

Jean-Luc Marion

Remarques sur les questions posées par Smadar Bustan

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Aporias in Jean-Luc Marion's theory of the Saturated Phenomena

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Givenness and the Orthodox Jew

Aporias in Jean-Luc Marion's theory of the Saturated Phenomena

Two moves and two aporias

- 1 Regarding the presumed clash between philosophy and religion, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion develops a full range of concepts and principles that characterizes the possibility of a phenomenological theology. With this new framework, he extends the historical consideration about the conditions of possibility of experience to set the basis for addressing "the experience of the impossible" (Marion, 2000, p. 210; *Being Given*, 2002, p. 218). The underlying assumption of his approach may be summarized in *two rehearsed phenomenological moves*, which introduce a novel element into the treatment of the presumed clash. His broad view first shows that in shifting the focus from the intending mind to the manifest in its most authentic and spontaneous form, a larger range of phenomena becomes available, allowing thus to access the invisible and mysterious in a manner so fundamental that it is sound for the most basic and daily cases. Secondly, in seeking to remain open and true to the manifestation of things, the philosophical attitude is then inverted so as to begin from the "last", from the occurring phenomenon as it offers itself. Following these two proposed methodological changes, we need to ask how such radicalization of an already established phenomenological practice suddenly opens the door to what has been considered out of reach for centuries of philosophical investigation. The thought that Marion provides in response is that following this philosophical perspective "a new field, which was taken to be meaningless, suddenly makes sense" (Marion, 2006, p. 335). In this paper, I would like to expose but also debate the foundations for this claim.
- 2 The aim, therefore, is to recover a clear understanding of this new manner of bringing together the phenomenological and the theological gestures to form an innovative philosophical pattern. It is proposed by way of defining the two major moves in Marion's work and their undeniable contribution to the classical distinctive approach. For that purpose, let us begin with the portmanteau notion of *givenness*, and the novelty by which its re-evaluation by Marion allows to explain how the unknown becomes more familiar, the unspoken may be evoked, and the enigmatic is present to our thought. The result, as we shall see, suggests a possible methodological solution for an ancient epistemological problem on the one hand (that of conceiving the unconceivable), and a common ground for the understanding between philosophy and religion on the other hand.
- 3 At the same time, the introduction of these ideas has a vocation that goes beyond the expository objective of the two moves. Having illustrated the merits of this thought on prior occasions, I wish to raise here *a possible conflict between the theoretical insight and the religious experience involved*; the point lies in two aporias that manifestly were never brought out, and that threaten the universal outcome of Marion's rigorous project by leading it back to an uncompromising particularism. And I would like to insist briefly upon these concerns before entering into the core of the theory, as both refer to the same question of givenness but take two directions in this enquiry.
- 4 The first difficulty regards a broad philosophical reflection that is essentially tainted by one type of religious approach. Any reader would notice that Jean-Luc Marion has drawn from the original sources of phenomenology but also from the Christian Exegesis. Nevertheless, and though the dominance of Christian terminology in Marion's phenomenological perspective is undeniable, it is not his choice of a specific theological language that puzzles. The confusion comes rather from his elaboration of a deep universal rationality that brings together faith

(theology) and reason (philosophy) while being inscribed within one monotheistic tradition. More particularly, it is to be feared that in obeying the rule of the given, taken to be the most primal and authentic mode of our relationship with the world, there is no room left for considering the possibility of the *ungiven*. God, in this respect, could never be considered as ungiven because this independent modality simply does not seem to exist. The problem is not strictly internal to Marion's thought. But in the context of a philosophical theory that aims at providing an impartial scope to all the forms under which 'things' may occur to us, it does seem to resuscitate a certain religious precept that admits no exceptions to the possibility of phenomena to be given. Hence, what we arrive at is not a solution under the form of a practice of the widest range, but rather *a religiously* (and philosophical) *biased common denominator* that prevents the *general* account of givenness from being received.

- 5 In the light of the first difficulty of the ungiven, a second issue imposes itself. What we then ask is whether it is *actually* possible to follow this type of philosophical journey while ignoring the precedence of religious or even cultural practices that condition us in a deep manner, especially when their nature reflects a disagreeable trajectory. Taking the Orthodox Jew as a key example here, I am wondering whether he would actually *be able* to appreciate the pure events the philosopher describes? Whether a person so entrenched with the divine commandment, "you shall not make for yourself a graven image", which profoundly bounds him from savoring the *representation* of the sublime in the bursting phenomena of the Icon or the Painting, could truly meet with any God under any form, and eventually appreciate "the manifestation of Christ", often suggested in Marion's theory (*Being Given*, 2002, p. 236)? The aporia here mainly concerns a hermeneutical phenomenology that describes things from one religious perspective and though rich and infinite, this approach remains hermetic for those who cannot *fully* relate to its theological commitments; a suggestion that has already been made in the first claim. But again, in undertaking a more precise analysis, what still remains at large is the idea that the religious phenomenon, considered by Marion as broadly encompassing so as to attest for other and outmost banal phenomena in life, undermines the involvement of our anthropological background in the process of their meeting. The problem with the whole enterprise lies right here, and the reason is simple: what manifests itself to us is given to us, but what is given needs also to be received¹. So even if we came to agree with Marion that the principles sustaining his approach are sufficiently independent and universal, there comes the conditions of possibility of the receiver that seem equally decisive. Our social habits, our religious practices, our historical ties, in short - the entire sphere of our individual reality – all play an important role in our ability to appreciate the phenomena that are imposed on us. Here then, the possibility of being freely subjected to the encounter with them no longer depends only on the manifesting phenomena (that we must receive because it is landing on us), since we should not forget that their disruption also involves our proper condition for receiving, or for being able to receive. The virtue of Marion lies in turning two philosophical intuitions into a more palpably evident scheme. What we need to probe is whether such a scheme actually respects the entire framework of our worldly and spiritual life.

On Givenness: The ultimate mode for encountering all phenomena

- 6 Let me first emphasize that, in Marion's view, the key to our relation with the world rests on one fundamental phenomenological notion, requiring us to begin by asking: "what is givenness?". In discussing the essential mode for meeting the diverse phenomena in reality Edmund Husserl, the founder of the phenomenological movement, used the term *Gegebenheit* already in his 1900 oeuvre *Logical Investigations* to describe how the diverse objects *appear* and thus are *given* to us (*In Excess*, 2002, p. 24). According to his theory, the mind intends at the appearing phenomena, and their different modes of appearance feed in return the process of

forming knowledge. In German, this term possesses a neutral and ordinary sense, which simply indicates that things are given to us (*gegeben*). In particular, in Husserl's oeuvre, it indicates that they are given as contents to the mind, which later transforms their manifestation into meaning and concepts. But even though in his theory of the "Saturated Phenomena" Marion remains a keen advocate of this central notion, he nevertheless chooses to add to the canonic term as translated into French [Gegebenheit=Donation] an engaging, sublime and new sense². In this way, his usage of the word no longer reflects a mere nuance of the original German term but rather a variation of a very different kind. The reasons for this change are major, serving his leading idea that the revival of givenness extends the realm of reachable phenomena beyond those that simply appear to the eye or to the mind, as traditional phenomenology tends to think. According to Marion, the descriptions of the way things are given allow us to put more weight on their actual occurrence, independently of what we expect from or project onto the manifesting object, and more in particular, independently of what comes or not into view for the observers. In effect, what he wishes to do is to characterize our encounter with the diverse phenomena in experience by emphasizing the most primal but long forgotten first nature: "no given would appear without [first] giving itself or finding itself given, thus without being articulated according to the fold of givenness" (*In Excess*, 2002, p. 24)³. This means that, long before seeing something, it is its unconditional givenness that determines a first contact with it.

