

## **Foucault, Marion, and the Irreducibility of the Human Person**

*Abstract.* I engage the works of Michel Foucault and Jean-Luc Marion on the nature of personhood and the self. I find Marion's phenomenology of the "gift" a more compelling account of personhood especially granting an intuition widely shared by personalist philosophers, namely, that persons are irreducible. I end by responding to objections from within the Christian philosophical tradition.

**Keywords.** Foucault • Marion • Personhood • Irreducibility

## 0. Introduction

0.1 Personalism as a philosophical school of thought considers the person to be the center and culmination of philosophical exploration.<sup>1</sup> One prominent school of personalism was born of Husserl's phenomenology and was largely a reaction to de-personalizing elements of enlightenment rationalist and idealist thought, tendencies such as one finds in Hegel's reduction of the human to moments within the absolute ideal. Phenomenology is, of course, broader than its personalist adherents and not every post-Husserlian thinker is concerned to prevent the reduction of persons to some broader theme. Consider for example Heidegger's account of the human as *Dasein* which is reducible to an emanation of Being.<sup>2</sup> For personalists, by contrast, the person can never be reduced or subsumed under these larger existential and metaphysical themes. Many phenomenological personalists including Edith Stein, Max Scheler, and Dietrich von Hildebrand share a common intuition that persons as such are fundamentally irreducible to anything else.<sup>3</sup> That is, according to what I'll call the *personalist intuition*, in answer to the question

Human persons are =<sub>def</sub> \_\_\_\_\_?

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, J. M. BURGOS, *An introduction to personalism*, CUA Press, Washington 2018; B. MONDIN, *Storia dell'Antropologia Filosofica*, vol. 2, ESD, Bologna 2002: *Le antropologie personaliste*, pp. 514-660; Th. R. ROURKE y R. A. CHAZARRETA, *A Theory of personalism*, Lexington Books, Lanham (USA) 2007; C. BARTNIK, *Personalism*, KUL, Lublin 1996; A. RIGOBELLO, *Il personalismo*, Città Nuova, Roma 1978; J. O. BENGTSOON, *The worldview of personalism. Origins and early development*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006; J. N. MORTENSEN, *The Common Good. An introduction to personalism* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2017). I thank an anonymous reviewer for these references.

<sup>2</sup> For a personalist critique of Heidegger, see D. O. DAHLSTROM, *Scheler's critique of Heidegger's fundamental ontology*, in S. SCHNECK (ed.) *Max Scheler's acting persons. New perspectives*, Rodopi, Amsterdam 2002, pp. 67-92.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. B. SHARKEY, *Thine own self. Individuality in Edith Stein's later writings*, CUA Press, Washington 2009; D. VON HILDEBRAND, *The Nature of Love*, J. F. CROSBY and J. H. CROSBY (trans.), St. Augustine's Press (USA), 2009, p. 200ff.

nothing fills the blank.<sup>4</sup> For example, Aristotle's famous definition of human as rational animal, whatever its merits with respect to our status as humans, will not satisfy our status as persons. As persons, we are always more than the metaphysical machinery employed to describe our way of being in the world. It is not my aim in this paper to defend this claim. Instead, I will assume the plausibility of the personalist intuition as an indispensable desideratum for any account of personhood including but not limited to accounts of the human person's particular place in the cosmos.

In what follows, I keep the personalist intuition in mind while evaluating Michel Foucault's and Jean-Luc Marion's account of personhood.<sup>5</sup> Foucault and Marion approach the self from the vantage point of postmodernism and late phenomenology. As such, they both have earlier philosophical epochs as resource in their analysis. They both look back on historical moments with anticipation of harvesting forgotten wisdom. They do not stop at reiterating the past, however, but contribute original insights progressing our understanding of self and other in new and important ways. Still, I will argue that Foucault's account of the self as object of care fails to uphold the irreducibility of the human person while Marion's account of the self as gift succeeds. The results of my argument will be particularly relevant to a growing interest in Catholic philosophy to give account of the irreducibility of the human person.<sup>6</sup> Motives for resisting reductionisms in Catholic philosophy include the ethical motive to avoid reducing persons to objects, the theological motive to secure the dignity of the human person as *imago Dei*, and a general concern to resist modernity's collectivist tendencies and their secular

---

<sup>4</sup> I'm indebted to M. K. SPENCER for this way of construing the intuition.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all references to Marion are from *Being given. Toward a phenomenology of givenness*, J. L. KOSKY (trans.), SU Press, Stanford 2002 and *God without being* (2nd ed.), T. A. CARLSON (trans.), CU Press, Chicago 2012. References to Foucault are from *Hermeneutics of the subject*, Macmillan, New York 2004 and *Discipline and punish. The birth of the prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans.), Vintage Books, New York 1995.

<sup>6</sup> See M. K. SPENCER, *The irreducibility of the human person: A Catholic synthesis*, CUA Press, Washington 2022.

humanisms which undermine human dignity by reducing the individual to the instrumental goals of those in power. I propose Marion's account as best satisfying these desiderata. To this end, I first analyze Foucault's account of the self in *Hermeneutics of the Subject* before turning to Marion's phenomenology of the gift. I end by addressing a series of objections to Marion from John Milbank who is working within the Christian tradition.

## 1. Foucault on Care of the Self

Foucault's mature work, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, gives us his most developed thoughts on the nature of the self from which we can plausibly extract his understanding of human persons. *Hermeneutics* approaches the subject in the context of the historical notion of care of the self. It might seem that this context removes the study from concern for the personalist intuition. However, Foucault sees an examination of the importance of care of the self as inextricably tied to the nature of the self, and so we have material from which to construct a plausible account of the person.<sup>7</sup> To construct this account, I look at the following themes in Foucault's study: *the gaze*, the distancing from self-knowledge, and the Hellenic model of self-care. From these themes emerge a vision of the person as object of most importance and as irreducible to rationalist models and techniques.

Even before *Hermeneutics*, Foucault is concerned with de-personalizing humanisms which he sees particularly highlighted in enlightenment rationalism and empiricisms. In *Discipline and Punish*, he reminds us that this period generated "a technique for constituting individuals as correlative elements of power and knowledge."<sup>8</sup> For the mechanical reductionist,

---

<sup>7</sup> Foucault observes that any theory of self-care will require an answer to the question "What is the self?" M. FOUCAULT, *Hermeneutics of the subject*, cit., p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 194, 217.

