

Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics

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Jean-Luc Marion, along with several other contemporary French phenomenologists-cum-theologians, represents a curious final shift in the course of twentieth-century theology.¹ In the traditions of neo-orthodoxy and the *nouvelle théologie*, they seek to think God through the pure reception of his word, which alone gives to us God himself. This strictly theological talk requires no philosophical foundations, and presupposes no metaphysical categories, not even that of Being, which most of all insinuates a false necessity. And yet, such a thinking out of the resources of revelation alone is specifically seen by Marion and many others as according precisely with the demand of modern philosophy in its 'phenomenological' variant that we should accept nothing as true except according to the conditions in which a phenomenon presents itself to us in excess of any preceding categorical assumptions. One can even go a stage further: not only does the God known from himself alone fall within the phenomenological understanding of 'donation' as the one transcendental condition for simultaneous existing and knowing; this God *most of all fulfils* the demand for pure phenomenality, for reduction to 'the thing itself', since in this instance solely it is impossible for anything in my experience, including my own subjectivity, to persist outside of the donating gift as the independent site of my reception of it. Hence God, whether announced through an ultimate 'natural' appearance, or else revealed through historical events, retains, against all conceptual idolatry, his absolute initiative, and yet operates as the phenomenon of all phenomena, the absolutely preceding call which 'interlocutes' us as subjects and provides transcendental permission for all other awareness. If, therefore, Marion continues to develop the characteristic twentieth century theology of divine word as gift and event, he also effects the most massive *correlation* of this theology with contemporary philosophy, but in such a fashion that at times it appears that he usurps and radicalises philosophy's own categories in favour of theological ones: Gift intricately slides into Charity. Compared with Marion, the ambition of a Barth is as nothing, for it is as if, so to speak (albeit in a mode already inscribed by Levinas) Marion seeks to be both Barth and Heidegger at once.

In what follows I wish to explore the coherence of Marion's abandonment (or partial abandonment) of theological correlation with

philosophy round 'Being', in favour of a correlation round 'Donation' or 'Gift'.

The contrast between 'Being' and 'Donation' arises, for Marion, out of the history of phenomenology. In the beginning stood Husserl, who erected the principle that one should accept nothing that could not be made explicit for a fundamental intuition.² A speculative ontology regarding 'beings' is replaced in its task by a transcendental phenomenology which identifies irreducible appearances which operate a nonetheless categorical universality. Even the transcendental 'I' itself is first 'given' in this fashion, but Heidegger later complained against his master that he had not truly grasped just how the 'I' is given to us: not as an object, nor even as the site for representation of objective 'beings', but rather as the site in which the contingency of beings, and hence the Being which is shown in them, but not exhausted by them, is manifest.³ A site where this Being is *in question*, and hence the issue of what-to-do with beings, how to live amongst beings (as the being whose specific difference is to disclose Being) has priority over the intentional representation of beings. With this shift, the transcendently eidetic philosophy of Husserl, which performed the ontological task, was transformed into a philosophy for which an unfathomable encounter with Being, and recognition that we are first *in* Being before we know, assumes priority. And yet, as Marion insists, Heidegger did not thereby abandon the priority of donation in favour of that of Being; on the contrary he allowed, following many openings in Husserl himself, for a donation which exceeds both our intentional grasp and even intuitive manifestation, since Being is not one more category which the ego 'intuits', but is the transcendental condition for the categorical itself, and for the ego itself as *Dasein*.⁴ Through its exceeding of both intention and intuition Being is manifest as that which hides itself in its manifestation. And since, once grasped, it disappears, it is all the more radically maintained as 'given', and inappropriable.

Despite acknowledging that this is the case, Marion nonetheless argues that 'Being' in Heidegger obscures the priority of Husserl's 'donation'. This is first of all because *Dasein remains* in a fashion both a Cartesian *cogito* and a Husserlian transcendental ego. For if Being is only apparent in *Dasein*, and even only is in *Dasein* (since otherwise it 'nihilates' itself in beings) then it requires *Dasein's* thinking of itself as a site of exposure, reflection and decision.⁵ With the ontological difference, *Dasein* must think also its own difference from objects. And however much certain 'existential' features of the analytic of *Dasein* may drop away in the later Heidegger—access to Being via anxiety and being-towards-death—nonetheless, as Marion rightly stresses, the direct prior 'call' of Being in the later works is still addressed to a *Dasein* presupposed as such. But

Marion goes further: for the ego to be able to identify the 'saturated phenomenon' which reveals/hides itself as 'Being', it must make an intentional projection of a universal that we can abstract from beings upon the identity of that which calls us; the call is reduced to Being as a 'screen' for beings. Here, however, Marion knows that he runs the risk of only appearing to say more, since for Heidegger also, Being is not 'in itself' Being, as outside beings it is nothing, and only becomes Being *in* beings, when it ceases to be absolute 'Being as such'. Therefore, for Heidegger, one must speak of Being as also nothing, and as the non-identifiable 'it gives'.⁶ Marion's demand, however, is that we be more absolutely agnostic concerning this source in which Being/beings is given. Simply, it *arrives*, but how can we know that it does not arrive from a more absolute distance, from a giving source bestowing Being/beings? This is no abstract issue: on the contrary it is here that the highest stakes of ethics, politics and nihilism are at issue. For if there is a gift before, beyond and without Being, a donation that we cannot even name Being/Nothing, then the *appropriation* of beings and of *Dasein* in its finitude by Being—whereby every finite 'presence' (of being) in its claim to a share of ultimate reality and of value is folded back into the flux of Being as time or non-present 'nothing'—is no longer the final word.⁷ Instead, beings are put back into play, diverted from their absorption into an impersonal Being, and accorded a new status compatible with that of 'creatures'.