7 The gloss Marion puts on the original term *Gegebenheit* does not remain, however, without controversy. Very soon Dominique Janicaud, Jacques Derrida and other defenders of the Husserlian tradition consider that his use is incorrect in phenomenological terms⁴. Their intense and diverse critiques all proceed to argue that, while claiming to serve phenomenology, it is instead theology that Marion is representing. The linguistic debate rapidly amounts to a rejection of Marion's entire philosophical move for trying to include the invisible transcendence within the orders of the phenomenological approach. For the critics, proclaiming that we may mentally meet everything - even the unseen - on the ground of the idea that it is simply being given to us, is basically another way to justify Revelation by addressing the invisible-unknown phenomenon of God as a manifest that we can hold on to without having to rely on actual evidence. In other words, and as Derrida advocated, in saying that we can think any phenomenon as given, even when it remains unapparent and basically enigmatic, seems to be understandable solely with the support of a theological belief⁵. The difficulty in its simplest form lies in rendering the idea of givenness the power to establish a first contact with us, while nothing truly apparent is there to attest to its emergence and thus to the possibility of getting to know it. Therefore in the course of what became the "French Debate", which began in 1991, we rapidly learn that although the terminological usage evoked hostility, it was in fact Marion's relentless emphasis on *givenness* as a universal principle that was at stake. For it is one thing to place yourself away from the prediction and evidence of the observable, advocating for a more *primary* mode to testify to things, and another to regard this new mode as an *inviolable* principle. No other proof is equally convincing as the certainty that what primarily provides us access to things is their givenness, says Marion. But the challenge is then to demonstrate that this criterion is both sufficiently general and unbiased, so as to portray the universal principle proclaimed by the Husserlian methodology Marion recommends⁶. And while the purpose of this paper is not to further an argument about the expansion of Husserl's original vocabulary, as it is clear that Marion's appropriation of the 'old term' both represents and misrepresents phenomenology altogether, its appreciation demonstrates an undeniable philosophical breakthrough. For despite accusations of deformation of a classical notion (fixed, to my mind, to a linguistic convention), Marion's insistence on referring to the traditional *Gegebenheit*, not only in Husserl's but also in Heidegger's works (*Being Given*, 2002, p. 19, 331 note 23), reflects a deliberate choice to remain within the phenomenological movement while adopting a distinct track. Attention to Marion's amended "principle of

givenness” is therefore essential to the understanding of his insight, before turning to grasp the conditions under which his new maxim still needs to be tested.

First move: Reversing the binome

- 8 Husserl’s: appear-(thus)-given, becomes Marion’s: given-(that may or may not be)-apparent.
- 9 In investigating the conditions that favor a faithful encounter with reality as it is, Marion directs us to ‘return to the things themselves’ just as Husserl himself instructs (Marion, 1994, p. 585-586). At the same time, precisely because Marion’s concerns are of a broad intellectual scope that trade on the ground of phenomenological but also theological experiences, it becomes necessary for him to determine a different fundamental mode of correspondence with the world: one that would be free from all forms of preconception or teleological prospect. In this sense, if this realm of what we call the “phenomena” proves to be a field that only includes the given of what *appears* to us, as Husserl claims (1981, p. 23), it becomes impossible to even consider what may never be visibly given, namely the Sacred. Consequently, the preeminence of visibility becomes problematic not only because it stigmatizes the trait of givenness, but mainly because it overlooks experiences that are not evidently framed by images.
- 10 From a Husserlian point of view, the experience of a given element is subject to its appearance before us, and in this respect, what I call Husserl’s phenomenological fundamental binome *appear*-(thus)-*given*, is valid for all forms of the physical or mental experiences. In perception or in a pictorial representation, during a recollection, a fantasy, or even a dream, what we encounter is what we see. At the same time, appearance as a universal law does not mean that phenomenology would not admit to the “*unseeable*” (“*unanschaulichen*”) but always, Husserl goes on to claim, as the missing part of what already appears, as the «“undetermined” reverse side, which is nevertheless “meant along with”» the part that we already observe (1981, p. 23). In this respect, Husserl’s “*unseeable*” is chained to what we can ultimately visualize and continue to consider as the potentially apparent whose hour may come. Take for example the case of perception, looking at the visible facets of a three-dimensional object such as the chair in front of us, we mentally complement the hidden sides that we could eventually lay eyes on (a process Husserl called “*apprésentation*”). Or another example, in reminiscence, is a recollection incited by catching sight of the back of a familiar person who just passed by, which triggers our envisaging of his face or even of his entire body as part of a natural process of recognition. Reviewing this point, Marion explicitly recognizes that traditionally “there is phenomenology when and only when a statement gives a phenomenon to be seen; what does not appear in one fashion or another does not enter into considération” (1994, p. 580-581). At the same time, he believes that when the various implications of this basic view are thoroughly worked out, then our intuitions can tell us more about what gives itself without having to rely on its appearing.
- 11 Husserl indeed may have failed to notice, but there remains the question of the *unseeable* par excellence, of having the experience of the unseen that may never appear and that is not intrinsically tied to anything viewable. The appeal of this option reflects Marion’s entire philosophical motivation. It’s quest is present as he goes on to discuss the original phenomenological commitment to the ostensible, particularly in the first chapter of the concluding book of his phenomenological trilogy, *In-Excess*⁷. To breakout from this restrictive commitment, Marion establishes two fundamental directives: **the first**, that a shift in perspective is necessary to extract us from our habits and to renew our contact with the unobservable. This appeal launches *the first major move of his philosophy*, which consists in reversing the Husserlian binome in favor of the given to form an alternative operative structure of *given*-(that may or may not be)-*apparent*. This conversion testifies to Marion’s way of claiming the unpicturable par excellence. But it mainly exposes us to a more vital attitude by freeing us from the phenomenological assumption that the “appearance of” is the most primary

condition to relate to the extended world, digging further to find out a more authentic initial source, that of givenness.

