

The Other of Correlation

(Small Prolegomena to any Future Phenomenological Metaphysics)

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Abstract: The recent liberation of phenomenology's "metaphysical" word seems to us to present a twofold risk: on the one hand, that of leading us to lose in intension what they will have made us gain in extension - what exactly does the term "metaphysical" mean here, and can we even hope to provide an exact definition? On the other hand, it would convert our former reservations, which may indeed have been excessive, into a temerity that would ultimately be no less so. The aim we have set ourselves here must therefore be modest: to attempt to avert this twofold risk by first equipping ourselves with a clear and unambiguous concept of what is or could legitimately be understood by the term "phenomenological metaphysics; to show then how and why phenomenology, rightly or wrongly, but without really realizing what was preventing it from doing so, has never really managed to do so; to indicate finally the question that a "phenomenological metaphysics" conforming to its concept would have to ask, and to which it would have to commit itself to answer.

Keywords: Phenomenology; Metaphysics; Correlation

1. Introduction: metaphysics and correlational a priori

Perhaps one of the most striking features of contemporary phenomenology is the ease with which it handles the concept of "metaphysics" and speaks of "phenomenological metaphysics" as if the possibility, or even the necessity, of such a thing were now a given — the only difficulty being to succeed in specifying the concept, sufficiently to make discussions between phenomenologists possible, or even a consensus on the subject. Of course, such an inflation of discourse will undeniably have had its virtues — and we'd like to highlight at least two of them here:

1/ On the one hand, to encourage phenomenologists to revisit, in a critical way, the multiple uses of the term "metaphysics" in the history of phenomenology (from the well-known "metaphysical neutrality" advocated by Husserl in the *Logische Untersuchungen* to the later theme of a "metaphysics of facticity", via, to, for example, the very particular meaning Levinas gives to this term since at least in *Totalité et infini*, and, of course, through the theme of a "metaphysics of Dasein" and the later Heideggerian characterization of metaphysics as

“ontotheology”), in order to emancipate itself from it sufficiently to justify the uninhibited use of an expression that it was once agreed should at the very least be considered problematic (see Römer and Schnell, 2020).

2/ On the other hand, and by the same token, to enable them to enter into discussion with other contemporary currents of thought in which the very use of the term “metaphysics” seemed, so to speak, less “regulated”, and thus not to refuse to engage, through excessive conceptual or lexical caution, in the treatment of questions considered to be burning — as in the many tireless debates, between France and Germany, via the confrontation with “speculative realism”, in relation to “realism” and “idealism” (see e.g. Ferrer, Gourdain, Tolbert and Schnell, 2021).

The fact remains that this liberation of phenomenology’s “metaphysical” word seems to us to present a twofold risk: on the one hand, that of leading us to lose in intension what they will have made us gain in extension - what *exactly* does the term “metaphysical” mean here, and can we even hope to provide an *exact* definition? On the other hand, it would convert our former reservations, which may indeed have been excessive, into a temerity that would ultimately be no less so, and which, while no doubt in keeping with the very letter of certain fundamental texts of our tradition, would nonetheless violate *the* initial *spirit* of *mistrust towards* any philosophical *Schwärmerei* (see Jean, 2023).

The aim we have set ourselves here must, therefore, be modest: to attempt to avert this twofold risk by first equipping ourselves with a clear and unambiguous concept of what is or could legitimately be understood by the term “phenomenological metaphysics” — although this is not, of course, the only possible concept of such a “metaphysics”, it will at least have the advantage of being clearly circumscribed; to show then how and why phenomenology, rightly or wrongly, but without really realizing what was preventing it from doing so, has never really managed to do so; to indicate finally — but in a way that, perhaps and by definition, could only be *definitively* programmatic — the question that a “phenomenological metaphysics” conforming to its concept would have to ask, and to which it would have to commit itself to answering.

2. The other *in* correlation: the avatars of ancestry.

To this end, and by way of introduction, we would like to refer at some length to the first pages of the introduction to *Dynamique de la manifestation* — perhaps the most important work to date by Renaud Barbaras and, in so doing, of contemporary French phenomenology:

Phenomenology is an approach that lies within the exact framework of the correlational *a priori*, that transgresses it neither on the side of the appearing, in the form of realism, nor on the side of the appearing, in the form of idealism, and proposes, as it were, a version or mode of elaboration. To question the meaning and possibility of phenomenology, then, is to question the meaning and possibility of this *a priori*, to bring to light, so to speak, the *a priori* of this *a priori*. Of course, the meaning of this new *a priori* can only be singular; it cannot be confused with that of the correlational *a priori* itself. It designates that which is implied by the correlational *a priori* without, however, being visible or directly accessible in it [...] Now, if this correlational *a priori* does indeed determine the field of what is to be understood by phenomenology, such a discovery would mean that phenomenology implies or envelops as its condition a dimension that is no longer strictly phenomenological, insofar as it exceeds the field of the correlational *a priori* and beckons towards its own *a priori*. Or rather, since this new dimension is eminently phenomenological, since it contains the very condition of phenomenology (of the correlational *a priori*), we should conclude that it is the very boundary between phenomenology and what is not phenomenology that is blurred, or, alternatively, that phenomenology inherently implies something like a kind of excess, supplement or internal overflow, by which it would surpass itself as phenomenology (of the correlational *a priori*) in order to accomplish itself as phenomenology - i.e., finally, so that this *a priori* can have meaning and possess a true consistency (Barbaras, 2013: 7-8).

