Marion on Miracles

Of Insufficient Reason and a New Enlightenment

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Introduction

This essay is nothing more than an attempt to raise a question, for in contemporary philosophy we are witnessing what one might call, especially seen from the viewpoint of the Enlightenment, a *miraculous return of the miracle*. Whereas the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries is famous for its critique of miracles, formerly proofs of divine revelation, now, when philosophy has turned unexpectedly to religion, again the theme, or at least the vocabulary, of the miracle has entered philosophical discourse as well. Immediately, the thought of Emmanuel Levinas and that of Jean-Luc Marion come to mind. Levinas has, in several instances, used the term miracle to refer to the alterity of the Other,¹ but it is Marion who seems particularly eager not to exclude the miracle from philosophy's concerns, since, indeed, the saturated phenomenon opens the frontiers of phenomenology to such an extent that it would be simply irrational not to include a phenomenology of theological phenomena. Marion asserts that his phenomenology of givenness offers the opportunity to read the data of Revelation (i.e. the scriptures) as simple and plain 'phenomena.' For Marion, miracles are no longer to be conceived of as exceptions to ordinary phenomena; it is rather the other way around: ordinary phenomena give themselves from themselves and as themselves, in short, they are *events* and, supposedly, "the event can take the figure of the miracle" (Marion 2002a: 53). We will limit ourselves here, then, to the thought of Marion.

One will object that the miracle of the saturated phenomenon has nothing to do with the well-known definition of the miracle, according to which a miracle contradicts the laws of nature. However, my focus here is not on the 'laws of nature,' or on whatever contradicts them, but

¹ See Levinas 2002a: 89, "the miracle of creation," and especially 97, "[a]lterity is possible only as a miraculous abundance." See also Levinas 2002b: 44, "[s]ubstitution, that miracle of ethics..."

on the contradiction itself and the exceptional nature that is evoked in many known definitions of the miracle. Indeed, in the course of history, other definitions of the miracle have been given as well, but, surprisingly, all of these definitions insist, in one way or another, on the exception the miracle brings to the rules of 'ordinary' phenomena, be it one's expectations (Augustine), the laws of nature (Aquinas/Hume), or one's experience (Rahner).²

Since, even in metaphysics, as the saying goes, the exception to the rule proves the rule, Derrida, for instance, would say that the absences and imperfections of this world are explained and justified by a discernable metaphysical presence that is able to remove what we experience as imperfect and incomplete. To discern such a presence, however, supposes that one immediately has to put this presence over and against an absence – or, in his terms, a defect, fall, or shortage – using binary oppositions so that both are relative to each other, instead of, as was assumed, explaining one another (rather: the one through the other) with absolute, necessary, and sufficient reasons. So the miracle was assumed to reveal the 'truth,' 'proof,' and 'reason' of the Christian faith: the presence of a supernatural event revealed the truth and the ratio of the natural order. The *Causa Sui*, the otherworldly 'God' of ontotheology, was able to ground and account for the diversity of the material world. Derrida would contend that this presence is never *given*, that that which is supposed to redeem the absence, the defect that is the material world, from its absences, is never simply present and thus is itself marked by an absence. The quest for reasons and explanations is therefore never-ending, always different and thus deferred. In other words, the instance that took the role of foundation, for instance the *Causa Sui* or the miracle, finds itself founded by and dependent upon that which it is supposed to found, and therefore we end up with a mutual founding or, in other words, without a full rational foundation.³

² See the entry on 'Miracle' in Lacoste 2002: 737-742 (translations mine). Cf. Augustine, "I call a miracle anything which appears arduous or unusual, beyond the expectation or ability of the one who marvels at it"; Cf. Aquinas, a miracle is "something beyond the order of created nature," and Hume's well-known definition that a miracle is a "violation of the laws of nature." For Rahner's definition, see below.

³ On this vice-versa of ground and grounding, see Marion 2001: 9-19, esp. 14-15. In the language of the early Derrida, this is to say that the signifier functions independently from the signified. The sentence 'the table is brown'

The end of metaphysics, in this sense, is the absence of grounds and reasons, or to put it in another way: the absence of the exception, the miracle, the Transcendent.

