

## RESPONSE

Kevin Hart

Since I started to think for myself I have been living in a triangle whose apexes are philosophy, theology, and literature. Sometimes it is an equilateral triangle, sometimes an isosceles triangle, and sometimes a scalene triangle. Always, though, at least since I knew the word, its center has been phenomenology, albeit a phenomenology that differs in one or more ways from its classical formulations. Chris speaks very kindly about my negotiation of academic disciplines. To my mind, I have simply been faithful in observing the many “regions of being,” as Husserl calls them, by which phenomena give themselves to us. Husserl was a great philosopher, and to some extent his posthumous publications are his greatest work, but he was not a poet. His metaphor “regions of being” has nothing to do with space but everything to do with the many ways in which phenomena give themselves to us. I shall return to this in a moment, but beforehand let me say something more general about how I see phenomenology.

A common narrative about phenomenology is that it begins with Husserl and then quickly frays into other versions of the philosophy that contest one or another of the master’s assumptions or procedures. So intentionality is questioned, transcendental consciousness is rejected, the reduction is dropped, and so on. You all know the joke: phenomenology is a church composed entirely of heretics. The same point can be put more positively. Perhaps no other philosophy has shown itself capable of getting by without so many concepts and protocols that its founder took to be essential. Or, again, perhaps there is no other philosophy that is as capable of re-inventing and re-launching itself from unlikely sites. I do not think of myself as a heretic in phenomenology, and yet I think that it still needs to discharge two main assumptions. The first is that it begins with Husserl. And the second is that it occurs in philosophy, and only there. It is true that Husserl brought clarity and precision to phenomenology. He did so mostly in the context of Neo-Kantianism, and we can often feel that contexture in his writings. Yet, as Heidegger saw very clearly, phenomenology begins in the Greeks’ experience of nature manifesting itself. Heidegger also showed that it can be used to read the texts of Greek philosophy, and not only those texts: I am thinking of his lectures on Paul’s letters. Already an important point has been made: phenomenology is *itself* a hermeneutic; it offers us ways of reading, though, to be sure, only

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Heidegger, and never Husserl, sought to read by way of phenomenology, and then only for a brief period. Paul Ricœur said that phenomenology needed hermeneutics in order to stop its slide into idealism. I think, rather, that it is its own hermeneutics: intentional analysis provides an extremely subtle series of ways of reading all sorts of texts, from philosophy to poetry.

Husserl saw, quite correctly, that phenomenology and art are very close relations: the phenomenological gaze and the aesthetic gaze are similar in important respects. It is easy to point to Francis Ponge, the poet of *Le parti pris des choses*, as a prime example of this, yet one could point just as readily to Maurice Blanchot whose narratives are preoccupied with prompts to reduction, from life in the “daytime world” of work and politics to the worklessness that occurs when undergoing the rigors of the approach of the neuter in the “nighttime world” of literature, a space in which everything we know as “world” is brought relentlessly into question. Michael has drawn attention to my interest in Blanchot, who I take to be the strongest French narrative writer since Proust, the most consequent atheist of the last century, and one of the most subtle and creative readers of Heidegger. Like Wallace Stevens, I can say “I love Maurice Blanchot,” but I love him as a phased counterpart of what I try to do. He attends to what precedes phenomena and I look to what exceeds them; and once again I shall have something more to say about this a little later.

To my mind, phenomenology has no borders; it participates in many discourses without belonging finally to any of them. It is the gentle art of nudging phenomena so that they show themselves. The kind of nudging that is required differs from phenomenon to phenomenon, and of course we must ready ourselves to perform the act. It has two phases, ἐποχή and reduction; for phenomenology turns on a dative (the person to whom something is made manifest, including his or her lived body) as well as on a genitive (the manifestation of something). What I am calling a nudging is simply a shift of attitude, a passage from asking “What?” or “Why?” to asking “How?” The questions “What?” and “Why?” have their rightful places, even in Husserl’s philosophy, yet it is the question “How?” that uncovers the problem of constitution, how a phenomenon is rendered present or absent, and in what precise manner.

