

Degrees of Givenness

ON SATURATION IN JEAN-LUC MARION



CHRISTINA M. GSCHWANDTNER

DEGREES *of* GIVENNESS

INDIANA SERIES IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Merold Westphal, *editor*

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INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS
Bloomington and Indianapolis

This book is a publication of

Indiana University Press
Office of Scholarly Publishing
Herman B Wells Library 350
1320 East 10th Street
Bloomington, Indiana 47405 USA

iupress.indiana.edu

Telephone 800-842-6796

Fax 812-855-7931

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Cataloging information is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-0-253-01419-1 (cloth)

ISBN 978-0-253-01428-3 (ebook)

1 2 3 4 5 19 18 17 16 15 14

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PREFACE

In this book I consider Jean-Luc Marion's proposal for a phenomenology of givenness and saturated phenomena, asserting a greater need for "degrees" of givenness and saturation. I discuss a variety of phenomena that Marion identifies as saturated, but also argue for other phenomena as saturated that Marion does not consider in his proposal, especially phenomena of nature. I move from some of the phenomena Marion identifies as "simply" saturated (event, idol, flesh, icon) to those he sees as "doubly" saturated, namely the phenomenon of revelation or religious phenomena. Throughout I contend that all these phenomena require an account of degrees of saturation, of degrees of "negative certainties," and especially a stronger role for hermeneutic preparation than Marion so far admits. The introduction sets the context by briefly laying out Marion's phenomenological project of givenness, explaining its most important terminology, such as those of the saturated phenomenon and negative certainty, and highlighting some of its central difficulties, especially those surrounding the role of hermeneutics. It discusses the ways in which Marion does or does not allow for degrees of givenness and considers why he focuses so strongly on the most excessive manifestations of phenomena. The introduction hence provides the background for understanding Marion's phenomenology but also articulates the contribution this particular study will make to that project. Although this book is critical of various aspects of Marion's thought, it certainly does not constitute a rejection of Marion's project *per se*; rather, it works within his phenomenology of givenness by suggesting important aspects that have not been explicitly considered by Marion himself but are not therefore incompatible with his project.

Chapter 1 focuses on historical events. Marion presents historical events as overwhelming encounters to which no historical account can ever do justice. They are excessive in quantity, so overwhelming that they cannot be "counted." He includes cultural and more personal events, such as a public lecture or a friendship. Marion admits that an "endless hermeneutics" is necessary in their regard because no account ever gives the full picture. Yet Marion says little about how distinguishing between accounts is possible, occasionally giving the impression that critical historical research is meaningless and futile. I show that he does not acknowledge that we might come to understand an event better after researching it

carefully, that knowledge about it might increase, and that some accounts may well be more accurate than others and argue that these are essential aspects of a full account of historical phenomena as given both in saturated and less saturated form.

Chapter 2 considers Marion's discussion of art. Marion defines the artist as the one who has had a vision of the unseen and is able to communicate this vision in the painting, which gives what was previously unseen to full visibility. Great art always has to be seen again and again and continually reveals new dimensions on the viewer. Instead of being an object we impartially observe, it is instead a given phenomenon that overwhelms us with the impact it has on us. While some great paintings may indeed be given in such overwhelming fashion, I suggest that degrees of givenness are also required for taking account of the fact that we are not always completely overwhelmed by every work of art we view and that this is not merely a "fault" of the observer who cannot bear the bedazzling weight of the painting's glory. In this context I also contend that Marion's account of the artist comes dangerously close to Kantian versions of the "genius" and is thus subject to Gadamer's critique of this account.

In chapter 3 I propose natural phenomena as candidates for saturated phenomena. Marion's account so far has no place for nature. Animals and plants seem reduced to "technical objects" or are ignored entirely. This is deeply problematic both for ecological reasons and for what it means to be human. I suggest that natural phenomena can indeed be given as "saturated" phenomena in Marion's sense, but that hermeneutics and degrees of saturation are necessary for such an account. In this chapter I also provide an analysis of Marion's account of the flesh and suggest that a more "natural" account of the flesh and its sensations as rooted in our experience of nature might well prove necessary and illuminating.

