

Practice and Givenness: The Problem of 'Reduction' in the work of Jean-Luc Marion

Andrew C Rawnsley

Abstract

Jean-Luc Marion's work has received plenty of critical attention in recent years. This paper returns to the core of Marion's project in a rather different way from many of the previous critiques by focussing on two troubling aspects of his work. Firstly, the way in which Marion conceives the relationship between phenomenology and theology is explored in the hope that Marion's missteps might illuminate the ongoing problem of the relationship between philosophy and theology; secondly, the major methodological move which Marion makes, that of linking givenness to phenomenological reduction, is critically examined. This latter critique is the main purpose of the paper, since it is apparent that the role which reduction plays in Marion's phenomenology, when seen under the rubric of a philosophical practice, also indicates one possible route towards the clarification of the first problem, that of the relationship between philosophy and theology.

Keywords

Jean-Luc Marion, phenomenology, French theology, aesthetics, practice

He who pretends to go beyond all metaphysics most often risks taking up again, without being conscious of it, its basic characteristics.¹

Although there have been plenty of assessments and critiques of Jean-Luc Marion's work in the last few years, this paper will attempt to approach what is positive and problematic from a rather different perspective. We will claim that there is an inherent oversight in Marion's oeuvre which is reflected in his failure to properly set out what the relationship between phenomenology and theology actually is. This is demonstrated most clearly, we think, in the way in which

¹ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, translated Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) p. 65.

he construes the phenomenological reduction. This paper will show how this latter issue in Marion's work, when re-assessed according to an understanding of phenomenological reduction as a practice, helps to provide some better starting points for thinking about the former problem, that of the relationship of philosophy to theology, not just in Marion's work but in philosophical theology and theology of religion more broadly.

Although our assessment of the work of Jean-Luc Marion will be overwhelmingly critical, it is important to note at the start that our engagement with this material stems from a sense of something positive in Marion's work. This positive aspect is to be found in his notion of a 'Eucharistic site' of theology, first presented in Chapter Five of *God Without Being*. Unlike most of Marion's subsequent writings, this chapter has elements of a quite concrete character which Marion himself does not fully develop. The 'Eucharistic site' of theology means that theology's impetus is located within the sacramental practice of the Church: theology begins in the mediation of the Word through the material and concrete.² For Marion, at this stage, it is the (Sacramental) Word that gives language and gives interpretation to Himself.

Because such a 'Eucharistic site' is rooted in the Church's concrete practice, it means that following through on this concrete character in tandem with the strongly phenomenological trajectory which Marion's work takes might provide some corrective measures to the over-idealized direction of his later writings, opening up some rich material for further theological work. That Marion's work has been very influential in some theological circles means that such a critical appropriation is necessary. Graham Ward is particularly astute in point out that:

The horizon of the post-modern project... provides Marion with his Eucharistic site... used to draw attention to an a-priori gift... but then Marion proceeds to a naming of the giver (as God) and the world as icon (the incarnated gift).³

Accordingly, one wonders whether this shift of concerns, which coheres around the point at which Marion posits a 'Eucharistic site',

² "Christ calls himself the Word. He does not speak words inspired by GXd concerning GXd, but he abolishes in himself the gap between the speaker who states (prophet or scribe) and the sign (speech or text); he abolishes this first gap only in abolishing a second, more fundamental gap, in us, men: the gap between the sign and the referent... Christ does not say the word, he says himself the Word. He says himself –the Word!... in him commune... the sign, the locutor, and the referent that elsewhere the human experience of language irremediably dissociates... Word in flesh and bone, he is given as indissolubly speaker, sign, and referent... the Word is said as it is given. Marion, *God Without Being*, p. 140; p. 142. Marion's emphases and italics.

³ Graham Ward, 'The Theological Project of Jean-Luc Marion', *Post-Secular Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 229.

is where his work goes astray. Granted that we think there to be some strong themes in this 'sited' aspect of Marion's work, and that it is, unfortunately, the later less successful work that seems to have garnered most critical acclaim, the rest of this paper will outline the contours of Marion's writings in order to open up useful space for critical reflection and positive appropriation. It is hoped that the focus on critical work does not disguise the original positive impetus to be found in our reading of Marion.

The appearance of Dominique Janicaud's polemical *The Theological Turn of Phenomenology* in the early 1990s signalled a new wave of critical interest in the reawakening of the question of 'religion' in a postmodern context.⁴ After the heady days of the late 1960s, the various currents of French philosophy had begun to question seriously the French philosophical legacy: the question of 'religion' was again posed anew, albeit within a discourse structured by a vocabulary and methodology vastly removed from the terminological conservatism of most dogmatians. At the heart of this controversy, a debate between different branches of phenomenologically-influenced work, is the relation between philosophy and theology. For Janicaud, the problem in the relation of phenomenology and theology is not "directed at the theological as such, but at certain of its translations or intrusions into the phenomenological field."⁵

Jean-Luc Marion's work claims fundamentally to be post-metaphysical.⁶ For Janicaud this is an issue. Critiquing the way in which Marion presents the adoption of the post-metaphysical as if it is "quasi-evident"⁷ Janicaud sets about showing not only that this notion of a post-metaphysical phenomenology is problematic, even within the terms with which Marion seeks to situate it, but that the basis on which Marion's phenomenology opens out onto the theological is very dubious. Janicaud's critique is mainly directed at Marion's "schema" of three distinct phenomenological reductions.⁸ This will be the basis for our own critical approach in what follows. Before we

⁴ Dominique Janicaud, *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française* (Paris: Éditions de l'Éclat, 1991); included in *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate*, translated Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), pp. 16-103.

