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Fundamental Ontology, Saturated Phenomena and Transcendental Dilemma

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I will argue that while Marion's criticism of Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology is in many ways sound, Marion remains bound to the conceptual opposition that existential phenomenology has successfully overcome. Namely, I will argue that Marion remains dependent upon the transcendental dilemma according to which we must rely on the strict differentiation between explanans and explanandum. Marion sees no way of departing from Heidegger's project other than reversing the order of explanation and switching the places of the explanans and explanandum, which means that phenomena start appearing as explanans. I will demonstrate how existential phenomenology has overcome this conceptual dilemma, and then I will argue that we could make a much better account of saturated phenomena, if we ground our insights in the idea of being-in-the-world.

KEYWORDS

Heidegger; Marion; fundamental ontology; saturated phenomena; transcendental dilemma

Introduction: Should We Stick to Fundamental Ontology?

Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology relies on the assumption that the problem of being, the fact that beings show up "as they are", can be clarified by investigation of being of Dasein. "Ontology," says Heidegger, "has an ontical foundation",¹ and the project of fundamental ontology presupposes the "demonstration" and "characterization" of this ontic foundation. The foundation is, of course, Dasein: since "[s]omething like being reveals itself to us in the understanding of being ...",² which brings us to the investigation of a being for which understanding of being is the determination of its being;³ "it is to the human Dasein that there belongs the understanding of being which first of all makes possible every comportment toward beings."⁴ In such a way, a fundamental ontology results in existential analytics, i.e. in the structural investigation of Dasein's relation to the world, which must clarify how things announce themselves

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¹ Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 19.

² Ibid.

³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 19.

⁴ Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 19.

to Dasein. This simple yet highly original idea has also proven to be extremely influential in launching a sequence of similar projects initiated by Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Patočka,⁵ Todes and many others. This family of approaches, which can be described as existential phenomenology, shares this fundamental conviction: the “being” of the world, its phenomenal givenness *for us*, can be clarified based on investigation of the being of the subject. This conviction, however, is not intended to reduce or subjectivize “things themselves” but to *clarify* them based on the being of a subject.

Influential as it is, Heidegger’s approach has attracted a wide range of criticisms from within the phenomenological tradition. One particular criticism, which will be of interest for the current work, was raised by J. -L. Marion. Marion has claimed that an attempt to explain phenomena based on the being of the subject necessarily means downplaying phenomenality, its alienation in favour of the subject or Dasein. Heidegger investigates how Dasein explains the givenness of phenomena, but by doing so he prioritizes the subject over phenomena and treats the subject as a measure of phenomenality; doing so necessarily means undermining the self-showing, gift-like character of phenomenal life. This move, which Marion sees as a remnant of the philosophical tradition, runs counter to the very idea of phenomenology and its famous maxim “back to the things themselves.” Consequently, Marion offers his notion of saturated phenomena that are not constitutable or encompassible by the subject and frees phenomenality from this alienating ontical foundation that violently imposes itself on phenomena.

In what follows, I will give a more systematic account of both these positions. I want to do this because I believe that even though Marion is right on a number of points, he also unwittingly demonstrates the overall importance of the project of fundamental ontology. I will argue that Marion misses the deeper significance of Heidegger’s approach and the reason why it has turned out to be so influential. Early Heideggerian ontology not only promises us an escape from traditional transcendental subjectivity; it opens up a way of escaping the very rigidity of the traditional transcendental argument as such. Mutual relatedness between Dasein and the world escapes the rigid opposition between *explanans* and *explanandum* and treats both Dasein and the world as equiprimordially significant in the order of explanation. This is a line of thought that might have been downplayed by Heidegger himself; never the less, it was developed more clearly by the subsequent generation of existential phenomenologists such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. The main assertion of this article is to stress the importance of such a starting point. I will demonstrate that while Marion’s criticism does identify certain drawbacks and weakness of the Heideggerian project, his own attempt to propose an alternative to such a project actually ends up demonstrating the importance of such a starting point. His inability to acknowledge the significance of the project of fundamental ontology results in systematic problems of his own account of saturated phenomena, which can only be resolved if we recognize the full significance of the idea of being-in-the-world.

⁵ Including Patočka to this list might appear controversial, but his “asubjective phenomenology,” of course, has never meant to leave out human existence as an explanatory insignificant element. In this sense, a number of clarifications concerning the program of asubjective phenomenology can be found, for example, in Patočka’s article “Subjektivismus Husserlovy fenomenologie a možnost “asubjektivni” fenomenologie” (1970).

1. Conditioned Phenomena and Conditioning Subject

Let me first quickly reconstruct Heidegger's early position before discussing its limitations.

Heidegger's attempt to clarify the givenness or being of entities based on being of Dasein can be roughly separated into two parts, Division I and Division II. The first and preliminary analytics of Dasein offered to us in Division I of *Being and Time* results in entrusting disclosure of being to the hands of what Heidegger calls *Das Man*, the one or, as it is frequently translated, they. Heidegger's phenomenological description of everyday life culminates in what might at first seem like a complete lack of explanation as such: the reason why Dasein "knows" how to disclose things and events in their Being is simply that Dasein "always already" has a tacit understanding of how they are supposed to be disclosed. *Das Man*, i.e. what *one* does, is this "always already" accepted corpus of normative expectations that exhaustively outlines what is done, what is said and what is seen in every possible circumstance. The passive voice here is crucial (and is implicated strongly by Heidegger's choice of the term) in demonstrating to us how everyday disclosure works: it is not *my* understanding in a strong sense; it is not *me* who has decided based on my own initiative what things are and how I take them to be. On the contrary, Dasein can disclose situations and the world as such because there are self-obvious ways of doing and saying things. No one is responsible for the way we hold forks and spoons, it just is the way the one holds them. Everydayness revels in and feeds on such self-obviousness of things since it can function only insofar as it is deprived of any kind of individual responsibility. How "things are done" suppresses the very need to ask "by whom:" endless deferral of responsibility, an explanation based on the general commonality of habits and traditions creates an illusion of self-obvious *and, therefore, the self-standing character* of our ways of disclosing and treating things. This is why we can disclose the shared world and this is why it is possible to form a community out of Daseins.⁶ Of course, there might be some reasons and some responsibility in our everyday dealings with the world, but sooner or later there must be a point where the Wittgensteinian spade gets turned⁷ and the one slips into this seemingly self-standing ground of how "things are done", saying something like, "I don't know, this is just something people say," "this is just the way we do it."

