

THE OTHER, OR HOW TO DISPOSE OF IT. A PROLEGOMENA TO ALL FUTURE ALTEROLOGY THAT WOULD LIKE TO PRESENT ITSELF AS PHENOMENOLOGY

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Phenomenology was first an egology (Husserl), then an ontology (Heidegger). Today, it takes more and more the form of what we may call an "alterology," that is, an attempt to think the constitutive phenomenon of a radical alterity. This paper aims to put the resources of "alterology" to the test by way of a descriptive analysis of the alterity of other individuals. It first examines the texts of Levinas, stressing his (voluntary) conflation of the other person and absolute alterity. It then presents the thought of J.-L. Marion as an attempt to overcome some problems in Levinas' thesis concerning the relation to individuals. Yet in both cases, and in spite of their differences, once we gain access to the phenomenon of the alterity of the Other, we thus lose the sense of an other as an individual. An interest in alterity is therefore motivated by the aim of systematically providing a device with which one is able to diminish the constitutive power of subjectivity, as opposed to a phenomenological account of the way in which the other shows herself as something emphatically singular – i.e. her "style of appearing".

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To Giovanna and Nisrine

Phenomenology was first an egology (Husserl), then an ontology (Heidegger). Today, it takes the form of an "alterology," that is, an attempt to think alterity *as such*. The adjective (other) becomes a substantive (the Other). Or better –or worse–, one moves from a relative alterity (other than) to the Other *tout court* (the absolutely other). This is a strange movement since, even if Plato could take it for granted to just speak about the Same and the Other, we by contrast normally only use the concepts of identity and difference in relation to a concept. For example, we do not simply say that Peter is the Other, but

that he is an alter ego, another human being, *etc.* Conscious of the paradox that arises when one makes an adjective into a noun, when one makes a phenomenon *sui generis* out of a determination, the alterologists conclude that the thought of alterity obliges us to overthrow our habitual conceptual framework; they conclude that the Other introduces a disorganization into our categories that must be more fundamental than their organization. The thought of alterity would thus force phenomenology to open itself to a beyond or to a before intentionality, being and language.

But is this “alterological turn” of phenomenology really fruitful? Taken on its own, alterity is indeterminate. Of course, the other is always not-me, but this can also be said of a thing, a work of art, and even of my own death or God. But what happens when the Other is, strictly speaking, *another person*? Back to the adjective, back to the relative alterity: what happens when alterology claims to provide a phenomenological elucidation of our relation to others? Is alterology more able to describe what Sartre called “our concrete relations with others” than the intentional analysis or the existential analytic that it claims to surpass? One could doubt that this is the case.

1. The phenomenology of alterity begins by criticizing Husserl, who supposedly missed the Other as such. The transcendental attitude and especially intentionality supposedly blocked his access to it from the beginning.

Levinas is generally credited as being the inventor of the thinking of the Other as Other, and with approaching the relation of me to others in a new way. First, he managed to assign to the face-to-face with the other a relation that is irreducible to the givenness of sense by intentional consciousness as well as to understanding as a way of being of Dasein. He approaches the question of the other as early as *Time and the Other*¹, which can be summarized as follows: Levinas starts from the self enclosed in its identity, and exposes it to the Other in order to disrupt its solitude, which amounts to liberating it from the dominance of intentionality. On the one hand, it is necessary to find a figure of alterity or transcendence that allows the subject to depart from itself without enabling it to return to itself. On the other hand, it is necessary that this transcendence still allows for a subject that can receive it and that the end point of the activity of this subject is neither that of its receptivity

or passivity. Against atheism, it is necessary to be open to Mystery; but against mysticism, it is also necessary to avoid an ecstasy in which the self would be completely absorbed in the Transcendent. The end of the text focuses on instantiating this formal structure.

The alterity of the thing in the sense of Husserlian intentionality is not suitable for Levinas's purposes because of the demand of transcendence. As soon as the thing becomes an object for the subject, its initial strangeness disappears and Narcissus can mirror himself in it without fear. Death, on the other hand, is not an object; it is an event that marks the limit of the power of the existing. Death is “the impossibility of having a project. This approach of death indicates that we are in relation with something that is absolutely other, something bearing alterity not as a provisional determination we can assimilate through enjoyment, but as something whose very existence is made of alterity” (TA, 63/74). In this case, however, the demand of the preservation of the self is not satisfied: when death occurs, the self disappears. There is no one left to be initiated to the Mystery.

