

IS LOVE A GIFT? A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY ABOUT GIVENNESS

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RESUMO *O problema do debate filosófico contemporâneo acerca do dom, trazido à tona sobretudo pelos filósofos franceses Jacques Derrida e Jean-Luc Marion, trouxe novas e vivas discussões sobre o que é e qual a sua natureza. O presente artigo analisa se o amor pode ser considerado como um dom ou se segue o mesmo problema sublinhado por Derrida. Segundo o autor, todo dom tem uma contradição interna e não pode ser considerado como tal. O que é dom para as pessoas (alguém doa algo para alguém de modo livre), para Derrida é uma commodity, um círculo econômico. Em outras palavras, o dom é impossível. A análise que se faz neste artigo é se o amor segue este paradigma, portanto é impossível, ou se ele constrói um caminho próprio e segue sua própria lógica. É possível analisar o amor seguindo os passos da fenomenologia? Reduzindo o amor a fenômeno, então a análise se abre a novos horizontes.*

Palavras-chave *Doação, Contradição, Fenômeno, Dom, Liberdade.*

ABSTRACT *The contemporary philosophical debate about “gift” brought into light above all by French philosophers Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion, brought about new and live discussions regarding what gift is and what is its nature. The present article analyses whether or not love can be regarded as a gift or, rather, follow the same problem showed by Derrida. According to him, every gift carries an internal contradiction and can never be*

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and, therefore, will never be gift. A gift is impossible. What is as gift to people (someone freely gives something to someone), is, actually a commodity, an economical circle for Derrida. This article seeks to inquire whether can or cannot love follow the same gift pattern or if it, rather, builds his own path and follows its own internal logic. Is it possible to analyze love following on the footsteps of phenomenology? If love can be analyzed in a phenomenological fashion – reduction of love – then a new horizon will be opened.

Keywords *Givenness, Contradiction, Phenomenon, Gift, Freedom.*

The query about gift, as raised by Jean-Luc Marion¹ and Jacques Derrida, leads to a significant issue specially – but not exclusively – regarding reciprocity. It seems to be common that if someone loves himself in a narcissistic way, this love is incomplete and lacks what is considered to be very fulfilling among humans: reciprocity. Loving only oneself does not add anything to anyone. Love is supposed to act in favor of someone else, outside the egoistic conception. However, if someone were to argue that love is reciprocal and is a gift, it would fall into the burden and impossibility of the gift as described by Derrida (Derrida, 2007a, p. 14). Is it therefore possible to love? Is love something that can be reciprocal and consequently subject to the economical exchange? Being not a thing, love has a unique consideration that

1 Whenever the gift is given in spontaneous fashion showing love, affection or another feeling that reveals gratuity, the gift would be given. For the object given to qualify as a gift, therefore, the giver must be free. That a gift cannot be returned or reciprocated is a feature intertwined with the freedom in which it is given. Because the gift is something freely given, if I attempt to repay it, my effort transforms the gesture of giving into an economic exchange and consequently annuls the “gift” identity of the object of the exchange. The very essence of the gift is motivated by something beyond economic language and never can be returned. The gift must be deliverable and it cannot be something present only in my intention or in my words. It has to be *something*. It cannot be only words or promises or products of speeches that might never come true. In addition, it cannot be only in my dreams. Derrida asks whether or not the gift is within the so called *economy circle* in which its value can be measured following the idea of exchange, merchandise, amortization of expenditure a circulation and return. Derrida, by way of contrast, as the quotation above exemplifies, considers the gift as an *aporia* – a problem that resists solution, offers no way out and withholds hope. At the very moment you think of the gift as an object – or as an action or gesture that is supposed to receive no return, the gift returns itself, cancelling it. The very structure of the gift is aporetic. Even in the event that the recipient does not send anything back, the gift returns anyway. An acknowledgment, a word of thanks, is enough to cancel the gift completely. Even if one gives a gift to an enemy, or the recipient hates the present and he curses you because you gave him something, the gift still returns to you. In fact, you will think that you did something good, you performed an act of bravery and courage and you praise the good man you are. This is precisely the return. In addition, in the very moment in which the gift is identified, it gets annulled. There is no way out. The gift is impossible and disappears.

