



Icon(oclast)ic Discourse: Marion's Logic of the Infinite

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Introduction

A Catholic postmodern phenomenologist, who gives perhaps his most infamous work the title *God Without Being*, inevitably invites controversy. Jean-Luc Marion, however, is fortuitously likeable by ingeniously rendering logic to the service of doxology and disarming with subtlety where one anticipated rivalry. As part of the task of engaging this unavoidable voice on the landscape of contemporary theology, this essay will delineate the formal logic of the infinite as an axiomatic and centrally guiding theme that informs the whole of Marion's corpus. There is a natural anxiety when attempting to "reduce" anyone's work to a single interpretive take, not to mention an individual as intricate and subtle as Marion. However, this paradoxically fitting vantage is the "theme" that disavows thematization. Following a treatment of the infinite, seeking to demonstrate the way in which its unique rationality permeates a variety of important aspects of Marion's thought, this essay will pose a series of questions to suggest that the actualistic theology of Thomas Aquinas explicated through the *analogia entis* may more coherently and persuasively encompass the formal logic of the infinite.

The Reason of the Icon

One might consent to the investigation of that peculiar and, if thoroughly considered, intimidating notion of the infinite so long as it is done by the philosophers, those trained professionals who have worked up the mental endurance for such enterprises. Marion on the contrary not only invites us to so regard the infinite, but he has insisted that we have never truly been without it. It is there, lingering even in the sciences, whether as a formality in theoretical mathematics, or as the boundlessness of physics in its extraterrestrial and subatomic variants, or the imperialistic vantage on endless

industrial possibilities.¹ It is the infinite itself that provides the sciences with their constituting characteristic, namely an openness to unending subject matter in the free progress of unassignable boundaries.² The flourishing of the sciences is based upon the *rational* apprehension of the infinite's unsurmountable nature, which rightly orients "comprehended" realities.³

If the infinite is not merely an entity inaccessible and contained at some remove but rather mysteriously "positive" as "incomprehensibility" than the discourse of knowing will submit the attempt to consume through labelling and render "unknowability" as a configuring notion for epistemology.⁴ Citing Descartes, as one among the likes of Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil of Caesarea, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas, Marion says the infinite is not simply the ever present possibility of *more*, rather infinite substance contains "more reality" than finite substance and "the perception of the Infinite is to be found in some manner within me before that of the finite, namely [the perception] of God [before that] of myself."⁵ This is no obstacle, says Marion; in fact it is "necessary" to admit as an *a priori* admission that the finite *cannot* comprehend by "containment," and thus it is the case that one encounters the *sensation* of an elusive yet hospitable beyond.⁶ In so far as human knowing fails to iterate this "paradox" it will fail to "reference" appropriately.

¹ Jean-Luc Marion, "The Formal Reason for the Infinite," in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Graham Ward, trans. A. J. Wickens (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 401.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 401–402.

⁴ "Incomprehensibility" is the epistemological face, while the "infinite" is the ontological. *Ibid.*, p. 403.

⁵ Parentheses original. Marion, "The Formal Reason for the Infinite," 402. Marion attributes the definite assigning of disciplines to the Aristotelian tradition which sought to hone various independent space for methods so deserving and suggests that the Cartesian critique reestablished the "homogeneous space" of *Mathesis Universalis*. This decision was rooted, in the Greek tradition, under the presupposition that knowledge implied the delimitation of that which is known. *Ibid.*, p. 401.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 402. In *Cartesian Questions*, Marion further explicates the arrival of the "infinite" in Descartes' metaphysics method, though not uncritically. While discussing simple natures and substances, Marion says of the *a posteriori* proof for God's existence that unlike simple natures, "God" cannot be eminently derived from the *ego*. What is required is an idea that permits transcendence from simple natures while at the same time being an object of rational thought. In order to meet both requirements, Descartes weds common and special notions of substance in referring to God as *substantia infinita* ("infinite substance"); thus the logical deduction of simple natures from the *ego* evinces their inherent comprehensibility; whereas the infinite remains "intelligible" though definitively "incomprehensible." Jean-Luc Marion, *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 61–63. Thus God (with the face of the infinite) extends beyond "measurement," as one of two universal criteria with "order," not simply by the unmanageable "task" of measuring it, but because its "immensity" by excess is beyond the realm of extension. *Ibid.*, 65. See also Graham Ward, "Introducing Jean-Luc Marion," *New Blackfriars* 76, no. 895 (1995): p. 4.

