Phenomenology of Religious Experience

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Phenomenology's Rejects: Religion after Derrida's Denegations

Abstract: Religion, as well as any individuals' volitionally chosen "worldview," generally get conceived solely in affirmative terms of value. "Religion" has been conceptualized almost solely on the terms of axiology: as the experience of "the greatest" holiness (Otto), the purely valuable sacred (Eliade); the most "ultimate concern" (Tillich); the symbols accepted to order life (Geertz), or the binding of oneself to deep value (Müller). Yet there are limitations of such axiomatic thinking, limitations that can be exemplified through an interpretation of Derrida's "globolatinization," which he described as a system of thought that promotes a universalism of pseudo or petit-valuations, and punishes those resistant and inflexible to them in the name of toleration. This essay investigates what happens when this "axiomatic" register (i.e. a reduction to a set of values) gets displaced in order to conceptualize religion also in terms of the non-valuable or "rejected." Rejection entails the paradox that what is rejected often speaks to a deeper reality of what in fact is desired. Thus, what we reject usually says infinitely more about us than what we claim to value and affirm. This essay interprets Derrida's essay "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" alongside his "Faith and Knowledge" in order to offer a Derridean conception of religion on the terms of a rejection that amounts to a double-affirmation or de-negation.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Denial, Derrida, Religion, Theory, Denegation, Faith, Knowledge, Globalization

> *"You ask who this person in the dream can be. It's not my mother" [says the subject]. Thus, [the analyst certainly can conclude] it is the mother.* – Freud[1]

The war over the appropriation of religion is today's world war. It is not that religion is "to blame" for its totalizing tendencies of monolithic monotheisms towards unconditional claims of fanaticism and zealotry (as Sloterdijk once put it not long after 9/11), for religion also is a part of the very process of conflict, as that means by which a totalizing calculus to grasp and understand totally is sought. In other words, today's world wars are waged over attempts to appropriate, instrumentalize, and militarize religion, which always already is conflictual by nature. Such efforts to appropriate and weaponize religion in part are predicated upon a certain reduction of religion to merely an apparatus of axiomatic evaluation, of a *kind of affirmation* of a "world" view.

In "Faith and Knowledge" Derrida radicalizes the notion of "world" to its core as a globalization in part founded in a kind of religion. The new "war of religion" as he puts it in the mid-90's precisely is "globolatinization," which seeks to set up a limitless pacification, even of religion, through "the world

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[1] Freud, "Negation," 235.

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market."[2] Religion in turn also gets instrumentalized by often-invisible authorities as a pacification machine that teaches subjects how to submit to authorities, namely through a secularization of faith. This is what is still "going on today," and a clear reason for why the question of religion is in need of being addressed once more.[3]

Although not always doomed to be an instrument of war or conflict, this difficult word "religion" generally gets conceived, for better or worse, solely in volitional and axiomatic terms. What is axiomatic thinking? Derrida in fact furnishes an answer for us: "An axiom always affirms, as its name indicates, a value, a price; it confirms or promises an evaluation that should remain intact and entail, like every value, an act of faith."[4] Under what we might call "axiomatic thinking," an implicit act of faith is always at work, therefore already implementing one's own religion unknowingly. Thus, it may seem strange that religion nearly always gets conceived axiomatically (in terms of self-proclaimed values) as the experience of: "the greatest" holiness (Otto), the purely valuable sacred (Eliade); the most "ultimate concern" (Tillich); an "ideology" or value machine (Marx); the anxious need for something to affirm for personal happiness (Hume); a "unified system of beliefs and practices" one accepts (Durkheim); or a cultural system of penultimate symbols by which one orders one's life (Geertz).[5] This axiomatic insistence even can be traced back to some of the first theories of religion, for as Müller wagered, if we follow *ligare* as the root of *religio* then religion concerns the act of individuals and communities being "bound" to what they claim to be of deep, often inexpressible *value*.[6]

It may be that religion's being reduced to "world view" is partly responsible for its becoming a catch-all for values. In 1901 James Leuba complained that the quantity of definitions (on which little agreement ever could be reached) could only point to the complexity of religion as irreducible to *little formulae*, concepts, or definitions. Of course, axiomatic thinking is to some degree unavoidable. Yet its limitations can be exemplified in the present day context of this globolatinization to which Derrida refers, which amounts to a universalism that punishes the resistant and inflexible who do not accept its own pseudo or petit-valuations. Acceptance and value of other's values becomes expected, and thereby undermines the very notion of value itself. It is no wonder then that today religion automatically is synonymous with "world view," which gets concocted in a celebrated liturgy of western life as the effortful hodge-podge of values one purports to admit and accept as inherently good.