sets it as something that may lead us along a different path. Unlike Descartes, who set the first and fundamental truth in finding the self – I think, therefore, I am – Marion seeks something else capable of bringing meaning to the whole life without being trapped by the self. Marion begins to engage in a clear and rigorous phenomenology of love intended as a gift and to explore a re-foundation of the metaphysics of love. Descartes' *cogito* is completely egoistic because it is focused inward and fails to see the other's face. In his book *erotic phenomenon*, Marion seeks to perform what he called *the reduction of love* (Marion, 2007, p. 67). A person only gets a sense of his own existence and happiness when he meets the other as an equal and capable of sharing life. What would life be like if one's decision were to live alone, refusing to engage in partaking moments that will bring the sense of fulfillment? The reassurance of the meaning of my own existence comes in the very moment I let the other be part of my life, when I give and when I receive love. By doing so, I do not renounce my own individuality but, rather, I enhance and enrich it. On the other hand, if someone chooses to live alone, he turns his life into an ocean of uncertainties that, according to Marion, comes from vanity.²

First of all, love is not primarily a concept. Indeed, Marion does not understand love as a pure conceptual event but rather as something lived as a sentiment, as mutual exchange and mutual confidence. Under this perspective, love is understood not as selfish commitment in which I engage myself in looking at the mirror in an act of self-love. This type of love is idolatry since it does not reflect the other, but only myself. The other is radically distinct from me, totally other toward which I incline myself to be able to partake life as whole and this other stirs my life upside-down and makes it better than it was before.

In short, the focal issue is the query about the difference between givenness and presence: I owe the other³ for making me (Marion, 2007, p. 100). People take for granted the fact that they meet the other,⁴ but such an

2 Marion would say that nothing resists vanity, since it can still skirt and annul all evidence, all certainty, all resistance. Therefore, it is necessary to renounce this very paradigm and bear an attitude that defeats vanity and brings life and happiness.

3 "The Other is utterly transcendent. While much of Western philosophy tends to think of the Other in terms of the same, that is, as an alter ego who is accessible by way of empathy or by virtue of their equality with me, Levinas makes absolute the distance of alterity. I simply cannot grasp the Other in knowledge, for the Other is infinite and overflows the totality of comprehension and of being. Infinity is *given* in my experience of the Other as utterly beyond and in excess of me. Who the other person *is* can never be present to me: our presents are never synchronous. At one stage, Levinas suggests that the Other inhabits a future I can never reach, and this seems to be an effective way of describing the relationship" (Horner, "Rethinking God. Marion, Derrida and the limits of Phenomenology", 63).

4 *Autre* and *altrui* is not quite the same thing in Levinas' conception. There is the other and the totally Other. The Other is transcendent and when I am exposed to the face of the other, such exposure causes to

encounter represents a breakthrough to one's entire life. Only when I open myself to what is different from me am I really able to understand myself as a human being. My life acquires sense only if I find the other – the one who is different from myself – to give and to receive.

We share with others the gift of existence, but existing on its own does not guarantee any difference between man and a stone. Because of my possibility or erotic possibility, however, the manner of other beings does not suit me. In other words, it is absolutely necessary that someone loves me and I do likewise (Marion, 2007, p. 20). The rank of my own existence demands of me a quality of life given only by the erotic phenomenon. Marion points out that the reason why I exist or I am in ontic point of view is exactly because I must *subsist* as radical possibility – a possibility that someone loves me or could love me. Vanity is a threat to love, and this opposition leads to a miserable life because it becomes entrapped in a selfish lifestyle in which exchanging becomes impossible. Seeking the protection of love, therefore, is the only way I can resist and defeat vanity.