“The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ‘ideological’ representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called ‘discipline’.”<sup>9</sup> He calls these de-personalizing conceptions an “abstraction of exchange” wherein the individual becomes relegated to the object of training for useful forces. The utilitarianisms and economisms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are just continued examples of this mechanization of persons. Foucault notes that “it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole *technique* of forces and bodies.”<sup>10</sup> Foucault proposes an historical narrative of three epochs in reflection on the self: the recollective epoch of Plato, the meditative epoch of Augustine and the High Middle Ages, and the methodological epoch beginning with Descartes and enlightenment rationalism which is this mechanical reductionism just mentioned. This last methodist epoch is evidently the most reductionistic about persons and the one toward which Foucault levies most criticism.

But if mechanical reductionism is an unsatisfactory account of persons, what should we replace it with? To answer this, Foucault in *Hermeneutics* looks back to ancient philosophy for resources. In doing so, he recovers an underrepresented theme in the history of thought about the self, namely, the theme of caring about oneself (*heautou epimeleisthai*). The theme of self-care for the ancients, especially the Stoics, was not merely an exhortation to make prudent decisions, to take care of one's body or even to acquire the virtues needed to live a flourishing life. Instead, the care of oneself is more directly a turning of one's gaze on oneself as most important object of concern. It was an invitation to spiritual exercise in detaching one's loves from everything

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Here and future emphases are mine.

fleeting and external to the self, an exercise in freeing oneself to love oneself as object of most importance in the world.

Before giving more context for Foucault's study of the self, it is worth noting his use of *the gaze* while moving through the various ancient approaches to self-care. Foucault writes of this gaze as a conversion of one's attention toward the self. For the "Hellenistic and Roman conversion you must turn to look towards the self."<sup>11</sup> That is, "You must have the self under your eyes so to speak, under your gaze or in sight." He then notes that a "series of expressions derive from this, like *blepe se* (consider yourself; you find this in Marcus Aurelius), or *observa te* (observe yourself), *se respicere* (looking at yourself, turning your gaze back on the self), applying your mind to the self (*prosekhein ton noun heauto*), etcetera." Important to note is that this gaze is not a merely empirical looking, nor is it an inferential "seeing what follows" which we find in abstract theorizing, but a receptive and focused directing of consciousness toward the experience of self. For Foucault, this ancient method of gazing on self invites us to "grasp the object as it is represented: *gumnon*, that is to say, naked, without anything else, shorn of anything that could conceal and surround."<sup>12</sup> There are clear phenomenological resonances to this gaze which will be relevant when we consider the phenomenological method in section 2.

Foucault situates his historical exploration of self-care between two competing accounts of the gaze toward the self. The first is the Platonic gaze toward self-knowledge (*gnothi seauton*) and the second is the early Christian ascetic (*askesis*) gaze toward the divine through self-renunciation. I want first to consider the Platonic gaze. Foucault first inquires after the nature of the "self" in care of the self. For Plato, the answer is that this self is the *soul*.<sup>13</sup> And the Platonic

---

<sup>11</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Hermeneutics of the subject*, cit., p. 213.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

soul is the mirror of the divine. We look inward and *recollect* to see ourselves in the divine. Says Socrates in the *Alcibiades*, “Just as true mirrors are clearer, purer and brighter than the mirror of the eye, so God (*ho theos*) is purer and brighter than the best part of our soul.” So, “It is God, then, that we must look at: for whoever wishes to judge the quality of the soul, he is the best mirror of human things themselves, we can best see and know ourselves in him.”<sup>14</sup> In summary, says Foucault, “To care for the self, one must know oneself; to know oneself one must look at oneself in an element that is the same as the self; in this element one must look at that which is the very source of thought and knowledge; this source is the divine element.”<sup>15</sup> The Platonic divine is not before and beyond us but within us, and it is the knowledge of ourselves in the divine that is the object of self-care.

However, self-care collapsed into self-knowledge produces a paradox:

In a way, Platonism has been the leaven ... of a variety of spiritual movements, inasmuch as Platonism conceived knowledge and access to the truth only on the basis of a knowledge of the self, which was a recognition of the divine in oneself ... However, at the same time ... Platonism was the constant climate in which a movement of knowledge (*connaissance*) developed, a movement of pure knowledge without any condition of spirituality, precisely because the distinctive feature of Platonism is to show how the work of the self on itself, the care one must have for oneself if one wants access to the truth, consists in knowing oneself.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 70-71.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

So, the knowledge-gaze of the self both engenders spirituality and at the same time eliminates it in favor of a rationality. For Foucault, this paradox fails to countenance care of the self as an important approach to reflections on the subject. Turning one's gaze on oneself is not a rationality but a spirituality. "It seems perfectly clear to me that it is not in any way a matter of constituting knowledge of the human being, of the soul, or of interiority, alongside, in opposition to, or against knowledge of the world."<sup>17</sup>

Foucault next turns to the early Christian writings on asceticism (*askesis*) in relation to self-care. The ascetic gaze of the self is a critical examination of conscience by which we purify ourselves in preparation for encounter with the divine. Unlike the Platonic looking inward to see ourselves mirroring the divine, the ascetic gaze has for master a spiritual director who puts the question to our self-knowledge. We are not reliable self-knowers, and we cannot see the imperfections which cloud our vision of God. Self-care is self-distrust which earns transformation and deification. For our purposes, these brief comments on the ascetic gaze will suffice. We can easily see a kind of paradox arising from this gaze as well: to care for myself I must abandon the self to the outside gaze of the director, but at the same time, to abandon my gaze outward in preparation for the divine, I must first, prompted by the divine, recognize myself as in need of transformation. The ascetic gaze sees the life of the soul as preparation for divinization but a preparation that the soul itself is not equipped to undertake. For Foucault, "There is an ambiguity and difficulty in this theme of a search for salvation of the self for which self-renunciation is a fundamental condition."<sup>18</sup> The ambiguity shows up in another kind of circularity: "If you want to be saved you must accept the truth given in the Text and manifested

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 250.



in Revelation [...] However, you cannot know this truth unless you take care of yourself in the form of the purifying knowledge (*connaissance*) of the heart [...] On the other hand, this purifying knowledge of yourself by yourself is only possible on condition of a prior fundamental relationship to the truth of the Text and Revelation.”<sup>19</sup> Finding this second gaze equally unsatisfactory for care of the self, Foucault proposes a middle way which he finds in the Hellenic and Roman Stoic tradition.