The point Heidegger wants to make is that this all-pervasive normative power does not invade the private being of Dasein from somewhere outside, rather it constitutes the very foundation of my own being. How things are done is a shared but faceless foundation of who we are, a foundation that makes it possible for me to have my "own" personality, a personality that is nonetheless defined in terms of *Das Man* and by its distance to *Das Man*. *Das Man* first introduces me into being-in-the-world in the fully-fledged sense of the word: through constant social training I become a member of society; I can do what I am expected to do, I understand the way I am expected to understand. But by doing so, I am firstly really taught how to be *someone* as such and what is at stake for this someone. So, "one belongs to the others oneself, and entrenches their power:"⁸ I can be myself only because I am just another other, that is, because I do

⁶ See, for example, Haugeland's *Dasein Disclosed* or Dreyfus's *Being-in-the-World*.

⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 217.

⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 118.

not differentiate myself from others for the most part but tacitly accept the relentless dictate of the one. With his trademark irony, Heidegger concludes,

we read, see, and judge literature and art the way the one sees and judges. But we also withdraw from the “great mass” the way the one withdraws, we find “shocking” what the one finds shocking. The one, which is nothing definite and which all are, though not as a sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness.⁹

In order to understand this “ground” onto which all everyday understanding eventually falls, we need to stress the *averageness* of *Das Man*. By the term average, Heidegger doesn’t mean statistically average. He is saying rather that there is a point toward which all human actions and ways of thinking are gravitating, a sort of average or basic understanding upon which everyone can uncontroversially agree. There is something self-obvious about almost anything in the world; such self-obviousness does not imply anyone in particular, but appeals to the average basis accepted by everyone, thus, excusing us from the need to be responsible personally. Human beings, in other words, are essentially conformist creatures: everyone seeks to give up one’s own initiative and rely instead on the average, grounded in the banality of “how things are done and said;” everyone tends to substitute “I think so” with “this is how it is thought about.” In such a way, everyday disclosure is a sort of universally levelling horizon that drags in and grinds every pinch of responsibility through the gravitational power of averageness. Anything at all can become a part of everyday disclosedness; for *Das Man*, there is nothing new under the sun: it knows and controls everything. But this overarching knowledge comes at the price of its banalization, obscuring Dasein’s genuine responsibility and its active role in bringing things out of concealment. *Das Man* transforms everything it touches into a bleak copy of authentic experience: it is this copy that would wander around as idle talk from one public place to another without any visible resistance – simply because it is something we all can agree upon without any further ado.

But this is, of course, not the final word on the understanding of being: everyday disclosure does not explain but *obscures* such an understanding. Heidegger describes everyday disclosure as *uneigentlich*, unowned: it gives us things, events, properties and particular identities at the cost of obscuring the very nature of disclosure and along with Dasein’s way of being. Inauthentic Dasein forecloses the very bringing of things out of concealment; it is trapped into an illusory but comforting picture of things given as they are as if Dasein weren’t responsible for the fact of their givenness. Inauthentic Dasein can only bear platitudes and commonalities of everyday life because this is the only way Dasein can foreclose its own sense of self, its self-understanding as Dasein and its responsibility for bringing things out of concealment. It identifies itself in terms of self-obviousness of the world succumbing to the temptation to think of itself as something intra-worldly, as something that is just as self-obvious as the norms and platitudes of *Das Man*. Consequently, it tries to view *Seinsverständnis* as something that has always been decided upon, as something that itself is a fixed entity. Inauthentic disclosure is a result of Dasein’s inability to face the truth about one’s own being.

Why does Dasein try to pass for an intraworldly being and, thus, to de-problematize its own role in revealing things in their being? In summary, the unifying motive behind

⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

all the terms that Heidegger deploys to describe authenticity – anxiety, guilt, death, conscience, freedom – is to show that Dasein is nothing but Being-possible and to teach us how to live based on recognition of this truth. Essentially this means the revelation of our “nullity:”¹⁰ we are nothing that can be explained in terms of the world, we are not an intraworldly being and the possibilities that such beings offer are not ours. Dasein is “a being which is determined by a *not*,”¹¹ says Heidegger and later adds, “it itself is a nullity of itself. Nullity by no means signifies not being objectively present or not subsisting, but means a not that constitutes this being of Da-sein, its thrownness.”¹² We are nothing but being-possible and we cannot become anything more than this being-possible. That’s why I can care for things that I am not in the first place: I am a “null” relation to the world whose being consists of *relating* and finding of its own being on the outside and not of something that I happened to be factually *related* to; “this nullity belongs to the being-free of Da-sein for its existentiell possibilities.”¹³ The only possibility that I really own is to stop being possible and, thus, to finally blend with the nothingness which I have been carrying around throughout my whole existence. So, the Heideggerian urge to recognize our own mortality is not about understanding the extremely high likelihood of me leaving this mortal coil. It is rather about accepting the fact that while living on it I am still entwined with nothingness: I am stuck somewhere in between this nothingness and the positivity of intraworldly things. This is a terrifying fact to acknowledge, so Dasein tends to avoid it at all costs; it tries to get rid of the understanding that it acts according to its own Being-possible and tends to pass over its responsibility to others in order to find refuge in the conformism and naïve complacency of social roles.

By contrast, authentic Dasein proves itself to be capable of accepting its essential nullity and corresponding freedom to pursue its existential possibilities. The important thing here is that such self-recognition has nothing to do with anything intra-worldly. Authentic Dasein can have the same possibilities that inauthentic Dasein has:¹⁴ it is not about the content, about *what* we are doing, it is about *how* we do it, its form. Authentic or “owned” Dasein is characterized by taking over, says Heidegger, or appropriation. What is appropriated is not this or that particular possibility but my own being as a ground for any possibility: I finally realize that while pursuing the possibilities that the world offers me, I am doing nothing more than realizing the possibility that I myself am, that it is me who is at stake every time. Possibilities, in such a way, are revealed as grounded: they are now recognized as a realization of Dasein’s freedom and manifest their true ontological status that was previously concealed by inauthentic Dasein, which endows possibilities with pseudo-objective density and tries to objectify its own way of being in the same way.

