

An examination of Phenomenology and its relationship to the Christian concept of revelation.

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In examining the discipline of phenomenology and its relationship to the Christian concept of revelation, we enter into a paradigm study of the relationship between philosophy and Christian theology, if theology is defined as the study of revealed religion. In this necessarily short article, after introducing key terms and concepts, I will argue that phenomenology can illuminate aspects of natural revelation and also clarify aspects of special revelation. The starting point of phenomenology as a human activity is both necessary in terms of the limits of its discipline as an epistemology, yet also a limitation which points to the necessity of 'outside' help from special revelation. I will treat in particular the theme of 'consciousness' in phenomenology as a potential subject matter of natural revelation and discuss to what extent phenomenology opens up or distorts this light. The important insight that hiddenness is a condition for the reception of revelation is dealt with next, alongside its corollary of the inexhaustibility of revelation. Finally there is a brief exploration of how phenomenology's treatment of 'things themselves' could help clarify an understanding of the relationship between the immanent and the economic trinity.

Firstly we need to define Phenomenology. Phenomenology can be understood as both an epistemology and a methodology. Going back to the source, in an article for *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1929, summarising his project 25 years after he began, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) defines Phenomenology as firstly a 'descriptive method' and secondly an 'a priori science'¹.

At the heart of phenomenology is a study of 'essences': the essential features of the world², such as space, time or physical objects. The goal is to move from the particular instance of a property, eg a red book, to a direct understanding of its abstract essence, eg universal redness. This process of reflection Husserl called 'eidetic reduction.'³ As with Plato and his Forms, Husserl claimed that the *eidos* is known by

¹ The full article is reproduced in **Kearney and Rainwater** op cit 15-22.

² **Merleau-Ponty, Maurice**, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (Routledge 2009), p.vii.

³ Later, however, Husserl concludes that all eidetic reduction really boils down to a study of the one *eidos* which is the transcendental ego itself in its manifold uncoverings. (See **Husserl, Edmund**, *Cartesian Meditations: an introduction to Phenomenology*, (translated Dorion Cairns, Nijhoff/The Hague 1977), p.71

direct intuition, without mediation. Unlike Plato's Forms, the *eidōs* is not independent of consciousness, but is immanent in consciousness.

The object of phenomenology, according to Husserl's successor, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) in *Being and Time* (1927), is "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way that it shows itself from itself."⁴ (Greek: *apophainesthai ta phainomena*). In other words the aim is to get back to 'things in themselves' from the phenomena. This definition already promises an important point of contact with the Biblical understanding of revelation since *phaneroō* ('manifest, make clear'), is also amongst the cluster of New Testament terms signifying revelation, alongside *epiphainō* (show forth), *deiknūō* (show) and *exegeomai* (unfold, explain). *Apokalypto*, however, is the main Greek term for 'revelation,' translating the Hebrew 'galā'. Packer defines the sense as : "unveiling something hidden, so that it may be seen and known for what it is."⁵ He further notes helpfully that the Hebrew vocabulary was not exclusively sacred in origin, whereas, by contrast, the Greek *apokalypto* is only used in a theological context within the New Testament. This might suggest that revelation can have both a general and special sense.

In systematic theology these two senses are traditionally known as 'Natural' and 'Revealed' theology. This terminology seems artificial because it implies that 'Natural' theology should not also be understood as a form of revelation and a mediator of grace. The traditional terminology has the unhelpful connotation of a Nature/Grace divide which takes an extreme form in Karl Barth.⁶ It would be more helpful to use the terms 'general' and 'special' revelation, recognising that both are acts of God's grace. It is the argument of this article that phenomenology could be understood theologically and positively as a window on general revelation understood in this sense and also to clarify terms and questions related to aspects of special revelation.

In addition to the eidetic reduction, phenomenology also employs the *phenomenological reduction*. This involves a 'splitting' of the ego to form an 'impartial spectator'⁷ who puts his natural, naive 'interest' in the world 'out of play', resisting the

⁴ Heidegger, Martin *Being and Time*, transl Macquarrie and Robinson, (Blackwell 2008), p.58 (Merleau-Ponty states a similar aim: "to reveal the mystery of the world and of reason." (op cit p.xxiv)

⁵ Packer, J.I. entry under 'Revelation' in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Part 3*, (IVP 1988)

⁶ Barth objects to the idea that "the establishing of His knowability in the natural sphere....will in fact mean a preparation for the establishing of His knowability in His revelation." *Church Dogmatics 2/1*, (T&T Clark 2004), p.89

⁷ Husserl's expression from the unpublished Sixth Meditation quoted in Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.xxii

temptation to explain and attempts merely to describe the phenomena which presents itself to him.⁸ But this immediately raises the question whether it is even possible to describe phenomena without prior categories, i.e. in an unmediated way? Most phenomenologists admit that this is an ideal rather than something perfectly achievable.⁹ They would reply that one must continually 'bracket' the 'natural attitude', so that one is aware of prejudices as they arise. It is for this reason that phenomenology is best understood as a method rather than a system.

A concrete example of this would be in the field of psychology where a patient may display schizophrenic behaviour. The practitioner of phenomenological psychology should lay to one side presupposed theories of what schizophrenia is and deal rather with the lived experience of the patient.¹⁰

Janicaud writes: "...the phenomenologist presupposes nothing other than the minimal methodological rules he or she has fixed. The phenomenologist is neutral, in the sense that he or she is open to the thing itself, without any other teleological prejudice than the ideal of rational and scientific truth."¹¹

This entails that the phenomenologist never truly 'arrives'. His understanding is always perspectival and provisional.¹² In this temporal world of flux, "there is no thought which embraces all our thought", consequently, the philosopher, is always 'a perpetual beginner,' writes Merleau-Ponty.¹³ For phenomenology, this presents the danger of an "infinite meditation..in so far as it remains faithful to its intention, never knowing where it is going."¹⁴ Meaning becomes forever deferred¹⁵.

⁸ **Husserl, Edmund**, *Cartesian Meditations: an introduction to Phenomenology*, (translated Dorion Cairns, Nijhoff/The Hague 1977), p. 35

⁹ So for example **Merleau-Ponty**, "The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction." (*Phenomenology of Perception* p xv).

¹⁰ This is the approach of **R.D. Laing**, *The Divided Self*, (Penguin 1960).

¹¹ **Janicaud, Dominique**, *Phenomenology and the 'theological turn': the French debate*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p.48.