In chapter 4 I examine Marion's troubling comparisons of love with war and argue that it highlights the "absolute" nature he attributes to love in his account. Love is utterly kenotic, totally overwhelming, inexpressible. I suggest that it must be possible to speak of a response to love and that it is problematic to speak of a lover who loves completely without any such response, that somehow the "phenomenon of love" can exist without a beloved. I also critique Marion's contention that an account of love must be "univocal" (that God loves in the same way as humans do) as inconsistent with his account in *Théologie blanche* that there can be no univocity in language applied to divine and human. Instead, I suggest that there are many different kinds and degrees of love and that even Marion's excessive account requires previous hermeneutic commitments.

Chapter 5 focuses on the phenomena of the gift and of sacrifice. Marion has extensively examined the topic of the gift and some of his more recent accounts qualify his earlier statements. I depict this trajectory and show that the more recent account in *Certitudes négatives* relieves many of the earlier difficulties, but is

still too excessive. I join to this an analysis of Marion's descriptions of sacrifice and forgiveness, which he closely associates with the gift. I argue that these accounts disregard normal human experience in order to focus entirely on extremely exceptional instances which are rare if not nonexistent. Again I argue that hermeneutics is necessary to recognize gifts as such and that gifts also come in degrees.

Chapter 6 examines Marion's accounts of prayer in *The Crossing of the Visible* and other places in his work and suggests that it is too extreme and solitary. Marion consistently speaks of prayer in the singular and does not consider communal dimensions of religious experience, such as liturgical prayer. This points to a more general problem in Marion's account in that religious experience is almost exclusively thought in terms of the mystic at the heights of solitary contemplation. Such accounts are difficult to "verify" or even to describe phenomenologically. The chapter also reflects on Marion's discussion of sanctity as completely invisible and suggests important parallels to his accounts of prayer. I show that the larger tradition, on which Marion draws, considers degrees an essential aspect of growth in prayer.

Marion has repeatedly provided analyses of the Eucharist, beginning in *God without Being* and continuing in several later articles. Chapter 7 examines these various accounts and shows how the more recent ones resolve problems in the earlier descriptions. At the same time, I point to places where difficulties remain in this work and that these difficulties are consistent with the issues perceived in Marion's work overall: the emphasis on absolute excess, the disregard for communal or corporate experience—particularly troubling for an account of the Eucharist—and the dismissal of hermeneutics, especially in light of the fact that Marion talks about a "eucharistic hermeneutics" in the early account in *God without Being*.

The conclusion brings these various critiques together in a more general consideration of Marion's account of "saturated" experience as a whole. I show how it is conceived primarily in very excessive terms and argue that this is not representative of experience more generally and indeed not even of religious experience more specifically. I also wonder about Marion's habit of employing religious experience as paradigmatic for all other experience and suggest that this might not be the best way to talk about other saturated phenomena or indeed about religion and its role in human life. Throughout, I contend that even saturated phenomena require degrees of saturation, that they cannot always be given as "absolute" in the pure sense Marion suggests. I argue that saturated phenomena must differ not only in "kind" but also in "degree" and that this requires a fuller account of what might constitute less saturated phenomenality—a topic largely unexamined in Marion's work. Similarly, "negative certainties" must admit of degrees of increase; negative "knowledge" cannot be as pure and total as Marion suggests. There are "better" and "worse" ways of knowing or comprehending something

about a work of art, a historical event, another person, and so forth. Increase in knowledge must be possible, even if it can never be total.