In this sense, Heidegger’s play with concepts constancy (*Standigkeit*), self-constancy (*Selbst-standigkeit*), unself-constancy (*Unselbst-standigkeit*) and grounded constancy (*Bodenständigkeit*) is highly illustrative. In §25 Heidegger first describes constancy as

¹⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 261.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 262.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁴ See, for example, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 274: “The ‘world’ at hand does not become different as far as ‘content,’ the circle of the others is not exchanged for a new one, and yet the being toward things at hand which understands and takes care of things, and the concerned being-with with the others is now defined in terms of their ownmost potentiality-of being-a-self.”

an ontic determination of Dasein: ontically speaking, the constancy expresses the fact that “an I is always this being, and not others;” as a being that is always “this and not others,” I “maintain” my identity throughout my “modes of behaviour and experiences.”¹⁵ Heidegger, however, warns us that such a constancy does not clarify the question of “who” of Dasein and its way of being. Only in the course of Division II does Heidegger explain how this description can be elevated to the description of the ontological structure of Dasein. Ultimately, what authentic Dasein reveals is simply that nothing else can be said about its being; Dasein is nothing but this “formal and empty” constancy. But this means that what ontically seemed to be the constancy of Dasein turns out to be an ontological *self*-constancy of Dasein: the constancy is possible only insofar as being is itself ontological, i.e. that it *exists through being-free for constancy*. Ontic, self-obvious constancy, in such a way, becomes *owned*, ontologically clarified and grounded (Bodenständigkeit); *it is removed into the possession of a being that constitutes the source of such a constancy*. In other words, this formal and empty *self-standing* nature of constancy gives ground (Boden) for any factual constancy that implies some sort of intra-worldly content. At the same time, authentic Dasein reveals that what has seemed to be the self-obvious constancy of inauthentic Dasein is nothing but an unself-constancy,¹⁶ which tries to obscure its “ontological constitution” but which nonetheless presupposes such a constitution in the very attempt to obscure it; unself-constancy is just an obscured self-constancy that tries to conceal the truth about its own being.

In such a way Heideggerian fundamental ontology culminates in revealing the truth of its existence, and putting Dasein “in charge of the being of this being.”¹⁷ From now on, Dasein realizes that disclosure of being is explained solely by the fact that it is disclosed in its being and it provides possibilities for its being; whatever is going on in its life belongs to itself as owned. The contingent nature of things and events in the world is exactly what is *inessential for Dasein*; what is essential is that Dasein relates to the world (not that it relates to something in particular). In such a way, Dasein transforms the contingencies and circumstances that belong to its facticity into “fate” through taking such contingencies over as mine; “existing fatefully in resoluteness handing itself down, Dasein is disclosed as being-in-the-world for the ‘coming’ of ‘fortunate’ circumstances and for the cruelty of chance.”¹⁸ Both cruelty and generosity of fate belong to the same extent to Dasein’s being-free for existential possibilities. In such a way, Dasein’s freedom for its existential possibilities is revealed as a ground – but this ground is not something outside Dasein: it is not something objective (neither is a sense of objective things nor objective processes) it is Dasein itself, its nullity and freedom.

2. Conditioning Phenomena and Conditioned Subject

In such a way, Heidegger’s investigation of the authentic Dasein grants the subject control (either explicit as *Selbst-Ständigkeit* or implicit and self-deceptive as *Unselbst-Ständigkeit*); as Heidegger puts it some years later, “the ground that springs forth in transcending folds back upon freedom itself, and freedom as origin itself becomes

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 108.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 351.

‘ground.’ Freedom is ground of ground.”¹⁹ As this ground of disclosure, Dasein loses a fair share of the mutuality of its relations with the world: authentic disclosure reveals that that which had seemed a generative influence of the world was just an obscured self-manifestedness of Dasein. If what is important about disclosure is not its intra-worldly content but that it is *mine*, Dasein loses its possibility to be formed by the disclosure in any genuine sense (or, to be more precise, it realizes that it has never had such a possibility): it is Dasein and its being possible which enables things to show up as they are. Nothing intra-worldly can any longer surprise Dasein; it cannot *move* it or really teach it anything because the only thing that is relevant about the intra-worldly content is that it *hands the ammunition* for Dasein’s formal freedom of relating to the world; the content (which is exactly what is supposed to surprise us, move and teach us) of this ammunition is irrelevant. Such a move *recapsulates* Dasein, assimilating everything into its being-free-for-existential-possibilities: everything becomes *mine* in a strong sense, a sense that abolishes the very meaning of possession – in the strict sense of the world, possibilities are no longer *mine* but become *me*. All of this, of course, looks a lot like a last-minute attempt to re-establish the possibility of autonomy of Dasein: authentic freedom conquers and assimilates the contingency of the world, transforming it into a fate: it is not important what actually happens to me in the world because all intra-worldly events belong to my being-possible to the same extent. I am destined to be myself, and nothing more can be ascribed to my destiny without falling into self-deception.

For J. L. Marion this move signals above all that the whole problematique of transcendental subjectivity retains its presence in Heidegger’s early writings, despite the latter’s attempt to overcome it. As Marion notes,

the reflective characteristics of Dasein – to resolve itself, to put itself at stake, to precede itself, to agonize over itself and each time for nothing other than itself ... - are such good imitations of the transcendental subject’s reflexivity that they should also suggest the character of subsisting ground for Dasein.^{20,21}

Of course, Heidegger takes a significant step towards renouncing the transcendental subjectivity placed outside the world and investigating the way of being of Dasein, which he repeatedly differentiates from traditional notions of transcendental subjectivity. But in the end he almost returns to the same position, postulating the authentic and reflexive “–self;” the destruction of the transcendental subject eventually leads him to postulation of the “auto-positing self”²² of Dasein. The subject is once again seen as a constitutive power – a transcendental condition of phenomena – which results logically in encapsulation of the ability-to-be and what Marion calls “ontological solipsism;” aporias of the

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 134.

²⁰ Marion, *Being Given*, 261.

²¹ In this sense, we should disagree with the recent article by C. Romano (2019), who claims that Heidegger offers a fundamentally new approach to the problem of ipsity since he does not consider “self” as a “foundation of our identity” but treats it as “conformity” or a “way of being” that can be found or lost. Contrary to this analysis, we should stress that Heidegger offers, first and foremost, an existential analysis of Dasein; a switch from inauthenticity to authenticity is a matter of existential modifications, which do not affect but presuppose the existential structure. Heidegger investigates such modifications only because the authentic modification makes this existential structure transparent, whereas the inauthentic one obscures and disguises it; but both of them presuppose this existential structure one way or another. In other words, our self can be lost only existentially but never existentially; existentially Selbstständigkeit remains an inalienable condition of our identity.