Foucault represents the Stoic middle through the approaches to self-care of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. Both approaches avoid on the one hand collapsing care of self to knowledge of self, and on the other hand subordinating care of self to preparation for salvation from a source outside the self. Instead, Stoic care of self is for the self, and the world shows up for me as partly constituting the experience of myself. I do not seek Platonic escape from the cage of my body and nor do I seek penetration into an otherworldly realm. Instead, for Seneca I seek to position my gaze on the heights.<sup>20</sup> That is, a gaze that looks down on the whole world and sees my *self* within it. This life is a test of preferring my self to all the allures of the world. In complement to this, Marcus Aurelius proposes a gaze of the self from below, that is, with an eye toward the smallest and immediate moments of my lived experience.<sup>21</sup> The aim for Aurelius is just the same: to dissipate the worries of the soul which subordinate the self’s importance to fleeting pleasures in the world. Foucault sees this as a proper orientation of life toward the self: “It seems to me that henceforth the care of the self not only completely penetrates, commands, and supports the art of living — not only must one know how to care for the self in order to know how to live — but the *tekhne tou biou* (the technique of life) falls entirely within the now

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>20</sup> See M. FOUCAULT, *Hermeneutics of the subject*, cit., pp. 271-289.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 289-315.

autonomized framework of the care of the self.”<sup>22</sup> Freed from extrinsic concerns, this third self-directed gaze is the most promising approach to care of the self. On this third model, “One must live so as to establish the best possible relationship to oneself [...] Ultimately, I would say, in a word: one lives ‘for oneself,’ but obviously giving to this ‘for’ a completely different meaning than is given in the traditional expression ‘living for oneself.’ One lives with the relationship to one’s self as the fundamental project of existence.”<sup>23</sup> We can see in this third model a vision of self that locates its irreducibility to techniques and themes such as the theme of knowledge of the divine in turning back the gaze of self on itself. I should not care for myself so as to accomplish some other end in the world, but instead I should accomplish other ends or techniques so as to ultimately care for myself.

## 2. Marion’s History of the Phenomenological Reduction

Turning now to Marion’s phenomenological approach, I begin by outlining his historical contribution to phenomenology. I do this to set the stage for Marion’s account of the person as gift. We will not be able to evaluate this gift account of persons without first understanding the historical context. I wait until section 3 to unpack this historical contribution as *also* the progressive contribution of understanding persons as gifts. Only afterward will we see that Marion’s account surpasses Foucault’s in satisfying the personalist intuition.

Phenomenology is a philosophical methodology which gives careful attention to how the world shows up for us in experience. It is a rejection of a cartesian and dualist distrust of appearances, the sort of distrust that leads Kant to radically separate the *phenomena* (appearances) from the *noumenon* (reality). By contrast, phenomenologists restore our

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 448.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

confidence in the phenomenon as giving a foundational beginning for all philosophical exploration. At the end of the day, all we have to go on for constructing theory, metaphysical or otherwise, is our experience. Marion has made a significant contribution to this method by both an insightful historical reading of the method and also a proposal to move the method in a new direction. This contribution will be clear in what follows.

Marion sees the phenomenological method as articulated in three moments: the Husserlian moment of reduction to the object, the Heideggerian moment of reduction to Being, and the current moment of reduction to givenness itself.<sup>24</sup> Before explaining these, it is worth noting (although space permits only a passing observation) an interesting point of contact with Foucault's three epochs of reflection on the self: the recollective epoch of Plato, the meditation epoch of Augustine and the High Middle Ages, and the methodological epoch beginning with Descartes and enlightenment rationalism. In some ways, phenomenological reflection on the self begins in recollection: Husserl turns our gaze inward toward the transcendental ego in effort to penetrate outward toward the extra-mental world (I explain this in a moment).<sup>25</sup> A second moment of phenomenology might be the meditative reflection beyond the transcendental ego to the pre-eminence of Being prior to individual *Dasien*. Were the narrative to continue, we would expect phenomenology to end in a methodist moment of reflecting on the self as source of practical activity in the world, the self subordinated to technique. As we have seen, Foucault's work combats the systematizing and methodizing of the self found in the enlightenment epoch. Phenomenology is certainly a method, but is it the sort of method subject to this Foucauldian critique? Does it parallel the methodist epoch? I don't think so. Phenomenology as movement is

---

<sup>24</sup> See J. L. MARION *Reduction and givenness. Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and phenomenology*, T. A. CARLSON (trans.), NU Press, Evanston, IL 1998.

<sup>25</sup> See E. HUSSERL, *Cartesian Meditations* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.), Dorian Cairns (trans.), Martinus Nijhoff Publishing, Boston 1977.

a response to the valorizing of theory over and against experience. The method of phenomenology is to bracket off abstract methods and return to what is given to us prior to theoretical conceptualization. In this way, phenomenology's method meets Foucault's desire for a spiritual approach distinct from a knowing approach to the self. Foucault sees in the Hellenic self-care over self-knowledge a unity of self and world with a call to return to self in the world. So too, phenomenology invites meditation and reflection on our lived experience in the world prior to manipulation through technique. Where enlightenment rationalism de-personalizes and "humanizes" through violently imposed conceptualizations of self — conceptualizations rendering the individual under systematic control — phenomenology as method, and especially personalism, resists these de-personalizing tendencies purifying our reflection from prejudiced theories and pre-conceptions.