How a phenomenon gives itself to someone depends on what Husserl called the “region of being” at issue: a number gives itself in a manner quite different from how an object gives itself, which, again, is quite different from how a non-Euclidean construction or a painting by Salvador Dali gives itself. A number’s phenomenality is exhausted in cognition, but not so for an object, while a Dali canvas deliberately frustrates cognition. We still have to chart all the regions of regions of being, and so in a sense phenomenology has only just commenced. (Deleuze dreamed of a book composed entirely of concepts; I dream of a book that documents all the regions of being, the ways in which phenomena can give themselves.) Another sign of the proximity of its beginning is that only recently have we begun to think capaciously about phenomenality. Marion questions Heidegger’s restriction of phenomenality to being, and Heidegger in turn extended phenomenality from the realm of objects to the realm of being. If phenomenality is linked to *Gegebenheit*, then Meinongian objects, poems by John Ashbery, and divine revelations, all lay claim to phenomenality. Not always the same phenomenality, of course. For Husserl, phenomenality is granted by transcendental consciousness and the phenomenon, and Marion is the first person to challenge his authority and to argue that, by rights, phenomenality belongs to the phenomenon. In doing so, of course, he prizes intuition over intentionality, and replaces the subject with what he calls *l’adonné*. It is unclear, it seems to me, whether *l’adonné* is an extreme *ξένωσις*, a contraction of the Cartesian subject to a point, or if it is part of a declension of the “I”: the ablative of the self, say, rather than the nominative.

Let me briefly cut my figure against this ground. In the first place, the standard history of phenomenality, from Husserl to Marion, remains within the field of subjectivity and inwardness. Even Michel Henry is in this field; in some ways, he exemplifies it in an extreme manner. It comes as no surprise to locate Augustine as a founding father here. Husserl quotes *De vere religione* at the end of the *Cartesian Meditations*: truth is to be found in the “inner man,” and true religion leads us back there. For Husserl, phenomenology *is* the true religion because it leads us to the true inner self, the transcendental dimension of consciousness. By contrast, my main interest has been what I call “the basilaic reduction,” which is exemplified in the parables of Jesus

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about the Kingdom. Jesus's parables show us how to pass from "world" in all its senses—κόσμος, *imperium mundi*, and all the rest—to what is radically prior to it, what he calls "kingdom." It is not that we are led to a transcendental consciousness in which we can constitute phenomena, including God, and so make them present to us. Instead, we are led back to see that we are called to live *coram deo*—in accordance with the two great commandments—and that if we do so our lives shall differ markedly from how they have been lived before: we shall experience experience in a new way. It's worth noting that, on this approach, we do not seek to make God present to ourselves, whether by knowing (natural theology) or by unknowing (apophatic theology) but rather we seek to live so as to become present to God.

The basilaic reduction is not simply kenotic, though, and so it differs from Marion's and Lacoste's phenomenologies; rather, it has two moments: the first is κένωσις and the second is ἐπέκτασις. Eugen Fink was partly right about the reduction; it unhumanizes us, leads us to the margin of the world, and partly disengages us from its attraction. Yet he was mistaken, I think, to hold that there is a special consciousness to which we are led, and to suggest that we remain on the margin of the world. The movement of ἐπέκτασις involves the risk of stretching into the Kingdom, which I take to be the primary state in which God reveals himself as Fatherly King. The revelation is Abrahamic, not specifically Christian, and at heart I do not think that it is confined to the West. A theology of religions finds appeals to the Kingdom in theistic and non-theistic religions alike. So if one wishes to speak of the phenomenality of God within Christianity, one has two options. The first is to say that Christ is the phenomenality of God. He is the datum for the self-revelation of the Father, the one who transforms revelation into manifestation by way of parables, sayings, and acts. Revelation re-veils as much as it reveals—the Father remains hidden—yet the specificity of the Christ consists in making a revelation manifest. The second way of speaking of the phenomenality of God is by way of the Kingdom. Origen was only partly right when he said that Christ is himself the Kingdom that he proclaims; in my judgment, the Kingdom approaches in and through love, *caritas*; its movement is caught in the Latin expression *modus sine modo*, a way without a way. We love God *modus sine modo*, at the extreme limit of how we love one another, and God loves us in another scansion of the Latin expression: in a way without a way. God comes to us not in a flash of pure self-presence but as a trace.

