The Flesh of the Other (Animal): Encountering Animals as Saturated Phenomena

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I. Introduction

On December 2, 2011, parts of Dimitri Shostakovich’s unfinished opera “Orango” premiered in Los Angeles. The opera’s story concerns a monkey-human hybrid, a tragic figure who, like Franz Kafka’s Red Peter, finds that his very existence calls into question human society as we know it. Yet, more so than Red Peter, the figure of the hybrid exhibits complex relations with his human masters and relations. The hybrid human-animal figure both unsettles the normal social context while, in the projected libretto, Orango is able to critique and satirize the political environment in ways that ordinary humans cannot. In L.A., as the music of Shostakovich’s prologue began, projected images appeared of animal torture and scientific testing juxtaposed with scenes from contemporary political protests associated with the Occupy movement, military formations, and oil fields. These images can be read as the director Peter Sellars’ attempt to demonstrate the contemporary resonances between issues of animality and so-called human political predicaments. In other words, it seems that the same concerns about what it means to speak as and for both humans and animals in the face of oppression and technologization animate today’s climate as they did in the early twentieth century. At the core of the opera is a question about how humans and animals encounter one another: it is as products, pets, or persons?

This paper takes up the question of how we ought to speak about the relationship between

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1 Many thanks to Joshua Dienstag, Giulia Sissa, Brian Walker, Stephanie Gehring, Krupa Shandilya, Libby Barringer, and Megan Gallagher for advice, conversations, comments, and questions at the various stages of this project.

2 The performance was by the LA Philharmonic conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen and staged by Peter Sellars. The opera’s libretto was conceived by Alexander Starchakov and Count Alexei Tolstoy.

3 Examples of this questioning is can be found along multiple fronts. Michel Foucault’s investigations of various forms of Western subjectivity continue to provide both foils and exemplars for questioning the historicized subject. From Giorgio Agamben’s genealogies of the divisions, fissures, and pathologies of the political subject from ancient times to the present comes another set of ways to understand the animal/human divide as paradigmatic within the story of subjectivity. This is not even to touch on the challenges to the rational subject from theorists of gender, race, postcoloniality, and other forms of difference, radical or otherwise. The psychoanalytic subject is another alternative to the question here, and by the literal/human hybrid in this project: psychoanalysis as the agency by Peter Sellars. The opera’s libretto was conceived by Alexander Starchakov and Count Alexei Tolstoy.
humans and animal. Beyond speaking, however, I ask how might understand those aspects of this relationship about which it is most difficult to speak. There are a variety of attempts to address the problem of animal rights in contemporary philosophy, yet the struggle to understand the importance of human being vis-à-vis other forms of being is ongoing and arduous. How might we as human beings fashion a vocabulary, a manner of speaking about animals that does not relegate them to the realm of mere objects, while still acknowledging the difficulties of negotiating differences—however we may delineate them—in our forms of life? This question goes to the heart of what it might mean to consider our own conception of the good life as inclusive of or reliant on animals, whether as products, pets, or persons. In answer to these difficulties with speaking, I take Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenological philosophy and use it to address several ethical concerns within the human-animal relationship that I argue cannot be adequately examined using dominant ethical approaches.

This difficulty with speaking about humans and animals has many implications for contemporary political theory, since it goes to the heart not only of a pressing contemporary problem—what rights and privileges we might accord to the natural world, its beings and processes—but also, how we view *human* being in a rapidly changing world. For human being is not a stable concept, despite appearing as an unitary idea both linguistically and throughout much of the history of philosophy. The question of who can join the political community has not been resolved into a stable consensus in the practices of nation-states. Furthermore, the notion of a unitary, rational adult human political subject is itself being questioned in an ongoing way within political theory, philosophy, and countless other disciplines. The fact that we are inclined in democratic contexts to believe that it is right to give a political voice to all adults, regardless of gender, race, creed, or social status, is merely a momentary resting point in a flux of difficult questions about who

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or what matters in politics. Figuring out which beings matter for politics might begin to help us to address ongoing difficulties in current political-social relations amongst human beings and thus open up conversations about how to negotiate the novel and surprising empirical conditions that will continue to confront political communities.

In order to begin to approach these large questions, this essay considers a broad and ongoing problematic: how do we speak about the ontological relationship between human beings and the rest of the natural world? I propose that we must continue to seek alternatives first, to using scientific language and methods to discuss our relationship to animals and second, to using the rational, human subject as the primary arbiter of theoretical and ontological importance. The search for other language is essential if we are to articulate a politics that can respond to the dynamism of the natural world. Such a politics must also resist the temptation to turn to certainty where we should instead exhibit humility regarding the precise form(s) of ontological difference that exists between human and non-human beings. This is particularly important given the seemingly unstoppable movement worldwide toward greater manipulation and technologization of the natural world, and the incredible velocity at which our built technologies are expanding in reach and capability. As new inter-species genetic combinations are opened up and created, the shared language of science may require other shared languages to come alongside it, in order to engage in the kind of reflexive examination of our relationship to animals that scientific language alone may not engender.4

Why do I take up the question of scientific language?5 In the world of environmental policy, as, indeed, in most policy approaches, the evocation of environmental destruction relies on scientific analyses in order to persuade others in the political realm to care about and for the natural world. There is nothing to be objected to in this regard; scientific knowledge certainly has a place in helping

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4 As Una Chaudhuri’s examination of the ways that performance art challenges the stability of the human/animal divide indicates, this problem is not limited to politics, but crosses aesthetics as well. See Chaudhuri, “‘Of All Nonsensical Things’: Performance and Animal Life.” (Chaudhuri 2009)

5 Cavalieri also says “the recourse to science when discussing normative questions is naturally problematic, insofar as it raises the controversial question of the relation between is and ought” (Cavalieri 2001, 13).
us to discuss the extent to which we are destroying our planet, our world, and our fellow creatures, both human and non-human. However, at the same time, if we as humans must wrestle with the question of what, exactly, we are confronting when we confront the natural world, then we continue to require urgently a way to speak about what exceeds scientific knowledge or understanding. Even though philosophical language shares a history with scientific language, its role in interrogating scientific assumptions remains vital.

