

# There is Power in Blood: Towards a Eucharistic Interpretation of Ivan Ilyich's Paradoxical Death and Life

Brady Woods



According to a certain interpretation of Heidegger, relying solely on his reference to Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, there is no possibility for a religious authentic being-towards-death. In this paper, I seek to refute this position through a reconsideration and reinterpretation of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Namely, I present five interrelated textual insights demonstrating the sacramental authenticity of Ilyich's being-towards death, and use Jean-Luc Marion's Eucharistic phenomenology to weave these threads together to show one way a religious person may possess authentic being-towards-death.

In this paper, I argue for an optimistic interpretation of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* which intersects with the phenomenological theology of Jean-Luc Marion, from which it can be suggested that living to die well must involve accepting the "excessive" gift of the sacramental presence of Christ. To do so, I first summarize the significance of this text for Heidegger's account of authentic and inauthentic being-towards-death in *Being and Time*. Significantly, *Being and Time* excludes the possibility of the

religiosity of Ivan Ilyich's, or any, authentic death. To show this wrong, I will present several textual arguments to show that Ivan Ilyich's authentic death is not only religious, but arises from sacramental presence. I will then present an interpretation of the text from the standpoint of Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology of Eucharist. Finally, I will draw some conclusions about the question of how to die well from *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> From the outset, it may be objected that literary analysis does not allow one to arrive at the truth, that in order to arrive at truth one ought to bracket out literature, art, and other "emotional" enterprises and instead pursue "objective" philosophy. This objection is significant, but I do not here have the space to adequately consider it, and intend to come back to it as the subject of another paper. However, at this stage I may at least minimally attempt answer how in the face of this critique this project possible, and what its aim is, though undoubtedly in an unsatisfactory manner. It seems the retreat of philosophy into method from art and literature has, in fact, cut off much of its access to truth. Gadamer, in contrast with the scientism of much of contemporary philosophy, insists that "the experience of art is the most insistent admonition to scientific consciousness to acknowledge its own limits" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, esp. xxiii). And in the rest of *Truth and Method*, he argues that the methodological approach is not the only approach to truth. This project rests on the project of philosophers as practitioners-of-dying, seeking wisdom in art and literature, as well as philosophical texts. In fact, as may be seen in the next section as I begin the consideration of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, the realms of literature and philosophy are much more porous than may initially be thought. As such, this analysis is not only possible, it may even be likely to point towards wisdom, though it will certainly not reveal truth in its totality or with a high degree of certitude.

**THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF AUTHENTIC  
RELIGIOUS DEATH: IVAN ILYICH AND BEING  
AND TIME**

In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger questions the meaning of Being.<sup>2</sup> In Division I, he explores Dasein (entities “who have an understanding of Being”; the word is translated literally as “being there.”) and existence, but without an account of authentic existence: the “way of Being in which Dasein is truly itself . . . liv[ing] with clarity and integrity.”<sup>3</sup> As such, he turns to the question of authenticity. Significant for Dasein is the being-towards death, as it gives Dasein its individuality and possibility: “what makes my life my own is ultimately the sheer fact that it is mine to live, mine to make something of, in the face of my possible non-existence.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, contra Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*, death “is the basic certainty of Dasein itself . . .”<sup>5</sup> Authenticity responds to the certainty of one’s own death by accepting and living in light of it.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, inauthentic being-towards-death is a “falling prey” characterized by “temptation, tranquillization (sic), and estrangement,” which veil from oneself one’s own imminent death: “. . . death is understood as an indeterminate . . . which right now is *not yet objectively present* for oneself, and is thus no threat.”<sup>7</sup> In this analysis, Heidegger references *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*.