¹² So for example **Heidegger**, "Our analysis of Dasein, however, is not only incomplete; it is also, in the first instance, *provisional*." op cit p. 38

¹³ **Merleau-Ponty**, *Phenomenology of Perception* p xv

¹⁴ **Merleau-Ponty**, op cit. p.xxiii

¹⁵ This is most evident in Derrida

Revelation and teleology

How might a belief in revelation alter the landscape here? Within Pannenberg's¹⁶ treatment of this subject he discerns in most New Testament contexts a tension between the present partial disclosure.¹⁷ and the future universal disclosure.¹⁸ which became explicit in so-called *apocalyptic* writings. (An exception to this is the 'natural' revelation of Romans 1:19). In this framework, knowledge is not endlessly deferred, because there is a teleology of the *Parousia*. The Parousia¹⁹ is connected with manifestation of glory²⁰ in which believers will share²¹

Interestingly, Heidegger employs the term 'parousia', playing on the root 'ousia' and its German equivalent *Anwesenheit* (thus committing the etymological fallacy),²² so for him it cannot serve the same teleological purpose, because, as part of his 'destruction of the history of ontology', he transposes the term into an entirely immanent frame of reference: namely that of 'Being as presence', i.e. being in its mode of temporality²³

For Paul, the future is already proleptically present. It has been publicly disclosed in the historical event of the Cross.²⁴ Christ's presence is already amongst his people.²⁵ The epistemic consequence of this is that partial knowledge will flow into perfect eschatological knowledge at the point when " I shall know even as I am fully known".²⁶ Aquinas was later to identify this event with full participation in the Divine nature."²⁷

Previously, Augustine (354-430), had seen in this experience the true fulfilment of Plato's beatific vision of the Forms. He speculated that in this Heavenly vision we would see "all our knowledge in one continuous glance."²⁸

¹⁶ **W. Pannenberg**, *Systematic Theology*, (T&T Clark Ltd., Transl 1991 Geoffrey Bromiley), 211

¹⁷ eg Matt 16:17

¹⁸ Eg Matt 10:26; Rom 2:16

¹⁹ 2 Thess 2:8

²⁰ 1 Peter 4:13

²¹ 1 Peter 5:1

²² Inwood notes that Parousia is one of a number of compound words formed from ousia, so it is arbitrary to associate it primordially with presence. **Inwood, Michael**, *Heidegger: a very short introduction* (Oxford 2000), p.64

²³ **Heidegger**, op cit, p. 47

²⁴ Rom 3:21

²⁵ Col 1:27; Matt 18:20

²⁶ 1 Cor 13:12

²⁷ 2 Peter 1:4. **Aquinas**, *Summa Theologiae*, 1. 12,5. "When any created intellect sees the essence of God, the essence of God itself becomes the intelligible form of the intellect" cited in **A.N.Williams** discussion in *The Ground of union* (Oxford University Press 1999) p.38

²⁸ **Augustine**, *De Trinitate*, transl Edmund Hill, (New City Press 2005), Book XV ch 4 par 26. p.418

A starting point in the ego or in God?

Recognising the advance of secularism in his day, Husserl observed that religious belief was becoming more and more 'externalized' and 'lifeless'²⁹ leading intellectuals like himself to reject Divine revelation in favour of "a new belief....in autonomous philosophy and science."³⁰ Husserl lamented that science had become too fragmented in his day. It was time for a new 'Copernican conversion,'³¹ a new unity of approach based on a new method, which he called *transcendental phenomenology*.

Husserl honours Descartes (1596-1650) in the title of his 1933 work: *Cartesian Meditations*, in which he describes Descartes' reflection as the 'prototype' of philosophical reflection. While ultimately rejecting Descartes' conclusions regarding ontological realism and the ego as a 'substance', the fundamental insight of Descartes, according to Husserl, was the *experience* of transcendence through the *epoche*³² By which Husserl means the ability of the ego to *transcend* or stand outside of itself and regard its own experience of suspending judgment regarding the external world.

Heidegger's starting point: Dasein

"Is the starting point optional, or does some particular entity have priority when we come to work out the question of Being?"³³

So asks Heidegger in his own enquiry into the nature of Being. His answer is that knowledge exists only for *Dasein*. - that is for human '*being - theres*.' Heidegger regards humans as the way into a study of the nature of Being. *Dasein* is distinguished from other beings because "in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it."³⁴ The essence of Being may be inaccessible, but the *Existenz* of *Dasein* is accessed by our immediate experience.³⁵ "Being....is made visible in its 'temporal character' "³⁶ A starting point in an atemporal God or even in supposed atemporal truths such as the law of non-contradiction

²⁹ **Husserl, Edmund**, *Cartesian Meditations: an introduction to Phenomenology*, (translated Dorion Cairns, Nijhoff/The Hague 1977), p.4

³⁰ **Ibid** p.4

³¹ **Husserl**, op cit p.144

³² **Husserl**, op cit p.27.

³³ **Heidegger**, *Ibid* p.26

³⁴ **Heidegger**, op cit p.32

³⁵ **Heidegger**, BT, p.33

³⁶ **Heidegger**, BT, p.40

are therefore ruled out *a priori*.³⁷ In this he goes further than Husserl who believed that the structure of the ego was "more than temporal formation."³⁸

This exclusively temporal nature of being for Heidegger leads him to radicalise Husserl's humanistic starting point to the extent that he overthrows all concept of *metaphysics*³⁹, along with the idea of a causal nature (aetiology). There is nothing 'beyond' phusis or being. Or, to put this another way: the something which is beyond being is precisely *nothing*.⁴⁰ (das Nichts). Heidegger thus makes the leap from humanism to nihilism.

Metaphysics began, according to Heidegger, not with Aristotle, but with Plato and his theory of two worlds. Consequently Heidegger also rejects the traditional correspondence theory of truth.⁴¹ Truth must return to what Heidegger considers its 'primordial' meaning of 'unconcealedness' or 'disclosedness.' (Greek *aletheia*). Heidegger may be committing the etymological fallacy here, but he goes on to claim that this original understanding prevailed until it was replaced with the secondary construct of truth as *adaequatio*: the notion that the content of one element corresponds to the content of another. Kierkegaard had come to the same conclusion: that the notion of truth as 'identity of thought and being' (a correspondence theory) would depend on an 'existing individual' being able 'to transcend himself' outside of time.⁴² Since no such individual exists, according to Heidegger, he concludes that alleged laws of logic and science are really only 'present -to -hand' assertions made by Dasein, similar to the artisan's hammer. They exist only as long as Dasein exists: "there is truth only in so far as Dasein is and as long as Dasein is."⁴³ Consequently, foreshadowing postmodern relativism, Heidegger writes that " all truth is relative to Dasein's Being."⁴⁴ In this respect Heidegger concurs with Nietzsche whose rejection of value tables is the

³⁷ Heidegger, BT, p.269

³⁸ Husserl, op cit p.77

³⁹ Husserl had opened the door for this approach by rejecting 'metaphysics in the customary sense' (op cit p.139).