This, however, is not the whole story of deconstruction. The later writings of Derrida have revealed that deconstruction does not entail the end of theology and religion, but is itself driven by a longing for the impossible, or to put it differently, for faith in the exception. It is in this sense that deconstruction utters a warning to both philosophy and theology. It warns philosophy of a sort of conceptual hybris (see Smith 2002) and it reminds theology, by doing so, of its inherent critique of idols (Caputo & Scanlon 1999: 1-19). Deconstruction constantly recalls that that which is easily identified and presented in concepts as transcendence always and already is never simply the 'pure' presence of the Transcendent God. Since this absence (i.e. the discrepancy between the concept of God and 'God') is structural, philosophy cannot obtain that which is truly God. Therefore, the presence of God (or of anything else) can never be obtained in full by reason alone. Similarly, it reminds theology that "anything *present* can [never] embody the *tout autre* or claim to be its visible form in history" (Caputo & Scanlon 1999: 5), and that theology, thus, as well and still, has to be wary of holy calves. Deconstruction, then, amounts "not [to] a denial of the presence of God but [to] a critique of the idols of presence" (Caputo & Scanlon 1999: 5). Idolatry therefore concerns both philosophy and theology.

We have evoked Derrida's thought for the simple reason that both he and Marion are referred to as proponents of a tendency in contemporary thought which is designated as a "*new* Enlightenment," one that is "enlightened about Enlightenment" (Caputo & Scanlon 1999: 3, 7). According to Marion, modern Enlightened rationality has limited itself to both the principle of sufficient reason and to that of non-contradiction. It conferred conditions to every possible experience. All that is real is real only if it is possible, that is, if it does not contradict the conditions of

does not need intuitive fulfilment in order to signify. Therefore, the sentence 'the table is brown' can be said to be true or even rational without a corresponding state of affairs. The "liberation of the signifier from the demands of intuitive redemption" (Caputo & Scanlon 1999: 5), from the constraints of the signified, shows that there is signification without there needing to be a total presence of the signified, and therefore also without the total transparency of the signifier.

the possibility of experience. These conditions are, according to Marion, first the transcendental subject purportedly possessive of universal reason (Descartes/Kant), and second, the idea of a horizon (Husserl) according to which every phenomenon has to and can only appear in a certain light and interpretation. The transcendental subject corresponds to the law of non-contradiction ($I=I$), and the idea of a horizon to that of sufficient reason, since in metaphysics, “nothing appears without attesting that it is possible. This possibility is equivalent...to the possibility of knowing the sufficient reason of such an apparition” (Marion 2002b: 182).

Marion thus queries the limits of rationality. Can one speak rationally about that which is regarded to be *impossible*? This ‘new enlightenment’ would be able to deliver an “even greater rationality” (Marion 2004: 34), one that can incorporate the excessiveness of certain phenomena such as revelation, iconic appearance and even, who knows, miracles.

The Saturated Phenomenon as the Possibility of the Impossibility

Phenomenology is that enterprise that investigates that which appears as “that which shows itself in itself” (Heidegger 1967: 51). We will see how Marion’s sketch of the saturated phenomenon, through a criticism of both Kant and Husserl, develops Heidegger’s definition of a phenomenon. Kant, on Marion’s account, aligns the phenomenon to the categories of the subject’s understanding to its transcendental make-up: what we can *know* is what can *appear*. First, the table is nothing more than the sum of its parts – a table is nothing more than a plateau with four legs (quantity). Secondly, a table is nothing more than that which in reality *is* or *is not*, and this difference is dependent upon the foreseeable intensity with which it appears (quality). Thirdly, a table appears in accordance with and analogous to other experiences – the table appears alongside the chair etc. (relation). Fourthly, the table can only appear if it aligns itself to the epistemological constitution of the subject, such that a table can and must appear only to a transcendental subject (modality) (see Marion 2002b: 199-215). The first three points describe the idea of a horizon, and the last aims at erecting the transcendental subject as the starting-point of all epistemology. In Husserl, Marion detects a similar restriction of the ability of the phenomenon to appear. Husserl investigated the intentional structure of consciousness through the pair intention/intuition: when I aim intentionally at a table, intuition always falls short to that which is intended. For instance, when I aim at the table

as a plateau with four legs, strictly speaking this intention is not fulfilled, since intuition only offers me two or three legs of the table at a time.