Thus, is there an alterity that is capable of altering the self without annihilating it? Is there an alterity that is capable of establishing a relation with the self while remaining other? Levinas answers: “The relationship with the Other, the face-to-face with the Other, the encounter with a face that at once gives and conceals the Other, is the situation in which an event happens to a subject who does not assume it, who is utterly unable in its regard, but where nonetheless in a certain way it is in front of the subject. The other “assumed” is the Other” (TA, 67/78).

The Levinasian approach does not lead from solitude to other people, but rather from solitude to alterity, and *then* from the Other to others. Since the structure of solitude is given as the original structure of the self, it is not as much a matter of describing the phenomenon of others as it is a matter of giving its transcendental deduction in some way. Between the noema and death, the Other comes to serve as

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Le Temps et l'Autre* (Paris: PUF, 1948); translated by Richard Cohen as *Time and the Other* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987). Henceforth, TA followed by the French then the English pagination.

the good form of alterity. *Time and the Other* is ultimately not at all devoted to others, but to different forms of alterity. What do death, the future, and the feminine – all of which Levinas discusses in his early work – have in common? They are *absolutely* other. The same goes for the other person, who only interests us because she is the Other.

2. *Totality and Infinity* essentially follows the same path from the self to others², that is, this time, from the Same to the Other. It does so with the same double requirement of thinking an alterity that grants the self the possibility of receiving it. The novelty of this work consists in presenting this formal structure by means of Descartes's Third Meditation in which the subject discovers the idea of the infinite in itself. On the one hand, "The idea of infinity is exceptional in that its *ideatum* surpasses its idea" (TI, 40/49). On the other hand, the infinite (only) presents itself as idea and therefore (only) reveals itself to a subject. "The idea of infinity is a mode of being, the *infinition*, of infinity" (TI, 12/26).

The infinite is a new form of alterity that was absent in *Time and the Other*. Like death, the future, or the feminine "The infinite is the absolutely other" (TI, 41/49). What is its relation to the good form of alterity – the Other? Like the Other, the infinite is situated *formaliter* between the noema and death. However, since the Cartesian term for the infinite is not the Other, but God, why not let God play the role of the good form of alterity? What is the relation between God and the Other? This question allows us to introduce the theme of deformalization, which, according to Levinas, is of capital importance. In line with this demand of concretization, the relation with the infinite has to play out within the relation between me and the Other. The relation with the infinite

is *formal*, while the relation with the Other is *concrete*. God himself cannot be the good form of alterity because he lacks concreteness – the Other is a concrete infinite.

In order to arrive at the concrete relation between the self and Alterity, that is between me and the Other, it is necessary to start from the self understood as ipseity, which reduces everything that is other to the same. The analysis no longer takes its point of departure from the notion of solitude, but from the notion of *separation*. "In separation – which is produced in the psychism of enjoyment, in egoism, in happiness, where the I identifies itself – the I is ignorant of the Other (TI, 57/62). The self ignores the infinite that enshrouds the Other, not because the self has never yet been in contact with another, but because it treats the other person as a means rather than as an end in itself.

In order to break with the Self, the absolutely other is required (thank God, I'm not alone!). The Other is "other with an alterity constitutive of the very content of the other" (TI, 28/39). Even if we had everything that qualifies us in common, the Other would remain the Stranger, the absolutely different. "Transcendence [...] is only possible because the Other [...] is the Other, because it is the one with whom I have, initially, nothing in common, because it is an abstraction"³. The concrete relation to others is, thus, just an abstract relation to alterity. Strangely enough, everything that relates to the concreteness of others is omitted in the effort to concretize the formal!

In conversation, the Other always surpasses the theme, since in dialogue the speaker can always come back to what she has said and to what her interlocutor has already understood. Therefore, "The way in which the Other presents itself, exceeding *the idea of the Other in me*, we here name face" (TI, 43/50, translation

² Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et Infini* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1971); translated by Alphonso Lingis as *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969). Henceforth, TI followed by the French then English pagination.

³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Liberté et commandement* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1994), 109, translation ours.

modified). It is exactly this surpassing of the theme that Levinas calls the Face – *and not some fragment of the body itself*. If this is the case, even “what is ‘contrary’ to the face” can make room for the surpassing that is the Face⁴. With this defection of the form that Levinas call the epiphany of the Face, we find again the surpassing of the idea by the *ideatum* that defines the merely formal schema of the idea of the infinite. “The idea of infinity [...] is concretely produced in the form of a relation with the face” (TI, 213/196).