⁵ Janicaud, p. 51. English translation.

⁶ The question of what a post-metaphysics might be like is affected from the start by the divergence of opinion over exactly what metaphysics is. In terms of understanding the way in which Marion means 'metaphysics', Robyn Horner claims that, for Marion, "...metaphysics . . . is (or involves elements of) a conception in terms of being as presence, with a claim to some kind of absoluteness, on the foundation of a transcendental I, whose existence and certainty is guaranteed by a term posited beyond the conceptual system: metaphysics is 'onto-theology'." Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), p. xiii.

⁷ Janicaud, p. 52.

⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 56-62.

engage in that task, we will briefly set out what Marion's position actually is. This is not at all an easy proposition, since one of the problems with Marion's work is that one cannot take at face value what he says he is actually doing.

In the English translation of Marion's influential book *God Without Being*, David Tracy contributes a foreword which introduces Marion's work as a philosophical theology that "needs new . . . concepts . . . to understand with conceptual rigour the reality of God's self-disclosure as Love."⁹ Tracy's introduction portrays Marion's project as principally one which makes the "need to question whether any transcendental or metaphysical reflection is the correct route forward for theology" a priority. Although Tracy may be right in suggesting that Marion's *philosophical* work is about finding new concepts for adequately dealing with revelation, a major element that is lacking in Marion's work is a reflection on what it means to *formulate* such new concepts and categories, and indicates a serious issue at the heart of Marion's project as a whole: his failure to account for his own philosophical and theological *practice*. Though, according to Tracy, Marion forges a "new and brilliant postmodern version of the other great alternative for theology: a revelation-centred, non-correlational, post-metaphysical theology", Marion fails to think out what this *forging* itself consists in. We think that this failure could well be attributed to Marion's firm espousal of the need to "abandon all the metaphysics of the subject which have defined modernity."¹⁰

This denial of the subject without any alternative framework being properly worked out means that Marion's project floats free of the *situational*: it has no proper historical or located dimension. The concepts and categories end up as epistemological factors which subsist within a field of disembodied consciousness, neither fully human nor fully divine. It is, then, not post-metaphysical, but an approach that has rejected 'Being'-talk as onto-theological, in favour of something else that is never quite made clear, though we are sure that what this something else is does not evade being described as some *kind* of metaphysics.

This 'something else' takes the form of Marion's most critically acclaimed work: the development of a *phenomenology of givenness*. The issue is how Marion gets to this notion of givenness, how it functions in his phenomenology, and what the relation is to his theological interests. Rather than taking on the whole of his work for exposition and for critical points, which has been done in a variety of forms by others,¹¹ we will focus on three fundamental problems which help to

⁹ Marion, *God Without Being*, p. xii.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. xi.

¹¹ See for instance the excellent and varied critical work from different perspectives in *New Blackfriars* Vol 76 No. 895 (July/August 1995). For more descriptive exposition

open up other paths of inquiry. These issues will mark out slightly different openings than others have chosen to follow. These issues in Marion are: the way in which he sets-up and works within a particular understanding of the relationship between *philosophy*, always conceived unambiguously as a type of *phenomenology*, and *theology*; the whole question which emerges, in this context, of a *First Philosophy*; and the role that the phenomenological 'reduction' plays in his work and the problems that accrue from his understanding of this *reduction*. It is the way in which Marion misunderstands reduction that points to what is most distorting in his work. We will suggest that his misunderstanding is caused by a strange and twisted kind of idealism which lurks in the background of Marion's work.¹²

The relation of theology to phenomenology in Marion's work is one of its most problematic elements. Marion emerges from a French philosophical tradition informed by highly detailed Cartesian scholarship.¹³ In his earliest books Marion develops, on the one hand, a series of careful analyses of Descartes; and on the other, a series of theological studies. The two strands come together in two important texts, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism* and *God Without Being*, both published in Paris in the 1980s.¹⁴

In the former book, Marion attempts to overcome Descartes' ontology, which Marion describes as being a kind of intensification of onto-theology to the point where onto-theology is overcome or exceeded.¹⁵ Marion closes the book by claiming that Pascal had realized the problematic ontological aspects of Descartes' rationalism and instead offers an alternative philosophical approach that can be described as having to do with the *order of charity*. This is the main theme of all of Marion's subsequent books, though under a variety of different guises. His oeuvre from this point on can be seen as an

with little critical work see Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theological Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

¹² Which is perhaps something which he has integrated into his work because of his intense studies of Descartes' philosophy. There is also the odd way in which, in his later books, Marion presents his phenomenology of givenness in terms of what he calls the 'saturated phenomenon' which he claims as an inversion of Kant's categories of the understanding.

¹³ As a Roman Catholic lay person, other influences are some dominant strands of French Catholicism of the 20th century: Henri de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain. From other writings, we can also see the pervasive influence of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Barth and Emmanuel Levinas. His socio-historical background is the "French spiritual and cultural crisis of the nihilism which...marked the years dominated by 1968..." Graham Ward, 'Introducing Jean-Luc Marion', *New Blackfriars* Vol 76 No. 895 (July/August 1995), pp. 317-8.

¹⁴ Marion, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-Theo-Logy in Cartesian Thought*, translated Jeffrey L. Kosky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); originally published in Paris in 1986; *God Without Being* was published originally in Paris in 1982.

