

WAYS OF BEING GIVEN: INVESTIGATING THE BOUNDS OF GIVENNESS THROUGH MARION AND HUSSERL*

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According to Jean-Luc Marion, phenomenology is to be understood as an attempt to bring the analysis of phenomena back from a description of what is *given* within the phenomenon to the description of the various modes of *givenness*. Instead of presupposing the given as the starting point of description, phenomenology focuses on the appearing of the phenomenon as such, which Marion understands as the moment where the thing gives itself absolutely.¹ Consequently, phenomenology does not deal with the given (*das Gegebene*) but only with the very fact that the given is given, with its givenness (*das Gegebenheit*) understood “as a mode of phenomenality and not as an ontic given.”² Givenness is nothing but the “style of phenomenalization [of the given] insofar as it is given.”³ This is the reason why Marion claims that phenomenological description requires a third reduction, which is supposed to reconduct the given to givenness and to “unfold” the pure “giving itself”⁴ of the phenomena.⁵

In order to demonstrate the phenomenological necessity of this third reduction, Marion provides in *Réduction et donation* a detailed analysis of the phenomenological breakthrough in Husserl. According to Marion, the discovery of categorial intuition in Husserl’s sixth *Logical Investigation* achieves not only a broadening of intuition but a broadening of givenness as such that legitimates the third reduction and provides the ground for Marion’s own phenomenology. The purpose of this paper is to show that this historical argument misses an important aspect of the phenomenological breakthrough and that a more subtle and interesting concept of the given

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can be found in Husserl. I will argue that phenomenology does not need to rely on a generalization of the concept of givenness in order to provide us with a faithful description of phenomena.

The broadening of Intuition

I agree with Marion that Husserl's phenomenology entails a criticism of the conceptions of the given that presuppose its reducibility to sensibility. However, I would like to emphasize that strictly speaking, this criticism is not yet phenomenological in Husserlian terms. Husserl's understanding of sensible intuition relies on a criticism of sense data that comes from Stumpf and Von Ehrenfels (and belongs to the history of gestalt psychology). For instance, Husserl draws on the concept of fusion (*Verschmelzung*), which Stumpf uses to show that sensible contents are not experienced as isolated data, and are already organized prior to our intuiting them. This means that sensibility cannot be reduced to an ensemble of impressions but has its own laws of organisation. Elaborating on these analyses, Husserl shows that these laws of organisation of sensible contents give rise to a new form of *a priori*, namely a material *a priori* that constitutes the insuperable ontological horizon of any act of consciousness (insofar as it applies to any object that can be intuitively given.)⁵ Two extremely important consequences can be drawn from this point. First, this non- phenomenological analysis of sensibility already discards what Marion calls the "ontic" conception of the given, since it invalidates the opposition between isolated data on the one hand and concepts that supposedly bring them to unity thanks to synthetic acts of consciousness. Consequently, the given can no longer be posited as the first causal element at the beginning of a process of conceptualisation.

Second, it is clear that the broadening of intuition to categorial intuition in Husserl does *not* result from the urge to overcome the limits of a conception of the given that identifies it to

sense data. The issue that Husserl tries to address is not a restricted conception of the given, as Marion claims. The problem is rather to understand how some linguistic acts of expression can be involved in the perceptual process. This question leads Husserl to distinguish between two fundamentally different types of structure within perception that are irreducible to one another: on the one hand, a strictly sensitive organisation of intuition that does not require any particular act of consciousness; and on the other a completely different kind of intuition that entails some expressive acts and fits the categorial structure of the meaning-intention.