The impasse between inaccessible transcendence and intelligible representation is mediated by the icon. With a similar resilience to the infinite, the icon is not seen, but appears (or “seems like”).⁷ The idol results from the gaze that aims at it. The icon portrays the invisible’s procession “up into” the visible.⁸ As the infinite gives the finite, so too does the invisible “bestow” (*décernant*) the visible as its own deduction, and therefore what the icon omits is not due to the inability of the aim but the fitting absence of the God whose presence is as such, thus the invisibility of the unenvisageable.⁹

Strictly speaking, the icon “shows” nothing, but teaches a distinctive gaze that surpasses itself by refusing to freeze on the representation, thus never settling but rebounding back upon the visible in an “infinite gaze.”¹⁰ The icon, says Marion, exceeds the metaphysical investment of divine *ousia* for the hypostasis of the one inscribed therein (*hypostasis* or *persona*), and this presence is circumscribed by that which characterizes the icon, namely the aim of an intention (*stokhasma*).¹¹ Though this resembles the precise making of an idol, which is the *product* of a gaze, it nevertheless remains a “nearly perfect inversion;” for *what* defines an icon is the gaze which belongs to it—the “face” that *meets* our aim, thereby correctly in-forming the invisible in the visible.¹² Marion then provides a nuanced rendering of 2 Corinthians 3:18, “We all, with face unveiled and revealed [*anakekalummenō prosōpō*], serving as optical mirror to reflect [*katoptrizomenoi*] the glory of the Lord, we are transformed in and according to his icon [*eikona*], passing from glory to glory, according to the spirit of the Lord.”¹³ This is to return to an introductory statement that Saint Paul’s reference to Christ as the “icon of the invisible God” [*eikōn tou theou tou aoratou*] (Col 1:15) needs be the generalized hypostatic norm for every icon, every “face.”¹⁴ In this way, epistemology is rent by an icon(oclast)ic discourse that sees by being beheld, articulates by speechlessness, and “knows” incomprehensibly.¹⁵

⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁵ The distance that the icon reclaims is derivative of Balthasar exposition of the intratrinitarian distance of filial love, which is the distance required for all love and thereby the “theme” reiterated back into a created world distort with the “distance” of affliction. See Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction* (London: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 51–52. In *The Idol and Distance* Marion says, “First, distance has a definition. Second, it remains indefinable by definition. Distance can be defined in several equivalent

Saturated De-nomination: Between Truth and Falsity

Marion's progenitors descend from the tradition of "negative (or mystical) theology;" however, not even a tradition as unassuming as this escapes contemporary efforts of deconstruction. Marion cites Derrida as one who argues in opposition to negative theology, contending that it is fundamentally incapable of thinking God outside the "metaphysics of presence;" for in as much as the negation heralds the ineffable, it perpetually gives itself to the concealed object of intention—namely the affirmation of kataphatic predication—which makes the negation intelligible as a denial.¹⁶ For Derrida, as long as the denial of *something* remains the conditions of theological apophasis, it will always remain a "quasi-affirmation" (especially concerning "existence").¹⁷

Marion appropriates from Denys a third way between affirmation and negation, for in the *Divine Names* one sees with indisputable clarity that negation prevails over affirmation but only then submits to that which overcomes both: "let us not believe that the affirmations are the contrary of the negations, since [the cause] which is above every negation as well as every position . . . is still more above all privation."¹⁸ Moreover, Marion turns to Nicholas of Cusa to establish the beginning of a third way; as one who explicitly uses

statements; among others, alterity alone allows communion, and nothing of that which distinguishes separates without, by that very fact, uniting all the more. Or again, between God and man, incommensurability alone makes intimacy possible. . . Distance as Di-stance therefore means: duality alone allows recognition. . . wherein gazes are exchanged." Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), p. 198.

¹⁶ Taken primarily from *Sauf le nom* in Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), pp. 132–33.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 132–33. The essay from which this chapter is derived was presented at a conference held at Villanova University in 1997 entitled "Religion and Postmodernism," and the presentations were published in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*. In response to Marion's citation of Derrida's critique, and his subsequent alternative in Denys' "third way," Derrida insists that his book *Sauf le nom* made no attempt to offer a thesis against specific individuals representative of negative theology; on the contrary, his book was to be a "pragmatic" engagement with rather abstractly labelled "what one calls negative theologies" or "negative theologies." Derrida suggests that he was sensitive to the "third way" as it appears in Denys, and quoting from his own work he says regarding Denys, "The paragraph I'm going to read has, in addition, the interest of defining a beyond that exceeds the opposition between affirmation and negation. In truth, as Dionysius expressly says, it exceeds the very position (thesis), and not merely curtailment, subtraction. . . . But by the same token, it exceeds privation." Jean-Luc Marion, "In The Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology,'" in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 43. See also Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), p. 245.