What makes this text interesting for our purposes, despite its great clarity, is the ambiguity it ultimately reveals:

1/ On the one hand, the “correlation between the *phenomenon of knowledge* and the *object of knowledge*,” or “*between the determinate appearing, as a unity, and the determinate infinite multiplicities of appearances*” (Husserl, 1950: 12; 1976: 316) constitutes, in R. Barbaras’ eyes, the axiom of phenomenology: to use the famous formula in which the Husserl of the *Krisis* acknowledges that it will have constituted “the work of [his] entire life”, the “task” of every phenomenological philosopher is the “elaboration” of this “universal correlational *a priori* of the object of experience and its modes of givenness” — *and nothing else*. However, in a pattern reminiscent of the opening pages of *What is Metaphysics?* — “Remarkably, it is precisely in the way in which the man who researches assures himself of what is *absolutely his*, that he speaks of an *Other*” (Heidegger, 1976: 105)— phenomenology, at the very moment when it circumscribes its object and in order to be able to do so, cannot fail to pose the question of its “other” — of an “other”, consequently, *of correlation itself, thus transgressing its own limits in the very movement by which it circumscribes them* or, at the very least, *drawing its own reverse*

in the very gesture by which it traces the circle from which it refuses a priori to leave. Assuming, then, that such can or even must become its *theme* in spite of everything — and assuming, in accordance with what will constitute our guiding thread here, that it is legitimate and indeed necessary to call “*phenomenological metaphysics*” the *thinking*, by and from phenomenology, of *its* other — the main *confusion* we would first have to prevent would be precisely that which immediately arises between this other *of* correlation and an other likely to manifest itself *in* correlation.

2/ But, precisely, the problem posed by this text can be clearly formulated: how can we reconcile the critique of such a confusion between an other *of* and an other *in* correlation, with the idea that the former would be accessible to us — just like the latter, precisely — by virtue of “a kind of excess, supplement or *internal* overflow”? How can we reconcile the radicality of the problem thus posed — the *metaphysical* thought of an other *of* correlation as the non-phenomenological “nothing” that alone enables phenomenology to circumscribe itself *as* phenomenology — with the idea expressed here that, in such a thought, it is within itself and not towards its other that phenomenology would “surpass itself”?

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Let’s begin by clearly determining the meaning of this confusion between the two versions of this “surpassing,” and let’s attempt to do so by returning *one last time* to a problem that, in recent years, has attracted a great deal of attention from contemporary phenomenologists: that of “correlationism” as formulated in 2006 in *Après la finitude*. After all, at a time when interest in such a problem seems to be waning, it’s not out of place to ask the question: why has Meillassoux’s work shaken phenomenologists to the core while at the same time giving rise to such hackneyed debates as whether phenomenology is idealism or realism? Perhaps the answer lies in this: in his critique of correlationism, Meillassoux *definitely posed an excellent problem* but in fact posed it *so poorly* that he ultimately engaged phenomenology in a debate that led it to misunderstand its meaning and fundamental issues.

According to Meillassoux, the thesis of “correlationism” can be summed up in the following formula: “We only have access to the correlation of thought and being” (Meillassoux, 2006: 17). Stated in this way, and without any further precision, we have to recognize that this is not only a thesis that *effectively characterizes* phenomenology, but, as we have seen, it also constitutes its *axiom*, which not only allows us to circumscribe it and its object, but also — and insofar as we bend the formulation somewhat: “We have access to *nothing other* than the

correlation of thought and being” — to outline the at least *possible* space of a “phenomenological metaphysics,” a metaphysics conceived as the other *of phenomenology itself*. And this is precisely why Meillassoux’s formula, in its apparent simplicity, *effectively* poses a fundamental question for phenomenology: Since phenomenology, in this minimal but entirely rigorous sense, is indeed “correlationist,” there can be no “phenomenological metaphysics” (and at the same time, no clear delimitation of the “non-metaphysical” field of correlation) unless phenomenology can take into account, not just “something else” than the correlation of thought and being, but the other *of* this correlation itself — once again: *its* other.

The difficulty, however, is that Meillassoux’s formula has a sequel: “We only have access to the correlation of thought and being” — certainly —, but he adds: “*and never to one of these terms taken in isolation.*” It is this precision that may well have proved disastrous — and weighed heavily, indeed, for a very long time, on phenomenological philosophy. As far as Meillassoux is concerned, it leads him, as we know, to envisage a way of thinking about the reality that is not the reality “for us” — as it would be caught up *in* correlation — but the reality “in itself” — this “thing without us” (Meillassoux, 2006: 14), independent of “*any human form of relationship to the world,*” and which the theory of “ancestrality” will address (“*ancestral*” being qualified as any reality “prior to the appearance of the human species” (Meillassoux, 2006: 26). In what sense, then, does the theory *of ancestrality* — as a response, first and foremost, to the need to provide access to the “objective” term of correlation itself, independently of what correlates it to a subjective pole — truly constitute a response to the question posed above of an *other* of correlation *itself*, of *its* other? And to what extent does the objection it claims to formulate against the “correlationism” of phenomenology thus suffice to circumscribe what might constitute the object of a “phenomenological metaphysics”? How can we fail to see that such an approach certainly consists in committing us to thinking an other *of* correlation, but an “other” that, against all logic, *we then simply assimilate to its own terms — the very ones that correlation, so to speak, “correlates”, and thus “delivers” to us exactly as speculative realism demands “metaphysics” to do?*

This is, in fact, what the most lucid phenomenologists were quick to object to Meillassoux’s own objection. Admittedly, certain famous texts in the tradition seem to explicitly circumvent, in a clumsily circular way, the problem of the ancestrality of the “world” — as in this uninspired passage from the *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which Merleau-Ponty declares that “nothing will ever make me understand what a nebula could be that would not be seen by anyone”, before adding that “Laplace’s nebula is not behind us, at our origin, it is in