Hence the response to the question of the good form of alterity. Can God play the role of this alterity, which alters the self without annihilating it? No, insofar as God cannot affect the self, because of the mere formal character of his infinity. Yes, if the Other is *like* God, that is, the one that is simultaneously there, rooted in a concrete face-to-face, while nevertheless always beyond that which I can seize of it. “But then the Other, in its signification prior to my initiative resembles God” (TI 326/293, translation modified). Between the noema and death there are of course multiple faces, but this multiplicity is only an accessory considering the sole Alterity that affects me: the one that surpasses each individual face and weighs on the self by revealing to it the inauthenticity of its separation. One cannot be altered by the multiplicity – only an Original Phenomenon can free us from ourselves.

There is only one step from the incomprehensibility of the infinite to the ethical meaning of the Other. The relation with the Other differs from every relation to what is relatively other – for example, the relation to the thing when absorbed in enjoyment or transformed by work – because what is Other escapes my grasp. A new sense of subjectivity arises from this failure of the constituting self: the self that assumes its alteration by the Other gives itself as responsibility, a responsibility that was already

announced by the analysis of conversation: “in discourse I expose myself to the questioning of the Other, and this urgency of the response [...] engenders me for responsibility” (TI, 194/178). The grand genesis of the Other is accomplished in and through the renaissance of a self that is insensible to the multiple, but in the end responsible.

3. Apparently, *Otherwise than Being* marks an important evolution in Levinas’s work⁵. The first model of the relation between the self and others, in which the self is *first* enclosed in its interiority and *only then* opened by the other, is abandoned. Levinas now tries to think subjectivity from the beginning as the Other-in-the-Same. The structure of the constitution is finally reversed: the Other defines itself as the one that cannot be constituted; it is *henceforth* that which constitutes me.

Consequently, there is a change in the angle of approach. It comes down to thinking subjectivity “before” the self spoken of in *Totality and Infinity*. “Before” should not be understood in the temporal sense, because the past is nothing else than a flown present and does not allow us to leave the element of consciousness. One should think a past that has never been present, a pre-original or an-archic past. For there to be question of the Other, it is even not necessary to go through the face-to-face anymore, it suffices to interrogate the Self – the Other can already be found there. “An allegiance of the same to the Other imposes itself before any exhibition of the Other” (AE, 47/25, translation modified).

The self undergoes a correlative reversal. While *Totality and Infinity* leaves us with an I that is assigned its status of being responsible by the Other, *Otherwise than Being* begins by defining the subject as responsibility for others. If the self is defined by its being responsible for

⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre nous* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), 244, translation ours.

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (City: Publisher, 1974); Translated by Alphonso Lingis as *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998). Henceforth, AE followed by the French then English pagination.

the freedom of others, then one has to say that I am by and for the other, that I am the one-for-the-other.

We have arrived at the second repetition of the theme of the ipseity of the subject that first took the form of solitude (where the self is defined by the relation to itself: $A = A$), then the form of separation (where the self is defined in relation to the Other: $A \neq B$), and finally the form of the notion of substitution (where the self is itself the Other: $A = B$). The responsibility for others finally reveals to us the true nature of the human subject.

With this series of thematic turns, one equally changes the means of individuation. In *Totality and Infinity*, “an inner *identification* of a being whose essence is exhausted in identity, an identification of the same” (TI, 334/299). With *Otherwise than Being*, the responsibility for others becomes the principle of individuation. As a result, sameness no longer exhausts the essence of the subject.

Two consequences follow from this: (1) if ipseity is defined by the other, the subject is always declined in the accusative, which is to be thought of as an accusation. (2) Thinking of the subject in terms of the accusation by others means that one thinks the subject as a passivity more passive than receptivity. While *Totality and Infinity* presented “subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality” (TI, 12/27), *Otherwise than Being* discerns in the notion of welcoming a mix of activity and passivity that is incompatible with the radical passivity of genuine subjectivity. If subjectivity is the Other-in-the-Same rather than the Other welcomed by the Same and if this conception affirms itself in the responsibility for the other in which the self does penance for the others, then one has to say that the subject is not a host for the Other, it is a hostage of the Other.

4. Then finally, what is the Other? One notices that from solitude to substitution, from host to hostage, the subject is always mentioned. The discovery of the Other is subordinated to a double requirement. On the one hand, one

has to part with the self. But this departure is motivated by a preliminary belief: the self is not the good subject, like the noema is not the good form of alterity. On the other hand, the Other – the good Other – serves to direct us to the good subject: the hostage. Thus, Levinas has long since answered the question “what makes the subject a subject?” by means of an analysis of this subject’s relation of the face-to-face with the Other, and then by the constitution of the subject by this Other. Whether the subject is constituting or constituted, it is always of the subject that one speaks when one poses the question of the alterity of the Other. From the egoism of solitude to the masochism of the hostage, the other is always there to teach us something about the subject. What do we know of the Other? That it surpasses. In relation to what? In relation to the subject, of course. Can one hope to ever find an answer to the question that any alterology should normally ask itself: what individuates the Other?