⁴⁰ This latter point is developed in Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (original edition 1943, tranl Hazel Barnes, Routledge 2008). Eg "Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being – like a worm." (p.45) or "it is nothingness which is at the very heart of transcendence and which conditions it." (p.42), "the being by which Nothingness comes to the world must be its own Nothingness." (p.47)

⁴¹ Heidegger, op cit p.257

⁴² Kierkegaard, Soren, *Concluding unscientific postscript*, transl David F. Swenson, (Princeton University Press 1968), p.176

⁴³ Op cit p.269.

⁴⁴ Heidegger, BT, p.270

necessary outcome of the death of *God* in works such as *Thus spake Zarathustra* (1891)⁴⁵.

From a theological perspective Heidegger is partially correct in his definition of truth. Truth is 'disclosedness,' but only through its connection with the reliability of the God who discloses it. The Judeo-Christian God is a speaking God who makes Himself known.⁴⁶ He can disclose himself non-verbally through events⁴⁷ through nature⁴⁸ and through consciousness⁴⁹ and pre-eminently through Christ⁵⁰, through whom the plan of salvation has been made known.⁵¹ But orthodoxy has always recognised an essential mode of Divine revelation as verbal⁵². The Gospel is God's verbal *disclosure* of his saving purpose for mankind.⁵³ So Aquinas, who is well known for his robust natural theology also recognised that there remain essential truths, for example the truth of the incarnation or that 'God is trinity' which can only be accessed through verbal revelation.⁵⁴

It is true that the later Heidegger saw the importance of language and expressed it in quasi-religious terms. After Heidegger's so-called 'turn' (*die Wende*), when he was about 70, he became pessimistic about the ability of philosophy to influence a technocratic society. In a final posthumously published interview with the journal *Der Spiegel* Heidegger confessed:

"philosophy will be unable to effect any immediate change in the current state of the world. This is true not only of philosophy but of all purely human reflection and endeavor. Only a god can save us. The only possibility available to us is that by thinking and poetizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god, or for the absence of a god in [our] decline, insofar as in view of the absent god we are in a state of decline."⁵⁵

Heidegger did not use the word "god" here in any personal sense but in the sense of the impersonal manifestation of Being. He thus recognised the bankruptcy of his previous Existentialist position and tried to replace it with what Schaeffer called the

⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, transl. R.J. Hollingdale, (Penguin 1969), p. 214-232

⁴⁶ Gen 1:3, 2:16, Ex 6:3, John 1:1, Gal 1:15

⁴⁷ see eg Psalm 105,

⁴⁸ Romans 1:19; Psalm 19

⁴⁹ Romans 1:19-20; 2:15

⁵⁰ Heb 1:1, Jn 1:18,

⁵¹ Rom 16:25f; 1 Cor 2:7-10; Eph 1:9; 3:3-11; Col 1:19

⁵² Eg Romans 1:17; John 1:1; 2 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:1; 2 Pet 1:21-22.

⁵³ 2 Thess 2:11-13

⁵⁴ Ibid 1a, q. 32, art 1

⁵⁵ "Only a God Can Save Us" Trans. from *Der Spiegel* 30 (Mai, 1976) "*Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten*," by W. Richardson in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker* (1981), ed. T. Sheehan, pp. 45-67. <http://www.ditext.com/heidegger/interview.html>, p.13

'connotation' word of language.⁵⁶ It is a 'connotation' word, because it suggests personality behind the universe, even though this is the very thing which Heidegger's humanism must deny. The speaking poet⁵⁷ somehow mediates the speechless universe, not with any content, since language 'cannot be translated'⁵⁸, but only by his mere existence as a poet speaking. Heidegger's position is essentially an anti-realist view of truth and language. Thus Heidegger's 'turn' is a turn towards mysticism, though he suggests that the dialectic of Eastern and Western thought will make ready for a new synthesis - a new 'god' to emerge.⁵⁹

Heidegger admits that one of the reasons he became resigned to the impotency of philosophy to address modern problems is that its primary task is to establish a basis for thinking itself.⁶⁰ This however leads to the aporia highlighted in Cunningham's book, *The Genealogy of nihilism*. The question of thought's origin seems to lead either to infinite regress or to an ultimate *non-thought* i.e. to an irrational origin. It would seem that (contrary to Heidegger), theism alone can offer an escape by pointing to *Thought itself* as the origin. "In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was with God and the Logos was God." (John 1:1). The solution lies not beyond thought but in the beyond of *thought*.⁶¹ Only *this* God can save us now!

Consciousness

From Romans 1: 19 and 2:15 we can infer that *consciousness* is an aspect of general revelation. The world opens up to us the possibility of what Ian Ramsey called 'disclosure situations'.⁶² These are situations where it seems that 'the penny drops', some window on truth opens up, analogous to 'magic eye' optical illusions.

"To see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower

Hold infinity in the palms of your hand and eternity in an hour."⁶³

⁵⁶ **Schaeffer, Francis**, *The God Who is There*, (IVP 1968), p.68.

⁵⁷ Heidegger was particularly thinking of the poet Holderlin.

⁵⁸ "Only a God Can Save Us" op cit p.18

⁵⁹ *ibid* p.17

⁶⁰ *ibid* p.19

⁶¹ **Cunningham, Conor**, *Genealogy of Nihilism*, (Routledge 2002) p.

⁶² **Ramsey, Ian T.** *Religious Language: An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases*, (SCM 1957).

⁶³ *Auguries of Innocence*, William Blake in **Butter, Peter**, *William Blake*, (Everyman, 1996), p77

It may come, for example, while contemplating the visual art of Kandinsky, listening to Bach's 'St Matthew Passion' or experiencing powerful emotions such as love or pain. Given this perspective, what might be disclosed to us by consciousness through the phenomenological method?

Firstly is the insight of Brentano, appropriated by Husserl, that consciousness is never alone; it is always consciousness *of* something. This is the notion of *intentionality*. The *Cogito* is always accompanied by *cogitum* or *cogitationes*.⁶⁴ Objects of consciousness, Husserl called *noema*, while modes of consciousness he referred to as *noesis*. The ego can always look at what it imagines or wills and describe it. It can also anticipate different perspectives of an object of consciousness in the flow of time, as happens in completing the sequence of a melody in the mind⁶⁵ or imagining the different angles on a die. Husserl calls this ability a *protention*.⁶⁶ This might suggest to us, on the face of it, the reality of an external universe, but it is complicated by the fact that fantasies and hallucinations are also objects of consciousness (*noema*).⁶⁷

Hence, although it remained the goal of Husserl's project to recover the objective existence of the external universe, his philosophy only really succeeded in establishing the facticity of the *noema qua noema*.⁶⁸ His epistemology did not establish the existence of mind-independent realities. Husserl's thought still contains elements of Berkeley's idealism. It leaves open the possibility that we are living in a Matrix⁶⁹-like illusion, albeit a coherent one.

