

Distance as Abundance: The Thought of Jean-Luc Marion

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Henrik Vase Frandsen, som arbetar som forskningslektor vid Institutet för pedagogisk filosofi, Danmarks pedagogiska universitet, presenterar i sin artikel några centrala begrepp hos den franske filosofen och teologen Jean-Luc Marion. I sin avhandling om Emmanuel Lévinas diskuterade Vase Frandsen en av de viktigaste influenserna för Marions fenomenologiska författarskap.

*The title of this essay, *Distance as Abundance*, is not to be taken as a thesis about the work of Jean-Luc Marion. My aim is more modest, namely to present Marion, but barely to discuss him, and I think that the best way to do this is to point out what I see as the fundamental thought or idea from which Marion is working, both in theology and in phenomenology. This fundamental idea is encapsulated in the ambition of hearing the distance *as* abundance.

If one were to put the project of Marion into an extremely brief formula, one would obviously focus on the concept of *distance*; the distance between the I and the other, the distance between the human and the divine, the distance between what I see and what is given to my sight. Negatively or critically, Marion's enterprise is about releasing the notion of distance from various metaphysical interpretations; for instance, when distance is viewed as a lack of presence, as a loss of authenticity, or even as a fall from an originality. In short, in metaphysics distance is interpreted as poverty, and Marion's ambition is to go beyond this, and thereby redeem another notion of distance: distance as abundance, distance as a gift, or even distance as an overwhelming wealth of meaning.

As already indicated, Marion criticises metaphysics both in the field of theology and in that of philosophy. Naturally, the blurring of the lines between these disciplines has been the issue of some rather intense discussions.¹ I will not go into this discussion here, but I should point out two things:

First, according to Marion himself, there is no question of mixing up the disciplines. Theology is not phenomenology, and phenomenology is not theology. Although he claims this, he at the same time maintains that phenomenology will not be able to survive without pretending to the range of *first philosophy*, or at least that of a «certain priority», as he says.² But this priority of philosophy does not cause theology to accept a secondary status (as is well known, Heidegger came to a different result, claiming the priority of phenomenology).

Second, even though I really am trying to avoid this discussion, it seems that I run into it no matter how hard I try. The very construction of this presentation seems implicitly to involve taking a stand on this question. By focusing on *distance* as a key concept in Marion, a mainly theological complex of problems moves to the fore, namely the question of the signification of transcendence. Of course, this question is not strange to philosophy, but how could one avoid admitting that it is in theology that the question

¹ In France primarily Dominique Janicaud: *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française*. Éd. De l'éclat, Combas 1991—and D. Janicaud: *La phénoménologie éclatée*, Éd. De l'éclat, Paris 1998. Also contributions from M. Henry, F. Laruelle, D. Janicaud, J. Greisch in *Revue de Métaphysique et Morale* 1991/1. Marion answers and gives an overview of the debate in his preface to *Étant donné. Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation*. PUF, Paris 1998².

² J.-L. Marion: *De surcroît*. PUF, Paris 2001 p. 3.

of what transcendence means gains its most immediate urgency, precisely because here we are dealing with God's transcendence. So in this *specific* understanding, theology is accorded a privilege. This I learned from Marion himself, but also from the Danish philosopher and theologian K.E. Løgstrup, and perhaps—I'm not sure, but that should be taken up elsewhere—in spite of Marion and Løgstrup.

The following contribution moves forward in two steps. First, I will look into Marion's attempt to a theological clash with metaphysics, then I will describe his attempt to take phenomenology out of metaphysics. Finally, and in place of a conclusion, I would like to pose a question.

1. A Theological Criticism of Metaphysics

The most spectacular of Marion's books would probably be *God Without Being*. As the title indicates, the book discusses, or rather *attacks*, the notion of a relationship between the idea of God and the concept of Being. In his preface, Marion states programmatically that the issue of the book is to query the evidence that God *is*; evidence that controls both the metaphysical philosophers and the theologians of neothomism.³ The immediate question is, of course, «Why?» What's wrong in saying that God *is*? The answer to that question goes in the following direction: In employing the concept of Being, the truth of God will be determined *within* the conditions that are posed by Being. One can affirm that «God exists», or one can deny it and say that «God does not exist». Those two assertions disagree about whether there is a God or not, but they do *not* disagree in claiming, that a true God must be a God that exists. Both assertions take for granted the priority of Being over God, and this is true *also* for the affirmative assertion. To claim that God exists is indeed an affirmative assertion, but the affirmation stems from the

conception of Being, the affirmation does not come from the conception of God. This is, so to speak, metaphysics <in function>: The truth about God is decided *not* from God, but from Being, and so Being exerts its priority over God; Being decides the destiny of God; Being determines the life and death of God. In short, the critical goal of the <theological criticism of metaphysics> (my expression, not Marion's) is to loosen the strong tie between the concept of Being and (the conception of) God. The aim is to meditate «the freedom of God with regard to his own existence» as Marion put it, with a quote from Schelling.⁴

