

Towards a Phenomenology of Religion Across the Limits of Reason Alone

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“Go near, you yourself, and hear all that the Lord our God will say.
Then tell us everything that the Lord our God tells you,
and we will listen and do it.”¹

“His mother said to the servant, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’”²
“‘Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’

Pilate asked him, ‘What is truth?’”³

Abstract

This paper attempts a re-reading of the relationship between religion and philosophy. The first section attempts to show that philosophy is not clearly demarcated by means of a reading of Derrida’s work on the university. The second section examines, with Heidegger, how philosophy presents the opportunity for introducing a kind of “cross”-disciplinarity in its articulation of the structure of our being as temporality, particularly in our “stretching” and “retrieve.” And the final section shows how philosophy can help us to turn back from the “cross”-disciplinarity of our own structure to the experience of philosophy as love, as it is given within some passages from Julian of Norwich. The paper ultimately concludes that the work of phenomenological history allows us to think and to write in such a way that we as phenomenologists are able to remain open to tradition without being enslaved by it.

¹ *Deuteronomy* in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: An Ecumenical Study Bible*, ed. Michael Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 253, 5:27.

² *The Gospel According to John* in *Ibid.*, 150, 2:5.

³ *Ibid.*, 178, 18:37-38.

There might be many reasons to claim that philosophy ought not to spend its time investigating holy scripture and divine faith. One might claim that philosophy has more important things to do. Or one might claim that faith and scripture need to be protected from philosophy's pointed, awkward, or inappropriate questions. Or, finally, one might claim that philosophy could do its job better if it left questions of the divine to the theologians. However, like John Caputo, Merold Westphal, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Luc Marion, Richard Kearney, and a number of other scholars involved in what I would call the phenomenology of religion, I think differently.

For the purposes of this paper, what I want to argue here, and to argue in line with these other phenomenological scholars, is that we ought to resist accepting a strict demarcation of philosophy's limits. Instead, like Socrates in the *Euthyphro*, I contend that each of us as philosophers ought to "follow [the] beloved wherever it may lead [us]."⁴ We ought to do this not only, perhaps not even primarily, for the sake of faith. But we should 'follow the beloved' in order to create, or return to, a certain kind of hermeneutics,⁵ to a vision of philosophy and theology and other disciplinary approaches as moments of a unified "divine science" that investigates "divine things" both "as the principles of the subject" and "for their own sakes."⁶

⁴ Plato, *Euthyphro*, in *Five Dialogues*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002), 22, 14c.

⁵ Richard Kearney claims that there is a type of hermeneutics that he calls "theological hermeneutics of incarnation inspired by the phenomenological retrieval of Christian mysticism." (Brian Treanor and Richard Kearney, *Carnal Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 121.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, "Super Boethium De Trinitate," *Dominican House of Studies Priory*, accessed 10 April 2015, <http://www.dhspriority.org/thomas/BoethiusDeTr.htm#23>. From the Reply in Aquinas' *De Trinitate*, Question 5, Article 4. See also the Reply to Question 2, Article 3: "it is impossible that philosophical truths are contrary to those that are of faith: but they are deficient as compared to them. Nevertheless they incorporate some similitudes of those higher truths." Ibid.

My characterization of theology is therefore not really a disagreement with Aquinas. Rather, it is a defense against a certain kind of Thomism that I think unfairly declares the separation, subordination, and impotence of philosophy and reason.

More particularly, and in order to move toward this new (yet strangely familiar) hermeneutical, divine science, I have somewhat provisionally developed the argument of this paper into three sections. The first section attempts to show that philosophy is not clearly demarcated, by means of a reading of Derrida's work on the university. The second section examines, with Heidegger, how philosophy presents the opportunity to introduce a kind of "cross"-disciplinarity in its articulation of the structure of our being as temporality, particularly in our "stretching" and "retrieve." And the final section shows how philosophy can help us to turn back from the "cross"-disciplinarity of our own structure to the experience of philosophy as love, as it is given within some passages from Julian of Norwich.

I. Derrida on the Fear of (and Right to) Philosophy

Let us consider two of the times in Derrida's work where he describes a situation in which the lines between philosophy and faith, or between reason and its other, become blurred. One of these times, in *Truth in Painting*, is where Derrida notes that Kant, who was perhaps the clearest marker of reason's limits, describes reason as "conscious of its impotence" in the face of its attempts to inform the will and to act morally. This moral impotence brings reason to the point of seeking out "recourse to the *parergon*, to grace, to mystery, to miracles. It needs the supplementary work."⁷

This "recourse," which is articulated by Kant in his *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, arises out of reason's moral "need" to enact itself within history, within the temporal lives of those who embody it. However, the bridge between the a priori and the historical is not given to reason as a possible task for its own faculties. So reason seeks a "supplement," a healthy *pharmakon*, an affect that could serve as a bridge between reason and historicity.