Finally, I contend throughout for the necessity of a more significant place for hermeneutics in an account of givenness and suggest that this brings together and maybe resolves to some extent many of the other difficulties (i.e., of excess and pure individuality and thus incommunicability and unverifiability). I argue that a hermeneutic dimension is necessary to contextualize experience and to make it possible to be “experience” even in a mode of “counter-experience,” that it is necessary to speak about degrees both in terms of experience and in terms of knowledge about and account for experience, and that it is necessary for a more communal and less individualized account. Hermeneutics then emerges as maybe the most significant lacuna in Marion’s thought, but also the issue with the most potential for resolving some of the difficulties of his phenomenology.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Earlier versions of several of the chapters in this book have appeared elsewhere. All have been significantly revised, but I thank the editors of the following journals and books for allowing me to reuse aspects of previously published material:

An earlier version of parts of the introduction appeared as “Marion and Negative Certainty: Epistemological Dimensions of the Phenomenology of Givenness” in *Philosophy Today* 56.3 (2012): 363–70.

An earlier version of chapter 3 appeared as “Might Nature Be Interpreted as Saturated Phenomenon?,” in *Interpreting Nature: The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*, edited by Forrest Clinger, Brian Treanor, Martin Drenthen, and David Utsler (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 82–101. The present version of chapter 3 is quite different but originated in this earlier piece. Some aspects of the arguments in that paper also appear in the introduction to this book.

An earlier version of chapter 4 appeared as “Love as a Declaration of War? On the Absolute Character of Love in Jean-Luc Marion’s Phenomenology of Eros,” in *Transforming Philosophy and Religion: Love’s Wisdom*, edited by Norman Wirzba and Bruce Ellis Benson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 185–98.

An earlier version of chapter 5 appeared as “The Excess of the Gift in Jean-Luc Marion,” in *Gift and Economy: Ethics, Hospitality, and the Market*, edited by Eric R. Severson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 20–32. Some ideas in that chapter also appeared in my response to Marion’s “Sketch of a Phenomenological Concept of Sacrifice” on the Martin Marty Center’s Religion and Culture Web Forum of the University of Chicago (Nov. 2008).

An earlier version of chapter 6 appeared as “Praise—Pure and Personal? Jean-Luc Marion’s Phenomenologies of Prayer,” in *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, edited by Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 168–81.

In this context I also wish to thank the many other people who have made this work possible and have provided much encouragement and assistance along the way: Donald A. Yerxa, my first philosophy teacher, who awakened a love for philosophy in me as an undergraduate, gave generously of his time to mentor me in countless ways, and also provided important pointers to sources for the first chapter. Stuart Martin at Boston College continually encouraged me to stick with phi-

osophy and shaped me as a scholar not only by challenging me but by believing in me and investing in me on all kinds of levels. I also especially thank Richard Kearney, Merold Westphal, and Jack Caputo, for their support, mentoring, friendship, and stimulating exchanges at many conferences. I am grateful to my former colleagues in the philosophy department at the University of Scranton (especially Matthew Meyer) and also to the many grants and other kinds of support I received from the university in my ten years of teaching there, including the tireless assistance and kindness of our fabulous secretary, Mary Rafter. My gratitude goes also to my new colleagues (especially Samir Haddad) and students at Fordham University, who have made teaching there a genuine pleasure. The interlibrary loan staff at the Fordham University library, Charlotte Labbé and Christine Campbell, were immensely helpful in locating several foreign language sources at the last minute.

As indicated above, several of these essays had a first life in other publications, often in the context of presentations at the Society for Continental Philosophy and Theology. The stimulating conversations at these conferences contributed much to my thinking, and I particularly want to thank the organizers, especially Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, as well as the group of colleagues who over years of interactions have become friends: Brian Treanor, Eric Severson, Jeffrey Hanson, Sharon L. Baker, and B. Keith Putt. Tamsin Jones and Merold Westphal read an earlier draft of the manuscript and made many valuable suggestions. Jean-Luc Marion, whose work provided the main inspiration for this book, has always been most generous and kind. I am also very grateful to the fabulous staff at Indiana University Press, with whom it is always a pleasure to work, especially Dee Mortensen, Sarah Jacobi, and June Silay. Thank you also to Deborah Oliver for her excellent copyediting and patience with my many questions, to Father Calinic Berger for help in finding the cover image, and to Dan Baditoiu for allowing us to use his photo of the icon at Sucevița monastery. Much of this book was written in Boston at the home of my generous and hospitable friends, Esther Bowen and Keith Hemmings. Their unflinching friendship sustained me, as did that of the many other friends and colleagues too numerous to mention who listened and talked and commiserated and inspired my thinking and writing along the way.