Thus, in this project I take up the question of human being and animal being by turning to Marion’s phenomenology, which will allow us to better approach the relationship between human beings and animals. Although Marion himself does not address the question of the natural world as such, I use his concept of the saturated phenomenon as the basis for an ontology that bypasses the tendency to identify a phenomenological abyss between thinking and non-thinking matter. Marion characterizes as “saturated” phenomena those existents that exceed the intuition of the subject encountering them. By extending this concept beyond the boundaries of Marion’s project, this paper argues that three of Marion’s specific examples of “saturation” capture important elements of the interaction between human and non-human beings: the experience of the “event,” the embodied

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6 To my knowledge, Marion’s phenomenological approach has not been leveraged with regard to the human/animal divide in the literature (at least the Anglophone literature) but other phenomenologists’ texts, insights, and methods have been utilized productively. Maurice Merleau-Ponty is perhaps the most frequent interlocutor for philosophers and political theorists working on the human/animal question. The main text is *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Merleau-Ponty 1945). For a book-length treatment of the problem of the animal and human bodies in phenomenological terms see Ralph R. Acampora, *Corporal Compassion: Animal Ethics and Philosophy of the Body*, which puts Merleau-Ponty into conversation with Husserlian phenomenological method and crafts a vocabulary inspired by Merleau-Ponty in conversation with a Nietzschean philosophy of the body/flesh (Acampora 2006). Other helpful engagements with Merleau-Ponty include William E. Connolly, “Materialities of Experience” and Diana Coole, “The Inertia of Matter,” both in *New Materialisms* (Coole and Frost 2010b). In that same volume, in a piece taken from her *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed draws on phenomenology via Husserl. See also Gerald Bruns, whose recent *On Ceasing to Be Human* traces the boundary of human being within the late twentieth century French writers from the border of phenomenology to beyond including Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari, Nancy, Bataille, Blanchot, and Lévinas, in a project Bruns sees as motivated by Cavell’s philosophy (Bruns 2011).

7 In his direct writings on animals Descartes refrains from asserting absolutely that animals lack thought, rather he says that this “is not likely” (Descartes 1892, 284) and that “on examining into the probabilities of the case, I see no reason whatever to prove that brutes think” (Descartes 1892, 285). Although Descartes concedes that sensation and movement in animals may indicate the same function of thought that causes sensation and thought in humans, he ultimately argues that there is more reason to consider animals as automata than to see all species of animal as thinking beings. “Earthworms, flies, caterpillars, and the rest of the animals” seem unlikely to him to possess “immortal,” “reasonable souls” (Descartes 1892, 285) and on the “reasonable soul” (Descartes 1892, 279). While other theorists since have granted to animals a kind of sentience coeval with that of humans, somewhat akin to Descartes’ allowance that there may be thought animating the feelings of animals, many philosophers still view animals as either unthinking or at the very least as deficient in rationality compared with humans. (This latter view is the one taken by Peter Singer, for example.)
character of the saturated “flesh,” and the face of the other as “icon.” Marion’s work thus helps us to flesh out the position suggested by Cora Diamond in her essays “Eating Meat and Eating People” and “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy.” I turn to the account of a North Carolina slaughterhouse by the New York Times reporter Charlie LeDuff for examples of how we might see this relationship as one characterized by the paradoxes of Marion’s notion of “saturation.” I also contrast the experiences of animals as “event” and “flesh” in the abattoir with the experiences of animals as pets treated as “icons.” I conclude that any spoken politics of the man/animal relation must rely on a radical rethinking of the Cartesian subject, one that is aided by post-Heideggerian phenomenological projects like Marion’s.

II. How to Speak of the Animal?

This section of the essay will lay out several of the main alternatives to speaking about the human/animal relation that I believe benefit most from the addition of Marion’s particular ontological framework. While the account here does not exhaustively cover the literature, it engages with two divergent approaches to the human/animal relationship. A consistent theme in these theories is their struggle with questions of sameness and difference between humans and animals, and the relationship between these questions and the possibility of animal subjectivity. Thus, one benefit of Marion’s work is that it provides resources for considering how humans and animals might be seen as jointly grounded ontologically without needing to posit either full ontological identity or a hierarchical structure with some beings greater than others. This corrects a deficit in the work of some prominent advocates of animal rights and liberation. Marion also helps us to speak of the relationship between humans and animals in ontological terms, giving us a way beyond the paralysis we might find ourselves in if we construct strictly Wittgenstein’s final proposition in the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* that “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.” Using Marion helps us to speak of that about which we have difficulty speaking, even if questions for further research and theorizing remain.
The problem about which we must speak is the question of the human/animal relationship. Paola Cavalieri has characterized the general state of human society as one in which “nonhuman animals are at the bottom of a pyramid, at the apex of which we have placed ourselves” (Cavalieri 2001, 3). The aim of the work of the philosopher Peter Singer is to dismantle this hierarchy and rectify the unequal treatment of animals. It is almost impossible to speak of the human/animal relationship without turning to the work of Singer, who has argued that animals possess rights and deserve consideration in the political sphere according to characteristics and abilities. Singer argues that “in violation of the fundamental moral principle of equality of consideration of interests that ought to govern our relations with all beings, humans inflict suffering on non-humans for trivial purposes” (Singer 1991, 212). Thus, humans must, according to Singer, weigh the interests of various beings by taking into consideration their characteristics. His argument is aimed at what he terms “speciesism,” or the blind according of status to all members of one species (the human species, in our case) over and above others.