This essay has no other pretense than to (1) investigate what happens when this axiomatic vector gets displaced when theorizing religion, and (2) to follow Derrida's work on religion wherever it may lead in this particular regard. In so doing, Derrida's essay "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" is read through the lens of his own "Faith and Knowledge" in order to conceive of religion through a theory of rejection that amounts to what he would have called a double-affirmation. It was Freud's conception of "denial" (*Verneinung*) that, in a therapeutic context, reminded us of the paradoxical reality that what we deny or reject is in many cases what we most fervently desire. The stronger the resistance within a rejection, the more powerful the desire. Removed from both its psychological-clinical context, and in a way that Freud may have disapproved,

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2 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 43.

3 Ibid., 38.

4 Ibid., 58. Derrida is not interested in religion as a state of being, but rather as an act; of *religio*-sity. It is in this context that he returns to the etymology of religion. *Religio* is said to be rooted in either: *relegere* (gathering, returning, starting over modestly and with piety) *or religare* (tying, binding, obligation, debt to God). Derrida seeks to find a tendency "common to the two sources of meaning thus distinguished." Ibid., 34. And for Derrida in both cases "what is at issue is indeed a persistent bond that bonds itself first and foremost to itself. What is at issue is indeed a reunion... a resistance or a reaction to disjunction. To absolute alterity." Ibid., 37.

5 And still for others, religious experience is, for Jevons, that of invisible things; for Freud, a system of illness and illusion; for Wittgenstein, of the form of life. For Tillich, "Religion as ultimate concern is the meaning-giving substance of culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself." Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 42. As expressed by Geertz "[A] religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts (2) to establish powerful, pervasive, long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence." Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," 90.

6 Müller, *Natural Religion*, Lecture 2. The problem of axiomatic thinking also is compounded by how the vast quantity of definitions of religion lead us to the brink reached by Tweed in the early 2000's: "...scholars of religion, who've heard it all before, exhale a knowing sigh. Not another (doomed) attempt to characterize religion!" Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 31.

this essay interprets rejection (especially in relation to religion) as a kind of symptom of what actively is determined to not-be-desired. Despite rejection being the act whereby abnormality is determined in a way that the rejected is dispelled from one's meaning giving conception of the world, there still remains some intelligibility that can be ascribed positively to the rejected. Kant's dictum "Being is no real predicate" expanded upon by Husserl and further defended by Heidegger, can in this sense be applied to thinking religion beyond a series of positively ascribed predicates of value. Religion, as argued here, and as developed from out of Derrida's work, may be thought in terms of this kind of double-affirmative rejection.

1 Derrida and denegation

"How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" (with the original, "Comment ne pas parler: *Dénégations*" appearing in 1986) was written under motivation to respond to concerns raised regarding Derrida's deconstruction by Jean-Luc Marion in *The Idol and the Distance* and *God without Being* (the negative themes of which Marion recently has extended in his *Negative Certainties*).[7] More broadly Derrida there responded more broadly to the mounting criticisms that those practitioners of deconstruction are merely "experts in the art of evasion, they know better how to negate or deny than how to say anything."[8] Following the misinterpretation of the "de" in deconstruction, some even had referred to Derrida as a sophist, skeptic, or "postmodern nihilist" due to the misunderstanding that deconstruction merely was a negative endeavor. And as the title of the essay suggests, Derrida was criticized for not being brave and pragmatic enough to make a claim or "say something," and it is here that Derrida employs negative theology to unfold his argument that faith to speak is not only faith-in, but further, is faith *as such*. This question ("How to Avoid Speaking?") starts from the outset with the difficulty of never taking a risk, of never braving to speak, and entails, along the way, a number of troubling concerns for any phenomenologist who presumes it in fact is possible to access a median space between thinking and speaking. Derrida concludes that there is always something "said" even when words are not uttered, and this raises the question as to whether or not there is a certain *polemical* and inherently conflictual nature to even a presumably neutral phenomenological approach.