This book is dedicated to my sister, Dorli, who has put up with me far more and far longer than anyone else, listened to more of my complaints, seen more of my many faults, and yet remains one of my very best friends. For your kindness and generosity, your endless patience, marvelous sense of humor, profound insight, continual encouragement, and just for listening again and again and again—thank you.

ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS BY JEAN-LUC MARION

The abbreviations in this list refer to the actual editions cited in this book, but date of first publication appears in brackets. For further information, see the full listings in the bibliography.

- BG/ED *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002. *Étant donné. Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998 [1997].
- CN *Certitudes négatives*. Paris: Grasset, 2010.
- CpV *Le croire pour le voir. Réflexions diverses sur la rationalité de la révélation et l'irrationalité de quelques croyants*. Paris: Parole et Silence, coll. Communio, 2010.
- CQ/QCI *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. *Questions cartésiennes. Méthode et métaphysique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991.
- CV/CdV *The Crossing of the Visible*. Translated by James K. A. Smith. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004. *La croisée du visible*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996 [1991].
- EG/QCII *On the Ego and on God: Further Cartesian Questions*. Translated by Christina M. Gschwandtner. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007. *Questions cartésiennes II. L'ego et Dieu*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002 [1996].
- EP/PE *The Erotic Phenomenon*. Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. *Le phénomène érotique. Six méditations*. Paris: Grasset, 2003.
- FP *Figures de Phénoménologie. Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas, Henry, Derrida*. Paris: Vrin, 2012.
- GH *Givenness and Hermeneutics*. The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology 2013. Translated by Jean-Pierre Lafouge. Milwaukee, Wisc.: Marquette University Press, 2012. Includes French text of the lecture on facing pages.

- GWB/DSL *God without Being*. Translated by Thomas A. Carlson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. *Dieu sans l'être*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, "Quadrige," 1991 [1982].
- ID/IeD *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*. Translated and introduced by Thomas A. Carlson. New York: Fordham University Press, 2001. *L'idole et la distance*. Paris: Grasset, 1977.
- IE/DS *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*. Translated by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002. *De surcroît. Études sur les phénomènes saturés*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001.
- MP/PM *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-theology in Cartesian Thought*. Translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986.
- OG *Sur l'ontologie grise de Descartes*. Paris: Vrin, 2000 [1975].
- PC/PaC *Prolegomena to Charity*. Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002. *Prolégomènes à la charité*. Éd. de la Différence, 1986.
- PPD *Sur la pensée passive de Descartes*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013.
- RC *La Rigueur des choses. Entretiens avec Dan Arbib*. Paris: Flammarion, 2012.
- RG/RD *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*. Translated by Thomas A. Carlson. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998. *Réduction et donation. Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989.
- RoG *The Reason of the Gift*. Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011.
- SP/LS *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*. Translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2012. *Au lieu de soi. L'approche de Saint Augustin*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008.
- TB *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991 [1981].
- VR/VeR *The Visible and the Revealed*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. *Le visible et le révélé*. Paris: Éditions du CERF, coll. Philosophie & Théologie, 2005.