Singer is clear that the solution to speciesism is a kind of flexible hierarchy:

If we have to choose between the life of a human being and the life of another animal we should choose to save the life of the human; but there may be special cases in which…the human being in question does not have the capacities of a normal human being (Singer 1991, 21).

The capacities of a “normal human being,” are thus the marker by which we are to judge the worth of human beings and other animals. Those beings whose “characteristics” are most similar to those of “normal human beings” are thus to be given preference, when a decision is forced, over those more dissimilar. Thus Singer says that for the case of human beings “who lack the characteristics of normal humans we can no longer say that their lives are always to be preferred to those of other animals” (Singer 1991, 21).

A trace of the Cartesitan rational subject—the res cogitans or thinking thing—as the measure of philosophical worth can be identified in Singer’s argument that “we should give the same respect

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8 Tom Regan’s work is also exemplary in this field for setting up an ethics of animal liberation and rights. See, in particular, the essays collected in All That Dwell Therein, The Case for Animal Rights, and Animal Rights, Human Wrongs: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy (Regan 1982, 1983, 2003).
to the lives of animals as we give to the lives of those humans at a similar mental level” (Singer 1991, 21). This for Singer implies clear political projects and stakes: eliminating or at least reducing animal testing and experimentation, vegetarianism and the eradication of factory farming and the abattoir, laws that don’t privilege all human well-being over all animal well-being, and so forth. These stakes differ from those implied by one of the newest approaches to the problem of humans and other beings: the “new materialisms.” This return to the facticity, reality, and importance of matter in our worldly existence is exemplified by the recent work of Jane Bennett and William Connolly, among others. In their introduction to an edited volume in this arena, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost argue that phenomenology (what they call “existential phenomenology”) has been “exhausted” in attempts to think about the matter of the world given the exigencies of the twenty-first century (Coole and Frost 2010a, 13). The inadequacy of phenomenology for theorizing about matter can in part be traced, they claim, to challenges by poststructuralists to certain kinds of ontological and epistemological presumptions (Coole and Frost 2010a, 13). What they believe the new materialisms approach contributes is a mode of approaching the facticity of matter in a way that is non-naïve and serious.

What the new materialisms attempt is to approach the problem of that about which we find it difficult to speak by a return to matter, to that which is, literally, within our purview. Yet the subject as such seems to fall out of this analysis. While the new materialisms we may help us to speak about animals as part of the broader assemblages of matter in philosophically interesting ways, I believe that Marion has something to offer that augments the phenomenological approaches on offer in the new materialisms: his particular articulation of the post-Cartesian subject as saturated.

For it is precisely the difficulty of knowing whether we can speak of animals as subjects, as potential subjects, or as non-subjects that haunts our efforts to think about how we might reimagine the politics of the human/animal relationship. As we have seen, Singer’s approach does not

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9 Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Toward a Materialist Theory of Becoming* is one of the touchstone texts for this movement. (Braidotti 2002)

10 They also think this is true of the particular kind of materialism that is structural Marxism.

11 The animal problem is only one of the questions facing twenty-first century political theory that centers on the definition and boundary of the human. The large—and rapidly growing—literature on “posthumanism” attests to the
fundamentally change the actors within politics, it merely advocates for different values within the
political sphere as determined by normal adult human beings. Against Singer’s analytic certainty,
Cora Diamond presents one of the main alternatives: a politics of indeterminacy, centered on a
discourse of examples. Diamond, a philosopher who has tackled the specific problem of how to
speak of “unspeakable” phenomena inspired by Stanley Cavell’s work on ordinary language and the
later Wittgenstein, offers us another approach to speaking of that about which it is difficult to speak,
one wherein examples hold sway and no specific political project is implied. Diamond is concerned
with “the experience of the mind's not being able to encompass something which it encounter”
(Diamond 2003, 2). She thus stages a series of encounters in her work that highlight the ways that
we continue forward in our actions toward animals in an ongoing negotiation with incredibly
complex contexts, emotions, and orientations.

Diamond’s approach both models and calls for a philosophical position that remains
humble in speaking about those phenomena that confound us and that lie far from our
comprehensive grasp, but yet are intimately connected to us. As Diamond herself indicates, the
natural world—and the animal, in particular—are exemplary of this form of phenomenon. But
Diamond also engages with Cavell’s skepticism about the worth of philosophy in helping us to
confront realities like that of the animal. She concludes that the difficulty we have in speaking
rationally, and thus philosophically, about reality has to do with the very concrete problems of flesh
and blood (Diamond 1978, 25). While her identification of this problematic leaves us questioning
about the use of philosophy, I argue that Marion’s phenomenology affords us several resources for
understanding how the “rational” subject is unseated through the encounter with paradoxical
phenomena that challenge our ontological certainty. Thus, Marion’s philosophy itself provides a
partial remedy to what Diamond sees as the ills of philosophy. Inasmuch as her philosophy is also
therapeutic, the two need not be in opposition.