Negative Theology provides a resource for learning how to "say something" in a way that is applicable to everyday life. Early thinkers of the negative (from Plotinus to the Greek Fathers, from Meister Eckhart to John the Scot Eriugena) were known to abide by the apophatic principle (as opposed to the kataphatic approach that focuses on divine, special revelation) that predicative language always will be inadequate when speaking of/to God. The "closer" one gets to God, the more difficult it becomes to speak, with *apophasis* literally meaning "speaking away."[9] Although not entirely critical of this movement, Derrida thinks that the failure of apophatic theology lies in the attempt to praise God, which always and already presumes far too much - - worship entails that one presumes a number of things about such a deity, starting with the a priori determination of absolute alterity. In Derrida's interpretation, there never can be an "infinite deferral" or "unnaming" of God because with time, the "the unnameable" becomes the new name of this divinity.

This points to the inadequacies, not simply of theological language, but of all speech acts and linguistic endeavors, most especially those that enter into what Derrida would critique according to a metaphysics of presence.[10] Yet at the same time, this does not entail that predicative language should be the default position for language, for it also has its own, often overlooked inadequacies. It often may fail to "say" anything of genuine interest regarding what changes with differentiation (namely, a deity or penultimate alterity). Derrida then returns to negative theology and retools it to show how it remains possible to access a quasi-secret reserve "beyond all positive predication" *and* negation, a sort of "superessentiality, a being

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7 Derrida then begins to answer the question: "Comment ne pas parler? How to avoid speaking? Plus précisément: comment ne pas parler *de l'être*." Derrida, "Comment ne pas parler. Dénégations," 587.
8 Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," (2008 version), 157.
9 Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," (1992 version), 75. For a helpful, philosophical introduction to early apophatic mystics, see Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying,* 1994.
10 For Derrida, "one is never certain of being able to attribute to anyone a project of negative theology *as such*." Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," (2008), 143.

beyond being."[11] In broad terms, Derrida explores the extent to which it may be possible to deny and yet also *not* deny, and how any *rejection* or denial of something effectively amounts to a diversion of attention away from whatever it is one actually *does accept*.

2 Derrida, Freud and rejection

Disavowal is part and parcel of every denial and rejection, yet it still accepts and affirms (*via negativa*) the disavowed. Freud's by now well-known conception of "denial" or *Verneinung* points to how our rejections in fact teach us about our innermost desires. He observes how his patients' most fervent denials ("No! it is not about my mother!") signaled to the paradoxical reality that what was being denied was in fact that which most fervently was affirmed by the desires of the patient. The stronger the resistance to questioning regarding a particular topic, the deeper the desire. When the therapist encounters resistance, she knows she has found a key for getting at the truth of what the patient desires the most, yet still prohibits himself from seeking satisfaction in. At the risk of oversimplification, this is one essential role of Freud's "talking cure," which comes about through penetrating rings of time as the patient accepts what is hiding in the denials and rejections. Derrida came to presume such a theory of *Verneinung*, yet he claimed that:

> "... what I am calling "denial" (*denegation*), [is] a word that I would like to hear prior even to its elaboration in a Freudian context (this is perhaps not easy and assumes at least two preconditions: that the chosen examples extend beyond both the predicative structure and the ontotheological or metaphysical presuppositions that still underlie psychoanalytic theorems)."[12]

This provides a unique, phenomenological twist on denegation: denial is a kind of double negative, and *therefore the negation of negation*: It is a kind of "affirmation" that has gone through the trial of the negative.

