IN THIS CONCISE AND THOUGHTFUL BOOK, Patrick Masterson discusses two approaches to the philosophical understanding of God: the phenomenological, exemplified by Jean-Luc Marion, and the metaphysical, represented by Thomas Aquinas. The first chapter (“Phenomenology”) presents Marion’s work, along with commentaries and modifications from Levinas, Ricoeur, Kearney, and others. The second (“Metaphysics”) treats Aquinas, with incidental support from several modern writers. The heart of the book is the rivalry between these two forms of philosophy. Masterson sees value in both and considers them complementary to each other. He argues that the phenomenological approach is incomplete without the metaphysical. His book provides valuable material for examining how these two forms of philosophy relate to one another, and how they can each serve in the philosophy of religion and in theology.

In my critical study, I wish to endorse Masterson’s point about the importance of metaphysics in the philosophy of religion and theology. I also hope to clarify the relationship between phenomenology and Thomistic metaphysics. I will present an understanding of several themes in phenomenology—such as immanence, objectivity, constitution, the epoché, and the transcendental reduction—that is different from his. I think that my interpretation keeps phenomenology from falling back into a Cartesian understanding of the human subject, whereas his presentation does not succeed in doing so. I also think that my interpretation can show how phenomenology can provide an important contribution to the Thomistic metaphysics that he describes.

Correspondence to: Robert Sokolowski.

According to Masterson’s exposition in chapter one, Marion begins with Husserl’s distinction between empty and filled intentions: in our normal experience, our intentions and concepts come first and find their fulfillment in the intuition of things; what we intuit is proportioned to our anticipations, which limit what can be given to us. The cognitional subject “constitutes” its objects and thus enjoys a certain dominion over them. Marion claims, however, that we also experience “saturated phenomena” that reverse this relationship. In them the knowing subject is subordinated to the given, which exceeds any conceptual anticipation. Examples of such experiences are “unpredictable pure historical events, the visual work of art such as a painting which can be looked at but not constituted, and the bedazzling face of a loved one.”

In such experiences our categories give way and the cool self-possession of the perceiver and scientist is overcome by what is given. Religious experience is one such saturated phenomenon; in fact, it is the primary one, and it can be discussed in the phenomenology of religion. Marion also examines the specific phenomena of biblical, Christian Revelation, a term he capitalizes to distinguish it from the name of phenomena in other religions. In all such saturated phenomena, the subject is inevitably self-involved and modified; he may even be newly given to himself by what is given to him. He is himself constituted rather than being the one who constitutes the givenness in question.

The metaphysical approach discussed in the second chapter appeals, not to givenness, but to inference and causation. Aquinas argues from the understood finitude of the things we encounter: the things we experience cannot account for their contingent and hierarchic way of being. Our grasp of the finitude of entities is based on direct experience. It does not require that we begin with an Anselmian notion of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought; nor need we somehow apprehend a nonfinite mode of existing to compare limited beings with in order to discover their finitude; nor must we appeal to an infinite desire to know. Rather, the finite

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2 Ibid., 28.
3 See ibid., 28–29.
character of things is revealed in their own internal composition; we need recognize simply the distinction between their existence and their essence, their being actual and their being limited to a kind of being: “individually their act of existence is limited to their determinate essential capacity.” This way of being calls for an explanation: finite existents would be incoherent and impossible except as having been brought into existence by a cause whose nature is simply to be, not to be as a certain kind. Such entities, as existent, make no sense unless there is an entirely different kind of “existent” that enables them to be. But finite entities are obviously not incoherent, impossible, or senseless, because they do in fact exist; hence they imply the existence of that without which they could not be. The insufficiency of such things is revealed to us by such features as their contingency and perishability (everything could not be like this) and by “the different measures and degrees in which existence finds actual expression” in them. The limited existence of the things we encounter implies the sheer or subsistent esse of that which enables them to be.

Masterson says that the inference to such a cause is an indirect argument, not a positive grasp of the cause itself. The cause is not given but inferred a posteriori on the basis of the metaphysical composition of things that we experience. He also says that according to Aquinas what is established is the truth of judgments about God; we are not led to the phenomenon or givenness of infinite being. We do not directly encounter the sheer or subsistent esse that we come to know must be; our intellect, which is geared to the intelligibility of finite and embodied things, would not be capable of such an experience. The world and the things in it imply God as their cause but do not present him to us. Masterson points out that the issue of the existence of things is different from what ancient philosophy explored in its metaphysics: “The context has shifted, from the Greek focus on material change and form as ultimate perfection, to the act of existence in its manifold expressions.”

The weakness that Masterson finds in the phenomenological approach is that it cannot establish the reality of—or the reality

\[^{1}\text{Ibid., 48.}\]
\[^{2}\text{Ibid., 52–53.}\]
\[^{3}\text{Ibid., 51.}\]
behind—the saturated phenomena it describes. Since phenomenology is said to turn to the knowing subject and to suspend belief in the objective world, it will, he says, be left with just the subject’s noematic correlates (immanent phenomena) and will be unable to validate them. Phenomenology needs to be complemented by a style of thinking that begins, not with phenomena (saturated or not), but with actual entities, which can serve as the base for inference to the being of the divine. The reality of things, understood metaphysically under the rubric of the finite existence of things, implies the reality of God. Chapters one and two thus examine two contrasting modes of philosophical analysis: the one deals with the subject and its immanence and the other deals with entities that are recognized as finite and in need of a cause. The two initial chapters are explorations in philosophy.