The saturated phenomenon defies these conditions of possibility; it contests both the idea that, for a phenomenon to appear, it is restricted to and limited by a horizon, and the idea that its appearance depends upon the anteriority of the transcendental subject. Perhaps Marion's most important proposal is to extend Heidegger's definition of the phenomenon as follows: not only does the phenomenon show itself from itself, but also as its self. The saturated phenomenon is therefore unconditioned, depending only on itself to appear. The saturated phenomenon shows itself from itself and as its self, that is, the phenomenon *appears* in phenomenality and visibility (shows itself), *autonomously* (from itself) and *individually* (as its self). Marion tries to think the human being's encounter with phenomena as a *singular* encounter, new at each moment in time, enhancing and stretching visibility to its limits and beyond. Consider this example: I inherit a table from my deceased grandmother. Marion's point is that whatever anticipations I make in receiving the table in my house – be it re-arranging my space so that the table, as an object, can be placed or re-arranging my time so that the table can be used, as a being ready-to-hand, to eat or write on it – this still does not exhaust the significations that can be attributed to the table. What happens, indeed, when this table at the time of delivery overwhelms me by the stories that give themselves to be told on the occasion of its gift, when I am bedazzled by the memories attached to this singular table? The table gives itself as an event: it defies whatever kind of anticipations I undertook to receive it. First, the table alters the conception of a horizon: instead of provoking one single horizon according to which it can appear (being or object), it provokes an infinite amount of horizons that altogether forbid to constitute it as a single object. It defies the anticipations of the transcendental subject, in that the table now appears as much more than the sum of its parts, as well-beyond the subject's limits to determine if it is or is not,⁴ as unique and unrelated to other phenomena, and, finally, as an event that convokes me to align myself to its appearance (cf. Marion 2002b: 119-131). Or, to return to Husserlian vocabulary, the table gives its self with an excess of

⁴ Recall that for Marion as for Levinas the ultimate question is not 'to be or not to be.'

intuition over against my (anticipating) intentions, which arise only on the basis of a certain horizon and the transcendental subject.

Thus, contrary to modern thought that limited the phenomenon to that which is possible, the saturated phenomenon extends the domain of the possible to that which, in the eyes of modern reason, is impossible, to *the possibility of the impossible* (Marion 2002b: 218). What is (im)possible, then, is that phenomena appear in their own right, defying the principle of contradiction as much as the principle of sufficient reason (e.g. Marion 2002b: 160, 172), for the being given gives itself both as consisting in nothing other than its giving it(s) self (Marion 2002b: 151) (and therefore as *other* than its essence as a being or as an object) and without any determinable reason, except perhaps its own. The gift and the event of the table give themselves without being. Marion comments: “Phenomenology thus makes possible the possibility par excellence – the miracle” (Marion 1989: 54).⁵

A number of questions arise here: the first one comes from Emmanuel Falque who asks, “whether it suffices to reverse Kant to take leave of Kant, thus whether to reverse metaphysics is sufficient to overcome metaphysics?” (Falque 2003: 71); the second is from John Caputo and reads: “From Derrida’s point of view, has Marion simply offered a more refined definition of hyperessentialism in terms of givenness?” (Caputo & Scanlon 1999: 9). In what follows, I will explore both questions, and try to show why they both strike at the core of Marion’s phenomenology of givenness.