It is not sufficient simply to claim that nothing is a "something," that there is a negation within every affirmation. Therefore one must seek the dynamic *Ursprung* of *différance* as a complete and total Nietzschean "yea saying" or affirmation as a double negative.[13] Such a double-negative is observable already in deconstruction.[14] Here he initiates thought on "the secret, which "speaks without speaking." The Biblical narrative of Abraham and Isaac (which Derrida closely addresses in *The Gift of Death* via Patocka and Kierkegaard) points to how Abraham keeps his secret by holding fast to a negation that "denies" or de-negates itself. This marks the phenomenality of a secret. Abraham knows that he is incapable of speaking about his secret, yet he persistently is reminded that he has a secret to keep. The secret is not merely hidden, per se, but is inconspicuously active despite its being rejected from any verbal articulation by Abraham.

Whenever one believes oneself to have a secret, one talks with oneself about this secret in the form of a re-presentation through an inner "speaking" concerning its status as a secret. Not unlike Freud's theory of denial, one promises to oneself not to speak about the secret, yet in making that very promise, one becomes even more committed to continually *reaffirming* to oneself that they cannot speak precisely *by speaking to oneself* about it. This theory of secrecy reveals the double-negation at work that makes affirmation what it is; even when one is rejecting to utter words concerning it, the secret has its own *phenomenality* or "how"

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11 Ibid., 147.

12 Ibid., 158.

13 Jean-Luc Marion attempts to also employ a notion of denegation in his approach to phenomenological givenness: "The negative...can be understood as the operator of dialectical givenness, which puts the concept into motion, to the point of producing it in actuality (Hegel).[...]Every negation and every denegation, every negative, every nothing, and every logical contradiction suppose a givenness, which authorizes us to recognize them and thus do justice to their particularities – in short, a given that permits us at the very least to discuss them." Marion, *Being Given*, 55.

14 Derrida continues to suggest that there "is a secret of denial and a denial of the secret. The secret as such, *as secret,* separates and already institutes a negativity; it is a negation that denies itself. It de-negates itself. This de-negation does not happen to it by accident; it is essential and originary." Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," (2008), 158.

of presentation.[15] Denial is "essential and originary" to the secret, and the secret provides one proof of this theory of denegation.

In rather different sense, just like a stone that is being carved into a figure and therefore takes shape through removal, any removal is an active and positive activity that, by nature of *taking away*, allows for something to *be given*. This sense of "givenness" immediately harkens to a phenomenological heritage. Not unlike Heidegger's revelation that within *Destruktion* is an *a-letheia* that marks the negation of the covered over, denegation is infused within Derrida's de-construction, in which "...at the same time, you have to follow the rule and to invent a new rule, a new norm, a new criterion, a new law."[16] Removal is poetic. And similar to Husserl's *Abbau*, which is the dismantling of crystalized "deposits" in relation to static and genetic phenomenology, deconstruction is "not the mixture but the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new."[17] The "de" in deconstruction attests *not to a negation of a construction*, but rather, *a negation of something already-having-been negated*. This retrieval follows a *Gelassenheit* that is not submissive, but *via* a Nietzschean *amor fati*, on affirming of something by "letting it be."

Derrida's notion of negativity is co-extensive with the affirmative, and offers a holistic application of negative theology (which holds God to be the "origin of this work of the negative") by pointing to our cultural absolutes that are shifting, differentializing "origins."[18] Just like apophatic theology, which negates God's self as God, this general origin of negativity entails its own negation as denegation. It is not a purely abyssal, empty space, but an effective negativity "that gives." It is not so much the extremity or polarity of being and nothing that is of interest to Derrida, nor is it their *mediation*. Being cannot be elaborated or expressed, yet any avoidance of it amounts to its expression. Thus, how is one to avoid speaking [of Being]?[19] Derrida turns to *Khora* (from *kharismos*) in beginning to respond to this question.

3 *Khora* and negation

This return to *Khora* comes from a reading of Heidegger's interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* addressed by Derrida both in "How to Avoid Speaking" and in "*Khora*" in *On the Name*.[20] In the former, *Khora* is described as a kind of slippage, spacing, and placelessness between "beings and Being." Since any possibility of an absolutely negative discourse is a fundamental farce, *Khora* is conceived as in between; as "nothing positive or negative."[21] As again addressed in "Faith and Knowledge" *Khora* is a "desert in the desert" that allows religion to uproot itself.