¹⁵ This notion of exceeding or excess is a recurrent one in Marion's later work.

attempt to work out the character of the order of *charity*. The notions of *givenness*, *gift*, and the whole set of cognates which he works with in his later phenomenology, are phenomenological versions or modes of this 'charity'. In other later books he sets out this notion of charity more substantially, but it is clear that givenness as a first philosophical term is dependent upon the Pascalian critique in which Marion first realizes the possibility of a philosophical order of charity which is reached by philosophical inquiry but which has strong connections with a theology.¹⁶ From the start it is evident that, through a philosophical inquiry, Marion finds a theological datum, or tacitly takes up a theological datum into a philosophical inquiry. A serious problematic issue, however, is that although Marion has critically engaged with Descartes' ontology, he never seems to question what the epistemological ramifications of such a critique might be. Marion's work thus takes up the task of overcoming or exceeding Descartes' ontology but remains within an epistemological framework.

What skews his work as a whole is that he seems overly concerned to assert that his phenomenology and theology are two separate endeavours, when it is obvious from reading his writings that the two mutually inform one another. This is something that has been noticed by most secondary source critics, even those who are sympathetic to Marion's project as a whole.¹⁷ What is odd is that most supporters of Marion's work do not find this basic methodological blindness to be a problem. Why does Marion refuse to acknowledge that his phenomenology is informed by theological insight and vice versa?

¹⁶ What is most illuminating is that after this clear insight at the close of this book, Marion does not return to explore Pascal with anything like the close scrutiny with which he has attended to Descartes. In fact, if anything Descartes remains silently in the background even after Marion has explicitly overcome him with the help of Pascal. This is a baffling aspect that has not been sufficiently noticed in the secondary critical literature. It, perhaps, helps to explain the sense that one is always being tugged in two different directions at the same time when reading Marion's texts. One wonders whether the connection between Marion's invoking of a 'First Philosophy', which he does plainly and explicitly in the first section of *In Excess*, is not the ghost of Descartes re-appearing after Marion has long since exorcised him.

¹⁷ For instance Robyn Horner who is, in general, relatively uncritical of Marion says: "... while his different strands of specialisation can be seen to stand independently ... they also seem to converge to form the fabric of a much larger project ... Marion ultimately seeks to show that there is a way forward for thought beyond metaphysics. Initially, he maintains that it is theology that best offers the way forward. Nevertheless, the leap from metaphysics to a (non-metaphysical) theology appears too much like the sheer imposition of dogma –and the consequent repetition of metaphysics at a new level. In a second phase of writing, Marion uses phenomenology to push the boundaries of metaphysics, and is then able better to contextualise theology as a non-metaphysical possibility. The two phases remain interconnected, which is why his non-theological critics generally remain suspicious about the extent to which dogma actually drives Marion's philosophical agenda, and why it is difficult to assess the ultimate success of his project." Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, p. x.

The other major text of this earlier period is the very influential and provocative *God Without Being*. Although there are many problems in its overall shape, the central core of the book presents a remarkably clear theological thesis: that theology must emphasize the *theo-*over the *-logy*, and that the principal way that this emphasis should occur is through finding ways to talk of God beyond the category of 'Being'. It is this work which helps to orient Marion's project as a whole, since we find both the most positive aspect of his work and its own problematic turning point within the same book. The positive articulation of the 'Eucharistic site' for theology, a 'site' arising out of the concrete sacramental practice of the Church, is quickly passed over in favour of rather abstract formulations about the ecstatic nature of time and of 'the gift'. This shift is discernible in the break between the fifth and sixth chapters of the book, towards that section entitled 'Hors-Texte'.

In the early chapters Marion's credentials as a 'post-modern' theologian are displayed to full effect. Within this context, these chapters are an attempt to articulate a post-metaphysical critique of onto-theology, roughly in the footsteps of Heidegger, through the dialectical figure of the relationship between 'idol' and 'icon'.¹⁸ But from the start of this inquiry Marion is concerned with another distinctly theological theme, that of the unconditioned. This allows Marion to develop a "transcendental trajectory" which becomes "an a-historical deconstruction of the history of metaphysics at once abandoned to and removed from historical destiny."¹⁹ The concern with unconditionality leads away from history in a dialectic of un-concealment and withdrawal, situated here in terms of abandonment to and removal from history tending towards the eschaton.²⁰ It

¹⁸ Roughly speaking, an 'idol' is used to indicate the talk of God still under the category of 'Being', whereas 'icon' is used to point to the new formulation of 'without Being' that Marion is trying to articulate.

¹⁹ Marion, *God Without Being*, p. xxii.

²⁰ One way that we can see a problem arising here is in the way in which Marion focusses on the traditional theological category of Revelation in his later (allegedly) purely phenomenological works. Marion perhaps realizes this problem, for he makes a typographical distinction between Revelation (capitalized) and revelation (uncapitalized). This distinction in the way in which the two terms are used points to two sets of concerns which are linked: Revelation (capitalized) is the historically actual revelation as a phenomenon; revelation (uncapitalized) is the possibility of such a phenomenon. Marion's phenomenology, then, is an attempt to describe the possibility of a Revelation. It is an attempt to philosophize about the very legitimacy of a theology of Revelation. Strangely, although Marion's thought is directed towards creating a phenomenological possibility for a historically actual Revelation, he gives very little attention to what it means for something to be historically actual. Here we see the problem of authority and legitimacy arising again. For Marion, historical actuality has some sort of status as a fixed event whose contours are only properly described by adherence to descriptions of that phenomenon already decided in advance and to which we must adhere if we are to be true to that historical actuality. How this single event in its historical actuality relates to both the continuing unfolding of

is notable that if Marion had extended and developed his notion of a 'eucharistic site', which has a quite concrete character, some of the miscues of the later work might have been avoided. It is precisely this aspect that we are picking up on with the intention of exploring further.

