



# Phenomenology as Apologetics: The Crossing of the Paths of Theology and Philosophy in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion

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**ABSTRACT** In this article, we analyse the relation of philosophy and theology in the work of Jean-Luc Marion in order to be able to see not only how the phenomenology of givenness can serve as a “new apologetics” for theology, but also how Marion’s phenomenology itself, in its historical development and in its core principle and method, is influenced and changed by theological phenomena. We present three ways of describing the relation, tension, mutual influence and separation of philosophy and theology: firstly, in line with Pascal’s distinction between the orders of reason and of the heart; secondly, in phenomenology, in terms of indications to the effect that there can be a phenomenon of revelation in the mode of possibility that is distinguished from the phenomenon of Revelation in theology in the mode of historicity; and thirdly, by analogy with Christian apologetics. In particular, we analyse this third dimension, putting forward the thesis that Marion’s phenomenology itself has some characteristics of the Christian apologetics he describes. We try to demonstrate this interpretation of his phenomenology in its key dimensions, such as the counter-method and descriptions of the phenomena of love and revelation, which constitute the culmination of the phenomenology of givenness, although at the same time, as it were, its limit, crossing over into the theological order.

**KEYWORDS** Marion, Jean-Luc; phenomenology of givenness; theology; revelation; apologetics

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## INTRODUCTION

Can a philosopher address theological topics? *De facto*, philosophy has always spoken about God, often understood as “the supreme being.” But since, for the believer, God reveals Himself, this revelation makes a difference between the “God of Revelation”<sup>1</sup> and the “God of the philosophers.” The problem of these orders, formulated by Pascal among others, takes on particular significance in the context of the phenomenological paradigm. The question of the influence that Revelation has on phenomenology (and, reciprocally, the influence that phenomenology can have on theological reflection) is therefore relevant.

In the light of these questions, we want to look at the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion. In his work, philosophical and theological themes interact. And so the culmination of his phenomenology of givenness is the description of saturated phenomena, the highest degree of which is the saturated phenomenon of revelation. Also central to his phenomenology is the question of love and the erotic phenomenon, which is at the same time a central theological theme. In fact, one could say that in his work, chronologically speaking, we have to do with posing the question—both philosophically and theologically—of the possibility of thinking God and love outside of the limitations of metaphysics, and then with developing the phenomenology of givenness, whose culmination and goal is a new access to the phenomena of revelation and love, where theological and phenomenological paths cross. In this endeavour, however, Marion seeks to maintain a particular distinction between the disciplines of philosophy and theology, and addresses criticisms of the lack of this distinction in his work.

The purpose of this article is twofold: firstly, we want to look at the specificity of the relationship between philosophy and theology in Marion’s work. Secondly, rather than examine how Marion’s phenomenology influences theological considerations, we want to see more closely how the relationship of these disciplines influences Marion’s phenomenology itself. Those topics have been described by, among others, Christina Gschwandtner (2005, 2013) (see also: Horner 2005; Mackinlay 2010; Graves 2021).

Gschwandtner, in her article “A new ‘apologia’: The relationship between theology and philosophy in the work of Jean-Luc Marion,” says: “Yet in explicating what Marion says about the distinction and relationship between the two disciplines we will see that these suggestions about how philosophy and theology are to relate actually also delineate well how

1. To distinguish biblical Revelation from revelation in a philosophical context, we follow Marion in writing the former with a capital letter.

Marion himself negotiates the boundary between the two” (2005, 300). We want to take up the theme of theory and practice and the resulting “negotiation” of the boundaries of phenomenology and theology, but as a background to the more specific issue of the impact this process has on phenomenology itself. In her book *Postmodern Apologetics*, Gschwandtner says: “One might suggest, then, that Marion’s own philosophy does precisely this: provide an alternative rationality that gives coherence to the phenomena of Christian faith, especially the experience of self-sacrificing love” (2013, 123). However, while Marion’s phenomenology may serve as giving *sui juris* rationality to faith, we argue that the reverse movement also occurs, where apologetics serves as a model for phenomenology. And not only—according to what Marion says—as the introduction of certain phenomena inaccessible without the help of faith, but also as an influence on the phenomenological method itself.

We will briefly discuss three complementary explanations of the difference and relationship between philosophy and theology, in order to then focus on the third: namely, a certain form of apologetics. This apologetics is particularly understood—not so much as rational persuasion, but rather in a phenomenological spirit—as the reduction of obstacles to the manifestation of the phenomenon itself, and the emphasis on the role of the will in the reception of the phenomenon, and thus in its phenomenalisation. Thus, while apologetics is understood by Marion in a particularly phenomenological way, at the same time phenomenology, though separated from theology, nevertheless acquires a particularly “apologetic” character.

