

Exceeding Truth: Jean-Luc Marion's Saturated Phenomena

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Abstract: Jean-Luc Marion is a contemporary French philosopher, whose theory of saturated phenomena is attracting increasing attention from theologians, because he proposes that the exemplary saturated phenomenon is divine revelation. Marion's claims about revelation have also provoked philosophical controversy, with authors such as Dominique Janicaud objecting that Marion's analysis of revelation compromises his avowal that he is engaged in phenomenology rather than theology. This article outlines the philosophical background to these debates, by describing the way Marion's theory of saturated phenomena reconceives truth. Marion objects to truth being limited to the verifiable truth of the natural sciences, and insists on an excess beyond what we can grasp and understand. It is this excess that opens new possibilities for philosophical thinking about genuinely transcendent revelation. The article begins by describing an event that is one of Marion's concrete examples of saturated phenomena, before sketching his theory for these phenomena, and setting out three corollaries that follow from this theory and concern the way we should conceive both phenomenality and subjectivity. Finally, it briefly indicates a number of reservations about the implications of some of Marion's more dramatic and strident claims.

MUCH OF THE TIME, TRUTH IS AN ISSUE FOR US in questions that can be framed in view of a simple answer of "yes" or "no". "Is it true that the earth revolves around the sun?" "Is it true that Iran is developing nuclear weapons?" "Is it true that carbon emissions are affecting the climate?" "Did John Howard tell us the truth about the 'children overboard' before the 2001 election?" Such questions raise epistemological issues about accurate measurement, the verification of facts, or the reliability of information. They presume that truth is conceived in terms of correspondence (or at least coherence), and sometimes that it can even be determined forensically.

There are, of course, other ways of conceiving of truth. Questions of truth can be framed phenomenologically, or even ontologically, in terms of essence and meaning, rather than facts and verification. Thus, Martin Heidegger insists that the most original sense of truth is the “un-concealedness” with which beings are disclosed (and in which Being itself opens a space by withdrawing). Here, Edmund Husserl’s urging to “go back to the things themselves” leads to something that cannot be verified or quantifiably measured, and that eludes any attempt to formulate it in determinate terms. A more metaphysical sense of truth such as this is, of course, deeply ingrained in religious thought, and is epitomised in Jesus’ description of himself as “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

Jean-Luc Marion (b. 1946) stands in the phenomenological tradition of Husserl and Heidegger, particularly as it developed in France through thinkers such as Emmanuel Lévinas and Jacques Derrida. He is also deeply influenced by the Christian religious tradition, as is evidenced by his fascination with the apophatic theology of figures such as Dionysius the Aeropagite. Marion develops what he calls a phenomenology of givenness, which culminates in his theory of saturated phenomena. This theory constitutes a resounding rejection of any attempt to establish verifiable and measurable truth as the paradigm for thinking about phenomena. Instead, Marion insists, the paradigm for our thinking should be that which *exceeds* verifiable truth, and cannot ever be grasped in determinate concepts – with the result that it also exceeds a subject’s capacity to know it exhaustively. It is this excess which, in fact, makes verifiable truth possible, and is itself exceedingly true.

Marion’s theory of saturated phenomena arises from a conviction that the phenomenological tradition of Husserl and Heidegger is undermined by fundamental presuppositions that belong to a line of thought running back to Immanuel Kant and René Descartes. In Marion’s view, both Husserl and Heidegger reduce phenomena within limits dictated by and for a sovereign subject (resulting in, respectively, constituted objects, and beings in Dasein’s world). Marion maintains that any sort of constitution by or for a subject imposes conditions on the appearing of phenomena, and he therefore concludes that both Husserl and Heidegger fail in their attempts to develop a phenomenology that fulfils Husserl’s stated goal of going “to the things themselves”.

Marion argues that Husserl’s original project can only be accomplished by an approach that begins from the givenness of phenomena, and that frees this givenness from any conditions that are external to it. This rethinking of phenomenality culminates in Marion’s introduction

of a new category of “saturated” phenomena. He claims that these phenomena give so much intuition that they exceed any concepts or limiting horizon that a constituting subject might attempt to impose on them. Therefore, saturated phenomena are given simply as themselves, and are privileged instances of the givenness of phenomena.