Now, looking a bit closer at the argumentation, one can see that the concept of Being in Marion's view seems closely related to what I would call a «domesticating hermeneutics». By this expression I would like to suggest a tie between Being and accessibility. To claim or to know that something exists or does not exist would not simply be a matter of pointing out a <quality> of some topic. Existence—or Being—would here imply a first and fundamental <making accessible> of whatever topic there would be at issue. Being implies, one could say, a sort of promise, namely that the topic that *is*, is a topic that can be understood; perhaps not now, but at some point. Being <crosses out> the exteriority of <what is at issue> and precisely makes it <an issue> or <an object>. In a restrained but fundamental way, Being takes the subject <inside range> and makes it possible to relate to the subject, makes it possible to understand, to comprehend; in short—makes <it> an object of comprehension.

It is clear that this view of Being—that Being isn't merely something <neutral> but in a reserved manner *works* or is *active* in exercising a discrete dominance—shows Marion's affinity partly to Derrida and his critique of <violence>, but also and more clearly his affinity to Lévinas and his critique of <totality> (an affinity which perhaps even shows up in the titles, in Lévinas' *Autrement qu'être* («Otherwise than being») and in Marion's *Dieu sans l'être* («God Without Being»)).⁵ Both seem to be in search of a pos-

³ J.-L. Marion: *Dieu sans l'être*. PUF, Paris 1991 (Fayard 1982) p. 10–11; *God Without Being*. Translated by T. A. Carlson, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1991 p. 2.

⁴ *Dieu sans* p. 10; *God Without* p. 2.

sibility for going <beyond> Being or <outside> Being, in search of a possibility of <otherwise than being> (not a <being otherwise>, but an <otherwise than Being>, if one talks with Lévinas). To put it in an other way, it seems that both thinkers are looking for a way to relate to something *other*, but in a relationship which does not cancel the quality and status of the other as (being) other and strange.

On the other hand, I would not draw too close a parallel between Lévinas and Marion. In Lévinas, the term of the *other* becomes the other person (*L'absolument autre, c'est Autrui*—The absolutely other is the Other⁶), and the term for <otherwise than Being> becomes the subject, the self in its *exception* from Being, an exception that shows up in the ethical relation to the Other.⁷ On the contrary, in Marion—that is in the *theological* Marion—the term for radical otherness is God, or the divine. *God Without Being* and *The Idol and Distance*⁸ are two books that seek not to investigate the phenomenon of the divine, but rather the *phenomenality* of the divine; two books in which phenomenology and the concept of intentionality are confronted with the thought of theology. Here, one might say, we have phenomenology in the school of theology. Regarding Marion's later production—works that are purely phenomenological—one might say that it is the thought of theology—and almost the thought of *dialectical* theology—that

inspires and challenges him to problematize the metaphysics that is still dominant in the phenomenological enterprises of Husserl and Heidegger. The crucial criterion is exactly the radical strangeness of God, the distance of God, the transcendence of God: «If God should become pertinent for us, we must first have an impression of radical strangeness».⁹

Marion's analysis is organized as an opposition between two concepts: the idol and the icon. Idol and icon do not designate two kinds of phenomena, but rather two kinds of phenomenality. Since in his later books he modifies the use of those concepts, I will only discuss them here very briefly.

First, the *idol*: the idol is characterized as a point where sight stops, where the sight finds rest and so will stiffen and be buried. The idol is the <first visible> and it functions as an invisible mirror, and it is a mirror exactly because what is at stake is a phenomenon whose conditions—or whose *phenomenality*—are located in that subject for whom it appears as phenomenon. One might sum up the characteristics in the way that the idol functions as some sort of climax in the sight, a climax in the movement of the sight towards an object. However, what is in question is no ordinary object, like a car or a table, but rather a sort of superlative objectivity, which one can see exemplified in statues and paintings of the divine. The idol saturates the sight; it offers the sight a place to stop. One could formulate this another way, that the idol blinds or dazzles the sight, it blinds because it is eminently visible. However, the idol can only do so because it fulfils the sight's search, because it pleases and meets the sight's demand, because it *completes* the sight's initial intention. In the idol, the answers are given to us, the answers to the questions of who we are, from where we came, what our fate will be. This means that we—through the idol—are making the world secure for ourselves, through the idol we are making the world homelike. In short, the idol is outlined inside what I call the domesticating hermeneutics and, in this hermeneutics, the distance has

⁵ Cf. E. Lévinas: *Autrement qu'être ou au delà de l'essence*. Livre de poche, Paris 1990 (1.ed. Martinus Nijhoff 1974). *Otherwise than being or beyond essence*. Translated by A. Lingis. Nijhoff, The Hague 1981.