The question of love is more fundamental than the question of knowledge or other questions. The fundamental query raised by the erotic phenomenon is “does anybody love me?” Essentially, the query reveals that a person is concerned about what comes from outside, or he finds out that there is something beyond his experience that comes to find him and complete his very existence. We can *quasi* say that my life comes from outside. The erotic phenomenon leads us, therefore, to another possibility. I must recognize myself as a *given and gifted* phenomenon. Marion writes (Marion, 2007, p. 22):

There remains, then the attempt at the third reduction: In order for me to appear as a full-fledged phenomenon, it is not enough that I recognize myself as a certified object, nor as a certifying ego, nor even as a properly being being. I must discover myself as a given and gifted phenomenon, assured as a given that is free from vanity.

The erotic phenomenon, however, befalls only when my unconditional love meets another unconditional love similarly which allows me to engage in a mutual reciprocity. An encounter – within the erotic point of view – does not consist of encountering another body an object in the world, a mere flesh. The erotic phenomenon occurs only if there is a reciprocal endeavor that allows

oneself to love and to be loved.⁵ The fuel that puts into motion the erotic phenomenon and the erotic reduction is the promise of being able to give – as a gift – or [being a] gifted ego. This ego is the thought which, in the very moment that the individual finds himself being loved, produces certainty.⁶ The sense of being loved comes from the other. God, man and woman can all be this *other*, because what matters is the capacity of being loved – that this love comes from elsewhere, outside me. The other comes and, even if it remains anonymous, little by little, approaches me and strikes me in the heart. The door of my life remains open to this experience that touches me in such a way that it is impossible to live without it. My entire life gains quality and the more I surrender myself to this love, the more my life is fulfilled.

It is important to bring into focus that this *ego* does not match the selfishness of egoism. In fact, the assurance never comes from ego, but from elsewhere. Egoism, by way of contrast, asserts that the individual experiences the boost from his own being and is perceived to be enough. Therefore, the egotist does not regard it as necessary to love others, as long as he loves himself. The *ego* in Marion's point of view, takes a different path: I love, therefore I am.

In short, phenomenology of love has, therefore, criteria that make possible the reduction. First of all, the reduction must offer a unified concept of love that includes also the reason and the passion. Consequently, it must set out as clearly as possible what do not appear as erotic thoughts because they may be regarded as *quasi* irrational. Jealousy and betrayal are examples of these. This approach must begin with the erotic phenomenon followed by philosophical reflection.

The willingness to love does not guarantee that one will be loved back. However, while this decision does not assure loving, it suffices to attest that one will love anyway. There is no guarantee of reciprocity here, but only the pure decision to pursue love as a goal to be accomplished.

The erotic phenomenon regards the physical enjoyment. Flesh becomes body when I adhere firmly to her flesh for her – so that she might receive it. To allow oneself to be loved by the other is to allow access to my own

5 Martin Buber points out that by encountering the other, two things may happen: Either I change something in the other or I let me be changed by him. I feel I have not the right to want to change another if I am not open to be changed by him as far as it is legitimate. Instead, when you encounter a *thing* no exchange is possible since a thing is unable to respond your questions.

6 I am not talking about the certainty achieved by Descartes that the ego has accomplished. Instead, for Marion, the ego is still important as the first experience of being loved and love. Being self-conscious is regarded as the second step to be taken. Perhaps the conscious of being love could arrive at the same time that the self-awareness, but certainly it is not the first consciousness. This honour belongs to the *ego* which acknowledges love.

body inasmuch as I have access to her body since her face becomes absolutely irresistible and both become reciprocal receptivity. This is what Marion calls the “flesh in glory” and he affirms that these intents and purposes are necessary for the erotic phenomenon to be accomplished. In other words, the erotic phenomenon attains the lover in his or her final immanence. Marion writes (Marion, 2007, p. 138):

Orgasm, the only miracle that the poorest human condition can definitely experience – for it requires neither talent, nor apprenticeship, but simply a bit of naturalness – nevertheless leaves nothing to see, nothing to say, and carries away everything with it, even its memory.

