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THE DARK SIDE OF GOD: A CASE FOR INCONSPICUOUS GIVENNESS¹

"We can perceive things in peripheral vision – like Mona Lisa's smile – that we miss in central vision...because our peripheral cone vision, which cannot perceive details well, employs a holistic analysis that enables us to see... peripheral vision may often be better than foveal vision..."

-Eric Kandel²

Why are modes of revelation and manifestation generally associated with light rather than dark, with clarity and obviousness rather than with obscurity and inapparency? Many phenomena actually become intelligible precisely in and through their giving an obscurity and darkness. "Dark matter" gives itself to space in being shrouded in invisibility, although it is fully immanent and constantly altering the environments in which it persistently intrudes. The villains of *film noir* reveal, through obscurity, the truth of a community that otherwise seemed to be understood as clear, idyllic, and peaceful. The blurry smile of the Mona Lisa enigmatically can be seen only through a peripheral glance that eludes the conceptual grasp of directedness. Some phenomena are given inconspicuously through one of the many potential modes of shifting between what Heidegger would call "concealment" (*Verborgenheit*) and "disclosure" (*Entbergung*). This shifting can be thought in terms of darkness (*Dunkelheit*, not lending to complete and utter invisibility), and the intelligibility of such things is given or brought into presence (*Anwesen*) through their sense data taking on various active or passive shades of obscurity, ranges of sound, or degrees of hiding, deception and mystery. There is a productive and effectual means of relation that one always already has with a darkness that does not have warrant to "reflect" or "shine" (*Schein*). Indeed, givenness, manifestation, and their similar cognates, give, along with their giving, layers and degrees of concealment. They hide in their giving, manifest in their veiling, and attest to the fact that brightness and darkness are experienced in shades.

This paradoxical relation between darkness and light, and between presence and absence, reaches its highest potential and challenge in the question of the givenness of God to thought.³ By definition, God cannot be thought, that is, not

¹ This article has been elaborated in the framework of the research project "Religion Beyond Myth and Enlightenment," underwritten by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF P 23255-G19).

² Eric R. Kandel, *The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain, from Vienna 1900 to the Present*. (New York: Random House, 2012), 246.

³ See also John P. Manoussakis, "The Phenomenon of God: From Husserl to Marion" in *American Catholic Quarterly* 78:1 (2004). For Manoussakis, "The Field where philosophical thinking runs the greatest risk of losing itself (but also, the field where it receives the greatest promise to regain itself) is that which concerns the question of God. The thought of God is, par excellence, that which does not belong to thought...yet...as a

in a way that allows comprehension through access to God as *causa sui*. Yet, to even suggest that God *cannot* be thought *is* to already operate with a given thinking of God. Thus, one immediately is caught in the demands to think, in some self-reflective and *discursive* manner, “about” God through “running back and forth” (*dis-currere*) between a thought and its being reflected upon. The “idea” of God, which leads to thinking about God, is given, although it may not directly or clearly come into appearance in any traditionally understood sense.⁴ The question then becomes “how is God given?” It is necessary to conceive, as Steinbock noted, of the “kinds of givenness...those that pertain to the way in which cultural objects, things, and the like, also ‘give’ the sphere of the Holy.”⁵ The givenness of God, the way God is given, corresponds to that which is given. For some, such as Descartes, the “idea” of infinity is, in fact, an “appearance,” and for good reasons: the Greek *idea*, from *idein*, originates in the Greek *ōpan*, “to see.” To have an idea, then, is to see or grasp something that appears due to its being brought into clarity. This can of course be related with *phainesthai*, (from which phenomenology gains its namesake) in terms of what is “illuminated” or brought into the open in the form of *Phaenitain*, a “shining” or “burning.”⁶ It is not without coincidence that *phainesthai* is traceable to the Indo-European root *bhā*, which means “to shine,” finding manifestations in the English “beacon,” or Greek *phōs* (as in “phosphorous”) as that which emits light. How far, though, might it be suggested that the idea of God is an appearance of God, and to what degree does such an appearance “shine” in relation to the light, or not shine, and therefore relate more with modes of darkness? To argue either for or against the existence of God is to have the idea of God, though its features may not “shine” so clearly. The extent to which God is a “phenomenon” in the sense of “shining” notwithstanding, it is at least, from the outset not prohibited to think God as an “un-shiny” (*nicht glänzend*), dull, or “unbuffered” “thing.”⁷ Some kind of idea of

question and as a problem posed to philosophy, is raised always within philosophical thinking, which it endlessly confronts.”

⁴ Similarly, from Caputo’s perspective: “I think that phenomenology provides the most successful, important, and meaningful way to think about God, with the proviso that this would always be a phenomenology that confesses the limits of what we can say about God. A phenomenological approach to God is necessary and inescapable, not only for religion...but also for phenomenology itself.” James H. Olthuis, ed., *Religion With/without Religion: The Prayers and Tears of John D. Caputo*, (London, New York: Routledge Press, 2002), 176.

⁵ See also Anthony J. Steinbock, “Saturated Intentionality,” in *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed., Donn Welton (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1999) 178-99.

⁶ Plato’s idea, of course, is a representation of something else, in consciousness. As duly noted by John C. Marcado, “A phenomenology of God, then, would seem to require a phenomenology of the unthinkable, of what cannot be given even to thought, such less to experience.” John C. Marcado, “Nothing Gives,” in *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, eds. Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, Jason M. Wirth (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 147.

⁷ For a deeper engagement with this question, see Jean-Yves Lacoste, “Perception, Transcendence and the Experience of God,” in *Phenomenology and Transcendence*, eds. Conner Cunningham and Peter M. Candler Jr. (London, UK: SCM Press, 2007), 1. For Lacoste in these regards, “God is admittedly no thing. And when he dares be present in the world as a thing, he does so in the sense perception perceives only as a sacramentum: the res is unperceivable.” Lacoste engages “one or two things about the

God has been given to thought and therefore, through reflection, the dark side of God is not disallowed from experience. In phenomenological terms, irrespective of whether or not one thinks *there is* a God, *es gibt*, there is, or “it gives” the thought of God.

The unhooking of the thought of God from metaphysics and ontotheology has become of prime importance to thinkers in “continental philosophy of religion” (henceforth CPOR), and there is often but one mode of hiddenness/revelation upon which its thinkers rely when thinking about the “mysteriousness” of God. The result of which, when describing the potential givenness of God, entails placing an overwhelming emphasis upon the *de facto* unknowability of God. Yet as Heidegger once warned, the mysterious is not simply “the unknown,” and the hidden is not simply the yet-to-be-disclosed. There are various ways and forms of hiding, and darkness may be thought as one among them. Recent work in CPOR is marked by the re-thinking of indecision, agnosticism, possibility, and mysticism, and in the process has potentially eclipsed any possibility of thinking the “how structure” of the givenness or *es gibt* of God beyond mysterious invisibility. Three central figures in CPOR seem to have relied more so on the “enlightening” of givenness through the potentially constructive distinctions between transcendence and immanence, namely, via the tropes of erring and marginality (Taylor), God and not-God (Kearney) and the mystical “God of perhaps” (Caputo). Mark C. Taylor’s work appeared in the formative stages of CPOR over 30 years ago in his 1984 *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology*, in which something was made explicit what was at that time only implicit: the value of deconstruction for “death of god theology” through the trope of *erring*.⁸ There was a pendular movement taking place at that time in religious thought “between seemingly exclusive and evident opposites” or “binary terms,” from which thinking must necessarily come to err. To err is to wander along the unstable border that is “irrevocably liminal or marginal,” and Taylor employs *errantly*, the adjectival form of being irregular or “uncertain in movement,” to study a society that has marginalized itself after the death of God.⁹ Such a motif became, in the bloom of postmodernism in the 80’s, a seemingly formal, relied-

way God appears while transcending his present apparition.” What it is that “gives” phenomenality its shape is, Michel Henry, puts it, something to be understood or sought after by phenomenology, for, “while the other sciences study specific phenomena – physical, chemical, biological, juridical, social, economic, etc. – phenomenology explores what allows a phenomenon to be a phenomenon.” Michael Henry “Phenomenology of Life,” in *Phenomenology and Transcendence*, eds. Conner Cunningham and Peter M. Candler Jr. (London, UK: SCM Press, 2007), 241.