⁶ E. Lévinas: *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité*. Livre de poche, Paris 1990 (1.ed. Martinus Nijhoff 1961) p. 28—*Totality and Infinity. An Essay in Exteriority*, translated by A. Lingis, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 1969 p. 39.

⁷ Cf. *Autrement qu'être* p. 10. The «Note préliminaire» shows clearly the tension in Lévinas towards the universality of Being, a tension that works throughout his *œuvre*. Beneath this <idea of Being> lie off course first Heidegger, and then the concept of intentionality in Husserl.

⁸ J.-L. Marion: *L'idole et la distance. Cinq études*. Livre de poche, Paris 1991 (1.ed. Fayard 1982).

⁹ Marion; *L'idole* p. 95 «Pour que Dieu nous devienne pertinent, il faut d'abord que nous en éprouvions la radicale étrangeté».

the predominant signification of being a lack that should be made replete. Here, distance is a need for completion.

It is different with the icon. St. Paul speaks of Christ as the icon, the image, of the invisible God (Col. 1,15). The issue here is of an image, a figure, which is visible, Christ, but this visible figure refers to an invisible, to God. So the icon does *not* reproduce what it illustrates, since what the icon is picturing is precisely invisible. In this way the icon does not end sight, because the icon permanently refers back to something invisible. It is this continuous reference to the other, to alterity, to the strange outside what is seen, that makes the proper characteristic of the icon. While the idolatric sight will be a kind of fulfilment, like a rest or a satisfied slumber, the iconic sight, on the contrary, will be a steady movement: It looks further, it moves towards infinity, it is a steady and attentive awakening.

But what sort of phenomenality is at stake? The phenomenality of the idol seems fairly clear: the idol is <produced> inside the hermeneutics of domestication, and it gives us the final answers to the lacks and the threats that surround humans. It is this hermeneutics of domestication that controls the phenomenality of the idol, and it also imposes itself on what Marion calls the «conceptual idol», on the *names* of God, such as the *causa sui* and the *ens maximum* of classical metaphysics. The question is how to avoid idolatry? How to <see> God without making God an <object> for the sight? How to speak of God and still preserve a sense of the radical strangeness of God? How to speak about God without defining the essence of God, without predicating something about God? How to avoid conceptual idolatry? No matter what concept we use about God, at the very least we must admit that it is a concept that comes *from us*, and so the concept stay in the danger of reducing God to the range of our sight, or to the mind of man. How to avoid all that? Marion seeks the answer to these questions in his reading of Denys the Areopagite, that is to say in a confrontation with the *via negativa* in theology.

The point of the *via negativa* is not simply to negate the attributes of the divine, and in this way to state what the divine is *not*. If the negation works in this way, it will simply empty the

object bit by bit, and one will end up with a vacuum. The point is rather the other way around: if one asks what it is that mobilises the negation, the answer is that the negation would not be mobilised by the lack of knowledge towards the divine, but—on the contrary—by the powerlessness of our *non-knowledge* towards our knowledge. To put it another way, the negation is not directed towards an <object>, which simply would be deprived of all its predications. The negation is directed towards an individual, who, so to speak, is being deprived of his knowledge or his ideas. The <field> uncovered by negation is some sort of non-knowledge, a non-knowledge hidden by knowledge, a non-knowledge covered up by knowledge. This is where Marion takes *via negativa*. He quotes Denys saying that <we are negating every thing in order to know the non-knowledge that every knowledge hides in every creature>, and Marion comments that here it is not about sinking down in emptiness, but about using the negation *in order* to know better, and furthermore to know better *without ideas*.¹⁰

Two things are important here. First, it is important to emphasize that this negation has a goal, a purpose. The negation has an *affirmative aim*. The work of negation takes place inside a more fundamental *affirmative* endeavour. The question remains, however, of what sort of affirmation. Second, it is about knowing better, as he says, but also adds that it is about knowing better *without ideas*. Knowing <without ideas> means to know in conformity with the distance. The strangeness of the divine is in conformity with this lack or <absence of ideas>. The question here is how it is possible to maintain such a <zone> in the middle of the field of knowledge; a zone that can remain untouched by ideas.