Marion's critique of the appropriating *Ereignis* of Being in terms of a call from 'before' being, as a pure possibility not even determined as 'to be' or potential 'act', is correlated with a certain return to a Husserlian priority of the knowing subject over Being, since the ego in its self-presence is no longer fundamentally *Dasein*, but the recipient of a call other than the call of Being.⁸ However, the radicality of a non-apparent phenomenon equivalent to an irreducible excess of intuition over intention is maintained, because the 'I' itself first is as called, or is subject only as 'interlocuted', as given 'me' before it is an I.⁹ The problem here, indicated by Phillip Blond, is that, as with the late 'theological' Husserl of the unpublished archives, and with Levinas, the calling 'other' can after all only be identified as a subjective caller, or as a giver, *by way of* a projection of one's own ego upon the other, an ego that would be once again an initial I, constituted firstly as the ground of intentional representation of objects.¹⁰ In one passage Marion concedes that in order to recognise the caller as another subject with *haecitas* and not just as another ego formally identical to oneself, one must permit him to have intentional projects—to have a *propriété*, or a *propre* while renouncing equivalent projects oneself in order that one may be radically interrogated and displaced from one's unethical stance of egotistical dominance.¹¹ Such

a sacrificial logic is incoherent, since one's own renounced intentionality and particularity is the ground on which one is recognising the particularity of the other as that of a subject, but in consequence one cannot ascribe any need for him, in turn, to renounce himself and to be interlocuted. The *aporia* of 'reverse intentionality' therefore persists, even if, as Marion stresses, the other has no intentional knowledge of his 'regard' in me. Whereas, to the contrary, it can only be avoided if the 'I' is first and foremost not defined over-against objects, but constitutes a specific 'character', or a certain not completed, and not entirely predictable, but nonetheless recognizable pattern of objectivity or 'embodiment' in the widest sense, including embodiment in language as specific 'idiolect'. In that case 'I' am always as external to myself as others are to me, and the specific network of intersubjective connections in which I am interpellated is indeed prior to my abstracted egoity, without this requiring any projection by an initial, autistic ego. With Marion, as with Levinas, the otherness of a first, non-objectivisable other, would seem to be a specifically Cartesian alterity, whereas the only 'other' not subject to 'reverse intentionality' is a specific, embodied, actual subject, a subject who after all always already 'is', even in his giving. *Not* invisibility, but visibility—which as beauty is *not* reducible to 'my aim', guarantees the otherness of the other. By maintaining the opposite, the only ground which Marion can find for the identification of the call as that of 'a caller' (rather than the impersonal *es gibt* of the *nihil*, which seems equally phenomenologically viable) is the act of ethical or even religious faith which 'wills' to respect the free-will of the other, even though every such willing is subject to the suspicion of a disguised self-interest and objectification.¹² Only the will itself of our freedom to acknowledge the freedom of the other gaze is inviolable in the face of such suspicion, and from this will alone, from the fact that we *do* love, we are able, says Marion, *univocally* to identify the love of the other, including the love of the ultimate caller.¹³ Hence there is a projection of my love, love as I experience it as a pure 'good will' unconnected with purpose or representation, onto the other, who is therefore, despite Marion's claim, no longer the other. Marion implies that the fundamental, overwhelming call, which is that of a transcendental 'Being given'¹⁴ identical with a universal 'giver', is mediated through our experience of the gaze of the human person as a pre-ontological ethical demand. However, it is clear that the first is entirely modelled upon the second, and that the second still conceals a 'representing', punctilinear subject whose admittedly irreducible self-consciousness (or *cogito*) is abstracted from his specific and contingent mode of self-embodiment and physical capacity. This being the case, a priority of ethical intersubjectivity conceived as a crossing of invisible gazes, cannot really be made

phenomenologically evident, and still less manifest is the identity of the call as that of a caller. For if Being/beings is itself given, then so also is our situation of ethical intersubjectivity, and why should one assume that the latter is itself given by an ethical caller? In just what *sense* is the crossing of regards more apparent than ontological difference? Unsurprisingly, Marion oscillates between (a) the absolute anonymity of the gift, (b) the gift as a 'natural' manifestation of a giver=God (c) recognition of this manifestation only through an act of will.¹⁵ The latter option appears to (i) deny that God is manifest as a phenomenon objectively apparent (as phenomenological reduction requires) and (ii) reduces God after all to a projection of our ego, albeit in the shape of our loving will.

The upshot, therefore, of this reading of Marion's receiving of the phenomenological tradition, is to conclude that his noble ambition to undo the nihilistic 'enfolding' of Heidegger's *Ereignis* cannot be accomplished in the mode which he attempts. This is because the 'distance' between Gift and Being/beings collapses back into a subject/object duality on the model of 'representation' which obscures both the 'subjectivity' of objects which only 'are' in their affecting, and the 'objectivity' of a subject which is a receptive site for complex occurrences, since representations represent in a specifically receiving and so creatively transforming mode.

If the Gift/Being contrast is still inscribed within the modern turn to the subject, which Marion would purport to see as the fulfilment or 'redoubling' of metaphysical *theoria* as a representing gaze,¹⁶ and therefore to be overcome through radical donation, then one might have hesitations at the outset concerning his attempt to use this contrast to read the history of the interaction between theology and metaphysics (identified with philosophy as such). The great merit of Marion's approach to history is that he takes seriously Heidegger's diagnosis of modernity as the consummation of metaphysics which fulfils the will-to-know objects as the will-to-power over nature, including human beings. Since metaphysics has a fundamentally *onto-theological* constitution, such that the highest being, or first cause, is identified as a perfect instance of what is fundamentally knowable, namely a 'being', while beings themselves are accounted for through the causal efficiency of the highest being, modernity is not at all, in its essence, atheistic.¹⁷ To the contrary, as Marion argues, atheism is a secondary rejection of the conceptual idols which modern metaphysics erects, as, for example, with Descartes' *causa sui*, while atheism itself submits new idols, best exemplified by Nietzsche's Will-to-Power as the ultimate foundation for our infinite capacity to relegislate and overturn every previous legal foundation.¹⁸ However, it is arguable that recent researches suggest that Heidegger's thesis that 'modernity fulfils metaphysics' should be radicalized as 'modernity invented metaphysics'.

