Being and the Ethic of Intentionality:
Return to Original Sin

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Abstract:
In one of his best known works, Being-Given, Marion argues for the anonymity of giving that wishes to avoid the dangers of intentionality, its known objectifying power in relation to the unassumable essence of things. But while attempting to avoid intentionality in the guise of promoting the ethicality of transcendence and even going beyond it—he also argues that ethics is not what comes first, as it presupposes something even more fundamental. It is in this sense that when Marion speaks of givenness he is in fact arguing, contrary to his own claim, that intentionality makes givenness possible. In religion and theology this breach is often associated with the engendering of sin; against this we propose an ethic of sin based on the unsubstitutable primacy of intentionality.

Keywords:
Marion, Heidegger, Being, anonymity of giving, original sin

The phenomenality of intentionality

We contend here that for something of an act to make "exception to objectness and givenness" intentionality must be left unproblematized if not problematized to a negligible degree.[1] Marion's proposal for a new phenomenology strongly indicates that this has been the intrinsic direction of his way of phenomenology. The direction to which his phenomenology leads is obvious from the start in terms of his raising the possibility of "making exception to objectness and givenness" for phenomenology to become a rigorous science. This exception is understood as itself a certain form of capacity—capacity to exceed intentionality in the sense of rendering it insignificant. But it runs into another paradox: if exposing intentionality is no longer the chief purpose of phenomenology, what then is left for phenomenology? Perhaps, it is the exposition of anonymity, that which exceeds intention.

The emphasis on the anonymous is not without a history. The return to anonymity indicates an act to which *epoché* returns after leveling the presuppositions of knowledge into primordial intentionality, which is the founding act of the self. But this return is done in order to avoid intending the same world it created by announcing the dangers of self-creation, by underscoring its responsibility for the problems besetting the modern world. At first, this sounds like an ethical admonition, but Marion is quick to clarify that even ethicality presupposes something even more fundamental.

Marion radicalizes the legacy of phenomenology by orienting its aim towards the exposition of intentionality within the founding anonymity of the act in the sense that intention presupposes it. Opposite the transcendental ego that Husserl proposed, he advances the unsubstitutable anonymity of the act that cannot be accessed by thought and language. Nonetheless, he is also aware that phenomenology cannot dispense with intentionality without risking the relevance of its discipline. Husserl's transcendental ego is the strongest proof of that—an ego that escapes material intentionality but that favors an intentionality that imagines itself transcending the subject-object duality, though still not in the proper order of the ethical. In any case, intentionality can underwrite itself insofar as it is still free, though presumably this time as more careful and discreet in light of the dangers and problems that intentionality helped create in the historical adventures of the cogito. Intentionality in this case undergoes an inversion in the form of reducing its own efficacy—from an efficient percipient agency into simply the receiver of that which gives. That which gives can simply be expressed as the unassumable, which approximates the beyond of the transcendence of the cogito and its empirical creations, as well as the paradoxes it engenders. In our view, however, that which gives, this unassumable, is still a certain kind of intention, one that does not participate in the cogitative, conative and affective acts of intending knowledge and action. For Marion, nonetheless, this intention is strictly anonymous.

[1] Jean-Luc Marion, "Answers," in *Being Given. Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. by Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 5.

As anonymous, that which gives is qualified as the *gift*. That which gives supposes the phenomenality of giving, which in turn supposes the founding event of the gift. The awareness of the gift in this sense is the only phenomenality that thought can ever qualify with regard to givenness. Thought can only qualify as much, in view of the inexhaustibility of that which gives, of the unassumable, vis-à-vis the claims of positive knowledge. The latter presumes to have exhausted that which gives in the givens, through the technical precision of the sciences that does not however touch on the basic question—what gives this giving that may be discovered in and through the given/s? Heidegger earlier proposed it is Being, *es gibt*, in an attempt to restore the privileged theme of phenomenology from the unquestioned determinacy of the intentionality (of Man) that assumes the character of Being to its proper grounding in fundamental ontology which states that Man is "not the starting point."[2] This is somewhat close to Levinas's argument. For Levinas, Being supposes an alterity, its Other, a being otherwise-than-being.[3] It is not that alterity precedes being, or that the other comes first before being but that alterity is the mode of being of being itself. Being is being-other, an alterity in the realm of being. For his part, Marion would reformulate alterity into the unqualifiedness of giving that does not announce its giving, that is to say, devoid of the subjective content that goes with giving such as the intention behind it.[4] As the mode of being itself, alterity redefines the meaning of Being. In the sense of that which gives, alterity gives Being a secured place away from the determination of subjectivity, and hence, the ontological integrity of Being. Now as ontically bereft to a certain degree, Being can assume a perfect sense of givenness, "perfect" relative to the weakening of intentionality.

