

From Phenomenology to Ethics: Intentionality and the Other in Marion's Saturated Phenomenon

Lee, Cheongho(Southern Illinois University)

Abstract

The "saturated phenomenon" is Jean-Luc Marion's principal hypothesis, by which he tries to ground the source of phenomenality. Against the transcendental phenomenology, Marion finds phenomena that go beyond the constitutional power of intention. The saturated phenomenon is never possessed because the saturated phenomenon withdraws itself and thus it endlessly escapes from us. A problem of intelligibility thus arises. The essential finitude of the subject requires that the subject passively receives what the saturated phenomenon gives. Marion, however, endows the gifted with more than the mere passivity. The subject is invited as a "witness" who actively responds to the call of the phenomenon. Marion posits the interpersonal relationship. The problem of the interpretability of intention is another problem inherent in the infinity of interpretation of the other. In our ordinary lives, we habitually search out the other's intention, infinitely. Emmanuel Levinas clearly points out that the other is the transcendent source of ethics, a source which is not intelligible to us. The other, for Levinas, does not appear to the subject, but conditions it. Marion, by contrast, neutralizes the other and "the face" imposes "oneself" as the other who is neutrally visible to us. I assume Marion is more interested in the world of objects, rather than the world of persons, and thus misses the peculiarity resident in the personhood of persons. We become passive in the presence of the personality, not because we want to become passive, but because we realize our own power of illustration does not fill in the personality.

Key Words- Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomenon, Intentionality, the Other, Levinas, ethics

I. INTRODUCTION

Jean-Luc Marion delineates the possible realm of the phenomenology of givenness through his description of the saturated phenomenon. The saturated phenomenon is Marion's ambitious project, by which he tries to ground the justifiable source of phenomenon. My main assumption is that Marion's saturated phenomenon tells about the forgotten source of phenomenon. In this paper, I pursue to elaborate the issues inherent in the saturated phenomenon: the problem of intelligibility, the problem of interpretability, and the problem of the other and person. In other words, what is object before us? How do we perceive object? How do we interpret "the other"? How is person different from the object? Before delving into those problems, I will suggest the skeleton of the saturated phenomenon.

II. THE SATURATED PHENOMENON

The "saturated phenomenon" is Marion's principal hypothesis, by which he tries to find a different dimension of phenomenology than Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Marion sees that Husserl's phenomenology lays too much stress on the *transcendental* givenness. According to Husserlian phenomenology (especially in the period of *Logical Investigations*), the phenomenon arises from a synthesis of two components: intention (concept or signification) and intuition. In such a situation, the subject construed as transcendental constitutes phenomena according to its power of intention. The point Marion tries to clarify is that Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is limited to a phenomenality which inadequately puts intentionality prior to intuition. The critical shortcoming of the transcendental phenomenology, for Marion, is that the transcendental ego is limited to its power of intentionality, which is only properly appropriated to, for example, mathematical equations, logical propositions, and industrial products (EP¹, 6-13). In Marion's words, "in contrast to the Cartesian or Kantian method, the phenomenological method, even when it constitutes

¹ EP refers to Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. by Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 2007).

phenomena, is limited to letting them manifest *themselves*. ... The method does not run ahead of the phenomenon ...” (BG², 9). The method of “the principle of principles” of transcendental phenomenology lays too much stress on the intentionality of the subject (BG 11-12), and, therefore, the transcendental ego rarely sees beyond the intentionality. Husserl’s limitation, according to Marion, lies, to some extent, in his identification of intuition with intention (BG, 191). The “catch” in transcendental phenomenology is thus its uncompromising propensity to assume a fixed structure of “noesis:noema” and in confining itself to the phenomena of intentionality (which actually is an extremely impoverished version of phenomenology).³

Marion seeks after the further possibility of experience in his pursuit of the saturated phenomenon. When it comes to *full* phenomena beyond any reference to signification, intuition that serves only the authority of intention allows us to overcome the rigidity of the transcendental phenomenology. Marion’s attempt regarding this phenomenon focuses on the investigation of phenomena of “the given.” As Marion puts it: “The gift is defined entirely in terms of givenness because he is completely achieved as soon as he surrenders *unconditionally* to what gives itself—and first of all to the saturated phenomenon that calls him” (BG, 282-283; my emphasis in italic). His main issue here is *not* about the extent the gift is retained in the giving as if the giving holds the gift still. Marion rather focuses on the realm beyond intentionality in the event of “giving.” In the transcendental phenomenology, the reality only reveals itself in accordance with the infirmity of the mind, since the transcendental phenomenology neglects the affluence of intuition donated from the saturated phenomena. We experience the saturated phenomenon as such, beyond our intention.