Chapter three (“Theology”) moves from philosophy to religious faith and its theology. Theology is defined as the effort to understand what is revealed in faith, and specifically in Christian faith. Masterson uses Karl Barth’s “rejection of natural theology”\(^7\) as a foil to bring out more vividly Aquinas’s position on the role of reason in approaching to God. Barth strongly criticizes the appeal to natural proofs for God’s being. He insists that God “has no need of our proofs” and that he “proves himself at every step.”\(^8\) Proofs such as the five ways, he claims, are more appropriate for a discussion of pagan divinities. In response to Barth, Masterson says that Aquinas’s use of natural reason, as both a preparation for theology and an activity within theology, is much more subtle than Barth’s criticisms imply. Three points are made. First, the Thomistic arguments for the existence and attributes of God do not lead to a direct awareness of God’s existence, only to the truth of judgments about his existence and attributes. Reason as such does not claim to know God as he is in himself. Second, for Aquinas theology takes its origin, not from natural reasoning, but from what is revealed in faith. Third, faith does not change our natural intelligence into something different; it does not make it possible for the believer to understand things that nonbelievers cannot. As he says, “The ‘light of faith’ does not enhance the natural ability of the human intellect, for example, by raising it to a higher level of intelligence enabling it to

\[^7\] Ibid., 75.
\[^8\] Ibid., 74.
comprehend and affirm new ‘supernatural’ truths.”⁹ God’s existence, as well as his attributes such as goodness, unity, and omniscience, are revealed in faith, but they can also be known by human reason, because, as Aquinas says, “faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature.”¹⁰ Revelation addresses a rational human being in his capacity for understanding; it could not be presented to a nonrational entity. Faith can be a light “only because we are able to see, to understand, what it proposes.”¹¹ Such naturally known truths are preambles to faith. They are part of revelation but can also be reached, in principle, by natural reason.

After developing the role of metaphysics in theology, Masterson turns to phenomenology to see what its role can be in that discipline. He says that in metaphysics we might reason to the existence of God as creator, but in faith we come to know that we are loved by God and redeemed by him. This is far more than what metaphysical thinking can reach. It surpasses the sense of God as creator and it has a greater impact on us. Masterson says that Marion’s focus is on the “New Testament name ‘God is love’.”¹² In this perspective, “It is because we are loved that we are beings. Being is secondary to love.” Masterson says that phenomenology can contribute to a theological clarification of this experience of divine transcendence and benevolence. It will, however, remain inadequate because its methodology severely restricts it to subjective immanence. As he says later, according to phenomenology such saturating phenomena occurring in faith “do not consider or inform us about any objective existence intrinsically independent of their immanent presence to consciousness.”¹³ This deficit in phenomenology can be remedied by combining phenomenology, which explores the subjective, and metaphysics, which thinks about being, and thinks about it in its independence from its givenness to us. The two approaches are irreducible to one another, and each is needed because of the limited character of our being and thinking.

⁹ Ibid., 76.
¹⁰ Ibid., 77.
¹¹ Ibid.
¹² Ibid., 83.
¹³ Ibid., 162.
The first three chapters, discussing phenomenology, metaphysics, and theology, form a comprehensive whole in the book. They secure the perimeter of the material that Masterson wishes to examine: two philosophical approaches, and an application of both styles of thinking to Revelation and faith. The rest of the book recapitulates and deepens the treatment of the material presented in these initial chapters. Chapter five ("Comparisons") goes into greater detail in contrasting phenomenology and metaphysics; that is, it revisits chapters one and two. Its major claim is to reassert the need for metaphysics and its causal argumentation as a way of complementing the work of phenomenology. Chapter six ("Relationships") refines the material covered in chapter three and shows in greater detail how both forms of philosophy can be enlisted into a theological reflection on biblical faith. Its major claim is to attribute a certain priority to phenomenology, which, as developed by Marion, has an advantage over metaphysics in showing how the truth of faith is given to the believer; its descriptive procedure may be more appropriate than the argumentation through causality that is used in metaphysics. A final unnumbered chapter of eighteen pages ("Conclusions") looks back over the whole, confirms the strengths and limitations of each philosophical approach, and shows how both can contribute to the philosophy of religion and to theology.

The reader will have noticed that in my summary I skipped over chapter four. At first glance, this chapter seems to interrupt the elegant architecture of the book. It is entitled "Spirit" and it deals with G. W. F. Hegel. The chapter is, however, not a digression but a further piece in the book’s structure. Hegel conflates everything that is distinguished in the book. He is the prime modern instance of a writer who merges theology into philosophy, and who also blends the two forms of philosophy (phenomenology and metaphysics) with one another. He joins the rational and the real and even the finite and infinite in a grand, orchestral synthesis of philosophy. Hegel "seeks . . . to combine in a single philosophical tour de force a completely unified account of the metaphysical, phenomenological, and theological approaches to God." Masterson uses this extreme unification to define his own opposing position. His explicit aim is to eschew false reconciliations and to leave

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14 Ibid., 172.
intact the phenomenological, metaphysical, and theological approaches. Each has its own excellence but only at the cost of not being the others. The human approach to the infinite is itself a finite endeavor and not an assimilation to what we are thinking about. Since it is finite, there will be various approaches that remain distinct from and irreducible to one another; each will need to be complemented by the others. Their restrictions and partiality will be a sign of the limited character of our efforts. In each of his chapters, Masterson develops his major point by contrasting it with what other authors say; here, he practices a larger-scale contrast, not within a chapter, but among the chapters themselves. The chapter on Hegel is the foil for all the others and Hegel is the contrary for the rest of the book: “Unlike Hegel, we have no comprehensive or uniquely adequate approach to God.”