But this divine "supplement" lies within an "inscrutable field,"⁸

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Truth in Painting* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 56.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 72.

within a haunting area with divine traces of “mystery” and “miracles.” Reason thus enters this ‘field’ with trepidation: “This additive, to be sure, is threatening.”⁹ And Kant quickly acknowledges this threat by allowing for the “supplement” to be imported into reason “uncognized” by means of a faith that is “reflective” but not “dogmatic.”¹⁰

Reason then frames its project of approaching the divine parerga as a kind of trip into a haunted house. And as it runs through what does not “belong within it yet border on it,”¹¹ reason hopes not to be caught by its own desires, as if by a kind of vertigo or autoimmunity. For, by means of the possibility of incorporating faith within reason, Kant is keenly aware that reason might well initiate an autoimmune response and thereby lose its own method and efficacy.

However, adding ‘grace’ or ‘mystery’ to reason would be ‘threatening’ to philosophy only if philosophy is equated with a cleanly demarcated pure reason. And, with Derrida, I wonder if it is. Is philosophy simply a carefully delimited, and actively ergon-omic, reason?

A second time Derrida attests to the necessity and danger of blurring disciplinary lines comes in *Eyes of the University*, where Derrida again takes up Kant and the ideas of pure reason—this time in relation to the university. Here Derrida speaks not just of the ‘impotence’ of a cut-off reason (or cleanly demarcated philosophy) but of the impotence of the university as a matrix of disciplines.

For Derrida, when Kant speaks about the university, as opposed to when he speaks about religion, Kant seems more confident. For the institution of the university does not require for its institution a ‘supplementary work’ even if the university is itself a “supplementary body”¹² to reason. Rather, reason is on surer ground with the university because there seems to be no experience of ‘impotence’ when reason sets itself the task of creating its own laboratory of self-development.

Instead, the only thing that is required of reason in order to set up the university as the ‘body’ of its faculties is the production of an idea,

⁹ Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 56.

¹⁰ Kant, *Religion*, 72.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 154.

namely “the idea of the whole field of what is presently teachable.”¹³ And if this is all the university needs in order to be created and sustained, then there is good reason to be hopeful. For reason is good at forming or framing or recognizing such essential ideas.

However, according to Derrida, this idea “of the whole field of what is teachable,” like the ‘inscrutable field’ of religion and of paragon, is also threatening to reason. In fact this idea too appears to be inscrutable and seems to require that we blur the lines between the architectonic character of reason or philosophy and the other disciplines that would be situated by it. Thus, even when reason is *not* desiring to see God, but rather desiring only to embody itself, reason seems impotent and bothered. It seems not to be at home within its self-created system.

But why does reason feel not at home? Why is the idea of the teachable an inscrutable field? Reason feels this way, the field is inscrutable, because the idea of the teachable cannot—and yet it *must*—serve as reason’s own ground. Reason feels not at home because, in attempting to form the idea of the teachable, reason presents itself with the sublime¹⁴ task of forming and reforming its product into its own origin and end. It exchanges the inscrutability of the divine for the inscrutability of itself.

The idea of the field of teachability is therefore “sublime” in Kant’s sense of sublimity within the *Critique of Judgment*. It forces reason to answer specifically, by means of the imagination, for what it cannot yet answer for. It calls for a trip not through a haunted house but to the edges of knowability and teachability and then to a return to itself with living, imaginative proof of its possibility, before it has plumbed them within concrete disciplinary maneuvers. Reason is thus, in the institution of the university and the formation of its concept, simultaneously caught trying to imagine the total future of its historical development while trying to remove itself from imagination and from history in order to state the essential, a priori concept of teachability.

Reason as such, then, places us over an abyss in the formation of the idea of the university—an abyss of temporality, historicity, as somehow within the quest for essential, omnitemporal truth. And, Derrida argues, in

¹³ Ibid., 134.

¹⁴ Derrida on the university as sublime: “now you can better imagine with what shudders of awe I prepare myself to speak to you on the subject—quite properly sublime—of the essence of the university.” Ibid., 134.

our participation within the university that reason has fashioned, we find ourselves called to ‘answer for’ it before we could ever find the time to work out the relation of historicity to essentiality: “to answer for the principle of reason (and thus for the university), to answer *for* this call, to raise questions about the origin or ground of the principle of foundation...is not simply to obey it or to respond *in the face of* this principle.”¹⁵

We cannot simply obey reason or the university insofar as the very institution of the concept defers itself to its development. The inauguration of the a priori enlists our imagination, our meeting of students and colleagues, our concrete, historical work in order to bring it about. We cannot simply send our representative, our prophet, to go out to meet the idea of the teachable. To the contrary, in this idea we are stretched out by a demand that we cannot adequately answer—a demand that does not originate with us that we nevertheless agree to put *to* ourselves on behalf of ourselves. Instead, in the face of the unresolved mixture of a priori and historicity, we stand, like Pontius Pilate, and mingle responsibility and critique, loyalty and interrogation.