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15 "This denial [*dénégation*] does not happen [to the secret] by accident; it is essential and originary. ... The enigma ... is the sharing of the secret, and not only shared to my partner in the society but the secret shared within itself, its 'own' partition, which divides the essence of a secret that cannot even appear to one alone except in starting to be lost, to divulge itself, hence to dissimulate itself, as secret, in showing itself: dissimulating its dissimulation. There is no secret as such; I deny it. And this is what I confide in secret to whomever allies himself to me. This is the secret of the alliance. Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," (1992), 95.
16 Derrida, "A Conversation with Jacques Derrida", 6.
17 And he continues: "The paradox in the instituting moment of an institution is that, at the same time that it starts something new, it also continues something, is true to the memory of the past, to a heritage, to something we receive from the past..." Ibid., 6.
18 For Derrida "God is not merely the end, but the origin of this work of the negative." Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," (2008), 146. Further, "God is not simply his place, not even in his most holy of places. He is not and he has no place, he does not take place *[n'a pas lieu]*, or rather he is and has/takes place *[a lieu]* but without being and without place, without being his place." Ibid., 163.
19 Being is a perennial topic in this essay: "I will limit myself to the question that my title imposes: How to avoid speaking? Or more precisely: How to avoid speaking *of Being*?" Ibid., 188.
20 Jacques Derrida, "*Khôra*", 126. cf 95.
21 "The passage by way of negativity of the discourse on the *khora* is neither a last word nor a mediation in the service of a dialectic, an elevation toward a positive or true meaning, a Good or a God. It is not a matter here of negative theology; there is reference to neither an event nor a gift, nor an order, nor a promise, even if, as I have just underlined, the absence of promise or order, the barren, radically anhuman and atheological nature of this "place" obliges us to speak and to refer to it in a certain unique way, as to the wholly other that would not even be transcendent, absolutely remote, nor immanent or close." Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," (2008), 174.

This "desert in the desert…resembles to a fault, but without reducing itself to, that *via negativa* which makes its way from a Graeco-Judaeo-Christian tradition" and through "uprooting the tradition that bears it, in atheologizing it, this abstraction, without denying faith, liberates a universal rationality and the political democracy that cannot be dissociated from it."[22] It is the denegation of the desert in the desert that holds religion together through a self-uprooting, which as we know, is paradoxical, given the fact that religion concerns (following the Latin etymology at least) a kind of *binding* or *bonding*. It simultaneously bonds and dissociates/uproots. The specific role that *Khora* plays here is through "the abstract spacing it helps uproot the strong…bifurcation between a tradition of the 'via negativa.'"[23] *Khora* is a new borderland of interior/exterior and does not "even announce itself as 'beyond being' in accordance with a path of negation, a via negativa."[24]

It is here that Derrida makes an intriguing discovery: "*Khora* never presents itself as such. It is neither Being, nor the Good, nor God, nor man, nor History. It will always resist them, will have always been…the very place of an infinite resistance, of an infinitely impassible persistence <*restance*>: an utterly faceless other."[25] *Khora*, precisely by not presenting itself, is a kind of *resistance* that is not purely negative. The resistance is essential to denegation, as a rejection. The resistance is infinite, and it subsequently fuels an affirmation through negation. The resistance of *Khora* presents a phenomenality despite not being given to expression, and this is reflected via an act of faith. This is one reason why apophatic theology, in "passing beyond the intelligible" aims to reach "absolute rarefaction, toward silent union with the ineffable."[26] To resist is to reject actively, yet in a way that one aligns oneself even moreso with that which motivates, in the first place, that very resistance. It now becomes possible, inspired by Derrida's denegations, to furnish a perhaps more explicit theory of rejection.

4 On rejection

"You are what you do," "you are what you think," "you are what you eat." These are all contemporary attempts to grasp predicatively and positively a subjectivity that remains in constant fragmentation. Yet if we take Freud's conception of *Verneinung* or "denial" (or Goh's more recent replacement of the sub-ject with re-ject) seriously, "you are what you reject" could be a means of describing more accurately the human condition.[27] As Freud indicated in psychological terms, and Derrida clarified in anthropo-theological ones, what our cultures reject and deny act simultaneously as deep affirmations. It may even be arguable that what we most fervently deny says infinitely more about our condition than whatever we claim to value or hold true.