lively interest and diverse interdisciplinary work going on in this field. Donna Haraway’s work is vital here, and I refrain
from engaging it in this essay not owing only to lack of space. See, in particular, The Companion Species Manifesto (Haraway
2003) and When Species Meet (Haraway 2008). Haraway takes us in a somewhat different direction from Marion, but her
work is generative with regard to these questions, and deserves a more careful comparison with more classical
phenomenological approaches than I could accomplish here. See also Cary Wolfe, What is Posthumanism? (Wolfe 2010).
How does Marion move the conversation forward? In his account of what he calls “saturated phenomena,” Marion sets up the problematics of speaking of those phenomena of which it is impossible to speak, expressing the same concern that Diamond has (for Marion, saturated phenomena are “paradoxes”) (Marion 2002a, 321). It is for this reason that I argue that Marion’s concept of the “saturated phenomenon” is apropos. Indeed, his reliance on the questions of the flesh, on the one hand, and the evental experiences of birth and death, on the other, answer to the gaps Diamond identifies within philosophical speech. In addition, in his theorization of the “icon,” he provides a way for us to think about the encounter with the face of the animal that connects that confrontation with the other ontological experiences of the animal/human relationship. My reading of the saturated phenomenon offers us one way to imagine how we might answer or flesh out what Diamond seeks to do, giving us an idea of what we might do in specific situations with animals. Put another way, I believe that the saturated phenomenon gives us some leverage onto the political implications of the ontological status and the phenomenological gaze that Diamond herself is demonstrating in her work, lending some concrete ideas about subjectivity and relationality to the human/animal relationship. In the following sections of the paper, I outline Marion’s phenomenology of givenness and discuss how the concept of saturation applies to and helps us comprehend the human/animal relationship.

III. Givenness and Saturation in Marion’s Phenomenology: Questioning the Human Subject

Marion’s concept of “givenness” attempts to move us even further from the solipsistic Cartesian subject than Heidegger was able to in his account of Dasein. By placing the idea of “givenness” at the center of phenomenology, Marion gives us an opening for talking about humans and animals that can take us in a very different direction from Heidegger’s path in his lectures given

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12 See also Raimond Gaita, *The Philosopher’s Dog*, for an especially thoughtful consideration of the relationships between humans and pets (Gaita 2002). Alphonso Lingis plays with the notions of enfleshedness and embeddedness in a world in “Animal Body, Inhuman Face” in *Zoontologies* (Lingis 2003).

13 Marion’s develops his phenomenology of givenness out of a reading of Husserl; see especially the discussion in the chapter titled “Phenomenology of Givenness and First Philosophy” in *In Excess* (Marion 2002b, 14-23).
in 1929-1930 on being and worldliness, published as *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. In those lectures, Heidegger asserted that the animal is “poor in world” in contrast to the human Dasein that is world-forming (and in contrast to the stone that is worldless). While we may see animals as having a very different relationship to world (and of that relationship varying across kind of animal, as well) there is something troubling about the stark line in the sand drawn by Heidegger. Accordingly, his distinction has been strenuously contested by political theorists and philosophers seeking to describe animals as being grounded in the world and possessing more similarities to humans than differences.

We might well ask how Marion might help us on this problem of the ontological grounding of animals; after all he does not explicitly address the question of animals, and his overall phenomenology pays far less attention to the natural world than does Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s. However, in Marion’s phenomenology of “givenness” we find a correction to Heideggerian ontology that affords us the means of rethinking the status of the animal in relation to the human. In particular, Marion provides an alternative grounding for the subjectivity of the human that goes further than Heidegger’s critique of the thinking Cartesian subject. At the same time, Marion is not seeking to overturn Heidegger as much as expand the Heideggerian rethinking of Descartes beyond the account of Dasein.

By moving subjectivity further from the Cartesian subject, Marion’s phenomenology implies that the individual human subject is not isolated. His concept of givenness is the grounds for relations between beings and with other phenomena. Rather than being solely a characteristic of

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14 For Heidegger on animals see *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (Heidegger 1995); For more on Heidegger and animals within the secondary literature, of particular note are: Agamben, *The Open* (Agamben 2004); Stuart Elden, “Heidegger’s Animals” (Elden 2006); and Derrida: *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (Derrida 2008).


16 Marion sees this as playing out in Heidegger’s wrestling in *Sein und Zeit* and subsequently in *Zeit und Sein* with the idea that we might say more than Being *is*, we might say it is what it gives (us). We can identify this difference in emphasis easily ourselves if we consider the way that the later Heidegger emphasizes the shimmering of the veiling and unveiling of Being in essays like “The Question Concerning Technology.” While Heidegger, arguably, never stops emphasizing the importance of Dasein as the subject that both receives/views and shepherds Being, there is hinted at in his work a possibility of there being phenomena that we might wish to speak of before or aside from their relationship to Dasein. Indeed, although the world itself achieves its meaning in relation to Dasein, there is in Being the echoes of a time, present, future or distant past, when Being outside of Dasein’s relationality is, simply, given.
thinking beings, or even of sentient beings, givenness is a characteristic of a variety of phenomena. Furthermore, Marion believes that experience of excessive givenness implies a modification of the subject, which is then named the “gifted” or adonné. Ordinarily, subjects appear when they receive something from the outside, something given, and they appear instantaneously with that which gives itself. But in the phenomenology of givenness, the given thing (res) (which is both given to itself and also open in some way to the other) and the one encountering/receiving it depend upon each other in order to be manifested through a relationship. As the receiving subject receives “what gives itself—it allows the given to show itself insofar as it gives itself” (Marion 2002a, 264).

At its simplest, givenness is the idea that the extent to which we can say that phenomena are is the extent to which they are given and to which this givenness is accessed by us as phenomena “give” themselves tous. The idea of givenness does not (Marion claims) imply a “theological” giver, but rather is meant to identify the difference between the phenomenon as it is constituted by a subject (the I) and the phenomenon that, in some way, shows itself (Marion 2002a, 3-4). All phenomena are given, but it is only in some that there is an opening to this givenness. Heidegger had discussed how phenomena “show” themselves to receiving subjects, but it is in Marion that we find an account of how phenomena “showing” themselves, thus “giving” themselves can actually affect the subject that receives them. Even in Marion’s most basic account of givenness, the subject and the phenomenon can be mutually affecting one another.