⁸ This exploration not only yielded new ways deconstruction might bear upon essential western theological notions – God, self, history, and book – but also implications for how religion can offer feedback into deconstruction, and consequently, the trope of chaos and erring.

⁹ *Erring* derives from the Latin “Errare (‘to wander, or stray about, to rove’)[which] is a cognate with the Gothic *airzjan*, which means ‘to lead astray.’” Further, “to err is to ramble, roam, stray, wander, like Chaucer’s ‘weary host that errest to and fro.’” Taylor refers to four essential uses of erring: errabund (random), errancy (the condition of being in error) errand (a message), and errantly (the adjectival mode of wandering, being irregular or “uncertain in movement...” Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

upon methodological trope as scholars of religion were invigorated to unshackle their field from its burdensome and outdated structures of normative thought and the metaphysics that so entrapped them. Hereticism, transgression, and erring, commanded a strip tease to the religious imagination that was a much-needed cultural corrective to a society that forgot how to live in existential relation with the radical *potentia* of God.¹⁰ More recently Richard Kearney's *Anatheism* takes Heidegger's concerns over the ontotheological constitution of metaphysics seriously while simultaneously seeking to establish meaningful discourses on God. Kearney engages the possible/impossible dyad and treats the inability to reference any "presence" of the impossible.¹¹ Instead of thinking God in terms of actuality – thus bidding *adieu* to the traditionally omnipotent God of metaphysics – God should be thought as "the possibility of the impossible." *Anatheism* seeks to avoid a dialectical synthesis between the separate conceptions of theism and atheism, yet there is an unknowing that maintains a trace of a transcendent God who may be in but not of the world,¹² namely, on the face of the stranger (the other, the orphan, and widow).¹³ Post-onto-theology meets a theory of hospitality that inserts man somewhere between belief/nonbelief, the possible/impossible so as to provide an existential jolt that breaks one of indecision in the face of un-knowing. The problem of the existence of God should be met with fear and trembling. Similarly, Caputo's recent *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* argues for how the idea of "'perhaps' belongs to another 'regime' than that of mere opinion and hazy indecision, that it enjoys an 'irreducible modality' all its own," aiming to establish a "more subtle" disposition that can accommodate to God speak.¹⁴ "Perhaps" escapes "the prestige of the present, and opens thinking to the weak force of the to-come,"¹⁵ and as opposed to indecision, "perhaps is not paralysis but the fluid milieu of undecidability in which every radical decision is made..." Faith must remain as such, never reaching its goal of certainty, yet it still should be safeguarded from falling into a neutral, agnostic indecisionism.¹⁶ Caputo's radical perhaps, not unlike Nietzsche's courage for the open-ended or dangerous unforeseeable, is similar to both Taylor's and Kearney's works in its prioritizing of conjuring an

¹⁰ See also Altizer, Taylor, Winquist, and Raschke's *Deconstruction and Theology*. (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

¹¹ The Derridean impossible can also be understood as short for "impossible to be presenced."

¹² There is an epiphany of "the divine in the face of the stranger." Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 149. Such unknowing is the impetus of wonder: "The felt absence of the old God (the death of God) ushers in a sense of emptiness that may provoke a new desire...for the return of the Other God – the divine guest who brings life," 63.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁴ "Perhaps" is "powerless in its very power." John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6. Caputo attempts to exceed the binary of belief and unbelief through the act of faith. For non-knowing "exceeds simple ignorance as faith exceeds simple blindness." "Perhaps" does not belong to the "dominant thinking about the possible in philosophy[.]" (p. 4), and is "a word of desire for something, I know not what..." and "Perhaps unhinges us from the real, making the impossible possible" taking us to the "depths of responsibility," p. 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

existential angst that originates in holding to an utterly “unknowable” God. Angelus Silesius’ poem, “The Rose is Without Why”, is given a theological voice *via* a transcendent *Tetragrammaton* that culminates in a certain *je ne se quoi*. God is a possible event (not necessarily metonymic to Heideggerian appropriation, or *Ereignis*) that shakes paralysis, yet there is still a sense in which it is a God of ultimately ineffable ambiguity; an unforeseeable stalwart to the thought of God’s being given. This productive angst that a “God of the perhaps” might bear may be helpful for taming the *Schwärmerei* of a religious fanatic or the extremism of those associated with new atheism, and gains its momentum through a presumably productive distinction between transcendence and immanence, between the visible and the invisible. Many of these tropes, of course, are just as capable of crystallizing into structures similar to those which they may have originally sought to dethrone and deregulate, and thus one must take care to not rely upon *erring* and its cognates too heavily. Further, care should be taken so as to not to rely too heavily upon the dialectical and dyadic borders and structures between absence/presence, outside/inside, or transcendent/immanent, for in the detaching of God from the metaphysical structures that impede God, a far too heavy emphasis upon *erring* and its cognates just as easily can become metaphysical and therefore only serve to reinforce the reign of causality even more viciously. A focus on the multidimensionality of the concealedness/disclosure relation at work within givenness (*Gegebenheit*) or presencing (*Anwesen*) may help prevent falling to such concerns. By coming to address the *how* structure of any experience of the thought of God *beyond dialectical thinking* (which Heidegger once named a “genuine philosophical embarrassment”), a necessary step can be made in safeguarding a non-ontotheological approach to God without reducing God to mere “unknowability.”¹⁷

This article seeks to think more carefully the “there is,” *es gibt*, “it gives” of God via a register of inconspicuousness, which relates with a darkness and obscurity.¹⁸ It is possible to conceive of two forms or expressions of inconspicuousness in relation to givenness that could be applied to thinking the ways in which God could be given, perhaps paradoxically, as veiled or “inconspicuous.” In conceiving different variations or “degrees of saturation” of givenness, Heidegger’s concept of “*Das Unscheinbare*,” inconspicuous or “non-shine-full” is reappropriated. Instead of an inversion of the light/dark paradigm, I take it that intelligibility and revelation come about through a synthetic oscillation between light and dark, between forms of *non-dialectical* presence and withdrawal. Inconspicuousness, like the wallflower, speaks to the way in which

¹⁷ Phenomenology is to be a non-metaphysical science, which is why Michel Henry claims that, “while the other sciences study specific phenomena – physical, chemical, biological, juridical, social, economic, etc. – phenomenology explores what allows a phenomenon to be a phenomenon.” Michel Henry, “Phenomenology of Life,” in *Phenomenology and Transcendence*, eds. Conner Cunningham and Peter M. Candler Jr. (London, UK: SCM Press, 2007), 241.

¹⁸ This is to be distinguished from the traditional ways in which God’s “being given” is conceived. In most cases, Gerard Manley Hopkins’ metaphor in “Gods Grandeur” seems appropriate: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.”

things, matters, and persons are overlooked through particular forms of seeing. After interpreting Heidegger's somewhat vague "phenomenology of the inconspicuous," it will then be extended and applied to show the efficacy of conceiving of a particular modality or type of givenness, which is then tested to assess the potential "givenness of God."¹⁹ Inconspicuousness provides a potential avenue upon which the "phenomena" of God can be both present and absent at the same time without reverting to the cause/effect structure of thought that has so entrapped God within God's own status as *causa sui*.

