SUBLIME APPREHENSION
A CATHOLIC, RAHNERIAN CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract
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This dissertation shows how the thought of Karl Rahner presents the ethos of Catholic Christianity, which, since the dawn of modernity, one might call the Catholic sublime, and its late modern instantiation, called sublime apprehension. As a constructive effort, the dissertation re-places Rahner into an idiom proximate, though unequal to his own—the Heideggerian critique of modern subjectivity. The majority of the dissertation’s work consists in uncoupling Rahner’s difficult term, \textit{Vorgriff}, from the metaphorical associations of grasping (\textit{greifen}) latent within it. This uncoupling occurs in various phases, passing through Rahner’s appropriations of Thomas Aquinas and Ignatius of Loyola and his teachings on grace, mystery, and eschatology, Martin Heidegger’s readings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Friedrich Hölderlin, and Rainer Maria Rilke, and the sublime-aesthetics of Jean-François Lyotard, Jean-Luc Nancy and Jean-Luc Marion. The dissertation aims to retrieve a truly Rahnerian Rahner, and to show his, and Catholicism’s, versatility for the future.
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Certainly it strikes me as amazing that, having written a dissertation in excess of three hundred fifty pages, composing a short statement of less than one page to thank those who made the completion of this project possible presents itself as the most daunting—even sublime—task I have yet faced. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the work of these pages is simply to let appear in word those to whom I owe thanks.

Thank you first to my director, Cyril O’Regan, from whom I have learned to write with rigorous generosity, and to treat even those with whom I ardently disagree with Ignatius’s *indifferencia* and Eckhart’s *Gelassenheit*. Our many conversations taught me innumerable lessons about being a teacher, scholar, a man, and a Catholic. Thank you to Lawrence Cunningham, whose willingness to read my chapter drafts, no matter their degree of inscrutability before undergoing his judicious correction pen, and his availability for impromptu meetings, verged on the superhuman. Thank you to Matthew Ashley for dealing kindly with my various questions about practical and administrative matters, and that over and above his endurance, with Professors O’Regan and Cunningham, of my text. Many others deserve my gratitude, among whom are Brian Daley and Randall Zachman, who played roles in the process of my candidacy exams, Mary Doak, Kevin Hart, Mary Catherine Hilkert, the rest of the Systematic Theology faculty, and the administrative assistant for the doctoral program, Carolyn Gamble. At Boston College, Robert Imbelli and Paul Kolbet
bear mention because they introduced me to Rahner and Notre Dame’s Department of Theology, respectively.

Thanks also to my colleagues, Steven Battin, John Thiede, S.J., Matthew Eggemeier, Joël Schmidt, Andrew Prevot, and Todd Walatka, whose charitable listening, critical prodding, and enthusiasm for the craft and import of theology strengthened my dissertation inestimably. Other friends, John Grimaud, Kevin Meme, and Stephen Calme, each in his own way, contributed to seeing this dissertation to term.

Above I commented on a couple of notable lessons Cyril O’Regan graced me with during the composition of the dissertation. Another was a new and deeper appreciation for the aesthetics of writing, and the importance of a strong conclusion to any piece of writing, however long (or in this case, short). For that reason I have saved an expression of gratitude to my family for last. Without the support of my parents, Paula and Matthew Fritz, in time, money, prayers, and love, I could scarcely have finished an undergraduate, let alone a doctoral, degree. It must be remarked as well that without their having raised me in the Catholic faith, the conditions for the possibility of my approach to theology, and life in general, would be non-existent. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for all these things. Thank you also to my brothers, Jeff and John, my grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and in-laws, who all found ways to assist me in this journey. Thank you, finally, to my wife, Rochelle, to whom this dissertation is dedicated. Your love is a sacrament. Your beauty is a beatifying vision. Your patience with your own doctoral studies, with the logistics of our living in separate locations, and especially with me is a resounding sign that Rahner is right: the only thing natural to human persons is their capacity to transcend all limits—*in nomine Caritate*. 
INTRODUCTION

It is not that Rahner’s theology has been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and therefore not really tried.¹

History moves forward into the future, but in order for the one faced with the future not to become overwhelmed, she must look to the past to locate resources for making sense of coming possibilities. Germans call this process *Wiederholung*, which commonly means “repetition,” but in this case the rendering, “retrieval,” proves more adequate. For those at all familiar with hermeneutics, this idea, retrieval, is a matter of course. The following dissertation consists in a retrieval of the theology of Karl Rahner. More specifically, this dissertation shows how Rahner’s theology presents the ethos of Catholic Christianity, which we might call the Catholic sublime, and its late modern instantiation, called sublime apprehension. As a constructive effort, the dissertation re-places Rahner into an idiom near, though unequal to his own—the Heideggerian critique of modern subjectivity. The majority of the dissertation’s work consists in uncoupling Rahner’s *Vorgriff* from the metaphorical associations with grasping (*greifen*) latent within it, thus bringing to light Rahner’s distance from, as opposed to his “turn to,” modern subjectivity. This uncoupling occurs in various phases, passing through Rahner’s appropriations of Thomas and Ignatius and teachings on grace, mystery, and eschatology, Heidegger’s readings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Friedrich Hölderlin, and others, and the sublime-aesthetics of Jean-François Lyotard, Jean-Luc Nancy

and Jean-Luc Marion. The dissertation proceeds with three hopes in mind: 1) that it will positively contribute to Rahner studies by retrieving a Rahnerian Rahner, 2) that, through Rahner, it will show Catholicism’s versatility for the future, due to its distinctive ethos, and 3) that it will provide a Catholic perspective on how to face up to a future that becomes ever more uncertain in a postmodern, globalized world where the past is all too easily, quickly, and willingly forgotten.

The most proximate goal is to revive Rahner’s theology. Some might find him an odd choice for a theologian for the future. The objection could be easily made that Rahner had his day during the third quarter of the twentieth century, and his influence has quite rightly waned ever since. This argument appears substantiated by the phenomenon in Catholic theological circles of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s ascendance amid Rahnerian decline. But the quote that opened this introduction raises the question of whether the growing perception of the “passé” character of Rahner’s achievement lays bare the fact that scholars never sufficiently understood Rahner, let alone assimilated his works properly. Rahner’s main supporters, in a move that, ironically, almost killed Rahner’s theology, decided to read him narrowly under the rubric of “practicality,” effectively ignoring most of his writings in the interest of immediate results. It seems that amid the initial enthusiasm over Rahner’s writings, Rahner’s supporters and his critics alike failed to survey the dimensions, especially the depth, of Rahner’s overall theological proposal. What has just been described might be called the first wave of Rahnerian studies. Its shortfalls led to a second wave, when, within the last decade—finally—a few important books on Rahner were published that attempt comprehensive reassessments of his project.2 Three different approaches have abided in this

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2 Three are representative (i.e., for the next few sentences), in chronological order of publication: Patrick Burke, *Reinterpreting Rahner: A Critical Study of His Major Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press,
second wave of Rahner scholarship: 1) a renewed exegetical critique of Rahner’s “system,” 2) the suggestion of Rahnerian “non-foundationalism,” and 3) a thoroughgoing analysis of Rahner as a spiritual theologian. All three entrees into Rahner’s corpus have in common the demand for an abandonment of Rahner’s early philosophical writings, because either 1) his early philosophy dooms his later theology, 2) his early philosophy is incommensurate with his later theology, or 3) his early philosophy means far less for his later theology than his lifelong study and practice of Christian (especially Ignatian) spirituality. This means that, despite refreshing Rahner and making apologiae for his continued relevance for theology, second-wave Rahnerians extend to Rahner a partial invitation back to the theological table—with the accent on “partial.” Rahner becomes divided against himself, a Rahner of two different periods, one unsavory and one to be saved. Even given this past decade’s Rahnerian renaissance, Rahner still verges on relegation to the annals of the twentieth century, where he will draw only historiographical interest. It is this dissertation’s conviction that Rahner still has much to teach systematic—that is, contemporary—theology.

An argumentative thread, borrowed from Philip Endean, runs through this dissertation’s entire offering, affirming the necessity of a retrieval of Rahner’s theology, due to the oversights of the past. Endean avers that thin readings of Rahner have hitherto predominated (implied: in the first wave of Rahnerian scholarship), leading to the demand for thick correctives (by a second wave). This dissertation has been crafted as thickly as possible, even more thickly than second-wave readers such as Patrick Burke, Karen Kilby, 2002); Karen Kilby, Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy (New York: Routledge, 2004), hereafter KRTP; Philip Endean, Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), hereafter KRIS.

3 Endean epitomizes the view that he shares with Burke and Kilby, but also other second-wave Rahner scholars when he observes of his own book, “[T]his study relativizes the importance of [Rahner’s] early philosophical works, and confirms how unhelpful it is to see Rahner’s theological achievement as merely the outgrowth of Spirit in the World.” Endean, KRIS, p. 7.
Endean and others yet unmentioned, like Fergus Kerr and Shannon Craigo-Snell. This thick retrieval transcends the first wave of scholarship from Rahner’s supporters. That wave left Rahner’s work for dead after bypassing a thorough reading of it in favor of mining it for practical pointers. We can learn from the first wave, though, an admiration for the unity of Rahner’s thought. Such an insight into Rahner’s thinking provides a seed for overcoming the second wave. As was obliquely observed already, this recent constellation of scholarship has eschewed Rahnerian unity, except in Burke’s case, where unity signifies Rahner’s tragic flaw. Non-foundationalist or spiritual readings of Rahner’s theology claim to promote him to a new century interested in matters non-foundational and spiritual, but, again, at the cost of ignoring or denigrating vast swathes of Rahner’s literary output. We can learn from the second wave, though, a respect for Rahner’s adaptability to new contexts, and furthermore a strategy of close exegesis of the words of Rahner’s texts rather than vague adulation over the general impression given by these texts. This dissertation, as a thick retrieval of Rahner, could only have been written after these different types of Rahnerian interpretation presented themselves. For each example of them, within both waves, anyone interested in Rahner must be deeply grateful. But now that they have shown up, Rahner’s work, from beginning to end, still demands a new, a fuller hearing, a third wave, a constructive reading to right past Rahnerian wrongs—another beginning.

The least understood, yet most maligned work in the Rahnerian corpus, *Spirit in the World* (1939), stands as the constant reference point and fount of the dissertation. For the past three decades (spanning both the first and second waves), at least in English-speaking scholarship, it has become increasingly fashionable to circumvent a close reading of *Spirit in the World* (with a dismissive comment about it being a “transcendental” or “modern” work) so as to reach more quickly Rahner’s theological writings, wherein Rahner’s potential and actual interest truly lie. This is an unfortunate development, but one that scholars have come by honestly and good-naturedly, their reticence toward *Spirit in the World* being predicated upon the absence of thorough, clear, and sympathetic treatments of the text.6

Within *Spirit in the World* move many if not all the theological and philosophical possibilities contemporary commentators on Rahner seek in his theological essays, and to say this is not to express a sort of Rahnerian foundationalism. Rather, the following chapters

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6 Francis Schüssler Fiorenza’s contribution at the opening of the English edition of *Spirit in the World* is notable as both clear and sympathetic. Thus Fiorenza moves in the right direction (i.e., toward a proper exposition of SW), but only partially (as fits the bounds of an essay), through an introduction to SW’s Kantian-Maréchalian pedigree. See Fiorenza, “Karl Rahner and the Kantian Problematic” in *Spirit in the World*. pp. xix-lv. Cf. Endean, KRIS, p. 50n57.
(the first two, most notably) attend so closely to *Spirit in the World* and make it so central because this book represents the exemplary locus where Rahner has, again in Endean’s words, been found difficult and not been tried.⁷ This dissertation tries *Spirit in the World*, and in doing so follows the exhortation of a recent symposium in Germany of preeminent Rahner scholars who argued for the now unfashionable position that Rahner’s theology is not fully understandable except on the background of his philosophical ideas.⁸

The trial transpires, it must be admitted up front, along a particular axis, this axis itself being even less frequently chosen than *Spirit in the World* itself—an aesthetic axis, and a Heideggerian one at that. It is hardly innovative to note the connection between Rahner and Heidegger, as countless Rahner scholars have mentioned that Rahner attended “Heidegger’s seminars” between 1934 and 1936.⁹ To be more precise, these courses included lectures on Hölderlin and Schelling, an introduction to metaphysics, the foundational questions of metaphysics, and seminars on Hegel, Leibniz, and Kant (*Critique of Judgment*).¹⁰ This group of courses squares quite well with the concerns of this dissertation. Had Rahner stayed another semester at Freiburg, the plot would have thickened even more, for we shall spend considerable time considering Heidegger’s courses on Nietzsche, the first of which, *Der Wille*

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⁸ The symposium, entitled “Der Philosoph Karl Rahner” (The Philosopher Karl Rahner), was held on 9-10 January 2004 at the Hochschule für Philosophie der Gesellschaft Jesu in München. Its proceedings are published as volume 213 of the *Quaestiones disputatae* series: *Die philosophischen Quellen der Theologie Karl Rahners*, ed. Harald Schöndorf (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005).

⁹ At the introduction of this project, we should note that in the introduction to his book-long overview of Rahner, William Dych (a famous first-wave Rahnerian) speaks of Heidegger (along with Aquinas) as a main teacher of Rahner. In this he follows Sheehan, who includes as his foreword to the above referenced book a statement of Rahner’s about his relationship to Heidegger as a student to a teacher. See Dych, *Karl Rahner* (New York: Continuum, 1992), p. 2.

zur Macht (als Kunst), was offered in the Winter semester of 1936-37. It is a new
collection to give the Rahner-Heidegger relation another look, especially with respect to
the courses Rahner took from Heidegger and Heidegger’s own scholarship surrounding
those courses. Furthermore, focusing on the specifically aesthetic profile of these courses
and this scholarship in correlation with Rahner’s corpus has long been much-needed.

In English-speaking scholarship, the Rahner-Heidegger relation has been, it seems,
unresolved solved or at least adequately treated since the 1980s, with Sheehan’s book (1987,
cited above), which summed up and expanded upon such articles as Robert Masson’s
“Rahner and Heidegger: Being, Hearing and God” (1973) and Denis J. M. Bradley’s
“Rahner’s Spirit in the World: Aquinas or Hegel?” (1977). Several reasons could be
marshaled to point to the inaccuracy of this perception of a closed field of questioning, but
perhaps the most obvious has to do with Heidegger, more than with Rahner—though the
publication since 1995 of the latter’s Sämtliche Werke cannot be overestimated as a beacon for
new Rahner scholarship. Within the past two decades, the gathering and publication of
numerous volumes of Heidegger’s Gesamtausgabe, many massively important translations of
Heidegger’s works into English, and rich reflections on Heidegger’s corpus coming from
France have yielded fresh perspectives on Heidegger. These views of Heidegger provide
more food for thought for reassessing Rahner, if indeed we deem, as we should, Rahner’s
philosophy and theology to be indelibly marked by Heidegger. Mapping the Rahner-

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on Rahner and Heidegger, published in the same year as Sheehan’s book, follows mainly this line of
interpretation: Jack Arthur Bonsor, Rahner, Heidegger, and Truth: Karl Rahner’s Notion of Christian Truth, the Influence
Heidegger relation onto *Being and Time* (1927) or “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1935) has become unveiled as a merely preliminary, hardly the final, word on the subject.

This dissertation does not touch, except on one or two brief occasions, the relation between Rahner and Maréchal, for two simple reasons. First, examining the Heideggerian provenance of Rahner’s texts provides ample material for a single dissertation, especially when this involves French appropriators and expositors of Heidegger. Second, the narrative of Rahner as “transcendental Thomist” has been told many a time, and in a few cases quite well.¹³ Even so, perceptive Maréchal enthusiasts should, within these largely Heideggerian-Rahnerian pages, enjoy healthy helpings of both the Transcendental (Kant) and Thomism (Thomas). The title of Chapter One makes this clear, and its topic sets the tone for and influences the content of the four further chapters. We shall turn soon to an overview of the chapters, but first, let us introduce some of the concepts and terminology of the dissertation, and within this treatment of terms, the favorability of the choice to foreground Heidegger as Rahner’s interlocutor should become rather obvious.

Since the concepts of this dissertation interrelate in a complex fashion, the next several paragraphs unfold not so much as a logical sequence, but as a cloud of associations. The hope is that the reader, at the end, can use them all to make sense of each other.

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¹³ In addition to the Fiorenza piece, see the recent essay (which sums up its author’s previous work), Otto Muck, “Thomas—Kant—Maréchal: Karl Rahners transzendentale Methode” in *Die philosophischen Quellen der Theologie Karl Rahners*, pp. 31–56.
Terms

Aesthetics

The dissertation discusses aesthetics, reads Rahner along an aesthetic line, with Heidegger as the chief interlocutor. Let us define aesthetics. This word operates on at least two different levels: general and specific. In general, and as a matter of etymology, “aesthetics” refers to matters relating to sense intuition as such (Greek: aesthesis). Under this meaning fits the idea of sense intuition of beauty. More specifically, or as a subset of the above meaning and an offshoot of a theory of beauty, “aesthetics” has come in the modern period to imply the theory of art. Both levels are at play in this dissertation’s reading of Rahner’s aesthetics. They will arise and interweave throughout.

The dissertation keeps two facts about aesthetics in mind as it proceeds. First, Rahner rarely (if at all) mentions the word, “aesthetics,” and certainly does not consider himself an aesthetician or expert in art, beauty, or some theory of sensation. In recent years, though, perhaps in large part due to the interest in theological aesthetics generated by Balthasar, a few notable strides have been made toward reading Rahner aesthetically. Richard Viladesau, in *Theological Aesthetics* (1999) and *Theology and the Arts* (2000), includes Rahner in a project that attempts to formulate an alternative to Balthasarian aesthetics along a transcendental-Thomistic line. Though Rahner greatly informs Viladesau’s approach, Bernard Lonergan ends up dominating the conversation, so these books have a focus alternative to the one of this dissertation. Stephen Fields’s article on Rahner, Balthasar, and

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the spiritual senses (1996), and his book *Being as Symbol* (2000), consider Rahner more closely. They describe his metaphysical hylemorphism in terms saturated with aesthetic significance. Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen adds an essay in the *Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (2005) that locates various sites in Rahner that open toward theological aesthetics. Precedents have begun to line up, then, for a full-blown aesthetic reading of Rahner.

Second, given this dissertation’s intention to read Rahner aesthetically, it remains chastised insofar as it is readily apparent that Heidegger—Rahner’s main conversation partner here—criticizes, and at times outright rejects, the philosophical discipline of aesthetics. For instance, in an essay (actually several essays) from *Holzwege* (1950), Heidegger mourns the rise of aesthetics (qua discourse on art) as a fundamental phenomenon of modernity. The appearance of this area in philosophy spells bad news for art—as soon as it moves “into the purview of aesthetics,” it “becomes an object of experience and consequently is considered to be an expression of human life,” as opposed to a revelation of Being, or ontophany. Heidegger sees, and rightly, the collusion of aesthetics with modern subjectivity—a term that will soon be defined. Prior to modern aesthetics, Heidegger implies, art functioned to allow beings to appear in their Being, at least insofar as art worked independently from determination by philosophical (i.e., metaphysical) thought. Aesthetics participates in the essence of modernity, that is, the transformation of the human person into the “primary and genuine subjectum,” meaning that the human “becomes that being upon which every being, in its way of being and its truth, is founded.”

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17 Ibid., pp. 66-67.
has problems with aesthetics in the strict sense of the philosophical discipline that treats of beauty (natural and artistic) under the rubric of the relationship of that reality to human subjectivity, or experience. In the epilogue to “The Origin of the Work of Art,” the most famous of his famous essays on art, Heidegger identifies the problem most forcefully: “Everything is an experience. Yet perhaps experience is the element in which art dies.”

This dissertation wishes to use the term “aesthetics,” but in a way that does not allow modern subjectivity to take over and to kill art with experience. Eventually, “aesthetics,” paired with the term “sublime” (sublime-aesthetic[s]), will figure into the dissertation’s main idea, the Catholic sublime, an ethos with aesthetic properties that resists the collusion of aesthetics with modern subjectivity. Many words must pass before we arrive at that point.

Sublime

Since the eighteenth century, the term “sublime” has been used in aesthetics to refer to something pleasurable because it is terrifying. In Kant’s aesthetics, which we shall treat at length below, the word refers to a feeling of negative pleasure that arises in a subject who encounters immeasurably large or small things, or incomparable power. In addition, the sublime connotes activity, as in the activity of the intellect and of human moral freedom. Though the sublime is neither a theme nor an oft-repeated word in either Rahner or Heidegger, this dissertation shows how the content the word “sublime” connotes (more than denotes) operates throughout the corpora of Rahner and Heidegger. Discovering how

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this is so requires some conversation between Rahner and contemporary French philosophy, hence the foci of §§9, 12, and 15.

The sublime became a staple of Continental philosophical discourse in 1980s France, when and where several theorists came to appreciate it as a means for critiquing modernity and for reassessing developments of modern and contemporary art as they intertwined with philosophy and criticism. Subsequent chapters (Three especially) will discuss French philosophy’s use of the sublime, so here it will suffice to note its importance for philosophy, and furthermore to gesture toward its entrance into theology via theology’s interface with philosophy. Interested theological readers will be most familiar with the sublime as it figures into the Radical Orthodoxy movement, but we must clarify here that this dissertation’s examination of the sublime has little if anything to do with such a modus interpretationis.

Perhaps the most important point on the sublime as it functions in this dissertation is this: it designates a site where theology, philosophy, and art, in addition to other disciplines, meet. The sublime has long been regarded as a term that indicates play on/at the limits of certain realities, and thus the transcendence or redrawing of limits. And of course Rahner is famous for his theological reflections on transcendence.

In keeping with the above view of the sublime, this dissertation utilizes a distinction found in a book by Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art* (1968), to complexify the sublime. Harries distinguishes the negative sublime and the positive sublime as two viewpoints on the sublime in modern philosophy as it relates to modern art. He describes the two modes of the sublime in this way: talk of the negative sublime emphasizes the feeling of freedom that accompanies sublime experience (terrified awe or negative pleasure),

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while the positive sublime accentuates a feeling of the numinous (a sublime “object”). The former focuses on the (evidently) absolute power of human subjectivity, while the latter stresses a meeting with some exterior absolute power or magnitude, announcing itself from itself. For our purposes, this distinction maps onto another, which now must gain exposure.

Noetic v. Ontophasic

Rahner points in the introduction to Spirit in the World to a distinction between two aspects of knowledge: the noetic and the ontological; the latter we shall recast as “ontophasic.” He writes,

Let it be said here explicitly that the concern of the book is not the critique of knowledge, but a metaphysics of knowledge, and that, therefore, as opposed to Kant, there is always a question of a noetic hylomorphism, to which there corresponds an ontological hylomorphism in the objects, in the sense of a thoroughgoing determination of knowing by being (SW liii, emphasis added).

Rahner takes as a matter of course in this passage that knowing involves what modern thinking calls “subjective” and “objective” correlates. The former he calls noetic, and the latter, ontological. His point in the passage is that a contrast appears between Kant and Thomas Aquinas on knowledge. Kant’s thinking privileges noetic structures as normative for a metaphysics of knowing, to the point that Kant risks canceling out the being of objects. Thomas argues that knowing always occurs within the context of a prior showing of objects, thus he privileges ontophany as the norm for a metaphysics of knowing. That is, human initiative plays a role in knowing secondary to a primary self-giving of objects so that they might be known. In other, more Heideggerian words, being determines knowing, not vice versa. The showing of being—ontophany—precedes noetic action: this is the main point of

contention between Kantian and Thomistic metaphysics. The theological implication of this philosophical point is that humans are receivers of things in the world as gifts, as grace. Human persons can achieve autonomy, as the Enlightenment would have it, but only within a greater context of having received all they have.

Now we can show the connection, as promised, between the negative and the positive sublime and the noetic and the ontophanic. This dissertation follows Rahner's lead by associating thinking that foregrounds the noetic with Kant (himself) and a couple of his late modern descendants: Lyotard and Nancy. These philosophers, by taking great interest in noetic structures, grant human freedom primacy of place, thus giving credence to modernity's championing of colonial conquerors, scientists, and businesspeople as exemplary human persons (see Chapter Three). They espouse the negative sublime. The dissertation adheres to Rahner's path again when it links Rahner himself, Heidegger (and Heidegger's reading of Kant), and Thomas (along with Bonaventure and others) with the ontophanic. These thinkers hold a conviction that Being communicates itself by its own power, thus making knowledge and freedom possible in the first place. They espouse, each in his own way, the positive sublime. Rahner acknowledges the validity of figuring the sublime as noetic, thus negative; after all, the description of the sublime inextricably involves at least some commentary on the structures or powers of human knowing (see Chapter Two). As the passage implies, though, Rahner, along with Heidegger, treats the ontophanic, positive sublime as prior to and determinative of the noetic. Human knowing, or more properly for this study, human sensory experience, concerns the manifestation of Being.
Theologically speaking, sublime-aesthetics concerns the revelation of God. Later chapters fill out the connection between Being’s manifestation and God’s revelation.22

Subjectivity

Rahner is commonly deemed to be a theologian of a “turn to the subject” or an “anthropological turn,” and in large part he earns this designation, because of his serious and iredic engagement with modern thought. Anyone with a working familiarity with modern philosophy and theology will have an intuitive sense of what this dissertation might mean by “subjectivity” or the “modern subject.” An intuitive (or common) sense of the meaning of any word, especially this one, will not do for this dissertation, lest a common sense view of Rahner, the sort of view that has led to the near demise of his thinking, abide any longer.

This philosophical term, “subjectivity,” has already played a role in the above comments, but its definition fits here because subjectivity as this dissertation views it can only be seen within the context of the aesthetic and the sublime, or sublime-aesthetics, with the attendant distinction between the noetic and the ontophanic. Likewise, the definition of subjectivity this dissertation assumes as its own comes from Heidegger, sublime-aesthetically read. For Heidegger, “subjectivity” refers to the constitutive principle of modern thought—human consciousness that relates to anything outside it in terms of representation, or a presentation to self, ordered toward knowledge through conceptual control. This dissertation concerns itself with the fact that subjectivity becomes, in the modern (Western) world, the normative framework for understanding the human person.

22 They also should make clear, as more a hint than an expressed theme, that the distinction between the positive and negative sublime is not predicated, as some might hope, upon the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity, even if it relates loosely to it. Those who might believe they catch a hint in this dissertation of a defense of “objectivity” against postmodern “subjectivism” will ultimately find themselves barking up the wrong tree, since the dissertation critiques objectivity as much as subjectivity, for the former arises in thinking only when the latter has taken hold.
Chapter Three will present three “figures” of the modern subject, or three images for the human person that cohere with a belief that, prescriptively speaking, the human person is subject. The dissertation does not claim that these three figures—conqueror, scientist, and businessperson—come to be as effects of some philosophical cause, but rather that modern subjectivity, as a philosophical construct, emerges in and through the thinking and activity of human persons who live quite self-consciously as conquerors, scientists, and businesspeople. Modern subjectivity appears in and through human attempts to control (to grasp) the world through colonization, science, and business.

The theological problem with modern subjectivity is that it obscures the revelation of God. A norm for humanity predicated upon grasping allows no room for God as absolutely incomprehensible—in German, *unbegreifliche*, ungraspable. As his career progressed, Rahner increasingly emphasized the incomprehensibility of God and God as Mystery, largely in response to his supporters, who happily yet erroneously read Rahner’s theology as a carte blanche to determine theology subjectively. This dissertation will show that Rahner calls for nothing of the sort. His devotion to the ungraspable God, and furthermore to the dignity of all creation, which derives from its Creator and Sustaining Ground a certain ungraspability and uncontrollability, leads him to reject, if often implicitly, modern subjectivity.

**Openness**

“Openness” is probably the leading topic of the dissertation. In our time and culture, this word sounds very relevant, and is bandied back and forth in both casual conversation and in some quite vacuous academic debates. Jean-Luc Nancy observes, “‘[O]penness’ has today become a somewhat jaded motif, the evocation of the easy generosity of a right-thinking, fashionable discourse (in which ‘alterity,’ ‘difference,’ etc. also
figure): a moral propriety, rather than an ontological one.

This dissertation has no interest in moral propriety in the sense of empty, self-defeating “politically correct” discourse. Instead, it seeks an ontological openness of the sort Nancy advocates, yet which Rahner, in contrast to Nancy, achieves. Thus, in broaching an ostensibly rather timely topic, the dissertation delves rather deeply into the untimely. Rahner engages stridently in the search for ontological openness, and this study of Rahner will argue that if one reads Rahner rightly, his texts show a way toward developing a truly open ontological position. This position is the prevailing (or at least normative) ethos of Catholic Christianity, which in a late modern era we can identify as the Catholic sublime.

A quote from Rahner can serve to anticipate a definition of the Catholic sublime.

One year before his death (1983), Rahner extols the wonderful fact that in its religiosity Christianity does not omit a single human dimension, that it is not afraid of points of contact, that it does not consider the loftiness of its relation to God through grace to be endangered when Christian existence becomes earthly, carnal, full-blooded, willing to assume whatever is human.

Rahner laces this sentence, which (by the way) appears in an essay on devotion to Mary, with several words and ideas that lie at the heart of this dissertation’s Rahnerian construction. He mentions the holistic humanity of Catholic Christianity, its admission of contact, its sublimity in grace, and its aesthetic standing in the world. Catholic Christianity in principle


24 A comment: this ethos shows up also in many Orthodox communions and certain sectors of the Anglican church—an inquiry such as this one, into ethos, makes no claims about the canonical status of any certain churches, except insofar as a church’s canonical status may in fact correlate quite closely with the extent to which it espouses a Catholic ethos. In short, though, this dissertation’s immediate concern is not ecclesiology or ecclesiological apologetics.

and many times in fact opens itself in a manner incomprehensible or even scandalous to other mindsets and spiritual dispositions. To the stereotypical modern theorist of “religion” we must say that even though Rahner uses the term “religiosity” in the above passage, one must not regard the Catholic sublime as beholden to some narrowly-conceived determinate sphere of “religion.” The theorist of “religion,” of course, exhibits the fear of contact that Rahner says Catholic Christianity defeats. The Catholic sublime operates ontologically, and as such, cannot be separated ontically from morals or politics, or anything else that touches on the whole of human living. Rahner’s discourse opens the Catholic sublime, which has the potential to open the world, if only we can put it to work. The act of putting the Catholic sublime to work in our contemporary age this dissertation calls sublime apprehension. Chapters Four and Five will explicate this latter term, because only then will we have at our disposal the conceptual apparatus needed to understand what “sublime apprehension,” the name for an as yet unnamed notion developed by Rahner, might mean.

Chapter Structure

The dissertation has five chapters. The first two remain close to the text of Spirit in the World, with material on Heidegger used to elucidate it. Also, these chapters elaborate the definitions of the aesthetic and the sublime, respectively. The next three chapters each center on a significant theme in Rahner’s theology: grace, mystery, and eschatology. They apply the sublime-aesthetic perspective developed in the first two chapters to unfold Rahner’s contributions in the three named theological areas. As the chapters proceed, from first to fifth, the Catholic sublime and sublime apprehension (ideas latent in Rahner’s theology) are unveiled. Chapter Four is the most important of the five, for a variety of reasons that cannot yet come to light. So goes the dissertation’s macro-structure.
We proceed from the macro-structure to the medium structure, the layout internal to the chapters. Every chapter has three sections, which are divided into different numbers of subsections. Rahner, as the primary focus of the dissertation, appears in the first section of each chapter, and leads the content of the additional two sections. Heidegger, as the secondary focus of the dissertation, shows up in the second section of each chapter, and usually figures prominently in the third. Chapters One and Two consist almost entirely in a conversation between Rahner and Heidegger that adheres to the protocols already outlined, but Chapters Three through Five add the element of contemporary French philosophy. Chapter Three’s third section discusses Lyotard, Nancy, and Marion, all with respect to what they might have to say to Rahner, and the third sections of Chapters Four and Five set up critical dialogues between Rahner and Nancy. So goes the dissertation’s medium structure.

Now let us attend to the dissertation’s micro-structure, i.e., the main ideas and movements of each chapter. Chapter One, “Rahnerian Thomas, Heideggerian Kant,” presents the aesthetic in Rahner via a discussion of the reproductive, or receptive, imagination in *Spirit in the World* as illustrative of human rootedness in the world. An extended exposition of Heidegger’s *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929) complements the discussion of *Spirit in the World*, with special focus on how themes from the former book are adapted in the latter. Amidst this discussion of complementarity between these Rahnerian and Heideggerian texts, the divergence between Rahner and Heidegger first becomes apparent, thematized as a division within the positive sublime. The first chapter’s main contribution as it leads to the second chapter is broaching the topic of what, for Rahner and Heidegger, it means to relate affirmatively to the world as horizon. This topic will return with pronounced force (and several mutations) in Chapter Four, where affirmation and negation play off one another in various ways.
Chapter Two, “Vorgriff,” presents the sublime in Rahner via a discussion of the imagination as productive, or active, pushing against its own limits and reaching toward the Infinite. An analysis of several of Heidegger’s texts, from *Being and Time* through material on Hölderlin and Nietzsche, accompanies the continued exposition of *Spirit in the World* (along with *Hearer of the Word*), so as to identify parallels between the sublime’s silent movement through Rahner’s and Heidegger’s works. For Rahner, the activity of the imagination occurs in the *Vorgriff*, a word whose (mis)translation is much discussed in this chapter. The root component of the word, *Griff*, from the verb, *greifen* (to grasp), leads by the end of the chapter to the question of whether and, if so, how Rahner’s theology sees beyond modern subjectivity’s grasping to a different, Catholic sort of sublimity.

Chapter Three, “Spirit Minus Grasping,” begins uncovering resources in Rahner for thinking of the Catholic ethos as counter-subjective, and from two interlacing sides, 1) theological: by examining the doctrine of cooperative grace, and 2) philosophical: by retrieving modern subjectivity and thematizing its origin. Heidegger’s readings of Rilke and Hölderlin provide a point of comparison and contrast with Rahner’s gestures beyond subjective grasping, especially with respect to ontophany, a topic on which Rahner and Heidegger simultaneously converge and diverge. The entrance of contemporary French philosophers, with their attempts to think “after the subject,” is a significant development in this chapter. The noetic perspectives of Lyotard and Nancy lend further depth to the Rahner-Heidegger discussion on ontophany, and Marion’s Rahner-esque defense of ontophany suggests the plausibility of locating Rahner’s discourse after subjectivity.

Chapter Four, “The Sublime Apprehender,” reaches a definition of the Catholic sublime, Catholicism’s comprehensive affirmative disposition, through a detailed and extensive examination of Rahner’s writings on apophatic language, God’s
incomprehensibility, and Marian dogmas. In contrast to modern subjectivity’s proclivity for assertion, which either pretends to grasp God, or despairs of ever understanding God, Catholic language attempts to let God appear as God. After subjectivity, this Catholic linguistic activity is called sublime apprehension. Heidegger’s diagnosis of modernity’s addiction to assertion and his proposal for Gelassenheit (meditative thinking) as a post-metaphysical mode of language exercise these ideas developed from Rahner. Further critical probing from Nancy’s thinking provides an opportunity for Rahner’s after-subjective thinking to exhibit its, and Catholicism’s, ontophanic durability—it’s resolute preservation of the revealed Mystery of God.

Chapter Five, “Consummation,” clarifies the distinction between the Catholic sublime and sublime apprehension, and relates both to modern Catholic history, with reference to Rahner’s teachings on eschatology—thus God as Absolute Future. The chapter completes the picture (insofar as it admits of completion) of Rahner as a fully ontophanic (again as opposed to noetic) thinker, adding the suggestion that Rahner should be read as an apocalyptic theologian. Defining a Rahnerian brand of apocalyptic, with sublime apprehension being a modified form of apocalyptic, becomes an important current in this final chapter. Heidegger’s narrative of the history of Being and Nancy’s philosophy of “the end” and death also appear in this chapter, mainly to call forth more notes from Rahnerian eschatology and to round out the idea of sublime apprehension.

Much more could be said about each chapter, but their individual introductions will bear the burden of presenting the plan for each. Given these (all-too) brief summaries of the chapters, the introduction nears its end. One more note must be made, though, concerning that perennially problematic word, postmodern.
Final Note: Postmodern

The introduction returns to the theme with which it began: history. This reading of Rahner applies to the historical moment, or the age, we call (for lack of a better word) “postmodernity.” On the surface, the dissertation may seem to fit approximately in the trajectory occupied in Rahner studies by Michael Purcell (Rahner and Emmanuel Lévinas) or Craigo-Snell (Rahner and “postmodern critiques”), but as *approximate*, not quite. Every author has many concerns while producing a text, especially with respect to what sort of a hearing the text will receive. Despite the engagement below with “postmodern” figures, especially Lyotard, Nancy, Marion and Derrida, this dissertation is not a reading of Rahner with a “postmodern” agenda, whatever that might mean. This is a Rahnerian construction not in the sense that it aims to find a Heideggerian Rahner, a Rahnerian Heidegger, a Marionian Rahner, a Nancean Rahner or a Rahnerian Nancy. Instead, it consults others in order to find a truly *Rahnerian* Rahner, after two waves of Rahnerian misapprehension, for *this* is the thinker who leads us to the threshold of the Catholic sublime, and to sublime apprehension. From here on out, we shall avoid the word “postmodern,” using periphrastics such as “contemporary” and “late modern.” This dissertation cares far less for naming the present than for responding to it.

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ONE
RAHNERIAN THOMAS, HEIDEGGERIAN KANT

Die Arbeit hat bei ihrer philosophischen Interpretation von Thomas hauptsächlich Kant und Heidegger vor Augen.27

Imagine a young Karl Rahner, who would soon author the (failed) dissertation, later published as (the brilliant) *Spirit in the World* (1939), reading the following passage:

If finitude is placed at the point of departure for transcendence as clearly as it is by Kant, then it is not necessary, in order to escape an alleged 'subjective idealism,' to invoke a ‘turn to the object’—a turn which is praised again today all too noisily and with all too little understanding of the problem. In truth, however, the essence of finitude inevitably forces us to the question concerning the conditions for the possibility of a preliminary Being-oriented toward the Object, i.e. concerning the necessary turning toward the object in general (KPM 51/73).

These words, from Heidegger’s *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929), set the stage for Rahner’s reframing of Thomas Aquinas’s metaphysics. Some key issues come to light—finitude, the subject/object distinction, turning and orientation—all in connection with a reappraisal of the teachings of Immanuel Kant. Heidegger and Rahner, as some might meet over dinner, met over metaphysics, and more specifically, over Kant.

A look at the volume of Rahner’s *Sämtliche Werke* in which the German text of *Spirit in the World*, *Geist in Welt*, appears provides some telling information for our foray into

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Rahner’s encounter with Heidegger. This volume contains unpublished manuscripts and lecture notes in which Rahner shows both his interest in and his reservations about Heidegger’s philosophy.\textsuperscript{28} The lecture notes, in addition to being determined structurally by Heidegger’s thought, are peppered with several details that vividly illustrate Rahner’s wrestling with the still relatively young Heideggerian corpus, including \textit{Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics}, as he attempts to adjudicate its philosophical coherence and theological utility (two things that go hand in hand). Although, as with any thinker’s personal notes, the precise meaning of each abbreviated phrase is up for debate, three points stand out as pertinent to this dissertation.

First, Rahner’s attempts at articulating lessons on metaphysical anthropology from the perspective of the “foundational structure” \textit{[Grundstruktur]} of the human person show his appreciation for Heidegger’s work on Kant. Rahner voices his agreement with Heidegger’s “realistic” opposition to Idealism through his “partial apriorism.”\textsuperscript{29} The a priori to which Rahner seems to refer comes to light in his notes on human finitude—sensibility and world appear as topics, as does “\textit{conversio ad phantasma},” which we shall see is the phrase from Thomas that Rahner examines at great length in \textit{Spirit in the World}.\textsuperscript{30} Rahner breaks ranks with Heidegger, though, when the latter’s apriorism comes to include an a priori preference for considering finitude that leads to a proscription of the infinite.

The second point originates in the last comment. Rahner asks whether Heidegger’s thought is an atheistic philosophy. This question flows from the fact that “the Absolute


\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 444.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 446.
does not present itself" (*das Absolute tritt nicht auf*) in Heidegger’s philosophy. This is a “de facto” condition in Heidegger, but Rahner’s next question seems to suggest that Rahner sees it as a Heideggerian *de iure* prescription: “Is this a methodological failure? [*Ist das ein methodisches Ausfallen?*]” If one connects these points to one that closely follows them in Rahner’s notes, where he makes an oddly spelled reference to Nietzsche (*der negative Nietzscheianer*), Nietzschean negativity (evidently), one catches Rahner’s drift that Heidegger has taken his cues vis-à-vis the non-appearance of the absolute from Nietzsche.³¹ Rahner begs to differ with Heidegger on this point—at the very least he thinks that the philosophical possibility that the absolute, or the infinite, could appear within the metaphysical field need not be foreclosed. Hence the short note he makes (partially in Latin), “*Die Unendlichkeit des Vorgriffs iam patet.*”³² As far as Rahner is concerned, the infinite finds its way into metaphysics, and by a non-conventional door—an unthematic anticipation of Being, “prior” to a specific encounter with a being. This *Vorgriff*’s infinitude remains open.

Third, among his notes on metaphysical anthropology, Rahner brings up the topic of negative theology. He calls Heidegger’s philosophy a “secularist negative theology” [*säkularistische theolog[a] negativa*]. Certainly, as Heidegger knows, *theologia negativa* is the Unterdrückung des Woraufhin des Griffes—the suppression (through language) of that after which one grasps. The question is how the negation—Rahner says here provocatively, the nothing (*das Nichts*)—appears (*erscheint*). Rahner answers, “*negatio ex affirmatione.*”³³ A negation follows some affirmation. Rahner’s argument is that against the background Christian thinking of negation, Heidegger’s own thought on Nothing looks vapidly “secular”

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³¹ For all the references in this paragraph, see Ibid., p. 441.

³² Ibid., p. 446.

³³ Ibid., p. 446.
by comparison. This results from Heidegger’s preliminary and overarching negation of infinitude in his “apriorism of finitude.” The points of disagreement may appear clear now, but not until §11 will we be able to adequately assess the parting of ways between Rahner and Heidegger on the issue of negation.

The above three points from Rahner’s lecture-sketches from the mid- to late-1930s, the time period on which most of this chapter focuses,34 have already hinted at the direction of the chapter. It has three parts. First, it gives a somewhat expository view of Rahner’s take on Thomist receptivity; “somewhat” means that it attends closely to some words from Spirit in the World, but in order to show how Rahner’s metaphysical project can be construed as an aesthetic one. Second, it tells how Rahner agrees with Heidegger’s transposition of Kant’s noetic thought-form into an ontophanic one, from the “critique of knowledge” to the “metaphysics of knowledge” (SW liii/14, emphasis added). Third, it sets forth a disagreement. Heidegger’s insistence in the Kantbuch on bringing thought to bear on finitude leads him to bracket or reject altogether the question of the appearance, or the (self)presentation, of the infinite, and even the appearance of the question of the infinite. Rahner, in turn, denies the validity of Heidegger’s drawing of such bounds. In this way, the former leaves open the philosophical possibility of the entrance of Christ into the world, while the latter forcibly forecloses it.35 Since the “standing apart” of philosophy and theology can be questioned “as

34 Without belaboring the point—this chapter’s subtext is the narration of the time of an encounter between Rahner and Heidegger (at Freiburg). The crucial years on Rahner’s side were 1934-36, when he studied under Heidegger, up through the publication of Hearer of the Word in 1941. The “give or take” consists in a stretching of the time period to include material written by Heidegger between 1929 (the Kantbuch) and 1943 (“Nietzsche’s Word: ‘God is Dead’”).

35 This comment has in mind Laurence Paul Hemming’s diagnosis that “Rahner … never problematizes the thought of Heidegger in relation to theology as such.” For Rahner, Heidegger’s refusal of certain questions does not open “a way into faith”—to the contrary, Heidegger’s thought stands as a pharmakon, beneficial at times, yet deeply poisonous for Christian theology. Rather than being a merely “conventional” interpreter of Heidegger, as Hemming would have it, this dissertation sees Rahner carefully handling Heidegger’s pharmakon. See Hemming, Heidegger’s Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), pp. 27, 19, and then a helpful, critical review of it—Cyril O’Regan,
their belonging together,”36 Rahner at once makes a philosophical objection and renders Heidegger’s thought theologically suspect.

The argument over the infinite and the finite between Rahner and Heidegger, which arises amid their otherwise convergent readings of Kant, concerns the directionality of the imagination vis-à-vis the reception of the showing of being. The present chapter limits its focus for the most part to the aesthetic, but the end of the chapter will indicate something to be kept in mind in Chapter Two, which talks about the sublime. Due to the difference of thought between Rahner and Heidegger, which we may locate on the positive side of the distinction between the negative and the positive sublime (see Introduction), another differentiation appears within the positive pole. Two different “experiences” of “the numinous” set the imagination on diverging paths.37 This divergence is a matter of spirit.

§1. Spirit—in the World: Aesthesis

Certainly rigorous interpretation, of Rahner or anyone else, can stem from having learned a text by heart,38 in which case the text’s own terms can be left unsaid. But even so, at the risk of re-plowing well-tilled area, let us take a low fly over Rahner’s text, lest this hermeneutical project derail from the very beginning. Admittedly, this dissertation stands in the line of Heideggerian interpretation, where its Auslegung will eventually turn to what

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36 Hemming, Heidegger’s Atheism, p. 29.

37 This word, “experience,” is used with some hesitation, for Rahner insists, pace so many who read him as Schleiermachian, that his theology is not intended as a theology of experience, if this means making religion into a simply intrahuman (innermenschlichen) phenomenon. See HW 154/274.

Rahner did not say, or at least not in the exact same way (with sublime-aesthetic language). Even so, we must clarify much material he actually does present. After all, Rahner himself tells us that feelings of recognition and familiarity (Bekanntheitsgefühle), such as the ones we get when we read (about) *Spirit in the World*, are “not always proof that one has actually understood the philosophical substance of the philosopher in question, who seems so well known and familiar and therefore so clear.”

This section should clarify Rahner, but also make him unfamiliar—by showing *Spirit in the World* as an aesthetic enterprise.

*Spirit in the World* has at its center a question: How does one give an account of metaphysics without recourse to intellectual intuition—meaning, metaphysics without an *a priori* escape hatch leading beyond this world? Rahner finds his answer, a rich and multifaceted one, in Thomas Aquinas’s metaphysics of human knowledge. Rahner makes no attempt to be deceptive by setting up his analysis of Thomist metaphysics as an historiographical account, for surely this explication has a distinctive flavor. This is Thomas with a twist.

The Rahnerian Thomas is a man of the world—not cosmopolitan, but earthly, earthy. This thinker meets the world around him with appreciation, the unabashed, undisappointed delight of someone confronted with really real reality. On this count, Rahner implies a contrast between Thomas’s metaphysics and other instances of (Western) metaphysics: “Thomas’s man dwells on earth, and it is not given to him to exchange his dwelling place for a heavenly one at his own discretion.” Rahner adds a key point, which some (Thomas’s critics and supporters alike) would probably assume to go the other way: “Even Thomas’s theology is not a flight from the earth, but the hearing of the word of God.

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within the narrow confines of this world and within the flitting brevity of an earthly hour” (SW 62/58). Many years after Spirit in the World’s publication, Rahner’s favorite student, Johann Baptist Metz, would observe regarding Rahner’s work as a whole, with Spirit in the World and the Rahnerian Thomas at its forefront, “Here was not a longing that would storm the heavens, but much more hushed sigh of the creature, like a wordless cry for light before the hidden face of God.”⁴⁰ Rahner’s Thomas neither bemoans nor apologizes for human finitude, rooted on the earth. He presumes it.

Rahner does not attempt a comprehensive overview of Thomistic metaphysics, but rather identifies an access point to a general metaphysics—the metaphysics of human knowledge. Thomas’s keen sense for human finitude comes to light quite clearly in this area of metaphysics, for any human with knowledge (every human) has come into it within the real world, namely this one. This one, as opposed to some realm of fixed, pure essences with “validities” all their own—this world is the real world, the apprehension of which yields human knowledge (SW 163-164/130-131). Thomas takes it as patent that human beings can apprehend things in the world in themselves (Ansich), and in this way Thomas may seem to flirt with some sort of naïveté. But Rahner certainly has something else in mind—a naïveté that infects Western metaphysics from long before Thomas to long after him, even in an age of so-called critical philosophy. Thomas’s sharp focus on the world in which we live distinguishes him from thinkers who either regard this world as provisional or who bracket a (possibly) higher world of the thing in itself (Ding an sich) in the interest of a critical worldview, à la Kant. Especially in the face of the latter, avant la lettre, Thomas maintains that “to put in parentheses an ultimate reference in a quiddity to the real actuality would be

⁴⁰Johann Baptist Metz, “Do We Miss Karl Rahner?” in A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity. Trans. J. Matthew Ashley (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), p. 120.
… equivalent to eliminating the quiddity itself” (SW 164/131). Thomas does not perceive objects as divided along lines of appearance and essence, *phenomena* and *noumena*, but rather, “knowledge appears from the outset as attaining to the things of the real world.” Thomas “sees no reason to extend the in-itself of the real world of objects by an ideal in-itself which is in principle independent of this world” (SW 165/131). The Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge evidences a staunch refusal of dualisms and of positing some “elsewhere” to serve as a referent for the world and its existents.

This being said, the Rahnerian Thomas may sound like a champion for some sort of materialism, a “secular” worldview. To see him as such is hardly fair to Thomas or to Rahner. The insistence in *Spirit in the World* on keeping one’s eyes glued to the earth, as it were, springs from another source altogether. Rahner and his reconstructed Thomas wish to remind us of something of vital importance: the world is the site of the incarnation of the Son of God. The Rahnerian Thomas’s affirmation of the world and the finite human who apprehends it arises from an undying devotion to Christ, who became flesh and *dwelled* among us (Jn 1.14)—here, in the world. The last two-thirds of the final sentence of *Spirit in the World* contain the most hermeneutically decisive words of the entire text: “Thomas’s metaphysics of knowledge is Christian when it summons the human person back into the here and now of the finite world, because the Eternal has also entered into this world so that human persons might find Him, and in Him might find themselves anew” (SW 408/300). A footnote follows this sentence, and directs the reader to Rahner’s next major text, *Hearer of the Word* (1941), as a “concrete development of the Thomistic starting point of metaphysics” (SW 408n8/300, second edition).

In light of the human person’s firm planting on the surface of the earth, the arena for God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, Rahner asks, a propos of his concern with the
metaphysics of knowledge (in Thomas), whether “a transcendence of its own basis by the human intelligence [is] possible without an intellectual intuition, and to what extent … it belong[s] to the constitutive grounds of the human experience of the world” (SW 40/41).

Thus far we have seen that the Rahnerian Thomas discusses the human knower in her finitude. The question now on the table involves the scope of human finitude, and leads to other questions. Human knowing has limits, but what is their nature, and how are they negotiated? How does one speak of transcendence within a finite field from which, evidently, there is no escape? Where would transcendence come from, where and how would it happen, if one has not stipulated (or discovered) some pre-installed conduit for such a movement “beyond”? Rahner senses intimations of a paradoxical answer to these questions within Thomas’s reflections on human knowing. Somehow, in Thomas, “The problem between knowledge of the world and a metaphysics reaching beyond the world has pushed its way into the knowledge of the world itself” (SW 21/28). Transcendence occurs within the world, within the knowing of the world, according to the mode of the knower.

To reflect Heidegger’s observations about Kant, which we met at the opening of this chapter, finitude is placed at the point of departure for transcendence. 41 And the problem of how to construct a metaphysics that sets out from, and stays within the parameters of, human finitude, finds its solution specifically in the imagination—hence the title of Spirit in the World’s brief third part.

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At least ostensibly, Rahner bases *Spirit in the World* on a single article in Thomas’s *Summa Theologiae*: I.84.7. In the thesis of that article, Thomas talks of the intellect as “united with receptive corporeality” (*passibili corpori conjungitur*), a condition that entails the impossibility of humanity attaining any knowledge apart from turning to phantasms (*convertendo se ad phantasmata*) (SW 4-5/19-20). This phrase, the “conversion to the phantasm,” occupies Rahner’s interest throughout *Spirit in the World*, and in fact determines the structure of the book’s central chapters (Part Two, Chapters Two through Four). Rahner defines “the phantasm” as “the keyword designating sense knowledge as such” (SW 237/181), and “conversion to the phantasm” as the “expression of the fact that sense intuition is the essential and abiding presupposition of all thought” (SW 310/232). The conversion to the phantasm is, again in Heidegger’s words, “the necessary ontological turning-toward the object in general” (*notwendigen ontologischen Zuwendung zum Gegenstand überhaupt*). Knowledge in the world, the knowledge finite human beings have, cannot evade sensibility, which is a function of corporeality.

A careful reader of *Spirit in the World* will notice, though, that for Rahner corporeality and sensibility are conditioned previously (*a priori*) by a way of being Rahner calls receptivity. This is Rahner’s version of the Heideggerian “preliminary Being-ordered toward the Object.” Rahner clarifies, “This much we can presume already: we have not grasped the essence of sensibility if we understand the senses as passageways through which things enter into us” (SW 45/45). The Rahnerian Thomas speaks of sensibility as a human being’s loss of self in the other, the entrance into a relationship of undifferentiation with the object apprehended, that is, received through the senses. This sensible apprehension is made

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42 Karen Kilby speculates about Rahner’s reasons for doing this, giving among other reasons the explanation that this is an example (“almost”) of a “conceit of a doctoral student.” Kilby, KRTP, p. 15.
possible because human Being is a receptive sort of Being. Rahner hammers home his point on more than one occasion, following the Heidegger of the Kantbuch, as we shall see below—

Thomas has the insight (before Kant or Heidegger, mind you) “that the human person has sense organs of a material kind because he can and must know receptively, and not vice versa” (SW 344/255-256). But at the same time, such an object is experienced as object, something thrown out in front of the active intellect. Human knowing involves both receptivity and agency. Rahner describes it this way: “Thus the truth of the human experience of world is, as it were, the mid-point between experience of world and metaphysics” (SW 54/51). Standing at this crossroads is the imagination.

Rahner says that the “whole thrust” of ST I.84.7 “goes to show that the imagination’s intuition [imaginatio] is the only human intuition, and without this the intellect would be blind” (SW 41/42, emphasis added). This discounts any hypothesizing about intellectual intuition; all transcendence of human intelligence beyond itself to metaphysics is that of the imagination, with the question being how this is possible (SW 38/40). In fact, for Rahner, this very transcendence delineates the scope of the imagination: “[T]he question about the possibility of metaphysics on the basis of the imagination is the question about the sense of [a] non-intuitive excessus as the condition of the human imagination, of the human experience of the world itself [Welterfahrung selbst]” (SW 53/50). This excessus, which transpires in a pre-apprehension (Vorgriff) of esse, or “what-is-in-itself as such” (das Ansichsein überhaupt), and which will form the backbone of this dissertation, expresses the human being’s character as “spirit” (SW 156/125, 186/146). It makes manifest the ordering of human knowing toward “that which is absolutely infinite” (SW 186/146), which nevertheless can be reached only in conjunction with (finite) sensibility, via the imagination. The imagination is the “fountain and root of the senses [fontalis radix omnium sensuum],” more
precisely, the medium “by which spirit itself forms itself into sensibility [durch die der Geist selbst sich in die Sinnlichkeit einbilder]” (SW 106/89, 309/231). From the imagination flows the entire “process” of the conversion to the phantasm, the unique manner of human knowing.

Rahner constantly insists on the unity of human knowing. But for the purpose of analysis, and perhaps even a performance of language’s ties to temporality (not to give Rahner too much credit), Rahner describes three elements of human knowledge as something like “steps”: sensibility, abstraction, and the conversion to the phantasm, once again with the last of these being a name, really, for the whole “process.”

The purpose of the present chapter is to establish Spirit in the World not just as a work on metaphysics, but also a work with fundamental implications for aesthetics, or fundamental theological aesthetics. Thus sensibility (aesthesis) seems the proper topos for spending some time. Rahner approaches the “essence of sensibility” with a question: “[H]ow can there be a knowledge of another as such in which this other is the proper object of the knowledge, that is, in which there is no knowledge antecedent to the other in which the other is known through the object of this knowledge, which object is identical with the knowing?” (SW 78/69). Rahner’s Heideggerian education springs into visibility here, as Rahner lays bare his concern that a phenomenon (the material other) be allowed to “show itself from itself.” Instead of possessing “knowledge antecedent to the other,” Rahner tells us that before “any apprehension of a definite other, the knower of itself must have already and always entered into otherness” (SW 79/70). The issue, then, is receptivity (Empfänglichkeit, Rahner also uses forms of hinnehmen and aufnehmen), an attitude toward the other

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43 One example among many reads, “The problem of the conversion to the phantasm is for Thomas a question of grasping human knowing as one insofar as all knowledge is placed upon the one basis of the imagination” (SW 65/60).

characterized by a “real abandonment” of oneself into the other (SW 81/71). For this reason, Rahner speaks of a “passivity of sensibility,” because sensibility as the Being of materiality, i.e. the way in which it is, consists in moving “out into the exterior of the world” (SW 86/75, 80/70, 95/81). With such a statement Rahner underscores the inherent spatiality and temporality of human knowing, in particular with respect to metaphysical questioning. As a receptive being endowed inevitably with sensibility, the human person “is located at a definite place whose boundary he does not overstep and which contains in itself an indication of how the question is to be posed, and by that very fact of how it is to be answered also. He asks as one who is already and always in the world … through sensibility” (SW 116/96). By a certain real, even seemingly total loss, the human knower becomes inserted into the world. This happens in every act of knowing, and, since the Being of the human person is a sensible sort of Being, has always already happened. The human person is, in effect (and act), as a sensible being, a receiver—a priori and a posteriori.

Rahner emphasizes throughout Spirit in the World both the unity and the uniqueness of human knowing. Human receptivity, which is truly aesthetic in the etymological sense, in unity with human intelligence, which is active in the sense of the Thomistic intellectus agens, makes for an utterly unique sort of being. This latter, active element of human knowing will occupy us in due course. Until Chapter Two, let us presuppose a certain primacy of the aesthetic in this unique human manner of Being: spirit in the world.

Why is human knowing, this aesthetic knowing, so unique? In various places Rahner describes Thomas’s metaphysics of knowledge as such—that is, without regard for something like an intellect united with a body, as with human knowledge. Rahner observes that Thomas accesses this problem by referring to angels in the corpus of ST 1.84.7. For Thomas, the angelic intellect, separated from the body, must know only those things separated
from bodies (SW 6/21). Rahner says that this logical deduction does not signify for Thomas a water-tight statement of truth about angels, but rather it more closely resembles a regulative idea. This and other sentences Thomas writes about the intellect of angels represent “the way Thomas treats the possibility of a knowledge which is based on an intellectual intuition” (SW 37/39). Angels, according to Thomas, “are self-present by themselves … their own natures are originally self-luminous to them, without any need of grasping something else” (HW 97/178). Because of the way it contrasts with human receptive knowing, the concept of an angelic intellect is, for the Rahnerian Thomas, a “Grenzidee,” or “limit-idea” (SW 38/40). The same goes for the intellect of God, of which the angelic intellect is a close, but inferior, approximation.

The limit-ideas of the angelic and divine intellects serve together as an occasion for Rahner to outline a more fundamental Thomistic ontology, which nevertheless we can for now grant little more than a passing mention. According to this ontology, knowledge in general gets figured as follows: “Knowing is understood as the subjectivity of being itself, as the being-present-to-self of being. Being itself is already the original, unifying unity of being and knowing, is onto-logical” (SW 70/63). Given these ground rules, the Rahnerian Thomas pronounces that “the intensity of knowledge is parallel to the intensity of being … an existent is present-to-itself insofar as it is being, and … vice versa, the degree of this ‘subjectivity’ is the measure of an existent’s intensity of being” (SW 72/64-65). Hence Being (along with knowledge) is by no means a fixed concept, if it admits varying intensities. In Hearer of the Word, Rahner devotes a chapter to this insight that Being is a “fluctuating concept.”

Rahner, citing a passage from Thomas that we will consider later in the chapter,

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summarizes the Thomist view of the concept of Being’s variations: “Every activity, from the purely material up to the inner life of the triune God, is but a gradation of this one metaphysical theme, of the one meaning of being: self-possession” (HW 38/76). One can rather easily infer that material activities involve much less self-possession than the life of the triune God, which Thomas defines as pure self-possession. This entails that for Thomas, knowing and knowability “are in a unique [eindeutigem] relationship to the relation of being to matter” (SW 74/66, ET altered). Being presents the intensity of subjectivity, and matter its privation. Being knows, and thus it is. Matter does not know, and thus properly speaking is not. Knowing is the Beisichsein des Seins, the “being-present-to-self of being, and this being-present-to-self is the being of the existent” (SW 69/62). Matter cannot be present to itself, as it has no Being or presence proper to it. It receives its Being from another.

These parameters, which, once again, belong to a limit idea, bring us back to human knowledge, which in light of the limit-idea gains some clarification. In keeping with his view of the Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge as accessible through human knowledge, Rahner takes care not to overstate his case and expound upon insights that would imply a metaphysical escape hatch beyond the world, that is, a clear view into the minds of angels and God. Instead, the outline of a general metaphysics of knowledge/ontology that we have just encountered cuts in a couple of different ways. First, general ontology as a limit-idea helps to set into high relief the fact that human knowing as conversion to the phantasm seems to consist in a unique admixture of resemblance to the material world and some sort of an opening “beyond” it, yet within it. In keeping with this, Rahner suggests that the Thomistic metaphysics of angelic knowledge might “show that for Thomas receptive knowledge and sense knowledge are essentially the same thing” (HW 113/202). The

46 “Erkennen ist Beisichsein des Seins, und dieses Beisichsein ist das Sein des Seienden.”
immateriality of angels shows that their Being is not fundamentally receptive; human participation in matter, which occurs through the senses, facilitates and illustrates human receptivity. Humans de facto are receptive and sensate; de iure for human knowing (the only sort of knowing to which we have direct access) receptivity is sensibility. Second, the description of the conversion to the phantasm as the unity of receptivity and activity seems to yield an idea of varying intensities among individual instances of human knowing, where at times sensibility appears more pronounced and at other times the operation of the agent intellect exerts more influence. Given a bit of thought, one could derive from this second point limit ideas of both pure materiality and pure intellect. This latter concept one could attach to Thomas’s statements about intellectual intuition, scientia (quasi) activa, in the angels and God. The important thing is to recognize that such intellectually intuitive knowing is not properly predicable of the human knower.

Rahner makes the significant point that “Thomistically, the human person does not consist of ‘body’ and ‘soul,’ but of soul and prime matter” (SW 324/242). Insofar as the human being is material, she knows not and is not—in an absolute sense—for she does not fully possess herself or anything that could be called hers. This point is best illustrated by the fact that human beings ask questions. The human being, then, by inquiring about Being shows that she “is deficient in [her] innermost ground of being” (SW 72/64). In other words, the human knower, because of her receptive Being, is bound up with materiality. To put it more strongly, yet nevertheless accurately, the human questioner stands poised at the edge of nothingness, only to receive her Being from the world, thus avoiding nothingness’s advance. This image of the human person standing on a cliff over the abyss, which has close ties with the later Rahner’s image in Foundations of Christian Faith (1976) of human knowledge as a “floating island” in the midst of the “vast sea” of the divine mystery (FCF 22), perhaps
most emphatically presents the idea of human knowing as aesthetically charged. The question as this chapter progresses and the next begins will be how the human person’s apparent creation of the world in the imagination squares with his reception of Being from the world. This is the question of the relationship between the aesthetic and the sublime.

The following is a key paragraph as Rahner moves toward his constructive proposal, his *Auslegung* of the Thomist philosophical event. It will act as a springboard for our elucidation of Rahner. He writes, in the wake of his description of Thomistic metaphysics as based in the limit-idea of *Beizichsein des Seins*, but also apropos of the Thomistic metaphysics of human knowledge as radically receptive (i.e. material, aesthetic):

Thus for the Thomist metaphysics of knowledge the problem does not lie in bridging the gap between knowing and object by a ‘bridge’ of some kind: such a ‘gap’ is merely a pseudo-problem. Rather the problem is how the known, which is identical with the knower, can stand over against the knower as other, and how there can be a knowledge which receives another as such. It is not a question of ‘bridging’ a gap, but of understanding how the gap is possible at all. If being is being-present-to-self, then in such a concept of knowledge it is perhaps easy to see further how a being could know another in its being-present-to-itsel insofar as it apprehends itself as the creative ground of this other. In this case the other is not the ‘proper object’ at all. But given such an approach to the essence of knowing, the question becomes more difficult how in such an approach a receptive knowing can be shown to be possible, in fact how there could be a non-knowing being at all (SW 75/66-67).  

This paragraph demands explication. We have just seen that Thomas’s regulative vision of the metaphysics of knowledge *as such* provides for knowledge, but not really receptive knowledge. To conceive of knowledge as the *Beizichsein des Seins* is tantamount to saying that knowledge’s only knowledge is of itself, and hence the knower becomes locked in a sort of “relation” of auto-affection. Human sensibility, on the other hand, creates the sort of wrinkle that disrupts such self-knowing or affecting, for it unavoidably implicates some kind

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47 Kilby enumerates this question, of the possibility of “receptive knowledge” or “knowledge whose proper object is the other,” as the second major one in *Spirit in the World* after the question of the possibility of metaphysics given human knowledge’s grounding in the world. Kilby, KRTP, p. 17.
of alterity toward which sensibility stretches. But to account for the whole of human being by calling the human person a receiver alone, purely material and aesthetic, would be a merely partial view that would risk sacrificing the human capacity for knowledge. A human person characterized by sensibility alone would have access merely to different aesthetic sensations that, after the “abandonment” of oneself into another, would appear merely as auto-affective, yet in a vastly different way than the purely self-possessed being/knower. The stakes of the Rahnerian Thomas’s metaphysics at this point relate to restoring the alterity of the other, or, to stay consistent with the terminology just now introduced, hetero-affection. To understand the possibility of a “gap” is to recognize the possibility of receptive knowing. To understand how there could be a non-knowing being, or a (material, sensible—human!) being whose lower intensity of Being makes it seem non-knowing as compared with higher (purely intuitive) knowers (angels and God), is to recognize the possibility of receptive knowing. The gap provides the space for the conversion to the phantasm. In the conversion to the phantasm, we find that “human being-present-to-self is … a being-with-the-other,” and “to move’ and ‘to be moved’ are the same in their intrinsic being” (SW 77/68, 359/266). To translate these insights into aesthetic terms—in the conversion to the phantasm, auto-affection is hetero-affection.

Thus far we have treated sensibility, the loss of the human knower in the other of the world, and the properly, fully aesthetic moment in human knowledge. As we proceed to §2, we commence a shift to the second aspect of the conversion to the phantasm, which Rahner calls by various names—abstraction, excessus, the activity of the agent intellect. It is well

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48 Rahner indicates the (logical) possibility something like this with the following question: “How then must we grasp these things [objects of knowledge], in our knowing and acting, so that this grasping, instead of leading up to judgment and freedom, i.e., to knowing self-subsistence, may not turn into a being-grasped by the things with which knowledge unifies us?” (HW 44/86).
known that Rahner develops his idea of Vorgriff within his account of this “step” in the conversion to the phantasm, and making a turn to the Vorgriff will necessitate bringing Heidegger more explicitly into the discussion. To review—by looking at aesthesis in Spirit in the World, we have found human receptivity to exemplify hetero-affection, though to such an extreme of emptiness that the hetero-element falls out. What interests us now is the extent to which for Rahner, and for Heidegger, the appearance of the other (hetero-phony) as the appearance of Being (onto-phony) can be salvaged and accounted for. The locus for this ontophany is the aspect of human knowing that Rahner takes to be so elemental in Spirit in the World—the imagination.

§2. Agreement: Noetic to Ontophanic

Imagination and Time

A look at the Kantbuch will bring out the Heideggerian echoes resounding throughout Spirit in the World, and hence a space of agreement between Rahner and Heidegger. Alison Ross argues for the pivotal significance of Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics on Heidegger’s “path” of thinking. This book brings Heidegger from the project of fundamental ontology that he laid out in Being and Time (1927) to a new though certainly not unrelated endeavor: an examination of “the historical setting or ‘occurrence’ of the question of being in the philosophical tradition.”  

Frank Schalow acknowledges something similar, though he puts it in terms of the Kantbuch presenting a historical context for Being and Time, as engaging the

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crisis in metaphysics from Kant to Nietzsche.\textsuperscript{50} In other words, Heidegger’s work on Kant, with its historical focus, precipitated a number of lectures and books devoted to how Being has shown itself (or as we soon shall see, withdrawn itself from sight) throughout the history of philosophy. It is within this period of Heidegger’s interest in onto-phony that Rahner encountered him.\textsuperscript{51}

The Kantian metaphysics of knowledge sketched out in the first edition of the \textit{Critique of Pure Reason} stands at the center of Heidegger’s project in the \textit{Kantbuch}. Heidegger sees his book as working against the grain of “the traditional interpretation of neo-Kantianism,” which privileges the second edition of the \textit{Critique}. In the second edition, Heidegger sees Kant giving “mastery” to logic as preeminent in metaphysics, a mastery he denied to logic, or at least rendered problematic, in the first (see KPM 171/244). This move gives rise, Heidegger believes, to a prevailing (neo-Kantian) epistemological reading of the first critique, and of transcendental metaphysics in general. This obscures the question that intrigued Kant enough for him to attempt a critique of pure reason: the question of Being. Heidegger, by way of contrast, declares in a lecture that he sees the \textit{Critique of Pure Reason} as “no theory of mathematical, natural-scientific knowledge,” indeed no “theory of knowledge at all.”\textsuperscript{52} Whether or not he gets “neo-Kantians” right, Heidegger has resolved to take Kant in a new direction, one in which the “historical” Kant did not explicitly go.\textsuperscript{53}


\textsuperscript{51} Hence the focus on history in this dissertation’s fifth chapter (see §§13-15).


\textsuperscript{53} Heidegger does not use the distinction between the “historical” Kant and the Heideggerian Kant; it is introduced here for clarity’s sake.
The Heideggerian Kant is not a thinker of noetic structures, the understanding of which would aid scientific inquiry, but rather a philosopher of ontophany, the apprehension of which could give access to the essence of metaphysics. He lays the ground for, seeks the origin of, *Metaphysica Generalis*, and with his findings, he shakes “the ground upon which traditional metaphysics is built,” thus creating the conditions under which “the proper edifice of *Metaphysica Specialis,*” including metaphysical thought of God, “begins to totter” (KPM 88/125). This disturbance of special metaphysics, which issues from the origin of general metaphysics, interests Heidegger in a palpably strong manner.

Heidegger’s “retrieval” (*Wiederholung*) of Kant begins when he collects the latter’s “assumptions” about the essence of knowledge into a short thesis regarding metaphysics and Kant’s proposed reconstruction of it. The Heideggerian Kant assumes the “humanity of reason, i.e. its finitude,” as the core of the groundlaying of metaphysics (KPM 15/21, emphasis added). The limits of human knowledge are not due to surface or accidental deficiencies and errors, but rather knowledge’s “essential structure.” Like the Rahnerian Thomas (before Rahner), the Heideggerian Kant contrasts human knowledge, marked by finitude, with “divine” intuition, which enjoys infinitude, and thus sees “through [Being] in advance” (KPM 17/24). Infinite (divine) knowledge can never have an object (KPM 22/31). Human knowledge, by contrast, consists in something with which we have become intimately familiar by reading Rahner, “receptivity” (see KPM 18/25-26). According to Kant, this receptivity of finite intuition creates a need for sense organs. Thus, “Kant for the first time attains a concept of sensibility which is ontological rather than sensualistic” (KPM 19/27). Sensibility interests the Heideggerian Kant because of the way that it receives Being’s “announcing” of itself.
Sensibility unites with what Kant calls the second of two sources of human knowledge: the understanding. By way of their “original unity,” Heidegger tells us, “finite knowledge can be what its essence requires” (KPM 25/36). And this original unity, or synthesis, results from the operation of the “power of imagination” \([\text{Einbildungskraft}]\) (KPM 44/63). The imagination becomes Heidegger’s focus throughout the \textit{Kantbuch}, and ends up being the site of Heidegger’s parting of ways with the Kant of the \textit{Critique of Pure Reason’s} second edition. Kant interpreted in a non-Heideggerian way thinks in terms of two sources; the Heideggerian Kant sees three, three-in-one, or two from one, totaling three.

Heidegger elects a particular, “exclusive” textual site for his interpretation of Kant’s first critique—“the working out of the Transcendental Deduction in the first edition” (KPM 49/69), read in close tandem with the “Schematism of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding.”\(^54\) We then see at least one source of Rahner’s idea to base \textit{Spirit in the World} on a short selection from Thomas, as Heidegger restricted his aperture to a rather brief part of the \textit{Critique}. In the \textit{modus operandi} of this section, Heidegger claims to have found a “formula for the task of an analytic of transcendence, i.e. of a pure phenomenology of the subjectivity of the subject, namely, as a finite subject” (KPM 62/87). In fact, this phenomenology of the subject is precisely what “occurs” in the “Kantian ground-laying for metaphysics” that Heidegger sees going on in the first critique. The possibility of ontology interrelates with the “unveiling of transcendence, i.e., of the subjectivity of the human subject” (KPM 144/205). The \textit{Kantbuch}’s search into the Kantian idea of the imagination, then, preoccupies itself with (re)defining the modern subject.

At the junction of the Transcendental Deduction and the Schematism, the Heideggerian Kant comes up against the idea of the subject as a being who effects a “making-sensible” [Versinnlichung] of the understanding’s concepts (see KPM 63-71/89-101). For sure this is an aesthetic re-reading of Kant, as Ross (among many others) suggests. The transcendence of the human knower is of an aesthetic sort, and in this way a profoundly worldly one, as the Versinnlichung of concepts is also a making sensible of the horizon for knowledge in general. This sensing of the horizon gives the human knower a clear experience of finitude.

Like the Rahnerian Thomas, the Heideggerian Kant insists that instances of finite knowing, which necessarily include a turning to the world in sensibility, offer a meeting with real beings. But for this to happen, the horizon must “have the character of an offering. The turning-toward must in itself be a preparatory bearing-in-mind of what is offerable in general” (KPM 63/90, cf. 44/62—“pure offering”). This preparatory bearing-in-mind pre-figures the Rahnerian Vorgriff, the linchpin of the conversion to the phantasm. The totality of objects of possible experience stands within the horizon, and the understanding “must grasp in advance” (vorgreifen) that this horizon gives itself (KPM 54/77). While the anticipation of the horizon belongs to the understanding, something about the makeup of the human person creates a link between this horizon and sensibility in order for the horizon to appear as offered (or the offerable in general), since humanity cannot evade its sense-receptivity as a condition for the possibility of knowledge. Heidegger seeks a key to understanding this mutuality of conditions for the encountering of a being.

These mutual conditions need a bit of clarification. Heidegger names two Kantian conditions for finite knowledge, which Kant files under the label “possibility of experience” (KPM 82/116). First, there must be a receptive being that the object can “summon.”
Second, there must be something that “open[s] up in advance the horizon of the standing-against, and as such it must be distinct” (KPM 83/117-118). In order for there to be an object, the “summoned” being has to be separate from the object—it cannot lose itself completely in the other, as we saw with Rahner, sensibility is wont to do. What brings these two conditions together, so that there can be a summoned yet distinct knower, or to put it another way, a subject who can sense the horizon?

Time emerges as the solution—one that raises more questions, yet a solution nevertheless. Heidegger argues, “[I]t is time, as given a priori, which in advance bestows upon the horizon of transcendence the character of a perceivable offer” (KPM 76/108). At the base of metaphysics, the Heideggerian Kant finds, lies the imagination, which is also known as (the) original (essence of) time (KPM 131/187). The work of the imagination is the sending or springing forth of time. Ecstatic temporality, that quintessential Heideggerian concept, issues from the transcendental power of imagination—Kant affirms this as if in anticipation of Heidegger. Readers of Being and Time will notice this, and probably connect the imagination’s movement here (in the Kantbuch) with Dasein’s “historizing,” or the “specific movement in which Dasein is stretched along and stretches itself along.”

55 The condition for the possibility of a meeting with Being, the subject matter of metaphysics, Heidegger locates within this finite “stretching.” He says, after just defining transcendence as “ecstatic-horizontal” (ekstatisch-horizontal) that “transcendence makes the being in itself accessible to a finite creature” (KPM 84/119), makes reality seem to advance as an offering. Heidegger says, interpreting Kant’s Lectures on Metaphysics, that time “as pure intuition is the forming intuiting of what intuits in one” (Die Zeit als reine Anschauung ist in einem das bildende Anschauen seines Angeschauten—KPM 123/175). The unique human way of being (knowing)—as the

55 Heidegger, Being and Time, §72, p. 427.
imagin-ation of time—unifies the horizon as offered to sense through a proleptic “grasp” of the understanding. *The Imagination and Time*—this could have been the alternate title for *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.

Time understood in the way just described “forms the essence of something like self-activating,” that is, “the essential structure of subjectivity” (KPM 132/189). Now, if the imagination is the root of sensibility and the understanding (a.k.a. apperception), and the imagination is original time, and time is *Selbstaffektion* (auto-affection), and time is the essential structure of subjectivity, then human subjectivity is at its root auto-affection, prior to sensibility, but also prior to understanding. After all, the transcendental imagination serves as “root” to “both stems.”