12 Taken aback by this fundamental change, we learn that the outcome does not amount only to an alteration in the phenomenological program. In its fully evolved procedure, it opens up the philosophical reflection to the religious sphere by proposing a common ground. Gauge again, that the given is traditionally reduced to the shown in a manner that does not allow to regard anything beyond what “is unfolded in the appearing” (*In Excess*, 2002, p. 21). Soon we discover that such reduction leads the bare phenomenological thought into a blind alley since it ceases to acknowledge the right to have any relation with the mysterious that can never be viewed, either requiring us to believe in its existence or else cease all attempts to unveil what is out of our reach. As a result, we face a distribution of roles between religion and philosophy demanding us to have faith in what we do not see, and to rationally assert only the phenomena that we witness. Thus implying, to quote Marion, that “some would like to leave a choice only between philosophical silence and faith without reason” (1994, p. 587). Or else, if we insist on sound reason regardless of faith, we may be forced to separate, like Kant, the observable and thus intelligible world (Phenomenal) from its parallel impenetrable and thus unconceivable world (Noumenal). Those who, like Marion, are opposed to the idea that reality may be split in two certainly favor other choices. Instead of alienating the enigmatic they undertake to include it within the common structure of human experience. And while one historical way to do so is to suggest that what we do *not* observe directly is still present everywhere and in everything, an ubiquity harbored in many central stands (as exemplified by Spinoza’s pantheism or Zen Buddhism), they all end up sharing the twin prejudice of *appearance* by replacing it with that of *presence*: requiring, nonetheless, the phenomena to be present or presented through the mediation of something that testifies to it. Whichever prejudice it may be, this is precisely the trap Marion wants to avoid. For it is not the direct or indirect apparent manifestation that necessarily and thus universally determines how we meet real but also ideal objects. It is rather, he argues, the unconditional disposition of things to be given, spontaneously, often unexpectedly, yielding themselves in the multiplicity of the ordinary life while affecting us well before coming in sight or to reason, that allow to overcome the fate of a dichotomous account. Our experience of the world may then be extended to include the phenomena that remain, by nature and sometimes by definition, invisible and subsequently not fully and distinctly presented to the mind.

13 This resolution of mystery, and how it is wedded in our experience, guarantees the exceptional but not the general. Clearly then, the definition I have just offered of the first move in Marion’s thought calls for more consistency in order to become a firm philosophical practice. Whence in a **second directive** of this move comes a solidifying additional consideration that enhances the criteria of givenness as the most credible and undeniably primary condition to determine the relation between subject and object, for it includes all possible components of reality “without exception” (*In Excess*, 2002, p. 22)⁸. In this respect, everything may attest to givenness – of itself or of another attributed through him - as there are infinite modes of variation and an endless scale of possibilities for being given in experience. In Marion’s understanding, the extent to which the principle of givenness covers the widest range of phenomena is unlimited: “no matter that they are or are not”, no matter if they appear or are imperceptible and may never be witnessed themselves, no matter if these phenomena are provided directly or indirectly, no matter if the receiving subject constitutes and even authorizes their occurrence or rather do they initiate their own event, nothing evades from this preliminary mode (p. 21)⁹. Thus presented, it also becomes clear that in incorporating a new factor that is not a function of a concept or of any intellectual ability to apprehend the given, but is drawn from the natural order of things in concordance with their infinite ways and possibilities of expression, the constraint of knowing can also be relaxed. Furthermore, constraints of other kinds which

have been proposed in metaphysical and ontological theories and which often come under attack in Marion's writings, may also be removed since in his large-scale hypothesis: to be given does not necessarily mean to be known, to be present and even to be recognized as existing¹⁰. Marion, like Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas before him, is suspicious of our philosophical dependence on the *presence* (and consequently on the *representation*) of things, so deeply rooted in the Husserlian phenomenology. In addition, he wishes to free us from all preliminary judgment about their *existence*, which has been haunting philosophy since Aristotle and is constantly nourished by the necessity to identify a being (*l'étant*) before looking into our experience of it (p. 5-7; 22)¹¹. This, he claims, is the major fault of Heidegger's version of phenomenology. Therefore the only way that could indeed release us from having to determine the ontological status of the given while handling its manifestation is to concede to Husserl's *own* "unlimited fullness" of givenness: so very ample and open that it unfolds strictly everything, including the unsuspected invisible and absent who's mode of being cannot be traced (p. 21).

14 In the craving for further explanation on this universal criterion, one should however not forget that despite the promising rise of the given, the theory built around it cannot be based on vague impressions of something indefinable and lacking all facticity (*Being Given*, 2002, p. 140-141). And indeed, this type of philosophical perspective is not obvious since it presupposes what some people consider only God can do, namely, have the possibility to experience a given that takes neither body nor form. For how can we admit to being in contact with what lacks effectiveness or embodiment? In order to find an answer to this question, we must look into Marion's discussion on absence or privation, where he claims that an appeal to a specific absent (a missing person, a lost item) would inform us of the phenomenality of the general state (*In Excess*, 2002, p. 22). By trying to show the possible nonentity of the given (for it is not necessarily *some thing* that gives itself), Marion secures the way to consider a modality so large that it can be identified as the most fundamental measurement to serve every scenario; a feature that has the advantage of attributing givenness the role of an inviolable principle, consequently sustaining both philosophy and theology. Yet the obstacle to this "absolute" account is that it clearly denies the possibility of the *ungiven* and therefore it may seem dogmatic. The problem, as I would further contest when raising the first aporia, is that this formula may be sufficient for including both present and absent phenomena, but unfortunately it does not hold for the ungivens themselves which constitute an impediment to this entire approach, unable in its quest for the unconditional mode to even consider their possibility.

First aporia: The ungiven as an obstacle to Marion's inviolable principle of givenness

15 The plain fact remains that the term "ungiven" never appears in Marion's writings. With his renewed phenomenological approach, he interestingly suggests that the nature of any lived experience involves a plurality of determinations all brought into light in one way or another. In a recent conference in Paris on the historical genealogy of givenness, going back not only to Husserl but also to Brentano, Lask, Meinong and even Kant, Marion once again proceeded to claim that there is no theoretical exception to this notion¹². Givenness is so primal that it includes the experience of whatever we may sense long before it develops the affinities of recognized objects or identifiable beings. Nothingness and absence can then be part of the general picture since they are said to be relegated by proxy – through another or due to their effect on us –, and thus are still accessible in our world, even without being directly presented to us. Let us consider what it means. (1) Coming back to Husserl, this analysis allows Marion to refresh phenomenology by looking deeper into its own resources, as the revised premise of givenness has neither limits nor limitations. In itself, this path seems promising:

we maintain the phenomenological approach by settling a first feature that no longer bounds us to appearing, and we do so by attributing a broader common denominator to every type of experience we undergo (since whatever we enter in contact with has to be given). (2) In addition, because the modality of givenness is not restricted to a single manner, the validity of any given phenomenon alone surpasses all need to identify the various properties of its manifestation. The source of its stimuli, that the subject needs later on to sort out, may remain un-represented but it may not remain un-given. “I thus conclude”, writes Marion, “that no appearing is expected from the fold of givenness, even if it does not always accomplish the phenomenal unfolding in it entirely”. The reason nothing escapes its orbit is due to the fact that “givenness is never suspended, even if and precisely because it admits an indefiniteness of degrees. [...] Givenness is thus set up, by its certitude and its automatic universality, in principle unconditioned” (*In Excess*, 2002, p. 23).