I see the saturated phenomenon should thus go beyond the horizontal manifestation of intention because of its unbearable *excess* of intuition. The *movement* of the saturated phenomenon takes a radically different route from that of the intentional subject.⁴ The

2 BG refers to Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Towards a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

3 Marion acknowledges that in the transcendental phenomenology of Kant, the subject receives content that it has not generated. Kantian phenomenology, however, for Marion, also accepts the fixed structure that leads to a hindrance to any further experience beyond the subjective conditions of phenomena. See Andrew Komarinski, “A Transcendental Phenomenology that Leads out of Transcendental Phenomenology: Using Climacus’ Paradox to Explain Marion’s Being Given,” in *Quaestiones Disputatae* 1 (2010): 118-125.

4 One notable point here is that the saturated phenomenon is always in *motion*. The self-givingness of the saturated phenomenon cannot be reduced merely to the givenness of the phenomenon. In process philosophy,

saturated phenomenon should be suggested as a “pure event” (BG, 207). In other words, the subject as a receiver merely participates in the event.⁵ One astonishing point is that the *pure* event, as purported by Marion, withdraws *itself* during the whole process, because the saturated phenomenon is never possessed: Once we are close to the point of attaining experience of a saturated phenomenon, it endlessly escapes from us. The saturated phenomenon as a pure event comes forward without any preconditioned force.⁶ The withdrawal of the saturated phenomenon, however, is not initiated from the inability of the subject, but rather from an inherent peculiarity of the saturated phenomenon. As Marion puts it: “Its coming forward precedes our apprehension, rather than resulting from it. . . . It comes before our gaze at it, it comes early, before us. We do not foresee it; it foresees us” (BG, 201). The receiver who is accustomed to its intuitional habit should be therefore in awe in the process. The withdrawal happens even before the subject is awed by it. Still, the other side of the coin is provided. The subject in the phenomenon of givenness should not miss all despite its inability, since the saturated phenomenon itself retracts back to the subject in every inaccessible moment. The saturated phenomenon is thus conceivable *and* always inconceivable (BG, 210). The reality is given in the midst of our forgetting.

The mystery of the saturated phenomenon continues to tell. Marion uses the method of “bracketing” (the “givee,” the “giver,” and the “gift”) in exploring the possibility of deploying “givenness” within the frame of reduced immanence. To begin with, the method is performed in order to bracket the “causal efficacy” between the giver and the givee and negate the “economy” of reciprocity (BG, 87). Again, Marion is against the transcendental phenomenology that privileges the constitutional power of the subject. By bracketing the giver, “I” loses its superiority as the starting point of all experience. When I face something unknown before me, I endlessly venture it, because the subject

the reason we need space is because we cannot succeed in perceiving the immediacy of the phenomenon. In this sense, a space for us to have moved in is virtual. It is our creation. Similarly, what Marion asserts is that because we cannot have the immediacy of phenomenon, we attend the movement. That is due to our limitation of not being able to get at the givenness of self-givingness of what is given. Therefore, there is a desperation in our creating a space. We have to create a space out of our profound lack of feeling alienation from time.

5 In Marion’s words: “To receive, for the receiver, therefore means nothing less than to accomplish givenness by transforming it into manifestation, by according what gives itself that it shows itself on its own basis” (BG, 264).

6 Bryne Lewis Allport, “Behold the Maidservant of the Lord’ Reading the Annunciation in Terms of Abundance and Absence in Marion’s Witness,” in *Quaestiones Disputatae* 1 (2010): 105.

always expects, anticipates, what it has not yet seen from the perspective of something already known (BG, 186).

The bracketing of the give unlatches the appearance of phenomenon from the power of intention to the unbearable excess of intuition. But since the subject lacks the power of intention, it thus struggles in perceiving the saturated phenomenon. Next section is devoted to surveying the inherent problem of the saturated phenomenology: the problem of intelligibility.

III. THE PROBLEM OF INTELLIGIBILITY

Before the saturated phenomenon, the subject is bedazzled by the excess of intuition that it cannot grasp according to its constitutional power, as laid out above. The subject persists but is weakened not enough to constitute the saturated phenomenon as phenomenon. At this point, one could justifiably raise a question, among others, whether the saturated phenomenon is intelligible to the subject in spite of all the ventures. In other words, given that in the saturated phenomenon the intentional effort is denied, can the subject perceive the saturated phenomenon as any-thing?

The issue in question deserves an investigation, as it will be discussed in this section. At the outset, Marion maintains the noesis:noema structure regarding the saturated phenomenon.⁷ Each of Intuition and intention has its horizon in which each exerts its own power. Before the saturated phenomenon, however, the ego has lost its intentional advantage. For Marion, the saturated phenomenon is presumed beyond the capacity of the subject. If intentional power of constitution is disqualified, there seems to be no other way for the subject to intuit the phenomenon than merely receiving the rich flow of intuition *without* any effort of conceptualizing.

