

# Checking Janicaud's Arithmetic: How Phenomenology and Theology "Make Two"

*Christopher Yates*

## Preview

Yates reviews Janicaud's critique in its first iteration, then observes what the emphases of its later form indicate about the kind of phenomenology he propounds. The paper highlights the contours of Janicaud's rigorous minimalism, his qualified atheism, and the peculiar manner in which his self-described pursuit of phenomenological possibilities is propelled by his rejection of theological possibilities. The author questions the selective appropriation of Husserl in Janicaud's adherence to phenomenality and neutrality by underlining ambiguities within Husserl's early focus on intuition and the now famous bracketing of transcendence and/or God set forth in *Ideas I*.

## Checking Janicaud's Arithmetic: How Phenomenology and Theology "Make Two"

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Phenomenology remains itself so long as it does not desert [the] appearing and its manifestations, and so long as its critique of this appearing does not lead it to deny its own essential finitude, but draws out the lines of its self-limitation, in particular before the practical imperative, whose motivations escape sensibility and without doubt every theory of pure appearing.

Dominique Janicaud

If the Husserlian project of phenomenology is traditionally Western in its alignment of knowing with *seeing*, its radical innovation comes through a reformulation of these terms according to their lived relationship. Knowing is broadened to what may be called a primordial awareness, and seeing accounts for this knowing by way of the evident givenness Husserl terms *Evidenz*. Taking this seeing as "*the primordial presentative consciousness of whatever kind*,"<sup>1</sup> the reality given as knowledge in lived experience can be articulated through phenomenological reflection. The working possibility thus amounts to a retrieval of the immediacy of experience, an articulation of how, before all theoretical assumptions and determinations, human consciousness is intrinsically involved in the world it grasps.

For this project to work, however, one must set aside transcendent or explanatory principles in order to explore more immanent principles given as

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<sup>1</sup> See Erazim Kohak, *Idea and Experience: Edmund Husserl's Project of Phenomenology in Ideas I* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), xi.

*evidence*. One wager of phenomenology, then, is that a rigorous return to the principles intrinsic to experience will uncover the necessary structures of human consciousness according to which what we call knowledge is constituted. This entails a careful, restrained exhibition of entities, ideas, and principles as they give themselves to intelligibility through constitution.<sup>2</sup> Exercising such restraint will, however, go against ingrained habits of seeing according to transcendent lenses. This is one reason why phenomenological description and reflection follow an “endless,” repetitive path.<sup>3</sup>

Recent attempts to radicalize and rethink the very possibilities of phenomenology have brought the tensions surrounding this wager to the fore. Has the path of methodological potential taken a troubling ‘theological’ detour? The phenomenological attitude, for some, appears to be intertwined with a specifically ‘religious’ orientation of the natural ego, an orientation which presumes a certain productive affinity between transcendent revelation and phenomenology’s transcendental appearance. Here the course of the phenomenological reduction might lead not simply to the elucidation of finite givens or the factual constitution of entities, but perhaps even to pure or transcendent findings. Can phenomenology attain the fundamental, the originary, the revelation of a content traditionally designated as religious?

Dominique Janicaud says no. His *The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology* (1990/1991) sounded a resounding critique of the “theological hijacking” of Husserlian phenomenology in the hands of French phenomenologists of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> His later recapitulation, *Phenomenology Wide Open: After the French Debate* (1998/2005), likewise interrogates the fissuring of the discipline’s immanent principle by invasions of

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<sup>2</sup> By “constitution” I mean, as Dan Zahavi interprets it, the “process that permits that which is constituted to appear, unfold, articulate, and show itself as what it is.” See Dan Zahavi, *Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 72f.

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Husserl, “Transcendental Phenomenology and the Way through the Science of Phenomenological Psychology,” trans. Donn Welton in *The Essential Husserl* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 336. Those who have sought to follow this path might add that its markings are not altogether definitive. Husserlian phenomenology passes from early analyses of logic and intentionality to a transcendental analysis of reduction and constitution, an awkward and arguable relationship to idealism, and onward to later analyses of intersubjectivity and the lifeworld.

<sup>4</sup> Dominique Janicaud, *The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology* (1990/1991) in Dominique Janicaud, Jean-Francoise Courtine, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, and Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate*, Janicaud’s text is translated by Bernard G. Prusak; other texts are translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky and Thomas A. Carlson and edited by Jean-Francois Courtine (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

transcendence and the infinite.<sup>5</sup> Thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and Michel Henry have, says Janicaud, advanced “the paradoxical revelation of Transcendence in a source at the heart of phenomenality.”<sup>6</sup> Openings to the Other [*Autre*], pure givenness [*donation*], and “archi-revelation” thwart the imperative focus limited to “appearing and its manifestations.”<sup>7</sup> A “methodological clarification” and “Manichaean censure” is in order.<sup>8</sup>

In what follows I review Janicaud’s critique in its first iteration, then observe what the emphases of its later form indicate about the kind of phenomenology he propounds. I highlight the contours of his rigorous “minimalism,” his qualified “atheism,” and the peculiar manner in which his self-described pursuit of phenomenological “possibilities” is propelled by his rejection of theological possibilities. I question the selective appropriation of Husserl in Janicaud’s adherence to phenomenality and neutrality by underlining ambiguities within Husserl’s early focus on intuition and the now famous bracketing of “transcendence” and/or “God” set forth in *Ideas I*. By comparison, I indicate certain problems with Marion’s use of these ambiguities. My aim is to identify what the key terms of this debate have been, and raise the questions according to which continued discussion might occur.