This would have to be considered an exaggeration to the degree that onto-theology is clearly inscribed in Aristotle's (after-named) *Metaphysics* itself, but one could point out that first of all, Platonism before Aristotle never sought a categorical inventory of what 'is' in the world, nor explained what is in becoming through an ultimate efficient or final causality, but rather referred what becomes to a partial manifestation (donation?) of a transcendent source or sources which brings about through intrinsic excellence—the Good.¹⁹ This philosophical figure is not onto-theological. Second, one could mention that Aristotle preserves an aporetic oscillation between 'every' being and 'first' being as the subject of metaphysics, in accord with his equal hesitation between substance as the composite and substance as the abstractable form.²⁰ This circularity, whereby the stability of material *ousia* seems already to require the unmoved mover as a model by which to conceive it, despite the invocation of the first *ousia* ostensibly to account for merely the actuation of material substance, at least exposes its own contradiction. By contrast, the new science of *ontology* which emerged in the seventeenth century, and which coincided with Suarez's use for the first time of 'metaphysics' to name a systematic discipline, finally occluded this contradiction by regarding ontology/metaphysics as first and foremost a science of what constitutes 'being' taken as a possible object of knowledge which is *unproblematically comprehensible* without reference to any non-material or absolute beings.²¹ *Metaphysica specialis*, dealing with the latter, is now firmly located as a subdiscipline of *metaphysica generalis* dealing with the former. No longer is there any question of God as 'most being'; rather God is simply a different type of being: infinite as opposed to finite, invoked simply to 'complete' causal explanation such that as 'first cause' or even *causa sui* he is univocally conceived as of the same type as a finite cause, and effectively becomes the first in a chain of causes.

In the third place, it could be pointed out that Neoplatonism, followed at least by Boethius, Aquinas and Eckhart, sought to resolve the Aristotelian *aporia* in the opposite direction—namely 'upwards' rather than 'downwards', by deriving the 'is' of temporal/spatial beings *entirely* from the first principle, but a principle no longer conceived as itself a representable object or being, which would depend for its foundation upon what it is supposed to found, in line with the characteristic contradiction of onto-theology. This unrepresentable source which one can only 'know' through a negative *élan*, and a flight of *eros*, yet which is implied in all knowledge, was named by Plotinus 'the One', and then by an unknown Neoplatonist (perhaps Porphyry) who probably inspired Boethius, as 'to be', since it was argued that the infinitive form of the verb avoided any suggestion of subject/object composition inappropriate to the absolute.²²

Hence in Christian tradition the thought of God himself allowed access to 'the ontological difference' between *esse* on the one hand and contingently being this or that subject or object with a definable *essentia* on the other.

Whereas Heidegger read the entire philosophical tradition and the Christian appropriation of philosophy as the history of metaphysics or onto-theology (which amounted often to reading it through neo-Scholastic spectacles) it now seems at the least unclear as to whether this accurately describes Platonism, Neoplatonism and Christian theology before Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus.

However, between the Heideggerean thesis about the history of metaphysics, and the more radical, emerging one, Marion noticeably hesitates, although he is manifestly moving in the second direction. Hence he acknowledges that God only becomes substance (Goclenius), individual being (Cajetan) and cause of himself (Descartes) in the early modern period, and (increasingly) that Aquinas's *esse* is not a conceptual idol, since Thomas speaks of God creating Being as such and not just beings, and conceives the divine *esse* as incomprehensibly other to the *ens commune* of creatures, since it uniquely coincides with his essence, or his infinite 'whatever he is'.²³ This characteristic renders it supremely concrete, and in no sense like the object of a bare existential affirmation. Nevertheless, Marion appears to draw back from the obvious inference: if Christian theology prior to Scotus avoided onto-theology (metaphysics) then this was because it was able to elucidate the hidden manifestness of God in terms of the hidden manifestness of Being in beings. It was possible, in identifying God with Being, to think the ontological difference in a manner that Heidegger denied was accessible for theology. But theology *read* this difference differently, *not* as the 'appropriation' of beings by Being which is also Nothing (even though Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine were able, as much as Heidegger, to relate the *aporias* of time to the non-possession of Being by beings),²⁴ but rather as the fulfilment and preservation of beings in Being as an infinitely actual source and realization of all essential possibility. Here the temporally becoming 'shape' of an essence does not betray Being through its contingency (in which case Being also univocally is this contingency which it immediately cancels) but instead is through and through 'like' Being, in so far as all that in it 'is', entirely derives from Being as a donating source.

This 'reading' of the ontological difference in terms of analogy and participation was never seriously considered by Heidegger, perhaps in part because his neo-scholastic background prevented him from grasping the priority of 'analogy of attribution' in the tradition, which inscribes a doctrine of mystical return to God as unknown source, rather than a logical or grammatical thesis related to predications in the ontic realm. But also,

and for certain, it was because Heidegger believed that he had considered Being not 'speculatively' (metaphysically) but according to Being's own giving of itself as a phenomenon. This meant that what was sheerly 'apparent', namely the self-occlusion of Being in beings, was taken as identifying Being as such. But one may ask, is there not a 'transgression of the bounds of pure reason' involved here, since it does not appear valid to identify the concealment of Being from us with the very 'nature' of Being, such that it is seen 'as' that which nihilates itself in beings, while in turn nihilating beings themselves. For if the ontological difference as such is 'seen', the 'event of appropriation' is surely *not* seen, but remains *after all* a mode of 'speculation' in rivalry with that mode of conjecture which is analogy of attribution. Thus while phenomenology was correct to lift the Kantian ban on ontology, since things only 'are' in their mode of appearing, and Heidegger was right against Kant to see that an antinomial relation between being and Beings (as between the 'present' and past/future) invades even the 'valid' finite sphere of pure reason's operation, requiring that we live (as *Dasein*) transgressively or metaphysically,²⁵ phenomenology has perhaps failed to acknowledge that it is *apparent* that Being is not fully apparent, not *even* in the mode of the appearance of the inapparent, for this *may* be Sublime 'appropriation', or it *may* be analogical elevation. Instead, Being calls for a Cusan 'conjecture' as to its nature, and the character of the ontological difference. This is not, however, to re-open the way to a metaphysical deduction from preceding 'causes', since such deductions are without grounds. On the contrary, the conjecture which judges considers that it 'sees' something or 'receives' something. One has not necessarily departed here from phenomenology, but one is nonetheless insisting on the 'subjectivity', in a Kierkegaardian sense, of reception: to receive one must be rightly attuned, one must judge aright, desire aright, as Platonic, Neoplatonic and Christian philosophy have always insisted. Marion's own writings display the difficulty of this issue for phenomenology, since at times he speaks as if the transcendental gift is objectively manifest, arguing that while we must receive, or give back through gratitude the gift, for it to be there for us, this giving back is nonetheless a pre-ontological precondition for our very subjective existence.²⁶ Here he accords with Levinas's strange converting of the categorical ought into something which precedes our willing. And yet at other times, Marion speaks of not merely the stance of faith, but even the *ethical* stance, as depending on a kind of Pascalian wager as to the reality of free will. In this case, it would seem, the free giving of the other manifest through our free response (the 'crossing of regards') does not unambiguously appear, but appears only for 'faith' understood as an act of will. To this extent, Marion concedes the apparent need for 'conjecture',