In the inauthenticity of the everyday approach to one’s being-towards-death, the “they”<sup>8</sup> hide death’s reality, and thus the possibility of approach to an authentic being-towards-death, from Dasein. While discussing the social inconvenience of death

for the they, Heidegger has the following footnote: “L.N. Tolstoi hat in seiner Erzählung ‘Der Tod des Iwan Iljitsch’ das Phänomen der Erschütterung und des Zusammenbruchs dieses ‘man stirbt’ dargestellt.”<sup>9</sup> Crucially, this may be translated into English in two different ways. The first translation emphasizes its application to the public: “In his story ‘The Death of Ivan Ilyitch’ Leo Tolstoi has presented the phenomenon of the disruption and breakdown of having ‘someone die’”<sup>10</sup> Second, it may also be translated as Stambaugh renders it: “L.N. Tolstoi (sic) in his story ‘The Death of Ivan Ilyitch’ has portrayed the phenomenon of the disruption and collapse of this ‘one dies.’”<sup>11</sup> This translation emphasizes Ivan Ilyich’s conversion from inauthenticity to authenticity.

The first translation holds to an extent but does not encompass Heidegger’s full meaning. Heidegger is using the text to illustrate inauthenticity of the public. This is most clear in the first chapter of the novella, where it is revealed just how much the public covers over the reality of death. The first response to the news occurs when his former colleagues immediately began wondering about the impact on their positions. At the funeral, his wife only uses the occasion to make sure of her financial position, and Pyotr Ivanovich, one of Ivan Ilyich’s closest friends “Never once [looked] at the dead man or succumb[ed] to depression, and he was one of the first to leave” and then proceeded to play cards.<sup>12</sup> Under this interpretation, Heidegger is identifying that inauthentic submission to the they-self is manifested whenever the word “propriety” appears, whether implicitly or explicitly: this is the “social

<sup>2</sup> Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein Und Zeit*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996. For an excellent introduction to both this text and the works of the later Heidegger, see Richard Polt’s *Heidegger: An Introduction*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Polt, *Heidegger*, 29-31, 85.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 87. See also Heidegger, *Being and Time*, esp. 232.

<sup>5</sup> Polt 87.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 235 and 234, respectively.

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger uses the “they” to refer to one dominating an other’s care. See Heidegger 114. One may here think of Kierkegaard’s concept of the mob or public as being analogous. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Crowd Is Untruth* [Place of publication not identified]: Merchant Books, 2014 and *The Present Age: On the Death of Rebellion*, Translated by Alexander Dru, New York: Harper Perennial, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Bernasconi 76, citing *Being and Time* 235 n. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Bernasconi 76, citing a translation by Macquarrie and Robinson.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 235 n. 12

<sup>12</sup> Tolstoy, Leo. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Translated by Lynn Solotaroff. New York: Bantam Dell, 2004. 32, 36-41.

inconvenience, if not . . . downright tactlessness, from which publicness should be spared.”<sup>13</sup> The reality of one’s own imminent death is, like the funeral service, simply a nuisance to “the so-called friends of Ivan Ilyich . . .”<sup>14</sup> Clearly, the text shows the reality of the covering-over of death by the public in its inauthentic everydayness. However, the first translation of the footnote is inadequate because it hides what Heidegger was primarily doing here. The second footnote is closer to the German. Further, like he does with a fable in an earlier section, Heidegger uses the text to show his account to be existentially based: “. . . to show that there was a prior ontico-existential basis for this ontological interpretation.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, Heidegger interprets the story as a gradual shattering of inauthentic being-towards-death and a dawning into the light of authenticity.

Why is this literary example significant? As Heidegger must show that there was a prior “ontico-existential basis for [his] ontological interpretation,”<sup>16</sup> so he needs similar confirmation here to show that his entire argument concerning being-towards-death is not arbitrary. Therefore, as Bernasconi notes, a religious/Christian interpretation of the ending of the text would undo Heidegger’s reasoning in *Being in Time* for the character of authentic being-toward-death. This is because the only case shielding him from the charge of arbitrariness is *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, and, as Bernasconi interprets him, a religious death would mean that Ivan Ilyich’s inauthenticity is not ultimately shattered.<sup>17</sup> However, Bernasconi thinks that *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* is flexible enough to account for a non-religious reading.<sup>18</sup> I disagree. In the remainder of this paper, I will show how *the Death of Ivan Ilyich*’s structure and content is unavoidably Christian, and how it offers support

to a possible interpretation using the Eucharistic phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion.