It is noteworthy that although Husserl is methodologically agnostic regarding the external world, he does not 'bracket' the internal world in the same way. Transcendental experience is 'trusted'⁷⁰ as intuitively 'given'. So Husserl ends his final Cartesian meditation with the words:

"The Delphic motto, 'Know thyself!' has gained a new signification. Positive science is a science lost to the world. I must lose the world by *epoche*, in order to regain it by a universal self-examination. 'Noli foras ire,' says Augustine, '*in te redi, in interiori*

⁶⁴ Husserl, op cit p.33

⁶⁵ This observation was first made by Bergson in the context of his theory of 'duration'. See Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford, 1995) p88

⁶⁶ Husserl, op cit p. 44-45

⁶⁷ Husserl, op cit p.34

⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty tries to avoid this conclusion of phenomenology, insisting that 'the world is always 'already there'. (*Phenomenology of Perception* p. vii)

⁶⁹ The Matrix (1999), *Groucho II Film Partnership*, directed by Andy and Larry Wachowski

⁷⁰ Husserl, op cit. p.151

homine habitat veritas." (Do not wish to go out; go back into yourself. Truth dwells in the inner man.)⁷¹

Husserl was at pains to escape the charge of solipsism through the positing of an 'intersubjective community of monads'⁷², but he began methodologically by bracketing the existence of other egos⁷³ and it is not at all obvious that he successfully made the transition to their existence-status without resorting to the very inductive reasoning his method sought to avoid. He argued, somewhat weakly, that associations of pairings (similar to Plato's pairs of opposites) such as ego/alter ego are known directly through intuition⁷⁴, but still could only conclude that the body similar to mine 'seems' to be an animate organism,⁷⁵ by an argument from analogy.⁷⁶ Even then the Other, for Husserl, remains phenomenologically a mere "modification of myself."⁷⁷ Such reasoning exposes the limitations of his methodological presuppositions, viz that *my consciousness* is the only grounding of reality.⁷⁸

By contrast, Merleau-Ponty (following Heidegger), sees man as essentially 'in the world.'⁷⁹ He roots his own theory of perception in the embodied, psycho-physical subject.⁸⁰ Consequently he rejects Husserl's appropriation of Augustine's 'inner man' and seeks to rescue the epoche from idealism, replacing it with 'wonder' in the face of the world:

"Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire."⁸¹

By rejecting the reduction of existence to simply my *awareness* of existing gives room for others to be aware of my existing and so for the existence of other minds. Merleau-Ponty is closer to the realist's position here, except that he has already rejected what he calls an independent 'no point of view.'⁸² He neglects the possibility

⁷¹ Husserl, op cit. p.157

⁷² Husserl, op cit. p.30 and his Fifth Meditation.

⁷³ Husserl, op cit. p.72

⁷⁴ Husserl, op cit p.112

⁷⁵ Husserl, op cit p.113

⁷⁶ Husserl, op cit p.111,118

⁷⁷ Husserl, op cit. p.115

⁷⁸ See Husserl op cit p.26

⁷⁹ Merleau-Ponty, op cit p. xii

⁸⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (Routledge 2009), p.235-237.

⁸¹ Merleau-Ponty, op cit p.xv

⁸² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (Routledge 2009), p.235-237.

of an infinite disembodied 'God's eye' point of view present in the doctrine of revelation as a ground for objectivity.

Intuition and the pre-cognitive ego

Phenomenology, in the person of Husserl, turned away from pure rationalism (Descartes), to a form of experientialism, and in particular, a form of intuitionism⁸³ for its grounding. Indeed, Husserl refers to it as "an experiential knowing."⁸⁴ Self-experience provides 'indubitability' of the transcendent subject and also of the *structure* of the ego, for example the sense of time it inhabits⁸⁵ (anticipating Heidegger's *Being and Time*) or formal logic.⁸⁶ Knowledge of structure is part of the eidetic reduction, known through 'evidence,' by which Husserl means something 'directly intuited.'⁸⁷

Descartes was wrong then in not recognising that there is an intuitive aspect of knowledge which precedes the *cogito*. Sartre calls this the 'pre-reflective cogito' which is 'the condition of the Cartesian cogito.'⁸⁸ Husserl described it as the "as yet dumb experience...which we are concerned to lead to the pure expression of its own meaning."⁸⁹ We can all identify with this in the common experience of struggling to find the right words to express an experience. This suggests to Husserl that the *eidos* is "prior to all 'concepts', in the sense of verbal significations."⁹⁰ This is analogous to the development of cognition explored by child psychologists, for instance, Piaget⁹¹ and also to Chomsky's theory of an archetypal 'structure' of language innate in the mind which necessarily precedes a learned language.

What is it that this pre-cognitive knowledge reveals? Significantly, it reveals that there is a 'thing in itself,' even before it is given meaning through culture and language (eg 'hammer' or 'light bulb'). There is a pure 'givenness' of phenomena which we receive passively. There are "ready-made objects" which confront us with their

⁸³ So Marion, "the intuition rather than the concept is king." *The Saturated Phenomenon*. P.191. NB This is not to be confused with Mathematical Intuitionism, although there are some parallels.

⁸⁴ Husserl, op cit p. 34

⁸⁵ Husserl, op cit. p.28 and p.74-77

⁸⁶ Husserl, op cit. p.59

⁸⁷ Husserl, op cit. p.57

⁸⁸ Sartre, *ibid* p.9

⁸⁹ Quoted in Merleau-Ponty, op cit p. xvii

⁹⁰ Husserl, op cit. p.71

⁹¹ Piaget, Jean, *Psychology and Epistemology: Towards a Theory of knowledge*, transl P.A.Wells, (Penguin, 1972), but also Husserl, op cit p.141.

existence.⁹² The Ego itself is 'already there' before it is grasped. Moreover, these intuitions follow a law-bound structure which itself is a 'thing in itself' preceding our interpretation of it.

