

Littleness and the Constitution of the Irreducible Person

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To think the irreducible — were it possible — is to think the unconditioned, the unbounded, the beyond concept and object, the infinite; indeed, who thinks the irreducible transgresses thought — thought thinking beyond thought.¹ To think the person, by consequence, is to think the irreducible par excellence. The person qua person begins and ends our thought which never accedes to a comprehension of it.² We cannot comprehend in totality what cannot be reduced.

So far, so little said. Can we begin to think the irreducible? Must we let lay the person *irreducible*, so far beyond comprehensive grasp? Must we remain silent? More still, need we accept a personalism perpetuating the race for first philosophy (*φιλοσοφία πρώτη/philosophia protē*): no longer the metaphysics of presence of Aristotle, no longer ontology, no longer the Ethic of the Other facing me, no longer the phenomenology of givenness alone, but the originating givenness of the person?³ To begin with the submission of the irreducible in its touchstone to the person raises questions which near question begging; but here I insist on a delay. The decision to submit the highest⁴ irreducibility to the person unfolds from a prior and indeed more threatening question: What, if any, are

¹ Says Emmanuel Levinas in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969: 49): “To think the infinite, the transcendent, the Stranger, is hence not to think an object. But to think what does not have the lineaments of an object is in reality to do more or better than think.”

² The irreducibility of the person, a cornerstone of personalist thought, sees an extended treatment in Mark K. Spencer’s just released “The Irreducibility of the Human Person: A Catholic Synthesis,” (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press: 2022). I review Spencer’s work in *Nova et Vetera* (forthcoming).

³ For an historical reading of the shift from classical metaphysics to the various phenomenological competitors for what is most fundamental, see Jean-Luc Marion’s essay, “Phenomenology of Givenness and First Philosophy,” reprinted in *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, chp. 1. See also Spencer 2021, “The Many Phenomenological Reductions and Catholic Metaphysical Anti-Reductionism,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 95:3 (Summer 2021): 719-735. I am heavily indebted to Marion’s genealogy of phenomenology in what follows. The ethic of the Other facing me is, of course, that of Levinas.

⁴ I speak of a “highest” or “paradigmatic” irreducibility to safeguard the wider sense of irreducible which extends beyond the personal. A discussion of this wider sense is outside the scope of this paper.

the conditions for the possibility of the *manifestation* of the so said irreducible person? The question (hereafter, Question) threatens since were it possible to submit the irreducibly given to the person, the constitution of the same would then face the aporia that what we intend to constitute (by whatever operations) remains in its irreducibility that which in its excess (in its beyond conceptualization) refuses constitution. The condition is a limit, the constitution its operation; but why think the constitution of the person possible after the insisted decision to uphold the person irreducible to any limiting condition?⁵ The question of the constitution of the person in its present staging threatens to halt the investigation before it begins. The problem opened by the Question that threatens turns out dead on arrival. Or so it seems.

The Question that threatens as soon as opened is the subject of the following analysis. In the end, however, I offer only the first sketches of an answer. Still, what follows provides a map, not a map which leads to nowhere (to the dead arrival), but one which opens a pathway for the non-violent resolution of the aporia of constituting the unconditional, a lifting which preserves unscathed the irreducibility of the person. What results is a *criterion* which constitutes the condition of possibility for any future prescription for constituting persons. That is, we arrive in the end at a limit condition for the bringing to presence of an unlimited, unconditioned, irreducibility, which finds its coronation in the person. That limit condition, I propose, is the phenomenon of littleness. Becoming little is the hidden pathway to the revelation of the person. However, the constitution of persons is possible it will be possible only by fidelity to the salutary paradox of littleness: selves are found only by losing them. I sketch this solution in the final section of this paper.

⁵ The desideratum for personalism is to resist reductionist accounts of the person, accounts which would define personhood in non-personal terms. There's a long history here. Aquinas considers the person by definition not communicable (so not definable by communicable terms): *ratione personae est, quod sit incommunicabilis STI. q.30 a.4; In Sententiis D.25 q.2 aa.1-3*. See, for example, Karol Wojtyła's essay "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being," in *Person and Act and Related Essays* trans. Grzegorz Ignatik (Washington D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2021: 536-545).