### **The *Telos* and *Praxis* of Phenomenological Neutrality**

Shaped around five thundering sections, Janicaud’s initial critique calls for a retrieval of fundamental Husserlian inspiration and method. The inspiration is, as indicated, in part an abandonment of the metaphysical mode of thinking (*metaphysica specialis*)<sup>9</sup> in favour of a descriptive analytic of the elementary structures of existence,<sup>10</sup> and in part the driving discovery of the principle of the transcendental a priori. Such moves set aside classical metaphysical problems and ground the essence of the sciences according to the project “of true, universal, and

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<sup>5</sup> D. Janicaud, *Phenomenology “Wide Open”: After the French Debate*, trans. Charles N. Cabral (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). This text first appeared in French as *La phénoménologie écartée* (Paris: éditions de l’éclat, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Janicaud, *Theological Turn*, 23.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 97.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

disinterested knowledge.” The inspiration is thus a “scientificity” amounting to “the condition of possibility for constituting the new intersection between philosophy and science.” Methodologically, Janicaud’s Husserl took his cue from the “open field” of “human experience” by means of two “instruments:” phenomenological reduction and description.<sup>11</sup> The link between inspiration and method would then be the “phenomenal immanence” in which the “essence of intentionality” is to be sought, provided this directive is safeguarded by one’s “constancy to the rational ideal.”<sup>12</sup>

The centerpiece of this faithfulness to phenomenal immanence is Husserl’s decision in § 58 of *Ideas I* to put any notions of God’s transcendence “out of circuit”:

Upon this ‘absolute’ and ‘transcendent,’ we naturally extend the phenomenological reduction. It [the transcendence of God] must remain excluded from the new field of study we have to create, insofar as this field must be a field of pure consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

For Janicaud, this means that one must not draw from any “religious consciousness” if neutrality is to be preserved. The claims of theology must remain in “hermeneutic indetermination”<sup>14</sup> for the phenomenologist. Something like a Jeffersonian “wall of separation” between church and state is needed. Separated by an “insurmountable” difference, phenomenology and theology “make two.”<sup>15</sup> And though he cautions that his critique is *not* directed at “the theological as such,”<sup>16</sup> it is precisely the theological motivation and content of his countrymen’s works which, he believes, contaminates the above exigencies.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 94–95.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 35, 91.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 68, 99.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>17</sup> “What, then, in the final analysis, do we object to?” asks Janicaud on the heels of his telling discussion of Henry. “Precisely the use of the flag and the cloak of the phenomenological method to invert it or compromise its effective insights—to transform precise, limited, clarifying procedures into incantory preludes to the absolute autoreference of life and its pathetic sacredness.” Ibid., 86. One could substitute Levinasian “Otherness” and Marionian “saturation” for “absolute

Janicaud orients his more narrow treatment through two important specifications. First, phenomenology must not be reduced to the *eidetic*. The descriptive point of view so central to phenomenological inquiry does not aim at an “essential apparition” or isolated *eidōs*; it simply reveals “the correlation between the world and intentional transcendence.” Second, and related, phenomenology is not *ontology*. “For Husserl,” says Janicaud, “the suspension of the natural attitude implies leaving behind all ontological realism.” Contra Sartre and Levinas, ontology should be bracketed “whether on the level of the entity or on the level of the ‘there is’ of being.” Where things begin to go awry, he believes, is in the liberties taken with respect to intentionality. Even though Husserl did not hold intentionality to be “reducible to the adequation of thought and object”<sup>18</sup> (Janicaud and Marion will differ on this point), this does not open the door to a surplus of the infinite, producing itself as revelation in subjectivity. Any hint of inverse intentionality, saturated phenomena, and/or the eidetic awakening of Being, Otherness, or God is thus suspect. But how and why does this suspicion take shape in the thinkers Janicaud opposes?

### **Phenomenology minus Phenomenality makes Bias**

What is first striking about the above specifications is the manner in which, for Janicaud, Martin Heidegger is the origin of their betrayal. *Being and Time* might very well pass for “a hermeneutic deepening of phenomenology,” but the trajectory of Heidegger’s thought quickly jettisons any devotion to the “enterprise of constitution” or even the phenomena.<sup>19</sup> This, says Janicaud places us at the crux of the matter where everything is decided: at the point of rupture between a positive phenomenological project and the displacement of its “possibility” toward the originary.<sup>20</sup>

The path to the “originary” tempts later thinkers toward the “unapparent,” “Sacred” givenness, “call,” “promise,” “autoaffection,” “Transcendence,” and the general affinity for Meister Eckhart’s “Deity” (insofar as it furnishes the “mysterious unity between phenomenal manifestation and the very basis of

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autoreference.”

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 37–38.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 30–31.

life”<sup>21</sup>). Heidegger’s disavowal of any “phenomenological theology” in his 1927 “Phenomenology and Theology” lecture at Tübingen does present a reinforcement of the “corrective” value of the reduction and eidetic description<sup>22</sup> when it comes to dimensions of “givenness.” But, for Janicaud, the fact remains that Heidegger’s path to the most originary or (later) “sacred” cleared the way for a rendering of the other-worldly “invisible” and its related idealities as a dimension of phenomenological description and givenness.<sup>2 3</sup> Let us consider how Janicaud interprets this legacy.

