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Horizon, Transcendence, and Correlation:
Some Phenomenological Considerations¹

“Horizon” is one of the central concepts of phenomenology. Though Husserl uses it in varying contexts, which correspond to a number of dimensions of the phenomenological constitution of meaning,² we can nevertheless discern some of its fundamental characteristics. Horizon is closely linked to intentionality, which is why Husserl speaks of the intentional horizon, and consequently of horizon-intentionality.³ If intentionality designates an openness of consciousness, which represents a condition of possibility for the constitution of an object or its intentional meaning, then the intentional horizon takes on a transcendental role. Horizon is transcendent with regard to that which appears (a phenomenon) within it, and so it is *prior to* the phenomenon, something that ensures the horizon’s *a priori* and transcendental status. It is precisely because of the transcendental status of the intentional horizon that we come to the following fundamental problem: is there even still the possibility of a transcendence which would mean a transcending of the horizon, and which would represent an absolute “exteriority”? It is no coincidence that the phenomenological ways of thinking that harbor a strong religious affinity intensified Husserl’s quest for phenomenological foundations since the question of transcendence in religion—especially those of Judeo-Christian origins—is of fundamental importance.

In this paper, I will first present Levinas’ and Marion’s criticisms of the intentional horizon, presented by both authors as a precondition for a relationship with true transcendence. However, the question is whether or not it is possible to transform the initial phenomenological postulates in such a way as to renounce the concept of horizon. For that reason, in the second section I attempt to build upon the understanding of this concept with the help of Heidegger’s early lectures in Freiburg. His interpretation of the phenomenological method places at the forefront a hermeneutic understanding of horizontality, which he connects to the comprehensive “actualization” (*Vollzug*) of existence. These analyses make it possible to show the limits of Levinas and Marion’s criticisms in the third, concluding section, while also offering a consideration of how an expanded concept

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² M. Staudigl, “Horizont”, in H. Vetter (ed.), *Wörterbuch der phänomenologischen Begriffe* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2004), 264-267.

³ E. Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge* (*Husserliana* vol. I) (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973), 21, 83; *Cartesian Meditations. An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. D. Cairns, The Hague: Nijhoff 1960, 48.

of horizon could provide new methodological possibilities when dealing with both, the paradoxical “phenomenon” of transcendence and the attitude of man towards it, which could be called “religiosity.”

I. Levinas and Marion’s Criticisms of the Phenomenological Notion of Horizon

“Since Husserl the whole of phenomenology is the promotion of the idea of *horizon*, which for it plays a role equivalent to that of the *concept* in classical idealism.”⁴ In this line from *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas makes a strong judgement of ontology. Ontology, as the “first philosophy” in the western tradition, is at its core “a reduction of the other to the same.” However, this reduction, “this mode of depriving the known being of its alterity can be accomplished only if it is aimed at through a third term, a neutral term, which itself is not a being.”⁵ The subject in the process of cognition enters into a relationship with something other (than himself), but through the mediation of the third term there occurs a subjugation of the other and domination over him. According to Levinas, this third term can be a concept in the idealistic sense, it can be “sensation” according to Berkeley, and it can also be the phenomenological horizon, which is interpreted by Heidegger as (the comprehension of) Being. Despite the differences between these philosophical positions, for Levinas this all has to do with the same ontological logic that is also the logic of the same, and consists “in neutralizing the existent in order to comprehend and grasp it.”⁶

As mentioned in the introduction, the essence of phenomenology is expressed in the conception of an intentional horizon. It is precisely a phenomenological awareness of the mediative role of intentionality that can overcome the naive belief that the subject knows or comprehends things directly and that such an independent, “objective” knowledge is possible. That is why the exploration of intentional horizons is an expression of the search for truth and an attempt to overcome naiveté. However, according to Levinas the phenomenological insight into the intentional constitution of knowledge presents us with a new and more difficult problem. It does not concern the fact that we *cannot* achieve knowledge, but rather the fact that we *are already* achieving it. For Levinas, knowing indeed discards every kind of otherness and reduces it to the same. With that, Levinas radically changes the value associated with knowledge and understanding. Intentionality becomes ethically questionable, as it embodies the logic of power and domination over otherness; the horizon thereby also receives a similarly negative role. If its original etymological meaning is to delineate a defined space (by establishing a boundary, in greek “horos”), the “space” of horizon is now being interpreted as a prison that forcefully “(de)limits” the other and confines him to the realm of the self (or the same). Research into intentional acts and the horizons that belong to them would thereby become a reflection on the various manners

⁴ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 44-45.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

in which the other is confined. This leads Levinas to the search for a genuine transcendence, which should be able to shatter the limits of every horizon.