but restricts it to a willing which entirely precedes 'reasons' even of an aesthetically judging or ecstatically desiring sort.²⁷ This is in keeping with his strict dualism of the invisible and visible which correlates the latter—'Being'—entirely with conceptual mastery, omitting from consideration the aesthetic and erotic cases where one is 'compelled' by a manifestation, yet can never exhaustively or incontrovertibly provide the reasons for this compulsion. (Thus, without historical warrant, he reduces the hypostatic presence of Christ in the icon to the gaze of the eyes alone, whereas its greatest theologians clearly considered the icon to be possible because the divine hypostasis was manifest through *singular* human identity, something like 'character' which is shown through our entire bodily objectivity).²⁸ This duality preserves, to a large degree, the Heideggerean refusal of analogy, and keeps conjecture to a minimum by taking what is invisibly manifest as a 'will' which precedes what is. However, a pure good will, utterly abandoned to the good of another will, yet not committed to any mode in which I or the other should *be*, is, as Marion says, a giving which does not necessarily require (and, indeed, requires there initially *not* to be) a giver who is, nor any actual reception by a donee.²⁹ It is a pure flux, which washes over every boundary and as such, it is difficult to know how it is 'the Good', nor how it truly differs from the impersonal Heideggerean flux of the *es gibt*. Without either desire or judgement, Marion's wager that the sublime phenomenon is 'will of the good' appears to reduce after all to a simple reception of the manifestation of the sheerly indifferent; indifferent not merely, as Marion requires, to Being, but also to beings as this or that.

Marion's non-questioning of phenomenology at its most vulnerable point, concerning the manifest non-avoidability of conjecture, means that, first of all, he does not question Heidegger's claim to have made the ontological difference phenomenologically apparent; second he is in consequence forced to speak of God and of human subjectivity in terms of the gift which exceeds ontological difference; third the manifest non-manifestness of the gift itself appears all too similar to that of Heidegger's *Sein*.

Given this triple stance, Marion has problems in acknowledging that Neoplatonic philosophy and Christian theology interpreted the ontological difference in a viable mode other than that of Heidegger. And yet he recognises that Aquinas's *esse* is a valid theological category and not a metaphysical projection. He is only able to do so because he effectively equates Heidegger's *Sein* with Aquinas's *ens commune*, the created Being of created beings, which Aquinas spoke of as the true subject matter (not God) of metaphysics. This equation, however, suggests that, for Aquinas, there is an immanent, purely created site of the ontological difference,³⁰ and

that philosophy concerned with 'Being' has an autonomous field of operation (and one should note here that Marion implies that the fold of Being/beings can be left unperturbed within its own 'sphere'). But neither is the case. On the contrary, for Aquinas the difference of *esse* from essence in the *ens commune* of creatures, and yet its real finite occurrence only in essences is 'read' in *entirely* theological terms as the site of the internal fracture of creatures between their own nothingness and their alien actuality which is all received from God. This means that the domain of metaphysics is not simply subordinate to, but completely *evacuated* by theology, for metaphysics refers its subject matter—'Being'—wholesale to a first principle, God, which is the subject of another, higher science, namely God's own, only accessible to us via revelation.³¹ This is *not* a matter of mere causal referral, but of the entire being of *ens commune* and its comprehensibility. And here we have reached the absolute crux of this matter, and the turning point in the destiny of the West. For insofar as Aquinas appeared to leave some ambiguity regarding how it was possible to speak of God by first speaking of finite beings, Duns Scotus resolved it in an untraditional direction by affirming that this is because one can first understand being in an unambiguous, sheerly 'existential' sense, as the object of a proposition, without reference to God, who is later claimed 'to be' in the same univocal manner. Here (following Henry of Ghent, who claimed that the essence of God as Being was the first object of understanding, directly and positively present to the intellect)³² arises for the first time ontotheological idolatry regarding God, and the placing of God within a predefined arena of being, which, as Marion rightly says, persists even in Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*.³³ Marion sees this, yet it is not clear that he also acknowledges Scotus's *idolatry towards creatures*, or in other words the invalidity of a now autonomous 'metaphysics', later to become 'ontology', which claims to be able fully to define the conditions of finite knowability, or to arrive at possible being as something 'in itself', despite the fact that nothing manifestly is in itself and every 'present' reality is riddled with *aporias* (of time, of space, of particularity and universality). Just where we assume to glimpse the late mediaeval commencement of the decline of metaphysics, in the opening to an autonomous, secular sphere of knowledge, one must on the contrary recognize its inception. Modernity is metaphysical, for since it cannot refer the flux of time to the ungraspable infinite, it is forced to seek a graspable, *immanent* security; hence, as Catherine Pickstock has pointed out, its characteristic project is one of 'spatialization', a *mathesis* or measurement of what is which can master that which merely occurs.³⁴ By contrast, the Christian thought which flowed from Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine was able fully to concede the utter unknowability of creatures which

continually alter and have no ground within themselves, for it derived them from the infinity of God which is unchanging and yet uncircumscribable, even in itself. Between one unknown and the other there is here no representational knowledge, no 'metaphysics', but only a mode of ascent which receives something of the infinite source so long as it goes on receiving it, so constituting, not a once and for all theory (or account of the ontological difference) but an endlessly repeated-as-always-different theoretical claim which is nothing other than all the biographies of every ascent, and the history of human ascent as such.