The answer to these two questions—what sort of affirmation lies in the negation, and the possibility of there being a <blank zone> in

¹⁰ «nous nions et ôtons toute chose afin de connaître sans dissimulation cette inconnaissance, que dissimulent dans tous les étants toutes les connaissances. Connaître l'inconnaissance que dissimulent nos connaissances ne revient pas à ignorer ou à s'abandonner dans le vide de la chose comme du savoir. Il s'agit bñe plutôt d'user de dénégation pour d'autant mieux connaître—sans idée». Marion, *L'idole* p. 186–87.

knowledge—is in a way simple, but perhaps also difficult to accept. Basically the answer consists in a radical change of perspective for the subjectivity, namely from the productivity to the receptivity of the subject, that is to the reception of the gift. Here I shall briefly outline how.

Marion engages in a profound discussion of three of Denys' concepts: *aitia*, *hymnein*, and hierarchy. I will leave hierarchy to the side, and discuss only *hymnein* and *aitia*, because they have a privileged relation. When Denys uses the different names of God—God is good, loving, wise, and so on—those names are not predicated as God's qualities, but God is *praised* (*hymnein*) as the *aitia* of these qualities. He would not say, for instance, «God is good», but rather «I praise God as *aitia* of the good». Normally, we would translate *aitia* with *causa*, as when Aristotle mentions the four *aitiai*. However, the close connection between praise and *aitia* indicates to Marion that *aitia* here works in a different way. *Aitia* does not describe the first and final quality of God, but operates as the final *disqualification* of any of God's names. *Aitia* marks transcendence, God as «beyond every name»; it is brought in play as a final reactivation of the *aporia* in the acknowledgement of God, namely that every «name» or «concept» used for God, in the end, refers to man and not to divinity. *Aitia* serves as a marker of the «blank zone» in knowledge, the «unthinkable» in the middle of thinking. How is this the case? Simply to «think at the unthinkable» would not be anything but naive, so how does *aitia* qualify the «blank zone» of non-knowledge? This is where the perspective changes. If *aitia* remains unthinkable, and if it disqualifies any denomination of God, then—Marion holds—it is because *aitia* is not to be thought but is to be *received*.¹¹ It is only in the *reception* that the thought can have a relationship to what is outside thought, or to what is at a distance from thought. Here the field of non-knowledge, detected by negation, is identified, as well as the fundamental affirmation in whose framework

the negation is operating. What one cannot recognize, because knowledge is active and productive, that is the reception. In Marion, the reception of the gift, or more programmatically the *thinking of the gift*, marks out the superior affirmative frame to *via negativa*. Consequently, Marion suggests another translation of *aitia*, not as *causa*, but as demanded (*réquisit*) with reference to the judicial etymology of *aitia*.

This receptivity he finds confirmed, when Denys does not say «God is good» in a predicative manner, but instead *praises* God as *aitia* of the good. The predicative discourse oversteps the distance to its object; in short it reduces its object. The predicative discourse reflects metaphysics and idolatry. But this predication and reduction are set a side in *hymnein*, in the *discourse of praise*, as Marion put it. Denys is quoted as saying that «theologians praise God as anonymous, and with every name».¹² *Anonymity and polyonymity* follow together (or: distance and abundance come forward simultaneously). This is the case because here one works with language in an «iconic» way. What is said, a name, refers to an unsaid: to the strange divinity. Anonymity marks the distance of the divine, it preserves for the divine a fundamental strangeness. But that means too, that the praise does not aim for an adequate language for the divine. The discourse of praise is working with *inadequacy*, it marks its own inadequacy by praising God *as* (i.e., in the capacity of, *en tant que*, that is the greek «*hōs*»). Therefore God has *no* name, and yet has all possible names. God is praised *as* good, *as* wise, *as* God of gods, *as* Master of masters, *as* the Holy of the holy ones, *as* eternal, *as* originator of time, *as* giver of life, *as* wisdom, *as* spirit, and so on. But God preserves the distance, the anonymity, in the middle of the many names by which he is praised. *The name* in the discourse of praise *does not* speak of the essence of God and, in this way, the praise is a continuous openness towards the possibility of God to «reveal himself» also in other names.

In the very end, the discourses of praise designates a contribution whose final conditions goes *beyond* the subject, that praises. So, if the

¹¹ «Si la cause / *aitia* demeure impensable, si elle disqualifie toute dénomination de Dieu et si la transcendance se dérobe à la saisie énonçante, peut-être peut-on convenir que la cause n'a pas à être pensée, mais bien reçue». Marion, *L'idole* p. 191–92.