Masterson’s explicit and detailed contrast between phenomenology and Thomistic metaphysics is an important contribution to current philosophy of religion and theology, but it has a wider scope than that; it helps us to understand the difference between modern and premodern philosophy in general. It helps us to see more clearly what the difference is between the turn to the subject inaugurated by Montaigne, Descartes, and Hobbes, and the theorizing of being in the medieval scholastics and specifically Aquinas. Masterson brings out many attractive features of Thomism: that it is focused on real entities that we encounter as existent; that such entities in their way of existing give off clues (“ciphers”) of something that is needed to account for their “being there” at all; that thinking about these indications leads, not to intuition of the ultimate cause, but to recognition of the truth of judgments about a necessary origin that surpasses anything we could hope to experience; and that we can nonetheless legitimately draw other inferences about some of the attributes of this subsisting esse, even though all we know of it is that it is the cause of the existence of the things that we experience. This rational exercise does not, obviously, achieve revelation and faith, but

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15 Ibid., 175.
it does open the ontological and conceptual space within which they
coccur. (One might also say that it opens the space in which revelation
and faith have occurred, because in point of historical fact this
investigation of esse arose within the Christian or biblical theological
tradition. Could one go even further and say that it could not have
arisen in any other setting, but once achieved it can be seen by anyone
to be understandable on its own terms?) Masterson’s presentation of
this Thomistic argument is bright, clean, and vigorous. It is sharpened
by being defined against the phenomenological approach to the topic.

His presentation of phenomenology is sympathetic but also
polemical. One of the purposes of his book is to justify the role of
Thomistic metaphysics in the philosophy of religion and theology, and
to contest its being dismissed as part of the “onto-theology” criticized
by Heidegger and others. In this polemic, Masterson points out what he
considers the limitations of phenomenology and he shows why it needs
to be complemented by metaphysics.

The core of his argument lies in a philosophical deficiency he finds
in the methodology of this kind of thinking. Phenomenology begins, he
says, by suspending the convictions we normally have about things that
we encounter while we live in the natural, prephilosophical attitude.
This suspension of our ground-level belief is the transcendental epochê.
It entails the “bracketing” of the things given to our intentions.
Concomitantly, in what is called the transcendental reduction, we turn
toward and describe the structures of our subjective cognitional life.

We analyze our “noetic” intentionalities and their objective “noematic”
correlates, but when we do so “the hypothetical ‘as though’ never
achieves, in phenomenology, the detached impersonal affirmation that
this is how things are irrespective of our conscious awareness.”

Masterson says that phenomenology does not share in the convictions
of the person in the natural attitude but suspends such beliefs and
simply reflects on them and their correlative phenomena, which are
now taken to be enclosed in the immanence of consciousness. We no
longer think about things but only about the noemas of things.
Phenomenology seems to turn the world into a virtual world.

I think that this critique is off-key. The epochê and reduction are
certainly controversial issues in phenomenology, but I think that they

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16 Ibid., 177.
can and should be understood in a way that does not confine phenomenology into the subjective domain in the manner described by Masterson. What is going on in the epochê and reduction is Husserl’s attempt to differentiate philosophy from ways of thinking that are not philosophy. This is an ancient and perennial problem, and Husserl struggled with it for the last thirty years of his life. He fretted about the nature of his philosophical reflection even in the Logical Investigations, but the question was formulated explicitly, with the use of the epochê and reduction, in his 1907 lecture The Idea of Phenomenology and again in Ideas I. His later works, especially Formal and Transcendental Logic and The Crisis of European Sciences, attain formulations that are less misleading than those of his earlier writings. The problem dealt with in the epochê and reduction is the same that we find in Plato, Aristotle, and any other philosopher worthy of the name. It is to express how the words we use in our normal worldly engagements, whether in conversation, politics, or technical science, can be adjusted to carry philosophical meanings. How do we begin to think philosophically? What point of view do we adopt, what formal object do we turn to? Husserl was operating within the intellectual current initiated by Descartes and other founders of modernity. He worked his way out of it, but his vocabulary shows the influence of these origins and it is all too easy for interpreters to push him back into what he differentiated himself from. If we do so, however, we forfeit the breakthrough he achieved, which was to go beyond the psychologistic modern reading of the human subject. Husserl enables us to acknowledge the human person as involved in truth and being, and to revive philosophy as the reflection on being and truth as such. It was this recovery of the perennial sense of philosophy that so attracted people such as Heidegger, Edith Stein, Sartre, and others to his work. Things became possible that had been precluded by a disjointed modernity: we could now think philosophically about whatever presents itself to us, and to accept it for what it is and as it presents itself. We need not deconstruct or demythologize it. We can now confidently say, even as philosophers, that we can be aware of our surroundings and are not “locked up” in the cabinet of the mind.\footnote{See John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (New York: Clarendon Press, 1975), Book 1, chapter 2, §15,
For ease of expression, let us adopt the term *transcendentalese* to name the language that we use when we have adopted the philosophical attitude and *mundanese* to name our prephilosophical discourse. The words were coined by Thomas Prufer. Words such as *immanent, transcendent, inside, outside, subject,* and *object* occur in mundane, but they are also used in philosophical speech, where they acquire modified meanings. If I were to speak as a psychologist or neurosurgeon and say that “what John knows” is “inside” his mind, my words would designate a certain spatial location and might have an acceptable meaning; the speaker might even say that what John knows is in his brain, and that if the brain were damaged he would lose certain memories, skills, and cognitions. But if I were to speak as a philosopher and were to say the same thing, my remarks would be seriously misleading. In fact, “what John knows” is that the car is out of gas, and this state of affairs is “outside” him but yet it is present “to” him and his mind and in a new sense it can be said to be “in” his mind, but not in the way that the neuroscientist says it is. The spatiality of the mind is not the same as that of material bodies; the spatial adverbs and prepositions are being used analogously, and we fall into artificial, unsolvable problems if we do not notice the tilt. We need to be attentive to the shifts of meaning that occur when we move from mundane to transcendentalese, and I would claim that Masterson is not sufficiently attentive to these changes when he says, for example, “In the light of the *epochê*, the context of phenomenological enquiry becomes that of the perceptive description of given phenomena and the elucidation . . . of their essential natures, conditions of possibility, significations, modalities, noematic-noetic structures, etc., but not of