1. The Person Must Be Irreducibly Given

Short of insisting on the self-evidence of the phenomenon of the person resisting submission to any other than itself, I begin by inviting a reduction to two absurdities consequent on the refusal to accede the irreducibly given to the person. The absurdities provide the irreducible person its still wanting justification. My aim here is not a complete defense of this irreducibility but some initial motives for its acceptance. I suggest that irreducibility is best defended by phenomenological reduction to the saturated rather than by any dialectical argument. I say more about this approach later.

1.1 *The Problem of the Persistence of the Problem of Solipsism.* The unrelenting problem of solipsism opens just as soon as the person is submitted to condition for its appearance. Take any concept you like, insist on the submission of the person to it, the concept returns an idol which opens a question which threatens in reverse⁶: What shows itself a person in that? The question threatens just as Moore's open question threatens, it remains open, never arriving at the constitution of a person. The concept is a limit of possibility, a bound, the person an arrival of the "impossible," that is, the what exceeds the categorial structure of consciousness which enables the constitution of the object. To conceive the person in this sense is to conceive the impossible, the miraculous conception.

History unfolds the error. Hegel's condition of the Absolute Ideal opening onto moments in time returns the projected idol: the Hegelian person yields to the concept of the Ideal. The always prior intentionality of Husserl's transcendental ego projects the *Solus Ipse*, origin of objectivity: the person conditioned by the conceptualizable because submitted to the unsurpassable horizon of the object. Heidegger's *Dasien*, the emanation and unfolding of Being, conditions the person by the prior concealment of the Nothing which claims, the pre-

⁶ Marion: "The concept, when it knows the divine in its hold, and hence names 'God,' defines it. It defines it, and therefore also measures it to the dimension of its hold. Thus the concept on its part can take up again the essential characteristics of the 'aesthetic' idol." *God without Being* trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago IL: Chicago University Press, 2012), 29. It will not be difficult to see that the same conceptual idolatry applies to personhood just as well as the divine.

given and non-transgressable horizon of Being⁷. the same fate falls the pre-given horizons of knowing and being imposed on the phenomenon of the person. Such accounts fall to the persistence of the problem of solipsism. Can I instead begin with myself unsubmitted to the conditions I impose on the other? No, even then the *Solus Ipse* falls to a *Nollus Ipse*: if only one, then none. If condition precedes the arrival of the person, the person never arrives. The resistance to the persistence of the problem of solipsism follows one path throughout: constitution (if it is possible) must secure the revelation of an irreducible person.

1.2 *The Problem of the Grounding of an Ethic*. For some, prospects of the *solus ipse* fail to disturb. Relegate the irreducible phenomenon to myth and the persisting problem of other selves disappears. After all, another decision remains live: to speak the person is to discharge a useful fiction.⁸ The person is an impossible aporia, phenomenology reaches its night here.⁹ Solipsism now falls to illusion, deflating the problem; I am not alone because neither the I nor the other exceeds conceptualization. Let's take this option. What now? Now the ethical claim of the face disappears and with it the injunction against killing. The impermissible yields to the impersonal *telos* of the idolatrous condition. The historical unfolding of *Dasein*, the necessary unfolding of collective consciousness, the social project of transcendental signification, or even the conversion of the soul to its beatitude according to Divine predestination. Even before an axiology of the goals, it is necessary to ask what could justify the instrumentalization of the person to them. The *sui iuris* character of the person, free to avow or disavow from itself in a fundamental attitude toward its future, succumbs to the prior condition. What then? The supposition itself sees self-defeat lurking: how make this decision without irreducible self to make it?

⁷ See Marion's analysis of the limiting horizon of Being in *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology* trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 198-202.

⁸ Consider Derek Parfit's attempt (among others) to eliminate his *self* in *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), chps. 10-13.

⁹ Emmanuel Falque, "The Extra-Phenomenal," *Diakrisis Yearbook of Theology and Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2018): 11. For discussion of Falque's talk of the night of phenomenology see William L. Connelly's "The Intelligibility of the Flesh: A Response to Emmanuel Falque," *Crossing: The INPR Journal* no. 1, 2020: 154-161.