¹⁸ *Divine Names* (Parentheses Marion's) quoted in Marion, *In Excess*, p. 135–36.

the term *theologia negativa*, Nicholas says "According to negative theology, infinity is all we discover in God," which for Marion indicates that the "learned ignorance" of this third way provides the illumination of incomprehensibility "as such" (eminence).¹⁹ Therefore if thesis and denial represent binary parallels to truth and falsity, then the "way" that exceeds a simple reduction to either affirmation or negation transcends the true and the false; if this is the case, negative theology makes no attempt to "say," and by its not saying it escapes the condemnation of covert kataphatism.²⁰

More than simply reconstruct the logic of the theological tradition, Marion insists upon preparing the phenomenological "possibility," conceiving the formal potential of "that with which the third way of mystical theology deals" and nothing more.²¹ Admitting with Husserl the duality of appearing and what appears (*l'apparaître et apparaissant*) in intention and intuition (noesis/noema, signification/fulfillment), Marion offers three possible variations of theological predication—one more than Husserl himself in Kantian tradition.²² The first regards the evidence of truth which radiates in kataphatic light as the representation of intention that finds partial fulfillment in the intuition; this is the establishment of the concept as the justification of an intuition. The second considers the object of intention to be inaccessible which thereby creates an impoverished intuition that can subsequently only negate in apophatic denial of the concept. There is, however, an alternative says Marion to these two avenues. The third variation refuses to conceptualize not because of an impoverished intuition, which proceeds atheistically in the lack of a pure void, but on account of the sheer *excess* of intuition that can never be predicted or contained by the signification.²³ This intuitive abundance "overcomes, submerges, exceeds—in short, saturates—the measure of each and every concept."²⁴ God therefore remains incomprehensible, not imperceptible. The "infinite proliferation of names" recognizes all names as remaining only as flags for the insufficiency of the concepts they employ, and thus the concept in general.²⁵

A negation is incapable of making a theology, though only equally insufficient as positivism, therefore the name we use to refer to God cannot ever be the "right" or fitting name; and given this fact, the name we *must* use is the one which "de-nominates" (*Dé-nommer*)

¹⁹ *De docta ignorantia* quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 159.

²³ Marion, *In Excess*, p. 159.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

this God.²⁶ This has the twofold *function* of saying and undoing the saying, relinquishing the nominative task of naming while overcoming the pressure to say *some-thing* about *some-thing* in defiance of predication on the whole.²⁷ It is the naming we are given to in the face of the infinite, that imposing though removed horizon that demands while frustrating our naming efforts. It is the logic we ought to embrace because it is of the beyond that has always embraced us. Saturated phenomenality has provided the third way of mystic theology, all of which accords with the formal logic of the infinite, that paradoxical rendering that situates all speech appropriately.

Given Language

For Marion the question persists, what “phenomenal face” of God remains for the philosophers in the wake of Heidegger’s condemnation of the *causa sui* of metaphysics and the reductive ousting of God from true phenomenological assessment in Husserl.²⁸ More specifically, how does God correspond to the “being-given” as the relief of being without demanding only again that one considers a new construction of the “being-giver” (*étant-donateur*)?²⁹ In response to these foreseeable concerns, Marion addresses two crucial considerations that if ignored will permit “givenness” to be suspect. The first of which demands upon the status of being (ground) which must necessarily accompany any “giver” so long as the being-given is received as such, invariably bearing the imprint of efficient causality; however, perhaps the complexity of infinite givenness so utterly transcends the expectations of efficiency that it should be thought to surpass causality entirely.³⁰ One’s inability to imagine even the possibility of such a thing betrays their complete dependence upon metaphysical thinking, certainly says Marion more than unearthing the dormant metaphysics of this phenomenology. The second consideration pertains further to the identity of the giver. It is not the case, he insists, that the being-given communicates a static location of giving; rather, the pervasive phenomenality of all things parallels

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Derrida adds a note of commentary on the play of Dénomination: “dénomination is untranslatable. In English, “denomination” is a monetary term. Dénomination works wonderfully in French, meaning at the same time to name and to unname.” Marion, “In the Name,” p. 44.

²⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries, trans. Thomas A. Carlson and Christina M. Gschwandtner, Third Edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 292–94.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

God as the being-given “par excellence.”³¹ This complete given is not limited to a specific “side” as presented to an intending gaze, it is rather without reserve and *therefore* without any “outline.”³² It is all the more possible then that this phenomenon go unnoticed as the pure invisible “*abandon*” of givenness par excellence, the gaze which seeks objects will only too easily miss the unavailable exposed without restraint and thus without delimitation.³³

This is certainly one of Marion's contributions to the question of “God,” posing a philosophical approach which in his estimation is devoid of metaphysics (or “without being”) that is as theologically traditional as it is intuitively receivable; regardless of the where the verdict may lay on such a depiction, Marion has proposed the “relief” of theology in the celebrated “bracketing” of objectification for a genuine theo-logy of an unpresuming iconic release.³⁴

In this way, a new “function” of language is introduced, which is itself already the admission that language is reduced to function. The demand of de-nomination instills the “strictly pragmatic function of language” that meets the “unattainable yet inescapable interlocutor

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., pp. 294–95.

³³ Ibid., p. 295. Concerning the phenomenological “bracketing” of the givee Marion says, “It is a question of bracketing the givee. Can we do so without also suspending the entire process of the gift? Certainly. Not only does the bracketing of the givee not invalidate the givenness of the gift, but it characterizes it intrinsically: without this suspension of the give, the very possibility of *giving* the gift would become problematic.” Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 85. Marion continues on to insist that not only *can* a genuine phenomenological assessment of the gift bracket the givee, but in fact it *must* do so. As long as the gift is given—even gratuitously—by an ever present giver who precedes the gift, there will always be an economy of efficiency (and even, he argues, misery according to the one who deserves the gift in a vision of “final causes”); moreover, the gift would have a reciprocal relation which instantiates, continually, a realm of commerce. The “giver” does not on the other hand stand over against the gift but “is” gift, and not as the gift of a specific efficient action but as the always already “given” with abandon: of the inability of the gift to be in metaphysics, Marion says, “The receiver of the gift, if he remains visible and accessible, can therefore disqualify all its givenness; his mere presence makes it possible to appoint him as cause and to inscribe the gift within an economy. No doubt it is just a possibility, but this—even without an actual demand for repayment—is enough to set a price, an intention, an exchange value for the so-called gift. In the gaze of the givee, humiliated or moved, the giver sees his gift disappear in a mere investment with interest, a payment in arrears; he wins recognition—but of a debt. The giver is paid with the indebted recognition of the givee. The gift never took place.” Ibid., p. 86.

³⁴ Marion elaborates on the concern of givenness and says that it has not to do with whether or not something can be regarded as an “unconstituted given” in epistemological philosophy of consciousness; rather, it is to proceed from the conviction that “everything that shows itself must first give itself. . . [which] implies that one is questioning givenness as a *mode of phenomenality*, as the *how* or *manner* (*Wie*) of the phenomenon.” Jean-Luc Marion, *The Reason of the Gift*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), p. 19.

beyond every name.”³⁵ The Good (*aitiata*) beyond being is the direction to which language acts by transporting the self through a passage to the infinite.³⁶ In other words, language is doxological, and therefore truly theological, for what it *does* as opposed to what it *says*. Prayer and praise then aim “indirectly” at the Good, setting out with all impropriety for sustained attention towards such a One.³⁷ This, Marion says, is the overcoming of the metaphysical sense of language as predicative and nominative, an overcoming borne of the given par excellence without remainder, “otherwise than being:” quoting Levinas, “the essence of discourse is prayer.”³⁸

Actualized Phenomena?

There can hardly be anyone who has to some degree contemplated the question of God that would not be in awe of Marion's acuity. What one strains to say, Marion expresses with a complexity that leaves the impression of simplicity—analyzing the mystery so as to give the mystery back to itself in fuller form. It is with a degree of trepidation that I pose a series of questions that inquire whether iconic logic of the infinite is not better suited for that suspicious brand of actualization maintained by Thomas Aquinas that retains a theological discourse of *esse*.

Marion seeks to overcome absolute “comprehension” for a hierarchy of rationality that sees comprehension and incomprehension working together for a logic of excess. The Infinite, says Marion is “an exceptional thought, in which this concept, and only this concept, *must* remain incomprehensible in order to remain rational.”³⁹ In an effort to guard the Infinite, Marion contests that it is not merely some-*thing* that is incomprehensible, but is itself incomprehensibility. However, by examining what is considered comprehensible, by virtue of being finite, Marion reveals that from which he is protecting the Infinite. He says, “Comprehension suggests adequate knowledge as long as one is dealing with things of the world.”⁴⁰ The two domains, the finite and the Infinite, are utterly contrasted, while

³⁵ Marion, *In Excess*, p. 140.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

³⁸ Levinas, *Entre Nous* quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 144–45. Regarding the liturgical function of language, Derrida agrees with Marion: “As for pragmatics, I agree with Marion. That's one of the points on which I feel very close to him. At some point I spoke of what I called the performative aspect of prayer, of liturgy. We should have a discussion about praise and prayer; it would be a difficult discussion. But this pragmatic aspect is granted a real privilege in the way I address the question.” Marion, “In the Name,” p. 45.