²² *Ibid.*, 260.

transcendental subject will forever “haunt Dasein.”²³ This problem is not coincidental but goes to the roots of Heidegger’s approach: his decision to investigate the ontic foundation of being cannot result in anything else but such “autarchy of the self.”²⁴ This is because “as long as we claim to begin with the ego, the ‘subject,’ or Dasein presupposed as a principle or, to speak like Aristotle, as a that ‘from which one would start first’ in general”²⁵ we would be committed to a perspective where possibility is always *subsumed under* and *explained by* such a condition. As long as we start from a being, we remain bound to this being, thus, constraining givenness of phenomena.

Marion goes on to stress that this constraining nature of Heideggerian fundamental ontology runs contrary to the very idea of phenomenon as Heidegger himself defines it. The approach that still leaves phenomena conditioned by the subject is essentially incompatible with the investigation of what “gives itself out of itself.” Being conditioned and explained by the subject, phenomena do not show themselves out of themselves; they fall under the constitutive activity of the subjects showing themselves only in accordance with such an activity. In short, a phenomenon cannot be conditioned by Dasein and show itself out of itself at the same time: to be conditioned means to show itself not on its own initiative but on the external one imposed on it by the conditioning subject. Marion writes:

how can a phenomenon claim to be deployed by itself and in itself if a transcendental I constitutes it as an object, placed at one’s disposal for and by the thought that governs it exhaustively? ... To admit, to the contrary, that a phenomenon shows itself, we would have to be able to recognize in it a self, such that it takes the initiative of its manifestation.²⁶

Or else: the phenomenon “comes, does its thing, and leaves on its own; showing *itself*, it also shows the *self* that takes (or removes) the initiative of giving *itself*”²⁷ Since what gives itself does so out of its own initiative, Marion’s aim is to find a situation where such *giving itself* is pronounced in the most distinct way. This means that we need to demonstrate that phenomenal self-manifestation is irreducible to the constitutive role played by the subject. In such a way Marion searches for what he describes as “phenomenal autonomy.”²⁸ In what follows, I will briefly sketch out Marion’s account of saturated phenomenon meant to demonstrate such autonomy. For the sake of brevity, I won’t try to offer an exhaustive description of Marion’s account but instead concentrate on a single and, arguably, most significant characteristic of saturated phenomenon, which Marion describes as counter-experience.

Trying to establish such a phenomenal autonomy, Marion distinguishes between “poor,” “common-law” and “saturated” phenomena based on the intensity or “degree” of their intuitive givenness. The first two types, which were preferred by the philosophical tradition, represent the types of phenomena which are in principle encompassible by subject, i.e. that are subsumable under subject’s conceptual expectations and constitutive activity. The subjective expectations at play here either encompass intuitions absolutely (one example of such a poor phenomenon would be givenness of a mathematical object)

²³ *Ibid.*, 261.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 260.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 261.

²⁶ Marion, *In excess*, 30.

²⁷ Marion, *Being Given*, 159.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 213.

or manage to keep intuition within the relevant constraints (an example here would be the physical laws which abstract non-relevant features and confirm the validity of the employed concepts). Those phenomena do not demonstrate the phenomenal autonomy that Marion is looking for; phenomenality here becomes measurable by the subject meaning that no differentiation between phenomenon's self and subject's constitutive self can be drawn. Saturated phenomena, on the other hand, reveal themselves contrary to any possible expectation and constitutive activity: according to their definition, saturated phenomena are *excessive* with regard to the subject's intentions; they are phenomena "in which intuition always submerges the expectation of the intention, in which givenness not only entirely invests manifestation but, surpassing it, modifies its common characteristic."²⁹ Saturated phenomena, in other words, give more than they were asked to; as a result, the subject's expectations are faced with an *abundance* of intuition that supersedes his constitutive capacity. This abundance of intuition submerges the expectation not because such an expectation is somehow flawed and imperfect; rather saturated phenomena give us an abundance of intuition going beyond what is expectable as such. Going beyond what is expectable, such abundance forces the subject to submit his constituting status and to follow the givenness of the phenomenon that he is incapable of reconstructing. This means that the givenness of phenomena here is no longer measured by determinable objects and subject's constitutive activity but surpasses them itself, becoming a measure of phenomenality: a saturated phenomenon gives more than objects, more than any expectation; it "shows itself only inasmuch as it gives itself."³⁰ In such a way we reveal the sought-after autonomous *self* of the phenomenon by reversing the traditional constitutive role of the intentionality into a constituted one, a move Marion describes using the term "counter-experience."

Marion uses music (in particular, the opening of Mozart's *Jupiter*) to give us an example of such a self-giving character of saturated phenomena. The powerful and rapid nature of *Jupiter's* introductory passages cannot be explained in terms of the givenness of a particular object (a particular sound), which is subsumable under a corresponding concept; it follows instead from being balanced out by the much softer entrance of the violin. The opening carries with itself a certain movement towards the next passages, which counterbalances the initial sound, conveying to it intensity and sharpness; what I receive, says Marion, is "the movement of the sonorous mass" where the sound drives forward, *resisting* the subject's tendency to treat it as an object. If it were given as an object, it would lose completely all its intensity and power, being transformed into an insipid "in itself" of a sound. The opening, in such a way, is given exactly as an opening because it is overwhelmed by the abundance of intuition: it gives much more than a single demonstratable object and much more than is in principle showable and objectifiable, creating this combination of tension and elegance so typical of Mozart. The softness and rapidness of *Jupiter's* opening becomes a playful manifestation of its excessive power, which overwhelms and astounds us. The opening lures our attention beyond any possible expectation that the attention might have been hoping to lure *for*: "[t]he coming forward exceeds what comes forward" being unexplainable in terms of the constitution as given "before any attempt at constituting it."³¹ The opening, in this

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 225.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 159.

sense, “presses urgently on the gaze more than the gaze presses toward it.” the intention of my gaze finds itself surpassed and, thus, *drawn* into the movement of the phenomenon.

It might be argued, however, that this abundance of intuition is nonetheless reconstructable in terms of constellations of objects and concepts (or T-sentences, if you wish) constituted by a subject; in this case the orchestral fabric and melodic line would “constitute two objects from two givens.”³² A sequence of constitutive acts helps us to encompass and conceptualize the abundance of intuition and match it one-to-one with corresponding objects. But such conceptualizations (including the one I have proposed above) would barely touch the surface of the saturated phenomenon. A technical, conceptual interpretation of *Jupiter* can only function as a guide to its intense givenness, but never as an adequate representation. Taken in itself, such an interpretation is nothing but a radically impoverished mould that cannot compete in intuitive givenness with the original. This is exactly because what *Jupiter* gives is an abundance of intuition, an ideal, “super-charged” pole where the concepts of power, rapidness and elegance become saturated, “electrified”, being constantly enriched by manifold intuitions creating this inexhaustible source of inspiration that results in establishing a tradition or what Marion calls “endless hermeneutics.” There can be an overwhelming number of interpretations of *Jupiter* precisely because it gives an overwhelming amount of intuition; as a result, the tradition of interpretation will hardly ever be finished. The timeless, lasting influence of Mozart does not consist in such a way of some sort of Platonic eternity, but follows from the abundance of intuition that overwhelms every receiver and ensures that every conceptualization falls short of the concepts transforming interpretation into an endless work. The movement of saturation consists of such *refracting* objects, which get drawn into the orbit of the givenness of the saturated phenomenon; objects make sense here only being part of what is not objectifiable.