Marion elaborates the possible kinds of saturated phenomena according to the four divisions in Kant’s table of categories, and then presents a figure as an example of each type: events, paintings, flesh, the face. He also includes a fifth kind, which encompasses all four of the divisions, and which is typified in the phenomenon of revelation. Much of the more animated discussion of saturated phenomena has focussed on Marion’s introduction of the religious domain to provide his saturated phenomenon par excellence.

In this essay, I first outline one of Marion’s examples of saturated phenomena, before sketching his theory for these phenomena, and setting out three corollaries that follow from this theory and that concern the way we should conceive both phenomenality and subjectivity. Finally, I briefly indicate my reservations about the implications of some of his more dramatic and strident claims.

THE SALLE DES ACTES

In the second chapter of *In Excess*, Marion focuses on events as a type of saturated phenomenon. He sets up an opposition between events and objects, where objects are constituted by a transcendental ego (IE¹ 30/35),² and (mis)understood as being permanently present through time, while events are beyond our measure, and impose themselves on us in a way that makes their happening irreducible to permanent presence. Marion argues that, in our normal “technical usage”, we generally misunderstand and distort phenomena by “reducing” them to objects (IE 35/42). Instead of seeing phenomena as the events which they are, we see only “an object, placed at one’s disposal for and by the thought that governs it” (IE 30/35). In support of his claim about the eventness of phenomena, which we generally fail to see, Marion

1. Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud, *Perspectives in Continental Philosophy*, no. 27 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); translation of *De surcroît: Études sur les phénomènes saturés*, *Perspectives critiques* (Paris: PUF, 2001).

2. The page reference of the English translation is given first, followed by the original page reference.

discusses the way in which a number of events “show *themselves*, instead of letting themselves be shown simply as objects” (IE 31*/36).³

Marion first presented this chapter of *In Excess* as a public lecture – in the *Salle des Actes* of the *Institut Catholique de Paris* on 29 January 1999. He proposes that the room in which the lecture takes place is itself an event that exceeds any attempt at measurement. Marion admits that, like any other room, the *Salle des Actes* is usually regarded as an object, and quantified according to the measure of its various parts: “Its walls define its volume, whereas other non-spatial parameters [*paramètres non étendus*]...define its budgetary weight and its pedagogical utility” (IE 35/41). From this perspective, the *Salle* is nothing more than the aggregate of its parts. Marion argues that for such a summation to be possible, our understanding must be able to bring together the whole series of a phenomenon’s parts, which must therefore be inscribed in the single horizon of a particular conceptual space. This single horizon means that we restrict a phenomenon to that which can be known “in advance”: “What appears will always be inscribed in the sum of what its parameters allow always already to be foreseen. The hall is foreseen before even being seen – enclosed in its quantity, assigned to its parts, fixed, so to speak, by its measures, which precede it” (IE 35*/41). In Marion’s view, such a “reduction of the room to its foreseeable quantity makes of it an object” and does not give an account of it as a *phenomenon* (IE 35/41).

Marion insists that the *Salle des Actes* can only be understood properly if it is considered as an essentially temporal happening – an event – complete with past, present and future. First, according to the past, we find the *Salle* “always already there, available for our entry and our use” (IE 32/37). It is independent of us, and also “prior to us...coming from an inscrutable past” (IE 32*/37). Its history “exceed[s] memory”, such that “it imposes itself on me in appearing to me; I enter it less than it happens to me of itself, encompassing me and imposing itself on me” (IE 32/38). Then, according to the present, Marion describes the *Salle* in theatrical terms, as the crowd that has gathered for a particular purpose, and the occasion on which words are spoken, and heard, understood or spoiled. As such an event it is “absolutely unique...unrepeatable and, for a large part, unforeseeable” (IE 32f/38). Though it is prepared and planned for, no one knows, as it actually unfolds, “if this will be a success or a failure” (IE 33/38). Finally, according to the future, Marion believes that no account of the *Salle*

3. An asterisk following a page reference indicates that the translation has been modified. Italics used within quotes are always those of the original author. Emphasis that I have added is indicated by underlining.

could ever describe all that happens in the event's continuing history, because an exhaustive description would need to include the background of each participant, their state of mind at each point of the evening, as well as "the consequences in the individual and collective evolution of all the participants, including the principal orator" (IE 33/39). To give a full account of the event of the lecture, "a hermeneutic would have to be deployed without end and in an indefinite network" (IE 33/39).

