Book Review

Tamsin Jones, *A Genealogy of Marion's Philosophy of Religion: Apparent Darkness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011)

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Tamsin Jones' overriding aim in this work is "to probe the *coherence* of his [Marion's] corpus" (1). Specifically, Jones sets out to investigate a tension in Marion's philosophy of religion between (i) the notion of 'givenness', wherein it is forbidden (*a priori*) to rule out the appearance of any phenomenon; and (ii) the notion of "saturation", which prohibits conceptual idolatry and thus does not allow any phenomenon to be constrained by a single interpretation. This, presumably, is a tension because, on the one hand, anything that is given must be given to consciousness and hence is circumscribed by the conditions as to what can be given to consciousness; but, on the other hand, these very conditions do not allow for saturated phenomena, that is, phenomena that exceed any and all conditions. Jones writes: "My task is to explore whether there is a point where the brilliant paradoxical balance can no longer be maintained and the various tensions dissolve into incoherence" (1-2). In a novel approach to this paradox, Jones focuses her discussion on Marion's retrieval of Greek patristic authors, especially Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory of Nyssa.

The analysis of this patristic retrieval begins in the first chapter, where Jones asks: "Whom [i.e., which Greek patristic sources] does Marion cite? How frequently? In what works? And most importantly, why?" (13) In the course of a survey of Marion's writings, Jones offers the following theses: (i) the "softer" or less contestable thesis that Marion retrieves Greek patristic sources, and particularly Dionysius and Nyssa, "univocally" – i.e., in the same way, without paying much attention to the differences between these sources, so that both 'are treated almost monolithically as a source of "truth" or "orthodoxy" with which to bolster Marion's own contemporary theses' (15); and (ii) the "stronger" or more controversial thesis that Marion defers to Gregory in such a way that the work of Gregory becomes a hermeneutical lens through which Dionysius' own writings are understood. Jones argues, for example, that at decisive points in Marion's debate with Derrida over the metaphysical status of Dionysius' apophatic theology, Marion comes to rely upon a Cappadocian theory of language, particularly as it was expressed in Gregory's *Contra Eunomium* (35-36).

The second chapter delves deeper into Marion's patristic retrieval and calls into question his univocal treatment of Dionysius and Gregory by way of exposing "the significant *differences* between the apophaticisms of Gregory and Dionysius" (44-45). After a brief survey of the comparative scholarship on Gregory and Dionysius, Jones offers a close reading of the depiction of Moses' ascent into darkness as an image of apophasis in Gregory's *Life of Moses* and Dionysius' *Mystical Theology*. This leads Jones to the philosophy of language embedded in each theologian's apophaticism. Gregory, it is shown, emphasises the conventionality of language on the basis of the view that there is a fundamental ontological divide (*diastema*) between Creator and the created world, and that language resides on the created side of this divide. Dionysius, however, is more optimistic about the potential of language to reveal (and not only conceal) God, and this on the basis of his understanding of analogy and participation. Jones then makes more explicit the ways in which these philosophies of language are situated within divergent visions of the world, God and the human being. Given this divergence between Gregory and Dionysius, a univocal retrieval of the two (like that performed by Marion) is ruled out. But, I wonder, are these conceptions (of God, creation, human perfection, etc.) mutually exclusive, or only differences in emphasis?

In the third chapter, on phenomenological method, Jones discusses Marion's three major articulations of this method. Marion's first articulation occurs in *Reduction and Givenness*, and is placed in the context of the Husserlian "breakthrough" (the first reduction) and the Heideggerian "broadening" (from beings to Being, or the second reduction). Broadening the method even further, Marion makes *givenness* the sole horizon (the third reduction). In his second articulation, found in *Being Given*, Marion defends the primacy of givenness and also claims that the results of the phenomenological method are *universal* (so that they don't merely apply to a limited region or domain – e.g., theology) and *indubitable*. This, at least, is Jones' reading, and it does seem to impair the credibility of Marion's method. Marion's third articulation, developed in more recent writings (such as *In Excess*), continues the theme of universality by defending the idea of phenomenology as "first philosophy" – "first" in the sense of being a universal precondition for all other fields of inquiry.

In contrast to the notion of a "first philosophy" yielding certain and universal results, Marion famously went on to develop the idea of a 'saturated' phenomenon, a phenomenon that exceeds all limits and categories (as Jones puts it: "Like a 3000-watt appliance being plugged into a 20-amp outlet, no general concept or pattern is able to receive or contain it," 112) and hence requires an "endless hermeneutics." In the fourth chapter, Jones takes a critical view of this hermeneutical turn in Marion, arguing that Marion's retrieval of Gregory amounts in this instance to a missed opportunity: "Gregory's treatment of scriptural interpretation as an

infinitely open and infinitely transformative response to the excess of revelation provides a rich instance of how Marion might think through the relationship between the pure givenness of the saturated phenomenon and one's subsequent interpretation of it. It is an opportunity that Marion misses" (129).

In chapter five Jones continues investigating the blind spots and tensions in Marion's work, and goes on to suggest that Marion might find solutions to some of his difficulties by turning more insistently towards Gregory of Nyssa's (rather than Dionysius') views on knowledge and language. Jones concludes her study with two under-explored issues which "trouble Marion's phenomenological project" (156): practices (such as silent prayer) that cultivate the capacity to receive phenomena, and how to make normative evaluations of these phenomena. Jones ends by noting the apologetic tenor of Marion's work, though it is an apologetics that "does not aim to convince by rational proof," but "represents an openness to receive the unexpected" (160).

Jones has here offered an excellent analysis of the patristic genealogy of Marion's phenomenology: clear, precise and richly documented in its accounts of Marion's thought, as well as astute and balanced in its critical appraisals. If only more philosophers – both analytic and Continental – could write this way.

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