Understanding the Miracle: a Debate between Caputo and Westphal

First we have to make sure that we understand the miracle of the saturated phenomenon correctly. To do this, we will now briefly turn to the debate between Jack Caputo and Merold Westphal. Caputo contends that Marion exposes himself to the danger of “phenomenologizing theology,” and that, through this danger of reading the New Testament miracles phenomenologically, theology might suffer from a “magical

⁵ See also Marion 1989: 45, for his definition of the miracle: “let us name as miracle every event of which the effectivity proves the possibility of that which I, previous to it, definitely held as impossible.” Falque 2003: 54, describes this text as “probably the best theological translation...of *Being Given*” (translation mine). Moreover, Marion’s description of the event in Marion 2002b: 172, almost literally rehearses this definition of the miracle!

realism” and “a historical literalism of the events of the New Testament” (Caputo 2006: 19). Westphal, however, suspects Caputo’s contention to be a “modern, all too modern, product of the dogmatic naturalism of the Enlightenment,” and even “a bondage to the principle of sufficient reason” (Westphal 2003: 3). Caputo’s reading is that Marion, while trying to describe the possibility of Revelation, falls in the trap again of a metaphysics of presence (in which the intuition/presence fulfills the intention/absence) in that he offers a hermeneutics of faith at the heart of the given. Marion indeed resorts to faith and theology as the only instances that “can judge [the] actual manifestation or ontic status” (Marion 2002b: 236)⁶ of Revelation. Surely it is striking that Marion has recourse to the language of being and effectivity when referring to the possibility of Revelation. If only faith can bridge the gap between the possibility of revelation and its actuality, the fact remains that this faith is, then, once again described as in search of actuality and the full-presence of what now, in faith, is considered to be possible. For any hermeneutic of faith, according to Caputo, will see Revelation *as if* it had actually occurred: faith will supply “an interpretative slant...that allows the believer to intend something that is precisely *not* given,” and here Marion’s phenomenology of givenness, Caputo contends, thus “finds itself resubmitted to the most classical Husserlian constraints” (Caputo 2006: 28-29). If this is the case, Caputo argues, Marion might not so much prove the possibility of a saturating intuition and givenness as testify to the fact that this longing for full-presence is precisely what defines faith as an excess of intention over intuition.

Thus we are left, once again, with the prayers and tears of deconstruction. Or so it appears! For Marion has responded to this debate – say, *par avance*. The ‘blasphemy’ of modern thought, according to Marion, is to think that “faith serves...to compensate faulty intuition,” not seeing that we “should believe...rather to confront the excess of intuition” (Marion 2002c: 145-146). In fact, “the most common and rude error with regard to the miracles of Christ consists in characterising them by a deficiency of intuition, givenness and manifestation that faith should compensate [for]” (Marion 1989: 56). Modern Enlightened thinking, that

⁶ Marion indeed distinguishes between phenomenology and theology in the sense that the former describes the possibility of revelation while the latter examines the actuality or reality of this revelation, see also Marion 2002b: 367.

is metaphysics,⁷ has limited the field of phenomenological manifestation in a very thorough way. While Marion contends that faith consists in believing what there is to see already, Caputo argues that faith consists in believing what is not available to sight. Let us take Westphal's lead to escape the impasse: "the phenomenologist, who describes the possible event of revelation, does not qua phenomenologist affirm the actuality of the supernatural" (Westphal 2003: 1-2); he or she should take note that this revelation may have been experienced as miraculous. This, indeed, seems to be more loyal to Marion's position when the latter states that "in this sense, the miracle...no longer bears on a physical event, but on consciousness itself" (Marion 1989: 49, 46). If the miracle reveals the limits of that which I held, prior to it, as possible, then everything hinges on the ability of the 'subject' (rather: the gifted) to recognize that the impossible is possible indeed, that the miracle is possible without needing to be referred to as supernatural. For indeed, what Caputo failed to see is that the distinction between the saturated phenomenon of the first order (idol, icon, etc.) and the phenomenon of revelation, a distinction which he casts as a distinction between the natural and the supernatural order (Caputo 2006: 21) does not hold: *both* degrees of saturation are described by Marion as the possibility of the impossible, and it is in this sense that revelation "remains inscribed within the transcendental conditions of possibility," available to both believers and non-believers (Marion 2002b: 218 (first order), 235-236 (revelation)). If there are conditions of possibility to appearances, Marion tells us, these conditions must not be conferred upon phenomena, but rather phenomena, when they show themselves as saturated,⁸ condition what we understand as possible to such an extent that what we understood as transcendently impossible shows itself to be in effect possible.