Marion believes that the phenomenon of the *Salle*, as he describes it, exceeds any possible synthesis of quantifiable parts: as "an absolutely unique, unrepeatable and, to a large extent, unforeseeable event.... [the *Salle*] escapes all constitution:... it shows *itself* from itself, on the basis of itself" (IE 32f*/38). The *Salle* cannot be foreseen, anticipated or constituted – it is not a measurable object. The *Salle's* appearing "does not proceed [*proviient*] from our initiative" (IE 34/40) – with which we would bring component parts together into a series that we could synthesise into a totality. On the contrary, the *Salle* imposes itself *on us* in its appearing.⁴ The *Salle* has multiple horizons, which prevent it being seen as a totality.

However, despite the *Salle's* multiple horizons, for the most part it is grasped as a limited and measurable object, thus excluding precisely the excess in it that Marion is at pains to demonstrate. In this respect, the *Salle des Actes* also functions for Marion as an example of the way in which "the essentially and originally eventual character of the phenomenon...[is] dulled, attenuated, and disappear[s], to the point that it appears to us as no more than an object" (IE 34*/40). He believes that "in the order of normal technical usage" we "reduce" phenomena such as the *Salle* "to the rank of second order, common-law phenomena" (IE 35*/42). This means that, rather than seeing them as they are, in their "full appearing [*apparaître plénier*]" as "fully a phenomenon [*phénomène plénier*],"⁵ we limit ourselves to a *foreseeing* in which phenomena "appear to us transparently, in the neutral light of objectivity" (IE 35f*/42). Such a phenomenon is "foreseen and not seen"; it is an object, which "appears as the shadow of the event that we deny in it" (IE 36*/42).

4. "It, on the initiative of its *self*, puts us on stage by *giving itself to us*" (IE 34*/40).

5. "*Plénier*" has the sense of "fully" rather than of "filled-up". Therefore, "*phénomène plénier*" should be understood as "fully a phenomenon" rather than as "a filled phenomenon". A different French word would be needed (for example, *rempli*, *complet*) if one wanted to refer to Husserlian adequation, in which intuition "fills" intention, and which is regarded by Marion as characteristic of "common-law phenomena". In contrast to such adequation, "*phénomène plénier*" strongly suggests the final category of Marion's topology of phenomena – saturated phenomena – which are the full instance of phenomenality.

SATURATED PHENOMENA

As an excessive and ungraspable event, the *Salle des Actes* is an instance of Marion's new category of saturated phenomena. In his theoretical account of these phenomena, he sets out the difference between objects (which are an instance of ordinary phenomena) and events (which are an instance of saturated phenomena) in terms of Husserlian phenomenology – in particular, Husserl's theory of adequation.

Husserl introduces the idea of adequation in his sixth *Logical Investigation* (LI)⁶ to indicate the degree to which an intuitive act offers fulfilment (*Erfüllung*) to an act of signification. When the intended object directly presents itself in perceptual intuition, no part of the act of signification remains empty; that is, every element of the intended signification has a corresponding intuition. Husserl calls this the “*ideal limit*” of adequation between intuitional content and significative intention, and describes it as “the goal of absolute knowledge” (LI VI §16, 2:227/2:598). It is an experience of self-evidence in which “the objectivity meant is in the strict sense *given* in intuition, and given just as it is thought and named” (LI VI §37, 2:261*/2:648).

Marion traces Husserl's language of adequation back to Kant's theory of cognition (BG⁷ 192f/270f). For Kant, intuition and concepts “constitute the elements of all our cognition”. These elements are produced by the faculties of sensibility and understanding respectively, which are the “fundamental sources” of cognition (CPR⁸ A 50 / B 74). Sensibility “gives” objects to us in intuition, while the understanding “thinks” these objects by means of a concept. Therefore, cognition depends on the unification of these two elements (CPR A 51 / B 75f). Thus, Marion summarises, there is adequation when intention is equivalent to intuition, or, in other terms, when signification is equivalent to fulfilment, or noesis is equivalent to noema. This is the

6. Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, ed. Dermot Moran, trans. J. N. Findlay, 2 vols., International Library of Philosophy (London: Routledge, 2001); translation of *Logische Untersuchungen*, ed. E. Heidegger (vol. 1: Hua XVIII) and Ursula Panzer (vol. 2: Hua XIX), 2 vols., *Gesammelte Werke*, Husserliana XVIII and XIX (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975 [vol. 1], 1984 [vol. 2]).

7. Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); translation of *Étant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation*, 2nd ed., corrected, Épiméthée: essais philosophiques (Paris: PUF, 1998 [1st ed., 1997]).

8. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); translation of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781, 1787).

ideal limit in which objective truth is accomplished subjectively by the self-evident experience of adequation (BG 190/266).

Marion makes two criticisms of Husserl's theory of adequation. First, he asserts that Husserl restricts adequation to being an ideal "that is never realised, or at least only rarely", with the consequence that "truth would also be made scarce, or become inaccessible" (BG 191*/267). This limit on adequation is because of the finite nature of sensible intuition, which Husserl adopts as an exemplar, and which can never give the whole object in one single intuition. It is not possible for all the aspects of a physical object to be presented simultaneously. Therefore, a complete perception of an object can be built up only by synthesising a series of apperceptions. But, as Husserl admits, "the all-sided representation is not achieved in such a synthetic manifold in the single flash which the ideal of adequation requires, as a pure self-presentation without added analogising or symbolisation: it is achieved piecemeal and always blurred by such additions" (LI VI §16, 2:228/2:599). Husserl describes the complex intuition of this situation as complete but impure, because at each moment, some aspects of the object are not actually given in intuition (LI VI §29, 2:246ff/2:627ff). As Marion correctly points out, according to Husserl's theory the only objects which can be given in a complete, pure intuition are formal or categorial objects; that is, objects where intuition is categorial rather than sensible. It is therefore only these non-sensible objects which can be given adequately. Because of the lack of sensible intuition in these cases, Marion dubs them "poor phenomena", by contrast with the "full phenomena [*phénomènes pléniers*]", which are "the appearance of the 'things themselves' fully given by intuition" (BG 192*/269).

Marion's second criticism is that Husserl ascribes a "strange modesty" to evidence, never claiming anything more for it than the "mere equality" of adequation.⁹ For Husserl, intuition can fall short of signification, or in rare cases, be adequate to it. Why, asks Marion, is it not also possible that intuition might *exceed* signification, giving "*more, indeed immeasurably more*, than the intention would ever have aimed at or foreseen?" (BG 197/277). Instead of being characterised as poor or lacking in intuition, as is most often the case, such phenomena would be characterised as *saturated* with intuition.

In Marion's view, considering the possibility of such saturated phenomena is inevitable if Kant's account of intuition is taken to its logical conclusion. As Marion points out, Kant repeatedly makes it clear

9. "Now this ideal of evidence, supposedly designating the maximum and extreme ambition for the truth, nevertheless claims, with strange modesty, only an 'adequation,' a mere equality." (BG 190/266)

that it is intuition alone which gives objects to thought (BG 193/271). This is the basis for Kant's famous dictum: "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (CPR A 51 / B 75). Marion argues that because only intuition can give something to be seen, thought without intuition is "incapable of seeing anything at all". On the other hand, intuition without concepts continues to give, even though it is blind. Marion judges that "blindness counts more here than vacuity" (BG 193/270). Thus, he concludes: "In the kingdom of the phenomenon, the concept is not king, but rather intuition, which alone has the privilege of giving" (BG 193*/271).