For there is yet, still now, nothing to meet, nowhere to send someone, even as parents send their children to us in our universities, even as we send our students forward to other university programs. To what, then, would we turn when we turn towards our own idea of the university as if to answer its call to fill in ‘teachability’? The best we can do is to notice that an attempt to answer “*for* this call” that reason, its university, puts to us is a call to “face” that which has no face. The best we can do is to see that reason, that the university, is a kind of ungrounded act of suspension, as in the case of the very beginning of the great European cathedrals, which would be completed after many generations of those who might continue to embody what we only thought of: “This very grounding, then, like the university, would have to hold itself suspended above a most peculiar void.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Derrida, *Eyes of the University*, 137. See also John Caputo on the role of the abyss in the hermeneutics of knowing and of the divine: “Whether one is a Dominican friar or not, there is a fine point in the mind where one is brought up short, a moment of midnight reckoning where the ground gives way and one also has the distinct sense of falling into an abyss,” John Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 269.

¹⁶ Derrida, *Eyes of the University*, 137.

If we are to answer for the institution of the university as the body of reason, as the embodiment of our faculties within the teaching faculties, then we must ourselves pattern our response after the manner of a ‘suspension.’ We must enact an *epoche*. If we are to answer to reason, then we have to suspend what we have taken reason and the university to be. And we must wait for what comes from beneath—we must wait for the idea of the teachable to show itself *simultaneously* in its historical and a priori character.

This suspension, this void, this having to wait, is something we each can experience. Working within the university, teaching and researching, we are at times (I would say always) uneasy. What is this thing, the university? Surely the university is not the executives, not the trustees, not the students in front of us, or the texts behind us. It is not we the professors either, insofar as we are replaceable and insofar as what we do is to perform disciplinary tasks. Even our disciplines shift, come and go, and live out a tension between methodology and results. No, the university is none of these, but it is that which situates all of these.

And yet, in being the thing that organizes and situates, the university is also shaped, developing, by means of the practices of teaching, researching, and governing. The university is not like other institutions, which also carry a kind of uneasy, super-structural position. For the university is the institution that contemplates, reproduces, and shifts all other institutions. And so there is always a kind of experience of unreality or void that encompasses the experience of the university. The center holds—but how? And for how long?

In light of this experience of the void within the idea, it seems strange and even problematic that we live within a world that has a university ‘system.’ How can we live within a system that escapes our critical account of it? Often we live in it by denying the experience of unease. But if we take up that experience, then this strange, problematic character of our life within the university can provide us with a clue to follow, an opportunity to realize, that we are working within that which is sublime.

As sublime, the university is a range of disciplinary mountains that often appear indissociable from the clouds, which shift their borders in order to hide the voids between them. As sublime, the university evokes mystery. And if we are to unpack the mystery of the university, then we must question it directly, and we wait for an answer, even an echo. In waiting, there is urgent need. We need to hear; and after hearing, we

need to answer. We need to listen in order to answer *for* that which would we demand answer *to* us. We, especially we, the philosophers need continuously to reconnoiter where we are as we teach and study.

And, indeed, within this ‘most peculiar void’ of the sublime concept (whether of the teachable or of reason or of the university) some entirely appropriate, difficult question can form itself to be taken up by us. A question that comes, childlike, out of the void in order to be addressed back to it. And those of us who stand within the world of the university, who can see and perform the suspension necessary to match its own suspension-structure, can ask such a question with Pontius Pilate: ‘what is truth?’

Perhaps we philosophers should value Pilate more. For poor, philosophical Pilate actually pursues, in fear and trembling, the origin of the idea of the divine among the human. And in so doing he gives us an example of how to interrogate the mixture of the a priori and the historical. But perhaps we are afraid of valuing Pilate. For we know what he gets for his virtuous act. He gets nothing. He is simply relegated to the historical shadows, judged to be a figure of non-trinitarian totalitarianism. He is cast aside. And that seems most unfair.

Shouldn’t we all be more like him, Derrida seems to ask: “Who is more faithful to reason’s call, who hears it with a keener ear, who better sees the difference, the one who questions in return and tries to think through the possibility of that summons, or the one who does not want to hear any question about the reason of reason.”¹⁷ Pilate responds to Jesus’ ‘summons’ by questioning the very ground of His utterance—namely the being of truth as the function of our ‘belonging’ to the divine. And thereby Pilate shows how well he listens. He might have asked, in another time, as a kind of precursor to the whole problematical suspension-structure of the university, whether virtue could be taught.¹⁸

Reason liberated on and confined to its paths, without a kind of ques-

¹⁷ Ibid., 138.

¹⁸ As Plato does in the *Meno*. Notice there that Socrates refers Meno’s initial question back to the meaning of virtue itself. And this makes the very institution of the university problematic, if the university requires a kind of transcendental idea of what is teachable prior to the discovery of the being and meaning of that which would be taught.

tioning after its ground, allows reason's principle to "install its empire"¹⁹ in a university that fosters "research that is programmed, focused, organized in an authoritarian fashion *in view of* its utilization."²⁰ Now perhaps that is what Pilate's question was. Perhaps it was a question that arose out of an installed empire, in view of what would be a utilitarian calculus—namely, not upsetting the Jewish people whose bodies and lives were being 'programmed' and 'organized' as clearly as those of university students. But perhaps, also, in Pilate's question, a question being asked from within the walls of the Roman empirical 'university,' there is something more being asked. Perhaps there is something more to hear.