This, of course, brings us back to the problematic set up at the end of §1, which talked about the contrast between auto-affection and hetero-affection and how this enters the discussion of the metaphysics of knowledge. The term auto-affection has now peeked its head back in, and in a quite interesting way. Heidegger assigns a sort of primordiality to auto-affection because of the origin-ality of the power of the imagination, which we now know as time. This primacy of auto-affection is granted, though, in light of a need Heidegger perceives for preserving the object-character of the object. The auto-affective origin—call it time or the imagination—though auto-affective, reaches out, of necessity it seems, toward something else. Such is the nature of ecstatic temporality. Hence, just as in *Spirit in the World*, it seems that for Dasein, living from out of its own essence in the world, auto-affection is hetero-affection. Schalow expresses the same idea: “For [Heidegger] shows … how what appears as the subject, in this case the knowing ‘I’ who stands in opposition to an object, is constituted out of otherness.” He continues, “In recasting the a priori synthesis in ontological terms, Heidegger recognizes that the being of the knower must also be
determined from within that intermediary domain which allows the ‘opposing’ of the objectifying act to occur.”

The question still remains, though, whether, when we take the Heideggerian Kant’s cue and “project” the understanding of Being “upon time from out of the ground of the finitude of the Dasein in” the human person (KPM 170/243), this necessitates placing artificial conditions on what sort of other can appear—what kind of ontophany there can be, what the scope of hetero-affection will be like.

Let us conclude this part by examining a couple of passages that will lead us from Heidegger back to Rahner. A paragraph relatively early in the Kantbuch indicates that Heidegger detects behind Kant’s interest in the human noetic framework the generation of insights for ontology. He writes, “The triad of pure intuition [sensibility], pure power of imagination, and pure apperception [understanding] is no longer a juxtaposition of faculties.” Instead, the triad “opens the space for play necessary for a finite creature and in which ‘all relation of Being or Not-Being takes place,’ this [knowledge] must be termed ontological” (KPM 59/84). The ontological triad—so we shall call it—is Heidegger’s prime evidence for how Kant blasts apart his own framework, which despite his revisionary aspiration remains very traditional. Kant presents, for instance, a Transcendental Aesthetic and a Transcendental Logic, corresponding to sensibility and understanding. But this bifurcation is haunted by a “homeless” tertium quid: the transcendental power of imagination (see KPM 94-96/134-137). According to Ross this haunting “undoes Kant’s attempt to ground metaphysics in the operations of a transcendental subject.” The subject has been reformulated—no longer the “I think,” the bastion of “pure reason,” which was traditionally (since Descartes) assumed to be the “proper foundation of metaphysics,” as strictly finite


57 Ross, Aesthetic Paths, p. 70.
and temporal, the subject self-shows as the being that “makes manifest the abyss of metaphysics” (see KPM 150-151/215). The human subject is “Dasein [that] holds itself into the Nothing” (KPM 167/238)—rather than the answer of pure reason, it is the foundational question of metaphysics.

This rethinking of the subjectivity of the subject reveals a creative liberty Heidegger has taken with Kant’s critical system. At least with respect to subjectivity, but probably in other areas, Heidegger reads the first critique through the third, the Critique of Judgment. Heidegger describes the imagination as forming “the look of the horizon of objectivity … before the experience of the being,” even “prior to any possible [experience].” The imagination does not depend on presence (Heidegger carefully deploys both Anwesenheit and Gegenwart in these lines), but rather does its work before presence, making the vision of something like presence possible (KPM 93/131-132).

Heidegger’s description of the imagination’s non-dependence upon presence echoes Kant’s portrayal of aesthetic “disinterestedness.” Kant writes concerning the mental image of a beautiful building, that the pure judgment of its beauty depends not upon the object’s existence, but with what I make from its representation within me, or put otherwise, whether I take pleasure in it or feel pain from it.58 This is not a cognitive judgment. Clearly, the passage from Heidegger demonstrates Heidegger’s interest in the non-cognitive, or to use Kant’s term, reflective, operation of the imagination as a step prior to the establishment of a logical metaphysics based in a concept of Being as enduring presence. Such is the project of the Heideggerian Kant, drawn from the pages of the “historical” Kant. This reflective springboard offers metaphysics a new (yet ancient) impetus—a question—for organizing thought about Being without the logical strictures of modern subjectivity.

58 Kant, Critique of Judgment, §2, p. 47; §5, p. 53.
Let us summarize. Kant’s groundlaying for metaphysics “leads to the transcendental power of the imagination,” the “root of both stems, sensibility and understanding,” thus making “possible the original unity of the ontological synthesis.” The imagination’s rooting in “original time” shows that the “original ground which becomes manifest in the grounding is time” (KPM 141/202). The problem is that Kant recoiled from all of these discoveries. The good news is that Heidegger has retrieved them. These statements bring us to the cusp of the Rahner-Heidegger encounter. They agree that metaphysics after Kant finds its basis in the imagination, as a matter of ontology, not epistemology. Heidegger persists in questioning whether and in what way Being appears within the horizon of time. Rahner conducts a similar inquiry, following Thomas’s admission that “the imagination does not transcend the horizon of time and space [tempus et continuum]” (SW 4-5/19).

Principium mundi

Perhaps the best way of segueing into Rahner’s own ontophanic objection to the “historical” Kant’s noeticism is to note a few comments Rahner makes against modern notions of intentionality. Presumably he has in mind phenomenology in both its loose and strict senses, thus from Kant through Edmund Husserl—the discourse into which Heidegger was plugged. 59 The above exposition of Spirit in the World pointed out that for Rahner, “being able to know and knowability are … intrinsic characteristics of being itself.” Given this point, Rahner argues that “an actual, individual knowing cannot be definitively conceived in its metaphysical essence if it is understood merely as the relationship of a knower to an object different from him, as intentionality” (SW 69/63). Rahner cites the

59 Among the non-Heidegger courses Rahner took at Freiburg was a practicum on Husserl and the phenomenological movement, taught by Fritz Kaufmann (Summer, 1935). Husserlian phenomenology, then, was fresh in Rahner’s brain when he wrote Spirit in the World. See the “Editionsbericht” in Geist in Welt, p. XVII-XVIII. This is yet another source where one can see Rahner’s schedule of classes at Freiburg.
words of Thomas from the Summa Contra Gentiles: “Intellectus in actu perfectio est intellectum in actu.” He translates and elaborates, “[T]he complete, ontological actualization of the intellect is the actually known, an essential proposition which can also be reversed: the actually known, in order to be itself, must be the ontological actualization of the intellect itself” (SW 70/63, emphasis added). Rahner continues the same line of thought a chapter later, during a discussion of the knowledge of sensible objects through sensibility. He rejects the possibility that the “real essence of knowing” could be understood as intentionality aimed at an “in-itself” of an object that has a “merely mental existence” (SW 84/73). In Husserl’s terms, Rahner is saying that for every noesis there certainly is a noema, not as an intentional correlate reducible to consciousness, but rather as a “real physical being” (cf. SW 89/77).\(^6\)

Surely Rahner’s extensive consideration of the Thomistic concept of “intelligible species” (SW 309-83/231-283) seems to have a very close modern equivalent in something like Husserl’s noema, but once again Rahner objects to a facile pairing of the two. He does this on the grounds of the ontology of emanating and receiving influences he sees in Thomas, which eschews the noetic cast of phenomenological ontology. He contends, “In its first and fundamental meaning, the species is not an ‘intentional’ (in the modern sense) double of the external object after the manner of an image, but, as the self-realization of the sensible in the material medium of sensibility, belongs to the object itself, since every emanating influence is a perfection of the agent” (SW 378/279). The sensible object acts on sensibility, which we might approximate as the “intending” subject—hence there is a two-way activity, resulting in a sort of receptivity, in the “subject” that a Husserlian noeticism, which one

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could argue reveals a logical end of Kantian noeticism, tries to cover over. Paul Ricoeur points to something like this in a brief critique of Husserl’s failed project of a “radical self-grounding” of the subject. Phenomenology’s inquiry into the subject, “in spite of itself,” Ricoeur suggests, stumbles upon ontology. It falls into, yet shies away from, the showings of “real being”—ontophanies. Rahner, without stumbling, presupposes such an ontophanic grounding.

The Heideggerian Kant unveils, during the ground-laying for metaphysics, the power of the transcendental imagination as the unifying source of sensibility and understanding. Furthermore, the imagination allows time to spring forth, hence the horizon for sensibility and the understanding (i.e., the encounter with an object). The Rahnerian Thomas has a similar idea, which Rahner treats under two different names, which for all intents and purposes are interchangeable: *intellectus possibilis* and *cogitativa*. The Rahnerian Thomas is just as concerned as the Heideggerian Kant with the unity of human knowledge coming from an original unifying source, thus displaying itself as ontological: “Conversion to the phantasm is the expression designating the essential unity of the one human knowledge, and therefore, it requires that the unity of this knowing be grasped from the unity of the *ontological constitution of man as its origin*, for only then can it be grasped itself” (SW 239/182, emphasis added). The possible intellect/cogitative sense/imagination facilitates this unified ontological grasp.

Rahner gives the term “possible intellect” attention first. It is intellect, obviously, but a unique type: “The possible intellect is possible. It is not until this statement is made that spirituality is apprehended for the first time precisely in its human peculiarity” (SW 242/184). Once again, Rahner uses the intellect of angels as a counter-example to highlight

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the unique receptivity of the human intellect. An angel deals only in intelligibles, and thus receives no sense impressions. It knows “through itself” (SW 243/185). One might say, interestingly enough, that the self-presence of an angel very closely resembles the modern subject’s attachment to presence (see §7). The possible intellect is different. By its very essence, it achieves presence only secondarily: “[I]t is that being which is present to itself in the knowledge of another” (SW 244/186). In order to become what it is, i.e., spirit, the possible intellect “must of itself create the possibility that another can encounter it objectively as its first-known.” This means that this unique sort of spirit can realize itself “only by becoming sensibility” (SW 247/187-188), by a certain Versinnlichung. The possible intellect thus becomes the unifying center and source of sensibility, as well as thought, the activity of intellect (see SW 254/192). The Rahnerian Thomas, in his writings on causality, “knows a receptive principle …which as such is an active principle” (SW 256/194). This principle is that of the “emanation” of the powers of human spirit. This emanation of powers turns out to look just like the Heideggerian “forming of the look of the horizon”: “The spirit itself actively opens for itself its access to the world in letting sensibility emanate; it forms of itself the horizon within which the individual, sensible object can encounter it as always and already open” (SW 264/200). The “possible” nature of the human spirit welcomes the encounter with otherness—hetero-affection—so its self-realization—auto-affection—may be complete.

Rahner’s treatment of the cogitative sense reinforces the idea of a receptive yet active principle. The cogitative sense and possible intellect do have their differences. Whereas the possible intellect lies more toward the receptive side, with an accent on Versinnlichung, the cogitative sense more closely resembles an act—the “spir</p>

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cogitative sense illuminates the object with the light of universality, so that sensibility can recognize the object as something separate, other, an “individual in the common nature” (see SW 270-271/204-205). Thus the possible intellect leans toward sensibility, and the cogitative sense, at least in a way, toward abstraction, but both express the manner of the one human knowledge: conversion to the phantasm. Despite differences of emphasis in his description of them, ultimately the Rahnerian Thomas concedes that the “cogitative sense is really the passive [i.e., possible] intellect: the center of the free spontaneity of spirit (intellect) and the reception of the encountering other in sensibility (passive)” (SW 305/229).

The same, incidentally, goes for the cogitative sense and the imagination, because both refer to the “internal sensibility,” the original receptivity of the human being that grounds external sensation. Furthermore, Rahner finds a textual justification for his linking of the cogitative sense and imagination: “Edith Stein translates ratio particularis, hence cogitative sense, as the ‘power of judgment’ (Urteilskraft).” Rahner notes the German philosophical convention of using “judgment” to designate “the power to think of the particular as contained under the universal,” as in the Kantian schematism. On these grounds, Rahner approves of Stein’s choice to render the cogitative sense in this way. Then he makes a connection: “[T]he power of judgment as the power to synthesize the universal, a priori of the spirit with the a posteriori, sensibly given is formed by the imagination, by which spirit itself forms itself into sensibility” (SW 308-309/231). The past few paragraphs leave us with the following group of relative equivalencies: possible intellect~cogitative sense~imagination~judgment (reflective—see SW 274-279/207-210). To simplify, let us file all these terms under the word “imagination.”

62 If we do that, and get sensibility, intellect

62 In Chapter Five we shall return to this passage to note the magnitude of Rahner’s equation (or at least assignation of congruence) of the imagination and judgment. This, indeed, is not a self-evident philosophical move.
(abstraction/spirit), and imagination as the Rahnerian Thomas’s trio of the powers of knowledge, and if this is all viewed as the ontological constitution of the human person, then we have a complex restatement of the Heideggerian Kant’s “ontological triad.”

The foregoing sounds very much like what we considered from the Heideggerian Kant, if with a bit more of a Latin flair. Where does Rahner make his distinctive mark on this material? A bit of interpretation is in order. In conjunction with his talk of *intellectus possibilitis, cogitativa*, and *Einbildungskraft*, Rahner presents us with the most intriguing and important, yet the most under-appropriated thesis of twentieth-century theological aesthetics. Rahner’s unpublished lectures (mentioned above) grant an example of his use of a phrase that crystallizes this thesis—with respect to the world, God is its “tragende Grund,” its sustaining ground that is “innerlich,” interior to it. Rahner clarifies against pantheism that God is the world’s “absolute beyond” (*Jenseits*), but God remains the *tragende Grund*.

The key to this phrase is the gerund form of *tragen*. As *tragende*, sustaining, God becomes figured as movement, instead of static bedrock. If the ontological constitution of the human person plays out in ecstatic temporality, and Rahner agrees with Heidegger that it does, the God that sustains human time “moves” (along with) the human person. *Spiritus ubi vult spirat* (*Jn 3.8, Biblia Vulgata*).

This idea of the *tragende Grund* is a direct reply to the Heideggerian Kant’s shaking of the foundations of special metaphysics by disrupting the “logical” protocols of general metaphysics. The Rahnerian Thomas denies the validity of a discipline of *metaphysica specialis* where God would be the subject (*Gegenstand*) of the science, for in “der Metaphysik considerantur res divinae non tamquam subjectum scientiae sed tamquam principium subject” (*SW* 389/287)—in other words, “God is a *principle* for human metaphysics” (*SW* 388/287). The

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Rahnerian Thomas avers, “A realm of the metaphysical is opened up to [the human person] only insofar as it is necessary for him to be able to be in the world” (SW 391/289). The person is able to be in the world, or better to recognize her “objective possession of world,” though, because of a pre-apprehension (Vorgriff) of absolute being (SW 398/293). Through this “implicit affirmation,” absolute esse, that is, God, is “given without being conceived, without being represented” (SW 398/293). At the Heideggerian Kant’s prompting, the Rahnerian Thomas finds a new way of thinking God that defies logic, breaks the metaphysical subject’s desire to view God as a metaphysical object—thus defeats the modern subject (see Chapter Three). Instead, God “shines forth” in every apprehension of the horizon (the world or “material quiddity”), every act of sensing the horizon, every time spirit “exposes itself to the whole destiny of this earth” (SW 406/299).

God is the principle of the world, not an object above, alongside, or in it. God manifests God’s self in a special way (theophany as ontophany), namely, through the human imagination, which we now know (Rahner agrees with Heidegger) as the essence of human transcendence. The human imagination is opened to an ever-broader horizon, to ever-more (magis): “Limits and ends are known only by reaching out to a being more comprehensive than that whose limits are known, and in the knowledge removed (aufgehoben)” (SW 395/291). Thus the imagination is a finite opening in the world, which in principle bears the trace of the infinite. The human’s proper place is directly on the horizon, “between time and eternity.” The question of the next chapter will be how human spirit interacts with this horizon. This is a question of ontophany, of aesthetics, but also of fundamental theology.
Noetic to Ontophanic

We have seen that Rahner objects to Kant and phenomenological tradition’s overconfidence in human subjectivity, and how Rahner’s objections find corroboration in Heidegger’s *Kantbuch*. Rahner’s reservations about the Kantian conception of subjectivity, which we treated as carrying through the phenomenological tradition, can be viably interpreted as stemming from a desire to articulate a truly aesthetic point of view. *Spirit in the World* is an exercise in verbalizing the way of human knowing, which coincides with human Being. The book teaches that humans, uniquely, are *aesthetic* knowers, and not just because we have sense organs. We receive the world—not some copy of it—and in the normal operation of our knowing we do not, cannot, guard ourselves against the reception of the world as it shows itself from itself.

Despite Kant’s efforts to diverge from his predecessors since Descartes and to call human knowers back to their true aesthetic manner of knowing, through sense intuition alone, Kant’s version of the subject manages to avoid its own humanity by constituting the world. The Kantian subject, as it were, sets up firewalls around himself, roadblocks to receptivity—this is the payoff of the Kantian insistence that we know only representations of objects, and not these objects in themselves. Subjectivity, then, effectively evades both humanity and world, and becomes locked into the mind alone, or, in Kantian language, *innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*.

Rahner and Heidegger agree, each in his own way, that this purely noetic focus of Kantian subjectivity is a recipe for disaster. Both try to remedy the problem with appeals to the (transcendental) imagination, and thus by a move toward the aesthetic. This is the value

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64 See, for example, Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, “General Remarks on the Transcendental Aesthetic,” pp. 94ff.
Heidegger perceives in the first edition of Kant’s first critique: “This itself … rattles the mastery of reason and the understanding. ‘Logic’ is deprived of its preeminence in metaphysics, which was built up from ancient times. Its idea has become questionable” (KPM 171/243). For Heidegger, Kant’s abandonment of this shaking of logic led to a current of thought that betrayed Kant’s most ingenious discovery: German Idealism, where logic—as evasion of human thinking—returned in full force. Heidegger’s (negative) view of German Idealism will figure into the next section. The point now is that Heidegger finds in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* a sort of aesthetic turn, or at least the ingredients for it—the “aesthetic” as a question for metaphysics, a *grounding* question (*Grundfrage*).

Heidegger finds inspiration in this—so does Rahner.

Critics might ask, does not this turn to the aesthetic, despite its ontophanic flavor, remain within a quasi-Kantian anthropology? Rahner, following Heidegger, outmaneuvers Kant in this respect as well. Rahner is frequently cited as saying that theology must begin as anthropology, and this idea culminates in the *Grundkurs des Glaubens*. But this section, while recognizing that the first section zeroed in on Rahner’s almost exclusive attention to human knowing, is aimed at giving a different spin to Rahner’s meaning in such statements. From the beginning of his career to the end, Rahner was interested in *fundamental* ontology, in the showing of Being from itself. If accessing this ontophany meant “starting with” humanity, Rahner would, just as Heidegger did. Rahner writes about the Heidegger of *Being and Time* and the *Kantbuch*, “What Heidegger says about [the human person] is always first and

65 Let us consider two examples. First, in the chapter entitled “The Hearer of the Message,” Rahner writes, “[T]heology itself implies a philosophical anthropology which enables this message of grace to be accepted in a really philosophical and reasonable way, and which gives an account of it in a humanly responsible way.” Second, in the final chapter on eschatology, Rahner observes, “Christian anthropology is Christian futurology and Christian eschatology” (FCF 25, 431).
foremost subordinated to the universal question of being.”\textsuperscript{66} Besides, if one wishes to call into question the ground of modern metaphysics—human subjectivity—the human should be one’s starting point.

§3. Disagreement: Finite or Infinite

\textit{Heidegger and Finitude}

This chapter’s introduction made brief reference to Rahner’s observation (accusation?) that Heidegger holds to a certain “apriorism of finitude” (\textit{Apriorismus der Eindlichkeit}).\textsuperscript{67} This section will explore how that “apriorism” plays out in Heidegger’s \textit{Kantbuch}, as well as other works immediately before, during, and after Rahner’s personal encounter with Heidegger. It will then show how Rahner differs from Heidegger on this count.

Heidegger states that within first \textit{Critique}’s task “the ‘critique’ of the difference between finite and infinite knowledge must carry special weight” (KPM 22/32). Heidegger carries the torch of this critique by championing the finite while calling into question the very possibility of infinite knowledge. In doing so, Heidegger envisions himself reversing a trend of a “growing forgetting of what Kant struggled for,” which began with German Idealism (KPM 171/244). Heidegger opposes German Idealism, for it leads to Hegel’s pretension to present “God as He is in His eternal essence” (KPM 171/244).\textsuperscript{68} Such logical philosophy, in forgetting its proper limits, which Kant attempted to lay down, likewise


\textsuperscript{67} Rahner, “Vortragskizzen” in \textit{Geist in Welt}, p. 444.

\textsuperscript{68} Heidegger quotes a passage from Hegel’s \textit{Logic}. 

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forgets its humanity. Kant left the door open for such a philosophical disaster by forcing his discovery of the power of the transcendental imagination into an “architectonic” oriented “toward traditional logic.” Heidegger wishes to release the imagination, thus finitude—“to hold the investigation open”—through questioning. He asks, “[I]s it permissible to develop the finitude in Dasein only as a problem, without a ‘presupposed’ infinitude? What in general is the nature of this ‘presupposing’ in Dasein? What does the infinitude which is so ‘composed’ mean?” (KPM 172/246).

The problem, one might say, is an overactive imagination, or a concept of the imagination that allows it activity beyond its means. Heidegger wants to avoid what he regards as the “constructed idea” of “absolute knowing,”69 which guides German Idealism, the extreme case of Western metaphysics. He concedes that in the Kantian view of imagination something like infinitude emerges. After all, the imagination is creative, productive. Heidegger concedes a certain claim to infinitude in the finite human creature, for this being can surpass itself indefinitely to understand Being. But the limited means through which the human being attains to such understanding, i.e., “thrown” engagement with beings, leads to the following conclusion: “[T]his infinitude which breaks out in the power of imagination is precisely the strongest argument for finitude, for ontology is an index of finitude.”70 Alison Ross’s commentary on the Kantbuch can enlighten the above paragraph: “Heidegger’s Kant book can be read … as identifying in the transcendental power of the imagination the priority of presentation to the supposed terms that are to be related through it.” Imagination presents infinitude, but cannot create like an infinite being


70 Heidegger, “Davos Disputation between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger,” Appendix IV in KPM 197/280.
could (in theory). The Heideggerian Kant arrives at the “insight that the absolute does not ‘precede’ or ground ‘its’ presentation.”\textsuperscript{71} Ross sees this movement as counter to what the “historical” Kant intended: “Heidegger in fact reverses Kant’s perspective to argue that the ideas of reason,” i.e., those that point toward the infinite, “do not, as Kant thought, precede the elements and context of material life but are in fact drawn from this context in the first place.”\textsuperscript{72} Heidegger’s view of presentation effects a shift in apriority. Kant blocks the intellectual intuition of the Absolute, but Heidegger amplifies this position in order to make sure that Kant’s granting of precedence to logic does not seem necessarily to pave the way for German Idealism, which eliminates finitude. For the Heideggerian Kant, Being shows itself to and through the imagination under the conditions of finitude—even in its greatest moments of productive (as opposed to reproductive) activity.\textsuperscript{73}

The above section talked about being’s showing of itself, and how this is important for Heidegger as he reconstructs Kant. This discourse on ontophany had to precede the next point. For Heidegger, perhaps the defining characteristic of Being is its withdrawal from appearance, its refusal to be comprehended.\textsuperscript{74} Heidegger’s work on the history of philosophy, which he begins around the time of Rahner’s encounter with him, attempts to discuss this insight in various ways. Early in the \textit{Kantbuch} Heidegger makes several statements that circle around the insight. For example, Heidegger says of Kant’s failure to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Ross, \textit{Aesthetic Paths}, pp. 78-79.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p. 81.
\item \textsuperscript{73} This distinction comes from Kant’s \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}. To put it a bit over-simply, let us think of the distinction along the lines of that between the aesthetic and the sublime, with reproductive imagination corresponding to the former, and productive imagination to the latter. Furthermore, let it be said (though not specified how) that German Idealists such as Schelling and Hegel allowed productive imagination to roam unregulated in a way to which Kant would have objected. For Kant’s distinction, see \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, p. 191-192 and 166n142.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Ross, \textit{Aesthetic Paths}, p. 65.
\end{itemize}
pursue his idea of the “common root” of sensibility and understanding, “[I]t leads not to the crystal clear, absolute evidence of a first maxim and principle, but rather goes into and points consciously toward the unknown” (KPM 26/37). Kant’s coming up against the unknown gets its full formulation later on in the Kantbuch, in §31, “The Originality of the Previously Laid Ground and Kant’s Shrinking Back from the Transcendental Power of the Imagination.”

To summarize, Being shows itself in Kant’s glimpse of the power of the imagination; it conceals itself in Kant’s failure to pursue his inquiry into the imagination. Hence the two editions of the Critique of Pure Reason are a performance of the mystery of Being in its showing of itself. Mystery manifests itself as the unknown, and the unknown is “what pushes against us as something disquieting in what is known” [was uns im Erkannten als das Beunruhigende entgegendrängt] (KPM 112/160). Heidegger contends that Kant could not take the disquiet. Kant fell short where he could have made the most sober statement of finitude, the complete finitude of Being, in the history of philosophy. In doing this, Kant acted out the very problem that Heidegger has with the metaphysical tradition.

Heidegger responds to this problem, which has at its foundation an apriorism of infinitude with an apriorism of his own—of finitude. Heidegger insists on this because he believes metaphysics misses its own point. Infinitude is not what philosophy should seek, but rather, because “philosophy opens out onto the totality and what is highest in man, finitude must appear in philosophy in a completely radical way.”

Ontology is a form of thought. Thought is by nature finite. Thus ontology is an index of finitude. Metaphysics obscures its own modus operandi when, à la Hegel, it pretends to infinite knowledge. In order for thought to return to the right track, Being must remain a mystery, questionable, a lure.

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Heidegger concisely lays out his view of the mystery of being in an essay written just a few years after Rahner’s contact with him, “Nietzsche’s Word: ‘God is Dead’” (1943):

Being itself removes itself into its truth. It saves [birgt] itself in its truth and conceals [verbirgt] itself in such shelter [Bergen].

In looking at the self-concealing shelter [das sich verborgende Bergen] of its own essence, perhaps we can catch a glimpse of the essence of the mystery which the truth of being essences.  

Being’s truth eludes any attempt by a knowing subject to comprehend it. In a post-Nietzschean world—actually it should have been all along—“questioning itself becomes the highest form of knowing.”

Heidegger observes, in words that make quite a bit of sense, that “an answer that bids adieu to the inquiry annihilates itself as an answer.” Such was the case throughout the history of metaphysics. The metaphysical tradition purported in many ways to reach some sort of a “beyond” through answers about Being. The problem, it seems that Heidegger would agree with Nietzsche, is this: “When the emphasis of life is put on the ‘beyond’ rather than on life itself—when it is put on nothingness—then the emphasis has been completely removed from life.” After Nietzsche, thinkers can, in a spirit of finitude without pretenses to the absolute, pursue questions in order to catch glimpses of the mystery, without demanding answers such as a full appearance of the mystery as infinite (in or

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“beyond” time). The mystery remains veiled and, most importantly, finite. The thinker’s task is to be comfortable with that fact, and piously to ask another question.

Much of Heidegger’s thought on mystery and questioning Rahner would find admissible, even fructifying for theology. In fact, Rahner’s theology of mystery is the main topic of Chapter Four. The problem, from a Rahnerian point of view, is a condition that Heidegger places on one specific question—the question of God. Jean-Luc Marion, referencing Heidegger’s text “Phenomenology and Theology” (1928—one year before the Kantbuch)—a text to which Rahner’s Hearer of the Word seems a direct, corrective response—puts it best: “God will never be able to appear within the field of questioning thought except under the mediating conditions first of ‘christianness’ and then of Dasein.” The question of God “plays only ontically,” meaning that ontologically God has no bearing on inquiry. Truly, Heidegger sticks by his assertion that ontology, the ontological, is “an index of finitude.” There is no room for the absolute, the infinite, or the divine in ontology—in the world. Thus Heidegger, who apologizes for the question everywhere else, refuses the question of God. He provides an answer that bids adieu to inquiry.

Our concern in this dissertation is with aesthetics, and we approach that area of thought through the imagination. For Heidegger, finite Dasein cannot imagine, make sense of, infinitude (even if it occasionally flashes from the imagination). To be specific, Heidegger treats the mystery of God as unimaginable. On the one hand, this is absolutely correct, but on the other, aggressively anti-Christological. This shows especially when Heidegger calls into question the Christian interpretation of Logos, treating it as a

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81 Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, p. 209.
misconstrual of Heraclitus’s teaching.\textsuperscript{82} Rahner cannot settle for this train of thought theologically, but also not philosophically—this we must now understand.

\textit{Rahner and Infinitude}

Sheehan describes the Rahnerian (Thomas’s) viewpoint on metaphysics as follows: “Metaphysics is a matter of taking one’s own pulse and feeling one’s own passions. It is the systematic destruction of all systems that would freeze movement and pacify desire, even those which promise a perfect \textit{stasis} in a vision of God.”\textsuperscript{83} Sheehan rightly observes after this that the above sentences evoke a stance that has much more in common with Nietzsche than with Plato or Plotinus. Certainly what Sheehan has said squares closely with Nietzsche and his Dionysian dance through the world, the nay-saying to metaphysics that he trumpets as yea-saying to the world.\textsuperscript{84} But is this Rahner? Patrick Burke expresses the concern that Sheehan has lost Rahner’s scent by “reducing knowing in Rahner to sensibility alone.”\textsuperscript{85} This well-conceived (if parenthetical) criticism can help us to make a crucial distinction between Rahnerian metaphysics/aesthetics and the Nietzschean, and Heideggerian, variety. Rahner refuses to revel in the finite to the point of proscribing appearances of the infinite in the world. Sensibility (\textit{aesthesis}) is not the last word of Rahnerian thought, but rather an

\textsuperscript{82} Heidegger, \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics}, pp. 133-134.

\textsuperscript{83} Sheehan, \textit{Karl Rahner}, 192.

\textsuperscript{84} See Nietzsche, \textit{Twilight of the Idols}, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” §49, p. 222-223, where Nietzsche praises Goethe as his Dionysian precursor: “A spirit like this who has become free stands in the middle of the world with a cheerful and trusting fatalism in the belief that only the individual is reprehensible, that everything is redeemed and affirmed in the whole—he does not negate any more … But a belief like this is the highest of all possible beliefs: I have christened it with the name Dionysos.” Another interesting thing about his paragraph is Nietzsche’s contrast of Goethe and Kant, a contrast that foreshadows that between the Heideggerian Kant and the “historical” Kant.

\textsuperscript{85} Burke, \textit{Reinterpreting Rahner}, p. 11n35.
important term in the whole process of the conversion to the phantasm, which gives the Rahnerian viewpoint its shape.

Rahner affirms the world, for sure, and in this respect Sheehan reads him correctly. But Rahner’s positive reception of the world is not Nietzschean, but rather Ignatian. Rahner informs us, “Ignatian affirmation of the world is not a naïve optimism, not an installing ourselves in the world as though we had in it the center of our lives.” Calling Nietzsche naively optimistic is more than a little gauche, not to mention incorrect, and besides, Rahner is not referring to him here. The world-centeredness Rahner talks about, though, does apply to Nietzsche, and Heidegger after him. To say that the human person is spirit in the world is to observe that the human person belongs in the world, for sure, and that the process of human knowing meets Being within the horizon we call world. Human knowing is, as the subtitle of *Spirit in the World* tells us, finite knowing (*endliche Erkenntnis*). But, *pace* Heidegger and Nietzsche, this is not the end of the story, *a priori*. For Rahner, philosophy needs a wider scope. The philosophical possibility must remain open that world-affirming people could also apprehend something like a Christ, that something other could be imaginable for a finite being that senses the horizon in time.

Rahner considers it the decisive characteristic of human knowing that “human knowledge as a pre-apprehending is ordered to what is absolutely infinite.” This constitutes the reason for the first half of *Spirit in the World*’s title: “Man is spirit because he finds himself situated before being in its totality which is infinite” (SW 186/146). In these remarks we see Rahner’s fundamental disagreement with Heidegger. For the latter, “ontology,” which comes to light in the *Vorgriff* (with *Vorsicht* and *Vorhabe*), “is an index of finitude,” and in

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keeping with this, either finite beings appear to human consciousness, or nothing does. For Rahner, Heidegger, as the “logical outcome of the Kant who opposed German idealism,” has asserted “the Vorgriff toward nothingness” as if it were fact, when in reality it is “an unverifiable hypothesis.” Rahner opposes to this hypothesis the thesis that “the Vorgriff toward being as such in its essential infinity belongs to the basic makeup of human existence” (HW 50/98). This is all prior to saying that the Vorgriff, in a carefully qualified way, “comes upon God [geht auf Gott]” (SW 181/143, ET modified)—as principium mundi.

Rahner’s Vorgriff has affinities with German Idealism. A major piece of evidence for this idea is Rahner’s statement in a note that Heidegger’s apriorism of finitude is “against us, wherein we [are] idealistic (gegen uns, worin wir idealistisch).”87 Rahner flirts with idealism through his own sort of a priori. In another important note, Rahner contrasts Thomas with Augustine, against the grain of a more traditional view that Augustine is an a priori thinker while Thomas is an a posteriori one. Instead, Rahner says that the fundamental difference between the thinkers plays out as “an apriorism of the intellectual light as a formal a priori of the subject in Thomas, and the apriorism of an idea objectively existing in itself in Augustine” (SW 390n9/288n9). The Thomistic intellectual light is the shining activity of finite spirit that in-spires the world (see SW 406/299). Also, as Vorgriff, this intellectual light touches absolute, infinite spirit, or at least leaves open such a possibility. This is something like idealism. In fact, it seems inspired, ironically perhaps, by Heidegger’s own words about Schelling, which Rahner would have heard in a 1936 lecture course. For Schelling, “The human is experienced in what drives him beyond himself in terms of those necessities by which he is established as … other … The human—that other—he must alone be the one

through whom the God can reveal himself at all, if he reveals himself.” Should God self-reveal—this is the question of *Heiner of the Word*—God would self-reveal through the *Vorgriff*, driving the human person beyond herself, toward something other.

Rahner avoids “absolute idealism” in the way Heidegger would—by invoking the human need to inquire, to question (HW 59/114). Rahner agrees with Heidegger that there is something worthy of question in the following: “[D]espite and in its luminosity, pure being is that which is utterly concealed.” We must ask “why being, to the extent that it is being, is not only present-to-itself, but also hidden, present-only-to-itself” (HW 58/112). As with Heidegger, this is not just a *de facto* concealment of Being, but one *de iure*, in principle. But for Rahner this question of infinite Being’s concealment, of God as hidden sustaining ground, is also the question of absolute Being meeting finite questions with a *free* revelation.

The Rahnerian Thomas’s intellectual light, even though it has an absolutely unlimited breadth in principle, meets absolute Being in a way comparable to an encounter with a “free, autonomous person,” where its “knowing slips back into unknowing.” A free person must choose to reveal herself, no matter the activity of the knower who approaches her. Such is the case with the personal God (HW 70/134).

Rahner the theologian holds that God, whom no one has seen (*de iure*), is always God made manifest (*de facto*) in Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 1.18). Rahner the philosopher does not proclaim Christ as Lord, or God as appearing in Christ, but he does leave open the door for


89 Heading off objections, Rahner writes, “[T]his personal face of God is not ascribed to God because we belatedly provide absolute being with human features. Rather God appears as a person in the self-disclosure of absolute being for human transcendence, because absolute being appears in the totality of being about which we not only can but must inquire” (HW 70/132-134).
the Christ to enter. This, in effect, is what his work on the conversion to the phantasm accomplishes. In *Hearer of the Word*, Rahner observes, “[W]e cannot say whether the spirit’s transcendental capacity may ever be filled without the help of a finite sense object” (HW 63/100). This may seem like a straightforward restatement of the Rahnerian Thomas’s metaphysics of knowledge, but we know that Rahner’s interpretation of this metaphysics is by no means straightforward. The mystery of God certainly entails God’s veiling of God’s self in the inapproachable light (1 Tim 6.16) which spirit anticipates (*vorgreift*), but the Trinitarian God has not left the human imagination without something to experience, for whoever sees the Son has seen the Father (Jn 14.9). In God’s freedom, God could have remained silent, but God chose to speak, thus opening God’s “hidden essence” to human spirit (cf. HW 73/138).

Proscribing the appearance of the infinite, as Heidegger does, is both an anti-Christological gesture, but also, Rahner implies, a philosophical hypothesis treated as undeniable fact. Derrida sums up what Heidegger worries about with respect to questioning—he is concerned that in metaphysics “the answer has already begun to determine the question.” It seems that Heidegger’s refusal to admit the possibility of a creator God or a mediator such as Christ determines the question with an answer just as

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90 Interestingly enough, though, when speaking of Thomist ontology, Rahner frequently refers to the *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV.11. He finds this chapter remarkable as a statement of Thomas’s conviction that the intensity of a being’s Being corresponds to its capacity for returning to itself (that is, as agent intellect). Even more noteworthy, at least for our purposes, is the subject matter of this chapter from Thomas. As it turns out, *SCG* IV.11 does consider causality and emanation, the material that interests Rahner, but its title—“How generation is to be understood in divinity, and what is said of the Son of God in Scripture”—reveals the chapter’s overall purpose. This is a Christological, and thus by definition Trinitarian, chapter; more than two-thirds of it explicates the relationship between God and God’s Word. One of Rahner’s favored resources, then, for his exposition of Thomist general ontology, which we have treated as a device for clarifying the spirituality of human knowing, is a Christological one. See HW 33/68 and SW 358n56/265n338.

much as the Christian affirmation of these tenets. Heidegger, even as he tries to open the field for ontophanies, restricts it—unjustifiably. To Heidegger’s proscription, Rahner opposes the thesis of the *Vorgriff* as a “co-affirmation” of the infinite in each finite act of questioning and/or knowing, not as a representation of the infinite, but as the condition of the possibility for knowledge of finite beings, driven by the infinite as *principium mundi* (HW 59/112). This co-affirmation operates somewhere between a question and an answer, for it drives the human person towards both. In phenomenological terms, Rahner allows for a broader field of phenomenality than Heidegger does. A note of Rahner’s on Heidegger’s “What is Metaphysics?” sums up the former’s position: “*Bei uns darf der Seinsbegriff nicht innerlich endlich sein*” (For us the concept of Being should not be inherently finite).  

Above it was indicated that *Hearer of the Word* seems a direct response to Heidegger’s “Phenomenology and Theology.” This comment is relevant in light of both the last paragraph’s point, that Rahner opens phenomenality wider than Heidegger, and the topic of the chapter in general, which is Rahner and Heidegger’s meeting over Kantian metaphysics. Both the Rahnerian Thomas and the Heideggerian Kant share the project of setting forth a metaphysics that describes human knowledge as a unified act characterized by two operations (sensibility and understanding) flowing from a common source (imagination). Rahner and Heidegger, in the two works now at issue (*Hearer of the Word* and “Phenomenology and Theology”), set their sights on defining the relationship between philosophy and theology. In doing so, one thinker remains consistent with respect to the project of defining a common source for two related operations, and the other deviates from it. Rahner, in keeping with *Spirit in the World*, says, “The problem of the relation between theology and the philosophy of religion is the metaphysical problem of the common ground

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from which both spring, hence it is also an inquiry into human nature, as the nature of the being who necessarily cultivates these sciences” (HW 4/14). Heidegger, by contrast, writes, “Theology is a positive science and as such is absolutely different from philosophy.”

Heidegger makes this claim in order to bar theology—the discourse driven by the question of God—from the high status of philosophy as the sole ontological discipline. Philosophy, in Heidegger’s hands, is a jealous science. Two questions arise: 1) Did an apparent double standard appear in Heidegger with respect to philosophy and theology because of his refusal to open phenomenality to its widest possible aperture? 2) In Heidegger’s opposition to something like a Rahnerian, Catholic proposal for ontological co-operation between philosophy and theology do we find a latent Heideggerian Protestantism (see §14)?

What Is Orientation in Imagination?

The chapter should end where it began, at the Kantian critique of metaphysics, which occasioned the encounter between Rahner and Heidegger. Kant ends his brilliant essay, “What is Orientation in Thinking?,” large sections of which deal with the philosophy of God, with a flourish worth repeating:

Friends of the human race and of all that it holds most sacred! Accept whatever seems most credible to you after careful and honest examination, whether it is a matter of facts or of rational arguments; but do not deny reason that prerogative.


94 We shall return to this question in Chapter Five, but for now, a few comments. The question really comes down to what Heidegger means when he uses the word “Christianity.” He gives somewhat of an indication when he describes Nietzsche’s view of Christianity: “For Nietzsche, Christianity is the historical, secular-political phenomenon of the church and its claim to power within the formation of Western humanity and its modern culture. Christianity in this sense and the Christian life of the New Testament faith are not the same.” Heidegger, “Nietzsche’s Word: ‘God is Dead’”, p. 164. Heidegger agrees with Nietzsche. He sees the external trappings of the Christian Church as merely accidental—they can easily be jettisoned, leaving faith alone, sola fide. The best reference on Heidegger’s Protestant leanings is S.J. McGrath in his two books, The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006) and Heidegger: A (Very) Critical Introduction (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008).
which makes it the greatest good on earth, namely its right to be the ultimate
touchstone of truth. If you fail in this respect, you will be unworthy of this freedom
and will surely forfeit it; and you will bring the same misfortune down upon those
other guiltless souls who would otherwise have been inclined to employ their
freedom lawfully and hence in a manner conducive to the world’s best interests.}

Kant shows his colors as the consummate Aufklärer, encouraging his readers to think for
themselves, which involves, of course, staying within the legal limits—the destiny of
humanity depends upon such autonomous reasoning. Freedom, rightly employed, is a
choice of the correct orientation—the North Star for thinking. The whole world has an
interest in one’s vigilant, informed decision. Kant even suggests that the world, or at least its
capacity for knowing truth, has two choices: Enlightenment or destruction.

Whether or not Kant overstates the case, the rhetorical force, the apocalyptic tone,
of his final paragraph is somewhat attractive. Kant performs for us an important insight:
there is a type of gravity—sublime, eschatological—we can and should attribute to the
directionality of thought, its whence and its whither, what drives it forward and what draws
it in. Rahner and Heidegger agree that thought after Kant’s critique of metaphysics
functions properly as metaphysics on the basis of the imagination. The final problematic we
need to treat, then, is how Rahner and Heidegger describe the orientation of the imagination.

The introduction to the dissertation explained a distinction borrowed from Karsten
Harries between the positive sublime and the negative sublime. The positive sublime has
been associated with ontaphanic thinkers such as Rahner and Heidegger, who accentuate the
undergoing of an “epiphany of the numinous” that accompanies the announcement of a
phenomenon to consciousness, and the negative sublime with thinkers of a noetic stripe,
with Kant in mind, who stress the loftiness of the freedom of consciousness to constitute

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95 Kant, “What is Orientation in Thinking?” in Kant: Political Writings, ed. H.S. Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet
phenomena. Now, we must introduce a further distinction. The above sections on the agreement and disagreement between Rahner and Heidegger have established that the two thinkers belong to a similar trajectory, but that they eventually diverge from each other. Between Rahner and Heidegger a division opens within the positive sublime, and this new distinction relates to the orientation of imagination, and, more specifically, the transcendence associated with the imagination. To put it plainly, where does transcendence go?

Heidegger exhibits in the writings and lectures of the '30s and '40s a sort of experience of the numinous that nevertheless has affinities with the negative sublime. Especially within his Rectorship address and his works on Hölderlin, Heidegger evidences a spiritual experience of the German people, of blood and nation, of the glow of the hearth.96 These spiritual experiences, though they in part exceed the individual, reveal a transcendence that is only that of the human person himself.97 Rahner makes a clear attack on this aspect of Heidegger’s thought within the context of his development of a philosophy of religion in Hearer of the Word. What Rahner says here about philosophy of religion applies to Heidegger’s thought of Being—“No objectified projection of racial peculiarities, of blood or

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96 This dissertation can make no more than tangential contact with the voluminous literature on Heidegger’s Nazism. Obviously, Heidegger was an active member of the Nazi party for a time during the 1930s, most notably as Rector at Freiburg from 1933-34. Heidegger’s Nazism does not bear heavily on this dissertation, since its primary concern is Rahner, not Heidegger or whether and how long Heidegger remained a Nazi. The more proximate concern, is twofold: 1) whether Heidegger indefensibly espouses an apriorism of finitude and 2) whether Heidegger’s thought inevitably romances evil (on this latter concern, see §11).

97 See Harries, Meaning of Modern Art, p. 45: “The negative sublime … presents the world in its nothingness, but not to reveal a meaningful reality beyond or behind the finite. The only transcendence revealed is that of man himself.” This might sound like Heidegger, but the reason he remains a representative of the “positive sublime” because Harries’s next sentences do not apply to him, or at least only do with some qualifications: “The finite is negated only the liberate the subject. The negative sublime is the epiphany of freedom.” Heidegger’s critique of the modern subject distinguishes him from this trajectory.
nation, of world or of anything else, not even the absolute idea of humanity, can possibly be considered as the ‘divine’” (HW 54/104).

For now let it be said that Rahner’s concern with metaphysics, which we can (and will) extrapolate to Heidegger’s more poetic thought, is that its basis in the imagination will tempt thinking to aim too low, or not to aim enough. In a theological essay from 1937, Rahner identifies as the “original sin in the history of philosophy” that the metaphysics of knowledge from the early Greeks through Hegel allowed “God to be only what the world is, [made] God in the image of man,” even conceived of “piety as a consideration for the world.” Even with the maneuvers Heidegger had begun to evade the metaphysical tradition, one gets the sense that Rahner nevertheless suspects Heidegger as still representing philosophy’s historical sin. Surely he has Heidegger in mind when he insists that the manifestation of the absolute must come as the discourse not of a “dark urge,” “abysmal night,” or “blind will,” but of “eternal light” (HW 41/80; cf. 1 Jn 1.5). The world could never shine as bright as the Father of lights (Jas 1.17).

What is Rahner’s (counter-)experience of the numinous? Rahner calls it an apprehension of eternal light, but what else? Rahner directs his imagination toward the ever-greater glory of God (ad majorem Dei gloriam). This attitude of the imagination, Rahner contends, readies us to “work as long as the day lasts, immerse [ourselves] in the work of the

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98 This statement still fits in our own day and context, where America has become overrun with a nationalism—patriotism is merely a euphemism—(on both sides of the political spectrum) almost as deeply misguided as the fascism to which Heidegger subscribed and the communism he detested. The failure of imagination Rahner ascribes to Heidegger has its present-day analogue precisely in American political life, which anyone with a tiny bit of awareness knows is just around the corner from most American religiosity.


time in the world and yet await with deep longing the Coming of the Lord.”\textsuperscript{101} This apprehension of the numinous is one of time, and one of finitude and world, thus we have another apparent agreement between Rahner and Heidegger. This time of working and waiting in the world—“ecstatic temporality”—holds the attention of both the Rahnerian Thomas and the Heideggerian Kant. But once again, this agreement is the site of a greater disagreement. Both of our thinkers associate the imagination with time, but Heidegger’s “horizon of time” blocks exactly what, or the one who, Rahner anticipates coming on the horizon—the Son of Man (Lk 21.27). The distinction within the positive sublime becomes a difference in eschatology. There is an eschatological question with which we must wrestle, culminating in Chapter Five: How do we, to take a phrase from the Heideggerian Kant, form the look of the horizon (see KPM 64/90)?

At the end of \textit{Being and Time}, Heidegger asks, “Does time itself manifest itself as the horizon of \textit{Being}?\textsuperscript{102} It seems, in keeping with Heidegger’s well-known analyses earlier in \textit{Being and Time}, that time does reveal itself as such a horizon. Time is the unthematic experience of \textit{Dasein} as a being towards death, who, through the understanding of its “ownmost possibility,” unveils its \textit{Being} as bound up with “the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all.”\textsuperscript{103} Such dire descriptions of finitude typify the Heideggerian imagination. It is certainly no coincidence that in \textit{Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics}, Heidegger uses the example of a “death mask” [\textit{Totenmaske}] (actually a photograph of it) as typical of the production of images (see KPM 66/94; see §12).

\textit{Heideggerian Being}, \textit{Heideggerian aesthetics}, the \textit{Heideggerian sublime}, as we shall see more

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\item \textsuperscript{101} Rahner, “Ignatian Mysticism of Joy in the World,” p. 293.
\item \textsuperscript{102} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, p. 488.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Ibid., p. 307.
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and more, comprise a discourse of openness, unconcealment, *aletheia* that hurtles toward an ultimate foreclosure. That is where transcendence goes for Heidegger, to no other “place.”

Rahner and his Thomas recognize and reckon with this world as the only world, so in a way, transcendence goes to no other “place” for them, either. But before we stop our train of thought there (much too early), we will have to contend at least a bit with Rahner’s thoughts on an ancient yet until recently all but forgotten Christian tradition, that of the spiritual senses. This chapter does not mean to give the impression that Rahner’s thoughts on the appearance of the infinite come solely as a result of his engagement with Heidegger. To the contrary, before Rahner encountered Heidegger at Freiburg, Rahner had already composed and published some material on the spiritual senses in the patristic and medieval eras. The Rahnerian aesthetics exposed above has patristic and medieval roots to go along with its modern ones, in but not just in Thomas. These medieval roots recall Rahner to something that those under the spell of Kant, even those such as Heidegger who critique Kant, forget—that this world opens. Heidegger asserts this, tries to articulate this, but his proscription of the appearance of the infinite obscures this. The world of space and time opens, within space and time, to something (like a) beyond. The Church Fathers and the medievals had a strong Pauline sense, such as he proclaims in Romans, “Creation awaits in eager expectation the revelation of the children of God” (Rom 8.19). Paul awaited an opening—a further opening—in the world (not of it), which would begin through some sort

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of a change in, a new revelation of, humanity. The Fathers and the medievals did, also; hence the doctrine of *thesis*—divinization—to which the idea of spiritual senses relates as a corollary.

Surely Thomas’s is not the only significant medieval voice defining the timbre of Rahner’s own. The impression of Bonaventure, Thomas’s colleague at the University of Paris, lies embedded rather noticeably in the Rahnerian Thomas’s thesis of God as *principium mundi* or *tragende Grund*. Suffice it to say that Rahner’s avoidance of intellectual intuition abides, but his affinity for Bonaventurian theology and spirituality, with its teaching of divine illumination, lends a unique brightness to the Rahnerian Thomas’s intellectual light. Aesthesis is transformed spiritually, by itself but at the same time by the initiative of another. Rahner’s view of the imagination applies to all people, but, lest critics object too quickly, in a minimal fashion (as an “empty possibility”). The sublimity of Christian grace, or Christian transcendence, is fully accessible only to those who are summoned to the world as the realm where Jesus Christ effected our salvation. The one who has ears will hear (cf. Mt 11.15)— *only* that one.

A later statement illustrates the continued influence of Rahner’s early work on the spiritual senses:

> Just as there are some scientific instruments to establish a ‘more’ in reality in the sphere of the material world, so too without instruments, but *not without the higher development of the spirit*, there are experiences which grasp that eternity which does not extend as a temporal continuation ‘beyond’ our life, but rather is embedded in the time of freedom and responsibility as the realm where they come to be in time (FCF 272, emphasis added).

Rahner speaks in this passage of eternal life, but viewed in terms of, and certainly not separate from life on earth. Life in this world, lived in freedom, can with the proper cultivation attain a level of aesthesis that yields something more (other). Rahner, borrowing
from Bonaventure, renders this more using the term “contact.” Chapter Two will elaborate on the theme of touch, further braiding together Bonaventure and the Rahnerian Thomas in a discussion of the “common sense,” or sensus communis. All the while, though, we shall keep in mind Rahner’s preference for ocularity (see §13), which his metaphors of light, especially his teaching of the beatific vision, make clear.

What is orientation in imagination? Orientation in imagination directs what we make of history. The strong words Rahner uses at the end of Hearer of the Word indicate what he supports bringing forth: “the place at which alone the free God of a revelation can be adequately reached”—the Catholic Church (HW 156/278). Rahner’s finite thinking reflects on human life in the world, this world—but without denying that elsewhere can appear here. Thought based in the world opens the world—by way of the principle of the world, which is this opening. This chapter has laid the groundwork for an understanding of Rahner’s imagination as it looks toward the future, a world that eludes modern subjectivity’s grasping. Though this account of the imagination resembles the Heideggerian one, and even owes it debts, we have already noted how much difference orientation can make.

Conclusion

Rahner deemed it possible in 1940 that Heidegger might publish the remaining planned sections of Being and Time, and Rahner felt free to speculate as to the direction of Heidegger’s future work. Rahner suggests a “final option” that Heidegger will eventually

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106 The conclusion of Hearer of the Word, which applies the much-controverted phrase extra ecclesiam nulla salus (outside the Church no salvation) to the “Holy Roman Catholic Church” may have undergone some changes in light of Vatican II’s ecclesiology. The substitution of the phrase subsistit in for est to describe the locus of the true Church in the Catholic Church (conceived more broadly than the Roman Church) would have been one of many possible grounds for this. On the other hand, throughout his life, Rahner remained steadfast in his belief that the Catholic Church is the summit of God’s revelation in the contemporary world, even given all the Church’s sins and ambiguities.
have to make, “for God or nothingness.”\(^{107}\) Should Heidegger go one way, his imagination would prove “profoundly religious,” a preparation for divine revelation. Should he veer the other way, the result would be “radically atheist,” a preference of darkness to light.\(^{108}\)

Almost seventy years after Rahner penned these words, and decades after Heidegger and Rahner breathed their last, effectively bringing their literary productions to a close, two things seem relatively clear: Rahner himself took the first of Heidegger’s options, and Heidegger took the second. Sheehan provocatively observes, “If Rahner uses Heidegger in order to extort an existential transcendental turn out of Aquinas, he uses Aquinas to extort an affirmation of God out of Heidegger.”\(^{109}\) Though Sheehan’s book on Rahner misses on many counts, Sheehan correctly notes that squeezing an idea of God out of Heidegger would only come by extortion, and not just because Heidegger made a “refusal of a theological voice.”\(^{110}\)

Nietzsche’s name has been raised in connection with Heidegger, and even, by Sheehan’s count, with Rahner. A question connected to this name now seems appropriate. Will the issue of the imagination between Heidegger(ians) and Rahner come down to the Antichrist versus Christ, or in Nietzsche’s words, “Dionysos versus the Crucified”?\(^{111}\) In an obvious way, the answer is yes. But considered again, the response could hardly be an unqualified yes. What is the Anti-Christ against, anyway? Like the Heideggerian Kant, the Antichrist objects to Christianity’s metaphysical relegation of “Real” Being to some realm

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\(^{107}\) See Rahner, “Vortragsskizzen” in Geist in Welt, p. 451: “Gottes-furcht statt Angst (Furcht) vor dem Nichts,” “Fear of God instead of Anxiety (Fear) before the Nothing.” Rahner is setting up an analogy: Rahner : God :: Heidegger : nothing.

\(^{108}\) Rahner, “Concept of Existential Philosophy,” p. 137.

\(^{109}\) Sheehan, Karl Rahner, p. 114.

\(^{110}\) See Hemming, Heidegger’s Atheism, p. 27 for his affirmation of Sheehan.

above the world, thus distorting its knowledge of and life within the latter. To respond quickly and affirmatively to the first question would give post-Nietzscheans and post-Heideggerians an exclusive philosophical claim on the world, by implying that Christians uniformly take (a “Platonic”) flight from the world.

But Rahner contends in varying ways throughout his corpus (we shall get to this) that Christians can form the look of the horizon, for the “Eternal has also entered this world”—and we have received Him, ontologically (not primarily as an ontic decision). Christians, then, have a stake in this world, and should not attempt to flee it. The Rahnerian Thomas teaches this: we cannot exchange our place in the world for one in heaven. A metaphysics stemming from the imagination can yield sublime unmaking of limits, or it can create even harder and faster ones. Heidegger and to varying extents Kant and Nietzsche draw a deep line in the sand, thus their imaginations aim low. Rahner and Thomas blur the line. The next chapter will show us that for Rahner, human aesthetic experience blooms sublimely, for this inner-worldly Dasein is spirit. Spirit’s trajectory is marked by openness to the whole, according to the whole (katholou). With this, we have commenced uncovering in Rahner das katholische Erhabene—the Catholic sublime.

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TWO
VORGRIFF

For redemption, or pardon, consists precisely in inscribing the elsewhere in here.¹¹³

Orientation, the word, sums up the aesthetic inquiry of Chapter One. By comparison, the present chapter will prove disorienting. Prior to the chapter's introduction, then, a road map may assist the reader to follow its often counterintuitive complexities. The map's coordinates are twofold: 1) text selection and interpretation, and 2) organization.

First, the method of reading texts will perhaps cause the most perplexity, and probably most of all for those who consider themselves familiar with Rahner. This chapter's text selection for Rahner remains on the one hand fairly near to the Rahnerian norm, with *Spirit in the World* and *Hearer of the Word* retaining preeminence. Differences appear, though, between the reading below and conventional ones. Whereas many readers of Rahner attempt to identify (or refute) anticipations of Rahner's last great work, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, in his early works, this chapter (alongside the subsequent ones) ignores connotations of preview. In relation to Heidegger, whereas most interpreters of Rahner expect him to dialogue with the Heidegger of *Being and Time* alone (the *Kantbuch* fits here, too, thus Chapter One is standard), later Heideggerian texts appear here as well, and will remain for the rest of the dissertation. The first sub-section under §5 will be important in justifying

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the decision to open the discussion between Rahner and Heidegger beyond the norm. In short, aesthetic (sublime) elements lie already in the underbelly of Being and Time (and by association, Rahner’s Spirit in the World) that propel Heidegger on his later thought-trajectory. To read Rahner’s texts beside Heidegger’s on Hölderlin and Nietzsche may strike Rahnerians as foreign, but the reader should consider these foreign elements as more adequately unveiling the Rahner in which she feels at home. Furthermore, this dissertation’s text selection and interpretation is designed to produce as much dissonance as synchronicity, to illustrate both the differences between Rahner and Heidegger, and between Rahner himself and the Rahner of popular interpretation, the sort of interpretation that has all but relegated Rahner to historical theology, disinventing him from the contemporary conversation. In the interest of dissonance, an apparently inconsequential text (on the conventional view), the essay, “Priest and Poet,” will get us almost as far as any momentous text could.

Second, the organization of this chapter and the ones to follow is at once deceptively simple and deceptively complex. In terms of volume, the chapter is carefully balanced, granting each subsection a relatively equal number of pages, but within the pages, straightforward thoughts mix with interruptive gestures, from texts medieval, modern, and contemporary. To facilitate collaborative inquiry, here are the guiding questions for the chapter: Is there a sublime undercurrent in Rahner’s early texts (§4)? How does this undercurrent relate to the Kantian sublime (§4), and then to the Heideggerian sublime (§5)? How do we uncouple Rahner’s Vorgriff from modern sublimity, while harvesting insights about Rahner’s sublime-aesthetic (§6)? Orientation is over; the disorientation begins.

Aesthesis, as exposed in Chapter One, involves abandonment into the other, hence a going-out, a leaving home, that in the Rahnerian conception of aesthesis evidently precedes the existence of a home. The home is the self, or may be presented as such—the auto (self)
of auto-affection, which hetero-affection, a feeling (receiving) of the other, opposes, or counter-poses. Overall, Chapter One concerned abandonment and going-out as necessary aspects of the true reception of beings. We began shifting late in the chapter to another element of human knowing (thus being) in the world. We shall continue that turn. Return, or reditio—this word, instead of going-out, must occupy us now. Let us proceed under the assumption that going-out corresponds to the aesthetic, and return, to the sublime. The image of homecoming (a coming-to-self) will be key. Finally, let us think of the question of home as an intensification, a re-raising or re-presentation, of the question of finitude.

Traversing the Kantian sublime is an inevitable task for this dissertation, especially this chapter. In the first section (§23) of the “Analytic of the Sublime” in his Critique of Judgment, Kant states that in contrast with the judgment of the “beautiful of nature,” where “we must seek a ground external to ourselves,” in the case of the sublime, “we seek it … merely in ourselves and in our attitude of thought which introduces sublimity into the representation of nature.” The Critique of Judgment as a whole examines the topic of the “purposiveness” (Zweckmässigkeit) of nature, and the judgment of the sublime, Kant holds, deviates from this topic. In sublime judgment, “there is only developed a purposive use which the imagination makes of its representation.”

By the final section of the “Analytic of the Sublime,” this “purposive use” the imagination makes of its representation shows itself as the action of sacrificing itself to the “higher purposiveness” of Reason, the “authority which Reason exercises over Sensibility,” which ultimately cashes out as the subject’s self-legislation of the moral Law. Sublime feeling (and judgment), then, can be


115 Ibid., §29, especially pp. 134-140, 143-144.
seen as shoring up Kantian subjectivity, even if he relegates the “Analytic of the Sublime” to the status of a “mere appendix to the aesthetical judging of [nature’s] purposiveness.”

Surely this suggestion requires somewhat of a jump from one thing to another, from a type of reflective judgment to the highest operations of Reason—Jean-François Lyotard, among others, would have objected that there is no “subject” of sublime feeling. With Lyotard’s critique in mind, yet bracketed, the reader might do well to entertain the hypothesis that despite its ostensibly somewhat marginal status in the Kantian critical system, the sublime actually serves as a symbol of it. Kant’s account of sublime judgment insists upon certain points that indicate the Kantian preoccupation with constructing a strong account of human subjectivity, characterized by a defeat of the imagination, and hence sensibility, in the interest of a higher cause—even a metaphysical one, in the sense of a metaphysics of morals. This dissertation has a general concern with subjectivity, along with a particular hunch that Rahner might bring us beyond subjectivity. But the dissertation argues that the sublime (Catholically inflected by Rahner) leads beyond subjectivity. How can this be, if the Kantian sublime strengthens subjectivity, treating it as the proper home (the auto-nomous ground) of the human person? This question will serve as our backdrop. Now let us block out the foreground.

This chapter does the work of defining the Vorgriff as the moment of the sublime in Rahnerian realism, and then preparing us to see where that idea leads. The chapter has three

116 Ibid., §23, p. 104.

117 Lyotard, Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 25: “There cannot be a subject as synthesis, as container, or as agent of sublime feeling any more than there can be a subject of taste.” See §9 for more on Lyotard.

118 Subjectivity in Kant, seems best expressed in the formula “the ultimate subjective ground of the adoption of maxims.” As hinted above, Kantian anthropology comes down to the free human’s capacity to self-legislate the moral law—an admirable, yet restrictive view. See Kant, Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 20.
parts. First, it identifies an opposition within Rahner’s metaphysics of knowledge. It can be argued on the one hand that *Spirit in the World’s* view of knowledge, according to Rahner’s order of presentation, has two aesthetic bookends—sensibility and conversion to the phantasm—with an incidence of the sublime between them—abstraction, or *excessus*. This first position should make some sense in light of Chapter One. On the other hand, one could argue, as §4 does, that knowledge for Rahner has two sublime bookends, for Rahner contends that in order for it not to be completely lost in matter, it must be said that “spirit is before and after sensibility” (SW 293/220). Rahner’s explanation of the *Vorgriff* falls within his chapter on abstraction, which he calls the “complete return,” “*reditio completa*” (SW 227/174). It is at this point in coming to knowledge that Rahner envisions the human person reaching out toward the absolute (infinite), or more precisely, the human person finds that she has always already (*vor* = before) been reaching out toward the absolute in every act of sensibility. *Excessus* brings the knower before God (*vor* = in front of), figured as the principle, *tragende Grund*, of knowing. Through this “meeting” the knower feels exalted—sublime. This sublime knowing occasions a return home, presumably at a higher level than before the (semi)abandonment to the other (matter). Through this “sublime knowing,” the knower inscribes the elsewhere (spirit) in the here (world)—“conversion to the phantasm” names this graph-ic gesture. A question comes to light near the end of this section—does the sublime exaltation of the knower in Rahner resemble the transcendental subject of Kant, which defeats the imagination? What does home mean for Rahner?

Second, to clarify yet complexify Rahner’s *Vorgriff*, Heidegger, from whom Rahner borrows the term, 119 demands some treatment. Since the topic of the sublime has been

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119 See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §32, p. 191. Sheehan rightly points out that Rahner’s appropriation of Heidegger’s *Vorgriff* without its companion terms, *Vorhaben* and *Vorsicht*, is a rather “loose” one. This does not strike me as problematic, as this seems to be the norm for theoretical borrowings of thinkers from thinkers.
raised, §5 focuses on sublime moments in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and his work a decade or more later on the poet Hölderlin and the thinker Nietzsche. Themes of danger and shelter, and their development through other themes—the *Unheimliche*, to deinon, a term Heidegger takes from Sophocles’ *Antigone*, and which he discusses in terms resonant with Kant’s sublime, and rapture and the grand style, two sublime operators in Nietzsche’s aesthetics—receive attention. As at the end of the Rahner section, the question arises of what home means for Heidegger, and how he proposes that people return to it after going out into the “foreign.”

Third, §6 begins to uncouple the *Vorgriff* from the connotations of “grasping” inherent in its root, *griff*. Rahner desires to escape from a discourse and mode of thinking that privileges the control of Being (and God)—this is especially evident in *Hearer of the Word*, where he worries about setting limits on revelation—yet he retains a word with metaphorical associations of gripping, grasping, manual command. This has led some critics to believe that Rahner constructs a theology that supports the modern account of the subject. A more careful reading revels that Rahner does not go this far. Rahner’s own words show that he belongs *jenseits von Greifen*.120 In Chapter One we commenced making headway in this direction. Even that early, our attention to the imagination as non-cognitive, thus reflective in Kant’s sense, yielded glimpses of the present chapter’s ultimate argument. In the last section we revisit these insights from Chapter One, but in a different, sublime, key across the board, and also because in the *Kantbuch*, it seems that Heidegger says many things related to the *Vorgriff*, and not many (if any) about *Vorbabe* and *Vorsicht*. Even so, see Sheehan, *Karl Rahner*, p. 204f.

120 “Beyond grasping.” With this phrase, Nietzsche remains in play, as perhaps his most famous phrase (among non-specialists), next to “God is dead,” is *jenseits von Gut und Böse*, beyond good and evil. The book that bears this phrase as its title has the subtitle, *Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft* (prelude to a philosophy of the future). Rahner provides us with the prelude to a theology of the future. See Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Judith Norman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
(with the Heideggerian sublime as background). Chapter Two’s end—the future that draws it forward—is the conviction that Rahner’s ontophanic aesthetics, if properly directed, can be a sublime theological guide past modern, grasping subjectivity. Rahner redefines the home, its building and maintenance, as a sublime-aesthetic art of transforming the heart, and the world along with it.

§4. Sublime Knowing

Which Bookends?

A sort of opposition stands in Rahner’s Spirit in the World, where sensibility and the intellect, the aesthetic and the sublime, each seem to oscillate in and out of primacy, leading to the problem of what to call the bookends of Rahner’s metaphysics of knowledge (as with any image, that of “bookends” limps a little). We shall meet the “second position” shortly, but let us first return briefly to the Heideggerian Kant to identify a possible source of this opposition in Rahner.

Heidegger recognizes something odd at play in the Critique of Pure Reason’s structure. For some reason, “the logic maintains an incomparable priority over the aesthetic whereas on the other hand, it is precisely [sense] intuition which is presented as primary in knowledge as a whole” (KPM 47/66, emphasis added). But this seems to be a difficulty inherent in giving finite knowledge honest consideration, if one wants to emphasize both terms—finite and knowledge—as significant for ontology (or ontophany). Heidegger observes that since finite knowledge is sense intuition, “it requires determinative thinking. Therefore, in the problem of the unity of ontological knowledge, pure thinking demands a central significance, without prejudice, and indeed does so precisely because of the preeminence which intuition has in all
knowledge” (KPM 50/71). Determinative thinking and sense intuition, then, make up unified human knowledge, and do so in a mutually enhancing way. Of course, this, in keeping with Heidegger’s view of Kant, applies more to the Kant of the first edition than of the second. How does this relate to Rahner?

In Rahner, we find something similar to the Heideggerian Kant—which really stems from an admission of the complicated nature of human knowing. At the beginning of his chapter on abstraction, which will occupy the duration of this section, Rahner describes what he calls the two phases of human knowing—but in a manner where three seem to appear. The layout (with numbers added) is as follows:

1) [I]n sensibility as such, man has already and always lost himself in the world (or would have, if his knowledge could ever be in sensibility alone).

2) [The knower] acquires his position as [hu]man in a self-liberating return from his abandonment in the subject-object unity of sensibility.

3) And yet he possesses himself as one who has really become a subject only in that he places himself over against himself and turns again to this world (SW 118-119/99).

Rahner clarifies that this should not be considered a chronological process. Even so, as mentioned in the last chapter, in the quoted passage, Rahner treats it as something like a process (call it a “process”—with quotation marks) with something like steps. Once again, Spirit in the World’s chapter structure depends on this as well. Surely, Rahner collapses together “steps” #1 and #3, calling them collectively “conversion to the phantasm,” but the order of presentation makes it seem as if abstraction (“step” #2) is an evanescent moment between two other moments, or alongside one moment (Sheehan leans this way), that are more lasting and constitutive of human knowing. Sensibility is before and after spirit: “In the Thomistic metaphysics [the] liberation of the subject from sensibility’s abandonment to
the other of the world is treated under the heading ‘abstraction’; turning to the world, which
has thus become objective, is called the conversion to the phantasm” (SW 119/99). The
aesthetic bookends seem clear.

As we saw in Chapter One, the element of *aesthesis*, as referring the human knower to
the world, is certainly a pillar of Rahner’s metaphysical project in *Spirit in the World*. The
Rahnerian Thomas has taken Kant seriously, congenially, assuming the conviction of the
intellect’s blindness without sense intuition, and therefore carefully hedging speculation’s
penchant for de-regulation. Over and above this reason, which concerns philosophical
credibility in the contemporary world, the aesthetic bent of *Spirit in the World* serves to
illustrate the orientation of human knowing toward the world that has served as the arena of
God’s self-manifestation in Christ, and hence the salvation of humankind. The appearance
of “aesthetic bookends” in his metaphysics of human knowledge thus assists Rahner in
articulating a view of receptivity with both philosophical and theological merits.121

The foregoing has restated the first chapter’s exposition of Rahner so as to set it up
as the first of two Rahnerian positions vis-à-vis the metaphysics of knowledge as this
dissertation “aesthetically” recasts it. Let us call this first one the “aesthetic” position
(aesthetic in the etymological sense), whose clear center of gravity lies in
sensibility/conversion to the phantasm. We shall now, after some ado, encounter more
explicitly than we have hitherto the second, “sublime” position, which is based in
“abstraction.” This will entail a couple of interlaced procedures. First, some exploration of

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121 This short paragraph will hit that familiar nerve of Rahner’s perennial critics, who accuse Rahner of
a capitulatory attempt to update Christianity, which relinquishes Christian “identity” in favor of vapid
secularity. Kilby provides an expert, persuasive response in defense of Rahner’s many remarks about the
“modern” credibility of Christianity. She writes, “His object … [is] to help those Christians who are also
modern people to more fully integrate their faith with other parts of their existence and their thought-world.
His object is to help Christians be more faithful, to allow the influence of their faith on their lives to grow by
brining a larger part of their lives into contact with it.” Kilby, KRTTP, pp. 107-108.
the metaphor of the “self-liberating return” must transpire. Second, we know that Rahner’s view of the imagination, which we view at this point largely from an aesthetic angle, is in part active—as the prefix of *Ver-sinnlichung* (making sensible) suggests. Just how active, how creative and productive, can it be? The answer lies in the *Vorgriff*. We shall now ask Rahner’s question of the “sense of [a] non-intuitive *excessus* as the condition of the human imagination, of the human experience of the world itself [*Welterfahrung selbst*]” (SW 53/50), from the twin angles of “return” and “activity.”

In Part Two, Chapter Three of *Spirit in the World*, called “Abstraction,” Rahner defines the essence of human knowledge in this way: “[The knower] is present to himself as himself, since in relating the universal, known intelligibility to something and in judging about something he differentiates himself from this something.” Something surprising shows up in this sentence. It somehow identifies the knower as self-present, but does not the process of knowledge begin, according to Rahner (along with Thomas and Aristotle), in the other, without the knower actually possessing any sort of self? Hence the appearance of phrases such as *tabula rasa*—blank slate—and prime matter, both of which (even if analytically and hypothetically) describe the human knower before any act of knowledge (SW 60/56). Rahner poses a question to Thomas that comes around to himself, as a follower of Thomas (see SW 222/170): Can the intellect be actual, active, and confer universality on sensible givens if it starts as blank and purely material?

There lies in Rahner’s definition of the essence of human knowledge a view of knowing as auto-affection; Chapter One should have made this clear. Rahner draws upon, if the reader will remember, the limit-idea (*Grenzidée*) of angelic knowledge (i.e., that obtained by intellectual intuition alone, therefore purely self-knowing), but applies it only obliquely to human knowing. He does this to leave room for a hetero-element of knowing. Rahner
provides it: “But it is only in this differentiation over against another that he is present to himself in knowing self-possession” (SW 133/109). The accent still falls on the knower’s self, but with ineluctable reference to another being as the object of human knowing.

Rahner clearly perceives a danger in insisting too much upon the strength of the hetero-element—he might seem to intimate full agreement with the tenet of post-Kantian metaphysicians that sensibility is the sole source of human knowledge (Patrick Burke, again, suggests that Thomas Sheehan pushes Rahner in this direction). But Rahner rejects this possibility: “[S]omething actually intelligible cannot simply be received passively from sensibility, and so it can owe its origin only to a spontaneous activity of thought itself, over against what is given sensibly, that is, to the agent intellect” (SW 136/111). For sensibility to be the sole source of knowledge, paradoxically sensibility must found itself in the intellect and its active, abstractive movement away from the concrete sensible object. Rahner circumscribes the agency of this intellectus agens a bit, specifying that its capacity to “universalize” a given sense object consists in knowing it “as a realized concretion,” and “only to that extent does it liberate the form from its material concretion” (SW 142/115, ET modified), but he still wishes to grant the intellect freedom to “hold sway” over matter.

As with so many things Rahnerian, this text cries out for translation. The intellect’s activity accomplishes a single, yet crucially important, advance in the “process” of knowledge: it sees an object against its wider surroundings—but how? Finally, we can speak of the Vorgriff—the anticipation of such a broad backdrop, or “field of possibilities” (SW 142/116)—within its proper domain. The Vorgriff is the answer to our questions about the activity of the intellect, which are also questions regarding the intellect’s ability to return to itself. What does Vorgriiff signify?
The following report on the *Vorgriff* will eventually bring up the topic of negation (*negatio*, which the Rahnerian Thomas groups with *comparatio* and *remotio*, all of which will receive treatment in due course—§10), and in keeping with that linguistic action, let us first say what the *Vorgriff* does not do. Incidentally, beginning with negation will appear as a performative contradiction to the positivity of the *Vorgriff* argued for below, but it will help to follow a heuristic order of presentation. First, it must be said (again) that the *Vorgriff* presents many problems for translation because of the root “*griff*” (grasp). While some feel compelled to translate it as “fore-knowledge” or “unthematic knowledge” because they hear within the word a strong sense of grasping, Rahner’s text proves allergic to such a rendering. He explicitly states, “*Vorgriff* as such does not attain to an object.” The *Vorgriff* stands as a condition for the possibility of knowledge, but does not itself constitute knowledge, for if it did, “then this *Vorgriff* itself would again be conditioned by another *Vorgriff*” (SW 143/116). Rahner posits the *Vorgriff* to fulfill a Heideggerian condition, that is, to keep philosophical inquiry open to asking questions—we cannot “inquire about … [the] absolutely unknown” (HW 28/60). Again, though, the *Vorgriff* does not possess any knowledge as its own.

A couple of more notes on what the *Vorgriff* does not do stem from Rahner’s self-differentiation from Kant and Heidegger, which he articulates most clearly in *Hearer of the Word*. Consider the following, where Rahner describes the *Vorgriff* as spirit’s transcendence—it is “not simply a transcendence toward a finite circle of possible objects, nor originally a transcendence toward nothingness” (HW 122/216). The first half of the sentence evokes the noetic constraints of Kantian critique, and the second half, the Heideggerian apriorism of finitude. Both thinkers offer only a “relative” openness that extends “merely to a certain sector of the real or of the possible” (HW 140/250). The *Vorgriff* cannot assume “No” as its first word, even if that would make sense in light of the
Vorgriff’s lack of attainment to a determinate object’s existence (see SW 145/117-118).

Hence we might identify as loaded Heidegger’s famous question, “Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?” Loaded, because Heidegger’s posing of the question in Introduction to Metaphysics (1935) leads us into a thought-form where Dasein, the questioner, finds a peculiar home in the Nothing (§5 below, cf. §§10-11)—Dasein “comes into suspense,” suspended animation. The same goes for the beings Dasein meets—the word “no” wins primacy.

The Rahnerian Vorgriff, against the structures and strictures of Kantian and Heideggerian critique, declares a resounding, if pre-cognitive and unthematic (i.e., without attaining to an object), “yes” to Being, instead of nothing.

We have defined what the Vorgriff does not do—let us, as Rahner would, now speak more positively. Chapter One taught that the imagination is active insofar as it makes the horizon sensible. Chapter Two will now tell that also, in its collaboration with the intellect, via the Vorgriff, the imagination helps to conceptualize sense objects. Concepts, by definition, relinquish at least a bit of concreteness so as to lay bear universal intelligibility. In short, concepts are generated by abstraction. Rahner explains this process: “[I]n abstraction, the light of the agent intellect is known simultaneously (miterkannt) in the universal object,” i.e., the concept, “and this light is the actuality of the knower himself,” meaning that “this actuality is such that of itself it has its knownness (Erkanntheit) in itself when it becomes the form of the sensible content” (SW 221/170). Human spirit, which shines forth from itself, in-spires sense objects, that is, finds within them their universal value, and molds these

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123 Ibid., p. 31. Even Rahner, following Heidegger, admits that the starting point for metaphysical inquiry is in some sense “nothing,” but the rest of Rahner’s work, which differs so sharply and self-consciously from Heidegger’s, inflects the “nothing” rather diversely. See SW 61ff/57ff.

