by the claim of existential/phenomenological interpretation which has recurred explicitly and implicitly throughout our investigation: specifically, the claim that the parable “presents a world.”

As the nexus of relationality, the world itself is neither a being (in the traditional sense), nor all beings as a totality, but is a completely distinct phenomenon governing relation. To “present” such a world, one must therefore do more than simply present individual objects, one must attempt to uncover the essence of their relations to one another. It is precisely this revelation of relationality which we have designated as the central and essential content of the parabolic act.

Yet, the reconstitution of a single relation is hardly capable of overturning the world-of-everydayness. The term “nexus” hints at the complex nature of the world as such; the world is not merely a single distinct relationship, but an inconceivably elaborate web of interacting and interpenetrating relationships. It is for this reason that parables are seldom found in isolation. A world cannot merely be given in a single blow, offered in its totality through a “perfect parable.” Instead, like a historian who seeks to uncover a distant

\(^{135}\) Funk, “The Parable as Metaphor”: 48.

\(^{136}\) Funk, “The Parable as Metaphor”: 46.
civilization, the world of the parable must be assembled slowly, piece by piece.

In order to analyze this creation let us turn to the parables of Jesus and their referent, “The kingdom of God,” as a case-study.

§4

“The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is within you.”

-Jesus

Before we begin this examination, we should engage a few particular questions or problems which arise from the choice to engage these texts. First, it must be recognized that there is a serious risk of limitation involved with the explicit use of the Biblical parables, and with Jesus’ image of the kingdom of God. Specifically, although our engagement is self-consciously theological, it is not intended to be restricted to a merely “Christian” theology. The analysis of parable that is found in this text, if its work has succeeded, should be equally applicable to a variety of parabolic authors; not simply those of Jesus, but likewise, all parables composed within and beyond the plethora of traditions mentioned at the opening of this investigation should be touched by this analysis.

Furthermore, we should note that there is insufficient space to properly examine the concept of the kingdom of God [ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ]. This concept has Jewish roots that considerably predate Jesus’ use of the term, and a considerable quantity of discussion and debate has surrounded its proper interpretation and understanding. As a point of full disclosure it should be recognized that, for the purposes of this investigation, this concept shall be understood as immanent in the tradition of “realized eschatology” and that subsequently the eschatological, apocalyptic, or teleological understandings of this term will

137 Luke 17.21 NRSV (with altered rendition of εντὸς as “within”).

Lastly, we should note that the term “kingdom of heaven” will also be found in the ensuing discussion. There does not appear to be any substantial difference between these two terms within the context of the Biblical texts, and for this reason they shall be treated as essentially interchangeable. With these various concerns in mind, let us now begin our analysis proper.

According to all extant sources, throughout his ministry, Jesus repeatedly invokes the concept of the kingdom of God. Particularly relevant to our discussion, a large section of parables found in the Gospel According to Matthew begin with the repeated refrain, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like...”

In light of this fact, and the overwhelming presence of “kingdom” language throughout Jesus' ministry, Weeden writes, "the ultimate extra-linguistic referent of all of Jesus' Parables, whether explicitly stated or not, is the kingdom of God."

While this position is not univocally accepted, substantial work, particularly Perrin's Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom strongly supports this thesis. Jesus, therefore, stands out from among authors of parable by his explicit naming of the reality implied by his parables.

In light of our preceding discussion, we must now recognize that if this kingdom represents the parabolic content, then the kingdom of God must itself be a world in the phenomenological sense, a nexus of relationships. As Funk writes, "The parables and aphorisms of Jesus constitute a fantasy: the creation of a secondary world called the kingdom of God, which is the good news or truth about the then regnant primary world." For Jesus, the kingdom of God stands in contrast to the everyday world of his contemporaries. At his trial before Pilate he is famously quoted as stating, “My Kingdom is not from this world.”