The great defender of this tradition, it is now emerging, thanks to the work of Alain de Libera and others, was none other than Eckhart. Against the Franciscans Eckhart refused the identifying of God with univocal being regarded as object of, and essentially external to, intellection. Instead, he closed the window of ambiguity left slightly ajar by Aquinas and insisted that analogical attribution means that no transcendental predication—of Being, Intellect, Unity and Goodness—belongs positively to any creature, but that all in them that 'is',—is united, 'or thinks', or wills the good,—reverts ecstatically back to its uncreated source.³⁵ Against Scotist idolatry, Eckhart could insist that God is above even *esse* in so far as he is intellect, which as Word 'is' not this or that but only indicates it (although God's Word *causes* to be whereas ours follows it). Nevertheless, the capacity of intellect to 'be' all things also shows for Eckhart (as for Aquinas) that it is itself unlimited Being and precisely the site of the coincidence of *esse* with *essentia*.³⁶ Hence while, in certain writings, Eckhart goes beyond Aquinas in showing how one can derive *all* the transcendentals from each other (where Aquinas tended to derive unity, intellect and goodness from *actus purus*),³⁷ he nonetheless states yet more emphatically than Aquinas that *esse est Deus*.³⁸ The point here is not, as von Balthasar claims, that Eckhart is departing from Thomas and inaugurating modern idolatry by identifying God as *esse*³⁹—for he is frequently more reserved about this than Aquinas—but that, to the contrary, he is resisting any 'grasp' of *esse* as a univocal term which can genuinely be predicated of a creature.⁴⁰ Where Scotus inaugurated a metaphysics independent of theology, Eckhart absolutely evacuated the metaphysical site in favour of theology. Everything now for Eckhart derives from a distant, inaccessible source: parts only have their being through wholes, accidents through substance, the *homo* assumed in Christ through the hypostatic Word, and substantial beings through Being, rendering all finite beings *entirely accidental*, and thereby more contingent, as more aporetic, than the voluntarists, despite everything, could ever have imagined.⁴¹

Marion perhaps does not demonstrate a sufficient awareness of the collapse of such 'evacuation' in Scotus, and thereby of the collapse of the

discourse concerning analogy and participation as the event of the obliteration of ontological difference and the emergence of conceptual idolatry. In this history, the question of a stress on one or other of the transcendental terms is relatively unimportant, since what is at issue is rather whether any one of them can be mastered by a finite gaze. Respecting the transcendental category of 'truth', this non-mastery is summed up in Eckhart's citation of Augustine, with its highly 'phenomenological' anticipations: "When you hear that he is truth, do not ask, what is truth? Remain, therefore, if you can, in that first flash, when you were dazzled as it were by its brightness, when it was said to you 'truth'". Augustine means that this is God.⁴² Indeed, Marion himself claims that the convertibility of the transcendentals, whereby every transcendental path absolutely overlaps with every other and yet none is dispensable or reducible to any other, is a mark of a 'saturated phenomenon'. In that case, one might ask, does not the idea that one transcendental, namely the Good, 'precedes' all the others threaten to drain this saturation, such that the Good becomes identified with the mere gaze of a subject, his mere good will, quite apart from questions of what it is to be good in act, how we are to live in harmony, unity and in accord with our nature? And if the ultimate phenomenon is exactly describable as the gaze of a subject, it would appear that it is after all merely ontic, and in seeking to trump ontological difference, one has instead connived again at its obliteration.⁴³

These suspicions are confirmed when one considers Marion's applications of the Gift/Being duality to the history of metaphysics and theology. Since he still thinks that Heidegger fully exposed to view the ontological difference, and must in consequence believe that to think God in terms of this difference is idolatrous, he is obliged to view the admittedly non-idolatrous character of pre-modern theology in terms of its supposed privileging of Gift over Being. And yet, for all that Good is the 'first name of God' in Dionysius, one finds (as Marion indeed recognizes) that in Gregory of Nyssa 'Being' is allowed to define the common divinity of the Trinity precisely because it is an entirely apophatic term indicating nothing of 'how' God is.⁴⁴ In the case of Bonaventure, Marion does not give the full picture: for the Franciscan 'Being' is the highest name for God's essence, revealed in the Old Testament, while 'Good' is the yet higher, New Testament name, since it discloses the emanation of the Trinitarian persons (something which for the Fathers, as for the early Scholastics, was even *foreshadowed* by the 'I am who I am', since this speaking also discloses God as a word, and in the gospels the Word identified himself as 'I am'—the 'before Abraham' which follows seeming to *legitimate* an ontological misreading of Exodus 3: 14, for all Christians

for all times).⁴⁵ Yet within the perfection of Good is included for Bonaventure also the perfection of 'to be'.⁴⁶ Indeed Marion persists in speaking as if 'Being' has always been used in a primarily existential post-Scotist sense, whereas for the previous tradition it was also regarded from the practical perspective of 'more fully becoming Being', such that while 'to be good' or 'to be true' (for Augustine, for example) is precisely 'to be' *per se*, this suggests inversely that Being is the plenitude of what is genuinely desirable.⁴⁷ Marion entirely misreads the Augustinian/Thomist (not exactly Aristotelian) priority of act over possibility in terms of the tyranny of a 'given' order, whereas if act is infinite it is on the contrary on the side of 'the surprize of what arrives'. By contrast, a possibility which is not the active potency of an act, but prior to the act, can only be *either* pure logical possibility or *else* an entirely empty freedom of choice, not free in terms of any submission to an objectively life-giving order, nor even the reciprocal interplay of the gift—since the purely 'free gift' fantasized by Marion, outside and before reciprocal relation, presupposes a freedom independent of the gift, a 'pure flux'. In both cases, it is possibility which constitutes a mere transcendental 'given', whereas only infinite act can give transcendent gift.