124 This “yes” is different than the “yes” Shannon Craigo-Snell discusses in her recent book on Rahner, insofar as hers is framed ontically as opposed to ontologically. Craigo-Snell, Silence, Love, and Death.
objects to better fit a conceptual framework, thereby causing their knowability and making them actually known. The human person fulfills an important condition of the possibility for this objective knowledge before she knows it, by antecedently changing the world as such—“the first-known, the first thing encountering [the human knower], is not the world in its ‘spiritless’ existence, but the world—itself—as transformed by the light of the spirit” (SW 406/299). Through this light, God shines as tragende Grund, principium mundi, as that which drives forward the Vorgriff. Since Rahner makes these points under the heading of the reeditio completa, one might call the light of spirit the light of the home, to which thinking returns.

What is the quality of this return—positive, or negative? The transcendence of the Vorgriff, with the absolute level of activity by which it surpasses individual beings, may appear to the untrained eye as a negation of these beings. Once again, conceptualization involves something like a stripping away of the properties of a being, for that being, when objectively known, becomes illuminated in its limitation(s). But Rahner takes care to specify his position with respect to this issue: “[T]he negation is ultimately the thematization of an affirmation” (SW 298/224). Indeed, when the Vorgriff denies the finite, “it is not ‘nought that noughtens’ (Nicht also das Nichts nichtet), but it is the infinity of being, at which the Vorgriff aims, that unveils the finiteness of all that is immediately given” (HW 49-50/96).

Whereas Kant and Heidegger take “no” as the first word of metaphysics, Rahner says, “Yes!”—yes absolutely. Rahner does not eschew the question of non-being, even the meontic, but rather observes that “[n]on-being is known, not insofar as being is held up against nothing, but insofar as esse as such is apprehended simultaneously” (SW 298/224). Marion corroborates Rahner’s philosophical position, when he says, “Finitude is disclosed
more in the encounter with the saturated phenomenon than with the poor phenomenon.”

Marion and Rahner agree, against Kant and Heidegger, that a metaphysics based on the imagination is fortified, not undermined, by keeping open the question of the absolute, the possibility of meeting the infinite. The Vorgriff seeks fullness, and never stops seeking it, not even when *esse*—“the fullest concept” (SW 162/129)—overflows and overcomes it.

A line from *Hearer of the Word* sums up what we have been saying: “[T]o be human is to be a spirit because, from the start, in our dynamism toward being as such,” i.e., in the Vorgriff, “we grasp single objects as moments of this unending” (or infinite—*unendlichen*) “movement of the spirit” (HW 52/100-102). The English translator of *Hearer of the Word* balks at rendering *unendlichen* as “infinite” here, probably to clarify the qualitative difference between God and humans, infinite and finite spirit, that Rahner persistently (and rightly) maintains. But as we know from Chapter One, Rahner willingly flirts with Idealism in order to make the point that God, as *tragende Grund*, is the creative source and eschatological end, who offers human persons a share in the divine life (2 Pet 1.4). Human knowing and loving, if seen for their proper dynamism (as opposed to being taken for granted as “everyday”), yield the conclusion that human persons “are forever the infinite openness of the finite for God” (HW 53/102, emphasis added). The self, therefore the home to which a human knower returns in the *reditio completa* (“after” sensibility), is openness for God. The movement of the finite, when it follows its ownmost (to use Heidegger’s word) trajectory, leads (back) toward God. To find its way, the Vorgriff must be allowed an unlimited scope.

A significant portion of this argument hinges on a disagreement with a comment from Karen Kilby, whose work on Rahner is admirable on the whole, if not on this point.

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Kilby expresses a concern that Rahner’s predication of his metaphysics of knowledge upon a theory of the Vorgriff, namely, that in order to know any single object the knower must have some sort of anticipatory sense of the whole of Being is, to put it simply, overdramatic. For Kilby, Rahner effectively argues that in order to see my house as an object among other objects, I have to fly out into space first to get a sense of the whole universe. Rahner’s Vorgriff looks to Kilby like a rather unwieldy and inappropriate instrument for thought. One may plausibly find oneself puzzled along with Kilby at the young Rahner’s passionate overstatement. But in light of today’s post-Heideggerian thought, one should reconsider. Kilby’s interests and worries yield a captivating view of Rahner, but not the best possible one. The colossal scope of the Vorgriff that repels Kilby attracts this dissertation’s reading of Rahner. The rest of this chapter, and the dissertation, will show why.

We considered aesthetic bookends above, and the several preceding paragraphs have initiated us into the sublime bookends position. This position nears the point that must be given voice. Rahner speaks again: “[S]pirit is before and after sensibility (Der Geist ist so vor und nach Sinnlichkeit)” (SW 293/220). Such is a summary of the sublime bookends position. Rahner chooses the name “return” for the activity of the intellect in abstraction, of which the Vorgriff is a constitutive condition. This implies a self—or home—that pre-exists the abandonment to the other that characterizes sensibility. That self is spirit, and spirit stretches forth toward the absolute, always pushing the bounds of finitude, thus always standing under the threshold, sub-limen, of infinitude.

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126 Kilby, KRT, p. 30: Rahner all but suggests “that in order to recognize that one’s own house is one house among several, that there are other houses on the block, one needs to be taken into outer space and given a view of planets and stars and whole galaxies. The solution is out of proportion to the problem, and simply leaves it behind” (emphasis added).
The sublime, or more precisely the *Catholic* sublime—Rahner offers us an entrée into such a concept by way of the magnitude and power of his idea of the *Vorgriff*. Rahner does not make space voyages, *pace* Kilby, but instead confronts his readers with a phenomenon just imposing enough to stimulate a healthy disorientation before the ever-greater God and the world that God continually loves into being. The Catholic sublime names the ethos for which this disorientation is possible.

The foregoing section has been complex, but appropriately so. We have not attained to something simple here, an opposition of two incommensurable positions. Instead, we have identified two interweaving lines of argument to which Rahner grants alternating accents. For example, the Rahnerian Thomas’s view of emanation, which Rahner explicates in his chapter on the conversion to the phantasm, bears within it the multifarious intersections of spirit and sensibility that go into a fabric that one could re-label as sublime-aesthetic. Rahner condenses his vision in the following sentence:

> [T]he *a priori* structure of the spirit becomes the form of the sensibly given because sensibility is the receptive origin of the spirit, and yet it (spirit) remains free, so that the spirit returns to itself and in sensibility knows the other, which it itself is in sensibility, *as* other, because the spirit itself is the origin letting sensibility emanate; not sensibility, but spirit itself is the end towards which its letting emanate tends (SW 294/221).

Accents alternate, here at a quick tempo—the ultimate emphasis falls on spirit, which appears as the future of sensibility. But, as human (essentially finite), spirit depends on sensibility for its vision. Spirit as future means breaking through limits while remaining within those very limits—Rahner presents nothing easily comprehended.
Sections 2 and 3 promised to speak in the present chapter of the life of human spirit as a border situation, the interaction of spirit with the horizon, on the horizon. Lest this promise remain deferred (in default), this section will give some glimpses on how the Rahnerian metaphysics of knowledge so presents the situation of human spirit. The Vorgriff, as an element of abstraction, reveals limits. The discourse surrounding the sublime, whether in a Kantian, (post)Heideggerian, Burkean, or whatever other mode, never ceases speaking of limits, horizons, bounds and borders, often if not always in connection with the unmaking of these.

Some more Kantian material will augment our vocabulary for discussing the sublime as interacting with—and transgressing—limits. We return to the Analytic of the Sublime, treating it in order and interlacing it with Rahner’s account of spirit. Kant’s analysis of sublime feeling and judgment introduces a distinction from the first critique that does not appear explicitly within the Analytic of the Beautiful: that between the mathematical and the dynamical.\footnote{Kant first makes the distinction within §11 of the second edition (B) of the \textit{Critique of Pure Reason} between mathematical and dynamical categories. See Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, p. 136.} For Kant, sublime feeling brings “a movement of the mind bound up with the judging of the object,” while in beautiful feeling, “taste presupposes and maintains the mind in restful contemplation.”\footnote{Kant, \textit{Critique of Judgment}, §24, p. 105-106.} Let us take Kant at his word. The sublime concerns movement.

Here lies a possible ground for speaking of Rahner’s Vorgriff under the rubric of the sublime, for Chapter One began describing it in terms of Heideggerian ecstatic temporality (i.e., motion out of an origin toward [while within] a horizon).

Kant continues, affording more terms for discussion. The mathematical sublime introduces the feeling and judgment of a “magnitude” deemed “absolutely great,” or Kant
says in Latin, “absolute, non comparative magnum.” The sublime is that which is without compare, and thus unleashes the imagination’s “striving toward infinite progress,” even to the point that it “excites within us the feeling of a supersensible faculty.” Reflectively, indeed aesthetically, the standard of sense (this includes ideas of number) gets called into question. For Rahner, spirit functions precisely to raise this sort of question, even if spirit lives by emanating into and activating sensibility, for sensibility is “a moment in an act of the anticipation of Being (Moment an einem Akt des Vorgreifens auf Sein)” (SW 285/214, ET modified). These words from Rahner outline the conversion to phantasm with the accent of primacy on spirit. Incidentally, Kant’s talk of the sublime falls at a similar, if rather different, angle. In sublime feeling, “the imagination reaches its maximum, and, in striving to surpass it, sinks back into itself.” We have movement toward an infinite abyss that brings a pleasurable return to the world of sense. Kant speaks of a “purposive violence” or “pain” that usually accompanies this sublime process—more on this later.

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129 Ibid., §25, p. 106f.

130 Ibid., pp. 109-110.

131 “And since the actuality of the spirit can only be known if its receptive origin itself is complete actuality, in other words, if sensibility is actually knowing, then the actuality of spirit is known as that of the complete actuality of sensibility” (SW 285/215).

132 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §26, p. 112.

133 Ibid., §27, p. 120. The “abyss” for Kant is that of a rational Idea before which we must comport ourselves with respect. Kant’s emphasis on the moral law saturates the Analytic of the Sublime. In this way among many others, Rahner diverges from the Kantian sublime, even as the former mirrors the latter. The “supersensible destination” of human persons is always more than ethical living, although it inevitably includes such praxis.

134 Ibid., p. 122.
The dynamical sublime introduces a couple of words that are important for Heidegger, *Macht* (might) and *Gewalt* (dominion). Kant regards the dynamical sublime as the aesthetic judgment of nature “as might that has no dominion over us.” Once again, the sublime concerns that which sets human beings apart from nature and the standard of sense. To undergo sublime feeling is to fear without being afraid (*fürchten ohne sich zu fürchten*). Kant states this in connection with the human disposition toward God, and though this would seem to directly connect with this dissertation’s theological endeavor, the most obvious connection at this point is the least helpful one. More to the point are comments like this: “Sublimity … does not reside in anything of nature, but only in our mind, in so far as we can become conscious that we are superior to nature within, and therefore also to nature without us.” The sublime shows up as an inner superiority, which applies (though secondarily, somehow) to determinate objects outside. Rahner calls the *Vorgriff*, which at every point in human knowing, “has always and already surmounted the horizon of space and time,” (i.e., the standard of nature), “the more original element” in the human person. The human person is origin-ally, “however much it would be blind without the intuition of sensibility,” spirit—the type of being that surpasses nature and sense (SW 240/182-183). By Rahner’s count, the human person as spirit is characterized by sublimity.

Rahner’s construal of the *Vorgriff* in *Hearer of the Word* amplifies the traces of sublimity of which the passages from *Spirit in the World* are redolent. Incidentally, Rahner’s sense of the sublime emerges as he distinguishes himself from both Kant and Heidegger.

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135 Project Gutenberg has a readily available edition of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* in German. See Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, URL: http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/?id=5&xid=1370&kapittel=1#gb_found (Accessed 16 Sept 2008).


137 See Ibid., p. 124.

138 Ibid., p. 129.
He declares, specifying his view of the Vorgriff against the possibility proviso of Kant and the nothingness of Heidegger, “that it is a transcendence toward pure being that has no intrinsic limits in itself” (HW 122/216). With no intrinsic limits, the Vorgriff, as heart of the agent intellect, can approach incomparable intensive magnitudes and unbearable might, with the assurance that in principle nothing it might meet in the world has greater dominion than it, the Vorgriff, has.

The activity of the spirit—its sublime moment—might seem to be that of the transcendental subject, the Kantian subject who accomplishes, as its highest triumph, a sublime defeat of the imagination. But actually, Rahner’s account of the subject, insofar as he followed Joseph Maréchal, might prove even more powerful, more superior—maybe even more purposefully violent—than Kant’s, and precisely because of the Vorgriff. Francis Fiorenza succinctly states the position Rahner considers as he develops his own: “Maréchal maintains that Kant incorrectly considers the activity of the human intellect in judging as a mere synthesizing of empirical data. He … emphasizes, against Kant, that there is a double aspect in every judgment: an absolute synthesis and an absolute affirmation.” This “absolute affirmation” concerns ontophany and the leaving open of the question of the appearance of the infinite, but because of its strength it would relinquish some of the reflective operation of the imagination in favor of determination. Fiorenza continues describing the Maréchalian background for the Rahnerian Vorgriff’s absolute scope, saying that the judgment’s anticipation of the absolute “is not just thought but affirmed, and is constitutive for

139 Though the dissertation’s introduction promises to resist treating Maréchal, the present point calls for inviting him temporarily to the conversation.

140 Fiorenza, “Karl Rahner and the Kantian Problematic,” p. xxxvii.

141 For the distinction between determinant and reflective judgment, see Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Introduction, §IV, p. 16, and this dissertation’s Chapter One, §2.
the objectivity of our judgments and knowledge in general.”

Surely Rahner does not reproduce Maréchal’s viewpoint in all its details, and thus does not accompany the latter all the way to his viewpoint’s logical conclusion—something very close to German Idealism—and Heidegger assists Rahner in this avoidance. But Chapter One witnessed that Rahner’s divergence from Heidegger, i.e. the former’s insistence on the non-finite character of Being, renders his view of the imagination suspect of over-activity, to the point where Rahner flirts with regression into the imagination-defeating power of idealistic subjectivity. Without getting too specific, let us posit that Rahner carves out a volatile position between Maréchal and Heidegger.

Rahner says early in his career, “When we step out of ourselves in grasping the things, we also return so completely into ourselves as ‘subjects,’ as distinct from the things we have grasped in stepping out, that we subsist in ourselves as subjects, as separated, as opposed to the outside objects we know” (HW 42/84, emphasis added). Then late in his career he writes that the subject’s a priori structure “forms an antecedent law governing what and how something can become manifest to the knowing subject” (FCF 19, emphasis added).

Because of statements like this about the self-subsistence and object-regulating (at least semi-determinant) action of the human subject, figured as a “return,” Rahner allows supporters and critics alike to associate him with a general “turn to the subject” in theology. Since such subjectivity undeniably arises at times throughout the Rahnerian corpus, by focusing on the *Vorgriff* as a coming-before-the-absolute, i.e. as sublime, this dissertation’s project faces great

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143 Saying this comes somewhat close, perhaps, to Burke’s contention that Rahner’s “dialectical analogy … fails to ground itself fully.” See Burke, *Reinterpreting Rahner*, p. 298. His critique comes down to the accusation that Rahner attempts to found his system on an overly dynamic, uncontrollable, concept of subjectivity. This subjectivity works for Rahner himself, but his “theological disciples” often lose his balance. Burke concludes his book with the above statement, assumed here for now as a placeholder, whose ultimate incorrectness will be unveiled later.
difficulty. It seems we have made a regression, if our goal is to find a way past modern, grasping subjectivity, and to exonerate Rahner of collusion with it. Even Chapter One went further, by speaking of the imagination as the intellect’s reflective source.

This fact shows that progress will not be made immediately, or easily. In order to get past the Enlightenment subject with Rahner, the only responsible thing to do is to pass through it, via the Vorgriff. Rahner opens the imagination, in opposition to the modern (Kantian) foreclosure of it, but this remains to be shown. Although for Kant, sublime feeling fortifies the subject (i.e., reason), so it may exercise its dominion over the imagination, Rahner can hint at how sublime feeling might explode the subject, rendering the human person both more receptive to God’s grace and more spontaneously able to do God’s work in the world. To define how this can be so, namely, how there can be a Catholic sublime, we now seek assistance in Heidegger’s re-visions of the category of the sublime.

§5. The Heideggerian Sublime

Being and Time

Many commentators have observed that Heidegger uses the term sublime (Erhabene) infrequently, if at all. Even so, from Heidegger’s magnum opus, Being and Time, forward, Heidegger’s path of thinking negotiates the sublime. The next several pages will dis-cover how Heidegger develops many ideas for which the term “sublime” could easily substitute. In order to anticipate (vorgehen) what lies ahead, we might venture a preliminary definition of the Heideggerian sublime as instituted in Being and Time. This work develops the sublime

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144 Jan Rosiek helpfully provides references to the scant occasions for Heidegger’s explicit mention of “sublime” in its nominal, adjectival, and verbal forms. See Rosiek, Maintaining the Sublime: Heidegger and Adorno (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 120-121n10.
without naming it as such, by phenomenologically describing an unsettling amalgam of
danger and shelter (home), demarcated by a complicated construal of which is which (i.e.,
danger or shelter) and what is found where. One word, along with but above several others,
will guide us through these descriptions, and will offer for thought a trace of the sublime—
unheimlich, translated as uncanny.  

Heidegger’s well-known (but often misunderstood) analytic of Dasein richly tells of
two primordial phenomena that lie at the heart of Dasein—the “they-self” (das Man-selbst)
and the “authentic” (eigentlich). The equiprimordiality afforded by Heidegger at this point
may surprise the casual reader of Heidegger, for more common existentialist readings tend to
treat Heidegger’s view of das Man as largely negative, whereas the authenticity of the self
demands a place of absolute honor. This is not quite the case, and Heidegger’s portrayal of
Dasein gains a depth of flavor because of it; thus we witness Heidegger arguing, “Authentic
Being-one’s-Self does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject … it is rather an
existentiell modification of the ‘they’—of the ‘they’ as an essential existentiale.”
The use of the term “existentiell” (note the ending) to modify authenticity indicates an element of Dasein’s choice
in coming to authenticity, in grasping one primordial phenomenon (authentic possibility for
Being) amid another (Being-in-the-world as the everyday Being of the ‘they’). Once again,
Heidegger, because of his ontological aims, removes himself “from any moralizing critique
of everyday Dasein.” The everyday Being of the “they” provides a crucial service to

145 On the “Unheimliche” and its relation to the “home,” see Richard Capobianco, “Heidegger’s Turn
length treatment of home in Heidegger, Robert Mugerauer, Heidegger and Homecoming: The Leitmotif in the Later
Writings (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

146 Heidegger, Being and Time, §27, p. 167.

147 Ibid., p. 168, Heidegger’s italics.

148 Ibid., Chapter V, B, p. 211.
Dasein, which finds itself thrown into a/the world—with its distinctive mode of understanding, talking, and interpreting, namely through “idle talk” about things as held in “common understanding” (in public), thus lending an intelligibility to virtually everything Dasein meets in the world. Such idle talk, which Heidegger does not want to disparage, gives Dasein the sense of a “protecting shelter.” Thus falls in a first building block for an account of the Heideggerian sublime as defined above—in idle talk lies shelter.

The shelter offered existentially to Dasein masks something unsettling, though—“an ever-increasing groundlessness.” Dasein loses itself, abandons itself, is absorbed into the “they,” or “Being-with-one-another”—the reader should make a mental note of a semantic connection here with Rahner’s account of sensibility—and in this way, one can speak of Dasein as “falling.” Dasein as inauthentic, that is, tempted, tranquilized, alienated, and entangled by the world and in the world, does not recognize itself as dispersed in the otherness of the neutral “they,” and does not realize that everyday life is actually flight from something. Heidegger observes, “When in falling we flee into the ‘at home’ of publicness, we flee in the face of the ‘not-at-home’; that is, we flee in the face of the uncanniness which lies in Dasein.” The something from which Dasein flies—the uncanny—remains inapparent to Dasein, in Dasein’s depths.

According to Heidegger, certain moods (Stimmungen) lay bare this uncanniness, which is another name for the groundlessness that public shelter covers over with an illusion of comfort. The most famous Stimmung Heidegger calls Angst (anxiety), and he states, “In

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149 Ibid., §36, pp. 211-214. Heidegger also treats the phenomena of curiosity and ambiguity as constitutive of the “they’s” understanding, talking, and interpreting.

150 Ibid., p. 214.

151 Ibid., §38, p. 228.

152 Ibid., §40, p. 234.
anxiety one feels ‘uncanny’,” or “not-at-home.” Anxiety brings Dasein “back from its absorption in the ‘world’”—in Rahner’s terms, the return then made by Dasein would be a *reditio in seipsum.*\(^{153}\) In this now more intense (sublime!) light, Heidegger redirects a bit the equiprimordiality of everyday Dasein and authentic Dasein, giving more positive weight to the latter. He writes, “From an existential-ontological point of view, the ‘not-at-home’ must be conceived as the more primordial phenomenon.”\(^{154}\) One might say that Heidegger attests here (and in the *Kantbuch*) to a certain turning to this more primordial phenomenon.\(^{155}\) Such a turning involves coming face to face with “the ‘nothing’ of the world,” which does not mean an experience of “something like the absence of what is present-at-hand within the world,” such as one might encounter through the public idle talk of the “they.” Instead, it involves an encounter that Heidegger speaks of in terms that suggest a reflective or disinterested manner, where the existence of the present-at-hand is not at stake, so that it “can show itself in an empty mercilessness.”\(^{156}\) Such facing up to the world as insignificant, simply there as the milieu into which it has been thrown, unveils Dasein’s “naked uncanniness,” with which it becomes fascinated.\(^{157}\) Dasein feels the odd mixture of negativity (pain) and pleasure that epitomizes the sublime.

\(^{153}\) Ibid., p. 233. Heidegger says as much: “Anxiety individualizes Dasein and thus discloses it as *solus ipse.*” He then quickly addresses the likely accusation of solipsism, differentiating authentic Dasein from an “isolated subject-Thing” placed in a “worldless occurring”—a reference to modern subjectivity.

\(^{154}\) Ibid., p. 234.

\(^{155}\) This statement keeps in mind Hemming’s critique of readings of Heidegger’s “turn” (*Kehre*), which astutely points out that Heidegger’s description of the turning as an “event in the history of being” appears throughout his work and for that reason may not serve as an effective key to tracing his intellectual development. This part of Hemming’s book is its best. See Hemming, *Heidegger’s Atheism*, pp. 75-101. On the history of Being in Heidegger, see §14 below.

\(^{156}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §68, p. 393.

\(^{157}\) Ibid., p. 394.
Heidegger illustrates the (sublime) coming to light of the uncanny most cogently through a phenomenology of the call. Heidegger urges his reader to resist the temptation to posit a caller other than Dasein, even though “the call is not explicitly performed by me.”\(^{158}\) The call arises from “the very depths of uncanniness,” and it is worth asking whether Dasein is in fact the caller of the call, but through the mode of the silent communication of “conscience.”\(^{159}\) Dasein, as conscience, summons itself “back to the stillness of itself, and is called back as something which is to become still”\(^{160}\)—Heidegger plays with the construction of this thought to give its verbs the feeling of the active, passive, and middle voices.

Through Dasein’s “desire to have conscience,” uncanniness chases Dasein, Dasein is sought out by uncanniness, uncanniness (as Dasein) goes on the hunt. The phenomenology of the call, Heidegger contends, makes known “that uncanniness pursues Dasein and is a threat to the lostness in which it has forgotten itself.”\(^{161}\) The uncanny silence of conscience attacks, though stealthily, the home Dasein believes it has built among the “they,” lending a fascinating discomfort to Dasein’s accustomed idea of security, by showing how very proximately home and security border on (and reside in) nothing.

The call of conscience for Heidegger, we now know, summons Dasein to its constitutive stillness. Another name for this stillness is resoluteness (\textit{Entschlossenheit}). Rather than being closed off from its “ownmost distinctive possibility,” Dasein opens itself in anticipation (\textit{Vorlauf}) of death, that is, to the one possibility that “fate” assigns it—finitude. Grasping this finitude of existence “snatches one back” from a field of multiple possibilities

\(^{158}\) Ibid., §57, p. 320-321.
\(^{159}\) Ibid., pp. 321-322.
\(^{160}\) Ibid., §60, p. 343.
\(^{161}\) Ibid., §57, p. 322.
to the only one.\textsuperscript{162} The act of grasping finitude, prompted by the call of conscience, issues in a return home, a complete return, though an uncanny one, for this return involves leaving behind a familiar shelter—marked by “comfortableness, shirking, and taking things lightly”—in favor of the gravitas of clear and present danger. Dasein’s “primordial historizing” consists precisely in this, where “Dasein hands itself down to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen.”\textsuperscript{163} The reader should recognize that with this last statement and its themes of historicity, finitude, and receptive activity, we have gotten back to the ecstatic temporality of the Heideggerian Kant’s imagination, though the element of uncanniness now in play lends to ecstatic temporality an augmented sense of sublime negative pleasure, more than the above discussion of the “positive sublime” (§3).

Dasein’s resoluteness brings it to an understanding of “its own \textit{superior power} [\textit{Übermacht}]” in its “finite freedom.”\textsuperscript{164} This superior power is hardly unbridled, though—since Dasein’s historicity discloses itself as fateful existence, and Heidegger defines fate as a “\textit{powerless} superior power which puts itself in readiness for adversaries,” Dasein’s authentic mode of Being depends on the apprehension of power yet to be deployed.\textsuperscript{165} This ought not to surprise those familiar with Latin—Heidegger’s \textit{Übermacht} and \textit{Ohnmacht} circumnavigate the connotations of \textit{potentia}—power, potency, potential (v. kinetic). Fate concerns an attribute of Dasein against which we have brushed several times already—Dasein’s essential futurity. Dasein’s power stands ready to be deployed until the moment when Dasein will

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., §74, p. 435. This entire section, “The Basic Constitution of Historicality,” is among the most important in all of \textit{Being and Time}.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., p. 436. These phrases come from a compelling paragraph that quickly turns to how Dasein’s exercising of its freedom happens along with the historizing of others, as the community collectively works toward its destiny (which Heidegger renders distinct from individual fate).

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid. Heidegger’s thoughts here reflect Kant’s in the \textit{Critique of Judgment} during his discussion of the dynamic sublime. See Kant, \textit{Critique of Judgment}, §28, p. 126 on power and powerlessness in sublime feeling.
“be thrown back upon its factual ‘there’ by shattering itself against death.” This “shattering against death” Heidegger also calls a “moment of vision,” which one may take as noetically determined, but which has a remarkable aesthetic (ontophanic) quality. This vision brought on by Dasein’s choice to free itself for death, thus accepting the inevitable future, redefines Dasein’s past and present, disclosing (erschließend) the uncanny that dangerously pursued Dasein all along as, in fact, a preserving shelter. Hence Heidegger’s statement, “The steadiness of existence is not interrupted … but confirmed in the moment of vision.” By an aesthetic (i.e., sublime) experience of powerless power, Dasein makes a return to a home that it never knew it had—a dangerous shelter and a sheltered danger.

_Hölderlin_

Probably the most important Heideggerian adumbrations of the sublime (again, Heidegger has no explicit theory of the sublime) arise amid his readings of Hölderlin, which he began while Rahner was studying at Freiburg. Much of Heidegger’s commentary on Hölderlin zeroes in on the poet’s many words concerning journeying and home, render as concrete images the sorts of experiences of danger and shelter Heidegger describes in _Being and Time_, which correlate (implicitly) with the flowing of time from the source of the imagination in the Heideggerian Kant. In the river, Heidegger finds an image dear to his heart: “[T]he river is the locality of the dwelling of human beings as historical upon this earth. The river is the journeying of a historical coming to be at home at the locale of this

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166 Heidegger, _Being and Time_, p. 437.
167 Ibid., p. 437-438.
168 Ibid., §75, p. 443.
Heidegger’s elliptical musings resonate with deceptive simplicity. Obviously, familiar footholds appear in Heidegger’s linking of the river with human historicity—finitude (§§2-3)—and the casual reader of Heidegger may find in this sentence a straightforward battle cry for one to make an immediate, existentialist (thus existentiell) decision to affirm one’s finitude, and to stiffen one’s upper lip. In this respect, Heidegger outstrips his existentialist appropriators. For Heidegger, the path “home” allows no direct inbound flights, and so often the identity and locale of “home” persist in occlusion in any event—home is mysterious even in its manifestness. The mysterious character of the home leads to the conclusion that the “path to the source must first lead away from the source.” A river, the Heideggerian Hölderlin instructs us, illustrates the paradoxical nature of the historical journey: “The Ister satisfies the law of becoming homely (heimisch) as the law of becoming unhomely (unheimisch).”

The human person, by his very essence, exemplifies this “law.” Heidegger believes that Hölderlin, in dialogue with the ancient Greek poet Sophocles, poetically—thus concretely and accurately—defines the human essence, through variations on a rather imposing Greek word: to deinon. Heidegger, idiosyncratically yet ingeniously, translates this word as das Unheimliche, the uncanny. The term to deinon, even in its classical use, carries

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172 Heidegger, *Ister*, p. 164. Heidegger makes many plays on the variations of the “home” adjectives—(un)heimlich and (un)heimisch (p. 69). All of these words, because of Heidegger’s idiosyncratic employment of them, carry sublime overtones.

173 Heidegger goes into laborious depth explaining his translation, and, of course, the problem of translation in general. See Ibid., pp. 61-68. Also, one need not succumb to the temptation to take an ironic
connotations that both, specifically, legitimate Heidegger’s translation, and, more generally, implicate to deinon within the orbit of the Kantian dynamical sublime, to which the Heideggerian sublime has a genealogical relation. The source for Heidegger’s engagement with to deinon lies within Sophocles’s play, Antigone, in the first choral ode. Heidegger interprets this text in depth in two different texts, which belong together, the second being an expansive elaboration upon the first, Introduction to Metaphysics and the lecture course Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister” (1942).174

We need not delve to far into the ode to find something interesting—the first two lines include the words ta deina (plural) and deinoterion (comparative). Heidegger translates the lines: “Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing uncannier than man bestirs itself, rising up beyond him.” From the lines he gleans the following message: “The human being is, in one word, to deinotaton, the uncanniest.” Heidegger has, obeying the syntax of the lines, intensified the comparative into the superlative (nothing more uncanny=uncanniest/das Unheimlichste). This is truly a sublime definition of the human essence, which Sophocles promulgates and Hölderlin accepts: “This saying about humanity grasps it from the most extreme limits and the most abrupt abysses of its Being.”175 By now, the words “extreme limits” and “abysses” are well-known code words for the sublime.

To call humanity sublime unveils an important truth (for truth is unveiling) about the human being—human Being is “violence-doing.” The uncanniest being “uses violence

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175 Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, pp. 158-159. Introduction to Metaphysics does not name Hölderlin here, but in the parallel text in Ister, Heidegger suggests that what occurs in Sophocles’s ode happens also at “the heart of Hölderlin’s hymnal poetizing.” See Ister, pp. 60, 69.
Clearly Heidegger speaks provocatively here, even when he qualifies his intention in using the word “the violent” (das Gewaltige) over against the common sense notion of “violent” or “violence.” But before we take offense at Heidegger’s cavalier deployment of a charged term, let us pause. Heidegger’s view of violence here invites comparison with Rahner’s view of abstraction and the Vorgrieff—violence indicates an overstepping of “the limits of the homely, precisely in the direction of the uncanny in the sense of the overwhelming,” i.e. in the direction of Being; for Rahner, something like this “overstepping” happens when the human being stretches toward absolute Being. Both violence and the Vorgrieff have in common the aim of making sense of (objectifying) beings. Hence Heidegger tells us that violence-doing “is a disciplining and disposing of the violent forces by virtue of which beings disclose themselves as such, insofar as the human being enters into them.”177 To fold Heidegger and Rahner’s language together, violence and the Vorgrieff keep Dasein from losing itself in abandonment to beings (a dangerous shelter) by pushing Dasein toward Being (a sheltering danger). This movement is uncanny, and therefore sublime. Heidegger’s “violence,” then, at least in this case (certainly not all cases), can assist us in understanding why the human being is and must be the uncanniest. Heidegger provides a good summary: “Uncanniness does not first arise as a consequence of humankind; rather, humankind emerges from uncanniness and remains within it—looms out of it and stirs within it.”178 Such is the life of the human, to deinotaton.


177 Ibid., p. 167.

178 Heidegger, Ister, p. 72.
For Heidegger, \textit{to deinon} rings tones of the positive sublime: “the 
\textit{deinon} can …instill fear and chase one into open flight, yet as that which is worthy of honor, it can also awaken awe, and thus become binding and take one into its concealed protection.”\textsuperscript{179} Those with ears to hear will recognize ever more clearly echoes of the danger-shelter interplay from \textit{Being and Time}—and more arise when Heidegger lists “the powerful” (dynamical sublime!) and the “inhabitual” as further attributes of the \textit{deinon}. Per Heidegger’s objections to modern aesthetics, with its noetic focus on “experience,” to call the \textit{deinotaton, das Unheimlichste}, “the most uncanny being does not mean that human beings arouse the most fear or instill the greatest terror.”\textsuperscript{180} Instead, the human, as uncanniest being, effects a particular type of ontophany. The human being—and the river that serves as her image—historize the uncanny. To be more specific: this historizing happens by way of poetry—thus the theme of \textit{deinon/Unheimliche} does not merely hold topical interest as a poetic element, just as poetry itself does not merely offer aesthetic (or sublime) experiences. The uncanny in fact describes the way Being shows itself from itself in poetry, that is, Being shows how it goes out from the home in order to return to the home and appropriate it more fully as its own. Poetry testifies to this, and makes it happen—hence Hölderlin’s going-out from Germany to the “foreign” Greece of Sophocles on his way back to Germany. Marion gives voice to this movement through poetry: “[A]rt opens to us a path toward that which remains most native to us.”\textsuperscript{181} Indeed, poetry for the Heideggerian Hölderlin depicts the elevation of the home

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., p. 63.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., p. 90.
\textsuperscript{181} Marion, \textit{The Idol and Distance}, p. 85.
through a return home—“[T]he gesture of art, more native, in its ‘native return,’ than the naturally born native.”

Heidegger has, by this point, already bequeathed to us several profound statements about Being, history, and poetizing, but perhaps none so far should make as powerful an impact as the following, and the reader should immediately recognize why: “Poetry is the sustaining ground (der tragende Grund [!]) of history, and therefore not an appearance of culture, above all not the mere ‘expression’ of the ‘soul of culture’”—nor is it a source for “experience.” Heidegger grants this exalted standing to poetry in a speech, “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” (1936), the same year that Rahner attended Heidegger’s first lecture course on Hölderlin. Rahner praises God as the tragende Grund of human existence who appears through the Vorgriff, and though one might feel the temptation to propose (rashly) a genealogical relationship between Rahner’s God as tragende Grund and Heidegger’s poetry as tragende Grund (not that anyone has), one must resist this bait, and instead take the more careful, yet equally interesting tack of observing the semantic—and theological—relationship between these two uses of the phrase. Does there lie in these two different yet oddly similar employments of a tightly-compressed, meaning-laden phrase a crucial philosophico-theological divergence? Yes.

It would prove reckless to assert that Heidegger has somehow “immanentized” a phrase properly applicable to God, turning it over to poetry instead, but one may viably make a similar claim from a Rahnerian standpoint. Heidegger views “tragende Grund” as very

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182 Ibid., p. 85.


184 He started honing this idea at least a year earlier; something like it appears in “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1935): “Art is history in the essential sense that it grounds history” (p. 75).
naturally pertaining to poetic creation and its inestimable role as “primal language” in the
happenings of history, and he does so because of his foreclosure of phenomenality. Because
of Heidegger’s refusal to investigate anything but finitude, he blinds himself to the possibility
that tragende Grund could appropriately serve to describe God and God’s activity in, to, and
through human living (sensing, thinking, receiving, acting, poetizing) in the world. Instead,
poetry becomes a vacuous practice of saying something between a “double lack and a double
not”—the poet poetizes in “the time of the gods who have fled and of the god who is
coming,”185 never in the time of a God having been revealed—Rahner’s God—who
promises, “I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28.20). As a result, we find
Heidegger unmasked as restrictively obsessed with the a priori limitations of factual
existence—thus aiming his imagination too low, or not enough. Rahner, on the other hand,
without forgetting the world, but rather affirming it, sets his eyes on the things above (cf.
Col 3.2)—largely through the Vorgriff.

In Hölderlin’s poem “Remembrance” (Andenken), he poetizes a homecoming (a
return, of course). At this moment in the poet’s journey, he asks for a cup of “dark light.”
Heidegger recognizes in this cup the possibility for movement to something higher, an
enlightening “intoxication” which is a “sublime elevation (Erhabenheit) of mood wherein that
single voice can be heard that sets a tone, and where those who are attuned to it may be led
most resolutely beyond themselves.”186 The poetic/artistic return interweaves with the
stimulation of wine—or could we say of the wine God, Dionysos? Return amounts to an
artistic accession to newfound power (Macht), a power that strengthens one’s (for Heidegger,

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185 Heidegger, “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” p. 64.

“German humanity’s”) resolve to accept one’s place in history, to be at home here, and nowhere else.\textsuperscript{187}

\textit{Nietzsche}

Two themes from Heidegger’s voluminous treatments of Nietzsche apply most prominently at this point: rapture (\textit{Rausch}) and the grand style (\textit{der grosse Stil}). In Heidegger’s first course on Nietzsche, \textit{The Will to Power as Art} (Winter 1936/37), these themes are central, and Heidegger speaks of them in terms reminiscent of danger and shelter. Once again, though, what constitutes danger and what shelter presents itself as a relevant and complex question. That question admits of further complications because it unfolds against the backdrop of another, that of the \textit{Nothing} and Heidegger’s (and Rahner’s) stance toward it. For now, Heidegger’s explanation of the Nietzschean view of the pall of nothingness that spreads itself over the world in late modernity serves as a working definition: “Nothing means here: absence of a supersensory, binding world.”\textsuperscript{188} The themes of rapture and the grand style concern the orientation of imagination (§3)—what occurs to the human imagination, and what can we do about it, in a world where the metaphysical carpet has been swiped from underneath us, when the ground moves and unsettles, disorients us? The Heidegger of \textit{Being and Time} and the Heideggerian Hölderlin tackled this problem, giving some possible approaches (anticipatory resoluteness and poetic homecoming). The Heideggerian Nietzsche can now have his say.

Heidegger devotes a chapter each to rapture and the grand style—we shall focus on those chapters while adding material from elsewhere. The Heideggerian Nietzsche defines

\textsuperscript{187} See Ibid., p. 171.

\textsuperscript{188} Heidegger, “Nietzsche’s Word: ‘God is Dead,’” p. 163.
rapture as “the basic aesthetic state … which for its part is variously conditioned, released and increased.”

This basic aesthetic state possesses three aspects: 1) “the feeling of enhancement of force,” 2) “the feeling of plenitude,” and 3) “the reciprocal penetration of all enhancements of every ability to do and see, apprehend and address, communicate and achieve release.” At this juncture, some Heideggerian violence must be done to the Heideggerian text. Although the Heideggerian Nietzsche continually discusses the beautiful in connection with rapture, the state of rapture, qua aesthetic state, reveals itself as sublime—dynamically (enhanced force, i.e., might), mathematically (plenitude, i.e., intensive magnitude), and according to the opposition of the positive and negative sublime, negatively (improved ability to achieve release, i.e., freedom—though the positive sublime does not lag far behind, for the Heideggerian Nietzsche does not discount all religious awe). The sublime is the great unsaid of the Heideggerian Nietzsche.

Heidegger observes that rapture’s status as feeling should not imply its evanescence—this is not fleeting feeling, but rather a manner of comportment toward beings, similar to Angst in Being and Time. The Heideggerian Nietzsche grants the artist a certain prominence or even normativity vis-à-vis the operation of rapture, or aesthetic (sublime) feeling generally, as it indicates a way of dealing with beings. Rapture sustains the “artistic state,” insofar as it enables the artist to possess “a steady and extensive reach into beings as a whole,” including her own reach, which she can “compel … to take form.”

This “reach into beings” signifies something very close to the Rahnerian Vorgriff. Thus, implied above with Hölderlin, Nietzsche’s view of art and the artist exemplify a possible site

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190 Ibid., p. 100.

191 Ibid., p. 102.
for making sense of Rahner’s *Vorgriff*—the *Vorgriff* as the ostensible center of the modern subject could become the inspiration for a post-subjective figure, perhaps an artist. Hence the declaration, “Rapture as a state of feeling explodes the very subjectivity of the subject.”

The Heideggerian Nietzsche attributes this to beauty, which draws the subject out of itself, but the Nietzschean view of beauty borders on the, if it does not wax fully, sublime.

Heidegger names a “guiding principle” for Nietzsche whenever he talks about art, which should clarify the last few comments: “[A]rt must be grasped in terms of creators and producers, not recipients.” This comment coheres with this dissertation’s framing of the sublime and the aesthetic—creators, as free and active, embody the sublime, and receivers, the aesthetic. For the Heideggerian Nietzsche, the accent in a discussion of art falls on the sublimity of the artist, in the interest of ontophany. Two texts back this claim. First, “Art, thought in the broadest sense as the creative, constitutes the basic character of beings,” and second, “With this being, the artist, Being lights up for us most immediately and brightly.” This is so because of the artist’s privileged way of channeling rapture, which we must elaborate as the artist’s capacity to corral rapture and deploy it in a “grand style.”

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192 Ibid., p. 123.

193 A chapter of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* informs us why Nietzsche may have avoided speaking of the sublime amid his aesthetic theorizing. In the chapter, “On Those Who Are Sublime” (*Von den Erhabenen*), Nietzsche associates sublimity with the “ascetic of the spirit” who turns a contemptuous eye toward the earth, thus emptying himself of all power and life. The “hero,” on the other hand, who possesses true power, achieves the highest, “most difficult thing”—“the beautiful.” The sublime ones, those stripped of strength, either from natural or self-imposed weakness, depend, Nietzsche suggests, upon the kindness of the powerful to graciously bestow beauty upon them. Anyone familiar with Nietzsche’s critique of morality can read between the lines that he connects the sublime, as does Kant, with morality, and thus finds it distasteful. The sublime must, for him, be overcome, just like Christianity, Platonism, and the morals that build on the Platonic-Christian foundation. This should highlight the irony between Nietzsche’s suspicion of the sublime and his tacit employment of it—especially with his “legislative” portrayal of our next theme, the grand style. See Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), Part Two, pp. 116-119.

sublimity of rapture cannot be understood as unchecked life, unless one wishes to relinquish its highest heights—a reference to the Kantian sublime, with which the Heideggerian Nietzsche shows not enough familiarity, confirms this: “[The feeling of the sublime] is a pleasure that only rises indirectly; viz. it is produced by the feeling of a momentary checking of the vital powers and a consequent stronger outflow of them.”195 The grand style provides this momentary checking by reining in the danger of rapture and reformulating it as shelter.

We are now ready to receive Heidegger’s definition of grand style (though strictly speaking it cannot be defined): “Art in the grand style is the simple tranquility resulting from the protective mastery of the supreme plenitude of life.”196 The grand style serves to master the plenitude that flashes forth in rapture, meaning that the true artist (art in the grand style is true art) becomes lawgiver—as creator of art, the artist self-legislates the law of the mastery of aesthetic states, just as in Kant’s view of sublime experience the subject feels induced to self-legislate the moral Law. The Heideggerian Nietzsche writes, “The artistic states are those which place themselves under the supreme command of measure and law, taking themselves beyond themselves in their will to advance.” And then again, “Art is … in itself legislation. Only as legislation is it truly art. What is inexhaustible, what is to be created, is the law.”197 With the grand style’s realization of artistic legislation, the “essence of art becomes actual,” that is, art safely makes its homecoming, it returns to its sustaining shelter, though on a higher plane than that on which it previously dwelled (the “peak of

195 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §23, p. 102. Chapter 15 of *Nietzsche, Vol. I* (pp. 107-114) considers Nietzsche’s misinterpretation of Kant’s doctrine of the beautiful (specifically the word “disinterested”) in the *Critique of Judgment*. The limited scope of his critical intervention in this chapter precludes Heidegger from bringing up the sublime, hence his connection of rapture with the feeling of the beautiful alone (p. 113). A reference to the “Analytic of the Sublime” here thus strays a bit from Heidegger’s text, but not arbitrarily or illegitimately so.


197 Ibid., p. 130.
[Nietzsche’s] ‘aesthetics’). With the grand style’s attainment to this peak, art becomes truly and fully active, as opposed to reactive (if not receptive). This is Nietzsche’s distinction between the grand style and romantic art, which coheres with Heidegger’s terminology—while romantic art “is a wanting-to-be-away-from-oneself” (risking loss into some other), the grand style deploys itself as will to power, and “willing is to-want-oneself.” The grand style, the will to power as art, is a *reditio completa in seipsum.*

The Heideggerian Nietzsche offers a contribution that can be juxtaposed with resolute Dasein, experiencing Überschafft-Übermacht, and the deinototon, producing the poetic ground of history: the Übermensch as creator. The Übermensch “is the man who grounds Being anew—in the rigor of knowledge and in the grand style of creation.” The Heideggerian Nietzsche agrees with the Heideggerian Hölderlin that in the late modern world, creation and the task of thinking, “estimating,” and “esteeming” Being belong together, and the poet-artist consolidates these activities. The work of artists prepares people for the coming of the gods (another theme common to Nietzsche and Hölderlin), and most importantly, creation (in the grand style) “is the Yes to Being.” The Übermensch, saying yes, overtakes all other humans (all-too-human), but climbs to such a height of power that he can (con)descend to bring joy to others, the joy of being at home in the world (with no supersensible world above), the joy of Zarathustra, one who becomes what he is.

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198 Ibid., p. 137.

199 Ibid., p. 136. Cf. Heidegger, “Nietzsche’s Word: ‘God is Dead,’” p. 180: “The creation of the possibilities for the will, possibilities which enable the will to power to free itself for itself in the first place, is for Nietzsche the essence of art … Art is the essence of the willing that opens perspectives and takes possession of them.”

§6. Jenseits von Greifen

Dis-orientation

... since the pre-apprehension (Vorgriff), if it is not to be a ‘grasp’ (Griff), can only be realized in a simultaneous conversion to a definite form limiting esse and in the conversion to the phantasm. The fullness of being which esse expresses is therefore never given objectively (SW 180/142).

Despite a bit of discussion about the “positive sublime” near the end of Chapter One, that chapter concerned aesthetics, and thus receptivity to the showing of being (ontophany). Calling aesthetics a simple affair would be foolish, but compared to the sublime, whose Heideggerian variety we just traversed (§5), one must admit that within the former several fewer caveats and distinctions are at play. Briefly stated, we all have some intuitive familiarity with sensation. The present chapter, especially §4, has tread more in the area of the agent intellect—more properly the imagination deploying itself intelligent-ly—reaching toward and to a certain extent “grasping” the highest possibilities of humanity. Such actualization of human potential glides by unannounced and unaffected most days of our lives. Properly, this is a movement of freedom—the Rahnerian Thomas speaks of spirit “conquering and holding sway over (vincens et dominans super) [the other]” (SW 293/220)—thus (violently? mightily?) asserting its freedom (dominion?) with respect to matter.

Presumably, one might think, as some of Rahner’s critics do (Balthasar at their forefront), that spirit’s free activity as Rahner unleashes it could deliver an objective and immediate grasp of God. Perhaps Rahner feels himself slipping this way, toward a preclusion of God’s revelation (or at least its uniqueness), and for this reason Rahner carefully calls God “free
and unknown”—de iure. Even so, grounds still offer themselves for cultivating criticisms of Rahner, but this time on the plane of a conflict between human and divine freedom. Therein lies the ultimate danger of maintaining a strong sense of the subject, as some have argued that Rahner does. This section responds that a strong subject appears in Rahner only in his least precise moments, when he does not see subjectivity as at stake.

The present section proposes that attention to Rahner’s more precise moments reveals his theology’s resistance to collusion with modern “grasping” subjectivity. With a little effort, we can find Rahner where he truly resides, beyond greifen (and another, related verb, fassen—to seize, grasp). §4 showed Rahner describing the activity of the Vorgriff in terms of modern subjectivity, but in an interesting move, he places the word “subjects” into quotation marks—we return to ourselves as “subjects” (HW 42/84). Could there be at play here something like the “law of quotation marks” to which Derrida points? With quotation marks, it seems that Rahner avoids saying the word subject, and in so doing suspends the concept of subject(ivity)—in order to open active “subjectivity,” “subjects,” to a kind of sublime receptivity: a sublime-aesthetic.

The Vorgriff is the topos for our problematic, the dis-orientation (prior to a re-orientation in later chapters) of the subject (toward sublime apprehension). The Vorgriff, by working intellectually over against matter (sensibility), allows the intellect to have objective knowledge. It crosses borders, and seemingly to seize some prey over the horizon. But the Vorgriff does something else for Rahner—it allows a glimpse, or even just indicates, the vastness of the horizon, so the intellect (“subject”) may turn back toward matter. Sheehan

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201 See HW 64/122, then the chapter that follows. Rahner formulates perfectly the objection of his later critics: “[W]hy does the absolute transcendence of the spirit as the a priori opening up of a space for revelation, combined with the pure luminosity of pure being, not from the start render superfluous any possible revelation?”

puts it well: “The Vorgriff projectively points towards beingness as a unified whole rather than grasping it, and this indication of a ‘more’ is what allows man to see a limited ‘less.’” The Vorgriff searches for the more, incomparably, dynamically more, but in the interest of shedding better light on the less. The Rahnerian “subject,” sublimely active, does not have designs on crushing sensibility’s aesthesis; it does not look to conquer the receptive imagination. Rather, this “subject” who glimpses rather than grasps looks to exalt sensation, and the whole world. In her return home, the “subject” graciously brings along—and thereby receives—guests. She lets her light shine before others (Mt 5.16), or maybe lets others shine before her light. This view of the Rahnerian subject will receive extensive treatment in Chapter Four, but more ground must be covered before then.

Combining the sublime knowing sketched above with the aesthesis described in Chapter One will generate some necessary insights to goad us forward in our reading of Rahner. Chapter One mentioned that the present chapter would discuss Rahner’s development of the idea of imagination in dialogue with Thomas’s “common sense.” This dialogue will feed into the concept of sublime-aesthetic, for a couple of quick maneuvers will demonstrate how the aesthetic as “common sense” can accelerate into the sublime.

Let us first lay out the texts where Rahner either uses the phrase “common sense” or cites Thomas’s commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima, or both. Rahner refers to common sense first within a section of Spirit in the World on space as an a priori structure of sensibility, and immediately after pointing ahead to his later description of the Vorgriff. He states that the reason space proves typical of sensibility lies in the existence of a “creative ground” for the bodily senses. The Rahnerian Thomas calls this, aptly, the “common sense,” from which the external senses spring and in which they remain (SW 104/88). After some maneuvering,

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203 Sheehan, Karl Rahner, p. 208.
Rahner equates this common sense with the imagination. Lest we think the common sense serves as the origin of space alone as an a priori structure, a few pages later Rahner adds time as a structure that emanates from the imagination (SW 114/95). Rahner talks of the common sense once again in a paragraph examined in Chapter One, where the cogitative sense, imagination, and the power of judgment are exposed as basically the same reality, by which “spirit forms itself into sensibility” (SW 308-309/231).

None of this material is new, given Chapter One, except for the emphasis placed here on “common sense.” We have approached a development, though, which alights upon the several strata of this dissertation, the Rahnerian, the Heideggerian, the contemporary French, and the medieval all at once. Rahner footnotes several passages from Sentencia libri De Anima, and the comments in and around these citations will underscore both the creative liberties Rahner has taken (for better) with Thomas’s text, and further possibilities Rahner provides for clarifying his own texts. Among the many distinctions from Aristotle that Thomas explicates, between sensation per se and per accidens, between common and proper, internal and external senses, a running theme emerges, and it has two parts. First, “there cannot be any proper organ of sense capable of cognizing the common sense objects that we sense through each sense per se and not per accidens.”

Thomas gives motion and standing still as examples of such “common sensibles”—Rahner, with a Kantian twist, names “spatiality” and the “quantitative.” No organ can perceive pure motion or pure space. Second, there is nevertheless a common source for the five sense organs collectively and individually, and this common sense is most closely approximated by touch. Even though no organ can apprehend pure motion or space, Aristotle maintains that the common sense

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205 Ibid., III.3.609, 602, pp. 314, 311.
does have an organ that serves as “common sensory principle,” and this is “some inner thing around the heart.”

Rahner deviates substantially from this latter point, where Thomas evidently agrees with Aristotle on some sort of a physiological view of the common sense. Rahner’s perspective is ontological—human imagination figures humanity’s receptive Being.

Another important alteration of Thomas appears in *In III De Anima* 3.612, where Thomas (i.e., Aristotle) argues that common sense “as being at its source and less divided” proves more superior than any given proper sense (sight, hearing, etc.), or all of them together. Rahner obviously agrees with this, metaphysically speaking. But Thomas’s next statement, “For all the powers of the sensory part are passive, and it is not possible for one power to be active and passive,” seems to grate against Rahner’s view of the imagination in *Spirit in the World* (as sublime-aesthetic). Thomas follows Aristotle in conceiving of the imagination as purely reproductive, hence passive—in other words, the imagination stands for *aesthesis* in the etymological sense. The Rahnerian imagination looks beyond the pure reception of the aesthetic *stricto sensu*, and thus adds an active component to the imagination, which he calls the *Vorgriff*. The imagination borders on the intellect, and thereby cooperates with it. This motif Rahner develops in conversation with German Idealism, borrowing, it seems, from that movement’s idea of the productive imagination. The common sense becomes a productive-reproductive realm for *reditio*.

The preceding interjection on Thomas’s *De Anima* commentary has raised issues that will carry through the coming chapters. By way of a return to *aesthesis* in Thomas, the theme of touch, broached in Chapter One in connection with Bonaventure, has reemerged. We have enhanced this theme with the introduction of one word—heart. Thomas says that the

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207 Ibid., III.3.612, p. 316.
organ of the common sense finds its locus near the heart. For the Rahnerian Thomas, metaphysics has its basis in the imagination, and by a certain transposition we might claim that further revision of Rahnerian metaphysics will reveal a metaphysics stemming from near the heart. The aesthetic resonances of Spirit in the World—of any Rahnerian work in which the imagination figures prominently (i.e., all of them)—will thus be amplified, to the point of sublimity. §9’s conversation with contemporary French thinkers will reveal the disadvantages and advantages of the amplification, whether through further engagement with the sensus communis (Lyotard), more explanation of touch as fundamental to sensation (Nancy), or by a radical opening of thinking via the phenomenological reduction (Marion).

Rahner’s dissonant relation to Lyotard and Nancy and his consonance with Marion will show that Rahner’s sublime—and the “heart” it implies—though resolutely late modern and thus pertinent today, is greatly instructed by the medieval philosophical-theological tradition.

To illustrate this point—Rahner’s discussion of the spiritual senses in Bonaventure leads him almost to the edge of a precipice, with the cliff itself being Christian tradition and the perennial philosophy from Plato to Hegel, and the abyss below being post-Kantian and post-Heideggerian late modernity. Rahner locates an apex affectus in Bonaventure, something akin to the common sense, which lies deeper than the intellect and will and “supports the capacities of both,” and achieves its full actualization through “contact” with God, who comes to the affect as “the dark fire of love.” The apex affectus attains to an “essentially affective … grasp (!) of God.”

A possible post-Heideggerian (Lyotardian, Nancean) reading of Rahner on Bonaventure might be constructed. Contact would undergo a re-rendering as touch with a recoil, a shudder, not a grasp, and the fire of God’s love would be transposed into an obscure erotic longing within the human (body), and thereby indexed as a

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208 Rahner, “‘Spiritual Senses’ in the Middle Ages,” pp. 124-127.
quasi-noetic suspension of any real relation to God. The connection Philip Endean draws between spiritual touch and the *apex affectus* in the early Rahner, which is mystical and exceptional, and the immediate experience of God in the later Rahner, which is universally available, as well as the *Vorgriff* throughout Rahner’s writings, would grease the wheels for this contemporary (mis)appropriation as well. Dark touch could assume the status of benchmark for theories about and experience of (something like) God under an aesthetic, or sublime-aesthetic rubric. But if we link the *apex affectus* with what we already know about the Rahnerian (Thomas’s) imagination, and Endean seems to encourage this link, we find Rahner’s allergy to the above brand of (failed) contact with God. Even at the darkest mystical moments, Rahner demands the maintenance of faith in the God who is eternal light (see §3, HW 41/80)—the God whose light we long to receive, even in the pit of darkness (Ps 130.1, 143.7), even to the point of darkness (Ex 20.21), and furthermore that enables us to long to receive it. This last clause is most significant, and Chapter Three will unfold it. God’s light—as grace—has already reached each human person, at heart, as it were, and the key is to respond to this already achieved contact by living in a manner that shows forth one’s longing to see God’s light more fully.

Before moving on to the last section of this chapter, this is as good a place as any to clarify something. This clarification will, in turn, put us back on showing how Rahner places himself beyond grasping. Rahner’s essay “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology” will guide us. So far this dissertation’s orientation and disorientation in Rahner has

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209 Endean, KRIS, pp. 24-29. A crucial summary statement underscores Endean’s distinctive contribution to Rahner studies: “Rahner’s late Ignatian writings … retrieve ‘the immediate experience of God’ from his earliest writings in the history of spirituality, and handle it in a radically transformed way. No longer does the term denote a particular, privileged state of mind and heart: it has, rather, become central to the theology of human experience as such, *a reality present in anyone, at whatever level of holiness*” (p. 59).

concerned God and the experience of God, with only passing mention of doctrine—let us change this. At the beginning of the article, Rahner divides his introduction into the question of mystery between apologetics (fundamental theology) and dogmatic theology. For the former, the question of mystery implies the issue of the modern world’s closure vis-à-vis God, and God’s radicalized transcendence in the face of this evidently self-sufficient world. God’s apparent remoteness causes religion to look suspect, for God in the modern world seems to have lost any proper, accessible name, yet organized religions still peddle predications for God. In part at least, this dissertation so far has confronted this problem of fundamental theology. Inquiry in this vein demands augmentation. Rahner’s comments on dogmatics interest us as well, insofar as the chapters to come define the Catholic sublime.

We read on: “As long as [people] find [dogmatic theology] a highly complicated collection of arbitrarily linked assertions, their readiness to believe will be inhibited.” Rahner answers an objection before the reader can raise it—is this not because people are rationalists, and demand clearer answers that do not rest heteronomously on Church authority? Not necessarily, Rahner replies. Instead, “[People] find the mystery of God so all-embracing that they cannot easily bring themselves to accept a multitude of mysteries which look very much like the complications of human reasoning which has tied itself up in knots.”

Now, why should these points pertain to an articulation of the Catholic sublime? Intimations of the sublime are here applied to Catholic dogmatics—Rahner points to the imposing, almost immeasurable profile of the dogmatic edifice as a whole, and to the incomparable power of the individual mysteries that comprise that edifice. This is a system that seems to grasp, due to its comprehensiveness, but we shall find Rahner arguing later, that is really beyond grasping, due to its revision of the meaning of comprehensiveness. The

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211 Ibid., p. 37.
average person, even the advanced believer, perceives danger in the dogmas of the Church, but Rahner, with his constant scholarly and spiritual engagement with various Church teachings, such as the Marian dogmas (§10), hints that the uncanniness people feel as they approach the Catholic mysteries may in fact be the sensation that attends a return home.

The clarification, then, concerns the Catholic sublime. This idea, or more precisely, ethos, includes, as a constituent feature, the depth, breadth, and especially the pluralism, of Catholic dogmatics. One cannot master Catholic dogmatics, as modern subjectivity may attempt (usually by way of jettisoning most dogmas). Even so, one need not feel threatened. The Catholic sublime signifies that, by a certain philosophical, theological, spiritual, even poetic-artistic preparation—by work in the world—one can allow the vast phenomenon of Catholic Christianity, that is, Christianity in its absolute scope, and view it as a protective, if uncanny shelter. This happens through receptive acts of creativity—it takes imagination, which is at root an affective yet active, disposition in contact, somehow, with God.

Sublime—Aesthetic and Art

Abstraction in *Spirit in the World* establishes a metaphysical view of the objectivity of knowledge, derived from (neo)Scholastic accounts of knowledge, but moving toward modern and contemporary art—its practices and theories. The road is long and winding, but Heidegger, among others, even with his (their) shortcomings, has set some pathmarks. Rahner picks up on many, if not all, of these cues. The easily overlooked essay, “Priest and Poet” (1955), shows symptoms of Rahner’s deep yet distant engagement with Heideggerian poetic thinking. For this dissertation’s project, “Priest and Poet” proves essential.

Rahner speaks of the poet’s feeling in creation as a sublime experience—positive (sheltering) yet negative (dangerous)—and adds that in so doing (making), the poet achieves
the sublime level of abstraction in the “process” of knowledge. Rahner writes, “The poet experiences the blissful, but also perilous, extremely perilous, pleasure of an aesthetic kind of identity between his being and his consciousness.” Rahner calls this aesthetic state a “\textit{reditio completa in se ipsum.}” Heidegger’s Nietzsche would concur with the former, and probably also the latter statement. Rahner has deftly described \textit{rapture}. But Rahner brings a distinctively Catholic perspective to this artistic \textit{reditio} that Heideggerians would not stomach. Artistic creation is a sublime endeavor, but not the highest of the sublime—Rahner compares the poet, as the title of the essay suggests, to the priest. Thereby Rahner shows his cards. They are Catholic, even somewhat “Neo-platonic,” rather than Dionysian; for Rahner transcendence ascends, rather than moving horizontally. The priest performs this ascent. He is privy to an even more sublime experience than the self-fulfilling poet (not that Rahner condemns poets for it—to the contrary). Rahner clarifies the relationship: “The words of the priest produce that unmasking which God alone can bring about. It truly humbles us. It gives us, if we accept it in true self-denial, sober spiritual health.” Rahner’s point is that the legitimate ecstasy of the poet, which can rise almost to the loftiest (Dionysian) heights and which comes from the poet himself, cannot compare to the production of God’s words issuing from the priest’s mouth. The priest, acting \textit{in persona Christi}, expresses the “remoteness of God,” which is qualitatively different than the poet’s singing of finite beings and Being. This is not to give the upper hand to the priest without condition, though—


213 A comparison could be made here with Balthasar, with whom Rahner seems virtually isomorphic on the topic of rapture.


215 Rahner’s thoughts invite another comparison with the very different, yet euphonious, ideas about poetry Marion sets forth in his Christian reading of Hölderlin in \textit{The Idol and Distance}. Of particular interest would be Marion’s reading of Hölderlin’s poem “Patmos,” where he treats the topic of the apostle(s) and poetry. See Marion, \textit{The Idol and Distance}, pp. 105ff.
“[The priest] is always more and mostly less than a poet.” The priest is “unmasked” by the prophetic Word of God—a word that Heidegger blatantly and deliberately misunderstands as celestial soothsaying—both as sinner and as indicator of the “pierced heart of the Son.” God lifts up the priest, but at the same time the priest is debased. This is the glory of the Cross, which Christ shares with all the faithful, but in a special way with priests—a glory that appears as “mostly less” (see Jn 13.31-32) to non-Christian eyes.

The poet has a different vocation than the priest. Rahner seems to suggest that the poet, as artist, undergoes the driving force of the Spirit whom the glorified Christ sends into the world (from his heart—Jn 19.34). The poet, by her very artistic action, proclaims the arrival of that action from elsewhere. Rahner puts it beautifully,

Art, real art, is always more than just that. If ever art is pursued exclusively for the sake of the aesthetic, it ceases to be art. It sinks down to the level of a poisonous narcotic banishing the fear of existence. But that something more which belongs to it and from which it lives cannot come to art from itself.

Rahner continues with an allusion to a line from Paul, frequently quoted throughout the Christian tradition: “And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given us” (Rom 5.5). Art belongs not within the discussion of aesthetics, narrowly (modernly) conceived, but instead within the teaching on grace (see §7).

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216 Rahner, “Priest and Poet,” emphasis added.

217 See Heidegger’s rather flat comments on the poetic word, trading on the etymological sense of propheteuein. Heidegger, “Remembrance,” pp. 136-137. Heidegger ignores, of course, not only here but elsewhere, the entire element of justice that dominates the “Judeo-Christian” prophetic writings, an element of which Rahner is keenly aware and evokes, though subtly, in “Priest and Poet,” but more explicitly and soundly in other writings on love of neighbor.


219 Ibid., p. 316.
We cannot avoid the motif of the heart, nor treat it lightly. The material on the common sense yielded a glimpse of “heart.” Now a heart, pierced and pouring, implicates itself with poetry. Heart is one of what Rahner calls, in Heideggerian fashion, the Urworte, primordial words, “living words” in which plays the “soft music of infinity.” Rahner characterizes these as “words of an endless crossing of borders”—how clearly they are tinged with the sublime!220 “Priest and Poet” admits of further sublime metaphors (the German makes this quite clear), where Rahner compares poetic words with doors (Tore), actually, “doors to infinitude” (Tore zur Unendlichkeit), “doors into the immeasurably immense” (ins Unübersehbare). These words “call for the unnamed” (Ungenannte), and “they stretch forth toward the ungraspable” (Ungreifbare).221 These words “try to force [the human person] to allow himself to be gripped, as they grip and grasp.”222

Rahner’s theology of the symbol, embodied best by his essay by the same title, but which “Priest and Poet” exemplifies, does not limit itself to poetry, but rather provides a broad enough theological framework to introduce both poetry and painting as matters artistic. Furthermore, this crucial aspect of Rahner’s theology offers further opportunity to illustrate the dimensions of Rahner’s debates with Kant and Heidegger, while showing how Rahner brings Catholic devotional life to bear on these thinkers’ philosophies. It is too little known that Rahner’s “Theology of the Symbol” (1959) concerns first and foremost an attempt to theologically describe the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.223 Those familiar


with this devotion may experience some cognitive dissonance, for the discussion is shifting all at once here toward modern art (including, maybe, the avant-garde), while keeping in view the devotion that has produced myriad examples of Catholic kitsch. But interestingly enough, some of Rahner’s comments on visual depictions of Jesus’ Sacred Heart, effect a certain convergence of kitsch and the avant-garde, namely through a critique of naturalistic representation. Rahner observes, “A representation of the Lord with his heart in the most ‘natural’ way possible (in which one as it were looks into the physiological ‘inside’ of the Lord) misunderstands the meaning of the symbol and distracts from its symbolical character.”

And elsewhere he maintains, “[I]t is right and inevitable that this representation should be stylized, because in this way the symbolic character of the representation and of its immediate object is more evidently proclaimed.”

In these rare statements about visual artistic style, Rahner clues us in to an affinity between his fundamental ontology, which teaches the symbolic nature of Being, his fundamental theology of grace, and a fundamental principle of modern art. Stylization unlocks something that naturalism cannot—the symbolic dimension(s) of reality. One would go too far if one declared that Rahner thus joins, say, Wassily Kandinsky’s “revolt from dependence on nature.”

One may more modestly claim that Rahner’s seemingly innocuous comments on

Bourke (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971), pp. 217-228; and idem, “Unity-Love-Mystery” in TI 8, pp. 229-247. The main ecclesial reason for this large output of literature (Rahner was not unique in this) was the publication by Pope Pius XII of an encyclical on the devotion to the Sacred Heart (15 May 1956). In §19, the pope urges “a more earnest consideration of those principles” on which “the worship of the Sacred Heart of Jesus rests.” Pope Pius XII, Haurietis Aquas, URL: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_15051956_haurietis-aquas_en.html.

225 Rahner, “Behold this Heart!,” p. 328.
Catholic kitsch, if folded into a careful reading of Rahner, can show his capacity for dialogue with thinkers interested in modern art and the sublime.

Rahner’s prolegomena to a theology of the symbol allow for another remarkable convergence—between his view of the imagination developed in conversation with the Heideggerian Kant, and the “Definition of Faith” promulgated at the Council of Chalcedon (451). Rahner points to this in short and long formulations. First, let us read the short version: “Reality and its appearance in the flesh are for ever one in Christianity, inconfused and inseparable.” The longer statement comments on the shorter:

In a real theology of the symbol, a symbol is not something separated from the symbolized … [T]he symbol is the reality, constituted by the thing symbolized as an inner moment of itself, which reveals and proclaims the thing symbolized, and is itself full of the thing symbolized, being its concrete form of existence.

In keeping with these words, Rahner argues that the theology of the symbol, if written, should have Christology at its center, for the doctrine of the Incarnation tells of the Word of God’s self-expression in the “other” of flesh, and thus their unconfused yet undivided unity. Rahner suggests that it might be sufficient in this chapter simply to exegete Jn 14.9: “The one who sees me, sees the Father.” Rahner’s philosophical word holds that spirit realizes itself by emanating into and as sensibility, and that as the sublime driving force of the conversion to the phantasm, spirit appears as aesthetic receptivity. With the addition of

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229 Ibid., p. 251.

230 Rahner, so as to avoid Hegelianism, would insist on a qualitative difference between the Word’s self-expression in another and the self-realization of another that marks finite beings.

Rahner’s theology of the symbol, of Being as symbol read against a Christological background, mutual enrichment of philosophy and theology shows itself. Fields (author of Being as Symbol) accuses Rahner of a willy-nilly baptism of sensation. But does not the Christological cast of the Rahnerian theology of the symbol testify to Jesus Christ’s healing and elevating (how sublime!) of normal human sensing, thinking, and loving at an ontological level, and not exclusively on the occasion of an ontic actus fidei? The Incarnation transforms the heart—that is, the whole, unified reality—of the human person forever, and God’s abiding love as tragende Grund always continues this process of transformation, through human activity and receptivity—or active-receptive poetry.

A crucial passage for this dissertation comes from Hearer of the Word. It can contextualize and amplify the ideas just considered, and point toward an articulation of the Catholic sublime in Rahner. It reads,

> Human openness for being as such does not derive from a previous, albeit narrower openness, which would come to us with our very nature, making known to us some objects, such as our essence itself. Rather transcendence opens for us when we receive an object given from without, showing itself by itself (HW 119/176).

These overtly Heideggerian, but more deeply and uniquely Rahnerian lines are Rahner’s first formulation of the Catholic sublime, the open ethos of Catholicism. In very few words Rahner articulates the unified operation of the conversion to the phantasm, with the receptivity of sensibility and the active transcendence of the Vorgriff. The receiving of an “object” of sensibility (an aesthetic moment) occasions exalting openness (a sublime moment). The Catholic sublime is a way of understanding the sublime-aesthetic character of

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232 Recall Fields, “Balthasar and Rahner on the Spiritual Senses,” p. 232. See also idem, Being as Symbol, which describes and synthesizes the philosophical and theological resources on which Rahner draws to develop a theological metaphysics of the Real symbol. As previously noted, Fields’s book stands as a forerunner to this dissertation insofar as it reads Rahner along an aesthetic axis.
human life, which begins and stays in the world yet continually opens to something more, something ever greater and more glorious, immeasurable and incomparable. But the accent in the Catholic sublime is always on the “from without”; thus it exemplifies the positive sublime. Some other elevates us, and properly, to this other glory is due, for glory consists in the showing of the other, with which our receiving should never interfere. Otherwise, that which is opened by the other becomes closed again.233

The openness that the Catholic sublime proclaims is, in reality, a high form, a grand style of art—some sort of drawing or writing—spirit’s inscription of the elsewhere in the here: “We penetrate into the world in order to reach being as such, which extends beyond the world” (HW 120/177). This art, which is received but nevertheless actively realized, raises us up *(erhebt uns)* into the heart of the divine mystery. Through a certain work—creating—human persons become what they receive. This is *theosis*—divinization. Heidegger attempts, implicitly, to reach something like this. He cannot—he forecloses that option for himself *in nomine finiti*. By contrast, Rahner stands in a long line of theologians (saints!) who have found ways of understanding and expressing this reality. Many, even most, of them lived long before the specter of modern subjectivity first reared its ugly head. We cannot go back to this time, but we can retrieve *(wiederholen)* its spirit—which *theosis* symbolizes—pass through modern subjectivity, and come out better for it on the other side. Chapter Three begins this retrieval, with the hypothesis that, as Michel Henry contends, modernity never reached true subjectivity, anyway.234

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233 These words evoke Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, pp. 3-10, where he aims to open an avenue between the Christian message (from Jesus’ parables) and modern art.

If this chapter has accomplished its goals, the Rahnerian Vorgriff should strike us as sublime. Along with Rahner, Heidegger helped bring this into high relief. Heidegger dubs the human person the uncanniest of all creatures, the deinotaton. To a great extent we must agree. A certain discomfort, a feeling of being away from home accompanies human life, whether one thematicizes it or not. Far from being a simple emotional state, the uncanniness—sublimity—of the human condition is an ontological fact, a given part of our makeup, especially in the late modern world. Through sensations, thought processes, and attempts at love, through words, actions, and ventures at creation, we receive intimations of the pull (push) of something more, evidently from elsewhere, yet here.

Might the label “uncanniest of creatures” find a cognate in the long Catholic tradition of human life as pilgrimage, as a status viatoris? Yes. Rahner places himself within the main line of this tradition near the end of Spirit in the World, by describing an essential ambivalence of humanity as both “already in the world and on the way to God” (SW 406/299)—Vorgriff is a shorter shorthand for this aphorism about the human condition. This tradition of the status viatoris irks Heidegger, in his Nietzschean moments more than a little, for it juts out as perhaps the highest, most all-encompassing expression of Christianity’s (neo)Platonism conceivable. But Heidegger, in his own way, re-places the same tradition. For Heidegger, “the gods” take the pilgrims’ place—the gods have taken flight, and a God is to come (see §14). Rosiek calls this feature of Heidegger’s “poetics” the “notion of a double Between,” where poetry holds an “intermediate position … in a modern de-divinized time.”\textsuperscript{235} Poetry (art), especially in the grand style, helps us bide our time until the god(s) return(s).

\textsuperscript{235} Rosiek, Maintaining the Sublime, p. 163.
This re-placement could be regarded in many ways, none of them flattering to Heidegger—he remains within the same language game as the status viatoris tradition while trying to escape it, he has merely immanentized the pilgrimage, or maybe he has blinded himself with an over-simplified view of Christian faith and life to the possibility that Christian being in the world, yet not of it, does not necessitate dualism or rendering the world provisional, or creating fictions to explain real problems (of fate) away. The issue at the end of Chapter Two, then, proves the same as the one at the end of Chapter One—how can one simultaneously risk exposure “to the destiny of this earth” while not limiting oneself a priori to its strictures? The means for the proper asking of this question lies in how we understand the phrase “on the way to God.” Both Rahner and Heidegger believe, each in his own manner, that we are on the way to God, or that God is on God’s way to us. Both aim to speak, often haltingly, of some sublime movement of arrival between humanity and God. This dissertation began with that concern in mind, hence it asks about the Catholic sublime in Rahner, with its un-restriction of phenomenality. We must abide in this concern as we carry on the investigation.
THREE
SPIRIT MINUS GRASPING

Der scheint aber fast
Rückwärts zu gehen …

Two names befit the modern subject at its dawn, or in statu nascendi, its naissance late in
(or after) the Renaissance, some time between 1492 and 1650: conqueror and scientist. According to Enrique Dussel, and an ever-growing cohort with him, “The conquistador was the first modern, active, practical human being to impose his violent individuality on the other.” The scientist—Cartesian, Baconian, or whatever sort—followed hot on the conqueror’s Columbian heels, no matter how supposedly pure the scientist’s original motives. The conqueror and the scientist share a simple, though deadly, practice, one born of epistemology, but which defines modern ontology (ethics, politics!)—objectification. When other beings become simple objects, violence becomes the subject’s progress.


237 Those even vaguely familiar with Western history will recognize these dates as denoting Christopher Columbus’s “discovery” of America and the death of René Descartes.


239 It is a trend in contemporary philosophy of science to exculpate thinkers like Francis Bacon, for the ill consequences that comprise their Wirkungsgeschichte.
These two figures of modern subjectivity are familiar. One more joins them, a bit belatedly: the businessperson. The businessperson manifests the modern subject at the end of its deconstructive rope—240—as the empty shell of both the conqueror and the scientist, thus the empty shell of empty shells, 241 conquering nothing and investigating nothing, but simply spreading a crushing acquisitive hold on the entire globe. The businessperson has gradually usurped normativity vis-à-vis human Being, and for this reason we must seek a way beyond the modern subject. Heidegger observes, “Creation, once the prerogative of the biblical God, has become the mark of human activity, whose creative work becomes in the end business transactions.”242 If business has seized “creation,” assuming it as its own, then the job presents itself of redirecting our imaginations to a different vision of creative work—and according to Christian doctrine, human creativity happens by grace (1 Cor 12.4-11). The reflections below record prolegomena to a Rahnerian description of the distinctively Catholic teaching of cooperative grace—in the traditional sense of co-operating with God, but also of a communal enactment of the Way of salvation. 243

The doctrine of cooperative grace will eventually lead back to the doorstep (limen) of the artist, who, in Chapter Two, stepped forward as a candidate to release modern

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240 Nancy best describes deconstruction’s meaning: “Deconstructing belongs to a tradition, to our modern tradition, and I am entirely ready to admit that the operation of deconstruction is part of the tradition just as legitimately as the rest … Furthermore, ‘deconstruction’ has this peculiarity: if we look back at its origin in the text of Being and Time, it is the last state of the tradition—its last state as retransmission, to us and by us, of the whole tradition in order to bring it back into play in its totality … To deconstruct means to take apart, to disassemble, to loosen the assembled structure in order to give some play to the possibility from which it emerged but which, qua assembled structure, it hides” (“The Deconstruction of Christianity,” in Dis-Enclosure, p. 148).