Is the impossibility of individuating the Other a failure that is attributable to Levinas alone, or is alterology condemned to find others as the good form of alterity?

5. J.-L. Marion believes that he has surpassed Levinas exactly by posing the question of the individuation of the other. In his article “From the Other to the Individual”⁶, Marion responds to our question concerning what we know of the Other: not very much since the relation that ties it to the subject is an ethical relation. Actually, according to Levinas, Giovanna or Nisrine are just the occasion of the anonymous epiphany of the Other. All individuals present the same Face, the same movement of piercing through the form. The Other is nothing more than “the *persona* of each possible Other” (AI, 299).

The choice of the mask of ethical alterity as the paradigm for the relation with the Other explains the impasse of Levinassian alterology. The

⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, “D’autrui à l’individu,” in *Positivité et Transcendance* (Paris: PUF, 1997). All translations of this text are our own. Henceforth AI.

absence of a relation to alterity, which would allow one to phenomenologically elucidate the epiphany of the Other without depriving it of its concrete face, forms the background of a set of Levinasian theses.

(1) The abstraction from the Other. Who is the Other? Levinas insists that we generally forget the difference between the answers to the question “who?” (who-ness) and the question “what?” (whatness). All too often, the who-ness of the who is not distinguished from the ontological whatness of the what. We insert the other in a context by understanding it in light of the cultural context in which it partakes. But if one really wants to respond to the question “who?,” it is necessary to refrain from placing the other in any system of relations. The singularity of the other can only escape from whatness by making itself unrepresentable. By refusing all attributes and any relation to multiplicity that would obliterate its who-ness, the other is a Face without qualities. It is not by means of any content that the other is other, since the nakedness of the Other is exactly the absence of every qualifying adjective.

(2) Such nakedness is not without relation to the Other’s universality. The object of an ethics is neither this nor that individual in particular, but an individual as such an individual is the bearer of the universal. Like for Kant, where one respects a person because one respects the law of which she gives the example, for Levinas, the responsibility for others is at the same time a responsibility for all others, for the “third party” that looks at me in the eyes of Nisrine – eyes that I cannot see without the epiphany of the Face being absent. The dual relation is just a methodological fiction, because, in reality, there is never a true face-to-face: “The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other – language is justice. It is not that there first would be the face, and then the being it manifests or expresses would concern himself with justice; the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity” (TI, 234/213). The Other is thus nothing else than a new name for an old abstraction: Man.

(3) If the face opens up to humanity, it cannot help but miss out on the individual. When I see Giovanna and I hear the Other that calls to me (in the name of humanity), Giovanna disappears like the Greek actor behind his mask (persona). *D’autrui à l’individu* thus comes down to the following question: how should we approach such an other in its unicity? How should we get rid of the abstract portrait of the Other, as well as of its function as a mask of the universal? Marion answers: only love is capable of doing so.

If the Face does not individualize the Other and if this anonymity is due to its ethical dimension, it is consequently not necessary to renounce a phenomenology of Alterity as such in order to reach the individual; it suffices to go beyond ethics and beyond the Face. Levinas’s impasse is due to the contamination of alterology by morals rather than to the coincidence of the problematic of alterity and the demand of breaking the self. Marion does not refrain from making the critique of the sovereignty of the subject the guiding thread of the phenomenology of the Other. It suffices to engage the subject in a relation to an alterity that is exempt from all humanism, even exempt from the alterity of the other human being, while holding onto the postulate of an originary constitution of the subject by the Other. Marion did not come to abolish, but to accomplish; he came to announce that, after all, Love should come to substitute the Law.

6. Since 1983, Marion has affirmed the necessity of replacing the responsibility for *all* others by the love for a *certain* singularized other. His point of departure is still Husserlian intentionality, which opens us to the phenomena and conceals them in their own dimension by reducing them to the identical pole of a closed subjectivity. To find “the intentionality of love” thus means to put the subject back in its place at the other side of intentionality. Indeed, according to Marion, love is not a lived experience and, correlatively, the object of love is by no means a noema: “If I love *in* myself the other,

it will therefore be necessary that I love *myself* in the other – that I love in the so-called other only the idol of myself⁷. The self of *Time and the Other* resurfaces here.