It should therefore be said that, firstly, Marion defends the separation of philosophy and theology, because Revelation gives itself on its own terms, not adhering to the conditions of possibility imposed by metaphysics and distancing itself from idolatry (also understood in a philosophical way). Secondly, in contrast to Heidegger—whom he accuses of the idolatry of thinking God in the horizon of Being and, at the same time, of silence in the face of the Revelation of the God of faith—Marion believes that the fact of the givenness of Revelation as an irreducible “call” requires a change of thinking, not silence. An aid to this change is to be found in the phenomenology of givenness. Phenomenology, even though it adheres to the requirement of reduction to givenness, by not assuming *a priori* any phenomenon that is not given—or precisely because it does so—reaches according to Marion all the way to the phenomenon of love and revelation. However, this frontier is already one that intersects with theological reflection, where reduction can go no further than making the transition to the theological dimension (or at least acknowledging a certain crossing

of the paths of philosophy and theology), paradoxically at the same time revealing the separation of philosophy and theology and suggesting their certain convergence in a common phenomenon.

### 1. THE IDOL AND THE ORDER OF CHARITY

The first distinction between theology and philosophy at issue is related to Pascal's doctrine of the three orders—of body, mind and charity. According to Pascal, posing the question of the knowledge of God within the framework of metaphysics leads to doubt and pride, which is why he says of Descartes that he is “useless and uncertain” (Pascal 1999, 30). In contrast, the other and proper order of knowing God is the order of heart and charity. Marion notes that in Pascal's eyes metaphysical questions about the being or existence of God “uncover an idol” (see Marion 1999, 297). Marion speaks here of the necessity of a kind of “epistemological conversion,” that is, of rejecting the horizon of certainty and replacing it with the horizon of charity: “Not that love dispenses with knowing or requires some sacrifice of intelligibility, but love becomes, instead of and in the place of *intuitus*, the keeper of evidence, the royal road to knowledge” (Marion 1999, 305).

Transition between these orders is only possible by crossing and transcending the previous one. Importantly, these orders are connected by a certain hierarchy—the higher one exceeds and sees the lower one, but remains invisible to it (see Marion 1999, 306). Therefore, “to see the ‘order of charity,’ one has not so much to know a new object, as to know according to a new condition, loving: ‘We enter into truth only through charity’” (Marion 1999, 316).<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted, however, that Marion does not simply embrace the Pascalian distinction between the orders of reason and of the heart. The complexity of Marion's approach to this issue is revealed in the context of the debate over Christian philosophy. There, Marion points to love, which is fully revealed in the theological dimension, as having a role in philosophy that is not only hermeneutic, but above all heuristic. A Christian philosophy or phenomenology of love would thus have a bridging function between the two Pascalian orders (see Gschwandtner 2005, 304). This is a crucial statement that will play an important role in the rest of our analysis. For, depending on the context and stage of his thought, Marion will either

2. Thus, it can be seen that Marion, drawing on this very motif, follows a line that runs from St. Augustine—“non intratur in veritatem, nisi per caritatem” (*Contra Faustum*, lib. 32, cap. 18)—through Pascal and, as Marion notes, up to Heidegger (see Heidegger 1993, 185; 1996, 404).

regard the order of charity as belonging exclusively to theology and not to philosophy (understood as metaphysics), or as a place common to theology and philosophy (understood as phenomenology).

Thus, on the one hand, charity unveils or reveals the truth in the manner of a new hermeneutics, not so much seeing new entities or objects of cognition (the first and second orders contain them all) as, rather, bringing a new point of view to bear on them, which reveals dimensions previously unseen, senses previously hidden: “From being a secondary and ambiguous passion, charity achieves the rank of hermeneutic principle: once its point of view is admitted—that is to say, once the mind succeeds in reaching it, another world, or other dimensions of the old world, is disclosed to the gaze” (Marion 1999, 313).

On the other hand, Christian philosophy is not just a Christian hermeneutic of reality, and thus does not rely only on a “Christian,” revelation-inspired interpretation of commonly available phenomena (see Marion 2008, 66). For such an interpretation would be subject to criticism like any other interpretation, and could be suspected of having an ideological dimension. In a polemic with Gilson, Marion states that Christian philosophy must have above all a heuristic function: “‘Christian philosophy’ is not practiced as a simple, possibly ideological, hermeneutic of a natural ‘given’ already accessible to rationality without Revelation, in short, as an interpretive supplement under strange command. It offers entirely new natural phenomena to reason, which reason discovers because Revelation invents them for it and shows them to it. Reason is therefore practiced as heuristic” (Marion 2008, 72).