Levinas finds this transcendence in another person. The other person is not like other phenomena, whose meaning is constituted within the horizon of intentionality opened by consciousness, but rather remains a unique kind of phenomenological paradox. Levinas describes the transcendence of the other in two ways, which are inextricably linked to each other: the face and discourse. The face is tied to the physical appearance of the other, but the other always transcends his appearance: “[t]he face is present in its refusal to be contained.”⁷ Nevertheless, the transcendence of the other is not merely a negation of phenomenality. The face also carries within itself the positivity of discourse. The face is the origin of speech, which addresses me and places me in a passive position. That is why the discourse of the other is first and foremost an ethical call; it is imperative and not indicative. Beyond the horizon of phenomenality and beyond the horizon of language, if we understand the latter as an articulation of logical meaning, the other reveals himself without mediation, directly, and in his own right; “*kath’auto*”. Her transcendence is entirely different from everything that exists—this transcendence is not ontological, but ethical.

Levinas is fully aware of the fact that with his defense of absolute transcendence he is not just challenging the logic of a certain region of phenomenology. This is a frontal assault on the foundations of thought and logic. The other must preserve her absolute alterity, and simultaneously she must enter into my world and thinking, even if this only occurs on the level of a disturbance, or in the form of a trace.⁸ Strictly speaking, we cannot maintain a relation with absolute transcendence—for every relation would demand a common horizon. The initiative of the relation is entirely transferred to the other, who must enter into a relation with me from himself, and completely independent of me. My subjectivity becomes a singular answer to the ethical call of the other—an answer that, in an ethical sense, means a passive condition (or better yet, the “in-condition-du soi”⁹, the “unconditionality”¹⁰) of responsibility. The methodological consequences also affect the very status of language: how then is it possible to speak if the subject finds himself in a radical passivity? Levinas knows – and there he preserves his obligation to phenomenology – that the key question has to do with the signification of sense. If meaning (or sense) remains bound to logic—something that characterizes the onto-logical tradition of western philosophy – then everything that seeks to have sense or be meaningful must subjugate itself to that meaning. This meaning is intrinsically linked to the concept of horizon, which is in turn characterized by its ability to constitute an identity within

⁷ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 194.

⁸ E. Levinas, La trace de l’autre, in: *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl and Heidegger* (Paris: Vrin, 1994), 187-202, here 197.

⁹ E. Levinas, *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1978), 143.

¹⁰ E. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 112.

a given openness. However, Levinas asks if there is another kind of significance or meaning which embodies the ethical relation to transcendence—a meaning of difference as ethical non-indifference. This ethical meaning of the-one-for-the-other (*l'un-pour-l'autre*)¹¹ is deeper than (onto)logical meaning, and the former cannot be reduced to the latter.

Only through this specific ethical meaning, which is not tied to ontological sense, can the transcendence that we connect with God also receive significance. For Levinas it is completely unacceptable for the sense and revelation of God to be bound to a given understanding of being. This thought, that any horizon which would attempt to condition the revelation of God renders such a revelation impossible and establishes a mere idol, is also one of Jean-Luc Marion's fundamental ideas. For that reason, in his early works Marion counters the concept of "idolatry" – which he expands on the conceptual level and ties to the horizon of being—with the paradigm of the icon.¹² Contrary to the intentional gaze (*regard*), the icon places the viewer in the passive role of a recipient who, in a paradoxical way, experiences the revelation of the invisible (transcendent) in the material visibility of the icon. Here it is possible to recognize the influence of Levinas' analysis of the face, which for Marion in his later writings becomes a prime example for the icon as one of the types of saturated phenomena.¹³

However, Marion does not remain merely with the problem of horizon, which renders a revelation of God impossible, but instead expands this question to phenomenological cognition as such. Philosophically speaking, is it even possible to achieve knowledge of "things themselves," which is the motive and goal of the phenomenological method, or does phenomenology also remain in the shackles of idolatry, which makes the self-giving of these things impossible? If the phenomenological reduction as a movement to original truth halted with Husserl at the horizon of *objectness*, and if Heidegger recognized this final horizon in *beingness*¹⁴, then, according to Marion, it is necessary to make an even more radical and definitive reduction—to the horizon of givenness.¹⁵ However, in this case the word "horizon" is no longer justified, as horizon embodies the conditions of the subject, which are set up for the appearance (and thus for the meaning) of a phenomenon. A reduction to givenness means a reduction to the "self-givenness" of the phenomenon; to the true *self* of the phenomenon (which, henceforth, cannot be equated with the appearance or being of the phenomenon).