Heidegger's *Phenomenology of the Inconspicuous*

Although Heidegger references the sacred, which prefigures and can go without the existence, flight, or salvific acts of Gods, his concept of phenomenological inconspicuousness provides another frame whereby givenness can be understood, namely, in terms of the "darkness" of what does not "shine."²⁰ Heidegger of course resisted the growing machination found in the industrialization of the modern mind and world, and thereby emphasized how things that are uncompromisingly simple can retain, in their being overlooked, particular layers of obscurity (or as the German *dunkel* suggests, darkness). The simplest, most ordinary of things resist technological efficiency in their not being of use.²¹ It is in inconspicuousness (*Unscheinbarkeit*) that the ordinary weds the

¹⁹ I find this view to be consistent with Steinbock's: "...[T]he attempts to merely describe empirically the variety of religions and religious experiences...fail to ask how the Holy or the other person is given." Anthony J. Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism: The Verticality of Religious Experience* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 158. Steinbock later notes the need to conceive different "kinds" of givenness: "What distinguishes so called natural religion from positive religion is not rational knowledge, metaphysics, and direct experience or 'revealed' religion, but rather different kinds of givenness. In the personal sphere, for the givenness to and through persons, I have used the term 'epiphany' to evoke this sense of givenness. For the so-called natural sphere, which for me concerns the Earth, and elemental being and beings, I employ the terms 'disclosure' and 'display'....There are still other kinds of givenness too, kinds of givenness that I sketch out at the very beginning - those that pertain to the way in which cultural objects, things, and the like, also 'give' the sphere of the Holy. I reserve the term 'manifestation' for this mode of givenness. They have, each in their own way, their distinctive ways of giving and being given." *Ibid.*, 230.

²⁰ Heidegger's sacred [*das Heilige*] is the space of wonder and awe (*Scheu*) at Being, a space described as the "open clearing" (GA 3, 258-259). The sacred is also the primal place wherein we stand in awe of the expansive excess of being, of given-being and the presencing of presence. In Hölderlin's "Flight of the Gods" (*die Flucht der Götter*, GA 39, 80) the flight is described by Heidegger as a part of the modern machination of the human condition towards a progress that replaces wonder at being. Since Heidegger describes *Unscheinbarkeit* as a tautological presencing *without* presence, and since the sacred is in awe at presencing, it is perhaps no wonder that Janicaud eventually drew an association between inconspicuousness and the sacred. The question may then become the nature of Heidegger's *Kehre*, as Janicaud wonders "can it be denied that Heidegger's 'turn' was conditioned by his quest for the Sacred, through his reinterpretation of Hölderlin?" Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 31.

²¹ Only a God "can save us," for Heidegger, and there is a certain "saving power" of things that are ordinary or inconspicuous, such as those that resist technological

obscure, that the mysterious finds its expression in the simple. For something (or someone) to be *unscheinbar* is for that thing to be *presencing* and giving yet not received by those to whom that which is given is given. Following the root *schein* (exemplified in *Fahrschein*, travel ticket, or *Parkschein*, parking pass), *unscheinbar* entails that a thing may indeed be giving phenomenal data that can be made meaningfully present and intelligible, yet it is not actively given warrant (*schein*) to do so. It wasn't until Heidegger's last Seminar, which was in Zähringen in 1973, that he even refers to a "Phenomenology of the inconspicuous," and it is there exemplified as a *way* of thinking or seeing, as "a path that leads away to come before... and it lets that before which it is led show itself."²² It is not through conceiving (*Be-greifen*) or "taking possession" that allows for a more wondrous comportment in relation to things. Seeing, as Heidegger interprets the work of Parmenides, "does not conceive."²³ This is closer to the nature of Being as a giving, of how Parmenides' "that it is" (*To Eon*) is decoupled from stativity. As *hyle* (the sense data of things, such as color, shape, hardness) are overlooked in preference for what categorial intuition pre-selects (a kind of Husserlian *Vorgegebenheit* or pre-giveness), this active conception of things limits the possibility of their potential givenness, most especially those that have a certain particular character trait of inconspicuousness. Despite a phenomenon's full and direct presence before us, it can dynamically change its affective structure behind the scenes of our awareness. In this sense, phenomena are fluxuating "in the dark" of consciousness. That which is *most present* most often has these traits or traces of inconspicuousness.

efficiency. See Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Nihilism, Art, Technology, and Politics," in *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 310.

²² Martin Heidegger, "The Zähringen Seminar," *Four Seminars* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 70. "So verstanden ist die Phänomenologie ein Weg, der hinführt vor...und sich das zeigen läßt, wover er geführt wird. Diese Phänomenologie ist eine Phänomenologie des Unscheinbaren." Martin Heidegger, *Seminar in Zähringen*, in: *Seminare*, GA 15, Curd Ochwad, (Frankfurt am Main, 1986, pp. 372-407). In a letter to Munier he claimed thought must be brought "into the clearing of the appearing of the unapparent." "Letters to Roger Munier" (dated Feb 22, 1974) cited in *Martin Heidegger*, ed. Michel Haar (Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 1983), p. 115. Prior to that, on April 16, 1973 he writes "[f]or me it is a matter of actually performing an exercise in a phenomenology of the inapparent; by the reading of books, no one ever arrives at phenomenological 'seeing'" Martin Heidegger, "the Appendix" in *Four Seminars* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 89.

²³ Martin Heidegger, "The Zähringen Seminar," *Four Seminars* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 89. This is "clearly a tautology...We are here in the domain of the inapparent: presencing itself presences. The name for what is addressed in this state of affairs is: *To Eon*, which neither beings, nor simply being, but *To Eon*, presencing: presencing itself. In this domain of the inapparent, however.. 'along this path there are a great number of indications.'" "Indication must be understood here...[as] what shows and lets be seen, in that it depicts what is to be seen." The tautology of presence getting presenced is a "primordial sense of phenomenology." *Ibid.*, 80. And since "Heraclitus signified the first step towards dialectic...Parmenides is more profound and essential (if it is the case that dialectic, as is said in *Being and Time*, is 'a genuine philosophic embarrassment.')" In this regard we must thoroughly recognize that tautology is the only possibility for thinking what dialectic can only veil." *Ibid.*, 81.

Although one aspect of the performance of the *epoché* concerns the “uncovering” of the hidden, *eine Phänomenologie des Unscheinbaren* does not concern simply phenomena that are *not-yet-appearing*, as there is instead a sense in which inconspicuousness somehow *permanently* resides in any phenomenal appearance, and therefore a phenomenological conceiving or grasping does not necessarily permit access to a more thorough, fuller, and deeper revelation of information that corresponds to these phenomena.²⁴ Inconspicuousness points to how there is a certain tease of such things that is neither appearing nor non-appearing: the more one attempts to permit a direct expression of the intelligibility of inconspicuous phenomena through coming close to them, the more they do not admit such expression, and therefore withdraw from experience all together.²⁵ Inconspicuousness can be thought in terms of that which is given, an approach to the given, or perhaps even the very coming into presence or “givenness” of phenomena.

Premonitions of the Inconspicuous in Sein und Zeit

The entirety of *Sein und Zeit* bears but one rather “insignificant” use of the word *Unscheinbar*.²⁶ Yet with over 130 uses of “appearing” (*erscheinen*) and its many variations, there is, as Jean-François Courtine also argued, a way in which inconspicuousness highlights the facets and strata of the “uncovering” (*désoculation*) of the appearing of phenomena due to the inevitable association with *Being*, *alethia*, and the covering/dis-covering (*Verbergen*, e.g.) relation inherent within them. The appearing or “apparent” is *erscheinen*, and refers to that which shows itself from itself and of itself. It is this self-showing that carries warrant (*Scheinen*) or a ticket for its own appearance.²⁷ To not appear is directly

²⁴ Françoise Dastur interprets this inapparent as “the nonappearance that resides in all appearing, the event itself of apparition and the giving of being.” Françoise Dastur, “La pensée à venir: une phénoménologie de l’inapparent?,” *L’avenir de la philosophie est-il grec?* ed. Catherine Collobert (Saint-Laurent, Quebec: Fides, 2002), 146. See also Gérard Guest, “Aux confins de l’inapparent: l’extrême phénoménologie de Heidegger,” *Existentialia* 12 (2002): 123.