front of us, in the cultural world.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 495)¹ But in another line, that is also Merleau-Ponty, masterfully followed by Etienne Bimbenet in his “trilogy” — *L’animal que je ne suis plus*, *L’invention du réalisme* and *Le complexe de trois singes* (Bimbenet, 2015; 2017; 2020) — and that we ourselves have taken up in *L’humanité à son insu* (Jean, 2020) we could argue that correlation delivers exactly what Meillassoux tells us it doesn’t — namely, its “objective” term as it is, independently of our relationship with it. Because, after all, the axiom of the correlational *a priori* has never consisted in maintaining that, by the very fact of correlation, we would never grasp the thing “in itself” but *only* as it is *for us* — in accordance with what we have called a “restrictive correlationism” (Jean, 2020: 29-31) — but, on the contrary — and this is precisely the revolution brought about by Husserl in his critique of Kant (Jean, 2020, chapter I) —, in positing that the phenomenon — the *Erlebniss*, the appearance — is that of the “thing itself.” From this point of view, the “revolution” called for by Meillassoux is one that would already be accomplished by the slightest experience, and first and foremost the slightest *perception* — so that if we were to call “phenomenological metaphysics” the grasp of the “objective” term of correlation independently of correlation itself, *we would simply have to identify this metaphysics with perception itself*. As written by E. Bimbenet, “For us who perceive, the reality is that which is there without us and which does not need us to subsist. [...] This is the strange metaphysics that the slightest perception declares” (Bimbenet, 2015: 20-21). But come to think of it, this is already what Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, after Husserl, were already trying to establish, each in their own way, by insisting on the excess of perceived reality over what “we” perceive of it. Hence Sartre’s concept of a “transphenomenality” of the “en soi,” which as such “overflows and grounds the knowledge we take of it” (Sartre, 1943:15-16), or Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the “aséité” of the thing — explicitly directed against a supposed “phenomenological idealism” — by virtue of which its “reality” is attested in the very movement by which it “evades our possession” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 270). And from this point of view, we could even argue, as we have done elsewhere (Jean, 2020: 23ff.), that much of the history of phenomenology has set itself the task of radicalizing this thesis by transferring, with varying degrees of emphasis (and rather more than less), the mode of being that Sartre and Merleau-Ponty recognized in the thing perceived to a series of “events” embodying the figure of a Real in excess over its phenomenon — be it that of the Other, of the work of art, of God or anything else — and thus to describe, at the very heart of correlation, the irruption by breaking in of a given in

¹ On this point, see the fascinating discussion between Merleau-Ponty, Ayer and Ambrosino on the existence of the sun before the appearance of man, reported by G. Bataille in a paper delivered at the Collège de philosophie on January 12, 1951, entitled “Le non-savoir et ses conséquences” (Bataille, 1976: 190ff).

an experience incapable of appropriating it. In short, between the ancestrality of nebulae or the sun, the transcendence of the thing perceived, and the anarchy or diachrony of the “Face,” we should finally recognize that, at least formally, there is little difference — and that, on this point, all phenomenologists will have more or less agreed: there is something in our experience that exceeds and precedes, that *transcends* the experience we have of it, and whose being, in so doing, is not reduced to a “being for us”. But such a “something” cannot constitute *the other of correlation* — and, as such, the proper object of what we have circumscribed above as an authentic “phenomenological metaphysics”: it is what is *essentially* given *in* and *through* correlation — *and nothing else*.

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Let’s go one step further: in the debates that followed the publication of *Après la finitude*, Meillassoux’s initial injunction — that phenomenology should pose the “metaphysical” question of an “other of correlation” — was not only misunderstood (because it was converted into the phenomenologically tautological question of an other *in* correlation), but also interpreted in a perfectly *one-sided* way. After all, there are *two* terms of correlation, not *just one*. Indeed, by focusing on the question of “realism”, contemporary phenomenology has acted as if the only relevant “metaphysical” question was whether the being taken in the correlation was the being-in-itself or the being-for-us — thus ignoring the fact that it concerned just as much and in the same way the “subjective” side of the correlational *a priori*: do we have access to thought *in itself*, to thought insofar as it is not *a priori* correlated to the object? Such one-sidedness is all the more surprising given that this question had not ceased to be formulated by the phenomenological tradition — first, no doubt, by the very first Levinas, in his famous critique of “contemporary ecstasism,”¹ but also, and probably closer to us, by Michel Henry and Marc Richir.

To illustrate this, let’s start with a short text, among many others, in which Henry formulates exactly this problem, himself starting from a critique of the “standard” correlation regime:

On the one hand, we have appearance (consciousness), and on the other, the something, the being. The being is in itself foreign to the appearing, incapable of phenomenalizing itself. Appearance,

¹ As in the famous passage from *De l'existence à l'existant*, where Levinas proposes to decorrelate correlation in order to reach a subjective pole likely to recover its former “substantiality”: “To the notion of existence - where the emphasis is on the first syllable - we oppose the notion of a being whose very advent is a withdrawal into itself, which, in a certain sense, against the ecstaticism of contemporary thought, is a substance” (Levinas, 1986: 138).

on the other hand, is such that it is necessarily the appearance of something else, of being. Appearance turns away from itself so radically and violently that it is entirely turned towards the other than itself, towards the outside — it is intentionality. Because appearing, as intentionality, is so essentially deported towards what it makes appear, it is no longer it, the appearing, that appears, but what it makes appear within it: the being. The object of phenomenology, its “thing itself”, is denatured in such a way that this object is no longer appearance, but the appearance of being, and ultimately being itself insofar as it appears. (Henry, 2003: 109)

Thus, in Henry’s eyes, as in Meillassoux’s, the limits of “historical phenomenology” lie in its “correlationism” — in the thesis that the philosopher only has access to “the correlation of thought and being,” and “never to one of these terms taken in isolation.” It’s just that Henry doesn’t — or at least not at *first* — formulate his critique in a, let’s say, “noematic” direction (as if the issue were to provide us with access to the “thing-in-itself”), but (and this has always been the real issue in “critiques of intentionality”) in an immediately *noetic* direction: *what is thought, what is appearing, independently of the fact that it makes being appear?* Or to put it another way: is there *an ancestry of thought itself* in relation to the being it thinks, and thus of the appearing in relation to the appearing?

And yet, despite everything that separates them, this is *exactly* the question that Marc Richir will also be asking. In the introduction to *Phénomènes, temps et êtres*, he writes:

Transcendental phenomenology is rooted [...] in the question of phenomenon as phenomenon, that is, phenomenon insofar as it is not always already “interpreted” as phenomenon of something other than itself (a prior structure, a thing or object to which certain concepts or ideas correspond), and consequently, phenomenon considered as nothing but phenomenon, where only phenomenon appears.