Heidegger too, accepted the point that there is something which precedes our rational knowledge of the world. For him this was not the being of consciousness but simply 'being-in-the-world'. Since Dasein is a body, he argues it must already be part of the world. (N.B. This begs the question against mind-body dualism). Dasein is also primarily *care*. Dasein is taken up with coping in the world. Thinking about it abstractly, whether through science or philosophy is a secondary activity which one falls into. Descartes' mistake was not to take notice of this. Thus, the 'scandal of philosophy' according to Heidegger, was, not merely that philosophers had failed to establish the existence of the world but the fact that "such proofs are expected and attempted again and again."⁹³

Similarly for Merleau-Ponty, the world, "of which knowledge always *speaks*,"⁹⁴ "...is there before any possible analysis of mine."⁹⁵ The world is simply 'given', as a brute fact.⁹⁶ Although epistemologically this appears to beg the question, ontologically, phenomenology is consistent with the Christian worldview on this point. Indeed some phenomenologists such as Jean-Luc Marion have 'turned' to religion to explain the 'givenness' of the world.⁹⁷

But what kind of religion does Marion turn to? Marion makes use of the reduction to 'suspend' the traditional assumption that God has being. God is 'gift', identified with agape,⁹⁸ 'God without being'. One problem for Marion, however, is his Kantian assumption that categories only obtain in the phenomenal realm⁹⁹. This must mean that the Noumenal cannot really *cause* anything (causation is a category), including the giving of a gift or the loving of a world. Consequently the word 'gift' and even the word 'love' retain only an equivocal meaning.¹⁰⁰ While wishing to preserve the primacy of 'revelation' over idolatrous concepts of reason, Marion must lose this also, since a

⁹² Eg Husserl, op cit. p.78

⁹³ Heidegger, BT, 249

⁹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, op cit p.x

⁹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, op cit p.x

⁹⁶ Op cit p.xi.

⁹⁷ Marion, *Being Given: toward a phenomenology of givenness*, transl Jeffrey L.Kosky. (Stanford University Press, 2002).

⁹⁸ Marion, *God without Being*, p.47

⁹⁹ Marion, *ibid* p.205

¹⁰⁰ This is similar to our discussion above on the connotation words of Heidegger, 'Only a god can save us.'

Noumenal God cannot truly 'reveal' anything. 'Revelation' does not encompass, as in orthodoxy, the verbal communication of a Personal God. It is rather "a strictly phenomenological concept."¹⁰¹

For the theologian starting with revelation, Knowledge is not only 'pre-cognitive' (of human cognition) but also 'pre-experiential'. God's knowledge is the primordial knowledge; ours is derivative and only true knowledge through participation¹⁰².

God's knowledge is also Trinitarian in nature¹⁰³, therefore our participation might imply that intuition is not 'prior' in order or rank to cognitive knowledge, nor to other ways of knowing such as somatic or kinaesthetic, but has more of a 'perichoretic' relationship with these other ways.¹⁰⁴

Swinburne, for instance, argues that there are always background presuppositions (eg of the existence and nature of God) in interpreting an experience as *revelation*.¹⁰⁵ In other words, revelation does not in itself prove that there is a God. This view is supported by Pannenberg who shows how in the history of Israel it is the *concept of God* which interprets Israel's *experience* of Yahweh. Every new revelatory experience presupposes previous content and knowledge of God.¹⁰⁶ This supports the thesis that these ways of knowing are interdependent.¹⁰⁷

Intuitive knowledge and faith

One of the key elements of phenomenology is that consciousness, like essences, is known directly to us by one mental act of intuition. It is fully 'given' to us (immanent), but this is distinguished from the self which is known indirectly (transcendent). This gives consciousness a special role, because it is only consciousness that we know directly.

Phenomenology might help clarify an aspect of revelation here, since faith could also be interpreted as a 'direct intuition' of the human spirit, itself 'directly given' by the Holy Spirit. Kierkegaard, the father of existentialism, described faith on similar lines as 'the infinite passion of inwardness'.¹⁰⁸ According to the writer to the Hebrews,

¹⁰¹ **Marion**, *The Saturated Phenomenon*, p.215

¹⁰² Ps 94:10; Isa 40:13-14, 28, 1 Cor 13:12.

¹⁰³ Matthew 11:27; John 16:15

¹⁰⁴ I intend to develop these ideas in a forthcoming Phd thesis: 'Trinitarian epistemology'

¹⁰⁵ **Swinburne, Richard**, *Revelation*, (Oxford University Press, 1992), p.69-70.

¹⁰⁶ **Pannenberg**, op cit, ch 2

¹⁰⁷ Peter Hicks argues a similar case in *Evangelicals and Truth: a Creative Proposal for a Postmodern Age*, (Leicester: Apollos, 1998).

¹⁰⁸ **Kierkegaard, Soren**, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, transl David F. Swenson, (Princeton University Press 1968), p.179

faith attains a certainty not accessible to reason alone¹⁰⁹ through "seeing him who is invisible"¹¹⁰ Faith then, is a kind of 'knowing', distinct from but complementary to reason¹¹¹. Faith can direct uninformed reason to its anticipated proofs. It 'proteins' them, to use Husserl's language. In contrast to the methodological *doubt* of phenomenology (through the *epoche*), revelation depends upon methodological *faith*. As Augustine and Anselm insisted, 'faith seeks understanding'. Faith becomes the key to knowledge; the portal to epistemological cyberspace!

Consciousness then holds a special role within phenomenology as something 'directly given.' It is the "all embracing apodictic Apriori."¹¹² Husserl rejected any notion of a Kantian 'noumenal' by circumscribing reality wholly within the limits of possible consciousness.¹¹³ While Berkeley had allowed for Divine consciousness to be included in such a view, Husserl reduces reality to the product of human consciousness.

Sartre too claims a unique identity for consciousness, which he terms 'being for itself' (*l'etre-pour soi*).¹¹⁴ Like Husserl, he regards it as non-substantial (*contra* Descartes). Consciousness therefore cannot be relativised as itself an object of knowledge. It becomes the Absolute, since the entire world is outside of it.¹¹⁵ Thus, for Sartre, consciousness takes the function of the Divine in theology. It can create *ex nihilo*, since human freedom precedes essence¹¹⁶. It is Absolute freedom¹¹⁷. Merleau-Ponty follows suit in declaring, "I am the absolute source, my existence does not stem from my antecedents..."¹¹⁸

Idolatry.

¹⁰⁹ Heb 11:1

¹¹⁰ Heb 11:27

¹¹¹ My view here differs from that of Kierkegaard, who regarded faith as based on the 'absurd' as far as reason is concerned. (Kierkegaard, op cit p.189). Faith has no content other than itself. (Kierkegaard, op cit p.181).

¹¹² Husserl, op cit. p.103

¹¹³ "The attempt to conceive the universe of true being as something lying outside the universe of possible consciousness, possible knowledge, possible evidence, the two being related to one another merely externally by a rigid law, is nonsensical. Husserl, op cit p.84

¹¹⁴ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness*, (Routledge 2008) p..19

¹¹⁵ Sartre, op cit. p12, (though note that Husserl also makes this point in *Cartesian Meditations* p.73)

¹¹⁶ Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism, in Kearney and Rainwater (ed), *The Continental Philosophy Reader*, (Routledge, 2003). P.68 "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself."