Translator Thomas Carlson offers us an insight into Marion's overall concerns in *God Without Being*, in his introduction to the relatively recently published English translation of Marion's first theological work, *The Idol and Distance*.²¹ Carlson maintains that Marion's stated aim of working post-metaphysically is really all about the question of conditions and the unconditioned:

Marion insists that the phenomenon constitutes its own, unconditional and irreducible self-showing, against a constitution by a metaphysical God or transcendental 'I'... Marion's theology passes beyond metaphysics by freeing God's self-revelation in distance (withdrawal-absence) from limiting conceptuality, conditions of thought... His phenomenology passes beyond metaphysics by freeing phenomena's self-showing from a-priori conditions, the thinking subject or a metaphysical God.²²

There is more than a hint of Descartes here, something which results in the later Marion's concern to set-out some kind of *First Philosophy*. In an attempt to push onto-theology to its destitution Marion manages to succumb to the temptation to set his philosophical project on a great height removed from the world as a sort of articulation of possibility. Philosophy thus conceived remains the adjudicator of a theology, whilst simultaneously wishing to grant theology an autonomy from philosophy, and depending on the very possibility that his phenomenology has set out to describe.

In the opening chapter of *In Excess*, a late book published originally in 2001 and a mature working out of his project, Marion attempts to cast his phenomenology as the problem of a *primacy*. Much of his work, seen retrospectively through this essay, can be viewed as predominantly a grappling with what is *a-priori* and *a-posteriori*. This should alert us to the fact that Marion's work is still fundamentally located within an epistemological framework. Rather than 'first principles', Marion calls his phenomenology a 'last principle' submitted to givenness. It seems that Marion's work, as a

history, to our own (or anyone else's) historical actuality, and what the relations between these elements (situated in a manifold world of phenomena and diverse interpretations of that manifold) are like, are for Marion, issues secondary to the delineation of the possibility for this kind of historical event. Concern for actual history is secondary to the concern for a particular kind of certainty about such historical events.

²¹ Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, translated Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

²² *ibid.*, p. xix.

whole, might well be best understood within the light of this essay which casts a retrospective shadow over the whole trajectory of his thought:

... it becomes vital for philosophy to maintain, even today, a claim of primacy ... it is only in claiming, essentially, the rank of 'first philosophy' that philosophy remains in conformity with its proper essence ... I will no longer ask if 'first philosophy' remains thinkable, but rather which determination of primacy can legitimately be exercised there.²³

The problem with Marion's definition of 'givenness' is that it seems to operate as a way of singularizing the manifold to a unified principle which underlies or determines it, or which supplies an intelligibility to an otherwise profuse manifold of phenomenality, (even if this intelligibility is always dissolved in an 'excess' which saturates what is usually understood conceptually.) Whatever he may call them, these moves appear to us as *metaphysical*, and metaphysical in a quite 'traditional' sense. The whole question of 'primacy' and 'legitimacy' seem to us to indicate that Marion's polemic against 'metaphysics' is misconceived, simply because he needs some sort of framework for even making the moves he does in his phenomenology. For instance, 'givenness' has the role of legitimizing particular strands within manifold phenomenality over others, yet the manifold is 'given' by one and the same givenness. If givenness, in Marion's thought, gives all phenomenality, then Marion's understanding of givenness must be able to account for the manifold nature of phenomenality without stripping away its diversity and complexity. Since Marion no longer sees it as necessary to ask whether 'primacy' is a 'legitimate' place to situate the philosophical and theological issues, we need to question whether the search for first principles is as immune to the critique of metaphysics as Marion appears to believe it is.²⁴ Marion's fondness for Descartes and Kant as dialogue partners also suggests that he remains squarely within an epistemological problematic, one that raises certain kinds of metaphysical questions.²⁵ Givenness operates

²³ Marion, *In Excess*, p. 2. This passage is very illuminating in the context of Marion's thought as a whole. It shows how Marion's thinking often closes off an avenue of exploration by simply refusing to ask another question, and it shows how, for Marion, the key move is often not that of questioning the appropriateness of this closing off, but whether what is appropriated by making this move can be posited and determined legitimately. 'Legitimacy' is a very significant word for Marion's work, something which he is always at pains to establish. One has to ask why this is so.

²⁴ Here it is pertinent to point out Marion's earlier concern with the problems of conditions and to reclaiming a theological unconditionality. In returning to the notion of primacy, in the sense in which Marion articulates it at this late stage, we wonder whether he has failed to consider that the notion of primacy and principle are themselves conditions. This is both a philosophical problem and a theological liability.