²⁵ For Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger “seeks out a direct expression of being while showing on the other hand that it does not admit of direct expression.” (“*cherche une expression directe de l’être don’t il montre par ailleurs qu’il n’est pas susceptible d’expression direct.*”) Maurice Merleau Ponty, *Notes de cours, 1959-1961* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 148. For More on Heidegger and the potential of the “direct expression” of Being see also Francisco Gonzales, *Plato and Heidegger: A Question of Dialogue* (College Station, PA: Penn State Press, 2011) p. 336

²⁶ “*Die Beschaffung, Sichtung und Sicherung des Materials bringt nicht erst den Rückgang zur »Vergangenheit« in Gang, sondern setzt das geschichtliche Sein zum dagewesenen Dasein, das heißt die Geschichtlichkeit der Existenz des Historikers schon voraus. Diese fundiert existenzial die Historie als Wissenschaft bis in die unscheinbarsten, »handwerklichen« Veranstaltungen.*” Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main : Klostermann, 1977, first edition 1927), 394. “The procurement, screening and securing of the material brings not only the decline to the ‘past’ in transition, but also sets historical existence according to that which has been seen before, that is, the historicity of the existence of the historian already ahead. This sound existential history as a science until the insignificant, “artisanal” events.”

²⁷ “Such self-showing we call warrants” (“*Solches Sichzeigen nennen wir Scheinen*”). Ibid., SZ, 29, BT 51.

related to that which seems, or appears to appear, yet inconspicuousness is not necessarily its virtual opposite:

Indeed it is even possible for an entity to show itself as something which in itself it is *not*. When it shows itself in this way it 'looks like something other.' This kind of showing itself is what we call "seeming [*Scheinen*]." [And] signifies that which looks like something, that which is 'semblant,' 'semblance' [*das "Scheinbare", der "Schein"*]. [Further] 'phenomenon' as that which shows itself... [and] 'phenomenon' as semblance...are structurally interconnected.²⁸

Things may be given as they actually appear to be. Yet in their being given, they can be mobilized as signposts to point to, or indicate, something else. This kind of appearing is a thing in its "seeming." Every reference or attention to Being entails the covering up of another strata of Being, and for something to "appear to be" (that is, to reflect Being itself) is not for that thing to straightforwardly give itself, but for it to seem (in the sense of surmising something to be) or be a resemblance of something else, in a radical moment of discursive recollection. In one sense, this is the act of association or "looking like," which can be a kind of camouflage that entails a thing's being-overlooked. The experience of a phenomenon's appearance, or seeming to be something, immediately leads one to make an association between it and something else already previously experienced. Seeming is association. In another, different sense, the inherent connection between a phenomenon's being both showing and seeming produces another understanding of "phenomenon" as a thing that shows itself in its seeming, in its associability, and in its status as tentative and temporally structured. A thing's being given could, at any point, seem to be given otherwise, though without contradicting the way in which it was, in the first instance, given. "Appearing" inherently implies an immediate referral or relationship between at least two aspects within a given phenomena that hold conflicting interests.

Although *Unscheinbar* is not referenced directly here, Heidegger refers to specific cases of phenomena that do not directly give themselves or "shine," but necessarily "seem" ("This is what one is talking about when one speaks of the 'symptoms of a disease.'). The perfect example would be the *appearance* of a *Krankheitserscheinung* ("sickness symptom"), which indicates (*indizieren*) itself precisely as that "which does not show itself," yet is still "announced" or introduced.²⁹ To follow the example, the sickness can be understood as *unscheinbar* in so far as there is a phenomenon that only indirectly shows itself, and employs symptoms to speak for its seemingly invisible, yet active nature. In such cases the phenomenal experience is with the indication itself, a proxy for the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., *SZ*, 29,,*BT* 52. "Here one has in mind certain occurrences in the body which show themselves and which, in showing themselves as thus showing themselves, 'indicate' something which does not show itself. The emergency of such occurrences, their showing-themselves, goes together with the Being-present-at-hand of disturbances which does not show themselves. Thus appearance, as the appearance 'of something', does not mean showing-itself; it means rather the announcing-itself by something which does not show itself, but which announces itself through something which does show itself. Appearing is a not-showing-itself."

inconspicuous phenomenon. Yet profoundly, the recognition is that the symptoms are not the phenomenon but manifestations of it. This sheds more light on appearance, which is more like an announcement through that which can possibly show itself (such as a “medium”) whether in the form of symptoms, sketches, or syntax.³⁰ That which can show itself, in other words, is a vehicle for a phenomenon’s unseeability, and this is accomplished through phenomena that specialize in showing. In these cases, a thing’s appearance must bear the marks of a “double signification: first, appearing, in the sense of announcing itself as not-showing-itself; and next, that which does the announcing [*das Meldende selbst*].”³¹ This understanding is not relevant simply for *particular* phenomena, but phenomenality in general.

The two aspects or movements of a phenomenon’s self-articulation (their showing and being shown) are not easily distinguishable from one another, so much so that these two movements are often one in the same. Within them is a subtle indication that they bear within themselves a strata or layer that is incapable of being signified or presented, yet this indication is indeed a phenomenon in itself that says something about that which does not appear. The phenomenon never fully shows itself, but this not-showing is still part and parcel of the phenomenon as shown. In this limited sense, the inconspicuous non-appearing appears.³² In the Parmenides Seminars Heidegger eventually unfolds a number of ways in which aspects of things or matters do not come to light, for example, as they are hidden, undiscovered, disguising, accidentally covered over, or actively buried over (*Verdecken*, which Heidegger names the most commonly employed in phenomenological thinking). Inconspicuousness is distinguished from these forms of hiding and is even named the primary *character trait* of mysteriousness.³³ Yet it also can of course embody and take on these forms, such as the way in which matters indicate themselves as inherently confusing or conflagrating as “Being false.” In order to see “inconspicuously,” any attempt to conceive (sic *Be-greif*) of a phenomenon must be surrendered. Phenomenology is no longer a tool that permits us to see something as it truly is but rather one that initiates a deformalization of that which is seen, becoming the exhibition of appearance itself, which in part involves a certain darkening or obfuscation of the phenomenon, so as to allow it to invoke wonder at its self-disclosure.³⁴ This is why Heidegger concludes it is precisely “Just because the phenomena are

³⁰ Ibid. “All indications, presentations, symptoms, and symbols have this basic formal structure of appearing, even though they are different among themselves.”

³¹ Ibid., SZ, 35, BT, 59.

³² Ibid. The phenomenon “is something that proximally and for the most part does not show itself at all: it is something that lies hidden, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself.”