Instead, Marion reads phenomenology's three moments as three models for phenomenological reduction. Before outlining these models, I want first to consider reduction itself. *Reduction* is a phenomenological term-of-art which refers to a conscious bracketing off of beliefs and attitudes which pollute our reflection on the phenomenon given to us in experience.<sup>26</sup> Beliefs and attitudes that pollute are those which project or superimpose theory on the phenomenon prior to that phenomenon giving itself to us in experience. If I hold in mind my metaphysical commitment that our senses are unreliable, we are all brains-in-vats, then any reflection on how objects appear to sense in experience fails to let sense phenomena "speak for themselves"; that is, I've pre-judged the experience to hold to my theoretical commitment. However, a good phenomenologist in reflecting on given experience will suspend these theoretical commitments so as to consider the phenomena on their own terms just as they given

---

<sup>26</sup> See E. HUSSERL, *Logical investigations. Volume 1*, J. N. FINDLAY (trans.), Routledge, New York 2001.

in appearance. In his *Logical investigations*, Husserl proposes that we reflect on *what it is like* to believe in objects of consciousness with fixed or unchanging meaning.<sup>27</sup> Are they merely constructs of our imagination? If they were, then we should be able, through varying the object in imagination, to construct its meaning whichever way we like. But when we try to do this, our mind runs up against immovable limits. Phenomena will not bend to whatever we think of them. I cannot imagine a spoon as a fork while holding in mind the objective meaning of “spoon”. Instead, imaginative variation serves to bring the essence or *eidōs* of the object of our reflection into relief. Edith Stein illustrates this process by considering the *eidōs* of a cherry blossom tree. She can imagine the tree in its life span, from seedling to aging tree, and with varying colors, heights, and other qualities. But in all this, the sameness of the object as cherry blossom tree remains.<sup>28</sup>

Husserl refers to this process of intuiting or seeing the essence of the phenomenon as *constituting* the object.<sup>29</sup> Importantly, constitution is not a kind of Kantian construction. Husserl insists that the phenomenon as given in our experience can be neither a construction nor projection of the mind.<sup>30</sup> Eidetic (from *eidōs*) reduction involves imaginative variation which will not admit of construction. Instead, constitution is more akin to a participatory process by which the object of reflection becomes intelligible or meaningful for me. It is not that I impose meaning on it, but that its inherent meaning is revealed through constitution. I, as *transcendental ego* (Husserl’s term for the subject of the objects of thought), participate in the showing of an

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. E. STEIN, *Finite and eternal being. An attempt at an ascent to the meaning of being*, K. F. REINHARDT (trans.), ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington 2002, pp. 16-17.

<sup>29</sup> For an overview, see P. RICOEUR, *A key to Edmund Husserl’s ideas I*, Bond Harris and Jacqueline Bouchard Spurlock (trans.), MU Press, Marquette, WI 2009, p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> The problem of reading Husserl as a realist, idealist, or something between them is outside the scope of this paper. For more, see G. HEFFERNAN, “Stein’s critique of Husserl’s transcendental idealism”, in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 95 (2021), pp. 455-479.

object's meaning.<sup>31</sup> Husserl's great insight for phenomenology is that consciousness is always consciousness *of*. To be aware of a phenomenon there must be a phenomenon to be made aware of. This becoming aware is what phenomenologists name *intentionality*. Intentionality here does not mean deliberate choice but rather that by which my consciousness is directed toward the phenomenal object proper to it. The *eidos* of the cherry blossom tree shows up for me insofar as I am intentionally directed toward it; that is, when my reflection is a pure attention to what is given to me in experience, the meaning of the object *pro tanto* shows itself to me. Constitution, then, names the contribution I make in the showing of the object's meaning. Without intending the object, I cannot constitute it as having any sense or meaning, and thereby no essence reveals itself to me. Put another way, without performing any phenomenological reduction, without directing our gaze toward objects as given apart from any presuppositions, the meanings of the world never show up.

For Marion, however, Husserl's reduction is limited in what it gives us. When Husserl tries to apply his method toward the constitution of the other, the alter ego, this other self arrives, like every other phenomenon, as an object constituted by my transcendental ego. While I do not construct the other, the other fails to arrive for me as wholly transcendent, as something entirely independent of my meaning-conferring acts. How could it? The Husserlian reduction always requires that I contribute something in constituting the object as meaningful. I constitute that object by directing my consciousness in an intentional gaze toward that object. I participate in the showing of meaning; I assist the transcendental object in giving itself as meaningful to me through intending the phenomena with acts of consciousness such as imaginative variation. For example, I consider the cherry blossom tree by suspending my presuppositions, even my natural

---

<sup>31</sup> P. RICOEUR, *A key to understanding Husserl's ideas I*, cit., p. 88, quoting *Cartesian meditations*, first meditation.

attitude that cherry blossoms exist, for the sake of letting cherry-blossomness unfold for me as meaningful. But is the phenomenon *as object* the only horizon of discovery? Is our experience of the world an experience of merely that which is given in meaning-conferring acts of constitution? Marion sees the history of phenomenology as rejecting this limitation.<sup>32</sup> He next considers Heidegger's reduction.

Heidegger, a faithful student of Husserl, shows us that the phenomenological reduction need not limit itself to what is given as object of intentionality.<sup>33</sup> Even before intentional acts of consciousness, the world is given to us as a world of existents, a world already constituted by Being. Heidegger expands the Husserlian horizon beyond the given as meaningful to ego. The new horizon is a horizon of Being, which is already given prior to ego, and from which emanates individual beings, existents, *Dasein* signifying our place in this landscape. What Heidegger shows us is that Husserlian reduction is more than Husserl thought it was. The phenomenological reduction once freed from the limits of ego, freed from constituted objects of meaning, reveals a process of being unfolding in the world prior to beings in that world constituting it. Our experience is now shown to reveal a phenomenon, Being, which is prior to and transcends the phenomenologist in her act of reflecting on it. With Heidegger we begin to move from the transcendental interplay of my intentional acts and the objects that shows up for these acts to transcendent phenomena which, as Levinas will later show, *interrupt* these acts, overwhelm them, and reveal themselves to be prior to and greater than these meaning constituting acts.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> See J. L. MARION, *Being Given*, cit., p. 61ff.

<sup>33</sup> Principally in M. HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, J. STAMBAUGH (trans.), SUNY Press, Albany, NY 2010.

<sup>34</sup> E. LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity. Essays in Exteriority*, A. LINGUS (trans.), Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Boston 1979.

Even without transcendental egos to constitute it, we can see that Being already has meaning as that from which constituting agents such as we are proceed.