¹¹ E. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 95.

¹² J.-L. Marion, *The Idol and Distance. Five Studies*, trans. T. A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 8.

¹³ J.-L. Marion, *In Excess. Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. R. Horner and V. Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 113-119. See also J.-L. Marion, *Being Given. Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. J. L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 232f.

¹⁴ J.-L. Marion, *Being Given*, 27ff.

¹⁵ J.-L. Marion, *Reduction and Givenness. Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. T. A. Carlson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 203.

For Marion the intentional correlation becomes a barrier for the true givenness of phenomena (from themselves). Though there are some phenomena (poor and common-law) for which we can achieve a complete correlation—which means intentionally grasping them – the majority of phenomena are such that they retain their transcendence, and their excess, with regard to the capabilities of our intentionality (or its horizon). Since their givenness – similar to the phenomenon of the face – floods our ability of reception, Marion refers to them as “saturated phenomena,” and in analyzing them demands a change to the fundamental postulates of phenomenology. Instead of the transcendental subject (Husserl) or Dasein (Heidegger), which form the horizon of understanding for phenomena, we must come to the deposition of such a subject, so that in its place the “gifted one” (*l'adonné*), who originally found himself in the dative, and who is the addressee of the self-giving of the phenomena, can arrive. This new subject “is itself received from what it receives,”¹⁶ and only from this transcendent giving is she, within passive acceptance, “constituted” as herself. The inadequacy and absence of every correlation between saturated phenomena and the recipient means a final farewell to horizon in the transcendental sense.

In his analyses, Marion comes very close to Husserl and Kant. Kant's transcendental I and transcendental forms of understanding become the “counter-model”¹⁷ for Marion's analysis of transcendent phenomena. With regard to the four categories of understanding (quantity, quality, relation, modality) he establishes four types of saturated phenomena: event, idol (painting), flesh, and icon (face). Besides them, there is also a saturated phenomenon *par excellence*¹⁸, which transcends all categories – this is the revelation of God. The border between phenomenology and theology is no longer a question of a difference in principle, but rather a difference in degree. The task of phenomenology then becomes to remove the horizons which render a revelation of saturated phenomena impossible, and to answer their transcendent call. However, is a phenomenology which gives up the concept of horizon possible? Marion himself reported that in a conversation with Levinas, the latter denied the possibility of that kind of phenomenology.¹⁹ However, before we devote ourselves to a critical reflection of Levinas' and Marion's transformation of phenomenology, we will first take a look at an understanding of the phenomenological method as developed by Heidegger in his early lectures.

II. *The Horizon of Actualization in Heidegger's Early Freiburg Lectures*

¹⁶ J.-L. Marion, *In Excess*, 43.

¹⁷ J.-L. Marion, *Being Given*, 278.

¹⁸ J.-L. Marion, *In Excess*, 158.

¹⁹ “I said to Levinas some years ago that in fact the last step for a real phenomenology would be to give up the concept of horizon. Levinas answered me immediately: ‘Without horizon there is no phenomenology.’ And I boldly assume he was wrong.” See J. Derrida and J.-L. Marion, “On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion, Moderated by R. Kearney”, in J. Caputo, M. Scanlon (ed.), *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 66.

A look at Heidegger's early lectures gives us the chance to follow the development of his thoughts during a time when he was searching for his "path of thinking." This search also had to do with his terminology, which took shape gradually and still had not been elaborated to the degree that we can see at work in *Being and Time*. In fact, the early Heidegger directed all his energy towards the question of method, for which Husserl "opened [his] eyes"²⁰ and opened up, if we may take the liberty in saying so, the phenomenological "horizon" for him. Though the word "horizon" does not appear often in Heidegger's early lectures, its question is a constant presence, and it concerns the phenomenological consideration of meaning or sense.