³³ “The secret in the mystery [*Das Geheime des Geheimnisvollen*] is a kind of concealment [*Verbergung*], characterized by its insignificance [*Unscheinbarkeit*, i.e., inconspicuousness] in virtue of which the mystery is an open one.” Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992), 63. GA 54 (1982), 93. “*Das Geheime des Geheimnisvollen ist eine Art der, die sich durch ihre auszeichnet, kraft deren das Geheimnis ein offense ist.*”

³⁴ It is on this point in particular that Heraclitus “the obscure” becomes a formidable source of inspiration for Heidegger in the early 1940s.

proximally and for the most part not given, there is need for phenomenology.”³⁵ And though “covered-upness is the counter concept to phenomenon,” inconspicuousness short-circuits those sharp distinctions. This, at least, is a premonition of a “phenomenology of the inconspicuous,” and helps shed light on an approach that is itself obscure, leading to moments of pause and reflection (*Nachdenken*) upon the “positive characterization[s]” of the overlooked, which paradoxically is “The closest thing.”³⁶ Appearing is announcing, insofar as it does not necessarily “show itself” yet still signifies, through a liminal appearing. It is this “closest thing” that becomes so ordinary and is therefore overlooked. This all says something about types of vision, even going beyond the standards of far-sightedness or near-sightedness: “what is closest to us ontologically is at the same time the furthest away.”³⁷ So easily does the ever-present and persistent Being slip into obscurity due to proximity.³⁸

Heidegger’s *Unscheinbare* pays reference to *specific* and distinct *ways* of experiencing phenomena that forfeit their phenomenality yet somehow are *present*, affective, and capable of being related with.³⁹ Such phenomena are closer to the fulcrum of presencing itself and are a character trait of mysteriousness, which is *not* metonymic with the “unknown.” Yet this concept is left slightly vague by Heidegger, initiating a play of differences between the seen and the unrecognized (note here, *not* the *unseen*) as they are in one shared space, a concept Figal has recently developed in relation to *Unscheinbarkeit*.⁴⁰ This shared space can be engaged in oblique ways, yet only in abandoning the ascent of the conceiving or attainment of knowledge or enlightenment. Knowledge may be the

³⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, (Frankfurt am Main : Klostermann, 1977, first edition 1927), 36. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 60.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, *BT*, 69 ref 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, *BT*, 36, ref 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, *BT*, 69.

³⁹ Marion seems lucidly in favor of the latter, demanding that “this [is a] paradox – a phenomenology of the unapparent as such, and not simply of the not-yet-appearing,” Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas Carlson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 60. See also Marion’s earlier work *The Idol and the Distance*, which takes up a similar questioning of proximity in reference to idolization. Under Marion’s reading, as early as Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* it is possible to see his conception of being as “intrinsically” unapparent or inconspicuous. It can neither come into “presence” like other entities or phenomena, entailing that any phenomenology of the in/unapparent is paradoxical. Being is a phenomenon despite not appearing ontically.

⁴⁰ Although Figal’s recent work on *Unscheinbarkeit* only briefly engages Heidegger’s treatment of the concept and is instead devoted to developing his own approach to space, this work shows how inconspicuousness is an appropriate means for understanding space or *Räumlichkeit*, perhaps even opening onto a necessary connection with “the sacred.” There, Figal concludes that “Space... does not appear but is inconspicuous, thus a *phenomenology of externality*, which is a realistic phenomenology, is thus a *phenomenology of the inconspicuous*.” (“Raum, so last diese Überlegung sich zusammenfassen, erscheint nicht, sondern ist *unscheinbar*, so das eine *Phänomenologie der Äußerlichkeit*, eine realistische Phänomenologie, also eine *Phänomenologie der Unscheinbarkeit* ist.”) Günter Figal, *Unscheinbarkeit: Der Raum der Phänomenologie* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 4.

greatest inhibitor to any experience of these phenomena through particular kinds of approaches that do not aim to bring clarity to the not-yet-in-the-light, but rather mark an indirect way or path for developing one's relationship with the dark sides of what cannot appear and their many clandestine ways in which they beckon us to concern ourselves.⁴¹ Are there any ways in which this approach to "un-shining" might bear upon the question of the givenness of God, the darkness, shrouding, and veiling of whom surely exceeds the seemingly dialectical opposition between both the known and "the unknown" in being given?

Inconspicuous Givenness and Inconspicuous Phenomena

Given the slight ambiguity of Heidegger's concept, a phenomenology of the inconspicuous can be employed towards thinking of a particular "way" or specific approach to inconspicuousness, specific phenomena that are characterized as inconspicuous, or as the fundamental way in which all phenomenology is to work. As such, it could be an approach that allows for various kinds of seeing (though again, not conceiving), hearing, and engaging with the given symptoms of what does not appear straightforwardly, and towards finding oneself at perhaps the most radical points of oscillation between the seen and the unseen, or more specifically, towards encountering the *media* between phenomena as they withdraw (*proodos* or "moving away") and come forward (*epistrophè* or "returning") and appear. A "reduction" (if one can be so bold) to inconspicuousness would mark a point of access to that very precise moment at which there is a simultaneous presencing and absencing of a thing's possibly intelligible data.

There is also a sense in which inconspicuousness can mark givenness (the coming-into-being-given) itself. "Givenness" provides a helpful lever for assessing this possibility, as giving also immediately raises attention to its seemingly dialectical opposite "economy," and to the question of "taking." Indeed givenness, which goes beyond any economy of "exchange," does not function according to the modes of causality or conditions of experience for thought. Yet at the same time its neutrality cannot be presumed, for it provides a basis for the appearance and the very *possibility* of appearance. Givenness points to the sheer excessiveness of the faculties themselves; that is, it is not only the thing that is excessive or saturated but also the very way in which something is given.⁴² The active seeing of things projects upon them, prior to their being given, dynamic strata of expectation and anticipation. A value of givenness in these regards can be exemplified in the understood preference for categorial intuition over sensical intuition, which at any point can be bracketed in preference for a

⁴¹ "Phenomenology has shown...that what is primary is the relation itself..." Anthony J. Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism: The Verticality of Religious Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 225.

⁴² For Taminiaux this seminar taught that, "...there is an excessiveness at the very heart of seeing. The seeing which grasps things in their coming-into-appearance, [whereby] intentionality, is itself transfixed with excessiveness; seeing must be beyond the given in order for things to be and to be what they are." Jacques Taminiaux, "Heidegger and Husserl's Logical Investigations in Remembrance of Heidegger's last Seminar" *Research in Phenomenology* 7:1 (1977), 79.

return to the immediate impressions of sense data. In this case, the sense data are given to intuition, and the categorial data are given as a withdrawal or withdrawing. There are various relations one has with the givenness of this pivotal moment or shift, which foreshadows a certain expansive multi-dimensionality in consciousness, as consciousness itself is being altered in order to accommodate to this new moment of givenness as it appropriates.

Phenomenology always has endorsed an active wrestling with different modes of appearing and revealing, and this likely is why theology has been a constant dialogue partner for its members. Max Scheler, an early pupil of Husserl, drew the systematic distinction between revelation and manifestation.⁴³ Levinas, in *Totality and Infinity*, upheld this line between revelation and givenness as disclosure, which subsequently inspired the work of Marion, who still holds fast to the distinction between theological revelation and phenomenological manifestation or givenness.⁴⁴ Michel Henry came to take revelation to be the founding basis of manifestation in a certain sense, namely in the self-revelation or manifestation of "life;" a "phenomenon" that demands – despite being so ordinarily overlooked – to be known in itself without needing to account for or justify itself according to any empirical, material grounds.⁴⁵ One thing all of the aforementioned thinkers agree upon, however, is that manifestation is in itself a phenomenon, although an often obscure one, despite how that which is revealed is what Hegel called a "necessity" (*Notwendigkeit*) of revelation or revealing. Though these distinctions between the modes of appearing for philosophy and theology are often helpful to delineate, all phenomena – or at the very least, all *ideas* – irrespective of classification, are species in the genus of givenness. Whether it is a coffee mug or God, all things and matters first demand to be given. Yet, the *way* in which these "things" are given vary greatly, and therefore there are different "forms" of givenness that correspond to the type, level of "saturation," or excessive force out of which a phenomenon is given.⁴⁶ Givenness itself changes according to the type of phenomena it wishes to reveal and maintain.