World, here a translation of the Greek κόσμος, may perhaps be more accurately rendered as

139 Matthew 13, NRSV.
140 Weeden, “Recovering the Parabolic Intent in the Parable of the Sower”: 97-120.
142 John 18.36 NRSV.
world-order. This κοσμός, like the phenomenological world, does not merely indicate a
physical world, but the entire present fabric of reality: physical, political, economic, and
inter-subjective. Yet, if Jesus asserts that his kingdom is not from/of this world, then in what
sense can we assert the immanence of the kingdom? How can we simultaneously uphold
Jesus' claims that the kingdom both “is not from this world” and “has come to you?”

What we must recognize is that the distance separating the kingdom of God and the
world is not a temporal distance. Rather, the attribution of temporal presence to both the
κοσμός and the kingdom necessitates the recognition that these terms are intended as
simultaneous realities. The language of the kingdom does indicate a radically different time,
a future posited beyond the present epoch, but a reexamination and reconfiguration of present
reality.

"Jesus appropriated the term from his Jewish heritage where "kingdom of God"
historically drew its meaning from the ancient myths: the myth of God as creator
of the world and the myth of God as Lord of history. But... he departs from his
contemporaries, particularly the apocalypticists, in disassociating the kingdom
from any historical or cosmological objectification." The kingdom remains saturated with the facts
of present life: one still labors, buys, and sells; the fields continue to grow. For, as Nietzsche writes, “The “kingdom of God” is nothing that
one expects; it has no yesterday and no day after tomorrow, it will not come in “a thousand
years”—it is an experience of the heart; it is everywhere, it is nowhere.” For Jesus, the
kingdom of God is here, if only we would see it.

Nonetheless, a vast chasm still separates the κοσμός and the kingdom of God. This
difference provides the meaningful ground by which the kingdom can be discussed and
affirmed. This affirmation, rendered in the biblical text by the concept of faith (πίστις),
amounts to nothing less than the radical reconstitution of the world-order itself. If, as we

143 John 18.36 and Luke 11.20 NRSV.
144 Perrin, “ Recovering the Parabolic Intent in the Parable of the Sower”: 113.
145 Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Antichrist" in The Portable Nietzsche trans. Walter Kaufman (New York:
have already indicated, the κόσμος designates the world-order in its totality, then the rejection of this reality for another parallel reality, the kingdom of God, must result in nothing less then a reconfiguration that drives to the core of reality, that is, relationality-itself. In the words of Funk, "to those who participated in God's imperial rule, however, the world took a new shape, its objects hung together in a new way, and the things themselves were transformed as by a miracle."\(^{146}\)

In this, our principal problematic has revealed itself. It might even be fair to say that our manifold and divergent investigations, although seemingly disjointed, have all brought us toward a clarification of this single point: a precise understanding of the way in which beings, “the things themselves,” can be transformed, radically reconfigured by the parabolic experience.

The possibility of such a transformation underlies the tradition of the existential/phenomenological interpretation of parable. Yet, the precise nature of this notion has evaded explicit analysis. An attempt at an explication of this phenomenon can be found in Funk's *Saying and Seeing: Phenomenology of Language and the New Testament*. Yet, the explicitly linguistic bent of this project reduces its scope and subsequently its impact. Reinterpreting the nexus of reality (relationality) as a merely “linguistic nexus,” the radical reconfiguration enacted within the parabolic event—glimpsed by Funk's other work, particularly *Parable as Metaphor*—is neutered, seemingly reduced to an interpretive act. Yet the explicit command of phenomenology, the return “to the things themselves” [zu den Sachen selbst!], necessitates a further analysis, an examination of the very reality proposed by such a phenomenon. In essence, we must examine the ontological consequences of the parable. Let us therefore turn to this final investigation.

**IV. Ontological Restructuring**

"But they interpreted the same fact differently and made the same happening visible to themselves in different ways."

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146 Robert Funk, "The Leaven": 107.
Indeed, what appeared for them as the essential fact and truth was something quite different.”