### LOVE AND SACRAMENT: THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYICH INTERPRETED AS CHRISTIAN MYSTICAL DEATH

In this section, I argue that the Heideggerian interpretation of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* is subverted by the text’s religiosity. Specifically, the text itself is directed by and towards Christianity. To argue for this interpretation, I will analyze five distinct yet interrelated textual arguments. First, the use of time and eternity of the text suggests a religious interpretation. Second, the text’s structural use of lightness and darkness will be shown to convey the ending’s religious meaning, and further that the journey of the text is parallel to Christian mystical accounts. Third, the presence of Gerasim, a religious believer who is authentically being-towards-his-death, suggests a religious interpretation. Fourth, the description of Ivan Ilyich’s final state suggests a religious interpretation. Finally, the placement of the Eucharist in the text emphasizes sacrament, profoundly suggesting Christ’s Eucharistic presence. This final argument will allow an interpretation of the text based on the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion, showing that it is Christ’s invisible presence in the novella who moves Ivan Ilyich from darkness into light.<sup>19</sup>

(1) The usage of time and eternity, both in the content and structure of the text, suggests its religiosity. Early on the text, a seemingly trite detail of Ivan Ilyich’s wardrobe has significant symbolic meaning: “When he graduated from law school . . . [he] hung a medallion inscribed *respice finem* on

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 235.

<sup>14</sup> Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 33.

<sup>15</sup> Bernasconi, Robert. “Literary Attestation in Philosophy: Heidegger’s Footnote on Tolstoy’s ‘The Death of Ivan Ilyich.’” Chapter in *Heidegger in Question: The Art of Existing*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993. 76-98. 80, 87-88.

<sup>16</sup> Bernasconi, “Literary Attestation,” 87.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 85. See also Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 230, 286.

<sup>18</sup> Bernasconi, “Literary Attestation,” 96-7.

<sup>19</sup> Note that in the following is not based on the claim that Tolstoy intended for the text to be read in an orthodox Christian manner. In fact, it seems clear that he did not intend for the text to be read in this manner: “Jesus is represented [in Tolstoy’s *The Gospel in Brief*] as a human being who happened . . . to be much more closely in touch with God’s will for human life and behavior than the ordinary person. Thus Jesus is, in Tolstoy’s account of him, not a deity . . .” (Gary R. Jahn, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich: An Interpretation*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993, 89). Nonetheless, I argue that, contra the author’s intent, the text *considered in itself* should be read in this way.

his watch chain . . .”<sup>20</sup> *Respice finem* means “consider the end.”<sup>21</sup> Time is viewed as being segmented and subservient, which is reinforced by watches. The public “share a desire to give life an ordered and controlled appearance . . .”<sup>22</sup> Throughout the novella, this controlled, public time reinforces inauthentic propriety: e.g., when Ivan Ilyich’s daughter uses the time to leave Ivan, and thus the consideration of the imminence of her own death: “it’s time we left,” she said, glancing at her watch. . . .”<sup>23</sup> In contrast, Ivan develops a different valuing and experiencing of time by the end.<sup>24</sup> In fact, it becomes apparent from the structure of the text and its content, that the shattering of time occurs in a move to eternity: Ivan’s available time shrinks until the moment becomes eternity.<sup>25</sup> This entering into the unchanging eternity from diminishing time is structurally suggested by the novella; as the plot progresses, the chapters shorten.<sup>26</sup> The text thus accelerates, until in the last moment it freezes and encompasses all, eternally.<sup>27</sup> Finally, the timeline of the final events is significantly symbolic of Christ and the Trinity. Ivan’s death takes place over three days (“three days . . . in the heart of the earth”), and the hour before his death somehow consists of three hours (three-in-one): “. . . an hour before his death . . . for those present, his agony continued for another two hours [and thus, three hours total].”<sup>28</sup> This conveys the participation of Ivan Ilyich in Christ, and the connection of the Trinity and Ivan Ilyich’s death. All of this provides a strong defense of the religious and Christian meaning of the text.