Besides, in the saturated phenomenon both coming to us and withdrawing from us happens at the same time, and, as a result, the entirety (or even a glimpse) of the saturated phenomenon is never graspable. Without being subjected to prior restraints, Marion ultimately surveys conditions of possibility and the limits of possible experience. Marion is ambitious in the sense that he aims at the very experience of the “impossible,” since the givenness, infinite intuition, cannot be grasped by any phenomenological effort.

⁷ See, among others, BG, 209. In Marion’s words, “This does not mean dispensing with a horizon altogether, since this would no doubt forbid any and all manifestation[.]”

Meaning seems never completed in the saturated phenomenon. Still, experience of the saturated phenomenon is possible, according to Marion, only after the saturated phenomenon comes to us. Marion thinks that this is the very advantage of the saturated phenomenon, because we are attracted by the rich intuition of the saturated phenomenon, and only by participating intuition, we could perceive the saturated phenomenon.⁸ But, the rich intuition, than solving the problem, puzzles us. How do we participate intuition? How is it possible that I, as having a pure intuition, only receive (or perceive) the saturated phenomena, given that we perceive phenomenon based on the conceptual understanding?

Allegedly, the answer Marion suggests would be not relying on the constitutional power of the subject. Marion considers the one who comes after the subject. (VR⁹, 141-144). Then who is the subject in this case? Because the phenomenology of given frees all phenomena from all transcendental subjection (VR, 142), the one who comes after is not the transcendental ego.

The answer lies, ironically, in the passivity of the subject. In the saturated phenomenon, the subject remains in its *passivity*, since the subject merely receives what the saturated phenomenon gives. Marion notices the essential finitude of the gifted (the subject) in receiving what the saturated phenomenon gives.¹⁰ The solution for the issue of intelligibility thus reside in figuring out what Marion has in mind regarding the “passivity” of the subject, in spite of the finitude and delimitations of the subject.

Marion, however, endows the gifted with more than the mere passivity. This is manifest when Marion further articulates the two essential characteristics of the receiver. The first is that, in receiving what is given itself, the receiver is put as “a filter” that works as a *form* beyond passivity and activity (BG, 264). This form functions in the relation between the call and response, which is radically different from the structure of

⁸ Allport, “Behold the Maidservant of the Lord,” 107.

⁹ VR refers to Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ As Marion puts it: “Since its [the given’s] finitude essentially determines the gifted, it cannot by definition adequately receive the given such as it gives itself—namely, without limit or reserve. The finitude of the phenomenalization operated by the gifted, therefore, does not necessarily succeed in rendering visible all that comes upon it. The phenomenological principle that what gives itself shows itself remains intact, but it is accomplished for us only within the limits that the finite gifted puts into operation. That these limits can recede, indeed recede continually and endlessly (which I would gladly admit as a new definition of what Kant names “genius”), does not invalidate this essential finitude, but on the contrary confirms it” (BG, 309).

the subject-object dichotomy of the transcendental phenomenology. In that structure, when (and, by his tone and emphasis, *only* when) the subject responds to the call, the subject becomes an active doer in the relation. In responding the call, the receiver completes the process by responding to the call. What is thus declined is not the activity. Marion clearly indicates that the receiver is invited into this relation as a “witness” who *actively* enables the call into existence (BG, 265).

But the point worth due attention is that the call for the gifted does not necessarily presuppose the response of the receiver for its existence, because the call *precedes* the response of the receiver. The call functions as a screen that arises from the “pre-phenomenal indistinctness” (BG, 265). Marion claims that the screen is transparent (pre-phenomenal) and only after receiving the call it *shows* itself (BG, 265). For that reason, “without knowing or wanting it, and perhaps without even being able to do so” (BG, 265), the receiver answers for what shows itself because he answers to what is given. In this way, the subject renounces constituting the phenomenon, but fulfills it by responding to it.

It is apparent that the witness is gifted by the endowment of givenness. The witness receives a justification of itself as long as the givenness is received.¹¹ But this is *mutual* phenomenization, between the witness and the saturated phenomenon. In specific, the subject exceeds mere passivity especially when the witness *alters* the givenness. If the subject stays passive only, the “economy of reciprocity” may arise in the relation between the giver and the givee (gifted). In this economical relation, the witness as a mere receiver passively participates in the give-and-take relationship. In other words, the giver and the givee are fixed as parties to commerce, and the exchanged gift is directed as an object of exchange only (BG, 77). The very important role of the gifted is therefore neglected.