⁴³ Scheler maintains the distinction between revelation (*Offenbarung*) and manifestation (*Offenbarkeit*). Max Scheler, *Formalismus in der Ethik und die Materiale Wertethik*, vol 2, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Maria Scheler (Bern: Francke, 1966).

⁴⁴ For Steinbock, "Levinas' work [TI] which, despite the fact that it seems to qualify the Other as what is not able to be given, makes a clear distinction between givenness as disclosure and absolute givenness or givenness as revelation." Anthony J. Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 12.

⁴⁵ Ibid.. Henry is similar to Scheler in that he is one "who criticizes 'ontological monism' this kind of limitation of givenness to one kind of being (=monism) and understands the very essence of manifestation to be revelation." See also Michel Henry, *L'essence de la manifestation*, (Paris: PUF, 1990). See also Steinbock's "The Problem of Forgetfulness in the Phenomenology of Life in The Philosophy of Michel Henry" *Continental Philosophy Review*, 32:4 (1999), 271-302.

⁴⁶ For an important engagement with, and extension of Marion's description of givenness and saturated phenomena, see Gschwandtner's recent *Degrees of Givenness*, in which the argument is made that givenness is not univocal, and for these reasons, various "givennesses" need to be explicated. Christina Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

It makes little sense, then, to attempt to determine whether or not God *exists* prior to conceiving of the manifold ways in which God could be given to thought, especially since God is not given in any direct or shining way (those who claim to “see” or “hear” God directly notwithstanding). One way of addressing the “how” of the thought of God could involve a synthesis between “inconspicuousness” and givenness. To ask, “how can God be given?” is distinct from asking, “can God be given?” The former, which is here of more interest, can be stated otherwise: “what is the how character, that is the characteristics of presentation, of such givenness of God, should that givenness occur?” The latter question (can God be given?) is still metaphysical, namely in its ascribing the name “God” first and foremost according to the *causa prima*, its seeking of a “yes” or a “no” in answer to that question, and in its bringing that thought to an ultimate conclusion that is not instantiated by a dynamic givenness. An inconspicuous givenness, or put otherwise, an approach to the givenness of that which is inconspicuous, is marked in general by its phenomena renouncing their *being given*. The gift given follows its way of being given, separating from the static being of presence, *renouncing* being, and thus not falling prey to a metaphysics of presence.⁴⁷ In order to think beyond the metaphysical confines of God as unknowable or ultimately “hidden,” it can be helpful to draw a distinction between inconspicuous phenomena and inconspicuous givenness in the consideration of “seeing” God as inconspicuous.

Inconspicuous Phenomena

Inconspicuous phenomena act as “inconspicuous” in so far as they do not accord to the rules of appearance, yet simultaneously are not immediately jettisoned from experience as “invisible.” As inconspicuous, they slide back and forth between the visible and the invisible, oscillating at the core of one’s sense of *relation* with “truth” as both concealedness (*lethe*) and uncovering (*a-lethia*). One can thus experience such phenomena, but in a way that they elude one’s totalizing grasp. Inconspicuousness can be exemplified in the case of “peripheral” seeing, and how we indeed “can perceive things in peripheral vision – like Mona Lisa’s smile – that we miss in central vision...[and] this happens because our peripheral cone vision, which cannot perceive details well, employs a holistic analysis that enables us to see...peripheral vision may often be better than foveal vision for interpreting emotion in a face.”⁴⁸ Phenomena that can only be grasped peripherally require, as Kandel notes, a “holistic” or broadening vision that provides an encounter with their particular presencing. The same goes for inconspicuous phenomena, which are “in the peripheries” of conscious experience. There are three particular ways it is possible to conceive these phenomena. First, such phenomena can be given to experience through various inconspicuous forms, such as hiding, (e.g. hiding a treasure), surrogating

⁴⁷ This is one reason why Marion holds that “the gift gives itself precisely to the strict degree to which it renounces to be, excepted from presence, undone from itself by undoing the subsistence in it.” Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 127.

⁴⁸ Eric Kandel, *The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain: from Vienna 1900 to the Present* (New York: Random House, 2012), 246.

(announcing itself via another phenomena), or screening (e.g. a translucent curtain through which light is refracted). They can be experienced as they immanently “come into presence,” with their data corresponding to the type of hiddenness they, at that point, enact or incite. My back pain could be experienced as inconspicuous in either the form of a passive, latent concealment (I do not notice it by merit of being distracted by a simultaneous knee pain) or in the form of an active camouflaging (I took pain medication that now covers it up). A second way of understanding such phenomena can be exemplified in the case of Heidegger’s *Krankheitserscheinungen*, which are present at hand only through and by *proxy* – as immanent phenomena that serve to indicate the presence of that to which is pointed. Yet there is still a sense in which such phenomena transgress what is typically called “immanent” experience. Like dark matter, these phenomena intrude into otherwise closed spaces of visibility and thereby employ the space surrounding them to communicate for them, usually without their being perceptible to the faculties. They are given by offering accord between the visible and inconspicuous, giving both something graspable and detectable through conception and, simultaneously, something perhaps accessible yet inconceivable. The immanently detectable data, however, of a thing given, are most often and unfortunately trumped by the data that one, in the first place, originally *conceived*. Thirdly, inconspicuous phenomena can be understood according to everyday experience, whereby conceivable intelligibility is preferred over that which is not conceivable. Yet this is strangely inconsistent with what we know about how we experience the data of phenomena. For example, the *hyle* or sense data of a horse (hair, teeth, brown, soft) are fully present to my senses yet they slide into obscurity in favor of my true *idea* of the horse and what I take it that a horse *does*. Thinking “horse” raises the negative association I attribute to horses due to my falling off a horse as a young child. Sense data slip into darkness, yet without too much effort, can be brought to bear in the experience and subsequently deformed. The data of a thing that are most present of the horse are that which become the most *inconspicuously given to me*. In order for a horse to be a horse and not be a blob of hair, blood, and muscle, these sense perceptions of the horse must render themselves inconspicuous in favor of the horse itself. The more a thing enters phenomenal appearance (or in the case of God, the more God reaches the level of idolization) or inapparence, the less it becomes possible to act dynamically with it. And the less it can be interacted with dynamically, the more it attains stativity. The more it attains stativity, the more likely it is that the phenomenon will be overlooked, ultimately prohibiting one from ever having any intuition as to what *is* inconspicuous.⁴⁹ In the case of phenomena that arrive inconspicuously, one can

⁴⁹ Par excellence, the gift works “...as a pure loss, which in order to give itself, it [the gift] must in effect disappear, it thus appears at the price of pure disappearance in it of all subsistence.” Neither subsisting nor being-stable, and in excessively giving in such a way that it is not the point of focus or attention, the gift gives *as* a loss. This is what Marion calls a “gift beyond gift,” which is a strange gift because it gives nothing, and “since this strange gift gives nothing (nothing real, not a thing), it frees itself in order to give the condition of the given...” This gift, the first gift, gives the very condition of the gift. Again, these are not conditions that are subject to causality but those provided by givenness, which in effect, “gives” its own ratio. This is another reason as to why attempting to first conceive the existence of God before the possibility of God’s

experience the profusion of what is simultaneously both here and not here through a kind of phenomenological seeing that is not unlike the “peripheral” vision.