243 The capitalization is intentional. See Acts 9.2; 18.26; 19.9, 23; 22.4; 24.14, 22.
subjectivity’s grasp. By contrast with the three modern figures, conqueror, scientist, and businessperson, the artist receptively ushers phenomena into appearance, while the conqueror/scientist/businessperson through pure action forces phenomena to presence. This contrast can serve for now as a limit-idea for our theological inquiry. It seems that the artist’s disposition presents more favorable conditions for the acceptance of God’s grace in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, whereas the others would either fail to understand that a gift was being given, or might culpably turn away from God in staunch refusal. The artist familiarizes herself, in every creative act, with the sort of receptivity to which Christian theologies of grace should enjoin all human persons. Rahner’s theology of grace pays sublime tribute to the sublime-aesthetic creative-receptivity that should serve as normative for human life, and which the artist approximates. To repeat: this chapter concerns topics taboo today—normativity, canon. This untimely meditation, raises the question: Who serves as the normative human being, now that the subject has had his day?

The chapter has three parts. First, Rahner sets the agenda—braiding the questions of grace and modernity. It starts with a section on angels, recurring to §2, which compared Rahner’s limit-idea (Grenz-idee) of the angelic intellect’s self-presence to the modern subject’s attachment to presence. This comparison leads, circuitously, to Christ’s opening of the salvific economy, and humanity’s role within it. The next subsection describes Rahner’s Ignatian view of the human being as creatively in-spired and in-spiring, as commissioned by the Holy Spirit to set the world on fire—a charge that sparks from early modern Catholicism. The section ends with a discussion of Rahner’s Trinitarian theology as a nexus of multiple topical threads pertaining to “spirit minus grasping.” The pairing

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244 A commendable article by Kevin Hogan seems the closest example of an inquiry akin to the one proposed in this chapter. See Hogan, “Entering into Otherness: The Postmodern Critique of the Subject and Karl Rahner’s Theological Anthropology” in Horizons 25.2 (1998), pp. 181-202.
“common” and “proper,” first encountered in §6’s material on “common sense,” features prominently.

The second section continues engaging Heidegger’s texts and lectures on poetry. It treats Heidegger’s estimation of Rilke, who, despite his metaphysical commitments, glimpses the post-subjective figure of the angel. Then the Heideggerian Hölderlin comes back with his re-calling of the ancient Greek spirit of exposure to heavenly fire. This all relates to Heidegger’s theory of the fourfold, which offers a life of “rootedness” in the world, where “mortals” (we) live cooperatively with “gods, earth, and sky” in an “in-finite relation.”

A major convergence between Heidegger and Rahner comes to light here—both thinkers find ways to revision the human person as a sort of sublime after-subject, a being whose agency stems from being grasped (collectivity implied here), rather than grasping. This active being grasped is no simple reversal of grasping, just as a poet does not just mirror the businessperson. Heidegger diverges from Rahner, though, when he attaches his after-subject to worldliness beholden to his apriorism of finitude.

The chapter’s third part enters the contemporary French conversation. Since this dissertation reads Rahner in juxtaposition with the Kantian and Heideggerian traditions on the aesthetic and the sublime, it makes sense to briefly show where these traditions have gone recently. Lyotard and Nancy each represent, to varying degrees, an interweaving of post-Kant and post-Heidegger. Lyotard picks up on the notion of sensus communis from Kant’s third Critique and folds it into his Heidegger-inspired excavation of the subject. Nancy’s idea of “touching” appears next, as an offshoot of the Lyotardian-Kantian aesthetic impulse and the Heideggerian in-finite relation. The philosophical event of thinking the after-subject in Lyotard and Nancy maps fairly well onto the Heideggerian elements that we

have opposed up to now, and in large part because both Lyotard and Nancy appropriate Heidegger noetically as opposed to ontophanically. In doing so, they place themselves at quite a distance from Rahner, along the axis of the negative sublime. They are included here to emphasize by contrast the ontophanic strength of Rahnerian thought.

The third French figure examined below is another story. Marion resembles Rahner very closely, almost to the point of repetition. Here is an ally. Marion’s thinking of l’adonné, the “gifted one,” which he develops within an “inversion” of the Kantian sublime, bears extraordinary possibilities for the project of showing a Rahner beyond greifen. In Marion lie some inroads to a theological sublime-aesthetic, a receptivity that welcomes the event and advent of alterity, that lovingly receives God’s light, and other persons—really all creation—as light. Marion allows, unlike his countrymen Lyotard and Nancy, but like Rahner and Heidegger, ontophany. Marion writes (of) the positive sublime. The chapter concludes with a summary sketch of how Rahner’s doctrine of grace re-frames the normative human being, after the subject. The artist stands as a suggestion at the chapter’s end, but as a placeholder. Not until Chapter Four’s end will a better alternative snap into focus.

This, the third chapter, has the word “object” and its derivatives in mind throughout. The modern subject is born by treating beings (even people) as objects, by setting up something objective before himself (vorstellen). Often this objectifying grasping reaches an extreme point where the subject’s autonomy transforms into autism—where the other as object becomes no-other. The Rahnerian Vorg riff functions to set up objects (§4), but in a way uncoupled from grasping (§6), thus objectification. Soon the Vorg riff shall appear as sublime apprehension, a disposition that avoids the subject’s autism. But first we must
recognize, with Rahner, that everything we possess (and do), we have received, through a gathered community of persons from the God who is ever-nearer.\(^{246}\)

§7. Grace: Prolegomena to Cooperation

*Thomas’s Angel*

Rahner uses the idea of the angelic intellect as a *Grenz-idee*, a limit- or regulative idea to enhance his account of human knowing (SW 38/40). Chapter Two suggested that the self-presence of the angelic intellect resembles the goal of the modern subject, namely, to achieve full self-grasping. The following paragraphs, using material from Thomas, should render more plausible the suggestion of a connection between the angelic intellect and the modern subject. This will set up an argument against Cornelius Ernst, who holds that for Rahner “every entity (every material entity too) is a more or less deficient angel.”\(^{247}\) On the contrary, Rahner disagrees with this opinion. He labors to open his own thought beyond grasping subjectivity toward the economy of salvation, where humans, as mediators, enjoy a unique status incomparable to that of angels, ruling out value judgments like “deficiency.”

Thomas’s mature treatise on angels in the *Summa theologica* (ST I.50-64) appears within the larger sweep of his theology of creation (ST I.44-119). Angels receive consideration first, after some preliminary remarks, for among creatures, angels bear the singular privilege of being “entirely spiritual.”\(^{248}\) Thomas’s angelology develops from this

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\(^{246}\) The basis for this thesis statement, which could be taken as the programmatic scriptural text for the dissertation, is 1 Cor 4.7: “Who confers distinction upon you? What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not receive it?”

\(^{247}\) Cornelius Ernst, “Introduction” in TI 1, p. xiii, n1.

\(^{248}\) Thomas, ST I.50.1.
single premise, that angels represent pure, unfettered spirit—form released from matter’s weight. At least two consequences relating to modern subjectivity follow: 1) angels have a uniquely powerful mode of knowledge, and 2) each angel comprises its own sphere, by nature enjoying true autonomy vis-à-vis other creatures. Thomas’s angel unwittingly predicts the rise of modern subjectivity—its acquisitive pattern of knowing and inability to live in common. Again, neither Rahner nor anyone else blames Thomas for this phenomenon, but rather a tradition after him, which gradually lost Thomas’s perspicuity in recognizing what is authentically human.

Although the angel’s power does not equal its essence (nor its existence), by the operation of its existence, the angel deploys a sublime dynamism. 249 I.54.4-5 make this clear. Foreshadowing I.84.7, Thomas argues, “The distinction of active and passive intellect in us is in relation to the phantasms … But this is not so in the angel.” As pure form, the angel knows only intelligible things. In human knowledge, an abstractive return from materiality renders matter intelligible. No such process occurs for an intellect separated from matter: “Knowledge … is not generated in the angels, but is present naturally.” 250 Thus, no distinction abides for angels—we need not even call their intellects active. For human apprehension, material “objects” stand outside, over against the soul, demanding inspiration. For angelic apprehension, there is nothing outside. 251 One should recall Kant’s contention that we encounter sublime experience only within the subject—a subject fortified by the erasure of the outside. The connection deepens in the next article, where the third objection relates to the imaginative faculty (vis imaginativa). In keeping with his founding

249 ST I.54.3.

250 ST I.54.4.sed contra, ad 1. Rahner cites I.54.4 on SW 243/185.

251 ST I.54.4.corpus.
premise, Thomas denies that the angel has an imagination, for this “power of the soul” works along with corporeal organs, but the angel, as the “highest intellectual creature,” is “entirely intelligent.” Angels know by connatural intelligible species—everything an angel needs, it always already has. This mirrors the ideal of the modern subject—autonomous, self-sufficient, sublimely self-elevated. An important difference appears, though, for angels never realize the pure self-legislation to which the modern grasping subject pretends: “They attain their intelligible perfection through an intelligible outpouring, whereby they received from God the species of things known, together with their intellectual nature.” Even so, subtract this (crucial) receiving, and the angel ominously prefigures modern subjectivity, with its self-sealing intellectual power.

The word “seal” has hermetic connotations: angels exist as intellects that could very well make it on their own. Since angels having nothing properly to do with matter, they exist in perfect differentiation from each other, each belonging to its own species as its only instance, in contrast to other creatures, which multiply in number within a species. Angels, then, multiply by a purely intellectual (formal) distinction, not by a material one. Furthermore, angels remain distinct from matter even when they co-operate with matter in the history of salvation. Impelled by the words of scripture, which narrate meetings between

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252 ST I.54.5.ad 3, corpus.
253 ST I.55.2.ad 2.
254 ST I.55.2.corpus, emphasis added. See also ST I.55.3.ad 1: “It is accidental to the universal to be abstracted from particulars, in so far as the intellect knowing it derives its knowledge from things. But if there be an intellect which does not derive its knowledge from things, the universal which it knows will not be abstracted from things, but in a measure will be pre-existing to them; either according to the order of causality, as the universal ideas of things are in the Word of God; or at least in the order of nature, as the universal ideas of things are in the angelic mind.” A careful reader of Rahner will note that angels also differ from the modern grasping subject in that angels are “without any need of grasping something else, distinct from themselves, in order to arrive at a conscious return to themselves” (HW 97, emphasis added).
255 ST I.50.4. corpus, ad1, ad 4.
humans and angels, Thomas attempts to make sense of such encounters. He deems it undeniable that angels “assume bodies,” but carefully clarifies that the “body assumed is united to the angel not as its form, nor merely as its mover, but as its mover represented by the assumed movable body.” The angel and the assumed body remain utterly separate, and the body remains lifeless as the angel does its work. This prefigures that oft-repeated (if disputed) description of the modern subject—a mind in a machine. This mind hardly admits of real encounters. In its body, the angel cannot share a meal with human persons. And without the body, when “knowing” other angels, the angel relates merely to a “species” of the other, which “has only an intentional existence.” The angel, philosophically speaking, proves the consummate proto-solipsist, prefiguring the subject as autistic. This is all to suggest that modern philosophy misapplies something like Thomas’s description of the angelic intellect to the human person, exaggerating it to make the latter into the subject.

Why, then, pace Ernst, is it incorrect to say that for Rahner, every being is a more or less deficient angel? To refute Ernst would mean to release Rahner from complicity with modern subjectivity. The argument relates to the economy of salvation. The history of Absolute Being, as Rahner apprehends it, includes the incarnation of Christ as its axial ontophanic moment (cf. §13). Rahner states, “Here is the absolute mystery revealed to us

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256 ST I.51.2-3. Thomas alludes to Gen 18-19 and to Tobit.

257 ST I.51.2.ad 2.

258 ST I.51.3.sed contra.


260 See Rahner, “On Angels,” p. 254, where he critiques “traditional angelology” for setting up angels as “Leibnizian monads.”
God’s self-communication, Christ’s being made human flesh teaches us, addresses itself to someone—the human person—thus laying a special responsibility on this being. In principle, abstractly, it might seem that angels, due to their immediate relationship to God, possess God’s highest favor, and in fact, this may be so. But given God’s unique communication to human persons, a wrinkle appears as we try to make sense of the human-angel relationship. Rahner urges us to think a difficult thought: “A really Christian angelology must, from the start, fit in with the fact of the God-man.”

The author of Hebrews wrestles with this problem, constructing a complex angelology where Jesus is superior to the angels (Heb 1.4), God bestows salvation from sin on the “descendants of Abraham” (Heb 2.16), and God sends the angels to minister to these heirs of salvation (Heb 1.14). The author exhorts the heirs, in turn, to pass on the joy of salvation to each other, but also to the angels: “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it, some have unknowingly entertained angels” (Heb 13.1-2). This complex textual fabric suggests that, in light of the God-man, humans are not deficient angels, but rather necessary mediators of salvation, as humans. Humans are simply different from angels, and this difference calls for cooperation (between humans, angels, and God) in favor of the enactment of the drama of salvation.

Christian Neo-platonism (a tradition Thomas knew well, but which the tradition after Thomas largely forgot) insightfully picked up where Hebrews left off, constructing a

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262 Ibid.

263 See Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: v. 1: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), pp. 674-677 (hereafter GL1), for a discussion of angels as representative of the cosmos, and “of the social character of the Kingdom of Heaven” (675). Rahner would substantially agree with Balthasar’s reflections here, especially his final point on the “reciprocal vicarious vision” of God, where humans and angels assist each other in seeing God, each according to their proper capacities (677).
beautiful vision of the multiple layers of the salvific economy. Perhaps no other Father’s work better exemplifies the height of Christian Neo-platonism than that of Maximus the Confessor (580-662). In Ambiguum 7, Maximus speaks of the different logoi according to which the Logos creates, noting that angels have a logos from which they are created, and humans another logos, and other parts of creation their proper logos. Thus, within their common destiny (the Logos calling creatures back to itself makes sense of their beginning), all creatures correspond to their own proper “discourse.” One might say (Heideggerian-ly), that all creatures are on a way of language, to Language. The key for Maximus lies in delineating the sort of logos that defines a certain creature’s action. The angel- logos articulates itself in the angels’ participatory knowledge of God and creation, which they in turn communicate to humans. The human- logos involves more than just an intellectual/rational/spiritual affinity with God, as with angels, because it also refers to the Incarnation of the Logos, a “blessed inversion” by which “the human person is made God by divinization and God is made human by hominization.” This good news, though it applies paradigmatically to human persons, does not pertain exclusively to them—for Maximus (as for Paul, the Cappadocians, and Denys the Areopagite), the Word’s becoming flesh and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit makes manifest the Father’s intention to deify the entire universe. Human knowledge and love, especially the latter, function as privileged sites for the return of creaturely particulars to the universal divine principle.


266 Maximus, Ambiguum 7, p. 60 (1084C).

The best Christological example of Maximus’s theological position emerges in the *Opuscula*, where he meditates on the Agony in the Garden as the salvific moment when Christ’s human will set itself aside so the divine will might be done.\(^{268}\) This example helps, but an eschatological example better meshes with Rahner’s sublime-aesthetic. In *Ad Thalassium* 22, Maximus highlights active and passive principles, which he reads Paul as also assigning to the “past and future ‘ages.’”\(^{269}\) Revising Maximus’s terminology, one may claim that sublimity, the exercise of virtually unrestricted freedom marks the current (past) “age,” for humans may choose for or against God, in a context of faith (not knowledge, thus a limited capacity with respect to angels). One might call the future age “aesthetic,” because Maximus associates it with the “passivity” of deification, but the name hardly fits—the eschatological outpouring of grace does not seem to be a sense experience, for we will have “fully transcended the principles of beings created out of nothing.” Indeed, even with its activity, the past age (for humans, along with animals) proceeds under the aegis of passivity, the passions (*pathos*), and the human *logos* quite naturally includes this pathetic element. In fact, Maximus assigns a great deal of importance to the will, on the threshold of activity and passivity, and its function of properly ordering the passions within the human *logos* toward the *Logos*. Thus, one might more precisely call the passivity of the future age a passivity beyond passivity and activity, a higher order receptivity that arrives from “elsewhere,” as the grace that alone “elevates our nature above its proper limits in excess of glory.” Such an idea of “higher order receptivity” stands behind the Catholic sublime. The point—humans should abide, while living in this age, within the proper *logos*, without pretending to something else or eulogizing human “deficiency” vis-à-vis “higher” beings (angels), for God


\(^{269}\) Maximus, *Ad Thalassium* 22, p. 117.
will exalt us, and the whole creation that surrenders to God, at the end of the age. Rahner, an avid reader of the Church Fathers, has something like this in mind as he relates humans and angels.

Late in his career (1976), Rahner writes an essay specifically on the rather untimely topic of angels. This represents, it seems, a rather straightforward apologetic intervention, unless one sets it against the background this dissertation describes. “On Angels” allows Rahner another opportunity to break with illegitimate apriorisms such as he identifies in Kant and Heidegger. The essay’s end begins our reading. As a final warning, Rahner admonishes readers against a “primitive rationalism” that asserts “that a priori no creaturely subjectivity can be conceived in addition to and ‘above’ humanity, or that such a subjectivity is purely and simply outside the field of possible experience.” We have some idea of our role in the economy of salvation, and although a metaphysics based on the imagination compels a bit more epistemic humility than Maximus (or Thomas) had, angels cannot be denied requisite space for performing a cooperative function with both human and divine economic action. After outlining his view of the angel’s relationship to materiality as a “subjectively interiorized regionality” with much more complexity and differentiation than humanity has, Rahner comments: “A free human subjectivity, open to the whole of reality,

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270 In this way we follow Christ in his ascension, when he “united through himself heaven and earth.” Maximus, Commentary on the Our Father in Selected Writings, “Prologue,” p. 103.

271 One more reference, now specifically to Spirit in the World, will reinforce the argument. Amid his preparatory clarifications on esse in Thomas, Rahner quotes a passage in line with Maximus’s doctrine of logoi proper to each being: “Human esse is limited to the species of humans because it is received in the nature of the human species, and the same is true of the esse of a horse and for any other creature … it is limited to some mode of the perfection of being” (SW 161-162/129, the reference to Thomas being De potentia I.2.corpus).

272 Rahner, “On Angels,” p. 274. Such rationalism presents itself in Descartes, who opened himself and the whole Western philosophical tradition to the danger of subjectivity by scoffing at, among other things, Thomas’s “pointless” efforts to understand angels. Descartes tells Frans Burman in their famous conversation, “[K]nowledge about angels is virtually out of our reach … We just do not know the answers to all the standard questions concerning angels.” By ignoring angels, Descartes slipped easily into anthropocentrism and a self-sealing view of human intelligence. See Descartes’ Conversation with Burman, trans. John Cottingham (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 19.
which at the same time is the ultimate organizing principle of a peristalsis of the digestive organs, is not *a priori* more probable than the idea envisaged here” (i.e., angelic intellect).  

Angels still retain a place in late modern theology, both as a calling of human beings to a higher actualization of their own capabilities, their own *logos*, and as a release from narrow anthropocentrism, such as that espoused in principle by modern subjectivity. By this road, one can retrieve an unexplored possibility of Thomas’s angel. The angel prefigures the subject, but another question arises—could the angel, another angel, anticipate (*vorgreifen*) the after-subject?

*Fire*

This chapter aims to think things catholic (Catholic) along with the dawn of modernity (the subject’s birth). Such is its project of *Wiederholung*. As a member of the Society of Jesus, Rahner, along with all his Jesuit brothers, bears an undeniable relation to modernity’s daybreak, for the Society’s own historical source lies in the person of Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) and the place(s) of Europe, during the time of the (Counter-)Reformation. The Catholic sublime, the ethos of Catholicism, passes through and is shown by Ignatius, the Catholic Counter-Reformation of which he is a figurehead, and the Baroque “style” of art that expresses the spirit of Ignatius—the profound if tricky spiritual teaching of finding God in all things.  

Artistic examples from now on will aid our passage from early Catholic modernity through the (non-)Catholic present, as we read Rahner according to his historical sway—Ignatian joy in the world (§3).

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274 The Churches of the Gesù and Sant’ Ignazio in Rome, the architecture by which they are constructed, and virtually all the art they contain, are prime examples.
Heidegger introduces his dialogue between Hölderlin and Sophocles by saying that “Greats” give only what they have received from “another origin … whatever is originary in other Greats.” Endean recognizes a need to view Rahner, a theological “Great,” through what is originary in another “Great,” Ignatius. Endean delineates Rahner’s twofold view of Ignatius: “Though he was a saint of the Counter-, or Catholic, Reformation, of the baroque and of Catholic restoration, he also has a significance for the period that is just beginning as a saint of the individual before God.” The motto of the Jesuits, *ad majorem dei gloriam* (toward the greater glory of God), expresses a fundamental experience of all Christians, but due to the changing attitudes at modernity’s commencement, most people associate it with Ignatius’s message of the individual’s encounter with the ever-greater God. His commitment to the Church, though, ought not to be underplayed. For Rahner, Ignatius marks the beginning of a new theology, one lived (ecclesially) before being reflexively appropriated in theological discourse (that task remains incomplete).

Endean takes up the Rahnerian torch of making sense of the new Ignatian impulse, by a careful examination of Ignatius’s spirituality and writings juxtaposed with the Rahnerian interpretation of them. With a complex hermeneutical move, Endean anticipates this section’s Rahnerian retrieval. The following pages describe, in an Ignatian spirit, the phenomenon of modern Catholicism starting from Rahner’s teachings on grace and Trinity, pitched at an aesthetic angle.

A twofold view of Ignatius lays the parameters for a hypothesis: at face value, Rahner’s writings follow Ignatius’s tendency to emphasize individuality and something like

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276 Endean, KRIS, p. 146.
277 Ibid., p. 124.
278 Ibid., p. 114.
modern, grasping subjectivity; Rahner, interpreted through a retrieval of Ignatius’s ecclesial side, tends more toward the catholicity of the Counter-Reformation, through which the Catholic sublime becomes thematically recognizable. At the risk of dividing Rahner (and Ignatius) too starkly along these lines, this is our working hunch. Put otherwise, the individuality Ignatius and Rahner uphold tends, in its pathological instantiation, toward modern assertions of self-will and self-sufficiency, as evidenced in the conqueror, scientist, and businessperson. On the other side, Ignatius, and Rahner after him, envision a permeable self, whose openness (call it sublime-aesthetic), allows God’s advent within a community dedicated to receiving God—Church.

Amid the multifarious controversies of the (Counter)Reformation period, which ignited both metaphorical and literal fires, disagreement over the doctrine(s) of grace raged, perhaps, most fervently, if for no other reason than grace’s foundational role in other church teachings and practices. §6 mentioned Endean’s attention to the influence of Bonaventure’s doctrine of spiritual touch on Rahner. Endean argues that Rahner’s appropriation of Bonaventurian touch navigates beyond the Reformation dispute over our assurance of justification by grace. The Reformers presupposed a subject with certainty of justification, while the Counter-reformers claimed that we can hope for justification by grace, but can never know ourselves as justified.279 This Catholic response proved problematic, Endean argues, because hope in God should dispel all doubt. In other words, the Catholic rejection of the Reformers’ teaching lacked proper grounding, and thus failed to resist the modern subjectivity asserting itself through the Reformers’ certainty. Rahner, utilizing Bonaventure’s “dark,” unreflexive (or reflective in Kant’s sense), spiritual touch formulates a robust Catholic answer. Rahner “enables us to interpret the tradition of assurance in terms of an

279 See the Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canons XIII-XVI.
absolute confidence *that* God’s saving grace is present with us, while simultaneously asserting that an uncertainty remains regarding *how* this grace is at work.”

Bonaventure is not Rahner’s only helpful resource in this regard. The second (or third) prelude to Ignatius’s *Exercises* expresses the conviction Rahner describes, for to ask God for specific graces, “the grace I desire,” assumes confidence in an already accomplished bestowal of grace that admits of various appearances for which we can hope and pray, but cannot know. More precisely, the prelude prayer consists more in the cultivation of a disposition of cooperation with grace already given. Pair this prelude with Ignatius’s famous injunction—“Set the world on fire!” (with the Holy Spirit)—and we have a complex interplay of acting and receiving, a sublime-aesthetic. The Reformers’ firm grip on certainty (a noetic control of God) misses the subtlety of this sublime-aesthetic.

The Catholic side of the Reformation also committed a sin, paralleling the Reformers’ sin of certainty. A classic theological distinction arose in Catholic theology out of the Reformation controversies, between “nature” and “grace.” This is no place for a full-scale narrative of mourning regarding the pitfalls of the nature/grace distinction turned disjunction, nor for a challenge to the de Lubacian diagnosis of a creeping modern extrinsicist/*duplex ordo* view of nature and grace, summarized in the single word, supernatural (or two more, pure nature). In fact, de Lubac helps us to locate the reason for labeling modern Catholic theology’s view of nature and grace as a grievous mishandling. As with

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Thomas’s angels, speciation presents a sticking point. Each of Thomas’s angels belongs to its own species. Interestingly enough, to modern scholastic theology, de Lubac argues, nature and supernature (grace) are “in some sense juxtaposed, and in spite of every intention to the contrary, as contained in the same genus, of which they form as it were two species.” On the one hand, the orders of nature and grace are not as perfectly specified even as individual angels (hence at times they collapse into one another). On the other, nature and grace each evidence a self-sealing containedness similar to that of the angel. De Lubac continues, “The two were like two complete organisms; too perfectly separated to be really differentiated, they have unfolded parallel to each other, fatally similar in kind.”

The intellectual distinction between nature and grace, with each as a hermetically sealed sphere, when compared to the speciation of angels, shows itself as bearing the visage of modern subjectivity. The idea of pure nature, accent on the pure, is a case in point. As such, the natura pura/duplex ordo tradition betrays the historical origin of the Catholic Reformation, a pronounced openness to God’s multifaceted appearing in the world—the dawn of the Catholic sublime. Insular spheres of nature and grace breed an insular church set over against the world, which modern secularity would palely ape from the other side.

The debate over the distinction between nature and grace in twentieth century Catholicism is well known, as is Rahner’s prominent role amid the (often heated) theological exchanges. Stephen Duffy, with a seemingly simple question, distills the central issue of this controversy, which connects semantically with our earlier talk of Bonaventurian touch: “Is

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283 Examples of this range from Catholic participation in the machinery of colonization in early modernity, to official Church policies that militated against modernization in the first years of the twentieth century. Both exemplify performances of the objectifying logic of modern subjectivity.
Rahner knows, unthetically, that in order to dismantle the *duplex ordo*, one must show how the so-called “two orders” touch. Perhaps most famous among Rahner’s contributions, “Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace” (1950), lays out his early position. Less famous is the following question: “What is signified by the ‘definition,’ and hence the circumscription of the human’s nature, if he is the essence of transcendence, and hence of surpassing of limitation?”

Echoes of sublimity resound from the question’s call—it summons thought on the human person as *deinotaton*, as perpetually bumping against her extreme limits. Consideration of nature, in the interest of an “objective” view of human destiny and of God’s mercy—these appear as the goals—cheapen both into objects, under the subject’s grasping gaze. A brush with sublimity, carefully (catholically) inflected, may avoid such a grip. Rahner himself did not successfully evade it completely. But the above question, which seems so marginal to his text, shows a breach in Rahner’s twentieth-century thinking by virtue of which modern theology’s historical origin (the sixteenth century) might gain reconsideration. Furthermore, this question may newly elucidate Rahner’s much-discussed labeling of nature as a “*Restbegriff*.”

The German word “*Rest*,” implies not simply “remainder” (the customary translation is remainder-concept), but also more deprecating ideas such as “residue,” “leftovers” or “remains”—in the sense of a corpse. “Nature” demands to be either discarded in the trash heap of theology, or at least buried in a grave.

The breach widens in *Foundations* (“Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace” and *Foundations* are usually deemed the two temporal bounds of Rahner’s doctrine of

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286 Ibid., p. 313.
grace). This widening hides itself insofar as commentators on Rahner fail to illuminate Rahner’s later teachings on grace with his reconstruction of the Thomistic imagination in *Spirit in the World.*

The fourth chapter of *Foundations,* “The Human Person as the Event of God’s Free and Forgiving Self-Communication,” contains several statements with a subtle flavor provided by strains of ontaphany and ecstatic temporality. The subtlety is often lost, but a few simple indications—like a healthy dash of salt—can bring it forward. Rahner, connecting grace with the beatific vision (see also §13), claims that the latter’s ontological constitution springs to light “only if it is understood as the natural fulfillment of that innermost and really ontological divinization of the human person which comes to expression in the doctrine of the justifying sanctification of the human person through the communication of the Holy Spirit to her.” He continues, emphasizing the unity of grace and the final vision as “two phases” of a single “event” of God’s self-communication, “which are conditioned by the human person’s free historicity and temporality” (FCF 118, emphasis added).

Another helpful passage will draw out some nuances: “The statement, ‘the human person is the event of God’s absolute self-communication,’ does not refer to some reified objectivity ‘in the human person.’ Such a statement is not a categorical and ontic statement, but an ontological statement. It expresses in words the subject as such … *in the depths of his subjectivity*” (FCF 126, emphasis added). These Rahnerian comments further corroborate the agreement and the disagreement between Rahner and Heidegger outlined in §§2-3. First, the agreement—we

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287 See a recent and clear example of this: David Coffey, “The Whole Rahner on the Supernatural Existential” in *Theological Studies* 65 (2004), pp. 95-118. Coffey discusses his inability within the confines of the article to speak of the supernatural existential in Trinitarian terms, and his intention to remedy this in a later essay. This section speaks of grace, then Trinity, but not of the supernatural existential. Coffey’s research agenda would be a much-needed supplement.

288 While Kilby’s argument for a non-foundationalist Rahner rings true in many respects, especially in its resistance to overarching condemnations of Rahner, the disjunction she suggests between Rahner’s early philosophical and his later theological work will perpetuate a standard unwillingness among Rahner scholars to truly wrestle with *Spirit in the World* and its implications, which provide the field of resonance, if not a foundation, for the entire Rahnerian corpus.
find the move to the ontophanic from the noetic when considering the depths from which subjectivity springs to light. “Depths” names the imagination. Second, the disagreement—we perceive Rahner’s insistence on divinization as a category applicable to historical, time-bound human persons, as their gesture of infinite opening; Heidegger, in the name of the finite, refuses to accept this account of the elevation of human persons. But even in Heidegger’s thought something like grace operates, and the poet co-operates best with it. Rahner and Heidegger would agree, with different meanings, to call this divine operation “heavenly fire.”

The ontological residence—in-dwelling—of grace, which sets us on fire, transpires in the imagination, called with Rahner’s work on Bonaventure in mind, the apex affectus. God, as the “dark fire of love,” inflames us from the imagination outward, to make possible receiving of God. 289 Thus Rahner’s early thesis of God as tragende Grund, alive in the Vorgriff, interlaces with his work on grace as late as Foundations. By interweaving Bonaventure and Ignatius, not that they were utterly uncoupled to begin with, Rahner makes sense of human life in modernity as a sending by grace into the world to dis-cover and dis-close the grace that sustains the world—a world no longer conceptualized as self-sealed. To adapt an image from the Gospel of Mark, so starkly stated, the Spirit drives us out into the world (cf. Mk 1.12). Reception of this driving force makes it effective—so it may set the world on fire. We must, Rahner suggests, let the Spirit drive us. We must let the Spirit be. Pretending to know fully the Spirit’s driving movement, as moderns subjects have ever since the (Counter)Reformation, kills the Spirit with experience—a perilous move (Mt 12.32). 290

289 Rahner, “Spiritual Senses in the Middle Ages,” p. 124. See Bonaventure, The Soul’s Journey into God, VII.4, p. 113: “No one receives except him who desires it, and no one desires except him who is inflamed in his very marrow by the fire of the Holy Spirit whom Christ sent into the world.”

Trinity

Talk of the economy of salvation, opened by Christ and extended by the Holy Spirit calls to mind Rahner’s famous work on the Trinity, where he articulates the maxim, “The ‘economic Trinity’ is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity.” For Rahner, a discussion of grace inevitably and directly leads to the doctrine of the Trinity, and vice versa. The Trinity, in turn, becomes understood first through the narrative of the missions of the Word and the Spirit, as given in the New Testament. The two economic missions relate, in Spirit in the World, to causality:

To act on another is for Thomas a ‘bringing self as realizing self into the medium of the other’; what is ‘in’ the patient is therefore the agent itself in its completed essence, the emanation of the agent’s own interior, its self-realization in that interiority which alone is possible to an essence which is exterior to itself (SW 358/266).

This dense passage concisely presents some thorny problems. Here Rahner speaks of inner-worldly causality, emanating and received influences, or spirit’s activity vis-à-vis matter. We have been wrestling with a difficulty while attempting carefully to sever ties between spirit and subjectivity. This came partially to light in the discussion of nature and grace. The trouble lies in defining “exterior” and “interior.” The issue of exterior and interior has been with us from the beginning of the dissertation, whether exterior suggests a supersensible world, or the hetero-element of hetero-affection, or whether interior implies the here and now of this world, or the auto-element of auto-affection.

Turning to the economy of salvation involves a conversion to the symbol, the logic of the symbol, a symbolic logic that ought not be confused with the discipline, “symbolic

291 Rahner, The Trinity, p. 22.
292 Ibid., p. 48.
logic.” Rahner’s symbolic logic tells of the paradoxical “realization” of God (exterior) in a patient, the human person (interior), so that the human person (interior) may become what she is in the world (exterior), on the way to God (exterior?/interior?). Let us expand these last (parenthetical) questions, with symbolic logic in mind. What if the outside is the world, and not an exterior to the second power (world outside the world)? What if the inside is not precisely inside, but opens out(side)? Believe it or not, the phrase *vice versa* from Rahner’s Trinitarian maxim, “The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and vice versa,” generates these questions and points toward their answers.

Rahner’s theology of Trinity bases itself in Ignatius’s *Exercises*, specifically the first contemplation in the second week. As the first prelude, the retreatant surveys “how the Three Divine Persons gazed on the whole surface or circuit of the world, full of people; and how, seeing that they were all going down into hell, they decided in their eternity that Second Person would become a human being, in order to save the human race.” The retreatant who successfully carries out this, and Ignatius’s further directions for the contemplation, will very closely approximate Rahner’s understanding of the Trinity. Ignatius’s words condense the complexity of the immanent Trinity’s indivisible relationship to the world through the work of salvation in the economy, a flowing history that issues from an eternal decision. Because of his formation in Ignatian spirituality, Rahner cannot but claim, “[N]o adequate distinction can be made between the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the economy of salvation.” Nor can one make a hard, fast, scientific distinction between outside and inside. In the Trinitarian eternity, God decided to become, via the Second Person, on the whole surface of the world, in order to save the human race from sin. The Trinity is near us.

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In *The Trinity*, Rahner aims to accomplish little more than compiling some notes, as a formal anticipation of a Trinitarian theology to come. Within the fundamental theological frame, Rahner discusses the thesis of “not-appropriated relations of the divine persons to the justified,” or the threefold self-giving of God to the human person through “quasiformal causality” (God’s formative action as *tragende Grund* “in absolute self-utterance” and “as absolute donation of love.” In a dogmatic key, Rahner makes an intriguing equation of the doctrine of grace and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology). Through these brief notes, fundamental and dogmatic, or fundamental-dogmatic, for Rahner’s fundamental theology equals his theology of grace, a tensile interplay happens between the common (“not-appropriated”) and the proper (to the Holy Spirit). The three divine persons cooperate in the bestowal of divine life on another (the human person), while simultaneously the Third Person gives the gift in a way proper only to the Third. The Spirit loves commonly, but the Spirit loves like no other. The same goes for Ignatius’s/Rahner’s Christology: the Trinity decides commonly to speak within the circuit of the world, but the Second Person alone becomes incarnate.

Historically, since one must attend to the salvific economy to know anything about the Trinity, one comes to know the proper before the common. Rahner’s critical intervention in *The Trinity* boils down to that point. This intervention cuts obviously against the primacy of the treatise *De deo uno* (on the One God—i.e. common essence) in scholastic theology, but less obviously though no less importantly against the objection that Rahner offers a transcendental theology from which one can derive explanations of the Christian (dogmatic) mysteries. More significantly, Rahner insists on reimagining reception of the

295 Ibid., p. 34, 34n1.

296 This is most clear at the end of the treatise, when Rahner states that “Christology and the doctrine of grace are, strictly speaking, the doctrine of the Trinity” (Ibid., p. 120).
proper. Grace will be our example, to which the theoretical operators noetic and ontophanic will be applied. Rahner’s theology of the Trinity, as God’s self-communication through uncreated grace to human persons in history,\textsuperscript{297} does not base itself upon a noetic recognition of or an ontic response to this communication, but rather focuses on the ontophanic reality of the communication. Rahner (properly) hammers home the message: “The Trinity itself is with us, it is not merely given to us because revelation offers us statements about it. Rather, these statements are made to us because the reality of which they speak is bestowed upon us.”\textsuperscript{298} When Luke, traditionally the artist-evangelist, narrates the events of Pentecost (Acts 2), he should elicit a response in excess of a purely intellectual assent to New Testament teaching—instead, reception of this text should consist in a recognition that the wind and flame of the Spirit have flooded human lives, allowing elevated actions. Proper remains proper (to the Spirit in this case), but Rahner recasts the issue ontologically, where the proper actions of a divine person (the Spirit) appropriate the recipient (us). The Trinity, in each of its facets, is given not as a statement (an object!) or series of statements (objects), but as life, to be shared in common (see §13).

This section consisted, like Rahner’s *The Trinity*, merely in notes on pertinent topics. It ends with the issue of the “common.” In Rahner, the common raises controversy as it applies to grace. Those objecting to Rahner’s basic theological position, his fundamental theology as such, hurl twin barbs at Rahner. First, so the argument goes, Rahner fails to appreciate the gratuity of God’s gift of grace, because he makes it an “existential” of the human person, a gift always already given. Second, Rahner betrays the distinctiveness and

\textsuperscript{297} On the distinction between created (an intermediary) and uncreated (God’s self-communication) grace see Rahner, “Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace,” in TI 1, pp. 319-346, which includes more important material for understanding Rahner’s relationship to Bonaventure and Thomas.

\textsuperscript{298} Rahner, *The Trinity*, p. 39.
uniqueness of Christianity by envisioning God’s grace as universally communicated. Rahner replies in two ways. First, negatively, he observes,

Unconsciously we are often guilty of living in the selfish narrow-mindedness of those who think their knowledge is more valuable and more blessed with grace if it is possessed only by a few; we rather foolishly think that God himself only makes an impression on men with His truth when we have already made an impression on them with our thematic and sociological-official and explicit form of this truth.  

Second, positively, in Foundations, he teaches, “The love of God does not become less a miracle by the fact that it is promised to all men at least as an offer. Indeed only what is given to everybody realizes the real essence of grace in a radical way” (FCF 127). After all, Christ says, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?“ To give love (grace) to everybody is the perfect, radical mercy of God the Father (see Lk 6.32-36, Mt 5.43-48), God’s prerogative, not ours. To receive the grace of God, through salvific events, which are not limited to “official” (proper) words, is the way human persons find their path to the Father. Graced receiving happens in a special, privileged manner in human persons (here is where privilege lies), through the imagination, which turns toward the world, the arena where we act out our redemption and sanctification. And, at least according to Thomas, “every good human action” (omne bonum opus hominis) happens by the reception of uncreated grace, first—“a first grace, as from its principle; but not from any human gift” (prima gratia sicut a principio; non autem … a quocumque humano dono).  

Action, to put it in line with Chapter Two, opens the economy (oikonomia)—the home (oikos)—so we may “be taken

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300 Thomas, ST I-II.114.5.ad 3.
up into God.” Rahner’s point of view on grace coheres with Bonaventure’s eschatology: “Oh how glorious is the kingdom of this most excellent King … It is not divided by the number of those who reign; nor lessened by being shared, nor disturbed by its multitude, nor disordered by its inequality of ranks.” In the end, the salvific economy opens even further—selfish narrow-mindedness has no place in this universal communication. The story with the globalized economy of the businessperson is unimaginably different. In that economy, pain is common to many—pleasure, property of the few.

§8. The Heideggerian Sublime II

Rilke’s Angel

A connection now appears between Rahner, and the Rahnerian Thomas, and a twentieth-century, post-Nietzschean poet whom Heidegger views as both fundamentally mistaken and vitally important in a destitute time (dürftiger Zeit). The link exists because of Heidegger, if not the poet himself, and the philosophical agenda Heidegger sets forth in Introduction to Metaphysics, lectures Rahner attended at Freiburg in 1935. Heidegger resolves in these lectures to continue a project he had already begun, notably in Being and Time and the Kantbuch, of pursuing the question of truth and our apprehension of it. Truth he defines, of course, as a-letheia, un-concealment, dis-closure, or the Open. Dasein is “in truth” insofar as it allows the Open to open. Thus the truth of Dasein consists in a certain rapport between Dasein and beings in their Being. In Spirit in the World, Rahner dubs this the

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302 Ibid., §45, p. 169.

303 The loci classici are in Heidegger, Being and Time, §7, pp. 56-58, and §44, pp. 261-265.
problem of understanding the gap between a knower and her “object” (SW 75/66-67, see §1). This subsection aims to put force behind the Rahnerian re-reading of Thomas’s angel (§7), which Rahner exercises in the interest of opening thought beyond subjectivity and objectivity, by juxtaposing it with Heidegger’s interpretation of Rainer Maria Rilke, who has his own angel.

The essay, “Wozu Dichter?” (1946, ET “What Are Poets For?), has as its chief concern the meaning of “Open” in Rilke. Heidegger broached this issue a few years beforehand in his course, Parmenides (1942), where he reads Rilke as a late instantiation of the Western forgetting of Being. As such, Rilke perceives an “Open,” but one fundamentally different, even incomparable with the real openness of the “Open” of unconcealment. Rilke poetizes his perception of the Open as a rejoinder to and corrective of the modern subject’s technocratic takeover of the world (as a realm of objects). Heidegger concurs with Rilke’s diagnosis of the problem, objectivizing logic that militates against the Open, but finds Rilke’s poetic course of action ultimately insufficient (because of its residual conspiring with metaphysics), even if visionary (because of its poetizing of the angel). In effect, the task of reading Rilke entails dis-covering a new, post-subjective poetic rapport with reality, thus transcending Rilke by means of his own insight (or, angel).

In the Parmenides course, Heidegger uses Rilke to render more precise his meditation on aletheia, and “What Are Poets For?” includes a similar, yet more polished exercise (in fact, 

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306 Ibid., p. 152: “‘The open’ in the sense of the unceasing progression of beings into beings and ‘the open’ in the sense of the free of the clearing of Being in distinction from all beings are verbally the same, but in what the words name they are so different that no oppositional formulation could suffice to indicate the gap between them.” Cf. idem, “What Are Poets For?” p. 106.
its argument is substantially the same, until the angel receives mention). As in Rahner’s encounter with Thomas’s angel, Heidegger’s thoughts circle around the mediating role of the human person—more explicitly, between animals (matter for Thomas) and angels (spirit for Thomas)—with respect to the Open (i.e., the Being of beings). Humans thus chart the course of existence between two sorts of beings that “venture” into the Open “carefree,” “outside of the unstilled,” or without a sense of uncanniness. Humans “go with the venture,” co-operate with it, and do so as their “purpose.” The problem, of course, lies in humanity’s fundamental misdirection of its mediating capacity in modernity, that is, the refiguration of the human person as grasping subject. Co-operation with the Open becomes “reframing or redisposing,” a “twisting” of the world as “the whole of producible objects” back toward the human self, thus a parting “against” the Open of Being. The Heideggerian Rilke calls the modern subject, who parts against the Open, the “self-willing person,” but a better name for this person who envisions the world as “market,” and who reckons all beings, even persons, as “merchandise,” is businessperson. The businessperson unleashes the perennial human condition of uncanniness, driving humanity (and the whole world) ever further into peril. Heidegger writes, “Thus ventured into the unshielded, the person … lives essentially by risking his nature in the vibration of money and the currency of

307 The gist of Heidegger’s critique of Rilke in *Parmenides* is that Rilke’s attempted inversion of the hierarchy of humans and animals in terms of “seeing” the scope of beings fails to do justice to the historical role of humanity as recipient of the event of Being. Thus, “the open” as Rilke conceives of it (the “unceasing progression of beings into beings”) misses the point of poetizing (or thinking) Being and truth. Heidegger, *Parmenides*, p. 154-161.


309 Ibid., p. 107.

310 Ibid., p. 108.
values.” The businessperson feels at home with the merchandise he sees, while ignoring the unhomely “draft” of the Open as the Invisible. The self-willing person does not recognize that “we’re not comfortably at home / in the interpreted (gedeuteten) world.”

Rilke points out, in some rather sublime lines, “The Zeitgeist builds huge warehouses of power, / formless as the straining urge from which it draws all else.” These “warehouses of power,” which are of spirit (Zeit-geist!), and formless, image something like the Kantian sublime, the subject’s gesture of self-fortification. Living in this spirit destroys the ability to receive beings in their Being. Rilke illustrates again, summarizing objectifying logic’s application to the world, “We arrange it. It decays (zerfällt). / We arrange it again, and we ourselves decay (zerfallen selbst).” Form disintegrates.

Rilke poetically explores an alternative to this objectivizing logic according to the paradigm of Descartes’s contemporary and opponent, Blaise Pascal: the logic of the heart.

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311 Ibid., pp. 132-133.
313 Rilke, “The Seventh Elegy,” p. 51, lnn. 55-56, emphasis added. Rilke adds religious significance, which Heidegger notices, in the next line: “Temples it can’t recognize anymore.”
315 See Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?,” p. 125. With this mention of Pascal, an interesting (possible) nexus of authors for another project can briefly appear, as an aside. Heidegger and Rilke point to Pascal as, in a way, gesturing toward an alternative path of the modernity that passes through Descartes into a scientific future. Heidegger views Pascal (and Rilke with him, we shall see) as still mired in metaphysics, but differently than his rival, Descartes. A similar idea drives the Catholic thinker Romano Guardini’s analysis of modernity, but in contrast to Heidegger, Guardini takes Pascal to be an exponent not of an alternative modernity, but rather as a first voice of a vision beyond modernity. Guardini pertains here because his career and Rahner’s are inextricably related to each other on a number of fronts, and Rahner held Guardini in very high esteem. One could imagine an essay, then, in which Rahner, Guardini, Heidegger, Rilke, and Pascal come together to converse critically (of each other, most likely) over modernity and its end—this last phrase being another allusion to the work of Guardini just mentioned. See Guardini, The End of the Modern World, introduction by Frederick J. Wilhelmsen, foreword by Richard John Neuhaus (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1998), a book that began as a series of lectures on Pascal (though he was omitted from the lectures as they became a book), especially pp. 103 and 113n6, where Guardini mentions Rilke and expresses his hope to write a comprehensive interpretation of the Duino Elegies.
Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei describes Rilke’s Pascalian poetic modus operandi: “Interiority becomes known to us not by an egological meditation but by intuiting the hidden intimacy of ‘external’ things.”[316] In the Duino Elegies (1923), Rilke looks to the angel as the symbol of this poetic logic. And rightly so, concurs Heidegger, because the “conversion of consciousness” Rilke advocates “must be a saying which says what it has to say to a being who is already secure in the whole of all beings,” because this being has surpassed the uncanniness of the subject via a turning to the “invisible of the heart.”[318] If the animal is a pre-subject and the human is subject, the angel is an after-subject, who can help restore a more balanced relation to the Open, one no longer predicated upon the subject’s control of objects. The logic of the heart the angel deploys, which coheres somewhat with the philosophical tradition of common sense (see §6), effects a certain abstraction—a transformation of form to formlessness—but one aligned with sensation, thus inverting traditional distinctions between passive sense and (abstr)active intellect. This distortion of categories is sublime, as is the angel. Rilke, in “The First Elegy,” expresses it compactly:

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316 Gosetti-Ferencei, Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language: Toward a New Poetics of Dasein (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), p. 240. Hereafter HHSPL. This book is very enjoyable, and meets this dissertation’s project in multiple ways on many levels, though Gosetti-Ferencei does not explore any theological implications of her philosophical work. The book aims to answer the question, “Who comes after the subject?,” with Heidegger as background, to a reading of Hölderlin in his own words and on his own merits.

317 Heidegger and Rahner meet again textually in this set of elegies, which begins and ends with the angel. In the essay, “Priest and Poet,” Rahner quotes a brilliant selection from Rilke’s “Ninth Elegy.” He then gives a sublime key to his sublime-aesthetic: “Only someone who understands these lines of the poet has grasped what we mean by primordial words and why they have every right to be, indeed must be, obscure” (p. 298).

318 Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?,” p. 131. See Rilke, “The Ninth Elegy,” pp. 61-68, where Rilke enjoins his reader (his lover?) to “praise the world to the Angel” (ln. 53), but turning his address to the world, exclaims, inquiring: “Earth, isn’t this what you want: to resurrect / in us invisibly? Isn’t it your dream, / to be invisible one day?” (lns. 68-70). Then, he specifies where the rise to invisibility would happen—“More being than I’ll ever need (Überzähliges Dasein) springs up in my heart” (lns. 79-80, emphasis added). Cf. Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?,” p. 138.
“Because beauty’s nothing / but the start of terror … Every Angel’s terrifying.”

Near the end of this same poem, Rilke casts the angel’s evasion of theoretical precision eschatologically, in connection with death. He observes, “But the living are wrong / to make distinctions that are too absolute.”

The angel, unlike the “self-willing person,” abides beyond business, and sees what the subject cannot. The angel, the “Incomprehensible One” on whom Rilke calls, opening himself from the heart outward, offers a formlessness alternate to that of the “warehouses of power.” The angel is a strong being who truly expresses its strength as strength, as opposed to the businessperson, who always shows weakness. The angel, and this gets us closer to Heidegger’s point of interest, inspires a “more venturesome being,” who looks, even goes, into the “abyss,” someone more daring than the modern person, but someone not yet an angel—the poet. He writes, “The daring that is more venturesome, willing more strongly than any self-assertion, because it is willing, ‘creates’ a securesness for us in the Open.” And this daring does not “manufacture” anything; “It receives, and gives what is received.”

The poet’s receptive act of creation, if it can achieve something like the alternative formlessness that the angel offers, gives a glimpse (this word is key), an anticipation of a post-subjective sublime-aesthetic.

Heidegger affirms this when he equates Rilke’s angel—metaphysically—with Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, “the advocate of Dionysos.” Zarathustra’s advocacy manifests

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320 Ibid., p. 9-11, ln. 80-81. See §14.


itself as a twofold teaching: 1) “eternal return of the same” as “the name for the Being of beings,” and 2) “Übermensch” as “the name for the human essence that corresponds to such Being.” The latter teaching, on the Übermensch, figured briefly into §5’s juxtaposition of Heidegger’s teachings on Hölderlin and Nietzsche. The former, eternal recurrence, we can understand provisionally as the sign for Nietzsche’s Dionysian world-affirmation (which thematizes a negation). Zarathustra braids these doctrines around each other, like a snake coiled around an eagle’s neck, so they fit as one fundamental metaphysical position (Nietzsche’s)—the end game of metaphysics. The angel, as metaphysically on par with Zarathustra, offers two teachings, unified in the angel’s self, which proclaim the end of metaphysics, and thus the subject. Rilke’s poetics melds well with Nietzsche’s artistic protest to metaphysics’ fixation of reality into (object-ive) “truth.” Rilke’s angel images a future where the subject loses grip, and must learn to comport itself toward the Open in a mode that allows the world to appear from itself, without cognitive anticipation, more openly.

Heidegger admires this poetic idea, but his equation of Rilke’s angel with Nietzsche’s Zarathustra shows that Heidegger breaks ranks with Rilke. The angel, Heidegger thinks, gets us to the threshold of post-metaphysical thinking, but Rilke fails to walk through the door toward a more originary view of the Open, for he accepts metaphysical definition of Being as worldly presence. Even a logic of the heart does not leave metaphysical logic.

From a Rahnerian perspective, critiques emerge that neighbor on Heidegger’s, but to which Heidegger, too, becomes subject. Rilke’s is an abstract angel, distant from the salvific

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327 Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?,” p. 130.
economy propagated by Jesus Christ. Ultimately, Rilke’s angel amounts to a voyeur of an empty world: “Then the angel / plays over and above us. Look at the dying, / surely they suspect that everything we do / is full of sham, here where nothing / is really itself.”

Rilke’s words quickly turn flat. Rilke, as a poet inspired by the closing of metaphysics, fixates on the inexpressible closure of death rather than the mysterious opening that happens through life and death. Furthermore, the sense of loneliness in Rilke’s poetry stems from a propensity toward isolation from other persons. Again, Rilke and Nietzsche, the poet and the thinker, resemble each other, for in desiring to rid themselves of the self-sealing thought of the subject, both believe that examining the “uttermost limits of being as a whole … must at the same time proceed … through the human being’sloneliest loneliness.” This is an extra-ordinary loneliness, because it involves exposure to the hazards of beings in their Being—Rilke and Nietzsche share this impulse with the Catholic sublime. But Rilke’s angel, like Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, inscribes in its itinerary some wrong turns, something like Heidegger’s apriorism of finitude compounded with a new sort of isolationism, an antipathy toward common life. Rilke’s hand, “open above, to be grasped (zum Greifen / oben offene Hand),” even if “weit auf”—widely—fails to open widely enough.

Fire

Heidegger’s criticisms of modernity may sound like laments, but to hear him properly, one must remember Heidegger’s Nietzschean amor fati: “This era is neither a decay

329 Heidegger, Nietzsche II, p. 25.
330 See Ibid., p. 47.
nor a downfall. As destiny, it lies in Being and lays claim to the human.” Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?,” p. 139.

332 See Rahner, FCF 330-331 on Jesus’ founding of the Church, and developments out of this historical origin. One could justifiably risk juxtaposing them with Heidegger’s language of poetic founding, even if Heidegger proves sometimes questionable on this point. And, of course, Heidegger’s sober approach to retrieval could correctly instruct many present-day Catholics who long nostalgically for the return of the past, often a past about which they know little or nothing.

333 Rosiek, Maintaining the Sublime, p. 165.

334 Rosiek, Maintaining the Sublime, p. 165.

In the material on Hölderlin, instead of common sense, common spirit (gemeinsame Geist) appears. A conversation between Heidegger and Derrida (on Hölderlin) arises from Hölderlin’s lines in “Wie wenn am Feiertage” (“As on a Holiday”): “The thoughts of the communal spirit they are, / And quietly come to rest in the poet’s soul.”336 Heidegger carefully distinguishes between the common spirit of metaphysics, “that which determines everything and … is essentially common to all beings” (in thought), and Hölderlin’s subtly different common spirit, which concerns the poetizing of human destiny, or historical gathering about the hearth.337 This poetic view of common or “communal” spirit, qua power of the holy, is preserved in the soul of the poet “as what is coming. That is why it is never represented and grasped as an object.”338 Heidegger takes interest in the poet’s cooperation with “historically founding Geist” by providing a “site” for it, while Derrida gives the Heideggerian Hölderlin’s poetic “soul” an ethical (Levinasian) boost, accenting the “welcoming” of spirit.339 In any event, all three—Hölderlin, Heidegger, Derrida—testify to some sort of indwelling of Spirit in the poet. Derrida’s reflections resonate well with Hölderlin, Heidegger, and even Rahner: “The thoughts of spirit inhabit the soul of the poet, they are at home there, native, heimisch.” And most poignantly, “The poet … gives spirit its space, he makes it reign in what is.”340 At face value, this reading of the poet, drawn from Heidegger, seems adaptable to a Christian theology of grace (pneumatology), but Derrida reminds the reader throughout the chapter that Heidegger resists any such interpretation.

336 Hölderlin, “As on a holiday,” in Selected Poems and Fragments, pp. 175, lnn. 44-45.
337 Heidegger, Ister, pp. 127-128; cf. Derrida, Of Spirit, pp. 75-76. Derrida insists on “the spirit of gathering” as the proper (!) translation of gemeinsame Geist, “(rather than common spirit).”
338 Heidegger, “As When on a Holiday,” in Elucidations, p. 89.
340 Derrida, Of Spirit, p. 79.
Heidegger opts instead for a Germanic reading of Geist, which he deems more originary than Latin spiritus or even Greek pneuma, and with which Derrida evidences discomfort.\footnote{See Ibid., p. 82 and chapter ten, pp. 99-113 passim.} Even so, Heidegger’s insistence that poets are “of spirit” suggests that the poet, the artist, receives spirit, and in this way plays an essential role in the coming of Being’s future, a future beyond the metaphysics of subjectivity. This receiving has an air of sublimity about it, a bold meeting with the “unhomely,” as it becomes homely—bold, because the poet could, in doing this work, get burned; sublime, because of the poet’s “gladness” despite danger of pain, even annihilation.\footnote{Heidegger, Ister, p. 134. Cf. Hölderlin, “As on a holiday …,” p. 175, lnns. 55-56: “And hence it is that without danger now / The sons of Earth drink heavenly fire.”}

Burned, because the German poet, in reaching out to the unhomely, reaches out to Greece, and “proper to the Greeks is the fire of heaven.”\footnote{Heidegger, “As When on a Holiday,” in Elucidations, p. 112.} Heidegger takes the first line of “The Ister” as a refrain, from his course on the poem in 1941 to a 1959 lecture: “Jetzt komme feuer! (Now come, fire!).” Hölderlin, the German, in intimate proximity to German Idealism’s main proponents, his college roommates, Hegel and Schelling—thus the peak of Western metaphysics—looks to the Greek poets, behind the commencement of metaphysics in Plato, to find a future beyond metaphysics.\footnote{Heidegger makes his case most succinctly for Hölderlin’s place outside metaphysics in The Ister, §4, pp. 18-20, then pp. 21-27. In “Remembrance,” Heidegger comments on Hölderlin’s image of the sea voyage, and how this phenomenon shows how a turn “toward the foreign … awakens a reflecting on what is one’s own.” Heidegger, “Remembrance,” p. 164.} Heidegger discovers in Hölderlin (the beginning of) a unification of charisms, the German and the Greek, “clarity of presentation” and “the fire of heaven.” Heidegger calls these attributes the “nature” of each. Nature here refers to that which is truly proper to a people only once it has been appropriated through a return—more native than the naturally born native (§5). Heidegger also calls this nature
“spirit”—but not super-nature. The Greek spirit interests us less than the German (so with Heidegger). The following sentence illustrates why: “The native trait of the Germans … does not become authentically their own as long as this ability to grasp [Fassenkönnen] is not tested by the need to grasp the ungraspable [Unfaßliche zu fassen] and, in the face of the ungraspable [Unfaßlichen] itself, to bring them into the proper ‘condition’ [Verfassung].”

This indicates that German clarity of presentation, figured supremely in the all-inclusive grasping of Hegelian Geist, grasps prematurely. Hölderlin envisions and enacts—poetizes—the event (Ereignis) of the ungraspable, the Greek spirit of openness to fire, with which the German spirit must contend, in order to become truly itself (er-eignen). But this poetic activity—founding—is really something like passivity, for “the poetic is opposed to all merit,” i.e., to all self-standing achievement. The beckoning, “Now come, fire!,” does not initiate the fire’s coming, but rather expresses a receptive disposition, favorable to arrival. The poet welcomes the holy, rather than grasping (for) it. Another sort of angel (to add to this chapter’s celestial cohort) assists the poet in this welcoming, “the angels for the hearth of the fatherland.” This peaceful poetic posture toward the holy may seem cozy—heaven in my own living room—but with ominous nationalistic (all-too-modern!!) overtones. One must wonder whether the hearth’s low glow is a euphemism for a raging furnace.

345 Heidegger, “Remembrance,” p. 113, emphasis added [“Andenken,” p. 88].

346 Ibid., 114.

347 Heidegger, Ister, p. 7: “The call says: we, the ones thus calling, are ready … [W]e are ready and are so only because we are called by the coming fire itself.”


349 Heidegger, Ister, p. 134.
Heidegger’s comment on merit sounds as modern as his residual devotion to the German nation-state. Heidegger easily opens himself to falling into the metaphysical dualism (common, incidentally, to much Protestant theology) of an antagonism between “merit” and something received (fire, here akin to grace). Careful interpretation can keep Heidegger on his own, post-metaphysical track. If the Heideggerian Hölderlin’s poetic spirit counts not as merit, it still acts in its turning of the poetic tide against the metaphysical subject via a unification of German and Greek charisms. The poetic spirit, “of spirit,” remains sublime-aesthetic. But lacking its own merit, the poetic spirit, as “of a calling” (Dionysos calls),\(^{350}\) proves also sublime-aesthetic. The fire of heaven arrives by itself from itself through the poet, who arrives to himself by way of fire. This poet no longer grasps, but rather “brings things into a proper ‘condition,’” a proper standing in their Being, with other beings. Hölderlin, whether with respect to common spirit or common sense, it matters not, “poetizes relations that do not have their ground in the ‘subjectivity’ of human beings.”\(^ {351}\) Heidegger’s interest in the fire of heaven concerns relations, or making life in common proper to oneself in light of the holy.

If one runs backwards through Heidegger’s works, one finds the same impulse operating. The Heidegger of “The Origin of the Work of Art” already reaches a description of the artist that complements the work on Hölderlin and heavenly fire. Heidegger observes, “It is precisely in great art … that the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge.” Art in a grand style witnesses the artist become channel, a river that dries up once its course is run, hardly exerting grasping autonomy. Heidegger contrasts this new view of

\(^{350}\) Ibid., p. 7.

\(^{351}\) Ibid., p. 165, emphasis added.
the artist with the old one: modern subjectivism’s devotion to the “genius.” Naturally, Kant fell under this illusion, ignoring the possibility of the artist as channel. To be of spirit “in the aesthetical sense” is to deal with materiality as that which “puts the mental powers purposively into … such a play as maintains itself and strengthens the mental powers in their exercise.” This spirit, even if aesthetic, grasps. The Heideggerian Kant was not fooled—with him, the imagination releases its attachment to presence, and emerges as a receptive-formative power (reproductive-productive imagination, not a performer of genius, at least not of its own volition)—(KPM 91). But of course this says more about the Heidegger of 1929 than the Kant of 1781; even in 1929, Heidegger had laid the groundwork for seeing the artist as a passageway or channel—not as operator (genius), but co-operator (with Being’s—Spirit’s—appearance). While the “historical” Kant speaks of an artist who seals the subject, the Heideggerian Kant stands before the threshold of exposure to heavenly fire. But, as Dionysian, Heidegger and his Kant dwell beneath an empty, if fire-filled, heaven.

Fourfold

Later (1950s) Hölderlin material presents Heidegger’s famous ideas about the “fourfold.” What better way to parallel Rahner and Heidegger than in an interplay of the threefold (dreifaltige) God and the fourfold (Geviert) of earth, sky, mortals and divinities? Heidegger’s theory (contemplation) of the fourfold proves amenable and profoundly

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354 This argument, expresses a twofold disagreement with Gosetti-Ferencei. First, it implies sympathy for the Heideggerian thesis of the artist as channel of Being. Gosetti-Ferencei opposes this thesis, finding the image, incidentally, too prosaic and philosophical, and too limiting of human poetic agency. She points out that Hölderlin would not have agreed with Heidegger on this point. See Gosetti-Ferencei, HHISPL, p. 127. Second, it finds more continuity between the Heidegger of the *Kantbuch* (thus *Being and Time*) and of the later poetic writings, though Gosetti-Ferencei rightly sees that Heidegger obscures this continuity through his frequent overstatements. See Ibid., p. 252f.
distasteful to a Christian theology after the subject: amenable because it involves a peaceful,
even artistic (as opposed to businesslike or technological) rapport with the world; distasteful
because unabashedly smitten with arbitrarily espoused Dionysian apriorism of finitude.

Heidegger introduces the fourfold in the lecture/essay “Building Dwelling
Thinking” (1951/54). Dwelling gets defined as a peaceful safeguarding “of each thing in its
nature,” and this preserving activity occurs within a determinate “range.” Heidegger writes,
“That range reveals itself to us as soon as we reflect that human being consists in dwelling
and, indeed, dwelling in the sense of mortals on the earth.” Thus Heidegger mentions two
participants in the fourfold, connecting them in the next paragraph with the other two: sky
and divinities. He continues, “By a primal oneness the four—earth and sky, divinities and
mortals—belong together in one.” Heidegger accesses the fourfold via the dwelling of
mortals, and he names the activity of mortals vis-à-vis each of the four: saving the earth,
receiving the sky, awaiting the divinities, and initiating their own mortal capacity to die
well.355 These activities consist in cultivating receptivity, and so in separating the “mortal”
from the subject’s self-will, spirit from grasping. Dwelling remains, which Heidegger
 provisionally defines as the “fourfold preservation of the fourfold,” but whose meaning he
spends over a decade unfolding. The problem of learning to dwell, Heidegger contends, is
the homelessness of human persons in the contemporary age.356 The world seems unheimlich
insofar as we have not yet learned how to relate.

If “Building Dwelling Thinking” raises the question of relation and the fourfold,
“Hölderlin’s Earth and Heaven” (1959) sublimes it, by drawing the lines of the fourfold

356 Ibid., p. 159.
toward the in-finite (almost as a parody of the Cartesian plane of coordinates).  Heidegger examines in this lecture Hölderlin’s hymn, “Greece,” and discovers within it the “regions” of the fourfold intimating an “in-finite relation” (un-endliche Verhältnis). The “in-finite relation” comes to light only inductively, so goes Heidegger’s meditation, and its emergence from concealment occurs both visually and aurally—“There is a wondrous sameness of looking and calling in the earthly song of the singers.” Heidegger relates the fourfold in its “in-finite relation” to both the Greek experience of “the shining revelation of what comes to presence” (i.e., earth and heaven), and to the first line of “Greece”: “Oh you voices of destiny (O ihr Stimmen des Geschiks).” Heidegger finds, by harmonizing the three versions of the hymn, that each “region” of the fourfold has a voice, which it lets ring out (tönen), performing and paying homage to the center from which each begins and back into which each is gathered. Destiny’s economy, one might name it, reveals that “none of the four stays and goes one-sidedly by itself,” thus “none is finite”—a special reading of the word, finite, to pair with a customization of infinite. Destiny’s economy corresponds to its immanence, and vice versa, for in its coming (through the four voices) it “remains” and destiny “sends that which it keeps to itself.”


358 Ibid., 193.


360 Heidegger, “Hölderlin’s Earth and Heaven,” pp. 194-195. This is as good a time as any to reveal that the thoughts here have Balthasar as a positive influence, especially his expositions of Hölderlin and Heidegger in the fifth volume of Herrlichkeit. For example, Balthasar makes a veiled reference to Rahner while elucidating Hölderlin’s latent Christology, finding within the latter’s poetry a “transformation of Christology into … ontology, or in theological terms: an equation of the economic with the absolute doctrine of the Trinity.” While Rahner remains mostly silent on Heidegger and completely silent on the Hölderlin material, Rahner and Balthasar evidence more isomorphism in their engagements with Heidegger, implicit or explicit, than either thinker admitted. See Balthasar, The Glory of the Lord, v. 5: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age, trans. Oliver Davies, et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), pp. 298-333, 429-450, here p. 321.
The voices of destiny co-operate and co-respond as they ring from and toward their common destiny. This common future arrives as a beginning, or more accurately, “The great beginning,” which “comes in the manner of a round dance.” Where dancing occurs, Dionysos dwells: “The round dance is the drunken togetherness of the gods themselves in the heavenly fire of joy.”\textsuperscript{361} This dance, which Heidegger seems to hold out as the hope for people in a destitute time, does not come, though, because people living under the pall of modern technology, i.e. subjectivity, “forestall” (zuwörikomen) it. Zuwörikomen and vorgreifen both mean anticipate, but differ in a manner congruent to prevention versus prevenience. We might suggest that Heidegger would prefer a Vorgriß of the round dance, as long as the grasping was rendered more humble—geringe—“A great beginning can come / Even to the humble (zu Geringem).”\textsuperscript{362} The humble becomes humble through the great beginning’s approach, or by cooperation with the heavenly fire. Until this happens, and it has not yet, the voices of the fourfold remain silent, the shining of the beginning (the Greek fire), dark. Heidegger writes, almost wistfully, “Yet perhaps the humble that is poetically experienced by Hölderlin is already destined for the great”—the grand style, presumably.\textsuperscript{363} By a poetic advent of the in-finite relation, its re-turn, the Geringe, with a struggle (Geringen) against the subject, will close a Ring: “Radiantly the ring joins the four.”\textsuperscript{364} And gods and mortals, Dionysos before them all, will rejoice in the holy marriage of earth and heaven.

From §3 forward, we have contrasted Rahner and Heidegger with respect to the infinite and the finite, that is, with respect to how each thinker answers the question of the

\textsuperscript{361}Heidegger, “Hölderlin’s Earth and Heaven,” p. 198.

\textsuperscript{362}Heidegger inserts above this line from the third version of “Greece” one from the second, “But like the round dance / To a wedding,” hence his talk of dancing. Ibid., pp. 178-179, 200.

\textsuperscript{363}Ibid., p. 204.

scope of human striving as it co-responds to the self-phenomenalization of the Infinite. The idea of the “in-finite relation” may prove the perfect illustration of the Rahner-Heidegger difference, as well as the most optimal transition to contemporary French thought. Rahner thinks the relation of the finite person (bracketing other creatures) to the Infinite God, who opens the finite (world) by drawing near to and working through it (the salvific economy).

The Heidegger of the later Hölderlin essays opts instead to re-vise in-finity, in more positive dialogue with German Idealism, in terms of the “intimacy in which the … four are bound to each other.”365 Although Heidegger claims that such a view would free the “regions of the relation,” on account of an indeterminate centering that each centers, from “one-sidedness and finitude,” we cannot but disagree—the very idea of the fourfold involves circum-scription (peri-grapsis) in the Dionysian order, which admits of nothing but the finite.

Heidegger takes to heart words such as these from Hölderlin: “The poets, and those no less who / Are spiritual, must be worldly.” No matter how indeterminate the center’s centering, “[F]irmly fixed (fest) is the navel / Of Earth.”366

The fourfold allows no opening of the finite such as that permitted, even necessitated, by Rahnerian Trinitarian theology, illuminated by his thesis of the tragende Grund. Post-Heideggerians pick up on Heidegger’s foreclosure of the infinite by the limits of the finite, and they radicalize its finitization—the in-finite relation in contemporary French thought (Marion is an exception) becomes indeterminate interactions between humans along surfaces, of human bodies, or of the earth. Heidegger develops the ideas of the fourfold and the in-finite relation in response to a crisis in “nearness”—at a time when by technology we

365 Ibid., p. 188.

conquer distances, we fail to achieve nearness.\textsuperscript{367} Undoubtedly a poetic, sublime-aesthetic road has the potential to lead back to nearness and true intimacy, but if the toll is leaving the infinite for/to the finite, we must, like Rahner, choose another (Trinitarian) Way.

Gosetti-Ferencei chides Heidegger for his eschewing of Hölderlin’s democratic politics, and though the above line of critique differs from hers, they converge at the issue of the common.\textsuperscript{368} Heidegger invites denunciation for fully immanentizing Hölderlin, for whether or not, as Balthasar and Marion claim, Hölderlin attempted to reconcile himself with Christianity, nevertheless his poetry remains open as a spiritual question.\textsuperscript{369} Heidegger’s purge of Hölderlin, a peak of Heideggerian interpretive violence, proves politically suspect, but even more deeply, “beyond politics” (as Heidegger likes it), shows a fatal flaw, proper to Heideggerian thinking of the fourfold. The wondrous shining, echoed calling, and circular dancing Heidegger so esteems are redolent of the glamour of evil that Christians reject at baptism—their entrance into Christ’s communal Spirit. Perhaps the whole problem of the Heideggerian-Hölderlinian exchange on the after-subject comes down to the interpretation, Christian or Dionysian, of Hölderlin’s poetic aspiration for the human community: “Much, from the morning onwards, / Since we have been a discourse and have heard from one another, / Has humankind learnt; but soon we shall be song.”\textsuperscript{370}

\textsuperscript{367} Heidegger, “The Thing,” pp. 163-164.

\textsuperscript{368} See Gosetti-Ferencei, HHSPL, pp. 181-185.

\textsuperscript{369} See the note on Balthasar above; Marion, The Idol and Distance, pp. 81-136 passim.

\textsuperscript{370} Hölderlin, “Celebration of Peace” in Selected Poems and Fragments, pp. 209-217, lnn. 92-94.
§9. After the Subject

Sensus communis

The next couple of subsections, as promised, intend to give the reader an anticipatory sense of the post-Kantian, post-Heideggerian conversation on aesthetics and the sublime so as to highlight Rahner’s perspective by way of contrast. We read Rahner’s thought as beyond grasping, that is, “after” the modern subject. Contemporary French aesthetics cannot be separated from varied proposals for an after-subject. Thus, even where thinkers such as Lyotard and Nancy diverge from Rahner, their thought still provides an opportunity to flesh out this dissertation’s reading of Rahner, especially along the coordinates set out in the introduction, noetic and ontophanic. Lyotard and Nancy exemplify a new noeticism that bends Heidegger back toward (the historical) Kant. Marion, against the grain of his countrymen, takes up the torch of Heidegger’s resistance to neo-Kantian noeticism via ontophany. In so doing, these three French thinkers perform variations on the sublime—Lyotard and Nancy, the negative sublime (an-archic human freedom), and Marion, the positive (a receiver undergoing the onslaught of givenness). The negativity of the first two departs from anything like Rahner’s sublime-aesthetic. Chapter Four will reinforce this point as a part of its distancing of Rahner from Kant. The positivity of Marion, though, approaches Rahner’s sensibilities, and thus can prove vital to continuing the Rahnerian conversation in the twenty-first century. Thus Marion peeks through this dissertation’s reading of Rahner, bolstering the latter’s already solid views.

§6 already examined Rahner’s appropriation of common sense in Thomas, an idea taken up by Lyotard’s hero, Kant—Lyotard is somewhat of a neo-scholastic of his—in the third
Critique, the text that tries to unify and shore up the subject. The common sense as used by Thomas and by Kant falls on the first side of a distinction between *sensus communis aestheticus* and *sensus communis logicus*. The more common sense sense of common sense, or “sound understanding,” does not concern Kant in the “Analytic of the Beautiful.” He intends the phrase to aid in defining taste “as the faculty of judging of that which makes *universally communicable* … our feeling in a given representation.” Kant renders common sense fully aesthetic, and by turning away from the understanding, he draws much contemporary interest. Even more so does his reformulation of the aesthetic as a reflective (disinterested) manner of “abstracting from the limitations that contingently attach to our own judgment.” By this abstraction, the human judge (not yet subject) achieves a “universal standpoint,” enlarging his thought to include the taste of others. This “subjective universal validity” (according to quantity) finds a counterpart in the beautiful’s modality—universal validity ought necessarily to be affirmed. The common sense serves as a “mere ideal norm,” or not so mere, for it conditions the possibility of any universal (necessary)

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372 Ibid., p. 172, note.

373 Ibid., p. 169.

374 Ibid., p. 173. Of course any talk of universal communication can be related in principle to Rahner’s theology of God’s universal bestowal of grace.

375 Ibid., p. 170.

376 Ibid., p. 172.

377 Ibid., p. 92.
communicability of aesthetic judgment, but also, the very logic by which the subject, unified by judgment, knows.\textsuperscript{378} The aesthetic precedes scientific logic.

When asked Nancy’s question, “Who comes after the subject?,” Lyotard responds with an article on the \textit{sensus communis} in Kant. Lyotard, by retrieval, moves toward an after-subject by excavating the grasping subject to find a stratum prior to subjectivity, hence the subtitle, “The Subject \textit{in Statu Nascendi}.”\textsuperscript{379} The subject’s state of birth-ing consists in a voice, the “voice of taste”—“before it sees itself or conceives of itself”—that emits from/as the \textit{sensus communis}. Lyotard calls it pure auto-affection, prior to time or diachronization.\textsuperscript{380} The reference to diachrony recalls us to the function of the \textit{Vorgriff}—to ensure the standing-apart of subject and object to enable objective thought. Since the voice of taste, or pure sentimental \textit{sensus}, “precedes all diachronization,” evidently it comes prior to anything like the \textit{Vorgriff}’s (abstr)action. The Rahnerian Thomas’s view of sensation as the “aesthetic” moment of the \textit{conversio} mirrors what Lyotard calls the “deferred originarity of the I” in Kant’s first Critique. But Lyotard wishes to peel taste’s initial attitude toward beautiful form away from completion in grasping subjectivity. In this way, he differs from the Kant of the first and third Critiques. He writes, “Compared to [the] deferred originarity of the I, the synthesis at work in aesthetical pleasure is at the same time more radical, less graspable, and wider in scope.”\textsuperscript{381} These last two phrases—on aesthetic ungraspability and subjective universality’s breadth—sound like, but diverge sharply from Rahner.

\textsuperscript{378} Ibid., p. 94. Kant deploys aesthetic judgment as a counteroffensive to skepticism, while self-proclaimed postmoderns like Lyotard find in the aesthetic/sublime an entryway for skeptical indeterminacy.


\textsuperscript{380} Ibid., p. 226

\textsuperscript{381} Ibid., p. 232.
For Lyotard, the Kantian philosophy of *sensus communis* vividly depicts this slippery, all-inclusive synthesis of aesthetic judgment. Its main power lies not, though, as Kant intended, in its capacity to unite the transcendental subject, but instead, to destabilize it at its root. When the *sensus communis* affirms beautiful form (reflectively), it denies beauty both matter and concept (neither understanding nor reason gain determinant—objective—traction). It leaves something more tenuous, “the feeling of a possible harmony of the faculties of knowledge outside of knowledge.” Lyotard’s aestheticization pushes even past Heidegger’s in the *Kantbuch*, and by implication Rahner’s in *Spirit in the World*, for he denies “pure pleasure” connection with Heideggerian ciphers for imagination such as “time” or “synthesis.” The key for Lyotard is a never-realized possibility—hence possible harmony between faculties—for entrance into actuality (grasping) constitutes an impossible transition from aesthetics to logic. In short, “There simply is no aesthetic transcendental I.”