Preontologically, Being gives itself to recognition as such, but only to the extent that it only gives its indeterminacy. It is this indeterminacy that phenomenology seeks to investigate, that which fundamental ontology attempts to ground. The *aporias* of phenomenology and fundamental ontology with respect to Being are quite familiar to us now: what they have discovered is the Being whose only essence is that it gives itself in the given. Being becomes Being-given, just being in the ontological sense, but also, and most originarily, the being that gives itself to phenomenality that makes an ontological investigation possible. The circularity is tortuously tenacious that it has to settle once again in the hermeneutic circle, which in the final analysis, depends on the dutiful, careful and judicious attitude of the researcher, the thinker, and the investigator, to not assume more than what the given offers in itself. Once again we are back to the intentionality of the phenomenologist, to an intentionality that is ethically improved. Nevertheless, as we emphasized, Marion wishes to exceed ethicality for the simple reason that it has the tendency

[2] Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, trans. by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 208.

[3] See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991).

[4] Marion, *Being Given*, 296-300.

to re-enact intentionality. It is not enough that the researcher knows his or her limits; rather the limits must be effaced once and for all. One way to do this is to assume, and here intentionality refuses to be silenced, that that which gives *gives* nothing in the given.

Nihilism and Epistemic Certitude: The Cycle of Distress and Hope

The givenness of the Being-given insofar as it is anonymous precedes and exceeds its recognizability in the realm of phenomenality, in thought and language. Marion observes:

"Givenness opens as the fold of the given: the gift given insofar as it gives itself in terms of its own event. Givenness unfolding itself articulates the gift given (eventually without origin, genealogy, or dependence—it matters little) along the progress of its advent (obscured by the first, or retained, or simply unknowable—it matters little).

By dint of this ambiguity, it is all the more a matter of the essence of givenness. Absent one of these two sides of the fold, the entire question of givenness immediately disappears...."[5]

The removal of either of the two sides of the fold—either the ontic or the ontological in Heidegger's ontological difference between beings and Being, or the phenomenon or essence of the anonymity of givenness would finally occasion the condition of possibility for inverting the difficulty of understanding *Gegebenheit*. Marion however clarifies:

"Now, such a hypothesis seems doubly problematic: first, because a phenomenon that does not give itself seems very likely to be a contradiction, or at least an exception; next, because even if one could justify these exceptions phenomenologically, they no doubt would not modify the rule that the phenomenon is implicated in the givenness that delivers it originarily as a given."[6]

The "exceptions" that Marion talked about in terms of going around the contradictions that a phenomenology of givenness may consciously or accidentally generate owing to the immanent limitations of thought and language are those which by dint of their ambiguous relation to the appearance of the gift as given paradoxically bring about a situation in which the aporias of framing *Gegebenheit* may be finally resolved. This resolution comes, at last, after an exhaustive phenomenological incursion into the protected anonymity of givenness, in the non-beingness of the giver and the givee of the gift, as well as in the non-beingness of time that gives itself also to historical recognition. This giving happens so that its non-being may be framed in being as an exception, that is, as "a presence intelligible in and through itself, a subsistence without provenance...a present puri-

[5] Ibid., 66.
[6] Ibid.

fied of all givenness."[7] This pure presence is the utmost limit that thought and language can reach with respect to framing the truly unconstitutable, unsayable, and ungraspable in being. That there are exceptions adds to the fact that the phenomenon of givenness is inexhaustible: *"It is no longer a question of knowing if one can and should think the phenomenon in terms of givenness, but if one can still think it without givenness."*[8] In short, pure presence becomes the exception understood as that which gives by not giving itself.