Perhaps Pilate's question is an opportunity for the phenomenon of the divine to show itself. And, in Jesus' non-answer to Pilate, especially in Jesus' silence, not in a storm or a hurricane but in a whisper—perhaps in Jesus the thinking that is the divine can show itself. But this would mean that we would have to look beyond Pilate's interlocutor right in that moment to see what and how something else responds to the question about the being of truth.

Perhaps lurking in some other preparatory or consummating work of faith would lie another member of a "community of thinking, for which the border between basic and end-oriented research would no longer be secured, or in any event not under the same conditions as before."²¹ We can hope that such a "community" of insecure borders would be the definition of a university, of its disciplines. Because, if such a community were not the university, then, perhaps a certain theology in declaring itself rigidly demarcated, and perhaps a philosophy that accepted those demarcations, would do the very opposite of faith—namely, ensure the death of community, the death of a thinking that was "not reducible to technique, nor to science, nor to philosophy."²² And if the university did that, then perhaps there would be no "Passover" toward liberation but instead the university would simply be branded a

¹⁹ Derrida, *Eyes of the University*, 139.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 148. See also Edith Stein's description of "a thinking together arises that no longer is experienced as an experience of one or the other but as *our* common thinking." (Edith Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2000), 170.)

²² Derrida, *Eyes of the University*, 148.

thief or a rabble-rouser and crossed out accordingly.

What I see within Derrida's work then is the "free play" of a kind of thinking that sees the university as a problem, as something set upon the future and the tradition but as depending on a hermeneutics of the divine to help it answer to the present. Derrida thus re-inaugurates a thinking, inherited from the *Euthyphro*, that allows the pursuit of what is loved, or what might be loved, or what was once loved, while confronting the beloved with what could only be difficult, perhaps painful, certainly life-affirming questions. I take from Derrida, finally, this notion of thinking: "'Thinking' requires *both* the principle of reason *and* what is beyond the principle of reason, the *arche* and the an-archy."²³ And from this kind of thinking I see philosophy as having always already been *required* to embrace the par-ergon of theology, the "threatening additive" of grace and mystery and miracles.

II. Heidegger on Suffering and Forgiveness

One way to begin to move into the thinking that is communal, to the insecurely bordered university, is to turn sympathetically, with and from Derrida, to Heidegger. For certainly Heidegger is at least with Derrida at the beginning of Derrida's movement toward a community of thinking: "the principle of reason installs its empire only to the extent that the abyssal question of the being that is hiding within it remains hidden, and with it the very question of the ground...especially as *stiften* (to erect or institute, a meaning to which Heidegger accords a certain pre-eminence)."²⁴ The university, and the disciplines within it, become solely 'technological' or utilitarian, solely uncritical of their borders and limits, insofar as "the abyssal question of the being that is hiding" remains unasked. So let us attempt to ask this 'abyssal question' by looking into Heidegger's hermeneutics. What hides in the principle of reason? What hides in the clear demarcations of disciplines? What hides in the university?

For Heidegger, Dasein hides, certainly. At least Dasein is hiding in reason and in reason's university. Perhaps more than Dasein is hiding. But let us stick with Dasein for the moment.

The project of the university, of reason constituting itself along its

²³ Ibid., 153.

²⁴ Ibid., 139.

own paths, forming a system of what is teachable, creates a concealment, a detour. This detour, as Husserl noted in the *Crisis of the European Sciences*, is the very covering over or forgetting of the life-world and of the subjectivity that actualizes itself in teaching itself (and others) the meaning of its involvement in the world. The university, and the disciplines within it, as they have developed over the course of centuries, is thus the detour away from the structure of Dasein who created it and who could find itself within.

A return to the being of Dasein is then the recognition, at least in part, that Dasein, as temporal, creates the university insofar as Dasein “stretches [*erstreckt*] itself along in such a way that its own being is constituted beforehand as this stretching [*Erstreckung*] along.”²⁵ In the act of stretching ourselves along, we push the very structure of stretching, of laying ourselves out, backwards. We achieve the a priori, the being “constituted beforehand,” that is, by means of our practice. We stretch “in such a way” that we have, in the very act, the very moment of our stretch, made a backwards reference to our being. We are always creating the possibility for the a priori that has been within the historicity that we are now.²⁶

This means that reason, the university, like all acts and productions of Dasein, will be the announcement in a particular way of the structure of what we are—namely, this stretching that gives itself a prehistory. Reason, the university, like all acts of Dasein, is rooted in the stretching, the care, that Dasein shows to its world and to its being-in-the-world. And what Dasein does in general, namely, giving itself to itself beforehand as the very act of stretching, it does in particular within the university and within reason.