DEGREES *of* GIVENNESS

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INTRODUCTION

Givenness, Saturated Phenomena, Negative Certainties, and Hermeneutics

As the subtitle of *Being Given* indicates, Marion's philosophy can be defined as a "phenomenology of givenness." The term "givenness" featured already in his earlier preparatory work *Reduction and Givenness* where he first developed the notion of a "third reduction" to givenness. "Givenness" translates the French *donation*, which ostensibly translates the German term *Gegebenheit*, which is an important Husserlian term also used by Heidegger, as Marion contends in a more recent essay on that topic (RoG, 35–49; FP, 45–58). This translation of *Gegebenheit* with *donation* and givenness is not uncontroversial, and Marion has been challenged on this.¹ The piece on Heidegger collected with two other articles on Husserl in his book *Figures de phénoménologie* justifies his use and translation of this term in light of the criticism.² While givenness in general was the primary characteristic of Marion's first phenomenological proposals, the notion of the saturated phenomenon, which developed out of this phenomenology of givenness, has increasingly become not only the most well-known aspect of Marion's work but also the primary focus of Marion's later writings. Givenness is still central to the saturated phenomenon, as it is precisely a phenomenon that is given fully and certainly relies for its justification and description on a phenomenology of givenness, but this larger context of givenness has been somewhat overshadowed by the saturated phenomenon's specific mode of givenness.

This focus, however, also concentrates Marion's work and discussions of his philosophy almost exclusively on the most excessive aspect of givenness. In theory, at least as Marion first outlines his proposal in *Being Given* and also as he recapitulates it at the end of *Certitudes négatives*, givenness covers the entire range of phenomena in varying degrees: from "poor" phenomena or "technical objects" to ordinary or "common" phenomena to saturated ones. Saturated phenomena are only one particular instance or "degree" of phenomena, namely those most "saturated" or most "reduced." This almost exclusive focus on the most excessive instances of the given is somewhat unfortunate, as it covers over or even ignores *degrees* of phenomenality and makes Marion's phenomenology more excessive than it needs to be—and maybe more than is healthy for it. Jocelyn Benoist contends

that Marion “absolutizes the phenomenon” and pushes it to an excessive extreme.³ Similarly, François-David Sebbah chides Marion’s phenomenology for hovering on the very limit of phenomenality, while remaining in a metaphysics of presence par excellence.⁴ Vincent Holzer speaks of Marion’s phenomenology as a “radical phenomenology,” Martin Gagnon names it a “phenomenology at the limit,” and Emmanuel Falque calls it a “phenomenology of the extraordinary.”⁵ This is exacerbated by Marion’s fairly heavy use of superlative terminology in his descriptions. Yet even what Marion identifies as saturated phenomena might not always appear as excessive and extreme as he occasionally seems to indicate.

In light of this focus on excess, this book tries to develop the less saturated aspects of Marion’s phenomenology or rather to argue that even the more saturated ones come in “degrees”: that they are not the all-or-nothing experiences they are often presented or understood as. This discussion hence does not attempt to be a critique of Marion’s project per se, but it tries to work within that project’s overall framework in order to argue for greater attention to the “degrees” of phenomenality’s givenness and for the importance of the hermeneutic dimension in interpreting and experiencing degrees of saturation or phenomenality more generally.⁶ Although I am at times critical of various aspects of Marion’s project, obviously it serves at the same time as the primary inspiration of my analysis. It is precisely because Marion’s work is so rich and in many ways innovative that it gives rise to questions, requires qualifications, and occasions further discussion. In this introduction I briefly spell out Marion’s proposal for a phenomenology of givenness, his notion of the saturated phenomenon, his more recent suggestion of “negative certainties” as an epistemological dimension of saturation, and the role hermeneutics has or has not played in this discussion. This is not necessarily an introduction to all of Marion’s work, but it does try to provide enough context and information for what follows.⁷

Givenness

As indicated, givenness has been central to Marion’s phenomenology from the beginning. In *Reduction and Givenness* he first tries to develop a phenomenology of givenness through a critique of Husserl and Heidegger. He suggests that their respective reductions to “objects” or “objectness” in the case of Husserl, and “beings” or “beingness” in the case of Heidegger, have restricted the self-showing of the phenomenon or at least of certain phenomena that cannot be described as objects or beings and are not experienced in that fashion.⁸ Their phenomenality does not “fit” the traditional descriptions, which are too reductive and limiting. The phenomenological reduction does not do justice to them because it makes too much dependent on the constituting ego that operates the reduction by constituting phenomena through its intentionality. This makes phenomena ultimately

subject to the ego's constitution instead of allowing them to appear "from themselves" as they show themselves or give themselves to consciousness. This self-showing of the phenomenon is, of course, a central claim of phenomenology, which sets aside (via the epoché) all concerns with the phenomenon's existence "out there" or any other concerns that would "transcend" what is experienced by consciousness. Marion therefore capitalizes on one central phenomenological insight in order to criticize or even "overcome" another: we must allow phenomena to show or give themselves more freely than our "intentional" attempts at constitution have permitted them so far.