Revelation helps philosophy to discover new phenomena. For in theology, Christ is the Revelation that comes “from elsewhere,” (see Marion 2020a) as a paradox for reason, as Revelation of “mysteries,” and an event of absolute newness. This Revelation of love “has purely theoretical effects on the horizon of rationality. As a new theoretical continent to be explored, it opens up what Pascal called the ‘order of charity’” (Marion 2008, 72). All the more so, however, a properly understood distance between the philosophical and theological dimensions must, according to Marion, be preserved—that is why an important part of his early work (*Idol and Distance, God Without Being*) is the rejection of not only the Heideggerian inscription of God in the horizon of Being, but also the Heideggerian silence in the face of the God of Revelation.

God thus reveals Himself as absolutely inaccessible to all thought, and yet, paradoxically, given—as Karl Barth, whom Marion cites, says: “God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself *through Himself*. He reveals *Himself*”

(Barth 2009, 1). His revelation goes both beyond what we can think, but also beyond what we cannot think: “For that which I may not think is still the concern of my thought, and hence to me remains thinkable. On the contrary, the unthinkable taken as such is the concern of God himself, and characterises him as the aura of his advent, the glory of his insistence, the brilliance of his retreat” (Marion 2012a, 46).

Moving beyond the aporia of thinking God is accomplished by Marion in pointing to the task of thinking love:

What name, what concept, and what sign nevertheless yet remain feasible? A single one, no doubt, love, or as we would like to say, as Saint John proposes—“God [is] agape” (1 John 4:8). Why love? Because this term, which Heidegger (like, moreover, all of metaphysics, although in a different way) maintains in a derived and secondary state, still remains, paradoxically, unthought enough to free, some day at least, the thought of God from the second idolatry. This task, immense and, in a sense, still untouched, requires working love conceptually (and hence, in return, working the concept through love), to the point that its full speculative power can be deployed. (Marion 2012a, 47)

This thinking of love in the light of Revelation and of Revelation in its own light of love constitutes an “immense task,” the means of which will prove to be the development of the phenomenology of givenness.

## 2. THE POSSIBILITY OF THE PHENOMENON OF REVELATION

Let us now turn to the second motif of the relation of philosophy and theology that can be found in the context of Marion’s phenomenology of givenness. In order to understand it properly it is necessary to begin with a broader historical view of the relation of philosophy to theology. According to Marion, philosophy itself must determine its path of reflection and its rational limits. In modern times, this led to what Kant called the “conflict of the faculties”: “A biblical theologian is, properly speaking, one *versed in the Scriptures* with regard to *ecclesiastical faith*, which is based on statutes—that is, on laws proceeding from another person’s act of choice. A rational theologian, on the other hand, is one *versed in reason* with regard to *religious faith*, which is based on inner laws that can be developed from every man’s own reason” (Kant 1979, 61). This conflict arises, on the one hand, from the sharp distinction between theology and philosophy, which only arises with the birth of modern metaphysics, whose *theologia rationalis* is separated from *theologia vero sacræ Scripturæ*. On the other hand, it results at the same time from a certain blurring of boundaries, since

“rational theology” within metaphysics can do without theology—hence the conflict of faculties.

However, Marion asks whether, with the “end of metaphysics,” their conflict is still valid. The distinction between the possible and the impossible, which has hitherto defined rationality and, from the perspective of metaphysics, separated philosophy from theology, is not so obvious in the context of the phenomenological paradigm. Moreover, from a theological point of view, the strict distinction between pure nature and grace, demarcating philosophy and theology, turns out to be at least simplistic in the light of contemporary theological reflection.