- 16 At this stage, the obstacle comes namely from an inner conflict implicit in Marion’s idea. On the one hand, he offers a substantive explanation for a phenomenological account of the non-displayed by demonstrating that what we actually and primarily experience is *not* necessarily the visible properties of things, thus transgressing the sway of appearance to evoke a broader condition. But on the other hand, it is not clear what supports the conclusiveness of his claim that what we *do* experience first is their givenness rather than their ungivenness. What seems to be incompatible with the openness to the unpredictable advent that Marion defends is precisely the desire to absolutize the description of our relation with the world by referring to everything as either *actually* or *potentially* given (*Being Given*, 2002, p. 132). It is the lack of consideration of another option, admitting that what we experience may *never* be given, which risks turning his essential thesis into a dogmatic one. For what are we to say of phenomena that by definition resist revelation and are to remain missing? The issue has been long pointed out by Marion himself and is in fact the basis for his celebrated theory of the *Saturated Phenomena*. In his address, he exposes an entire list of prototype phenomena so overwhelming in their mastery when manifesting themselves on their own basis, that they are inevitably saturating our cognitive and emotive faculties while remaining uncovered. As a result, a part of them always grasps us despite their preserved mystery, implicitly attributing a contact by keeping alive the motion of givenness. But what is the essential quality, which allows us to experience these unknowns? It is not a godlike quality since these saturated phenomena involve different types, going from the most trivial to the dazzling divine, from unspotted suffering experienced daily in our body to the blinding luster of the sublime¹³. For Marion, givenness is assured through the undeniable effect of what penetrates us, often unwillingly and unexpectedly. And while I agree that this renewed phenomenological understanding secures our relation with the unfathomable phenomena that dazzles our mind, it is not at all clear what is the basis for the fundamental assumption *behind it*, suggesting that everything in experience gains to be given.
- 17 Take the example of black holes, mentioned to me by Prof. Gabriel Motzkin when raising the issue of the ungiven¹⁴. To describe them we speak of regions of space-time from which nothing can escape, not even light, attributing their scientific nature to deprived material that can never leave its sphere and thus be handed to us. With mass concentration so dense, no object may evade its gravitational pull and light remains trapped in, preventing it from being seen. Properly speaking, these are phenomena that resist exposure and are to stay missing. At the same time, we are quite confident black holes exist and from a Marionian point of view, it is precisely insofar as they give themselves through indirect evidence that attests to their impact on the surrounding environment (for example the disappearance of the roaming star into their invisible domain and the bending of light rays nearby), that the seizing of black holes may be confirmed. It is the left (given) aura around them, which allows us to experience black holes *at first hand*. Consequently, the basic difficulty is not whether every phenomenon may give itself directly or be given without reserve¹⁵. The deeper philosophical problem lies

rather in Marion's conviction that givenness is so undeniably absolute that ungivenness is simply a matter of temporary inexistence or inarticulation. In case such rule is true, it leaves no leeway allowing a distinctive state that resists all conversion into the universal mode of givenness. Hence, what we face here is a single continuous thread from beginning to end and the interpretation is so penetrative that it seems as if experience is based on nothing but one kind of a relational mode. To account for it, we find Marion's clear voice:

One would not doubt a given, because either one considers it precisely insofar as given and, whatever its given mode (sensible, intuition, imagination, vision of essences, categorical intuition and so on), it will be given, or else, one will meet there with a deception, which simply attests that, by mistake [...] one has taken as a given what has not given itself authentically. (*In Excess*, 2002, p. 20)

- 18 And he adds a significant reservation about this possible mistake, "but which nevertheless was already given without any doubt, in *another mode simply not yet distinguished in its specificity*" (*In Excess*, 2002, p. 20, I emphasize). In other words, the givability of something is undeniable, and what is rather lacking is our capacity to unveil the process by which we may penetrate or comprehend its exposure. This incapacity is compensated, according to the philosopher's recent writings, by patience and the undertaking of infinite hermeneutics he later associates with love (*Prolegomena*, 2002, p. 153-169).
- 19 Since no change of this conviction is found in Marion's early or late work, it seems to suggest that his entire enterprise lies upon a very profound commitment to *the mechanism of the becoming*. Echoes of traditional phenomenological¹⁶, but also reminiscent of Christian perspectives, may be found in this celebrated open prospect by which the vitality of givenness takes it all: what *is* given to us and what did not give itself as much, or not at all, but *is yet to come*. So if we ask what is misleading here, we tend to suspect it is the conviction that a universal mode encompassing indefinite options has become uncompromised. And from then on what is unsettling is Marion's refusal to admit alongside the unconditional concept of givenness the *possibility* of the absolutely ungiven, integrating the latter into the general portrayal of experience which up to now solely depended on the interplay of the actually given (fully or partially) and the potentially given (the currently ungiven). In my mind, such conclusiveness has several delimiting effects.
- 20 On a practical level, it means that the religious experience, or any experience of the enigmatic, would never let itself be put into question. Thus, in reminding ourselves of the theological dilemma: "where was God during the Holocaust?", one can no longer consider its unveiling during this making of horror as proof for the ungivenness of God but rather as another way for it to be offered on its own terms. In silence, in concealment or unexpectedly, whatever form of event (revelation) took place, God's entire phenomenon may have been admitted to a lesser degree or not yet recognized authentically, but its givability is not doubted. In this way, there is no need for a mystical insight as the general frame of things include diverse degrees, sufficient enough to consider the occult as part of the making of our experience. The problem begins however, when individuals are unable to relate to this evasive partaking of the divinity and to consider it as a form of givenness, particularly while searching for God's thwarting of evil at times of atrocities.
- 21 On a metaphysical level, the most that can be said of Marion's account is that when we are put in a condition in which we are able to appreciate the given half full glass, we could also appreciate the half empty glass whenever it is reflected within. Insofar as we do not always attempt to anticipate it, leaving it free to determine its own becoming, we may surpass with Marion the deep distrust since Kant, namely, that any talk about such unknowns (noumena, ungivens) would be inevitably impossible since empty. But as Marion's thought offers an excellent corrective to such an idea by keeping the grounds of vagueness within the boundaries

of reality, I find that for his thought to be fully instructive, he must also admit to the possibility of unknowns that may never be given even when hindered by others. If not, the novelty of his theory contradicts its own philosophical as well as theological purposes because it remains bound up to a pre-fixed horizon. With Marion, we no longer say *what* would emerge, but we still say *how* it would emerge when placing everything within the range of the single axes of givenness.