2. The Interruption and the Event: Appearances of the Unseen Irreducible

A first move toward surmounting the Question which threatens to nullify the investigation is to bring the irreducibly given to evidence, make it seen – prior to its submission to the person -- and so secure its phenomenality. Bringing the irreducible to evidence by faithful reception of what is given in experience is a route more sure and more direct than dialectical reasoning. But If the irreducibly given is not properly (though no property) a phenomenon, it not only escapes any phenomenological reduction (and stalemates our quest) but it itself remains hopelessly obscure. How, then, could irreducibility ever accede to persons who evidently *do* appear? Fortunately, the irreducibly given has by now two advocates who bring it to presence for us masterfully: Levinas and Marion. I now consider two ways they do this.

1. What is irreducibly given cannot be anticipated by a comprehending gaze.¹⁰ Instead, it interrupts intentional consciousness giving itself without submission to constituting acts. Levinas locates such an interruption in the face of the other.¹¹ The interruption of the irreducible Other is a rupture of the stream of time consciousness because it shows up uninvited, without limit condition, without finitude. With Levinas, may we not think the irreducibly given in thinking beyond the totality to an infinite Other, which we learned is to do better than think? Have we not then arrived at a phenomenon – the interruption of the Other, the claim of infinity collapsed in the other’s face – which makes appear for us the irreducible *as person*?

But this is too quick. The irreducibly given, even as appearing in interruption of non-totalizable alterity, appears as relation of distance to myself (absolute alterity), without yet securing *my* self among the irreducible. The otherness of the Other appears on the face of the one facing me, the in face of the face (*rapport de face à face*).¹² Yet if the other appears

¹⁰ Levinas: “The epiphany of the other carries its own signification independent of this signification received from the world. The other does not arrive from a context alone, but without mediation; he signifies by himself.” *The Trace of the Other*, 1963: 351. Translation mine. See also *Totality and Infinity* pp. 49, 53, 192.

¹¹ “The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed.” *Totality and Infinity*, 194.

¹² “The ‘in face of the face in its expression—in its mortality—assigns me, demands me, claims me.” Levinas, *De Dieu que vient à l’idée*, 1982: 245, 265. Cited in Jean-Luc Marion *Reduction and Givenness*, 196-197.

to me free from limiting constraints, but I do not appear to *myself* in this same way, have we arrived at the concept of the person? Am I not person no less than the other facing me? Moreover, the other appears *with* finitude, with a body, with the limits of sense intuition if not reducible to these. How is it possible for irreducible transcendence to appear in this imminent finitude? Infinity appears, yes. But the process of its revelation remains mysterious not just in otherness but in my being a mystery to my very self.

2. A second advocate remains: Marion's breakthrough to a phenomenology of givenness.¹³ The metaphysics of the transcendence of the Other yields to an expanded phenomenological reduction promising phenomenality without remainder. The expanded reduction reduces to what gives itself *from itself*. The origin of the reduction, however, no longer rests in the autarchic ego, nor even in *Dasein* unfolding a pre-given horizon of Being¹⁴, but rests instead with the phenomenon *itself* giving itself. But if what shows itself gives itself *from its self*, what is given in the reduction exceeds the limit of intentionality, exceeds the conditions for conceptualization, that is, exceeds constitutional conditions. The exceeding is for Marion an excess (*un surcroît*) which he names the saturated phenomenon (*la phénomène saturé*).¹⁵ The saturated phenomenon shows up as totally unforeseeable and irreducible *event* which saturates space, time and relation by giving itself by surprise and without cause.¹⁶ The saturated phenomenon transgresses the limit by moving beyond it into excessive intuition. The trajectory of the saturated in its phenomenality is through the ceiling of the here and visible to the beyond and unseen. The unseen and excessive arrives, not as planned, but prior to our intentions, so by surprise. By contrast, the irreducibly given in its phenomenality points back to what has been transgressed to manifest its inviolable

¹³ See Marion's seminal work, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ Both Marion and Levinas move the phenomenological reduction beyond Heidegger's Being given prior to constituting acts to what is given irreducibly and otherwise than being. I do not have space to discuss this development.