(2) The usage of darkness and light in the text is

religious. The text symbolically presents the reader with darkness as untruth, and two kinds of light: the false, superficial light and the true light.<sup>29</sup> The text structurally moves from false lights into darkness, and from darkness into the true light. The false lights, indicated linguistically in Russian and symbolically, include: Ivan’s position as judge, the doctors, Ivan’s marriage, Ivan’s family, daylight, and whist.<sup>30</sup> These things have the form of light, but in fact “have no spiritual content, no inner light . . .”<sup>31</sup> Pain draws Ivan into darkness, into the realization of the false lights’ falsity. This is reinforced by the text’s use of dark imagery, e.g., the “black bag” dream.<sup>32</sup> Yet Ivan’s perspective shifts:

Day becomes night; life becomes death. . . .  
darkness takes on new meaning for Ivan. . . .  
darkness initially stands for all that is false about  
Ivan’s life; he eventually comes to see the value of  
the darkness as a guide to the true light . . .<sup>33</sup>

The shifting of his perspective allows him to see darkness as being an apophatic approach to true light. There are three true lights which he “flies” towards: “his servant Gerasim, his childhood, and the light at the end of the black bag”: the light at the end.<sup>34</sup> The change allows Ivan’s “External form [to be] filled with spiritual content . . . Gerasim’s view of death is taken to heart and from figurative childhood Ivan progresses (regresses) to spiritual rebirth.”<sup>35</sup> As the former two true lights (Gerasim and Ivan Ilyich’s childhood) are ontologically real, it seems to be highly likely that the final true light really is True

<sup>20</sup> Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 44-5.

<sup>21</sup> Verno, Michael. “Exact Times and Watches in Leo Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*.” *The Explicator*, 67, no. 2 (2009): 123-125. 123.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>23</sup> Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 97. See also Verno, “Exact Times,” 125.

<sup>24</sup> Verno, “Exact Times,” 124.

<sup>25</sup> Jahn, *The Death of Ivan Ilich*, 96-7.

<sup>26</sup> Jahn, Gary R. *Tolstoy’s the Death of Ivan Il’ich: A Critical Companion*. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1999. 25-26.

<sup>27</sup> See Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 113.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-13. See also Mt. 12.40b, NRSV.

<sup>29</sup> Danaher, David S. “Tolstoy’s Use of Light and Dark Imagery in *The Death of Ivan Il’ich*.” *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 39, no. 2 (1995): 227-240. 227.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 228-31. Some of the linguistic subtleties appear to have been lost in the translation into English.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 229

<sup>32</sup> Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 99.

<sup>33</sup> Danaher, “Tolstoy’s Use of Light and Dark Imagery,” 234.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

Light: the Truth. Further, the relation of this pattern of false light to darkness, darkness to true light is indicative of a kind of Christian mysticism.

For some Christian mystics, literal darkness begins to lead one into the spiritual light of the realization of God's presence.<sup>36</sup> To know God, one must first take the path of "unknowing" in the deconstructionist mode of theology.<sup>37</sup> In a similar way to the mystics, Ivan Ilyich must come to unknow what he 'knows'. This comes in two profound, interconnected moments. The first, after he partakes of the sacraments and speaks with his wife, and her appearance "said to him: '*Not the real thing*. Everything you lived by and still live by is a lie, a deception that blinds you from the reality of life and death.'"<sup>38</sup> At this moment, he is plunged into darkness and unknowing. All that he 'knew' was a lie holding him in inauthentic being-towards-death. In Russian, there is wordplay that indicates that "Not only was his life "wrong"; it was not life at all . . . not life, but death."<sup>39</sup> This unknowing finally breaks, after an intense struggle, he is finally in a place where he can see the truth, and true knowing sets in: "Instead of death there was light. 'So that's it!' he exclaimed. 'What bliss!'"<sup>40</sup>