Our consideration of the phenomenon as nothing but a phenomenon therefore amounts to radicalizing the Husserlian phenomenological reduction and giving it a new meaning: it involves considering the phenomenon outside (by bracketing it or taking it out of the circuit) all positivity and all determinacy, which, for us, can only come to it from elsewhere or from elsewhere (Richir, 1987: 18).

Richir’s critique of “correlationism” is the same as Henry’s — the fault of the phenomenological tradition is to have considered that we would only have access “to the correlation of thought and being, and never to one of these terms taken in isolation” — but in a sense that, contrary to the ultimately Husserlian inspiration of Sartre or Merleau-Ponty, does not turn to

the side of “being” to exhibit its “transcendence,” but rather to that of “thought” and its immanence — insofar as it is freed from the intentionality which, by virtue of an ultimately transcendental illusion constitutive of phenomenality in its eidetic structuring, *seems to* relate it essentially to the being to which it gives appearance, or to the “event” which it would find itself essentially compelled to welcome. But precisely: in view of what we have already circumscribed as the theme of a possible “phenomenological metaphysics” — “the other of correlation” — this second version of the *decorrelation* of the terms of the correlational *a priori* with a view to their *pure* or “separate” intuition — here: in view of the pure intuition of *the appearing* separated from the appearing (Henry) or of the *phenomenon* as “nothing but phenomenon” (Richir) — is it truly better than the first — than the project of seizing the thing or event in its transcendence with regard to the thought that thinks or receives it? What does this second phenomenological version of the “critique of correlationism” ultimately lead to, insofar as we are willing to evaluate it lucidly?

To answer this question, we refer to one of the very first texts published in 1969 by the young Marc Richir — he was 26 at the time — which, very significantly, entitled “Le problème du psychologisme. Quelques remarques préliminaires,” aptly anticipates the conception of phenomenality put forward in *Phénomènes, temps et être*¹. In this little-known text, Richir first attempts to situate the birth of phenomenology within the more general framework, constitutive of the very beginning of the 20th century, of philosophy’s struggle to wrest “thought” from the naturalistic paradigm underlying all psychology, and ultimately from psychologism itself. As Richir attempts to show, Husserl would proceed in two stages that are difficult to reconcile: against the “metaphysics” ultimately inherited from Greek thought, and according to a “psychologizing” inspiration, he would have proposed to bring thought back to “lived experience”; but against the psychologizing drift of psychology, he would *also* have undertaken to show that this empirical experience is what it is only by being articulated to the field of idealities — in this case logical — which, precisely, transcend it and which, as such, are capable of regulating it *eidetically* — and not empirically. As Jean-François Lavigne has since shown with extreme precision (Lavigne, 2005: 105-144) the problem was to maintain this dual inspiration and to protect the new phenomenology against the twofold danger that lay ahead: either, in the name of the methodologically constitutive character of lived experience, to reduce the ideal to the empirical — and thus fall back into the trap of psychologism; or, on the contrary, to reduce the

¹ This text, from a lecture given to the Société Belge de Philosophie on December 14, 1968, was published in Richir (1969). Hard to find, it can be consulted on the website dedicated to Marc Richir: <https://marc-richir.eu/fr/articles-en-francais> (last consulted 08/30/2023).

empirical to the ideal — in a more or less refined form of “Platonism.” Hence the strange *circularity* of the phenomenological approach: on the one hand, it is “because phenomenology studies lived experience *in its essence* — in what essentially links it to thought ideality - that it escapes the classical objections of introspection and the difficulties of psychologism” (Richir, 1987: 117); but, on the other hand, this eidetization of lived experience always presupposes, in accordance with what the young Richir calls the “circle of pre-comprehension” (Richir, 1987: 137)¹, a prior grasp — and by definition non-phenomenological, not fully reconducible to “lived experience” — of the ideality which, precisely, seems perpetually to cause phenomenology to fall from the Charybdis of psychology to the Scylla of Platonism. Hence, the problem on which this text closes:

It is in Husserlian phenomenology and its struggle against psychologism that the thought of phenomenalization is rooted, as it attempts to escape the circle of metaphysics laid down by the Greeks. [...] The question we’ll end with is this: [...] isn’t thought always already thought of phenomena enclosed in the circle of pre-comprehension? Here we come up against unheard-of questions that will perhaps always remain unanswered. At the very least, this lack of answers should determine our task. I could very well have entitled this talk: “Questions on the possibility of a thought of phenomenalization”. Phenomenalization is the other side of that old quarrel of our time: psychologism (Lavigne, 2005: 105-144).

However, read in the light of the introduction to *Phénomènes, temps et êtres*, quoted above, this text by the young Richir seems to us to make a philosophically strange sound: Certainly, the whole theory of “phenomenon as nothing but phenomenon” will have precisely the function of approaching phenomenality outside the “circle of precomprehension”, which allows us to escape the psychologism that threatens the reconduction of idealities to lived experiences only through the mediation of an eidetics which, if it allows us to “de-empiricize” them, itself presupposes a “symbolic” knowledge irreducible to any phenomenological “givenness” whatsoever. But if, as the young Richir also recognized, only the pairing of ideality and eidos is likely to extricate phenomenalization from psychologism, how can we prevent this critique of ideality and eideticism from converting, as Bruce Bégout recently proposed, phenomenology into “phenology”? — a “study of appearances (the *phainesthai*, the middle form of the verb *phaino*)” uncorrelated from that of “appearances (the *phainoména*)” (Richir, 1992: 130) — and, in so doing, lead us straight back to psychologism? A refined psychologism, admittedly, that