Lyotard also limits the common sense to “in principle” communicability.

Lyotard’s evacuation of the subject through excavation claims to retrieve a subject “being born” who “will never be born as such.” Texts cited so far concern the beautiful, but Lyotard is most famous for reflecting on the sublime, especially in his *Lessons*. Kant shows uneasiness toward the sublime because he predicates the unification of the subject upon beautiful judgment’s claims to universal validity, which the sublime judgment’s attention to the formless disallows. For Lyotard, the sublime takes his aesthetic after-

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386 Ibid., pp. 233.
387 See a text on which Lyotard reflects: Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §30, pp. 150-152.
subject even further along its own axis. The ever-being-born subject always defers subjective universality, and the sublime destroys it, in its moral and aesthetic dimensions.\textsuperscript{388} Sublime feeling defeats aesthetic “communicability,” because the sublime is the feeling of reason’s demand forcefully infiltrating aesthetics.\textsuperscript{389} The pre-born subject tears itself asunder—noetically, according to reason—short-circuiting itself, causing communication breakdown. If born, it is only by reason’s violation of the virgin imagination.\textsuperscript{390} Lyotard revels in all this conflict and violence, feeling exhilarated to discover the illegitimacy of Kant’s hope for a unified subject. He locates in the Kantian corpus itself the ground-zero of its implosion. But even so, Lyotard, to an even greater extent than Kant, obsesses over noetic structures.

§7 pointed to some loci in Rahner where modern subjectivity gets called into question. In light of these Rahnerian texts, Lyotard’s tenacious opposition to the modern dream of grasping subjectivity might initially appear as welcome, and to a small extent it is. The problem lies in the fact that Lyotard’s sublime disemboweling of the Kantian subject leaves little more than a “miserable inscription” that pales in comparison to the Word to which Rahner testifies.\textsuperscript{391} Lyotard, like the sublime, gets carried away. In casting off the shackles of subjectivity, he delights in a sense of limitlessness, but by discharging aesthetic lightning, he constructs new limits. Paradoxically, he fortifies Kant’s noetic limitations while trying to destroy them. Likewise, he makes hard and fast the Heideggerian apriorism of

\textsuperscript{388} Lyotard, Lessons, p. 239. “Differend” means irresolvable conflict.

\textsuperscript{389} Ibid., pp. 228, 231.

\textsuperscript{390} Ibid., pp. 54-55, 180. Lyotard’s imagery, which suggests rape, is downright disturbing. One familiar with both thinkers cannot help but connect Lyotard’s thought with Heidegger’s view of Being in Introduction to Metaphysics, where he speaks of Being’s violation of Dasein “in the literal sense.” See Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 190. This convergence between Lyotard and Heidegger on violence is profoundly ironic, given Lyotard’s excoriation of Heidegger for his Nazism.

finitude, fully casting aside Heidegger’s already circumscribed hope for ontophany. Thus Lyotard gives us a clear vision of the result of the negative sublime, which celebrates human freedom’s capacity to break limits. His discourse seals itself off from possibilities of communication and community. He forcibly removes the “common” from common sense. He rejects the very possibility of something like Rahner’s theology of grace, let alone the reality Rahner’s theology proclaims—that the Absolute, *in principium*, is communicable, and communicates (see §11).

*Touch*

Nancy’s possible relation to Rahner proves a bit more complex than Lyotard’s. The latter’s approach to sublime-aesthetics contrasts sharply against Rahner’s, as “dark” against “light.” Lyotard cultivates a fascination with the sublime as figuring primordial violence, hidden in the “faculties,” and he casts a shadow on any questions but the strictly critical. Lyotard insists upon noetic darkness as philosophy’s center, while Rahner witnesses to the bright fire of ontophany. Nancy, though he objects to Lyotard’s penchant for violence, graphs himself along Lyotardian coordinates when developing his central thematic of touch. Nancy asks in *The Muses* (1994), “What is the *aisthesis* of significance, what is its receiving organ?”392 This question permeates Nancy’s writings. He works to set up aesthetic signposts toward a fundamental ontology. In this way he resembles Heidegger, by considering the possibility of ontophany, and thus Nancy shares some ground with Rahner. But Nancy’s thought continually follows the direction of something like Lyotard’s noeticism. Nancy’s thought grounds itself in the hidden urges that, as they oscillate between pleasure and pain, condition and precede noetic “faculties.” These hidden urges, when they function

“between” people, move “toward” a sense of the world—an ultra-finite rapport that sets
human limits. At times Nancy’s thought verges on agreement with Rahner, for both pay
close attention to limits. Rahner writes in a late essay that human limits cannot be surpassed
“because human beings are already creatures of unlimited transcendence.” Rahner affirms
this due to his conviction that God, the Unlimited, appears through humans—ontophany.
Nancy could write virtually the same sentence, but would radically recode the final word,
“transcendence,” along noetic lines.

In an aphorism entitled “Infinite Finitude,” from The Sense of the World (1993), Nancy
notes, “[o]ne must think … the being-in-common of finitude as a fundamental theme.” He
continues, “Sense is common, or it is not.” This aphorism objects to the philosophical
thesis (to which Rahner subscribes to some extent) that finitude is privation. Nancy
proposes instead that “finitude is the truth of which the infinite is the sense.” This
oracular statement derives from Nietzsche’s inversion of the Platonic hierarchy of truth and
appearance. Nancy aestheticizes the infinite, as “infinite self-mediation,” a reconfigured in-
finitive relation. Finitude, then, as auto-affirmation (Dionysos!), consists in shared essence, or
an essence that is “transitive” from the get-go. The essence is always ex-isted, that is
“traversed, before itself and in front of itself”—in German, vor—“the essence passed and
passed away.” The Being of finitude is always common, and always sense—both

393 Rahner, “Profane History and Salvation History” in Theological Investigations 21: Science and Christian

394 Nancy, The Sense of the World, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

395 Ibid., p. 29.

396 Ibid., pp. 33, 31: “Esse … drags essentia into existence before it is annulled in its immanence, before
it has closed itself in on its nowhere, therefore, ‘before’ it has become ‘essence.’”

397 Ibid., p. 31.
assertions against the self-sealing, grasping subject.\textsuperscript{398} This common sense is not just aesthetic, but sublime-aesthetic, for every traversal of essence involves the breaking, unmaking, and remaking of limits: unlimitation.\textsuperscript{399}

In his introduction to \textit{Who Comes After the Subject?}, Nancy claims that philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century has crossed its limits so many times that it discovers “that it never did have proper limits, that it never was, in a sense, a ‘property.’”\textsuperscript{400} The time after the subject is marked by common and be-ing, but not by common Being, if Being means anything other than the coming of sense (\textit{aisthesis}). Nancy speaks against Heidegger’s \textit{Jemeinigkeit}, Dasein’s self-standing, and would object to Rahner’s limit-idea of the \textit{Beisiehein des Seins}. Nancy no longer accepts the (Hegelian, he says) definition of subjectivity as a presence-to-self that is my own. For him, the question of the after-subject is a communal question. He thus sees the active source of presence as a plural singular, a “community without subject,” but with a common sense arising as senses meet in coming.\textsuperscript{401}

Nancy’s theme of touch illustrates this. Ian James explicates touch in Nancy as a logic of contact in distance which singularizes the singular insofar as it makes of sense a relation to something other than itself (to another instance of sense) but maintains the singular as an irreducibly fragmentary plurality insofar as such a relation occurs only on the basis of an originary separation or rupture.\textsuperscript{402}

\textsuperscript{398} Ibid., p. 11: “[T]here is nothing other than experience of sense (and this is the world).”


\textsuperscript{400} Nancy, “Introduction” in \textit{Who Comes After the Subject?}, pp. 1-8.

\textsuperscript{401} Ibid., p. 8.

Touch is neither transcendence, nor immanence, but “transimmanence.” Rahner’s symbolic logic, in-spired by the missions of the Trinitarian economy, which, to use James’s terms differently, is ultimately a “logic of contact.” Nancy offers, rather, a semiotic logic, a logic of the “swarming” of signs around a “void.” Nancy develops his logic from Nietzsche and Heidegger, but also from the French Freud tradition, thus Jacques Lacan, and the psychoanalytic idea that the “unconscious is the world as totality of signifiability.” For Nancy, “unconscious” means “world” prior to theoretical grasping. Nancy ropes the symbolic in with grasping subjectivity, and announces that the semiotic, as an original, fragmentary “spacing,” has logical precedence with respect to the symbol. Primordial touch, the transimmanence of sense, being as sign, should guide thought after the subject, and this involves rejecting anything like what Rahner might call “being as symbol.”

The thought of sense’s transimmanence stems from Nancy’s a fear of teleology (i.e., determinate ends) and of mysticism (i.e., human being ends in absorptive unity). Nancy pits against teleological and mystical strains of thought one propelled by the pulsion of “coming,” a word he mines for its most finite connotations, namely birth, sex, and dying. Nancy manages to highlight the sublime-aesthetic qualities of these events, exacerbating and radically finitizing them, superceding even Heidegger’s most Dionysian moments. The Nancean sublime speaks of touching as the “erotic,” narrowly conceived. Hence Nancy’s consideration of the “essence of art” as comprised “with a touch,” sexual touch. Because of

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403 Nancy, Sense of the World, pp. 46-47. To avoid unnecessary complications, this dissertation limits its engagement with Freud, but Freud could pop out, among other places, from behind Heidegger’s rendering of the uncanny.


405 Cf. Marcel Duchamp’s parody of the Mona Lisa (1919), L.H.O.O.Q. According to Duchamp, one could read these letters, “Elle a chaud au cul”: she has a fire down below.
art’s ability to “fracture” the symbolic, “art is considered indissociable from erotic
jouissance.” Art proves, likewise, inseparable from death—the end that infinitely affects us.
Nancy understands human affectivity as, primarily it seems, the justification for noetic
critique, for gerrymandering reality into innumerable, unsystematizable sectors. As a post-
Heideggerian, (semi)ontophanic thinker, Nancy might be taken as resembling Rahner, but
the last few comments show that Nancy attaches himself more to a Vorlust than a Vorgriff. 407
For Nancy, we must learn to deal with feeling about in the dark, and let go of any hope for
perspicuous, all-embracing vision (this is how Nancy envisions, comprehensively, the
aspirations of metaphysics, elided all too easily with Christianity). Such a view of human life
would unleash human freedom to a hitherto unachieved sublime height. The question, of
course, is whether Rahner’s ontophanic thinking of the visio beatifica as the end of human life
and freedom (see §13), offers something even higher.

L’adonné

Marion is an ontophanic counterpoint to the foregoing Lyotardian and Nancean
noetic points, and thus can assist in the work of highlighting Rahner’s presentation of the
Catholic sublime, an ethos ineluctably tied to confidence in ontophany. Furthermore, Cyril
O’Regan detects a “non-identical repetition of Rahner” operating in Marion’s discourse. 408
Repetition: Marion, like Rahner before him, aims to open philosophy beyond
objectivity/objectness. Non-identical: Marion goes not as far, yet farther than Rahner with

406 Nancy, Sense of the World, pp. 133-136, also p. 83: “[T]here is not art that is not the art of a clear
touch on the obscure threshold of sense.”

407 Nancy, like Lyotard, writes an essay entitled “In Statu Nascendi,” referring to an inchoate aesthetic
theory in Freud, based in Freud’s notion of Vorlust, or that which conditions pleasure. See Nancy, The Birth to
Presence, pp. 211-233.

408 O’Regan, “Jean-Luc Marion: Crossing Hegel” in Counter-Experience: Reading Jean-Luc Marion, ed.
Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), pp. 95-150, here pp. 127.
respect to philosophy’s engagement of theology, and theology’s main source, scripture.\textsuperscript{409}

The main thing to take from O’Regan is the point that, in Marion’s original contributions to philosophy (and theology), a proximity to Rahner resides, and Marion can provide support for this dissertation.\textsuperscript{410} Among other things, Marion’s ambivalent relationship to Kant can help clarify Rahner’s own similar relationship. Marion suggests that Kant’s sublime smacks of the concept, the person, most common in modernity: the subject. By a move that may appear backwards to common sense, Marion inverts the Kantian sublime.\textsuperscript{411} This inversion, yet another French, aesthetic, tactical strike, but unlike the others one of which one should take positive note, subtracts grasping from spirit.

Before getting into the key insight for our purposes (Marion’s inversion of Kant’s sublime), we should let Marion clarify why he pursues an after-subject. He constructively points out that the critique of the subject does not stem from “some stubbornly negative or ideologically based polemic,” but rather from its “continually confirmed powerlessness to do justice to the most patent characteristics of its own phenomenon.”\textsuperscript{412} Marion enumerates the twin objections that the modern subject, as “transcendental I,” fails to achieve individuation, but also slips toward solipsism. The same criticisms apply to modern appropriations of Thomas’s angel, and to modern Catholic theology’s parsing of nature and

\textsuperscript{409} Ibid., p. 127: “First, Marion does not follow Rahner all the way down the apologetic path and proceed to demonstrate that Christianity ... offers the unsurpassable dogmatic figuration or refiguration of universal human experience. Second, Marion radicalizes the Rahnerian project by in a sense bringing Scripture itself ‘inside’ phenomenology.”

\textsuperscript{410} The irony here is that Marion’s theological preference does not fall on Rahner, but rather on the other side of the traditional dichotomy of Barth and Balthasar vs. Bultmann and Rahner. See Marion, \textit{Being Given}, p. 367n90. One has to wonder whether Marion might ever come around (in print, if he has already in person) to appreciating Rahner and his own proximity to Rahner.

\textsuperscript{411} For background, see my “Black Holes and Revelations: Michel Henry and Jean-Luc Marion on the Aesthetics of the Invisible” in \textit{Modern Theology} 25.3 (July 2009), pp. 415-440.

\textsuperscript{412} Marion, \textit{Being Given}, p. 252.
grace. Marion adds two more objections to the modern subject, and a grammatical layer to boot, focusing on the rivalry inherent in Kant’s construal of the subject between the transcendental I and the empirical me. First, Marion claims that transcendental I and empirical me are two sides of the same coin (metaphysical subjectivity), and the after-subject goes beyond the nominative and accusative cases, assuming the dative as its own. Second, the very splitting of the subject into transcendental I and empirical me evidences a refusal (in the Kant of the first Critique especially) to consider the subject as receivable (qua phenomenon) and receptive (qua the “givenness” of a phenomenon)—in other words, the subject as transcendental I becomes otherworldly (outside the world of phenomena) and as empirical me only enters the world as a secondary philosophical concession (presumably to the categories of understanding). Marion’s objections amount to this: by attempting to run the philosophical show, the subject loses sight of itself and everything else. He shares this objection with Lyotard, and probably Nancy, but Marion distinguishes his perspective quite clearly from the noeticism of the other two. As a phenomenologist, who believes that “there is nothing concealed that will not revealed, nor secret that will not be known” (Lk 12.2), he decries the subject’s inability to bring things to light. The subject precludes ontophany.

Marion’s chapter in Who Comes After the Subject? follows directly after Lyotard’s. This early form of the after-subject, l’interloqué—the addressee of a call, blossoms more robustly in Being Given into l’adonné, which Jeffrey Kosky translates as “the gifted one,” rendering both its connection with la donation (“givenness”), Marion’s fundamental concept, and its source in Marion’s phenomenology of le don (the gift). L’adonné is the dative of the subject, the one to whom givenness gives itself from itself. Certain phenomena show more

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413 The material from the last few sentences all comes from Ibid., pp. 252-256.

414 Marion, “L’Interloqué” in Who Comes After the Subject?, pp. 236-245.
clearly the relationship between the given phenomenon and the “who” named l’adonné, and Marion labels these “saturated phenomena,” due to their propensity to “saturate” intention with excessive “intuition.” The stakes here prove rather simple—Marion interrogates the philosophical tradition about its choice of examples. Marion’s project, like this chapter’s, concerns normativity: what kind of phenomenon is norm-al? From Plato through Husserl, and especially from the conqueror and scientist to the businessperson, phenomena selected for examples for analysis and for building the foundations for a theory of Being have tended to be either concepts or simple objects, “poor” or “common-law” phenomena—e.g., the number 3, or a hammer. Philosophical examination of such concepts and objects enhances the feeling that the human subject has control over the appearing of phenomena, or in more strict phenomenological language—where the concept or object becomes simply a noematic correlate for noetic intentionality. But by a better selection of examples, which will facilitate a more precisely executed phenomenological rapport with the phenomena (i.e., a more rigorous performance of the phenomenological reduction), the givenness of phenomena, their freedom from subjective grasping, will become evident. Hence Marion’s studies of complex phenomena such as event, idol, flesh, and icon—“saturated phenomena.”

Saturated phenomena dis-close the truth that no phenomenon, if allowed to appear of itself, appears as an object (or being) conditioned by subjectivity. In truth, then, there is no subject, but rather, a “unique screen open to receive all manifestations, all truths, all realities.” L’adonné opens universally, catholically—or is opened by the phenomenon, before grasping (vor Griff).

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This brings us back to Marion’s ambiguous relationship to Kant. Marion regards Kant both as creditor and foil. He declares at one point, “Kant’s determination of the transcendental I was and still is … the counter-model of the gifted,” but four pages later, states in connection with the feeling of respect, “Kant thus anticipates the fundamental traits of the gifted.” Another couple of texts gets to the heart of the matter. Appreciation—Marion finds a “foretaste of … a saturated phenomenon” in Kant’s aesthetic ideas, especially the sublime. Correction—since one cannot extrapolate the Kantian sublime to yield the saturated phenomenon, Marion writes, “The path to follow now opens more clearly. I must develop as far as possible the less common hypothesis” (i.e., of the saturated phenomenon) “glimpsed by Kant himself—and against him.” For Kant, we look inside the subject for the ground of the sublime. For Marion, against Kant’s sublime, we look to the phenomenon, to which l’adonné relinquishes the status of selfhood. The sublime, says Kant, brings a certain measure(lessness) of suffering—Lyotard makes this disturbingly clear—an auto-pathic self-undergoing of the subject that ultimately bolsters the subject, setting its limits in stone. L’adonné does not suffer itself, as with Kant, but rather it suffers another self, the phenomenon. The phenomenon un-limits the subject, a sublime ontophany, resulting in an aesthetic receiver.

Marion’s recently published essay, “The Banality of Saturation” (2007), includes an extended treatment of how phenomena announce themselves to all five senses. Each of the proper senses meets with phenomena both as objects and in excess of objectivity. At the end of his meditation on the senses, Marion notes that a “gap” opens between the two ways

417 Marion, Being Given, p. 278.
418 Marion, Being Given, p. 197, pp. 198-199.
419 Marion, “The Banality of Saturation” in Counter-Experiences, pp. 383-418.
phenomena phenomenalize themselves to consciousness in each sense, and “in this gap become visible saturated phenomena.”\textsuperscript{420} At this point, Marion’s non-identical Rahnerian repetition springs to light, just as saturated phenomena do. The “gap” stands for the common sense, understood in a Rahnerian way as the wellspring of the outer senses, but radicalized phenomenologically according to the reduction to givenness, the \textit{per se} of phenomena, as opposed to their \textit{per accidens} (to use a Thomistic tongue). The common sense resists, but does not grasp, the crushing weight of givenness. Marion, like Rahner, amplifies the Kantian aesthetic gaze, as when Marion recognizes that a phenomenon need not be “without concept” to establish aesthetic rapport, but rather could call “for all” concepts, saturating the field of pleasure.\textsuperscript{421} This amplification of the aesthetic should go by the name sublime, but one that counteracts the Kantian sublime and its subjective fortification.

Keeping in mind Rahner’s reconstruction of the \textit{sensus communis} in Thomas, along Marion’s axis, Rahner’s presentation of the Catholic sublime, a phenomenological space where the various devotions, rituals, ethical practices, texts of the Christian faith are allowed to appear as they give and show themselves, before we dismiss them simply as mere objects, becomes somewhat clearer.\textsuperscript{422} The Catholic sublime implies Catholicism’s open view of phenomenality. Marion, like Rahner, advances a philosophical case for opening phenomenality (beyond grasping subjectivity) without re-closing it noetically, like Lyotard and Nancy.\textsuperscript{423} With a key insight (amplification of Kant), Marion helps us read Rahner.

\textsuperscript{420} Ibid., p. 397.

\textsuperscript{421} Ibid., p. 394.

\textsuperscript{422} Ibid., p. 397: “Thus the relation between common law and saturated phenomena is reversed: though the former arise most often and from the outset, the latter offer, by virtue of their very banality, a more originary determination of phenomenality.”

\textsuperscript{423} The tenor of Marion’s recent book, \textit{The Erotic Phenomenon}, is a case in point. The cusp of the issue between Marion and Nancy (bracketing Lyotard, who on this does not merit comparison) distills into the difference between Marion’s “infinite hermeneutic” of loving discovery and Nancy’s “infinite self-mediation”
This section ends with another artistic example, earlier in time than Hölderlin, Rilke, Newman, and Duchamp, from the Baroque period, a flowering of the Catholic sublime: Caravaggio. Marion finds in Caravaggio’s painting, *The Calling of Matthew*, clues toward a relatively adequate articulation of *l’adonné* as the after-subject who becomes manifest in its response to the call of saturated phenomena. Caravaggio, when he paints Matthew pointing to himself in response to Christ’s invisible (and inaudible) call, makes the realization that “the call gives itself phenomenologically only by first showing itself in response.” Marion’s phenomenology of the call that phenomenalizes itself only in the response provides a hermeneutic for Rahner’s idea of the human person in *Hearer of the Word*, the “possible subject” of a “possible revelation of God.” Rahner, in *Hearer*, predicates this upon the human subject’s ability to “perform in consciousness a complete return into self” (HW 44). Marion could hold Rahner to his thesis of God as *tragende Grund*. With him, one could highlight how human spirit’s possibility is actualized from within by divine initiative, so that the divine message becomes first seen, heard, or felt, only through the human person. The voice of Christ is heard only through Matthew’s hand, as he gestures toward himself.

The view approached here can be shown again by contrast with another painting in the same chapel (the Contarelli Chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi, Roma). Right next to our first painting hangs one of Matthew the evangelist, being dictated to by an angel. Caravaggio, in one of his least creative moments, has composed a snapshot of the extrinsicist view of divine-human relations that has plagued Christian theology from the dawn of modernity to the present. Rahner, in his least creative moments, supported this of erotic syncopation, and between Marion’s “invisible” and Nancy’s “obscure.” See Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), starting with pp. 97-105; idem., *In Excess*, p. 123-127.

view by envisioning the human person as a self-contained subject capable of a full spiritual return to self(-presence), by nature. This chapter has shown the other path Rahner opened, toward a permeable self, a gifted one, spirit minus grasping, a type of person exemplified with a good deal of adequacy by artists. This finite receiver of God, through whom Grace self-reveals in the world, and who continually breaks down barriers set by the world, for the greater glory of God—stretching toward the infinite—thus enacting the Catholic sublime, points toward the normative human for our time, the sublime apprehender.

Conclusion

Chapter One made a rather counterintuitive claim about the Rahnerian Thomas: at the Heideggerian Kant’s prompting, the Rahnerian Thomas finds a new way of thinking God that breaks the metaphysical subject’s desire to view God as a metaphysical object, and thus defeats the modern subject. To review, for the Rahnerian Thomas, God “shines forth” in every apprehension of the horizon (the world or “material quiddity”), every act of sens-ing the horizon, every time spirit “exposes itself to the whole destiny of this earth” (SW 406/299). A certain amount of exposure proves the best way to counteract modern subjectivity’s self-sealing, to oust the businessperson from the role of normative person.

Speaking of exposure, the classic term from Trinitarian theology, *perichoresis*, which names the mutual exposure of the Trinitarian *hypostases* to each other, and which Maximus uses to describe the interpenetration of natures in Christ and of God and the cosmos, can tie up this chapter. Various translations could accurately render the valences of meaning latent in this word. Let us break the word into its parts, *peri* and *choresis*. The former gives the sense of “around,” but also of its use in titles of treatises, equivalent to “de” with the ablative in Latin (e.g. *De anima*), or “On the” or “Of” in English (Of Spirit—*De l’âme*). The latter
relates to the *chorus*, the dancers and commentators of Greek theater. Following Rahner’s theology of unappropriated relations, one can say *of the dance* that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit risk exposure to human beings, and thereby bestow the grace by which human persons join the divine threefold (dance). For Heidegger, dance figures in as well, where the roundness of the a-round (*peri*) gains emphasis, insofar as he melds the thought-worlds of Hölderlin and Nietzsche with puns on the *ring*, and where the *chorus of choreis* proclaims the Dionysian wedding-song of the fourfold—simply inflaming downward-looking finitude.

Our French figures, Lyotard and Nancy on one side and Marion on the other, serve mainly to deepen the flavors of the Heideggerian and Rahnerian lines respectively. When Lyotard and Nancy, in their own unique ways, write *of the dance*, they write of eroticism, configured in terms of noetic suspension. Marion resists post-Heideggerian proclivities in favor of an ontophanatic opening toward an ever-widening movement of phenomena, no longer viewed as a dance (orbit) around the modern subject, but as *l’adonné*, the human person who has a foretaste (*Vorgriff*) of the joy of receiving grace. Marion supports this chapter’s implicit claim that the Catholic sublime in Rahner, if it is to bear fruit in today’s theology, must always sustain exposure to post-Heideggerian, and especially Kantian counter-proposals.

Endean closes his book on Rahner and Ignatius with a profound statement, whose content all but eclipses that of the thousands of words expended above: “Seen in themselves, our efforts are only fragments: mere attempts to clear space so that God’s grace can be disclosed.”⁴²⁵ The message of the Catholic sublime proves contiguous with these fragmentary efforts at receptive space-clearing. Contiguity—a word that expresses the touch that the grasping subject paradoxically and prudishly avoids. Beyond modern autism, after it, Rahner awaits and allows the advent of divine—Trinitarian, not fourfold—grace, the event

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⁴²⁵ Endean, KRIS, p. 260.
of revelation. *Our efforts: this space-clearing constitutes a common (if disparate and plodding) project, fueled by the fire of the Holy Spirit. Our efforts: this space-clearing comprises an application of will, freedom, but one beyond objectivity, or even broken noesis. Grace stimulates human action, which, Thomas affirms, is full of merit.*

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426 Thomas, ST I-II.114.1. sed contra: “On the contrary, it is written (Jer 31.16): ‘There is a reward for thy work.’ Now a reward means something bestowed by reason of merit. Hence it would seem that a person may merit from God.” This whole article (and question) merits sustained reflection.
FOUR
THE SUBLIME APPREHENDER

-Is there soul in things that have sense, when they have sense? Or have also soulless things sense?
-Only things with soul.
-Then do you know any phrase that has soul?
-No indeed.
-Then why did you ask me just now what sense my phrase had?427

“Negation as Measure of the Freedom of Spirit in its Ordination to Sensibility”—so Rahner calls a brief yet rich section of *Spirit in the World*. The section lies roughly midway through Rahner’s chapter on conversion of the phantasm, and directly before his discussion of the cogitative sense, which figured prominently in Chapter One. This seemingly oddly placed section—on negation—stands at the heart of Rahner’s project in *Spirit in the World*. Perhaps this is merely a coincidence, but maybe not. Perhaps negation belongs near the heart of Rahner’s thought, not just in *Spirit in the World*, but throughout. And perhaps negation opens Rahner’s thought, is an opening within it, and provides open access to it. We still seek the Rahnerian Rahner, the Rahner who, in Endean’s words, has not been tried.428 This and the next chapter will hone the tools needed to find and to try him.

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428 Recall the words quoted at the head of the dissertation’s introduction, “It is not that Rahner’s theology has been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and therefore not really tried.” Philip Endean, “Has Rahnerian Theology a Future?”, p. 282.
Why, then, devote a chapter to negation, when we fully intend to affirm (something about) Rahner? Why explore the “no,” when we wish to predicate a “yes” to/of Rahner? An attentive reader may recognize that this chapter is not so different from the others. Each chapter featured in some measure strategies of negation. Chapter One introduced, among other things, the question of un-restriction of phenomenality. It aligned Rahner with a phenomenological tradition, from Husserl through Heidegger to Marion, that ventures to remove certain a priori conditions on the appear-ability of phenomena. How many noetic limits, we asked, will Rahner dismantle to allow for ontophany? Chapter Two’s §6, “Jenseits von Greifen,” (explicitly) began the pursuit of the question as to whether the “Griff,” grasp, of Rahner’s Vor-griff may be separated from grasping. How does he get “beyond” grasping? Is there a Rahnerian (after-) “subject” that glimpses rather than grasps? Chapter Three, called “Spirit Minus Grasping,” unveiled within Rahner’s theology an agenda for negating modern subjectivity so that a new sublime-aesthetic rapport of humanity with reality, and especially with God, might appear. How does Rahner show how human persons can be “of spirit,” without predicing human existence on controlling “objects”? How might we evade the allure of the power that comes with being a conquerer, scientist, or businessperson? The present chapter grapples with the same challenges (which relate to grasping), but more formally, or—formlessly.

The efforts in previous chapters and in this one aim to unearth a sort of negation that drives and derives from Rahner’s practices of affirmation. Rahner’s entire discourse stems from an original affirmation—of God as tragende Grund. A large part of his discourse consists in negative thematizations of this affirmation. These are the ideas that attend the Vorgriff, which in Spirit in the World stands at the center of abstraction, the free activity of the intellectus agens (§4). The foremost criticism of Rahner appears as a variety of denunciations
of his theology as “abstract.” This criticism implies, whether or not critics possess the sophistication to recognize this implication, that Rahner’s theology colludes with modern subjectivity to such a great extent that his theology crushes all matters of Christian doctrine and practice under an all-too-active intellect. Hence Balthasar’s (rather unfortunate) association of Rahner with the comprehensiveness of German Idealism’s “System.”

Actually, Balthasar’s accusation of controlling comprehensiveness gets to the crux of this dissertation’s overall thesis about Rahner. This dissertation holds that Rahner dis-covers the Catholic sublime, a phrase not yet properly defined, in part because by definition it eludes precise definition. For now, a working statement of meaning for the phrase follows: the Catholic sublime connotes comprehensiveness without comprehensive grasping. The *prehendo* (Latin: I grasp) latent in *comprehend* loosens when it comes to the Catholic sublime and, then, Rahner. Balthasar and others detect in Rahner comprehensiveness with comprehensive grasping. The present chapter disagrees. It affirms that Catholicism’s wholeness, comprehensiveness, shows up in Rahner, as it does in Balthasar himself. Catholicism “is” this sublime comprehensiveness. It manifests itself without grasping. Catholicism “is” all the more sublime because it freely chooses not to grasp. This feature of Catholicism drew Rahner to common and obscure matters of Catholic doctrine and practice—he felt at home in all of them. Rahner turns with such fervor toward the various building blocks of Catholicism because he senses in them the paradox of an incomparably massive edifice that,

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at heart, only inappropriately serves as a bastion. The edifice stands, even looms, but without grasping. The negativity of “without grasping” turns us toward Rahner’s thought. The capacity of Rahner’s theology to endure into the twenty-first century may in fact be predicated upon this negation.

This chapter explores negation in Rahner, so as to show the separateness of his thought from grasping. This essential attribute of Rahner’s thought appears in three sections. Each section admits, even more than the first three chapters, a great deal of complexity. Rahner would have relished this. He always allowed the complexity of language to reflect the many facets of the things he thought.

As always, a section on Rahner appears first, this time with the name, “Geheimnis.” This, of course, is the German word for Mystery, which Rahner used with increasing frequency as his career progressed. The section begins with an examination of Rahner’s early theory of negation, which includes an inchoate theory of freedom. It continues with a reading of some of Rahner’s later texts on Mystery, at which he could not have arrived without his early reflection on negation and freedom. Thomas involves himself prominently in this subsection. Rahner maintained an abiding relationship with Thomas throughout his life, most significantly in his later theology of Mystery, or the incomprehensibility

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430 The reader should keep these architectural metaphors in mind, because they relate to the sublime in general and the Kantian sublime in particular. Kant’s remarks on the Egyptian pyramids and on (fittingly) St. Peter’s interlace with this dissertation’s view of Rahner’s relationship to the body of Catholic dogmatics. See Kant, Critique of Judgment, §26, p. 112 and my §12 below.

431 See Johannes Herzsgell, “This Language Directs us to Insight: A Conversation with Johannes Herzsgell, S.J.” in Encounters with Karl Rahner: Remembrances of Rahner by Those Who Knew Him, ed, and trans. Andreas R. Batlogg and Melvin E Michalski (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2009), pp. 35-43, here p. 41: “I never had the impression that he spoke elegantly just for the sake of eloquence, but rather it was always to address the matter at hand. He always focused on the issue and the complexity of the language mirrored the complexity of the issues he was dealing with.”
Along with Thomas, and this has been a subtext of this dissertation, Bonaventure also proves inestimably important for Rahner. His much-maligned phrase *reductio in Mysterium* is Bonaventurian, an expression of Bonaventure’s theological method of diving into the depths of things (*or persuasio*). Because of Thomas and Bonaventure’s intimate involvement in the development of Rahner’s language, examined here as un-saying, this subsection has the title, “Medieval Apophasis.” Rahner’s theology does not amount to a rehashing of medieval linguistic conventions. Rather, his contemporary theology gains and offers much due to its being instructed by Thomistic and Bonaventurian apophasis. This subsection, set on the background of the first three chapters, amounts to the refinement of a lens through which sublime apprehension, *qua* after-subjective attitude, can snap into focus.

With all of this material on negation, freedom, Mystery and method in mind, we turn to a subsection on Rahner’s Marian writings. Were one inclined to attempt to locate an axial point in the dissertation, this would be it. Rahner’s writings on Mary elicit far less attention than, for example, Balthasar’s or Henri de Lubac’s. Even when they do garner attention, Rahner’s works on Mary tend to be read solely in terms of his larger project on the development of dogma. This subsection, while acknowledging that Mary does not play a central role in Rahner, argues that his Marian essays and books provide access to the center of Rahner’s theology—the Catholic sublime. If we read Rahner in terms of the Catholic

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433 On this issue, Elizabeth Johnson’s work exemplifies a refreshing exception. She pays sustained attention to various Marian writings of Rahner. See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2006), especially Part 3: “A Way Forward,” pp. 95-134. Johnson approves, in particular, of Rahner’s reframing of Mary studies in terms of grace as opposed to Christ-maternity or ecclesial typology. Also positive on this point is Nancy Dallavalle, “Feminist Theologies” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, pp. 264-278.
sublime, a comprehensiveness without comprehensive grasping that first appears in *Spirit in the World*, his interpretation of Christian dogmatics, especially Marian doctrines, appears as quite at odds with the way Rahnerians often think Rahner approaches dogma. Rahner does not attempt to make dogma more palatable, but rather to let it say what it says. Rahner applies a sort of *Gelassenheit*, to deploy that term a bit too soon, to dogmatics. This “releasing” appears negative to positivist eyes, but it retains all dogma and doctrine as the figures that lead back to the ground of Mystery. Furthermore, if we carefully understand Rahner’s sublime-aesthetic appropriation of dogmatics via Marian doctrine, Mary emerges as 1) an exemplary site for apprehending the Sublime God, that is, in and through doctrines about Mary, and 2) as the paradigmatic sublime apprehender. Mary, as the free anticipator of the Unanticipatable God, actualizes the full potential of the human *Vorgriff*.434 This idea lies on the margins of Rahner’s text—margins that cannot be ignored.

The second section (§11) contains material from Heidegger geared toward fleshing out the Rahnerian approach to language and dogmatics sketched in §10. If §10 discusses Rahner’s apophatic *modus operandi*, prompted by Thomas and Bonaventure, §11 traces the course of Heidegger’s apophatic self-emendations as they arise from his reading of the history of philosophy and of poetry. From *Being and Time* forward, Heidegger seeks to discover a primordial “undergoing” of language.435 The “site,” to put it loosely, of this “undergoing,” seems analogous (with the requisite implication of dissimilarity) to the imagination as unveiled in Chapter One. “Undergoing” thematizes an experience of

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434 See below on the potential Christological objection that Jesus Christ uniquely effects this actualization of the *Vorgriff*. Let the reader be reminded that what binds us to Mary in a way incalculably different than our tie to Christ is that Mary *receives* Christ. God makes Mary, like us, a child of God by adoption (Jn 1.12-13, Eph 1.5, Gal 4.4-5, Rom 8.23), whereas Christ is God’s Son by his divinity.

nearness in a no to modern subjectivity. This no receives expression through a new sort of 
*letting* beyond the imagination’s letting “objects” stand (*Gegenstehenlassen*) in the *Kantbuc...* 
*Gelassenheit*. This *Gelassenheit* relates to (higher) freedom, so Heidegger’s lectures on 
Schelling’s treatise on freedom (1936) join the discussion. Since Rahner heard these lectures 
in person, they provide a perfect opportunity to delve into the convergent 
divergence/divergent convergence of Heidegger and Rahner. The word (and reality), *charis*, 
grace, sums up the tipping point of the Rahner-Heidegger relation. Both thinkers recognize 
a promise in language—a promise of communication. For Rahner, language, sustained by 
God as *tragende Grund*, self-gives benevolently. The case remains almost the same with 
Heidegger, except that language’s benevolent giving comes edged with evil, malevolence, or, 
simply, callousness. This critique of Heidegger compounds the one already set in motion— 
Heidegger’s apriorism of finitude illicitly proscribes any appearance of the infinite, whether 
as Christ or grace.

The next subsection relates Heidegger more specifically to Rahner’s Mariology. Here 
the focus narrows to Mary’s “objective” status as a locus for apprehending the Sublime. The 
latter half of §12 will unpack a bit Mary’s “subjective” status as paradigmatic sublime 
apprehender. But §11’s interest is how we can claim to apprehend the Sublime through 
doctrines about Mary.436 Heidegger’s work on “the thing” will help. At many points in 
Heidegger’s corpus he steps back to ask how one might let things appear as things. This 
question presupposes the question of language: how might one understand language to allow 
it more functions than grasping (defining, constituting) objects? In “The Thing,” Heidegger

436 Here, in connection with Heidegger, it must be said that the willingness to capitalize “Sublime” and linguistically put that nominal form of the adjective in the grammatical place of God stems in large part from Rosick’s overall thesis in *Maintaining the Sublime* that for Heidegger (and Adorno), the *S/sublime* is a “religio-literary translation” of the meta-physical.
proposes speaking of the thing as an organizer of the fourfold. The jug, his example, pours forth the four. Heidegger brackets object-ive language to elevate a seemingly lowly thing. This point in Heidegger’s thinking of language can assist us in articulating Rahner’s view of dogmatic propositions, particularly Marian ones. They do not delimit an object of faith. Instead, they say things about a lowly woman who, by the Holy Spirit’s power, poured forth the Trinitarian economy. Marian dogmas let Mary appear as Mary, Mother of the Lord.

The third section (§12), like §9, highlights Rahner by contrast with a contemporary French thinker, Nancy. §§10 and 11, on Rahner and Heidegger, present variations on ontophanic sublime-aesthetics, deployed within theories on (negative) language. Rahner and Heidegger, with their commitments to ontophany, also dwell within the positive sublime. Nancy, like Rahner and Heidegger, interests himself with apophasis, but pursues it in a thoroughly negative manner. He declines Heidegger’s thought noetically, according to his own aesthetic reframing of Kant’s intellectual faculties. In keeping with this, Nancy exercises the negative sublime, a feeling of freedom against an otherwise empty horizon. This yields a rather different extrapolation of Heidegger’s Kantbuch than Rahner provides in Spirit in the World. Nancy depicts a Nietzschean Heideggerian Kant, and Rahner a Thomistic-Bonaventurian Heideggerian Kant. It should become clear as this subsection proceeds that this exposition of Nancy alongside Rahner means to distance the latter from Kant inasmuch as Kant’s line travels in Nancy’s direction. Thus critics who associate Rahner with Kantian agnosticism, an accusation that seems especially apropos of his negative language and theology of Mystery, miss the mark.

The final subsection briefly discusses some of Nancy’s meditations on Mary in painting. Like Rahner, Nancy (for some reason) envisions Mary as a paradigmatic figure who enacts the sublime-aesthetic attitude that Nancy develops in his writings. But for
Nancy, Mary lives out a sort of noetic deferral of the sublime, never allowing any full appearance. Thus Mary expresses something essential about painting, which in turn sums up the ebb and flow of human life, which is nothing more than the oscillation between pleasure and pain. Rahner’s Mary, on the other hand, continually yet practically silently works out her Vorgriff of Mystery. From Mary’s few words we know that she bears greater sublimity than both poet and priest, the preliminary candidates for models of humanity beyond grasping (§6), and the sublime-aesthetic artist of Chapter Three. Mary is the paradigmatic sublime apprehender, who, to use Ignatian-Rahnerian terminology, lets shine the glory of the sustaining Ground of all things. The chapter concludes with a recapitulation of our progress toward defining sublime apprehension and unfolding the Catholic sublime in Rahner.

Before leaving this extensive introduction, let us state the chapter’s thesis. The Catholic sublime, Catholicism’s comprehensive affirmative disposition, exemplified paradigmatically by Mary, appears in a special way in Rahner’s most apophatic moments, which open language past scientific assertion, 437 so language may let God appear as God.

§10. Geheimnis

Medieval Apophasis

Apo-phasis—loosely, this Greek word translates with a compound: nay-saying. Rahner has received a lion’s share of nay-sayers. Among the reasons—nay-sayers fault

437 Below it becomes explicit that “modern science” and “assertion” stand in for a variety of dispositions toward language that happen within a milieu determined by science and assertion—from rationalistic historicism to the militaristic, fideistic certitude of various pieties today.
Rahner’s view of and use of language.438 Nay-sayers come by their discomfort honestly. They share classical worries about the negative, the “-less.” Francis Caponi’s critique of Rahner’s theology of religious language centers on Rahner’s identification of grace and revelation, and tellingly ends with a reference—“in passing”—to Balthasar.439 Caponi borrows Balthasar’s preference for the aesthetics of form, thus an antipathy toward Rahner’s openness to form-less-ness. Mark McIntosh likewise appeals for Rahnerian “form-fullness.”440 James Voiss, on a more irenic note, tries to show how Rahner “sees” Balthasar’s “form.”441 This dissertation deems Rahner’s formlessness not a threat, but rather an opportunity, and one that, in any event, Balthasar benefited from just as much as Rahner.442

The next few pages show how Rahner looks to the past (medieval form), but faces up to the future (contemporary formless). Our access point lies in Spirit in the World, the

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438 Varied accusations have appeared, from a fundamental contradiction in Rahner’s theory of language (Caponi) to Rahner’s superficiality on the issue of language (Endean), and the ever-present claim that Rahner (co)vertly tries to evade language altogether (various). The main complaint is that Rahner attempts to say that the unsayable is unsayable by saying it. To substantiate this critique would involve repudiating the entire biblical and Western tradition on speaking of God. See a representative critique: Francis J. Caponi, “A Speechless Grace: Karl Rahner on Religious Language” in International Journal of Systematic Theology 9.2 (April 2007), pp. 200-221.


440 McIntosh, Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), p. 97. Something must be said about “form,” and the equivocal sense in which this chapter utilizes it. English uses a single word to express what Rahner (and Balthasar) call Form and Gestalt. The former, which Rahner uses frequently in the passages of Spirit in the World examined below, refers to universal forms in the sense of Plato’s forms. The latter, the form in form-less (Gestalt-loi), derives from Balthasar, and his concern with seeing (or the look of) the form (Schaud der Gestalt). Gestalt, in this sense, denotes a particular (yet absolutely unique) form, the “revelation-body” of Christ (GL1, p. 433), apprehended as the result of a concrete synthesis of (Platonic) form and matter. See the key section in GL 1, “Christ the Center of the Form of Revelation,” pp. 463-525. By comparison with Balthasar’s Gestalt, which refers to an object that has undergone what Rahner calls the conversion to the phantasm (the third “step”), Rahner’s Form, which refers to an element of abstraction (the second “step”), will look “formless.” The question of the status and meaning of this formlessness has yet to be asked sufficiently.


section indicated above: “Negation as Measure of the Freedom of Spirit in its Ordination to Sensibility (The Ontological Sense of ‘Nothing’)” (SW 297-99/223-24). This lead-in needs exegesis (ex-egesis = leading out). Rahner queries negation’s possibility—three words suffice to answer: apprehension of Being. As das Erst-Erfasste, first—“grasped,” Being conditions non-being. Rahner’s citations are instructive: Quaestiones disputatae de potentia 9.7.ad 15, and ST I.11.2.ad 4, inter alia. The former appears within a treatise on Trinity, and concerns the predication of number to God. In the article’s corpus, Thomas stridently argues that the exercise of naming God stands outside categories (e.g., quantity). By invoking this text, Rahner takes up residence, somehow, in Thomas’s theory of transcendentals. He prioritizes meta-physics over physics. Transcendental affirmations become negations of categorial predications. ST I.11.2 continues this thought, as it calls the transcendental, “one,” a “privation” of multitude (quantity). Rahner links these texts with the Vorgriff of absolute Being (esse schlechthin).

Being as first apprehended (by the Vorgriff, before objectivity—such is the Rahnerian Thomas’s thesis. The question at play comes from I.84.7, objection 3, regarding the understanding of incorporeal things: truth, God, angels. How do human knowers know them? Thomas answers, by comparatio, excessus, et remotio. Excessus serves as the linchpin for comparison and remotion (negation). Rahner calls excessus “Vorgriff.” This Vorgriff stands at the center of language, especially when it speaks of things incorporeal.

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443 Thomas, De potentia 9.7.corpus: In addition to the many philosophers who misinterpreted the issue of number and God, “there were others who, considering that there cannot be quantity of any kind in God, maintained that words signifying one or many have no positive signification when attributed to God, but only remove something from him. For they cannot ascribe to him save what they signify, to wit discrete quantity, and this can nowise be in God.” Thomas names Dionysius the Areopagite, John Damascene, Moses Maimonides, and Peter Lombard as some of these “others.”

444 Cf. SW 297/223, where Being “expresses the metaphysical structure of anything objectively apprehended (gegenständlich Erfaßten) in human knowledge at all.”
Rahner deploys this thesis for and against Heidegger. Rahner seeks, like Heidegger, a way beyond the hegemony of categorial predication (objectivity). Negation as Vorgriff leads the way—Vorgriff of esse. Being, not nothing, negates. It is not the nought that noughtens (HW 50/96). Rahner directs these words against Heidegger, much to Thomas Sheehan’s and Robert Masson’s chagrin.\(^{445}\) Our sustained argument associating Heidegger with Nietzsche’s Dionysos suggests why Rahner’s apparent misreading of Heidegger nevertheless hits the mark.\(^{446}\) For Rahner, beings border on the Ever-greater, not finitude. Rahner opens the possibility for seeing negation as a deepening engagement with (in) beings, not any ordinary removal of them, or abstraction from them. Hence the Rahnerian Thomas’s words: ens (empty being) is always already surpassed in the Vorgriff of esse (full being) (SW 298/223). Full being, received outside an apriorism of finitude as infinite, negates. Full being negates worldly beings (including me). But such negation opens (the) world to me (or us),\(^{447}\) as an

\(^{445}\) Sheehan and Masson both fault Rahner’s reading of Heidegger’s “nothing,” effectively calling it a shallow reading. A deep reading of Rahner, though, would show his own depth in interpreting Heidegger. See Sheehan, Karl Rahner, pp. 211-216; Robert Masson, “Rahner and Heidegger: Being, Hearing and God,” pp. 479ff. This latter article derails insofar as it reads the contrast between Rahner and Heidegger along the lines of Rahner’s supposed attempts at a transcendental proof of the existence of God, which differs from Heidegger’s non-interest in such a proof. This was not a major stake in Rahner’s project. The question of proving the existence of God is a noetic, not an ontophanic one, and Rahner is decidedly not interested in matters noetic. Rahner’s difference from Heidegger runs, once again, much deeper.

\(^{446}\) Stephen Fields, though he does not discuss Rahner and Heidegger with respect to Nietzsche’s Dionysian, does approach similar insights to this dissertation’s with respect to Rahner’s view of negation as reaching past finitude. Most importantly, Fields agrees that Sheehan and Masson misread Rahner on the way to their accusation of Rahner’s misreading of Heidegger. See Stephen Fields, “Rahner and the Symbolism of Language” in Philosophy & Theology 15.1 (2003) pp. 165-189, here pp. 181-186.

\(^{447}\) In keeping with last chapter’s concern with subjectivity, or the auto-nomy of the I, an example from Marion can illustrate what is afoot in Rahner. When reframing the idea of the I, beyond Heidegger’s Daein, Marion writes, “‘Mineness’ [Jemeinigkeit]—the characteristic according to which I am at issue, in person and without any possible substitution—can … be accomplished without self-determination or ‘anticipatory resoluteness,’ provided that a claim imposes a choice on me; or better: that a claim poses me as the there where one might recognize oneself. The proper name can be proclaimed only when called—by the call of the other. In short, the claim does not destroy the irreducible identity-with-self by dismissing any I in me, but, inversely, underscores it and provokes it.” Marion, Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evaston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 201. This last sentence proves crucial—a seeming negation of subjectivity strengthens it, but in the light of otherness. Similarly in Rahner, beings “negated” through abstraction in the light of the Vorgriff of esse are not destroyed,
offering (cf. §2 and KPM 63/90). An affirmative fullness offers itself—too much fullness, the fullness of the Absolute—in way that we thematize it, negatively, formlessly.\textsuperscript{448}

Formless negation is of spirit. Negation measures spirit’s freedom. Spirit’s freedom is formless. Spirit’s freedom plays, indeterminately. We have noted, using the rather unplayful metaphor of bookends, the play of the aesthetic and the sublime in human knowing (§4), or (less objectively) apprehension of truth. Spirit is free to view the world as the \textit{Spielraum} (play-space) in which it meets the other. For the Heideggerian Kant, the “finite creature” allows a \textit{Spielraum} by freely “holding itself in the nothing” (KPM 50-51). Heidegger borrows this word from Rilke (§8), whose “Open” envisions a \textit{Spielraum}. When finite spirit carves out a space to play, it tran-scends into a nothing that is not absolute nothing, but a nothing in which a thing may appear. Rahner’s “spirit” does something similar. Spirit lets things into an indeterminate realm. Not a realm of nothing, and surely not \textit{nihil absolutum}, but rather, for Rahner, \textit{esse absolutum}—spirit transpires here.

Spirit’s sublimity occurs as abstraction. Abstraction may now be re-vised as letting (\textit{lassen}). The letting comes from \textit{Gegenstehenlassen}, letting-stand-against. Heidegger says this in the \textit{Kantbuch}. Rahner adapts it.\textsuperscript{449} He unsays \textit{Gegensteben}, which forms objects (\textit{Gegenstände}). Spirit’s activity, for Rahner, occurs beyond objectivity. Spirit’s free play lets things appear. This letting comes to light as spirit’s free deployment of form. Through spirit, things are

\begin{itemize}
  \item[448]Terrance Klein’s language relating to Rahner contains an indisputable insight: “The key insight of Transcendental Thomism is not to concentrate upon the affirmations which our concepts might produce about God, but rather the recognition that language itself, the ability to grasp even the provisional essence of a known object, is only possible because that object reveals itself against an infinite horizon. In this sense, God appears not as that which is forged by language, but rather as the forge upon which language itself is produced.” The in some sense negative image of language being hammered out on a forge is, one must admit, a rather sublime one. Klein, “The Forge of Language” in \textit{Philosophy \& Theology} 15.1 (2003) pp. 143-163, here p. 147.

  \item[449]KPM §17 connects the \textit{Gegenstehenlassen} with a \textit{Vorgriff}: “In the face of what is encountered, this a priori unifying unity,” the \textit{Gegenstehenlassen}, “must grasp in advance (\textit{vorgreifen})” (KPM 54/77).
\end{itemize}
allowed to rise to form. The key is form’s infinity. Rahner tells us that form enjoys “negative infinity,” or the denial of “intrinsic limitedness” (*Ungegrenztheit*, SW 152/122-23).

In contrast to the definition of form as something distinct and perceptible as limited, this form looks formless—like the meontic, me-morphic. Rahner names it “formal actuality” (*formhafte Wirklichkeit*, SW 154/124). Via me-morphic activity, spirit apprehends matter, generally. Rahner says, for and against Heidegger, that spirit does know matter as set within nothing (general materiality), but only as this “broader nothing” folds into me-morphic infinity (SW 154/124). The *Vorgriff* opens this perspective, the perspective of spirit. This long, broad, “negative” view is truly free: “Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor 3.17).

This dissertation has repeated *ad infinitum* Rahner’s statement, “Every negation is founded upon an affirmation.” While on the topic of freedom, we can properly attend to the source Rahner cites for his statement. He footnotes Thomas’s treatise, *De malo* 2.1.ad 9 (SW 299/224). The title translates as *On Evil*. Rahner’s view of language—negation, privation—bears some reference to evil. Let us keep this in mind. *De malo* 2.1.ad 9 considers sins of omission, in terms of language. Thomas writes, “*Not every negation is founded on a real affirmation*” (!). Rahner, it seems, misread this. Thomas admits, though, “[E]very negation is grounded on an understood or *imaginary* affirmation (*in aliqua affirmatione intellecta vel imaginata*).” He gives the reason: “It is necessary for something of the thing negated to be apprehended (*esse apprehensum*).” Rahner’s ostensibly imprecise citation leads to a deeper insight. Negation is a problem of imagination and its free play. Negation proceeds from a certain apprehension, sublime apprehension of *esse*. “My” free delimitation

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450 *De malo* 2.1.ad 9, emphasis added. The next few references to Thomas come from the same paragraph.
of phenomenons occurs only by the arrival of the Unlimited. More accurately put, since the Unlimited happens through phenomena, they delimit themselves to me (dative) as free receiver (l’adonné). The Vorgriff’s ownmost activity gets constituted by this event of the Unlimited. This event, sublime apprehension, a “negative pleasure,” measures (is the measure of) spirit’s freedom. Hence Rahner’s prayer (1937): “You have seized me; I have not ‘grasped’ You.”

What, again, is freedom free to do? It is free to affirm. But what and how does it affirm? What is yea-saying? For Rahner, “the question is whether, according to Thomas, esse as ‘what is formal in everything’ can also express in its negative infinity an ultimate intrinsic finiteness. Thomas answers this question in the negative [verneint diese Frage]” (SW 184/144-45). According to the Rahnerian Thomas, a Dionysian standpoint proves untenable. Esse resists a priori circumscription in finitude. Esse is freedom’s “whither.” As such, it frees freedom, qua Vorgriff, to anticipate—the Infinite. The Vorgriff does not reach for Nothing, if this means “privative infinity,” or a finite indeterminacy that effectively equals privation of infinitude. Rather, the Vorgriff apprehends “negative infinity,” as “more” than “my” finite knowledge (SW 184-185/145). More, Mehr, magis—Rahner pits this quintessentially Jesuit word against Heidegger’s Nothing. More is no thing, but not nothing. More lures the Vorgriff vorwärts. The Vorgriff’s linguistic motion sur-passes objectivity (see SW 200/155).

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451 Kant, Critique of Judgment, §23, p. 102. See also Critique of Judgment §26, p. 111, which concerns measure. Furthermore, Kant contrasts apprehension and comprehension. The former “can go on ad infinitum,” but the latter “becomes harder the further apprehension advances, and soon attains to its maximum.” Such a passage shows how Kant positively prefigures Rahner and the Catholic sublime (Marion sees something like this). Rahner, riding the contours of Kant’s distinction between apprehension and comprehension, uncovers a comprehensive apprehension without the grasping of comprehension. The noetic cast of Kant’s comments, though, limits his contribution.

Throughout his writing life, Rahner found it more and more necessary to address the topic of mystery. Among other reasons, not that sufficient reason interested him, modern, objectivistic science’s pretended normativity leads Rahner to mystery. Modern science disregards mystery as nothing. Rahner deconstructs science. Thomas helps. First, let us observe some Rahnerian statements against science. Then we shall consider Rahner’s retrieval of Thomas (and Bonaventure) as a response to science’s ultimate vacuity.

*The Trinity* (1967) swipes at science. When science becomes the ideal measure of all knowledge, mystery “looks like a negative value, not like the most basic positive character of that supreme kind of true knowledge which derives from man’s openness to the lasting mystery.”\(^{453}\) Because of science’s hegemony, even theology made the mysterious idea of “incomprehensibility” a “(negative) attribute of God.” Because of science, mystery and incomprehensibility become assertions. They are names below all other names.\(^{454}\) “The Hiddenness of God” (1974) unloads more antipathy onto modern science.\(^{455}\) Rahner directly calls into question the Catholic “manualist” theology that sprouted from the tainted soil of modern science. This “traditional” theology fails to bear fruit on the topic of God’s hiddenness because it assumes a definition of knowledge as “comprehensive mastery.” For this mastery-model, an “object” that eludes the grasp of the understanding “must be qualified with the negative predicate of incomprehensible.”\(^{456}\) Rahner pointedly summarizes his rejoinder to “classical” theology. It cleaves to “a defective form of the true knowledge in

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\(^{453}\) Rahner, *The Trinity*, p. 50.


\(^{455}\) Rahner likens the idea of “the natural sciences” to the “Greek desire of absolute gnosis.” Rahner, “The Hiddenness of God” in *TI* 16, pp. 227-243, here p. 231.

\(^{456}\) Ibid., p. 234.
which the mystery itself unfolds.”  Modern Catholic theology, Rahner implies, is the dupe of modern science. This is unacceptable. Rahner anticipates something greater. In a 1982 lecture, he calls it “suprascientific.”

Rahner believes he has learned from Thomas a different way of parsing incomprehensibility. Rahner gives a rule—do “not overlook the fact that this doctrine is primarily a statement about the human person, about his finite nature and its positive quality.” Far from an anthropocentric statement, this rule relates (to) fundamental ontology. It speaks (of) finitude’s positivity. This positivity consists in the finite’s capacity to let the infinite be (infinite). Rahner refers to ST I.12.7. Here Thomas states, “God is called incomprehensible not because anything of God is not seen; but because God is not seen as perfectly as God is capable of being seen.” God gives God’s self to be seen. God shows God’s self—fully. But being given and shown does not necessarily imply being fully visible to the senses and fully cognizable to the understanding. It may seem like we see nothing, when we see no thing (i.e., object). But not so. In a (not-so-)different context, Marion muses, “We are granted a vision of the invisible.” Such a thought, in part, comes

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457 Ibid., p. 236.

458 Rahner, “A Theology That We Can Live With” in Theological Investigations 21: Science and Christian Faith. Trans. Hugh M. Riley (New York: Crossroad, 1988), pp. 99-112, here p. 104. This is as good a point as any to clarify Rahner’s stance vis-à-vis science. He does not eschew science because he wishes to inaugurate the sort of non-rigorous mish-mash that, unfortunately, often drips from the pens of Rahner’s self-proclaimed followers. Rather, Rahner chooses the term “suprascientific” to suggest that theology can take all that is good in science, releasing grasping and other unhelpful aspects of it, and elevate the good to greatness. For this reason Rahner makes sure to say later in the article, “Logic and its principle of contradiction are not the enemies of theology” (108).


460 ST I.12.7.ad2.

from Heidegger: “God’s *manifestness*—not only he himself—is mysterious.”

We cannot bear the full vision of God (cf. Ex 32.20; ST I.12.11.sed contra). But this possibility is given—not to comprehend God. Only to one bent on comprehension does the negative expression “in-comprehensibility” seem negative. It teaches that finite beings can always approach God. Put otherwise, finitude is always before grasping (*Vorgriff*). This is our destinal task.

Two points now press themselves upon the discussion—one on ST I.12, and one on Rahner’s article on Thomas and incomprehensibility. First, Thomas’s question, “How God is known by us,” yields little to no material on epistemology, but a bountiful harvest on eschatology. Without a doubt, 1 Jn 3.2, “We shall see God as God is,” steers the whole question.

Our knowledge of God, figured as final vision, depends upon God’s gift of *lumen gloriae*. The light of glory is the eschatological fulfillment of the light of faith.

Thomas puts human knowledge on edge. Rahner knows this. Thus, second, Rahner’s choice to end his article on Thomas with a section on “*excessus*” makes sense. Rahner treats Thomas’s *excessus*, from *Spirit in the World* on, as equivalent to the *Vorgriff*. In turn, the *Vorgriff* refers inevitably to eternal beatitude. Rahner submits that for Thomas, God’s incomprehensibility resides in the *excessus*. This *excessus*, *Vorgriff*, grounds all knowledge. It does so by and as a “free human act in which a person accepts her own being ordered in grace to the incomprehensibility of God.” Divine and human freedom (of spirit) interlace.

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464 ST I.12.5.corpus and ad 3. With the *lumen gloriae* comes *deiformitas* (deiformity) of intellect—Thomas’s teaching on *thesis*. See also I.12.6.corpus.

Furthermore, freedom and intellect cross. All meet at an “origin”—a root of both stems (now more than just sensibility and understanding). This origin is the Vorgriff.

Within his concluding statements on excessus, Rahner raises the topic of language—through negation. Rahner denies a mindset that identifies excessus and via eminentiae. 466 Thirty-five years previously, Rahner makes the same point (see SW 394/291). What does Rahner mean? Rahner grapples with modern Thomistic views of language. Nothing is wrong with the via eminentiae per se. Rahner’s word, “simply,” indicates that a complex view of both excessus and via eminentiae must hold sway. Rahner wishes to make sure that ontological weight backs Thomas’s theory of eminent predication in ST I.13. In Thomas himself, of course, it does. The way of eminence does not serve merely as a noetic tool. Language does not simply speak. Language opens. Language provides access—because of excessus. Because God self-communicates to persons in the Vorgriff, we can sublimely say God’s sublimity.

This all relates to negation. After all, excessus founds negation (remotio) (SW 52-53/49-50). In “Priest and Poet” (cf. §6), Rahner puts an ontophanic spin on words. Among his profound comments on poetic language, Rahner cautiously remarks, “Were it not to sound exclusively negative, and therefore destructive, one could say that negation alone lives in it. The word alone is the gesture which transcends everything that can be represented and imagined, to refer us to infinity.” 467 Language, especially when directed toward God, manifests itself negative-ly. Indeed, it is not destructive to say negation lives in words. Looking back to the “Incomprehensibility” essay, Rahner pleads for a serious retrieval of “Thomas’s doctrine of a perichoresis … of the transcendent determination of a being as

466 Ibid., Rahner’s exact phrasing: “This ‘excessus’ should not simply be identified with the ‘via eminentiae,’ even though it is the latter’s ultimate foundation.”

distinct from its categorial determinations."\textsuperscript{468} The negative gesture of word helps maintain this distinction, which facilitates the dancing-around of “determinations,” or names.

Rahner draws fire from all sides for speaking on names, or no-names. The anonymous should, though, represent not a Rahnerian lightning rod for controversy, but rather a heuristic device for dis-covering a more Rahnerian Rahner. Anonymous Christians—Rahner made this phrase (in)famous. But “anonymous” has a more primordial reference point than those who have not found a home (\textit{Heimat}) in the Church. Instead, “Anonymous” approximates God. Human knowers, when forming concepts, reach “out beyond the conceptual into the nameless and the incomprehensible.”\textsuperscript{469} We sense God as the \textit{Geheimnis} (Mystery) whose \textit{Heimat} is not limited to human language and knowledge. Mystery eludes the categories of understanding and the strictures of human language (even poetry). Rahner emphasizes this point to release theology from determination by modern science and subjectivity. If Mystery tied itself to categories, our best hope would be a “journey into the bright light of categorial and ultimately scientific understanding.”\textsuperscript{470} This light would wax ever more hellish. This hell would be excessive comfort. The Christian, by contrast with the modern scientist, risks exposure to the Nameless. The Christian reaches meta-physics. Rahner describes the meeting with Mystery in sublime terms. Mystery menaces us, makes us “chafe and protest,” it “seems to ask too much … to overburden [us] with monstrous claims.” Mystery leads where we do not want to go (Jn 21.18). Mystery, respecting human freedom, forces upon each person a choice, between an “uncharted, unending adventure where he commits himself to the infinite, or … of taking shelter in the

\textsuperscript{468} Rahner, “Incomprehensibility of God,” p. 254.


\textsuperscript{470} Ibid., p. 237.
suffocating den of his own fine perspicacity.”\footnote{471} The one who chooses to follow Mystery elects (= is elected by) a sheltering danger over a dangerous shelter (§5).

Rahner foregrounds the Anonymous, always in protest against physic-al cleverness, sometimes to disrupt overly certain piety. He never unsays, though, the link between God’s Namelessness and God’s revelation in the economy (§7). Spirit’s sublime freedom braids in one rope with aesthetic receptivity. Spirit’s freedom is ordained to sensibility. In Rahner’s own words, “The abstract notion of the absolute proximity and self-communication of God … is and can only be attained in the experience of the incarnation and grace.”\footnote{472} But one ought not to negate the impact of Rahner’s attention to the sublime, formless, transcendental, anonymous. When, in \textit{Foundations}, Rahner insists on the transcendental as \textit{a posteriori}, he protests too much (FCF 52ff.). He should have maintained his position from \textit{Spirit in the World}. Recall the footnote on the \textit{a priori} in Thomas versus in Augustine (SW 390n9). The position is an apriorism of intellectual light (\textit{lumen}). Rahner, like Thomas, need not apologize for his apriorism, nor back into the corner of the a posteriori. Why not? Critics of the Rahnerian doctrine of Mystery tacitly submit to the modern priority of reason. They bow to physics. They regard Mystery as a deficiency of truth.\footnote{473} Thus Rahner appears either agnostic or Gnostic. With these two names, critics attempt to silence Rahnerian questioning. Neither name sticks. Rahner’s apriorism of \textit{lumen}, shining through the \textit{Vorgriff}, elucidates the world with a primordial Yes to God’s Truth. The Yes is thematized as a No

\footnote{471} For the past several ideas, see Rahner, “Concept of Mystery,” p. 58.

\footnote{472} Ibid., p. 72.

\footnote{473} See Ibid., p. 41. Typical is Burke, \textit{Reinterpreting Rahner}, p. viii: “[D]espite its originality and brilliance, there is a fundamental weakness in Rahner’s system. The role of the concept in his epistemology is weak. Rahner, recognizing the importance of conceptual knowledge in distinguishing his position from modernism, insisted doggedly on both the necessity and validity of the concept within the knowing process. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ground the claim within his own system.” Burke blames this on Rahner’s failure to treat properly the passive intellect. This dissertation is a commentary on Rahner’s extensive, deep, and thick treatment of the passive intellect, which he also calls imagination.
to merely worldly truth, and to simply worldly names for God. Rahner offers transcendental affirmation that sounds like categorial negation.

The Rahner-Marion relationship can assist us in understanding Rahner’s difficult manner of speech. It has been called reductive. Let us reframe the word, “reduction.” Husserl reinvigorated reduction’s etymology—re-ducere, to lead back. In Husserlian phenomenology, phenomena are re-duced to consciousness. Marion amends Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, recasting it as the reduction to givenness. For Marion, phenomena re-duce consciousness to themselves. The grammar of the preceding sentences shows that Marion aims to effect a reversal. He envisions a new method of thought, a “counter-method.”

Marion’s reduction, his counter-method, incidentally, strikingly resembles Rahner’s famous (ly misinterpreted) “reductio in mysterium.” Rahner invokes this (counter-) methodology in many places, but in no other place does he discuss it as pithily as in “Reflections on Methodology in Theology” (1969). Rahner again rejects science’s comprehensive mastery. Against Mystery, mastery reveals itself as deficient. Mystery overtakes the stratum of science. Digging deeper, Rahner considers the stratum of theology. This discipline traditionally regards itself as expositor of manifold mysteries. Theology’s

474 Marion, Being Given, p. 10. Marion speaks on this page of a “turning,” an operation that looks “negative,” but ultimately only because it (the reduction) “does nothing” to something positive. He describes the turning: “Phenomenological method … claims to deploy a turn, which goes not simply from [scientific] proving to [phenomenological] showing, but from showing in the way that an ego makes an object evident to letting an apparition in an appearance show itself: a method of turning that turns against itself and consists in this reversal itself—counter-method.” A multitude of issues could be discussed here, most importantly, that Marion’s view of counter-method may be the best reading of Heidegger’s much-discussed Kehre.

475 Rahner, “The Concept of Mystery,” p. 62: “[A]ll understanding of any reality whatsoever is in the last resort always a ‘reductio in mysterium,’ and any comprehension which is or seems to be devoid of the character of mystery, is only arrived at through the unspoken convention that this ‘reductio in mysterium Dei should be excluded from the start’—i.e., an apriorism of finitude.

agenda, accordingly, proceeds within the categories of quantity. Theology enumerates *mysteria stricte dicta*. Rahner finds this assumption questionable. He deems it odd that generations of theologians left it unquestioned. He questions.⁴⁷⁷ Do not Mystery and mysteries have nothing to do with number?⁴⁷⁸  At most, Mystery “relates” to One (the transcendental). Theology must follow a method that approximates this One-ness without number. Theology “has the task of reducing the mysteries which manifest themselves, or appear to manifest themselves in it to this single mystery”—of God.⁴⁷⁹ Rahner requests not conceptual “unifying and systematizing,” but rather active-receptivity to the summons latent in all dogmatic statements.⁴⁸⁰ Rahner’s *reductio* leads all things back to God’s Trinitarian Incomprehensibility.

Apropos of medieval apophasis, Thomas has been the focus thus far. Bonaventure now demands a (brief) hearing. Without Bonaventure, the *reductio in mysterium* would have remained inapparent to Rahner. How does Bonaventure show him the *reductio*? Emmanuel Falque, a philosopher (and student of Marion) specializing in medieval philosophy and phenomenology, answers. Falque styles Bonaventure as a proto-phenomenologist. Bonaventure even out-phenomenologizes phenomenologists, from Husserl through post-Heideggerians. A reduction guides Bonaventure’s thought in several works, most obviously the *De reductione artium in theologiam*, but also the *Breviloquium* and *Commentary on the Sentences*.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 105.


⁴⁸⁰ … and presumably in liturgical, devotional, and ethical-political testimonies to revelation. Ibid., p. 110.

In this latter, Falque examines the notion of *persuicratio*. This is, Falque argues, a method of “boundless, bottomless penetration into the mystery.”482 Falque further specifies the method as “capable of supporting [a] dive into mystery without either destroying the mystery or priding itself on the discovery of it.”483

*De reductione artium in theologiam*, Bonaventure’s tiny treatise on education, exemplifies this *persuicratio* perfectly. He names four “lights” that trace back (re-duce) to Mystery: external, lower, inner, and higher. These correspond to four sets of “arts”: mechanical arts, sensation, philosophical knowledge, and grace/Sacred Scripture.484 Bonaventure calls these four “lights/arts” his “fourfold” (*quadruplex*). The *quadruplex* provides access to the hidden God. The *quadruplex* opens this access by its ordination to the Wisdom of Scripture.485 Bonaventure makes several passes through the *quadruplex*, achieving new depth (nearness to Mystery) each time. He finds that the “multi-form (*multiformis*) Wisdom of God … lies hidden (*occultatur*) in all knowledge and all nature.” Indeed, “in everything that is sensed (*sentitur*) or known God Himself lies (*interius lateat ipse Deus*).”486 All things re-duce to God’s hiddenness.

A Bonaventurian impulse, it seems, steers Rahner’s counter-subjective method. No destruction, no prideful grasping of Mystery, but rather *persuicratio* or *reductio in Mysterium*—

482 Falque, “Phenomenological Act of Persuicratio,” here p. 9. See also p. 7: “The Heideggerian determination of the phenomenon … is already at play—paradoxically as if in advance of itself—in the depths of the river that, according to Bonaventure, are to be searched.”

483 Ibid., p. 10.


485 Ibid., p. 29.

486 Ibid., p. 40-41, emphasis added, ET modified.
Rahner deploys these theological strategies. Not scientific stripping of Mystery, but a trusting dive into a Mystery already open—Rahner wants/does/says this.

The last several pages have let a complex Rahnerian concatenation: negation—transcendental—freedom—Mystery—reductio. Spirit, sublime, and form-less reinforce the chain. Amid Rahner’s reflections on the reductio, he utters the phrase “authentic silence.” Such silence has its source in Christ’s lips, sealed in death. This incomparably free (not passively contemplative) silence suffuses each word of Rahnerian theologia. One could say negation alone lives in her—kept in her heart (Lk 2.51).

Mary

Mary, of the same race as ourselves, is the portal of divine mercy, the gate of heaven, through which we are in fact saved and redeemed and taken up into the life of God.

As observed in this chapter’s introduction, Rahner does not make Mary a centerpiece of his theology. Nor does Rahner elucidate any clear connections between Mary and his early philosophical works. The following comments on Rahnerian Mariology may strike the reader, then, as counterintuitive, even eccentric. This last word fits because of the manner in


488 Craigo-Snell picks out silence as one of three themes with primacy of importance in Rahner’s thought. The reader would to well to consult Craigo-Snell, Silence, Love and Death, pp. 39-78.


490 As does, for example, Balthasar, who quite literally places Mary at the center of the central panel of his theological triptych. See Balthasar, Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Volume 3: The Dramatis Personae, The Person of Christ, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), pp. 283-360. With Balthasar on the table, it must be said that he and Rahner engage in similar strategies to redeem Marian doctrines in a time when people began to find them obsolete and inscrutable. But despite their similarities in this respect one must see Balthasar and Rahner as different insofar as the former utilizes Mary mostly as a type of the Church, whereas the latter makes a concerted effort to emphasize the personal, individual aspect of Mary, even when he puts her forward as a paradigmatic figure.
which scholars of Rahner have treated his Marian writings. The works on Marian doctrine usually fall within more general treatments of Rahner’s view of the development of dogma—and quite legitimately. After all, the very title of a significant Rahnerian writing on Mary, “Virginitas in partu,” bears the subtitle, “A Contribution to the Problem of the Development of Dogma and of Tradition.” This subtitle underscores the content and intent of several other essays in Rahner’s Mariology. Mary does not, it has already been said, reside in the center of Rahner’s theology, but she gives expression to it. For this reason, the tendency of Rahnerian scholars to emphasize times when Rahner seems to push Mary to the margins of theology are on the one hand perfectly legitimate, but on the other hand somewhat distorted.

Rahner’s writings on Mary allow him to perform the Catholic sublime, in that Rahner attempts to redeem all Marian dogmas and doctrines. He refuses to short-change any Catholic doctrine in the interest of some apologetics we can “live with.” Indeed, this is a sublime, a great, an immeasurably difficult task. To add to the challenge of this task, its fundamental affirmation of Mary and teachings about Mary get thematized negatively. Naturally, then, interpreters see similarities between Rahner’s approach and something like Kant’s sloughing off of parerga, or doctrines deemed marginal to true religion. But Rahner’s negativity is altogether different from Kant’s. Following Heidegger’s displacement

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of assertoric logic (see §11), Rahner calls propositions into question insofar as they promise to yield a firm, noetic grasp of things in themselves. Rahner attempts to release Marian doctrines from a rubric of correctness—e.g., is it correct that Mary never sinned?—so as to truly expose Mary’s significance. This is why Rahner boldly declares that the “Church does not need to know anything from history” to know about Mary’s life, and specifically her life’s consummation (the Assumption). Marian doctrines are not condensed statements from historical science. Marian doctrines are not tools, present-at-hand (vorhanden). Marian doctrines should not be employed as bricks to fortify a bastion. But nor should they be ignored. These Rahnerian points speak against, un-say, at least three perspectives: 1) modern historical science, 2) self-proclaimed conservative contemporary Catholic piety (which coheres with a certain stripe of apologetics), and 3) progressive apologetics. Rahner constructs his own, suprascientific rapport with Church teaching. Marian doctrines, if allowed to say what they say—not more or less, invite a persucratio into Mary, so she may reduce us to Mystery.

On the one hand, then, this subsection meditates on Rahner’s sublime-aesthetic redemption of Marian teachings. Inasmuch as these teachings express Mary as a special way to Mystery, we respect Mary as a sublime “object” (notice the quotation marks, since objects are in question), as reflecting God’s sublimity. On the other, this subsection makes some headway toward characterizing Mary as, “subjectively,” the consummate sublime apprehender. Mary is the mother of Jesus, and in traditional dogmatics, Mother of God. Rahner expounds these beliefs, familiar from catechesis, into a sublime-aesthetic theology. Rahner treats Mary not as some passive receiver that utters “fiat” in some weak sense, but rather as the lowly one whom God lifts up (remember the connection between exaltation

494 Rahner, Mary, Mother of the Lord, p. 83.
and the sublime) in and through her own word. Rahner’s Mariology contrasts with Thomas’s on this point. Thomas regards Mary, according to the science of his time, as a pure patient. Mary cannot cooperate with God in Jesus’ generation (thus the Word’s Incarnation) because, supposedly, the female plays merely a passive role in reproduction. Not so for Rahner—Mary as exemplar of cooperative grace actively receives Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. She paradigmatically performs the human sublime-aesthetic encounter with God, activity that intertwines with receptivity and stems from a root prior to activity and passivity. Rahner affirms, “[T]his divine motherhood occurs, by God’s grace, as a freely-willed conception, receiving for the world the grace that the incarnation brings; it is a true partnership with God’s action for humankind.” Mary sets the stage for all Christian sublime apprehension. She differs from Christ in that she actively receives Christ—thus she does not satisfy the condition for being a sublime “object” in the sense of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (the condition being absolute unconditionedness). Mary embodies the “subjective” side of post-subjective sublime apprehension, the action of one living the Catholic sublime. But Mary does this in an absolutely unique way: she gives birth to God. Mary receptively-actively opens the world to the “eternal mercy” God offers in Christ. Mary is hardly a marginal figure. As the sublime apprehender par excellence, she directs us to the center of Rahner’s theology.