In *Reduction and Givenness*, Marion proposes this in terms of what he calls a third reduction that would operate on the principle "as much reduction, so much givenness." This means that if certain restrictions are set aside or "reduced," the phenomenon will show or give itself more fully. In this work Marion tries to develop the phenomenology of givenness naturally out of Husserl's and Heidegger's respective phenomenologies by showing their limitations and logical consequences. He argues that both open the field of given phenomena in certain ways but do not themselves proceed into it. Both Husserl and Heidegger insist that phenomena must show themselves from themselves; both acknowledge the importance of the given, but both ultimately draw back before its abundance. They open the possibility of moving beyond metaphysical constrictions, but they do not realize this possibility as fully as they should have. The given as such hence remains limited by objectivity (or objectness) in the case of Husserl and by beingness (or the power wielded by Being) in the case of Heidegger. Marion instead seeks to uncover givenness in all its fullness and remove any restrictions whatsoever. He does so by exercising the reduction—as the fundamental phenomenological method—more rigorously and removing even the phenomenological horizon when it threatens to restrict the self-showing of phenomena to their form or to being (RG, 161; RD, 240). Beyond the "call of being," as Heidegger delineated it, a more originary call can be heard, the call or claim of the other (RG, 197; RD, 295). Henceforth I am summoned (as *interloqué*) by the unconditional and unconstrained call of the given as such (RG, 204; RD, 304).

Marion develops this proposal much more extensively in *Being Given*. The first part of that book spells out more fully the critique of Husserl and Heidegger as restricting the self-givenness of phenomena via a preoccupation with objectness and beingness, respectively, and justifies the ultimate principle linking radical reduction and full givenness in much more detail. Part 2 develops his earlier discussion of the gift and now uses it as a paradigm for the givenness of the phenomenon more generally.⁹ Parts 3 and 4 concern the "determinations" and "degrees" of the given. The final part examines the recipient of the given: *l'adonné*, the one "given over" or "devoted to" (or "gifted by") the given. Parts 3 and 4 specifically concern

aspects of phenomenality that are appropriately described as “degrees” of givenness, and the saturated phenomenon is articulated only fairly briefly in the latter half of part 4 (BG, 199–247; ED, 280–342), where the poor phenomenon also still occupies part of the discussion. Yet Marion’s subsequent work focuses almost exclusively on this notion of saturation and on the various types of saturated phenomena. The poor phenomenon and the possibility that there might be degrees of givenness disappear almost entirely from view.¹⁰