³⁹ Marion, “The Formal Reason for the Infinite,” p. 404.

⁴⁰ Marion, *In Excess*, p. 155.

being mutually informative for one another. If we contend with the manner in which Marion regards the comprehensible nature of finite reality, it will subsequently call into question the means of protecting theology from idolatry.

The everyday warrants further investigation. The angst of phenomenological “describing” belongs both to the Infinite and the finite. That an “object” is material is no opportunity for obscuring the fact that the coincidence of that thing’s givenness for two individuals simultaneously makes possible any speech about that object. “Things” are elusive, any collaborative or pedagogical enterprise reveals this. One experiences the failure of concepts in the finite world immediately when two people cannot see eye-to-eye as it were. Being challenged on fundamental concepts always demonstrates how much we take for granted, and how much we depend on the mysterious givenness of all things. Thus, in some ways, objects bear the characteristics of the infinite, as Marion says knowledge of the ineffable depends upon a mutual *sensation*: the un-representable in “the atonal tonality of bedazzlement.”⁴¹ If finite reality is likewise suspended in its own incomprehension, and *retains* within that tension intelligible “features,” then it could constitute an instance of mystical predication that could go back upon the infinite—justifying in small measure the legitimacy of doing so *while* consenting to the ever present limitation of language in the face of what exceeds. This is to insist that comprehension was never a requirement for language which has always dealt with the excessive.

If the inherent inability and failure of language to predicate absolutely is proper to both the Infinite and the finite, then there is at the outset a “likeness” between the two in discourse. The epistemological approach of mystical theology, predicated upon the given par excellence without being, seems to be analogous to the way one perceives finite things. If this is the case, actualized being does not stand opposed to excess, saturation, and transcendence. Aquinas’ analogy of being may, therefore, offer a compelling resolution. First, the recognition that finite beings exist as an image of the Infinite opens the possibility that divine being could grant all the mystical aspects of Marion’s thought. Second, the absolute, equivocal difference between Marion’s Infinite and finite does not persuasively account for the real analogical similarity and difference between the two. The desire to retain *esse* theologically is not an attempt to configure God into an idol, but teach the whole of reality its supernatural “nature” and regard being itself as iconic.

By appropriating Thomas according to the Aristotelian-Neoplatonic synthesis, one is given different “speculative” avenues; as case study,

⁴¹ Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” p. 295.

I will consider the nature of divine simplicity.⁴² For Thomas, properly “incomprehensible” concepts such as simplicity are not delineated by virtue of their absolute exhaustive immediacy to the mind; in fact, concepts like simplicity have an inherent grammar that accords the unknowability of their vastness. What “simplicity” does as a theological confession is negatively regard *how* God stands in relation to creaturely being. This is not to deny *that* God exists in and of Godself, as the fullness of essence and existence in necessary actuality, rather it is to render “positive” speech to that which is uncomprehended: thus we cannot speak of simplicity out of the natural orientation of a particular faculty.

Thomas offers various conditions in which multiplicity and complexity have their existence; and by negating such preconditions for complexity as alien to the essence of God, he demonstrates a negative way to divine simplicity. In the *Summa Theologiae* 1a.3.7, Thomas gives the following examples: God does not have any quantitative parts (whether that of a body as form over matter, existence over essence, subject over accident); God is not the posterior *summation* of parts, but is the first being; in addition, unifying principles have a cause of unity—God has no cause; in every composite there is movement from potency to actuality—but with God there is only actuality as he “is” the convergence of his essence and his existence; and finally, God is pure form and thus does not succumb to the distinction between unity and parts (e.g. “man” is not predicated of man’s parts as in his foot). This logical movement from complexity to simplicity follows a robust tradition of theological contemplation as God continually appears as the ground and condition of perspectival and dispersed finite intonations; for example, the intervals of time are not encompassed by an infinity of concrete successions but by the incomprehensible *condition* of such finite vantage—thus contained by eternity. Space, also, is not met by the God who is materially in each place, but by the mystery of the God who is ineffably transcendent. Causes are made possible by the One who is eternally actualized. Thus whatever differentiation, distinction, or distance may be understood *within* God, it will always be refracted in and through simplicity—“the primary distinguishing feature of divinity”—lest one permit notions such as “procession” or anthropological metaphors found throughout scripture to dissuade the logic of God’s aseity.⁴³

⁴² See Jordan on loosening the reigns of “Aristotelianism” in Thomas. Jordan, *Rewritten theology*, p. 60–65. See also White for a reading of *sacra doctrina* as a properly ecclesial teaching, as opposed to a strict Aristotelian “science.” White, *Holy Teaching; The Idea of Theology According to St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 4.