Therefore, Marion is not so much smuggling in a theology of the supernatural as raising the stakes of the 'natural,' transcendental, conditions of possibility to the level of incorporating the possibility of the impossible, i.e. the miracle. This is what allows Marion to say that "one should then apply to every given phenomenon the character of a fact that Schelling describes so perfectly with regard to just one (Revelation)" (Marion 2002b: 141), even to the point that Falque can

⁷ It is striking that in Marion's account of metaphysics the reader is more often referred to Leibniz, Kant, and Suarez than, for instance, Plato or Aristotle.

⁸ I.e. a phenomenon that shows itself from itself and as its self.

remark that every phenomenon comes to me as if it were a miracle, and is experienced as a quasi-divine appearance *ex nihilo* (Falque 2003: 61-62).

What needs to be examined, then, is not the distinction between saturated phenomena and revelation, but rather the relation and the distinction, if there is any, between the common phenomena of beings and objects and the saturated phenomenon, or, as we might add, between the rule and the exception. This, in fact, refers us to Falque's article where it is asked whether all this emphasis on the extraordinary character of the saturated phenomenon, "whether the extension of saturation to...the whole of phenomenality" does not leave us in the dark with regard to "the most ordinary limitation of our existence," finitude (Falque 2003: 54, 73-74)?⁹ In the vocabulary of our introduction, did not Marion, by making the exception the rule (or even identifying them), overlook the fact that he remains trapped in the logic of metaphysics, according to which the exception to the rule proves the truth of the 'ordinary' logic of finitude? In other words, is evoking the infinity of intuition of the saturated phenomenon not, once again and *inevitably*, responsible for the view that finitude and the finite response to the given fall short with regard to the excess of the given? Is there, behind this univocal sense of the miraculous given, not once again a recurring of binary oppositions, such that the excess of the given *is relative to* the inability of the gifted to make the given appear? Indeed, our finite being is once again described as a defect and as a shortage: not seeing the given corresponds to a 'vouloir défaillant,' a 'faulty will' (Marion 1998: 431), that is, to a lack of willingness to make the given appear. This is Marion's explanation why unconditional givenness does not appear as such and why we usually see only objects and beings: it is due to the perturbations and unwillingness on the part of the finite receiver. Falque therefore is right when saying that *Etant Donné* comes at a great cost: "consecrating the excess as the rule, [the phenomenology of the gift] tends to place the 'fault' of its non-phenomenalisation on a powerless and faulty subject," thereby losing the "neutral and constitutive horizon of human beings, for whom it was, at first,

⁹ The theological question is, then, whether the stress on the miracle of the Resurrection does not obfuscate the carnal ordinary of Christianity (Incarnation).

conceived” (Falque 2003: 74).¹⁰ According to Falque, then, the phenomenology of givenness’ inability to think finitude as such must be complemented (Falque 2003, 55 and 75) with a phenomenology of poverty and proximity between human beings and God.¹¹ In our view, however, this would not solve the problem. This is the case because if Marion did not succeed in overcoming metaphysics the deficiency of finitude might not be accidental – something that can be compensated, complemented – but rather structural. For when Marion contends that with the phenomenon of revelation ‘it is necessary that we no longer define the saturated phenomenon simply by the inversion of the determinations of the common-law phenomenon... but even [must free ourselves] from their destruction’ (Marion 2002b, 245), it is precisely this liberation that did not succeed. We have in effect already shown that there is no clear-cut distinction between the saturated phenomenon and the phenomenon of revelation.¹² Therefore, not only the saturated phenomenon of the first order, but even the phenomenon of revelation remains trapped in what it wanted to overcome: the simple inversion of the logic of common-law phenomena, of metaphysics.