From the perspective of phenomenology itself, although Husserl demanded methodological atheism (see Husserl 1983, 133) he also argued that the elaboration of a phenomenology that radically breaks with metaphysics was a task important for both phenomenology and theology (see Husserl 1983, 117). As Marion notes, the phenomenon of revelation can be given in phenomenology, if only as an intentional object, without prejudging its ontological status. Marion finds such a possibility in phenomenology, citing both Husserl and Jean Hering: “If one objects to the phenomenologist that some religious givens are not objects of Experience but of Revelation, he will answer that the intrinsic meaning of a ‘Revelation’ implies the unveiling of a given in front of or for the Consciousness; consequently the given and the way of its appearance will be susceptible to description, as well as the particular kind of certainty which accompanies it” (Hering 1939, 372; my translation; see also Hering 1925, 129–30).<sup>3</sup>

Marion therefore poses a fundamental question: faced with the idolatrous “God” of metaphysics on the one hand, and the methodological silence of phenomenology on the subject of God on the other, are we limited to the alternative between philosophical silence and a faith devoid of any rationality? In other words, can the rationality of faith nevertheless be described by means of phenomenology? Marion answers in the affirmative, while still maintaining the distinction between the God of faith and the God of philosophers: “Yet outside of revealed theology there is no reason to prohibit reason—here, philosophy in its phenomenological bearing—from pushing reason to its end, that is, to itself, without admitting any other limits than those of phenomenality” (Marion 2008, 61–2). What phenomenology can

3. Marion also quotes in this context Husserl: “Here, as throughout phenomenology, one must have the courage to accept what is really to be seen in the phenomenon precisely as it presents itself rather than interpreting it away, and to *honestly* describe it. All theories must be directed accordingly” (1983, 257).

bring is the possibility of the phenomenon of the revelation of God outside of metaphysics—and therefore outside of the categories of being and cause—and yet still as a “luminous shadow,” as the phenomenal face of the “God of the philosophers” rather than the “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Marion 2008, 64). Phenomenology can serve theology; on the other hand, theology exerts a heuristic influence on phenomenology.

How, then, can we distinguish phenomenology from theology, when both deal with the *phenomenon* of revelation? Marion says:

Between phenomenology and theology, the border passes between revelation as possibility and Revelation as historicity. There can be no danger of confusion between these domains . . . . When the being-given turns to charity (the loved or loving being, the lover in the strict sense), phenomenology yields to revealed theology exactly as the second order, according to Pascal, yields to the third. Here again, no confusion could creep in. (Marion 2008, 64)

The distinction between phenomenology and theology corresponds to the phenomenon of revelation in the modes of possibility and historicity, respectively. The transition to the theological level of Revelation, which Marion links here to the order of charity, requires precisely a transgression and a departure from the one order into the other. By contrast, in phenomenology it is rather a question of a form of phenomenality and phenomenological description that, without becoming confessional or smuggling in an un-reduced, assumed *a priori* form of transcendence, nevertheless relates to the religious subject matter. Jean-François Courtine, in his introduction to *Phénoménologie et théologie*, even asks: “Is there a specific form of phenomenality in religious experience . . . that can affect phenomenology itself in its design, its purpose, its fundamental concepts, or its methods?” (Chrétien et al. 1992, 9; my translation).<sup>4</sup> It is thus a question of the limits of phenomenality.

Marion therefore refers to a phenomenology that seeks to free the phenomenon—including the “religious phenomenon”—from metaphysical constraints within which the possibility of manifestation and its limits do not depend on the phenomenon itself, but are determined *a priori* (see Chrétien et al. 1992, 83). We can see that he initially relates the “saturated phenomenon,” which later finds its theoretical framework in the phenomenology of givenness,

4. The quoted text responds to accusations of a “theological turn” in phenomenology (see Janicaud 1991). It is also worth mentioning that the debate on the theological turn also connects in a special way with Marion’s debate with Derrida on the possibility of the gift (Caputo and Scanlon 1999; Derrida 1991, 1993; Sebbah 2001, 109–52).



to the phenomenon of Revelation. It is therefore a privileged phenomenon serving to guide the development of his phenomenology, in which the notion of the saturated phenomenon will later be extended to all phenomenality. However, with the later development of the phenomenology of givenness, Marion seeks to be more careful in distinguishing between the philosophical and theological orders: “This distance between the saturated phenomenon in its quadruple banality, on the one hand, and the phenomenon of revelation (and hence the possibility of Revelation), on the other, makes it possible to maintain a neat distinction between phenomenology (even of givenness) and theology (even of Revelation)” (Marion 2008, xiv).

To summarise, if phenomenality in its highest degree of saturation is revelation, then conversely “revelation, and in particular biblical revelation (Jewish and Christian), plays out in terms of phenomenality” (Marion 2016a, 4; 2018a, 46)—even, or especially, when it is a “phenomenology of the unapparent” (Marion 2002b, 110).<sup>5</sup> In his recent book, *D’ailleurs, la révélation*, Marion even reverses this dynamic, which would support the thesis of our article: “In fact, since *The Visible and the Revealed*, which already collected earlier sketches and avowed an obsessive theme, I had begun to tackle the question of Revelation. Or rather of the phenomenality of revelation in general, thus also of biblical Revelation in particular—unless it is the other way round: Revelation as such opening up the case of the phenomenon of revelation in the common phenomenality” (2020a, 10; my translation).