This would be for at least three reasons. First, in the present day context of a forced toleration, of a globalized universalism that punishes the inflexible and unaccepting, there are an overwhelming variety of whims to be valued and affirmed. Even more dangerous is the notion of "world views", which one volitionally pastiches together with the presumption that values remain explicable. This gets more complicated in a western imaginary today that wishes to universalize its values, while simultaneously not living up to them, and without knowing it is doing so. It may perhaps be only when "no" is said that it is possible finally to arrive at the truth of what most deeply is affirmed (via denial) and according to which one is willing to negate.

Second, values often are expressed in far too volitional and voluntaristic terms that place individual desire at the pinnacle of human functioning and flourishing. This creates conditions in which the subject

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22 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge", 19.

23 Ibid.

24 Further, "in respect of this borderline place, a new war of religions is…employing as never before to this day, in an event that is at the same time both interior and exterior." Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 20.

25 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 21.

26 Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," (2008), 150.

27 For an interesting replacement of the traditional sub-ject with a re-ject, see here Irving Goh, *The Reject: Community, Politics, and Religion after the Subject*.

is tricked into thinking its values are accurately assessed. Here again, rejections can be more aligned with the truest of affirmations because they get asserted through plasticity in the form or *resistance*. It is not the superficial values that might be affirmed about our traditions that alter the world and our futures the most, but rather the fragmentary reworkings and innovative rearrangements and innervations of what we reject.

Third, what is rejected is founded on a repulsion from what one accepts into oneself, and it therefore exacts a powerful reaction. Yet despite the rejected being deemed to have no value; it in fact operates in the hinterlands or backside of the truest affirmations. Rejection can refer to things, unused material, unproductively useful concepts, or whatever is cast or projected from oneself by merit of its being repulsive. These meanings can be traced back to their Latin origination in *Vastus* (the root of "waste"), which refers to the *uncultivated*, rejected, unoccupied, valueless, or barren. Overall, any such out-of-placed-ness signals to how the order of values simply differentiates itself through *shifts* and *changes*.

In another sense, and more generally speaking, rejection also can be a symptom. What is rejected is what we determine to not-desire. "To not" or negate in rejection can be an act of determination, or on an un-conscious or pre-conscious level whereby the rejected is more quietly dismissed to have no value or significance. Yet in both cases (outright, purposeful rejection, and a more sub/unconscious rejection) the rejected still maintains intelligibility – what is deemed *undeserving of attention* still has a phenomenality. Indeed, it is not "negative" per se, but only negated, and therefore still bearing potential for positive description and affirmation. As Girard's mimesis teaches, non-desire is the rejected, and desire is what is wanted or positively valued. The rejected is not simply what we do not want; it is a desire in the form of resistance.

It is in this sense that religion might be understood, beyond a re-evaluation *of all values* as Nietzsche so fervently preached, but precisely as an engagement with one's *non-values*. The human often is understood as a composite whole of what it values and accepts into itself. Yet the human is composed not only of that to which it positively ascribes sense, but also of what it deems (from within its own activity) as "out of place."

5 Rejection and religion

It is according to these general contours of rejection that, through a reliance upon Derrida's developments, religion might be understood, namely, according to a denegation that is a double-affirmation. To restate one core problem this essay has attempted to address, religion far too often is conceived according to an axiomatic presupposition by which we believe our subjectivity is developed through ascent, acceptance, or even the affirmation of whims. This cultural tendency often entails that religion is cast likewise (as the aforementioned experience of the greatest good, the holiest of values, or the highest of essences. Although there certainly remains something still to be retained of this kind of affirmation in religion (naturally, it cannot nor should not in every case be jettisoned from the structures of belief), it is possible to bracket and suspend momentarily these value theories of religion in favor of thinking it in terms of "rejection." There are at least three ways of doing so.