- 22 But perhaps even more than other kinds of difficulties, what is most discriminating here is the paramount aim to determine our gatekeeper to the world via the defense of an absolute mode. On a historical level, the obvious risk is that it may rapidly seem as if one flagpole is simply replacing another and a dissolved aporia uncovers a second one so that along the multiple condemned propositions of a first principle in the history of philosophy, we are now offered the new refreshing but uncompromised option of givenness. It is particularly striking considering Marion's criticism of the metaphysical aspiration to conceive reality according to a *a priori* set of conditions for experience. At the same time, despite his requirement to abstract from the trap of a predetermining first principle in accepting the authority of givenness, put on a pedestal and solemnly entitled "last principle" (p. 23-27), the critical aspect of a single standpoint remains. I therefore believe that the last step for a real Marionian phenomenology would be to admit to the possibility of the ungiven. Or else, the philosopher commits the same disputed error of his predecessors (Husserl, Heidegger) by inscribing everything within the confinement of one type of framework instead of opening up to other unpredicted modalities and not only to unpredicted phenomena. The way is not less significant here than the content it brings along. And as I see it, it is the only manner to be true to the phenomenological "principle of non-presupposition" Marion himself promotes and which sets foot for the second move I am about to discuss.

Second Move: Starting from the end

- 23 In order to enhance the independent emergence of the given and abolish all prior obscuring guidance, Marion's phenomenological development calls for a second shift in perspective. After the first inversion that brought us closer to the bursting phenomena by freeing it from the criterion of appearance when focusing on its givenness, Marion seeks to go further in this procedure of deliverance. What he proposes is to recognize the autonomy of the manifesting phenomena in experience, obliging the philosophical approach to "undergo a reversal" that would place the starting point at the end (p. 26). This does not only signify that we must begin with the manifest rather than with the scrutinizing I, but that the way to do so is by divorcing the idea of correlation which is at the core of Husserl's phenomenological thought. I emphasize this transgression because Marion never ceases to claim his commitment to this school of thought. And indeed, it may be his way "of radicalizing phenomenology and driving it to excess", as John D. Caputo suggests, but it may also have a counter-effect (Caputo, 2007, p. 67). Advocating an equilibrated reciprocity, Husserl has defended the idea of correlation between the mind and the world, between the thing that appears and the conscious subject to which it appears. At the same time, even if the purpose was to think a correspondence freed from any discriminative hold by reflection, the background conditions of Husserl's phenomenological enterprise remained to be of a fundamentally detective sort. What I mean by detective is what Marion means by subjective, intentional, and transcendently *a priori* and what other thinkers as Emmanuel Levinas and Paul Ricoeur mean by an idealist or an intellectualist approach (*In Excess*, 2002, p. 11-13). In the course of their regained criticism, new forces entered the phenomenological arena seeking like Marion to avoid being disclosed to our subjective view. On this account, Marion's radical change relies primarily on the fact that if we were to proceed following the guideline of a first principle or of an anticipating consciousness and determine in advance our line of reciprocity, as Husserl was accused of

doing, we would deliberately miss the possibility that something may defy this line. We would miss the possibility of an unanticipated and true givenness. But most of all, we would deliberately ignore the fact that some things may not even enter our circumscribed molds and that another approach needs to be adopted. Marion's new picture suggests a means to overcome the impulses of controlling. Instead of focusing on the way our minds turn towards reality he asks us to *let experience speak for itself* in its most explosive manner. Accepting the appeal of what invites itself to our doorstep is a way of pushing the boundaries of reason in order to appreciate better the actual gushing reality without dismissing the input of our receptive intuition. The mind is obliged to agree with reality, and there is no better way than referring to an open air of occurrences allowing for a more true correspondence to life.

- 24 For that purpose, he instructs us to respect the true primacy, beginning with the manifest rather than with the inspecting mind in a "reversal of the *a priori* principle in favor of the *a posteriori*" (1994, p. 582). Putting forward the phenomena that may be intellectually brushed but which may also crash upon us unexpectedly, is a way to admit to the unlimited power of what is given without prior notice, of what occurs "where it will, when it will, and to whom it will" (*In Excess*, p. 38, 78). Opening up to the advent means allowing for it to reveal itself according to its own conditions, "without my authorization, by its own initiative" and independently of conceptual schemes that predefine standards of revelation, and later on established norms for interpretation (2005, p. 158). More critically it means that we should *not* even expect the unexpected, leaving room for the unforeseeable by totally assuming the tyranny and anarchy of what forces itself on us without warning. How then? Methodologically, such "open program" involves a deliberate philosophical choice requiring that we change our frame of reference. Such "enterprise", Marion explains, "consists in rendering to the phenomenon an incontestable priority: to let it appear no longer as it must [...], but as it gives itself" (*In Excess*, 2002, p. 25). Placing the starting point at the end thus becomes the major second motto of a philosopher on his way to a sweeping innovation of phenomenology. Rendering givenness its due by considering it "as the last criterion and as the absolute uninterrogated", is treating the most recent occurrence as the first to guide us further. Such change reflects the practical value of a principle qualified by Marion as last because it is said to follow the phenomenon rather than precede it, as Kevin Hart justly points out (2007, p. 19).
- 25 On the whole, the result of this second shift does not lead Marion back to Husserl's proposed *detour* which allows any manifestation to be seen by highlighting *retroactively* the backstage of the world (as described in the prior examples of the chair or the passer by). Instead, it offers an *inverted* perspective that begins with what gives itself without necessarily ever entirely being offered to us in intuition and without putting the condition that our mind must focus on it in order to have the experience of it. This shifted mode, which Marion calls in his early books *counter-intentionality*, borrowing the term from Levinas, and *anamorphosis* in his own theory of Saturated phenomena later on, exposes another major and subsequent alteration when going beyond phenomenology in order to follow a phenomenological theology (*In Excess*, 2002, p. 123-127; *Being Given*, 2002, p. 230). But before going further, let me summarize Marion's two radical inversions as follows: 1. Reversing the husserlian binome when placing the givenness of something before its appearance, thus including all types of manifestations (the seen and the unseeable) to enlarge the spectrum of possible experiences; 2. Taking then a step ahead to start from the "last principle" – givenness – and not from a selected first cause or foundation (respectively p. 2, 23-27; p. 213)¹⁷.