⁴³ Burrell, *Knowing the unknowable God*, p. 38. Burrell offers a helpful distinction as it pertains to “simplicity” as it is predicated of God: “The best way I know to put this is to remind ourselves that simpleness is not an attribute of God, properly speaking, so

In this way, God's "simple" nature and triune life mutually interpret one another, each requiring the other to be truly intelligible.⁴⁴ All that God is, he is at once.

Moreover, Thomas' negative inductions are not merely the anthropological ascribing to "God" all the things conveniently noble and sacred to humanity (as victim of Feuerbach's evaluation); rather, it is the formal logic that accompanies and expositis the fundamentally given reality of God throughout the narrative of Christian revelation. It is the confessional intelligence that proportions causation, intention, and finality in and through God without ever containing him by the idolatrous limits which creation erroneously places back upon him. It is the measured response to the God who answers to—and swears by—no other, who gives life because he "is" Life, and who teaches us how not-knowing is knowing and know is not-knowing (in other words, the one who purposes us upon the infinitely excessive bliss of knowing and loving *this* God).⁴⁵

It would be tempting to treat simplicity as a matter of prolegomena, a necessary and preliminary abstraction, that while required offers little in the way of relevance for life—or even the rest of theological articulation. However, it is precisely *because* of its (ontological) relevance that it is the "abstraction" that one must have if they are to attend to God in proper proportion. In Q3, "Of the Simplicity of God," Thomas gives the argument that God's essence is his existence, which further explicates the logic of simplicity.

As it pertains to finite creatures, complex and composite creatures to be sure, the very reality of their existence is *added* to their nature accidentally. That is to say, the sufficient definition of a certain creaturely genus is fully intelligible without the addition of the act of "to be." In this way, "existence" has a degree of potency within a given genus in a way that it may or may not be realized; whether existence is properly predicated of a certain essence is entirely conditioned upon that essence having a definite being in matter—*this* existence, here and now as it were. It is the unrelenting particularity of an *act*-ual existent. What is important to note is that the singular act of being is not proper to, or necessary for, the form of (any) creaturely essence/nature. *This* whiteness (particular existent/matter) is not a part of the definite essence or nature of "man," for instance; rather, the act of being and the essence of that which is in being are sustained

much as a 'formal feature' of divinity. That is, we do not include 'simpleness' in that list of terms we wish to attribute to God – classically, 'living', 'wise', 'willing'. It is rather that *simpleness* defines the manner in which such properties might be attributed to God." Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, p. 46. See also Burrell, *Aquinas*, p. 26–30.

⁴⁴ This point was insightfully provided by Simon Oliver in conversation.

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (ST) 1a.3.7.

by an ontological tension.⁴⁶ At the most fundamental level, this is the all-pervasive condition of composition which Thomas attributes to all finite being; therefore, it is also the place where God's unique act of "to be" contrasts with the complexity of added subsistence.

Thomas' application of divine simplicity in and through the discussion of essence-existence offers a polished treatment of previous themes found in medieval philosophers such as Ibn-Sina and Maimonides, and this thoroughly Christian treatment would provide simplicity with the necessary formula required in order to exercise consistent and weighted influence over the whole of theological contemplation. For Thomas, the weak and rationally veiled character of metaphysics may indeed treat being, or brute categorical existence, with a degree of conceptual accuracy. Being can be regarded by the intellect as colour is to sight, and thus it is conceivable that "Being" should be employed with a vacuous inattention to what might in fact be the "content" of *that* Being which is Being as such. This is to ask about the "form" of that brutal and secular void that philosophy (in the autonomous sense) attaches to things. In so far as existence remains categorical, factual, and empty as the mere affirmation of essences' tangible presence on the surface of an abyss, secularity and perspectival relativity will always ontologically contextualize—with the utmost certain and falsely humble Kantian borders—any subsequent questions of purpose, meaning, goodness.