For, along with *itself* as stretching itself out in steps, Dasein also pushes back the stretched out *methods* of analysis. With its own being, and with more fanfare than its own being, Dasein stretches out and pushes

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 343.

²⁶ Derrida examines Heidegger’s ‘dangerous’ use of *Erstreckung* as “the movement of suspense by which [Dasein] is tended out and extended of itself between birth and death, these two receiving meaning only from that intervallic movement.” (Jacques Derrida “*Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference*,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Heidegger*, eds. Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2001), 66.

back the methods and results of its sciences. For as they arise as meaningful, as methods and truths, disciplines, emerge, they do so as always already having been relevant and truthful in the act of taking them up.

As a system of acts of care, then, the university is simply another way in which Dasein takes up its temporality and lays itself out for itself to see (or to cover over in order to see something else). As acts of care, the university is the self-stretching act of the self-stretching actors. And so well does the university embody the structure of care that we can turn from the one who cares toward the fields of research and never know what we cover over by doing that. We can turn from the being whose very being enabled the project of the university to the beings that the university discloses.

But there is something else to the fact that all care has this structure of “self-stretching.” And this ‘something else’ is the whisper, the suggestion, of torture, or at least of suffering. For stretching need not only be preparation for real exercise to come. Stretching can also be done simply in order to put ourselves on the rack, to exhaust our body, our limbs, our very selves for reasons that are not immediately clear and that may well be harmful. If so, then the most whispered part of this torture, if it exists, would be that we might do it to ourselves in the name of ourselves.²⁷

To secure this point: we say that learning something difficult can ‘stretch’ the mind, or, more particularly, that coming up with a model for quantum physics must ‘stretch’ the imagination. And by this we mean that we are relying on our ability first to ‘constitute beforehand’ the understanding that we will become and then to live into the newly grasped concepts as our own. And this seems good or right. After all, we expect students to stretch to meet us as they study what we represent.

But just as in stretching before a run or a game we can lose ourselves in the preparation, the anticipation of the exercise to come, so too in reason or in the university we can lose sight of ourselves as the very structure, the very being of what we teach and learn. We can, by forgetting to secure the meaning of being, simply harm. We can stretch ourselves, our students, out of shape. We can shut down their appropriation

²⁷ See John Caputo’s argument about these sections in Heidegger: “the ‘violence’ of hermeneutics is ‘natural,’ for it is dictated by the structure of self-withdrawing Being. Hermeneutics is able to ‘retrieve’ the primordial only insofar as it dismantles the overlaid accretions and derivative understandings of the world.” (Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 63.)

of tradition by claiming to have stretched ourselves out and to have found it (already) to be complete, static.

In such a university setting, in our stretching ourselves and torturing our students, we can lose sight of the fact, by our false imitation of it, that “as care, Dasein *is* the ‘Between.’”²⁸ We can forget that we are the stretching that ought to be for itself and for others and not simply for the origin or for the goal.²⁹ We, our students, the disciplines we represent—we are between end and means together. And this ‘between together’ is where the university lies—or ought to lie—and how it ought to be brought into being anew by our participation in it.

What Pilate prepared for, namely the entire history of a certain Rome that was to-come and the interest in Jesus that would follow his interrogation, is an authentic act of stretching. In Pilate’s question is the European, catholic university. And, by means of Pilate’s interrogation, the discipline of the crucifix, the cross on which a God died, is a singular act of stretching that became an event that demands to be interpreted. The crucifix too, so close to Pilate, is a stretching that “stretches itself along,” that puts itself backwards in time toward the beginning.

If we take Pilate and Jesus to constitute a university in their relation, then surely Jesus’ silent answer on the cross is that he embodies, takes himself to be, and teaches—teaches the very image, the life, of the “between” of Dasein and the divine, whatever else the divine might be. And surely, this professor Jesus, his sublime arms open in both torture and embrace, enacts the very figure of “the specific movement of the stretched out stretching itself along” that Heidegger calls the “*occurrence* [*Geschehen*] of Dasein.”³⁰ Without this act of the professor stretching himself out, without the moment of enactment that he himself resolutely accepted, Jesus could not have disclosed (both forwards and backwards in time) the relationship of Dasein to the divine as calling for hermeneutics, for interpretation.

²⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 343.

²⁹ See Michael Lewis’ discussion of *Erstreckung*: “What must be emphasized again and again is the fact that any process of stretching always tends towards *at least* two asymptotic points, two ends towards which it reaches out.” (Michael Lewis, *Heidegger and the Place of Ethics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 38.)

³⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 344.