To sum up: according to Marion, the possibility of the miracle has nothing to do with the actual occurrence of a violation of the laws of nature. On the contrary, the miracle is in the eyes of the beholder: something can be experienced as miraculous. This is not exceptional, but, according to Marion, “appropriate to every decisive evidence in our

¹⁰ The latter point can be proven by referring to *Being Given*: whereas Marion contends that this ‘vouloir défaillant’ must not be taken in the moral sense (Marion 2002b: 314), at another place he asserts that, for a gift to appear as a gift to a receiver, the latter must recognize a debt. This recognition is then described as the hardest ordeal, both phenomenologically *and morally*, see Marion 2002b: 100.

¹¹ Vis à vis Marion’s emphasis on ‘distance’ and excess.

¹² Contrary, then, to what Falque seems to think, a number of questions arise with regard to Marion’s rather abstract classification of saturated phenomena. Since, while Marion asserts that these phenomena are ‘strictly distinct’ (Marion 2002b: 297), it can easily be shown that the saturated phenomenon of the event is implied in all other saturated phenomena. See Marion 2002a: 43, 98 (birth as saturated phenomenon of event *and* of flesh), Marion 2002a: 122 (icon and event), Marion 2002a: 72 (idol and event). Hence, our question how to see the relation between objects and beings (poor phenomena) and the saturated phenomenon. See also Marion 2002b: 195.

life” Caputo & Scanlon 1999: 75).¹³ However, since most often human beings do not see what there already is to see, since indeed most often we only see objects or beings, someone or something must cause or lie at the origin of this non-appearance. Here, Marion points the finger to the human subject, which is either unwilling or unable to show the given as it gives its self.¹⁴ In both cases, human beings fall short of the given phenomena: either there is lack of will to see what there is to see – what is given – or one, structurally,¹⁵ lacks the ability to do just that.

Longing for Ockham: Of Other Gifts and Other Lovers

But did not Marion say that the event, the miracle, or the gift give their selves autonomously and individually “independently of every position we would have taken in its regard” (Levinas 2002a: 65)? However, it might be that here the crux of the problem arises, since the question of overcoming metaphysics becomes all the more pertinent once one considers not only the part of finitude, but also that of excess. And here we will have to side with Caputo again. For the intrusion of the language of being into the phenomenology of givenness is perhaps not accidental, and more grave than Caputo seems to think.

For Marion describes the reception of the given as given in a quite problematic way. Experiencing the given is to experience a *counter-experience*. This counter-experience “contradicts the conditions for the experience of objects” (Marion 2002b, 215). It is not that the superabundance of intuitive givenness gives nothing to see or hear, but rather that its witness is drawn into an obscure pre-phenomenological field¹⁶ wherein nothing is seen or heard clearly and distinctly. The witness experiences ‘its own powerlessness’ (Marion 2002b, 216) towards givenness and is summoned to a space wherein *the* decision concerning the reason of things has to be made. We should note two points. First, while we have carefully avoided the vocabulary of the contradiction until

¹³ The citation is taken from the famous debate between Derrida and Marion. Marion mentions, among others, love, birth, and death as examples.

¹⁴ Compare Marion 1989: 56.

¹⁵ Compare Marion 2002c: 148, “the miscomprehension even appears *inevitable* – so much does the inadequacy of our concepts to the factual intuition of Christ result directly from the incommensurability of the gift of God to the expectation of men” (emphasis added).