The Levinasian imposition of the face of the Other [*Autre*], and the “force” of its summons to “altruism,” is perhaps most symptomatic of what concerns Janicaud. Here there is what we might call sins of omission and commission: Levinas omits the finitude of any real phenomenon and commits to this absence a moral weight. Janicaud’s challenge is almost too easy: this “traumatism of transcendence” is a “defection from phenomenality.” Levinas’s “infinity” is the “phenomenology of the symbolic order.” There is, however, no substantial “appearing” in the “first phenomenon” of the face, no sensible givenness. Janicaud thus balks that phenomenology is “doubly short-circuited: in its transcendental grasp of intentionality as in the neutrality of its descriptions.” The noetic–noematic correlation is overtaken by the hyperbolic “ek-stasis” of transcendence.<sup>24</sup>

Janicaud’s case in point is Levinas’s “phenomenology of Eros” in *Totality and Infinity*. Where Levinas enacts a move “from the ‘phenomenological’ description to the fundamental level of what it means to reveal,” his approaches to caress, modesty, and tenderness describe without using description in any heuristic role. His “pure experience,” again, is illustrated by “voluptuousity,” but the descriptive elements don’t rule the day—surely Levinas has already presupposed a “revelation” of absolute experience and opposed this to the disclosive nature of mere description.<sup>25</sup> The landscape of Eros, in point of fact, signifies “nothing” while claiming to evoke an illustration of “pure exteriority.”

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 100–101.

<sup>23</sup> By contrast, observes Janicaud, there is Merleau-Ponty’s “incontestably phenomenological” restriction that a properly phenomenological dimension of the “invisible” is the invisible “of this world” as opposed to “absolute” (ibid., 34).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 46–47.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 40–41.

That's precisely the point, a Levinasian might counter. Alas, cries Janicaud, "why keep playing along at phenomenology when the game is fixed?"<sup>26</sup> Levinas should be clearer about his "intentionality of transcendence" if he is in fact trying to overcome intentionality, or circumvent it by way of the sensual. Otherwise, he remains guilty of a certain "two-timing" [*double jeu*] (a somewhat unfortunate pun by Janicaud) whereby we witness "an Eros that gives pleasure in experience in just the same way that the transcendence of exteriority is supposed to arise in immanence."<sup>27</sup> Phenomenology has been "taken hostage by a theology that does not want to say its name."

If Levinas is a two-timer, Marion is a wily seamstress weaving phenomenology with an "immaculate thread." Never mind Marion's own defence that his sense of givenness "is obviously not a question" of "invoking revealed authority in order to broaden phenomenology's field."<sup>28</sup> His betrayal of 'neutrality' is more contemptible even than Levinas's.<sup>29</sup> Marion purports to enlarge the phenomenological fabric by threading the method of reduction to the horizon of the "pure." His schema of the three reductions (transcendental, existential, pure) obscures the subtleties of the Husserlian *epoché*<sup>30</sup> and the Heideggerian analytic of *Dasein* so that the "true sense of phenomenality"<sup>31</sup> cleverly comes to the fore in the recognition afforded by the third reduction. Janicaud accounts for these charges in two related ways.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>29</sup> Janicaud's discussion of Marion is, accordingly, decisive in a unique way for the whole of Janicaud's critique. If the path to *possibility* is paved with departures from rationalism, then Janicaud must demonstrate why Marion's exit ramp is doomed from the start. Observe Janicaud's one-upmanship of Marion on this point: "Whereas a gun slinging rationalism (today less and less prevalent) would enclose itself in a double refusal—of the opening [*ouverture*] of philosophy onto the 'unapparent,' and of the elevation to the question of God—our critical inquiry means, on the contrary, to make room for all phenomenological and philosophical possibilities. Thanks to a methodological discrimination, we mean to permit each project to retrieve its specificity and to respect the type of rigour specific to it." Ibid., 50–51. Marion's situation in phenomenology is comparable to Wassily Kandinsky's in modern art. Kandinsky "enriched abstract art" but got carried away in thinking himself to have actualized a theosophical "spiritual rebirth." Ibid., 51. This critique bears revisiting. It is Janicaud at his best against Marion at his most phenomenologically perspicuous; Janicaud's Husserl against Marion's.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 57f.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 61.

First, he assails Marion for contriving an “inverse proportionality between reduction and givenness” which leads to “the astonishing promotion of pure givenness.” By collapsing the Husserlian, Cartesian, and Kantian reductions into one undifferentiated transcendental reduction, Marion allows Husserl’s transcendental horizon to be “diminished to an egology of constituting objects” and implies that “the quest for integral and objective presence annuls the opening [*ouverture*] of the *epoche* onto the correlation with the world as such.”<sup>32</sup> Second, Marion’s “pseudoreduction” seeks credibility by associating itself with Heidegger’s “deepening of the Husserlian reduction” and proceeding from the analytic of Dasein toward the “pure call.”<sup>33</sup> Janicaud calls this a *coincidentia oppositorum* wherein “the more phenomenality becomes attenuated, to the point of annihilating itself, the more the absolute inflates and amplifies itself, to the point of apotheosis.” Marion’s “superabundance of grace” pivots on an experience that is “too pure to dare to pass itself off as phenomenological,” and Marion never owns up to the fact that “the only tie that binds” an experience of “the pure form of the call as such” is already religious.<sup>34</sup> Janicaud could allow a strict questioning of the phenomenological sense of the notion of “givenness,” but when *Reduction and Givenness* alludes to its own positioning of a “platform” for a “higher edifice”<sup>35</sup> the overtones belie an insidious methodological contamination. (Chrétien’s work commits comparable sins<sup>36</sup>). All of this is too much for Janicaud:

In Marion’s work, there is no respect for the phenomenological order; it is to be manipulated as an ever-elastic apparatus, even when it claims to be ‘strict.’ In the same way, his response concerning “givenness” [*donation*] makes use of the term’s very ambiguity to avoid truly responding to the question posed, which did not contest the recourse to the notion of givenness.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 56–58.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 61–62.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 65–66.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Ibid., 66–69.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 65.