Let me be clear about the inherent mutuality of the saturated phenomenon. The mutual phenomenon between the given and the gifted appears in the *dative* manifestation of “me.” the gifted. Marion’s notion of the receiver may be considered ambiguous, compared to the traditional subject-object relationship, because it is beyond the dichotomous relationship, as mentioned above. By the virtue of the saturated phenomenon, the subject is *shaped into* “me.” Said differently, the nominative *I* gives its power to the dative *me*.¹² The subject no longer claims to possess the phenomenon

11 Allport, “Behold the Maidservant of the Lord,” 108.

12 See BG, 249 and also Dwyer, “Husserl and Marion on the Transcendental I,” 41.

(BG, 249), but, conversely, the subject as the dative “me” is located beyond the nominative I. This is possible because the saturated phenomenon exceeds “my” intention. The saturated phenomenon gives the subject the power to overcome its nominative intention and is equipped with a *necessary* “relationship” beyond “I.”

The crucial point here is that the witness opens another mode of *being-given*. In the structure of subject and object, the subject, as a first person, regards the object as object. Within the relationship between the gift and the givenness, however, the process of *being-given* does not specify a particular individual. In other words, *any* subject can be included, at this level, because the subject does not have any predetermining power. The self is not forgotten during the process as one of significant others, though. In this sense, Marion presupposes the *interpersonal* relationship in the saturated phenomenon at the outset, in which “I,” as the subject, does not need to be specific. For that reason, the subject is meaningful only as a corroborated being, as a dative manifestation of the interpersonal relationship.

In the saturated phenomenon, a witness thus involves a *social* function. A witness actively witnesses, but never constitutes, not fully comprehending with concepts. The witness does not remain in pure passivity, because the witness endlessly performs *infinite* hermeneutic by which suggests his or her own version of story regarding excessive intuition in question (VR, 143). What Marion has in mind is that the witness fulfills his or her intuitional power up to the point of alteration, in other words, *revelation* of the given. In the case of call and response, as an instance, the response makes the call visible. In this sense, “the gifted remains in the end the sole master and servant of the given” (BG, 319). The problem of intelligibility from the perspective of a passive witness results in activity of the receiver. Next section is dedicated to the problem of interpretability of intention, which is inherent in the infinity of interpretation of the other as infinite source of intentionality.

IV. THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETABILITY

Marion’s search for the “myth of the given” opens modes of givenness which have been concealed. Marion himself notices this point especially when he suggests two phenomenological situations where phenomena exceed their horizons (what is given, in

this case) (BG, 209-211).¹³ The first is the situation in which the phenomenon receives an excessive intuition beyond the frame of the concept and signification. In this situation, there no longer remains the noematic core of the known (BG, 209), but invisibility by excess—bedazzlement. Marion does propose a way of “phenomenalizing” in the first situation, wherein the subject actively searches the intention in the object, the situation that involves what Marion calls “appresentation” and “adequation.”¹⁴

In the first phenomenalizing, the phenomenon fulfills, to its maximum, the limits of concepts or signification (BG, 209). In so doing, the phenomenon saturates intuition to its limit, by deploying all available resources, including “appresentation” and “adequation.” On the one hand, Marion points out “appresentation” is the presentation of absence (IE¹⁵, 63). Appresentation happens in the case of the absence of direct visibility (IE, 66). Briefly, for example, when we see an object, we construct what we do not see from what we see. Adequation, on the other, is suggested as to subjectively provoke objective evidence.¹⁶ In the case of adequation, the subject searches out the evidence of the object even when it is not available, that is, “with no intuitive requirements” (BG, 191). A peculiar example of adequation is the “poor phenomenon.” The poor phenomenon is the phenomenon that is poor in intuition (BG, 197). Marion provides “a concept of reason” as an example of the poor phenomenon (BG, 191).¹⁷ The ideal of reason cannot directly appear to us, because of its penury (or absence) in intuition. The poor phenomenon thus seems to appear inaccessible. The poor phenomenon, however, is intelligible *at least* in an abstract form. It follows, then, I think, that the “purer” the phenomenon is, the more it relies on the method of conceptual abstraction of intention. That said, the poor phenomenon is the phenomenon wherein

13 Marion mentions three cases of “phenomenalizing” where phenomena exceed their horizon. In this section, however, I will deal with only the first two situations.

14 Whether in appresentation phenomena overrun their horizon is worthy of debate, since Marion himself does not mention appresentation in this place in the text (BG, 209-210). I include appresentation here simply because I take appresentation as gaining access to what is *not* given, which I assume is exceeding what is given.

15 Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

16 In medieval philosophy, adequation is one of the ways to discern the transcendental as a first object. See Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Medieval Theories of Transcendentals,” available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendentals-medieval/>.

17 Marion also provides a formation intuition (space in mathematics), a categorical intuition (logical beings), no intuition at all (empty tautology) as (BG, 191)

intention *overwhelms* intuition. The poverty of intuition still manifests the *constitution* even with a poor constructor. The poor phenomenon is thus an “objective experience” constituted by conditions that favor the intentional power of the ego. This way, the poor phenomenon is intelligible.