¹¹⁷ Husserl had not gone this far, recognising limits to the freedom of the will to create other realities. See p.140-141, *Cartesian Meditations*.

¹¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, op cit p. ix

In these respects phenomenology distorts the general revelation given in consciousness in an idolatrous direction.¹¹⁹ It either reduces reality to the product of human consciousness (Husserl) or else ascribes rationality to the world itself (Merleau-Ponty,¹²⁰ for whom consciousness is the world's 'project'.¹²¹)

We can infer from this that adequate revelation exists to see what God intends to be seen, but it is sufficiently concealed to allow freedom to ignore it¹²².

A revelation-informed view of knowledge will take account of the epistemic effect of sin.¹²³ Man has eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good *and* evil. The heart may have reasons (Pascal), yet it is also "deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt. Who can know it?"¹²⁴ That is why Augustine felt the need to 'digress' (from a modern perspective) into the plan of redemption in his theological account of knowledge.¹²⁵

Heidegger recognises a 'fallenness' (Verfallenheit) in man, but again his vision is distorted. It is not a result of an alienation from God, but rather an alienation of man from himself, in which he falls into 'inauthenticity' and acts merely because it is 'what one does' in a present-to-hand context¹²⁶.

Revelation of freedom

The 'reduction' nevertheless brings to light something of the essence of freedom. Husserl describes phenomenologically how the Ego is changed by its own decisions and can keep returning to them as its 'own'. A unity of identity through them shows the reality of a 'personal character'¹²⁷ and a 'history'.¹²⁸ Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty have drawn attention to the real power of humans to create meaning in the world. Faith need not merely describe the darkness, "It is dark", but can speak the performative words: "Let there be light!" Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer grouped such human capacities under the heading the '*mannishness of man*'. They form an

¹¹⁹ Romans 1:19-23

¹²⁰ **Merleau-Ponty**, op cit pxxiii

¹²¹ Ibid p.xx

¹²² See further discussion below.

¹²³ Romans 1:25, Psalm 14:1. See **Plantinga**: *Warranted Christian Belief*.

¹²⁴ Jeremiah 17:9

¹²⁵ **Augustine**, *De Trinitate*, Books XII and XIII. See also Bk X, ch 2, par 7-8; Bk IV, ch 1, par 4

¹²⁶ **Heidegger**, BT, p.219-220

¹²⁷ **Husserl**, op cit p.66-67

¹²⁸ **Husserl**, op cit p.75

existentially undeniable aspect of life, part of the general revelation from *The God Who is There*.¹²⁹

Hiddenness as a condition for receiving revelation

An important area in which phenomenology clarifies the doctrine of revelation is in its recognition that hiddenness is a necessary condition for the reception of revelation.

As we have seen in Husserl, perceptual objects cannot be seen in their totality. We only perceive aspects of them (indirect knowledge). This is revealed for example in how we 'protain' objects of consciousness.¹³⁰ Merleau-Ponty makes a similar point.¹³¹ According to Heidegger (against Kant), the primary meaning of phenomena is not 'appearance' but a 'showing forth' of the thing in itself.¹³² Hence we really see the 'thing-in-itself' as it shows itself, not exhaustively (because then we would not see it at all), but nevertheless really. So too, Sartre: "The appearance does not hide the essence, it reveals it; it is the essence."¹³³ But this does not mean that the being of the phenomenon is reduced to the phenomenon of being. There is always a greater potentiality of meaning.¹³⁴ There remains a 'transphenomenal' which is coextensive with the phenomenal, yet surpasses it.¹³⁵

I cannot see the chair exhaustively. I see it from different angles, below, above or in front and in different light settings, but not all at the same time. My sight is partial. This is necessary in order to know the chair at all. The fact that it is not the floor it is standing on, nor the table it is next to (the 'background' or 'horizon' of the chair) also reveals the something which it is. Merleau-Ponty uses Gestalt theory to support the reflection that perception can only take place against such a background.¹³⁶ The general truth which phenomenologists recognize is that hiddenness is the *condition* of revelation and knowledge for a contingent being. All finite things are circumscribed by limits and thereby arises partial merit in the *via negativa* as an epistemological method.

¹²⁹ **Schaeffer, Francis**, *The God Who is There*, (IVP 1968)

¹³⁰ Above and in **Husserl**, op cit 46-47

¹³¹ **Merleau-Ponty, Maurice**, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (Routledge 2009), p.234-236.

¹³² **Heidegger**, *Being and Time*, (Blackwell 2008), p.51-55.

¹³³ **Sartre**, *Being and Nothingness*, (Routledge 2008), p.2

¹³⁴ **Husserl**, op cit p.46.

¹³⁵ Ibid p.6

¹³⁶ **Merleau-Ponty**, op cit p.4

For every presentation there is what Husserl calls an 'appresentation'.¹³⁷ which means presentation in such a manner that it is never fully present; there is 'another side' which is not directly revealed. This is preeminently true of other minds who always 'transcend' the oneness of my primordial sphere.¹³⁸

When Heidegger refers to truth as 'disclosedness' he is saying that it only makes sense from the background of previous concealment:

"Logos is *in itself and at the same time* a revealing and a concealing. It is *aletheia*. Unconcealment needs concealment, *lethe*, as a reservoir upon which disclosure can, as it were, draw."¹³⁹

A fortiori theologians can conclude that for an infinite being to reveal Himself to a finite creature he must limit himself, because pure infinity would completely dazzle a creature and thereby communicate nothing. More than that, Infinite Power and Glory would actually annihilate the creature. God is a consuming fire¹⁴⁰ who lives in unapproachable light¹⁴¹ "Tis only the splendour of light hideth thee" sang the hymn-writer of *Immortal, Invisible*.

Emerging church spokesman and apophatic writer, Pete Rollins is only partly correct when he, following Marion, speaks of a God who 'saturates our understanding with a blinding presence', a 'transcendence/immanence' which Rollins refers to as 'hypernymity'.¹⁴² This is the justification of Rollins' radical agnosticism (apophaticism). "We are short-circuited by the excess of presence."¹⁴³

But isn't this precisely why God has *not* communicated in this way? Heraclitus declared that "The essence of things likes to hide." But this is not because God delights in secrecy. He hides himself *in order to reveal!* It is an act of his grace. All revelation is mediated through his 'back parts' in the 'cleft of the Rock'.¹⁴⁴ This supports one reading of Mark 4:12 that Jesus communicated in hidden parables in order to reveal truths that the hearers otherwise could not receive.