¹ On this concept, see Schnell’s remarkably clear and profound explanations in Schnell (2020: 43-57)

will admit nevertheless, in a Merleau-Ponty's vein, the existence of *wild Wesen* ("more archaic than being", "wild because not symbolically coded," "escaping all teleology and intentionality" (Richir, 1992: 30), but a psychologism all the same, since such eidetics, precisely insofar as they are non-teleological and non-intentional, and as archaic, will by definition have, under the guise of "cosmic event" (Richir, 1992: 135-136), no other "theme" than what we called *the ancestrality of thought* — i.e., thought purified, by the critique of the circle of pre-comprehension and, in so doing, of the correlational *a priori* itself, of any relation to being? Now — let's go one step further — what is such "pure thought," if not, very simply, but, philosophically, very tragically, the "interiority" of the philosopher himself, in his remarkable but ultimately very incommunicable singularity? Michel Henry himself explicitly admits this in a striking and explicitly anti-Sartrean, passage of *L'essence de la manifestation*: "By tearing existence away from the absolute milieu of exteriority, the present research [...] invites us to ask ourselves whether it might not be appropriate, today, to give new meaning to the concept of 'inner life'" (Henry, 1990: 58). And in fact, how to avoid the decorrelation of the terms of the correlational *a priori*, in its intrinsic link with the questioning of intentionality and its eidetic structuring, from producing such a retreat and, ultimately, reducing phenomenology to an inspired and, it is true, often inspiring description of the philosopher's own *psyche* in its profoundly *monadic* dimension¹? Hence the striking statement in the preface to *Phénoménologie et institution symbolique* and, ultimately, the dangerously "psychologistic" conception of philosophy itself that it exposes:

In the words of Antonin Artaud, all we're doing here is "showing our mind", rather than proposing a "work". In any case, this is how we understand the risk of philosophy, which is the singular path of meaning, shown to others and to ourselves, before turning into a doctrinal body, exposed to scholastic dissections, which are more or less estimable. It is undoubtedly high time to consider that, since the historically unprecedented development of the positive sciences, philosophy has been freed from the tasks of knowledge, and can therefore tend less blindly towards what must make up the consistency of its place (Richir, 1988: 11-12).

We suggested above that Meillassoux's critique of "correlationism" had the virtue of leading phenomenology to clearly formulate *its own* metaphysical problem — is there *an other of correlation*? — but it also set it, in the very movement by which it clarified its content — "we

¹ See Henry (1990: 38): "The structure of being is monadic, and it is this structure that we call, for want of a better term, 'interiority.'"

only have access to the correlation of thought and being, and never to one of these terms taken in isolation” — on a path such that it became impossible to grasp it rigorously — the other of correlation then being immediately understood as one of its terms made independent of the other. But it has to be said — and this is what we have tried to establish schematically here — that in the history of phenomenology, and long before Meillassoux gave it the opportunity to re-examine this question rigorously, it had never ceased to be asked, and phenomenologists responded in two ways: by *the ancestry of the reality*, on the one hand, and it is transcendence which, decorrelated from immanence, will have been understood as the other of correlation, of which it is nonetheless, in its “being-in-itself,” and however “event-driven” its manifestation may appear, only a constitutive eidetic component; by *the ancestry of the thought* of the other, and it is then immanence that will have been grasped as this other — leading to a refined psychologism of the “inner life” which, in the end, leads the “phenologist” to an infinite hermeneutic of himself.¹ Hence the importance — for anyone wishing to do justice to an authentic “phenomenological metaphysics” — of examining the problem in greater depth: how can we understand the question of an other of correlation other than as the question of whether it is possible or legitimate to decorrelate its terms, to relate to the subject or the world in isolation and apart from their relation, a path which then inevitably leads to the double ancestry of reality and thought?

3. Metaphysics and phenomenology of *phusis*: the being of correlation.

At the very least, the first condition of such thinking has just been clearly stated: refusing to decorrelate the terms and, in so doing, conferring a *being* on the correlation — or, to divert an expression from Henry himself, granting a “phenomenological substantiality” to the

¹ Of course, these two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Just as Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception, for example, admits an “inhuman background” of subjectivity by which “we are not in the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 466); similarly, in Henry’s work no doubt, but above all in Richir’s, the phenomenology of a “thought-in-itself” uncorrelated from the reality it thinks - the theory of pure appearance and of the phenomenon as “nothing but phenomenon” - also gives rise - as if in *remorse* - to a philosophy of an “in-itself” which, for its part, for us”, of a transcendence that would not be “intentional”, and would ultimately be even more radical than that of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and other phenomenologists of the event. Such is the case with Henry’s strange theory of the “Cosmos” in *Voir l’invisible*, and with Richir’s theory of *absolute transcendence* articulated to the phenomenon as nothing but phenomenon - an “absolute transcendence” that alone could confer on thought an outside of which it had by construction been deprived (on this point, see Richir, 2014: 210). On this concept of “absolute transcendence” - intended to counteract, in a way that it’s difficult not to experience as somewhat artificial, and which, in our view at least, is above all *symptomatic* of it, the immanentization to which decorrelation or the breaking of the “circle of pre-comprehension” leads - see A. Schnell who, in *Phénoménalisation et transcendence*, evokes in this respect a “double tendency” in Richir (Schnell, 2020: 55).

intentional relation itself¹ so that, guarded against the false problem of the ancestry of its terms, we can question in the direction of *the other of this being*. Admittedly, the expression “being of correlation” is familiar to phenomenologists, as is the question to which it gives rise: the correlational *a priori* having been given, what type of “entity” — of “reality,” of “substantiality” — is it possible or even necessary to recognize in correlation itself? But the fact remains that they are equivocal until we have distinguished two versions of them — and, historically, the meaning of their sequence:

1/ On the one hand, questioning *the being* of correlation may consist of identifying the mode of being of *the being* that constitutes its “support” or locus; this is, as we know, the path followed by the Heidegger of *Fundamentalontology*, whose project in this sense is never so clearer than in the criticisms he addresses to Husserl in his famous letter of October 22, 1927:

We agree on the point that being (*Seinde*), in the sense of what you call “world,” cannot be illuminated in its transcendental constitution by returning to a being (*Seinde*) of the same mode of being. But this does not mean that what constitutes the locus of the transcendental is absolutely nothing of being; on the contrary, the *problem* that immediately arises is to know what is the mode of being of the being in which the “world” is constituted. This is the central problem of *Sein und Zeit*, namely a fundamental ontology of *Dasein*. (Heidegger, 1994: 117)

We can see that, by questioning the being *of* correlation in this way — the mode of being of *that* or which “bears” it — we are also, as was Heidegger’s case, pursuing a search for the being of the “world” as it manifests itself *in* correlation — and ultimately of being “in general” as it is opened up in and by *Dasein*, understood precisely as the being whose mode of being is such that it relates to it *a priori*. But if posing the question of the being *of* correlation in *this way* also leads us to questioning the being *in* correlation, we still have to determine the *being of what makes possible the primary co-belonging between Dasein’s mode of being and the being that this mode of being makes “comprehensible” to it*.