This is one reason why turning to Marion on the question of the human/animal relationship may prove productive. Without yet going so far as to say that the human and animal are both subjects, it is intuitively persuasive that the animal, in its active, sentient presence, is a phenomenon that gives itself in some way and in so doing, affects the human who encounters it. The active sense that this encounter exceeds our ability to control it and understand it purely scientifically necessitates finding language that can help us to think about what happens as we encounter beings which are not

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17 (Heidegger 2008, §7)

18 Givenness is a central concept in Marion’s formulation of what phenomenology is about at its core, part of his overall assertion that phenomenology is the true “first philosophy.” However, we needn’t see this as “true” in some way to see its relevance for political theoretic questions.
like us, and yet present themselves to us for some form of relationship.

Marion’s notion of givenness here begins to provide us with a language for talking about that which is without the phenomenological temptation to view what is solely in terms of what “we” can discover or say about it. Marion stresses that this does not mean “givenness” is some mysterious aspect of phenomena. Givenness is rather that which is most basic to phenomena, that which they have themselves and which they might be able to open up to other phenomena. This requires that we not encounter phenomena by seeking to comprehend them, but rather that we let them appear. And, “[t]o let phenomena appear demands not imposing a horizon on them….they are admitted as what they give themselves—givens, purely” (Marion 2002a, 320). The first stage in Marion’s understanding of the relationship between the human and the animal is to let animals appear for them to be, to use Marion’s language about given phenomena more generally, “admitted as what they give themselves” (Marion 2002a, 320).

For the next stage, we must turn to Marion’s idea of “saturation,” an extension of the theory of givenness. I will then argue that, in at least two ways, animals exhibit characteristics of being “saturated phenomena,” opening up the possibility that in the human/animal relation, both animals and humans may exhibit the kind of subjectivity engendered by encounters with saturated phenomena.

According to Marion, there are three rough categories of phenomena. When a subject encounters a phenomenon, it has some sort of concept for the phenomenon. The phenomenon offers up some sort of intuition to the subject, giving to the subject what might be apperceived, known, or received by it. Intuition may be reduced to sensible or visible components, for instance;

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19 See the discussion at 11 in *In Excess*. Marion explains that to take recourse to the I as the primary authority for philosophy opens up the problem of seeing the I as transcendental—and thus the “unique, non-object-like authority, which fixes the conditions of possibility of the knowledge of objects.” This sets up a division between the transcendental I, that which assures the self apart from the objects of the world and the self as object, the empirical I (that which I am) and the me (moi) which is that which I know of myself—myself as object. In pointing us toward givenness, Marion ultimately seeks to open up the difference (Robyn Horner sees him engaging here with Derrida’s *différance*) between seeing the self as the primary stage of knowledge, against which other phenomena manifest themselves, and allowing other phenomena to manifest themselves as well, in their givenness. See Robyn Horner’s introduction to *In Excess*, (Marion 2002b, xvii)

20 (Marion 2007a, 383-385)
in any event, intuition that characterizes the phenomenon is made accessible to the subject in some way. By the time intuition is in play, we are already removed from the founding experience of the phenomenon (but as Marion is careful to stress, all intuition is always already given.)

In the encounter between subject and phenomenon, phenomena can accord perfectly with the concept, presenting to the subject an amount of intuition that ends up filling the concept completely (picture a circle fully colored in; this is the rare paradigmatic case.) These sorts of phenomena are, I would argue, mostly fleeting: the phenomenon of satiety may be one example. Phenomena might, on the other hand, present only a small amount of intuition, not filling at all the concept that the subject brings to the encounter (picture here a circle only partly filled; this is the “poor” phenomenon. It is poor because it is poor in intuition.) These phenomena are easy to identify and surround us continually. The concept of a meal is rarely met in its actual phenomenality; many first dates also fall into this category. In the third case, the phenomenon presents itself, giving an excess of intuition such that the receiver-subject’s concept is completely exceeded (picture here a circle colored in, with the color spilling outside the lines, unable to be contained.)

This final image of an excess of intuition overwhelming the intention of the receiving subject is the case of the saturated phenomenon. Marion’s theory of saturation is based on a particular relationship to the givenness that he believes inheres in all phenomena. Here, the subject encounters a phenomenon which then exceeds the concept with an excess of intuition such that the saturated phenomenon opens to the subject its own excessive givenness (potentially through a gaze, or a sensation.) This openness then highlights the way that ordinary encounters with phenomena are being overturned in this encounter with excessive givenness; the deeper grounds of being are revealed as given. This relationship is the one that occurs when the subject who encounters a phenomenon is confronted by something that does not fit within the circumscribed parameters of

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21 See “The Banality of Saturation” in Counter-Experiences (Marion 2007a)
22 The concept of the saturated phenomenon is where Marion’s work on givenness in phenomenology takes a twist that opens up the possibility of a relationship to intuition that goes far beyond that imagined by Husserl. Marion reads Husserl (and to a lesser extent, Kant) as defining phenomena based on being first, present within a delimited, definite horizon, and second, accessible to and constituted in terms of a finite I. These are precisely the sort of phenomena that are susceptible to the classical form of the reduction, wherein the finite, given phenomenon can be opened up to some subject (the I) via the horizon of phenomenality.
the subject’s concept. Marion calls saturated phenomena “paradoxes” for a reason, since it is the experience of encountering that gives the human subject the feeling of having encountered something paradoxical—perhaps even this experience is at the root of all experiences of paradox as the sense of encountering an excess of intuition which exceeds our intentions and concepts. The language Marion uses is gives us a sense of the blinding encounter with the saturated phenomenon.23

Although Marion does not discuss the animal, I assert that the experience of encountering a saturated phenomenon describes part of the human/animal relationship. We can immediately see how this might describe the animal/human relationship well in some contexts and poorly in others. After all, the experience of encountering an animal can be completely ordinary, not surprising or destabilizing us at all. One imagines an experienced shepherd or a cattle rancher going for many days without being surprised by the animals with whom he or she daily works and without being troubled by any sense of lurking paradox in the relationship between humans and animals. Indeed, we might even argue that the daily experience of animals normalizes them, and even more so in the ordered relationships of the farm (no matter how humanely practiced, it is clear who is in charge.) But it is not my intention to argue that the experience of animals as saturated explains every human/animal encounter, but rather that it captures some elements of these. A closer look at the specific examples of saturated phenomena that Marion outlines will help us to see how this may be.