Regarding presentation and adequation, what Marion suggests is that we fulfill the phenomenon not beyond, but *within* the delimitations of the horizons of intention and intuition. The saturated phenomenon thus understood opens itself to “the possibility of an endless interpretation of modes, finite as well as infinite” (BG, 210). This is the second phenomenizing that Marion calls “an infinite plurality of horizons” or “an infinite hermeneutic” (BG, 211). Regarding the second situation, Marion sets out the dynamic “movement” of the saturated phenomenon regardless of objectification. Emancipated from the dogmatic doctrine that there is only one and the same kind of reality, the subject experiences other modes of experience, by “[passing] beyond all horizontal delimitation (BG, 210).

Ethically speaking, the first situation of the saturated phenomenon is limited because, saturated with intuition, it overruns the constitutional power of the subject in spite of its abundance in intuition (the problem of intelligibility; in other words, it lacks interpretation), and also neglects the infinite source of intentionality that is necessarily presupposed in the mutual relation inherent in the saturated phenomenon, as mentioned above. The second situation of phenomenizing, however, is free from that attack, because the infinite possibility of interpretation regarding mutual relation is acknowledged. This point warrants more investigation.

I believe the main reason for the claim is that the purview of object is not limited to *things*. We do discern “the other” as an object. There is a difference, however, between ways that we discern a thing and the other. We find *intuition* from the other, whereas we rarely find intuition from a thing. Putting it differently, when I have understood (or perceived) the other person, I have anticipated the *intention* of the other, in most cases. The structure that lies in this anticipatory process of intention is thus basically ethical, the process wherein we analyze, if not perfect, the other’s intention, because interpretation happens with relation to the other person.¹⁸

However, the peculiar *problem* of interpretation of intentionality arises. In our ordinary lives, we habitually search out the other’s intention, and, as the interpretive

¹⁸ This anticipatory relation is not exclusively ethical, but is interpretive in the sense that we *figure out* intention of others.

process goes on, one learns that there is another level of anticipation. In assuming the other's intention, we inevitably stand in the other's shoes: what if I were the other, how would the other intend in this case? Since this "way of assumption" is never perfect, there are infinite *what-if* processes and the process goes on *infinitely*.

I think Marion proposes this same point in the example of friendship, where we can find canonical determinations of the phenomenon as event (BG, 318; IE, 37). When we are involved in the infinite process of interpretation between friends, friendship does not follow my intentionality toward a friend. As Marion puts it: "I take for myself his point of view on me, without reducing it to my point of view on him" (IE, 37). This sounds nonsensical in some sense, however, because we think we are inclined to satiate our own interest as much as possible. But Marion argues that in friendship facticity is already set for us,¹⁹ and that the ultimate meaning of an event remains inaccessible (IE, 37). It is true that when we situate ourselves in another's point of view, we pursue the aim of being *objective*, which I will focus on in the next section, along with Marion's view, and on the other hand, in comparison to Levinas's.

V. THE OTHER

Levinas's influence on Marion seems manifest, especially regarding his view on "the other," relating to the indication that Marion follows the path that Levinas took in his description of the other.²⁰ However, I see differences as well as similarities between two thinkers concerning their views on ethics. My attempt in this section will be to delineate the elements that reside in Marion's standpoints on the other and their significance to ethics.

For Marion, phenomenology, not ethics, is the first philosophy. Marion's ethics is then grounded on phenomenality. At the center of Marion's ethical views, there stands the reality of the infinity of ethical relations with the other. Ethics is initiated, actualized when the other appears to us as phenomenon. But in this case, phenomenology and

¹⁹ My interpretation is that Marion alludes precognitive intentionality here, which comes before any constitution of the subject.

²⁰ As Robyn Horner acknowledges, Levinas' interpretations of Husserl and Heidegger form an important influence on Marion. See Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift*, 41.

ethics are compatible with each other.²¹ Phenomenology as first philosophy emerges from Marion's cynical bent toward transcendentalism. Marion believes that if ethics has transcendentalism, and so is prior to the givenness of the gift, then it should be rejected (BG, 88). This way, Marion seems to depart from *any* transcendence that distracts us from phenomenon itself. Naturally, Marion undertakes finding what is possible within the horizon of phenomenology, where all our intentional meaning gracefully glides into any relational settings that matter for ethics.

An interesting point regarding Marion's authentic effort here is that we need to find the *structure* of the everyday event within the horizon of phenomenality. Unlike proponents of phenomenology who took whatever is "beyond the horizon" as the source of structure that conditions our everyday event, Marion tries to find the structure *within* the purview of horizon. Marion constructs "ethics without transcendence" under (or on) the horizon of intelligibility and also practicality. How then can the responsibility of the subject to the others be accounted for "without transcendence"? Marion's solution is simple: the ethicality is *given*. Because of the very absence of the other, the other should be given to me in the responsible relation. Phenomenologically speaking, Marion thus posits the source of ethics as dependent upon "givenness," which does not allow the transcendental preset of relations.