2/ Hence a completely different possible, and indeed necessary, use of the expression “being of correlation,” no longer to designate the mode of being of the one who bears it and is thus open to the “being” that manifests itself in it, but to question in the direction of what *founds* and in turn “*supports*” the structural *whole* constituted by these terms “appropriate” to each

¹ On this return of the vocabulary of “substantiality” in contemporary phenomenology, and its implications for the question of the relationship between monism and dualism in phenomenology, we refer you to our text in Jean (2022).

other. This second path, obviously opened up by the Heideggerian *Kehre*, is the one followed in his own manner by Renaud Barbaras in a way that will help us move towards the question at hand: to what extent does such an understanding of the being of correlation — of *what* appropriates its terms from one to the other admit — indeed, make necessary an interrogation in the direction of its *other*?¹

Let us refer here to a specific text, taken from the chapter of *Dynamique de la manifestation* significantly entitled “The being of correlation - towards the processual world,” and quite representative of this movement of thought:

Because of its constitutive character, the phenomenological relation between the appearing and the subject, a relation that circumscribes the field of appearing, must be underpinned by an ontological community more radical than the ontological difference between its poles [...] In this sense, the very difference between the subject and the world [...] will have to be understood as a derived difference, and the whole difficulty will be concentrated in the status of this derivation and in the reason for this difference. In raising these questions, we pass from the plane of correlation as such to that of its being [...]. There is no true relativity of terms to each other except against the background of a common being, which can only be the very being of the relation, and it then becomes legitimate to pass, as it were, over the correlation to question its foundation. (Barbaras, 2013: 134-135)

As we can see, R. Barbaras’ point of departure here is indeed the recognition of a *being* of correlation *as such*, and *thus* the refusal to decorrelate its terms — a refusal that explains why Barbaras ultimately remained faithful to Heidegger and never drew his inspiration from either Henry or Levinas, from the phenomenological psychologism of interiority or the phenomenological realism of the event, and never ceased to refer them to each other. Yet, at the same time as it encourages us to admit a *being* of correlation, this text also raises questions in the direction of its *other*: on the one hand, because, without ever annulling the distance in and through which its terms relate to each other, this being is predetermined as their “common background” with which neither one nor the other is confused — which already amounts to making correlation *the other of its own terms*; on the other hand, and above all, because this

¹ Of course, we can’t address this problem from a specifically Heideggerian perspective, even if only briefly, so we’ll confine ourselves to formulating a simple question: if we accept to call *Ereignis* that which “appropriates” or “co-proprieates” Being and *Dasein* under the condition of their common finitude, and thus to see in such an “Event” the version, in its most radical way, of what we have called “*the being of correlation*” — for what precisely is *Ereignis*, if not “*correlation as being*” — wouldn’t we also have to ask, *simultaneously as it were*, the question of its *other* - of *the other of the Ereignis itself*, which nothing *a priori* allows us to say would be legitimate to confuse with its *own* “withdrawal”, or with its *own* “forgetting”? The difficulty of the task is easy to imagine.

common ground is determined not only as what the terms *are* in the last instance, but as *what they derive from* and, in so doing, as the original unity *from* which their correlation *derives* — an original unity with which, consequently, this correlation *does not*, strictly speaking, merge, and which, in so doing, would only be accessible by passing “over” it. Hence the question that such a movement cannot fail to raise: is it legitimate, after having rightly rejected the assimilation of the other of the correlation to one or other of its terms, to identify it, under the condition of their “ontological community”, with that from which their correlation *derives* and which thus constitutes, with regard to the correlational a priori, *its own a priori*?

In order to clarify the meaning and stakes of this difficult but crucial issue, let’s refer to a specific passage in the introduction to *Dynamique de la manifestation*, in which R. Barbaras attempts to synthesize this entire path, commenting freely on Dufrenne’s *Le poétique*:

The being of the relation, which relates the subject and the appearing to each other in order to make them exist as such, cannot be sought elsewhere than on the side of a nature, which would indeed answer the question of the a priori of the a priori of correlation. This is what Mikel Dufrenne lucidly sees in the last part of *Le poétique*:

To define the idea of Nature is to try once again to answer the question that in various ways haunts contemporary philosophy: what is the meaning of the intentional - noetic or practical - correlation of man and the world?

However, this nature is what overflows consciousness, not only as the world in which it is inscribed, but even more, as the power from which it proceeds. This nature [...] can obviously no longer be understood as the correlate of a consciousness; it radically undoes the transcendental framework that led to it. This is why he legitimately asserts that we must “substitute or at least join to the intentional correlation an ontological correlation” (Barbaras, 2013: 19-20).

Let’s break down the fundamental thesis here:

1/ Against any “decorrelationist” temptation and any fascination with the ancestrality of thought and/or reality, the starting point of phenomenology is, according to R. Barbaras, to recognize *the being of their correlation*;

2/ But as it ensures the inseparability of its terms, this *being* of correlation is at the same time *its other* — insofar as it is that from which it *proceeds*. This other of correlation — which in this respect constitutes its own *ancestrality* — then receives — in a philosophical decision whose paradigmatic significance in contemporary French phenomenology we cannot fail to

recognize — the name *Nature*,¹ whose whole question is then to specify the exact type of link it maintains with correlation, whose *being* (it ensures its consistency or “substantiality”) and *other* (it is its *origin* and is distinguished by definition from what it engenders) it thus seems to constitute.