Second aporia: The Idol and the Orthodox Jew

- 26 In promoting the new authority of givenness, Marion does not only pay tribute to our era's celebration of the death of metaphysics (and its irreparable first principle). He does not only propose a significant corrective measurement to the phenomenological movement. What his

systematic philosophy mainly leads up to is a new field mentioned at the opening quotation, a field to which Marion himself refers to as the domain of the exceptional, or even the impossible, that suddenly makes sense since highlighted by its own engaging exposure. The upshot of the two united moves sets the tone: the pretense that the subject may be caught in his own intellectual set of expectations (intentions), thus reducing the spectrum of free interactions, is a good enough reason to search again for the right philosophical principle while proposing a change in the general approach. The tendency to dismiss certain moves while clinging to a potent principle is Marion's revisionist way to free phenomenology from its charges. *Marion's true to life phenomenology* with its true to life methods does not simply use the renewed criteria of givenness to determine the way we experience phenomena in general, but it does so from the viewpoint of a religious perspective. And though up to now I have exposed his thesis in a way that permits – in most parts - to strip it off from any theological facets, conforming to Marion's line of defense when claiming that his enterprise could stand from a strict philosophical point of view, his *way of demonstrating* this "principle of all principles" suggests however that it cannot uniformly apply to everyone (*Being Given*, 2002, p. 218).

27 The different types of counter-examples brought up in the first aporia, whether scientific (black holes) or religious (God) permitted to cast into doubt a modality that admits no exceptions. Exerting under a single rule, this approach testifies to the large range of predictable but also unpredictable arrivals. Though always, I claimed, operating under the auspices of "(the)-about-to-be-given", which seems to consist entirely of the inclination to regard the possible as potential, following a strong belief in the becoming of independent revelations of reality¹⁸. Such optimism in our relation to the phenomenal world, however, lacks balance. It seems to obey a paradigm that even though it is not based on belief, as Derrida's seemed to claim, it does obey a religious rationale when considering all things have the potential of being given. In presupposing that the occult (since cryptic and unknown) may manifest itself in various penetrative ways, Marion's "phenomenology of the invisible" shows that we no longer have to see in order to agree with something, but we still have to accept the possible effect of the obscure that charges itself on us on the basis of its given effect. It is therefore not surprising that "the religious phenomenon poses the question of the general possibility of the phenomenon", according to Marion, because if we may suspend all "conditions of visibility" and still admit the unseen within the circle of our interfaces, so can it be with any viewed phenomenon (2000, p. 176; 1991, p. 74). This is a crucial point because it sets the ground for considering any kind of experience through a chain of command that goes from the exceptional to the trivial. The question then remains: whether the guideline of such a paradigm does not escape the objectiveness required for a universal theory as it is no longer simply a matter of a single mode taking the lead, but of a high degree of sameness in our ability to welcome it. I mean by this that although such philosophical approach enlarges the scope of experiences we can now embrace, it does so by assuming that the triumphant domination of any given phenomenon destines each one of us to be responsive to it, actively or passively. But in fact, if the given is indeed self-imposed and thus sufficiently independent from any presupposition, is it equally independent from all conditions of possibility of the receiver? In other words, if something is given without reserve, does it also have to be accepted without reserve? From here on, we no longer doubt the mastery of the given but rather its ability to be received in the totally free manner Marion describes.

28 Towards this issue, Marion's theory of Saturated Phenomena is very enlightening. Its large spectrum of examples encompassing from the divine to the most mundane, demonstrates how the revelation pattern of the sacred may occur in the most ordinary instants of our human existence: experiencing esthetic astonishment at the sight of a painting, being inhabited in our flesh when undergoing suffering, having pleasure or growing old, being subjected to the

unpredictable in the course of an event we are planning, or feeling overwhelmed at the gaze of Christ. All these cases, and more, have in common the capability of disrupting the intentional depicting mind in a paralyzing manner that prevents from transforming their manifest into something intelligible. Their excess is attributed not to the element itself (for example the object-painting) but rather to the way it happens to us, to its givenness. Overshadowed by surprise and the extend of its occurrence, our intuition finds itself saturated by an uncontainable amount of meaning that it cannot convert into pure and simple understanding. Every attempt to define or represent to oneself what is unfolded in that moment would always leave out an aspect of such unpredictable (the event, the feeling body), unrepresentable (the icon, the idol, the face) and unseeable (God) phenomena, which are imposed on us beyond imagination.

29 In this vast topography, I deliberately chose a Christian-associated phenomenon as the hallmark of my concluding discussion for it testifies to the troubling contrast between the universal aspiration and a particularistic demonstration. The Idol and the painting, exemplifying the second type of saturated phenomena, share the same practice (*In Excess*, 2002, p. 54-81). Undergoing an aesthetic but also a religious experience of looking at something that can never be objectified, despite being contained in a physical element, we realize that what we look at is not simply captivated in a frame and some colors. Observing the idol in the church or the painting in the museum, we soon notice that the intensity of the experience dazzles us until we have to return to it again and again in a vain attempt to exhaust what we see. Our captivated look reveals the power of the painting's radiance on us, confusing and thus blinding our mind in such a way that we cannot inscribe what we see in a fully apprehended representation. "The maximum of intuitive intensity that I can endure while keeping my look on a distinctly visible spectacle" shows the disturbing irruption of what comes out of the object I observe, in a fascination that exceeds what the mind may contain (p. 61). Opening to what infiltrates us unwillingly, "only to let us be affected by the extravagant rhapsody of the accident as it happens", is Marion's manner of solving the old epistemological problem of thinking the unconceivable (p. 55). In such a situation, we interact intuitively with something while being blinded by its sight. In spite of this illuminating possibility and although Marion has made a clear effort in this late analysis of *In Excess* to secularize the example of the idol, stripping it from the religious references in the earlier texts by making it purely equivalent to any admired painting, one question must still be raised: may the Jewish believer ever see in the idol what Marion sees in it? Would a person embedded with the interdiction of the second commandment, forbidding the creation and worship of idols, be ever overwhelmed at its sight? "Name your idol, and you will know who you are", says Marion (p. 61). In other words, name what exceeds you and you will know your limitations as well as what you are capable of. The problem with this dictum begins when a person cannot at all feel concerned by the frame of reference of what is supposed to define him.