Inconspicuous phenomena can present themselves in the shifting of thought from categorial to the sensical intuition, can give themselves liminally through a proxy, and can be engaged through sifting out the type of hiddenness in which their data are/can be given. In the case of God being taken “as inconspicuous” (God’s status as a phenomena notwithstanding), it generally would involve twin, simultaneous intuitions: God’s coming into appearance, and God’s withdrawal from that very appearance in which God comes. More particularly, God could be inconspicuous as one looks over the features of how God could very well be introduced, in a new way, to thought. “God” is overlooked in preference for data that one has previously been given in reference to God. One prefers the doctrines or pre-understood means of how one takes God to always already be given instead of any potentially new ways and means of God’s being given. Second, God as inconspicuous could be animating actively not-so inconspicuous phenomena to “indicate” or speak *in lieu* of God. The uncanny and mysterious means of God would be rendered experienceable in and through ordinary, even seemingly banal phenomena, such as rocks, trees, or even bushes. Yet in such cases, God would only appear as non-appearing. God would be given as resistant to the very means and modes of appearing itself, which in this case would lead one all the more to take interest in deformatizing God. Thirdly, God as inconspicuous could be given to thought through one’s sifting through the various forms of inconspicuousness, hiddenness, or latency. By attuning oneself to one’s active thoughts of God that are often hidden or overlooked, one might first determine the nature of the present experience with inconspicuousness out of which God might be acting. There may be cases, for example, in which the thought of God is a constant source of troubling and is therefore actively covered over or anesthetized. In which case, this overlooking would need to be actively engaged in such a way as to not “overcome” it, yet to experience it more deeply by scandalizing or “springing the trap” (*skandalon*, σκανδαλον) of the thought of God, which in this case is “covered over” through anesthesia. Or, there could be thoughts of God that are incongruously simple, ordinary, or insignificant, which are of course modes to which inconspicuousness deeply relates. An engagement with God as inconspicuous in this sense would entail a closer attention to the simplicity of simpleness, to the marginality of the marginal in such a way that wonder is incited precisely at such phenomenal overlooking. The dull and marginal most often retain the most hidden potential (*dunemei*, the root of “dynamite”) for the mysterious, curious, and wondrous.

In all these potential cases, it seems, the experiences of an inconspicuous God could be actively engaged in the obscure yet present experience with/at the radical juncture or shared boundary between *both* immanence and transcendence. Such an appearance is preconditioned upon inconspicuousness or not shining

givenness may fall short. Jean-Luc Marion, “Sketch of a Phenomenological Concept of Gift,” in *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought*, ed. Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 127-128.

(*Unscheinbar*).⁵⁰ The type of inconspicuous “appearance” allows for general, more holistic features of God to “shine” through, as aspects of the mysterious or uncanny can be seen and experienced in everyday phenomena. This results in a kind of epiphany (which comes from *phainesthai*, what shines or appears) or coming into appearance of that which reflects an out of the ordinary relationship *with* the ordinary. It is in the somatically seen or felt that experiences in scenes, sounds, visions of the Holy arrive on the limited horizon of human experience (Steinbock). God can be given “in the hyle” so to speak, of sense perceptions, sounds, objects, or callings. Yet this stretches onto another dimension of thinking, one whose depths cannot be probed, but rather, incomprehensively given in an experience that is not in the blind spots of thought, but on the edge of them. Direct grasping cannot earn or merit an experience with God, yet it may be possible, on the fuzzy edges of an indiscriminate line between that which shines and that which does not provide sufficient reflection for conclusive conceptions (*Un-schein-bar*) that intuition can engage in that which intention cannot grasp. Something of God has been putatively given, which would signal to God’s own givenness, a kind of “inconspicuous givenness.”

Inconspicuous givenness

Inconspicuous givenness has a very subtle, yet consequential difference from their corresponding phenomena. It may not necessarily be the case that phenomena *are characterized* by being inconspicuous, but perhaps that inconspicuousness can mark also a way in which things are given. Such a givenness gives so that inconspicuousness itself is brought to bear upon an experience. There is a certain on-the-verge-ness that is incited concerning the aforementioned border between the seen/unseen. There is a heightened awareness that something is being overlooked, thus providing a sense of strangeness or uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*). There is a sense of something having passed through one’s peripheries in a way that eludes both confirmation and negation. Inconspicuous givenness gives the sense of something being neither here nor there as it is at the radical place of presencing, which dynamically transitions things from somewhere to elsewhere. Yet, the givenness of inconspicuousness is effective despite any potential illusions, and operates by giving one little control over its unique oscillation between presence and absence. As effective, this kind of givenness alters the entire environment in which things are to appear, as well as the way in which one relates with the non-visible. Such givenness does not come with any automatic, self understood (*selbstverständlich*) justification of how it gives, for as inconspicuous its mode of apprehension is likewise *unscheinbar*. Yet simultaneously, this does not entail that the experience of such givenness is invisible (*Unsichtbar*), for it is capable of giving so that aspects of that which are given “shine with clarity” and ordinariness, while other

⁵⁰ The inconspicuous appears in the most ordinary of matters, “but,” says Heidegger, “it is the substantiality that, in its non-appearance, enables what appears to appear. In this sense, one can even say that it is more apparent than what itself appears.” Martin Heidegger, “The Zähringen Seminar” in *Four Seminars* (Bloomington: University Press, 2003), 67. In the Christian tradition, for Caputo, “the very appearance of Jesus is conditioned upon his nonappearance...inasmuch as we need the ‘condition’ in order to apprehend him as the Incarnation.” Caputo, *Religion Without Religion*, 176.

data are given “darkly.” One might only access these data peripherally, for such givenness must remain inconspicuous. This marks an oscillation between light and dark that further unfolds these pre-understood dialectics.

Despite any potential for giving the mysterious or uncanny, such “givens” remain to be experienced in marginality or ordinariness. To follow the metaphor of “the wallflower,” it is a very subtle change of indicator that marks such givenness, as just enough data is given to intuition so that the givenness itself remains less observed. Though we tend to see only what is in the light, this type of givenness does not shine, reflect, or present any warrant for appearance or seeming (*Schein*), yet it also cannot be so easily named “dark.” The non-shining of something directly corresponds to the margin one allows for its *inappareance*. The experience of the givenness of inconspicuousness in this sense comes in a marginality that may carry with it affects of boredom at its “ordinariness,” thus further contributing to the given phenomena being overlooked so easily. This givenness actively forfeits, with every gift of inapparent phenomena, *phenomenality as such*, yet by offering still data that can be intuited through a sliver of detectability or intelligibility.

As for how this might be applicable to thinking the givenness of God, were God to be given, the actual content of the appearance (i.e. the phenomenal data) would be likely of less consequence than the form of its transmission or givenness, at least for that particular moment at which one is attuned to such givenness, and not to the phenomena given.⁵¹ The content would be left in the shadows of a liminal appearing, on the threshold of appearance and withdrawal. While this inconspicuous givenness exclusively gives, along with its phenomenal content, an overlooking and darkness, alongside that sense of overlooking comes a corresponding idea of God as overlooked. That is, some thing or some data that corresponds to God is given, or appears in the peripheries of thought, which thereby provides occasion for thought of God. This givenness gives, along with this feeling of overlooking, *some mode of access appropriate to God's being given*. God is given in the darkness of thought in a way that surprises by coming out of the dark and returning into it. This would be not a “phenomenon” in the sense of shining or *coming into the light* (which would continue to uphold the dialectic between appearing/non-appearing) but would instead mark the always ever-coming-into-presence and the ever-retreating-into-absence. This presencing and absenting is referential to the “tautology” of which Heidegger once spoke that goes beyond that “genuine philosophical embarrassment” for phenomenology, the dialectic. Thus, if theological revelation is to be thought in a way that exceeds the dialectic between the absolute unknowability and absolute materiality/immanent nature of God, then a kind of “appearing in darkness” may prove useful. The activities of “truth,” the endeavors of *alethia* are to unconceal as they conceal in giving. One finds the *there is* or *it gives* of God as

⁵¹ The call (Chrétien), other (Levinas), or feeling (Schleiermacher) of God are all modes in which inconspicuous givenness could be expressed. In the case of “the call,” for example, the inapparent means through which God might be given would entail that the force of the call itself be committed to obscurity.