-Heidegger

§1

In the parabolic experience, the parable brings an alternate world into focus, challenging one to reorient oneself accordingly. The individual experiences what Lacoste might designate a “redistribution of the field of experience.” This redistribution or reorientation of objects within the world, even if understood as nothing more than an interpretive gesture, nevertheless enacts an undeniable phenomenological change. The mode-of-appearing of objects within the world does not remain static. On the contrary, one experiences a fundamental ambiguity at the core of phenomenality: an ambiguity which permits objects to be experienced in radically distinct manifestations.

As an example, let us take one of Heidegger’s favorite models of phenomenality, drawn from the everyday world of work. In the course of my everyday life I find something needing repair, perhaps within my house, that requires a hammer. I enter my basement, searching extensively until the appropriate tool can be located. Having discovered the hammer, I commence the repair, finishing in short time. Having completed the repair, I briefly pause to examine the hammer in my hand.

Even in an example as trivial as that presented above, the radical ambiguity of phenomenality can be easily detected. Specifically, the mode-of-appearing of the hammer does not remain fixed, but instead is experienced as two distinct reorientations of phenomenality. The first appearance of the hammer itself, in this example, is the hammer as found. In this instance, the hammer is not experienced within the specific confines of its “intended use,” that is, the hammer is not a tool oriented towards an end. Instead, the hammer is itself the end, the objectified goal of a search. In Heideggerian language, the


148 Lacoste, Experience and the Absolute: 199.
hammer is present-to-hand; although more specifically, it's presence is experienced as a whole; it is the hammer in its totality that is sought and found.

Thereafter, the hammer appears to fall out of focus: it no longer stands out of the horizon. The hammer's mode-of-appearing has shifted, it now appears as a tool. To once again borrow Heidegger's language, the hammer is now experienced as ready-to-hand: that specific phenomenality of the tool (means) towards an end. Phenomenologically, the experience of the ready-to-hand is as closely related to non-appearing as it is to appearing. For, in the act of hammering, the focal point of the horizon has shifted from the hammer to nail, or perhaps more generally, from the hammer and nail to the project to be completed, the repair to be made. In this sense, the hammer itself appears to fall outside of explicit focus; it achieves a sort of phenomenological transparency.

Lastly, our example ends with a final reorientation. The project is completed and the hammer is examined as a physical object. Here, the hammer may once again be understood as present-to-hand. Nonetheless, although present-to-hand, its phenomenality is not identical to the hammer as found. The hammer as a physical object is experienced, essentially, as a whole of parts: its wooden handle, iron head, leather grip. In this sense, the hammer manifests as a conceivable object in the traditional sense, we might “take it to pieces and reform it to make a clear idea;”149 it is what the theoretical disciplines intend by “object.”

It is precisely this ambiguity at the core of phenomenality, the manifold manifestations that phenomena might take, which is utilized by composers of parable. What they recognize, even if only implicitly, is an instability underlying the world, the potential for a revolution or reorientation of phenomena. When Jesus preaches his parable of the “unjust steward,”150 he does not merely teach the ascetic abandonment of “earthly riches,” but offers the possibility of a reorientation towards material wealth as such. He proposes to the

149 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception: 231.
listener/reader the possibility that material wealth need not necessarily be experienced through the everyday framework of the world-order, but instead, that one might bear a decisively unique relationship of releasement towards it.

While the phenomenology of such a reorientation may be granted, is it possible that this change could be understood as an ontological restructuring? That is to say, is a change in mode-of-appearing necessarily correlative to a change in Being? Historically at least, the answer to this question appears to be negative. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant provides for an absolute distinction between phenomena and noumena (the things-in-themselves), writing:

“If, therefore, we wanted to apply the categories to objects that are not considered as appearances, then we would have to ground them on an intuition other than the sensible one, and then the object would be a noumenon in a positive sense. Now since such an intuition, namely intellectual intuition, lies absolutely outside our faculty of cognition, the use of the categories can by no means reach outside our faculty of cognition.”