One can see here a somewhat problematic (paradoxical?) simultaneous separation of theology and philosophy, as well as a certain unity within phenomenology, freed from the constraints of metaphysics. The recognition of the phenomenon of Revelation, which is an event whose reception requires not less than the grace of faith, is something external and autonomous in relation to the domain of philosophy, although it does not make a breach in it, because it can be described according to the principles of the phenomenology of givenness, constituting the very fulfilment of phenomenality: “Paradoxically, but logically, revelation, by virtue of the givenness that it alone performs perfectly, would accomplish the essence of phenomenality” (Marion 2016a, 7).

### 3. PHENOMENOLOGY AS APOLOGETICS

Besides the aforementioned two ways of approaching the relationship between philosophy and theology, one can recognise in Marion a third, related to Christian apologetics. This theme is the key issue of this article,

5. “Diese Phänomenologie ist eine Phänomenologie des Unscheinbaren” (Heidegger 1986, 399).

as it points at a fundamental level to the intersection and mutual influence of theology and philosophy in his thought. In the text “Evidence and Bedazzlement,” included in *Prolegomena to Charity* from 1986, he describes the purpose of Christian apologetics as follows: “The aim would no longer be (but has this ever been the goal?) to develop an argumentative machine, which would claim, like well-executed propaganda, to force an intimate conviction by force of reasons, or rather of popular slogans, an approach that testifies more to a will to dominate and strengthen an apparatus, than to a gesture of love revealing Love . . . So long as the will does not freely will to love, apologetics has gained nothing” (Marion 2002c, 55, 7).

The rejection in the order of faith of the pretensions of rational persuasion, and the appeal to the will as a *sui generis* rational principle, can also be found in Pascal. Marion notes that Descartes, too, accepts the irreducible domain of faith and Revelation, but relates it exclusively to the non-rational will: “This does not preclude our believing that what has been revealed by God is more certain than any knowledge, since faith in these matters, as in anything obscure, is an act of the will rather than an act of the understanding” (Descartes 1985, 15). Pascal not only emphasises, like Descartes, the role of the will in the context of “knowing” God, but at the same time recognises the will as a separate power for arriving at truth, and he breaks with the Cartesian equation of truth with evidence (see Marion 1996, 343). Reason demonstrates truth by evidence, “the heart” by the consent of the will. Reason and the heart are the two authorities of the soul, that “each have their principles and the prime movers of their actions” (Pascal 1999, 194).

Marion understands apologetics as leading to the phenomenon of love itself, which requires love for its manifestation: “Apologetics . . . progresses toward its goal—to reach Love by love—only by becoming useless (as regards arguments) little by little, for finally love alone, and not discourse, can go the place where apologetics claim to lead” (Marion 2002c, 69). According to Marion, the phenomenon of love is not irrational, but rather saturates the categories of reason: “What Jesus Christ reveals of God shows to much evidence for our gaze” (Marion 2002c, 66). One can already see here the roots of the concept of the saturated phenomenon elaborated later.

We can thus see certain stages on the path of apologia that are akin to that of phenomenology. Firstly, the phenomenon of love and revelation is already given in a theological way, for those who see it in faith and love, while for reason it is given in the form of a paradox.<sup>6</sup> The paradox consists

6. For Marion, this paradox is both the starting point and the goal of his phenomenology: “The beginning belongs to the given and that beginning decides the end. With the given, from

in this: that despite the fact that “concerning God, we only encounter a triple impossibility—impossibility of intuition, impossibility of concept, and thus also impossibility of experiencing the slightest phenomenon of him,” He is nevertheless given to thought. “The question of God survives the impossibility of God” (Marion 2015, 57). What is thus given, performing a heuristic role, from the side of phenomenology requires a reduction that brings this phenomenon to its givenness, clearing the horizon of what does not belong to it (which constitutes a kind of apologia of the phenomenon). Ultimately, however, there is a “disappearance” of this work in favour of the manifestation of the phenomenon itself by “reaching Love by love.” For reason there can be only a “negative certainty.”<sup>7</sup> One may thus discern a parallelism between the work of apologia and the phenomenology of givenness, as also in the whole direction taken by Marion’s thought. Such a path would therefore lead from the paradoxes that Marion essentially describes in *The Idol and Distance* from 1977 (2001), *God Without Being* from 1982 (2012a) and *Prolegomena to Charity* from 1986 (2002c), via the “broadening of rationality” in his phenomenological trilogy about givenness<sup>8</sup> (and thanks to this broadening and apologetical work), to what is in some way beyond it, which is the more theological topics essentially found in *The Erotic Phenomenon* from 2003 (2007), *In the Self’s Place* from 2008 (2012b), *Negative Certainties* from 2010 (2015), and *D’ailleurs, la revelation* (2020a).