If one does not get rid of this Narcissus, the intentionality of love will always remain concealed. Following a Heideggerian motif, to break with intentionality means to escape the objectifying gaze on beings. Love requires that the other insofar as it is other is invisible. If it enters into visibility, it transforms itself into the object of a constituting I, since only objects are visible. Marion concedes here to Levinas: intentionality makes me lose the alterity of the other by bringing it into the horizon of objects, by turning the Other into a noema. Marion reasons as follows: in love we are indeed dealing with intentionality. But for love to be, the Other has to remain invisible, or one would fall into the schema of perception. Nevertheless, something has to be seen, without which the relation would not be intentional. This implies that this time the arrow of intentionality goes toward the subject and that the seen implied in the intentional relation is the self that, suddenly, is the one looked at. It is not I who stares at the face of the other; it is the other whose face turns towards me. It is the other that looks at me – in all meanings of the word. Intentionality, movement of the self towards the other, is met with an injunction that comes from the other, even if I experience it in me.

While the Other as Face only opens up the formal universality of the moral law or the abstract generality of humanity, the source of the gaze is always *individual*. In the individuation by responsibility, I substitute myself for all others (and it does not matter which other is substitutable to the persona of the Other). In love, however, it is the insubstitutability of

the other that calls and appeals to my own insubstitutability. What she exposes in *her* gaze, uniquely, enjoins me to answer in person to her summons.

With regard to its intentional structure, love is thus what, in the invisible appeal of a singular gaze, envisages the subject as the one that is looked at. Its meaning is to define the subject with regard to the Other. As to its content, we are dealing with a love that is finally rid of the triviality of desire. The phenomenon of love is finally described by a single concrete instance: charity. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas already designated love as the original form of the relation with the other. This love, even if it was thought of in different terms than fusion and possession, still had the name *Eros*. In *Totality and Infinity*, the ethical has dethroned the erotic, which is stigmatized for its ambiguity. Desire, which respects the exteriority of the loved one but is always out for satisfaction, holds a place between immanence and transcendence. Marion feels compelled to rehabilitate love, without however falling back in eroticism. One can only get to the other in its individuality by a love without sexual desire, the one that the first Christians, in order to distinguish it from *Eros*, called *Agape*.

7. The early theological writings of Marion already sketched the same motif, but apart from a discussion of intentionality. The theme of a love beyond the visible is treated in and through the difference between idol and icon, which one encounters again in the analysis that *Being Given* devotes to the alterity of others.

According to Marion, idol and icon do not refer to two categories of beings, but two possible ways of being for the same being. The idol is the visible on which the gaze is fixated. There is nothing invisible in it that opens up the gaze for a depth that could move it. Contrary to the idol that fills the gaze, the icon provokes it. When I contemplate the icon, my gaze is looked at by an invisible gaze that appeals to me from beyond the visible spectacle. In the icon, *Agape* envisages me.

⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *L'intentionnalité de l'amour, in Prolégomènes à la charité* (Paris: La Différence, 1986) 97; translated by Stephen Lewis as *The Intentionality of Love in Prolegomena to Charity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002) 77. Henceforth, *IL* followed by the French then English pagination.

We can easily recognize here the distinction that *the intentionality of love* makes between perception and love. In this sense, Marion can write that love, as a lived-experience that is irreducibly mine, precisely makes of the other “my idol,” a mirror in which I can reflect myself at my own leisure and where, like Narcissus, I can fall in love with my image. This would be a form of “self-idolatry” (IL 97/78). On the other hand, if I get rid of intentionality, the other makes itself an invisible gaze and summons me in return to my insubstitutability: it is, as Marion says in *Being Given*, an icon of the invisible. The other is thus idol and icon depending on whether or not we keep the necessary distance to its alterity.

If one finds the same conception of love both in theological and phenomenological writings, both with and without recourse to intentionality, the question arises: how is phenomenology supposed to contribute to the elucidation of love?

Apparently, it is not. Love, first developed in theological terms (the idol versus the icon), is repeated in phenomenological terms (intentionality of love, ethical counter-directedness, crossing between intentionality of the I and injunction by the other, etc.) without real innovation. In these variations of the register, one time and again finds the invisible as characteristic of the non-narcissistic relation to the other. The gaze of the icon is invisible, the other that looks at me in this crossing of gazes that is love equally does so with an invisible gaze, and, in *Being Given*, the saturated phenomenon of the other gives itself again in the same way. The invisible with which we are dealing here is different from the invisibility of the intentional horizon, which is always a potential visibility, as well as from the invisibility of the universality of the moral law. We have finally found a good invisible that allows us to face the other as individual.