¹² Marion, *L'idole* p. 224.

subject is capable of praising, it's because the subject *in advance* has received its «qualification», the «authority» permitting him to praise. There is no doubt that this is where Marion wants to take his reader. He explicitly points out the *receptivity* in the praise as *the* decisive condition that makes the subject capable of praising. The subject receives in advance the «authority» to praise. From where? From what the praise is aiming at! This is the *ecstatic* moment in the discourse of praise.¹³

Now to return to the question of phenomenality in the idol and the icon. If it is accepted that a «hermeneutics of domestication» carries the phenomenality of the idol, it is now also obvious that the phenomenality of the *icon* is carried by the «hermeneutics of the gift». This should not come as a surprise. Take *love* as an example. One does not «understand» love by describing and conceptualising, but rather by receiving love, and the only «adequate» way to receive love is by giving love, an «adequacy» that precisely takes place outside language. By definition, love is *more* than the words about love. By definition, God is *more* than the words about God, and it is exactly the transcendence of God—or his distance, or his strangeness—that liberates this «*more than ...*», that liberates the semantic abundance of the divine.

2. A non-metaphysical phenomenology

In 1989, Marion published *Réduction et donation*¹⁴ (Reduction and Givenness), a work that consists of six intense studies on the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger. In 1997, he followed this with the ambitious *Étant donné*.

¹³ «Cette extase, où celui qui énonce se trouve d'avance repris par ce que vise, sans prédication, l'énoncé, confirme que nulle subjectivité ne grève le langage de louange». Marion, *L'idole* p. 229–30.

¹⁴ J.-L. Marion: *Réduction et donation. Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie*. PUF, Paris 1989. Translated by T. A. Carlson as, *Reduction and Givenness. Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger and Phenomenology*. Northwestern University Press. 1998.

Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation. Both books are part of the same enterprise, namely to take phenomenology beyond its metaphysical limitations; an ambition that has so far culminated in the remarkable idea of the *saturated phenomenon*. (I say «so far» because Marion in the final pages of *Étant donné* announces a further, as yet unpublished, book on subjectivity and love.)¹⁵

The first question that appears is that of reaching a more precise idea of the metaphysics that weighs phenomenology down and has led it down the wrong path. Marion gives us different formulations of the metaphysical misinterpretation of the phenomenon, but it seems to me that they point all in the same direction: that in metaphysics, the possibility of something to show up will not belong to what actually does show up. Phenomenality will not belong to the phenomenon, but rather to something that precedes the phenomenon, and at the same time defines the possibility of the phenomenon and imposes its limits on the phenomenon.¹⁶

I would like to concentrate on this critical formulation—that in metaphysics, the possibility for something to appear will not belong to what actually appears—because it has at least two critical facets: On the *one hand*, it is critically turned towards the dominance exercised by the subject or by recognition over the «object». The aim here is to liberate the phenomenon from the *metaphysical egology* that, according to Marion, still binds Husserl (and to a certain extent Heidegger as well). The egology breaks out, for example, in the promotion of the *horizon*, the horizon that already is «seen» before the phenomenon shows itself, and in that way becomes the «prison» of the phenomenon. The egology also appears in the paradigm of equality or adequacy between intention and intuition, or between signification and fulfilment. This ideal of equality or adequacy defines the evidence in Husserl, and so Husserl joins the line of philo-

¹⁵ J.-L. Marion: *Le phénomène érotique. Six méditations*. Ed. Grasset 2003.

¹⁶ See, for instance, *Étant donné* p. 255: «En régime métaphysique, la possibilité d'apparaître n'appartient jamais à ce qui apparaît, ni sa phénoménalité au phénomène».

sophers for whom examples from mathematics have a privileged position in epistemology. In math, this adequacy seems easier to establish. However, Marion claims, the examples from mathematics are all «poor phenomena», and he sees no reason why poor phenomena should determine the paradigm for all phenomena. More generally speaking, the claim is that the phenomenon—in the regime of metaphysical egology—will be reduced to a finite objectivity due to the finite self, or the finite I, that imposes its own limitations on the phenomenon.