¹⁶ Compare Marion 2002b: 306.

now, it is clear that Marion considers the exception to the rule once again as revealing the truth of the rule.¹⁷ Second, this space of (in)decision towards givenness is precisely where a doubtful *doubling of the logic of the gift* takes place. Marion insists that the gift decides (on) itself more than human beings decide on its appearance, or, more precisely, the gift decides and persuades human beings to give themselves over to the gift (cf. Marion 2002b: 111-113). But, on the other hand, *how* exactly does the gift decide itself? And how is it experienced? Note here that just as the miracle has nothing to do with an actual violation of the laws of nature, but all the more with its bearing upon consciousness, so the gift does not consist in the actual (gift of a) being or object but rather on the way consciousness relates towards its being given. For our question on the relation between an ordinary object and the givenness of the saturated phenomenon, then, it is important to understand how Marion tries to distinguish the gift from the actual object or being which is being given since one will recall that it is precisely this distinction that determines the ‘self without being’ of the saturated phenomenon. What is as remarkable as it is doubtful, then, is that another gift comes in to explain the logic of the gift.

According to Marion, the gift is exempt from presence, and therefore distinct from the actual transfer of an object or a being from a giver to a receiver. The gift resides in the decision that follows upon the upsurge of visibility that appears around an object or a being: suddenly an object appears as givable, and appeals to the giver to be given (or to the receiver to be received) (Marion 2002b: 106ff). However, this givability of the object is, according to Marion, itself a gift and, therefore, all gifts are dependent upon “another gift” (Marion 2002b: 108). This *other gift* is therefore supposed to explain why this or that object appears to consciousness as givable or acceptable. The gift explained through a gift: hence a longing for Ockham. Therefore, Marion’s attempt to distinguish between the object and the pure gift can and needs to be questioned. Consider Caputo’s comments: “In order to shield the gift from being and presence, Marion is forced to trade on a positivistic sense of the

¹⁷ Marion almost confirms here Rahner’s definition of the miracle. See the entry on ‘Wunder’ in Rahner and Vorgrimler 1961: 389, “Wunder heißt ein im Gesichtskreis unserer menschlichen Erfahrung antreffbares Ereignis, das wesentlich nicht aus den (grundsätzlich einsichtlichen) Eigengesetzlichkeiten dieses Erfahrungsraumes erklärt werden kann...”

gift" (Caputo 1999: 211), that is, the visible object or being is bracketed in a phenomenological reduction only to give way to the "hyper-appearance" of invisible givenness: for instance, the gift of power does not coincide with the actual transfer of the key of the city, the ritual of the handshake, and the sheet of paper (cf. Caputo and Scanlon 1999: 63).¹⁸ Just as the valorization of the excess entailed the downplaying of the finite receiver, so the invisibility of the 'pure' gift requires the outstripping of the object as a visible thing. Just as the excess of givenness commands a corresponding 'faulty will' on the part of the finite, the excess of the gift over objects and beings reduces the latter to "merely an extra, interchangeable, and optional support" of the gift (Marion 2002b: 103-104). Thus, the phenomenology of givenness not only functions at the expense of finitude (Falque), it also posits its hyper-visibility at the expense of the ordinary visibility of objects and beings (Caputo). This might once again mean that both are relative to each other rather than explaining one another: the gift *presupposes* the being and the presence of the object, albeit only to suspend the latter to preserve the former. This means that the saturated phenomenon, though evoked to explain the extension of givenness to the whole of phenomenality, is nevertheless dependent upon the object to make givenness appear. One should ponder why Marion proposes the decision concerning the reason of things as a choice between either saturated phenomena or objects, since if givenness is universal it ought to incorporate objects as well, leaving no room for a dilemma of the either/or kind. The *contradiction*, time and again evoked by Marion, between the object and the saturated phenomenon is therefore problematic.

Note that the very same objection might be raised against Marion's account of love in his recent *Le phénomène érotique*. The 'bond' between my lover and I consists in the oath she and I take to gather our different intuitions into a single signification: 'here I am.' But this oath suffers from a lack of durability and visibility: it lasts as long as we, as lovers, perform this oath. This performance takes place in our erotic interchanges and in fecundity. Both performances, however, suffer from

¹⁸ This 'hyper-appearance' would then be an appearing without an appearance (in being), just as the 'hyper-ousia' of negative theology is supposed to be 'without being.' The gift of power is an example that Marion uses often in Marion 2002b.