¹³⁷ Husserl, op cit p.122

¹³⁸ Husserl, op cit p.124

¹³⁹ Martin Heidegger, 'Logos' and 'Aletheia' in *Early Greek Thinking*, tr David Farrell Krell and Frank Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), cited in Raymond Tallis, *The Enduring Significance of Parmenides Unthinkable thought*, (Continuum 2007). P.56

¹⁴⁰ Hebrews 12:29

¹⁴¹ 1 Timothy 6:16

¹⁴² Peter Rollins, *How (not) to speak of God*, (SPCK 2006), p.24

¹⁴³ Rollins, *ibid* p.24

¹⁴⁴ Exodus 33

As Tallis puts it " a minimal degree of opacity is the price of visibility...total revelation...(is)..incompatible with substantial presence"¹⁴⁵

This suggests one interpretation of the ambiguity of general revelation. John Hick (following similar thoughts in Pascal) speaks of 'epistemic distance' and a 'religiously ambiguous universe' deliberately constructed by a God of love to allow cognitive freedom.¹⁴⁶

There is a parallel in the philosophical problem of the existence of other minds. We can never have *direct* access to the subjective identity of another person, otherwise we would *be* that person! (a scenario humourously explored in the film, *Being John Malkovitch*).¹⁴⁷ How, then, can we cross the chasm of the There of her body to the Here of her own?¹⁴⁸ Husserl argues that "what is there perceptually motivates belief in something else being there too."¹⁴⁹ Our 'knowledge' of the Other is mediated through what Husserl calls "an analogising apprehension." Remarkably, this is the same conclusion Aquinas reaches in discussing the problem of how human beings can communicate about God in language!¹⁵⁰

The inexhaustibility of revelation.

Yet this also has the positive corollary that revelation is necessarily *inexhaustible*.¹⁵¹ The world is 'underdetermined'¹⁵² by the sense experience which mediates it to us because the object of knowledge always exceeds the sense experience that reveals it. Tallis refers to sight as the supreme example of this, but he also mentions touch. It is only the resistance in an object which makes it explicit. "There is a something that goes beyond the revealing."¹⁵³

This means that the more ephemeral and transparent an object is, the less it is accessible in our knowledge. Marion is right that God should not be contained in our

¹⁴⁵ Tallis, *ibid*, p.56

¹⁴⁶ Hick, John, *Evil and the God of love* (New York: Harper and Row.1977).

See also Proverbs 25:2

¹⁴⁷ *Being John Malkovitch*, directed by Spike Jonze, (Universal Studios 2003)

¹⁴⁸ Husserl, *op cit* p121

¹⁴⁹ Husserl, *op cit* 109-110. This phrase is reminiscent of Augustine: "it is on account of the known thing it loves that it seeks the unknown." (*De Trinitate*, Bk X, ch 2, par 5.)

¹⁵⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* Bk 1, Ch 29

¹⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty: " I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible." *Phenomenology of perception*, p.xix

¹⁵² Barry Stroud cited in Tallis, *op cit* p.165

¹⁵³ Quoted in Tallis, *ibid*, p.165

thoughts as if he were an idol¹⁵⁴. "How unsearchable his judgments and his ways beyond finding out."¹⁵⁵ The 'philosopher' in Ecclesiastes remarks that "God has put eternity in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end."¹⁵⁶ Perhaps this is the 'saturated intuition' or 'excess of donation' which Marion refers to.¹⁵⁷ Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on embodiment as essential to perception¹⁵⁸ parallels the theological necessity of the Incarnation, where the God who is everywhere, becomes somewhere¹⁵⁹, in order to make his Presence felt.

God's concealment in suffering.

Heidegger observed that we only notice the everyday nature of things when they don't do what we expect - eg a broken hammer. Loss brings a recognition of the value of what was present. Joni Mitchell was evidently aware of this when she penned the lyrics:

"Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got
Till its gone
They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot."¹⁶⁰

Could it be that God hides himself in the sheer perplexity and mystery of suffering *in part* to provide a horizon which brings into relief qualities such as beauty, gratitude, heroism, goodness, love and compassion? In other words, His hiddenness in suffering is something intended *to reveal*. C.S.Lewis observed something similar in *The Problem of Pain* (1940):

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁴ **Marion**, *God without Being*, ch1

¹⁵⁵ Romans 11:33

¹⁵⁶ Eccl 3:11

¹⁵⁷ **Marion**, *The Saturated Phenomenon*, p.195

¹⁵⁸ **Maurice Merleau-Ponty** is another phenomenologist who has pointed readers to the necessary condition of embodiment for knowledge *Phenomenology of perception*. (Routledge 2009). Eg 235-240.

¹⁵⁹ A phrase originating with preacher and theologian Roger Forster

¹⁶⁰ **Joni Mitchell**, *Big Yellow Taxi*, (1970)

¹⁶¹ **Lewis, C.S.** *The Problem of Pain* (New York, Macmillan, 1940). (Evidently Heidegger was deaf to this megaphone, not seeing the implications of his own insight!)

Crossing the Boundaries.

By asserting boundaries to knowledge in this way, do we not fall foul of Hegel's criticism of Kant that in order to know there is a boundary to knowledge one must already have passed it? This seems to hold for Kant's position because he relied on autonomous reason to establish the limit and denied the possibility of revelation.

To the early Christian mystics however, and to orthodox Christianity generally, it is meaningful to talk about a limit to (human) knowledge because the God of revelation is beyond the limit Himself and has communicated its existence.

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law."¹⁶²

Point of contact: the 'Thing-in-itself' reveals itself: How does the economic trinity relate to the immanent trinity?

Augustine, Athanasius and the Cappodocians maintained that what is experienced in the revelation of God in history (the economic trinity) truly reflects God in his relationships in himself (the immanent trinity), for example in the idea of procession. By contrast the more apophatic writers argued for a hiatus between the two, so for Gregory de Palamas, God's (unknown) essence is radically distinct from his (revealed) energies.

Recently, Calvinist writer Roy Clouser has sided with the apophatics, arguing that because God's essential nature is ineffable, it is beyond even necessary truths such as the law of non-contradiction (which he regards as a creation of God).¹⁶³

Just as Kant who could not explain how the thing as it appears to us (the phenomenal) corresponds to the thing in itself (the noumenal), so Clouser and the apophatics cannot explain how God in Himself can relate to God as He reveals himself to us. Can Phenomenology assist in clarifying this relationship?

Kant's own division of phenomenal and noumenal was called into question by his successor Fichte (1762-1814), who argued that we do see the 'thing in itself'¹⁶⁴. Fichte was one of the inspirations behind Husserl and the Phenomenology school, including Heidegger.