For Marion, there are four precise ways that intuition can exceed concept in the encounter between the subject and the phenomenon. These four archetypes that demonstrate the principle of saturation are the event, the idol, the flesh, and the icon.24 These are the saturated phenomena which Marion characterizes as essentially “banal” or everyday and worldly.25 They are a part of the world as we receive it as human beings. The “event” he calls the “happening” phenomenon. Events are non-

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23 See in particular (Marion 2002b, 54ff)
24 These four types, when concentrated in a single phenomenon, constitute what Marion calls the phenomenon of revelation, which is, in essence, a divinity/God. Furthermore, readers will note that Marion is explicitly seeking to connect his phenomenology with Merleau-Ponty’s work on the flesh and Lévinas’ on the face. This goes along with his stated goal of reconciling the history of philosophy rather than overturning it.
25 This is in contrast with the noumenal, which he also considers in this work, but which is not directly relevant to the question of the animal as I am seeking to answer it.
repeatable and evoke a sense of their unique place in time and space. Examples of events can range from a performance to the experience of birth or death. One’s own birth and one’s own death are, in a Heideggerian move, those events that are most paradoxical and most excessive of one’s ability to grasp them (Marion 2002b, 44). Yet they also ground the human being’s experience in the world because of the way that they begin and end the phenomenon’s presence in time, a presence in which the phenomenon is being given to itself repeatedly (Marion 2002b, 48).

The “flesh” is simply the givenness of the body, inseparable from the self as such. The flesh does not merely connote the organic matter, however, but the mind-body connection, with its sensations, soma, and senses. While the “idol” is most closely denoted by a painting, an object that yet can awaken in us a sense of its excessive givenness, the “icon” is best exemplified by the other, as the one whose gaze we meet, forcing us to acknowledge its own givenness and character as an adonné (Marion 2002b, 113). The icon, unlike the idol, makes a move similar to that of the flesh. While being closely tied to the matter of the self—the face or the body, respectively—the icon and the flesh both indicate the excessiveness of the individual, the way that it cannot be merely objectified as body or face. More is happening under the surface than another other one individual subject can discern. This awakens the sense of givenness and begins the movement toward the subjectivity of the gifted, who each view one another as saturated.

Crucially, Marion’s argument about how these saturated phenomena are encountered is not couched in terms of rational or scientific discovery. Rather the saturated phenomena are those in which the essential givenness is not masked as it often it by the process of reception. Instead, the saturated phenomenon has some opening within its-self that allows the subject to encounter it as given, not merely as object. This approach to phenomenology gives us a good deal of traction towards articulating agency in terms other than those we use with regard to humans. Reason does play a role in subjectivization, but it plays a role in the experience of the human reception of the phenomenon, not in the phenomenon’s own opening up of its access. Thus, Marion is likewise not espousing an anti-rationalist philosophy.

But it is precisely the nature of the saturated phenomenon that even as it calls on reason in
its relation to the receiving subject, it also asserts itself not as object, but as a kind of subject itself. This therefore allows us to claim animals as a kind of subject, jointly constituted via saturation with human beings. It reverberates back upon the subject that ordinarily in phenomenology is seen as being a transcendental I. In the encounter with the saturated phenomenon, the subject’s own ability to rationally comprehend the phenomenon is destabilized by the excess of intuition it encounters. It thus must see the phenomenon as, in a way, coming alongside the subject as its own given.

This results in a rereading of what Heidegger has called the thing “which-is-shown-in-itself” (Marion 2002b, 30). Marion believes that what is shown must first be given, and that this necessity is often omitted by ontological accounts. Phenomenology, he asserts, has frequently failed to ask about the disjuncture between the thing-in-itself, which shows itself, and how this showing is then received by the subject in question.

Marion thus outlines a kind of theory of the reception of phenomena in his treatment of saturation. This sort of theoretical framework helps us to understand how we might speak about the reception of the world as humans. And it does so for us as humans (for I do not pretend that in this present, other beings are in my audience) to speak about and amongst ourselves, how we might think more expansively regarding the problem of the non-human natural being.

IV. The Implications of Saturation: Crossing the Phenomenological Abyss

In this section of the paper, I discuss further how the terms of Marion’s phenomenological analysis allow us to encounter animals as saturated, along a pathway wherein both humans and animals are beings whose experiences include/comprise saturation. Marion’s account gives us the language of saturation, which I use to to discuss the ontological relationship between humans and animals, seeing the “human subject” and the “animal subject” as both saturated. Thus, I extend Marion’s language to frame the human/animal relationship as one inhabited by jointly constituted “gifted” subjects, or adonnés. Doing so provides us with the basis for a kind of subjectivity in common, allowing us to speak politically about how it is that humans and animals exist together.