For Marion, however, Heidegger's reduction leaves us under the impersonal and ineluctible movement of Being, the now expanded horizon of phenomenality underlying all possible experience.<sup>35</sup> Reduction to Being escapes the ego-tethered reduction to object by expanding our horizon of discovery. Yet for Marion, even Being will not satisfy our desire for the revelation of transcendence. After all, in the face of an uncaring Being, determining me in history without me, I can remain bored.<sup>36</sup> And if I can remain at an unmoved distance even from the revelation of Being which is beyond every object or particular being, we must turn beyond what is given in the desire for Being and on to what is given in *desire itself*, what givenness itself gives in every experience of it.<sup>37</sup>

To do so, Marion asks us to consider a reduction not just to what is given in experience but to *givenness* itself – givenness giving its “self”.<sup>38</sup> For Marion, givenness, and not object or Being, is fundamental to experience. There is no experience without the given. Drawing on Levinas's exploration of the *interruption* of the other prior to constitution and the object-limited Husserlian reduction, Marion seeks a reduction that unlocks the Husserlian and Heideggerian limitations and shows the truly transcendent.<sup>39</sup> Husserl's principle of all principles says this: “Everything that offers itself to us originarily in intuition must simply be received for *what it gives itself*, but without passing beyond the limits in which it *gives itself*.”<sup>40</sup> This sounds like

---

<sup>35</sup> See J. L. MARION, *Being Given*, cit., p. 176ff.

<sup>36</sup> See J. L. MARION, *Reduction and givenness*, cit., 189-98.

<sup>37</sup> For more on desire, see J. L. MARION, *The erotic phenomenon*, Stephen E. Lewis (trans.), UC Press, Chicago 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. J. L. MARION, *Being Given*, cit., p. 234ff

<sup>39</sup> E. LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity*, cit., pp. 198, 291.

<sup>40</sup> E. HUSSERL, *Ideas I*, quoted in J. L. MARION, *Being Given*, cit., p. 184.



what Marion is after. And in fact, Marion reads Husserl as failing to follow his own principle by restricting our intuitions of what gives itself to what objects show up for meaning-constituting intentionality.<sup>41</sup> Intuition, for Husserl, is always a participation of the ego in the showing of what is given. But why limit intuition to this participation? If we liberate the reduction from this restriction, we open the possibility for a reduction to givenness itself prior to objects as they are given, including Being. Space prevents a full explication of this new and third phenomenological reduction to givenness as it gives itself. However, if we consider the simple intuition that givenness cannot be reduced to an object of constitution since whatever we contribute toward the object's showing its meaning is itself already given to us. The structure of constitutional acts is already given prior to our performing these acts, otherwise they are only constructions and projections onto the world and give nothing. Givenness cannot be an object of our intentional acts since our gaze, once on the object and its meaning, is by that fact on *what* is given and hence no longer on the given in itself. In the next section I carry Marion's reduction to givenness into analysis of the gift.

### **3. Persons as Gifts and Icons**

The gift, for Marion, is not anything other than the given. The given reduces to the gift since the gift is givenness giving itself. While Marion is not here attempting to give an account of the irreducibility of persons, his phenomenology of the gift fits that description so long as we consider personhood itself as gift. I do not think Marion will object to this reading since it is in the course of unpacking the phenomenon of the gift that he gives an account of the horizon of the

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-53.

“I” as what he calls a *saturated phenomenon*.<sup>42</sup> A saturated phenomenon is given *in excess*, that is, the phenomenon overwhelms and exceeds our ability to grasp and conceptualize it. It is overflowing with meaning. Consider for example the phenomenon of the wedding ring. The wedding ring as object of perception gives a limited and immediately grasped meaning, but the wedding ring as symbol of marriage is a rich and saturated phenomenon; what it gives far exceeds its being. So too, on this reading, the person will far exceed our attempts to constitute it as object of meaning.

Why should we identify givenness with the gift? The reason is simple: for any identification of gift with what is other than givenness itself, the gift disappears. In performing Marion’s reduction to givenness, we experience givenness giving itself as gift. But when the gift is considered under the reduction to object or the reduction to Being, it always fails to show up for us in experience. To see this, Marion first observes that the gift cannot be an item for economic exchange. In this, he echoes Foucault who resists reduction of the self to a technique for power and exchange. Exchange is a *quid pro quo* with anticipation on the part of the giver and the givee of compensation for the debt. But the gift as givenness does not give itself from and for compensation of a prior debt. Rather, it gives itself of itself. Marion makes clear the irreducibility of the gift to the exchange through three possible reductions of each of the relations of the gift: the giver, the givee, and the gift itself.<sup>43</sup> I next outline these reductions which will reveal the irreducibility of the gift to anything other than givenness giving itself.

---

<sup>42</sup> See J. L. MARION *Being Given*, cit., pp. 179-234, and *In excess. Studies of saturated phenomena*, R. HORNER and V. BERRAUD (trans.), Fordham University Press, NY 2004.

<sup>43</sup> J. L. MARION, *Being Given*, pp. 71-119.

The first reduction to gift brackets the givee or the recipient of the gift.<sup>44</sup> That is, I first suspend from conscious intention any givee while reflecting on the gift as given in experience. But is this possible? Can any gift show itself without givee? Marion shows that it can. First consider that some gifts are given anonymously. If I donate (the French “gift” is *le don* from donation) anonymously to a cause in a foreign country, I see an image of a child in need which inspires my donation. But I do not know that my gift will go to that child. I do not even know if that child exists. I may not know that my money will go to any particular children at all or even if it will be used for the cause I want to give it. Still, I may choose to give the gift. The gift is given without encounter with the givee. Following Levinas, Marion sees the encounter with the other as transcendent interruption of my flow of consciousness. I do not first constitute the other in my transcendental ego but am first given the other prior to my intentional acts. Yet the gift is not even reducible to this transcendent encounter since the gift resists reduction to givee. “One essential consequence also appears: the gift can be given – here out of concern for efficacy – *without regard for the face of the Other*; and if one admits that ethics is governed by the silent injunction of the face of the Other, by definition transcendent because Other, then it must be concluded that the gift does not fall strictly within ethics ... The givenness of the gift does not depend on ethics, but inversely, ethics no doubt supposes the givenness of the gift.”<sup>45</sup>

In bracketing the givee, we can consider two other moments of the gift giving itself without being received.<sup>46</sup> The first is what Marion calls the *enemy* of the gift. Christ enjoins us not only to love those who love us, but to love our enemies. In doing so, we give the gift of our love to the one who hates us and rejects our gifts. The enemy of the gift refuses to receive the gift and in

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 85-94.

doing so destroys the givee of the gift making the gift truly gift. “Only the enemy makes the gift possible; he makes the gift evident by denying it reciprocity – in contrast to the friend, who involuntarily lowers the gift to the level of a loan with interest.”<sup>47</sup> Besides the enemy, the *ingrate* also validates the gift by removing the repayment of gratitude and so removing any possible exchange. The ingrate cares nothing at all for the gift, he abandons the gift. And yet the gift is still given.