If Levinas “sways” and Marion “veers,” Henry, his methodological soundness notwithstanding, will “surprise” phenomenology with an all too revelatory and religious manifestation of immanence as “pure autoreference.” Janicaud is more measured in this attack, but still fires a battery of charges. The leading concern is that Henry achieves “the most fantastic restoration of essentialism” through this “autoreferential foundation” that twists immanence away from phenomenological experience into “absolute autorevelation.” In the end phenomenology is the “crutch” for a return to the most originary, there becoming “the most idealist metaphysics.” Henry’s “pure phenomenology” is actually a spiritual movement in the vein of Eckhart’s mysticism. A Kierkegaardian tonality justifies “the abandonment of all exteriority” and the withdrawal into an “essential and pathetic unity of human and divine.”<sup>38</sup> At least Henry is acute enough to ask: “is not a phenomenology of the invisible a contradiction in terms?”<sup>39</sup>

Like Heidegger’s distinction between metaphysics and “thought,” Henry’s heterogeneity to “eidetic-logical” phenomenology desires something other to the Greek *logos* but runs into a “complete disjunction between form and content.” An archi-revelation is formally embedded in the autoreference of life, but the content is merely a verbal “Word of Life”—an object thinkable only by those intimately acquainted with John’s gospel. Henry could resolve this if he spoke of a conversion or leap toward “an experience more secret than that of any phenomenology” but he resorts only to the lure of life’s “infrangible positivity” which does not escape its aporetic character.<sup>40</sup> Henry confuses a critique of *logos* with a Husserlian “eidetization”<sup>41</sup> so as to counter these with a phenomenology of life that would be guided by a material devotion to pure phenomenality. Worse still, Henry never adequately demonstrates this priority for phenomenology. He speaks well of the priority of methodology, but doesn’t follow his own precautions.

What unifies Janicaud’s above treatments of these thinkers is that phenomenality is overburdened by a revelation exceeding the bounds of basic givenness and constitution. Even if remnants of Husserlian inspiration drive these upheavals, methodological rigour is heedlessly compromised. Does this imply

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 80–81.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 82.

phenomenological possibilities had reached their terminus in Husserl? Is Janicaud simply preaching the doctrines of a conservative Husserlian phenomenology, if there is such a thing? Could it be that the “theological turn,” contestable as it is, signals a deeper ambiguity within phenomenological philosophy since Husserl, a confusion Janicaud hopes to transform into a renewal of possibilities for the phenomenological project?

### Contours of a Minimalist Atheistic Reorientation

In the closing section to his *The Theological Turn* Janicaud pays tribute to the tension and promise inhabiting the “infinite task reactivated by phenomenology’s methodological institution.”<sup>42</sup> (One wonders if his adjective is telling—the very phenomenology he seeks to shelter from infinite givens is itself compelled by an infinite vocation). This, no doubt, is a way of checking coming criticism: infinite methodological rigour heeds neither the positivity of the sciences nor a mathematical formalism.<sup>43</sup> Janicaud does not want a rationalist phenomenology nor, *pace* Husserl and Bergson, a prescriptive authority over other disciplines, but an ongoing self-limitation. But the same rules apply: within such limitation the phenomenologist must repent of the “methodological slacking off”<sup>44</sup> perpetuated by the theological turn. The goal, following Husserl, is to keep phenomenology within a “rational teleology.”<sup>45</sup>

If then the “spiritualist camp” has paid an unwelcome metaphysical visit to the phenomenological estate and compromised the very grammar of “meaning,”<sup>46</sup> is a self-correction possible? Janicaud proposes that its

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>43</sup> This “double distancing” owes its origin to the Husserlian view that phenomenology “opens its way *between* the objectivism of the sciences and the most speculative metaphysics.” Ibid., 91.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Here then is the predicament: “This guarded relation with scientificity and this constancy to the rational ideal both kept Husserl from any regression to the *metaphysica specialis* of the tradition and equally safeguarded his capacity to pose the problem of the sense of the lifeworld. It is no longer the same, though, when the originary and the fundamental serve as a cover for a speculative or theological restoration (reducing phenomenology nearly to the role of a manuscript illustrator).” Ibid., 91–92. See also D. Janicaud, *La puissance du rationnel* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1985); idem, *Powers of the Rational: Science, Technology, and the Future of Thought*, trans. Peg Birmingham and Elizabeth Birmingham (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 92–93.

accomplishment hinges on a better definition of the intersection between philosophy and science. This would entail a scientific turn, a renewed bracketing of all things pertaining to “the nature of the soul, of the world, and of God,” and an adherence to “neutrality in search of truth.”<sup>47</sup> And yes, this self-limitation does, and must, mean a retrieval of Husserl’s own ambiguous passage “between the transcendental and the ideal.”<sup>48</sup>