To review the alternatives briefly, Singer emphasizes the human subject in a way that does
not alter the terms of our political conversations about humans and animals. Singer focuses on the
difficulties of evaluating the degree of suffering of animals vis-à-vis humans. Thus, while he
acknowledges that uncertainty exists, he ultimately seems to view the animal as like the human
except for when its capabilities are less than those of normal adult humans. While Singer believes
this fundamental difference does not imply that less consideration is due to animals, his political
project continues in the same terms as before, leaving open what can be called the
phenomenological abyss between thinking beings and non-thinking beings.

Diamond’s work, while pointing out the complicated and layered ways our relationship to
animals plays out in daily life, does not tell us, ultimately, about what we have in common with
animals. Thus, in turning to Marion, I seek in part to answer one of the aims of Singer’s work—
identification of solidarity with animals—while holding onto the insights and nuances of Diamond’s.
Marion’s theories need not invalidate Diamond’s cautious approach; rather, the notion of saturation
can come alongside her, giving us a story about how we can be at one and the same time drawn to
animals for companionship and relationship, reliant on animals for our own subjectivity, while
tending to view them as objects.

My appropriation of the concept of saturation relies on Marion’s notion that humans are
saturated, as “flesh.” Thus, the first prong of our experience of saturation in relationship to the
animal as to any other entity is as saturated ourselves. Can we then consider the animal to be
saturated also? In order to do so, I assert that we must bring together Marion’s concepts of the
event, the flesh, and the icon; animals, on my view, can bring us any of these three forms of excess
givenness. We can encounter animals either through a “happening” or as enfleshed saturated
selves—the flesh as saturated phenomenon—or as icons themselves: faces that confront us and
make a demand of us.

*Encountering Flesh*

In Marion’s struggle with the Cartesian notion of the body, I detect several bases for a
theory of being-with others that brings together the bodies of other beings with the bodies of human beings. Marion proffers a way of theorizing about the givenness of the self through a radical rethinking of what is called “flesh.” His notion of the “flesh” is peculiarly suited for the kind of reconfiguration that a political theory of non-human being might require. This proceeds in several ways, of which the most noticeable are the following.

First, the experience of the self in “taking on flesh” is co-dependent with the enfleshedness of the world (Marion 2002b, 82). In this way, the relation to the world is recuperated from what Heidegger might have seen as a temptation toward preoccupation, something that Marion signals as he says “Daily life scarcely gives me access to myself; actually it dispenses me from having the desire and even the need of it” (Marion 2002b, 82). Indeed, the distractions or preoccupations of daily life lead to a mode of life characterized by forgetfulness of the self and of being as “in this way I traverse my life in a state of separation of body and of thought from myself” (Marion 2002b, 82). I do this, Marion claims in a Heideggerian mode, in order that I might not have to “verify” the existence of myself in every moment, so as to “deal with my worldly business with a free spirit” (Marion 2002b, 82). So there is first of all a way in which I am in myself experiencing some sort of gap between my body, mind, and the givenness of my self, while at the same time, I am not fully aware of this gap. What allows me to cross it daily, even when not cognizant of it, is my experience of myself “in taking flesh” (Marion 2002b, 82).

What is the “flesh?” How does it help us to overcome the mind/body divide? What does the flesh imply for animals? Feeling as an enfleshed being has as much to do with intuition as it does with any kind of kinesthetic grasping. The subject who takes on flesh feels his or her own flesh through an awareness of, and affection of, the self. But the flesh also opens up the adonné to the other, and thus offers an opening via intuition for intersubjective relationality. Finally, flesh is most

27 While one can give this a theological reading, Marion seems to be articulating a view that may originate in theology (I’m thinking here primarily of the division of the wills and of the self against the self in Augustine) that comes to us here via Heidegger. On the Augustinian roots of Heidegger there are several sources (list to come.) While it’s clear that Marion has Augustine as a significant interlocutor in his word broadly (his Au lieu de soi: l’approche du Saint Augustin (Marion 2008a) is a significant treatment of the Augustinian self,) this concept seems aimed at a wider problem than that concerning Augustine. Additionally, the observation that one can feel divided from oneself or that one may forget one’s being in the midst of daily distractions is articulated many philosophical venues, not just Catholic theology.
importantly an example of the given because it is that which cannot be conjured by the subject. One might be able to conceive that the *ego* can certify itself as self based only on thought, since thought can be seen as being created from within the *ego* itself. But the flesh is manifestly that which we cannot create for ourselves. It is what we are given from elsewhere—at our birth—and thus exposes to us the “fortunate” character of our existence in the world. (In Excess 96)

It is this concept of the flesh that is the grounds for Marion for understanding suffering. It is only as the subject is enfleshed that it can be part of a world and, contra Descartes and following Heidegger, it makes no sense to think of this subject apart from its flesh. Yet, the specific idea of the flesh allows Marion to theorize suffering beyond what Heidegger offers us. “Suffering does not only hurt me,” Marion writes, “it assigns me especially to myself as flesh” (Marion 2002b, 92). Physical suffering involves the self as such, as it is an experience that is “crucial to flesh,” as Marion puts it, but which also confirms to the sufferer that he or she is inseparable from his or her flesh.28

But the flesh is also the site wherein human beings experience pleasure, while it is in the taking on of flesh that the encounter with the face of another has its meaning. While Marion confines his remarks on the flesh to the experiences as human beings encounter one another, the link to the animal is straightforward. While Heidegger’s framework implies that the animal can never fully constitute a subject of its own (although he does not use the language of subjectivity) Marion’s framework is not limited to the experience of the human being. Other beings or phenomena29 are capable of possessing some of the same qualities that are foundational for human subjectivity. While Marion sees his work as grounding the relationship between the self and the Other as Emmanuel Lévinas theorizes it, he believes that Lévinas’ account of the face of the other is only one picture of how we might confront something that both calls to us and makes some sort of demand on us as human subjects. Despite some possibilities for considering Lévinas as a resource for thinking about the human/animal relationship, the explicit way Marion’s work speaks outside of the human

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28 Marion also discusses the centrality of pleasure in the taking of flesh, something crucial in his phenomenology of love (Marion 2002b, 94-96). And see also *The Erotic Phenomenon* (Marion 2007b).