While Kant does not explicitly accord any priority to intuition,¹⁰ Marion points to Kant's analysis of aesthetic ideas – and the sublime in particular – as an example of the results when intuition's pre-eminence is taken seriously. While aesthetic ideas cannot become a cognition, this is not because intuition leaves a concept empty, but rather "because it [the aesthetic idea] is an *intuition* (of the imagination) for which a concept can never be found adequate".¹¹ Marion emphasises Kant's description of such an idea as an "*inexponible* representation of the imagination" – one that cannot be expounded by being brought to concepts.¹² For Marion, incapacity of the understanding to grasp such an idea is a result of the idea's "superabundance" of intuition, which "submerges" concepts so as to saturate them and "overexpose" them. The resulting phenomenon is thus not recognisable as a "definite object" – it is "invisible", not because of a lack of illumination, "but indeed by an excess of light" (BG 198/279). This is Marion's saturated phenomenon, not constrained by the norms of objectivity and definability, and therefore able to open givenness "in all its scope [*portée*]" (BG 199/279).

CONSEQUENCES

There are three main consequences of Marion's theory of saturated phenomena. First, Marion places at the centre of his theory a group of phenomena that are often classified as exceptional or marginal, and thus disregarded, and then uses his accounts of these various saturated phenomena to argue persuasively that their richness and complexity

10. In fact, Kant discourages any judgement about priority: "Neither of these properties is to be preferred to the other" (CPR A 51 / B 75).

11. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), §57, remark 1; translation of *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, ed. Heiner F. Klemme, *Philosophische Bibliothek*, vol. 507 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2001), Akademie Auflage, 5:342.

12. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, §57, remark 1, Akademie Auflage, 5:343.

offer a far better paradigm for understanding phenomenality than do everyday phenomena such as objects.

Indeed, Marion's claim about the paradigmatic status of saturated phenomena is so persuasive that it raises the question of whether all phenomena might not actually be saturated. I believe that the most consistent reading of Marion's texts implies that saturation should in fact be regarded as the normal way in which *all* phenomena appear. In this case, saturation should no longer be understood as a rare exception to "ordinary" phenomenality; instead, "poor" and "common-law" phenomena (such as objects) should be seen as unusual exceptions to saturated phenomena. The prevalence of such apparently unsaturated phenomena should in turn be regarded as a consequence of everyday phenomena being distorted by the objectifying way in which we approach them. Thus, these everyday phenomena are not deficient reflections of an exceptional paradigm, but rather covered-over originals.

In other words, just as Newtonian physics can be regarded as a limited case of special relativity and quantum mechanics, so our everyday approach to phenomena as determinate and exhaustively knowable objects is a limited case of an approach such as Marion's, which recognises the excess of intuition with which phenomena in fact give themselves beyond any possibility of being grasped by our concepts.

Secondly, because saturated phenomena function as paradigms, and so define the essential characteristics of all phenomena, their excess beyond the grasp of a knowing subject allows Marion to establish the primacy of givenness (*donation*) in phenomenology. He insists that phenomena only appear as themselves when they are reduced to "pure givens". That is to say, phenomena must be reduced to that as which they give themselves, without any modification by a constituting ego, or a Dasein that projects a world. Such a reduction "brackets all in this phenomenon that does not stem from [*ressortit à*] pure phenomenality: [namely] objectness and beingness" (BG 52*/77). The result of understanding a phenomenon purely in itself is that it is determined only by givenness, and accordingly appears only as given, without any residue or remainder.¹³ Marion concludes that, by excluding all that does not belong to givenness, his form of the phenomenological reduction goes "beyond [Husserl's] objectness and [Heidegger's] beingness" (BG 18/27); his phenomenological reduction reduces

13. "[N]othing other than givenness determines it and, as a result, it appears only as given – without any nongiven residue... [It is] a purely and strictly given phenomenon without remainder and owing all its phenomenality to givenness" (BG 39*/61).

phenomenality to “pure givenness” (BG 18/27), and phenomena to “pure given[s]...[that] appear absolutely” (BG 52f/78). In this respect, he believes that he makes significant advances over both Husserl and Heidegger in going “to the things themselves”.

Thirdly, these claims about phenomena as unconditioned “pure givens” entail a correlating set of claims about the subject as a recipient that has no initiating or constituting role. Such a subject is defined purely in terms of receptivity, and is named by Marion as an “*adonné*” – one who is given along with the self-giving of phenomena. Importantly, even though Marion proposes a very different understanding of the role of the subject, he continues to situate this role at the centre of phenomenality (BG 322/442). Indeed, he describes the subject as making a crucial contribution to the appearing of phenomena. Thus, the challenge Marion faces is to remove the subject from the purely active role of constitution, without making it a purely passive recipient. The *adonné* is a subject who is freed from subjectivity.