Marion clarifies here that the given is nothing that gives and is nothing given despite its necessary entry into the realm of phenomenality—necessary to the extent that it gives itself to phenomena recognizable to thought.[9] But as phenomenon, the field of signification stays within the dimension of paradoxes, and is where thought and language conspire to pull the givenness out of its non-recognizability, so that givenness may still be recognized in terms of the given or the givens.[10] Givenness will then be recognized as showing itself, appearing itself in the phenomenal world—specifically, a world that can only be constituted by thought and language in the form of representing, totalizing, or objectifying the phenomenality of appearing, of that which gives in light of the given/s—to which that which shows shows itself, as a result of the acquired and progressive transparency of the self to itself, a self-concretion in acting or willing, initiating the signifying of givenness. This is what is called the phenomenological act or intentionality in contrast to the ethicality of transcendence that dispenses with intentions. Against this, Marion proposes a view beyond ethicality. He states: *"The givenness of the gift does not depend on ethics, but inversely, ethics no doubt supposes the givenness of the gift."*[11] This statement would indicate that the transcendence of ethics in the realm of human relations remains a secondary phenomenality, in fact, inferior to the perfect absence of subjective content in the original phenomenality of givenness. This anonymity, this sexless, faceless, nonhuman presupposition is the condition of the possibility of ethics, so to speak. Needless to say, the chief point of Marion's critique of the ethicality of transcendence is the limitation of the ethical translation of givenness itself that has preoccupied the philosophical tradition since the ancients.[12]

In this light, Marion identified three historical translations of givenness that has saturated the field of phenomenon, the field of fulfillability of achieving a correct under-

[7] Ibid., 67.

[8] Ibid., emphasis mine.

[9] "Phenomenon is implicated in the givenness that delivers it originarily as a given." Ibid., 66.

[10] Ibid., 224.

[11] Ibid., 88; emphasis mine.

[12] See Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 117-19.

standing of givenness in Western philosophy. These are, namely, the theological, the metaphysical, and the phenomenological.[13] These historical translations correspond to interlocking events in the history of philosophy—the ancient, the medieval (the supremacy of the metaphysical and the theological) and recent history (the explorations of the phenomenological and its continuing influence on philosophy and science). These three historical translations may also qualify as expositions of the two-thousand-year-old or more history of saturating the field of phenomena in the effort of translating givenness (since the time of the Presocratics). This saturation has led to nihilism, the self-assertion of intentionality as the engine of signifying givenness in the realm of phenomena. In the recent history of philosophy the problematic of self-assertion has given way to the re-invention of the concept of the self in the ethicality of transcendence, which among its other manifestations, imposes on the self a set of duties and responsibilities that must accompany self-assertion. For his part, Marion proposes self-emptying as a counter-saturation, an ethic of self-emptying in terms of the Christian notion of love, such as expressed in the practice of the virtue of charity. Ultimately, Marion places the phenomenality of love within the context of that which gives, namely, the gift. That which gives is love in its highest degree, noting the proximity of this formulation to the ancient understanding of *philosophia* as love of wisdom. But wisdom other than the intelligible for even the intelligible is representational, thus, intentional. Other than the intelligible this love can be expressed as intuition. Seen in this light, Marion clarifies the meaning of intuition as a paradox:

"The fundamental characteristic of the paradox lies in the fact that intuition sets forth a surplus that the concept cannot organize, therefore that the intention cannot foresee. As a result, intuition is not bound to and by the intention, but is freed from it, establishing itself now as a free intuition (*intuition vaga*). Far from coming after the concept and therefore following the thread of the intention (aim, foresight, repetition), intuition subverts, therefore precedes, every intention, which it exceeds and decenters. The visibility of the appearance thus arises against the flow of the intention—whence the paradox, the counter-appearance, the visibility running counter to the aim."[14]

This paradox is all the more compelling in the Christian notion of charity.

The deficit of existence

In Marion as it is in Christian theology, charity is a form of self-emptying; it is the

[13] Marion discussed these three folds of givenness in Book II, *The Gift*, section 7, 71-74 against the background of the question whether his phenomenology of the Being-given, or the Gift itself revives a transcendence that has borne the infamies of the claim to universalism.

[14] Marion, "*The Given II*," in *Being Given*, 225.

actualization of the phenomenality of giving which objectifies giving within the non-intentionality of giving in the sense of giving without intending the gift. But the gift can scandalize the non-intentionality of giving by exposing the intentionality of giving in the last instance: Charity always presupposes a struggle to repress a desire for recognition and restitution. The more magnanimous one's act of charity is, the more intense this desire will challenge self-restraint. The higher the stakes are the better for the self to prove that it is worthy to repress the "I" and eliminate its tempting offer of recognition, of the restitution of the "I." In Christianity the ultimate model of this charity is God's sacrifice of His begotten Son; in short, God is the perfect model of self-emptying, the ultimate non-I. His self-emptying starts history proper where the propriety proper to it is the self-transcendence of God that makes human history possible.