(3) Gerasim further confirms the religiosity of the text. As stated in the last section, he is described as a true light to Ivan Ilyich. Further, he is one of the only other characters in the novel who approaches death authentically, as he admits the possibility of his own death, stating: "We all have to die someday."<sup>41</sup> As Ivan Ilyich realises, "Gerasim was the only one who did not lie; everything he did showed that he

alone understood what was happening . . ."<sup>42</sup> Even Bernasconi concedes Gerasim's authenticity, though he attempts to brush it off.<sup>43</sup> It is not insignificant, therefore, that Gerasim is introduced as a believer in divinity: "It's God's will, sir."<sup>44</sup> The fact that Gerasim, a religious believer, is clearly existing in authentic being-towards-death, indicates the falsity of the Heideggerian viewpoint. This point will become significant later in this paper, for Gerasim serves an even deeper purpose in the novella: "Gerasim is a sacramental presence who enters into communion with Ilyich, freeing Ilyich to do the further work of dying."<sup>45</sup>

(4) The textual details of Ivan Ilyich's death and funeral explicitly support the religious reading of the text. The way that the One Ivan is rectifying to is described in a pronoun: "knowing that He who needed to understand would understand."<sup>46</sup> This is anything but ambiguous; the text practically forces the reality of God onto the reader. The encounter which Ivan Ilyich has with the Divine Light has a transforming effect even on his corpse: "his face had acquired an expression of greater beauty—above all, of greater significance—than it had in life."<sup>47</sup> In the face of this evidence, it seems clear that the text is unambiguously religious. Now I may turn and consider the Eucharist's place in the text.

(5) In the light of the above, I can interpret the Eucharist's place in the text.<sup>48</sup> At the end of chapter eleven, at his wife's encouragement, he does confession and receives the Host. As he does so, he is thinking of his possibility of being cured of his "caecum", saying "I want to live, to live!"<sup>49</sup> Initially, the

<sup>36</sup> St. Julian of Norwich. *Showings*. Translated by Edmund Colledge, and James Walsh. New York: Paulist Press, 1978. 128: "After this my sight began to fail, and it was all dark around me in the room, dark as night, except that there was ordinary light trained upon the image of the cross . . ."

<sup>37</sup> Turner, Denys. *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 19.

<sup>38</sup> Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 110.

<sup>39</sup> Jahn, *Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilyich: A Critical Companion*, 204.

<sup>40</sup> Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 113.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>43</sup> Bernasconi, "Literary Attestation," 91.

<sup>44</sup> Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 41.

<sup>45</sup> Brungardt, Gerard. "Teaching The Death of Ivan Ilyich: A Guide to Introducing Tolstoy's Classic". *Journal of Palliative Medicine*. 12, no. 8 (2009): 679-682. 680.

<sup>46</sup> Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 113. Emphasis my own.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>48</sup> Note that this fifth argument is dependent upon the others; without them, this point is ambiguous.

<sup>49</sup> Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 109-10.