The flesh is bound to the givenness of the self. Daily life scarcely reveals who one might be and does not reveal the true self. Probably Marion has in mind what Saint John wrote at the beginning of his gospel “the word became flesh and lived among us”. The Word revealed himself as Son of God in the very moment he found himself as human since all nations could see his flesh. In Marion’s account, however, body does not identify necessarily with flesh since the body appears and flesh remains invisible because “it makes appear (one think here inevitably of the phenomenological relationship Heidegger established between being (*l’être*) and being (*l’étant*)”. A phenomenalization of the world passes through my flesh. Without it, the world would disappear for me. In short, I cannot separate myself from my flesh and precisely the flesh turns to be the factor that makes possible the appearance of the erotic phenomenon. Nothing is more original to me than my now flesh and, even if I wanted, I could not live without it. It seems that Marion regards flesh as a different way of saying *ego*, although the flesh gives meaning to the body. Flesh does include the openness to what surpasses the mere physical level and achieves the self.

Although Marion’s account of erotic phenomenon is regarded as strictly bound to flesh enjoyment, he leaves the door open to further consideration. Phenomenology does not break with metaphysics and God is regarded as the ultimate and supreme life we must pursue. Erotic phenomenon is the maximum sign of pleasure achievable by people while we are on earth, but it is not the last one. Love as confirmation seeks eternity and has eschatological limits. There is an inner eternity to love.

Erotic Phenomenon and the Gift

We must now face whether the erotic phenomenon falls into the monetary exchange circle, therefore not being a gift or, alternatively, escapes the circle. If love is a gift and the loved recognizes it as such, then it is cancelled. In order to attain and remain a gift, love must overcome and escape the gift circulation. Is it the case for reciprocity? If love is reciprocal – in order for the erotic phenomenon to be achieved – will it be doomed to be cancelled by reciprocity? If I realize that one will not love me back or if my beloved has betrayed me, will I be inclining to love him anyway or will I no longer engage in this path by breaking any contract? Marion stresses that while the contract usually will be broken, we cannot say the same of the erotic phenomenon.

The erotic phenomenon is exactly the opposite. Indeed, and if you love having this purpose – to be loved back – you will not succeed. My action has to be performed in such a way that I am the first lover, willing to love and absolutely not expecting to be loved in a similar way. Here, my love is completely gratuitous and it has to be in order to be erotic phenomenon. In the very moment I expect to be loved back there is no longer a gift but an exchange, as we have shown previously. Therefore, within the erotic phenomenon one will never be sure to be loved back. Marion brings into focus that I have no guarantee that love will be there always and in the same way forever and, therefore, I will never be sure that the loved will love me back. Here it is virtually impossible to verify if the other has the same *level* of love. Therefore, you will never be able to identify the exchange because there is no exchange. If you want to be loved, you have to trust in the lover, but there is no guarantee about such love.

In short, what we expect in erotic phenomenon is the unequal and uncertain love coming from both lover and loved. Love here will not be reciprocal. After being loved, there is an experience that your love will never come back. If one loves his own child, for example, this love is absolutely unconditional because the result of your love was the transmission of another life. The child will never be able to give me life back. What has been given – life – will not return to you, but it will be passed on to your child's children. The property of this gift is therefore clearly neither economic nor reciprocal. The exchange is doomed to be caught in the circle, but the gift of love escapes and continues on as a present to the others, but not to the donor.

How does the gift of love remain present? Who is the recipient? Horner (2004, p. 209) raises his concerns about considering love as a gift because we will never know if it was truly given. But the phenomenology of love has brought into focus that even when any gift is refused or not acknowledged,

it would still be given. Being certain or not about the gift's arrival does not threaten its givability. In this case, the donor will certainly be protected against any return.

Ultimately, the event is historical and the time will not be repeated but will keep going to other people. Here you must leave what has been done for good, for others. The gift as a gift has no reason to be given. I simply give and I do not expect anything back. I cannot apply the principle of sufficient reason to the gift because as soon as I have a reason to give, there is an exchange. To be able to be a gift, the erotic phenomenon implies no reason to love, no reason to do good, and no reason to explain why I am loving. I just love. Here, Marion points out, that in order to be erotic phenomenon, the principle of insufficient reason must be applied. The gift has no "why." The principle of insufficient reason brings into focus that no one has the right to have a reason to give anything to anyone. Marion claims that the principle of sufficient reason, which had been radicalized on the basis of everything, has to have a cause or the concept. The gift does not fit into the frame of this principle, but goes beyond it. In order to be a gift, the giver has no reason at all to give. He simply gives.