¹⁵ Asks Marion: "Are phenomena of revelation still rightfully phenomena? If yes, do they belong to objective or ontic phenomenality, or even to phenomenality of another type—that of the event, the paradox, *or the saturated phenomenon*, and so on? ... All these questions, although they can only be formulated in the field of revealed theology, belong nevertheless also and rightfully to phenomenology, since revelation itself claims to deploy a particular figure of phenomenality." *In Excess*, 29. Emphasis mine.

¹⁶ *In Excess*, 30ff. Marion sees the saturated as an excess of the traditional Kantian categories of quantity, quality, relation, and modality: now event, idol, flesh, and icon. Revelation, in a double paradox, exceeds all the categories at once (*In Excess*, 29 n.41). With Levinas and Marion, can we speak of a revelation of the *person* as more than Other and more than the iconic face which occasions the revelation? That is where I want to push my investigation.

distance from the reducible. What is saturated cannot be reduced to the common law phenomenon it exceeds, while what is irreducible always exceeds its manifold visible manifestations, so is always saturated. Thus we are now vindicated in upholding the saturated phenomenon as the phenomenon manifesting the irreducibly given from itself, and the irreducibly given shows itself to be properly (improperly, that is) phenomenological according to phenomenology's breakthrough to givenness.

The interruption of the person now freed from relation as alterity and from condition of being envisaged succeeds in acceding to the irreducibly given.¹⁷ The irreducibly given is brought to presence in the appearing of what exceeds the seen. But what of the Question that threatens? What of the one charged to reduce to givenness? Marion insists on a passivity of the reducer to preserve the given prior to constitutive acts.¹⁸ Once again the revelation of the person remains mysterious: the person exceeds the finitude within which it appears, but how is this possible? Is the new reduction a concession to silence on the question of constitution? If silent, the solution awaits a hearing.

3. The Lasting Problem of Empathy and the Way Forward

The decision to submit the irreducibly given to the person, the claim that the revelation of the person shows itself to be the irreducible phenomenon *par excellence*, remains to be justified. The justification, however, requires by way of preparation a re-presentation of the problem of empathy—the problem of constituting another self besides mine—which remains unresolved since Marion's breakthrough to givenness.¹⁹

Why think the problem of empathy here returns and in returning presents itself as yet unresolved? The problem of empathy lasts because, to speak of a surprising and often

¹⁷ Marion: "The other person only appears to me starting from the moment when I expose myself to him or her, thus when I no longer master or constitute the other and admit that he or she expresses self without signification. Must the face that envisages me remain an unintelligible phenomenon, because without signification? Not at all. For if the face lacks a conceptualizable meaning, it is not by default, but by excess." *In Excess*, 122. See also *God without Being*, 2012: 17.

¹⁸ Marion: "This operation—to phenomenize the given—by rights is owed to *l'adonné* [the one given over to] by virtue of its difficult privilege of constituting the only given in which there is the visibility of all other givens. It therefore reveals the given as phenomenon." *In Excess*, 49.

¹⁹ I have in mind Edith Stein's formulation of the problem in her *On the Problem of Empathy*, trans. Waltraut Stein, 1964. Stein remains an underappreciated source of Husserl's own investigation into the problem of constituting other constituting transcendental subjectivities.

overlooked situation, the problem arises at the *origins* and in the *center* of phenomenology. It arises at the origins as early as 1905 when Husserl in introducing the *epochē* soon realizes the problem of constituting an alter ego, another reducer.²⁰ The Husserlian development of transcendental phenomenology carries within it and with its own development the problem of empathy (*Einfühlung*, feeling into), with full exposure in *la Méditations Cartésienne*, but never with full resolution.²¹ The problem of empathy (hereafter, the Problem) appears in phenomenology's center because the prospects of constituting fellow constituters forces reconsideration of constitution itself; it forces the project of transcendental phenomenology to redirect toward a prior project of an inter-relational, social ontology. A woman excluded from the academy, the overlooked Edith Stein, presses Husserl's look toward the inviolably originary but not originarily given experience of the other.²² But the Problem persists, and Husserl's look bedazzled by the object of intentionality, stops short of a solution.²³ If what is given bows to what is aimed at, and the aiming aims at the object—the what can be grasped by a signifying act of consciousness—intuition never exceeds intentionality, which is to say that the irreducibly