A second reduction to the gift brackets the giver of the gift.<sup>48</sup> Again, is this possible? How can a gift be given with no giver? In fact, the gift is given without giver. When we receive an inheritance from a deceased relative, we receive a gift given with no giver to repay. The inheritance prevents repayment because we cannot repay what is given without present giver. The giver gives perfectly insofar as the giver disappears perfectly. The disappeared giver prevents the gift from being reduced to a measure or exchange. Moreover, the giver of the gift may give un-consciously. The artist or athlete or Saint who gives from a single-minded love is not aware of how their gift is received, does not want to be aware and has to be told that it was, and so gives without knowing that they are the giver. But the disappearing knowledge of being giver enables the gift to give itself without risk of indebtedness. The givee too, once disappeared, removes the burden of repayment: “The givee is found to be originally insolvent in and through the recognition of the irreparable anteriority of the debt to all response – the anteriority of the gift of self given to the self over and above the self itself.”<sup>49</sup> Christ gives himself on the cross in proclaiming that even the Father who is equally God does not recognize him. The giver disappears in the giving of the perfect gift.

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 94-102.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

And a third reduction to the gift brackets the gift itself in giving itself.<sup>50</sup> The gift doesn't give anything because it isn't any *thing*. "The gift is often not associated with even the lowest level of object [...] When it is a matter of making a promise or reconciliation (or a break), or enacting a friendship or a love (or hatred), the indisputable gift is not identified with an object or with its transfer; it is accomplished solely on the occasion of its own happening, indeed without object and transfer."<sup>51</sup> So the gift in disappearing from the object which is its visibility gives itself more purely. The object of the wedding ring is the gift of promise which is not visible and no object. Moreover, the gift gives *itself* by *itself*. If the gift were necessarily given, the burden of the necessity would destroy the gift and become instead an imperative. Instead, the gift decides for itself; the gift decides the giver to give itself since every giver is *already* given in its capacity as giver. Likewise, the gift need not be accepted though it must be acceptable. And to make itself acceptable costs nothing real but instead costs only the seeing of the object *as gift*. The gift shows itself to me in choosing me as its acceptability. If my gaze is transactional, I fail to see the gift. But in seeing the gift, all that is needed for completion is that I accept it. "The gift shows itself (phenomenally) in such a way that it wins (or imposes) its receivability in a givee – it shows itself so as to give itself."<sup>52</sup>

Finally, I want to consider two gazes only one of which shows the gift which I am here proposing to be Marion's account of the person. These two gazes are the gaze of the idol and that of the icon.<sup>53</sup> For Marion, the gaze of the idol is a gaze which fails to see behind the given object to the invisible which can never be reduced to the seen. Marion's talk of the gaze of the idol reflects the *saturated phenomenon* in that the idolater is blind to what meaning that transcends

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 102-113.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>53</sup> J. L. MARION, *God Without Being*, cit., pp. 7-53.

the grasp of the immediate object of perception, even if the idol is not material object but concept. “The idol depends on the gaze it satisfies, since if the gaze did not desire to satisfy itself in the idol, the idol would have no dignity for it.”<sup>54</sup> The gaze of the idol is looking for an idol, it is active and closed to transcendent interruption of activity. When the gaze finds its idol, it stops the gaze and sends it back on itself like a mirror, an invisible mirror because the idolator is too blinded by the dazzling spectacle to notice that he is looking at himself. “The idol thus acts as a mirror, not as a portrait: a mirror that reflects the gaze’s image, or more exactly, the image of its aim and of the scope of that aim.”<sup>55</sup> The aim is never what is given to me prior to my intentional acts since as idolator I also intend the satisfaction of my gaze which is the idol – the idol is already the construct of my mind, and in finding it I find only myself. But since the idol is whatever shows up as object of my idolatrous aim, even if that object is a concept, the gaze of the idol does not penetrate beyond the reduction to object. It is not that the reduction to object is always performed by the gaze of the idol but that the gaze of the idol could not ever be a reduction to the gift. The gift never shows up for the idolator who is looking only for objects to be grasped and never gifts to be received.

By contrast, the gaze of the icon is a piercing gaze, or for a Marion a *transpiercing gaze*, which sees through the visible to the irreducible invisible represented by it. The following extended quotation illustrates the opposing moments of the icon's gaze in contrast to the idol's:

Our gaze does not designate by its aim the spectacle of a first visible [visibility of the idol], since, inversely, in the vision, no visible is discovered, if not our face itself, which, renouncing all grasping (*aisthesis*) submits to an apocalyptic exposure; it

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

becomes itself visibly laid out in the open. Why? Because, as opposed to the idol that is offered in an invisible mirror – invisible because dazzled as much as dazzling for and by our aim – here our gaze becomes the optical mirror of that at which it looks only by finding itself more radically looked at: we become a visible mirror of an invisible gaze that subverts us in the measure of its glory. The invisible summons us, “face to face, person to person” (1 Cor. 13:12), through the painted visibility of its incarnation and the factual visibility of our flesh: no longer the visible idol as the invisible mirror of our gaze, but our face as the visible mirror of the invisible. Thus, as opposed to the idol which delimited the low-water mark of our aim, the icon displaces the limits of our visibility to the measure of its own – its glory. It transforms us in its glory by allowing this glory to shine on our face as its mirror – but a mirror consumed by that very glory, transfigured with invisibility, and, by dint of being saturated beyond itself from that glory, becoming, strictly though imperfectly, the icon of it: visibility of the invisible as such.<sup>56</sup>

There is no denying the visibility of the icon just as there is no denying the givenness of objects and beings in experience. However, the visibility of the icon unlike the idol does not stop the gaze but opens up the gaze to the gift giving itself in visibility. Following Levinas, Marion sees the face of the other as icon to an infinity; that is, the transcendent encounter of the face of the other unveils the irreducibility of the other to that face. “One even must venture to state that only the icon shows us a face ... The icon alone offers an open face, because it opens in itself the visible onto the invisible, by offering its spectacle to be transgressed – not to be seen, but to be

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

venerated.”<sup>57</sup> The icon too shows up for us as mirror –not mirror of the gaze of the gazer but mirror of the gift of the one gazed upon. In fact, “the accomplishment of the icon inverts, with a confounding phenomenological precision, the essential moments of the idol.”<sup>58</sup> If we consider Marion's icon/idol distinction in relation to the self, Foucault's self shows up for us as the gaze of the idol. This gives the personalist reason to adopt Marion's account.