scene appears inauthentic because of his distraction and his plunging shortly thereafter into a new weight of pain and three days of screaming.<sup>50</sup> However, a careful reading in light of the arguments above shows that the Eucharist has an effect on him. First, the “I want to live, to live!” of chapter eleven is rhetorically repeated in the beginning of chapter twelve: “I don’t want it! I don’t!”<sup>51</sup> Recall from above that this time symbolically references the time in which Christ is in the grave. Combined with the inversion of death and life that occurs at the end of the text, this may be seen as Ivan’s internal struggle: he wants life, but does not want the life which is given in death. The Eucharistic moment is what propelled him forward, launching him into the darkness from which he will finally see the Absolute Light. In the end, he is finally able to love, but only after partaking of the sacrament.<sup>52</sup> He required grace to love, one might say. Finally, the understanding of Christ’s Presence as being in the Host, and the subsequent participation of Ivan in Christ’s death and resurrection, hints that it is *because* of the sacrament that he can participate. “In his brokenness and utter humility, Ilyich is now able to receive—in the sacraments of confession and communion—the grace necessary for the resolution of his spiritual suffering, his chief torment.”<sup>53</sup> This allows the interpretation of the text using the Eucharistic phenomenology found in Jean-Luc Marion.

### EUCCHARISTIC GIFT: MARION’S PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE LIFE AND DEATH OF IVAN ILYICH

In this section, for the purpose of coming to an

increased understanding of the life and death (or, more properly, the life-in-death and death-in-life) of Ivan Ilyich, I will turn to the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion. First, I will offer a necessary introduction to his phenomenology. Second, I will articulate his Eucharistic phenomenology and theology. Finally, this will enable relating it to the text and drawing some conclusions.

Jean-Luc Marion is a French phenomenologist, and a significant figure in the so-called ‘theological turn’ of phenomenology. He is fundamentally concerned with givenness: “he wants to dissolve any conditions of possibility for the appearing of an object to appear . . . [he takes it] that an object is given to consciousness . . . is the *primary* aspect of phenomenology.”<sup>54</sup> Key to the understanding of Marion is his concept of saturated phenomena: “phenomena where ‘intuition always submerges the expectation of the intention,’ and where ‘givenness not only entirely envelops manifestation but, surpassing it, modifies its common characteristics.’”<sup>55</sup> Saturated phenomena are powerful in that they transform Da-sein from active to passive receiver in their excessiveness.<sup>56</sup>

Key to any understanding of Jean-Luc Marion is his Christology and sacramental theology. In order to avoid the charge of onto-theo-logy levelled by earlier phenomenologists, (such as Heidegger) against theology as an ontological project, Marion works to show that his theology is imaging rather than idolatry.<sup>57</sup> In contrast with onto-theo-logy, Marion presents God without being, who discloses Godself to us. Christ is simultaneously saturating phenomenon, gift, and giver *par excellence*.<sup>58</sup> The Eucharist is a substantial site where this occurs.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 110-11.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>53</sup> Brungardt, “Teaching The Death of Ivan Ilyich,” 681.

<sup>54</sup> Simmons, J. Aaron and Bruce Ellis Benson. *The New Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. 63.

<sup>55</sup> Horner, Robyn. *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co, 2005. 123.

<sup>56</sup> Rivera, Joseph. 2012. “*Corpus Mysticum* and Religious Experience: Henry, Lacoste and Marion”. *International Journal of Systematic Theology*. 14, no. 3: 327-349. 341.

<sup>57</sup> See Heidegger, Martin. “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics.” In *The Religious*. Edited by John D. Caputo. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002. 67-75.

<sup>58</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 238-39; Rivera, “*Corpus Mysticum*,” 342; and Simmons and Benson, *The New Phenomenology*, 150.

<sup>59</sup> Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 72 and Rivera, “*Corpus Mysticum*,” 343.

This self-giving saturating phenomenon is external to any consideration of subjectivity, even belief.<sup>60</sup> The Eucharistic gift gives one identity, hope, remembrance of Christ, and even the possibility of understanding the gift (the gift proceeds understanding).<sup>61</sup>