At the end of *Being and Time*, when Heidegger writes that it is temporality that makes the "disclosive understanding of Being" possible, and when the unfinished work concludes with a question regarding "time itself [...] as the horizon of Being,"²¹ it is merely an expression of what had motivated his path of thinking from the very beginning. The question of time is not a final result, but rather the original motivation which enabled Heidegger to restate the phenomenological question anew. However, here we are not talking about an abstract concept of time, but the temporal dimension of all of phenomenality. For that reason, for phenomenology's initial point of departure Heidegger posits life in its temporal happening, a verbal substantive, which one cannot achieve at a distance and objectivize from the outside. Instead one always lives it "from within" (this impossibility of separation is also the foundation of Heidegger's concept of "facticity"). Life means a concrete occurrence, or an actualization (*Vollzug*) of the verb "to live," and we can also denote this happening with expressions such as temporality and historicity.

Similar to the way an intentional openness essentially determines consciousness according to Husserl, so does understanding belong inseparably to this happening life. That is also the reason why understanding is also a temporal happening that we live, and not merely our theoretical projection. However, does the coincidence of understanding and factual life that results thereof not just mean the imprisonment of man, who cannot transcend this facticity? The answer lies in the fact that the happening of life is deeply characterized by the "category" of possibility, which, existentially speaking, comes before actuality,²² and that life—as well as its corresponding understanding—is always the "life" of one of its possibilities. Heidegger's notion of "hermeneutics" corresponds to the primacy of possibility on the level of understanding. However, the various possibilities of understanding are by no means equal in value: the criterion for their "truth" is originality. And since every understanding has a direct equivalent in life, the final criterion of truth is precisely a

²⁰ M. Heidegger, *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. J. van Buren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 4.

²¹ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Stambaugh (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), 398.

²² M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 34: "Higher than actuality stands possibility."

greater or lesser originality, or the “fullness” (genuineness, authenticity), of lived life.

This presentation of fundamental concepts is important, because it is at this point that a decision is made concerning the methodological point of departure, or initial position. If we take as our basis lived life (in the first-person-perspective and in its temporal “happening”) then every attempt to deal with or discuss something without a relation to the original temporal horizon in which (the understanding of this thing) occurs is revealed as phenomenologically naive. That is also the reason why Heidegger’s early criticism is directed against the theoretical attitude,²³ which projects a lived phenomenon as an immutable object, as something which lies in front of me (‘ob-iectum’), and by doing so pulls the phenomenon out of its happening within (the horizon of) factual life. The prevalence of the theoretical attitude, which initiates Heidegger’s criticism of western metaphysics, represents, according to him, a neglect of the horizon of temporality, or an attempt to make a specific form of this neglect—which includes a specific way of disclosing phenomena—a criterion of the truth (in the sense of a timeless insight).

In Heidegger’s early lectures he cites examples of theoretical objectification, which is one of the (hermeneutic) possibilities of understanding phenomena, but through them the original meaning of phenomena is lost or extinguished. Here we could mention the difference between a flowery meadow on a May morning and a botanical-scientific treatise about it.²⁴ The same “thing”, the flowery meadow, receives a different intentional meaning depending on the particular (intentional horizon of the) approach. Heidegger differentiates between various dimensions of sense, which form the meaning or sense of a given phenomenon (its “being” in a verbal sense).²⁵ Firstly, the flowery meadow has a determined “content” sense. This content sense, or *what* a phenomenon is, is dependent upon the way, or *how*, we approach the phenomenon. With Heidegger, this approach, which we could also call the horizon, receives a hermeneutic character and represents one of the possibilities we relate to the phenomenon. The horizon which is opened by the approach has a certain orientation, which consequentially determines in relation to what (*Woraufhin*) the content sense of a phenomenon is formed. For this reason Heidegger aptly calls this dimension the “relational” sense. However, the horizon within which the sense of the phenomenon is constituted is not at all something static, but rather has to be conceived as a living and “happening” understanding. That is why even the sense of a phenomenon takes place as an actualisation—a phenomenon “is” in the sense that it

²³ M. Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, trans. T. Sadler (London, New York: Continuum, 2002) 74-76.

²⁴ M. Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. A. Hofstadter (1919/20) (Bloomington: Indiana university Press 1982), 55.

²⁵ M Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 184; *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression. Theory of Philosophical Concept Formation*, trans. T. Colony (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 26-7; *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. M. Fritsch & J. A. Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 43.

is occurring; it is lived in concrete life. This deepest dimension, which determines the sense of a phenomenon, is called the “actualisation” or “enactment sense”.