Therefore, we must say that the gift is not fair because it does not give to the giver what he thinks he deserves. One might think that the givee should give back something, but, precisely, the gift would be cancelled when it is given back. Consequently, a gift cannot be fair to the giver since it is not reciprocal, but, rather, it is creative and generous. The gift offered by erotic phenomenon has another important feature: It cannot be stopped by death. There is a thirst for eternity that will continue even after death. Here Marion shows his believers' side, discussing when the metaphysics will take place and when the physical dimension will be overtaken. In other words, a gift is perfectly given even under the condition of the receiver's lack of awareness.

Marion points out that the gift can be thought of within the frame of givenness and, therefore, within the horizon of phenomenology and this leads him to analyze whether or not the gift is, or must remain an *aporia*.⁷ Utilizing the Aristotelian words, Marion sets the gift in such a way that he must satisfy the principle of sufficient reason and somehow link it with the four causes. The gift is not a metaphysical entity that finds no reason to come to light, but, rather, givenness, recipient and giver being necessary to make it possible within

7 "Le donateur donne le don comme une cause efficiente, utilise une cause formelle et une cause matérielle (ce qui est comme le don) suivant une cause finale (le bien du donataire et ou la gloire du donateur), ces quatre causes permettent à la donation de satisfaire au principe de raison suffisante" (*Êtant Donnée*, 77).

the limits of phenomenology. The donor is the *causa agens* and produces an effect in the recipient – *causa finalis*, through the material and formal cause. Probably, we can call to mind what Leibniz called the ‘principle of sufficient reason’ according to which every event that happens has an explanation, has a reason to exist.

The more you give, the less you get it; this is the logic of the gift. The gift is not reciprocal just because it cannot be repaid. Erotic phenomenon, as I have states above, is an example. If love is a contract, you destroy it immediately. You have to love with no consideration of being loved back. If you establish conditions on your love – for example, if I love you, you must love me back, you will never succeed. And if you are very insistent, the simple fact that you take that chance... you will be sure to be loved back, you do not know if you will continue to love, how can you guarantee that you will be loved back? You will never be able to verify if you will be loved to the same level, you will never be in a situation that you will love that much, you will never know if you are less or more love; you have to trust. What we expect from the erotic phenomenon is the uncertain chances of being loved; there is no reciprocity.

That is clearly the case in loving the child. In the erotic phenomenon you have to love, spontaneously or not, but it is part of this experience. What you gave to the child will never be paid. You gave the life his life, and this will not be paid. The child will never give back what you gave him. Children, however, will give the same thing to the next generation. The gift is not reciprocal.

In order to avoid injustice, you have to repeat this back by giving money. Time is oriented to the return of the equal. Time cannot reproduce the same thing. When you love you give life, when you give life, you will not be given it back, but life will be given again and again. But this is not repeated time; this is not return and not repetition. So the gift is not reciprocal but historical.

The gift has no reason to give. If we have reason to give, then there is an exchange. The rose has no “why”; the gift has no “why.” You don’t love because you have a reason to love. Therefore love is not reciprocal, but historical, creative, opened to the future. There is logic in the gift.

Language beyond language

The modern science makes a clearly theoretical distinction between finite and infinite. The difference cannot be measured in terms of size but only in ontological fashion. The very nature of infinity shows that it is boundless and, therefore, beyond any attempt to physical demonstration, and an infinite sum of finite would not be able to change what is finite into infinity. In other words,

infinite and finite are opposite concepts that have nothing in common. As much as finite expands, it can never reach the infinite. There is no progression between one to another. In similar fashion the distinction between divine and human cannot be measured and there is an unbridgeable gap that is impossible to overcome. It is a radical abyss that separates humans from God and if we attempt to talk about God, our language will always be inappropriate because it cannot show the real nature of the divine, no matter what word or terms we adopt to speak about him. Our language may serve more to separate us from God rather than unite us.