²⁰ See the “Empathy” entry in Dermot Moran and Joseph Cohen's *The Husserl Dictionary* (New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 95. The term “empathy” (*Einfühlung*) first appears in Husserl's research notes in 1905. We see a more developed yet unresolved engagement of the problem in Husserl's *Formal and Transcendental Logic* trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Hijoff, 1969), 232-243.

²¹ Husserl: “As the point of departure for our new meditations, let us take what may seem to be a grave objection. The objection concerns nothing less than the claim of transcendental phenomenology to be itself transcendental *philosophy* and therefore its claim that, in the form of a constitutional problematic and theory moving within the limits of the transcendently reduced ego, it can solve the transcendental problems pertaining to the *Objective world*. When I, the mediating I, reduce myself to my absolute transcendental ego by phenomenological *epochē*. do I not become *solus ipse*; and do I not remain that, as long as I carry on a consistent self-explication under the name phenomenology?” *Cartesian Meditations* trans. Dorian Cairn, 1960, 89.

²² Stein shows us that the subjectivity of the other while not primordially given in empathy is given through a special intuitive penetration of the originary viewpoint of the other. “And while I am living in the other's joy, I do not feel primordial joy. It does not issue live from my “I.” Neither does it have the character of once having lived like remembered joy. But still much less is it merely fancied without actual life ... In my non-primordial experience I feel, as it were, led by a primordial one not experienced by me but still there, manifesting itself in my non-primordial experience.” Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy* trans. Waltraut Stein (Washington D.C: ICS Publications, 1989), 11.

²³ For Marion, the Husserlian phenomenological reduction reduces what can appear to the objectifiable according to consciousness. “Consciousness thus radically determines phenomenality by imposing upon it the actuality of presence ... The return to the things themselves is limited to a ‘return to the sources of intuition.’ The phenomenon that so emerges receives, with its purity, its limit.” *Reduction and Givenness*, 54.

given remains concealed, the person reduced to the condition of meaning-conferring acts of constitution, the condition of objectivity.²⁴

But must we press on all the way to givenness arriving from itself, the saturated phenomenon? Can we not sooner take another road, a road taken by disciples of Husserl in resisting the master's turn to the transcendental? Stein, Ingarden, Hildebrand, and Scheler resist Husserl's turn. Taking solace in the *reality* of what gives itself, these realist phenomenologists resist the demand for the suspension of the attitude fitted to it, the natural attitude.²⁵ The "parentheses" of the *Logical Investigations* was, for them, never a resting on the laurels of the zero point of a transcendental ego, the pole of subjectivity.²⁶ The for the later Husserl unbreachable gap of the transcendental and the totally transcendent, at least not without discharging metaphysics and ontology, never arose for the phenomenological realists who detrained before the turn.²⁷ The realist phenomenologist would then open for us a road prior to reduction itself onto the transcendent, that is, a solution to the Problem which says: the other shows up for me as an otherwise than transcendental consciousness because what gives itself in experience is already in the realm of the real. The transcendental ego is in nowise the origin of the other. Yet the Problem persists; and this for two reasons. 1. The silence of the phenomenological realist about the *self* of what gives itself from itself opens a lacuna: the *what* of what gives itself from itself, in the realm of the real, remains concealed.²⁸ Stein charges transcendental

²⁴ Compare Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 148-153 on "objectivity." All conscious acts which pre-condition what the possibility of the manifest given submit to the generally formalizable object.

²⁵ On the suspension of the natural attitude as constituent of a transcendental phenomenology, see Husserl's *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* trans. F. Kerstein (Norwell MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983), 5-8. For an example of the early criticism of Husserl's transcendental turn, see Roman Ingarden, *On the Motives which led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism* trans. Arnor Hannibalsson (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975). For discussion see George Heffernan's "Stein's Critique of Husserl's Transcendental Idealism," in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 95, no. 3 (Summer, 2021: 455-479).