In contradiction to metaphysical egology, the aim for Marion is to attempt to define the phenomenon without having recourse to a transcendental field of *a priori* conditions. Corresponding to that aim, he seeks to define the self without recourse to a transcendental ego. Marion reverses the priority in the relation between the I and the phenomenon. The self is defined alone from its «attributory function to the phenomenon»¹⁷, so that it is the phenomenon itself that takes center of stage. The phenomenon gives itself, it gives itself from itself, it gives itself, so to say, by virtue of its own initiative. The phenomenon *gives itself*, and the I can only receive it. This *giving* or *donation* is the central term in Marion's non-metaphysical phenomenology. The first thing to say about phenomena is that they give themselves. Monstration is first of all donation.¹⁸

Through this precedence of the donation over the recognition exercised by the subject, I reach the *other* facet of Marion's critical diagnosis of phenomenology in regime of metaphysics. If it is not the I or the consciousness that marks out the possibility of the phenomenon, if, inversely, it is, as Marion claims, that the phenomenon appears as given *to* and given *for* an «I», and this «I» only discovers itself by receiving itself from the phenomenon, then it

would be almost too obvious to detect a «giver» behind the phenomenon's «being given», in short a God. This conclusion, though, is premature, that is it is metaphysical. Let me repeat the diagnosis. In the regime of metaphysics, the possibility of something to appear will not belong to what actually appears. Implicitly—and indeed explicitly as well—Marion rejects the notion that givenness or donation should reveal some external giver, like a *causa* of the donation. To argue such a giver would only be returning to pre-modern metaphysics, to *metaphysica specialis* and eventually to a rational theology, which Marion seeks to avoid. The phenomenon shows up «from elsewhere», it comes to me as unforeseen, it forces itself on me, it demands my attention. All this does not mean, however, that it comes from a phenomenon-external «giver». Marion claims that his descriptions remains immanent in consciousness, and when a phenomenon appears both as «itself» and as «from elsewhere» (*ailleurs*), there is no question of referring back to something else, but only that this «internal distance» *in* a phenomenon is characteristic for its mode of appearing. It appears with a «dimension of depth», so to speak. Metaphysically, this non-origin would be viewed as a lack of origin, as a loss, but, liberated from metaphysics, this internal distance in the phenomenon will be seen as a surplus, i.e. as the surplus of the phenomenon towards the consciousness that receives the phenomenon. By virtue of the internal distance between «itself» and its «from somewhere else», the phenomenon exercises a sort of «going beyond» the consciousness that can only receive it. To put it a different way, there is an asymmetrical relationship between what the consciousness is capable of receiving (or of synthesizing), and what the phenomenon is capable of giving. However, such an asymmetrical relation does not indicate that comprehension is at a loss, or lacking. On the contrary, the asymmetrical relation is an indication of the surplus in the phenomenon, its wealth of signification, the surplus of the thinkable in its relation to thought.¹⁹

¹⁷ «Dès lors, comment ne pas tenter de définir le *Je* sans recours aucun à la transcendance, ni à l'exercice de l'*a priori*, mais uniquement à partir de sa fonction d'attributaire du phénomène, tel qu'il se donne à partir de lui-même et de lui seul?» Marion, *Étant donné* p. 264.

¹⁸ «... chaque phénomène ... se montre en tant qu'il se donne», *Étant donné* p. 168.

¹⁹ «Tout phénomène, en tant que donné, garde en effet comme un surplomb sur ce qui le reçoit: aussi pleinement délivré soit-il, son exil hors l'*ousia* et son

As far as I can see, it is this decision, to view the distance not as a loss but as an abundance or as an ongoing donation, that creates the fruitful point of departure in Marion's phenomenology. This decision leads him to the concept of the *saturated phenomenon*, a phenomenon saturated with intuition, phenomena where the intuition gives more than what intention is aiming at. I shall only briefly outline this theory. Departing from the *leitmotif* of saturation in intuition, Marion distinguishes between three modes of phenomenality: the poor, the common, and the saturate.²⁰

The *poor phenomena* would be primarily mathematical and logical intuitions. Those phenomena suggest a sort of <borderline case>, namely a sort of phenomenon that tends towards the absolute zero of intuition, traditionally called <evidence> or <certainty>. Certainty shows a zero-degree of intuition (and a zero-degree of receptivity). That is indirectly confirmed by Descartes when he excludes all that is made uncertain by experience from the sphere of certainty. To put it another way, certainty is characterized by a radical phenomenological deficit: certainty cannot be «experienced».

The next layer is that of *common phenomena*: objects and phenomena dominated by objectivity. They have their own phenomenality. An example of such phenomenality is the law for falling bodies: this law can only be confirmed experimentally by reducing everything <individual> in the concrete fall of a concrete body, for instance the resistance of the air, the wind, humidity in the air, the surface of the body, etc., everything that counts as <sources of errors>. The law precedes the fall of the body. Another type of this kind of phenomenality Marion finds in modern *products*, like clothes, cars, or coffee makers. Here the *concept* precedes the actual thing. The intention commands the intuition, so that the <real> object in fact does

not add anything to what has been foreseen by the concept. The *existence* of the concrete car or coffeemaker does not change the *concept* of the car or the coffeemaker. Existence is simply a complement, an «anecdotic appendix» as he puts it, to what was already there in advance, but existence does not give the concept anything fundamentally new.