It is at this point that Janicaud’s critique becomes self-consciously positive—ambiguities equal openings for his topography of phenomenological possibility. He foresees productive “methodological grafts and fertilizations” between, for example, the question of intentionality and new cognitive models. Even theology holds promise in such border-crossings, specifically the aesthetic forays of Henry’s *Voir l’invisible* and Marion’s “icon.” What will matter is a rigorous attention to “both the appearing as such and what it offers.” Janicaud points to Paul Ricoeur’s exemplary dictum that the birth of phenomenology is assured when we “treat the manner of the appearing of things as an autonomous problem.”<sup>49</sup>

But there is a concluding question Janicaud leaves unresolved in his initial text: If phenomenology and theology “make two,” does this make atheists of phenomenologists? To press the point, what if pretensions to rigorous neutrality were themselves already ideological, or even religious in the negative sense? Does the mere designation of a “religious” manifestation testify to a theological intrusion, or are some appearances, for better or worse, overwhelmingly religious in character and content? Can a phenomenologist behold the face of the poor or orphan without being a Jew? It might help the case if Marion, Levinas, and Henry were at least agnostics. But Janicaud, of course, knows they are not, which means his reading of their texts can all the more easily seize upon their lack of self-limitation. Does this make his critiques *ad hominem*? His case for “hermeneutic indetermination” is compelling, but seems to assume, rather triumphantly, the sanctity of a neutral horizon that precedes the religious, transcendent, or ideological. To render a stated *telos* a practicable ‘ground’ is to forget the inescapably hermeneutical and finite situation of even the most rigorous phenomenology. Isn’t ‘neutrality’ a goal one adheres to in a kind of faith? From whence do the brackets derive the assurance of neutral integrity? Having accounted for the broad and narrow concerns driving the critique of “The

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 98; cf. 34.

Theological Turn,” and having registered the above questions with respect to Janicaud’s way of approaching phenomenological possibilities by way of limitations, we now turn to his more recent work in order to understand and weigh his larger aim.

Janicaud’s sequel, *Phenomenology Wide Open*,’ picks up at the point where the first work left off: possibilities. By his account, the point of the first work was not a polemic as such, but a provocation for the kind of debate that would revive phenomenological research and rescue it from methodological short-sightedness. The good news is that “a renewed effort for the translation and reflection upon the complexity of Husserlian thought”<sup>50</sup> has, he believes, indeed awoken.<sup>51</sup> This means productive questions may now be posed concerning the principle of givenness and the horizons of phenomenality, the articulation between phenomenology and hermeneutics, and the prospects for Janicaud’s own “minimalist,” though still pluralist, rebirth of methodological rigour.<sup>52</sup> But not all the news is good. Some of it is confusing. Janicaud claims, for example, that the attribution “theological” was used ironically, *cum grano salis*. Never did he intend to imply his targets were theologians or even direct professors of a theology.<sup>53</sup> He could not have called it a “metaphysical turn,” he explains, because his opponents have rather nuanced positions with respect to their own metaphysical hesitations.<sup>54</sup> And yet, was not the implication of a “special metaphysics” nevertheless decisive for Janicaud? What is at first all the more confusing, however, is that Janicaud claims to “turn” his own focus. Rooting out the “theological” heresies is no longer the point. Weighing the prospects for a “radically atheistic” phenomenology is.<sup>55</sup>

This, nonetheless, is no real surprise. Was not atheism, perhaps by the names “neutrality” and “scientificity” already the arbiter of methodological

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<sup>50</sup> Janicaud, *Phenomenology “Wide Open,”* 10.

<sup>51</sup> As if to speak on behalf of the phenomenological discipline itself in terms of this exercise and controversy, assessing his own “reception” or lack thereof, Janicaud oddly adopts third-person references to himself in the early chapters. Cf. *Ibid.*, 3–7, 17.

<sup>52</sup> He reflects: “If phenomenology, as a unified and imperial discipline, gets split wide open, phenomenology is reborn as an interrogation of its own projects, its possibilities, and its limits.” *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>53</sup> After all, “the literal sense would have taken all the spice out of the affair, which consisted precisely in that the surreptitious turn toward the Other, the arch-original, the pure givenness, etc., occurred at the very heart of the most confirmed phenomenological pretensions.” *Ibid.*, 2–3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

rigour? But the “chance” for atheism, as he now identifies it, is supposed to be more strategic than declarative. A reconsideration of this atheism will reinstall phenomenology “within strict limits,” and this will allow the present possibilities for phenomenology to come to the fore.<sup>56</sup> This is a cagey move. But the rejoinder is all too easy: if “possibilities” are the goal, have not Marion, et al., by Janicaud’s own analysis, used theological sensibilities to entertain, catalyse, or indeed realize phenomenological possibilities in their utmost? Janicaud’s answer would be clear enough judging by the economy of this later work (which dwells considerably on Heidegger and Marion). The chance for atheism is a possibilizing strategy for phenomenology by virtue of the fact that it trumps the chances for Marion’s persistent theistic phenomenology (even in the more carefully conceived and properly phenomenological *Being Given*). The second work thus concludes on the same matter as the first—the “attitude of neutrality” eliminates “doxic prejudices” such as the “description of a certain type of phenomena” which remains the Trojan horse for “an all-too-French and overly ideological situation.”<sup>57</sup>