55: “The senses at first let in particular ideas, and furnish the yet empty cabinet.” Also *Of the Conduct of the Understanding, in Some Thoughts concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1996) §45, 224: “And when by any strong application to them they are roused a little, they are like men brought to themselves from some remote region; whereas in truth they come no farther than their secret cabinet within. . . .”

their objective existence beyond the limits of cognitional immanence.”

It is also misleading to say that the phenomenological reduction “abstracts from the natural prephilosophical attitude by a conscious exercise of selective inattention which brackets the issue of the independent existence of things affirmed in the natural attitude.”

The speaker of transcendentalese does pay attention to the independent being that has come to light, but he describes it as coming to light for the person who knows the thing in question, because the entity is originally presented to that person, and it is presented to him as being independent. It has been verified by him and it appears as such, and the authority of the person in the natural attitude is recognized and not overridden by the philosopher. This acknowledgment of the true existence of things is expressed by Husserl in his treatment of what he calls Evidenz. The theme is developed, for example, in Part Four of Ideas I, which is entitled “Reason and Reality [Vernunft und Wirklichkeit],” and especially in the second chapter, which is entitled “Phenomenology of Reason.”

Husserl distinguishes between the way the true thing is given to us, in contrast with what occurs in empty, inadequate, vague, or false intentions, and he observes that such evidencing occurs to people in the natural attitude who exercise their intelligence and are receptive to the way things present themselves. If he as a philosopher recognizes that distinction, then he does not turn real existence into mere appearance. Even as a philosopher he uses the term Wirklichkeit, but he uses it from his own perspective. The situation is analogous to Aristotle’s description of the virtuous agent, the spoudaios, as the one who determines the appropriate middle course in a situation calling for action. Aristotle is not acting ethically when he writes his philosophical analysis; he is looking on phenomenologically, but he does recognize the difference between the virtuous and the vicious ethical agents, and so he does acknowledge the middle even though he is not the one who chooses it. Similarly, the phenomenologist acknowledges the difference between

19 Masterson, Approaching God: Between Phenomenology and Theology, 141.
20 Ibid., 160.
the true and the false, even while he defers to the authority of the one who achieves the truth.

Most words used in philosophy are recruited into it from ordinary language, but sometimes new words are coined and given a technical meaning by philosophers. Husserl coins the terms noesis and noema. The danger in introducing new terms is that the word seems to bring along a new kind of entity that it designates, much as the term neutron brings with it a new subatomic particle.\(^{22}\) The peril is greatest with the term noema. It seems to designate something immanent in our conscious experience. In some interpretations of Husserl it is equated with Frege's Sinn. In Masterson's reading of phenomenology, the noema as immanent is contrasted with the transcendent object whose existence is bracketed. The issue is important, because it is so closely involved in the meaning of philosophical reflection and philosophical speech. The word noema is something like a dial that we can turn slightly to the left or to the right, and what we do with it will make all the difference in making our philosophical speech refer either to something just “in the mind” or to something “out there” in the big wide world. In fact, the noema is not something in the mind that is different from the thing intended in our awareness and thinking. The noema is the thing “out there,” the tree or the house that we see in its presence or talk about in its absence; but it is that thing as being considered from the new phenomenological attitude. The thing changes into the thing-noema when we reflect philosophically on how the thing is given. Instead of saying that philosophy speaks about the noema, it may be less misleading to say that as philosophers we “speak noematically” about the thing. It is a real thing, a tree, for example, but as philosophers we are no longer engaged with it as a gardener or lumberjack or anyone else in the natural attitude might be. We are engaged with it as philosophers, and we contemplate how it presents itself as being to those who are concerned with its being (the gardener,

\(^{22}\) In the case of the neutron, a new subatomic particle was discovered and we needed a new name for it; but in philosophy the name comes first, because the writer wants the reader to notice something new and to look at things from a new angle. He does not want to name an entity that he has already discovered and shown to others. For a thorough discussion of the noema, see John Drummond, *Husserlian Intentionality and Non-Foundational Realism: Noema and Object* (New York: Springer, 1990).
the lumberjack, and the people picnicking under it). It is their business to assert the tree while they are involved with the world. We as philosophical lookers-on have another task; we think about what the asserted tree is, and about what it is for something like a tree to present itself as real to those who see, touch, and know it. We think about it in its ontological truth. Performing this philosophical reflection does not turn the tree into something immanent in my awareness or in the awareness of all these people. It is, rather, an enhanced appreciation of the being of the tree; we now consider its truthfulness or power of manifestation. As philosophers we know more, not less. We do not drop assertion and the asserted (noesis and noema), we contemplate them.