What Kant articulates in this passage is an absolute cognitive distance separating the subject from noumena. The I has access to phenomena alone and can only, through abstraction, infer the noumena: the thing-in-itself [ding an sich]. The being or the noumenon, is fundamentally unknowable. The unbridgeability of this chasm, separating the thing-in-itself and its associated phenomena, does not permit one to induce a direct relation between a change in phenomenon and a change in noumenon. Such correlation, for Kant, must always be mere speculation; there exists no causal connection uniting phenomenology and ontology. To insist upon such a connection would be a failure to respect the epistemological boundaries of reason, tantamount to a category error.

If we hope to ground our phenomenological claim in Being, then it is precisely the relationship of these two fields—phenomenology and ontology—which must be explicated. For this we must return to Michel Henry and his seminal essay: *Quatre principes de la phénoménologie.*

§2

In the *Quatre principes*, Henry attempts to uncover the four fundamental presuppositions underlying phenomenological research from Husserl forward. Although the entirety of his project is profoundly important for the history and continuing development of phenomenology, it is his first principle which is of particular concern our project. He opens the work:


If we might follow Henry's train of thought regarding this principle, then we must begin as he does, with the recognition of an apparent equality. This principle—“as much as appearing, as much as being,”—seems, at its face, to establish nothing more than a simple identity. Henry recognizes this fact, commenting, “Le premier principe établit une corrélation décisive entre apparaître et être.” Yet, when pursued beyond its face value, this simple correlation appears to disintegrate.

Henry continues, “L’identité de l’apparaître et de l’être se résout dans la fondation du second par le premier. Identité d’essence veut bien dire ici qu’il n’y a à l’œuvre qu’un seul et même pouvoir, mais ce pouvoir c’est celui de l’apparaître.” Being, outside of its appearance, must be recognized as simply nothing [l’être n’est rien], an utter lack or privation. Because of this absolute reliance of Being upon appearing, the earlier claim of identity must be radicalized: not only is phenomenology on equal footing with ontology, but

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152 *Phenomenology rests upon four principles which it claims explicitly as its foundations. The first: “as much as appearance, as being” is borrowed from the Marburg School. Instead of this ambiguous proposition, because of the double significance of the term “appearance,” we prefer the strict statement: “as much as appearing, as being.”* [my own translation] Henry, *Quatre principes de la phénoménologie*: 3.

153 *The first principle establishes a decisive correlation between appearing and being.* [my translation] Ibid.: 4.

154 *The identity of appearance and of being is resolved in the foundation of the second by the first. The identity of the essence means that there is at work only one and the same power, but this power is the one of appearing.* [my translation] Ibid.: 4.
more strongly, ontology itself is grounded within phenomenology. This understanding was alluded to earlier in our work and may be seen as a complete inversion of the traditional ontological hierarchy.

Yet, Henry's intensification of phenomenology's project continues beyond even this elevation above ontology. To argue that Being only “is” in so far as appearing appears may be read as a hierarchical assertion, but, perhaps more radically, it can also be recognized as an identity: an identity of a distinctly different character than our previous correlation. This identity of phenomenology and ontology is not merely a mutuality or equality, but instead, ontology is fully dissolved into phenomenology. To locate Being within appearing is to elevate appearing not only to principal concept, but single concept. “L'être réside dans l’apparaître et s’épuise en lui. Ou encore : il n’y a aucun être qui serait en soi différent de l’apparaître de l’apparaître, qui ne se réduirait pas purement et simplement à celui-ci.”

While such bold assertions may be recognized as a rejection of the traditional Kantian framework, it must also be recognized that, from a certain perspective, it is simply a radicalization of Kant's own project. For, although Kant divided the world into phenomena and noumena, it was the former alone which could be thought as a subject of study. Phenomenology, like Fichte's transcendental idealism before it, has simply recognized that this concept, the noumena, possesses no functional role in the Kantian system. Instead of working to identify this mysterious being (as perhaps Schopenhauer may be understood), one must come to recognize that its essence is already contained within the essence of phenomena. There are no noumena, because phenomena possess their own Being.