This analysis allows an interpretation of the significance of Eucharistic presence in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*.<sup>62</sup> In his participation in the Eucharist, I remarked earlier how Ivan Ilyich seemed inauthentic. In a sense, he was. Yet the externality of Christ present in the Sacrament, like Gerasim, had a transformative effect, despite Ivan's lack of authenticity and distraction.<sup>63</sup> Though he thought he was hoping for a return to life through medicine, his cry for life reveals a deeper desire that the sacrament in love is able to manifest: a desire for *real*, eternal life. The Eucharist plunges him into his final darkness, his last unknowing, baptizing him in shadow for the dawning of the Light of lights.<sup>64</sup> The presence of Christ discloses to him—him as the passive *me*, and not the active *I*—that what came before was not real, but the eternal bliss into which he is plunged. And the *Ānanda*, the Bliss, as David Bentley Hart notes is true of most Classical Theist traditions, is God.<sup>65</sup> This gives him, in the end, a greater significance in 'death' than he had in 'life'.<sup>66</sup> Ivan Ilyich did not 'live' his life well, because he did not live.<sup>67</sup> But in the end, Mercy is waiting for him. In sum: the Gift and Giver is God, saturating Ivan's life-of-death. In God's saturation, Ivan realizes an absolute paradox of Christianity: life is death and death is life.

### LIVING TO DIE WELL: SOME CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, after considering the possibility of the permeability of literature and philosophy, I considered the significance of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* for Bernasconi's interpretation of the Heideggerian

claim of religion's inauthentic being-towards-death. I found that, in fact, this novella subverts Heidegger's analysis, destabilizing his account of death. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* not only disclosed the possibility of authentic religious being-towards-death, but also the need for sacramental presence for an authentic being-towards-death. Using the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion allowed me to philosophically confirm and expound these literary insights. How, then, does this text address the question of how to live so as to die well?

Of course, as I am working from and in literature, none of this should be taken as necessarily certain (there has been no demonstrable proof of these claims). However, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* does suggest some *possible* answers. To philosophers, it suggests that, insofar as philosophy is the preparation-for-one's-own-death as in the *Phaedo*, cannot rely on itself alone. In fact, the gift which offers one the authentic being-towards-death and good death must be accepted *before* it is understood. On this account, the Kierkegaardian 'knight of faith' is, to a degree, vindicated. Yet, unlike Kierkegaard, this faith is not grounded subjectively. Though there is a leap of faith, this leap itself only occurs from a gift, and is a leap contingent on an external reality; as Marion shows, it is a leap based on and into Christ's Presence as Christ presents Himself in the Paschal Mystery. In the reality of Christ's Eucharistic presence, life is made death and death is made life. To die well is to partake of the Saturating Gift of the Body and the Blood.

### Bibliography

Benson, Bruce Ellis. *Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida & Marion on Modern Idolatry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

<sup>60</sup> Rivera, "Corpus Mysticum," 343 and Purcell, Michael Purcell, "Sacramental Signification and Ecclesial Exteriority: Derrida and Marion on Sign," *Studia Phaenomenologica*. 9, no. 1 (2009): 115-133. 118.

<sup>61</sup> Rivera, "Corpus Mysticum," 343-44 and Purcell, "Sacramental Signification and Ecclesial Exteriority," 121.

<sup>62</sup> Note that Eucharistic presence is not limited to Ivan Ilyich's participation in the sacrament; it includes all of the true lights he encounters, especially Gerasim, who as noted above is himself a Sacramental presence.

<sup>63</sup> See (3), above.

<sup>64</sup> See (2), above.

<sup>65</sup> Hart, David Bentley. *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2013. 238-92.

<sup>66</sup> Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 35. See also (4), above.

<sup>67</sup> See (1), above.