Yet this earlier discussion of “determinations” and “degrees” of the given is illuminating in various ways, besides raising some questions about Marion’s phenomenology that have not been fully addressed. Part 3 of *Being Given* begins by stating that, based on the discussion of givenness and the gift in parts 1 and 2 respectively, *all* phenomena must appear as given; phenomenality and givenness are identical. Here clearly not only saturated phenomena are meant. Part 3 articulates this “given” in terms of what is called anamorphosis, sudden arrival (translated as “unpredictable landing”), *fait accompli*, incident, event and “being given.” When they are first formulated, these aspects indicate aspects of givenness more generally and do not yet apply exclusively to saturated phenomena. Marion’s examples speak of technical objects “with the mode of Being of technology,” of “practical” and of “theoretical” objects, and range from the experience of a computer, over that of a shading tree in hot weather, to the hailing of a taxi cab or the experience of shopping (BG, 128–29; ED, 181). The latter are identified as “habitual phenomena,” a term Marion never uses again in his subsequent work. The way in which they are introduced certainly seems to imply that they constitute an important category: “I call these phenomena *habitual phenomena*. Habit does not mean that they function longer than the others (some of them are signaled by their brevity and incessant changing), but essentially that we must habituate ourselves to them. Habituating ourselves to them sometimes implies taking the time to accustom *ourselves* to them . . . and always finding the right attitude, the correct disposition, the *hexis* or the *habitus* that helps resist them, behave in relation to them, use them, potentially understand them. When habitual phenomena are at issue, the question therefore consists only in knowing and being able to inhabit them” (BG, 130, trans. mod.; ED, 184; original emphasis). It is surprising that Marion neither returns to this issue nor mentions this category again, especially as the need to “habituate” oneself to a phenomenon has significant overlap with his later suggestion that some people might have a predisposition to “see” certain phenomena while others remain entirely blind to them.

At the end of this section on anamorphosis, Marion identifies these experiences of technology and habit as examples of “contingency” and ultimately of anamorphosis: These phenomena are “given” to me because I need to be in a certain place or position to experience them properly (BG, 131; ED, 185). They are

surprising and unpredictable phenomena that limit our initiative to receptivity and make intentional constitution impossible. Similarly, Marion outlines the “facticity” and “incidental” nature of the given in a general fashion that applies not solely to saturated phenomena but to “phenomenality as such without exception” (BG, 143–50; ED, 202–212). In fact, he explicitly says that “facticity brings it about that phenomena are encountered, and therefore it also determines, *in a gradation* [à une dénivellation près], all phenomena—precisely because they give themselves” (BG, 147; ED, 208; emphasis added). He illustrates this with tools of various sorts, with a “simply subsisting being,” and an “ideal” such as the “integral calculus” (BG, 148–49; ED, 209–210). In this section, Marion repeatedly stresses that his analyses apply to *all* phenomena, regardless of their level of saturation and most of his examples are in fact technical objects or mathematical truths or other clearly “non-saturated” phenomena, although that terminology is not yet used here. Yet when Marion employs the terms of “anamorphosis,” “fait accompli,” or “incident” in his subsequent work, they are almost exclusively applied to saturated phenomena.¹¹

There is also a curious tension between Marion’s use of the term “degrees” here and his description of the saturated phenomenon as a “paradox.”¹² Marion concludes part 3 by asking: “Couldn’t we imagine, by contrast, that givenness admits variation by degrees [*des variations de degrés*]? On this hypothesis, the determinations of the given phenomenon, while remaining ordinary and definitively acquired, would modulate with variable intensity. As a result, thresholds of phenomenality in terms of givenness would define discontinuous strata of phenomena, which would then be distinguished by their level of givenness and no longer by their belonging to a region” (BG, 178; ED, 249–50). Part 4 is subtitled precisely “Degrees” (*Degrés*), and Marion proposes three degrees of givenness in this context: poor phenomena that lack intuition, common-law phenomena that “vary in terms of givenness” and could in principle receive adequate fulfillment, and saturated phenomena that are rich in intuition (BG, 221–26; ED, 309–316).

While the notion of degrees and indeed Marion’s discussion of it, would seem to indicate a slow progression and infinite variation of degrees of givenness from poorer to richer phenomenality, the notion of the paradox and Marion’s descriptions of the saturated phenomenon instead indicate far more absolute distinctions: a phenomenon is *either* “poor” *or* “saturated,” intuition is *either* “empty” *or* “full,” consciousness *either* controls and constitutes the phenomenon *or* it is overwhelmed by what is given and utterly unable to constitute it or impose its own parameters on it. This latter account has become the far more common description of Marion’s project. Yet his discussion in these middle parts of *Being Given* would indicate that at least at one point in his work a less absolute articulation of givenness was still possible. And there are occasionally hints that this possibility of degrees of givenness or saturation has not been completely abandoned. Before we

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