The broadening of givenness

Now, does this broadening of intuition to categorial forms imply a broadening of givenness? Does categorial intuition open the field of experience to modes of givenness that go beyond sensible givenness? In a way, it seems obvious that it is precisely what Husserl attempts to do in the sixth *Logical Investigation*: to see more than the manifold of things around us, as it is the case in what Husserl calls ‘simple’ ‘plain’ or ‘straightforward’ perception (*Schlichte Wahrnehmung*).⁶ I do not only see this book, but its relation to other objects, the fact *that* it is on the table, *that* it is red, etc. Sensible perception is characterized by its lack of articulation and so by its simplicity, whereas categorial intuition describes a way for the object to be given so that the perception *verifies* or *makes true* some propositions that account for the perceived: I do not only see a book, I perceive this book *as being on the table*, which means that I perceive *that* it is true that the book is on the table. Perception does not only put me in contact with something, it is able to fulfil some meaning-intentions and to verify the propositions that they express.

This particular kind of perception involves a kind of articulation of the perceived that is no longer grounded in the immanent organisation of sensible contents or forms (*Gestalten*), but relies on language’s ability to provide an adequate report or to sufficiently express the perceived

(as for instance when I say “I see that this book is red”). However, the description of the relation between the meaning-intention and its intuitive fulfilment enables Husserl to single out the ‘material - *stofflichen* – moments,’ which come to fulfilment directly or straightforwardly and to distinguish them from meaning forms or categorial forms, which are essentially deprived of such direct fulfilment. Within a statement like “A is on the right of B,” the meanings A and B can be directly fulfilled through perception. While it cannot be the case that the “supplementary formal meanings” or categorial structures can be discerned as “on the right of” something else: “only at the places indicated by letters (variables) in such ‘forms of judgment’ can meanings be put that are themselves fulfilled in perception itself (*in der Wahrnehmung selbst*), whereas it is hopeless, even quite misguided, to look directly in perception for what could give fulfilment to our supplementary formal meanings.”⁷ Thus, the broadening of intuition in the sixth *Logical Investigation* relies on the conjunction of two theses that may seem almost contradictory: First, only the material elements of the intention find a corresponding element within perception capable of fulfilling them, whereas the categorial forms do not; and second, categorial forms are nevertheless *somehow* fulfilled. As Husserl writes: “We have taken it for granted that forms, too, can be genuinely fulfilled, or that the same applies to variously structured total meanings, and not merely to the material ‘elements’ of such meanings.”⁹

The Unboundedness of givenness

Categorial intuition is such that the fulfilment of a propositionally structured meaning-intention happens *even though* nothing within perception is likely to properly fulfil the categorial forms in the way sensible intuition fulfils the material elements of the meaning-intention. Now, what does this imply with regard to categorial forms? I will now show that two opposite readings of this analysis can be proposed. First, since categorial forms are not fulfilled by sensible

intuition, they *must be given* in a non-sensible fashion, which means that we need to broaden the limits of the concept of givenness. Such interpretation is shared by Marion,⁸ Romano,⁹ and Heidegger: “Within categorial intuition, Husserl succeeds in thinking the categorial as given.”¹⁰

According to such interpretation, when I see that the book is on the table, the ‘being on the table’ of the book is somehow given to me, even though it cannot be given by sensible intuition. Marion relies on this interpretation when he claims that the discovery of categorial intuition achieves the broadening of givenness and not merely the broadening of intuition: “Intuition is opened to its “broadening” only inasmuch as it is given first as a mode of givenness.”¹¹ The broadening of givenness is not merely a consequence of the broadening of intuition, it rather goes the other way round according to Marion: Husserl needs to broaden intuition because phenomenological description is compelled to acknowledge the unboundedness of givenness. “The decision that leads to categorial intuition therefore does not arise from intuition itself, but from the excess of givenness over the sensible, over the giving intuition in the sensible.”¹² This reversal of Husserl’s analysis provides the true meaning of the phenomenological breakthrough: “The breakthrough does not consist here, either, in the broadening of intuition alone, but in the broadening of the concept of reality or of objectivity to the dimensions of givenness.”¹³ This point is absolutely fundamental for Marion, since it allows him to downplay the principle of all principles and to prioritize givenness over intuition against Derrida’s interpretation of Husserl in *La voix et le phénomène*¹⁴: “if intuition deserves a privilege, it owes it not to the ecstasy of intentional fulfillment but to its quality as giving intuition.”¹⁷