Saturation, in such a way, defies conditioning by the subject because the abundance of intuition, so to say, pours over this conditioning. This pouring over undercuts the subject’s claim to the authorship of the logic of givenness along with any attempt to place it within the field of subjective expectations. “Guarding” of the phenomenon in a sense of fixing its determinate conditions is substituted by following the logic of its givenness. The sequence of intuitions introduces me to this phenomenal excess where each intuition promises more than itself: each particular intuition is given as short of givenness. Saturation escapes from objectivation precisely because it conveys such “shortness” to every objectivity making us jump from intuition to intuition in order to keep up with the givenness of the phenomenon. Every particular intuition is caught at this movement of transcendence, necessarily implying more intuition instead of being a complete expression itself. The phenomenon of *Jupiter*, in this sense, “passes beyond” every particular intuition that expresses it but also renders each of them intelligible. This means that the only way of following a saturated phenomenon consists of gathering together the intuitions that the phenomenon bestows upon me: I can follow what gives itself in the way it gives itself but I can never metabolize and subsume it under an expectable logic.³³

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 215.

³³ Ibid., 230.

Instead of being constituted by an I, saturated phenomena must be “suffered passively.”³⁴ “The activity” here “falls to phenomenon:”³⁵ phenomena show themselves even though I cannot cope with them or reconstruct the power of their phenomenality; I am not capable of constituting this givenness, yet there is no way of denying that it has been conveyed upon me. Self-showing of phenomena are no longer paralleled by the subject; they demonstrate that their initiative is irreducible to that of the subject’s. The phenomena are no longer “alienated in an external instance – that of the I – in order that it might perform its own appearing”³⁶

The most immediate consequence of such an account is that a subject that has abandoned the claim to being a producer of phenomena³⁷ is now transformed into what Marion calls a “receiver” or “gifted.” The receiver, says Marion, is a “prism” that “brings about that the first visibility arises;”³⁸ it does not produce this visibility but discloses it, lets it speak by itself and by doing so become itself. As such a prism, the receiver is nothing but a locus of revelation, which has no inner content and which is ultimately unconceivable without regard to what it reveals. It is this prismatic character that becomes obvious in cases of saturation: saturation shows us how givenness stops being measured by the subject and his expectations and becomes instead a measure of subjectivity. The investigation of the “self” of the phenomenon and the need to interpret ego based on such self-showing brings us to the conclusion that a subject which has lost its constitutive role *must itself be seen as something constituted*. What was seen as a condition by transcendental philosophy turns out to be a conditioned element instead. The subject becomes itself through submerging to the absolute initiative of the phenomena; he “receives himself from what he thinks neither clearly nor distinctly; he is, despite the failure in him of the ‘I think (myself).’” It is this “failure” that confirms that the autonomy advocated by Heidegger is unachievable. The subject’s existence remains dependent upon something that surpasses it; subject does not and cannot “take over” everything in his existence, and saturated phenomena demonstrate this simple fact with their overwhelming clarity. In such a way Marion substitutes Heidegger’s fundamental ontology with an ontology of a receiver: Dasein as a condition of possibility gives way for the gifted that receives his self from the saturated phenomena.

3. Transcendental Dilemma and Existential Phenomenology

The originality of Marion’s project, however, shouldn’t divert our attention from its limitations. Let us first recall a point frequently made against Marion: authors such as Kearney,³⁹ Mackinlay,⁴⁰ and Jones⁴¹ have argued that Marion’s ontology of a receiver renders the subject excessively passive. To give but one example, Mackinlay writes “there is no sense of activity in the reception, not even of ‘mediation’—the adonné seems to be simply passive;”⁴² similarly Joeri Schrijvers claims that

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 212.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 264.

³⁹ Kearney, *Debates in Continental Philosophy*, 15–32.

⁴⁰ Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess*.

⁴¹ Jones, *A Genealogy of Marion’s Philosophy of Religion*.

Marion's givenness requires a powerless subject, at least a subject that does not distort with its own intentions the gift of phenomena. ... the subject is stripped of its subjectivity, i.e. it is reduced to a mere receptiveness and passivity towards givenness.⁴³

The objection is, of course, questionable. It has been disputed by Gschwandtner,⁴⁴ Morrow,⁴⁵ Lewis⁴⁶ and others, who argued that the notion of response involves activity since it presupposes the possibility to neglect the gift; furthermore, the aforementioned authors have argued that Marion's account also stresses the role of capacities in accepting the gift. At first sight, the latter group of authors seems to have a more solid textual foundation. After all, Marion does talk about the hermeneutic dimension, i.e. a dimension that presupposes the activity of interpretation from the receiver, frequently enough; he discusses capacities and stresses the possibility of neglecting saturated phenomena. He also systematically claims that response to the saturated phenomena is placed beyond the distinction between activity and passivity.⁴⁷ But such a reply would hardly satisfy the critics. Yes, Marion gives us some reply, but it can hardly outweigh the suspicion that Marion's system simply does not leave *much* space for subject's activity. *De facto*, Marion spends most of his time talking about receptive, passive witness; he frequently uproots the positive role of activity where possible (as an example, we can recall how Marion downplays the role of interpretation of a musical piece: "a memory of previous performances no doubt allows me to identify the melody more quickly and to access the orchestral ensemble, but it does not allow me to abolish the arising, therefore, the event"⁴⁸) So, it remains a matter of a debate whether Marion is actually *entitled* to the assertion that subject has an active role to play when it comes to saturated phenomena.