30 Any manifestation of a phenomenon, and particularly of a saturated phenomenon, calls for interpretation. And even if one agrees with Marion that, in saturation, the resulting astonishment and conceptual deficit are so large that an endless hermeneutics is required to address the situation. In such case, bracketing all historical beliefs (Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, etc.) in order to embrace the event of the given, requires putting into brackets the Christian hermeneutics of the text as well. This is something Marion consciously chooses not to do, even though his critics consider it deeply undermines his project. Nevertheless, as noted previously, what makes things difficult here is not the ambition to introduce a rigorous and universal approach, marked by the language of the cross. As Richard Kearney, who has been in dialogue with Marion for many years now, pointed to me, Marion's reference to Christianity should be deployed as mere *scaffoldings* that are intended to inspire the move rather than to promote a theological development. Hence, we may very well use his Christian paradigms (saturated phenomena) as inspirations for interpreting the revelation of deeper levels of reality, where

the role of a phenomenology of religious is to serve as a “privileged index” for all types of experiences (200, p. 177). And indeed, I have already demonstrated elsewhere how the traditional await for Elijah the prophet during the Jewish Passover obeys the same setting of saturation (Bustan, 2009, p. 161-171). But while it seems to me that in using a language that is not confessionally neutral Marion may indeed be using Christian theology as scaffolding, the problem lying at our path is that he is also using it as *rationale*. No matter which prototype we chose, the free awakening they invoke still presumes an *innocent* welcoming of their landing and an unquestionable ability to receive the given, as if nothing that existed before their arrival could stop them from penetrating us. Ideally Marion is right: the mere possibility of being stunned by a singular palpitating manifestation of something which displaces the subject away from the familiar, is an open possibility. Just so do revelations that are at the basis of religious conversions or of pivotal moments in a person’s life. But since the immense map of relations he is drawing with the modality of givenness takes place practically every day, ignoring the predisposing role of our identity at the time of the encounter, is like ignoring who we are and what we bring into the situation. According to Marion, in facing the manifestation of the saturated phenomenon one is numb, struck, paralyzed, even to the extent, in the case of the revelation of God, that one must be Wittgensteinian and remain silent if one cannot speak. At the same time, if the alterity of the given expresses itself in a form of total tyranny, considering that a phenomenology of the mystic and the sublime cannot be avoided, neither can the anthropological context within which it occurs. The fact that one person is sublimed by the beauty of the blooming flower while another remains indifferent; the fact that a believer may be profoundly affected with the train of sensations at the site of an icon; or the fact that a Jewish person may be deeply moved by the view of the Star of David on the ruined wall of a demolished synagogue; all show that any type of manifestation has a variable value which does not only depend on the exposure to the given phenomenon but is equally defied by the rich background of *meanings* we carry along. Insomuch as there is no interference with our prior constitution, the given phenomena have the infinite potential of playing the role of vertiginous revelations in landing on a level plane. But when our receptivity finds itself at conflict with the given, as in the case of the Orthodox Jew facing the icon, then the priority of the given may certainly be disputed. At the very least there is an interaction and an authentic response, but never a total revocation of the prime receiving self. On this respect, I doubt that the key element of givenness serves us all equally, especially when it comes to the religious phenomena Marion describes.

31 Coming to the end of my claims about the aporias of the ungiven and the predisposed receiver, there is one last consequence that we need to address. In Marion’s picture, givenness is invincible and everything is measured against its positive form. Speaking then of God, we cannot but ask whether Marion is right and any debate on the ungiven is limited by the fact that something of it is always given to us, even if in the minimal way of raising his name. At the same time, in our assessment of the independent modality of the ungiven, what is considered is what we give to ourselves –by imagining thy, thinking of thy, believing in thy, which in itself remains out of reach. All along, it is God we think of here, and whether his genuine possibility in our world is given to us or rather by us. Here again, the consequence of the absolute account of givenness goes beyond the discussion on Marion’s phenomenology, leading us back to the challenging matters of knowing the unknown.

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Notes

1 Those familiar with the French Debate probably recall that it was Jacques Derrida who raised the concern about the independence of the giver. In this paper I will be raising a different concern, asking whether the universal principle raised by Marion is sufficiently neutral so as to allow a reception independent from the receiver’s condition (portrayed here by the orthodox Jew). See KEARNY Richard, “On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion”, in Caputo and Scanlon (éd.), *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, p. 54-78; and Derrida’s responses pages 42 and 98.

2 In 1989, Marion published the first book in his phenomenological trilogy, *Reduction and Givenness – Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger and Phenomenology*. To the objections that follow during the polemics of 1991-1992 in France about – among others - his usage of the German phenomenological term *Gegebenheit* and about his decision to translate the term into *Donation* (in French) or *Givenness* (in English), Marion answers in detail in his second book from 1997: MARION Jean-Luc, *Being Given – toward a phenomenology of givenness*, op. cit., in particular pages 61-70. An insisting reference to Husserl’s vocabulary, we find again in the third book of the trilogy, first published in 2001. See, MARION Jean-Luc, *In Excess*, op. cit., p. 21.

3 My addition in parenthesis.

4 The polemics begun with Dominique Janicaud's book entitled *The theological Turn of the French Phenomenology* (1991), published in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2000. In this English translation, Janicaud's text is followed by key articles of towering figures that took part in the debate and is enlighteningly described in an introduction by the translator Bernard G. Prusak. Derrida's critique is addressed separately in: "On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion", in Caputo and Scanlon, eds. *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, p. 54-78.

5 See the connection made by Marion himself in *Being Given*, op. cit., §24, p. 236; Derrida expressed his view in a debate with Marion, moderated by Richard Kearny, at the conference "Religion and Postmodernism" in September 1997 at Villanova University. See notes in the introduction of Bernard G. Prusak: *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, op. cit., p. 6.

6 For Derrida, to think of it as unbiased is to conceive of a given independently of a giver, which is not always easy to satisfy.

7 See the first chapter of *In-Excess*, and in particular p. 21-22.

8 The author is quoting here from the discussion of Alexius Meinong on the theory of the object; MEINONG, *Über Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie* (Leipzig, Barth, 1904), in *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Rudolf Haller and Rudolf Kindlinger (Graz: Akademische Druck – u. Verlagsanstalt, 1968-1978), vol. 1; *Théorie de l'objet*, trans. Jean-François Courtine and Marc de Launay (Paris, J. Vrin, 1999), respectively §4, p. 74 and §6, p. 83.

9 See further Tanner Katheryn, "Theology at the Limits of Phenomenology", in *Counter Experiences – Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart, Notre Dame Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, p. 208.

10 This explains Marion's resistance to translate *Gegebenheit* into *présence* (presence), as Robyn Horner remarks. Marion is indebted here to Heidegger who does not consider the two terms as equivalent, though his reasons are different since Marion wishes to defend the possibility of an absent that may still be given, consequently saving us from the of flagrant substantiality in philosophy. See *In-Excess* p. xii and p. 24. About the givenness of nonbeings, see MARION Jean-Luc, *Being Given*, op. cit., p. 245-247.

11 See also *Being Given*, op. cit., p. 11.

12 Invited talk in the Seminar of Prof. Jocelyn Benoist at the Ecole Normale Supérieure on March 14th 2009, entitled "Esquisse d'une généalogie pré-métaphysique de la donation"; See also, Marion, *In-Excess*, op. cit., p. 20-21.

13 In favoring the unconditional, universal, surprising and imposing (modality of) givenness, one no longer emphasizes his commitment to a philosophy that bases itself on what is validly given in intuition, but rather to a philosophy that goes beyond the evident to consider the given that takes hold of us, exceeding whatever any human mind can process. Such givens are precisely what Marion calls the saturated phenomenon where the actual revelation of God is displayed as the saturated phenomenon par excellence. In the hierarchy constructed by Marion, we observe five types of such phenomena: from the event in its daily or majestic form, to the idol (or painting), the feeling body, the icon and the Divine Revelation.