495 Thomas, ST III.32.4.corpus and ad 1: “that she might … bring Him forth, not actively, but passively, just as other mothers achieve this through the action of the male seed.”

496 Rahner, Mary, Mother of the Lord, p. 13, emphasis added. See also Rahner, “The Immaculate Conception” in TI 1, pp. 201-213, here p. 203: “[T]his Motherhood is a free act of the Virgin’s faith.”

497 See Rahner, Mary, Mother of the Lord, p. 36: “Mary is the perfect Christian … because in the faith of her spirit and in her blessed womb, with body and soul, then, and all the powers of her being, she received the eternal Word of the Father.” See also one of Rahner’s latest essays, “Courage for Devotion to Mary,” p. 135: “She is not grace, she is not the one mediator, but she is the free acceptance of grace and of the one mediator, that in the history of salvation occurred once and for all of us.”

498 Rahner, Mary, Mother of the Lord, p. 60.
The following exposition of Rahner’s Marian writings is organized according to three Marian dogmas: the Immaculate Conception, Virginity, and the Assumption. These “mysteries” lead back to the (transcendentally) One Mystery—God. Each Marian “mystery” inscribes the complex interplay of the “subjective” and “objective” sublime in such a way that we may recognize, in Mary and teachings about her, the Catholic sublime. So as to unveil better the experience of Mary (in both senses of the genitive) on which Rahner meditates, three meditations guide us.

1) The Immaculate Conception attests to Mary’s reception of God’s gift of grace. She is gifted, *l’adonnée*. From the beginning, Mary receives no thing but the Spirit’s influence.\(^{499}\) This in-flow leaves out guilt. Sin is ordinary human experience; it orients our freedom. We always live with it. As sinners, we grasp worldly things. Mary does not live with sin. For her, though she, every day of her life, is an everyday person, sin is not something to be lived with. If we want to follow God, we cannot write off sin as a matter of course. Nor, and this is the implication of “living with” sin, may we regard God as a matter of course, who could disregard sin by fiat. No—Rahner writes of Mary in a 1954 essay, “There was someone for once who endured being out of the ordinary and for whom God never became ordinary. There was someone who could receive God’s grace in overflowing fullness without keeping it.”\(^{500}\) Much has been made of Rahner’s theology of the everyday, or Rahner as everyday theologian, or “mystic of everyday life,” but this characterization of Rahner usually derails as soon as it departs.\(^{501}\) Rahner’s view of everyday or ordinary things

\(^{499}\) Ibid., p. 50.


\(^{501}\) See Harvey Egan, *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1998) for an example of how seeing Rahner as the “everyday” theologian succeeds. Egan emphasizes, rightly, that Rahner’s interest is not ultimately the everyday, but how even the everyday re-duces to God. The problem with a book like
always runs through the optic of the extraordinary. Mary, the paradigmatic sublime apprehender, shows this fact with perfect clarity. Receiving God’s grace in overflowing fullness without keeping it—probably no better formulation of the Catholic sublime exists in Rahner’s corpus. Mary lives without regard for sin. Its glamour, so perniciously everyday, attracts her not. She directs indifference, to use a powerful Ignatian word, toward it. Mary meets God, separate from sin. This comprises the true calling of all Christians, not living with (settling for) the everyday. Like Mary, the sublime apprehender par excellence, we must render the everyday sublime, extraordinary, even uncanny.

Mary manifests a calling. It appears through her as sinlessness, or as an absence of the everyday. But to be precise, Mary’s sinlessness (God’s call to her) first comes to light in language, when Mary responds to the angel Gabriel, “Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum” (Lk 1.38, Vulgate). Anna and Joachim could not see Mary’s sinlessness as she grew up. The “less” shows itself in word (first). The “less” thematizes fullness (of grace). This thematization does not reach its full manifestness—thus it appears as nothing—until Christ’s Resurrection. The Resurrection lays bare Mary’s role as sinless. Her redemption avant la lettre lights up ex post facto. Rahner emphatically states that Mary “is the one member of the redeemed without whom it is impossible to think of the Redemption as victorious.”

Mary, sinless, is necessary, universally (beyond scientific modality and quantity).

Universally—Mary’s fiat contra-dicts modern privatism, the autism of the modern subject. Rahner teaches that Mary’s preservation from original sin, put into word by the fiat,

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Egan’s, though, is that his subtlety is easily lost on less careful interpreters of Rahner. The very title of Egan’s book bears within it the danger that “everyday mystic” becomes a misleading slogan that misses the point of Rahner’s analyses of everyday phenomena.


503 Rahner, “The Immaculate Conception” in TI 1, pp. 201-213, here p. 213.
is not a private evasion of Adam’s loss of grace. Rather, the Father grasps the whole world by appropriating grace to Mary “in the Son in her womb.” God gives Mary “radical redemption” as her property, but not as private property, that great engine of business. Mary receives “the whole Christ” corporeally, making way for corporate—common—redemption. She becomes “Mother of all the living.”  

Mary, sinless, has—is—a Vorgriff of full redemption for all to share. How?

Mary uniquely plays the role of anticipating the unanticipated Christ. The angel’s words give to Mary (l’adonnée) the fullness of the Trinitarian economy (cf. §7), the missions of Son and Spirit (Lk 1.31-33, 35). Mary asks, “How can this be?” (1.34). This shows that the angel’s words remain mysterious in their manifestness. The words seem non-sensical, or overladen with sense—as formless content. Mary cannot fully anticipate the angel’s meaning (1.29). She cannot grasp it as a concept. But her response, “Fiat,” evidences a certain capacity for receiving Mystery. A Vorgriff empowers her fiat. In the fiat, an action of spirit, potentiality and actuality are indistinguishable—“to move” and “to be moved” are the same (SW 359/266). Potentiality equals power, equals (in this case) power deployed (actualized). But this is a peaceful power, an Ohnmacht that, due to its ohne (-less), is Übermacht. This is not a superpower, the superior willing of the Übermensch, or the poesy of Rilke’s Angel, but the work of a human, full of grace. Mary’s Vorgriff involves no grasping. The son Mary will bear, Jesus, remains, at the time of the fiat, a possibility (potentiality). Jesus is, for Mary, the future. Mary cannot comprehend this future, but she apprehends this future comprehensively—the Catholic sublime. Mary’s yes (thematized by the fiat) manifests itself as a no, a no to sin, a no to the everyday insofar as it is sinful, but also a no to a finite world


505 Recall the discussion (§5) of Heidegger’s Ohnmacht and Übermacht in Being and Time.
in which the infinite has not definitively and finally appeared. Mary rejects, *in principium*, a Dionysian worldview. Mary negates an apriorism of finitude.

A *Vorgriff* of the Unanticipatable, actualized, exalts Mary. By her exaltation (and ours), God “is” Ever-greater—an Ignatian reading of Mary that Rahner, as Ignatian, provides. Mary expresses her exaltation, the Ever-greater God, in sublime language: *Magnificat* (Lk 1.46). Mary speaks in the grand style. This is not a Nietzschean grand style, but rather the language—the art—that comes from the lowliest, the most sober one. Mary does not attempt to stir up excitement in an empty world, but rather to give word to a full world—a world of grace.506

2) The doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity magnifies the Lord further. This teaching expresses far more than—though does not, *per* the Catholic sublime, leave behind—biological abstinence. It expresses More, *in se*. It reassures us that “an attitude of expectation, of readiness and receptivity to grace … [an] awareness that the ultimate thing is grace and grace alone” is possible. It happened in and as Mary. The world may find this attitude sterile, Rahner admits.507 Virginity, whether as biological abstinence from sexual intercourse or a prayerful cultivation of constant readiness for mystery or both, normally issues in nothing productive. Virginity does not calculate. Virginity does not manufacture. Modern science may find it impossible that Mary remained a virgin her whole life—simple biological urges would surely preclude that. But the main objections to dogmatic propositions about Mary’s perpetual virginity emit from the businessperson’s mindset, which


demands productivity. It chafes at the thought of “nothing productive.” Nothing comes from nothing—so says the grasping subject—nothing consumable nor consumed. But in Mary ex-ists a no to sexual consummation. Rahner knows that this no thematizes consummiate fecundity. Ex Maria virgine exemplifies transcendental affirmation—the fundamental yes of the sublime apprehender.

When Thomas reflects on Mary’s virginity, he quotes Augustine. The bishop of Hippo writes that closed doors present no obstacle to God. Jesus arrives through locked doors (Jn 20.19, 26). Doors and thresholds suggest the sublime. God meets us at the threshold. Mary welcomes God at her door, and at the door she remains. This belief about Mary elicits reflection not just from Augustine and Thomas, but from a host of other Christian writers throughout the centuries. Rahner traces this long line in his extraordinarily rich yet almost universally ignored essay, “Virginitas in partu” (1960). This essay considers a significant profile of the overall phenomenon of Mary’s perpetual virginity. Mary, the teaching goes, did not lose her virginity even though/as she gave birth to a child (Jesus).

Time and space limit our ability to attend to Rahner’s survey of Christian thinking on Mary’s virginity in partu, or in Jesus’ statu nascendi. We must, though, let “Virginitas in partu” instruct us. Of particular interest is Rahner’s critical response to theologian Albert Mitterer. Rahner finds the latter’s work on Mary’s virginity unacceptable on account of its presupposition of a “circumscribed, biological notion of birth.” Mitterer self-legislates an exclusive adherence to modern science. Rahner rejects—negates—this perspective. Likewise, on the other side, Rahner criticizes the “undialectically smooth and clear terms”

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508 Thomas, ST III.28.2.ad 3, citing Augustine’s commentary on John’s Gospel.

that “some ‘pious people’” apply to Mary’s childbearing in the name of orthodoxy. Such people declare Mary’s virginitas in partu miraculous, and assume that such a statement ends the discussion. To the contrary, Rahner submits, calling this tenet of faith a miracle does not make the thing itself … very mysterious. The problem now clarifies itself. Rahner worries that scientifically- (or historically-, to link this discussion with an earlier one) and piously-minded persons fail to open themselves adequately to Mystery. At this point Rahner does not set out in “Virginitas in partu” to find a “nucleus” of the teaching, as Herbert Vorgrimler has it, but rather a “more concrete picture of the doctrine [of virginitas in partu].” Rahner does not strip, as it were, a cellular membrane and cytoplasm (parerga) off of the doctrine’s nucleus. This would be a rather scientific approach, much like Rahner’s opponent in the essay, Mitterer. Instead, Rahner approaches the doctrine more gently—sublime-aesthetically.

Both modern science and modern “piety” direct aesthetic concerns toward Mary’s virginity, thus both science and piety lend themselves to aesthetic reading. To select two important concerns—science and piety worry about pain and the hymen. They make assertions about Mary’s body. They do not take care with language, and so they threaten Mary’s body. Science, including contemporary common sense, finds that motherhood includes childbirth pangs and a breach of the hymen. Mitterer, among hordes of others, holds these truths. If Mary indeed gave birth to Jesus, she suffered these things. “Piety,” or ecclesiastical common sense, contends that divine motherhood implies a miraculous removal.

510 Ibid., p. 156n97.
511 Ibid., p. 152.
of pain in childbirth (cf. Gen 3.16) and the maintenance of “intact” body parts. Thus, Mary experienced joy in partu without suffering. Neither science nor piety satisfies Rahner. Mary is other(wise). Rahner urges “prudence” in depicting Mary’s “‘otherness.’” Theologians can draw such practical wisdom from the “criterion of the salvific economy of Christ”—paradox. Mary embodies the paradox of Christianity as her “grand style,” as a capacity actively to receive the economy. Due to her unique standing (sinlessness), Mary can “turn what she has to submit to into the pure expression of her active decision.” The economy arrives to Mary without her ability to fore-see it, but by freedom (of spirit) Mary does her best to do justice to it, in the world. Mary puts her sinlessness to work in partu. Vorgreifen is Mary’s art, the art that all in whom the Vorgriff operates (i.e., all people) are called to practice. This art somehow relates, in Mary’s case, to pain and to “bodily integrity,” but Rahner worries about those who say exactly how. Rahner reserves some pointed questions for the “pious” one who denies childbirth pain to Mary, on account of Mary’s sinlessness. “Piety” calculates: sin results in pain. Quite logically, no sin equals no pain. Rahner retorts, are pain and sin necessarily aligned? Could pain not be “of a healthy nature and an exuberance of life”? How does the “pious” one understand “painlessness,” given pain’s physiological and spiritual complexity? For Mary, in partu, “has the physiological element been changed, or the personal interpretation, which is

514 Ibid., p. 160. Rahner renders Mary’s “otherness” even more other by enveloping it in quotation marks.

515 Ibid., p. 160, 159.

516 Cf. Marion, In Excess, p. 126: “I will only be able to bear this paradox and do it justice in consecrating myself to its infinite hermeneutic according to space, and especially time.”

517 Ibid., p. 48: “L’adonné[e] is … characterized by reception. Reception implies, indeed, passive receptivity, but it also demands active capacity, because capacity (capacitas), in order to increase to the measure of the given and to make sure it happens, must be put to work—work of the given to receive, work on itself in order to receive.” Cf. the material below on Heidegger’s “Origin” and art (as) putting itself to work.
an intrinsic element of the pain which is experienced?” Is pain inevitably “caused by hostile attack and moral misdeeds (cf. Jn 9.1ff)? Lastly, Rahner asks whether the “pious” one considers that “Mary’s integrity is infralapsarian … that it works in and through the law of suffering and pain.”\footnote{Rahner, “Virginitas in partu,” pp. 159-160.} Rahner puts out more questions in this vein, this time more toward “scientific” ones, with regard to Mary’s bodily integrity: “[W]hat is really included in the concept of ‘bodily integrity’? … Are any of the processes of normal birth to be placed under the rubric of ‘injury’ or ‘damage’ (corruptio)? And if so, what has been damaged? The ‘virginity’ or bodily ‘integrity’ or ‘soundness’?”\footnote{Ibid, p. 161.} Science (along with business) protests against the closed door that Catholic dogma ascribes to Mary. Science assumes clear and distinct knowledge of bodily integrity—a virgin’s biological non-participation in coitus. In a gesture that mirrors “piety’s” equation of sin and pain, science asserts, a priori, birth involves damage. Science and piety, each in their own way, break the mystery of Mary’s person by failing to speak well, by saying too much, too forcefully. Science and piety, each in their own way, assert. Rahner, as we have seen, questions.

Through the question, Rahner suggests Mary’s spiritual (meaning that which relates to free disposition of body) response to Jesus Christ’s advent. Bracketing Mary’s pain and miraculously preserving her “integrity,” as the “pious” one would have it, would prettify the sublimity of Christ’s nativity. Categorically predicing the ordinary pain of childbirth and a rupture of the hymen (loss of virginity) to Mary, as the “scientific” one would have it, would remove the sublimity of Christ’s nativity. The Catholic dogma of Mary’s perpetual virginity, by contrast, shelters the sublimity of Christ’s nativity in the way it proposes Mary as, by analogy, a sublime “object” of faith in her “subjective” attitude of sublime apprehension.
Mary’s active reception of the economy reduces her, and us through her, to Mystery. The dogma of Mary’s perpetual virginity gives no details about how Mary remained virgin. The lack of details, the negative space—to use a term from painting—of dogma opens questions that need not, cannot be closed by determinate answers. Rahner says this not, pace his critics and his supporters (like Vorgrimler), to explain Mystery away, but to preserve it. He is convinced “that our language about God’s grace”—and Mary, full of grace—“can never be a discourse of control, of grasping.” Rahner, following the syntax of dogma, leaves the undecidable (Mary’s pain and hymen) undecided—if decidedly “virginal.”

This sounds French (Derrida). Not quite—this is a performance of the Catholic sublime, formless “by excess, not default.” Marian doctrines contain a relatively small number of words, as is true of other central teachings of the faith. These words, though few, open a comprehensive vista. Marian doctrines carry within their words the “silent music of infinity” (§6, “Priest and Poet”). Because of this linguistic proximity of Mary and the Trinitarian Mystery in dogma, we may see Mary, in this way, as sublime “object.” She stands always in

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520 The proposition that Mary is Virgin ante partum, in partu, and post partum “does not offer us the possibility of deducing assertions about the concrete details of the process, which would be certain and universally binding.” Ibid., p. 162. See also Rahner, “Mary’s Virginity” (1976) in TI 19, pp. 218-232, here p. 227-228: “Is it really necessary, after all, always to give an unambiguous answer immediately to all questions which arise in faith and in theology?”

521 Cf. Endean, KRIS, p. 171.

522 Rahner, “Virginitas in partu,” p. 162. Notable on this page is Rahner’s positive use of “miraculous,” a word he calls into question at times in this essay, and his placing into quotation marks of “virginal.”


524 Marion, In Excess, p. 122.

525 On Marian dogmas and centrality, see the very short piece of correspondence between Rahner and Karl Barth: Rahner, “Antwort auf eine Frage Karl Barths, inwiefern die Mariologie zu den ‘zentralen Wahrheiten’ des Glaubens gehöre” in SW 9, p. 711.
the sublime glory of Christ’s nativity. The peculiar language of doctrine, so very different from scientific and pious assertion, allows—lets—this view.

The issue of Mary’s virginity also opens another crucial opportunity to speak of Mary as the consummate sublime apprehender. To do this, we must make a connection Rahner does not explicitly make, but which he might as well have, and all but does in the short lecture, “Christmas in the Light of the Ignatian Exercises.” Christmas is the feast of Christ’s birth, thus it relates to Mary’s condition in partu, during Christ’s birth. Rahner’s lecture on Christmas and the Ignatian Exercises suggests reimagining Christmas in terms of Ignatius’s teachings on the twin activities of “indifference” and “choice of the particular.” Indifference, in large part, coheres with the sublime, the formless that the present chapter considers. Choice of the particular coheres with the aesthetic, that which may be received sensually, bodily. At Christmas, the sublimity of the divine Mystery, to which freedom and moments of silence point, crosses the aesthetic dimension(s) of the world. Christmas inspires Ignatius, Rahner submits, to teach that “indifference and choice of the particular possess an ultimate unity in diversity; freedom becomes concrete and what is concrete becomes free.” The Incarnation—the conception and birth of Christ—makes possible truly sublime-aesthetic living: a receptivity that reaches toward divine heights, a freedom for the infinite that occurs through sense. To put it another way, the Incarnation empowers the conversion to the phantasm, spirit’s ordination to sensibility. This all relates to Mary because, from the Annunciation through Christmas, she lives the conversion to the

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527 Rahner’s several essays on Christmas point to this way of articulating his view of this feast day. See Rahner, “Thoughts on the Theology of Christmas” in TI 3, pp. 24-34; idem, “Christmas, The Festival of Eternal Youth” in TI 7, pp. 121-126; idem, “Holy Night” in TI 7, pp. 127-131; idem, “Peace on Earth” in TI 7, pp. 132-135.

phantasm in the most powerful, yet most receptive way ever in the history of the world. With full freedom, indifference—the “deathly reaching-out into the darkness of God beyond the circumference of [her] own existence which [she] can name and mould in freedom”—Mary chooses to bear and give birth to this particular child, whom she shall name Jesus (Lk 1.31). Mary has the most aesthetic experience of Jesus of anyone, and in this reception of him, she actively decides to affirm him as Son of God (Lk 1.35). Any pain she has (if she has pain) follows from this one, incomparably momentous decision. This decision of spirit constitutes Mary’s integrity of body. Mary’s sublime-aesthetic affirmation of the God-man as her own destiny is her virginity. So might go a Rahnerian-Ignatian reading of Mary as the sublime apprehender of Christ(mas).

3) A meditation on the Assumption can remain short. The topic will re-arise in Chapter Five. There it will concern final judgment. But something remains to be said here and now. An aura of “no” surrounds Rahner’s book on the Assumption (composed 1951). A censor precluded the book’s publication. Rahner never fully revised it, never resumed the project. The Assumptio-Arbeit was left unsaid.530

The Assumptio-Arbeit’s fourth chapter comprises the bulk of the text, and of Rahner’s constructive effort in the book. The lengthiest section within this chapter considers the blessed Virgin’s death.531 It ends with a rather minimal matter of language. Rahner writes,

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529 Ibid., p. 4. Rahner uses these words to describe in general the one who practices Ignatian indifference, but Mary is an example of one who did something like this beforehand.

530 Vorgrimler, Understanding Rahner, pp. 88-90 briefly recounts this unpublished manuscript’s history. Since then, a Sämtliche Werke volume devoted to Rahner’s studies of Mary, including the hitherto unpublished Assumptio-Arbeit, has appeared, with an editor’s introduction that lays out in greater detail the situation surrounding the non-publication of the Assumptio-Arbeit. See Regina Pacis Meyer, “Editionsbericht” in Maria, Mutter des Herrn: Mariologische Studien: Sämtliche Werke, Bd. 9, bearbeitet von Regina Pacis Meyer (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2004), pp. XI-LVI.

531 Rahner, Assumptio Beatae Mariae Virginis in Maria, Mutter des Herrn, pp. 3-347, Vierter Abschnitt, §3, pp. 133-182.
“In short: Mary has truly died; Mary lives; what lies ‘between’ the content of both of these sentences does not lend itself to absolutely certain determination.”532 The meaning of Mary’s assumption turns on a preposition: zwischen, between. Traditional dogmatic formulas may seem to explicate the entire meaning of this “between.” They appear to some (usually in direct proportion to their “piety”) as determinative in a noetic, epistemological sense. Thus it seems quite justifiable to reach for (greifen zu) them as scientifically correct—science and piety in modernity share strikingly similar attitudes toward language. But Rahner urges caution, especially to those with a pious curiosity (fromme Neugier) about Mary’s death. Even the best formulas express only figuratively (nur biddlicher), what the “between” allows to be veiled in Mystery (im Geheimnis verbüllt sein lassen). To put it in terms of ontophany, dogmatic language is much more nearly reflective than determinative. A certain negativity lives within reflection. Dogmatic language about Mary (and other “mysteries”) lets Mystery unsay it, so language may say Mary, in “between.”

The “between,” reflectively-negatively thematized, opens the eschatological question.533 Rahner speaks “negatively” about traditional Marian language so the question may appear. More properly, he dives into Marian language to a depth inapparent to those who take dogmatic formulas as present-at-hand (vorhanden) or ready-to-hand (zuhanden). The depth of Rahner’s dive is the measure of the Catholic sublime. Rahner’s unfolding of the word, “between,” displays Rahner’s depth. One who handles language like a simple tool—a hammer, for instance—might miss “between” as yet another preposition to glide over on the

532 Ibid., p. 182, my translation. The original: “Kurz: Maria ist wahrhaft gestorben; Maria lebt; was ‘zwischen’ dem Inhalt dieser beiden Sätze liegt, läßt sich nicht mit absoluter Sicherheit bestimmen.” The next quote comes from the same page.

533 §2 of the chapter we are examining bears the title, “The Possibility of an Eschatological Question about Mary.” Ibid., pp. 127-133.
way to substance. But the “between” of the dogma of Mary’s Assumption displays Catholically sublime depth when Rahner lets it say Mary’s intimate nearness to the Sublime Mystery (sublime “objectivity”). In “between,” Rahner sees Mary anticipating (“subjectively”) the Vollendung (completion) of humanity and the cosmos. She does this in history. She is the geschichtlicher Vorgang (historical predecessor) of human fulfillment. Mary enfleshes a promise already fulfilled—verklärte Leib, glorified flesh. Rahner, in keeping with the Assumption dogma, turns negative force against a bloodthirsty world. He diagnoses a contemporary obsession with physical humanity. People thirst for bodies as sexual objects or objects of violence—conquered bodies. Business and science drive these desires. Catholics view the body otherwise. Rahner writes, “To this world of hated, idolized, and suffering human flesh and blood, the Church announces her doctrine of the Assumption of the blessed Virgin.” The body is a thing as near to us in life as anything else, something easily confused with presentness-to-hand or readiness-to-hand. The doctrine of Mary’s Assumption says body as not-an-object. The body, at its uppermost edge (eschaton), touches glory. Geheimnis en-lightens it, gives it a Heimat. Chapter Five attends a bit more to this idea of Mystery as the body’s home, continuing, of course, the theme of home that became prevalent in Chapter Two.

534 The hammer is Heidegger’s famous example, which Rahner would have known well. See Heidegger, Being and Time, §15, pp. 98ff, and §33, p. 196, where the hammer joins Heidegger’s critique of assertion.

535 Rahner, Assumptio, p. 188.

536 See Ibid., pp. 130-131. Rahner lists some biblical texts that point to the assured salvation of certain faithful persons, such as Jeremiah (2 Mac 15.12ff), Stephen (Acts 7.55-60), and Enoch (Heb 11.5), to name a few (he points to more). But based on what faith knows about Mary, it feels especially assured of the opening of salvation (glorification) toward her.

537 Rahner, Mary, Mother of the Lord, pp. 90-91.
This subsection opened with a statement of Rahner’s. He calls Mary portal, gate. Indeed, this subsection was only a gate to Mary, a sketch that will only come to fruition via the second halves of §§11 and 12, and parts of Chapter Five. §11 will expound upon comments about Mary as sublime “object” (of faith), accessed through dogmatic statements. §12 will fill out talk of Mary as sublime “subject,” or an after-subject, who relates properly to Mystery. We pass through the gate, and shall keep passing. Door imagery immediately strikes sublimely, since sub-limen (Latin: under the doorway) parses sublime. Certainly Christ, too, is the Gate (Jn 10.9), the narrow door (Mk 10.25). But Christ’s sublimity only intensifies his mother’s. This is the Catholic sublime, the utter height prepared for those who cooperate with God (§7) to make straight God’s path (Isa 40.3, Mk 1.3). In Christ, God’s perfect (holy) path becomes ours (Mt 5.48, Jas 1.4, 1 Pet 1.16). Rahner never treats the veneration of Mary (as sublime “object”) as a requirement for walking this holy path. She shares in sublime “objectivity,” the condition that requires worship, only insofar as she reduces to Mystery. He does, though, grant veneration of Mary inestimable importance. Near the close of Maria, Mutter des Herrn, Rahner calls honoring Mary “a sign of a truly Catholic life.”538 By 1983, Rahner’s view has expanded. He expresses it negatively, “The weakness of the veneration of Mary is basically the result of a human weakness in us.”539 Rahner leads us to a modest conclusion. If the Catholic sublime is never wholly a-nonymous, and as a human, historical reality, it cannot remain nameless, the name Mary has much to do with it.540

538 Ibid., p. 102.

539 Rahner, “Courage for Devotion to Mary,” p. 131. This seems rather contrary to the popular picture of the later Rahner as a post-Vatican II theologian who has severed ties with Vatican I piety and Catholic dogma. His “universalism” here reinforces his bold, uncompromising Catholicism.

540 Ibid., p. 139: “By praising and honoring Mary, the Church welcomes and calls by name that which God has done and continues to do for her until the end of time” (emphasis added).
The Catholic sublime necessarily includes, somewhere between its center and its margins, the anticipator of the Unanticipatable—the consummate sublime apprehender.

§11. Gelassenheit

Heideggerian Apophasis

The character of mystery belongs to the essence of the origin of language.\(^{541}\)

The end of the subsection on Rahner and negation mentioned the phrase “authentic silence.” These two words, especially the latter, open an entrance for deepening engagement with Heidegger. Deepening, because we shall delve further into Heidegger’s corpus, again into territory with which Rahner was, presumably, unfamiliar, but to which Rahner’s theology, especially his theology of Mystery, bears a resemblance. It does so quite naturally because, and this has been a major chord in the argument, Rahner attunes himself to the systole and diastole of Heidegger’s early works, beats that increase in pressure (as language condenses) in Heidegger’s later ones. The late works, Gelassenheit and Unterwegs zur Sprache (both 1959), prove most pertinent for assessing a Heideggerian silence, reached through Heideggerian apophasis, which is a compression of language. This Heideggerian silence amplifies the resonance of Rahner’s “authentic silence.” Let us begin exploring this sonic space by listening to the sound of silence in Being and Time and the Kantbuch, which Rahner knows quite well. Here, in principium, a critique of assertion sparks what will later flare up as a full-blown thinking of language—as open to mystery.

\(^{541}\) Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 182.
Being and Time §44 renders questionable the primacy Western thought since Aristotle gives to apophansis (assertion). Heidegger attempts to un-say modernity’s “scientific” view of truth as “correctness” by rooting out its addiction to the apophantic. Heidegger, finds, of course, a different truth in origin-al Greek experience. He asks, “Is it accidental that when the Greeks express themselves as to the essence of truth, they use a privative expression a-letheia?” No, something resides in truth’s affirmation. Bare positivity fails to proffer language’s truth, truth’s language. §44 is a major way station for Heidegger’s subsequent thinking on language. From this early point, later thought gains some (if not all) orientation. After this, Heidegger intensifies his apophasis against apophansis. Rahner would have known about this, and connected it with the medieval apophasis he learned from Thomas and Bonaventure. Spirit in the World’s theory of negation has Being and Time §44 in mind.

Rahner also may have been privy to material from Heidegger’s 1928 lectures on Leibniz and logic, whose critical appraisal of modern logic’s failure to appropriate its ontophanic capabilities fits within the genealogy of apophansis commenced in Being and Time and carried through in the Kantbuch. There Heidegger’s “no” to neo-Kantian noeticism specifies Being and Time’s unsaying of apophansis’s priority. The Kantbuch’s “no” intends to facilitate ontophany. Negation does the same thing in Spirit in the World. On ontophany, Rahner and Heidegger agree (§2). The negativity of Kantian dis-interestedness, a key aesthetic concept from the Critique of Judgment, provides the wind that erodes the primacy of logic. This happens in Heidegger, and the same happens in Rahner. The Kantbuch infers from Kant some tasks geared toward dethroning logic—establishing the congruence of abstraction and reflection, and uncoupling abstraction from determination. In the Kantbuch,

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542 Heidegger, Being and Time, §44, p. 265.

Heidegger believes he has cleared an entryway to an illogical path. Really, Kant uncovered it. And what he discovered was something like mystery. Kant saw the unknown (KPM 118). He covered it, to preserve the traditional (what would become neo-Kantian) preference for reason’s mastery (KPM 119). Heidegger prefers Kant’s original road. The first Critique’s first edition locates in the transcendental power of the imagination an originary letting-spring-forth, *entspringenlassende* (KPM 123). This mysterious letting Heidegger connects, tenuously and marginally, to *Gelassenheit*. This mysterious letting takes on a qualitative difference from *Gegenstehenlassen* (KPM 50ff.). It leaves (läßt) behind the object (*Gegenstand*). Heidegger’s desire to leave behind the object generates his critique of apophansis. Heidegger’s nay-saying to epistemology and mastery cohere with this critique.

With respect to Rahner, similar counter-objective moves loosen the grip of propositions, or assertions. The Heideggerian Kant cracks a window to admit the first light of Heidegger’s meditative thinking to come. The Rahnerian Thomas likewise prepares Rahner to unleash the ontophanic potential of dogmatic statements as non-assertoric sites of letting.

Other glimpses of meditative thought flash in Heideggerian texts from the mid-thirties and afterwards. Heidegger develops thoughts on “reticence” in his Nietzsche lectures, delivered soon after Rahner’s attendance of Heidegger’s seminars and lectures at Freiburg from 1934-36. Near the end of the second Nietzsche lecture series (1937), Heidegger clarifies what “reticence” means. It denominates thinking’s proper language. Hardly simple un-language, “supremely thoughtful utterance does not consist simply in

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544 Here are the steps to this hermeneutical jump: Heidegger relates the transcendental power of imagination to time (KPM §32). He calls time the self-activating character of the self (§34). In his constructive proposal, supposedly building off Kant’s “Transcendental Aesthetic,” Heidegger sets out to elucidate Dasein’s fundamental transcendence, “care” (*Sorge*), as temporality (§§43-44). On the way, Heidegger mentions *Angst* as a part of the interpretation of care. In a marginal note he says that *Angst*, as a “holding-onself-into-Nothing,” “is grounded in *Gelassenheit*” (KPM 167a). Evidently this link means to highlight *Angst*’s passivity amid Dasein’s temporal activity.
growing taciturn when it is a matter of saying what is properly to be said; it consists in saying
the matter in such a way that it is named in nonsaying. The utterance of thinking is a telling
silence."545 This echoes Nietzsche’s own words, where he convinces himself to observe
At this point it behooves me only to be silent.”546 He steps aside, so one “heavier with
future,” Zarathustra, may enter. Heidegger latches onto Nietzsche’s pairing of silence and
future. Silence befits the future. Assertion, by implication, is a thing of the past. In the
same year that Heidegger delivers this batch of Nietzsche lectures, Rahner, the theologian of
the future, tells Christians how to say silence. He publishes a series of prayers, which
eventually are gathered into a thin book called Worte ins Schweigen (Words in the Silence, or ET
Encounters with Silence).

“Priest and Poet” shows that Rahner remains interested in words’ ability to
broadcast soundlessness. Rahner hears in poetry the “soft”—silent, or at least reticent—
“music of infinity.” Poetry’s language is soundless(ess). Heidegger develops the same idea
in his later Hölderlin texts. Three examples will illustrate. The first lends silence the same
future tense that thinking affords it. The future, for the Heideggerian Hölderlin, comes as
in-finite relation. Heidegger observes the immediacy of the “uncanny” (in-finite relation) to
today’s (1959) people. He explains, “Destiny approaches man silently—a mysterious kind of
stillness. The human will presumably ignore this stillness for a long time to come. Thus, he
is still able to correspond to this destiny of denial. Rather, he evades it through his more and
more hopeless attempts to master technology with his mortal will.”547 The human future,


evidently, consists in a denial, an un-saying. People avoid this future. Technology (science and business) serves as a medium for disregarding the immediate uncanny. Mortals thus face earth-ly danger. Heaven-ly danger presses upon them, too. Mortals fail to attend to the uncanniness of divine glory. Our second text reads, “The existence of God is not veiled in darkness. For even more veiling than this darkness is the brightest light.” Mortals, enamored with technology, forget about divine light, the heavenly fire we spoke of in Chapter Three. Mortals open themselves to getting burned (§8) and in so doing close themselves to silence. Heidegger teaches that mortals cannot allow such closure. They need silence just as much as they need a safer relation to heavenly fire. In our third text (1968), Heidegger considers the divine fire-light once more, and again it coexists with quietness. The divine directs poetic language: “The poet is ‘compelled by the holy’ into a saying that is ‘only’ a quiet naming. / The name, in which this naming speaks, must be dark and obscure.” Here the Heideggerian Hölderlin reflects Rahner’s insistence on God’s Anonymity. Overpowering heavenly light elicits dark un-naming. By this brush with the Anonymous, the poet “feels in advance” the advent of the gods. The poet anticipates the destiny (future) of mortals, which by necessity accords with the divine destiny. A silent future promises a more fruitful rapport between the human and the divine, in contrast to contemporary technology. Interestingly enough, the poet Hölderlin expresses in prose the spirit of silence. The fragment, “The Significance of Tragedy” (1802), ends as follows: “If nature genuinely represents itself in its weakest gift, then, when [nature] presents itself in its

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548 Ibid., p. 198.


550 Ibid., p. 219.
strongest gift, the sign = o."\textsuperscript{551} The null sign is a poet’s negation of the tragic hero. By this sign, Being appears. A deathly silence denies word. Language opens in-finitely. Soft music plays—something like Rahner’s spiritual tune.

_Gelassenheit_ and _Unterwegs zur Sprache_ aim to elucidate the sublime power of word, particularly when the word is denied.\textsuperscript{552} Heidegger’s effort to show this force of word consists, significantly, in dis-covering the where of word. _Gelassenheit’s_ “meditative thinking” (das bestimmliche Nachdenken) converges divergently with the _Kantbuch_. Chapter One examined the role of “horizon” in the _Kantbuch_, and by association in Rahner’s _Spirit in the World_ (§2). Within a horizon, sensible objects appear as offered. “I” sense the horizon as offerability in general (or in Rahner’s Thomistic language, “pure material quiddity”). Turning toward a horizon includes letting—Gegenstehenlassen—a lassen that lets objects (Rahner: oppositio mundi, opposition to the world). Heidegger’s apophasis, by 1959, can no longer stand for this type of letting. This letting, Heidegger suspects, still colludes with modern subjectivity’s “calculation.” It still obscures “what lets the horizon be what it is.”\textsuperscript{553} The key, Heidegger proposes, is to allow (lassen) oneself to think through the “region” (Gegend). The regions ring, remember, in Heidegger’s in-finite relation (see §8). Heidegger continues, and deepens, this tack in _Gelassenheit_ (and _Unterwegs_), in ways both problematic and productive vis-à-vis Rahner’s theory of language.


The region empowers word by denying it its customary power, horizon-al willing. The word must leave the apparent shelter of the horizon, with its attendants—apophansis, objectivity, and technology—and pursue the alternate shelter of the region. Like the horizon, the region offers. But the region offers by withdrawal, in contrast to the horizon, which advances to meet a subject’s grasp. The region lets things return to rest, no longer requiring them to stand (stehen). Instead, the region opens a “between” in which one might wait. This Heideggerian between constructs a bridge, unbeknownst to Heidegger and Rahner, between Heidegger’s later work and Rahner’s Marian writings, especially the Rahnerian between in the *Assumptio-Arbeit*. We wait between, through the word—for Heidegger, of thinking and poetry; for Rahner, of theology, doctrine, and prayer. And the word’s “mystery” lies in letting a “thing be as thing.”

We wait in between—what? Yes and no. *Gelassenheit* stays restlessly suspended between yes and no. At the same time, it stays restlessly suspended between willing and non-willing. This sort of *nolens-volens* appears paradigmatically in a word Rahner interprets over and over—*fiat*, may it be done—a word of incomparable active-passive, sublime-aesthetic density. This word may sound like nothing, like the submission of a channel to water that courses through it, but this is hardly the case. Heidegger repeatedly expresses the possible objection that *Gelassenheit* is nothing—will-less, word-less letting. This misunderstanding, like that of the *fiat*, descends from modern scientific judgment, the same tribunal that fails to apprehend, for example, the no-thing of the poetic word, and thereby renders invalid opinions on poetry. The problem with the modern scientific perspective is

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554 Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, pp. 66-68.


556 Ibid., pp. 86-87.
its demand for human faculties. Modern science wants to name “thinking” and “language” human faculties—nothing more (this proves disastrous, Rahner notices, for Catholic doctrines). Heidegger unsays this desire. Thinking has to do with humans, surely. But those who dwell in Gelassenheit recognize a shift. Humans no longer grasp truth. Rather, the human person “is the one who is made use of for the nature of truth”—not as a passive instrument, but as a true receptive-actor. Heidegger thus recapitulates a gesture from the Kantbuch (which Rahner follows, see §2), in which he discussed sense organs as logically subsequent to humanity’s constitutive receptivity, and not vice versa. Hölderlinian strains resound in the resumé. The sound of language rises from the earth. Its “sounding” is “no longer only of the order of physical organs. It is released from the perspective of the physiological-physical explanation … The sound of language, its earthiness is held within the harmony that attunes the regions of the world’s structure, playing them in chorus.”

Between yes and no, willing and non-willing, language/thinking transpires through human breath, receptive-actively. Human persons cannot claim language or thinking as private property acquired through purely free, autonomous action. Rather, language and thinking appropriate (ereignen) us “mortals,” thus we receive them by our own action. More properly, das Ereignis appropriates each of us so saying may come to language.

In between yes and no, Heidegger joins Rahner in thinking the form-less. Like Rahner, he thinks and says “form” and “Gestalt” separately from the determination of

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557 Nietzsche lampoons this search for faculties, referring specifically to the young Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling, and Kant as their “father,” but the possible reference could range more widely to include virtually all scientific thought. See Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, §11, pp. 12ff.

558 Heidegger, Discourse on Thinking, pp. 84-85, emphasis added.


560 Ibid., pp. 127-130. The German is worth a look especially on these pages. See Heidegger, Unterwegs zur Sprache (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959), pp. 258-261.
objectness. Heidegger briefly raises the topic of form after stating his “formula for the way [to language]”: “To bring language to language as language.”\textsuperscript{561} This formula says the form “in which the essence of language that rests in the \textit{Ereignis} makes its way.”\textsuperscript{562} Saying the form, but not \textit{seeing} the form—language rests in the \textit{Ereignis}. The \textit{Ereignis} is the “most inapparent of the inapparent”\textsuperscript{563}. John Caputo helps explain the formless language Heidegger seeks: “[O]ne tempered by silence and originating from silence.”\textsuperscript{564} Formlessness is to the visible as silence is to the audible. When Heidegger speaks (of) soundless (“formless”) language, is this the “authentic silence” for which Rahner calls? The \textit{Vorgriff}, a sustaining (tragende) silence, tempers and originates Rahnerian language. This “authentic” silence, though formless (no-form), says yes. This yes Rahner calls grace—the promise of divine communicability fulfilled in divine self-communication. Rahner, \textit{qua} Bonaventurian (yet at no great distance from Thomas), cooperates with the tradition from Denys the Areopagite through Maximus the Confessor, and holds the proposition, \textit{bonum diffusivum sui} (Good pours itself out), as predicable of God.\textsuperscript{565} God’s generous self-communication sustains all human communication (linguistic or not). Divine self-communication, furthermore, warrants human apophasis—negative thematizations of affirmations. Language, grace(d), promises to be with us always (cf. Mt 28.20). Derrida’s reading of Heidegger suggests that something similar appears in the latter. Heidegger’s

\textsuperscript{561} Heidegger, \textit{Unterwegs zur Sprache}, p. 261: “die Sprache als die Sprache zur Sprache bringen.”

\textsuperscript{562} Heidegger, \textit{On the Way to Language}, p. 130.

\textsuperscript{563} Heidegger, \textit{Unterwegs zur Sprache}, p. 259: “das Unscheinbarste des Unscheinbaren.”


\textsuperscript{565} See a helpful article on Bonaventure and Trinitarian theology, which features Rahner at certain points and gives attention to the affirmation “\textit{bonum [est] diffusivum sui}”: Ilia Delio, “Theology, Metaphysics, and the Centrality of Christ” in \textit{Theological Studies} 68.2 (June 2007) pp. 254-273.
between reveals a “dissymmetry of an affirmation, of a yes before all opposition of yes and no.” A primal and final promise (Versprechen) provides bounds for Heidegger’s apophasis. This promise of language, Derrida adds, “would also be a promise of spirit.” Rahner affirms that negation measures spirit’s freedom. Heidegger, in his own way, agrees.

“Promise” promises to open this inquiry into the Rahner-Heidegger similar-difference on language, in the interest of a fuller appraisal of Rahner’s (thinking of) language. The dissertation has been tracking, always keeping in mind their agreement on the primacy of ontophany over noeticism, a disagreement between Rahner and Heidegger over whether the infinite can appear (in philosophy/the world). Rahner allows it; Heidegger, following Nietzsche, proscribes it. Nietzsche’s exclamation about reticence, cited above, ends an essay that begins with a promise—Nietzsche promises to discuss the human as the animal who, by right, promises. Human promise begins and ends, for Nietzsche, with a rejection of the supersensible, of which “the infinite” is an instantiation. This rejection is the negative moment of the overall Dionysian affirmation of life that Nietzsche crystallizes in phrases such as “eternal recurrence of the same” and “amor fati.” Heidegger draws on this Dionysian interplay of negative and positive as he attempts to affirm finitude through an apophasis of apophansis. In the end, Heidegger’s Dionysian proscription of infinitude sets itself at odds with Rahnerian allowance for it.

To this disagreement between Rahner and Heidegger another adds itself. Again the disagreement appears on an important common ground—the promise of language, or more generally, of appearance. Rahner and Heidegger share confidence that reality consists in phenomena that show themselves from themselves. Reality communicates itself. They

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566 Derrida, Of Spirit, p. 94.

567 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 57.
differ, though, in the goodness Rahner ascribes to appearance, and the callousness or maliciousness with which Heidegger edges appearance. That which shows, or says, itself from itself can say itself as evil as much as good. For Heidegger, we must cultivate *Gelassenheit*, as a mode of negation that shapes our freedom, to let not only good but evil also. The next few pages substantiate this claim, which has important implications for the Rahnerian letting, or sublime apprehension, that this chapter intends to articulate.

Nietzsche locates his “promise” beyond good and evil. In Heidegger, freedom beyond good and evil opens onto evil, as he reaches behind Nietzsche to Schelling. This happens more than two decades before *Gelassenheit/Unterwegs*, in the Schelling lectures Rahner attended (1936). The lectures concentrate a number of themes that figure prominently in Rahner’s early through his later work: negation, freedom, spirit, incomprehensibility. These themes receive Heidegger’s attention under the rubric of evil. The Heideggerian Schelling raises evil as a—or the—metaphysical question. In order to ask this question, Heidegger observes, one must have a *Vorbegriff* of evil. *Vor-be-griff* coheres more with translations of *Vorgriff* such as fore-conception or fore-grasp than *Vorgriff* does. But Heidegger carefully chooses the term *Vor-be-griff* here and *Vorgriff* elsewhere. Rahner would soon follow. The *Begriff* of *Vorbegriff* fits in this case because to gain an understanding of evil, one must comprehend its attendant concepts. For the Heideggerian Schelling, evil signifies reversal, a reversed will. The will it reverses is “universal will.” Such universal will, the center of German Idealism, denotes the universal striving of all existence toward its ground. This striving follows from the ground’s origin-al striving-for-self that opens a

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separation so there may be existence. “Universal will” figures an affirmative relationship between ground and existence. As spirit (Heidegger’s Schelling speaks much “of spirit”), the human being can present universal will in language. The human word is free to affirm. This one possibility of freedom may lead to another. Rather than serving the universal will, human spirit can decide for “individual will.” For the Heideggerian Schelling, “evil is the individual will gaining *mastery* over the universal will.” Rahner (and Marion) make(s) many notable countermoves, inversions, and reversals. Here Heidegger writes that with evil becomes a “counterspirit,” a “reversed God.” The counterspirit announces a counter-language, negation. Heidegger observes that the “true essence of negation that revolts as reversal in evil” comes to light only when set against a “primordial” concept of affirmation. A reflective yea-saying to harmony and unity within the order of being comprises this concept (*Begriff*). Negation, then consists in nay-saying harmony and unity. One might prefer to call it yea-saying disharmony and division.\(^{571}\) According to this concept, this promise, the human word is free to negate. Human language can, equiprimordially, affirm universal unity, or negate this unity, bending all being back toward itself. The promise—of evil, because the *Vorbegriff* is of evil—encompasses all this.

The promise latent in the Heideggerian Schelling’s *Vorbegriff* presents a problem—a problem of charism, for grace (*charis*) is at stake. Rosiek makes a similar observation in a slightly different context. He connects *charis* with Heidegger’s reading of *Freundlichkeit* in Hölderlin. This word, which commonly means friendliness, means in Hölderlin’s case a sort of sympathetic relationship between the divine and the human in and through poetry. Rosiek tells us that, in this view, “the movement of poetry is the moment of man’s [*sic*]

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\(^{570}\) Ibid., p. 149, emphasis added, and for the preceding remarks, pp. 141-149.

\(^{571}\) Ibid., pp. 143-144.
felicitous measuring in relation to a divine standard.”

Certainly Heidegger wishes for this peaceful, “grace”-ful rapport of mortal and immortal to shine brightly, but a shadow accompanies the light. Poetic Freundlichkeit only approximates charis, and with a strong infusion of Dionysos’s wine (see §§5 and 8). Heidegger’s Freundlichkeit as charis embraces evil in a way completely foreign to a theology of grace such as Rahner’s—this is its problem.

While on the topic of Gelassenheit, one must wonder whether the charismatic problem in Heidegger’s Hölderlin and his Schelling lies in Heidegger’s Gelassenheit. Two questions demand consideration: does Heidegger’s Gelassenheit simultaneously promise everything and offer far less? Does Heidegger’s Gelassenheit give this empty promise because it bases itself in purloined grace (charis)? The anticipatory answer to both can be yes, signifying Heidegger’s stepping off his convergent path with Rahner, but within that overall affirmation, let us keep the questions open. Above, the word “equiprimordially” reentered the discussion. That term recalls Being and Time, where Heidegger, speaking of language, credits “idle talk” and “authentic speech” with equiprimordial ontological standing (see my §5). These two “talks,” one might surmise, are two possible forms (Gestalten) of human language. So too are good and evil possible Gestalten of human freedom.

In principle, human freedom oscillates formlessly between possibilities. Rahner would concur with Heidegger on this point, but not the next. Heidegger, purportedly sticking close to Schelling, states that by virtue of the ground of human possibilities, “evil is … something positive in the highest sense.” Evil bears spiritual (charismatic) affirmation (with)in itself. The Heideggerian Schelling’s

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572 Rosick, Maintaining the Sublime, p. 245.

573 Heidegger, Schelling’s Treatise, p. 118. Later on, Heidegger insists on the “co-presence of evil in good and good in evil” (p. 157).

574 Ibid., p. 119. Derrida points to this passage from the Schelling lectures as the exemplary site for thinking the “dissymmetry of affirmation” in Heidegger. Derrida, Of Spirit, p. 133n5.
asymmetrical treatment of evil hoists evil on the pedestal of the sublime, extolling it as terrible greatness—“which is, of course, reversed”—by which human freedom achieves its loftiest affirmation. The Vorlagen of evil re-duce to the Absolute. Heidegger indifferently lets it be so—Gelassenheit. Through human freedom, the Absolute lets evil be—Gelassenheit. The Schelling lectures, more in the spirit of Being and Time than of Gelassenheit, hold that the Absolute lets evil be so freedom may decide. Decision makes history. Heidegger calls history, human freedom’s spiritual destiny, its beyond, good and evil. No free decision decides good or evil. Decision affirms both, equally. Heidegger simply says this, without any worry over what it might imply. He performs Gelassenheit, releasing this worry. One might call it indifference, seemingly in Ignatius’s (thus Rahner’s) sense. But something about Heidegger’s indifference seems different from Ignatius’s.

Heidegger’s Gelassenheit (indifference) lets evil, lets the dominance of self-will. This letting lies at the ground of Heidegger’s later Gelassenheit (meditative thinking). Hence the connective gestures above between Being and Time/Kantbuch and Gelassenheit/Unterwegs zur Sprache. An evil thread sutures the earlier with the later works. The free human (“Dasein” or “mortal”—the name matters little) lets evil be. Mirroring the Kantbuch’s gesture of the imagination letting time spring forth (entspringenlassen), free letting (Gelassenheit) lets evil spring forth. Heidegger allows himself to say yes to evil, and even if it appears a speculative evil or not the standard evil we think of (malice), this evil foregrounds some positively uncanny statements at the center of Heidegger’s negativity. For instance, and this is the most telling example, the counterspirit of evil in the Heideggerian Schelling, a figure for modern

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576 Ibid., pp. 159-160.

577 Ibid., p. 156.
subjectivity, closely resembles the calculative thinking that *Gelassenheit* (the book and the receptive-activity) opposes. *Gelassenheit* (the book) reflects the counterspirit’s activity even further. Just as the Absolute frees the counterspirit’s will to mastery to do what it pleases, so does meditative thinking let technology be. Technology proves unavoidable. We affirm its products as unavoidable, even beneficial. When we “let them alone, as things that are nothing absolute,” the game is already up. Heidegger *lets* that which he most *laments*. He assents (yes!) to that to which he addresses an emphatic no, all the while endorsing a “comportment” that inhabits exactly this space between yes and no—“*Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*.”

Heidegger concedes technology’s mastery, modern subjectivity, evil, all the while he calls them into question. This letting of everything he contests could be a display of dogged asceticism, or instead almost libertine callousness. *Gelassenheit* promises a sense of rootedness, a life in which people might be comfortable in their own shoes, on this earth—but it becomes more and more clear that the price of admission equals evil. Rootedness, like grace, implies peace, but this is no ordinary grace. This is not a grace without cost, such as Rahner describes, but rather “grace” at all costs, a “yes” prepared to disseminate innumerable “no”s. Instead of Ignatius’s indifference that stretches forth toward the infinity of the Ever-greater God (Mystery), Heidegger’s indifference in *Gelassenheit* stretches wide its arms to welcome the most deplorable conditions of finitude. Due to its breadth, its overfullness to the point of being indiscriminate, Heideggerian *Gelassenheit* promises nothing.

Before explicating how Rahner outmatches Heidegger with respect to the promise of communicability, for that is still up for consideration under the name grace or charis, it would help to expose one more text from *Unterwegs zur Sprache*. Heidegger speaks much of evil as he elucidates Georg Trakl’s poetry, and his commentary on Trakl in large part certifies

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578 Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, p. 54.
the relation we are now drawing between Gelassenheit (the receptive-activity) and evil. Particularly relevant is Heidegger’s calling pain “the benignity in the nature of all essential being.” Heidegger revisits Schelling’s letting Absolute. Essential being benignly allows pain (presumably along with pleasure) with perfect Gelassenheit. Pain, like Schelling’s evil, gives “the gift of great soul.” Pain doles out the charism of greatness, thus elevating the soul (approximately Trakl’s word for a wandering person) to the role that the Holy Spirit plays in Christianity generally and Rahner’s theology in particular. Of course, Heidegger would specify that the soul silently conditions all Christian talk of Spirit. The quiet soul, though quiet, storms heaven, un-saying Christianity and the Spirit on its “homecoming” journey toward its “stiller nature.” Heidegger reads this anti-Christian, pain-ful apophasis into Trakl, with more willful violence than Gelassenheit. Whatever Trakl’s poetic proclivities, Heidegger finds in his language a way to return home (cf. §4), on a path blazed by evil spirit’s flame—a path to nowhere. This path’s absent destination is symptomatic of the pathological condition of the Heideggerian corpus. This pathology hammers home the end game of Heidegger’s chosen Dionysian viewpoint: the rootedness of the finite mortal/Dasein entrenches ever more deeply the autism of the very same modern subject it aims to overcome, even if it transposes this autism into a register other than absolute knowing. Since this is a problem endemic to Heidegger’s thinking of language, one must ask whether the esotericism of Heidegger’s late writing reinforces a diagnosis of creeping autism.

580 Ibid., p. 181.
581 Ibid., pp. 190-191.
582 See, again, Derrida’s ambivalent portrayal of Heidegger in Of Spirit.
One would bestow upon Rahner far too much credit if one attributed to him the insight that Heidegger’s manner of thought, specifically his *Gelassenheit*, leads to this dire state of affairs, an empowerment of the modern subject as a result of a largely successful, yet only temporary, loosening of the subject’s grasp. Largely successful, because Heidegger’s rigorous concentration on the question of ontophany disrupts, if it does not entirely defeat, modernity’s habitual noeticism. Rahner learned much from Heidegger in this respect, and since Heidegger’s thought is fundamentally continuous, it stands to reason (without grasping) that Rahner possessed an innate sense, indeed a *Vorgriff*, of Heidegger’s ontophanic promise up through *Gelassenheit*. This sense, which arises when Rahner undergoes the advent of Being, through Heidegger and elsewhere (Catholic Christianity), §3 named the “positive sublime.” The same section characterized the agreement between Rahner and Heidegger as their mutual commitment to ontophany, which responds to an “epiphany of the numinous.” Their disagreement, though, posits a division within the positive sublime, with Rahner ascending nearer to the “numinous,” and Heidegger tenaciously digging his heels into the ground and searching for (or creating) the numinous in the world alone. Heidegger’s idea of ontology as an “index of finitude” succinctly expresses his difference from Rahner. For Rahner, such an index unjustifiably, dogmatically (in Kant’s sense) anathematizes infinitude. The current section enhances the Rahnerian critique of Heidegger initiated in §3. It does so in order to adequately gauge the level of toxicity that accompanies the medicinal effects of Heidegger’s apophasis of apophansis, his stopping the hand of modern subjectivity.

Heidegger proves poisonous insofar as the attitude of *Gelassenheit* he champions starts to mimic the orientation (recall §3) of modern subjectivity. The latter, from modernity’s birth through Husserl and beyond, pretends to an “absolute presuppositionlessness,” an objectivity directed by a calculating, clinical eye. This eye ceases,
in our three paradigmatic figures of the subject, to see people as people, but sees them
instead as “savages,” “cases,” or “consumers.” Land becomes “territory,” “geological
phenomenon,” or “producer of yield.” Heidegger opposes the conqueror, scientist, and
businessperson and their purported objectivity, but he imitates each at a distance when he, in
principle, coolly lets himself will evil’s sway over things. Lévinas sniffs out this Heideggerian
tendency in his much-quoted dig: “Dasein in Heidegger is never hungry. Food can be
interpreted as an implement only in a world of exploitation.” At times, Heidegger
redirects the will of modern subjectivity, but onto a closely parallel trajectory. One might
conjecture, then, that the conversation between Heidegger and Rahner ought to die under
this latest blow. If orientation were our sole topic, this guess would be indisputable. It is
not. Disorientation obliges our efforts, also (§6). The disorienting aspect of Heidegger’s
admittedly dangerous Gelassenheit greatly informs the Catholic sublime. This pulls us back
within Rahner’s orbit.

The dissertation’s introduction put forward the thesis that Rahner’s theology and
philosophy opens the possibility for explicating the Catholic sublime, which was
preliminarily defined as the ethos of Catholic Christianity. The time has come to elaborate
that point. “Catholic” means universal. Prescriptively (as opposed to descriptively) put, a
catholic ethos lets even those things that disturb the universal itself. Universal can easily
connote something abstract, something that floats above the grit of history, something
pristine and pure. But universal can also mean, and this is what Rahner means by it, a trans-
numerical letting of things in history. Such a universal lets, for example, the syncretism
implicit in Our Lady of Guadalupe, or liturgical failures that elicit righteous cries of

“Sacrilege!” from piously exact people, or work for justice alongside people hostile to Christianity. Maybe these things sound like lettings of evil. The Catholic sublime, though, remains indifferent to these (created) things, so as to promote more God’s praise and glory. The Catholic sublime, readers familiar with Ignatius will recognize, tries to express Rahner’s thinking through of Ignatius’s injunction to find God in all things. Rahner thematizes Catholic Christianity’s (sometimes-more-than-) prodigal confidence in the absolute promise of grace, the promise kept by the Absolute in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Catholic sublime, like Heidegger’s Gelassenheit, entertains the possibility of absolute promise, and therefore cultivates an overall affirmative attitude toward things. Heidegger affirms all things finite. By a Rahnerian reconsideration, “all things” involves doctrines, devotions, ethics, politics, orders, societies, relics, and holy sites—but also, the Infinite, the “Thing” of things. A catholically sublime indifference discerns the promise that things reduce to Absolute Mystery. Both Heidegger and Rahner agree that the promise cannot be calculated, nor grasped. Indifference silently lets all things, with one condition … that they, too, let.

The Thing

While we work on “things,” Heidegger’s explicit statements on things, no less his essay, “The Thing,” present themselves as immediately relevant. Moreover, Heidegger’s view of the thing can clarify the above sublime meditations on Mary, as promised. The thing in the later Heidegger plays a strikingly similar role for him to Mary in Rahner’s thought, when Rahner treats Mary as sublime “object.” Or the similarity might appear in unplayed

584 Cf. Endean, KRIS, p. 18.

585 Endean writes, “Christ, as one ‘thing’, or as originator of one set of ‘things,’ guarantees the possibility of finding God ‘in all things.’” Ibid., p. 98.
roles. Mary cannot figure as co-redemptrix, thus as the fourth party to the Trinity, and the thing stands as an impossible fifth to augment the fourfold. But if Mary anticipates Mystery and gathers the Church (she does), the thing accomplishes the same with respect to mortal beings disposing themselves toward the Ereignis. This happens, Heidegger submits, only if language lets the thing appear as thing. And once again, Rahner seeks, in doctrine, a language that lets Mary appear as Mary, Mother of the Lord.

First, it must be acknowledged that Heidegger’s “The Thing” (1950), connects nicely with Chapter Three. The thing as thing(ly) evades the regime of objectness. To think, and more importantly to say, the thing requires an opening inaccessible to modern, grasping subjectivity. Science’s subject-ive circumscription of the field of “objects of possible experience” precludes it from truly meeting a thing. Heidegger argues as early as 1935 that the modern subject knows no thing. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” a predecessor to “The Thing,” Heidegger comments, “The unpretentious thing evades thought,” modern thought in particular, “most stubbornly.” The thing subsists beyond objectivity. In this chapter’s terms, the thing relates to negation and mystery.

Heidegger’s selection for an exemplary thing is opportune for him, but more for us, with our theme of negation. He opts for the jug (Krug). He observes, “The vessel’s thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds.”

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586 See Hines, “Rahner on Development of Doctrine,” where Hines names the controversy over Mary as co-redemptrix as a background issue for her treatment of Rahner on Marian doctrines.
589 Ibid., p. 168.
Gosetti-Ferencei, citing this same passage, locates Heidegger’s description of the jug within his thinking of the es gibt. The “it gives” of “there is” re-places thought’s focus from Being’s “presencing” to its “withdrawal.”\(^{592}\) The thing withdraws so “something” might emerge. It withdraws from an eye that would notice it, and from clear and distinct language, clearing
the way for ontophany, or the fourfold’s arrival. The jug (it) gives the opportunity to let the
fourfold be with minimal human intervention, though a human must always respond to it.
The jug, the thing, “[a]ppropriating the fourfold … gathers the fourfold’s stay.” Receptive
gathering presences only as active “pouring out”—a withdrawal for purposes from
refreshment to sacrifice.\(^{593}\) The jug things—Heidegger in Heideggerian wise transforms
noun into verb—sublime-aesthetically to people who may speak of it. This—language—is
the core (though not an isolable one) of Heidegger’s enterprise in “The Thing.” How can
we let a thing (noun) thing (verb) in/by language? The answer is anticipated, somewhat
without finality, in Heidegger’s fluid use of the word thing: language, to let things thing,
entails fluidity. Not “relativistically,” to invoke the term so flippantly bandied about by
thinkers vexed by specters of misapprehended “postmodernism”—Heidegger still names a
thing a thing. But he allows a noun to function verbally. This raises the Rahnerian question
of how dogmatic language operates—is fluidity a part of it?

Before addressing this query, a bit more material on language and the thing presses
upon us from “The Thing” itself. Heidegger names Meister Eckhart, rather favorably
remarking upon the latter’s use of the word, “thing.”\(^{594}\) Eckhart cautiously utilizes “thing” to
designate whatever is, regardless of whether a human subject sees this “thing” as an object

\(^{592}\) Gosetti-Ferencei, HHSPL, p. 89.


\(^{594}\) Ibid., p. 174.
for consciousness. In this way, Eckhart’s medieval sensitivity to things prevails over the modern demand that things become objects (or non-objects, in the case of things-in-themselves, à la Kant). Caputo finds Eckhart and Heidegger comparable in that both write about “returning” (in language) to a place where “nothing’ is happening.”

Eckhart’s sermon on Acts 9.8, “when Paul opened his eyes he could see nothing,” is a case in point. Eckhart explains that Paul’s blindness, seeing nothing, equals seeing God. Paul undergoes some sort of excessus: “the powers of his soul leap beyond themselves.” His soul un-limits in a vision of God. That is, all things, under God, manifest themselves to Paul limitlessly. They re-duce to God. Eckhart preaches, “When I know all creatures in God, I know nothing.”

Countless readers have lifted statements like this from Eckhart to proclaim his eccentricity to the Catholic tradition. The “leap” he speaks of in Paul is, so the story goes, tantamount to a leap into the ether of an empty trans-Christianity, mysticism in the narrow sense of something hyper-real, occult, or Gnostic. This strategy of Eckhart interpretation seems to apply nicely to the Heidegger-Eckhart encounter, since Heidegger places himself so overtly outside Christianity and approves so openly of Eckhart’s thought as distinct from its Christian trappings. Marion seems to concede this modus interpretationis when, in The Idol and Distance, he constructs his Christian theological rejoinder to Heidegger with Nietzsche, Hölderlin, and Denys the Aeropagite, instead of the first two and Eckhart. But in reality, Eckhart’s comparison of knowing all creatures in God and knowing nothing foreshadows quite nicely, and in a Thomistic-Bonaventurian manner, Ignatius’s “finding God in all

595 Caputo, Mystical Element, p. 159.
598 See Marion, The Idol and Distance, pp. 139-195.
things,” and thus Rahner’s retrieval of Ignatius. Eckhart inflects, in his own way, but not an idiosyncratic one, Thomas’s theology of excessus and Bonaventure’s perscratio. By this path Eckhart arrives at his view of things, which he expresses in his words on Paul. A couple of centuries later, Ignatius will effect a similar intra-traditional inflection. This all relates Eckhart (and Heidegger with him, if somewhat off the Heideggerian track and more on the Catholic, Rahnerian one) to a common protest against Catholicism, and a response to this protest. Catholics often meet complaints against their attachment to things. Eckhart, and a Heidegger directed toward Rahner, suggests a re-reading of Catholic thing-attachment as detachment. The Catholic tradition, qua catholic, knows in princiopium that all things reduce to God. We can see things in their proper light by speaking of them as always already referred to God. Thus catholic Christians can say, “When I know all things in God, I know nothing”—I know things as nothing … other than their re-duction to God. For Eckhart, Heidegger’s master of language, we relate to things by detachment in attachment, attachment in detachment—a rather fluid linguistic disposition.

Heidegger’s reference to Eckhart concerns language. Appropriately, because Eckhart painstakingly examines language. In the sermon just mentioned, Eckhart teases at least four semantic valences from the single word, “nothing.” Of course, all words (not just “nothing”) are, properly, no-thing, no being. This goes even for Catholic dogmas and doctrines. But “we have an understanding of things when the word for them is available”—only then. This statement gives voice to a detached-attachment (i.e., even in Gelassenheit we need words). Furthermore, in this statement, several Heideggerian texts meet. Being and Time, Introduction to Metaphysics, “Origin,” and “The Thing” criss-cross On the Way to Language.

599 For background on Rahner’s retrieval of this pillar of Ignatian spirituality, see Endean, KRIS, pp. 69-80.

600 Heidegger, On the Way to Language, p. 87.
Their junction is Nothing. The texts unfurl a “thinking of nothingness [that] is alien to science.”

Nothing, alive (flowing) in words, evades science’s grasp. This life of Nothing, of the word as no-thing that allows the thing to appear, lets. It lets things, especially sublime things. The Heideggerian textual nexus braids into the tightrope Christians, with Rahner at their forefront for the time being, must walk when they verbalize sublime “objects”—for example, Mary. With an attitude of Gelassenheit, attached to words but not grasping them, Christians, exercising the Catholic sublime, can sublimely apprehend the Sublime.

Heidegger: our saying of the jug contributes to the pouring of the fourfold. Rahner: our telling of Mary, as Immaculate, as Virgin, as Assumed into Heaven, leads back toward God, and to up the ante, lets us imagine and judge the world as salvific economy.

One paragraph from “The Thing” lends itself particularly well to the Heidegger-Rahner dialogue. Let us interpose Rahnerian words amid Heidegger’s.

When and in what way do things appear as things? By Mystery, comes the answer. They do not appear by means of human making. Human making is not purely human, anyway—thus not purely (active) making. But neither do they appear without the vigilance of mortals. People keep watch, and they must (Mk 13.23, 33, 57; Mt 24.1-13); by the End, all things appear. The first step toward such a vigilance is the step back from the thinking that merely represents—that is, explains—to the thinking that responds and recalls. The reductio in Mysterium does not represent or explain. It unfolds. It dives in. As such, it “steps back.” As the receptive activity of a hearer of the word, the Rahnerian reductio responds—fiat. As the active receptivity of a doer of the word (James 1.22), the Rahnerian reductio recalls—it does, in memory. Heidegger’s “The Thing” rings well with Rahnerian phrases.

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601 Derrida, Truth in Painting, p. 378.

602 Heidegger, “The Thing,” p. 179. Heidegger’s words are in italics. The regular typeface words are my own, in a Rahnerian spirit.
Rahner and Heidegger agree in much (§2). This section has emphasized their convergence. Still, they differ widely (§3). Heidegger’s interlacing of (no)thing(s) and the fourfold proves unpalatable for a Catholic imagination such as Rahner’s. The Heideggerian framework—Dionysian—proves problematic. Late in his career (1976), Rahner still has Heidegger and Nietzsche in mind, though without naming them. A central Nietzschean slogan arises in Rahner’s text. This slogan drives Heidegger’s “fourfold” and his “Gelassenheit.” Rahner writes, “We are familiar with the Latin expression *amor fati* … This resolve in the face of one’s destiny means literally ‘love for the word that has been uttered’ … Only love for what is necessary liberates our freedom.” Heidegger and Nietzsche agree. *Amor fati* conditions affirmation. Those who reach out toward a supersensuous nothingness negate reality. They crush their own freedom. Surely, they would think, if Rahner has any sense, he will concur. But Rahner has not finished: “This *fatum* is ultimately the word ‘God’” (FCF 51).603 Rahner re-states *amor fati*. It proclaims the Word uttered into the world that makes the world salvific economy. Rahner expertly eludes Heidegger’s Nietzsche. Viewing the world as salvific economy, suffused with the Word “God,” affirms world. It lends world an almost unheard of sublimity, making it, almost, sublime “object.” Bonaventure’s *persuatio* (as well as Thomas’s *excessus* and Eckhart’s vision of “Nothing”) performs this affirmation. Yes—God in all things (Ignatius). Dionysian yea-saying says only so much. It hits a limit: the Nameless. A prior condition—finitude, to say nothing of evil—bars Heidegger from affirming the Nameless.604 One cannot let the Nameless go nameless.

603 Also worth noting is Rahner’s reference in “The Hiddenness of God” to “God is dead,” a “modern slogan” that Rahner believes “is now beginning to ebb and fade away.” Rahner, “The Hiddenness of God,” p. 227.

604 Heidegger, Discourse on Thinking, pp. 70-71 suggests that “there is nothing nameless.” This seemingly innocuous phrase carries all the potency of Heidegger’s Dionysian apriorism of finitude.
Where the word breaks off, no thing may be.\footnote{This line from Stefan George’s poetry sustains many of Heidegger’s reflections in On the Way to Language. See Heidegger, On the Way to Language, p. 60 and passim.} Heidegger loves this fact \textit{(amat … fatum)}. Rahner loves another—\textit{Geheimnis}. The Nameless God alone opens thought to things. In the \textit{Vorgriff}, God releases thought from the inside out, pouring forth the Spirit—light. Light lets even the Anonymous. Heidegger’s promise ends with Dionysos. This god negates the Spirit’s \textit{lumen gloriae in nomine finiti}. Drunk on dark wine, he name-calls—with much the same object-ive callousness as the modern subject. Trakl’s words ring, \textquote{Herrlich: betrunken zu taumeln in dämmernenden Wald.} \footnote{“Glorious: to stagger drunk in a duskng forest.” Trakl, “Zu Abend mein Herz,” accessed online at http://www.literaturnische.de/Trakl/ged.htm#zuabendmeinherz, 8 May 2009.}

§12. \textit{L’obscurité de Dieu}

\textit{Kantian Apophasis}

All artists are Decians, and to become an artist means nothing but consecrating oneself to the gods of the underworld.\footnote{Friedrich Schlegel, “Fragments from ’Ideas’” in Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics, ed. J.M. Bernstein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 266, fragment 131.}

Darkness and light, the most common of all contrasts, ended the last section, and without comment this contrast may seem too stark, should darkness pertain exclusively to Heidegger and light to Rahner. By now, almost four whole chapters into the dissertation, the distinction between Rahner and Heidegger should be clear—if not clear and distinct. The proximity of Heidegger and Rahner must be reiterated, though, as we move into a section on a thinker who does diverge sharply, nearly completely antithetically from Rahner.
These two thinkers inhabit an interest in ontophany (the appearance of being), and thus the positive sublime (an undergoing of the “numinous”). Their shared ontophanic frame of mind is distinct from a “noetic” one, one interested primarily, following Kant, in “faculties” of knowledge inasmuch as they attain or fail to attain to objects. Rahner opposed noeticism on two fronts: the neo-Kantianism that Heidegger, too, combated, but also the neo-Scholasticism that resisted yet partially submitted to Kantian epistemology—in no small way in controversies over faith and reason. Noeticism tends toward yielding an experience of the negative sublime, a perception of human freedom unfettered from any “higher” freedom. Kant’s sublime is mostly, if not completely, negative. Thus Chapter Three concluded that Marion’s reversal of Kant’s sublime approximates a Rahnerian, Catholic, ontophanic view of the sublime. The Heideggerian sublime is, probably, the Catholic sublime’s next of kin, but in the guise of a somewhat misguided brother. Heidegger presents some worrying elements to Rahnerian eyes, but overall Heidegger invites redemption because of his thought’s ontophanic sway. Greater, graver problems unearth themselves, though, when the Heideggerian sublime gets spun noetically. Such a twist evidences itself in Jean-Luc Nancy.

Rahner’s theology normally proceeds at such a distance from something like Nancy’s post-Heideggerian, post-Lacanian, post-Lyotardian philosophy that one may justifiably wonder why anyone should take the trouble to juxtapose them. This chapter’s introduction preliminarily indicated the purpose. Oddly enough, when we look at Rahner and Nancy with respect to each thinker’s relationship to Heidegger’s thought, some similar moves show themselves, especially when one reads Rahner aesthetically. Alison Ross contends that Nancy modifies Heidegger along the axis of Kant’s theory of presentation.\(^{608}\) The *Kantbuch* features prominently in Nancy’s recasting of Heidegger. This mirrors Rahner’s alterations of

Heidegger in *Spirit in the World*, which Rahner admits in the short saying cited at the head of Chapter One. If Rahner negotiates with the Heideggerian Kant to reach the Rahnerian Thomas, Nancy changes the Heideggerian Kant to a Heideggerian Kant to the second power (Kant squared). Nancy swipes the ontophanic rug from underneath Heidegger’s enterprise, replacing it with noetic underpinnings. The section above expressed the concern that Heidegger reinscribes modern subjectivity (such as Kant fortifies), while Rahner remains impervious to this inertial temptation. Nancy, like Heidegger and Rahner, resists modern subjectivity, and proposes an alternative. Even so, unlike Heidegger and Rahner, more the latter, Nancy succumbs to the noeticism endemic to modern subjectivity, even if he presents something after the subject. Nancy turns back to “faculties,” critiquing them like Kant, while accenting their failure to a much greater extent than Kant. Nancy finds a niche, then, near Lyotard and his mini-narratives of sublime short-circuits. Nancy holds Lyotard at arm’s length, mimicking an interest in ontophany (Lyotard gave up on this long ago), but in effect, Nancy offers a sublime negativity ultimately even more negative (because more sophisticated) than Lyotard’s. Since Nancy sets out toward this destination from Heidegger’s *Kantbuch* (among other launching points), he originally looks like Rahner. When he ends in a thoroughgoing negativity, he resembles Rahner only as a Doppelgänger.

Nancy’s texts grant us a peek at a contemporary noeticism striated prominently with the negative sublime. He aggressively continues the Heideggerian search for finitude’s sense, but without any taste for glory, even withdrawn glory. Finite spirit (though Nancy hardly speaks of spirit either) unsays anything like glory, heavenly fire, or Christian *lumen*. We shall discuss, then, Nancy’s apophasis, a Kantian apophasis impelled by Kant’s sublime, with its

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609 A reminder: “The work, with its philosophical interpretation of Thomas, mainly has Kant and Heidegger in its sights.”
testimony to the failure of mental faculties and the paradoxical, exuberant feeling of freedom that wells up alongside this failure. This will facilitate a dialogue between Rahner and Nancy, as rival interpreters of Heidegger, and more importantly as thinkers who attempt to affirm the world—one through true affirmation, the other through a desperate parody of affirmation. Among the assets this subsection will provide, its resultant distancing of Rahner from Kant, an essential stake in answering Rahner’s detractors, stands out as paramount. It may be a bit crass to paint Nancy as a “Kantian agnostic,” but hardly incorrect. Rahner, on the other hand, even though critics attempt to depict him as the consummate Catholic Kantian agnostic, wholly evades this charge. Rahner and Nancy’s incommensurable (i.e., only contrastable) fruits reveal just this.

Nancy’s relatively recent essay, “L’imagination masquée” (2002) is the best place to start. This piece performs an exegesis of the Kantbuch §20, a central portion of Heidegger’s retracing of Kant’s abandoned steps, i.e., the historical Kant’s “shrinking back” from his discovery of the power of the imagination, released in the schematism. This section of the Kantbuch concerns the “making sensible of concepts” (KPM 66). Making concepts sensible—Heidegger underscores this possible interpretation of Kant, an aesthetic Kant who calls thinkers back to finitude, the finite nature of human sensation, or of receptive being in general. This hearkening back to finitude implies a rejection of intellectual intuitionism—innate metaphysical ideas, such as the idea of God—or a reshaping of thinking apart from intuitionism. Nancy picks out this element from the Heideggerian Kant and stresses it even more, in connection with the death of God. For Nancy, the removal of intellectual intuitionism from thought is God’s death knell in Western philosophy. A subtle move

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611 See Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, pp. 75-76.
transposes Heidegger’s ontophanic interest into a noetic frame—the bracketing of a certain type of human knowledge (“divine intuition”) throws thinking into disarray. A noetic reconfiguration of Heidegger’s aesthetic re-vision of Kant completely evacuates the horizon, making the world a network of in-finite self-mediation (§9), whose outer limit is death. When Nancy reads the Kantbuch §20, all-encompassing dying assumes the place of honor.