Thomas is unequivocally uninformed of any such positivism. God is not a form that is added to existence—which is a logical inference measured by considered attention to Christian scripture and tradition, repudiating the multivalent manifestations of idolatry; to so regard God's relation to existence in the way form is to matter in finite beings would raise an infinitely greater, and vastly overwhelming, array of speculative questions of this "existence" which *grants* God his stay. If God is the God always and already implied in the deepest and most ultimate questions, than no such horizon may be allowed to situate what is of unbounded transcendence: the God who created even the heavens, who casts away death and hell, and commands an angelic choir. Therefore, Thomas admits the primal and necessary convergence of *esse* with *essentia*. God, unlike created beings, requires existence for the intelligibility of his essence; stating the same thing conversely, existence *is* or *has* a shape and form *that is* the essence of the God revealed in Jesus Christ.⁴⁷

This replete convergence of essence and existence in God propels the logic of simplicity forward with what is required for unabating consideration of *Theos* in all *logos*. It is the basal ratio that unleashes

⁴⁶ ST 1a.3.3.

⁴⁷ Thus, revelation fulfills (or "perfects") metaphysics. See Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 4.6, 190. Jordan, "Theology and Philosophy," p. 235.

robust and reverent attention towards the purely beatific while demanding a perpetual “remembrance” of this teleological formality *in all inquiries*. The explicit science of *sacra doctrina* is only distinct in emphasis as it more acutely regards the essential contours of that “existence” which is partially appropriated in “natural” discourse.

By contrasting the relation between *esse* and *essentia* essentially in God and contingently in created beings, Thomas provides the concept of analogy to describe the proportionate interval between finite and Infinite being.⁴⁸ As a repudiation of univocal and equivocal attribution, “analogy” weighs continuity and discontinuity according to the logic of simplicity explicated by the sublime convergence of essence-existence. The analogy that follows God’s essence-existence is not an epistemological extrapolation that discerns merely sufficient analogies for the God that is otherwise intuited though “intentionally” elusive: thus consenting to the general requirements of analogy as that which is in some manner apophatic and kataphatic yet never univocal or equivocal.⁴⁹ To so regard analogy as primarily a matter of linguistic construction is to “forget” simplicity which inspires knowledge teleologically. Saying finite being is analogous to divine Being is not a detached attempt at the most convenient metaphor, rather it is to confess the ontological priority of the named One *who* “is” *esse* essentially. It is the expressed continuity of a single (simple) Being that is consequently involved if one is to predicate Existence to any finite being; conversely, it is also the expressed *discontinuity* between this one who is Being and those who borrow, or *participate*, in the existence which is proper to another. This is an *analogia entis* that undercuts “modest” linguistic appraisals which inevitably whittle theology to guesses by removing the ontological priority that makes local instantiations confluent.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ This analogy has two aspects within it: the *analogia attributionis* (the positive—that which is fundamentally shared between two things) and the *analogia proportionis* (the negative—the categorical distinction and difference). Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, p. 135; Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*, p. 135.

⁴⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, in rejecting Aquinas’ God-as-*esse*, purports to offer a “third” alternative to univocal and equivocal predication in “mystical (negative) theology.” One can appreciate how near saturated phenomenon is to the *analogia entis*; and given that Derrida’s own response was to say Marion, by suggesting the “essence” (over) saturated the intuition, departed from pure phenomenology, it is worth pondering whether and how far Marion has stepped towards Thomas. Offering an analogy of the function of “icon” (contra “concept”) Marion says, “Achilles is not counted among the gods, but he seems like a god, like the semblance of a god. In him, so to speak, something characteristic of the gods rises to visibility, though precisely no god is thus fixed in the visible.” Marion, *God Without Being*, p. 17. See also Marion, “The Formal Reason for the Infinite.” For fine treatments of Marion along the lines of the analogy of being see Milbank, “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics”; Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, pp. 237–41.

⁵⁰ David Bentley Hart offers a compelling summary of what is intended by the *analogia entis*, in the broadest sense: “I use the term ‘analogy of being’ as shorthand for the tradition

The primacy of functional intentionality which *means* pragmatically through an unpretentious navigation of incomprehensible realities is not, as Marion admits, ultimately protected by any phraseology including even “excess” or “givenness par excellence.” And if it is the case that we are already acclimated in small degree to a kind of communal admission of mysterious realities in the incomprehensibility of even the “everyday,” then it is philosophically conceivable that intentionality could equally well in-form the iconic pragmatics of a discourse on *esse*, having the “*evacuated*” metaphysics of Thomas be as spiritually didactic as it is conceptually acute.⁵¹

By allowing the contours of the infinite to control our appropriation of analogous realities—in other words, by not naming God with

of Christian metaphysics that, developing from the time of the New Testament through the patristic and medieval periods, succeeded in uniting a metaphysics of participation to the biblical doctrine of creation, within the framework of trinitarian dogma, and in so doing made it possible for the first time in Western thought to contemplate both the utter difference of being from beings and the nature of true transcendence.” Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 241. One’s attempt to deny the transcendence of God’s Being for all *beings* while attempting to appropriate an analogical “principle,” perhaps an *analogia relationis* or *analogia fidei*, will face significant difficulties. In so far as God is “analogical” via revelation or encounter, one will continue to depict God as utterly over-against “being;” and in this way, God is contrasted by his removed “location”—which places God in dialectical relation with finitude in a manner that situates God as “a being” among beings. See Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 242.