It is in terms of Being as a plenitude, and as the site of conversion with all the other transcendentals, that one should read Aquinas's relating of Being as the first name of God to *ens* as first object of our comprehension. For Marion, this opens the way to Scotus's idolization of God as univocal *ens*, although he does not mention that in that case it may equally be taken as opening the way to Scotus's claim that there can be an independent science of finite being.⁴⁸ But since it does not really do the latter, neither does it do the former: on the contrary, Aquinas says that something is comprehended as *ens* before it is comprehended as *unum*, *vivens* and *sapiens*, precisely because things are the latter of themselves, whereas they only *are* by participation.⁴⁹ In other words, *ens* is not the first thing that we grasp, but the ungraspable horizon which opens out the possibility of all other knowing. It is not that God is 'placed' in a metaphysical (and epistemological) category, but that this category is evacuated in favour of God from the outset. If there is a weakness here, then it concerns Aquinas's failure to see that one might reverse this proposition in favour of the other transcendentals, making 'Unity' that which does not properly belong and Being that which is proper to us and so forth. Precisely such teasing ruses were played out by Eckhart, although it is notable that he does not appear to have been so often willing to derive the other transcendentals from that of *Goodness*. For while Aquinas only makes *ens* first in the order of intellection, whereas in the always accompanying mode of willing goodness takes the lead⁵⁰ (again Marion fails to point this out) it is

nonetheless the case that the Dominicans somewhat reduced will to bare 'assent' to the exigencies of the intellect, omitting the Augustinian (and thoroughly trinitarian) sense that judgement itself depends upon a right desire, even though we inversely desire what we judge to be true.⁵¹ Here Marion supplies a corrective, and his reflections on the gift might be recast in the mode of *one* transcendental path of derivation of the other transcendentals from the Good, in a fashion that does not displace the equal priority of actualised Being and gnoseological/aesthetic judgement. This would surely give a more trinitarian form to his reflections, for in that case the gift would have a mode and a shape, the shape of giving as an intrinsic excellence or harmony, and equally the gift would no longer solipsistically precede relation (so collapsing into a preceding validity of a given, not giving will) but occur only as equally presupposed with reciprocity. However, the same trinitarian shape would *preserve* Marion's phenomenological stress on a transcendental 'appearing', equiprimordial with Being.

My suspicion, therefore, is that in failing to see that the crux of a non-metaphysical theology regards not Gift versus Being, but rather the referring or not of the transcendentals to God via analogical participation, Marion is still somehow the legatee of such a non-referral, still within *metaphysics*, which is identical with secular modernity. For the enterprise of phenomenology itself is hitherto 'Scotist' in that, independently of any spiritual discipline, it aspires to 'see' the essences of things, if in a highly singular and a posteriori fashion. Because he adheres to the phenomenological notion of an unproblematic 'presence', albeit of that which cannot be made present (and even Derrida likewise still adheres to this), Marion regards the Heideggerean fold of Being/beings as valid within its own *temporal* sphere⁵², although it is difficult to see how this is compatible with his brilliant theological reading of the temporal 'present' not as the site of appropriation, but as incorporated into the eucharistic gift of the body and blood of Christ, all the more bodily and all the more 'transubstantiated' because only available in the mode of present as 'gift', not as present objectification. For this renders the passage of time through all its *present* moments as gift, so that here temporal being 'is' a gift, in its very being, not just as a result of a pre-ontological regard.

The same containment and yet endorsement of metaphysics is borne out also by Marion and his pupil Vincent Carraud's (perhaps accurate) reading of the Pascalian 'orders' of political power and secular science as transcended by the logic of charity, and yet left undisturbed within their own spheres.⁵³ Whereas an Augustinian, trinitarian, perspective suggests instead 'another' power and 'another' knowledge, albeit realized in and through that other love which is charity, Marion appears to despair

altogether of both politics and science, while being resigned to their perpetuation. This is borne out by his analysis of *ennui* as an indifference to being that is overcome only by the light of love for being, itself indifferent to what being is. One might ask, here, is not true being intrinsically lovable as what it is, for otherwise it is exhaustively defined as bare, univocal existence, as brute (political) power and sheer (scientific) objectivity? And is it true that love is unconcerned to attend to how things are, or to how they should be, because being is properly the object of a pure objective, metaphysical science? Finally, one might reflect, while boredom with being is possible, is not boredom with the gift also possible? In fact *this* defines *accidie* for Aquinas.⁵⁴

Again with respect to his relation to the metaphysical legacy, one can also note that the correlation in Marion of voluntarism with a refusal to engage in (or at least make discursively basic) the eminent attribution of being and intellect to God seems to repeat precisely late scholasticism, while ignoring that in the latter case it is admitted that the notion of God as pure will and gift assumes that God is bare existential being in his essence prior to his intelligence, which now merely 'represents' this being, and no longer coincides with it as the *verbum* whose production ecstatically refuses identification with this or that.

However, Marion's lingering 'Scotism', or entrapment within 'metaphysics' which is modernity, is most of all evident in the very heart of his theology, where he demands 'What if God did not first have to be, since he loved us first, when we were not?'⁵⁵ For here the question can only hold if (a) the contingency of our being and (b) its referral to the transcendental Good (love) as what does not belong to us over against Being which does (and there is no reason why Marion should not, in the fashion of Eckhart, reverse Aquinas's play with the predication of transcendentals in this manner), is *univocally* transferable to God. Hence, as Balthasar pointed out, Marion makes the division between creation and creator, understood as that between Being and the Gift, idolatrously recur in God himself, such that God, who also is, is turned into a God beyond God, distant from himself or free in relation to his own being, as Schelling put it, just as we are distant from him.⁵⁶ If this distance of God from God is, for Marion, as he indicates, that of Father from Son, then not surprisingly this distance is regarded as identical with that of God as gift, from God in Christ as dead on Holy Saturday (although since Paternal giving is *not*, Marion, unlike Balthasar, allows that the Father is dead with the Son). Since God's Being like ours can also 'not be', Christ in his divinity is dead upon the cross, and here, first and foremost, according to the *logos tou staurou*, God as giving love is disclosed. But then, one might ask, is not the process of life and death in time divinised? Is not the saving action of God

reduced to a manifestation of *what God is?* (paradoxically). And is not God's love defined reactively and sacrificially, as that which gives on the occasion of evil as much as out of its spontaneous living plenitude, whereas the cross reveals the life of love despite death? And is not this love defined gesturally as a good will, rather than as the event of grace which repeats creation, despite the annihilation that is 'Evil', as a new gift of non-violent, harmonious life?³⁷ Surely it is not true, as Marion claims, that whereas we first are, and *may* love, God loves and *may* also be, for to the contrary, on a non 'Scotist' understanding of *esse* we only are as we love and remain in love, whereas God who is love cannot not be. God loves-to-be, and not in indifference to being, else death is celebrated as a sacrificial opportunity.