I am convinced that he doesn't. Even though Marion has never stressed the priority of passivity over activity and even tried to refute it, such a priority follows from the simple conceptual opposition that Marion is trapped in. This can be perfectly demonstrated in Marion's critique of Heidegger. As we recall, Marion argues that Dasein retains the tacit control over phenomena as a condition of their possibility, which undermines both the self-showing nature of phenomena and the very heterogeneity of Dasein's being. But the only alternative that Marion seems to be offering us is to *overturn* this situation: instead of the subject that conditions phenomena, we should start with a subject that is conditioned by them. Marion departs from Heidegger's transcendentalism that "alienates" phenomena by turning it upside down: he treats Dasein as something conditioned, whereas the condition is relocated to a different place; the only way of showing that phenomena are irreducible to their condition is to show how phenomena "contradict"⁴⁹ such a condition and condition it instead. This conceptual opposition can be described as a *transcendental dilemma*: the price of an explanation that presupposes a strict division between *explanans* and *explanandum* is that *explanandum* is left deprived of any explanatory function and rendered inert and passive. Marion faces what he thinks of as an either-or situation: either we start with a constituting subject or with a constituted

⁴² Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess*, 33.

⁴³ Schrijvers, "Ontotheological Turnings?".

⁴⁴ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*.

⁴⁵ Morrow, "The Cartesian Metaphorization of Capax/Capacitas," 72–98.

⁴⁶ Lewis, "The Lover's Capacity," 226–44.

⁴⁷ Marion, *Being Given*, 264.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁴⁹ Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 136.

one. All his attempts to give subject the semblance of activity are componentized beforehand by this starting conceptual opposition and doomed to ambiguity: how can we expect any active role from something that has been placed into a subordinate position from the very beginning? Marion's attempt to specify the explanatory function of what is explained remains ambivalent and obscure (which is a point that is accepted even by those authors who normally defend Marion from criticisms, for example A. Steinbock⁵⁰): how *exactly* can we neglect the gift? What is the *exact* role of capacities? If the receiver is placed beyond activity and passivity, what *exactly* is reserved for subject's activity (other than the presumed and obscure capacity of neglecting the phenomenon)? That Marion didn't give us any clear account of subject's active role is not an oversight; it follows from the fact that any actual space reserved for activity would undermine his starting point, forcing him either to lean toward Heidegger or re-elaborate his very conceptual system.

Marion deploys these conceptual tools having particular (ultimately theological) goals in mind, goals that go far beyond the present paper. What I want to argue, however, is that if those goals are not binding for us, then we would realize that Marion's inability to deploy both the active and passive sides of saturation stems entirely from a conceptual opposition that we don't have to accept. Instead of taking sides (where either subject or saturated phenomena would be taken as explanatory prior), we could neglect the very transcendental dilemma according to which one element of the relation between the world and the subject must be taken as *explanandum* and the other as *explanans*. While accepting Marion's criticism of Heidegger and preserving the surpassing status of saturated phenomena as something that forms and shapes us without the possibility of exerting any kind of second-order, reflexive control over them, we don't have to convey to them constitutive power over us: to do so means merely to transpose the traditional transcendental problems to a new domain. Instead of arguing for a one-sided, unilateral explanation, we could try to establish a mutual relation where both sides of the relation presuppose each other. In Merleau-Ponty's words, we should try to demonstrate that saturation is *both* centrifugal (surpassing subject's ability to predict or control it) and centripetal (following from subject's being).⁵¹ The task, which in many ways was integral to first-generation existential phenomenologists such as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Todes and Patočka (if not to Heidegger himself in the early days), basically amounts to reconsideration of the active/passive distinction in a different, more pronounced way than we have seen in Marion.

Marion dismisses existential ontology too quickly, because he identified it with Division II of *Being and Time*, whereas from the point of view of the project of existential phenomenology, the most important programmatic claims of *Being and Time* are contained not in Division II and not even in Division I, but in the introduction, where Heidegger first famously argues that Dasein's essence follows from its existence. In the account promoted by the existential phenomenology building upon this introduction and the overall project of fundamental ontology, subject is nothing but ecstatic movement, an attempt to root oneself in the world. As we have seen from the projects proposed by Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Todes and others, subject/consciousness/embodied

⁵⁰ Steinbock, "Poor Phenomenon," 124.

⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 510.

existence can be held as explanatory potent without “alienating” phenomena by some external constitutive power. This is because, on the one hand, we have to accept that subject is “a project of the world:”⁵² it exists by disclosing a phenomenal field as relevant for itself, i.e. as something liveable and contributable to subject’s being-in-the-world. Disclosure, in this sense, is a creative achievement that depends upon (is conditioned by) the subject and his particular background. “The world,” says Todes “does not compel us” to disclose the phenomenal field; it is our own “need.”⁵³ On the other hand, such an achievement does not amount to any alienation of phenomena because the subject has nothing to impose; subjectivity itself is entirely empty of any content.⁵⁴ The ecstatic being of subjectivity discloses itself *as it is* by disclosing things *as they are*; subject’s own initiative consists of searching for an initiative that is not that of his own. In other words, the subject *searches to be determined* by the world exactly because the subject himself lacks any inner determination. The very meaning of subjective activity consists of a search for passivity; *subject is active in his passivity and passive in his activity*. Being essentially proactive, the movement of disclosure does not define in advance or set any control over what is disclosed; on the contrary, it opens towards the heterogeneous, unpredictable and bedazzling.⁵⁵ Ecstatic being does not make sense without phenomena *as they are*; phenomena as they are do not make sense without the subject that would disclose them as they are. This was essentially Merleau-Ponty’s point when he said that “the true meaning of intentionality ... is that it related to pre-constituted unity of the world:”⁵⁶ subjectivity as “the act of bringing truth into being” does not make sense without the “truth” and *vice versa*. The conditioning element here is itself conditioned by what it conditions, a sophisticated move that substitutes the unequal relation between *explanandum* and *explanans* with a mutual one. Subject and the world are working in tandem.

The approach that builds on the ecstatic nature of subject’s being and claims that his activity amounts to a striving for passivity *and* that this striving for passivity is a form of activity offers us an escape from the transcendental dilemma that Marion is stuck with. Instead of defining saturation as this one-sided constituting power, we should try to ground the seemingly passive state of bedazzlement in subject’s ecstatic search for determination; we need to recognize the simple fact that saturated phenomena can structure and form subject only because subject from the very beginning is defined as the ability-to-be-structured. Something can be unpredictable, bedazzling and can attain a decisive authority over us – but only because of our ecstatic being-in-the-world that searches for saturation in the first place; an abundance of intuition also means an abundance of subject’s own being. Conceived this way, we could at the same time preserve the possibility of saturation, of losing control over phenomenal life and retain a genuine sense of proactivity, an understanding of the fact that a particular factual individual is responsible

⁵² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, preface xix.

⁵³ Todes, *Body and the World*, 176.