#### 4. Response to Objections from John Milbank

*For that which is abandoned, outside donation, reception, and mutuality, is after all such a mere object, and not as Marion would have it, a gift.*

— John Milbank<sup>59</sup>

Milbank offers his critique of Marion's account of the gift in the context of an historical dichotomy of approaches to ethics.<sup>60</sup> The first approach is one of self-possession, which Milbank associates with eudemonistic ethics. The paradox of this approach is that without a theology underwriting it, what we pursue, happiness, is subject to chance. We are fortunate to be happy. The second approach is one of self-government, which Milbank associates with the modern turn toward altruistic or totally other-regarding ethics. These modern ethics are absolutist; they look for a logical principle for ethics which, on Milbank's reading, ignores the contingencies of lived

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 21 *passim*.

<sup>59</sup> J. MILBANK, *Being reconciled. Ontology and pardon*, Routledge, NY 2003, p. 152.

<sup>60</sup> J. MILBANK, *Being reconciled. Ontology and pardon*, Routledge, NY 2003, p. 142 *passim*. Catherine Pickstock echoes Milbank's concerns about an absence of reciprocity in Marion's account of the gift in “The phenomenological given and the hermeneutic exchange. Which holds priority?” in *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, 76 (2020), pp. 715-728. Other philosophers within the Christian tradition also object to Marion's gift. E. STUMP sees a second-personal reciprocity in the gift which emphasizes its being given and received in *Wandering in darkness. Narrative and the problems of suffering*, OUP, Oxford 2012, pp. 418-451. S. D. ROCHA objects that Marion's gift necessitates its being given (it must give itself) and imbues it with juridical overtones in “Folk phenomenology and the offering of teaching” in *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 2 (2016), pp. 121-135. Rocha proposes offering as more fundamental than gift since we can offer what we cannot give. I take my response to Milbank below to also satisfy these concerns.



experience. Levinas, Kant, and Marion fall into this second camp. By contrast, Milbank proposes a mutual giving-receiving account of the gift which demands neither self-possession, the gift is grace freely given, nor absolutist self-government, the gift is received in the particulars of lived experience. He further distinguishes this gift from the transactional exchange which abandons the recipient and commodifies the other.

Engaging Marion directly, Milbank charges Marion's gift with a Cartesian and Kantian genesis. Marion's gift is Kantian in that it does not take up the givee in being gift. It is thus given in abandonment with an aim toward absolute self-government, the perfect fulfillment of duty. I return to this in a moment. Secondly, Marion's gift is Cartesian in that it relies on a division of subject and object which leads to the total subjectivity of the intention to give without regard for its reception. My intentions are isolated from anything outside myself. Marion's (and Levinas's) self which emerges in this gift as total subjectivity is thus never really given. The self as gift is bound within its own subjectivity.

My response to these charges will be as follows. To concerns about a Cartesian and Kantian genesis of the gift, Marion agrees that we should avoid such a genesis, and he clearly does so. To the extent that Marion's gift does not address the importance of its recipient, I do not take this to be an objection to Marion's account but instead an invitation for further exploration. There is nothing inconsistent with upholding the recipient and the gift together so long as the one is not defined in terms of the other.

Let's first address the apparent subjectivism of Marion's phenomenological approach. We can trace subjectivism concerns back to Husserl's overestimation of the transcendental ego. But Marion himself makes this criticism. He sees that Husserl's transcendental "I" gives *no* individuation of the person. Says Marion, "As transcendental I, the 'I think' accomplishes *no*

*individuation* [...] because it exerts a pure abstract function, ‘the representation ‘I’ does not contain in itself the least manifoldness and it is absolute (although merely logical) unity.’” Instead, “It unifies the manifold precisely because it remains an empty unity, orphan of all particularity. It therefore intervenes as ‘one and the same in all consciousness’ so as to prevent it from happening that ‘I should have as many-coloured and diverse a self [*ein so vielfarbiges verschiedenes Selbst*] as I have representation of which I am conscious to myself.” Neatly, “The ‘subject’ secures its transcendental at the price of its deprivation of all quality; it therefore establishes its universality at the detriment of its identity.”<sup>61</sup> The transcendental ego, for Marion, amounts to everything happening “as if the ‘I think,’ which claims as its function and foundation alienating the ‘self’ of the phenomenon by objectifying it, lost in this destruction first and above all its own ‘self.’” And this objectification leads to a dilemma: “if the ‘I think’ as transcendental does not permit – better, forbids – the individuation of the [I], must we renounce thinking subjectivity as far as its irreducible individuation, or renounce thinking the individuality of the “I” in terms of the transcendental figure of the ‘I think?’”<sup>62</sup> The obvious choice, for Marion, is the latter.

The difficulty of the transcendental ego in light of the givenness of the person in experience is itself difficult to elucidate and leads to misunderstanding. For example, the difficulty is not, according to Marion, “just a matter of the classic difficulty demonstrating the existence of the outside world (Descartes, Malebranche, Berkeley, Kant, etc.), a difficulty limited to a region of being and by right always surmountable (Husserl, Heidegger).”<sup>63</sup> Instead, “It is above all a matter of the transcendental implications of the primacy of an ‘I think’ that would

---

<sup>61</sup> J. L. MARION, *Being Given*, cit., p. 252.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

accompany every other representation.” “Such a situation would suppose that all representation equals, at bottom, self-representation, that all *cogitation* harbors a *cogitation sui* [...] [and] in itself, that is, the primacy of the ‘I think (myself)’ not only does not let us take into account the finitude of the ‘subject’; It radically forbids it.” The reason for this is that Husserl “lets his transcendental I drift toward indefiniteness and universal oneness because he always maintains the primacy of activity over and above passivity and the intentional aim over and above intuitive fulfillment.” Therefore, it “seems clear that the privilege accorded the ‘I think’ in the description of subjectivity ends up contradicting or ignoring its essential trait – finitude.”<sup>64</sup> Constituting alter egos within the transcendental ego, as Marion shows, results less in irreducible persons and more in subjects reducible to a universal oneness and not individuated because they are constituted through and in my meaning-conferring intentional acts.