To put this in another way, the people who assert the reality of the tree, the people to whom the being of the tree appears, are the gardener, lumberjack, and picnickers who are involved with it. Their authority of assertion is paramount. Sometimes they are wrong in their doxa or belief: one of them thought he saw a fox but it was only a shadow. It is not the phenomenologist’s task to tell that man what is really there (a shadow and not a fox); it is the responsibility of his colleagues who have a better view of the situation, or it is his own responsibility, if he can take a better look. Verification and confirmation are carried out in the natural attitude by people who speak mundane. They respond to the being of things. The phenomenologist recognizes this verification in his own analysis; the sense of the “thing as verified” is now layered into the noema of the thing, as opposed to the “thing as spoken about in its absence” or the “thing as questionable” or the “thing as vaguely intended.” The thing verified is originally presented as verified and confirmed by those who know it, and philosophical analysis acknowledges it as such, but the philosopher is not the one who establishes it. He takes a distance to all such first-level cognition and assertion, and he adopts this neutrality so that his own analysis will not be contaminated by slipping back into one of the first-level inquiries he wishes to think about. He is freed to

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23 Husserl speaks of two kinds of truth: the truth of correctness, in which a proposition conforms to the way things are, and the truth of actuality (Wirklichkeit), in which a thing or state of affairs manifests itself to us. See Formal and Transcendental Logic, trans. Dorion Cairns (New York: Springer, 1977), §46, 127–9.
think about what truth is. It would be incoherent for him as a philosopher to make a natural-attitude assertion in his own philosophical voice.

It is, therefore, misleading for Masterson to ask, “However compelling and desirable this phenomenologically inspiring religious account of mankind’s ultimate meaning and value appears to the eye of faith, the question remains can its objective validity be confirmed from within a phenomenological viewpoint?” Philosophy is not supposed to confirm any prephilosophical claims to truth. That is not its business. What it can do is to show what kind of truth claim it is, and to clarify how it is different from others. In this case it might show how religious evidencing is different from the kind achieved in psychology or mathematical physics. The work of verification is achieved by the religious person or the believer, not by the philosopher. My first general comment on Masterson’s book, therefore, is to differ with his claim that the method followed by phenomenology turns real entities into virtual things. My second comment will deal with a contribution that phenomenology can make to Thomistic metaphysics.

III

As I said earlier, Masterson’s book helps us to understand the historical contrast between the modern turn to the subject and the premodern study of being. In this contrast, we set up a stark and exclusive alternative between the focus on the subject and the focus on entities. I would like to translate this contrast into terms that are more metaphysical and conciliatory, and will say that Masterson’s work helps us understand the two kinds of existence that things can enjoy.

It is a classical metaphysical doctrine that there are two ways of being: real and cognitional. Entities exist in themselves, but they also enjoy cognitional being in the mind, imagination, and senses. Metaphysics is the science that examines both ways of existing. Joseph Owens introduces this distinction near the start of An Elementary Christian Metaphysics, where he writes, “The same things . . . can exist

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24 Masterson, Approaching God: Between Phenomenology and Theology, 88; emphasis added.
in two different ways. They can exist in reality, they can also exist in
cognition; or they may have for the moment the one way of existing,
while lacking the other.”

He speaks of “the two different ways of existing—real and cognitional—that one identical thing may enjoy,”
and says that the thing “does come to be in a new way every time it is
known.”

In An Interpretation of Existence he writes, “There is no
ground for claiming that to exist only in the imagination means not to
exist at all.”

The analysis of thinking and knowing could thus be
carried out, not as an independent epistemological inquiry, as it has
been done in modernity, but as part of the science of being as being. If
we were to adopt this approach, phenomenology could be seen as the
part of metaphysics that examines cognitional being, at least as it
occurs when human beings know. It would provide an expanded
analysis of what the person does in order to achieve knowledge, and it
would also discuss the identity of the human “agent of truth.” It would
examine how things present themselves to the dative of manifestation,
and how entities are identifiable between the two states of being simply
and being known. The transcendental reduction could then be seen as
the turn toward the part of metaphysics that studies the cognitional
way of being. This approach would pry phenomenology loose from its
intricate association with modernity and free it from modernity’s
disadvantages. It would de-Cartesianize phenomenology. The “first
philosophies” of Aristotle and Husserl would be found to be less
antagonistic.

Both phenomenology and metaphysics would need
adjustments if this were to be done, but each would be enriched by the
other.

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25 Joseph Owens, An Elementary Christian Metaphysics (Houston, TX:
Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), 31. The topic is introduced at the start of
chapter 2.

26 Ibid., 33.

27 Ibid., 35. Owens continues a few lines later: “‘Being known’ denotes,
therefore, something far more profound than ‘being named’ or ‘being listed’.”