1. *Religion and rejection as suspension*: The basis of the phenomenological method is the *epoché,* suspension, or bracketing of a running thesis or presupposition momentarily in order to bring a thing's various valences and strata under investigation in a way like never before. Religion, especially given its insistences on re-birth, also can be thought in these terms. As Derrida once wondered, perhaps "even to suspend for an instant one's religious affiliation…[is] the very resource, since time immemorial, of the most authentic faith or of the most originary sacredness."[28] This suspension, or bringing into tension one previously held view with another potential reality involves a temporary rejection of one's *past* religions in favor of what new is appearing for one to act upon (this would not be unlike St Paul's call of "forgetting what lies behind" as a faith act in Philippians 3:12-16). In this case living religiously in its truest sense could be interpreted as an act that suspends all past religions. This would amount to the inversion of how religion generally is understood today: religion as a metaphysics of presence composed of various predicative

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28 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 23.

claims and assertions of values (that often have the inadvertent effect of disallowing any *potentia* and dynamicity of religious life). Such an understanding of religion may run the risk of reducing the religious act to merely the creedal acceptance or ascent of values and truth claims without ever living dangerously in the conflicts of true religious life. Instead, living religiously could be understood as the rejection (in the form of a temporary suspension) of past religious experience.

2. *Religion and rejection beyond pure volition*: Throughout Derrida's work runs the not-so-subtle critique of volition as a primary means of understanding human life. For him the will, or even a Husserlian directedness or intentionality, often fails because it reduces the desired or intended to past experience, and therefore remains limited in terms of any true openness to potential *différance*. This becomes relevant for thinking about rejection, because in rejection one does not always act according to one's own will, per se, but according to what one might observe oneself rejecting.[29] This reflects an awareness of not simply a kind of split-subject (after all, we have known about this long before Freud) but a subject who operates with a pre-conscious horizon that, for example, in an act of rejection, furnishes a kind of awareness of its announcement. Such awareness would bear potential to alter the situation in which one finds oneself. Following Derrida's claim that "religion is the response," that religion is responsive, responsible, and marks the ability to respond, one could here suggest that the response to the rejected is the religious act.[30] That is, one responds to what one finds oneself rejecting, not simply to what one finds oneself affirming volitionally. This displaces the "sub-ject," which primarily is thought be the essence of desire and volition, and replaces it as a kind of "re-ject" (Goh) that can come to grips with the facts that (1) it knows not what it wants, and (2) it is in a constant stalemate with itself in ever attaining what it wants to affirm, even if such awareness were to be achieved.

3. *Religion, rejection, and the trial of negative*: The "what" that is held onto in acting religiously is precisely *the act*, namely the act *that rejects* not only past religious acts, but also anything that stands in the way of one's being able to respond and act religiously. Given the inherently aforementioned conflictual/polemical nature of religion, one could call this a kind of fanatical, unconditional act, as the rejection of what stands in the way of acting religiously is total and uncompromising. Yet it does not overlook intentionally what could counteract or argue against its activity. And thus, such rejection goes through the trial of negation, and brings it into pertinence in an existential situation whereby affirmation is equally active.

Rejection (as denegation, as the double-affirmation) is a form of arrangement that extends beyond our usual sense relations of situations that dichotomize the negative and the positive. Rejection points fundamentally to a *relation* whereby a dialogue or discourse (following the Latin root *discurrere*) or running "back and forth" between two poles (in this case, between the negative and positive) takes place. This is a tension. It would be in this context that Derrida's resurrection of the concept of *Khora* (as "the desert in the desert") would prove itself essential to providing a means of description of this "placeless place" or slippage within any situation one finds oneself so that this particular matrix of opposition might be deconstructed. This shifting square could be that which institutes the relation (between negation and affirmation) that makes religion tick, thereby allowing for one's cherished and often disavowed imaginaries and beliefs to be brought under, not simply investigation, but more importantly alteration. Rejection *as* religion furnishes religion with an internal mechanism for grasping the intelligibility of what slips past our reason giving (and highly volitional) conceptions about how the situations in which we find ourselves operate often without our awareness; it also allows for a more realistic understanding of religion that is consistent with the *unthought* of the *conditio humana* despite today's cultural insistence upon conceiving religion as something that one, on their own, chooses volitionally in axiomatic terms.