Finally there are *saturated phenomena*. Here Marion distinguishes between four types of phenomenality: the event, the idol, the flesh (*la chair*, not *le corps*) and the icon. The idea of disposition beneath those concepts is picked up from Kant, in his four main categories of understanding, and they designate how the phenomenon overwhelms the receiver by overflowing the category of quantity, quality, relation or modality. Let me sketch out these four types.

First is the *event* (referring to the category of quantity), which corresponds to the saturated phenomenon as *unforeseen*, as a surprise, an astonishment. An example is the battle of Waterloo. In order to understand such an event, Marion argues, it is necessary to work with several different horizons (as for instance military, diplomatic, economic and ideological); but even taking all these horizons into consideration, nobody is able to give a full description of the battle of Waterloo. The event is a saturated phenomenon that gives more than it is possible to synthesize. Second comes the *idol* (an overflow of the category of quality). The idol is <saturated with visibility>; it dazzles the sight and is in this way unbearable. The eminent example here is the painting (in *De surcroît* Marion gives some outstanding analyses of the paintings of Rothko). The dazzling nature of the idol involves a further individualization of the subject, since none sees and are saturated by the idol in the same way. The third form of saturated phenomenality Marion calls the *flesh* (referring to the category of relation). The issue here is an identity between the one affected and that which affects (identity between *l'affecté* and *l'affectant*). In the flesh, I am affected <by myself>—in joy, pain, love, fear, the erotic, etc.—and this auto-affection (à la Michel Henry) provokes solipsism. The flesh gives me to myself, even before I enter into any relation to an object. The flesh is a *fait accompli* and appears in that way as abso-

déficit de cause le laissent finalement inégal à la connaissance inadéquate. Mais cette inégalité ne signifie pas tant une défaite de la pensée que l'excès du pensable», *État donné* p. 224.

²⁰ The following pages refer primarily to *État donné* § 23 p. 309 ff.

lute. The flesh has its signification detached from any external relationship, it is individualizing. Finally, the fourth form is the *icon* (corresponding to the category of modality). This type of phenomenon is invisible (*irregardable*), and will not let themselves be reduced to the <I>, since the icon is exercising its own sight over the individual who sees the icon. The icon takes the initiative, and consequently is a kind of contra-experience (i.e., I experience that I am subject to an experience), or a contra-intentionality, which makes the <I> into a <witness> (*temoin*) of the phenomenon, and hence singularises the self in a reverse objectifying movement. The example here is the sight (*regard*) of the other, the face of the other—as Lévinas describes it.

To these four types of saturated phenomenality Marion adds a *fifth* possibility, a form of phenomenality that in itself includes the four previous forms; a *possible* phenomenality, which condenses the saturated phenomenon. Hence, there is here a phenomenality that is saturated to a maximum degree. A phenomenality that does not add a new element, but is a variation of the four forms, or is playing at their possibility.²¹ This fifth possibility of saturated phenomenality is the possibility of the *revelation*, and the paradigmatic example here is the revelation of Christ. Briefly: A) as *event*, Christ is unforeseen and unexpected; he is unforeseen even in relation to the prophecies he is fulfilling; Christ is radically heterogeneous. B) as the *idol* Christ is dazzling and unbearable; understood in the way that the unbearable precisely is to recognize him as Christ. C) According to the saturated phenomenality of the *flesh*, Christ appears as an *absolute* phenomenon, as a *fait accompli*. The revelation of Christ is absolute in the sense that he's saturating and exceeds any horizon from which he becomes visible. Not only is there a need of at least four gospels in order to describe Christ, but none of these four <horizons> are able to describe his significance in an adequate manner. His <kingdom is not of this world> (John 18,36). D) Finally, and corresponding to the *icon*, Christ is manifest as a saturated phenomenon that *looks* at me, a result of which is that I

am constituted as his witness; which corresponds to how Christ chooses his disciples (and not inversely: it is not an transcendental ego that constitutes Christ).

3. Termination

I will limit myself to two concluding remarks, one as a summation, and the other suggesting a theological perspective.

In the preceding, I have claimed that a central point in the works of Marion is to see the distance as an abundance, an abundance of possible significations. In his theological works I find this quite unproblematic to claim. This <distance as abundance> is the <logic> behind the interpretation of the concept of God in Denys the Areopagite; it is the key in the assertion that God can be simultaneously characterized as an anonymity and as a polyonymity, that God has no name, and yet has all possible names. Furthermore, it is distance as abundance that allows us to realize that the withdrawal of God is also the way for God to step forward. Finally, distance as abundance allows us to understand that the famous <death of God> is simply an ontological restriction and a metaphysical distortion of the radical transcendence of God.