28 Joseph Owens, An Interpretation of Existence (Houston, TX: Center for
Thomistic Studies, 1985), 38.

29 See Robert Sokolowski, “How Aristotle and Husserl Differ on First
Philosophy,” in Life, Subjectivity and Art: Essays in Honor of Rudolf Bernet,
reconciliation between Aristotle and Husserl would have been achieved
through a Thomistic point, but this would not be surprising, given Brentano’s
role in the origins of phenomenology.
I will continue to use Owens's work to develop this theme, but I will do so by disagreeing with him. In *An Interpretation of Existence* he makes a remark about pictures and words (which he specifies as being on labels and index cards). He goes on to say,

> Even where one says that a man exists in his portrait, what one quite obviously means is that the portrait recalls his features so clearly that it vividly brings the man into the cognition of anyone who is contemplating it. . . . As regards the label and the index card, one would hardly say that what they signify exists in them.

But I would indeed want to say that the man exists cognitively in his portrait, and that the intelligibility of the things designated by words exists in the words. Owens does not give enough ontological weight to images and words and, by implication, other kinds of signs. A portrait or photograph of Harry Truman does not just remind its viewer of Truman, nor does it present something similar to Truman to the viewer; the man looking at the picture recognizes Truman as depicted in the picture. Truman is identifiable in the picture. If Harry Truman can exist cognitively in the mind and imagination of human beings, why can he not exist as depicted in another appropriate vehicle? And if the intelligibility of arsenic can exist in the mind of someone who reads the label, why can it not exist in the word written on the label itself, when that word is activated as a word by being read? Why should the cognitive existence be limited to the inside of the knower, if his perception extends to his surroundings? It is true that such cognitive existence in pictures and words could not occur if there were no cognitive agent to activate it, but the same is true for cognitional existence in the mind: as Owens says, “Only when the person actually recalls the object does it begin to exist anew, this time in his cognition.”

Pictures and words can be carriers of cognitive existence. The picture can take on the intelligible and visual forms of Harry

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30Owens, *An Interpretation of Existence*, 37–38; See also Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 35: “The label and name and catalog, on the other hand, do not make the thing exist in any new way. They are merely symbols that will cause a person familiar with them to recall the object signified.”

31Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 35. We should also note that the perceived thing is a perceived thing through our cooperation; we activate it as such, but we do not change what the thing is in itself. This is an instance of the transition from *dunamis* to *energeia*. 
Truman without their corresponding matter, just as the mind and imagination of the knower could take them on, and the picture achieves this thanks to the activity of the person who looks at the picture and identifies Truman in it. The name arsenic takes on the intelligible form of arsenic without its matter, and it does so thanks to the cognitional activity of the person who reads, hears, or pronounces the word. Our minds are public and our sensibility ranges beyond our bodies.

Pictures and words are pictures and words, and they also are, cognitionally, what they depict and signify. They would not be the former without also being the latter. Their way of being is open to both a phenomenological and a metaphysical analysis; the two philosophical styles of thinking blend into one, since in both we think about cognitional existence. If we were to discuss the picture and the thing depicted in it, we would, to use Husserl’s terms, be speaking noematically; if we were to discuss the viewer of the picture, we would be speaking noetically and we would go on to describe what the viewer does when he engages in this distinctive form of manifestation.\footnote{See, for example, Robert Sokolowski, “Picturing,” Review of Metaphysics 31 (1977): 3–28, and “Visual Intelligence in Painting,” Review of Metaphysics 59 (2005): 333–54.} Much can be said to illuminate, philosophically, this way of being truthful, both on the objective and on the subjective side. Such an analysis would qualify as an exercise in the science of being as being. In Metaphysics 6.2, Aristotle distinguishes four senses of being: as the accidental, as the true, as the schemata of the categories, and as the actual and the potential.\footnote{A similar list of the senses of being, with some interesting differences, is given in Metaphysics 5.7.} Phenomenology examines the second of these four ways of being, being as the true, which Owens explores under the rubric of cognitional being. We need not limit “being as the true” to the correctness of judgments; in Metaphysics 9.10 it is applied to the grasp of the intelligibility of things, which is not simply equivalent to the truth of correctness, and which can also occur in pictures and in names. To discuss things as known and knowable is to speak of them as true, and such discussion is part of the science of being as being.

The problem with modernity is that it detaches “being as the true” from being in its primary sense, which is being in energêia. I propose
that pictures and names, as well as other forms of symbolism, furnish a helpful starting point for working through a restoration of the truth of beings.\textsuperscript{34} Pictures and sculptures in particular have a public, tangible presence, and yet they “contain” things and their intelligibilities. They depict things and express what they are; in many cases, they are used to declare that these depicted things exist. But for Hobbes, who set the modern standard in this issue, statues or paintings are called images “not for the resemblance of any corporeal thing, but for the resemblance of some phantastical inhabitants of the brain of the maker.” The “idols” are “originally in the brain,” where they have been “made by nature,” that is, by the effect of things on our sensibility; they are mere ideas. Then, they are “painted, carved, molded, or molten in matter” by the artist, who is able to “give matter to those shapes, and make them in wood, clay or metal.”\textsuperscript{35} For Hobbes, the pictures and statues that we see express only the natural impacts that have taken shape inside us. All we have given to us in depiction is a dark interior, the cabinet of the mind. It is a great relief to escape from this vortex of subjectivity by engaging in a philosophy that puts us back into the world in which we live. Pictures depict things, not images inside us.