Marion himself compares apologetics to phenomenology: “apologetics can recover a theological legitimacy, as a style of phenomenology (but strictly foreign to philosophy) of the mind labouring at conversion” (2002c, 69). The question can be raised of whether, if apologetics, strictly separate from philosophy, can be phenomenological, then phenomenology, strictly separate from theology, can nevertheless be apologetic in style and method.<sup>9</sup> The common denominator here, of course, is phenomenology understood as

the beginning, we see the end, we are finished, in every sense of the word” (Marion 2016b, 60; my translation). “It always seemed to me that the role of philosophy consists in helping us see (and understand) things that one does not see at first glance—paradoxes” (Marion 2017, 97)

7. “This negative certainty, then, in Marion’s view is a real broadening of our field of knowledge, albeit in an apophatic mode (the parallels to Marion’s earlier analysis of negative or mystical theology are striking)” (Gschwandtner 2013, 116).

8. *Reduction and Givenness* from 1989 (1998), *Being Given* from 1997 (2002a), and *In Excess* from 2001 (2002b).

9. It is noteworthy that Heidegger compares his thinking to apologia (fundamental theology), justifying another way of thinking and initiating into it: “Thus the relation of fundamental ontology to the clarification of the meaning of Being—which was not published—would be analogous to the relation between fundamental theology and theological system” (Heidegger 1972, 32).

a method and the object of this method—the phenomena of love and revelation. On the one hand, such a “philosophical” apologetics remains within the rigour of phenomenology, adhering to the “principle of all principles” and the requirement of reduction; on the other hand, it is intended to lead to the given, and thus also and above all to the phenomenon of love. The starting point as well as the point of arrival is the phenomenon of love.

Let us now try to reconstruct briefly the path of Marion’s phenomenology, following the guiding thread of understanding it as a specific apologetics. We have seen that the description of apologetics involves the disappearance of arguments in favour of the appearance of the phenomenon itself. Such a feature can be found in the phenomenological goal of the ultimate disappearance of reduction in favour of the manifestation of the phenomenon itself. This is the premise of Marion’s counter-method, and the “turn” assumed in it:

The reduction does nothing; it lets manifestation manifest itself . . . All the difficulty of the reduction—and the reason it always remains to be done and redone, with neither end nor sufficient success—stems from the swerve it must make, one where it invents itself (“zigzagging” along). The reduction must be done in order to undo it and let it become the apparition of what shows itself in it, though finally without it. Or rather, the reduction opens the show of the phenomenon at first like a very present director, so as to then let this show continue as a simple scene where the director is necessary, to be sure, but forgotten and making no difference—with the result that, in the end, the phenomenon so dominates the scene that it is absorbed in it and no longer distinguished from it: self-directing. The reduction is enacted precisely with this turning. Phenomenological method therefore claims to deploy a turn, which goes not simply from proving to showing, but from showing in the way that an ego makes an object evident to letting an apparition in an appearance show itself: a method of turning that turns against itself and consists in this reversal itself—counter-method. In its terrifying simplicity, this turning offers such difficulty that the phenomenological project is forever reconsidering how to formulate it, perhaps without yet having done so completely. (Marion 2002a, 10)

A certain tension can be seen here between the disappearance of reduction in favour of the appearance of the phenomenon itself via the path of reduction, albeit now without it, and the requirement for the constant repetition of this reduction, which never ultimately reaches the phenomenon. The phenomenon is always greater in its givenness than the interpretation

that assumes it. Similarly, in theology (as in the “erotic reduction”) it is also possible to “fulfil” the reduction through an act of will, though this act, too, still requires constant actualisation.<sup>10</sup>