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29 For more on this argument of Derrida's distancing himself from volition or desire as a primary means of understanding the human condition, see Alvis, *Marion and Derrida on the Gift and Desire*.
30 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge", 26.

6 Conclusion

It was in more explicitly phenomenological terms that Husserl considered often the "un" of the un-thought. Is the unthought the not-to-be-thought-any-longer, the never-to-be-thought, or the eventually-will-be-thought? For Husserl the unthought could be simply the given empirical and historical truths about a subjective state, and how the "I" denotes a subject's reality as a conscious being. To the extent that Husserl grounded *everything* in the transcendental subject, the (empirical) unthought still would be an active part of a subject's intelligible reality. It should be accepted that the unthought is an ineliminable "other" of what it means "to be." The I-am-not of transcendental life comes to form "the I" just as much as any self-proclaimed values originating from an I. This helps illustrate how even beginning with Husserl there was a recognition (albeit from another angle) how the unthought, like "the rejected," still plays an active role.

Thus Derrida may not be the heretic of phenomenology some might claim him to be. He leads us to the point of being able to recognize how rejection is doubly-affirmative and something positive. Yet he also distances himself from any phenomenology that might optimistically allow one to obtain in consciousness a silence or "singular power not to *say* what one knows."[31] For conscious subjects things and ideas come in and out of mind through a constant, steady stream, and it generally goes presumed that many, if not most of these things, are not acted upon or concretized in *acts* (namely, speech acts). This classic "cognitive model" of understanding consciousness often overlooks that the lack of uttering a word, of keeping silent about it, in no way precludes that such a word is not thought, desired, or active. There remains a semiotic structure of all thoughts, and like Derrida's theory of the secret, which must constantly enter the form of an ever-reminding soliloquy, this demands that (to at least some degree) "thought" can be classified also as a form of speaking.

It is in "Faith and Knowledge" that one might observe Derrida dismantling, piece by piece, different overly presumed understandings of religion, calling for a phenomenological orientation that does not take for granted the sharp distinction between thinking and speaking: "religion?...if one were still supposed to speak of it...perhaps one could attempt to think it in itself or to devote oneself to this task."[32] One can avoid speaking no more than they can the steady stream of conscious activity, and it remains essential not to be duped by the promises of neutral silence, but to find the "thing itself" of religion wherever it is always already active. Derrida's basic tendency of rejecting the distinction between thought and speech is reminiscent of Levinas' in *Totality and Infinity* when he condemns the age-old distinction between thinking and practice to the point that he makes "one of the theses of this book..." to overcome a very particular "...hierarchy: activity rests on cognitions that illuminate it."[33] Instead, thought is an act, with theory and practice being intertwining modes of metaphysical transcendence.[34]

Thus, any phenomenological suspension of activity would not be to limit the unthought or rejected, per se, or to bring it all under a totalizing investigation. Rather, and especially in the context of thinking religiously, such a suspension is a rejection that is irreducible to an infinite deferral: when one "negates" or defers, something always is affirmed. Yet the infinite still remains in play with a slightly different twist: there is an "infinite resistance" (as Derrida puts it in "Faith and Knowledge") and we might interpret this resistance as a rejection that could be part and parcel of acting religiously. Phenomenologically inflected, religion then could be conceived as an act of suspension that amounts to a kind of plastic rejection and resistance to anything that seeks to hinder oneself from precisely that religious act of suspension. Religion amounts then to the *ability* to resist infinitely whatever seeks to pacify or quarantine religious life by parsing religion into little *formulae* in order to bring it into the world market. An infinite resistance to what might

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31 Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," (2008), 156. Derrida then raises the question, which has definite phenomenological undertones: "And yet is any problem more novel today than that of consciousness? Here one is tempted to designate, if not to define, consciousness as that place in which is retained the singular power not to *say* what one knows, to keep a secret in the form of representation. A conscious being is a be-ing capable of lying, of not presenting in a discourse what it nonetheless has an articulated representation of: a being that can avoid speaking."

32 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 23.

33 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 29.

34 Ibid., 27.

be referred to as an implicit weaponization of religion, following Derrida, may be today's most true act of faith.[35]

Acknowledgements:

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