an essential finitude: eroticization ends with the orgasm, and our offspring takes on its own oath and therefore its proper (in)visibility. The ‘eternal’ bond between her and I appears unable to show itself in visibility. Our love, according to Marion, is therefore abandoned to the constant repetition of the oath, which comes very close to both Nietzsche’s eternal return of the same and Levinas’ understanding of totality and being as terror. To save our love from its temporal repetition¹⁹ and to save “the unconditional love without being” from its entanglement with being and visibility, Marion has recourse again to “another lover” who assures the visibility and durability of our temporal oath.²⁰

While one can grant Marion that the gift never simply coincides with the object given, this does not, in turn, imply that the visible object is totally distinct from the gift or indifferent to the gift *as gift*.²¹ When I, for instance, give a ring to someone to show her my love, this ring surely does not coincide with my (gift of) love for her.²² But that does not mean that this visible ring takes up the role of a simple support for my love for her. One might imagine situations (death, quarrels etc) in which this ring *as an object* becomes more, and much more, than a simple index of my love for her: instead of being an occasion and (necessary?) support for the ‘pure’ gift, the ring would then be the *condition* for its appearing. The gift would then never be a ‘pure’ given (without being), but always and already entangled with the visibility of being and objects. In this view, the relation between my lover and I *requires* its visible formulations and symbolizations – the wedding certificate, the wedding’s anniversary, etc. – in order to appear (or, similarly in Marion’s terms, be a lived experience). So the question that Marion could not answer in *Le phénomène érotique* could be answered if only it entailed a *re-appraisal of visibility*. If Marion’s account of love suffers from the absence of durability and visibility of the oath between my lover and I, it would have

¹⁹ Which is, literally, the *contradictio in terminis* enacted by successive monogamy, see Marion 2003: 257–265.

²⁰ Marion 2003: 331. This lover turns out to be God. God is a ‘better lover’ than we are, and is therefore able to assure our love of its visibility and durability even when us lovers do not (or no more) confirm our oath to one another.

²¹ See, for instance, Marion 2002b: 46, in which the given phenomenon of the painting “remains indifferent to its character as a thing.”

²² The example is also used in Marion 2002b: 105, and in Marion 2004: 19.

found these (but, again, not as the 'visibility of the invisible as such') in granting these visible formulations its status as 'presenting' and constituting the 'invisible' bond between her and I. The distinction between, for instance, the 'pure' gift of power and the physical counterpart of it (the key to the city, etc.) would disappear, but the presence of the latter would not, in any way whatsoever, *inhibit* or *impede* anything to appear as a gift (perhaps not even revelation): its presence would be ambiguous, and its signification never pure, present, or transparent. The problem, therefore, is that in Marion's account the object cannot be a saturated phenomenon (since the object, the physical counterpart, is simply the support of it, but, in fact, has nothing to do with its pure apparition as a lived experience), *while* he maintains that givenness is original and universal. It might be that the distinction that Marion carefully wanted to maintain (object versus saturated phenomenon) will not stand: sometimes an object 'as such' can be an excessive phenomenon, but the saturated phenomenon of Marion cannot be an object.

Conclusion

We have seen that Marion re-introduces the miracle into the philosophical discourse. This miracle is not primarily a violation of the laws of nature, but bears upon the lived experiences of consciousness. The miracle of the saturated phenomenon contradicts the conditions of possibility of the appearance of ordinary objects and beings. However, while Marion would contend to have given a non-metaphysical account of the miracle, we hope to have shown that, both on the part of finitude as well as on the pole of the excess, a metaphysical mode of procedure recurs. First, the subject (adonné) is to be blamed for the non-appearance of the saturating givenness, and second, even if this givenness would consist in a hyper-appearing – the visibility of the invisible beyond ordinary visibility – this hyper-appearance would nevertheless presuppose the presence of the ordinary object. The lived experience of the miracle would, thus, in phenomenology still be 'miraculous' or metaphysical. Hence the question motivating this essay: is this line of reasoning sufficient to speak of a new Enlightenment?

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