If the phenomenology of givenness should assume a “turn,” we can now link it to the apologetic motif associated with the phenomenon of love and revelation. In order to demonstrate this assumption, it is important to note, firstly, that the descriptions of the saturated phenomena blur as their meaning comes to play a role in ever higher phenomena or “phenomenological situations”—and, ultimately, in the phenomenon of revelation and the soughtafter phenomenon of love (which are in many ways linked in Marion’s work). The description of saturated phenomena thus seems to be still part of the path of reduction, rather than its disappearance in favour of the manifestation of the phenomenon itself. This is indicated by the conclusion of *Being Given*, which Marion calls the “opening of the question”: “What remains is to take the most perilous step: thinking this self/itself—which alone permits the phenomenon to show itself. For this project, I turn to the phenomenology of givenness because it opens at least a way of access to the self/itself ... This individuation has a name: love” (Marion 2002a, 320–1, 4). Reduction to givenness, by making a turn, imposes on phenomenalisation itself the logic of giving and receiving (the self) from another. With the elaboration of the phenomenology of givenness in *Being Given*, Marion states that a new question opens up—that of receiving the Other and oneself from the Other. Such a phenomenological “situation” constitutes “less an exception to ordinary phenomenality than one of its most advanced developments and, perhaps, its completion” (Marion 2002a, 323).

In *The Erotic Phenomenon* from 2003, Marion states: “This book has obsessed me since the publication of *The Idol and Distance* in 1977. All the books I have published since then bear the mark, explicit or hidden, of this concern. In particular, *Prolegomena to Charity* was published in 1986 only to give witness to the fact that I had not given up on this project, despite the delay in completing it” (Marion 2007, 10). He links this delay in completion precisely to the need to move away from a purely polemical exposing of the deficiencies of the philosophical approach to love (often from a theological position), and towards a phenomenological description (see Marion

10. “According to the diagonal of the *nun*, every moment can (and must) be lived as the last—as the opportunity to decide for or against Christ, as the opportunity to end the time of indecision” (Marion 2020a, 577–8; my translation); “Faithfulness here does not have a narrowly ethical, optional, and psychological status, but rather a strictly phenomenological function—to allow the temporalization of the erotic phenomenon, so as to assure it a visibility that lasts and imposes itself” (Marion 2007, 185).

2018, 10).<sup>11</sup> In this way, Marion addresses the question of the relationship between phenomenology, as embodied in *Being Given*, and the description of the phenomenon of love in *The Erotic Phenomenon*:

The phenomenon I had described in *Being Given* still remained a phenomenon within the world, but what would happen if we were to suppose that another *adonné* were at stake? It took me almost ten years to pass from one—the given in the world—to the other, the givenness of another *adonné*, from *Being Given* to *The Erotic Phenomenon*. At that moment, I could hope to have the phenomenological means to conduct a description of the link of one *adonné* to another *adonné*. Only this phenomenology, radicalized and pushed further than its own truth [et poussée plus loin dans sa propre vérité—S.U.], would allow me to describe the beloved or, better, erotic phenomenon . . . . Phenomenology thus also permitted me to resolve a theological question that so far I had treated only negatively. And in this sense *The Erotic Phenomenon* constitutes the culmination of a journey, the moment where the phenomenological line meets up with the theological line. Contrary to Dominique Janicaud's objection, *Being Given* was not yet able to accomplish or even fully see this. Of course, the meeting of these two lines presupposes an essential point: It requires that the erotic logic stay univocal, that is to say, what is valid of the erotic phenomenon in human experience remains valid for the love with which God loves. (Marion 2017, 116)

It can be said that phenomenology, “radicalised and pushed further in its own truth,” and combining philosophical and theological reflection, represents the “turn” of reduction where, indeed, the “phenomenological line meets up with the theological line.” This represents, in a sense, a course correction of the sharp separation of phenomenology and theology previously assumed by Marion. At first, Marion seems to have pursued a parallel path of theological and “philosophical” apologetics. Comparing, in 1991, the overcoming of the horizon of being in *God without Being* on the one hand and in *Reduction and Givenness* on the other, Marion states a fundamental difference between them. The first position passes over metaphysics by relying on “external data” (Revelation) that is presupposed. Marion will say, however, that “this privilege remains ambiguous”: “because in

11. Marion further points to three stages of this task being undertaken: historical (*Reduction and Givenness*), systematic (*Being Given*), and more descriptive (*In Excess*)—“And each of them ended with a more or less direct announcement of *The Erotic Phenomenon*” (Marion 2018, 11; my translation).

phenomenology, only the ‘principle of principles’ matters—only the direct demonstration of phenomena legitimises a statement ... as soon as it is no longer a question of theology or history, but of phenomenology, the givenness of the matter in question requires replacing (or confirming) indirect faith or tradition by immediate intuition ... Such a demand is not satisfied with merely aiming at the region outside of being, the ‘third order,’ the ‘charity’—it demands to see them face to face, to see them by pure intuition, thus to hold them under the gaze ... Thus *Reduction and Givenness* is limited to a kind of negative phenomenology, following the negative theology deployed by *God without Being*” (Marion 2021, 21–2; my translation).