In a different way than Levinas, as will be discussed below, Marion invites a certain normativity in the act of giving. He acknowledges the priority of givenness of the gift that does *not* yield a reciprocity that would color (as I would call it) the purity of the given. The "purity" in this sense is the givenness of phenomenon (in excess of intuition), and "coloring" is adding *our* intentions for one person, while the other is given (*as* other) because we *don't* fully know the other's intention; thus, we interpret what is given to us. Our ethical responsibility, then, is to interpret the intention of the other, even beyond our intuition of his/her givenness to us.

Marion extends the purview of "ethical responsibility" to all the others, all other things that can be construed ethically.²² Again, for Marion, we cannot experience the

21 Marion says that ethics is the first philosophy and there would be no incompatibility between phenomenology and first philosophy (IE, 14-15).

22 In Marion's words, "Responsibility cannot be restricted to just one of the paradoxes [saturated phenomena] ... nor confined to just one horizon, be this the ethical.

Responsibility belongs officially to *all* phenomenality that is deployed according to givenness: what is given (the call) succeeds in showing itself as a phenomenon only on the screen and according to the prism

transcendence of the givee, because the givee is concealed in the practice of giving in the transcendental setting. In other words, the givee does not arise from ethical concern because only the transcendence of the giver is privileged. As Marion puts it: “We must therefore renounce relying on any and all relation, even an intersubjective or ethical one, at least as long as its transcendence has not been reduced or rendered compatible with intentional immanence. Mere recourse to the Other is not enough to determine as a gift what changes hands from him to me (or inversely); nothing forbids this gift from still functioning in the mode of economy” (BG, 120).

A notable point is that Marion suggests that we consider the other as related to “intentionality.” When we make ethical decision, the other person receives my ultimate privilege, my intentionality. In Marion’s words, “[t]he other manifests me in exercising on me an intentionality as original as mine” (IE, 78). The constitution of the other is necessary, however. The other is constituted for the determination of the intentionality of the subject toward the other. But the other thus constituted should always remain in the realm of possibility. The other is never given to me as a *real* object. Always, in the other, there is some part that *infinitely* withdraws, fades away from the grasp of our senses. An interesting point is: The infinite withdrawal of the other is the source of ethics. The problem is then how the other, while remaining below the threshold of appearing, can, or should, have “ethicality” to me.

As mentioned above, Marion refuses to accept a reciprocal economy in ethical relation. The economy is repudiated especially when he performs the validation of the “bracketing” of the givee and the giver (BG, 87-88). The issue here is to what extent the method of bracketing should be performed. I am convinced that the bracketing of the givee (and the giver) is a method of *neutralizing* the other. Interest in the other person comes as neutral, for Marion, as I said early in this inquiry.²³ In regard to the method of bracketing, therefore, Marion puts forward the “anonymity” of both the givee and the giver. Only after the bracketing of the givee, is the gift revealed in the practice of giving. The giver does not do any justice to the use of the gift once it departs from him. The givee remains anonymous to the giver. Only then can we see that “the gift can be given

that the gifted (the responsal) alone offers it. All the determinations by which the phenomenon gives itself and shows itself starting from itself to the point of exerting a call ... are concentrated and transcribed for the gifted in the responsibility that he suffers from them” (BG, 293-294; my emphasis in italic).

23 Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 40.

... without regard for the face of the Other” (BG, 88).²⁴

Marion suggests that an *absence* of vision could be a neutral determination that refers back only to itself (IE, 54). The absence is not a privation, but the failure and the lack of a perfection intrinsically owed to the limitation of our nature (IE, 54). However, even though the absence of vision lacks the phenomenal existence of beings who can see, namely, humans, “humanity always wants *more* than that of which its nature is capable” (IE, 55; my emphasis). In this sense, Marion distinguishes seeing and looking at. Seeing in its weakest sense, for Marion, is the working of sensible organs, while looking at requires more: one must look at the visible from itself (IE, 55). Then how is “looking at from itself” possible for Marion? To “look at” is “to manage the excess of the visible” by resisting the flux of the visible (IE, 57). For Marion, when things (including the other) *appear* to us, when things *are visible* to us, the physical and ontological lack should be overcome. As he puts: “[t]he visible exercises its empire over us when it is physically and ontically lacking” (IE, 55). This I think is the crucial point. We assume ourselves as taking the role of an *object* in the interpretive process, as mentioned above. The other is also neutralized and, at the same time, gains compensation, that are imposed *ends* on the visible (IE, 56).