²⁶ "Parentheses" and "bracketing" are typical metaphors for the act of reducing proper to the phenomenological reduction.

²⁷ A case study in the realist epistemology emerging from these early students of Husserl is Dietrich von Hildebrand's *What is Philosophy?* (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, 2021 [1960]).

²⁸ To be sure, the constitution of the self of myself and that of the other was considered. Says Stein, "We also see the significance of knowledge of foreign personality for 'knowledge of self' in what has been said. We not only learn to make us ourselves into objects, as earlier, but through empathy with 'related natures', i.e., persons of our type, what is 'sleeping' in us is developed." *On the Problem of Empathy*, 105. But *my* self and *our* selves arrive *after* the always already present transcendental "I," the stream of conscious experience (cf. 28, 36). By contrast, we are here considering the "self" of givenness *itself* prior to constituting the empirical experience of ourselves.

idealism with reducing *what is* to what can be thought, depriving it of ontological independence.²⁹ Should we then submit the irreducibly given to the ontologically independent? The decision only risks the return of reducibility: By what reduction is the ontologically real constituted? The retention of the natural attitude in the realist reduction opens the lacuna and risks, on one reading, the failure to locate an *irreducible* phenomenon, that is, risks the return of the Problem.³⁰ 2. Is the so called “Husserlian turn” not instead a proper development of the breakthrough of the *Investigations*? Before venturing toward exegesis, we rightfully wonder whether ligaments of Husserlian intentionality, reduction to signification, tether the realists to transcendental idealism more than they wish. The wondering opens the lacuna: can intuition *exceed* intentionality? Marion shows us that it can. So to close the question requires the voicing of what the realists kept silent.

Phenomenology works to show, and if the irreducibly given cannot be seen, the invisible never shown, then phenomenology’s limit arrives, and the Problem persists. But the possibility of an appearing saturation, the event resisting constitution, arriving unforeseen, fills the lacuna. The fulfilling intuition now fulfills by overflowing. The possibility, in turn, of the non-totalizable interruption of the Other, rupturing our intentional time consciousness, presents on its face an unintended event. Not yet arriving at resolution, we are here confronted with a *criterion* for any future constitution of the person. The criterion is revealed in the possibility of the impossible: the appearing as phenomenon of the irreducible, invisible, unforeseen revelation of the constitution interrupting person. The possibility of this impossibility opens onto another possible impossibility: the *constitution* of what resists all constitution. The constitution gains possibility on grounds of the phenomenality of the irreducibly given phenomenon, the visibility of the invisible. The criterion constitutes a condition for reduction of what defies reduction, namely, that any

²⁹ See George Heffernan’s “Stein’s Critique of Husserl’s Transcendental Idealism.”

³⁰ Stein speaks of personhood as revealing “types” with respect to one’s ability to feel and realize values (see note 24 above). But can infinity surrender to a type? Stein preserves the absolutely prior “I” of the stream of conscious experience which conditions constitutive acts. “So far we have always spoken of the pure “I” as the otherwise-indescribable, qualityless subject of experience (36).” And she entertains even a “pure ‘I,’ for which no living body of its own and no psycho-physical relationships are constituted primordially (81)” at least in possibility. But how could the irreducibly given require a prior transcendental ego for its givenness? The “I” for Stein underwrites the strata of all experience including the personal: “Now, types have various grades of generality in the realm of the mind,” and “every single person is already himself a type (104).” These questions at least motivate the search for a clearer path to the constitution of irreducible persons.

such constitution secure inviolable the manifestation of the person in its saturated givenness. What remains is to justify the decision to submit the irreducibly given phenomenon to the person.