Fittingly, for Nancy’s purposes, Heidegger chooses an intriguing example of an image, or an image in the process of Imaging: a photograph of a death mask (KPM 66-67). For Heidegger, the pure power of imagination, exemplified in some way by the death mask, unlocks the first Critique. For Nancy, the death mask, expressing in some way Heidegger’s imagination, unlocks the Kantbuch. Centering his analysis on the death mask, Nancy fabricates a pastiche of transcendental affirmation. We briefly glimpsed above Rahner’s residence in Thomas’s theory of transcendentals, picking out the transcendental, “one,” as influential on Rahner’s thinking. Nancy retouches “one,” describing it as the “possibility that anything at all … may come to presence.” “One” conditions categorial emergence. This bare statement seems to Rahnerian eyes hardly like a creative (or destructive) restoration, nor (necessarily) does the next. Categorial emergence occurs through and from the imagination. Such, in any event, is the argument of Spirit in the World’s final section. But Nancy takes “one,” and the imagination along with it, in a noetic direction. The imagination, or Einbildungskraft (power of making an image one), becomes the exclusive site of the “one,” and further, the imagination is born transimmanently (utterly without transcendence even in a revised, Rahnerian sense) through images. The Nancean imagination, to rephrase it, comes horizontally, on the earth’s surface and nowhere else, with reference to surface alone.

“One” transforms into surface. This brings this paragraph back to its original thought—the

612 Nancy, The Ground of the Image, p. 84.
death mask’s surface tells the story of the imagination’s imaging, its Ein-bildung. The imagination’s imaging occurs before any (completed) image. Vor-bild contrasts with Vor-griff. The Vorbild, illustrated by the death mask, offers not the Vorgriff’s transcendental affirmation, which sublimely apprehends ontophany, but rather quasi-transcendental deferred affirmation, a no masked as a yes, that dwells disconsolately within the disappearance of noetic possibility. The Vorgriff, especially with reference to charis in Rahner, testifies to universal communicability, a promise that Rahner (and Catholic Christianity as a whole) believes has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ’s grace. Nancy’s Vorbild, even more of a parody of grace than Heidegger’s purloined grace, claims to witness to our inability to know whether there is communicability, let alone communication.

To the one who views it (or uses it as a philosophical example), the death mask shows some aspect of another person. This aspect appears as an empty gaze, a surface behind which nothing remains but absence. The death mask, then, presents withdrawal, pure and simple. Nancy knows that Heidegger views withdrawal as Being’s most constituent feature. Being reveals itself only inasmuch as it remains silent and veiled. Nancy tweaks this perspective on Being, re-ducing it to the world (of the imagination), and specifically, to the death mask. Just as the “one” (ein) of Einbildungskraft, never gives a full image, the death mask never gives a completed death. Rather, the death mask grants the viewer “something like an access to the other’s dying.”613 Access—this, one of Nancy’s favorite words—means noetic access: not knowledge, but something pre-cognitive in the sense of a perpetually deferred cognition. This is a free deployment of “cognition,” or making of sense, in keeping with the negative sublime’s emphasis on freedom, but an activity bent willingly on collapse, a collapse of relation. The death mask, always prior to an image (Vor-bild), is a threshold to an

613 Ibid., p. 94.
absolute of sorts. Not the Absolute that sustains the *Vorgriff*, but an ab-solute, a “without-relation,” that echoes Kant’s sublime. Nancy generalizes the noetic failure that Kant relegates to sublime experience only—the feeling of the inadequacy of our “faculties” turns out to be normative. Far from a grasping subject, but equally distant from Rahner’s sublime apprehender, Nancy envisions (as a plausible offshoot of Heidegger’s *Kantbuch*), a human sense-making that disappears, along the axis of the imagination, into the dying of the other.614 Instead of advocating *Gelassenheit* to resist subjective grasping, Nancy cuts off the subject’s hands—a final touch with no finality.

*Vor-bild* as the movement of dying—so Nancy reframes the imagination. This contrasts sharply, as *scuro*, with Rahner’s *Vor-griff’s chiaro*. *Vor-bild* and *Vor-griff*—these terms inhabit the center of philosophy. Nancy argues, “To sense oneself making sense, and even more, to sense oneself as the engenderment of sense, this is without a doubt the ultimate stake of philosophy, of which the first form deployed was the ‘hidden art’ of the Kantian schematism.”615 Nancy makes much of the schematism as hidden—as a matter of noetic collapse. His emphasis on hiddenness proves most important for including him in a chapter on Rahner and Mystery. Nancy’s efforts to foreground the imagination as philosophy’s ultimate stake reflect, though darkly, Rahner’s own. With this stake in mind, both men think through the trans-categorial. Rahner sees the imagination in terms of Thomas’s negative infinity, the trans-categorial universality (“one”-ness) of *esse* (SW 178/141). Nancy draws on Lyotard’s notion of tauteogy—the reflective feeling of judgment prior to categorial determination.616 Rahner and Nancy work through these trans-categorial ideas in dialogue

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614 See Ibid., p. 96 on disappearance and Kant’s sublime.


with Heidegger’s *Kantbuch* (§20). Due to their engagement with a common resource they sometimes look similar. But *Vorbild* and *Vorgriff* could scarcely end up more different. We may thematize the discrepancy between them with reference to the two valences of *Geheimnis*: “secret” and “mystery.” One connotes superficiality, the other, infinity.

In a list of notable death masks, Nancy names L’inconnue de la Seine, a mask with no identifiable girl behind it, made famous by artistic dabblers in the occult (hence the quote above from Schlegel, about artists consecrating themselves to the underworld). From L’inconnue’s smile, we may read Nancy’s *Vorbild*. Her smile presents joy in dying—*amor fati*, perhaps. It hides the *secret* of the imagination by modeling an absented gaze. The secret moves, or the secret is movement (*Einbildung*). Nancy’s “image goes from death to death.”

Dying intuition has replaced divine intuition. Nancy’s *Vorbild* blantly parodies 2 Cor 3.18: “All of us gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (see §13). Rahner’s *Vorgriff* flows from this text, because before him, the whole of Ignatian spirituality, summarized in the maxim *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, aims to live out the transformation by glory of which Paul speaks. The *Vorgriff*, like the *Vorbild*, does not assert intellectual intuition of the divine, but neither does the *Vorgriff* deem it necessary to ridicule divine glory. The *Vorgriff* freely, actively, and gratefully receives divine glory—thus from within God gives orientation to the imagination. The *Vorbild*, in opposition to divine glory, is doomed to perpetual disorientation, failure to understand a secret that seems somewhat maliciously withheld (Nancy shares the Heideggerian Schelling’s taste for evil). The *Vorgriff* undergoes disorientation, more often than not for those who truly allow themselves exposure to the excess of God’s call, but always within the (ever-) greater sweep of God’s definitive and generous outpouring of grace.

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617 Ibid., p. 196, emphasis added.
Nancy suggests that the Kantian sublime leads him to parody Paul’s saying, “from glory to glory.” Nancy’s “from death to death” un-says Christian promise, the Catholic sublime. “From death to death” is the clarion call of one convinced that a critique of modernity must include an abandonment of anything remotely resembling Christianity. Nancy’s pleas for a thinking-through of Christianity that never leaves it fully behind do not absolve him from a centrifugal force that projects his texts outside Christianity’s circle.\footnote{This is an underlying thesis of all of the essays in \textit{Dis-Enclosure}.}

Nancy’s critical force derives from the father of critique, Kant, and the apophasis by which the latter, with parergonal logic in hand, surgically picks apart Christianity in the \textit{Religion}. As with Kant, in order to arrive at Nancy’s brand of modernity-critique (apophasis), one must give tacit credence to modern reason. Kant held unparalleled faith in reason. Nancy does not recoil much from Kant’s faith. With Rahner, things are different. Endean notes that Rahner “never completely subscribed to Enlightenment technical models of rationality.”\footnote{Endean, \textit{KRIS}, p. 146.}

Rahner’s \textit{Vorgriff} anticipates a thinking much more sublime than modern reason—thinking illuminated by glory. Quite logically, Nancy (like Kant, unlike Rahner) blinds himself to true sublimity. Something sounds wrong in his dictum, “Sublimity: from one end of the world to the other, there is nothing but the formless form of infinitude.”\footnote{Nancy, \textit{Sense of the World}, p. 42.} Sublimity here indicates the erring that accompanies aesthetic breakdown—unidentifiable, secret sensations. Rahner could have penned the same sentence, and would he have, its sense would be the complete opposite. Sublimity would mean the continuous arrival of Absolute Mystery through the \textit{Vorgriff}, and through the various manifestations of God’s power that bejewel Catholic life, from rosaries to hunger relief, “from one end of the world to the other” (cf. Ps 139).
Rahner’s essay, “The Hiddenness of God,” was originally published as “L’obscurité de Dieu.” In the essay, Rahner comments on the pain of finitude after German Idealism’s collapse. He remarks, “It only remains to ask whether with the predominance of the desire for theoretical understanding the radical recognition of God’s utter incomprehensibility does not naturally lead to an indifference on the human person’s part towards something which he cannot understand, that is, to a kind of practical atheism.”

Nancy’s dissemination of complete negativity, especially with respect to God, travels down Kant’s well-worn track toward the very practical atheism Rahner denounces. Nancy misapprehends God’s hiddenness as a secret (Geheimnis) with no consequence for the world than ever-worsening spiritual frustration in those hell-bent on understanding the un-understandable. Nancy perfectly illustrates the persistence of a negative misinterpretation of Mystery that Rahner detects in a very different theoretical enterprise—Catholic neo-Scholasticism. Rahner catholically accepts Mystery (Geheimnis) as the giving (self-communication) that we must allow to occur to us. His positive estimation of Mystery, God’s incomprehensibility and hiddenness, surpasses any thinking of death (of God), any dying thought. Rahner, surely no noetic agnostic or purveyor of (semi-)atheistic apophasis, bequeaths to us an ontophanic thinking that lets itself be carried from glory to glory, toward a God hidden in light.

On the V(iger)ge

This subsection will supplement the Rahnerian material above on Mary as sublime apprehender. It keeps in mind that “aesthetics” is a general name for reflection on human sensation (including but not limited to apprehension of beauty and sublimity) and on art. The subsection will tip the balance slightly toward the latter component of aesthetics. We

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shall fill out the idea of the paradigmatic sublime apprehender by narrowing our focal point to an *Auseinandersetzung* of Rahnerian and Nancean texts on art. Coincidentally (or not), Nancy’s reflections on painting alight on the Virgin Mary. We have spoken of Mary as important for Rahner insofar as she exemplifies transcendental affirmation, or the Catholic sublime. When Nancy meditates on Mary, he, as if obeying an unwritten piece of self-legislation, specifies his pastiche of transcendental affirmation. He depicts Mary as a free agent who actively (even in death) masks a spiritual secret by touching others. Mary enacts a sublime-aesthetic, but one downwardly directed. The Nancean Mary’s shortfalls, if carefully articulated, can sharpen the idea of the Rahnerian Mary, the consummate sublime apprehender who enacts an authentic attitude toward Mystery.

Ross observes that Heidegger’s “Origin of the Work of Art” lectures “prefigure” Nancy’s “sense-ontology.” Heidegger’s identifies “in the ‘strangeness’ of the work of the artwork the coming of a new sense … beyond any present thing.”\(^{622}\) Nancy takes off from this point to simulate a general ontology, with art on its front lines (*avant garde*), art that shows Mary. The Virgin (*vierge*) transforms, at Nancy’s command, into a locus for sense on the *verge* of emergence.\(^{623}\)

Nancy tries to avoid “canonical and dogmatic scenes” when he selects Marian paintings for commentary. But even the “scenes of strangeness” he prefers to examine touch upon dogmatics, for any encounter with Mary, as Rahner would remind us, passes somehow through scripture and traditional Marian teachings, be they doctrines or dogmas.\(^{624}\) Nevertheless, Nancy attempts a shell game where scenes occurring on the edges of the


\(^{623}\) Ibid, p. 135, inspired the title and organization of this sub-section: “In Nancy, … it is not truth but meaning or sense on the verge of its emergence that art presents.”

“scenes” Catholics call “Annunciation,” “Virgin birth,” and “Assumption” conceal the scenes’ dogmatic import. Three paintings, *Visitation* by Pontormo, *Madonna del Parto* by Piero della Francesca, and *The Death of the Virgin* by Caravaggio, \(^{625}\) are appropriated as three pillars of Nancy’s alternative Mariology, which predicates itself upon the deferral of sense. This sense of a sense always coming that never comes, for Nancy, grounds an interrogation of modern subjectivity by the circuitous route of tracking down the “subject of painting.” In the “strange,” pre-dogmatic scenes of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth, Mary’s display of her pregnant belly, and Mary’s corpse laid out in front of mourners, Nancy perceives an alignment of subject matter and “subjectivity.” Mary, the woman expecting birth and resurrection, stands frozen in each of these paintings, or more properly, suspended. \(^{626}\) Artists have painted her in action (even in death, where she elicits the hand-motions of her mourners). Mary acts on what she has received—the Holy Spirit and the yet-to-be-born Christ child. But even more obviously, as a figure in each painting, Mary functions actively-receptively to let the ground peek through. Mary the painted figure delivers nothing more than painting itself, and for Nancy her receptive-action in painting translates nicely to her offering in the world—Mary, even given her pregnancy, offers nothing but worldly existence—“*jouissance* and suffering.” \(^{627}\) This is her secret. No Word is born from her womb, only silence. And if Mary says *fiat*, it is only to being in the world (*amor fati*).

Nancy strictly limits what Mary can do, and as if this were not enough, he restricts the implications, especially devotional and dogmatic ones, one may draw from Mary’s life (including her death). He intemperately calls the “religion of the Assumption” an “extreme


\(^{626}\) Nancy, *Ground of the Image*, pp. 111-112 calls the subject of painting, “suspension.”

\(^{627}\) Ibid., pp. 119, 123.
of idolatry in the religion of the Redemption.” Nancy clearly finds Catholicism, the religion that calls Mary’s Assumption a dogma, objectionable, and believes that he occupies a moral high ground over Catholicism. To Nancy, the fact that Rahner took the time to author a book on the Assumption would be unthinkable, immoral and distasteful. In *The Muses*, Nancy tries to pawn his own disdain for Catholicism off on Caravaggio, a painter who indeed had a rather ambiguous relationship to the Catholic Church of his time. But Nancy’s charge of idolatry against Catholicism derives more nearly from Kant, his apophasis, and (therefore) his sublime. The translator of Nancy’s essay, “La représentation interdite,” underscores (without knowing it) the sublime basis of this essay, which is very telling for Nancy’s viewpoint in general. “Interdit,” translated as “forbidden,” carries twin connotations: 1) legal prohibition, and 2) the adjectival sense of “forbidding,” as we say of a fearful or disorienting thing. Nancy perceives something interdit, forbidden and forbidding, in paintings of Mary, which stand in for (represent!) the many other things that comprise Catholic reverence toward Mary. When confronted with Caravaggio’s painting of Mary on her deathbed, Nancy decides to relieve the pressure of Mary’s forbiddenness through a noetic lancing of the scene. He strips off resurrection and assumption (as parerga), and denies the scene the satisfaction of presenting a “philosophy of death.” Instead, Nancy rereads Mary’s death as an occasion for reflecting on the being-together—the touching—of the ones Mary leaves behind. Mary, in death, teaches nothing, except that she reveals herself as one among many who live together, touch each other, and eventually die. Mary,

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629 See Nancy, *Ground of the Image*, pp. 27-50, and for the translator’s note, p. 144. The essay, “Forbidden Representation,” enters here not because it concerns Mary or paintings of Mary, but because it greases the wheels for a dialogue between Nancy and Rahner on the sublime.

dead and never to rise, forbids us to try to look past the surface of the world to find something else. She sets noetic conditions (a reframing of Exodus 20.4, the injunction against images that shows up in Kant’s “Analytic of the Sublime”), in the interest of a sublime-aesthetic being-with. Her dead visage, painted so alluringly by Caravaggio, is a forbidding reminder of our perpetual dying. With these multiple tactical strikes, Nancy protests, first and foremost, to Catholicism, the religion of the Assumption.

The Catholic sublime better names the ethos Nancy judges as so forbidding as to merit being forbidden, the “religion of the Assumption.” Rahner’s theology and philosophy, though he never thematizes it in this way, present the Catholic sublime as an alternative to descendants of the Kantian sublime, such as Nancy’s sublime. Rahner, clearly, since he wrote quite a bit on it, concedes in certain places that Marian teachings and devotions, such as the Assumption, prove forbidding for many people, particularly “modern” people who negotiate with modern subjectivity, and their cousins, exponents of sola scriptura.631 The Assumption, or all Marian “things,” may make it look, noetically, as if for Catholics all representations are permitted and yield knowledge of God. In short, Catholics connect all dots, whether God connects them or not. On this noetic view, which also subscribes to the negative sublime (which concerns freedom), forbidding representations appear to un-limit human freedom illegitimately, and thus some law regulating such representations must intervene. Hence modern (usually Protestant) prohibitions of Marian things—Nancy is only the latest instantiation of these rules, Kant being his most influential forerunner. Rahner’s practice of the Catholic sublime in his Marian writings eludes the (aesthetic) moralism of the noetically-minded, because Rahner (and numerous sectors of Catholic tradition with him) operates on an ontophanic plane. Rahner and those like him need not fear idolatry, even

when the accusation of idolatry seems most pertinent and precise. The Catholic sublime, the accusers believe, hopes for a system—a complete, closed statement on God, or a dogmatic (in Kant’s sense) dogmatic theology. Nancy rightly suspects modernity of this design—comprehensive grasping—and he associates modern Catholicism (the Baroque) with it. For this reason he writes on the verge, emphasizing her position on the verge (of never-completed presence). Various outposts of Protestantism have assumed a general theological stance that approximates Nancy’s general philosophical one—an overarching prohibition of completion or culmination. The dogma of Mary’s Assumption falls immediately under the ax of this Protestant prohibition, which forbids glory’s appearance on earth, except as a promise on the verge of culmination. The Catholic sublime, on the other hand, following Mary’s example, lets God’s glory show wherever and in the manner that God shows it. Sublime apprehension is this receptive act of letting.

This chapter has suggested that Mary plays the role of consummate (in the face of Nancy’s allergy to consummation!) sublime apprehender in Rahner’s theology. In part, this means that God gives in a special way in and through Mary innumerable points of access to God’s self, Incomprehensible Mystery. God gives, God shows through Mary. Before we specify this thought with a few other ones, we can, with a proposition (ordered minimally toward grasping), that Rahner and Nancy differ insofar as Rahner sees Mary as one through whom God shows, and Nancy regards Mary as one through whom God is withheld. Nancy has extrapolated Kant’s sublime and apophasis; the contrast between Rahner and Nancy is remarkable; Rahner stands outside Kant’s line. Now we may delve further into Mary’s life of sublime apprehension with Rahner’s counter-Kantianism in mind.

632 Cf. Nancy, *Ground of the Image*, p. 31, where he narrates the connection between Exodus 20.4 and an interdiction against “complete” images.

Rahner’s essay, “Priest and Poet,” is again the anchor point. This essay considers art (poetry), and its producer—the poet. This person, in his active-receptive making, undergoes the “perilous pleasure” of “an aesthetic kind of identity between his being and his consciousness.” Rahner makes no “epistemological” statement here, even though the “identity” he names includes “consciousness,” and presumably consciousness directed in principle toward knowledge of some sort. In short, Rahner proceeds at quite a distance from Kant. This distance, though, implies nearness—to Heidegger, particularly his *Gelassenheit* and “The Thing.” Rahner, referring to Thomas’s *reditio completa in seipsum*, the sublime ontophanic moment, sees the poet’s activity as a “sublime blessedness” of closeness to one’s “immeasurable remoteness.” Artistic speech gives rise to a special kind of rootedness in the world, such as Heidegger describes in his later work, and Nancy recalibrates noetically in his meditations on the *vierge*. Rahner highly esteems this poetic vocation, with all its perilousness (i.e., proximity to infinity: in Greek, *a-peras*), but sees in the poetic *reditio* a still incomplete movement. The priest suffers an even more intense (Rahner again uses the word sublime) arrival of language’s force. Through him, in word, there is produced “that unmasking which God alone can bring about.” Unmasking—a negative action of language occurs in the priest’s preaching and his prayers. Rahner speaks of an unmasking of the priest’s sins, but the unmasking accomplishes something more. Poetic words unmask the self, Rahner says. They make major headway toward ontophany, but hit a wall—the limit of the reflexive pronoun: I unmask myself—“Look, there go I!” Evidently, since he draws an implied but not specified contrast, the priest’s words unmask in general, or intransitively. Priestly words seem, then, inferior or “less” than poetic words. This is a fructifying (if sometimes debasing) less. The priest’s words achieve, quietly and soberly, ontophany. God appears when a priest acts out his office of preacher, teacher and
sacramental minister. For Rahner, not nothing, but the Father of everything appears at the end of poetry. 

Reditio completa in seipsum blossoms as reductio in Mysterium. The poet advances to the threshold of sublime apprehension; the priest guides the poet (and others) through the door. The priest is a true sublime apprehender and custodian of sublime apprehension. This picture ends “Priest and Poet.”

Rahner’s writings on Mary indicate her standing as incomparably higher (and lower) than both the poet’s and the priest’s. Mary pronounces very few words, and so looks mostly less than both poet and priest. Her personal history is lowly, mostly wordless, virtually a-historical if history entails written records. But from her silence, Mary produces God’s Word into history. Mary’s silence is not the result of a failure of historical bookkeeping, or a gap within which nothing belongs. Nor is it a secret successfully guarded from infiltration by “faculties.” Rather, Mary’s silence is the depth from which the Word of God becomes visible, and indeed from which redemption is diffused over all of history. By the soft music of one word, Mary lets this happen: fiat. This linguistic crystal, compressed in extremo, is not a matter of her “private life-story,” but of “the public history of redemption.” Mary’s inner depths spring outwardly to the ends of the earth, in a birth destined to complete history. Sublime apprehension, an activity that gains its power proportionate to the extent to which it receives, becomes fully alive in Mary. Mary perfected Christianity before anyone

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635 Recall the reference above to Heidegger’s exposition of Stefan George’s line, “Where the word breaks off, no thing may be.”

636 Readers should note the specificity of the references to priesthood in “Priest and Poet.” Rahner does not give a full theology of the priesthood (nor the laity) in “Priest and Poet.” This paragraph merely wishes to show that for Rahner, the priest can be affirmed as an exemplary sublime apprehender, not the sublime apprehender exclusively.

637 See Rahner, Mary, Mother of the Lord, pp. 36-38.
(re)cognized Christianity. Mary’s sublime apprehension of Mystery, her yes, is an overarching affirmation of God’s grace to which all Christians are forever consecrated. Rahner’s prayerful requests of Mary at the close of Mary, Mother of the Lord suggest the ontophanic character of her sublime apprehension—he repeats the word, “show,” as in “Show to us Jesus our Lord and Savior, the light of truth and the advent of God into this world of time.” Mary shows God. Mary shows God in the world. All Christians, in word and deed, must do this showing, this letting of God’s showing, this sublime apprehending.

If Rahner upholds Mary as the consummate sublime apprehender, he follows Ignatius in so doing. Within his list of the mysteries of the life of Christ, Ignatius takes a creative liberty with the biblical text that illuminates his intense devotion to the Virgin Mary. He, against the grain of the gospel resurrection accounts, assigns Jesus’ first resurrection “apparition” to his mother, Mary: “He appeared to the Virgin Mary.” Ignatius defends his reading of the gospels’ unsaid words: “Although this is not stated in Scripture, still it is considered as understood by the statement that he appeared to many others.” Ignatius appeals to the understanding that Jesus enjoins in Mt 15.16: “Are even you without understanding?” Thus Ignatius proclaims Mary as the anticipator of the Unanticipatable whose active-receptive attitude toward Mystery reaches its peak in the risen Jesus, whom Mary apprehends first—if not in temporal order, at the very least in paradigmatic order. Mary is first to enjoy the completion of the Word’s economic mission, which was initiated with/in/through her consent, stated almost wordlessly: fiat. Jesus allows his Mother a vision

638 Ibid., p. 107.

639 Given Ignatius’s frequent mention of Mary in the exercises, and the fervent devotion to Mary throughout the history of the Society of Jesus (except, perhaps, in recent years), it is rather odd that Endean fails to give even passing reference to Rahner’s Marian writings in his book on Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality.

640 Ignatius, Spiritual Exercises, n. 299, p. 197.
of glory, the glory to which Ignatius will testify a millennium and a half later, and Rahner four centuries after him. This glory is not the glamour of a subject’s full noetic conquest of a supposed divine secret (pace Nancy). This glory, ever-greater, is the opening by which the world shines forth as salvific economy, before those who freely let themselves sense it. The more people, like Mary, let this happen—particularly through language, for language shelters infinity—the nearer they come to enacting the Catholic sublime. They release all things—indifferently—toward the glory of their tragende Grund.

Conclusion

By the end we may have affirmed many things, but the effort of carefully marshalling language has left us with a string of negations, which unsettle apparently settled answers to questions about Rahner’s work. For example, is not Rahner a “Kantian agnostic”? Does not Rahner empty Christianity whereas others, say Balthasar, provide more fullness? Does not Rahner marginalize Christian doctrines and dogmas in the interest of a more fashionable Christianity? And of course, is not Rahner the theological exponent of the “turn to the subject”? No—Rahner is not, does not do those things. Rahner demands affirmation as a Catholic theologian, a Jesuit priest, a prayerful man with a rosary, as someone different from Rahner commonly understood. An extended critical conversation with Heidegger and Nancy (whom we needed to flesh out as more than emaciated foils) has let Rahner have his say—the Rahner who says, “The human person as transcendent subject is not the shepherd to being but the one protected by the mystery.”

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641 Rahner, “The Hiddenness of God,” p. 236. See also idem, “On Recognizing the Importance of Thomas Aquinas,” p. 8: “Thomas knows … that the utmost precision and the soberest realism which is achieved in true theology are ultimately designed simply to serve a single end: to force a person out of the brightness of the dimension which he can comprehend, and into the mystery of God where he no longer grasps but rather is grasped, where he no longer rationalizes but rather adores, where he no longer controls but rather is himself subject to a higher control.”
the glory of God shine in and through Christian language. This chapter simply points out where Rahner’s theology shows and makes good on this promise.

Rahner’s underappreciated works on Mary specify his promise in two ways. First, they give determinate locations to his expression of the ethos we have called the Catholic sublime. Second, they embody, or allow Mary to enliven the post-subjective Rahnerian attitude: sublime apprehension. Mary, in Rahner, becomes the consummate sublime apprehender. Mary lives among us in a special way through language, so Rahner’s careful crafting of language about Mary serves (or could serve) to shape Mary’s continued life in the church, her perpetual modeling of a proper disposition toward Mystery. Rahner’s presentation(s) of Mary, in turn, exemplifies for theologians the Gelassenheit—the lack of scientific calculation, which is not to say a lack of rigor—that should characterize theological inquiry in our time. But most importantly as we move to Chapter Five, Rahner’s writings on Mary open an eschatological question. The sublime apprehender (Rahner’s after-subject) introduces us to the heights of sublime apprehension, a receptive-activity/active receptivity that re-duces all things to God. The consummate sublime apprehender (Mary) attains to the comprehensiveness without comprehensive grasping of the Catholic sublime. The consummate sublime apprehender—the Virgin—raises the question of consummation. Consummation worries Heidegger because of its connotations, in Christianity, of belief in a full revelation of the Infinite (and an irrevocable denial of evil). Consummation repels Nancy because of his Kantian (noetic) resistance to Hegel’s pretense to System. But for Rahner, consummation is the undertow of his whole theology. Ordination to sensibility in the world prepares us, like it prepared Mary, in as-yet-formless (yet mysteriously full) ways, for the end of ontophany and its apprehension: visio beatifica in lumen gloriae.

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And already for this world as a whole the fermentation has commenced which will bring it to [its] momentous conclusion.  

Those familiar with the ins and outs of twentieth-century eschatology know that eschatology has ceased to be as simple as cataloguing doctrines of heaven, hell, and purgatory.  Insofar as Rahner surpasses the theological manuals from which he learned how to study the last things, and the preeminent chronicler of Rahner’s eschatology in the English-speaking world, Peter Phan, contends that Rahner carries far past neo-scholastic eschatology, we have him to thank (or blame) for how this fifth chapter will proceed. But not only Rahner—the philosophical tradition from Kant through French post-Heideggerians profoundly recasts Christian eschatology. These philosophers, with Christian doctrines of the last things as their tacit point of departure, commence speaking of the end of philosophy, or of metaphysics, or they proclaim that they have reached the outermost edges (eschatē) of Reason (Hegel). Heidegger and his followers thematize this edgy inclination of

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643 In Germany, for instance, “eschatology” calls to mind the entire theological projects of the early Karl Barth and of Rudolf Bultmann. Also, the terms “eschatology,” “eschatological” and others became remarkably fluid in the twentieth century. See Harald Fritsch, *Vollendende Selbstmitteilung Gottes an seine Schöpfung: Die Eschatologie Karl Rahners* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2006), pp. 17-18.

modernity, with little more than disapproving regard for traditional Christian eschatology. This last chapter of the dissertation will uncover areas of Rahner’s thinking that bear discursive resemblances to, and thus grounds for critical conversation with, late modern proclamations of the end. It will accomplish nothing more than formal (or formless) sketches for this future discussion, which would entail another volume of its own.

Neuzeit—so Germans call modernity. They name it new-time. This is the sense of the English word, “modernity,” also, but without the immediate visibility of Neu-zeit. Christian eschatology interprets Christian belief in the (eventual) arrival of a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21.1). This chapter will have fulfilled its intention if it shows, in fits and starts, how Rahner opens the question of new time, new heaven, and new earth. Like the dissertation’s other chapters, then, this chapter has an apologetic motive in response to Rahner’s critics, who worry that Rahner forecloses revelatory novelty. Rahner’s eschatology, like his theologies of grace and Mystery, allows for—lets—the novum of God. To dig even deeper, he accomplishes this letting by being, contrary to popular belief, an apocalyptic theologian.

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645 This play on the word “edge” is an evocation of Catherine Keller’s eschatology, by this chapter is greatly instructed. See Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), and eadem, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005).

646 A possible starting point for this venture (in addition, of course, to this dissertation) may be Rahner’s essay, “Theological Observations on the Concept of Time” (1967), in which Rahner refers on multiple occasions to philosophies of time since Kant’s first *Critique*. See Rahner, “Theological Observations on the Concept of Time” in TI 11, pp. 288-308.

647 The popular belief, originating with Rahner’s prize student, Johann Baptist Metz, runs as follows: The key component missing in Rahner’s theology, thus allowing it to succumb, in large part, to idealism, individualism, and the pitfalls of a modern, evolutionary view of time, thus contravening its biblical heritage, is apocalyptic. Without it, Metz contends, Rahner “takes the edge off” the historical struggle for Christianity and its identity. In dramatic, apocalyptic fashion—with an “unveiling”—Metz closes the book on Rahner. This chapter reopens it. See especially Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Crossroad, 2007), pp. 151-152: “Unveiling the Hedgehog Trick—or, A Critique of the Transcendental-Idealist Versions of Safeguarding Identity.”
The chapter’s first section “The End of Sensibility,” reinforces and lends eschatological weight to the sublime-aesthetic vista opened in *Spirit in the World* and the rest of Rahner’s thought. Whether we discuss the completion of sensibility, which is not the circuit of a *reditio completa in seipsum* simply stated (Chapter Two), in terms of cooperation with grace (Chapter Three) or linguistic letting (Chapter Four), the phrase “sublime apprehension” covers the semantic field. Yet some things remain to be articulated to fill out the idea “sublime apprehension.” §13 accomplishes them *in nuce*. First, sublime apprehension must be established as a species of the Catholic sublime, and at that a prescription for the contemporary period, after the subject. Since we can uncover the Catholic sublime and sublime apprehension in Rahner, we must elaborate upon Rahner’s place within and relation to the modern epoch. Certain theorists find that the hierarchy of the senses is reordered in modernity, leaving sight (as opposed to hearing) as the premier sense. Following from this, we may speak of Rahner’s theory of vision, which for him relates inevitably to the Catholic eschatological belief in the beatific vision. Second, Rahner’s rather idiosyncratic definition of judgment demands attention. For Rahner, judgment, with the *Vorgriff*, coinhabits the center of the conversion to the phantasm, and Rahner’s parsing of this process has drawn the ire of Thomists for its philosophical heterodoxy. This subsection asks whether it might be helpful to view Rahnerian judgment not as the result of (erroneous) Thomistic exegesis (a short point) but rather as historically and ontophanically primed (the main, longer point). Such a reading would be amenable to bringing together the Rahnerian departure from (not turn toward) modern subjectivity, his eschatology, and his Ignatian roots. Third, we delve back into Rahner’s view and use of language, now in an eschatological

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648 This is the upshot of the editor’s foreword to *Die philosophischen Quellen der Theologie Karl Rahners*, and of the essays contained in that volume. See Harald Schöndorf, “Vorwort” in *Die philosophischen Quellen der Theologie Karl Rahners*, pp. 7-11.
register, to give the impression that sublime apprehension, as the acting out of the Catholic
sublime in the current age, is an open work, a work of openness, a late modern re-vision of
apocalypse.

As in Chapter Four, the next two sections lend support (if often on a via negativa) to
the Rahnerian prospects of the first section. §14, on Heidegger, coheres with the vein of
history and epochality in §13. Commencing with the question of whether Rahner may have
learned (silently) to approach theology epochally from Heidegger, this section engages in
some exposition of Heidegger’s Seinsgeschichte (history of Being). This involves briefly
outlining Heideggerian eschatology and protology, both of which find analogues in Rahner.
Any analogy, of course, inscribes a greater “no” than its “yes”—the “no” side of Rahner’s
analogy to Heidegger’s historical schema is the former’s refusal to treat good and evil with
equanimity (recall §11). The next subsection speaks of “justice,” a comprehensive grounding
of Being’s truth in the Heideggerian Nietzsche, as it interlaces with Heidegger’s critique of
Christianity. Heidegger’s decision against Christianity insofar (very far) as it expresses his
attempt to overcome metaphysics after Nietzsche’s “consummation” of the metaphysical
tradition betrays Heidegger’s blindness to the Catholic sublime as a possibility for
Christianity. Heidegger views Christianity’s paths as exhausted in varieties beholden to
modern subjectivity (e.g., Catholic duplex ordo and Protestant theologies of justification), but
Rahner shows that this is not so. Another path remains standing: sublime apprehension.
The third and final subsection of §14 gets us back to the Heideggerian Hölderlin, and his
poetic plea for openness to a future in which “the divine” might return in a more intimate
(in-finite) relation with mortals, the sky, and the earth. Marion returns to help a critical
Rahnerian engagement with Heidegger’s supposed openness to “another beginning” by
reminding Heidegger of his commitment to ontphanic apocalypsis (unveiling), which he risks
forgetting when he apologizes for poetic reticence. This path fills out the ongoing
Rahnerian critique of Heidegger—Rahner’s open work surpasses Heidegger’s in openness.

§15 presents another opportunity to separate Rahner from a noetic trajectory of thinking (cf. §§2, 4, 9, 12). Again Nancy is Rahner’s interlocutor. A first subsection examines Nancy’s eschatology as a sublime-aesthetic of finitude’s, that is, (human) freedom’s, failure to attain to an end, traditionally understood. “End” becomes a cipher for freedom’s letting things evanesce in and out of nothingness—or, freedom’s letting of death. This figuration of “the end” is unacceptable for Rahner, even if he might be sympathetic with the Nancean counter-grasping sensibility behind it. The second subsection stands in apposition to the Rahner subsection on judgment and the Heideggerian one on justice. Rahner’s reframing of the doctrine of the separation of body and soul in death ignites a critical dialogue between him and Nancy on the human person as an “offenes System” (open system) thereby further complexifying Vorgriff’s meaning. The section ends with a return to Rahner and Heidegger on the topic of death, thus a return to ontophany after Nancy’s noetic framing of death, the final end that both Rahner and Heidegger view, in convergent-divergent ways, as a litmus test for post-subjective openness. This last gesture fleshes out the openness—the cosmic apocalypse—implied in Rahner’s sublime apprehension.

The chapter’s argument, which again is more monstrative than demonstrative, proceeds from three theses. First, eschatology is the undertow of Rahner’s entire project, a seismic vector set in motion from two sides, the Heideggerian and the medieval (thematized Ignatianly). Second, Rahner’s eschatological undertow develops under the auspices of sublime apprehension, which is a receptive action (comprehensive vision without comprehensive grasping), a variation on the Catholic sublime for late modernity. Third,  

sublime apprehension is a modified form of apocalyptic. The last things (even of a
dissertation) bear within them a certain apocalyptic sting, which is not easily removed, but
for which we might, if we have cultivated a proper anticipatory disposition, find ourselves
unexpectedly, uncommonly prepared.

§13. The End of Sensibility

*Dawn*

Derrida proposes in *Of Spirit* that Heidegger’s thought on spirit might be explicated
in terms of four interlacing threads, the last of which is epochality. One wonders, or one
should, whether Rahner might be amenable to similar analysis. Interrogatively put, does
Rahner’s thought attach itself to a parsing of distinct historical epochs? More specifically,
does Rahner’s corpus have some inextricable relation with the edges of modernity, its dawn
and dusk? An overall affirmative air gets each question off the ground, and an affirmative
answer is presumed, especially given the drift of Chapter Three. But the yes that surrounds
the question of Rahner and epochality denies us immediate access to the meaning of this yes.
Some more work presents itself.

We must return to the retrieval of Ignatius called for in §7. This entails placing some
distance between this constructive reading of Rahner and that of Philip Endean, whose work
on Rahner, as it grows more influential (and rightly so),⁶⁵¹ will determine future views of

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⁶⁵¹ At the Catholic Theological Society of America Annual Convention in 2008, Robert Masson
(before offering his own proposal for future Rahner scholarship) praised Endean as probably the most
promising voice in a “new generation” of Rahner scholars. See a synopsis of Masson’s paper, “Reinterpreting
Rahner’s Balance”; Terrance W. Klein, “Karl Rahner Society: Rahner and a New Generation of Readers” in
Rahner’s stance vis-à-vis modernity with some notable distortion(s). For some reason, Endean insists that in his Ignatian writings, Rahner emphasizes the continuity of Ignatian spirituality with the whole of Christianity. In short, for Rahner, Ignatian spirituality is not all that distinctive.\footnote{See Endean, KRIS, pp. 75, 89, 123ff., 240-241, 244.} Endean means by this that neither Rahner nor Ignatius wishes to preach a Gospel different from that of Jesus Christ, and one must appreciate this point. The concern is that Endean’s view of Rahner on Ignatius blunts the force behind Rahner qua Ignatian—the power of epochality. Rahner sees Ignatius, and Endean helpfully acknowledges this,\footnote{Ibid., pp. 145-146.} as a key voice in modernity’s advent. Ignatius and the tradition of spirituality he founds have ineluctable ties to the modern epoch as distinct from pre-modern ages. The essay, “Ignatian Spirituality and Devotion to the Heart of Jesus” (1955), hints at Rahner’s complex view of the Ignatian negotiation of the treacherous waters of modernity.\footnote{Rahner, “Ignatian Spirituality and Devotion to the Heart of Jesus” in \textit{Christian in the Market Place}, trans. Cecily Hastings (Sheed & Ward: New York, 1966), pp. 119-146. Endean sees this lecture, evidently, in terms of Rahner’s statement, “There is only one Christianity” (p. 120), which suggests that this piece, among others, downplays the distinctiveness of Ignatian spirituality. Context clues should have led Endean to another conclusion, since Rahner continually refers to Ignatian spirituality’s (and the devotion to the Sacred Heart’s) place in the current age of the Church. A great deal of the lecture consists in Rahner exhorting his audience at Canisius College to appropriate the special elements of their dual spiritual heritage, Ignatian spirituality and devotion to the Sacred Heart.} The foregoing chapters explored how Rahner guides us past modernity’s pitfalls. A subtext to this text holds that Ignatius’s unique navigation of modernity’s dawn, his living of early modern Catholicism,\footnote{“Early modern Catholicism” derives from the work of church historian John W. O’Malley, who prefers it to other designations such as Counter-Reformation Catholicism and Catholic Reformation. See, for example, O’Malley, “Was Ignatius Loyola a Church Reformer? How to Look at Early Modern Catholicism” in \textit{The Counter-Reformation: The Essential Readings}, ed. David Martin Luebke (New York: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 65-82.} has a key role in strengthening Rahner’s late modern sea legs.

This dissertation’s reading of Rahner’s philosophical-theological wayfaring transposes his thinking, Ignatian and otherwise, into aesthetic categories. Roland Barthes,
hardly a traditional commentator on Ignatius but a solid one nevertheless, suits our purposes because he associates Ignatius with a kind of aesthetic shift at the modern era’s beginning, a reordering of the “hierarchy” of the senses from the primacy of hearing to the primacy of seeing. Ignatius develops a language full of images, a spiritual praxis of seeing, a comprehensive deployment of vision (which, Barthes comments as a sidebar, Ignatius shares with Baroque art—cf. §7). All this while Luther, among scores of others, held fast to the traditional orthodox preference for hearing. If Ignatius is a practitioner of the image in a new age marked by a preference for seeing, Rahner the Ignatian disciple acts on Loyolan cues. From start to finish, ocularity—striving after vision—drives Rahner’s enterprise. Like Thomas, filtered through Ignatius, Rahner inscribes in his entire corpus anticipatory (non-grasping) movements toward the beatific vision. The Vorgriff is the field for and fund of these motions of sublime apprehension.

The final piece of Rahner’s exposition of the Vorgriff in Spirit in the World presents an “ontological interpretation” of Thomas’s description of the function of the agent intellect with the image of “light” (SW 211-26). This section strikes at the center of Rahner’s constructive effort in Spirit in the World, his unveiling of a Thomistic theory of human active-receptivity toward Being apart from any intellectual intuitionism (as in an angel) or illumination theory of knowledge (Augustine). The image, “light,” given Rahner’s counter-illuminationist designs, elicits some Rahnerian discomfort, hence light figures in the Rahnerian Thomas’s view of finite (human) knowledge as an “illuminating medium sub quo” (accent on medium) that relates to “what is illuminated”—the “object” in Rahner’s early terminology (SW 216), or the “thing” in a refined Rahnerian lexicon (§§10-11). The Vorgriff

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is, again, the driving force of knowledge, the engine of human spirit, and Rahner describes it by way of a silent juxtaposition of Thomas with Bonaventure under the heading of intellectual light, or lumen (§3). Furthermore, the Vorgriff is the sublime moment of the conversion to the phantasm (§4). As light, the Vorgriff shines sublimely and lends its shining to things in the act of apprehension.

Recurring to “The Ontological Interpretation of the Light-Image” draws the eschatological flavor from Rahner’s reflection therein. The pages that end the section intimate, rather un-self-consciously, that “light” in the Rahnerian Thomas plays at the limits, the edges, of the human capacity for presentation (i.e., the imagination). Rahner reminds us that, should one follow Thomas’s presuppositions, the agent intellect’s light can, in principium, “make the totality of possible objects into actually knowable objects by the power of its pure spontaneity.” Light connotes a possible comprehensive vision of all things, of which humans catch a glimpse in the Vorgriff. Rahner continues, “But, on the other hand, [the agent intellect] does not already have of itself the totality of possible determinations with itself, for otherwise it would have to be able to present this to the possible intellect by itself alone, without the help of sensibility and its a posteriori material” (SW 224). Human knowing, thus human being, reveals itself as, at its most sublime height, incapable of total presentation “of its own.” Human being hits an edge, and precisely in its imagination. The very operation of the Vorgriff, though, promises the surpassing of the edge. This promise is based in a more overarching one, the promise that the tragende Grund of all reality is self-communicating, and further that fulfilled communication is not merely a possibility in principium, but rather a de facto given (from the future). The Rahnerian Thomas teaches that the light of Absolute Spirit (SW 226), the Trinitarian God, is (will be) the medium of this edge-defying communication (effected in our own “medium”—Vorgriff). Thus ST I.12 (see
§10) and 1 John 3.2—“we shall see God as God is”—re-enter: the promise of a future vision brightens current apprehension of things.

Rahner’s early philosophical testimony to light finds a late counterpart in an essay that casual readers of Rahner might regard as somewhat surprising, due to its subject matter. The famously bookish theologian with relatively little to say about art (other than poetry), devotes one of his last essays to “The Theology of the Religious Meaning of Images” (1983). It comes to light that Rahner writes this essay to address a characteristically modern turn to images (conversio ad phantasmata?) in the context of prayer. He points out the difficulty of reconciling a more traditional (Western) practice of contemplation without images (thus more oriented to words and hearing) with meditation on images. Rahner expounds upon the conundrum:

This question is connected with a question that refers to Christianity as a whole, which in its efforts to arrive at the absolute God, intends to take along the earth as a whole, the glorified earth. It is only if we accept this basic thesis that it is possible ultimately to understand the Ignatian method of meditation, for example, in which contemplation has an important role, one which requires frequent practice and in which the ‘application of the senses’ is to be considered not the lowest, but a most sublime level of meditation.

Rahner’s “example” is not so random as his “for example” playfully suggests. The impulse that comes from “Christianity as a whole”—catholic Christianity—to regard the whole earth as glorified, a salvific economy (§7), embarks upon a new epoch of fruitfulness with Ignatius’s practice of meditation. Ignatius makes aesthesis sublime—he inaugurates sublime-aesthetics, thus the Catholic sublime. Seeds are sown for sublime apprehension as an after-

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subjective attitude at the time of the modern subject’s birth, when “non-objective”
meditation with images (application of the senses) arises as a possibility. Ignatius and those
in his wake (including Rahner) attempt to work out “joy in the world,” an attitude of world-
affirmation first considered in Chapter One, and that begins with affirmation of the senses.
“Joy in the world,” eschatologically thematized (this chapter’s concern), is the disposition
that provides a Vorgriff of the final human destiny—consummation in the (beatific) vision of
God, in the light of glory.

Rahner derives his doctrine of final vision from Thomas, a medieval thinker. But
only on this (as opposed to Thomas’s’s) side of the dawn of modernity can one speak with full
earnestness about the visio beatifica as the end of sensibility. The modern epoch hurtles
toward its end (aged at roughly five hundred years) by way of a proliferation of visual media,
from digital photography, HDTV and the unchecked (cancerous) growth of the internet.
Rahner knew nothing, since he died too soon, of these last three offshoots of modernity’s
logic, but in centering theology on light, Rahner extends to theology today the raw materials
for formulating responses to contemporary aesthetic problems. Foremost among these
problems is nearsightedness, the obscuring of future visions by a barrage of present images
that aim to communicate nothing more than what products are currently on sale. We must
ask at this point whether Rahner’s thought lends itself to rendering more porous the wall of
imagery that continually hardens before us, casting us back upon a timeless present. With
Ignatius, Rahner envisions images we might move through to attain to God’s glory. This is
not to say that Rahner seeks what Marion claims to have found in the icon.659 Marion
approvingly cites Basil of Caesarea’s maxim from On the Holy Spirit (c. 375), “The honor

659 See Marion, The Crossing of the Visible, pp. 62-64.
given the image passes to the prototype, thus presenting a kenotic view of the iconic image’s visibility. Rahner, despite his proximity to Marion elsewhere, openly disagrees with Basil, effectively apologizing for an altogether different disposition toward the visible, a more aesthetically positive one, in the etymological sense of aesthetics (§1). Rahner halts in the face of the overt Platonism of Basil’s statement, suggesting in Ignatian wise that we find God in images, not behind them. Images—all things visible—are light (not representations of light), by virtue of the God who has saved through them. This proclamation follows from Ignatius’s exaltation of sensibility. But images can revolt against this exaltation. The problem with contemporary images is their inability (a reflection of the autism of the modern subject) to let the light of God shine through so it may be sublimely apprehended. Rahner’s thinking of sublime apprehension is but one example of the kind of discourse needed to re-teach (on a grander scale than ever before) the visible, in the wake of modernity, its consummate role: letting God shine.

Judgment

For Rahner, shining is a matter of history—even of matter—but never a matter of surface. Shining occurs in, not on things. The surface of reality appears so immediately that

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661 Rahner, “Theology of the Religious Meaning of Images,” p. 161. The exact context is Rahner’s case for the venerability of images based on a community regarding them as venerable. His case is somewhat dissatisfying, so the following elaborates it using other Rahnerian principles.

662 The third chapter of Hearer of the Word (perhaps the epicenter of Rahner’s commitment to metaphors of light), includes this affirmation: “Whatever is, to the extent that it is, is not something that may be experienced and known only in obscure urges, in the chaotic turmoil of dark powers. Of itself at least it is luminous; it has always been light” (HW 33).
we think we can get it right, pin it down correctly, and thus feel compelled to make inroads toward controlling it. The consummation of reality, though, remains uncontrollable, even if it shines in our own history. Rahner declares, “Consummation is not something that is located ‘beyond’ history, as it were seeing that it is in history that that takes place for which we are responsible even though it may not appear on the surface of any reality that we know and cannot be judged by us.”663 The consummation of history cannot be judged by us. This statement stands in tension with Rahner’s conviction, implied in his sticking to the conversion to the phantasm as the operative mode of human relating to the world, that judgment, the engine of the conversion to the phantasm, is the engine of human history. Maybe, then, to keep Rahner consistent, one should assume that history as a whole cannot be judged—this seems (and is) true enough—but that individual events and things can, thus keeping history going, not leaving its various vehicles without drivers. But perhaps, again, the case is not so simple, and not simply because we have begun playing with various connotations of the word, “judgment.”

John F. X. Knasas, in an article representative of the general Thomistic unease with Rahner’s philosophical position, considers judgment in Rahner as an act that justifies a knower’s knowledge by guaranteeing objective correctness.664 Rahner opens himself to such a reading especially because of his various attempts within Spirit in the World to persuade his audience that his reading of Thomas agrees with mainline Thomism, among whose staples are objectivity and correctness. In Knasas’s case, Rahner’s protestations that he remains a

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663 Rahner, “Theological Problems Entailed in the Idea of the ‘New Earth’” in TI 10, pp. 260-272, here p. 270. Cf. idem, “Profane History and Salvation History: Limitations and Presuppositions of the Inquiry from the Viewpoint of Christian Faith” in TI 21, pp. 3-15, especially pp. 6-7, where our inability to judge history definitively is the flip side to God being the sole judge of history. This, of course, is a major principle of Metz’s theology, and he may have prompted Rahner to thematize it.

faithful Thomist lead to a critique of Rahner’s rendering of the “target” of judgment. Knasas feels quite justified in asking the question—which is a very good one—of what “esse” means for Rahner, and when Knasas finds that Rahner’s definition of esse does not line up with Thomas’s, Rahner is called to the stand to defend his transcendental method, which Knasas perceives—rightly—as the source of Rahner’s idiosyncratic view of esse. Since, Knasas contends, Thomas’s view of esse (along with ens) speaks much better to philosophy’s concern with reality, prosecuted along a vector of correctness, Rahner’s transcendental inflection of Thomas ends up looking superfluous (at best) or obscurantist (at worst). Rahner, Knasas implies, muddies the clarity of Thomism, and furthermore, does not beat Kant “at his own game.” Knasas stops short of rejecting Rahner’s approach, and in fact he closes his article on an irenic note, calling for dialogue between various Thomisms, including Rahner’s “transcendental” and/or “existential” trajectory. Based on his philosophical commitments, Knasas provides a cogent set of arguments calling into question Rahner’s project in Spirit in the World, and by implication, his later theological enterprise. The main complaint, to be specific, is the following: Rahner’s transcendental turn loses sight of the concrete existence (actus essendi) of beings on their own, i.e., independent from thought. Knasas has a legitimate worry—that Rahner performs modern subjectivity’s desire for control over objects. Interestingly enough, but from a far different place and for a far different purpose, Knasas, as a Thomistic critic, mirrors a possible Heideggerian critique of Rahner, worin er idealistisch. If two conditions hold, the first being that Rahner should be judged strictly Thomistically, and the second that Rahner succumbs to transcendental

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665 This question was already opened, if not already by others, by Denis J. M. Bradley, “Rahner’s Spirit in the World: Aquinas or Hegel?” in The Thomist 41.2 (1977), pp. 167-199, p. 183.

666 “Wherein he is idealistic”—in the German Idealist sense. This refers back to Chapter One, §3, which pointed to Rahner’s note on his (and those of like minds) difference from Heidegger and the latter’s apriorism of finitude, “worin wir idealistisch.” Rahner, “Vortragskizzen,” p. 445.
Idealism, then Knasas’s critique defeats Rahner’s entire project from the inside out, for Knasas attacks, he believes (properly), its heart.\textsuperscript{667}

Do Knasas’s terms of engagement hold? It seems so. But to the contrary, they need not. \textit{Respondo ad primum ergo dicendum quod} the past few hundred pages have shown that Rahner lends himself to evaluation on non-Thomistic just as much as Thomistic grounds. \textit{Et ad secundum}, our argument presents Rahner’s distance from modern subjectivity, thus German Idealism,\textsuperscript{668} in his espousal of sublime apprehension. Knasas and other Thomists have a point in meeting Rahner with some incredulity; his doctrine of judgment needs explication. But if it makes little sense on Thomistic terms, other hermeneutical suggestions must be made.

The introduction to this chapter suggested that judgment’s ontophanic character in Rahner provides 1) an escape hatch from Thomistic critique (philosophical heterodoxy) and 2) links judgment to history (our inability to judge it). The first point is implied in the above paragraph, but let us unfold it, in the interest of reaching the second point. First, within Chapter One, Edmund Husserl comes up, and more specifically the phenomenological act of \textit{epoche}, or bracketing an object’s actual existence so as to emphasize it as a noematic correlate to noetic intentionality, that Husserl places at the center of phenomenological method. Rahner refers off-handedly to the \textit{epoche} when he says, “[T]o put in parentheses an ultimate reference in a quiddity to the real actuality would be for [Thomas] equivalent to eliminating the quiddity itself” (SW 164/131). The Rahnerian Thomas refuses to collude with transcendental Idealism, whether Husserl’s or Kant’s. Hence Rahner’s continual

\textsuperscript{667} See Knasas, “Esse as the Target of Judgment,” p. 222: “The heart of Rahner’s philosophy is his understanding of abstraction,” and for Knasas, Rahner’s philosophy is the heart of his theology.

\textsuperscript{668} This, even given Rahner’s greater proximity to German Idealism than to Heidegger on the issue of infinitude’s appearance in thought. See §3.
repetition of “real being”—concrete, historical, worldly being—in the pages following the one just referenced. A second text applies to the first point, and this one, likewise, has already received attention. Rahner’s discussion of the cogitative sense ends in a statement of the “intimate connection” between “the common sense, the imagination, and the cogitative sense” and their merging “into an ‘internal sensibility’” (SW 308). Immediately afterwards, Rahner approves of Edith Stein’s translation of cogitativa into Urteilskraft—(the power of) judgment. Finally, Rahner summarizes the meaning of conversio ad phantasmata in Thomas: “the unity of intuition and thought in the power of judgment (ratio particularis) as the expression of the original unity of the free spirit with the sensibility into which it forms itself” (SW 309). Rahner’s connection of judgment (the act of abstraction) to imagination and sensus communis transfers to the “power of judgment” cogitativa’s name: ratio particularis, thought of the particular, the appearance of concrete, real being. Rahner arrives, then, at what Knasas demands—an affirmation of judgment’s apprehension of the actus essendi of something given—but by engaging (not avoiding) transcendental Idealism and, indeed, beating it at its own game, in large part due to Stein’s propitious translation of cogitativa. Following Rahner’s interest in Stein’s practice of translation, we render judgment in Rahner as “sublime apprehension.”

The issue of judgment (sublime apprehension) in Rahner, given that it concerns ontophany (real being) and not noeticism (post-epoche noemata), relates to an apprehender’s rapport with things in the real world. In light of Chapter Four, it should seem plausible that judgment in Rahner gets a strong impetus from the Ignatian spiritual practice of cultivating “indifference.” Rahner defines indifference in “Ignatian Spirituality and the Heart of Jesus” as “an extremely alert, almost over-acute sense of the relativity of all that is not God himself; of all things distinct from God as preliminary, needing to be passed through, expendable,
ambiguous.” This suggests that Knasas’s worry that Rahnerian judgment slights things by ignoring their *actus essendi* in favor of some *esse* that enjoys some radical independence from all things, does not account for the possibility that Rahner’s doctrine of judgment might be a veiled inscription of Ignatius’s *indiferencia* into Thomas’s *conversio ad phantasmata*. One can hardly blame Knasas, or any other Thomist, for not making this connection, which may have been impossible to make before Endean’s thorough exposition of Rahner’s commitment to Ignatian spirituality. But now we cannot fail to see at the heart of the Rahnerian Thomas a nexus of *Urteilskraft*, *cogitativa*, *indiferencia*, Bonaventure’s *persu ratio*, and Rahner’s own *reductio in Mysterium*. The *actus essendi* of each real thing in the world is 1) apprehendable as a way to God and 2) a testament to God as *tragende Grund* of all the world—and its destiny in God.

This statement brings us, at last, to history. The field for the rapport implied in judgment is history, and for Rahner, the *conversio ad phantasmata* is the engine of history. When one inquires into the manifold, or especially the unity, of history in terms of the *conversio ad phantasmata*, or the judgment that acts as its center, and in reference to the drawing out of the implications of Rahner’s treatment of it as laid out above, one makes a turn back toward Rahner’s statement that commenced this section: the consummation of history cannot be judged by us. We cannot judge the consummation of the world because that consummation is our future. The future, as yet undetermined by the present, does not have real being, if, per the Thomist mindset (which Rahner largely adopts), real being is the *actus essendi* of worldly beings. The future’s *actus essendi* is inapparent (as yet). If this is true of the future, the world’s future, how much more is it true of God, the *tragende Grund* of the world’s future and, by implication, the Absolute Future? By implication, of course, because the ungraspability (*Unbegreiflichkeit*) of things in the world provides access to God’s abiding

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669 Rahner, “Ignatian Spirituality and Devotion to the Heart of Jesus,” p. 123.
incomprehensibility (Unbegreiflichkeit). All things lead back to God along the route of history, which Rahner figures in many places as “personal,” i.e., individual, history, but which, given Christian belief in the world as salvific economy (§7), is truly consummated only as a whole. ⁶⁷⁰ Any determinant judgment of things in this world, of their real being, is formed by their coming consummation in the incomprehensibility of the Absolute Future. This consummation (will) occur(s) as the outer edge (eschaton) of history. Thus Rahner can say that eschatology is “a formal structural principle for all theological,” and he would add philosophical, “statements.” ⁶⁷¹ Paul’s injunction, “[D]o not make any judgment before the appointed time, until the Lord comes, for he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will manifest the motives of our hearts” (1 Cor 4.5), thus takes on a supra-moral, ontophanic-phenomenological significance: all judgment, whether “theoretical,” “moral,” or “aesthetic,” makes sense only in light of history’s final unveiling in the light of God’s glory.

Open Works

Both the Exercises and the Constitutions are open-ended works, works to be used, works in which what really matters is not described because it cannot be predicted: the preservation and increase which comes only “through the almighty hand of Christ our God and Lord.” The same applies to Foundations of Christian Faith. ⁶⁷²

Endean, qua Ignatian, in a similar (yet more nuanced) mode as Knasas, qua Thomist, assesses to Rahner a shortfall in hermeneutical presuppositionlessness in his Ignatian writings. Stated otherwise, Endean criticizes Rahner for doing interpretive violence to

⁶⁷⁰ See Rahner, “The Question of the Future” in Theological Investigations 12: Confrontations 2, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1974)), pp. 181-201, here pp. 182-183: “We only understand what saving history and revelation history mean if we live through them and recognize them as the history of the promise of salvation extending more and more to the very roots of our being.”

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., p. 182.

⁶⁷² Endean, KRIS, p. 244.
Ignatius’s textual corpus, in particular the *Exercises*. Rahner, when he presents Ignatius, presents him incorrectly. Given the reflections in Chapter Four, standards of correctness appear questionable at best. Endean (along with others) risks encircling himself within an economy of apophansis, which we roundly negated last chapter. This is not to say that Endean gets Rahner wrong (that would privilege apophansis), but rather that if he (as the best among a host of other Rahner scholars) insists on the incorrectness of Rahner’s interpretation of Ignatius (or Bonaventure or whoever else), he risks concealing the power of Rahner’s thought. This power is not noetic (Endean’s word: epistemic), but ontophanic power. Endean’s better moments recognize that Rahner’s power consists in his ability to produce open works. Endean acknowledges in the statement used as the epigraph for this subsection that Ignatius writes open-endedly. So do Thomas and Heidegger (despite their air of wholeness, the *Summa theologiae* and *Being and Time*, for instance, were never completed). By Endean’s admission, Rahner’s *Foundations* joins this list of open works.

Why speak of open works? The category, “open work,” borrowed from Umberto Eco (*opera aperta*), can enrich our articulation of the Catholic sublime, of comprehensiveness without comprehensive grasping, in Rahner. “Open work” comes up as a topic amidst our discussion of eschatology because of the open-endedness of open works.

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673 For example, see Ibid., pp. 239-240, which sum up Endean’s various complaints throughout his book about Rahner’s imprecise appropriation of Ignatius. In summary, Endean writes, “We must … acknowledge that Rahner’s attempts at serious Ignatian exegesis are both few and flawed.” See also Phan, who sees some hermeneutical confusion in Rahner in general: “Should we direct to Rahner Emilio Betti’s objections to Gadamer’s hermeneutics, that it confuses *Auslegung* with *Sinngebung*, consequently jeopardizes the legitimacy of referring to the objective status of objects of interpretation, and thus renders questionable the objectivity of the interpretation itself?” Phan, *Eternity in Time*, p. 76.

674 Endean, KRIS, p. 52, while exposing a sentence from *Hearer of the Word*, brushes against an ontophanic reading of Rahner, but quickly drops it for its noetic shadow: “[T]his ‘ontological’ approach to epistemology […], while relativizing a more ‘gnoseological’ account, does not exclude it, and Rahner’s point both can and should be transposed into a more ‘gnoseological’ idiom.”

The indeterminate “ends” of open works loosen the grip of the modern subject, or at least this is the idea. And since this reading of Rahnerian eschatology connects with aesthetics, now seen as a discourse on art, “open works” as a topic opens Rahner to contemporary art, an opening to which Rahner allows himself exposure (§§6, 9, 12), though his lack of expertise in art precludes his thematization of this unthematic exposure. This dissertation intends laying the groundwork for a Rahnerian engagement with contemporary art as one of its fruits (in the vein of a positive side-effect). This groundlaying will be accomplished via the prism of the *Exercises*.

Our appropriation of Ignatius, like Rahner’s, will evidence some imprecision, for we shall render Ignatius prismatic by (again) consulting Barthes. The latter’s exposition of Ignatius depends not upon theology, so he need not feel discomfort at Ignatius’s “archaic, and embarrassingly naïve” theological execution. Instead, Barthes credits Ignatius with creating a language that founds the act of divine interlocution (recall Marion’s *l’interloqué*, §9)—the act of being addressed by God: a sort of sublime-aesthetic active-receptivity. This matter of language pairs with another. Barthes writes, “The *Exercises* is the book of the question, not of the answer.” Ignatius composes his text in an interrogative mode—he leaves uncertain how God will reply to the retreatant’s requests for things (graces) desired. This questioning mode coheres with what Rahner sees as a growing tendency of the contemporary age, a potentially poisonous fruit of modern subjectivity, but also a possible opening toward Absolute Mystery. Humanity in general is in question, leading to new

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676 Endean, KRIS, p. 7. Evidently Endean stands in a long line of those who foreground Ignatius’s scribal awkwardness, for Barthes cites several examples of Jesuits’ portrayal of the *Exercises* as “impoverished” writing. See Barthes, *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*, p. 39.

677 See, for example, Barthes, *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*, p. 44.

678 Ibid., p. 74.
findings. Rahner curtly states, “Man is discovering that he is ‘operable.’” Operability—a term sodden with the ambivalence and ambiguity of the open work, with its rich connotations of future, latent in the suffix, “-ability.” The crux of “operability” is its location at humanity’s edges.

Rather than engaging Rahner’s examples of human efforts at self-manipulation, some of which are dated at this point, let us get a sense of his estimation of the meaning of human operability with respect to a controversial site in Rahner’s corpus that discusses our view of the future. The text in question is Rahner’s distinction between eschatology and apocalyptic in the essay, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions” (1960), which sets up a series of seven theses offering a hermeneutical framework for interpreting eschatological statements in Scripture and tradition. Rahner states as a part of his fifth thesis, “If we hold fast to the principle that there is knowledge of the eschata only in the knowledge of the presence of salvation in Christ, we should be able to exclude in consequence … a false apocalyptic understanding of eschatology such as is found in certain sects and often colors Catholic theology of eschatology.” Soon after this rather tame suggestion, Rahner takes pains to separate eschatology and apocalyptic, eventually connecting the latter with “fantasy” and “Gnosticism.” Phan, at the forefront of others, reads this as a lapse in judgment on Rahner’s part. Phan takes Rahner to task for misrepresenting apocalyptic, and setting up an eschatology systematically opposed to apocalyptic. He hints that Rahner does this out of

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681 Ibid., p. 336. In the other half of this sentence, Rahner rejects de-mythologization, also. Though we cannot treat that point here, readers of Rahner would do well to heed Rahner’s words against de-mythologizing, especially because of the all-too-facile connection that it once was customary to draw between Rahner and Bultmann.
ignorance. Rahner does not base his negative appraisal of apocalyptic “on a thorough knowledge of apocalyptic literature,” and he does not “appreciate the positive impact of such literature on the struggle for liberation from an unjust social situation or persecution.” Phan makes a strong case against Rahner, but let us see if this point of Rahner’s thinking might be redeemed.

Another read through Rahner’s statements differentiating eschatology and apocalyptic shows that, far from being an intervention bent on systematic comprehensiveness (thus “thorough knowledge”), Rahner’s hermeneutical hedging of apocalyptic proves very focused and almost scrupulously circumscribed. Rahner introduces the term “apocalyptic” with the qualifier “false.” Rahner enumerates a few elements that contribute to false apocalyptic’s falsity: it “unwittingly supposes that the future already leads of itself a supra-temporal existence, of which history is only the projection on the screen of worthless time,” and thus time becomes “a nothingness which is unmasked and really eliminated in … gnostic contact with the true reality, called apocalypsis.” Apocalyptic becomes false, thus distinguished from eschatology, when it denigrates time and history and transforms both into halves of a cosmic simulcast, completed by a supersensible future. Rahner’s world-affirmation stops him short of an affirmation of this divisive mindset. And most importantly, apocalyptic proves particularly pathological when it presumes noetic

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682 Phan, *Eternity in Time*, p. 76, and see pp. 70-72, 206-207.

683 Morwenna Ludlow suggests that this phrase, “false apocalyptic,” is confusing, and that this leads to the criticisms of other theologians, including Phan. Ludlow seems to have a more positive (or at least a neutral) estimation of Rahner’s understanding of apocalyptic. See Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 140.


685 Rahner’s concern here, it must be said, corroborates to a certain extent the Nietzschean-Heideggerian critique of metaphysics’ positing of the supersensible. Clearly Rahner disagrees with the extent to which Nietzsche and Heidegger pursue this critique, but “false apocalyptic” gives them some critical traction on the Christian tradition as co-conspirator with metaphysics.
contact with true reality independent from history, and thus noetic control of the future and everything lying under the future’s purview. Rahner’s commitment to the Catholic sublime rejects such pretension to comprehensive noesis as a closure against ontophany.

There are various definitions of apocalyptic, of course. For example, Johann Baptist Metz, who criticizes Rahner sharply for the anti-apocalyptic mentality of his “idealist” theology, operates under a vastly different definition of apocalyptic than does Rahner. Metz’s “apocalyptic” privileges “interruption,” the ever-possible (i.e., imminent) inbreaking of God into time as the Lord of time, as the condition for the possibility of social critique. Rahner’s “apocalyptic” squares with more traditional definitions of apocalyptic whose prime element is total—comprehensive—revelation. As a result of their divergent definitions of the same term, Rahner opposes apocalyptic insofar as it is noetically charged, and in large part for the reason that Metz champions apocalyptic: to preserve the openness of open works. This leaves open the possibility, of course, that apocalyptic ontphanically charged could do this work of preservation. For Rahner, in a way comparable to Catherine Keller, apocalyptic (especially the book of Revelation) perpetually verges on closure, in that it views all of history comprehensively and often, by implication, (to connect with the Heideggerian critique of apophansis with which we have allied Rahner) correctly. Apocalypse so determined anticipates, if it differs widely from, modern subjectivity. This sort of apocalypse

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686 In his recently delivered and published Père Marquette Lectures, Cyril O’Regan provides a framework—a schema of “spaces”—for understanding the panoply of modern deployments of apocalyptic in theology. O’Regan’s work illustrates that apocalyptic is by no means a hard and fast category, and that Rahner has as much viable claim to his definition as do Phan or Metz. See O’Regan, Theology and the Spaces of Apocalyptic (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2009). The key, of course, is being upfront about one’s definition of “apocalyptic.” Most theologians leave this key point hidden.


688 See Keller, Apocalypse Now and Then.
risks making it “impossible to explain what the essential, divinely guarded mystery of our open and unforeseeable future might be.” But again, apocalyptic, since it has a “false” or pathological variant, could just as well turn out true and healthy—after the subject.

To access this last thought from a different angle, perhaps Rahner has in mind, when he rejects “false” apocalyptic, a certain tone of language, which for him would refer more to the neo-Scholastic theological tradition rather than the biblical, deuto-canonical, and extra-canonical texts scholars file under the name “apocalyptic”—for this reason Rahner need not adduce textual examples of apocalyptic such as Phan would like. In contrast to Phan, Fritsch gives a sympathetic reading of Rahner’s distinction between Christian eschatology and apocalyptic. Fritsch highlights the interplay of two footnotes whereby Rahner elucidates his allergy to false apocalyptic. At the end of the section on his fifth hermeneutical-eschatological thesis, Rahner devotes a footnote to the (neo-Scholastic) objection that Christ, since he possessed the beatific vision during his earthly ministry, and since he proclaims several apocalyptic discourses, validates apocalyptic’s (perceived) attribute of correct narration of future events. Rahner merely raises/acknowledges the objection, without providing a full-scale response to it, other than with some sketchy comments and a reference to Mk 13.32. Fritsch perceptively notes, though, that Rahner returns to this objection regarding eschatology and Christ’s beatific vision “a year later, 1961, more in connection

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690 This evocation of tone could invite Derrida (back) into the conversation at this point, particularly because of Derrida’s constant employment of the words “grace” and “work” in his text on/in/of apocalyptic, but this is yet another project for another day. For those interested, see Derrida, “Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy” in Derrida and Negative Theology, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 25-71.

691 See Fritsch, Vollendende, pp. 110-114, below translations are mine.

with the knowledge and self-consciousness of Christ” in general. The real link to the objection occurs in a second footnote once Rahner has reached the topic of eschatology late in the article, after a general description of Christ’s self-consciousness and knowledge.

Rahner puts Jesus’ human consciousness at somewhat of a distance from normal human consciousness, on account of his consciousness’s being marked by the beatific vision (Rahner never denies this point, and to this extent fully agrees with the neo-Scholastic conception—the area of disagreement lies in what beatific vision means). But the two, Christ’s visio beatitif (or visio immediata dei) and human consciousness (or spirit) prove analogous because of the “direct presence to God” both involve. Rahner calls this direct presence “an unsystematic attunement (Gestimmtheit) and an unreflexive horizon.” The words, unsystematic and unreflexive, cohere with Rahner’s next comment, that the direct presence to God excludes “standing opposite’ an object” (gegenständliche Gegenüber). Turning to Christ’s consciousness of His divine Sonship specifically, Rahner emphasizes its aesthetic (i.e., receptive) dimension, which we can also call “history.” Christ’s consciousness is realized “gradually,” but not foremost in the sense that Christ always becomes aware of new objects, and only partially. The primary accent of Christ’s aesthesis “consists rather in the never quite successful attaining of what and who one is oneself, and this precisely as what

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693 Fritsch, Vollendende, p. 111. Fritsch proceeds into an excursus on Rahner’s article on Christ’s knowledge and the beatific vision. See the next note.


695 See Ibid, p. 213: “The Church’s doctrinal pronouncements command us to hold fast to the direct vision of the Logos by the human soul of Jesus. They do not, however, give us any theological instructions as to what precise concept of this vision of God we must hold.”

696 Ibid., p. 209, ET modified. Two points: 1) Rahner makes special note of his use of Gestimmtheit instead of Stimmung, two closely related words. One wonders if this is a slap at Heidegger, for whom Stimmung is an incomparably significant term, particularly in Being and Time. 2) “Unreflective” changes here to “unreflexive” to keep this dissertation’s distinction of Kant’s aesthetic meaning of “reflective” from “reflexive,” as specifically oriented toward knowledge.
and whom one always already possessed oneself in the depths of one’s existence.\footnote{Ibid., p. 211.} This passage echoes several points of the dissertation, all together. Christ’s spiritual history (Chapter Two) is received (Chapter One) through a perscrutatio of his Mystery (Chapter Four), a dive into his life that one might call a homecoming (Chapter Two) or a retrieval (Chapter Three) that until its final consummation is always incomplete (Chapter Five). Christ’s beatific vision does not attain to God’s presence completely in the sense of a grasping knowledge of the divine essence. “Beatific vision” need not equal “grasping.” Rather, beatific vision “sees” God immediately (non-objectively) in the sense of an abiding attunement to God’s abiding promise to bestow God’s self on humanity and through humanity, the whole world. In this sense, Christ’s vision is an apocalypsis—comprehensive unveiling—of God, but without grasping. Thus Rahner locates a true type of apocalyptic that proves analogous to sublime apprehension.

Christ’s apocalyptic discourses should not be interpreted within a rubric of objective correctness: “[T]he objective perception of every individual object right down to the last detail would be the end of freedom.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 214.} Rahner rejects this, not all, apocalyptic. This is “false” apocalyptic. Could Rahner have chosen better language to express this idea? Maybe, but rather than quibbling with Rahner’s language, we would do better to take his point: eschatology, like any language, should let God abide as Mystery. Apocalyptic eschatologies are especially in need of this reminder: modes (tones) of language that willingly pay the price of closure to scratch the itch of curiosity with the nails of correctness militate against God’s chosen manner of communication—unending opening. Such is the sense of the Ignatian vision of God as Ever-greater. Maybe this is why, and Endean can rejoin helpfully, the

\footnote{Ibid., p. 214.}
“concern” of Ignatius’s texts is not to be “prescriptive,” but rather “to offer a ‘way of proceeding,’ a way of handling realities as yet unforeseen”—through works directed into openness, open works.699 Eschatology should, Rahner, like Ignatius, implies, proceed along an axis of non-knowledge or “docta ignorantia futuri” (learned ignorance of the future), lest it relinquish its claim to Christianity through too much speaking, an over-active imagination, a violation of the Catholic sublime.700 This ignorance of the future opens our ears to divine interlocution. Under the divine question, Rahner believes, our lives can become and remain texts of the (eschatological) question, not of the (false apocalyptic) answer. Operability, to return to that word, could mean the possibility of working out a comprehensive view of history—some sort of apocalypse—so long as it preserves Mystery.

§14. Seinsgeschichte

Daybreak

Nietzsche opened the most prolific decade of his literary production with a book called Morgenröte (1881). This word contains the image of the coming redness of morning, what in Homer is translated as “rosy-fingered dawn.” Nietzsche’s title has undergone several variations in English renderings, but the best is Daybreak—a wonderful English expression that presents the connotation of “breakthrough” that Nietzsche aimed to suggest.


700 See Rahner, “The Question of the Future,” p. 201: “Anyone who rejects the docta ignorantia futuri … is properly speaking no longer a Christian, even though this rejection is posited in a sphere which, since it is apparently wholly secular in character, seems to have nothing further whatever to do with Christianity and theology.” This borderline harsh statement shows the absolute seriousness with which Rahner takes the Catholic sublime. Its openness is not, as the dissertation’s introduction noted, the willy-nilly openness of contemporary “culture.” It is a sublime challenge to human persons to keep open what seems impossible to keep open: the way to God, paved by Christ and the Holy Spirit.
The above discussion under the heading of “Dawn,” intimates that Rahner bears out an eschatological relation to the dawn of modernity, thus ushering in (with other twentieth-century theologians), a new age in theology, marked anew by the beatific vision. It must be said, furthermore, that this theological age is concurrent with a new age in the Catholic Church (parallel too with the burgeoning socio-economic reality called globalization), the age of the world church.\textsuperscript{701} Rahner’s efforts to go beyond (while always passing through) the prevailing neo-Scholastic theology of his formative years show his conviction that the theological tradition has reached an end that doubles as a new beginning. Rahner’s theology is epochal, thus on edge, eschatological.

One cannot help but wonder if Rahner learned this practice of an eschatological reading of a tradition from Heidegger, that is, if one knows Heidegger. The latter makes an industry (if a counter-technological one) of exploring the edges of the tradition of Western metaphysics, from Plato through his own Being and Time. The Kantbuch, which we know influences Rahner so deeply, sticks out as among Heidegger’s first efforts toward a comprehensive re-reading of the Western tradition. But the acme of this metaphysical eschatology emerges within his lectures and essays on Nietzsche. Hence, alongside other reasons, the above invocation of \textit{Morgenröte}. Nietzsche, peering over metaphysics’ end-time precipice (in the Alps), might rightly bear the moniker of Heidegger’s own \textit{Morgenröte}.\textsuperscript{702}

Rahner just missed Heidegger’s Nietzsche lectures, but he did attend \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics}. There Heidegger makes the statement, “Limit and end are that whereby beings


\textsuperscript{702} It is no coincidence that Heidegger cites \textit{Morgenröte} near the beginning of his essay, “Nietzsche’s Metaphysics.” He writes, “With \textit{Daybreak}, published in 1881, a light dawns over Nietzsche’s metaphysical path … From then on, for almost a decade, he wends his way in the most luminous brightness of this experience.” Heidegger, “Nietzsche’s Metaphysics” in \textit{Nietzsche III}, pp. 185-251, here p. 188.
first begin to be.”\textsuperscript{703} This may sound like an eschatological statement, referring to the “end times” of beings, but in reality it is a summary of Heidegger’s protology of Being.