What then of Janicaud’s own project? What does this reveal about his Husserl, his manner of thinking phenomenological possibilities? Janicaud’s “minimalism” purports to oppose the chief temptation of pinning all phenomenological studies on “transcendental subjectivity,” a vigilance indicative of what looks to be a new companionship with immanence. His minimalism, that is, returns him to the side of immanence so as to shelter it (in its neutrality, it’s safe to assume) from the transcendence that has overburdened it “in its various guises and at its various levels.” The minimalism of phenomenological immanence becomes the horizon from which he can, once again though under a new name, reject the “slipping away” of the immanent to “Transcendence,”

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 67–68; The problematic French-ness Janicaud appears to have in mind owes its lineage again to the later Heidegger’s “phenomenology of the inapparent,” a loss of the correlation between transcendental subjectivity and essences so that the “as such” of phenomenality might appear. But the relationship to the Heideggerian problem is now more complex. Janicaud deftly grants Heidegger the merits of a distinct minimalism in view of his intended overcoming of metaphysics and departure from the Husserlian goal of scientific apodicticity. He appears to have decided that Heidegger’s ambition remained one of expanding the “possible” of Husserlian phenomenology, a feat Janicaud is content to borrow from in terms of reorienting phenomenology away from “the methodological investigation of invariants” and the “project of universal constitution.” Ibid., 72–76. Janicaud thus finds a way to make peace with Heidegger (provided minimalism is the concern) even while the unfolding of French religious phenomenology under the illumination of Heideggerian heuristics compels Janicaud to dim the lights, so to speak.

meaning to “Meaning,” and revelation to “Revelation.” This time he is even willing to enlist Deleuze and Guattari as allies in the cause.<sup>58</sup>

The inspiration for Janicaud’s renewed phenomenological orthodoxy is, however, not Husserl alone, but Husserl ‘plus’ Mikel Dufrenne. Here we return to the question of atheism. Dufrenne’s “Pour une philosophie non théologique” (1973) is proto-Janicaudian in its non-theological intractability. Before the theological turn became thematized and challenged by Janicaud, Dufrenne had already fired warning shots in the direction of Heidegger, Derrida, and Blanchot for their apophaticism and openness to the “sacred.”<sup>59</sup> Janicaud concedes that he was not aware of this text at the time of *The Theological Turn*<sup>60</sup> (even though he did mention Dufrenne on p.17). Fortunately, for Janicaud, Dufrenne’s position buttresses the initial censure but helps orient it towards something more positive.

The short version of this relationship runs as follows: With Dufrenne, Janicaud may doubt the ability of theologically-themed philosophies to “think presence in its real immanence.” The attribute “non-theological” is Dufrenne’s way of saying that a “philosophy of the appearing does not need to go beyond the horizon of phenomenal immanence; it merely states the absence of God in our sensible experience.”<sup>61</sup> The same holds for Janicaud’s phenomenology. But Janicaud knows he must be careful not to let this “non-theological” adherence slip into a “dogmatic” or “radical” atheism which could be assailed as “a pretext . . . toward introducing an actual atheism more easily.” A phenomenological reduction, to be sure, is going to be “more radical still than a gnoseological reduction.”<sup>62</sup> Janicaud wagers that we will take him as honourable in this respect, and agree nevertheless that Dufrenne’s atheism opens doors for a more nuanced and judicious ‘neutrality.’ In his specifically phenomenological (more than ‘philosophical’) focus, Janicaud seems to say we must be agnostic about atheistic beliefs.<sup>63</sup> Total neutrality will be atheistic with respect to intrusive theisms, and indecisive with respect to defiant atheisms. In so doing, it will further substantiate the possibility for a non-theological phenomenology, a minimalism (as opposed

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 13; Dufrenne’s unique position was one of carrying phenomenology beyond Husserl to the aesthetic or poetic domain of “presence,” yet making explicit the need for a philosophical decision to exclude “metaphysical or theological Transcendence.” Ibid., 14.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 15–16.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>63</sup> He states: “we attest to the abandonment of all former beliefs or axiological opinions susceptible of clouding our phenomenological vision.” Ibid., 19.

to Marion's "maximalism"<sup>64</sup>) that is atheistic by necessity and not dogma. These are delicate distinctions to maintain in practice. In this way they are not unlike Marion's converse qualifications about the 'religious.'

Running parallel to this minimalism is, for Janicaud, a restrained relation to hermeneutics, and the danger of thinking phenomenology as 'first philosophy.' Here the relationship to Husserlian approaches grows complicated. If phenomenology gets too ambitious in its possibilities (by annexing hermeneutics, for example) it runs the risk of less and less methodological specificity and an increasingly unclear relation to metaphysics.<sup>65</sup> Rather than having to idealize its own coherence, phenomenology should rest content with a plurality of approaches (excepting the theological, of course) organized around the minimalist modesty of "a return to the origins of wonder before the appearing." This would be what Janicaud dubs "heuristic phenomenology,"<sup>66</sup> a "working hypothesis" style of attending to the methodological descriptions that proliferate possibilities in much the same way as Husserl's imaginative variations.<sup>67</sup> Phenomenology is a practice, an inspiration, an "inexhaustible plurality" that is "living ... in its singular styles."<sup>68</sup> But all the while its possibility comes only in proportion to its restraint. And a qualified atheism, the addition sign in Janicaud's arithmetic, is (he believes) the best recipe for this restraint.