Marion applies the formula of the apostle Paul, who turns Christ into “the icon of the invisible God,” to all icons, thus also to the face of the other. The invisible, which rids the sub-

ject of all narcissism and constitutes it before all activity – the invisible which allows me to see Giovanna insofar as she is Giovanna and not insofar as she is the objective correlate of my vision – is the same invisible as the one that surfaces in the face of Christ, namely God. In the end, this means that if I do not traverse the face of Giovanna (which surfaces in its visible side: being, object, idol) and if I do not see the invisible icon of God, I can never love her. What is more, if I do not see the appeal of God in her eyes, I do not see her for herself.

Of course, the invisible gaze of the other does not refer, like it does for Levinas, to humanity in its entirety; but this does not mean that Giovanna doesn’t again have to be surpassed towards the invisible in order to be reached. The multiplicity of her characteristics, her smiles, the way she closes her eyes when she lies to me, is nothing if not passed through the sieve of the invisible. In the icon, “the visible only presents itself here in view of the invisible” (DSE, 29/18).

Marion claims to lead us from the persona of the other to the individual by means of love, but it was to better bring us back to God. When put to the test of the phenomenon of the other, Marion’s phenomenology of alterity again gives us the form of the good alterity – the concrete infinity of God.

8. The difficulty of describing the other is not due to the ethical dimension that is imposed on it by Levinas; the difficulty is due to the alterological project itself. A certain *device of alterity* commands the different attempts of an alterology. In reality, it gives way less to a phenomenology of the other than to a deduction of alterity from what we may call *the axiom of the diminution of the self*. This deduction has to counter the auto-constituting transcendental subjectivity that is promoted by Husserl. Thus, for Levinas, if the other does not help us to find the good subject, it is not useful for anything. The alterological analysis is forced to distinguish between what surfaces of the variable and multiple characteristics, on the one hand, and the

alterity of the other, on the other hand; it forces us to classify as originary everything that can contribute to the constitution of the subject.

The problematic status of individuality is the first effect of this device. The other only concerns us insofar as she remains Other (the infinite *beyond* the individual face, the invisible *beyond* the visible gaze). Therefore, as soon as the prism of alterity is in place, one is stuck in a false dilemma: that is, the other is only envisaged in what we may call her “alterating function” diminished to the level of a noematic object, subject to the egoism or the auto-idolatry of the self.

Marion distinguishes the phenomenon of the other and its “alterating function”. Each phenomenon gives itself in overthrowing intentionality, each event that appeals the subject to be what it is from the point of view of its response, is termed “saturated phenomenon.” In this way, Marion does not thus indicate, as one would think, the invisible through the visible, but “the excess of the intuition over the intention.” To surpass intentionality means to surpass presence. Each saturated phenomenon can play this role of the other within the device of the other that is governed by the axiom of the diminution of the self. The other, or better, the Other, exerts an appeal on me that is understood in my response and makes of me what I am – namely, the last name of the good subject: the gifted, l’ “*adonné*”.

Thus, the other is just one saturated phenomenon amongst others. Even the historical event is no longer an object for a constituting subject. At once, it surpasses each and every unique perspective, encompasses every intention that targets it. Similarly, the painting summons us to incessantly try out new concepts that would match up to our intuition of it, though without the incommensurability ever disappearing. Finally, the flesh as auto-affection is beyond all ecstasy. As a pure immanence, it does not soar out towards the world in order to constitute objects; rather, it constitutes us in what we are. Marion can thus relativize the role

of the other by retaining the original dimension of the relation to alterity. Irreducible to other saturated phenomena, the essence of the icon is nevertheless in its excess, in its surplus.

From the perspective of givenness, the phenomenon of the other is thus reduced to a simple task, the same task that Marion accomplished twenty years earlier with respect to the intentionality of love: to be individualized, to weaken intentionality and thereby to call the subject to be what it really is. The icon of *God without Being* fulfills this task by means of the retreat of the invisible gaze, the one of *Being Given* does it through a hyper-visibility (which, nevertheless, at the same time points toward the invisible, in the sense of that which cannot be seen intentionally); nevertheless, in both cases, its function in the device of alterity remains the same.

So what about the individuality of the other? To liberate the other from the burden of having to represent all alterity was the condition of encountering her again as an individual. Well, the other can now definitely be individualized, but only by blinding intentionality (by means of the lack or excess of visibility) and through a genuine call for any witnesses that places the subject back in its place again. Once again: in search for the other – one rediscovers the subject.