If we take Pilate and Jesus to offer a dialogue, a passion play, that resonates with the university, then perhaps we can see that there would thus be no event of faith without a certain suffering, a certain stretching or suspension over a void. Perhaps we can see, too, that *by participating* resolutely in his torture as a teachable moment, Jesus redirects what might have been torture and allows for us to see in a particularly divine way that “disclosure and interpretation belong essentially to the occurrence of Dasein.”³¹

To live the between, the stretching, and to do so authentically, resolutely, is to give space to the student, to one’s colleagues, to the process of attending to meaning that comes by way of witnessing the professor’s following of the beloved, wherever he might lead. To participate in the stretching that is learning, to separate teaching from torture, in the face of a God who seems to vanish into the void, of a God abandons us to the void we ourselves create in our institutions—perhaps we ought to think more about that.

Certainly a discipline of philosophy that stuck to reason’s university in Kant’s sense, as it covered over the being of Dasein, as it concealed the being of the self-stretching stretching itself along—this would be an impoverished philosophy. It would be impoverished because the event and the very *need* and *possibility* for meaningful “disclosure and interpretation,” for philosophy, lies in the way in which Dasein is always making itself anew, living in “between” disciplines, between ends and means.

But if we move beyond Kant’s university within our own, we can take up the disclosure of the “cross” philosophically. And that is what I see as our task, namely, to take up “cross”-disciplinarity, to take on self-stretching.³² Philosophy that was “cross”-disciplinary would therefore be rooted less in a border separating itself from theology than in the transcendence of proposed limits within a resolute act of listening and witnessing.

But the cross too, Jesus’ act, is easily concealed in favor of belief,

³¹ Ibid., 345.

³² Obviously, I am indebted to Jean-Luc Marion’s discussion of “crossing”: “Christ offers to the gaze only an icon, while showing a face, that is a gaze, itself invisible. It is thus a matter, in a first instance, of a crossing of gazes [*une croisée des regards*], conforming to the schema in love.” (Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 57.)

of “destiny,” to use Heidegger’s language. We too easily turn faith into religion, and we too often depend on another to have approached the whispers of the divine. We allow, we demand that designated person, or prophet, to “go near” and to “hear all that our Lord God will say.” And we too often see ourselves, professors, as having been granted that authority a priori, without projecting ourselves and our students into a future in which we approach the divine together.

For certainly there have been those, who claim to have drawn near, who say that the cross just means salvation—believe and live; fail to believe and perish. And so, like the wealthy, we philosophers—who might have seen something integral in the passion—turn away saddened. We turn away because, if doctrine is all there is within that event, if there is nothing more to disclose, then we ought not to give up the wealth that led us to take halting steps back to the divine, to relation between the divine and the human. The university, our disciplines, are too much to cede to faith, if that faith does not allow for a “cross”-disciplinarity.

But such people are wrong. And the wealthy should pursue the divine, with Heidegger, a bit further. Heidegger would remind us of the being that hides in the university. As *Dasein*, as this stretched out being that pushes itself and its products backwards and forwards into its history and future, we are not simply annihilating ourselves by our involvement of the university. We are also embracing our participation on the rack of knowing, on the rack of our occurrence. We embrace and stretch in order to see and, by seeing, transcend.

If we see the university and reason as the self-articulating of our being, then, we can also see that, in our participation in the university, in the projects of thinking and writing that go on there, each of us acts by “*handing oneself over* [*Sichuberliefern*] to traditional [*überkommener*] possibilities, although not necessarily *as* traditional ones.”³³ A crowd comes to a lecture, to a paper, a crowd that may or may not hear what we say. And we stand with colleagues, students, foundational texts, and, in standing together, we hand ourselves over to what is to-come within our new readings. We hand ourselves over without swords, or with just a few, to those who uphold tradition. But in handing ourselves over we also remain resolute within our new vision.

³³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 351.

We do not, then, just hand ourselves over to the university or to reason or even to faith, as a kind of submersion of ourselves into what is present-at-hand. Rather, as we ‘hand ourselves over’ we also enact “retrieve [*Wiederholung*]” of the acts of care of the university, of the insights and methods, and thereby enact “explicit handing down [*ausdruckliche Uberlieferung*]”³⁴ of those possibilities and contents by means of a hermeneutics of interstitial creativity. Or we could. And that is the urgency here. Derrida and Heidegger are posing what could be if we were to take up the university authentically as our own attempt to concretize our stretching and retrieve. If we resolutely, carefully, handed *ourselves* over to a discomfiting set of insecure disciplinary borders, then we *could* hand down or hand ‘over’ the university to itself and to each other. Our hands could hand over. We could be ready to hand them over.

If we were to accomplish Derrida’s and Heidegger’s exhortation to turn the university more authentically, more self-critically, toward Dasein, then, we would see that the kind of “retrieve” that we enact would be one that “neither abandons itself to the past, nor does it aim at progress.”³⁵ This retrieve would be the between, the critical taking up of what is handed down in order to listen to what is “unthought” within it, as Merleau-Ponty says in “The Philosopher and His Shadow.”³⁶

To put this in dialogue with tradition a bit more explicitly: if we follow Heidegger’s descriptions, we might just be able to claim that Aquinas’ identification of the three theological virtues—faith, hope, and love—were possible because of the structure of Dasein.³⁷ That is, it is only as the “stretched out stretching itself along” that we could become committed to faith (as the past), to hope (as the future), and to love (as the present) as three ecstatic possibilities that arise within the unified to-

³⁴ Ibid., 352.