Levinas is generally reconcilable with Marion’s later scheme about the other. For Levinas, the other functions as the infinite source of ethical relation. Levinas’s ethics is based on the infiniteness of relations.²⁵ However, ethics is first philosophy for Levinas. Levinas puts ethics over ontology and regards ethical relations as presupposed by epistemic processes and ontology (and also phenomenology). Therefore, human relations, not phenomena, are the source of ethical obligation.

According to Levinas, our *critical* survey on “the freedom of the exercise of ontology” should be *beyond* ontology unless we are stuck to the infinite regress.²⁶ Questioning can be done infinitely by referring to “beyond horizon” and also beyond our ontological (and ontic) intelligibility. The Other is always external to and irreducible to the I.²⁷ The other, for Levinas, exists *at least* as a condition of the self. The other should work as the *form*

24 As will be discussed below, regarding “the face,” Marion takes a different route than in the case of the other. While the other is neutralized, the face is fundamentally contextualized.

25 Steven Crowell, “Why is Ethics First Philosophy? Levinas in Phenomenological Context,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 23, no. 3 (2012): 565-566.

26 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 43.

27 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.

of phenomenon (this is why Marion assumes Levinas's ethics is transcendental). But for Levinas, we cannot impose one's ends to the other, unlike Marion's view. The other, for Levinas, is beyond the conditions of intentionality or the conditions for "intentional content."

The point here is that, for Levinas, the transcendent structure is *not* intelligible. In other words, we never know the transcendent relation to the other, the relation that is the source of ethical meaning. There should be no "attributes" in the other, consequently. Without quality, person *qua* person comes to us, not being determined even by otherness (in a formal sense).²⁸ The other *qua* other must remain transcendent *and* interpersonal so that it endlessly answers to our interlocution whenever it is necessary.²⁹ This "primordial phenomenon of reason" presides over the communication that is conceptually constituted.³⁰

So the other appears as the condition for the subject, not as existence, *nor* being. "Alterity" of the other is the source of ethics. That is, everyone that is separated from the other has ethical obligation to the other. The separation activates the possibility of obligation to the intentional being (me). *Both* the saturated phenomenon and the other presuppose alterity. When we perceive an object, it never happens that we sense all the aspects of it. We objectify the part that is alterior to us into perception: we more or less constitute the perceived as an object *beyond* our senses.

For both Marion and Levinas, the relation between the ego and the other seems asymmetrical. Both posit the predominance of the other as the source of infinite relation. But what Marion argues is that the subject performs the constitution of the other. Appearing involves more than mere constitution, though. We cannot fully grasp Making an object in the flux of time necessarily requires a detachment of the object from the abundant, continuous temporal flow. Leaving behind the abundance of intuition, therefore, the object appears to us in extremely impoverished fashion. For Marion, the totality of object is given to us to the extent that it is phenomenally determined. For Levinas, by contrast, there is inevitable indeterminacy in human existence, which is truly beyond phenomena and thus transcendent.³¹ My experience of the other who is an

28 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 251.

29 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 251-252.

30 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 252.

31 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. "Emmanuel Levinas," Last modified August 3, 2011. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/levinas/>.

animate organism is something which, unlike the hidden side of a physical thing, can *never* be given to me *in person*.³² While the other remains untouched by constitution for Levinas, Marion assumes that the other is influenced by our constitutional power.

VI. PERSON

Thus far, Marion's notion of the saturated phenomenon was discussed. Some might wonder, for Marion, whether the other is the saturated phenomenon. This point leads to the problem of the "person": How is it possible that "I," as having a power of constitution *receive* the saturated phenomena? Is it possible only for the subject with passivity? It is true that in the saturated phenomenon, Marion proposes a minimally functional self with passivity. This issue, however, deserves more investigation in terms of Marion's mention of the "face."

Marion asserts that "face" saturates the categories of modality. The saturated phenomenon as icon is irreducible and irregardable in the sense that the face (of the Other) gives me nothing to see, but nevertheless weighs upon me and is that from which I receive myself (BG, 228-233). For Marion, the face imposes "oneself" *as* the other person, no more as only "the other," but as the neutral visible without retreat (IE, 78). His view lead to the point that "the face does not appear; it manifests itself by the responsibility that it inspires in me" (IE, 78). I think Marion's assertion here misses some implications that are not in line with what he suggests, based on the discussion so far.

Marion works with the world of the given, what is apparent, that which takes on phenomenality when intuited. Thus, he is more interested in what we would have called "nature" at earlier stages of the development of philosophy, i.e., the relationships among phenomena. My assertion is that Marion should include, in the complexity of the relation he most thoroughly works out, the personhood of persons. Access to one another is subordinated to the world of objects, the world where subjects deal with objects. For Marion, it is necessary to figure out what the world is before we figure out what another person is.