²⁵ Janicaud suggests as much when he points out in his discussion of Marion's formulation of the phenomenological reduction that: "... for Marion, the transcendental reduction

as a *principle* within the primacy to which phenomenology's 'last principle' is correlated. So Marion's work is split between *epistemological apriori-aposteriori* problematics and the search for *metaphysical primacy*:

...if one expects of a 'first philosophy' that it determines what it brings to light in fixing to it a priori a principle or group of principles, in particular, in imposing the transcendental anteriority of the I (or the equivalent), then phenomenology no longer reaches...the status of a 'first philosophy'...For...the determining originality of its enterprise consists in rendering to the phenomenon an incontestable priority: to let it appear no longer as it must (according to the supposed a priori conditions of experience and its objects), but as it gives itself (from itself and as such)...instead it offers a last principle...The last principle takes the initiative to give priority back to the phenomenon. It comments on the act by which what shows itself gives itself, and what gives itself shows itself, always starting from the irreducible and prime self of the appearing.²⁶

One sees here that despite his quest for a non-metaphysical philosophy, Marion's work still shows major features of post-Cartesian philosophies, particularly the attempt to shape issues connected with the problem of 'metaphysics' around supposedly 'epistemological' inquiries. Marion's 'First Philosophy' is of this rather odd hybrid kind. This hybridity also extends to Marion's conception of the relationship of philosophy to theology. On the one hand, he separates off theology from philosophy; on the other, he wants to set out a *first philosophy* and yet clearly works within *theological* parameters to do so. What is noticeable is that Marion clearly conceives *God Without Being* as a piece of theological work. We think this is the work where Marion's concerns become quite clear *theologically*. Yet it is also in this book that Marion turns to the analysis of the 'gift' and to a phenomenology of givenness in order to give a theological theme –*charity*– a philosophical possibility of articulation: in 'givenness'. Ironically, in focussing on the how of charity, on givenness, on a sort of phenomenological possibility of Revelation, Marion fails to question *the way* of charity and the *life* that issues from such a way. This way is not a *principle* –like 'givenness'– but a *practice*. Likewise, if we are not to remain hopelessly abstract and idealistic, is not the more fundamental issue not the *gift* as such, but *what it does* and how it fits into concrete lived situations?

is not uniquely Husserlian, but 'Cartesian' or even 'Kantian' as well. 'It matters little here' the author bizarrely specifies. On the contrary, it matters a lot, for the question is whether it is possible to amalgamate, for the needs of the cause, such different undertakings." Janicaud, p. 57.

²⁶ Marion, *In Excess*, pp. 25-6.

II The Correlation of 'First-Last', 'Givenness-Reduction'

I have but one theme: if the phenomenon is defined as what shows itself in and from itself (Heidegger), instead of what admits constitution (Husserl), this *self* can be attested only inasmuch as the phenomenon first *gives itself* . . . What *shows itself* first *gives itself* –this is my one and only theme.²⁷

Since Marion's phenomenology of givenness is so heavily dependent on the correlation that he establishes between givenness and *reduction*, it is essential to understand the problematics that surround the way in which Marion conceives the phenomenological reduction. What will be apparent is that the point we have just made about the confusion of a *principle* with a *way*, is also operative in the manner in which Marion formulates his central methodological correlation.

How does Marion get from the latter half of *God Without Being* to the 'First Philosophy' of *In Excess*? What is apparent is that during this period, Marion became interested in Edmund Husserl. Whereas the earlier texts refer often to Heidegger, an influence still apparent in the first half of *God Without Being*, the figure of Husserl is prominent by his *absence*. By the time of - *Reduction and Givenness* Husserl has moved to centre stage.²⁸ In the first chapter of this book, Marion thoroughly explores early Husserlian texts. In *Being Given*, Marion explicitly links reduction and givenness by appealing to Husserl's text *The Idea of Phenomenology*.²⁹ It is in this text that Husserl first talks about the notion of a phenomenological reduction.³⁰ We are compelled to ask, why did Marion not work with later texts where Husserl had more carefully worked out what reduction might mean? It is clear that it is because in *The Idea of Phenomenology* Husserl *links reduction specifically to givenness*, something which he does not do in later formulations. It is precisely this issue which has been

²⁷ *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, translated Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 4; p. 5. Marion's italics.

²⁸ *Reduction and Givenness* is the first of the trilogy of books where Marion works out the phenomenology of givenness, the other two are *Being Given* and *In Excess. Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, translated Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998). *Réduction et donation* was originally published in 1989, *Étant donné* in 1997, *De Surcroît* in 2001.

²⁹ Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, translated Lee Hardy (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999). A translation of *Die Idee de Phänomenologie*, 1907. Marion cites explicitly from this text. *Being Given*, pp. 14-15; p. 21; cf: Husserl, p. 34; p. 64; p. 66.

³⁰ "Only through a reduction, which we shall call the phenomenological reduction, do I acquire an absolute givenness that no longer offers anything transcendent . . . to every psychological experience there corresponds, by way of the phenomenological reduction, a pure phenomenon that exhibits its immanent essence . . . as an absolute givenness.;" "The psychological phenomenon in psychological apperception and objectification is not really an absolute givenness, rather, only the pure phenomenon, the reduced phenomenon." *The Idea of Phenomenology*, p. 34; p. 64. Husserl's italics.

picked up by Janicaud. In an important section of his essay, entitled 'The Schematism of the Three Reductions', Janicaud critiques Marion for not being sensitive to Husserl's development of the notion of reduction:

...this unified presentation of the transcendental reduction fails to recognize the difference, introduced by Husserl...between regional reductions and the epoché as such. The epoché is no longer simply directed at objects related to psychological events, but at pure lived experiences in their intentional correlations...Marion systematizes the Heideggerian critique of the Husserlian reduction...to such a point that it becomes impossible to discern either the interest or the originality of Husserl.³¹

Janicaud then presents a detailed analysis of each of Marion's points with regards to his appropriation of Husserl and Heidegger that lead to Marion's own formulation of a new phenomenological principle, "so much reduction, so much givenness."³² Janicaud's main critical point is that whereas Marion presents this formulation as "inevitable", it is anything but: "the path that was supposed to lead to it proves to have been too artificially flattened."³³

Janicaud's criticisms focus primarily on the way in which Marion's conception of phenomenology itself is really rather odd, whilst presenting his work as being strictly within the tradition of Husserl and Heidegger:

In Marion's work, there is no respect for the phenomenological order; it is manipulated as an ever-elastic apparatus, even when it is claimed to be "strict"...his response concerning "givenness" makes use of the term's very ambiguity to avoid truly responding to the question posed...the question is one of a totally phenomenal givenness, which is precisely not the case with... "Marionesque" givenness.³⁴

Janicaud's critical work is incisive. However, we would like to suggest another problem which opens out Marion's work in another direction. It may be that it is not 'givenness' which is the most

³¹ Janicaud, p. 57; pp. 58-59.

³² Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, pp. 203-205.

³³ Janicaud, p. 61.

³⁴ Janicaud, p. 65. This issue of the way in which Marion understands the task and reach of phenomenology comes to the fore in the discussion between Marion and Jacques Derrida published as 'On the Gift'. In a point of debate over Marion's desire to do away with the notion of a 'horizon' (the condition of phenomenality, the 'as such') and to focus on the unconditioned, Derrida accuses Marion of not doing phenomenology: "Then would you dissociate what you call phenomenology from the authority of the as such? If you do that you would be the first heresy in phenomenology...I am also for the suspension of the horizon, but, for that very reason...I am not a phenomenologist anymore." 'On the Gift', in *God, the Gift and Postmodernism*, edited John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 66.

problematic issue in Marion's work, but the way in which he understands and uses the notion of a *reduction*.

Just what is *reduction* and how is it employed in the phenomenological tradition as formulated by Husserl and Heidegger? Briefly, the reduction emerges as a *methodological practice* or *discipline* out of the original formulations of phenomenological method. It is always a part of the intentional structure which is the *binding together of intuition with phenomenon*, that structure which undercuts any need to emphasize subject or object, subjectivity or objectivity. On this basis, Heidegger does not depart from Husserl. Where Heidegger moves away from Husserl, is in the specifics of the reduction itself and what is involved in its operation. Fundamentally, *the reduction is a methodological technique* for phenomenology as a philosophical *method* and as such lies at the heart of phenomenological practice.³⁵

The reduction can not be operated or emphasized outside of phenomenological practice. To focus on reduction means to take this intentional relation seriously from the outset and not to collapse it into a monolithic givenness. Marion's problem is that he does not reflect on *his own practice of the reduction* and he has no coherent account of the philosophical practice in which he is engaged. This results in a failure to give any account of how his philosophical polemic to strip away *human-centred* questions from his philosophical vocabulary can even be *articulated* without consideration of the *human who practices philosophy*. Given that Marion's engagement with Heidegger is long and detailed, one struggles to see why he fails to recognize that these are some of the *fundamental* issues with which Husserl and Heidegger grappled, particularly those discussions which evolve out of Heidegger's notion of *Dasein*:

Phenomenological reduction as the leading of our vision from beings back to being nevertheless is not the only basic component of phenomenological method... For this guidance of vision back from beings to being requires at the same time that *we should bring ourselves forward positively toward being* itself...³⁶

Now Marion certainly is able to take account of certain elements of Heidegger's concerns, but he often seems burdened by the desire

³⁵ Reduction for Husserl leads to phenomenological seeing, to eidetic clarity, and operates out of (detaching itself, so to speak, from) a natural attitude. Reduction for Heidegger is the working out of the comportment structures which are *Dasein's* natural attitude. In both cases, the natural human attitude is thus taken up into phenomenological insight, which reflects on, out of, and upon the natural attitude, which is embedded in an intentional structure.

³⁶ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, translated Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 21-23. My italics.

to strip away any possible mediation by that which is human.³⁷ Yet simultaneously he is also highly critical of Husserl's focus on *objects*, on *objectivity* in general, or of any philosophy which seems to be directed at a dimension which could be described in terms of its *conceptuality*. Yet we see this also firmly placed within the frame of a phenomenological method by Heidegger:

... here necessarily belongs to the conceptual interpretation of being and its structures... to the reductive construction of being, a destruction – a critical process in which the traditional concepts... are deconstructed down to the sources from which they were drawn... These three basic components of phenomenological method – reduction, construction, destruction – belong together in their content and must receive grounding in their mutual pertinence...³⁸

Marion's attempts to recast the subject and downplay the object, whilst privileging a 'pure' transcendental unconditioned givenness which gives both objectivity and subjectivity, must be critiqued from this perspective. If there is any sense in which we can speak of this pure givenness, it emerges not as a monolithic transcendental, but from the intentional structure itself, which is relational. The correlation which pervades all aspects of phenomenology is this *relationality* in clear view, emerging out of intentional structure.

The best way to show the problems with the way in which Marion uses the notion of reduction is through one of his own phenomenological analyses. In *Excess* provides us with a fine example of such an analysis. The third essay in this book, a reflection on the 'saturated phenomenon' of the Idol entitled 'The Radiance of the Painting', is an attempt by Marion to bring his phenomenology of givenness into the realm of aesthetics, and simultaneously the setting out of Marion's 'inversion' of the Kantian category of 'quality'.³⁹

This essay is very problematic. The 'closing off' operation that we observed earlier is properly at work in this essay. He treats the painting as "not an object", but casts it as an instance of radiance, an excess of givenness which the painting merely instances, or provides a site for. The painting itself is simply a vehicle for a more originary givenness which is just 'there' regardless of the individual painting under consideration, like some sort of Platonic form. This means

³⁷ For instance his employment of the notion comportment towards the 'Other' is always situated in terms of "hearing the Call" and human actions are always in response.