Thus viewed, Heidegger’s phenomenological method might be described as a “correlational research” (*Korrelationsforschung*), but the concept of the intentional horizon is transformed radically. The horizon (of sense) is understood as a possibility and not an immutable givenness. At the same time the horizon is inseparably connected to life. Phenomena live in our lives depending on our openness to them (i.e., with regard to our lived horizon) and, conversely, they determine how we live. This insight concerns the basis of hermeneutic circularity. However, instead of seeing here a forceful subjugation of phenomena to our horizon, for Heidegger this concerns the opposite: how can we, in a lived experience, truly and *genuinely* know a phenomenon? In a genuine or original lived experience (*Erlebnis*) a phenomenon does not remain “outside” of us, in its own transcendence and independence, but rather enters into our lives in such a way that it comes to its (own) genuine “happening” (or “being”) within our life. The term *event*, the key word which already appears in Heidegger’s first lectures²⁶, uncovers the fact that—unlike in the supposedly neutral theoretical attitude—to truly know implies that kind of “appropriation” of the phenomenon, which becomes an “event” in our life and changes it. The flowery meadow enters into the life of both the one walking through it on a May morning and the life of the botanist, but its understanding, or its “event,” is by no means the same in each case.

In comparison to Husserl, Heidegger further intensifies the phenomenological reduction with regard to “transcendence.” There is nothing that can be beyond the horizon of understanding. Therefore, it is necessary to pose the phenomenological question of how the meaning or understanding of what presents itself as transcendent is constituted. This does not mean that transcendence does not exist, but rather that it “is” only when it occurs *as such* in life and understanding. This holds equally true for that which goes beyond understanding, or is not understandable. Heidegger writes: “It is peculiar to phenomenological understanding that it can understand the incomprehensible, precisely in that it radically *lets* the latter *be* in its incomprehensibility.”²⁷ Within the phenomenological method, and in a positive way, Heidegger sees the possibility of enabling and freeing a phenomenon to be what it is *in its own “transcendence,”* and not subjugating and appropriating it in a negative sense. An understanding which understands transcendence *as* transcendence does not take anything away from it, and it does not “reduce” it either. Obviously, once again this is about the fundamental question concerning understanding and, consequentially, concerning horizon: do we understand the two as an openness, which gives space, or as closedness, which creates a prison?

III. A Hermeneutics of Horizon and the Event of Transcendence

²⁶ M. Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, 63 [“event of appropriation”].

²⁷ M. Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 64.

Considering Heidegger's and also Husserl's methodological presuppositions, I contend that the concept of horizon is something we cannot give up, since this would imply to relinquish the concept of understanding, too. Beyond horizon would also mean beyond understanding – which in turn cannot be a new kind of understanding, even though it would claim to be completely different. Beyond understanding can only mean darkness, as far as sense is concerned. Phenomenology does not speak of "things in themselves," an expression that must not to be confused with "things themselves."²⁸ Not a thing in itself, but rather *cognition* (sense, understanding) of things in the widest possible sense is the goal of the phenomenological effort – that is how things enter into the horizon of man's knowledge. The *a priori* character of the phenomenological correlation, which implies an *a priori* rejection of transcendence "in itself," insists on this relationship to the horizon of man's understanding, regardless of whether or not this horizon is to be understood as the embodiment of a non-temporal logos, or as something historically and factually conditioned.

This in turn means that every insistence on transcendence "in itself" would be possible only by means of a new (horizon of) understanding, hence of something which would run the risk of not being adequately reflected.²⁹ Given this, I would like to focus now on several questions which arise in connection with Levinas and Marion's defenses of transcendence. Levinas, to start with his account, maintains that the "face" of the other person is an epiphany of transcendence. However, here it becomes immediately obvious that this transcendence of the other is not purely formal but that it is rather determined in terms of contents. With regard to the face, Levinas indeed speaks of an *ethical* call that transcends phenomenality. If transcendence has a predetermined "content sense" – even though this sense has its own *ethical* "logic," which is paradoxical with regard to other phenomena – then the following question needs to be raised: is not an appropriate attitude necessary for a revelation of this sense, i.e., an appropriate "intentional" relation (in the sense of hermeneutic possibility) of the subject towards the face of the other? We might indeed question the "relational sense," the form the approach takes, in order for the face of the other to address us *as* ethically transcendent. And it is evident that we can approach the face of the other in many ways: one is to merely see its physical countenance and reduce it to the level of other phenomena in the world. Or, we could see someone in it who is threatening us. In fact, Levinas writes that "[t]he face threatens the eventuality of a struggle," but he immediately adds that "this threat does not exhaust the epiphany of infinity, does not formulate its first word."³⁰ If the face can give itself in various ways – even though its genuine "presentation" demands precisely that we uncover a transcendent ethical beyond the physical presentation, which cannot enter into presence; that we therefore understand the other *as transcendent*, and never present in the same way as other phenomena – then our attitude and approach towards the other is