⁵⁴ E.g. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 34 or 78; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 284, Todes, *Body and the World*, 176.

⁵⁵ See, for example Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 423 “Whether we are concerned with my body, the natural world, the past, birth or death, the question is always how I can be open to phenomena which transcend me, and which nevertheless exist only to the extent that I take them up and live them; *how the presence to myself (Urpräsenz) which establishes my own limits and conditions every alien presence is at the same time derepresentation (Entgegenwärtigung) and throws me outside myself.*”

⁵⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, preface xix.

for a particular saturation. So, not only can Marion's emphasis upon the abundance and unpredictable nature of phenomenality be deployed within this existential frame; it could be seen as its organic development. But of course, this approximation between Marion's phenomenology of givenness and existential phenomenology would also require a number of corrections introduced into Marion's account that would re-introduce subject's activity.

First of all, we should ask Marion why he chooses *Jupiter* and Christianity as examples of saturation and not *The Wall* and Buddhism? Why Austerlitz and not Stalingrad? Why Picasso and Cubism instead of Ngaro and their cave paintings? There does seem to be an awful lot of saturated phenomena, and only some of them have a hold over us. It seems quite indisputable that one phenomenon can be saturated for one person and not saturated for somebody else (or at least saturated to a different extent). For a Buddhist the revelation of Christ would hardly be a saturated phenomenon, whereas, for a devoted Christian, Buddhism can very well be a respectable teaching, agreeable in many ways, but not saturated (at least not in the sense that Christianity is). It seems absurd to require a Buddhist to open up to the revelation of Christ or for a Christian to open up to the Buddha. In the same way, asks Harding, why should we take Napoleon over Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana?⁵⁷ Do we then adopt the naïve Eurocentric (or even Franco-centric) position asserting that it is Marion's saturation that really counts as saturation, *or* could we assert that particular saturations can be at least in part exclusive, i.e. that saturated phenomena *can be* saturated only with regard to a particular position in the world? If we go with a more obvious option, we would have to admit that this position, i.e. particular background consisting of skills, norms, beliefs, habits etc. (i.e. everything that falls under the scope of commons and poor phenomena), stops being an auxiliary guide and becomes *a positive condition that makes saturation possible*. The figure of Napoleon, for example, can appear as saturated only because it appears right at the centre of entanglement among a certain heroic interpretation of war, phenomenal complexes pertaining to citizenship, culture, responsibility and self-identity. For someone who is not French, who is pacifistic or cosmopolitan, the significant part of this saturation would remain inaccessible and Napoleon would be transformed into a common-law phenomenon (a famous military man), if not a poor one (somebody from history). This concession implies two crucial consequences.

First, it opens up some factual space for subject's activity, which stops being an empty promise and obtains some factual space for itself because saturation obtains the status of a *creative achievement* of a subject. If we accept the simple fact that phenomena wouldn't be saturated unless they are connected to the broad scope of other phenomena through interpretation, we would also have to accept that an individual is faced with the hermeneutic task of paving the way for saturated phenomena starting from his own position, from what is familiar and intelligible for him. Every understanding has this unique trajectory, and every individual must *work his way* into the richness and depth of saturation. Saturated phenomena presuppose this "creative effort" of self-revelation that roots human reality in the world.⁵⁸ Because saturation depends on such creative opening up of the resonance between among different phenomena, neither is there a guarantee

⁵⁷ Harding, "Saturating the phenomenon: Marion and Buber," 297.

⁵⁸ Todes, *Body and the World*, 221.

that such saturation will be achieved nor that there is any pre-defined way of doing so. There is no ready-made answer on how to make Gandhi a saturated phenomenon for a convinced militarist or how the heroic interpretation of war can resonate with a pacifistic standpoint. Of course, the extent of this achievement can vary significantly. For a sixteenth century aristocrat, it wouldn't be much of a task to understand the saturation of war, for example. His background and self-identity would probably be tied so closely around practices that surround war (such as honour, glory, richness, political leadership) that there wouldn't be much ground that understanding needs to cover. At the same time, it would be a tremendous, probably impossible, achievement for him to understand the saturation of Gandhi's teaching; in this case, it would require a serious re-interpretation of most areas of his life. In both cases, however, saturation that establishes relation among phenomena is *unnecessitated* and retains at least an implicit sense of achievement.

Marion is unable to acknowledge this conditioned nature of saturated phenomena because, as we have seen, this would mean abandoning the most important insights that he relies on. He remains bound to the need to demonstrate that saturation "contradicts" its own condition being irreducible to the I. But this can only mean that all Marion's attempts to reintroduce hermeneutic dimension along with any kind of activity of the subject are doomed to ambiguity. Certain passages of *Being Given* seem to explicitly neglect the possibility of hermeneutics rendering the subject absolutely passive (for example, when he says that "In space, the saturated phenomenon ... precedes [witness] with an interpretation always already there"⁵⁹). In different places, however, Marion has tried to soften this assertion saying, for example, that the subject is "charged with its reconstitution and its hermeneutic"⁶⁰; in "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics" he argued that hermeneutics should be seen as a preparatory step for the givenness of saturated phenomena. Finally, *In Excess* infinite work on hermeneutic interpretation comes short of explanation being placed "after the fact" of the givenness of a saturated phenomenon. Marion's attempts, however, are quite abrupt; they suffer from ambiguity and lack of clarity, and it is hard to find any actual content in his appeal to hermeneutics (which, again, is a point widely discussed in secondary literature).⁶¹ Such ambiguity is not coincidental: an attempt to demonstrate subject's activity would run up against Marion's own assumption that saturated phenomena contradict their condition. Either they are dependent on the background or they are not; if they are, then they are not saturated and if they are not, then it simply becomes unclear how any kind of hermeneutic work is supposed to help us to access something that denies this hermeneutic dependence from the very beginning. Marion's description of "active response" towards God's gift suffers from the same ambiguity. What are the parameters of the response, asks Gschwandtner?⁶² The response remains just as non-individual and abstract as saturated phenomena themselves; the witness's responsibility remains empty of any actual content.

The second implication is even more significant. Having recognized the active role of the subject and his background, we would no longer be capable of starting with saturated phenomena while treating common-law and poor phenomena as derivative and

⁵⁹ Marion, *Being Given*, 217.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁶¹ See for example the already mentioned Kearney, *Debates in Continental Philosophy or Mackinlay Interpreting Excess*.