¹⁶² Deut 29:29

¹⁶³ Clouser, Roy A. *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2006)

¹⁶⁴ Though he first called it the 'Unconscious self-limitation of the I,' and later 'absolute being' (Sein), (Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* p.278)

We have seen that for Heidegger the primary meaning of phenomena is not 'appearance' but a 'showing forth' of the thing in itself.¹⁶⁵ Hence we really see the thing in itself as it shows itself, not exhaustively (because we then would not see it at all), but nevertheless really. Limitation does not mean exclusion.

Phenomenology's claims shed light on the special revelation of scripture which suggests that we can know that God's revelation is a true image of Himself, since Hebrews describes the Son as "the image of the invisible God and the exact representation of his being"¹⁶⁶ Jesus claimed boldly that 'He who has seen me has seen the Father.'¹⁶⁷ Logical laws reveal and depend on the God who cannot lie¹⁶⁸ and cannot deny himself.¹⁶⁹

Augustine makes the profound point that when God uttered his Word he could not have fully expressed who He was if that Word was either less than or more than Himself. That Word is utterly equal to Himself¹⁷⁰. On that basis God's 'Yes' means 'Yes' and His 'No' means 'No'.¹⁷¹ He does not utter an equivocal synthesis of Yes and No. As Poythress puts it:

"God's self-consistency is the foundation for all human consistency. God's self-consistency is intrinsically Trinitarian in character."¹⁷²

For Barth too, "God, the Revealer, is identical with His act in revelation and also identical with its effect."¹⁷³ In posing three questions of Scripture: Who is the One who reveals? How does He reveal and What is the effect of the revelation? Barth discerns the triadic answer: *God reveals, God reveals himself through himself* and what God reveals is *Himself*. Hence:

"Revelation in the Bible is not a minus; it is not another over against God. It is the same, the repetition of God. Revelation is indeed God's predicate, but in such a way that this predicate is in every way identical with God Himself."¹⁷⁴

In the prologue to John's Gospel there is both a '*witness*' and a '*wasness*': ("..the Word was with God and the Word was God."¹⁷⁵) The *wasness* indicates the identity of

¹⁶⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (Blackwell 2008), p.51-55.

¹⁶⁶ Hebrews 1:3

¹⁶⁷ John 14:7-9

¹⁶⁸ Tit 1:2, Heb 6:18, Num 23:19

¹⁶⁹ 2 Tim 2:13

¹⁷⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, translated by Edmund Hill, (New City Press, 2005), Bk IX, ch2, par 16

¹⁷¹ 2 Cor 1:20-21; Matt 5:37; James 5:12

¹⁷² Poythress, Vern S. Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til's Idea of Analogy, *Westminster Theological Journal* 57/1 (1995) 187-219.

¹⁷³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1:1*, (T&T Clark International), 2004 p.296

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid* p.299

the Word (Revelation) with God, but the *witness* indicates the distinction. It does not say, for instance, that the Word was the Father. So again Barth:

"In the New Testament the names of the Father and Son are similarly inexchangeable. But the same applies to the revealedness of God attested in the Bible. If God gives himself to man, He is still someone other as Giver and as gift. So the names Christ and Spirit or Word and Spirit are inexchangeable."¹⁷⁶

The radical division between God's essence and God's revelation present in Clouser and previously in the Eastern apophatic tradition, could be criticized then as implicitly Arian in conception. The Word is no longer *homoousion* with God in himself. But unlike Arius, neither is it *homoiousion* since even an analogy with the Divine nature is rejected. The Revelation of God becomes less than God, just as, after Philo (20-30AD), the neo-Platonic interpretations of how *logos* relates to *cosmos* resulted in the former being understood as less than fully Divine.¹⁷⁷

Therefore Barth claims agreement with Western orthodoxy in declaring God's triunity to be found not only in His revelation but, "because in His revelation, in God Himself too, so that the Trinity is to be understood as "immanent" and not just "economic."¹⁷⁸

Unfortunately, Barth paradoxically also affirms the position that revelation is: 'the self-unveiling, imparted to men, of the God who by nature cannot be unveiled to men.'¹⁷⁹ There seem to be two reasons why Barth takes this position.

The first is that revelation for Barth is understood not so much as *content* as it is *event*. The Word of God is not located in propositions in Scripture, but in the encounter between God and a believer which may occur when he reads a portion of scripture. "...revelation is the *ineffabile* which encounters and reaches man and proves itself to be such."¹⁸⁰ That is why it is unimportant for Barth whether the Bible can be verified by history or not. The Christ of faith is distinct from the Christ of history.

The second reason Barth takes this position is his conception of God as 'Wholly Other', for whom there can be no analogy of being. In other words, Barth has still not thrown off Kant's Noumenal/Phenomenal split.

¹⁷⁵ John 1:1

¹⁷⁶ Ibid p.299

¹⁷⁷ Collins, Paul M. *The Trinity: A guide for the perplexed* (Continuum 2008)

¹⁷⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 1:1*, (T&T Clark International), 2004 p. 333

¹⁷⁹ Ibid p.315

¹⁸⁰ Ibid p.330

Phenomenology's recovery of the Thing-in-itself, in contrast, is consistent with the orthodox view that God reveals Himself, not a substitute. God is in absolute conformity with what he reveals. The economic trinity reveals the ontological Trinity, not exhaustively, but nevertheless truly.

CONCLUSION.

John Milbank, in a discussion on metaphysics and theology, is somewhat dismissive of the value of phenomenology for theology: "An independent phenomenology must be given up along with the claim, which would have seemed so bizarre to the fathers, to be doing philosophy *as well as* theology."¹⁸¹

Milbank is correct that phenomenology can never access truth autonomously of revelation. It's very failure to do so is itself a revelation, to those with ears to hear, that outside help is needed. This is reminiscent of the film, *The Matrix*, in which Neo could never have known that he was living in a computer-generated world without information from outside. But this is not to say that Phenomenology (as philosophy generally) is not a valid discipline within its own sphere. Although some of its major practitioners have interpreted their findings in an idolatrous framework, the method itself can potentially illuminate aspects of both natural revelation and special revelation.

Both a revelation-based approach to knowledge and phenomenology are suspicious of rationalism, though I have argued for a 'Trinitarian epistemology' rather than the phenomenologists' priority of intuition/experience over reason. The theme of 'consciousness' in phenomenology is also a feature of natural revelation, including the parallels with an understanding of faith as 'direct intuition'. Hiddenness and the importance of 'background' as a condition for the reception of revelation is another significant insight of phenomenology, alongside its concomitant, humbling truth that revelation is inexhaustible. Finally phenomenology's goal of recovering 'things-in-themselves' supports a constructive understanding of the relationship between the immanent and the economic trinity.

¹⁸¹ John Milbank, *The Word made strange* (Blackwell 1997), p.49

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