On the other hand, calling God “being par excellence” does not help from releasing him from the frame of our boundaries and understanding. Every time we apply our concepts – like being – to talk about God, we are making him as comprehensible as a human because we are applying the word *being* univocally for both humans and the divine. *Being* becomes a unified concept that applies in the same sense – logically or intrinsically – to both creatures and God.⁸ Even when we call God *Supreme Being* – as Duns Scotto did – we still make him prisoner of our concepts. God becomes captive of the essence of our reason and our logical truth, product of our efforts to comprehend the world through logic. He would be like a logic mathematical operation that seems eternal and immutable.⁹ Logical truths are not eternal in the same way God is, because human intelligence can still grasp and explain it whereas God is completely ungraspable.¹⁰

Marion is aware of the way God has been trapped within our concepts in our history. He attempts to free him from our limits by letting him be God, not in the fashion we think he is, in the way he *really* is. Every time we treat God within our concepts, says Marion, we are blaspheming against him in idolatrous way precisely because we are confining him within our limitations. Marion recalls the famous words of Ludwig Wittgenstein to show that not always do we have to say something to someone: “what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (Wittgenstein, 2002, p. 27). Even though

8 Gschwandtner, 2007, p. 108. She writes: “Not only is God conceived from this univocal concept of being, however, but understanding between humans and God is due to the same concept. Univocity of essence and univocity of thought become closely linked.”

9 Somehow Descartes already had seen the gap between humans and the divine when he asserted that the *res cogitans* – logical element – is completely different from *res extensa* – material element. For Descartes nothing can be said in the same way of us as it can be said for God since the latter infinitely surpasses human capacities.

10 Marion, 1991, p. 55 He writes: “the *causa sui* says so little about the divine God that assimilate it with the latter, even with the apologetic intention of furnishing a supposed proof, amounts to speaking crudely, even in blasphemy.”

Wittgenstein is not talking about God, he recognizes that sometimes we must remain in silence.

There is an inner *suspicion of idolatry* every time one speaks about God in theological fashion attempting to define him from our limited point of view. By doing so, one may speak about God with violence especially because – perhaps unaware – he is violating his right to be God, the Most High.¹¹ The idol is the “splendor of visible” whose polychrome gives rise to the polysemy of the divine.¹² The idol stops the gaze or reflects the gaze of idolater and fixes it in a specific aim – which is himself – closing the entire horizon. His gaze does not reflect toward the infinite, but returns to the gazer and remains with him. By doing so, the gazer remains very far from God or treats him within the frame of his horizon, confining him to human power.¹³ The intention of the gaze may, sometimes, aim the divine, but stops here in the first visible, incapable of going beyond it. The idol freezes the gaze and buries it and the divine is measured precisely by the human gaze.

Marion attempts to raise a new way of dealing with the divinity in the way he deserves to be treated: Free from all human efforts to grasp him. However, the problem comes forward immediately: Which language should I use in order to refer to God without trapping him into an idol or into our idolatrous concepts? On the other hand, being not an angel, I must use what is proper to my nature, the language and the culture I have. The question is how?

Marion extensively addresses the theme in his book “In Excess”, and for the sake of time and purpose, I will not analyze it in depth but only make an introduction to it in order to understand whether or not God can be a gift. Marion calls *non-predicative* the form of speech in which words do not play an important role in the relationship with God. Words almost never are able to describe facts of nature exactly and, therefore, much less can they

11 Perhaps the announcement of the death of God, made by Nietzsche, confirms the death of an idol not of God, the Most High. In fact, the collapse of the moral values only occurs because they were based in god completely unable to or change his destiny. Such god shall be no more and the will of power forges gods at every instant. In this case, says Marion, we produce god and therefore, we kill or revive him the way we want. This is the rise of the idol.

12 Marion, 1991, 8. Here Marion gives rise to the features of the idol: “The idol never deserves to be denounced as illusory since, by definition, it is seen – *eidolon* – that which is seen. It even consists only in the fact that it can be seen, that one cannot but see it. And see it so visibly that the very fact of seeing is suffices to know it – *eidolon* – that which is known by the fact that one has seen it. The idol presents itself to man’s gaze in order that representation, and hence knowledge can seize hold of it. The idol is erected there only so that see it [...] The idol fascinates and captivates the gaze precisely because everything in it must expose itself to the gaze attract, fill, and hold it.”