3/ It is on this point that the key proposition is put forward for discussion: if the *a priori* correlation of the subject and the world must be overcome — under the condition of its being, in the direction of its other — the relation of this correlation to this other, which as such would constitute its origin, *would itself be a correlation*. Or, to put it another way, the other of the correlation would be an other with which the correlation itself would find itself *a priori* and “ontologically” correlated — this second, “ontological” correlation thus presenting itself as *the a priori correlation between nature and the “intentional” correlation as such*.

Hence the possibility for us to clarify our own question: can we call “other” of the (intentional) correlation that with which this correlation would itself be *a priori* (ontologically) correlated? Doesn’t such an “ontological” correlation itself amount to converting the other of the correlation into an other as manifested *in* the intentional correlation itself?

Let’s begin by noting that there are ultimately two ways of conceiving such a correlation between intentional correlation and nature — two ways that would precisely make it possible to assert the reservations expressed by R. Barbaras in the remainder of this introduction with regard to the Dufrennian conception of *Phusis*:

1/ The first, ultimately specific to Dufrenne’s thinking, but reminiscent of the Merleau-Ponty motif of an “indirect ontology”, would be to recognize that “standard” intentional correlation, by virtue of its “ontological” correlation with *Phusis*, would simply constitute its *appearance* — but in an entirely different mode from that in which this same intentional correlation ensures the appearance of “objects”. Such an understanding of “ontological correlation” would therefore require us to distinguish between two levels of appearance itself: at the first level, specific to this “standard” intentional correlation, appearance would remain that of appearing, or being; on a second level, that of ontological correlation, intentional correlation itself, taken as a whole by virtue of its *being*, would in its own way ensure the manifestation of the nature that engenders it — and according to a specific modality that Dufrenne calls “*expression*”. At the same time, in accordance with intentional correlation, the appearing makes the things appear; this appearing of the things itself, this intentional correlation understood in its

¹ On the reintroduction of the theme of “nature” - or *phusis* - in contemporary French phenomenology, subject to the questions we raise here and in its relationship of proximity and distance to its Heideggerian version, see Jean (2021: “Introduction”).

being, *would express*, by virtue of ontological correlation, the nature that constitutes its *other*. Hence Dufrenne's formula that "Nature does not appear in itself, but through the world": it *appears* in the intentional correlation that, by virtue of the ontological correlation that links it to it, expresses it — which is why Dufrenne often adds that it is not "perceived" ("expression is not an experience as perception is" (Dufrenne, 2011: 560) but "felt" — feeling was then nothing other than the affective test of this indirect phenomenization of the *depth* of nature, as well as of what makes it possible *through* the intentional correlation and thus the appearance of the world and its "objects."¹ In the Dufrenian version of such a device, and because the other of the intentional correlation that is *physis* is phenomenized in this same correlation insofar as it is *a priori* linked to it by another correlation, this time ontological, this other does indeed remain an other *in* the properly phenomenological correlation — even though it only appears there *indirectly* and insofar as it *expresses* itself or trans-appears there.

2/ However, the second way of conceiving this relationship between *Physis* and appearing — which lies at the very foundation of the "cosmological" turn taken by R. Barbaras in phenomenology — is, in fact, very different since it consists in recognizing that *nature itself* has the power to phenomenize beings (in accordance with a correlation that must be called "cosmological") and in so doing, to conceive of "ontological correlation" as the *a priori* correlation between "cosmological correlation" and "intentional correlation", between *its* way of making them appear and our own. As Barbaras makes clear in a synthetic passage in his seminal work *La vie lacunaire*,

Beyond the life of the subject and the movements that can also occur within the world, there is an archi-movement, that of the "physical" process, in which both the emergence of the world and the activity of the subject that makes it appear participate. [...] This is why it can be characterized as *physis*. To speak of *physis* is not to reduce philosophy to a philosophy of nature, but on the contrary to give nature, in the Aristotelian sense of *physis*, a phenomenological scope [...]. Insofar as our own phenomenizing movement is inscribed in it and draws its power from it, so to speak, we must affirm that this arch-movement of *physis* is none other than the very movement of appearing. To say that our movement is part of the movement of *physis* is to recognize that things can only appear to us insofar as they first appear in themselves: it is because they lend themselves, so to speak, to our apprehension, already outlining the gesture by themselves, that we are able to

¹ Cf. Dufrenne (2011: 494): "What measures the object's depth is the depth of existence to which it invites us; its depth is correlative to our own. This correlation is characteristic of the feeling that culminates in aesthetic experience, and we can describe this feeling by explaining this correlation, by showing how man makes himself profound, and how, in return, the object appears profound to him."

perceive them [...]. In other words, we need to take the measure of the fact that it is the world itself that appears. (Barbaras, 2011: 150-152).

This second version of ontological correlation — and this completely different way of understanding what a “correlation” actually is — is what Barbaras calls “*belonging*”: to posit that there is an ontological correlation between intentional correlation and cosmological correlation is no longer to say, as in Dufrenne’s thinking, that intentional correlation *indirectly* phenomenalizes nature whenever it ensures the direct phenomenalization of its objects, but, on the contrary, to recognize that this intentional correlation is itself only *a modality of the cosmological correlation* by virtue of which, in its “archi-movement”, nature gives appearances to its constituents, a modality which is itself only capable of phenomenalizing its objects insofar as it *belongs to* them and, *in its own way*, recovers its power of manifestation. Paradoxically, however, it is the very idea of “ontological correlation” that is rendered useless — because there is in fact no longer *any other* of the intentional correlation to which it should be “ontologically” correlated: to make *intentional* correlation a *mode of cosmological* correlation is, in the end, to admit that there is only *one correlation*, with which intentional correlation merges, of which it *participates* or, precisely, to which it *belongs* under such and such a modality and to such and such a degree that “feeling”, this time, will come to reveal in a direct way — as a test of “our participation in being” and “the mode under which belonging is phenomenalized” (Barbaras, 2019: 109). To the question of a possible *other* of correlation, Barbarassian phenomenology thus responds in a series of steps which, in an extremely rigorous manner, lead to its pure and simple dissolution:

a/ The recognition, against all “decorrelationist” temptations, of a *being of* (intentional) *correlation* leads us to project it in the direction of its other, which, under the term *Phusis*, presents itself first as that which founds and engenders it;

b/ However, this other of the correlation actually turns out to be *another correlation* — a “cosmological” one — which, in fact, has no need of an “ontological” correlation to found and engender an intentional correlation, since the latter ultimately turns out to be not *other* than the former - but only one of its modalities, to this or that degree of participation or belonging ;

x/This is why, far from being the *other of intentional correlation*, or even *another correlation than it* and to which it would be ontologically correlated, *Phusis*, as “cosmological” correlation, reveals itself to be quite simply “the correlation” — the only correlation that exists and which, as such, admits of no otherness, not even that of intentional correlation, which is precisely only one mode of it.

We asked R. Barbaras above: how could the *metaphysical* thought of an other of correlation, such as the “nothing” by definition non-phenomenological, which alone allows phenomenology to circumscribe itself *as* phenomenology, be reconciled with the idea that it is within itself and not towards its other that phenomenology would “surpass itself”? The answer to such a question is now perfectly clear: if it is within itself that phenomenology surpasses itself towards its other, it is precisely because what it discovers, in this very surpassing, *is that there is decidedly no other to correlation — that there is only ever one correlation, the correlation, and nothing else.*

Conclusions

We formulated a very simple hypothesis above: Assuming that the correlational *a priori* constitutes the very axiom of phenomenology, the very possibility of a “phenomenological metaphysics” depends on our ability to answer, *as phenomenologists*, this single question: “Is there *another* of the correlation”? And yet, as we have tried to show, the phenomenological tradition has never managed to give a positive answer to this question — by the very fact of having converted it, in the various ways we have tried to suggest here, into a completely different question : that of an other *in* correlation. And indeed:

1/ Either the other of the correlation has found itself reduced, *via* the decorrelation of its terms, to an other situated on *its outer* edge — to *the ancestry of the being or event* (the other of the correlation thus finding itself *internalized* in a realist-events correlation).

2/ Either the other of correlation has found itself reduced, *via* the decorrelation of its terms, to an other situated on *its inner* edge — to *the ancestry of thought or of the phenomenon “nothing but phenomenon”* (the other of correlation then finding itself *internalized* in an immanent-psychological correlation of thought with itself).

3/ Either the other of the correlation has been reduced to an other in the correlation insofar as the latter, maintained as such in its *being*, has seen itself *a priori* correlated to the ancestry of a nature that it would be destined to express indirectly *in itself* (the other of the correlation thus finding itself *internalized* in an “expressive” correlation).

4/ Either the other of correlation has been reduced to the ancestry of *another correlation*, but another correlation which, according to a logic of belonging, ultimately presents itself as *the one and only correlation* — a “cosmological” correlation which certainly internalizes the

intentional correlation as its other, but *an other which is not other than it* since it is only a *mode of it*.

Now, on the strength of this series of observations, we seem to be faced with a strict alternative:

1/ Or, in phenomenology, *there is definitively no other of correlation* — any other of correlation presenting itself as an other *in* correlation, manifesting itself there directly or indirectly; and so, in all rigor, there is no possible “phenomenological metaphysics.” But the price we have to pay for this impossibility is that we cannot, *a priori*, assign limits to phenomenology — since any overcoming of the phenomenological presents itself as a self-overcoming, there can never be any question of an overcoming of the phenomenological as such —, and finally rigorously circumscribe its field.

2/ Alternatively, it may make sense to speak of an other of correlation which, negatively, would ensure phenomenological closure as such, but this other — the object of a “rigorous phenomenological metaphysics” — would not be confused with any of the historical figures mentioned here, which *only* have phenomenological consistency and manifest themselves in and through correlation itself (neither with the real or the event, therefore, nor with pure thought or pure phenomenon, nor with nature, however we conceive its relation to correlation itself).

Let’s suppose, finally, that we wish to embark on this path; what then emerges as a guiding thread is a question that is in itself very simple: can phenomenology, *as phenomenology*, be led to recognize something as “in itself”? *As phenomenology*, let’s insist here, for this is what it’s all about:

1/ If we look closely, the axiom of the correlational *a priori*, which defines phenomenology at the same time as it assigns it its field of investigation, ultimately means only this: there is no “in itself” in the Kantian sense — neither a being-in-itself of the thing, nor a being-in-itself of the subject, nor a being-in-itself of nature, all of which have no being other than to appear.

2/ But the only philosophically legitimate conclusion to draw from this is not *that there is no* “in itself”, but that if there is, it cannot by definition be confused either with the “in itself” of the thing, or with the “in itself” of the subject, or with the “in itself” of nature — which means, to put it in terms of a classical metaphysics with which phenomenology, for this very reason, has offered us a break with, that “the self,” “the world” and God (*sive natura*) will only ever have been different, more or less inspired and more or less masked ways of *naming different eidetically constitutive components of phenomenality*, and not its *outside*.

But what does this mean in a positive sense? It means that there would only be a “phenomenological metaphysics” if phenomenology could provide itself with a means of admitting an “in-itself” that is precisely not thinkable in the architectonics of traditional metaphysics — a non-Kantian “in-itself” that is representable, even by analogy, neither as a thing, nor as a subject, nor as a nature, nor as a god, and whose function would only allow us to say: *for us*, there is nothing other than the correlation, nothing other than the beings that appear in it as they are and in accordance with the multiple and infinitely rich eidetic components of their manifestation; *but “ourselves” — all that there is and the way in which there is what there is — are not everything*, precisely because there is something other than *what there is* and tant that “*there is*” — not an other *in the correlation*, but an other *of the correlation itself*.

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