³⁸ Heidegger, *Basic Problems*, p. 21.

³⁹ For Marion, a 'saturated phenomenon' is a way of indicating not a 'phenomenon' as much as different modes of phenomenality per se, the way in which things appear. Marion's notion of a 'saturated phenomenon' is an attempt to reformulate Kant's 'pure concepts of the understanding' – the categories – by inverting them. Kant's quartal division of quantity, quality, relation and modality become, in Marion's work, the categories of event, idol, flesh and icon, and the four are gathered together simultaneously as revelation.

that his aesthetics operates with an *a priori* notion of what makes paintings 'work', something which he never spells out explicitly. In Marion's analysis, the painting, in order that it might serve as an instance of givenness, is made to *perform* some kind of *reduction* of the phenomenal field. How paintings accomplish this reduction is never unpacked or examined, but simply claimed. We need to ask, how can a *painting* do that? A reduction is the application of a philosophical technique performed by the phenomenologist! According to Marion, givenness is 'known' (or 'perceived', in this case) through the type of saturation proper to paintings (conceived as radiance, or as "idol") and this means that the painting must be some kind of 'object' for perception. To claim otherwise means to call into question the proper status within the phenomenal field that the art work holds. Clearly to function as an instance, as Marion seems to suggest, means that the painting is situated as a particular element within the *broader* field or *region* of phenomena. Consider the following:

Here is the painting: the *non-physical space* where the visible alone reigns abolishes l'invisible (the invisible by default) and reduces the phenomenon to pure visibility... the painting, such that in its frame *it operates a reduction of the given to pure visibility*, produces... a visible that has never previously been seen by anyone.⁴⁰

There are several problems with this, but we will focus on the two that are most apparent with the aim of showing what is fundamentally misguided about Marion's approach. Firstly, as Graham Ward points out, Marion often has recourse to making the *material*, the *physical*, merely a metaphor, "... the movement from the concrete, the *reale* (sic), into the metaphoric, where objects continually lose their specificity..."⁴¹ We can see this in the example above. Marion *de-materializes* the painting, it is for him a "non-physical space". Marion seems to be operating with a crudely Platonic semiotics, or something quite like it: worldly visibility is merely a sign pointing to a higher visibility which makes itself known through the radiance of paintings, in excess of our capacities.

Secondly, the painting "operates a *reduction* of the given to a pure visibility". How one interprets the way in which Marion's notion of reduction operates, pretty much decides whether his project as a whole is viable, since in his work the correlation between reduction and givenness is absolutely crucial. In this passage, Marion seems to suggest that he conceives of the phenomenological reduction in a very strange way. It is not a philosophical *method* but something else entirely. What this 'something else' is remains a complete mystery. Just *how* does a *painting* operate a reduction? One major place where

⁴⁰ Marion, *In Excess*, p. 68. My italics and emphasis.

⁴¹ Ward, *Post-Secular Philosophy*, p. 233.

Marion's analysis becomes difficult to comprehend is, therefore, in the status of the *reduction* which the painting supposedly performs.

What Marion appears to be attempting is to downplay simultaneously the status of objects whilst also attempting to sidestep subjectivity by placing the operation of a reduction with a now somehow 'de-objectified' object. Subjectivity is constituted by the excess of intuition required to assent to any kind of perception or cognition of the saturated phenomenon which "gives itself": saturatedness or givenness 'calls forth' an excess of intuition which constitutes a being-given in place of subjectivity. The problem remains that Marion never elucidates just how the painting, for instance, operates a reduction. Marion's failure to unpack this claim means that his project remains suspiciously unclear.

What does Marion's *phenomenological reduction* look like considered under the rubric of a *practice*. Marion hints at this in *Being Given*:

[the painting] . . . comes from the studio of a minor master . . . the work of a well-endowed student skilled in copying . . . what phenomenon is thus given to me . . .⁴²

In other words, a student produces the work. What then are these "skills" of copying? What might they tell us about the activity of painting, whether by a student or by a minor master. In either case, the *painter produces* the painting as an instance of a set of *painting practices*, both technical and expressive. The viewer sees the painting as part of a set of viewing and interpretative practices, from the individual appreciation (in Marion's language 'admiration') to the cultural economic (many 'art lovers' view paintings as more than simply "viewable" objects, since they enter into culturally defined and defining relations, such as 'taste', 'value' and 'high-low' culture/class issues.) But it is clear that for Marion, the properly human involvement which art in general is a particular, and important, manifestation, is "banal":

The abrupt metamorphosis from the unseen into the idol, which the painting accomplishes in its own right, reproduces nothing already seen and resembles nothing visible in the world. It adds to the visible of the world a visible that no longer belongs to it, transcending and annulling it. The painter does not reproduce it, he or she produces, copying nothing, making seen –these are banalities . . . The history of art must be understood as the emergence of a flux that is sometimes interrupted but always renascent until this point, of visibles so intense and dense that they irremediably submerge what the world gives to see.⁴³

⁴² Marion, *Being Given*, p. 40.

⁴³ Marion, *In Excess*, p. 69.