Hence it would seem that, in contrast with my initial suggestion that Marion 'usurps' phenomenological Donation to re-think it as Christian Charity, this usurpation simply does not go far enough. The phenomenological notion of an objective, isolatable manifestation subverts Marion's thinking of transcendence into the terms of modern 'sublimity' which is dualistically separated from the beautiful, so *disallowing* the 'visible appearance of the invisible' which he seeks.³⁸ Such sublimity is the extreme instance of the treatment of the world as a series of 'givens' to be known rather than gifts to be received and returned. And modernity can only reckon with the given, it must be metaphysical, (as Heidegger half saw), even in its nihilist mode, where the 'spatial' becomes the interminable and unsurprizable flux of *différance*. Whereas, to the contrary, in order to convert the given into the gift, to receive love, one must admit the mediation of appearing and revelation via the judgment and right desire of 'the inspired man' (as revelation prior to early modernity when it became a positive, actual content, was always understood) even if it be equally the case that judgement and right desire are themselves entirely given. When this is done, to receive the gift as love one must further *evacuate* all philosophy, leaving it merely as the empty science of formally possible perspectives and barren *aporias*. An independent phenomenology must be given up, along with the claim, which would have seemed so bizarre to the Fathers, to be doing philosophy *as well* as theology. Philosophy as spiritual discipline, orientated to (an always in any case implicit) abstract reflection on the 'context' of our ascent, can indeed be embraced and consummated in a Christian version by theology. In this sense theology can still have recourse to *theoria* and *logos*, and if the latter constitute 'metaphysics', then talk of its overcoming is absurd. But philosophy as autonomous, as 'about' anything independently of its creaturely status is metaphysics or ontology in the most precisely technical sense. Philosophy in fact *began* as a secularizing immanentism, an attempt

to regard a *cosmos* independently of a performed reception of the poetic word.⁵⁹ The pre-Socratics forgot both Being and the Gift, while (*contra* Heidegger) the later Plato made some attempt to recover the extra-cosmic vatic *logos*. Theology has always resumed this inheritance, along with that of the Bible, and if it wishes to think again God's love, and think creation as the manifestation of that love, then it must entirely evacuate philosophy, which is metaphysics, leaving it nothing (outside imaginary worlds, logical implications or the isolation of *aporias*) to either do or see, which is not manifestly,—I judge—malicious.

- 1 For others, see J-F. Courtine ed. *Phénoménologie et Théologie* (Criterion, Paris, 1993); H-B. Vergote et al, *l'Être et Dieu* (Cerf, Paris, 1986); J-Y. Lacoste, *Expérience et Absolu* (P.U.F. Paris 1994); J-L. Chrétien, *L'Inoubliable et L'Inespéré* (P.U.F. Paris 1991).
- 2 See J-L. Marion, *Réduction et Donation* (P.U.F. Paris, 1989), 79ff and Edmund Husserl, *Ideen*, § 24.
- 3 *Réduction et Donation*, 1–13, 130ff.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 1–63, 163–210.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 183–4
- 6 See Martin Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics' and 'Letter on Humanism' in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (Routledge, London, 1977) 93–110, 213–67; *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Harper and Row, New York, 1972).
- 7 *Réduction et Donation*, 249–305; Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being* trans. Thomas A Carlson (Chicago U.P. Chicato, 1991) 25–52, 83ff; *L'Idole et La Distance* (Grasset et Pasquella, Paris, 1977) 264–9.
- 8 *Réduction et Donation*, 119–61, 211–47.
- 9 Jean-Luc Marion, 'L'Interloqué' in *Who Comes after the Subject*, ed. Eduardo Cadava et al (Routledge, London, 1991) 236–46.
- 10 Phillip Blond has maintained this point in several unpublished lectures and private conversations. See also Jocelyn Benoist, 'Husserl: au-delà de l'Ontothéologie?' in *Les Études Philosophiques* 4 1991, 433–458.
- 11 Jean-Luc Marion, 'L'Intentionnalité de l'Amour' in *Prolégomènes à la Charité* (La Différance, Paris, 1987) 91–120, p.117.
- 12 'La Liberté d'être Libre' and 'L'Evidence et éblouissement' in *Prolégomènes*, 45–67 and 71–88.
- 13 *God Without Being*, 48 and Jean-Luc Marion, 'De "La Mort de Dieu" aux Noms Divins: L'Itinéraire Théologique de la Métaphysique' in Vergote, *L'Être et Dieu*, 103–130, p.130.
- 14 Jean-Luc Marion, 'Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relève for Theology', unpublished paper delivered in the Cambridge Divinity Faculty, June 1993.
- 15 *Ibid.* and see *Prolégomènes*, 45–67, 71–78; *Réduction et Donation*, 249–302.
- 16 Jean-Luc Marion, *Sur le Prisme Métaphysique de Descartes* (P.U.F. Paris, 1986) 14–43. But see also Jean-François Courtine, *Suarez et le Système de la Métaphysique* (P.U.F. Paris, 1990) 484–495 who argues against Marion that the *Regulae*, not the *Méditations*, give Descartes' ontology, such that the determination of the *ens* as the transparently knowable has priority over the *cogito*. If Marion's diagnosis here is incorrect, this would accord with his giving too little weight to how modern ontology based on univocity of Being transforms our notions of *finite* being, not just divine being, as I argue later in this article.
- 17 See *L'Idole et la Distance*, 15–45.
- 18 *Ibid.* 45–106.
- 19 Plato, *Phaedo* 96b–99d.
- 20 See Edward Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology in Islamic and Christian thinkers*

(Cambridge U.P. Cambridge 1983).