Marion believes that the absolute priority of givenness means that a “subject” not only receives a phenomenon from the phenomenon’s own giving of itself, but also receives its own self (as subject without subjectivity) in this giving. A “subject” thus not only receives *that which is given* (the *donné*), but is itself *the one who is given* (the *adonné*). The *adonné* is not a preconstituted receiver that precedes and conditions the giving of the phenomenon, but is rather itself constituted *as receiver* in the very receiving of the phenomenon itself: “The *adonné*...receive[s] himself by receiving the given unfolded by him according to givenness” (BG 282/390). Marion believes that the nominative case can no longer be claimed for a figure such as this. In discussing the way a response always depends on a prior call, he comments: “I receive *my self* from the call that gives me to myself before giving me anything whatsoever” (BG 269/371). The *adonné* appears in the dative case, which Marion suggests may perhaps be indistinguishable from the ablative, “since the *myself/me* makes possible...the opening for the givennesses of all other particular givens” (BG 269/371). The *adonné* receives itself as a kind of “place”, “where what gives itself shows itself [*où se montre ce qui se donne*]” (BG 322/442).

CONCERNS

Marion’s account of saturated phenomena is a very significant contribution to phenomenology, and offers rich possibilities for re-thinking our paradigms about truth, particularly with respect to fundamental dimensions of our human reality, and also of that which radically transcends us. However, I have a number of reservations about his

theory – particularly in some of its more dramatic claims – and conclude this article by briefly indicating two of them.

First, although Marion wants to distance his analysis from the structures of Cartesian and Kantian subjectivity, he retains its essentially adversarial characterisation of the subject-object relation, but simply inverts it. Thus, he ascribes a quasi selfhood to phenomena, and relegates the *adonné* to an essentially passive role. Marion repeatedly speaks of phenomena “imposing” themselves on a recipient, and even describes this as like “crashing” onto a screen (BG 265/365; cf., 69/101, 146/207, 175*/246, 304/419). Marion’s account certainly succeeds in displacing the subject from a dominant, constituting role and removes any vestiges of Cartesian or Kantian sovereignty. However, in many instances this dethroning seems to be accomplished simply by enthroning a new sovereign, rather than by overturning the dominion of sovereignty as such.

Secondly, consistent with the fundamentally passive role he assigns to the *adonné*, Marion restricts any hermeneutic element in his phenomenology to a series of epistemic acts that interpret the meaning of a phenomenon *after it has already appeared*. The actual appearing of the phenomenon is fully accomplished independently of any such interpretations of its meaning. What is excluded here is the ontological (or existential) sense of hermeneutics established by Heidegger. In Heidegger’s approach, hermeneutics in the sense of epistemic acts of interpretation is derived from a more fundamental ontological (or existential) sense, in which hermeneutics is a structural dimension of Dasein’s being. In this more fundamental sense of hermeneutics, human existence is constituted by understanding. Therefore, rather than hermeneutics being restricted to the interpretations of existence that arise when it is subsequently recounted, human existence is itself considered to be hermeneutic *in the very structure of its happening*. Consequently, phenomena are not only interpreted *after* they have appeared, but are *always already* interpreted in their very appearing.

I believe that a hermeneutic element in the Heideggerian sense is implicit in each of Marion’s accounts of saturated phenomena. The appearing of such phenomena depends on the interrelationship between the recipient and the world, and on the interpretive features of that relationship. In many instances (for example, anamorphoses, idols, icons, the face of the other person), Marion himself describes the appearing of the phenomenon as dependent on the recipient approaching it in the appropriate way (for example, with reverence for the icon, or by envisaging a face rather than objectifying it). In other words, the space needed for these phenomena to appear (as themselves) is only opened by an active and interpretive reception. Such an active

reception is not compatible with the passivity of Marion's *adonné*, nor with his claims that phenomena give themselves solely on the basis of themselves.

Thus, while Marion's saturated phenomena offer a paradigm that exceeds both verifiable truth and any conditions imposed by a constituting subject, they remain necessarily hermeneutic, because a reception that actively interprets is part of the very structure of the appearing of phenomena.