14 The present paper developed from my lecture "The Intersection of Two Worlds: On Givenness in the Hebraic Context", delivered at the Van-Leer Institute in Jerusalem on the 21st of January 2008. Prof. Gabriel Motzkin hosted the colloquium "On givenness" dedicated to Marion's thought. I would like to thank Prof. Motzkin for his comments and contribution to this paper during the colloquium. I would also like to thank Dr. Itzhak Benyamini for his comments.

15 The richness of experience and the detailed analysis we find both in *Being Given* (1997) and *In-xcess* (2001) have already taught us that we may have a sense of something by ways of another. And of course, with the theory of Saturated Phenomena other mediating attempts show how the unexpected landing of undisclosed phenomena allows us to appreciate them despite their retained obscurity.

16 Very early on Marion associates his belief in the wide open measurement of givenness with the surpassing of the infinite horizon of the world in phenomenology, regrettably attributed, he says, to the limiting context of the mind and its endless potentiality to access whatever would appear to our thought or action. However, what I affirm here is that considering its full nature, the idea of an open perspective is kept by Marion, while being liberated from the subordination to the mental and to the phenomenological belief of a given within the restricting range of the mental flux; See, *In-Excess*, op. cit., p. 106-111.

17 In Husserl's phenomenology, the first spot is attributed to our consciousness, considered as the leading torch in our relation with the world as it is the one intending at and thus identifying the given. Privileging the manifest, as Marion suggests, requires from us to clear out the way and abandon our guardian post

so that every phenomenon that surges forth may be considered as true pioneer for our correspondence with the world.

18 Marion speaks of “positive potentiality”, see *Being Given*, op. cit., p. 107.

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À propos de l'auteur

Smadar Bustan

University of Luxembourg

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Résumé

Cet article expose la nouveauté de l'approche de Jean-Luc Marion à travers une définition de deux mouvements méthodologiques majeurs, comprenant sa thématisation élargie de la « donation », comme mode le plus fondamental de l'expérience. Néanmoins, ces contributions philosophiques nous posent deux problèmes principaux : celui d'ignorer la possibilité du non-donné, et celui d'ignorer l'impact de notre arrière-plan anthropologique, culturel et religieux lors de notre rencontre avec les phénomènes donnés. Tout au long, c'est à Dieu que nous pensons, se demandant si sa vraie possibilité dans le monde nous est donnée ou plutôt si nous nous la donnons.

Jean-Luc Marion

Remarques sur les questions posées par Smadar Bustan

- 1 Excellente traductrice de mon travail, Smadar Bustan en est aussi un bon interprète. Et comme telle, elle déploie une lecture que je ne peux qu'enregistrer, donc prendre en considération comme un développement *volens nolens* de mes analyses. Mais, précisément parce que je m'instruis de cette lecture, je crois pouvoir lui adresser quelques brèves remarques.
- 2 Le point essentiel tient sans doute à la conception du phénomène saturé et d'abord du donné, qui commande tout le reste. J'ai soutenu et je l'espère par des arguments, qu'aucun phénomène ne pourrait se montrer, s'il ne se donnait pas d'abord. Et de fait, chaque phénomène se donne, de quelque manière que ce soit. Husserl inclut dans le donné jusqu'au non-sens et à la contradiction, sans parler de l'impossibilité empirique. Heidegger a exposé que même le néant se donnait comme phénomène (par exemple dans l'angoisse). On peut et doit donc soutenir que rien ne se soustrait à un donné, à la donation comme donné, sitôt que nous pouvons, même *minima*, en parler. Bergson argumentait que l'idée de néant elle-même résulte d'une négation de la positivité originaire. Sans parler ici de négation (au sens logique), j'accepte l'argument. En ce sens, le non-donné, si nous pouvons en discuter (et tel est le cas, comme le prouve Smadar Bustan ici même), relève encore et toujours d'une donation : sinon, nous n'en discuterions même pas. J'avais exposé que le non-donné (le néant, la mort, etc.) renvoie toujours à un donné et qu'il vaut mieux alors parler de dé-négation que de non-donné ou de donation négative (voir Marion, 1997, §5, p. 79 *sq.*).
- 3 Rapporté à la question religieuse de l'idolâtrie et d'un Dieu non imaginable, ni concevable (dans la Révélation juive et donc chrétienne), il faut donc dire que Dieu se donne *comme* l'invisible, l'inimaginable, l'inconcevable, etc., précisément par l'opération que j'avais thématiquement sous le titre de dé-nomination (voir Marion, 2001, c.VI). Il n'y a là aucune exception et difficulté particulière : la piété respecte l'altérité du Saint en s'*imposant* de ne pas prendre la donation de l'inaccessible pour une disponibilité, mais au contraire pour l'épreuve de son indisponibilité. D'ailleurs tout phénomène saturé implique, plus qu'une expérience, une contre-expérience, où le témoin ne constitue aucun objet. L'idolâtrie suppose au contraire qu'on méconnaisse l'excès du donné comme donné.
- 4 Il faut, en effet, bien considérer que si tout ce qui se montre se donne, tout ce qui se donne ne se montre pas pour autant (Marion, 1997, §6). Cette différence tient à ce que ce qui se donne se donne comme un appel invisible et anonyme, qui ne peut se rendre manifeste qu'à la mesure de la réponse, disons du réflexe (de la réflexion comme sur un écran) de celui (l'adonné) qui le reçoit. Dans certains cas (phénomènes pauvres ou de droit commun), tout le donné se rend par cette réponse visible ; mais dans le cas de phénomènes saturés et par excellence d'un phénomène de révélation (donc le premier et ultime d'entre eux, la Révélation), la manifestation de ce qui se donne dans ce qui se montre reste limitée, voire s'estompe presque totalement. Toute la question consistant à savoir jusqu'où va ce « presque ». Ici la vision intuitive le cède, non par défaut mais par excès d'intuition, à ce qu'on a coutume de désigner sous le nom de « foi ». Et qu'il faudrait mieux sans doute nommer autrement : par exemple l'*endurance* ou la *résistance*. Ce qui ne peut se montrer autant qu'il se donne ne s'en donne pas moins. Et la piété de la pensée rejoint ici la pensée de la piété, pour s'appliquer à laisser se manifester autant que nous le pouvons *supporter* ce qui se donne sans mesure, donc à notre démesure.
- 5 Comme je tente de le démontrer dans mon dernier ouvrage, la phénoménalité de la donation peut (et souvent doit) aboutir à des certitudes *negatives* (Marion, 2010).

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À propos de l'auteur

Jean-Luc Marion

Université Paris-Sorbonne & Université de Chicago

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