Consequently, phenomenological description can be freed from the limits of intuition and rely on a pure givenness that exceeds what intuition is or is not able to give: “Givenness is

measured only by its own standard, not by that of intuition.”¹⁸ This thesis urges Marion to allow an unlimited extension to givenness, since it cannot be limited from the outside by anything, not even intuition: “If intuition suffers limits (and this, according to all of philosophy, is one of its constitutive characteristics), givenness knows none. What gives itself, insofar as given in and through reduced givenness, by definition gives itself absolutely.”¹⁵ However, it seems difficult to understand how the unlimited extension that Marion grants givenness can be compatible with his claim that “the reduction restricts appearing to what attains *real* givenness in it.”¹⁶ How are we to make sense of such implicit distinction between real and unreal givenness if we accept Marion’s claim that givenness knows no limits? How can we understand inauthentic givenness if givenness “admits no compromise”?²¹ To avoid the difficulties raised by Marion’s conception of the unboundedness of givenness, I will now propose a second interpretation of the broadening of intuition, following a substantially different path.

In order to put forward the broadening of givenness beyond sensibility that categorial intuition is supposed to achieve, both Heidegger and Marion stress the importance of the analogy between the categorial and the sensuous in Husserl’s reasoning, which leads them to somehow disregard or neglect their opposition. Heidegger writes: “By what path did Husserl arrive at categorial intuition? The answer is unmistakable: since categorial intuition is *similar* to sensuous intuition (namely, as giving), Husserl reaches categorial intuition by way of an *analogy*. Categorial intuition is “made analogous” to sensuous intuition”. Heidegger concludes: “For Husserl, the categorial (that is, the Kantian forms) is just as given as the sensuous.”²²

Three important arguments can be raised against this interpretation: First, such analysis neglects a fundamental thesis of the *Logical Investigations*: the irreducibility of meaning to intuition.¹⁷ Marion acknowledges the fundamental ‘excessiveness’ of meaning, but not its

specificity: the meanings cannot be fulfilled by direct intuition and yet are still somehow given. In this acknowledgement, Marion relies on the same interpretation of the analogy between the sensuous and the categorial that Heidegger was making: the broadening of intuition is in fact a broadening of givenness so that even categorial meanings can be given. They are “just as given as the sensuous,”[†] although they require a non-sensible mode of givenness. However, if Husserl stresses the irreducibility of meaning to intuition, then the analogy cannot mean that there is a non-sensible form of givenness; on the contrary, it means that there is an insuperable distance between sensible and categorial intuition so that *categories will never be able to be given* although there is something like categorial perception.

In support of the first argument, one must keep in mind that in the *Logical Investigations*, the distinction between sensuous and categorial intuition relies on a distinction between two opposite kinds of acts: sensible and categorial. Sensible intuition is a straightforward act that has an essential phenomenological character that cannot be founded on any other act.¹⁸ Such “founding acts” are opposed to categorial acts, which are always founded and require a founding act as the basis on which they can be performed. Unlike material meanings, categorial forms cannot be directly fulfilled by perception and their fulfilment entails a mediated or indirect relation to sensible acts. Thus, categorial acts are essentially grounded on straightforward acts, which Husserl maintains as the basic acts for any perceptual givenness. Consequently, if we are to acknowledge a broadening of intuition, this broadening must maintain some insuperable sensible constraints over categorial givenness: categorial intuition only makes sense insofar as it is grounded on sensible intuition. Sensible intuition reconducts givenness to its ontological conditions: being given is still fundamentally being given *as a sensible being*. Straightforward

[†] Ibid.

perception is identified by Husserl as the only originary giving act, characterised both by its logical simplicity and foundational primacy. This is why Husserl never writes that the categorial is *given* by intuition (nor in any other way). Perception does fulfil some meaning-intentions that involve some categorial forms, but it does not mean that these forms (the “being on the table” of the book for instance) are strictly speaking given.