If instance of anything, the painting is an instance of a whole set of *artistic practices* (painting techniques, cultural transmissions both artistic and economic, tradition history) which are brought to a focal point in each individual painting, but in each case the practices involved shape the painting in a way which is distinctive for each individual instance. The painting is thus a locus of social and cultural practices without those practices 'explaining' the individual painting as such. The practices do not act as a causal or explanatory scheme, since they are always various, complex and embedded in diverse historical and social situations. They escape simple categorization by their complex diversity. In each case the painting provides a site, or locus, in which these practices come together (or gather), but they do not define the painting in any singular sense. This can be seen in its complexity by considering that the painting is a locus in its own terms. This means preserving a sense of the painting as 'artifact' or 'work', as long as this remains neutral and not extended into a pinnacle achievement which somehow rises above its cultural situation, but is situated within a tradition of other such artifacts and works. This means to preserve the common sense interpretation of a painting or other artwork as that which is produced as real 'object' or entity, on canvas in the instance of a painting, without reducing this artifact to the result of a guiding principle or 'idea' which the artifact embodies, or denying the work any real status as entity in its own right. This locus is then extended and made more complex by the painting being situated in a museum, auctioned, placed in a home, stolen, etc, with each situation introducing different emphases in terms of the social and cultural field. Against Marion, then, it must be clearly emphasized that these situations are each a part of the region of phenomenality in which the painting is situated, with the painting itself a specific phenomenon within it.

For Marion, the category of 'idol' is about *visibility as such*. The painting, since it is a part of the field of visibility is chosen to demonstrate the category. However, this procedure on Marion's part is problematic because, as we have done, it is possible to produce a very different reading of the same phenomenon from another perspective.⁴⁴ So far from being determinative, Marion's category of 'idol' itself offers a *multiplicity* of different readings and interpretations. Rather than determining anything, it offers itself up for interpretation; far from being a property of the phenomena under interpretation, the

⁴⁴ Moreover, Marion's understanding of the relationship between the 'visible' and the 'invisible' could also be subjected to a critique via Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy. Here we would be careful not to understand the invisible as being un-worldly, as Marion appears to do. For Merleau-Ponty, the invisible is another dimension of this world. This is, the whole gist of categorial intuition, the problem of Being, the genealogy of logic and the generation of language for Merleau-Ponty.

hermeneutic enterprise, though determined by the phenomenon as the focus of attention, is still a hermeneutic practice. It does not matter how much determination is given to the phenomenon or to the interpretation, since any interpretation is situated within a practical set of skills of interpretation which are embedded in some sort of practice.

In the end Marion's work remains difficult because although he has acknowledged Pascal's critique of Cartesian metaphysics, and although he seems to be critical of the traditional problematics of subjectivity and objectivity, he remains firmly within the sway of certain epistemological problematics. This makes Marion's thinking a highly dense, confusing and complex affair, which offers on the surface the rhetorical flourish of French philosophy in the post-Heideggerean climate, but requires great leaps of acceptance of Marion's pre-suppositions and refusals in order to string together a coherent trajectory in his work. His work is highly problematic once one starts to dig deeper below its rhetorical surface: whilst the surface glitters with promise, the depths prove murky and misleading.

Marion's work seems to move too easily in blurring the boundary between proving something and showing something. Considering his rhetoric is so heavily oriented to the notion of letting things show themselves from themselves, there is considerable irony that he must be-labour the point as he does. Is he attempting to prove that things show themselves from themselves?⁴⁵ Failure to think carefully enough about some of the intricacies of his own philosophical practice, combined with his suspicion of any kind of mediation or activity by a human 'subject', seem to find a strange parallel in Marion's failure to question how human persons might be *involved* in the way that things "show themselves from themselves." We think that this question is one that is answered by a focus on the practices of doing philosophy and on the practices of doing theology, and in this way also illuminate their relationship to one another and to the object of their inquiry and articulation. Doing phenomenology is fundamentally about *including* those practices as a part of what is elucidated: the 'space' disclosed by such phenomenological practice inevitably involves the *activity* of philosophy as a *situated* practice. This is the whole point of Husserl's emphasis on phenomenological reduction. The reduction is exactly that procedure which is not merely jettisoned once one has made the reduction, but is continually re-done because it

⁴⁵ We suspect, however, that the subversive element that we have pointed out before is revealed by Marion's concerns with authority and legitimacy. We have reason to be suspicious that his focus on givenness is not so much about allowing phenomena to show themselves as about providing some sort of phenomenological warrant for the notion that what the Church's teaching office sets out must be taken as already given. It is about setting out a philosophy which leaves room for the revelatory claims of the Church. In this sense his philosophy takes on a very different character indeed.

is itself a part of what phenomenology elucidates. The reduction helps to bring phenomena into presence through a kind of 'marking-out' of a realm or domain for thought, but more: this 'marking-out' of a realm for thinking is the very *matter* of philosophy, this marking-out is an *activity* that is engaged in, occurring in a particular situation, as part of a life. 'Concepts' and 'categories' are not the *objects* of philosophy, nor even of thought, they are the *way* in which we mark out a region to work with, work in, to work-out-of. The more flexible and fluid these markings-out become, the richer the region thus marked out. Philosophical activity is richest when it seeks to dissolve the rigidity of precise definition in favour of the opening up of regions of investigation whilst remaining rooted in the life in which such activity always occurs and in which it has its sense. In order to unpack some of the implications of such a thesis, we must return to re-assess basic issues within the phenomenological tradition with the view to opening out new critical angles and opportunities. Although Marion has seen the necessity of such a return, it is clear that his desire to get 'beyond' being is a move in the wrong direction, since he thus cannot account for *his own situatedness as a philosopher*.

Andrew C. Rawnsley
St Mary's College,
University of St Andrews
South Street
St Andrews, Fife KY16 9JU
Scotland
ar37@st-andrews.ac.uk