Masterson does not discuss cognitional existence directly. He praises the strong realism of Aquinas: “It is this firm grasp of . . . actually exercised esse, that is, existence understood as ultimate actualizing perfection . . ., which provides Aquinas with a sure norm for distinguishing real being metaphysically from merely apparent or imaginary beings such as blindness, bank overdrafts, dragons, triangles, etc.”\textsuperscript{36} Earlier in the text he says, “It is the attribute of actually exercised esse which constitutes real being as real and radically marks it off from nonbeing, or intentional being or merely possible being.” He goes on to say, “In the same way [Aquinas] analyzes an old muddle which baffled Parmenides and Plato and which even still confuses

\textsuperscript{34}One might compare this project with John Deely’s tracking of semiotics, the science of signs, in Latin philosophy and postmodernism. See \textit{Four Ages of Understanding: The First Postmodern Survey of Philosophy from Ancient Times to the Turn of the Twenty-first Century} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).


\textsuperscript{36}Masterson, \textit{Approaching God: Between Phenomenology and Theology}, 55.
certain conceptions of finite being. It is the confused opinion that because we can predicate terms such as ‘not-being-John’ of Peter, therefore ‘nonbeing’ must somehow be.” He then concludes this passage, “Metaphysically, only what actually exercises esse is being.” Masterson thus distinguishes “things” such as blindness, dragons, and triangles from real beings; the latter have esse, the former do not.

He often mentions paintings as an instance of saturated phenomena, but he does not discuss their mode of being; do pictures (and words) enjoy merely “intentional” being? Pictures have a kind of existence, and so do words, even though they could not be what they are if we were not there to make and take them as such. Also, beings are true, and they are true in their character as beings, even though they depend on entities like us to be actualized as true. Such questions arise in regard to the being of pictures and words, and similar questions arise in regard to other kinds of artifacts; does a table exist as a table, or is it a merely wood, and is the table just a being of reason? It is a table only because we make and take it as such, but that does not prevent it from truly being a table. The question also arises in regard to political life. The modern state is, as Hobbes put it, “a creation out of nothing by human wit,” but is the ancient city not more of an entity than that? It seems to me that such entities and phenomena call for a richer analogy of being. They are and do not just appear. The emphasis on “actually exercised esse” is admirable, but it ought not diminish being as the true, and it ought not wash the world clean of everything but natural substances and their accidents.

38 Should one say that the esse of words and pictures is intermediate between real and cognitional being?
39 Considering phenomenology as the study of cognitional being can also shed light on what occurs in Husserl’s epochê and reduction. If we express the fear that the epochê and reduction lead to a “loss of the world,” we show that we do not understand the special nature of philosophical detachment. In philosophy, we “step back” from our involvement with things, and we also step back from our critical appraisal of our judgments. When we carry out the transcendental reduction, we arrive at a reflective position from which we examine “the true as true,” and this is analogous to adopting a position from which we examine “being as being.” The first turns to the domain of cognitional being, the second to the domain of actual being, which is now taken precisely “as being.” Both maneuvers can be considered as two aspects
Marion’s “saturated phenomena” are used by Masterson to describe the relation of phenomenology to theology. In such phenomena the subject is receptive rather than active. The question arises: do saturated phenomena involve categorial forms? Phenomenology distinguishes between simple and categorial intuitions. A categorial intuition is one that involves syntax. If we register a state of affairs in its direct presence—we see a tree and declare it to be healthy—we achieve a categorial intuition. We intuit not just the tree but also the state of affairs that it is healthy. If we were to just perceive the tree, we would take it in, but we would take it in just continuously, not in a thoughtfully articulated way. The categorial intuition is based on the perceptual but also adds to it. The tree as simply seen is lifted cognitionally into a state of affairs when we break it up linguistically and syntactically into a whole and its parts, as we think and say something about it while we continue to enjoy the evidence of what we are saying. We have simple experiences and we have articulated, categorial experiences; how are saturated phenomena related to these two?

Masterson’s description of saturated phenomena seems to make them simple and unarticulated, bereft of syntax. Saturated phenomena seem to overwhelm our categories and our cognitional initiatives; we lose our ability to constitute what is there. On the other hand, some examples he gives of saturated phenomena seem to involve categoriality; a great historical event or a painting that deeply impresses us involves articulation of some sort, even if our anticipation is destabilized and we ourselves are reordered by what we experience. We know it is a glorious victory or terrible defeat (even though we
directly experience only part of it); we know that it is a portrait or a landscape. In fact, not just saturated phenomena but even ordinary intuitions often cancel out some of our anticipations—the other side of the building turns out to be different from what I expected; it’s not like anything I’ve ever seen—and yet such an experience is certainly not forceful enough to be a saturated phenomenon. How are saturated phenomena different from ordinary intuitions? Is saturation just a matter of the degree of intensity in what is given? And does it contain syntax?