History reveals nonetheless that this historical act of charity has become a weapon of oblivion. Against this charity Giorgio Agamben has a counter-offer. As Agamben notes, charity imposes a lifestyle that

"Consists...in the decision to remain in a deficit of existence, to appropriate the power to not-be as a substance and a foundation beyond existence; or rather (and this is the destiny of morality), to regard potentiality itself, which is the most proper mode of human existence, as a fault that must always be repressed."[15]

The deficit in question supposes the anonymity of givenness that Man will never fully represent or objectify. In filling up the deficit, a surplus of "being with exception" arises, an exceptional being that Nietzsche detected as the agency of the will to power. Nonetheless, this deficit of being in existence is said to be naturally given to the gifted (Marion's agency of the giving and receiving) as an opportunity to make an act of charity. Here, the deficit becomes publicly ascertained, and the gifted gazes at this form of privation, this poverty of being in response to a call. It may respond to a call for charity in the manner of exercising a victorious power over the deficit by means of giving love and life. The deficit brings itself to the attention of an impotent gifted, to one who is, ironically enough, aware of the total impotence of charity. Nonetheless, the gifted responds to the call by diverting its historicality into the ahistoricality of the response. Elsewhere, Marion emphasized this ahistoricality in terms of "the gift that decides the giver (who is gifted)."[16] In this sense "the gift does not coincide with anything real."[17]

[15] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 35.

[16] See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and The Revealed*, trans. by Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Pres,, 2008), 92.

[17] Ibid.

By responding to the call of the gift—the call that decides who is to give, and also, who is supposed to receive it—the gifted believes he has triumphed over his impotence; he believes that he has defeated the temptation to-be, and to make restitution for the act of giving. In Marion, both the giver and the givee (in essence united under the notion of the gifted: to give and to receive necessarily involve a participation in the phenomenon of givenness, each is as gifted as the other) are phenomenologically united within the ahistoricality of the response to an otherwise historical call. Because it is first and last a historical call, the ahistoricality of the response (anonymous response) is at best rhetorically posed.

Seen in the above light, the supposed anonymity of giving would rather qualify as a hedonistic form of self-emptying, at least in the time of modernity, or the time of gift-giving[18] , which, as Agamben argues, is made "infinitely susceptible to being tempted."[19] That is to say, tempted to proclaim, recognize, and appropriate the gift by either giving it or receiving it with "aim, foresight and repetition," as Marion describes "the thread of intention." In both ways the gift aims to ignore the impotence of either the giver or the givee—by having been already decided by the gift—by tempting each to celebrate a *"victorious struggle of a power to be against a power to not-be"*[20] in terms of the material offer of the gift: on the one hand, the stature and power of the giver may be enhanced in and through the act of giving; on the other hand, the givee's circumstances in life may be improved by receiving the gift. The time of modernity—the time of gift-giving as Derrida earlier broached upon—approximates Marion's saturated phenomenon which to him must rather occasion a return to an original intuition by means of bracketing the intuitions of the "principle of all principles."[21] This original intuition is the anonymous phenomenality of the Being-given the fundamental awareness of which is supposed to deliver the subject, the I, from a nihilistic appropriation of the Being-given, from the positivity of the power to-be, accompanied by a victorious feeling of overcoming a deficit of Being in and through the gift. For Marion the deficit in question must suppose the anonymity of givenness that Man will never fully represent or objectify, which shifts the burden of the evidence of givenness from intentionality to the phenomenality of anonymous bestowal and recipience.

On the side of the gifted, the gifted gives or awards life and love to the other (the givee) who wallows in historical deficits, mainly, those that, Marion argues, belong in the order of the phenomena that suffer from a "shortage of givenness."[22] "Phenomena," he adds, "are characterized by the finitude of givenness in them," which explains why any intentional aim that operates on the phenomenological level of experience will always be "disappointed."[23] This disappointment applies much to the gifted though different in na-

[18] See Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Wills (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[19] Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 31.

[20] Ibid, 31.

[21] Marion, *Being Given*, 10.

[22] Ibid., 31.

[23] Ibid.

ture and degree. The gifted who awards life cannot be anonymous because the recipient of a life-giving act is situated in phenomena whose shortage of givenness, of the fundamental recognition of the non-intentionality of giving, is susceptible to misrecognizing the gift as intentional.[24] To the same degree the *call* that calls the gifted "without any other identification of origin"[25] cannot be other than anonymous.