Let us now return to our original problematic, the question “is a change in mode-of-appearing necessarily correlative to a change in Being?.” In light of our disintegration of ontology into phenomenology, such a question instantly loses not only its force, but moreover its sense. If being is nothing more than the appearance of appearing, then this question is

155 "Being resides in appearing and is exhausted in it. Or again: There is not any being which would be in itself different from the appearing of appearing, which is not reduced purely and simply to this later.” [my translation] Ibid.: 5.
reduced to a simple tautology, specifically: “is a change in mode-of-appearing necessarily
correlative to a change in appearing?.” To this we must respond, at threat of violating the
most basic law of identity, with an undeniable affirmative.

§3

"Releasement toward things and openness
to the mystery belong together.
They grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world
in a totally different way."
-Heidegger156

This reconstructive hypothesis is certainly shocking. To identify Being as anything
other than the firm fixity of substance seems to lend itself to an absurd relativism. This
accusation of relativism has been cast against nearly every thinker who identified this
fundamental instability at the root of Being. Heraclitus, Nietzsche, and Derrida are merely a
few examples of those who have been disparaged for such challenges. Yet, even among the
classic pillars of philosophy and in particular Hegel, this ambiguity can be found in the form
of the dialectic. “The original character of the German dialectic...lies in medieval alchemy,”
which, “by claiming to make gold out of lead...implies... that the ground of reality is not
made up of fixed things, of immutable elements, but that it is instead change.”157 In this
sense, our recognition of Being as fundamentally indeterminate is not novel, but merely an
extension of a tradition: founded in Boehme, extended through the German Idealists, and (by
way of Schelling) deeply imbedded in Heidegger, Henry, and phenomenology as such.
It is for this reason that this ambiguity and its associated reconstructive capacity are already
present in even the most basic tenants of phenomenology. If “what “is” only is in so far as it
shows itself,”158 then any alteration of this “showing” must necessarily correlate to an
alteration in this “being.”

158 Henry, *I am the Truth*: 14
The consequences of this ambiguity upon our phenomenology of parable are deep. The parabolic experience, that moment when the parable asks one to “take up” a world—that is, to reorient one's relationship to beings—cannot be understood as a simple alteration of interpretive or hermeneutic lens. Instead, it must be recognized that this reorientation is at its core a restructuring; an alteration of the very Being of beings. When one adopts the world of the parable, reality itself changes.

It is here that we have arrived at the essence of the parable, the essence that has been the motivation of our investigation as a whole. It is only now, after our extensive examinations of the nature of the world and of Being that we are in a position to finally clearly delimit this phenomenon. The parable is a short narrative or story which challenges one to take up a world, a nexus of relationality, and to thereby fundamentally change the Being of beings, the reality of lived experience.

§4

At this point in our discussion it may be helpful for us to recapitulate, briefly, our initial question and recall the path upon which we have traveled. Our investigation arose, it might be remembered, as a search for an essence: the essence of the parable. Our work began with a simple guiding quote, “No proof of any kind is offered by scriptural parables or by a parabolic reading of scripture. Parables show, they do not prove.”159 From this arose our first determinate question, what does a parable show, when it shows something? Already, the path of our investigation was set before us; for what methodology, but phenomenology itself, might permit an investigation of appearance?

Following our foray into the nature of phenomenological theology, we were positioned to begin our investigation with an analysis of time. Already, the complexity of parabolic interpretation was revealed, for parables must be read in light of three distinct, and often competing, temporalities. They have been written by a particular author at a

159 Hart, Meister Eckhart: 5.
determinate point in world-history, they are built around the “in that time...” of the narrative, and they attempt to speak into the eternity of universality.