²⁸ E. Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, 32-33.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 199.

also critical. This problem concerns the question of the hermeneutic horizon, which is opened by the subject so that she can experience the ethical call of the other. Levinas, without a doubt, presupposes that the other is her own source of meaning and that I (the subject) cannot be the one who decides on her intentional meaning (or understanding). For that reason he describes the encounter with the face in *Totality and Infinity* in terms of an "objective" epiphany of the other, which is no longer dependent on the sense-bestowing powers of a transcendental subject. However, it appears very difficult to deny the necessity of the intentional correlation: "I" must be capable of accepting such a revelation of the other—even if in the process of *my* understanding the absolute priority of *the other* and the asymmetry of our relationship become clear to me.

One could object here that the other does not reveal herself primarily in the sense of a physical-visual appearance. As Levinas contends, she rather does so by way of discourse, thus her call is always prior to my understanding and response. Unlike other phenomena, which receive their meaning from me, I find myself in front of the ethical call of the other in a completely passive state. However, even in this case, an understanding of the call proves to be necessary since the call is not merely formally transcendent, but is rather determined by its very content. After I am "hit" by the call of the other, I must open my "horizon" of understanding so that the call may have the chance of addressing me *as* a call. Only upon this condition we may also understand its content. The call of another person (approaching us in discourse) is something we understand differently than the "call" of a physical phenomenon, which may also put us in the passivity of wonderment.

Since, however, we cannot give up the "content sense" of the call, this necessarily leads to a question regarding the hermeneutic horizon, which correlates to the content sense. The same argument must be made for Levinas' interpretation of the difference (between the self and the other) as an ethical non-indifference.³¹ The difference carries an ethical meaning. If if Levinas argued that this ethical non-indifference (qua responsibility) precedes the (onto)logical concept of difference, nothing would change. The "content related" (ethical) understanding forms the horizon for the "sense" of the difference and of the otherness of the other.

Similar considerations are also valid with regard to Marion. When Marion expands the privileged status of transcendence—which according to Levinas only belongs to the face—to a variety of other "saturated phenomena," the question of the hermeneutic horizon is further aggravated. All the four types of saturated phenomena exhibit their own "excess," which gives itself in a different way each time. However, is not excess "understandable" only within an adequate approach on the part of man? Is not the "content sense" of excess, which according to Marion transcends phenomenality, dependent on the "relational sense" of our attitude to it? For instance, with a change of attitude the "icon" can

³¹ E. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 71; 83; 178.

become an "idol." This does not mean a lapse into "endless hermeneutics," which, according to Marion, takes place *after* a givenness phenomenalizes itself³²; rather this has to do with the hermeneutical horizon, which already *in advance* renders the understanding of a phenomenon *as* transcendent possible. This implies that it is not possible to insist on the absolute passivity of the subject which merely has the role of a prism, if we take Marion's metaphor,³³ changing the white light (givenness) which strikes against it into a coloured appearance (phenomenality). Quite to the contrary, the subject must open itself to even be able to accept light, and it is only in this acceptance that light becomes experienced and understood *as* light. If we take the example of the saturated phenomenon of the "event" (*événement*), it becomes saturated only in the moment when we become "aware" of the fact that it is transcendent with regard to our expectations, that "it attests to an unforeseeable origin"³⁴ and is absolutely unique. "Understanding an event" in its transcendence means being open to it in such a way that a true "event of understanding" – if we use Heidegger's language – can occur. That is why we can agree with Shane Mackinley, who convincingly demonstrated that "the saturated character of the phenomena described by Marion depends upon how they are interpreted by the one to whom they appear,"³⁵ and what we are here calling the (hermeneutic) horizon in a wider sense, Mackinlay calls "a hermeneutical space that is opened by a subject's active reception."³⁶