But let us pretend here that the call *calls* in silence, for instance, in the silence of prayer as a response to a call whose origin the gifted who prays/responds cannot claim to know. He cannot claim to know the origin of the call because, ironically, its origin had been decided beforehand, before he could even pretend to not know. It was already historically decided, in oblivion—this historical decision to perpetuate oblivion. He could not also claim to know vis-a-vis the enormity of the task of and the utter frustration involved in uncovering the long history of this oblivion, an 'oblivion' that is saturated by competing intentionalities that have the capabilities to disguise themselves as 'presence'. It is in this light that to differentiate absence from presence, a temptation to uncover the kernel that constitutes the paradoxes subsisting between these terms that sustain historical oblivion, to seek to fill up the deficit that accrues upon this paradoxicality by unveiling the intentional, and hence historical conditions of privation in order that happiness (*eudaimonia*) may be attained, is to challenge the powers that perpetuate the nihilism of history. The temptation we speak of here belongs, once again, in the order of the phenomena where "shortage of givenness" encourages intentionality, initiative, selfishness, and aggression that Nietzsche describes altogether as the "will to power," and yet a power that enables life in the sense that it uncovers the negative conditions for the pursuit of *eudaimonia*. In general these negative conditions are oblivious to the historical character of willing. To uncover and seek happiness is therefore already to accuse the power behind the perpetuation of historical oblivion, that which aims to protect the sacred unsubstitutable ahistoricality of the call and its origin, no less the essence of Marion's anonymity of giving. To exercise the will-to-know in this light, and also in light of exposing one's intention to award life or love to the givee, or one's struggle to uncover the oblivion of Being, that which complements *aletheia* that Heidegger assigns to philosophy's fundamental task, and finally, the pursuit of happiness (by filling up a deficit), is considered blasphemous. Blasphemy: it is the courage to stand up to historical oblivion that has assumed of late a unique phenomenality in the guise of *Gegebenheit*.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Or the being that responds to an anonymous call; to a nameless voice. Marion, *Being Given*, 266, also, 296-300.

The return to the original sin: rejecting anonymity

To Marion, only by recourse to the phenomenology of revelation can givenness be phenomenologically constituted as the givens of the fulfillability of ethical transcendence. They can be discovered only to the extent that the gifted accepts the immeasurableness of

the task in and through the exercise of a love without concupiscence, without intentionality, devoid of the instincts of power. But love without ecstasy is love incurably impotent, a love that has already decided on the fate of freedom. This is how the phenomenology of revelation claims to make love, modeled on kenosis as its privileged theme.

Kenosis symbolizes the anonymity of givenness in that the partial relinquishment of Christ's divinity in order to become man yields a being with exception, but whose exception it decides to seal off from the temptations of power. Kenotic love is thus different from the love of an accusatorial being whose love is blasphemous, perverted, pornographic, and sinful in the sense of an ex-positional ek-sistence, exposing what truly obstructs a phenomenological *scene* from disclosing itself to the gaze of being (ob-scene).

As Marion would have it, kenosis is the basic motive for understanding the phenomenality of givenness, the givenness of the death of God that makes human love possible at all. But as a basic motive, *kenosis* blocks the self-engendering of being as accusatorial and blasphemous from fulfilling its ecstatic urges, which provide the turning point for the ex-positional ek-sistent.[26] Kenotic love fixes the death of God as the end of self-engendering and the beginning of the impotence of human freedom. It took God His Son to relinquish Himself to become Man later sent to the cross. *Ecce signum*: the ineffaceable mark of the impotence of the human will. Ironically, the death of God also occasions the aspiration of the human to replace God.[27] But the destiny of (any) God is *kenosis*, namely, the indubitable end (in the cross), and hence, by implication, the death of Man as "the shepherd of Being."[28]

Epilogue

In conclusion we can say here that there are two eventalities that have taken place in the wake of the death of God. On the one hand, it occasions the privileged theme of love in the nihilism of transcendence, which Nietzsche describes as the "death of God" that gives rise to Man's ambition to assume the place vacated by the divine, in terms of the relinquishment of the malice of intentionality in favor of the gentleness of the historical oblivion of power (because anonymous and therefore incapable of intending anything historically

[26] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. by David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), 126-27.

[27] Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead," in *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. by William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), 100.

[28] *Martin Heidegger, "Letter of Humanism," in* Basic Writings, ed. by David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), 210.

effective, such as good and evil). On the other hand, it also occasions the opportunity for authoring and co-authoring a careful dissemination of original sin in terms of the renewal of Being that encourages accusation, a restitution of that which gives in the mode of exposing its proper alterity, its lies and conceits.

Finally, in place of Marion's kenotic theology, we are more inclined to advance an ethic of sin as the philosophy of impropriety, impropriety as being's own uniqueness, as well as its givenness to freedom, that is, to intentionality as the founding act of being-given, that which truly gives.

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