Now, on the other hand (i.e. beginning with *The Erotic Phenomenon*), the paths of philosophy and theology cross. Their intersection is the *phenomenon* of love—common to phenomenology and theology. It is no longer a “negative phenomenology and theology,” but now a more positive approach to the phenomena of love. Marion concludes *The Erotic Phenomenon* by stating that love expresses itself in only one sense—its own. Love “defines itself” in a particular way—as a phenomenon that is only visible from within itself, “as it develops,” and thus beginning with the erotic reduction made by the lover (Marion 2007, 217). Love, accessible in this way, has, according to Marion, its own univocal sense. This thesis is directed above all against the division of love into apparently different, or even opposite, concepts such as *eros* and *agape*. According to Marion, God, who reveals himself as love, loves as we do, with the same love, or rather—we love with the same love as God, who is infinite love (see Marion 2007, 222). From the theological perspective, God is ultimately revealed as love, and in the icon of Jesus Christ (see Marion 1991, 103).

We see, then, the fulfilment of the “apologetic” project of phenomenology, and the turn of reduction, in the erotic reduction. But at the same time we come back to the tension of the counter-method—it “always remains to be done and redone, with neither end nor sufficient success” (Marion 2002a, 10). The tension, irreducible and constitutive at the same time for the phenomenalisation of Revelation, is thus played out between “the unconditioned infinite and the finitude of our reason; or, if we can translate these concepts into theological terms, . . . ‘among us,’ in our phenomenal field, as that which, however, ‘no one has ever seen’” (Marion 2020a, 184; my translation). Despite the achievement of a more “positive” description of the phenomenon of revelation, reduction (and interpretation), both in phenomenology and in theology, does not disappear, despite—or rather because of—the fact of givenness of revelation received in the decision and grace of love. Instead, it takes the form of a hermeneutic that responds to

the prior call of the phenomenon: “The responsal remains in suspense, and this very suspense offers the last truth of givenness—that the first is also the last. Givenness traces, perhaps in sand, but ineffaceably, the most rigorous hermeneutic circle” (Marion 2002a, 308).<sup>12</sup>

To summarise, the phenomenology that was supposed to lead to the phenomenon of love and revelation coincides with the paradoxical characteristic of apologetics: “it becomes possible as such only in admitting the impossibility of a necessary success. Its identity coincides with its failure” (Marion 2002c, 58). The “failure” of reduction and counter-method is its success: both in its disappearance in favour of the manifestation of the phenomenon of love itself—through the decision to love (see Marion 2020a, 571–9)—and in its constant repetition in the realm of hermeneutics and “negative certainty.”<sup>13</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Marion develops his theological and philosophical thought in parallel. His starting point is the phenomenon of Revelation, which, as a given, as an event and a paradox, guides his theological and philosophical reflections. With reference to the Pascalian orders, he separates theology from philosophy, but at the same time theology gains new possibilities through a phenomenology free of metaphysical constraints, while phenomenology is open to the given, including the possible phenomenon of revelation. The distance of God, inaccessible otherwise than through his own Revelation of love, from the perspective of theology is not problematic, but assumed—or rather discovered. But from the perspective of phenomenology, we see a certain tension that arises as we reach its boundary—the saturated phenomena *par excellence* of revelation and love. These phenomena, which constitute the fulfilment of Marion’s phenomenology, at the same time in a sense transgress it, or rather bring to fulfilment the paradoxical requirement of the counter-method. This also happens as the assumed endless hermeneutics of these phenomena. This transgression, or crossing of paths of phenomenology and theology, somewhat blurs the previously strongly emphasised boundaries separating them. The “turn” of reduction, in which the phenomenon is supposed to take control in its manifestation over the

12. “The phenomenology of givenness therefore manages the gap between what gives itself and what shows itself, the stake of which fixes the *self* of the phenomenon, only by the exercise of a properly phenomenological hermeneutics” (Marion 2020b, 19; see Grondin 1999; Greisch 1999, 1991).

13. “In fact, biblical revelation implements the privilege of a givenness that surpasses all expectations, all predictions and finally all reception” (Marion 2020a, 57; my translation).



reduction leading to it, takes place here more in the decision of the will, in love, which, as Christian apologetics explains, is the only possible access to the phenomenon of love.

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