Establishing the topology of our discussion as the transcendental structures of Being, specifically the “world,” we explored the tradition and development of “world” in phenomenology. There, we established the necessity of engaging the world as a subjective phenomenon. More importantly, we recognized the importance of the world as an active mediation point between the I and its objects, as a nexus of relationality, as a key constituent of the phenomenalization of phenomena. Furthermore, through an examination of the tradition of the existential/phenomenological interpretation of parable, particularly that of its founder Robert Funk, we were able to recognize the principal role of parable as world-presenting. Of particular importance became the parabolic experience, that moment where the audience of the parable is asked to “take up” the parabolic world. Finally, our investigation took its most important turn, as the “taking up” became our explicit focus and it became increasingly clear that the reorientation of the parable is nothing less than a restructuring of beings themselves. This, it seems, is the essence of the parable.

With our investigation as a whole before us, the importance of this restructuring can be seen in its full clarity. While a simple answer to our initial question—what does a parable show, when it shows?—might simply be “a world,” this does not recognize the depth of the parabolic call. The parable does not merely show a world, but a world in which the listener/reader is being asked to live. The parable does not simply offer a list of actions, some approved, others banned; nor does it merely offer an interpretive nexus, an alternate way of reading reality. Instead, the parable offers an actual reality; it offers a glimpse at a possible configuration of the life-world [lebenswelt] of the individual and challenges the individual to occupy this reality.

Such a claim may appear radical or even absurd. Yet, the restructuring of being-itself
is a phenomenon that is common to anyone who lives in a world saturated with meaning.\textsuperscript{160}

For who, upon discovering an object of the past, has not found this item invested with a overwhelming depth of meaning, a meaning of such poignancy and fecundity as to rip the object from its common reality—its presence-to-hand, its mere "thingness"—and reinstate it within the world in such a way as to fundamentally reorient its mode-of-being, that is, its very reality. Consider, once again, our trite example of the hammer. As this object rushes through its various appearances, its various phenomenalities, what of the hammer remains consistent? Investigated, it is a complex convergence of various materials; found, it is a single absolutely unified object; used, it appears translucent, nearly invisible. It is only through a constant recourse to a single mode-of-appearing, that is, the present-to-hand, that this perceived change could even be conceivably denied. But, for what reason are we to privilege this single mode-of-appearing? On the contrary, phenomenology grants all intuition the authority of evidence, even that which seems absurd.

It must therefore be recognized that the being of objects is unstable and that ontological construction is a fundamental aspect of human life. We constantly participate in the construction of a world around us. Certainly, this is not to advocate a solipsism or absolute idealism, but merely the recognition that we are active participants in our world. As Funk writes, “As actant however, I am not merely captive to an inherited or habituated life-world: I do indeed operate within that world, \textit{but also operate on it}.”\textsuperscript{161}

To author or speak a parable is therefore to recognize, implicitly at least, this constructive capacity of humanity. It is to reject quietism and to recognize that humans are essentially responsible for the world in which they live. To be called to “take up” a world is to be respected as a creator and asked to bear the burden of one’s own experiences and relations. When Kafka presents a world in which absolute value is always just out of reach,

\textsuperscript{160} And as Merleau-Ponty writes, “because we are in the world, we are \textit{condemned to meaning},” Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Phenomenology of Perception}: xxii.

\textsuperscript{161} Funk, “From Parable to Gospel”: 157.
he is asking the individual to take up this absurd world and make it ones own. When Jesus proclaims that “the kingdom of God is like...,” he does not seek the faith of simplistic belief, he does not simply ask one to enter, but to build; he seeks the creation of this kingdom as a reality upon earth. The kingdom is here because he lives in it, and calls out for others to live in it as well.

"Then it takes on the colour of God, and shame becomes honour, bitterness is sweetness and the deepest darkness become the clearest light. Then everything takes its flavor from God and becomes divine, for everything conforms itself to God."

-Eckhart

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