Instead, Marion proposes to consider persons in light of their manifestation in givenness, as irreducibly given. This means, for Marion, a radical rethinking of the other from the former “subject” to now *the gift*. Marion summarizes as follows: “Thus is born the gifted, whom the call [givenness demands a response] makes the successor to the “subject,” as what receives itself entirely from what it receives.<sup>65</sup> This call “institutes the gifted phenomenologically in terms of the four characteristics of its own manifestation. The first of these is the *Summons*: the interloqué [recipient of givenness] suffers a call so powerful and compelling that he must surrender [*s’y rendre*] to it, in the double sense of the French *s’y rendre*: being displaced and submitting to it.”<sup>66</sup> And secondly the *Surprise*: “The interloqué, resulting from a summons, is taken and overwhelmed (taken over or surprised) by a seizure [...] but this seizure determines

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 267ff

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 268.

him all the more radically as it remains (or can remain) of indeterminate origin.” That is, “The call surprises by seizing the gifted without always teaching him what it might be. And thirdly the *Interlocution*: “By no means is it [interlocution] a question of a dialogical situation in which two speakers converse with one another in an equal relation, but of the unequal situation in which I find myself *interloqué*, that is to say called, indeed assailed as the “unto whom” of an addressed word.” Now “it is no longer a case of understanding oneself in the nominative case (intending the object – Husserl), nor in the genitive (of Being – Heidegger), nor even in the accusative (accused by the Other – Levinas), but in terms of the dative: I receive *my self* from the call that gives me to myself before giving me anything whatsoever.” And finally, *facticity*: “the *interloqué* endures the call and its claim as an always already given fact [...] [and] this given fact of the call leads into the undeniable facticity of the *interloqué*.”<sup>67</sup> For our purposes, Marion here shows the insufficiency of transcendental egology born of the reduction to my sphere of ownness to give the other in all that other's given irreducibility and individuality. Milbank's charge of subjectivism in reliance on the transcendental ego is, therefore, simply mistaken.

Finally, what of the charge of a Kantian origin? Does Marion's gift ignore the recipient to the point that it is not given? Here is how Milbank puts it:

As only alive, estranged from the inheritance of honour down the generations, [the donee] is reduced to a thing, a commodity. For that which is abandoned, outside donation, reception, and mutuality, is after all such a mere object, and not as Marion would have it, a gift. Hence Derrida, Marion, Levinas, and Blanchot have all failed to

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 268ff.

see that the private, supposedly 'free' gift of market society is identical, precisely as abandoned, with the commodity of the capitalist mode of exchange.<sup>68</sup>

In response, recall that for Marion, even the concept of God can be an idol. And Marion is clear that the concept of God as Kantian Moral Law is surely an idol. Marion's gift is not an absolute ethical ideal constructed by a transcendental consciousness divorced from its lived experience in the phenomenal world. That is, it's not Kantian. The absolute ideal is an idol, whereas the gift is seen in the icon. The recipient as icon inflects the gift; its importance is eternal. To be sure, Marion's account of the gift does not direct our gaze toward the recipient. But it isn't meant to. The phenomenological reduction is non-multiplicitous, its gaze is on the *single* object given as given – even if given as non-object, as Being, or as gift. The gaze of the gift, therefore, is not yet the gaze of its donation, its reception, or its giver.

In the end, to constitute the gift as gift, freed from the tethers of its usual transport between members of an exchange, is not, contra Milbank, to reduce the gift to the object. In fact, it is just the *reverse*: to contaminate the gaze of the gift with a co-gaze of its reception is to reduce the gift to the object. Such a contamination renders the gift conceptualizable, the gift becomes that which already traffics in the universalizable notions of a transfer of goods from giver to givee. To be sure, the transfer of goods is not yet a commodification – not every exchange is a transaction as Milbank shows.<sup>69</sup> Marriage is not a commodification. All the same, an exchange presents itself here to the phenomenological reduction. The gaze remains no longer on the gift in itself. It turns toward the effects of the gift, how it is received, how it is given, towards what is *already* given, which only returns the question of how the given is given. If our

---

<sup>68</sup> J. MILBANK, *Being reconciled*, cit., p. 152.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 150-154.

eyes remain fixed on the effects, our gaze becomes that of the idol. Milbank sees the abandoned Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* as "reduced to a commodity" because she was not received in that culture of "capitalist mode of exchange" in which she suffered.<sup>70</sup> Marion, in turn, refuses the reduction to exchange affirming that even in abandonment, she as gift remains so.

## 5. Conclusion

I relegate the evaluation of Foucault's and Marion's account of the person vis-a-vis the personalist intuition to the conclusion because once the two accounts are juxtaposed, the verdict is simple: Foucault's Stoic gaze on the self is a mirror of the self which, as Marion shows, never reveals the irreducibility of the given as gift. Foucault avoids the mechanical reductionisms of techniques and methods by subordinating these to the care of the self. But since the care of the self is a gaze of the self on the self which never penetrates beyond it, the gaze of the self just is the gaze of the idol. Marion's account of the gift goes beyond not only the constitution of the object in intentionality or the reduction to Being prior to *Dasein*, but his account of the given as gift shows us that the gift exceeds conceptualization while remaining personal to us and in us. The gift cannot be reduced to the self as subject because the subject is already given, so the gaze of the self on itself does not show the self to be irreducible to anything more general or prior to it. To this extent, Foucault's person thought in terms of a self as object of care is not irreducible (even if Foucault himself is), while Marion's person as gift finally is. For these reasons, the personalist should prefer Marion's account of persons as paradigms of givenness giving itself, that is, as irreducible gifts.

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.