³⁵ Ibid., 353.

³⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 160ff.

³⁷ See Aquinas’ Reply in *Summa Theologica*, Question 62, Article 1: “it is necessary for man to receive from God some additional principles, whereby he is directed to supernatural happiness, even as he is directed to his connatural end, by means of his natural principles, though not without divine assistance.” From Thomas Aquinas, “*Summa Theologica*,” New Advent, accessed 10 April 2015. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2062.htm>

tality of Dasein's response to its own ground.

Whatever role grace might play as benefactor, then, in giving to us the 'supplementary body' of the theological virtues, or of the university, or of philosophy itself, it might still be the case that the possibility of their echo, their projection, and their enactment would be rooted in what it meant to be the being for whom time (and therefore givenness) is an issue. It might be that we can love because we are already stretching, showing ourselves toward the divine as echoing the passion of the cross.

III. Julian of Norwich and the Pursuit of Care-ful Love

If the university, if philosophy, makes room for the pursuit of knowledge of the divine, for the pursuit of "cross"-disciplinarity, then in what *way* ought it to make room? In the past, the university has made room by creating a hierarchy of disciplines under the guidance of one divine science, by subordinating all thought and insight to a direct interrogation and explication of the divine presence (and absence) in all things. Later, the university made room by creating a border for the pursuit of the divine, as if to say that the divine science and its centrality were 'overcome' for the sake of reason. And perhaps that was because reason had grown, had revolted and had demanded to study all things for *its* own sake. But what now?

Well, if we take our cues from Derrida and Heidegger, we might see the turn toward reason's other, toward Dasein as the being that hides within reason, as an opportunity to wait for the divine to show itself within Dasein. We might see the structural isomorphism between stretching and grace as the opportunity for epiphany as presenting itself in the space between tradition and progress.

And, as I prefer that possibility, I will demonstrate here that this 'between,' this renewed hermeneutics, is precisely where I think that Julian of Norwich brings us. Ironically, in examining her work, we return to a medieval time, a time of a certain university, a time of divine science. But we return to her in order to remain faithful and yet apart,

immersed and yet detached,³⁸ from the university of the past. We return to the “shewings” of God to Julian, a woman, in a time when the only students were men and the only teachers were priests. And we do so in order to approach the divine anew.³⁹ We return to listen to a voice that speaks to Julian “ere God shewed any words,” to a voice in which “He suffered me for a convenient time to give heed unto Him, and all that I had seen, and all intellect that was therein.”⁴⁰

In Julian’s descriptions of the “shewings,” we return to being, to the question of the meaning of being, to a time before words show themselves.⁴¹ We return to the one who, like Moses, draws “near” to God and listens on our behalf. We return out of a certainty that we have the interpretations of the past correct to a disconcerting time of being “suffered” to listen. To listen to the divine in order to approach anew “all intellect” that is within the perceptions of the occurrence, of the ‘shewing.’

As Julian listens and sees, she makes a strange claim: “And from that time that it was shewed I desired oftentimes to learn what was our Lord’s meaning.”⁴² From the time of the showing, of the occurrence, Julian says, there is desire to know meaning. Wrapped up in the moment

³⁸ See John Russon’s *Bearing Witness to Epiphany* for an excellent discussion of our status as immersed and detached within the world. In that book, Russon makes a compelling case, albeit implicitly, for the relevance of faith within phenomenology.

³⁹ See Pope Benedict XVI’s General Audience: “‘all manner of things shall be well’: this is the final message that Julian of Norwich transmits to us and that I am also proposing to you today.” Pope Benedict XVI, “General Audience 1 December 2010,” the Vatican, accessed 10 April 2015. http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20101201.html.

⁴⁰ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (Waxkeep Publishing, Kindle Edition, 2013), Chapter XIII.

⁴¹ Diane Antonio argues that Julian clears women to be freer in their disclosures: “with her epistemology of sensual ‘showings,’ Julian of Norwich positioned Western women to be able to refigure their embodiment and speech acts, to be freer of defining and delimiting conventional perceptions about the body than before she dared to speak her lived body’s experience.” Diane Antonio, “The Flesh of All That Is: Merleau-Ponty, Irigaray, and Julian’s ‘Showings’” *Sophia* 40.2 (December 2001): 48.

⁴² Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, Chapter LXXXVI.

of being, then, is the inclination toward meaning. The question of the meaning of being is the question of being's production of desire.

Reason, or rather thinking, then follows being, pursues it by means of the desire to learn, by a desire that seems to be akin and yet the other to being. Thinking in a desiring way, pursuing the beloved wherever it may lead us, we turn with Julian to education. And we do that because the divine shows itself *before* words, in a way that overflows the boundaries of our intellect, and we must return to what we perceive and what we know in order to learn from those.⁴³ To perceive and to know is to have to return to perception and intellect. To perceive is to desire to learn. Or it could be. It ought to be. For not everyone is like Julian.