Religious experiences, and specifically biblical and Christian experiences, involve verbal articulation. The stage needs to be set and the experience needs to be specified by words that are part of it. It would seem, therefore, that even these paradigmatic saturated phenomena need categorial formation. Such experiences, furthermore, involve not just syntax but also the making of distinctions. In biblical narratives, for example, Moses needs to be told that the burning bush is not just an interesting phenomenon, as he initially considered it to be; Christ in the Transfiguration is differentiated from Moses and Elias by a voice speaking to the apostles from the cloud that envelops them; Paul on the road to Damascus hears a voice that makes him identify in a new way the people he is persecuting. The experience precedes the articulation, but the articulation does not just emerge out of the experience in the way a judgment arises from ordinary perception. Rather, the verbal formulation defines what the experience really is. The words and syntax are needed for the person to know what is happening. Furthermore, it is important to note that the defining and distinguishing statement is not the subject’s own achievement; it is not done through his own initiative. Someone else speaks to him, and the situation is shaped for him by what the other person says. The words are received; they are proclaimed by someone with authority and they call for conversion, which implies that the subject who receives them becomes distinguished from what he was heretofore.\footnote{Distinctions need to be made even in other, nonreligious phenomena. Shakespeare’s Troilus, confronted with the saturated phenomenon of his beloved Cressida, is afraid: “I do fear besides / That I shall lose distinction in my joys.” \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, act 3, scene 2. Loss of distinction is a thing to be feared. I am grateful to Kevin White for this observation and reference.}
Even the word *constitution* is not philosophically out of place in the description of such saturating encounters. The term may be stylistically inappropriate but it is not technically wrong. Masterson says that it is out of place, because it implies a cognitive mastery on the part of the knower: “From the perspective of saturated phenomena, the constituting primacy of the *I* or subject is called into question. In this context, the subject is rather the recorder or witness of the impact of a given intuition which has precedence over any subsequent attempt to describe it conceptually.”\(^41\) In another passage he remarks that “the visual work of art such as a painting . . . can be looked at but not constituted.”\(^42\) But constitution need not require that we dominate a situation; it simply means enabling the thing to present itself to us. We let the thing come to light and we recognize it in its identity. Also, a painting needs to be “constituted” or construed as such if it is to be a painting for us. We don’t just look at colored shapes; we need to see what is before us as a painting and we must see what is in it as depicted. Constitution normally involves passivity as well as active intervention. In religious experience the passive dimension may predominate, but the person involved still has to be there to receive what occurs and he must be aware of himself as being there. He could not be “the recorder or witness” nor could he later attempt to describe what happened unless he articulated it when it occurred. He does not constitute the given in the way a scientist formulates a hypothesis, but neither can he disappear as the dative of manifestation if the presence is to take place.\(^43\) The person may have his self newly given to him (he may be “born again”), but he is in some formal sense the same dative of manifestation and agent of truth that he was before this event. If he were not, he would not be born again but would have been simply born. Furthermore, the fact that the believer receives the proclamation—the *euangelion*—from someone else means that he “constitutes” his new

\(^{41}\) Masterson, *Approaching God: Between Phenomenology and Theology*, 150.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 28.

sense of the world under the verbal guidance of the person or the community that announces it to him.

V

The most significant and original contribution in Masterson’s book is his restoration of the role of causality in the study of religion and theology. In his treatment of metaphysics, he shows that human reason looks for causes, and that causality gets us involved in the reality of things: this has come to be because that made it to be so; this is not just a phenomenon that I entertain but also an effect that some other entity, and not just my own consciousness, has brought into being. It can become a phenomenon for me, not through my own projection, but because something put it there. If we exclude causation and remain just with the meaning that things have for us, it is all too easy to get lost in a dreamy contemplation of forms and phenomena. We might make many distinctions, but none of them will make—or reveal—any difference. We get lost in words. The danger is especially great in regard to religion.

Masterson shows that we experience and understand things as limited in their existence, and this limitation shows that they are caused. In Aristotelian philosophy, things are presented as formed but changing through time. Familiar substances in our lower world (such as plants and animals) come and go, and their causes are evident to us. But even the most sublime beings that we perceive—the celestial entities that endure in endless regular motion—call for a cause, and these causes are nonvisible. We infer their existence a posteriori, on the margin of what we can see. They are forms independent of matter, capable of bringing about the activities of the highest things that we perceive, as well as the substance and activities of the things in our sublunary environment. In Aquinas’s metaphysics, the finitude of things and their corresponding need for a cause are raised to a higher pitch, into a different kind of margin. According to Aquinas, we consider entities not just in their substance, activity, and change, but in the fact that they are there at all, and we become aware that what they are does not contain a principle that lets them be. Even necessary beings are discovered to be finite in this new sense; they too might not
have been. They point beyond themselves to a nonvisible cause that could not not be. Masterson’s development of this theme shows the incompleteness of a phenomenological approach to religion. Phenomenology as first philosophy does not look for causes; it looks to the way things present themselves.

What phenomenology can contribute to Thomistic metaphysics, however, is the examination of how the finitude of things appears to us. It can help to clarify how entities can be recognized as limited in their existence. How does the existence of things show up as an effect and not just as an unquestionable fact? How do the things that we experience call for a cause of their esse and not just their ousia? If the search for causes is an Aristotelian theme in metaphysics (the science that follows on his physics), the consideration of how things show up to us as needing a cause for their very existence could be considered a Platonic heritage in Thomism.44

Patrick Masterson has taken on a difficult task in this book. He brings Thomistic metaphysics into a current philosophical and theological debate. The most important contribution that can be made to a philosophical conversation is to define the issues and to bring them forward in a way that lets them be fairly discussed. Masterson has put into play two prominent approaches to theology, phenomenology and Thomistic metaphysics, and has shown how each can benefit the other. He has done so with clarity and conviction. To paraphrase Paul Ricoeur, “Ce livre donne à penser.”

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