God comes *into* (and simultaneously departs from) truth itself.⁵² Like dark matter's limitless expansion into, yet inconspicuous relation with the universe, one does not attain more clarity of God through the knowledge or experience of God's truth, but precisely the opposite: one comes into the revelation of more obscurity. This revelation of obscurity is a kind of "knowledge" that entails a multiform of means of transgressing what we traditionally understand to be "visibility."

The obscure appearing of God, which is met through oblique glances, brings with it tools to access God somehow: a way of seeing that actively challenges any attempt to grasp God squarely and directly. The metaphors of seeing help shape the givenness of things: the phenomenological reduction's emphasis on the "depth structure" of matters entails attention to the minutia of what is visible or not yet apparent. "Horizontal" seeing gains its force from the eyes adjusting to the far-sighted and distant, spherical curvature as it rotates and brings further clarity. "Verticality" is a mode of seeing that entails an attunement to the invisible phenomena of religion, which are not seen by human eyes, as their phenomena stand out and beyond the "evidences" of clarity. Peripheral seeing, which can exemplify one aspect of inconspicuousness, could invert the *epoché's* brackets outward, stretching vision toward what dangles off the edge between the enlightened and the darkened. This is not an inversion of Husserlian intentionality, *per se*, in the way that Marion's "saturated phenomena" are accessible to intuition yet "irregardable" by intention. Instead, this kind of bracketing might provide a way of experiencing the givenness of that which cannot be directly addressed, intended, or "aimed at."⁵³ It is in this sense that God's being given must overcome God's having-been-given, which so easily become projections of God based upon prior associations and experiences.

Of Idols and Mysteries

⁵² See here Jean-Luc Nancy, *Disenclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). Throughout his most recent works, more generally Nancy has referred to God as "he who passes by" and is marked by the experience of "passing."

⁵³ It is in this sense (but perhaps only in this sense) that inconspicuous is similar to the invisible, as "invisible, from *viser*, designates that which cannot be aimed at, meant, or intended." Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 363, n 41. Marion's Saturated Phenomena are an inversion of Husserlian intentionality as they are not capable of being aimed at, yet saturated with intuition that overwhelms intention. The phenomena "will therefore be invisible according to quantity, unbearable according to quality, absolute according to relation, and incapable of being looked at [irregardable] according to modality." *Ibid.*, 113. This is taken up and altered by Manoussakis, for whom "inverted intentionality" entails the looking-in of God: "God appears while He remains invisible; He appears, nevertheless, in me and only in me, a fact that indicates that, insofar as I am the Other for God, an Other that He can look at and be in relationship with, God is in need of me as the horizon that possibilizes His (otherwise impossible) appearance. The human self, and therefore every human self, is understood as the sacred place of God's epiphany." John Panteleimon Manoussakis, *God After Metaphysics: A Theological Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 68.

In studying the different types of givenness that could correspond to God's being-given to experience, inconspicuousness could offer a number of paths to be thought. Even still these treatments are by no means conclusive, and stand to be tested further. Yet they ultimately seek to overcome the temptation to quarantine the thought of God to the invisible, transcendent, or entirely inaccessible. As Heidegger frequently bemoaned, these forms of "the unknown" are often mistaken for being metonyms and the univocal meaning of "mysteriousness." The obvious references to God in terms of "light" in the primary texts of many faith traditions, notwithstanding, there are also persistent references within such traditions to God's invisibility, a *Deus absconditus* which can be otherwise understood as a de facto *ultimatus obscurare*. It may be that even these attempts fail by merit of being more idolatrous on the account of still *conceiving*, albeit silently and without words, features of God, thus still not escaping the beating heart of sin, idolization (Romans 12:3). In which case, it would not be so much the *twilight* of the idols as light fades from refracting upon them but their inevitable and stillborn *dawn* in which a new metaphysics can arrive. In the place of a woodcarving would stand an empty vacuity filled by any fancy of thoughts. I certainly do not claim to have given a thorough answer to these problems yet if, as Bloechl put it so well, "in the end, idolatry is an event of comprehension, of holding something up in a light that can be crossed effortlessly by an imperial gaze" then the opposite of idolatry is not anti-idolatry, but an appropriated adoration within the most ordinary and marginal of life's aspects.⁵⁴ The category mistake often made is that openness is openness *as such*; that naming something "unknown" can cease or terminate the swarm of thought. As Levinas once demanded, irrespective of predispositions, one "... cannot escape God."⁵⁵ Whether in the form of an Anselmian "that than which nothing greater can be conceived," a Cartesian "idea of God [that] is given" or a "Marionian" synthesis between the two, that "as irreducible, the idea of God is given as that which one cannot have," the thought of God will be given, and may even be inescapable despite going beyond the confines of what consciousness seeks to grasp.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ See Bloechl, whose position on "darkness" is a bit more extreme than my own in terms of its intelligibility: "If we associate that light with intelligibility, then 'darkness' must signify a condition in which we are no longer in the presence of intelligible things. As one moves from experience by light to experience in darkness, the world and everything in it cease to appear intelligible..." Further, "(W)hat distinguishes darkness from anything given in the light is the fact that it gives itself without possibility of being ordered, and we know this: the deeper we enter true darkness, the more inclined we are to surrender any attempt to search for order. This surrender of all comprehension leaves us exposed in a way that can never be the case during the daytime, when experience always navigates ordered relation and any gaps that might interrupt them." Jeffrey Bloechl, "The Twilight of the Idols and the Night of the Senses" in *The Experience of God*, eds. Kevin Hart and Barbara Wall (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 160-161. As Steinbock notes, "experience is not limited to objects of presentation." Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 223.

⁵⁵ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Autrement qu'être* (La Haye, 1974), 165. (*Otherwise Than Being*, Pittsburgh, Pa: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

⁵⁶ "How does the idea appear to us? Here again, as a given, or according to the most minimalistic acceptance, as a pure given: 'Si detur Dei idea' (*ut manifestum est illam dari...*). That is, if the idea of God is given (as it is manifest that it is given...) it appears as a "pure" given. The idol shows what it shows, and does not hold anything to be

The two approaches to inconspicuousness that have been described here – inconspicuous phenomena and inconspicuous givenness – seek ways to further reduce the thought of God in a way that goes beyond the seemingly necessary and inevitable confines of idolization. To actively think the givenness of God is to think God beyond any dialectic between light and dark, immanence and transcendence, visibility and invisibility. It will be only in the dismantling of these dialectics that it is possible to think God beyond metaphysics and its ontotheological constitution. To think God beyond such a metaphysics must entail a turn away from understanding God according to a “mysteriousness” that is univocal with the “unknown.” If God is “given,” God would indeed give Godself as escaping any direct and conscious grasp (*Be-greifen*), yet would do so in a way that some “thing,” some inconspicuous yet still traceable data remain to be experienced. It then would be a matter of discerning how such data actively and darkly obscure themselves. This provides one approach to thinking the dark side of God.

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Alvis, Jason W. “The Dark Side of God: A Case for Inconspicuous Givenness,” in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 15. no. 1 (Fall 2015): 51-71.

revealed: “...the title ‘God’ does not grant access to this ‘God,’ but in that very instant, offers a perfect view of the one who produced or recited the word. In other words, it all comes back to the question of the idol. The idol, and this once again bears repeating, is not an illusion or deception, but simply shows perfectly that which it shows, without a shadow, and without concealment or withdrawal. But it only reveals that which it is aimed at – namely, the one who does the aiming, not that at which he aims.” Jean Luc Marion, “The Irreducible” trans. Jason W. Alvis. Unpublished, forthcoming 2016.