But philosophy ought to cultivate Julian as much as Pilate. So that the meaning within the showing can be generated, apprehended, handed down, made explicit, created. For the meaning that Julian sees is not given before, not given except *through*, a process of making explicit that must take its cue from the showing and from our desire to be faithful to the showing.⁴⁴

And so the question of the meaning of being becomes a question of the love of wisdom: "Would you learn our Lord's meaning in this thing? Learn it well: love was his meaning. Who showed it to you? Love. What did he show you? Only love. And for what reason did he show you? For love. Hold onto this and you will learn more of the same."⁴⁵ The meaning that matters, the meaning that binds 'meaning' to 'this thing,' is love. It is the desire to connect the meaning, the thing, and the one who

⁴³ See Julia Kristeva's characterization of Orthodox anthropology for a compelling parallel: "Didn't Heidegger himself in contemplation in an Orthodox monastery at Kaysariani, become aware of the unique presence of a *truth* that does not deny the difficulty of the blossoming forth of Being? A *truth* that would still remain perceptible within the rush toward that factitious independence in which a technical civilization producing 'goods' takes pleasure?" (Julia Kristeva, "Bulgaria, my suffering" in *Crisis of the European Subject* (New York: Other Press, 2000), 150.)

⁴⁴ See Merold Westphal's argument about knowledge within his inauguration of a phenomenology of religion: "We seek to understand our effective involvement with the world, not to fill the storehouse of knowledge, but in order to prevail over the facticity of our existence, to *preside over our lives*," Merold Westphal, *God, Guilt and Death: An Existential Phenomenology of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 23.

⁴⁵ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, Chapter LXXXVI.

is shown. Love is the meaning, the ground, the showing of the ground, and the end. Reason, intellect, if it exists, is the 'between' of meaning, ground, showing, and end. And as this 'between' it moves back and forth to what is already connected in order to "learn more of the same."

What discipline could be best suited to follow up the link between the showing and the one who shows, between the showing and the one who occurs more fully in the face of the showing? What discipline except the one that orients itself on the desire to follow the beloved, to draw near to the truth and to interrogate it with others?

If this discipline is philosophy, as I think it is, then philosophy is not a game. Nor is it a production in which 'progress' is made by means of erecting an edifice. It ought not get caught up in that sort of production.

If philosophy is a production, an *ergon*, it is akin to a theatrical production, to a dramatic dialogue. It is an *ergon* that looks for a *parergon*, an intellect that looks toward what shows itself before words, in a showing that demands words, calls for desire. Philosophy is the uncovering of the void within oneself, of the void within being that hides within the university of thinking. And it is the concealment of the quest for mastery and utility in order to listen to the beloved and to do what the beloved demands.

Philosophy ought not to do more than approach the quiet that is the divine by means of its own care. Not simply by treasuring what it finds in its own heart, in its own language. For we have, as did Mary, a duty to speak about what is revealed within a divine showing. Indeed, philosophy ought to speak, as did Julian, so that others can hear, even when they tell philosophy that it ought not to speak. She, we, must help them to find the ears within which the resounding sounds can grip their hearts. And, yes, we must interrupt the divine, the university, our own disciplines, so that the divine can resound even in silence.

Philosophy ought not to be bound by a certain kind of demarcation that does not arise from the things that show themselves. It ought to set other disciplines, especially theology, free by means of doing whatever the showing demands. And sometimes that demand is challenge, interrogation, discomfort, rupture, interruption, correction. But if it is done philosophically, for the sake of the showing, philosophy is not absent from the divine even in interruption and correction. Pilate, like Socrates, is a philosopher who would speak for the sake of listening, listen for the sake of speaking—Pilate is a philosopher.

If philosophy does anything else than generate the explicit from the implicit, anything other than phenomenology, then it loses sight of the fact that the ground of philosophy is the love, the care, that it bears. If it does anything other than make explicit what the meaning of that love, that care, is, then philosophy turns into sophistry. But if it takes up the space ‘between,’ then philosophy, Dasein, thinking, the university—it can save theology, can save the divine, from being relegated to the museum of the university.

So, if philosophy is told to be quiet and stay apart from faith, then I say with Moses and Julian that it ought to “draw near,” to listen, and to speak. Philosophy is not *in service* to religion; rather, it *serves* those who would bind themselves together to approach the divine in faith and hope and love.⁴⁶ And philosophy ought to continue to speak directly, interrogatively, interrupting and correcting where it must, in such a way that it is letting the divine declare the path of desire in whatever ways (Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Catholic, Orthodox, etc.) it is “shewn.”

⁴⁶ See Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez’s claim about the role of evolution in revelation: “Recalling the evolution of the revelation regarding the presence of God in the midst of his people will aid us in clarifying the form this encounter in history takes.” Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 189.