- Bernasconi, Robert. "Literary Attestation in Philosophy: Heidegger's Footnote on Tolstoy's 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich.'" Chapter in *Heidegger in Question: The Art of Existing*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993. 76-98.
- Brungardt, Gerard. "Teaching The Death of Ivan Ilyich: A Guide to Introducing Tolstoy's Classic". *Journal of Palliative Medicine*. 12, no. 8 (2009): 679-682.
- Danaher, David S. "Tolstoy's Use of Light and Dark Imagery in The Death of Ivan Il'ich". *The Slavic and East European Journal*. 39, no. 2 (1995): 227-240.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Chicago: University Press, 1981.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Gift of Death*. Translated by David Wills. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York City: Continuum, 1999.
- Hart, David Bentley. "Christ and Nothing." *First Things*. October 2003, accessed at <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2003/10/christ-and-nothing>.
- Hart, David Bentley. *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2013.
- Hart, David Bentley. "A Philosopher in the Twilight: Heidegger's Philosophy as a Meditation on the Mystery of Being." *First Things*. February 2011, accessed at <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2011/02/a-philosopher-in-the-twilight>.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics." In *The Religious*. Edited by John D. Caputo. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002. 67-75.
- Hemming, Laurence Paul. *Heidegger's Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002.
- Hoffman, Piotr. "Death, time, history: Division II of Being and Time." In *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. Edited by Charles B. Guignon. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 195-214.
- Horner, Robyn. *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co, 2005.
- Hurlbut, Stephen Augustus. 'Hortus Conclusus;' *A Series of Mediaeval Latin Hymns with Selected English Renderings ... with Indices*. Washington, D.C.: Printed by S.A. Hurlbut at the Saint Albans Press, 1936.
- Jahn, Gary R., Editor. *Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Il'ich: A Critical Companion*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999.
- Jahn, Gary R. *The Death of Ivan Ilich: An Interpretation*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993.
- Julian of Norwich. *Showings*. Translated by Edmund Colledge, and James Walsh. New York: Paulist Press, 1978.
- Kamm, F.M. "Rescuing Ivan Ilych: How We Live and How We Die." *Ethics*. 113, no. 2 (2003): 202-33.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Crowd Is Untruth*. Merchant Books, 2014.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Present Age: On the Death of Rebellion*. Translated by Alexander Dru. New York: Harper Perennial, 2010.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. *The Reason of the Gift*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. *The Visible and the Revealed*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.
- McGill, Arthur Chute. *Death and Life: An American Theology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003.
- McGill, Arthur Chute. *Suffering: A Test of Theological Method*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006.
- Plato. *Phaedo*. Translated by David Gallop. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Polt, Richard F. H. *Heidegger: An Introduction*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. Translated by Colm Luibhéid and Paul Rorem. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.
- Purcell, Michael. "Sacramental Signification and Ecclesial Exteriority: Derrida and Marion on Sign". *Studia Phaenomenologica*. 9, no. 1 (2009): 115-133.
- Rahner, Karl. *On the Theology of Death*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1961.
- Rivera, Joseph. 2012. "Corpus Mysticum and Religious Experience: Henry, Lacoste and Marion". *International Journal of Systematic Theology*. 14, no. 3: 327-349.
- Simmons, J. Aaron and Bruce Ellis Benson. *The New Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- Solotaroff, Lynn. "Introduction." In Leo Tolstoy. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Translated by Lynn Solotaroff. New York: Bantam Dell, 2004. 1-29.
- Teresa of Avila, St. *The Life of Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of Teresa of Avila*. Translated by E. Allison Peers and Silverio. New York: Doubleday, 1991.
- Tolstoy, Leo. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Translated by Lynn Solotaroff. New York: Bantam Dell, 2004.
- Turner, Denys. *The Darkness of God: Negativity in*



*Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Verno, Michael. "Exact Times and Watches in Leo Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilyich." *The Explicator*. 67, no. 2 (2009): 123-125.

Wallenfang, Donald L. "Sacramental Givenness." *Philosophy and Theology*. 22, no. 1 (2010): 131-154.

Wardley, Kenneth Jason. "A Desire unto Death: The Deconstructive Thanatology of Jean-Luc Marion." *The Heythrop Journal*. Vol. 49, no. 1 (2008): 79-96.

Wirzba, Norman, and Bruce Ellis Benson. *Transforming Philosophy and Religion: Love's Wisdom*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.