- 21 J.F. Courtine, *Suarez et le système de Métaphysique*, 436–457, 521–538.
- 22 Pierre Hadot, 'Dieu comme acte d'être dans le néoplatonisme. A propos des theories d'E. Gilson sur la métaphysique de l'Exode' in *Dieu et L'Etre: Exégèses d'Exode e.14 et de Coran 20.11–24* (Études Augustiniennes, Paris, 1978).
- 23 *God Without Being*, 'Preface to the English Edition' xix–xxv and J-L. Marion, 'The Essential Incoherence of Descartes' Definition of Divinity' in *Essays on Descartes' Meditations* ed. A.O. Rorty (California U.P. Berkeley, 1986) 297–338.
- 24 See John Milbank, 'Can a Gift be Given?' in *Modern Theology* (January, 1995).
- 25 Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics' in *Basic Writings*, 109–110.
- 26 *Réduction et Donation*, 297; *God Without Being*, 104–107.
- 27 *Prologomènes*, 45–67, 71–88.
- 28 Christoph Schönborn, *L'Icone du Christ* (Cerf, Paris, 1986) 127, 217–74.
- 29 De 'La Mort de Dieu' aux Normes divines', in *L'Etre et Dieu*, 125–6.
- 30 *God Without Being*, 'Preface', xxiii.
- 31 Thomas Aquinas, *In Metaphysica*, Prologue.
- 32 See Edouard Weber, 'Eckhart et L'Ontothéologisme': Histoire et Conditions d'une Rupture' in Emilie zum Brunn et al, *Maître Eckhart à Paris: Une Critique Médiévale de l'Ontothéologie* (P.U.F. Paris, 1984) 79–83.
- 33 *God Without Being*, 39–42.
- 34 See Catherine Pickstock, 'Asyndeton: Syntax and Insanity : A Study of the Revision of the Nicene Creed' in *Modern Theology* 10: 4 October, 1994 and other unpublished papers.
- 35 Alain de Libera, *Le Problème de L'Etre chez Maître Eckhart: Logique et Métaphysique de L'Analogie* (Cahiers de la Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie 4, Geneva, 1980); Emilie zum Brunn et al, *Maître Eckhart à Paris*.
- 16 See Eckhart, Parisian Question number 1: *Utrum in Deo sit idem esse et intelligere* (trans. A.A. Maurer, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 1974, 43–50. Or see *Maître Eckhart à Paris* 176–187 for the Latin original plus French translation and notes).
- 37 Parisian Question number 3: *Rationes Equardi* (Maurer 55–67, or see *Maître Eckhart a Paris* 200–223).
- 38 Eckhart, 'Prologues to the *Opus Tripartitum*', General Prologue, Maurer, 85–6.
- 39 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord* vol V (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1989) trans. Oliver Davies et al. 29–31.
- 40 Eckhart, *Prologues*, General Prologue, Maurer, p.79; A. de Libera, *Le Problème de l'Etre*.
- 41 Eckhart, *Prologues*, Prologue to the Book of Propositions, Maurer, 100104; Parisian Question No. I, Maurer, 49–50. (*Maître Eckhart a Paris*, 165–6).
- 42 Eckhart, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, Maurer, p.110; Augustin, *De Trinitate*, VIII, 2.
- 43 This was precisely Marion's own earlier argument against Levinas. See *L'Idole et la Distance* 264–9.
- 44 Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* I, 8.
- 45 See *Dieu et L'Etre: essays* by Harl, Nautin, Madec and zum Brunn, 87–167; *L'Etre et Dieu*, 'Epilogue' by Dominique Bourg 215–244; Dominique Dubarle, 'Essai sur l'Ontologie Théologique de St. Augustin' in *Dieu Avec L'Etre* (Beauchesne, Paris, 1986) 167–258.
- 46 Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* 5 and 6.
- 47 See Emilie zum Brunn, *St Augustine: Being and Nothingness* (Paragon, New York, 1988).
- 48 *God Without Being* 80–82 ff.
- 49 Aquinas, *In Librum de Divinis Nominibus Expositio* 635 (Caramello p.235).
- 50 Aquinas, *S.T.* 1a Q.5. a2.
- 51 See Paul Vignaux, 'Pour situer dans l'école une question de Maître Eckhart', in *Maître Eckhart a Paris*, 141–154. And see Balthasar, 50.

- 52 *Réduction et Donation*, 304.
- 53 Marion, *Sur le Prisme Métaphysique de Descartes*, 338–69; Vincent Carraud ‘La Généalogie de la Politique: Pascal’ in *Communio* no IX. 3. May–June 1984, 26–37.
- 54 S.T. II II Q. 35. a3. resp. Marion cites this passage (*God Without Being*, 135) yet does not reflect that if, for Aquinas, *accidie* is essentially boredom about Charity (the gift) as much or more than it is boredom about being, then the sensation of melancholy or awareness of vanity is not neutrally ‘transitional’ in Christian thought as it could be for paganism. It is rather the intrusion of sin under the mask of reflectiveness and profundity.
- 55 *God Without Being*, 3.
- 56 F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge U.P. Cambridge, 1994) 54–6.
- 57 See Antoine Delzant, ‘Redemption et Ontologie’ in *L’Etre et Dieu*, 81–103.
- 58 See J-L. Marion ‘Le Phénomène saturé’ in *Phénoménologie et Théologie*, 79–128. Also my unpublished paper, ‘On the sublime subject of Modernity.’
- 59 See Marcel Detienne, *Les Maîtres de la Vérité dans la Grèce Archaïque* (Maspero, Paris, 1967); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Qu’est-ce que la Philosophie* (Eds. de Minuit, Paris, 1991) 38–60. See also Catherine Pickstock’s unpublished essay ‘Socrates goes outside the City: Writing and Exteriority’.

Reading Heidegger: Is God Without Being? Jean-Luc Marion’s reading of Martin Heidegger in *God Without Being*

Laurence Hemming

Jean-Luc Marion is one of the first theologians to take seriously the force of Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics *as a whole*, which means he takes seriously Heidegger’s claims about the “overcoming” (*Überwindung*) of metaphysics. In other words, when in the work of Martin Heidegger the whole of metaphysics is thrown into question, any and all of its determinations become “questionable”, that is, worthy of being questioned. Marion concedes the impact this may have for theology.

This study concerns itself with how Jean Luc-Marion attempts in the work *God Without Being* to speak of God after Martin Heidegger’s claims for the overcoming of metaphysics. This arises as a question about