Distance as abundance also seems to me to be the key to Marion's phenomenology, even though it appears less obvious here. I have only given a rather superficial presentation of his phenomenological enterprise, but what I would like to stress in his phenomenology is that the <coming-from-elsewhere> is stated as a *constitutive* part of the way in which phenomena appear. If one likes aphorisms, one might say that the phenomenon in Marion is constituted as not-being constituted; or that the original phenomenon is a denial of having an origin. It is this non-originality that gives the vision a chance to see <farther>. The <from-elsewhere> character of the phenomenon, or its *internal distance*, corresponds with its intensity, with its surprise, with the <novelty> of the phenomenon.

My second remark concerns how metaphysics is understood, and in what sense *theology* might go beyond metaphysics. If <distance as abundance> is to be viewed as a way of going beyond metaphysics, this inversely indicates an

²¹ Cf. *Étant donné* § 24 p. 325 ff.

indirect characterization of metaphysics. What characterizes metaphysics is the predominant interpretation of distance as a loss, as a lack, or as a fall from a more authentic plane of existence. Metaphysics then should be homesickness, nostalgia, and to go beyond metaphysics should consist in taking leave of this homesickness and nostalgia. My question relates to this departure: What constitutes «leaving nostalgia» in *theology*?

Marion's answer to this question points in one decisive direction, toward revelation, i.e. that God reveals himself in Christ. In this way, Marion seems to make himself a proponent of a theology of revelation, almost in a Barthian manner. The Son comes «from elsewhere», from the Father, but a Father we only see in the Son and that we only know in the figure of the Son. This internal distance in the manifestation of Christ, which according to Marion we can call the *distance from the Father to the Son*, this distance seems to be repeated by any manifestation and so to become the primary mark of the saturated phenomenon. In a way one might say that any phenomenon appears within the manifestation of Christ, in so far as any phenomenon describes a part of the revelation taken as the extreme and last possibility in the phenomenology of donation.

However, in theology it should be possible to go another way to bid farewell to homesickness, to the metaphysics of the loss. It should be possible to do so by rethinking the concept of *creation*.²² I have tried elsewhere to show that it is possible to read a theology of creation in Denys the Areopagite, and furthermore that it is this theology of creation that prepares and supports the ascent of the apophatic, the ascent to the radical *beyond* of God, the ascent to the *hyper* of

²² In a Danish context, this suggestion in no way is surprising, considering the importance of K.E. Løgstrup and his lifelong attempt to rehabilitate a *theology of creation*. Cf. K.E. Løgstrup: *Skabelse og tilintetgørelse. Religionsfilosofiske betragtninger. Metafysik IV*. Gyldendal, Copenhagen 1978 and later. Translated in German: *Schöpfung und Vernichtung. Religionsphilosophische Betrachtungen. Metaphysik IV*. Übersetzt von R. Løgstrup; J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen 1990.

God.²³ I would like to conclude this presentation of Marion's ideas, by opening towards this other way of questioning the predominance of the metaphysics of the loss. The best way to do this is to recall a single, but very beautiful, phrase from Denys; a phrase where this theology of creation and the *tension* towards Being—but not the dismissal of Being—comes to full expression:

The theologians —describing God/ the divine principle—say that he is «in the spirits and in the bodies, in the sky, on earth, and whilst remaining the same in Itself, [God/ the divine principle is] in the world, around the world, beyond the world, beyond the sky, beyond all being; he is the son, the stars, fire, water, spirit, dewdrops, clouds, precious stone, rock, *all that is and nothing of it*».²⁴

(Linguistically improved by Bradley F. Abrams, whom I am most grateful for his help)



²³ H.V. Frandsen: «Sur l'ontologie de la théologie négative. Individu et univers chez Denys l'Aréopagite» in M.M. Olivetti: Biblioteca dell' «Archivio di Filosofia» vol. 29: *Théologie Négative*. Cedam, Padova 2002.

²⁴ *Divine names* I,6; Greek text in J.-P. Migne (ed): *Patrologia Graecae* vol. 3. 596 b–c. English translation in *The Divine Names—by Dionysius the Areopagite*. Translated by the Editors of The Shrine of Wisdom. Surrey 1957, p. 14–15 (modified). I emphasize the «παντα τα οντα, και ουδεν των οντων», which shows the necessity of the theological *tension* towards Being; a tension that is not to be abolished or closed in a divine or in a human totalisation, but which preserves the simultaneous possibility of autonomy and heteronomy.