⁵¹ On the evacuation of metaphysics (philosophy) in Thomas see John Milbank, “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” *New Blackfriars* 76, no. 895 (July 1, 1995): p. 334. For a treatment of “revelation” in Thomas that delineates its continuity with reason, as opposed to occasionalistically imposed with data, see John Montag, “Revelation: The False Legacy of Suárez,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 42–49.

Marion, though critical, ultimately exempts Thomas from the charge of “onto-theology.” He then takes it further to think *esse* in Thomas “without being;” it seems to be that “being” for Marion continues to be determined by prior expectations, or critiques, which orient any reading of being/existence. Marion says, “the Being from which God is liberated in *God Without Being* is defined in terms of two different domains. On the one hand, we have the metaphysical tradition of the *ens commune*, then of the objective concept of being, of its abstract univocity. . . but, then, according to so incontestable a Thomist as E. Glison, this ‘Being’ no longer has anything to do with the *esse* that Saint Thomas assigns to the Christian God.” Marion does however intend to liberate God from the Thomistic *esse*, nevertheless for the Dionysian prioritization of “the Good” as the first among the divine names. However, he evinces a rather peculiar comprehension of the *analogia entis* by contrasting the pseudo-liberated divine *esse* (uniquely convergent with his *essentia*) absolutely with the “*ens commune*” of creatures and “metaphysics.” If the convergence of essence and existence in God is admitted, one would know that it would thereby be impossible to divorce that unique Being from every instance and question of Being as such. Marion, *God Without Being*, xxii–xxiii. See also Jean-Luc Marion, “Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theo-Logy,” in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard, trans. B. Gendreau, R. Rethy, and M. Sweeney (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 65.

Being but naming Being with God—we open the space required to prioritize the ineffable as ineffable.⁵² One might see in the drastic call for God without Being a final and novel solution to the confusion of infinite and finite realities; but the radicality of the convergence of *esse* and *essentia*, before detailing it any further, permits a relentless categorical distinction that may be thought to be more radical, as the claiming of *esse* which is intonated through participation more profoundly distinguishes than the blatant contrast of “being” and “without being.” In the end, it is the infinite that suffers, flickering as the face of opposition with the substantiality of the finite world practically appearing more “real” or “actual.” Considering the vista which Marion suggests makes proper scientific method possible as a progression into genuinely uncertainly regions of the infinite, one can see the pushing back against or into the Infinite. They are opposed, as the territory of the Infinite becomes more comprehensible. By denying any “excess” beyond excessiveness in the form of *esse*, there remains the troubling notion that the Infinite *given within the proper domain of being-given* bears only the marks of a façade, lacking the dynamism of integrity and actuality that repels these kind of (metaphysical?) comparisons with the finite. If there is a world on the other side of the phenomenological bracket, including wives, father, mothers, taxes, etc. is it possible *esse* too lies beyond the reduction, as opposed to appearing in the guise of possibility as such.⁵³

Conclusion

In a time in which one can begin a discussion of God with the presumption that it is not only nearly impossible but undesirable, Marion's voice provides a refreshing take on the givenness of what has been hitherto radically criticized. The face of the Infinite, as that which meets us in every aspect of our knowing while providing the comprehensive statement on incomprehensibility as such, has shown forth an iconic mode of referencing that takes transcendence at “face

⁵² This phrase is a slight variation of Marion's who said of the God who “loves before being” that he only “is” as he “embodies himself” and in this way, Marion is not concerned with “the possibility of God's attaining Being, but, quite the opposite, the possibility of Being's attaining to God.” Marion, *God Without Being*, pp. xix–xx.

⁵³ The notion that the infinite would be perceived as the *appearing* of possibility is owned in Richard Kearney's reading of Marion: “one of the main ways in which the infinite comes to be experienced and imagined by finite minds is as *possibility*—that is, as *the ability to be*.” Richard Kearney, “Hermeneutics of the Possible God,” in *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 220.

value.” It has been suggested here that what Marion proposes by way of the formal logic of the Infinite compliments the *analogia entis* more coherently than the being-less God of phenomenological reduction alone.

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