The common denominator of all these saturated phenomena is givenness, which is the "principle" of Marion's phenomenology. But is a phenomenological reduction to givenness – which uncovers a "reversal of intentionality" (*counter-intentionality*) and a de-centring of the subject – truly without any kind of (hermeneutic) horizon? In his earliest lectures, when Heidegger speaks of givenness (*Gegebenheit*), he shows how the apparently original question, "Is there something?" (*gibt es etwas?*) is actually far from original, but rather is the result of the theoretical attitude. There is no trace of the generosity of the verb "geben", to give (*es gibt*, it gives) – which is central for the later Heidegger – but instead the opposite is true. If something is reduced to givenness (*Gegebenheit*), then we are dealing with "a theoretical form,"³⁷ which represents an exemption from the lived world. Heidegger labels it as "the initial objectifying infringement of the environment,"³⁸ which leads to the "de-vivification" (*Ent-leben*) of life. This example is interesting because here givenness has a negative connotation and is diametrically opposed to the gift. The passage from givenness to the gift is for that reason a hermeneutic action (of understanding). Marion would maintain that the primacy of givenness is not bound to our evaluation, but it must be acknowledged as that which is always prior to any

³² J.-L. Marion, *In Excess*, 104.

³³ J.-L. Marion, *Being Given*, 264.

³⁴ J.-L. Marion, *In Excess*, 31.

³⁵ S. Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess. Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

³⁷ M. Heidegger, *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie* (GA 56/57), 89.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

understanding.³⁹ However, in the very receiving of what is given, the hermeneutic openness of the recipient is already at work—making it possible to even understand something *as* given, and possibly later even *as* a gift.

The motivation for the kind of interpretation I am trying to put forward here is a positive understanding of horizon and, consequentially, also a positive understanding of “being.” Horizon is not a prison which encloses, but an openness which gives room and enables something “to be.” That is why the fundamental hermeneutical question concerns the *adequacy* of this openness, so that the genuine revelation of a phenomenon can occur. While Levinas and Marion seek a way to *transcend understanding*, the hermeneutic perspective makes the effort to “genuinely” *understand transcending*. This understanding does not abolish transcendence, as it by no means seeks to dominate or to master it. Instead, it attempts to understand transcendence *qua* transcendent, and in return it may discover how it itself is determined by transcendence. Even discovering one’s own passivity does not mean that this passivity is cancelled out, just because an awareness of it includes the moment of activity. Instead of the mutual exclusion of activity and passivity (transcendence and immanence, being and beyond being), horizon has the role of mediator between these opposites. The hermeneutic horizon (of understanding and being), however, is not a fixed reality, but a possibility, which can be changed and transformed. We can always search for new possibilities of understanding (and being), especially in front of the paradoxical nature of transcendence.

The question of Being is closely tied to what early Heidegger calls the “actualization sense.” The “content sense” of a phenomenon directs us back to the relational sense, or our approach (relation) to a phenomenon. However, the relation—in the sense of directing understanding, which represents one of its hermeneutic possibilities—is not an attitude which would be taken by a static subject. On the contrary, this interpretative relation occurs in the lived life of the “subject” and is carried by life. This has to do with lived understanding, which is not something that is added to life, but instead is a modality of life. The way of understanding is a way of living, or a “way of being.” For that reason, the horizon of understanding of being is difficult to illustrate with the metaphor of the screen (Marion),⁴⁰ because it is not about a state, it is about a “happening.” The actualization of life (of ‘being’ in the verbal sense), and the understanding that belongs to it, is that which forms the horizon where the (verbal) being of a given phenomenon is understood—e.g. the “being” of the flowery meadow. If a certain way of understanding presents itself as more genuine than another, if phenomena truly occur “as themselves” within a certain way of understanding, then this is inseparably connected with a certain way of *our* being; with a way or manner

³⁹ For Marion’s analysis of this Heidegger’s lecture see J.-L. Marion, “Remarks on the Origins of *Gegebenheit* in Heidegger’s Thought”, in: *The Reason of the Gift* (Charlottesville, London: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 35-49.

⁴⁰ J.-L. Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. T. A. Carlson (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 37.

of our life. A genuine "event," as enactment and actualization, is for that reason a coinciding, so to speak, of our being and the phenomenon—the flowery meadow occurs to its fullest when in my life I adequately open and give myself over to it. That kind of event (e. g., of the flowery meadow in my lived experience) is diametrically opposed to the egoistic tendency of the self to possess the other.