Claire offers a very subtle criticism of a recent affiliation of deconstruction and atheism. To my mind, deconstruction is a moment in phenomenology; it is the moment of de-sedimentation in genetic phenomenology, which Derrida, under the influence of Jean Hyppolite, extended to the notion of structure. Derrida offers a powerful criticism of self-presence or full presence, though he often thought that this criticism extended to presence in all its modes. It does not; it is restricted, or should be restricted, to fulfilling intuitions, real or imaginary, and the real ones are few and far between, mostly to be found in logic and pure mathematics. In a brilliant analysis, Derrida shows that even in mathematics we cannot rely simply on a fulfilling intuition: empirical signs are needed. Where Derrida goes wrong, I think, is in proposing archi-writing as a master region of being. It is true that in writing all being is given without being. When I say "Whose woods these are I think I know" no physical woods appear before me: the being of the woods is given without sensual being. And it may well be true that all our intentional relations with the world involve language. Yet the being of the tree also gives itself to me by way of perception, anticipation, recollection, resemblance, fantasy, and so on. What interests Derrida is the trace that is left by being without being, by the withdrawal of the absolute character of any singular phenomenon: these woods, the idiom of Robert Frost, and so on. *X* without *X*: the syntax of the trace is something Derrida associates with Blanchot. Now does it follow that the trace is necessarily linked to the finite? Certainly not for Blanchot; for him, the Outside is neither finite nor infinite. And of course the syntax of *X* without *X* is not unique to Blanchot.

Is the trace confined to the finite? I do not think so. Before saying anything about it, though, let me put something to the side, something that Claire raises in her paper: it is the issue of God and infinity. It was only in the fourth century that Christian theology transformed its notion of God by making infinity an essential trait of the deity. Only when Gregory of Nyssa proposed in his *Against Eunomius* that the defining trait of divinity is infinity rather than ungeneratedness did God and infinity become linked. He did so in order to combat the

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philosophical wing of Arianism. Now Gregory had unlimitedness in mind, and the idea was very risky for the Greeks: to say that God is without limit seemed to deny the essential dignity of God. Nowadays, of course, unlimitedness is not a risky notion: without mathematical infinity, as explored by Leibniz, we could not have bridges or space ships. Calculus is the domestication of infinity. In medieval and modern theology, however, it is not the mathematical infinite that is important but rather the claim, clarified by Aquinas, that simpleness is infinite. That which is compound is necessarily finite. If God is simple (and his triune nature is a matter of real distinctions, not divisions), then God is infinite. Now if this absolutely singular and metaphysically simple deity were to become incarnate, the absolutely singular character of its simple nature would withdraw: one would be left with a trace. The adventure of the trace does not turn on finitude or infinitude, on composition or simpleness. Deconstruction is something that happens to texts by dint of a phenomenon giving itself in the region of being called writing. Any ontology of finitude that Derrida held was in addition to his formulation of deconstruction.

The syntax of *X* without *X* begins with Augustine; it can be found in the fourth book of his *The Literal Commentary on Genesis*. Our predications of God take the form, he says, of *X* without *X*, and this is because of the transcendence of God. The deity exceeds phenomena. Now what Blanchot and Derrida discovered is that the same syntax can be used in that region of being that precedes phenomena, what Blanchot calls “the space of literature” and what Derrida calls “la différance.” To use Jean Wahl’s distinction, the syntax appropriate to transascendance turns out to be appropriate to transdescendance as well. One might say that that part of postmodernity associated with Blanchot and Derrida is preoccupied with the specular relations of transascendance and transdescendance, with what exceeds phenomena and what precedes them. Yet this preoccupation loses force as soon as one rejects spacing or *différance* or writing as a master region of being, and points instead to the plurality of such regions.

The best early attempt to map the regions of being was made by Richard of St Victor in the twelfth century. His ark treatises have usually been read as labored allegories of medieval psychology, yet they can be read as offering as complete a map as he could make of the different ways in which phenomena can manifest themselves. If Richard provides a proto-phenomenology of all that is, Husserl allows us to bring precision to it. Richard’s concern is with the gaze, the various stages of contemplation, and Husserl’s concern is with the refinement of the gaze, of the development of phenomenology as a “spiritual exercise” to do with contemplation of phenomena. Phenomenology was always waiting in theology, and it was doing more than waiting to be discovered; it was working, concerning itself with the constitution of phenomena.

Of course, phenomenology is always at work in poems as well. Poems are sites where “regions of being” are concatenated in intense and memorable ways, and perhaps this is what makes us think, with reason, that great poems say everything. For in a poem perception does not overwhelm anticipation, modes of absence jive with modes of presence, the region of being we call “resemblance” sits with the region of being we call “phantasy.” I think that Claire points to this in her reading of “Gacela” and in her general comments on my poems.

KEVIN HART is the Edwin B Kyle Professor of Christian Studies at the University of Virginia and Professor in the School of Philosophy at the Australian Catholic University.