### Janicaud's Husserl and Beyond: Sources for Continued Debate

We have begun to see that, while following Husserl's path in his own nuanced way, Janicaud's critique of the theological turn is motivated by a disdain for the manner in which this turn rivals his own orientation for radicalizing phenomenological possibilities. More than a "censure," this amounts to a distinctively Janicaudian bracketing of his counterparts. Established Husserlians may very well agree with the spirit of his critique. But would they endorse his insistent privileging of phenomenality, his allergies to the eidetic, and his resulting minimalism, atheism, or immanence? Does Janicaud speak for Husserl? Whomever Janicaud's Husserl maybe he is at least the Husserl of the *epoche* as rendered in § 58 of *Ideas I*, the Husserl who excludes any "absolute" or

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 64f.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 67–68.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 68–69.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 81.

“transcendent” being from the field of pure consciousness.<sup>69</sup> This is the Husserl for whom God’s transcendency, thought according to religious consciousness, cannot serve as a ground for the factualness of constitutive consciousness.<sup>70</sup> This limitation, and not a string of subsequent “reductions” from Heidegger on, is the only appropriate grounds for thinking the possibilities of phenomenology.

In view of this decisive trajectory, one step for further discussion would be to revisit this particular limitation. Could it be that this ‘God’ is specifically the positive God envisioned by what § 24 of *Ideas I* calls the “*scientific investigator of Nature*,”<sup>71</sup> the God who competes with absolute consciousness for the origins of worldly “factualness?”<sup>72</sup> Erazim Kohak interprets this extension of the reduction as a way of guarding against coming temptations. “With the world and the naturalistic explanation bracketed,” he explains, “a theistic explanation becomes tempting.”<sup>73</sup> The aim of a phenomenological understanding of lived experience would be compromised by speculation concerning world-transcendent explanations. But, says Kohak, “[This] is not a matter of denying or affirming God’s existence.”<sup>74</sup> It is not even a matter of eliminating “prejudices,” but rather, “the specific pre-judgment that the world explains experience rather than vice versa.”<sup>75</sup> In this case Husserl’s comments stem from his desire to avoid a tug-of-war between the God of natural theology and the “*factual concatenations*” of consciousness alone.<sup>76</sup> But this is perhaps a different matter than suspending all notions of transcendence, divine donation, or sacred intentionality.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten. (The Hague/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982/1913), 134.

<sup>70</sup> As Husserl notes, the “rational grounds for ‘believing in’ the existence of an extra-worldly ‘divine’ being” would already transcend “‘absolute’ consciousness.” Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>73</sup> Kohak, *Idea and Experience*, 41.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 201, n. 16.

<sup>76</sup> Husserl, *Ideas*, 134.

<sup>77</sup> This question also signals a need to reconsider the place of the “natural attitude” in *Ideas I*. Janicaud appears to assume that the suspension of this attitude is wholesale and includes the bracketing of religious consciousness. As Ronald Bruzina has recently noted, however, Husserl himself later recognized that the considerations of *Ideas I* were, in fact, by necessity conducted from *within* the natural attitude. It may therefore be fruitful to consider the more positive and necessary function of this attitude (and its ‘ego’) in intuition, and how this significance should inform or complicate readings of § 58. See note 20 above. See Ronald Bruzina, *Edmund Husserl & Eugen*

Husserl places “absolute” and “transcendent” in scare quotes for a very specific reason—to set apart their authority as rational grounds from that of absolute consciousness. He is concerned about a specific motivation of religious consciousness and not, as far as one can tell, a strict exclusion of all religious manifestation in phenomenological reflection and description. But Janicaud seems to take the scare quotes in a more emphatic sense, as though they are exclamation points serving the wholesale privilege of neutrality. As a result, his claim that a special metaphysics is at work in his opponents is an attempt to align their works with the natural theology Husserl sought to avoid. Arguably, however, Marion and company would say that natural theology has nothing to do with their God. They may consent to Husserl’s exclusions at the outset of phenomenological investigation, but do not take this to be an operative limitation on phenomenological findings per se. When the ‘divine’ returns to the fore on the plane of immanence, absolute consciousness still configures the field of consideration, so to speak. The sacred, pure, or saturated phenomenon returns through phenomenology after the temptation of a transcendent ground has been avoided. In the very least we may say that Husserl’s exclusion in § 58 leaves open more possibilities than Janicaud is willing to admit.

Furthermore, on the heels of suspending the absolute/transcendent from consideration, Husserl himself allows that this “cannot mean an exclusion of all transcendencies” since the very possibility of “a science of pure consciousness” itself depends on something teleological and transcendent.<sup>78</sup> Janicaud’s stated *telos* of “infinite rationality” no doubt depends on this acknowledgment. “A science of matters of fact,” after all, “cannot renounce the right to make use of eidetic truths,” says Husserl.<sup>79</sup> For all of its immanental rigour, then, phenomenology is not without norms, and immanence is not without a certain species of non-objective essences. But Janicaud wants the *telos* as atheism even while distancing himself from the neighbourhood of the eidetic. Can he have it both ways? As qualified as his atheism may be, does it not bypass the indecision of agnosticism or neutrality and inflate itself into a determinative pre-judgment? If this is the case then he may very well be committing the same sins as his

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*Fink: Beginnings and Ends in Phenomenology 1928–1938* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 174–205; and Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, edited by Andre Orianne (Northwestern University Press, 1995, 1930).