Everything Heidegger says about Being’s history points back to a “Greek origin.”\textsuperscript{704} The sentence just quoted follows upon a series of Heideggerian remarks on the words “\textit{telos}” and “\textit{Ende}” as they relate to beings. Heidegger places them under another word, \textit{Vollendung}—fulfillment. For the Greeks, he argues, at the beginning of Being’s history, a being is that which “de-limits” itself, and which “stands” of its own, by a power called Being. The standing-forth of a being is the truth of Being. Later metaphysics, Heidegger narrates, fell away from these initial elements of the Greek conception of Being, eventually arriving at modern subjectivity. \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics} closes on an eschatological note, urging “waiting” through “questioning”—for a new manifestation of Being.\textsuperscript{705} Rahner heard these Heideggerian protological thoughts, with their ultimate eschatological inflection. The decline from the proton opens the possibility of metaphysics’ eschaton, a completion of metaphysics and a way forward after subjectivity.

Rahner did not hear the following passage in lecture, and probably never read it, but it distills Heidegger’s eschatology in a few lines, written soon after Rahner left Freiburg:

\begin{quote}
Before Being can occur in its primal truth, Being as the will must be broken, the world must be forced to collapse and the earth must be driven to desolation, and man to mere labor. Only after this decline does the abrupt dwelling of the Origin
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{703} Heidegger, \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics}, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{704} See Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Beginning and the End of Philosophy” in \textit{Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments, Volume 1: Philosophy}, ed. Christopher E. Macann (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 16-28, here p. 28: “If one has not come to terms with the meaning of this Greek origin for Heidegger, it becomes virtually impossible to understand the late Heidegger.”

\textsuperscript{705} Heidegger, \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics}, p. 221.
take place for a long span of time. In the decline, everything, that is, beings in the whole of the truth of metaphysics, approaches its end.\textsuperscript{706}

The first line gestures toward the protological, but the remainder of the passage casts singular focus on the future. Even the reference to the “Origin” hardly implies a return to some idyllic past, but rather a new and enduring sort of dwelling. Heidegger’s rhetoric here (as elsewhere) waxes millennial, with a healthy helping of something like apocalyptic (more on this soon). Metaphysics will end (is ending, has ended—temporal sequence becomes fluid here) with a thousand-year reign of post-metaphysical, thus post-subjective (/objective) thinking and dwelling (and surely building). So much the better, Heidegger implies, for the thinker called to the task of retrieving Being from the morass of metaphysics, but (and Heidegger leaves this point almost thoroughly unevaluated) so much the worse for virtually every other person living in the West, and over the entire globe, because the West’s metaphysical pretension was always global dominance. The desolation of the West entails global collapse. Such are the fateful consequences of the rise and fall of subjective will.

There we have the main outlines of Heideggerian eschatology.

One could specify Heidegger’s eschatology through two points of Rahnerian critique, which would correspond (taking care with this word) to the two aspects of Rahnerian critique developed to the brink of their fullness in Chapter Four: 1) Heidegger’s foreclosure of infinity (i.e., his Dionysian perspective), and 2) Heidegger’s prodigal Gelassenheit (i.e., his welcoming of evil into thinking). We shall address only the second here, though, for it proves most relevant. Heidegger’s fatal tone when he writes of the “collapse” and

\textsuperscript{706} Heidegger, \textit{The End of Philosophy}, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 86. A note on the English volume, \textit{The End of Philosophy}: Joan Stambaugh, in consultation, it seems, with David Farrell Krell, who translated the Nietzsche lectures, published the first three essays that make up \textit{The End of Philosophy} separately from the two Nietzsche volumes, although they appear in the second volume in German. The final essay of \textit{The End of Philosophy} is a translation of an essay in \textit{Vorträge und Aufsätze}. 

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“desolation” of the earth, his description of the violent end of an age so that another may come, sounds far too sober—even to the point of a staid inebriation with the frigidity of historical necessity. Heidegger embraces evil. He shows no sign of resisting or crying out against it. He advocates letting it occur. This *Gelassenheit*, now all-too-familiar, strays far from anything Rahner supports.

But still we can learn from the Heideggerian duality, eschatology-protology, after a brief Rahnerian chastisement. For Rahner, instead of Heidegger’s *proton*—Greek (pre-Socratic) Being—to which metaphysical developments and the impending millennium of meditative-poetic thinking refer in their own ways, all future occurrences in history point back to the Christ-event (Incarnation, Cross, Resurrection) as their *proton*.707 On the ground of this *proton*, Rahner argues against a theology (or philosophy) of history that accords “with the pattern of an ascending development,” which readers of Rahner might understand him as espousing in his essays on “Christology within an Evolutionary Worldview.”708 Rahner means that no dawn or daybreak progresses beyond the Christ-event (nor does it fall from it, à la metaphysical doctrines falling from Greek Being in Heidegger). This is not to say that history remains static. There are genuine breaks of day. We read, “Rather, will history present ever new but ultimately equivalent ways for the realization of human development and for the relationship to God.”709 Ever new, but ultimately equivalent—so Rahner styles, with the equanimity of one versed in *Gelassenheit*, Christian historical life through the ages,

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707 In “Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions,” Rahner names the Christ-event the “aetiological source of [eschatological] knowledge” (p. 334).


709 Rahner, “Profane History and Salvation History,” p. 12.
with all its sins and virtues. This point bears on the Catholic sublime, but let us leave it untouched for now, until we pass under the purview of “justice.”

**Justice**

Heidegger’s multifaceted and multilayered account of the history of Being consists, one could say, in an extended forensic argument. The main charge he brings against metaphysics on behalf of the prosecution is that metaphysics follows, from its very inception, a track of exhaustion. Metaphysics doomed itself from the beginning (*proton*), to the consumption, really the squandering, of each and every one of its possibilities. With Nietzsche, the fund of possibilities reaches its point of depletion. This is what Heidegger means by the “end of metaphysics”: the end of new possibilities. Like a German Qoheleth, Heidegger proclaims, decidedly, there is nothing new under metaphysics’ sun. Given this end of possibilities, then, thinking must turn to an extra-metaphysical realm of possibility, which Heidegger rather unfortunately insists on thematizing in Dionysian terms.

Heidegger’s judgment against metaphysics, particularly the modern metaphysics of subjectivity, has driven many of our reflections in this dissertation. Likewise, Heidegger’s judgment against Christianity, which according to him goes hand in hand with Western metaphysics, has provided a field for critical traction against Heidegger, with respect to his proscription of the appearance of the Infinite in thinking (and poetry)—thus his bracketing of the possibility of a Christ—and his consequent romancing of evil (§§3 and 11). As this two-sided engagement with Heidegger continues, let us now zero in on Heidegger’s charge in *The End of Philosophy* that Christianity consummately validates the metaphysical turn from truth as unconcealment to truth as correctness and then, in modernity, the subject’s

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710 See Heidegger, *Nietzsche IV*, pp. 147-149.
certainty. The issue, Heidegger claims, is salvation and the believer’s conviction of her possession of it. When the Christian, or in Heidegger’s tendentious parlance, Christianity (as a whole, presumably), asserts faithful certainty of salvation for some and thus damnation of others, metaphysics’ end lies just around the corner. On the one hand, Heidegger’s description of Christianity’s culpability for modernity’s excesses (of grasping) seems apt. The modern era certainly functions as an arena for innumerable Christians holding fast to salvation as their God-given private property. This mentality coheres quite nicely (or horribly) with the expeditions of conquerors, the experiments of scientists, and the exploits of businesspeople. On the other hand, Heidegger misfires his condemnation of Christianity as a factory for certainty when he takes aim at all of Christianity. Not all types of modern Christianity assume certainty and assertion as fiduciary tender. While some lines of Christianity bask in their master-ful determination of God’s salvific plan, others dwell (often uncomfortably, unheimlich) within a different linguistic space, which lets uncertainty be, so God’s truth may gradually unveil itself. Christianity, pace Heidegger, is not a movement that has exhausted its possibilities, nor is it bent on exhausting possibilities, but rather it expresses transcendence toward ever new possibilities, whose only limit is the ever-greater God. In Rahner’s language, this transcendence is called reductio in Mysterium, and in ours, the Catholic sublime. This Christian transcendence, unlike the unfolding of metaphysics, involves no exhaustion, but rather an unending (unendliche) dive into the Infinite (Unendliche).

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711 See Heidegger, End of Philosophy, pp. 19-26. Cf. Heidegger, Nietzsche III, pp. 239-241, which in the context of Nietzsche’s development of the concept of justice (see below) discusses modern subjectivity as bound up with “liberation to a new freedom,” beyond “the Christian Church’s assurance of redemption based on belief in revelation” (p. 239). Modern Christianity and modern metaphysics, in effect, somehow share the same root, even if they end up at loggerheads—in metaphysics’s end in Nietzsche (again, see below).

712 Lest the reader bristle at this last phrase, the context of the rest of the dissertation should alert her that this phrase has nothing to do with modern, bourgeois ideologies of progress.
Despite our Rahnerian problems with Heidegger, a relationship akin to mirroring has been falling into place in this dissertation, and now it must be thematized explicitly. The Catholic sublime, as the last paragraph hints, reflects Heidegger’s genealogy of the West’s allowance of truth as unconcealment to fall into truth as certainty, except that the Catholic sublime stands in excess of this historical falling. The Catholic sublime, the ethos of Catholicism, exists almost as long as and always alongside metaphysics, sometimes interlacing with it, but with an abiding capacity to elude its clutches. The Catholic sublime, then, is historical, or is catholic history—the history of universality, a view of the whole world that stops short of comprehensive grasping of the whole (thus a worldview, Weltbild, in Heidegger’s sense).\footnote{See Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture (1938)” in Off the Beaten Track, pp. 57-85.} Historical occasions of imperialism, papal power-grabs, colonialism and various other sins in the church resulted, it must be said, from performative misapprehensions of the Catholic sublime, from individuals and entire societies who understood the ethos of Catholicism as comprehensiveness \textit{with} comprehensive grasping.\footnote{Hence Pope John Paul II’s famous apologies for the sins of the Catholic Church, especially in the second millennium. For a short example of such apologies, see Pope John Paul II, “Homily of the Holy Father: ‘Day of Pardon,’” delivered Sunday, 12 Mar 2000, accessed online at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000312_pardon_en.html, 4 Sept 2009.} Thus the Catholic sublime most closely approximates the pretensions of Western metaphysics only when the Catholic sublime is betrayed. But to add a layer of complexity, the Catholic sublime proceeds in a similar way to metaphysics, insofar as both are driven by decision. Heidegger explains “decision” as the “fundamental positions” that define Being’s unfurling history (thus exhaustion).\footnote{Heidegger, \textit{End of Philosophy}, p. 19.} Heidegger focuses on modern fundamental positions,
associating (not equating) them with Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Schelling, and Nietzsche. In Catholic decisions appears a historical track alternative to metaphysics.

This ostensibly new claim simply specifies the dissertation’s overall thesis, that Rahner presents the Catholic sublime. A few initially loose statements of congruence will support this claim. These statements will braid together Heidegger’s history of Being in modernity and the retrieval of modern Catholicism at play in Rahner. First, if Descartes stands for the decision to determine representative thinking (subjectivity) as subjectivity, Ignatius, qua ecclesial person, inaugurates the Catholic sublime in early modernity as a force resistant to sprouting subjectivity. Second, if Nietzsche consummates (exhausts) modern metaphysics by pointing forward to a comprehensive worldview named justice (more on this soon), Rahner as late modern exponent of the Catholic sublime ushers in sublime apprehension, consummate comprehensiveness without comprehensive grasping. Third, the certainty that Heidegger diagnoses as constitutive of modern Christianity coheres with the fundamental positions of Descartes and Nietzsche, but not of Ignatius and Rahner.

Each of these three statements demands explication, but we shall put emphasis on the second, if for no other reason than that §7 preliminarily sketched the first, and the third’s explication is contingent upon that of the second. Let us attend, then, to the Heideggerian Nietzsche and to Rahner, in terms of justice and justification. Metaphysics ends, Heidegger famously argues, with Nietzsche. As a part of his metaphysics-consummating doctrine, Nietzsche teaches that truth is justice.\textsuperscript{716} Heidegger culls this teaching from various notes of Nietzsche’s from the period after \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra} (after 1885, the last four years of Nietzsche’s literary activity). Justice, Heidegger avers, has no legal or moral significance, but rather a metaphysical one. It refers to an “opening of perspectives, [in which] an all-

\textsuperscript{716} See Heidegger, \textit{Nietzsche III}, pp. 137-149, the chapter called, “Truth as Justice.”
embracing horizon spreads, the delineation of that which is already apportioned in advance
to all representing, calculating, and forming.” This horizon surpasses that of correctness
or the view of truth as a relationship of adequation, such as apophantic logic has it. Thus
Nietzsche’s expression of the essence of truth raises (renders more sublime) modern
thinking of truth. He does this by heightening human subjectivity’s power vis-à-vis the
horizon. Heidegger gives special attention to a note in which Nietzsche speaks of justice as
“panoramic power,” a full deployment of the will to power, or Nietzsche’s intensification of
modern subjectivity. Such panoramic power serves as the basis, or justification, of any
human action on beings, whether in the interest of art or knowledge. Nietzsche’s justice is
comprehensive grasping. Furthermore it comprises comprehensive grasping of the future,
as it implies pretensions to “permanentize beings as a whole,” which as yet remains an
unfulfilled possibility. From a Rahnerian point of view, which can interlace with Heidegger
at this point, as future comprehensive grasping, or comprehensive grasping of the future,
Nietzsche’s justice bears some resemblance to Rahner’s “false apocalyptic” (§13).

This is all interesting enough on its own, but more germane to the concern which
opened this subsection is Heidegger’s thesis, “Iustificatio in the sense of the Reformation and
Nietzsche’s concept of justice as truth are the same thing.” Let us tease out the sense of
this statement based on the points elucidated above. The Reformation teaching of instificatio
is the target of Heidegger’s criticism of “Christianity’s” clinging to certainty of salvation
based on belief in revelation. This instificatio, even if it prefers immediate certainty as

717 Ibid., p. 148.


719 This is among the most hotly contested points in Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche, because it is
the consummate moment in Heidegger’s portrayal of Nietzsche as the consummate metaphysician. See Krell,

720 Heidegger, End of Philosophy, p. 97.
opposed to a certainty mediated through doubt in Descartes, cannot evade its intimate
connection to Descartes’s foundation of (location of the justification for) truth in human
subjectivity. Nietzsche’s justice, as a comprehensively grasping perspective, represents a full
turn to absolute subjectivity, thus a completion of that which Reformation \textit{justificatio} and
Descartes’s \textit{cogito} commence.\textsuperscript{721} §8 witnessed Heidegger writing an equation between Rilke’s
angel and Nietzsche’s Zarathustra. The same principle applies to that equation and this one,
between Reformation \textit{justificatio} and Nietzsche’s justice: all teachings involved point toward
the end of metaphysics, but remain firmly entrenched in metaphysics.\textsuperscript{722} Rilke’s angel,
Zarathustra, and now justification and justice all provide ways to the threshold of something
ew, but fail, venturesome though they be, to cross it. Heidegger suggests, we now know,
that this failure to cross results from exhaustion of possibilities for thinking beings.

Rahner’s Catholic sublime, this dissertation has been arguing, crosses a threshold
toward something new (though not toward a new beginning of the “thinking of Being”). §7
linked Rahner’s teachings on grace with the Council of Trent’s \textit{Decree on Justification}. That
thought pertains to the present discussion. One wonders, since Reformation teachings on
justification were opposed by the Catholic treatise on justification at Trent, whether the
Catholic view of justification (as elucidated by Rahner) eludes the grasp of metaphysics. Our
hypothesis is that it does.

\textsuperscript{721} And this, Heidegger reports, even beyond Hegel’s absolute subjectivity. See Heidegger, \textit{Nietzsche
IV}, pp. 136-146, especially p. 145.

\textsuperscript{722} Heidegger places Catholic Christianity under the same ban with reference to the Thomistic formula
\textit{gratia supponit naturam} (Ibid., p. 24). This dissertation’s §7 provides an answer of sorts to that objection by
showing that Catholic theologians since de Lubac, including Rahner, have called into question the metaphysical
framework of the \textit{duplex ordo} that was long interpreted as a faithful interpretation of \textit{gratia supponit naturam}. This
previous analysis works toward the critical affirmation that Heidegger’s relegation of Catholic teachings on
grace to the same history of Being as Nietzsche’s justice and Reformation justification fails to hold.
Trent’s *Decree on Justification* was promulgated at the council’s sixth session, 13 January 1547, near modernity’s dawn. The decree consists of several chapters and a list of anathemas. A couple of the chapters and some of the corresponding anathemas apply here. The central chapter connecting with the Rahner-Heidegger dialogue is Chapter IX: “Against the Vain Confidence of Heretics.” This short chapter introduces the belief expressed by some people of the day that sins are forgiven for those who “boast of [their] confidence and certainty of the remission of [their] sins,” and the related conviction that justified sinners “must needs, without any doubting whatsoever, settle within themselves that they are justified, and that no one is absolved from sins and justified, but he that believes for certain that he is absolved and justified.” The decree disagrees with these beliefs, and thoroughly on account of their entanglement in certainty. Though “pious people,” the decree submits, should not doubt God’s mercy, Christ’s merit, or the efficacy of the sacraments, each one, with respect to oneself, “may have fear and apprehension touching one’s own grace.” Fear and apprehension—the bishops at Trent agree that the sublimity of God’s grace must take precedence over human noetic control. The *Decree on Justification* serves as a milestone, a marker for the *status nascendi* of sublime apprehension—an apprehensive, that is, non-grasping and nervous, active-receptive rapport with God and the world God graces. The Council sees certainty, the calculation of salvation, as beyond the pale of Christianity, precisely because it functions to close Christians off from true receptivity to grace. Rahner, committed to all three modern Councils beginning with Trent, agrees. He relates this view to the heart of eschatology:

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Its central affirmation is concerned only with the victorious grace of Christ which brings the world to its fulfillment (Vollendung), though couched indeed in terms which safeguard God’s mystery with regard to individual persons as still pilgrims and do not say whether the individual is included in this certain triumph of grace—or ‘left out.’

To put it negatively, a doctrine of justification marked by certainty, a gesture of closure, violates the Catholic sublime, the fundamental ethos of openness.

The Heideggerian story of the oblivion of Being tells of metaphysics’ continual running-aground, particularly in the time between Descartes and Nietzsche, culminating in the closure of the subject’s dominant world-structuring (Gestell) only to be remedied—possibly, we can hope—by a new millennium of meditative thinking (cf. Gelassenheit) and poetry. The Catholic sublime’s historical career more nearly approximates a success story, one attempted in fits and starts (much like the history of Israel from the Exodus through the Exile), of opening the world for and according to the self-communication of God. The consummation of the Catholic sublime, its eschaton or leading edge (on the side of finitude), is sublime apprehension, the latest (potential) success. These comments fit here because the difference between the Heideggerian and Rahnerian narratives hinges on our current topic—justification.

Heidegger helps greatly in the development of a Rahnerian narrative, but still the former remains problematic. Why? What is the problem with Heidegger, really, from Rahner’s perspective? To identify it as, for example, his ignorance of Trent’s Decree on

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725 Two comments are in order at the end of these paragraphs on Rahner. First, see Rahner, “Questions of Controversial Theology on Justification” in TI 4, 189-218, here p. 196, an article, obviously, on justification in which he aligns Protestant certainty of justification with an overblown Catholic attachment to “orthodoxy.” He writes, “Absolute certainty about one’s own inmost orthodoxy in the sight of God (which would be the presupposition of such absolute certainty) seems to me to be as impossible and un-Catholic as absolute certainty about one’s justice in the sight of God.” Second, one should consider a deep reflection on justification and eschatology (and the church) in Rahner, “The Church and the Parousia of Christ” in TI 6, pp. 295-312, the relevant pages being pp. 299-301.
Justification, and thus of the promise of modern Catholicism inscribed therein, would, it seems, miss the point. One would fly at Heidegger at such an oblique angle as to not even touch him. But would one (not)? Gregory Smith argues that when Heidegger speaks of the Seinsgeschichte, “Being does everything, and man [sic] nothing.”\footnote{Gregory B. Smith, “Heidegger’s Nietzsche” in Martin Heidegger: Paths Taken, Paths Opened (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), pp. 155-164, here p. 160. Cf. Heidegger, “Nietzsche’s Metaphysics” in Nietzsche III, p. 249: “Metaphysics is not a human artifact. Yet that is why there must be thinkers. Thinkers are in each case preeminently situated in the unconcealment that the Being of beings prepares for them.”} Being stands over against beings, specifically human beings, as absolutely active, without any need for cooperation (except perhaps from a few privileged thinkers, Heidegger included).\footnote{As François Raffoul describes it (though approvingly, in contrast to our disapproval), “The self is … given to itself from an abyssal and opaque withdrawal at the very heart of the givenness of Being, a secret of Being to which we belong as we belong to ourselves.” Raffoul, Heidegger and the Subject, trans. David Pettigrew and Gregory Recco (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1998), p. 258. Being’s secret, it seems, is that we never actually belong to ourselves.} Compare this with Rahner’s criticism from Hearer of the Word of a Protestant perspective on God’s relationship to human beings: the human becomes merely the negative correlate to divine positivity, and the human must therefore be justified by God, lest the human remain purely negative (HW 19, 154). Heidegger tacitly inhabits a Protestant doctrine of iustificatio, even if he insists that his thought of Being bears no analogy to any Christian rendering of the God-creation distinction. For Heidegger, Being forsakes humanity, and any return of Being would be a result solely of Being’s arbitrary will. Being is a No to humanity. In Heidegger’s later work, the operative experience of Being is forsakenness, which follows from his early thought, steeped as it is, S.J. McGrath emphasizes, in Protestant sources, which may be called “phenomenology for the Godforsaken.”\footnote{See S.J. McGrath, The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy: Phenomenology for the Godforsaken.} It has been said time and again, Heidegger does not evade the very metaphysics he wishes to overcome. We can restate that thesis in terms of Heidegger’s Protestantism: when Heidegger sets Being and humanity at odds with the
metaphor of abandonment, he espouses a Protestant, competitive worldview—a Weltbild like Nietzsche’s justice. He submits to the pull of metaphysics, while Rahner meets metaphysics with Ignatian indifference—an attitude that never seeks for certainty of salvation and that never sees humanity as a negative correlate to the positive God. Sublime apprehension, which Rahner brings to light, allows the unsettling experience of living without settled justification, with the charge of cooperating with God’s grace. It involves working through every moment as if undergoing the Unheimliche leads directly to our Heimat in Geheimnis.

Poetic Opening

Marion’s essay on Hölderlin … suggests that the overcoming of Heidegger is not produced by recurring to apophasis but also to apocalypsis. 729

One must therefore undertake to say. To say in order to identify the silence. 730

Many reasons present themselves for beginning the end of this Heidegger section (i.e., the third subsection) with Marion’s The Idol and Distance. §9 elaborated (following O’Regan) the sort of repetition afoot between Marion and his hitherto seemingly unlikely theological-philosophical predecessor, Rahner. Hence this dissertation’s reading of Rahner, even prior to §9, as “opening the aperture of phenomenality” through his philosophical works. Furthermore, this dissertation has come some distance in its sections on Heidegger by discussing (the Heideggerian) Nietzsche alongside (the Heideggerian) Hölderlin. Though Heidegger at innumerable points places these two in juxtaposition as Denker and Dichter, for theology (and perhaps everyone else), the contents of The Idol and Distance make the pairing

729 O’Regan, Theology and the Spaces of Apocalyptic, p. 144n42.
730 Marion, The Idol and Distance, p. 137.
of Nietzsche and Hölderlin as compelling as any site in Heidegger. And finally, Marion’s relationship to apocalyptic (language) makes him a natural choice for treatment in this subsection. But did not the above Rahnerian section inscribe a rejection of apocalyptic? Why allow apocalyptic to reenter here? A negative answer to the former question should suffice as a positive one to the latter. Rahner, and Marion with him, lets apocalyptic remain in theology, as long as it does not devolve into false apocalyptic. In this subsection’s epigraph, O’Regan ascribes to Marion a preference for *apocalypsis* over *apophasis* in the overcoming of Heidegger (an ambiguous genitive). For example, Marion’s highlighting of Hölderlin’s allusive poetic relationship to texts on Christ’s resurrection reveals an essential aspect of Marion’s theological position in *The Idol and Distance*, which closely resembles the thrust of Rahner’s *Vorgriff*.  

Poetic saying nears the sublimity of theology when it sustains a non-grasping anticipatory disposition (*Vorgriff*, rightly understood) toward God’s full unveiling (*apocalypsis*) in the final resurrection. Poetic saying since Hölderlin should be viewed less as oriented toward or normed by *apophasis*, thus negativity (the danger of Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit*), than by comprehensive affirmation (the Catholic sublime).

Language of the thinker (Nietzsche), the poet (Hölderlin), and the theologian (Denys), as Marion sees it, turns on what we might call the “between.” Thus we hearken back to Chapter Four’s discussion of theological language, especially as it relates to Mary’s Assumption, which, Rahner tells us, hinges on the preposition, “*zwischen*.” This preposition opens the eschatological question, the purview of this chapter. Marion’s between is not

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731 See Ibid., pp. 128-129. The key statement follows: “Resurrection therefore does not become the object of a desire, nor of a nostalgia, but only of an enduring wait, where the tension already mimics completion, without claiming to anticipate it” (128). Marion means here by “to anticipate” the sort of fore-conceiving with which Rahner’s *Vorgriff* has been, in the past, so woefully and recklessly confused.

732 Without preoccupying ourselves with an excess (!) of details, let it be said here that the relationship between Hölderlin and Denys in *The Idol and Distance* cries out for comparison with the relationship between the poet and the priest in Rahner’s essay, “Priest and Poet.”
exactly Mary’s between life and death, but rather the “between” in which human persons dwell, the distance opened by God the Father in the sending of God’s (and Mary’s) Son. 733 Dwelling, as pointed out above, consists in waiting for the full apocalypsis of the Son in the final resurrection. Marion thus theologically recalibrates Heidegger’s interpretation of the “between” in Hölderlin as “the time of the gods who have fled and of the god who is coming,”734 the “destitute time” (dürftiger Zeit) that ends the question with which we are familiar from our subsection on Rilke (beginning §8), “What are poets for?” Poetic language, Heidegger stipulates, belongs in essence to this between-time. So too does Heidegger’s path of thinking, between the end of metaphysics and another beginning.

Heidegger perceives this other beginning’s dawn in Hölderlin’s poetry, whose proximity to the Greek experience of truth as beauty shines with a brightness akin to, yet superior to (Heidegger implies) that of thinking. 735 Truth as aletheia involves shining, or to be more provocative, is no more or less than shining that shows. The Greeks accorded “[a]rt, as the pointing that allows the appearance of what is invisible,” with the designation, “the highest kind of showing.”736 This heightened showing occurs in Hölderlin’s poetic saying, just as it did for the Greeks. The Heideggerian Nietzsche glimpses this highest showing when he speaks of art in the grand style, but as a thinker (not a poet) he fails ultimately to access fully this art’s power. Nietzsche’s grand style, in the first volume of the Nietzsche

733 Marion, The Idol and Distance, especially pp. 129-136.

734 Heidegger, “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” in EHP, p. 64. A more comprehensive treatment of this “between” in Heidegger, and his eschatology more generally, would have to grant substantial room to the Beiträge zur Philosophie, but this subsection does not leave us that luxury. The future project on Rahner’s eschatology referred to above would accomplish this task, among others. See Heidegger, Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning), trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).


736 Ibid., p. 186.
lectures (see §5), appears as a light on the horizon, but Heidegger decides eventually that this light and this horizon belong to metaphysics’ sunset, and not a new daybreak. Heidegger tells as much when he treats Nietzsche as the last metaphysician, consummating metaphysics with “justice.” If there would be a grand style, then, it would be performed in something like Hölderlin’s poetry, where the dawn of a new beginning appears as the saying of the fourfold and the “in-finite relation of the voices of destiny.” Let us hear a bit more, in order to clarify how “fourfold” and “destiny” help concretize Heidegger’s thinking of time, or between-time, and how this relates to Rahner’s eschatology (via Marion).

Destiny occupies the center of Heidegger’s fourfold, as a gathering of the four, and this center is “the great beginning.” The great (or other) beginning, though it first becomes visible in Hölderlin, does not arrive in Hölderlin’s poetry as a fully accomplished presence, but rather it “remains an advent.” This means that the beginning belongs to the future. The new intimacy of earth, heaven, mortals, and gods, for the showing-forth of this “togetherness” is the import of the beginning, happens, Hölderlin says laconically and enigmatically in “The Rhine”—“Then.” Heidegger asks, “When is the time of this ‘then’?” Hölderlin leaves it, and thus the temporality of the fourfold, indeterminate. Heidegger immediately answers his own inquiry: “It [i.e., the beginning’s time] withdraws itself from all calculation. Such time temporalizes itself for the expectation within the calling which looks out.” Hölderlinian poetry coheres with (and surpasses?) Gelassenheit as a use of language

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738 Heidegger, “Hölderlin’s Earth and Heaven,” p. 195. See the Heideggerian statement that has arisen already in this dissertation: “This number [i.e., four] is never expressly thought or said by Hölderlin. Nevertheless, throughout all his sayings, the four are first caught sight of out of the intimacy of their togetherness.”

739 Ibid.

740 Ibid., p. 197.
that eschews calculative thinking, and thus lays bare time in its incalculability. This time, approaching covertly (like a thief in the night, perhaps, cf. 1 Thess 5.2\(^{741}\)), demands a special type of saying to correspond to its “mysterious kind of stillness,” or the “silent voice” with which it ties together the four of the fourfold.\(^{742}\) Hence Hölderlin’s carefully measured poetic address of the four, which undertakes to open human freedom, and thus history, to a great beginning. Hölderlin opens history to heavenly fire, and as Marion points out, to \textit{apocalypsis}—the “brightest light” that preserves its incalculability, and thus incomprehensibility (\textit{Unbegreiflichkeit}) as such, by virtue of its blinding force.\(^{743}\) The highest achievement of Heidegger’s eschatology is his expression of a hope, cultivated through an encounter with Hölderlin, that humans, even in an age of closure, can still open the world (to \textit{ontophany}).\(^{744}\)

This \textit{apocalypsis} comes, though—and this is key—as a result of exhaustion, of a death inscribed in the history of metaphysics. This \textit{apocalypsis}, with its attendant incomprehensibility, sounds very much like Rahner’s, indeed. Heidegger and Rahner share in common an association of temporality grounded in the future, intimately braided with an abiding divine incomprehensibility, with human linguistic praxis that relinquishes the desire to grasp reality and instead says it wonderful-ly so as to identify the silence of divinity and

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\(^{741}\) The reader should recall that some significant work of Heidegger’s in the decade preceding \textit{Being and Time} included a detailed study of Paul in general, and 1 Thessalonians in particular. See Heidegger, \textit{The Phenomenology of Religious Life}, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), §§23-26, pp. 61-74. Compare the above words on time’s incalculability (from 1959), in what might be named Hölderlin’s eschatology, with the following, from 1920, on Paul’s eschatology in 1 Thes: “The when is in no way objectively graspable” (Ibid., p. 73). As an additional aside, Gosetti-Ferencei’s treatment of the Heideggerian Hölderlin in HHSPL (see §8 above) oftentimes seems colored (to positive effect) by her project of translating these early Heidegger lectures.


\(^{743}\) Ibid., p. 198.

temporality (history) as bearing within them the promise of the brightest light, a full elucidation of human life. For Heidegger, this full elucidation stands outside, or at least apprehends a light other than that of, metaphysics—even Nietzsche’s, which falls ever so slightly short, when the grand style collapses into justice. But Heidegger’s apocalypsis here reduces, even at this point, so seemingly far from Being and Time, to being-toward-death, to a type of being inescapably beholden to finitude, and thereby to metaphysical determination. Rahner, on the other hand, through his hypothesis of the pancosmicity of the soul (see below), acknowledges an apocalypsis related to death, but not subsumed a priori under its supposed strictures. Apocalypsis, within a fully open (phenomenological) field, unveils human life and history as ordered toward a more sublime life, which Christianity calls eternal.

Heidegger’s eschatology of the great/other beginning reneges on the promise of openness to the future by blocking its infinite apocalypsis and by determining it (as opposed to keeping it reflective) with characteristics of the callousness of the intoxicated. Rahner, however, sets up an eschatology of a new beginning, of an outstanding yet coming future that we can anticipate in our time, never through calculation, but rather through sublime apprehension, a poetic disposition of sorts that has the courage to say, as the Catholic Church’s ethos has encouraged countless persons to do throughout the ages, “Fiat” (Chapter Four), but also “Marana tha” (1 Cor 16.22): “O Lord, come”—as Lord of history, the vision of whom is a blessing (beatitudo).

Perhaps here more than anywhere in the dissertation, Heidegger may appear to have led Rahner down a path Rahner never would have chosen, namely, a grand narrative that reflects Heidegger’s own storytelling with respect to Western metaphysics and the other

beginning. In this section, the Catholic sublime and sublime apprehension have, to repeat, been set up, by suggestion rather than assertion, as alternatives to, for instance, Descartes’s cogito and Nietzsche’s justice. But lest the reader think this an illicit Heideggerianizing of Rahner (yet again), several lines from Rahner’s essay, “Christianity and the ‘New Man’” demand consideration. Rahner observes, in relation to the emerging reality of globalization,

[I]f the universality of the Church is to be or become something real, and is not to be merely something belonging to the basic definition of Christianity, then this can be achieved by Christianity in the concrete only in, together with, and by the creation of this globally unified history. The Christian will not be surprised to learn, therefore, that this fusion of the history of every nation of the world into one had its real starting point in the very birth of Christianity and in the place where Christianity first took roots in the world and in history, viz. in the Western world.746

We could, quite justifiably, wrangle over the imprecision and eurocentrism of Rahner’s words.747 Instead, let us merely observe that they indicate that Rahner relates Christianity’s universality and its birth to the global spread of Western culture in modernity. Christian universality, to which the Catholic sublime witnesses, bears the stamp of history. It has history, happens historically, especially in modernity. Surely this history is not Being’s history, nor the falling of metaphysics—that is precisely the point.


747 And in fact, often times the charge of Eurocentrism could, if one were adventurous enough to play the iconoclast against iconoclasm, be exposed as a red herring. For instance, when Heidegger speaks in “Hölderlin’s Earth and Heaven” about directing questions “back into [Europe’s] beginning,” is he “being Eurocentric” or making a real effort to discover what went so awfully awry in Europe’s history to lead to its “technological-industrial domination … [of] the entire earth” (pp. 200-201)? A similar question could be asked of Rahner’s examination of Catholic history and our exposition of Rahner’s thinking as, in part, a retrieval of early modern Catholicism.
§15. Impossible System

The End of Freedom

Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* keeps coming up as a guiding (if negatively guiding) text for this dissertation. This final section before the dissertation’s conclusion will simply touch on the third Critique, so with this touching the conference between Rahner and Nancy can reconvene. The *Critique of Judgment* aspires mainly to join the two previously constructed pillars of Kant’s critical system, represented by understanding and reason, or nature and freedom, with the bond of reflective judgment. This latter “faculty,” or aspect of a faculty, for determinant judgment figures prominently in the first two Critiques, offers a special characteristic predisposed, Kant thinks, toward unifying philosophy. A.C. Genova summarizes it—reflective judgment presupposes “that nature in its particularity conforms to the requirements of judgment in its need to conceptualize nature as a logical system.”

Reflective judgment signifies, Genova continues, “reflective spontaneity, a free play of the faculties.” A free play oriented toward system, toward an end in system, a logical systematizing—judgment indicates a noetic end of nature, conceived in freedom. The noetic end of this system, as reflective, does not imply as its telos nature knowable in itself. Such knowledge of nature is impossible. But a critique of reflective judgment yields—this blazes a trail to Rahner and Nancy, via German Idealism—a regulative idea of the development of nature toward freedom, of freedom as end. To parallel the language of “of spirit” that has cropped up since Chapter Three, the end of Kant’s critical system is “of freedom.”

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749 Ibid., p. 63.
Chapter Four laid out reasons why one might justifiably distance Rahner from Kant, particularly on the grounds that 1) Rahner and Nancy, despite their appropriations of similar philosophical resources, Heideggerian and Kantian, differ widely in their applications of these resources, 2) the vast difference between Rahner and Nancy derives largely from the latter’s proximity to Kant’s noetic interests as opposed to Heidegger’s ontophanic ones, and 3) Nancy’s noeticism cashes out as a commitment to the negative sublime, which foregrounds freedom, while Rahner’s interest in ontophany privileges numinal encounter. This is not to say that Rahner puts no stock in freedom—we know that he greatly esteems it. Rather, Rahner contextualizes freedom instead of making freedom a context on its own. We shall now unpack that statement by replaying our contrast of Nancy and Rahner in the context, since we speak of context, of eschatology.

The formula most commonly associated with Rahner’s eschatology states that eschatology treats of the consummation of a history of personal freedom. This formula appears in this, the eschatological chapter’s last section, for two reasons. First, it welcomes dialogue with Nancy. Second, more importantly, the chapter’s organization mirrors the above thesis about Rahner, that he contextualizes freedom—within the ambit of God’s ever-greater glory—rather than fixing freedom as theology’s context. Let us begin with Nancy. Rahner will receive requisite time and space in the next subsection.

Could the phrase, “consummation of the history of personal freedom,” ever appear positively in Nancy’s thinking, or that of any post-Kantian noeticist? Most likely not,

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750 Ludlow, both to highlight the importance of freedom for Rahner and to facilitate a dialogue between him and Gregory of Nyssa on freedom and when it can be enacted, prioritizes freedom as a principle for arranging her content on Rahner (e.g., the sixth and seventh chapters of her book each have freedom in the title, underscoring freedom’s primacy of place). Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, pp. 168-236.

751 Nature, too, becomes contextualized within God’s glory—hence all our talk of apprehending the world as salvific economy (see §7).
because Nancy raises critical questions about both “consummation” and “the personal.” Freedom, on the other hand, stands at the center of Nancy’s works, but more importantly for this eschatological chapter, on their edges. The essay, “A Finite Thinking,” treats finitude (thus freedom\textsuperscript{752}) in eschatological terms, in the twofold sense that it finds in finitude the working out of the end of sense (see §9), and that it sees this work occurring at the end of the modern epoch. Before considering some words from “A Finite Thinking,” we should note its Heideggerian inspiration. Nancy cites in his essay the \textit{Kantbuch} §41, “The Understanding of Being and Dasein in Human Beings,” which is a linchpin for the \textit{Kantbuch}’s fourth part, the site for Heidegger’s constructive positioning of Kant into the former’s narrative of fundamental ontology, which would later become the history of Being (KPM 158-162). In this section, Heidegger stridently argues that in order for the human being to be—to exist—the human being must understand Being (or, have a \textit{Vorgriff} of it). So the human does, but Being is understood without a concept. Thus, though Heidegger leaves this thought silent, understanding of Being implies reflective judgment and, at least for this section, nothing more. By virtue of this nonconceptual (non-grasping) understanding of Being, the human being allows Being to irrupt from within, showing itself from itself as a self (KPM 160). Being operates, then, as the sustaining ground of human finitude. Nancy picks up where Heidegger leaves off, emphasizing certain points to his own end. He plays up the “vertigo” to which Heidegger refers when he speaks of Dasein on the verge of determining Being (KPM 158), making Being less into an ontophanic origin than into noetic groundlessness pure and simple, thus “sense” as inappropriable aesthetic existence.\textsuperscript{753} Nancy


\textsuperscript{753} Nancy, “A Finite Thinking,” p. 9.
underscores Heidegger’s “understanding without a concept,” naming conceptual grasping as the completion of an “infinite circle of insane appropriation”—implied: à la Hegel. Finitude, Nancy continues, extrapolating from the *Kantbuch*, asks no questions about the end come full circle, but rather about suspension of sense (a double genitive), “each time replayed, re-opened, exposed with a novelty so radical that it immediately fails.”⁷⁵⁴ Again we have the theme of failure, of noetic collapse (an exacerbation of Heidegger’s exhausted metaphysics). Finitude is characterized by a special noesis, no longer sustained by Being (which undergoes erasure), but rather by finitude’s own auto-deconstruction along reflective, aesthetic lines.

Nancy presents, then, the opening of an eschatology of sense, a new eschatology that defines novelty as that extreme noetic vertigo that immediately precedes a noetic refractory period.

*The Sense of the World* contains many moments of eschatological reflection, and develops the ideas just mentioned. We shall quote two, with the first being interrupted mid-course so some relevant points may intervene. First, Nancy writes, “‘Finitude’ should … be attributed to what carries its end as its own, that is, what is affected by its end (limit, cessation, beyond-essence) as by its end (goal, finishing, completion).”⁷⁵⁵ Finitude is a matter of affection, or affected matter, with quite a measure of autochthony—rootedness in itself that manifests itself as a kind of self-sustaining, though one in which the “self” is very much in question. This first text interests us because of its alignment of two valences of meaning for end: border and goal. The former is important for removing the latter. This opens Nancy’s second statement, that based on finite thinking (of freedom’s affection),

> [w]hat is not foreseeable but already present, it seems, is that there will no longer be any ‘reason in history’ or ‘salvation of the human race.’ No more parousia, in short,

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⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

no more present, attested sense (if there ever was such a thing), but a completely different eschatology, another extremity, another excess of sense.\textsuperscript{756}

Nancy demands a revised eschatology, with some unnamed Christian eschatology as its foil. He echoes quite obviously Heidegger’s critique of Christianity, particularly its cleaving to the certainty of salvation. This is unsurprising, as is the rejection of \textit{parousia}, deconstruction’s consummate staple. Unsurprising yet telling is the phrase, “reason in history.” Nancy elides Christian eschatology in general (since he fails to specify it) with Hegelian metaphysics. The height and end, the sublimity, of Christian eschatology resides in Hegel’s system. United they fall before another sublimity, or sublime-aesthetic—at least Nancy calls for as much.

The whence of Nancy’s new eschatology and the whence of finitude’s affection coincide. We rejoin the text from above: “—and is \textit{affected} by it not as by a limit imposed from elsewhere … but as by a trance, transcendence, or passing away so originary that the origin has already come apart there.”\textsuperscript{757} Here Nancy makes a move Rahner does—against extrinsicism, or a conceptualization of freedom arriving completely from outside a person. In Rahner’s corpus, evasive maneuvers with respect to extrinsicism (the problem of \textit{duplex ordo} theology—see §7) drive his thinking of nature and grace. Grace comes from within, as \textit{tragende Grund}, even if it is unmerited and thus must be discussed (carefully) as properly external to humanity, or outside of the strictures of human property. Thus Rahner accomplishes an interweaving of internal and external that any deconstructionist should admire and emulate. In Nancy, affection comes from within; one cannot help but wonder whether freedom consists for Nancy in auto-affection, pure and simple. But this auto-affection shows fault lines for a coming rupture, or perhaps even, as the end of the sentence

\textsuperscript{756} Ibid., p. 24.

\textsuperscript{757} Ibid., p. 32.
suggests, originary disintegration. This auto-affection, then, dissociates itself from the auto-affection of the modern subject, with its aboriginal integrity.

Another essay, “The Sublime Offering,” clarifies the difference, using beauty and the sublime as its headings. The experience and judgment of beauty in Kant’s third Critique pave the way for a subject’s integral auto-affection. Hence the rising of Hegel’s encyclopedic logic from Kant’s imagination. Sublime experience/judgment, by contrast, is the “exact reverse” of Hegel’s Aufhebung, or the main step toward the complete representation of history’s significance (“reason in history”). The sublime, qua “excess of sense,” removes limits (aesthetic and logical) on their external edge (bord—eschaton). The sublime removes the external: “Il n’y a rien hors de la limite.” Sense come full circle (Hegel) exscribes an outside while it inscribes itself. Thus sense, for Nancy the tragende Grund of freedom, avoids consummation. History, if it can be “of personal freedom,” which it cannot, certainly admits of no consummation. Nancy rejects this possibility as a result of 1) his reading of Christian eschatology as Hegelian metaphysics, 2) his reading of Kant’s sublime as anti-Hegelian, and 3) his hypothesis that Kant’s sublime, inflecting Heideggerian finitude, should radically revise eschatology. The latter becomes determined, despite Nancy’s efforts to keep it reflective, by negativity, the negative sublime and its singular focus on human freedom, however it is “affected.” Kant’s line ends here. Rahner cannot condone such noetically-shaded Kantian eschatology, on the grounds that freedom, though autochthonous in some sense, gains its primary impulse from divine grace (a gift, a showing of glory).


759 Ibid., p. 58: “[L’]enlèvement sublime est l’exact revers de la relève dialectique.”

760 Ibid., pp. 51, 59.
Rahner compresses his eschatology (which, due to his generosity toward and indebtedness to Thomistic thinking of causality, both philosophical and theological, involves protology) into a single, if long sentence. It follows, with an interruption: “The absolute future of humanity and of human history is God Godself as the origin of its dynamism and as its goal.” The sentence continues, but its first part elicits comment. Rahner lends heavy theological weight to his eschatology, or theory of the edges of human history—God occupies, to put it somewhat crassly, first (origin) and last (goal) place (Rv 1.8, 22.13). Furthermore, as origin of human dynamism, God as tragende Grund carries along human history “between” its edges. Rahner proceeds, getting to his and our point, “God Godself, who is not just the mythological cipher for a future which is eternally outstanding, a future which human persons create from out of their own emptiness in order to let it fall back again into the nothingness from which it arises” (FCF 446). Rahner emphasizes that eschatology, as a discourse, speaks of real ontophany, against a Kantian paradigm, ontophany without noetic determination.\(^{761}\) We have observed several times now that Nancy works out the end of Kant’s line of thought. He does so, we can now say, specifying our previous position, by foregrounding the evanescence of all things tried within the bounds of human freedom.\(^{762}\) Rahner, in the second half of his sentence, explicitly excludes from his eschatology the idea that God may be reduced merely to a “cipher” for such evanescence—the rise from and fall back into nothingness, or what one might call a reversed exitus-reditus scheme endemic to post-Heideggerian philosophy. Eschatology does, indeed, concern the end of freedom, Rahner teaches. This end consists not, though, in a flaring of fury (Nancy’s

\(^{761}\) Nancy lines up his eschatology with art, or a Kantian view of art that militates against ontophany. See Nancy, *Sense of the World*, p. 138: “If art is the presentation of presentation and not of being, it is in this sense that it has a relation to truth: as truth’s sense in action” (emphasis added).

\(^{762}\) In *The Experience of Freedom*, Nancy names these bounds as “nothing other than birth and death.” Nancy, *Experience of Freedom*, p 122.
figure for evil) or death’s extinguishing of life’s authentic projects, but rather in the revelation of the source of all human light. An anticipatory apprehension of the sublimity of this revelation need not be avoided, pace Nancy, for fear of Hegelian systematizing, because a true Vorgriff, sustained by God’s grace, never demands systemic closure, anyway.

Death and Separation

Rahner speaks at length in On the Theology of Death of the traditional Catholic description of death as “the separation of body and soul.” Two aspects of Rahner’s analysis relate to the conversation between Rahner and Nancy: 1) the thesis of the “pancosmicity” of the soul after death, and 2) the presupposition for this thesis, the idea that the “soul-animated body is an open system in relation to the world.” We shall read these Rahnerian ideas in tandem with a group of paragraphs from Nancy’s recent text, Noli me tangere: On the Raising of the Body, which concerns the separation of bodies from each other, body from spirit, and glory from sensuality. Again it should become apparent that Nancy’s fear of systemic closure leads him to overdetermine thinking’s immunization from system as such, whereas Rahner’s openness to system shows system’s openness. This is a main presupposition of the Catholic sublime. We shall conclude by turning back to the common sense, a theme that brings us from the Nancy-Rahner dialogue back to the Heidegger-Rahner dialogue, and then to Rahner himself, specifically the interface of his theology, his philosophy, and his piety.

Death as a natural process ends in the separation of body and soul—so traditional Catholic doctrine holds. But the classical description of death leaves “obscure … the very

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concept of separation.” The concept of separation remains veiled because the concept of the unity of body and soul, and thus the soul’s relationship to material reality in general, likewise remains insufficiently articulated. Rahner sees this obscurity and insufficient articulation as another opportunity to show the Catholic system’s fundamental openness, while Nancy does not even see the obscurity, and assumes that articulation is insufficient by the nature of the case—Christian theology pretends to a system it cannot deliver. In so thinking, Nancy lays bare his own noetic insufficiencies, which he inherits from Kant. We shall discuss them before we arrive at Rahner’s re-vision of separation.

Nancy’s text on the raising of the body assumes that Christianity as a whole holds to the position that Rahner identifies as customary: the soul is supra-empirically united to the body in life, only to relinquish this unity in death. Again, Nancy sees this as an undesirable extrinsicist schema, and he attempts to give a different spin to it. Unlike Rahner, who we shall see is perfectly willing to redescribe doctrines to elucidate the Catholic system to which they belong, Nancy more nearly intends to confront Christian teaching with the caustic properties of his sublime-aesthetic noesis. Nancy uses, in discussing Jesus’ raised body (in paintings of the noli me tangere scene—Jn 20.11-18), language shot through with Heidegger’s apriorism of finitude, thus focused on being-toward-death, but mapped on a noetic grid. He writes, “What ‘is not of this world’ is not elsewhere: it is the opening in the world, the separation, the parting and the raising.” The glorified body of Christ—a post-dead body, to put it more suggestively—opens the world’s presence, thus Christ shows forth the body’s character as open, in a way, but as a presence that is absence—an absence of a “sensual”

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765 Rahner, Theology of Death, p. 18.

766 Nancy, Noli me tangere, p. 48.
body, on the border where the “sensual body” unlimits itself.\textsuperscript{767} Seduced by today’s faddish attachment to the Jesus-Mary Magdalene relation figured erotically, Nancy intimates that the glorification of Christ is an exemplary site of erotic unconsummation, where two bodies fail to touch, yet relate precisely in this \textit{aisthesis interruptus}.\textsuperscript{768} The interruption of, or death knell for, sense (thus system) is Nancy’s re-reading of the separation of body and soul. Let us read one more short, related passage, and then complete this brief treatment of Nancy: “You hold nothing; you are unable to hold or retain anything, and that is precisely what you must love and know. That is what there is a knowledge and a love. Love what escapes you. Love the one who goes. Love that he goes.”\textsuperscript{769} Who is he? Nancy speaks ostensibly of the Risen Christ, but as he trails off at this passage’s end, Nancy tips his hand. The Risen Christ signifies the flight of sense, Nancy’s replacement for Hölderlin’s flight of the gods (borrowed from Heidegger). The Risen Christ reflects the sense that escapes the Magdalene and likewise “us,” the ones who occupy the contemporary world. Sense “goes,” it separates itself from us, as in death, and we should love this fact—\textit{amor fati}. We ought to love not so much the fleeting trappings of a dead system (why does Nancy not fixate on the burial cloths, left in the empty tomb?), but rather the fact that the contents of these trappings departed. Christianity, Nancy hints, misunderstands the charge latent in Jesus Christ’s resurrection—to give up on claims to presence (system) and to baptize oneself in the waters of indeterminacy, of a prolonged dying (the “emptiness of the tomb” qua “emptying out of

\textsuperscript{767} A longer treatment of Nancy on the relation between dead/raised and living bodies would have to involve Rahner, “The Life of the Dead” in TI 4, pp. 347-354.

\textsuperscript{768} This thought rises to a climax on Nancy, \textit{Noli me tangere}, p. 48: “Mary Magdalene becomes the true body of the departed.”

\textsuperscript{769} Ibid., p. 37.
presence”). Christianity falls early into an addiction to the “glorious” resurrection body, thus a fictitious presence purportedly captured in a theological system.

To speak of death, then, would be to furnish Nancy with an exemplary test-case for his hypothesis that sense in the contemporary world consists in little more than the disorientation that follows the demise of modern system. To speak of death as separation (of body and soul) would further strengthen Nancy’s case—separation can now be rendered as the only possible relationship between Christianity and its goal: all-encompassing grasping of the world. But death and separation, these ideas, do not, in fact, reduce to noetic structures, nor to their malfunctioning (nor to the impossibility of their proper functioning). Death and separation, these ideas, involve us again in describing ontophany, and thus they bring Rahner and Heidegger back into the picture, with Rahner as the focal point.

*On the Theology of Death*, in order to be read clearly, must be set on the background of Rahner’s convergence with Heidegger over the issue of human being’s constitutive receptivity (see §§1-3). As receptive beings, the *Kantbuch* and *Spirit in the World* agree, human persons have sense organs, and relate to the sensible world. “Natural” receptivity comes first, conditioning sensation. The same goes, Rahner suggests, for death. Rahner comments, against Protestant or Jansenist (i.e., two insufficient early modern) views of death as due to sin alone, that Catholic theology is convinced that death has a “natural essence,” which results immediately from “the constitution of [the human as body and spirit].”770 Human spirit is inevitably, or “naturally,” directed toward death—in a way similar to Heidegger’s *Sein zum Todes*, when one understands it precisely, as sublime-aesthetic, active-receptive, and not some veiled configuration of modern subjectivity.771 Our reading of *Spirit in the World* should

have suggested by now that the constitution of the human person as body and spirit has theological import, namely that this constitution leaves the human person ready to receive, from the outset, God's grace (the possibility for salvation or damnation) as *tragende Grund*.772

In light of all this, Rahner sets to work re-articulating the insufficiently defined concept of the separation of body and soul at death. Two options present themselves for unfolding the concept. First, the soul, because supra-empirically united with the body, and thus the material world, could, in death, become “a-cosmic.” Second, the soul could just as likely, as the form from which a body looses itself in death, enter “into some deeper, more comprehensive openness in which [a] pancosmic relation to the universe is more fully realized.”773 Though traditionally the “acosmic” scenario tends to prevail when thinkers attempt to enlighten the concept of separation, Rahner prefers to try the second, “pancosmic” route.774 He cordons off misunderstandings before they can happen—pancosmicity should not be confused with occult happenings or a vacuous spirituality of the soul of a dead person being suddenly “connected” to everything and everyone. Instead, pancosmicity shows forth a central characteristic of each and every human person, a

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771 It seems that, in attempting to understand Heidegger’s being-toward-death and Rahner’s view of death, most interpreters take the existentialist tack (in Rahner’s case this is a bit more justified since he did not adequately reject the term “existentialist” as applicable to his thinking, and in fact encouraged this appellation). In doing so, the active element of “grasping one’s last possibility” gains primacy of place, thus missing the aesthetic point of factical existence in Heidegger and the unforeseeability of death in Rahner. Our focus on Ohnmacht in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and the plausible association of that term with Rahner’s view of (the) human being should discourage (with some finality) a focus (positive or negative) on Rahner’s account of death as an active deployment of subjective freedom. Death is, for him, always both “actively achieved” and “passively suffered,” both stemming from the primal receptivity of human being, prior to a distinction between activity and passivity. See Rahner, *Theology of Death*, p. 40. Cf. Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Death” in TI 13, pp. 169-186, especially pp. 182-184.

772 Rahner, *Theology of Death*, p. 56.

773 Ibid., p. 19.

774 In a somewhat uncareful moment, Rahner ascribes the attraction of the “acosmic” alternative to “the persistent influence of a Neoplatonic mentality” (Ibid., p. 19). Peter Phan corrects Rahner on this (see bibliographical references above), and we should join Phan in this, especially since the thesis of pancosmicity owes just as much to “Neoplatonism,” although with a different inflection. See §7 above on Rahner’s favorable rapport with Christian Neoplatonism.
characteristic that renders the modern subject impossible, or at least unmasks the modern subject’s autism as pathological (see §7). The human person, as an embodied soul or ensouled body never lives as a “closed monad without windows”—Rahner’s phrase recalls Leibniz, but also Heidegger’s *Dasein* as a critical response to Leibniz’s monads—“but is always in communication with the whole of the world,”775 forever residing in a common sense (see §§6 and 9). This is all to say that the human person, an “open system in relation to the world”—the whole world—quite naturally reaches beyond subjectivity’s strictures in life, and quite plausibly this would obtain in death.

Chapter Three opened with a subsection on Thomas’s angel, and how this philosophical-theological *topos* prefigures modern subjectivity, especially Descartes’s early articulation of it. A section later another angel, Rilke’s angel, pointed beyond subjectivity in Heidegger’s “What Are Poets For?” It remained hidden at that point that Rahner, too, envisions an angel who might assist in developing a view of human apprehension of God and the world after subjectivity. This articulation of the angel takes wing in *On the Theology of Death*, hence the delay of its arrival until this point. The angel, for Rahner, has a permanent (i.e., without being conditioned by death) panocosmic relation to the world. Rahner, following this idea, speaks of the angel in such a way as to rule out constrictive apriorisms, and thus to reinforce his panchosmicity hypothesis:

The theological assurance of a natural, panchosmic relationship between the angels, as personal spiritual beings, and the world, makes it impossible to exclude, *a priori*, as an idea without parallel elsewhere, the possibility of some such relationship in the case of the spiritual, personal principle in [hu]man[s]; or to preclude the possibility that in

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775 Ibid., p. 22. The phrase “open system” (below) comes from the same page.
death it is not abolished, but is rather, for the first time, perfected, becoming a fully open, pancosmic relationship, no longer mediated by the individual body.\textsuperscript{776}

One might look at Thomas’s treatise on creation in \textit{Summa theologica}, which contains I.84.7, as locating human persons between the world (matter) and angels (spirit). Rahner revises Thomas’s angel, as the thither side of humanity, in its connection with humanity’s hither side, world, to reframe the discussion of the human person’s relation to the world in death, which should profoundly affect views of the human person’s relation to the world (including other human persons) in life. As spirit, the angel helps us to recognize, the human person relates openly to the world. The truth of the human person consists in systemic openness to all things worldly. This openness is perfected—unconcealed (Heidegger’s word) consummately (Rahner’s word)—in death. The thesis of pancosmicity, then, renders the separation of body and soul apocalyptic, in the sense of a full unveiling of human inspiration of the world, which is prefigured by sublime apprehension in the world.

Both Phan and Fritsch express reservations about Rahner’s thesis of pancosmicity, and both breathe a sigh of relief that Rahner eventually abandoned it. This dissertation, in its last moments, esteems Rahner’s discarded thesis more highly than Phan or Fritsch do, by and large because the idea, “pancosmicity of the soul,” fits it rather well. Rahner’s discarded thesis summarizes his commitment, even to death, to thinking through ontophany. Rahner’s discarded thesis presupposes the ensouled body as an open system, a system that could bring God’s grace to bear on all creation. It connects (even genealogically relates), then, to our discussion (§7) of Maximus the Confessor and the “higher order receptivity” of the “future age.” Rahner’s discarded thesis—it seems he never discarded it, but rather sublimated it—is

\textsuperscript{776} Ibid., pp. 23-24.
yet another example of the Catholic sublime, the ethos that drives the Catholic “system” as it faces up to the future, after subjectivity.

Rahner appended *On the Theology of Death* to the *Assumptio-Arbeit*, the book that led us to the eschatological question, as an “excursus.” The connection between these two works is consummation—and the consummation of the human person in death and Mary in her Assumption is called “resurrection of the body.” Rahner writes an article, included in *Theological Investigations* 2, on the topic of bodily resurrection. In it he observes, “[I]t is significant how little, how hesitatingly and really lifelessly the whole literature on the Assumption entered into the content of the new Dogma. Hardly any portion of this literature seized the opportunity to restate more precisely and vitally, and to study more profoundly, what precisely is meant by ‘resurrection of the body.’” Rahner’s thesis of pancosmicity, which he connects (by excursus) to Mary’s Assumption, aims to unpack the meaning of bodily resurrection. The Rahnerian saying most apposite to Nancy’s concerns, which the latter adapts noetically from Heidegger’s thinking on death, reads as follows: “Remoteness-from-the-world and nearness-to-God are not interchangeable notions, however much we are accustomed to think in such a framework.”

Our discussion of Mary as the consummate sublime apprehender reinforced the point that nearness to God is achieved through *persucratia*, an undergoing of and diving into (thus nearing) all things of the world. Sublime apprehension is, to repeat, not a noetic operation, but rather cooperation with ontophany.

Mary is the consummate sublime apprehender, but she can be, and, according to the conviction of the Church, has been joined by many others who approached God through a

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Persuatio of all worldly things. Such people are called saints, or collectively, the communion of saints. Rahner’s writings on Marian devotions, which we examined extensively in Chapter Four, should also be seen as contributions toward the Catholic theology of the communion of the saints. In fact, at least one recent commentator has remarked that Rahner’s “devotional life,” which led him to write so much on Mary, “is centered on the doctrine of the community of the saints.”779 These people, the saints, share with Mary a sense that nearness to God may be achieved in the world, since God shows God’s self through the world, and perhaps most sublimely through human anticipation (Vorgriff) of the full revelation (apocalyptic) of God at the end of history. With a particularly active attunement to God, a sublime-aesthetic awareness, a common sense, these people welcome the Future. They do so not as a part of a round dance of inebriated mortals (Heidegger), but rather as a cosmic liturgy of those who anticipate (vorgreifen) seeing a world that will need no lamp or sun, for the Lord God will give it light (Rev 22.5). Rahner’s theology is a theology of these sublime apprehenders, the saints.780

Conclusion

No additional chapter follows this one, so, in distinction from prior chapter conclusions, this one need not spend space or time preparing for what will come. We shall simply observe that this chapter on edges, finality, possibility, exhaustion, unlimitation, openness, closure, and vision, does not pretend, with these many words, to provide a


780 This is yet another point of agreement between Rahner and Balthasar, who puts much stake in being a theologian of the saints.
summation of the chapters that precede it. It has, however, built off of them, in the interest of a new beginning, in this case, to the study of the theology of Rahner, and thus twentieth-century Catholic theology, and thus the coming future of the church. The foregoing, Chapters One through Five, has comprehensiveness in view, but a comprehensiveness without comprehensive grasping that the author has learned from Rahner as he wrote out of the heart of the church (ex corde ecclesiae)—with special emphasis on the church after Trent.

Chapter One remarked that Heidegger’s Kantbuch, on which Rahner relies heavily in Spirit in the World, could have borne the alternate title, Imagination and Time. Virtually the entirety of the foregoing chapters was spent variously inflecting Rahner’s view of imagination. This final chapter unearthed Rahnerian reflections on time, or the temporal undercurrent of Rahner’s corpus more generally—deepening our examination of the Rahnerian imagination, or sublime-aesthetic. The very pursuit of a sublime-aesthetic in Rahner relates, over and above its relation to the Kantbuch/Imagination and Time, to temporality and history. Even a cursory reader could pick up on this, especially since the opening of Chapter Three, which overtly placed us within a retrieval of modern subjectivity. This re-trieval would entail a re-reading, a re-tracing of steps Western people have taken over the past five hundred years, from Columbus to Citibank. Furthermore, the discipline (for lack of a better term) of aesthetics and, within that discipline, fascination with the sublime, do not arise until the modern period. And again, aesthetics and the sublime lend momentum


782 This mention of Columbus indicates (again) that this dissertation is instructed by Enrique Dussel’s dating of the dawn of modernity as 1492 and Columbus’s so-called “discovery” of America. To accomplish the sort of retrieval of modernity envisioned here would entail much listening to Dussel’s thick and varied attempts to expose the imperialism of previous theories of modernity, even if it may be impossible to follow Dussel to many of his conclusions along his same path of thinking.
to modern proclamations of the end, which in one (or many) respect(s) has been specified as art’s end—the death of art. Modernity, more than any other epoch, tellingly claimed death, a prominent topic of this last chapter, as its property. Some headway has been made in this chapter on Rahner toward showing how he nudges modernity (and its aftermath in Heidegger and Nancy) past its obsession with death, ends, and exhaustion, to a renewed sense of life: the common sense of the saints. As this chapter’s introduction suggested, an additional volume would be necessary to elaborate this point.

Another rationale presents itself for treating the discourse on the “last things” at the end of this dissertation. Chapter Four came to emphasize the Ignatian praxis of “finding God in all things.” This, any Jesuit would tell, is not a phrase one should take lightly, nor one that a person may arrive at immediately. Finding God in all things becomes possible, so far as the sequence of the Spiritual Exercises goes, only after the exercitant has passed through a week-long contemplation of Jesus Christ’s Passion and Death. Finding God in all things occurs, as but an echo in the text, only when resurrection, eschatological reality, has broken (upon) the horizon. By now, Chapter Four has been set firmly within the context of eschatology, talk of the last things. Thus we have fully made the move begun in Chapter Four, with its material on Mary, who opens the eschatological question.

The dissertation does not end here, but only begins, and it begins at its final edge, in a way not completely at odds with Hölderlin’s new beginning near the end of metaphysics (Heidegger). The new beginning of theology manifests itself in a practice of (not merely an idea of or belief in) sublime apprehension in the corpus of Karl Rahner, which avoids

783 Particularly helpful on this topic is Eva Geulen, The End of Art: Readings in a Rumor after Hegel, trans. James McFarland (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), with pp. 112-139 (“The Same End and the Other Beginning: Heidegger”) being most pertinent to this dissertation.

speaking of no devotion, liturgical action, prayer, art form, ethical praxis, academic speculation, or everyday chore, but aims comprehensively to consider them all, not as objects, but as revelations of God’s sustaining of life as a whole, which we should let shine as such. The totality of Rahner’s text participates in Christian eschatology, the discourse on the end of the world as an endless opening to God—in love. As such, Rahner’s corpus is, as this chapter argued, a special form of *apocalypsis*. This is, especially in a world still addicted to (and alternately traumatized by) subjective grasping and system—a powerful parody of *apocalypsis*—the challenge of Rahner’s theological-philosophical thinking. He writes, in the spirit of Ignatius, out of a love that, “however much it may seem only to attach itself to one individual [here, Rahner], reaches to the Whole.”  

Rahner names the challenge of his thought while discussing eschatology in particular, but it applies to everything he writes; we give him the last word:

The complete, all-embracing solution is always the most difficult, because it must reconcile everything. It is most difficult for such a solution to penetrate the narrow limits of our mind which demand concise and synoptical solutions. And so it is also with regard to the question about the end.  

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785 Rahner, “Ignatian Spirituality and Devotion to the Heart of Jesus,” p. 139.

CONCLUSION

Of course Christianity is an extremely complex reality and ultimately speaking no one individual can achieve a comprehensive view of it as a whole. Nevertheless it is such only because Christianity neither omits nor neglects anything in the complex reality of [humanity’s] world whether at the individual or at the collective levels of human life, whether of the body or of the spirit, whether of the past or of the present. At the same time, however, the message which Christianity has to convey of this infinitely complex reality of humanity precisely as such, and the manner in which it lives in and through this reality, in other words that which alone constitutes what is specific and proper to Christianity, is something utterly simple, namely the question maintained in openness, of the absolute future which is God or—which is saying the same thing—the question of God who is the absolute future.787

Five chapters have now been spent showing how Karl Rahner presents, or really performs, the Catholic sublime. The above quotation alludes to the Catholic sublime, and might be accepted as yet another definition of it. As the ethos of Catholic Christianity—Rahner omits the modifier, “Catholic,” but presupposes it—the Catholic sublime consists in maintaining an open question, that is, never foreclosing avenues for persusratio into human life in the world.

Rahner, as a man on the receiving end of almost two millennia of Christian tradition, became, through his thinking, a great agent of the Catholic sublime. Rahner’s theology acceded to a central position in twentieth-century Catholicism, not just in Europe, but all over the world. Every dissertation has a concern, and this one’s was with the seemingly imminent loss of Rahner from the contemporary conversation, except, as the dissertation’s introduction suggested, for the occasional gesture toward the pedigree of today’s ideas. For

787 Rahner, “The Question of the Future,” p. 188.
many in the theological community, Rahner’s waning voice seems a welcome prospect, but for those who truly appreciate Rahner’s works, this is not an option. To exclude Rahner from the contemporary theological conversation, for whatever reason, would be equivalent to pushing Kant or Hegel out of philosophy. Discourse in general and academic discourse in particular does not depend solely on “great” or “classic” voices, but without them, all discourse would be vastly different—that is, worse. Without Rahner, theological discourse would lack one of its strongest exponents of Catholicism, and its constitutive openness.

The most recently published major book on Rahner, Craigo-Snell’s *Silence, Love, and Death*, shares this dissertation’s worry that Rahner’s theology is increasingly regarded as a thing of the past only. Craigo-Snell puts forth an admirable effort to reveal the continuing vitality of Rahner’s work, her main contribution being addressing Rahner’s texts with current feminist theological questions.\(^{788}\) Most notable about the book as a whole is Craigo-Snell’s intent to provide a “generous reading” of Rahner.\(^{789}\) Such generosity performs, though Craigo-Snell does not use this phrase, the Catholic sublime—and she knows well, if intuitively, that it does. Such generosity should be imitated if future scholars of Rahner wish to push him, as they very well could in the interest of bringing Rahner forward, in the direction of proposals by Susan Abraham and the various authors of the volume, *Rahner Beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim*.\(^{790}\) Rahner hardly could be held accountable for a “postcolonial” consciousness such as these authors assume as their own,

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\(^{789}\) Ibid., p. 232.

so a hermeneutic of charity—guided by the full width of Catholic openness—is called for here, as in many other conversations to which Rahner may be related.

This dissertation proceeded under the impression that as some scholars who remain interested in Rahner have begun to bring “feminist,” “postcolonial,” or other contemporary perspectives to bear on him, it still remained to be seen what Rahner’s theological achievement was. In order to face up the future, the past still had to be retrieved. It is the author’s hope that the dissertation succeeded in what it set out to do—to show forth in the best possible light Rahner’s multifaceted contribution to the academy, society, and the church. This involved detailed readings of Rahner’s own texts, but it also meant conversations with a few other noteworthy partners. Heidegger brought forward the ontophanic notes of the Rahnerian corpus, while also showing that not just any loyalty to ontophany will do, because between Rahner and Heidegger appear varying levels of openness of thought’s aperture and thus differing valences of the positive sublime. Lyotard and Nancy rendered clearer and more dramatic the convergence in divergence between Rahner and Heidegger, as each of the latter two thinkers differentiates himself from noeticism, such as Lyotard and Nancy (following Kant) espouse. These French philosophers also complexified the already multi-layered character of the positive sublime by displaying the negative sublime. A series of discourses unequal to, though uncannily proximate to Rahner’s greased the wheels for finding a truly Rahnerian Rahner.

Without trying to sneak some sort of “foundationalism” under the door (sub-limen), this study attempted to discover some fundamental undercurrents of the whole of Rahner’s works. Surely the dissertation privileged Spirit in the World, in a way that may vex those who have labored so diligently to dismiss it. The author believed, as a result of reading widely across Rahner’s catalogue and the voluminous secondary literature about it, only to return to
and to find it still inestimably important, and as a result of independent conversations with several different colleagues, all of whom expressed their puzzlement at the relative dearth of a solid, sympathetic explication of *Spirit in the World*, that this dissertation was justified in privileging it. Something about the book—most likely its subliminal Heideggerian and Kantian messages, just below the Thomistic surface—still, over seventy years after 1939, demanded attention, in at least one dissertation, if not a number of volumes. But if *Spirit in the World* lies at the feet (not to say the foundation or ground) of this dissertation’s project, reference to a panoply of other Rahnerian texts was needed to substantiate the dissertation’s claims, especially its thesis that Rahner presents the Catholic sublime and sublime apprehension, and that this dual presentation is Rahner’s great achievement. After developing the ideas of the aesthetic and the sublime and how Rahner continually brushes against them, in *Spirit in the World* but also in minor essays like “Priest and Poet,” the dissertation found at least three Rahnerian undercurrents that serve to clarify Rahner’s project (or constellation of projects). First, much of Rahner’s thinking develops the idea so important to modern Catholic theology (in light of Reformation controversies), cooperative grace, which Chapter Three treated as a modern unfolding of the Catholic (and Orthodox) vision of the world as a salvific economy in which human persons participate. Second, at the heart of Rahner’s thinking lies a complex practice of negation that arises from an overall affirmative confidence in God’s self-communication: hence the operator, Mystery, *hidden in its manifestness*, on which Rahner, in a manner akin to Mary (Lk 2.19), so deeply reflects. Third, the epigraph to this conclusion should indicate that Rahner keeps constantly before his eyes an eschatological vision—or an expectation thereof—that benefits from robust instruction from the above two currents just mentioned. Rahner’s eschatology, his sense of history’s drive toward, while under the sustaining (*tragende*) influence of (thus in
cooperation with), its Absolute Future (an ungraspable Mystery), suffuses any theological or philosophical writing he undertakes. Human history consists in and subsists in shared life, common sensing and action, ordered toward a gathering into the Life of a Mystery called God, wherein abides a community Catholics call the communion of saints. Rahner conveys, time and again, this hope for human history, which has driven Catholicism throughout the centuries, even in times of sin, violence, and distress, to strive to remain in Christ’s love (Jn 15.9-17), in innumerable and absolutely great (non comparative magnum \textsuperscript{791}) ways—so ornately multiple and powerful that no term other than sublime, the Catholic sublime, applies.

Titles often tell next to nothing, but (no matter the problems of intention in hermeneutics) the author of this dissertation intended for its title to be a full, not an empty, gesture. Its name is “Sublime Apprehension.” The name of its central chapter, which treats of names, nothing, and emptiness, though within the purview of fullness, is “The Sublime Apprehender.” It names Mary as the consummate sublime apprehender. This move could not have been previewed. As late as the first draft of Chapter Four, the idea of Mary as the consummate sublime apprehender did not yet show itself, the main reason being Mary’s ostensible lack of centrality, her parergonal place in Rahner’s theology. But at least one question spurred the author not only into affording Mary more space than he originally thought appropriate, but also to arguing for Rahner’s careful location of Mary at an axial position in late modern Catholic theology. The question was the following: Why were Marian dogmas of Immaculate Conception and Assumption, on which Rahner writes in depth, not promulgated until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? It might appear, and probably some have argued somewhere, that these dogmas unmask nineteenth-twentieth-

\textsuperscript{791} This moment could not pass without one more reference to Kant’s “Analytic of the Sublime”: Kant \textit{Critique of Judgment}, §25, p. 106.
century Catholics as a group of red-handed collaborators in modernity’s addiction to correctness and exactitude, for they tried to force centuries of common, informal Marian piety into officially-sanctioned, hardened concepts. Instead, Rahner prompts us to see the new Marian dogmas, thus a renewed importance of Mary in Catholic life (which, admittedly, has waned quite a bit in the past half-century), as a new presentation of the Catholic ethos—comprehensiveness without comprehensive grasping. Mary is not conceived as in a modern system, but rather the Church looks to her because Mary exceeds modern, grasping concepts. Rahner prays at the end of his book on Mary, “We come to you, then, because in you our salvation came to be, was conceived by you.”

Our time demands a model for a new way of apprehending the world, after subjectivity and its concepts. Philosophers like Derrida and Nancy attempt this overcoming (which they learned from Heidegger) through deconstruction, which is always a noetic deconstruction of the (Hegelian) concept. For Rahner, Mary’s uniquely powerful language, “Fiat,” which lets a conceiving irreducibly other to grasping concepts, creates the possibility for an alternative path beyond modernity, whose receptive-activity this dissertation called sublime apprehension. The work stemming from this root has barely had its dawn.

It seems the quite natural thing to do in a conclusion to gesture toward future projects, whether for the author, or for other scholars. But this dissertation, at the behest of Rahner and other Catholic theologians of the middle of last century, put rather little stake in “the natural,” “nature,” or even “the supernatural” (cf. §7). After all, for Rahner, the “nature” of human efforts is, by virtue of the divine grace that conditions their possibility (not to advert to Kant’s brand of transcendental), to break through what are commonly regarded as human limits (hence the dis-invitation to Kant). Prior chapters provided prior

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792 Rahner, Mary, Mother of the Lord, pp. 106-107.
anticipations, ones the author, or perhaps no one, will pursue. Anyone writing after Derrida should have a keen awareness of the *Fragwürdigkeit* (questionableness or question-worthiness) of the promise of writing, of promising words to come, or (if one were so bold) of promising the truth in a future text, painting, or other medium.\(^{793}\) To be more specific, though, a dissertation that labored, in/of love, so much on articulating the theme of the unanticipatable Future in Rahner would performatively contradict itself if it spent any time anticipating a future, scholarly or otherwise, in any great thematic detail. The five chapters we have now traversed considered many artistic examples, or ideas of art more generally, to concretize its sublime-aesthetic outlook. The final chapter introduced, somewhat tangentially (in Nancy’s sense), Umberto Eco’s idea of open works. Eco bases this idea off of his observation that, from modernity’s inception, artworks commenced granting increasing autonomy to performers (music), readers (literature), and viewers (visual arts) to respond to and, in a way, “to finish” them.\(^{794}\) Thus an author must adopt a certain *Gelassenheit* with respect to the completeness of any given work. This dissertation closes by way of opening to the reader’s autonomy, as long as she promises—that word, again—to remember Rahner’s contextualization of freedom within the movement of God’s glory. The reader should keep in mind the dissertation’s findings that no Heideggerian-Dionysian waiting, no Nancean unconsummation, and no complete *apocalypsis* (if this would entail some sort of grasping vision, thus falsity) can offer a work the openness of which compares to that which Rahner’s sublime apprehension lets appear. If Rahner gives us anything, and surely he does, Rahner gives a *Vorgriff* of something that people of our time can, in cooperation with God and each other, make to happen in the world: an opening—the Open.

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\(^{793}\) Of the virtually countless sites in Derrida where one might find “the promise,” this comment stems from a reading of Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, pp. 1-15: “Passe-Partout.”

Karla Rahner

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