4. **Becoming Little: Intimations of Solution**

The revelation of the person is the saturated phenomenon *par excellence* because what gives itself from itself, when the person appears, has self, oneself to give. What Marion has given us are the seeds for a method of constituting irreducible persons. The criterion constituting the condition for constitution is set: the constitution *never* precedes in conditioning but always *receives* what arrives unforeseen. What Marion does not yet give is the method for constitution. He will not speak of constitution but instead of the resistance of *l'adonné* (the gifted one) in receiving the gift: the resistance of *l'adonné* breaks open the visibility of the irreducible.³¹ The arrival of the person "*ni ne pourra jamais se reproduire*" (couldn't ever be reproduced), yes, but must it be received, must it be seen? "*Autrement dit, l'ego, dépouillé de sa propre transcendantalite, doit s'admettre comme il se reçoit, comme un adonné*" (In other words, the I, deprived of its proper transcendentality, must be admitted, as it is received, as a gifted one). But must the gifted let the gift arrive, at least in the appearance, and if not, how let it come? There is no question here of a prior condition proceeding from the reducer. Nor must we deny the already received surprising gift of the possibility of constitution itself. Still, the possibility remains, and the remainder invites the unfolding of these seeds.

The persistence of the problem of the possibility of the revelation of the person to us finite creatures (though persons ourselves) sets the stage for the phenomenon of littleness. In thinking the recipient of the gift, *l'adonné*, Marion humbles the transcendental ego lowering it from its former primacy: the gift gives prior to any reduction to it from a constituting subject. Tucked inside an objection to this radical passivity of the reducer (the recipient) of the saturated phenomenon (Is such a radical powerlessness over the given properly phenomenological?), Marion inserts the pregnant phrase *diminutio ipseitatis* hinting at the

³¹ *In Excess*, 49ff. The resistance of *l'adonné* is a passive receptivity of the saturated which nonetheless requires from *l'adonné* courage to withstand.

significance of littleness.³² “*Parmi les objections possible contre une telle diminutio ipseitatis de l’ego ...* » (Among the possible objections against such a making little the self ... etc).” If such a making little the self names not the situation but the *process* spoken soon as a resistance, screen, or prism which phenomenizes the saturated phenomenon, may we not take our departure from this phenomenon of becoming little in thinking the method of constituting the person?³³ The breakthrough to givenness so far remains eagerness to show from and by the given itself protecting itself from reduction to the reducer. If over-eager, such a phenomenology threatens to overlook the easily unseen, the phenomenon of the little which opens to visibility the beauty of the given. The recipient of the given is here, now, in its visibility, but also and together with the beyond and not yet, the invisible. As such, becoming little plays a role, smaller to that played by the what (or who) giving itself prior to constitution, but indispensable for the possibility of the revelation of the person: indispensable not as necessary prior condition but as wonderful, posterior, cooperator. The resistance of l’adonné to the saturated begins the inquiry into the revelation of the person, but what remains is the elucidation of a method for resistance. I want to magnify the phenomenon of the little, the diminishment of the I as final solution to the search for a way of revealing both the other and myself. Becoming little is a method for revealing the already given saturated phenomenon par excellence, a method which in its paradoxical becoming less to give more meets the condition to secure inviolate in constituting the unconditional, irreducible person. Littleness meets the criterion for constituting irreducible persons because it manifests only in being subordinate to, and so *after*, the unconditional arrival of the saturated person. But the passivity of receiving the givenness of the person is not the annihilation of the recipient (the constituter, the reducer) since the lessening of myself always increases not only the other but myself, equally persons: I find myself in diminishing it. We find in the little not a dead passivity, but just the reverse: the greatest

³² *In Excess*, 45.

³³ I take as inspiration for this concept the doctrines of the spirituality of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, affectionally called her “Little Way”. For example, “J’ai compris encore que l’amour de Notre Seigneur se révèle aussi bien dans l’âme la plus simple qui ne résiste en rien à sa grâce que dans l’âme la plus sublime, en effet le propre de l’amour étant de s’abaisser” (I understood finally that the love of Our Lord reveals itself just as well in little souls who resist nothing of His grace as in the most sublime souls, that the essence of love was in making little the self). See *Histoire d’une âme*, Manuscrit A, 2r-3v, available in critical edition facsimiles with transcription at the Lisieux Archive website: https://archives.carmeldelisieux.fr/type_archive/manuscrit/

reveals itself in the least. The diminution for increase that I propose gives in excess to what was already given. The details of such a phenomenology of littleness remain for future work.

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