<sup>78</sup> Husserl, *Ideas*, 135.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

opponents, though in an inverse way: a ‘religious’ consciousness is suspended by a decidedly ‘atheistic’ consciousness.<sup>80</sup>

Finally, it is unclear whether manifestation is as reducible to phenomenality as Janicaud believes. Marion’s position on this matter remains instructive even if it fails to convince. By conceiving of the truth of an appearance within a view of evidence rooted in the *adequatio* fashion, Husserl, Marion believes, compromises his return to the things themselves with a qualifying ideality.<sup>81</sup> Intention and meaning will invariably surpass intuition and fulfilment, limiting the equality which characterizes adequation. There will thus be a “surplus of meaning”<sup>82</sup> testifying to the impoverishment of intuition. The deficit of intuition amounts to a shortage of *donation*, a finite situation which begs for a converse possibility—“unconditioned and irreducible phenomena would become possible only if a nonfinite intuition ensured their donation.” He thus asks: “Can a nonfinite intuition even be envisaged?”<sup>83</sup> This would require an excess of donation that would make up for the excess of intuition which causes the failure to produce an object.<sup>84</sup>

The problem with Marion’s resulting formulation of the saturated phenomenon is more a fault of his style of discourse than a premeditated theological veering.<sup>85</sup> He entertains the saturated phenomenon as an appearance in the hypothetical consideration of phenomenological possibility, then conflates this with the possibility for an appearance in lived experience. His train of

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<sup>80</sup> It may be that this predicament recalls the way in which the confusing proximity of the transcendental reduction to the psychological reduction (as discussed in § 9 of Husserl’s 1927 “Transcendental Phenomenology and the Way through the Science of Phenomenological Psychology”) testifies, here again, to the relationship between the phenomenological and natural attitudes. Husserl sets forth the need for discernment in the following way: “My transcendental ego is thus [obviously] different from the natural ego, but by no means as a second, as one *separated* from it in the natural sense of the word, just as on the contrary it is by no means bound up with it or intertwined with it, in the usual sense of these words” (Husserl, *The Essential Husserl*, 331). To my knowledge, Janicaud nowhere takes up this relationship to the natural attitude, even though it should inform decisions about what prejudices of ‘consciousness’ (religious or atheistic) can in fact be suspended in the phenomenological reduction.

<sup>81</sup> Janicaud, *Theological Turn*, 187.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 212.

phenomenological reflection jumps tracks, so to speak.<sup>86</sup> But Janicaud oversimplifies the move at the cost of overlooking Marion's important consideration of ambiguities in phenomenality. Marion may not carry the day, but his work does indeed require that we consider whether, in descriptive practice, the 'sense' of a noematic correlate can include a manifestation that is at once religious and factual, even overwhelmingly so. "Revelation," its connotations notwithstanding, may in fact designate "the phenomenon taken in its fullest meaning."<sup>87</sup> Without racing ahead to pure donation, we must allow that manifestation is not limited to visible appearance.

In my attempt to account for the terms of this "debate" about phenomenological possibilities by reviewing Janicaud's two texts, I have drawn attention not only to lingering questions requiring further consideration, but also to the need to understand Janicaud's critique in the context of his own distinct project. We cannot go along with a "censure" of his opponent's detours without likewise considering the terrain in which Janicaud hopes phenomenology will resolve to make its home. Janicaud's appeal for a revival of questions concerning inspiration and methodology is appropriate. But he has a certain arithmetic in mind. His minimalism is, in large part, intended to close off Marion's maximalism, just as Marion's donation is meant to problematize a strict adherence to phenomenality such as Janicaud's. One feels the magnetic pull of atheism, the other revelation. It is difficult to enter this debate about the possibilities of phenomenology without knowing all too well what is at stake.

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<sup>86</sup> Marion's discussion on p. 212 of "The Saturated Phenomenon" (as published in *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn*) is driven by a consideration of a possibility that "surpasses actuality." He explains how *not* to understand this—namely, not as a limit case or mystical case of phenomenality—then suddenly turns toward a positive characterization. This is the moment in which a language of "appearing" slips in: "it alone appears as itself . . . it alone appears without the limits of a horizon." Ibid., 212–213. "Appearance" is then rendered as "revelation." Ibid., 213. The "appearance" that was entertained as a hypothetical possibility suddenly takes on an actual, lived meaning. John Caputo's discussion of Marion's "phenomenology of the gift" is also relevant to this point. Caputo accounts for the manner in which Marion considers "the very lack of appearance of the gift" as nevertheless a "phenomenological event." Like Heidegger's claim that the *Sache* of phenomenology "is not the being that appears, but its Being, which does not appear," Marion's "givenness" is experienced as a non-appearing horizon according to which "every gift" is to be thought. It would seem, then, that donation, as saturated phenomenon, appears in the form of an event and not as a factual appearance. See John D. Caputo's "Apostles of the Impossible" in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, edited by J. Caputo and Michael Scanlon (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 206–208.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 213.

Even still, do these competing interpretations, together with those of Levinas and Henry, signal viable openings in Husserl's thought? Are the concerns about phenomenality, invariant essences, transcendence, categorical intuition, and donation indeed touchstones for renewed possibility? More discernment is needed. Scholars long-acquainted with Husserl's thought (and less encumbered with stakes for or against the 'religious') need to weigh in.