We must then put forward a third argument in favour of an alternate reading of the broadening of intuition based on a fundamental distinction between irreducible ways of being given. In the intuitive fulfilment of a meaning-intention, the categorial form is not strictly speaking given but only “putatively given”¹⁹: it is, as Husserl writes, perceived “as given.” It is fundamental to understand that being “putatively given” is not a way for something to be given, otherwise the phenomenological specificity of the categorial acts would be lost and categorial forms would be perceived as sensible objects. If we want to preserve the particularity of categorial fulfilment, we must acknowledge that it is not a mere mode of givenness. With categorial intuition, perception fulfils the intention *as if* the categorial meanings were given, which stresses very clearly that they are precisely not given. Accordingly, the 6th *Logical Investigation* does not attempt to demonstrate that even the (non-sensitive) categorial elements of the meaning intention come to givenness within a particular kind of intuition: it shows on the contrary that *perception does not need to actually give all the elements that are intended through the meaning-intentions in order to fulfil them.*

Conclusion

Two conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. First, if Husserl’s breakthrough in the sixth *Logical Investigation* brings out an original kind of intuitive fulfilment that broadens the sphere of intuition to categorial forms, it nevertheless maintains a rather classic conception of the

given, grounded on sensibility and on the laws of the material *a priori*. Second, the originality and the radicality of this breakthrough consists in the extension of the given beyond givenness, thanks to categorial intuition. Categorial forms are fulfilled by intuition *as if* they were given, and although they are never actually given in the strictest sense of the word. Rather than reducing the given to its givenness, the phenomenological breakthrough allows a conception of the given that does not need to involve any moment of givenness whatsoever. What Husserl will later on call the pre-given is a good example of such conception of the given that does not need to presuppose any actual givenness: as in the sixth *Logical Investigation*, the given, rather than givenness, appears as the insuperable horizon of phenomenality.

Notes

¹ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 24: “No being would appear without giving itself or finding itself given, thus without being articulated according to the fold of givenness”.

² Jean-Luc Marion, *The reason of the gift*, trans. Stephen Lewis (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 20.

³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Towards a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey Kosky, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 2; Jean-Luc Marion, *Etant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: PUF, 1997), 6.

⁵ I cannot have the intuition of a surface without a colour, or of a tone without intensity: a sensory quality can only exist as qualifying an extension... These *a priori* laws are not only valid for the sensible contents of intuitive representations but are necessarily true for any object. They are not the laws of our representations but the very laws of being: to represent something by itself always requires that we represent it “as something *existing by itself*, as existing *independently* from all other contents.” To think of something is always to think of it as something that can be given and that obeys to the material laws of intuition.

⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana* (Louvain: Husserl Archives, 1950), XIX/2, 676.

⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. 2, trans. Findlay (London: Routledge, 2001), 276.

⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *Réduction et Donation* (Paris: PUF, 1989), ch. 1: “La percée et l'excédent”; and Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, trans. Thomas Carlson (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1998).

⁹ Claude Romano, *Au cœur de la raison* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Four seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 66. The very same analysis can be found in Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 13: “Of the categorial, as universal essence, there is datum, and intuitive datum.”

¹¹ Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 33.

¹² *Ibid.*, 36: “If intuition becomes categorial, it is because Being gives itself, and not because Being is given by virtue of categorial intuition”

¹³ *Ibid.*, 37: “The stake of the *Investigations*, particularly of the Sixth, has less to do with categorial intuition than with what it points to without itself realizing it - the broadening of presence, understood as objectivity, according to the excessive measure of givenness.”

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, trans. Leonard Lawlor (Chicago, Northwestern University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: “to give itself admits no compromise, even if in this given one distinguishes degrees and modes: every reduced given is given or not”.

¹⁷ Marion, *Being and Givenness*, 15.

¹⁸ See for instance Husserl, *Logical Investigation*, 312, where Husserl emphasises the irreducible gap between meaning and intuition and stresses the autonomy of meaning: “The realm of meaning is, however, much wider than that of intuition, i.e. than the total realm of possible fulfilment” (6.§63).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* §47-48.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 278 .

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