13 Marion, 1999, p. 8. Here Marion attempts to show that while the idol shows its way of defining being – he gives an example of the adoration of the golden Calf in which we can see the splendour of the visible – strictly as an idol when we restrict the visibility to ourselves.

describe the relationship with God. What Marion proposes has been known in the history as *negative theology* also known as *mystical theology*: prayer or contemplation.¹⁴ Prayer is not about words or dialogue as we are used to do in our daily lives. Prayer and contemplation are union of human heart and mind with the divine and this is an experience that only he, who actually has had the experience, can know what it is about, even though he is unable to describe it with words. Perhaps Derrida could raise one counter argument affirming that contemplation and prayer, somehow, name God to which I direct my prayer and, therefore, is a positive way of talking to him. If this is true then, my thought, when I pray, has a recipient that I named *God*. Here is Marion's response (Marion, 1999, p. 143):

The proper name marks the fact that an individual's presence remains anonymous in direct proportion to the degree to which its name becomes more present. In this way, supposing that praise attributes a name to a possible God, one should conclude that it does not name God properly or essentially, nor in presence, but that it marks God's absence, anonymity, and withdrawal – exactly as every name dissimulates every individual, which it merely indicates without ever manifesting.

What comes to mind is very simple: By worshipping God, we are not describing him or attempting to do so, but rather, we are assuming a true relationship that takes place between man and God. Certainly such assumption does not lead to a descriptive sense but to real experience of the infinite within the finite that leads me to say how great God is and how poor I am. This is a *mystical* experience that only mystical theology can describe. I have to point out, though, that mystical theology goes beyond negation or affirmation. It has to do with the experience of incomprehension that is literally a *transgression* of the definition of being. God does not fit in what Being is supposed to mean and, in this regard, prayer can be *understood*¹⁵ as a pouring of pure love that only God himself is able to do. Despite of the fact that my prayer or

14 Negative theology, also known as *apophatic theology* assumes that God cannot be completely described in words or human language. Whatever the divinity may be, we will always inevitably fail in defining him. Then negative theology attempts to describe God by negation speaking in terms what he is not, rather than what he is. Three theologians in early Christianity have emphasized the importance of this way we approach God in order to try to understand him a bit more: Basil the Great, John Chrysostom and Pseudo Dionysius. Negative theology assumes that we can assert what God is not, to a certain extent. For example, we can say that God is not evil or limited while if we say "God is good" we are assuming that this *good* falls into our understanding of what goodness is and precisely here is the problem. In fact, all concepts of goodness we have are inevitably limited if we compare with God.

15 I obviously mean here not the understanding that is fruit of human rational capacity or human intelligence in all its splendour, but rather, the understanding of accepting what is incomprehensible.

contemplation has a purpose,¹⁶ the recipient – God – turns out to be so high that I am the one who actually receives what I meant to give. In fact, by praying, I do not add anything to him, but I am the one who gets better, better person, better human being. This may not fall into human logic or human grasping but, rather, is a real transgression of what we thought we had known, but we did not. The mystical theology does not fit into rational understanding and precisely this is the reason why it is called *transgression of the being*. Mystical theology is not obsessed or gripped with the *presence* and it does not care whether or not God will answer the prayer or perform miracles just to show how powerful he is. After all, if God performs what I ask him to do, I assume his functions and he would be conceptually understood. However, if God is conceptually understood, it would no longer be God. Instead, God has no obligation whatsoever toward creatures because he (Horner, 2004, 242-243) “cannot be seen, not only because nothing finite can bear his glory without perishing, but above all because that could be conceptually comprehended...”

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16 I have pointed out earlier that one of Derrida’s objection to negative theology – prayer and praise – is that it has a destination, and therefore a specific object of mind. If there is an object of mind it would easily be named by theology in the old fashion. But if the object, such as understood by Derrida, is applied to God, God will never be named properly – as Marion himself has shown. In this way, I will never be able to properly name my interlocutor: God

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