32 Crowell, "Why is Ethics First Philosophy?", 572.

This view is incomprehensible to Levinas. Nature is not his primary concern. For Levinas, the world that we live in is the world for persons. The transcendence of the other is thus understood as the face-to-face relation.³³ The face of the other, according to Levinas, is a phenomenon whose significance comes into view only within the ethical relation, where obligation is at stake.³⁴ The deep essence of person is revealed only by the presences of the other that responds to us, but to whose deep essence we cannot be related. The face of the other continually presents us with the temptation to do something, which is the intimate call of the divine. We get our relations with one another properly arranged, and only then does nature appear to us as the same pure thing that it is.

A relevant issue for Marion is whether the given is ever a person. The other person is given in the way the object is constituted. Before the saturation of the person, we exert our constitutional power by filling in an “illustrative” invisible that actually is not the same as the non-given invisible. My point here is that Marion’s way of constitution requires us to tell the difference between illustrative invisibles and constitutional ones. I mean by “illustrative invisible” the “givables” of one’s own creation. For example, let’s say that if someone’s parents *look at* what the person does for a living, then they urge the person to go to a medical school, but that is different from what the person really does. In this case, they fail to see what the person is. Likewise, if we constantly fail in adding all kinds of invisibles to a person (in other words, if we fail in anticipating the person’s intentions constantly), we cannot clearly know whether we constitute a person rightly. This does not become a problem with most objects, because most objects do not care whether they have a future. But all persons do.

One of the Marion’s points is the idea that the other should not be objectified at all.³⁵ But I think that is not how it works. We are objectified *for* others and it cannot be any other way. It is true that we could evaluate whether the objectification is better or worse in terms of how we are objectified by others. In order for anybody to be autonomous, in order for anybody to be individual, we have to allow that we are objects for one another, despite better and worse objectifications.

Another point is: When we face the other, something is immediately sacralized, anything that has nothing to do with our intention. That is a moment of encountering

33 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. “Emmanuel Levinas.”

34 Crowell, “Why is Ethics First Philosophy?”, 566.

35 It should be noted that in ethical meaning, Marion disavows the mutual gaze between I and the Other: As he puts it, “I do not take into view the gaze of the Other. I never enter into the crossing of gazes and mutual regard. I avoid it, bypass it, and avert it” (BG, 318).

one's uniqueness. The peculiarity of person thus lies in something more than one's own constituting power. As an instance, when somebody, an overwhelming personality, steps into the room, everybody in the room knows that constitution of what is invisible in the person is impossible, because the personality is too powerful. We become *passive* in the presence of the personality, not because we want to become passive, but because we realize that our own powers of illustration do not fill in the invisible we attempt to constitute. We do not know how the person becomes this person and are thus "impressed" by the person. That is the point where we stop trying to fill in the invisible with mere illustrative powers. The amount of time and effort that takes, actually engaged with the other in order to get to know another as a person is *infinite*. We should acknowledge this inherent problem of constituting another person.

VII. CONCLUSION

The figure below epitomizes what we have discussed so far.

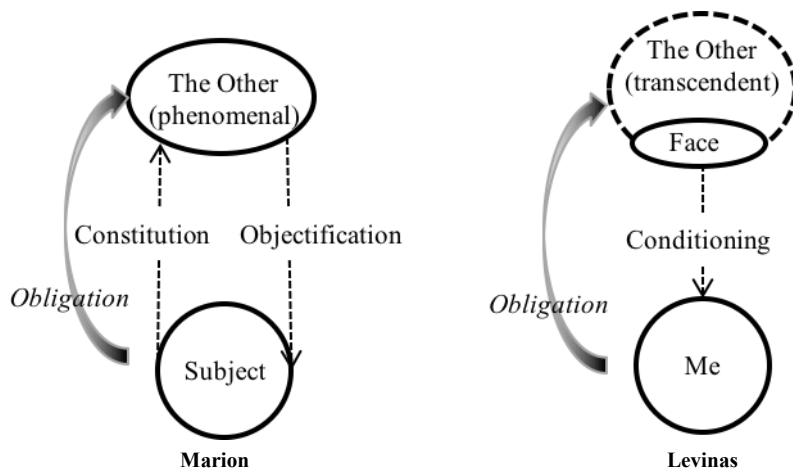


Figure 1. The other in Marion and Levinas

Marion digs into the saturated phenomenon regarding intentional sense-giving.

Intentional sense-giving is the illusion inherent in the subject that the subject is the arbiter of all the intuition: I, than anybody else, know all the phenomenon around me best. The truth is that our intentions in ourselves are *infinite*, like those in the other.

For Marion, the alterity of the object originates from the excess of intuition, not from transcendence. What Marion truly suggests is that the world of saturated objects is *not* different from the ordinary world. On a daily basis, our action is ethically enlivened with the meaning among our actual relations with the others. We evaluate our action where responsibility does its task. What actually happens has actual ethical meaning without suspension in function.

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