9. We thus find in both Levinas and Marion the device of alterity founded on the axiom of the diminution of the self. Giovanna or Nisrine, through the device of alterity, are there to us as the living call for any witnesses, a call that liberate our subjectivity from egoism and auto-idolatry. One should be worried already then and wonder if this does not have any other secondary effects. From now on, it is clear that the project of an alterology is less about extending phenomenology to new phenomena, to make room for saturated phenomenon besides the phenomena, than it is about producing a new form of subjectivity.

D. Janicaud has pointed to a “theological turn of French phenomenology.” If phenomenology takes as its object the mode of the

phenomenalization of phenomena, how can it give an account of that which cannot enter into the light without being distorted by it, of that which does not let itself be phenomenalized? In short, as Janicaud put it, isn't "the phenomenology of revelation" that Marion opposes to the phenomenology of manifestation a contradiction in terms?

The polemic started by Janicaud does not go to the roots of the problem. Is the theological turn an accident, due to the private faith (Jewish or Catholic) of certain phenomenologists, or is it a necessary development that must be accounted for? We think that the theological turn is explained by the alterological turn; the return to God is just a new secondary effect of the device of alterity. Alterology does not intend to have a discussion about God as much as it wants to open a dimension that is capable of teaching something about the subject. The device of alterity only offers the alternative between reification and religion, between objectivation and real transcendence, between idol and icon – in the case of ethics as well as in the case of love.

Besides the loss of individuality and the "gain" of divinity, a third secondary effect is illustrated by the paradigmatic value that Marion attributes to *Agape*. The invisible crossing of gazes is said to be the essence of love. Husserl thinks of essence in terms of variation. In §87c of *Experience and Judgment*, Husserl teaches us to connect essence to *hen epi pollon* – the one in the many. In other words, for an essence to be, phenomenologically, one has to give the proof of its variations. The essence of love has to detach itself from the multiplicity of its phenomena. However, Marion thinks that only a certain love can incarnate this essence, namely charity. All other imaginative variations of love – the ones that imply desire, the body, but also dream, hallucination, complicity, and intimacy – are simple deviations from the ideal in the normative sense of the word rather than variations of essence. In the cases of Laura and Petrarca, on the one hand, and Albertine and Marcel, on the other, we are not dealing with two variations of

one love because while the first couple surely incarnates the ideal of *Agape* and is therefore a case of pure love, the passions of the lovers of *In Search of Lost Time* can only be a perverted form of love; that is to say that it is not a form of love at all. The only thing that can be called love is what brings the lovers into a relation of mutual devotion, far from any egoism, that relates them by means of a gaze that goes beyond the needs and even the body – and that indicates, as a prolegomena, the path of charity.

Like Midas, forced by the device of alterity, Marion cannot touch a phenomenon without saturating it, without transforming it into the gold of his ideal (in line with his conformity to the axiom of diminution). The love that he gives us a description of is as beautiful as well as precious as the objects touched by Midas. But, one cannot live this love. One can only contemplate its ethereal beauty; its taste does not resemble any of the loves that we have known. But are we condemned to make of the loved one either an idol or an icon? Can the other not be something else than a mirror, either of myself or of God? No, if one is alterologist; no, if love can only serve to decenter the subject. But yes, if one is a phenomenologist, insofar as Husserl has taught us that one should not search for essences in the depths of the originary phenomenon but on the surface of the phenomena; not by avoiding the multiple, but by traversing it.

For a subject to be affected by an appeal, one has to, and it suffices to, go beyond the visible. This theoretical framework forces us to retain from the multiplicity of phenomenal characteristics only what of it can serve as support for the invisible. In this way, the description of the essence of love in *Being Given* can only open to the gaze of the loving/loved one a single visible mark, and still this is a bodily mark that one does not see. While love was said to deliver the other to us in her *haecceitas*, the device of alterity forces us to retain from this multiple and differentiated phenomenon only the most undifferentiated and impersonal mark that there is. Finally, what individualizes

Giovanna in her difference from Nisrine is the hole of her pupil!

10. Let's leave aside the question of the effects of the device of alterity in order to return to the causes that have motivated its institution. Why did phenomenology take this alterological turn? When phenomenology arrived in France in the 1930s, when the philosophies of existence were in fashion, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty used it against neo-Kantianism – like it was used in Germany, one could say – with the only difference though that in France Brunschvicg's neo-Kantianism was inspired by Fichte and defined the self as a pure activity that constructs the world. In short, Brunschvicg promoted a subject that is very different from the formal Kantian subject that was taken over by the German neo-Kantians. The common problem of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty is to escape from the idealism of Brunschvicg without falling back into a naïve realism. It is not the question of being that they remember from *Being and Time*, but rather the equilibrium between subjective and objective – except that Sartre wants to keep the sovereignty of consciousness while at the same time restoring the reality of things, whereas Merleau-Ponty intends above all to show that the subject does not constitute the world by a centrifugal *Sinngebung*. Their relation to phenomenology is already ambivalent insofar as Husserlian constitution reminds them of Brunschvicgian construction and insofar as they cannot always make the distinction between these two varieties of transcendental idealism.