⁶² Gschwandtner, *Degrees of saturation*, 49.

inessential for the explanation.⁶³ Instead, we would have to accept that saturation is not a (super)-characteristic of a particular phenomenon; it is not explainable in terms of one part of the phenomenal spectrum, but has something to do with the whole spectrum as such. Saturation cannot happen in isolation from the background and the phenomenal array of everyday life but requires them as a positive condition. In this sense, we should rather assert that saturation concerns integration of phenomenality, or what might be called *phenomenal intertwining* that opens up a resonance among manifold phenomena, a resonance so rich and polyphonic that it stops being explicable or predictable.⁶⁴ One phenomenon in itself cannot explain saturation no matter how *nominally* influential it is: its saturation is measured by its impact upon other phenomena and by its ability to organize and integrate them, a capacity that places the saturated phenomenon right at the heart of phenomenal life. In other words, there is an essential unity of the phenomenal spectrum, and excess of intuition is nothing but one extreme of such a spectrum, whereas poorness of intuition is the opposite one. Following Merleau-Ponty, we could assert that this spectrum itself is nothing but “search for sense,” this ecstatic self-realization in the world for which human beings are “condemned;” saturation, in this sense, would appear as a culminant point *of* such a search.

This unity of the phenomenal spectrum will help us to make better sense not only of saturated phenomena but also of common-law and poor phenomena. The very meaning of common-law and poor phenomena (and the reason why poor phenomena are intentionally impoverished), the reason why those objects are learned, transmitted and taught at schools, is that they ultimately help us to find meaning and reach saturation: our active mastery of common-law and poor phenomena is from the very beginning codified for the search for passivity, i.e. for the possibility of being determined by the world. In other words, the very meaning of control over phenomena is to let them lead us into an abundance of intuition that would no longer be controllable. The value of this revision is best illustrated using Marion’s own assertion according to which music is the privileged example of saturation since “it shows itself out of itself.” This cannot be right: if music as such would imply saturation, then no theory of music, no solfeggio would be possible. Simple melodies, chords and harmonies are very well encompassible by a constituting subject, a domain that was well-mastered by Husserl and his “flat phenomena.” Although given as perfectly encompassible, the basic “musical objects” are, in fact, *building blocks* for far more complex givenness, a phenomenal intertwining of phenomena that would no longer be placeable under subject’s constitutive activity. The genius of Mozart does not consist of a god-like inspiration resulting in *Jupiter*, but of his ability to search for this resonance, to spot and establish it. Mozart managed to formulate a phenomenal echo among different musical objects, thus, creating a coherent piece of art that bedazzles us to this very day. Reaching saturation, once again, remains up to the creative effort of interpretation.

Starting with a unity of the phenomenal spectrum, we could also make far better sense of the plurality of saturated phenomena. So far, we have talked about saturated phenomena which are clearly culture specific: it is easy to imagine that some particular musical

⁶³ See, for example, Marion, *Being Given*, 197.

⁶⁴ In a recent article I have described this intertwining with a term “disclosing potential”, see, Koloskov “The Primacy of Practice and Phenomenological Method”.

piece, ethical teaching or historical event wouldn't be saturated at all for someone who lacks the appropriate (musical or cultural) background. It could be argued, however, that some saturated phenomena such as Other or death are more cross-cultural and, thus, are less (or not at all) dependent upon (contradictory to) any particular background. On closer examination, we would realize that we shouldn't talk about background-transcending givenness since the exact nature (and the extent) of the saturation might differ so drastically that any kind of talk of the same saturated phenomenon should be abandoned. A traditional archaic culture, for example, would probably locate the resonance of the other within such domains as haunting, responsibility, masculinity, piousness etc. Others that are not linked to the relevant phenomenal complexes lose part of their saturation; the agency of women, children or slaves is likely to be either limited or even denied, while their own status can be often reduced to the status of an object or commodity (remember, for example, how smoothly "all men are created equal" combined with slavery). Analogously, death might be a saturated phenomenon for every culture, but the nature of saturation would be very different for the ancient Greek, Christian and atheist, as they would probably have different correlates (for example, immortality in the eyes of fellow citizens, afterlife, nothingness) and resonate with a different constellation of phenomena. So, even though some saturated phenomena do occur across diverse cultural backgrounds, there is nothing counterfactual about this fact, i.e. there is nothing that would *per se contradict* each background. Those phenomena become saturated because they prove themselves to be efficient organizational topics for the factual backgrounds; what saturated phenomena have in common is not some particular content but their power to introduce us right into the density of a given culture and its phenomenal life.

Another crucial point is that Marion's hugely promising project of establishing the difference in degree among saturated, common-law and poor phenomena has been left mostly unfulfilled, as C. Gschwandtner has emphasized. Since Marion has excluded any substantial role of the subject, there is not much space left for the genesis of saturation, for border-line cases or any dynamics among different categories of phenomena. Being independent of subject's activity, saturated phenomena are not prepared to sacrifice even the slightest part of their saturation. Recognition of subject's active role in saturation makes it possible to make sense of saturation as *gradual* enrichment or a movement, not a particular phenomenon or a particular (super)-quality which would help us to establish the promised difference in degree among phenomena. The very idea of such a difference makes sense only in a context where saturation is partly explained by the activity of a subject, where a free and smooth transition among saturated and non-saturated degrees of phenomenality is possible. If we accept the active role of the subject, we would be able to describe how the phenomenal intertwining takes place, how it occurs, gradually accumulates the degree of its intuitive richness and then finally culminates in saturation (we could follow, for example, how one additional tone, one chord or maybe even a slight change in tempo and accentuation suddenly re-structures the melody, endowing a sudden consonance and acoustic depth to something that had been encompassible and insipid just a moment ago). We would be able to demonstrate that the saturation of phenomena, their slipping away from subject's control, rests on a massive preparatory work, on combining and intertwining among phenomena with the subject *building upon* phenomena and reaching saturation.

Conclusion

The project of fundamental ontology as it was realized by Heidegger in the early days might not be acceptable, but it contains a number of conceptual tools and methodological decisions that promise us a much more thorough and solid foundation to overcome the limitations of the tradition. As I have attempted to demonstrate, reversing Heidegger's order of explanation would only resolve one set of problems at the expense of launching another: an excessive activity of the constituting subject would be replaced by the excessive passivity of the constituted subject. I believe that a way out of this lies in the fact that we should reject the very idea of a strict separation between enabling and enabled and start instead with being-in-the-world as seeking to be structured. This move not only resolves certain logical problems that Marion's conception faces; it also helps us to make full use of its originality. Being transplanted into new conceptual soil, the notion of saturated phenomena might be rendered much more flexible, which would make for much richer, finer phenomenological work.

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