That is why the phenomenological correlation in the hermeneutic perspective presents us with the challenge of directing our attention towards our own openness of understanding, which is at once an expression of *our way of being*. As we have seen in Levinas' treatment of the epiphany of the face, the question can be posed when I encounter another person in her original "givenness." This encounter depends on my openness to her. This genuine openness of understanding in front of the face (of the other) has a certain direction which we can analyze (the "relational sense") and, provisionally, we could describe it by using Levinas' notion of "proximity."⁴¹ To me, in the horizon of proximity, the other person becomes my *neighbor (le prochain)*—beyond all other intentional concepts that also label him. And it is only in proximity that we can open ourselves to his ethical call and become aware of our responsibility to him. However, this proximity is not something that would include a mere understanding, but instead it demands a way of my being. Only when I "live" my proximity towards the other, does the other really occur in the fullness of her meaning. The horizon of proximity towards the other does not remove or assimilate her alterity, but in fact actually makes it possible for her alterity to truly and originally occur. In the lived horizon of proximity my understanding and my way of being is modified and transformed. In the framework of Levinas' thought one could say that the more I am close (or in proximity) to the other, the more I realize that I should be even closer, and that I am called to infinite closeness and infinite responsibility for her. If we question the "actualization sense" of the other, we could tie this sense to Levinas' later concept of "substitution."⁴² In substitution, the other fully occurs in my life (being) only when my being, or existing, completely becomes a "being-for-the-other." This paradox, i.e., that my being is actualized as being-for-the-other, is not something that would go beyond being, but rather announces an extreme possibility of (my) being.

Similarly, we could also extend these reflections to the question of givenness, which must also correlate with a certain kind of openness on my part. Marion, without a doubt, is correct in contending that givenness does not demand the metaphysical conclusion that there must exist a cause or a giver of givenness. But, seeing the aspect of the gift in the "given," and with that also the aspect of the good, is something a "given" cannot do on its own. It would be wrong to say that the way of being *as* a gift is

⁴¹ E. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 81. The interpretation of proximity that is suggested here and opposed to Levinas stresses the necessity of an appropriate attitude (or openness) to recognize the other as my neighbor (i. e. "close" to me in a specific ethical meaning).

⁴² This is also the title of the central chapter in E. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 99-129.

merely a subjective experience that has nothing to do with the thing itself (a condition for experiencing a gift is precisely its independence from us), but it is equally difficult to say that a thing in itself “objectively” embodies a transcendent givenness, independent of our cognition. For that reason, we must not treat givenness as an “objective” necessity, but rather understand it as a hermeneutic possibility. Given this, it would be more suitable to pose a question regarding the horizon which makes it possible for everything that “is” to attain the characteristic of a gift. This concerns the question of our relation to phenomena (beings), which is led by a certain relational sense and which consequentially determines the content sense of phenomena (beings). Through givenness Marion discovers “the Good” as that which gives “Being” its deepest and most original meaning. Yet we may ask whether this tradition, which inspires Marion and places “the Good” beyond “Being,” does not emphasize the necessity of a specific “way of being” (way of life), i.e., of being able to open ourselves to transcendence (one may think of Dionysius the Areopagite who requires an attitude of prayer and praise⁴³)? The commitment to form an adequate “horizon” of understanding in our lived life represents the precondition that allows transcendence, precisely in its inscrutable mystery and paradox; to allow it to “happen” in our lives.

This lived horizon of understanding that allows transcendence to “actualize” itself (referring to the actualization-sense) in one’s life can also be called a religious mode of existence.⁴⁴ It is a specific way of openness and a hermeneutic possibility of our being. This openness makes it possible to recognize transcendence without reducing it to the immanence of the self. The encounter of transcendence within the religious horizon leads to an inversion which is advocated by both Levinas and Marion, and which constitutes the core of the religious way of being: to acknowledge the priority of the transcendent other over myself. The openness of my horizon can inversely be seen as a gift of transcendence – rather than it being me who “constitutes” transcendence, I find myself being constituted by it. And yet, the inversion does not abrogate the active part of the self. Even if it is recognized as a gift, this openness has to be constantly cared for, exposing itself to the possibility of “closing” itself off and being lost. Given this, the phenomenological correlation, which for Levinas and Marion appears as a barrier for transcendence, thus receives a positive meaning. The correlation stands for an active, never-ending effort on the part of the self to maintain and to deepen the religious horizon of understanding so that it will be able to “correlate” with the paradoxical character of transcendence. This effort can also be called spirituality. Contrary to the fears that any re-duction (leading back) of transcendence to a horizon would abolish it, we I contend the opposite: without an appropriate (“correlative”) reception of transcendence it would never be able to reveal itself.

⁴³ J.-L. Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 180.

⁴⁴ The term religion is understood in a broad meaning, similarly to Levinas’ characterization of religion as a relationship to transcendence (of the absolute other): “We propose to call ‘religion’ the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality.” (E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 40)