Philosophically speaking, Levinas and Marion belong to another generation. They continue Merleau-Ponty's battle against the auto-constituting subject, but by concentrating their attack on Husserl, rather than on Brunschvicg (who is quickly forgotten), and by radicalizing this attack: being in the world does not sufficiently alter the subject. We should mention that in the meantime Heidegger himself had altered his concept of the good subject: the Dasein of *Being and Time* is moved out of the way in the "Letter on Humanism" for Da-

Sein, always out for being that claims it. Since Levinas and Marion oppose themselves to the young Heidegger, it has not always been noticed that the alterological turn is inspired by the ontology of the second Heidegger. The critique of being as presence entails the critique of "the metaphysics of subjectivity," accused of thinking the being of consciousness as presence in itself. Heidegger finally reproaches traditional metaphysics not for having forgotten being, but for not having understood that being is absent or rather concealed. Only a "phenomenology of the unapparent" can do justice to the retreat inseparable from any manifestation. From that moment on, the existentialist program that consisted in saving the reality of the world, does not suffice anymore. One still has to think a subject whose being is never exhausted by presence, a broken subject, a decentered subject, always in difference with itself. That is the origin of the axiom of the diminution of the sovereign (Fichtean) subject as the paradigm of the appeal to witness.

Now, sometimes alterology is characterized as phenomenology pushed to its limits. But one might be tempted to say that "French phenomenology" – with rare exceptions – is nothing much of a phenomenology. Since *Being and Time*, Heidegger designates being as the phenomenon par excellence, because it does not phenomenize itself! A new idea is born, highly fascinating as well as highly problematic: a phenomenology of the unapparent or the invisible. An alterology does not worry about describing the phenomenon of the other, but only about producing a theory of subjectivity conforming to the ontology of retreat. In the case of both, Levinas and Marion, the strategy to dislocate the self functions very well, but the Other as a conceptual persona once again covers over the singular individual that should have been described in its specific style of appearing and not in its claimed exception from phenomenality. Instead of claiming to have surpassed Husserlian phenomenology, one has, at the very least, to make the effort to read Husserl himself

and to avoid the question of being (without conflating Husserlian phenomenology with post-Kantian idealism). Maybe then it will be noticed that Husserlian transcendental idealism does the most justice to phenomenality, including the phenomenon of other human beings.

*Translated from the French by
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KITAS, ARBA KAIP JO ATSIKRATYTI. PROLEGOMENAI KIEKVIENAI BŪSIMAI ALTEROLOGIJAI, NORĖSIANČIAI BŪTI FENOMENOLOGIJA

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Iš pradžių fenomenologija buvo egologija (Husserlis), vėliau – ontologija (Heideggeris). Šiandieną ji vis labiau įgyja tai, ką galėtume vadinti „alterologija“, pavidalą, kaip pastangą apmąstyti radikalią kitybės konsituojančius fenomenus. Šiame straipsnyje, pasitelkus deskriptyvią kitų individų kitybės analizę, siekiama įvertinti „alterologijos“ prielaidas ir šaltinius. Šiam tikslui įgyvendinti nagrinėjami Levino tekstai, itin daug dėmesio kreipiant į jo sąmoningą kito asmens ir absoliučios kitybės sugretinimą. Toliau parodoma J.-L. Marion pozicija, vertintina kaip bandymas išspręsti kai kurias problemas, su kuriomis susiduria Levino tezė, nusakanti individus. Tačiau abiem atvejais, nepaisant esamų skirtumų, kai atveriamas priėjimas prie Kito kitybės fenomeno, prarandamas Kito, kaip individualaus, supratimas. Dėmesys kitybei iš tiesų yra motyvuojamas intereso pateikti sistemingą būdą sunaikinti konstitutyvią subjektyvumo galią, priešingai tokiam fenomenologiniam aiškinimui, kuriame Kitas parodo save kaip kažką empatiškai išskirtinio – tai yra jo „pasirodymo stilių“.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Husserlis, Levinas, Marion, Kitas, kitybė, individualumas.

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