29 Or noumena
phénomène se prête plus pleinement à l'application au monde naturel et à l'animal.

Deux formes de saturation sont liées à la mort. La mort marque le seuil entre l'animal en chair et l'expérience de l'événement. Un exemple illustre comment ce compréhension de ce seuil comme paradoxal est au cœur de la question humain/animal. Dans "Manger de la viande et manger des gens," Cora Diamond utilise un poème de Walter de la Mare pour décrire l'expérience de ce qu'elle appelle "la réaction de congénère" qu'elle croit "se trouve en nous avec d'autres." Le poème "commence avec un enfant qui pleure son cœur en voyant un lièvre mort sur la table de cuisine." Plus tard, l'enfant retourne "mais le lièvre a disparu- 'Maman', elle demande, 'peut-on aller voir qu'il a été nettoyé?'" (Diamond 1978, 475). L'enfant aide Diamond à montrer la différence entre la position philosophique sur l'animal en tant qu'animal mort versus l'animal en tant que viande; Diamond's main object here is to highlight the ways that human relationships to animals are thickly constituted. “This mass of responses,” Diamond seizes as containing “significant patterns…it is not more just a lot of confused and contradictory modes of response than is the mass which enables us to think of our fellow human beings as such” (Diamond 1978, 476). Yet much of what we can take away from Diamond here is a sense that she is highlighting the ontological difficulty that we face vis-à-vis both humans and animals. How does Marion help us to understand this example differently? What is happening to this young girl that allows her to at once experience great empathy toward animals blended with an indifference toward the death?

The child is caught between the experience of the animal as chair and blood—occasioning weeping and mourning—and the experience of the animal as an object which is being turned into meat. Marion’s work takes us along this pathway, explaining how we might understand the linkages between these various paradoxes and their ontological importance for human being.

Without discussing the moment of death, Diamond is not able to link the complex, knotty

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30 One might also effect the work I am attempting with Marion through a rereading of Lévinas, using the face of the animal in place of the face of the Other, but as Cary Wolfe and others have argued about “what Lévinas has called a ‘total responsibility’ to the Other ‘without waiting for reciprocity’” (Wolfe 2003, xvii). Wolfe characterizes the position thus: “The opening this potentially provies for bringing the question of the animal other into the ethical equation would seem clear enough, but the problem is that it is immediately foreclosed, once again, by an essential Kantian problematic: by the fact that the subject of ethics…is by definition human—only the human, to use Lévinas’s figure, has a face” (Wolfe 2003, xvii).
character of the child’s relations to the hare with the paradoxical nature of death itself, yet this
linkage is crucial in understanding the phenomenon of the animal. Indeed, as an event, death
constitutes for Marion (as it does for Heidegger among numerous others) an experience that shows
something about the ontological relationships between the being-that-dies and other beings. As dead
flesh, the hare has become a mere object. Thus, in the progression from the child’s weeping to its
calm interest, we can read the progression from a sense of the shock of the event, of the loss of the
animal as flesh, to an acceptance of the animal as object. This progression seems to be precisely the
one that characterizes not only the child’s response to meat, but more pervasive difficulties we face
when seeking to view animals as having been enfleshed—as we are—once they are dead. The
example of the slaughterhouse demonstrates further our difficulties in encountering the animal as
saturated phenomena in the event of its death.

**Experiencing the Event**

Here, I take up the experience of death as it occurs as an event in the slaughterhouse. The
experiences in the slaughterhouse, I argue, bring together the animal as flesh with the animal as
event. While meat would most likely be considered a “poor phenomenon” if it were to be
considered in Marion’s phenomenology, I believe examining the movement from animal to meat
requires the concept of saturation.

What does it mean to encounter the saturated phenomenon of the event? Events are that
sort of phenomenon that Marion says “keep within them the trace of their givenness, to the point
that their mode of phenomenalization will not only open such an access to their original self but
render it incontestable” (In Excess 31). The event, when it “happens” (i.e. occurs or is
phenomenalized), opens up access to its original self precisely through the coincidence of its
happening and its original identity; the two are one and the same.

There are several important points here that indicate the requirements for this form of
opening up of a phenomenon, these pertain to the event, but have implications for all saturated
phenomena. First, the phenomenon has a “mode of phenomenalization” that allows some sort of
pathway for the original self to be made visible. Second, this “access” or pathway must show the
given self and make it stable; in the case of the event, access to it confirms its givenness. The sense of the phenomenon’s givenness must be palpable, must be felt by those who are accessing it. Once these conditions are met, the phenomenon can be received through the opening up of this means of access by the receiving subject. It is not the phenomenon’s full givenness but a trace that is felt, a trace which takes the form of intuition that is given to the subject. In the encounter with the animal, I argue, this experience of “the blur, the fog, and the overexposure that [the eye] imposes on its normal conditions of experience,” can occur at any moment (Marion 2008b, 119).

To grasp these phenomena according to the principle of saturation is to understand that this form of grasping sees these phenomena not as being objects but as appearing in an event, with its givenness undeniable and it being impossible to render it as an object. The phenomenon of the event is one that describes those phenomena that are fundamentally nonobjectifiable. Marion articulates his understanding of the event to account for “the possibility that certain phenomena do not manifest themselves in the mode of objects, and yet do still manifest themselves.” (Marion 2007a, 386).

For Marion, as for Heidegger, death is an exemplary case of the event that reveals the saturated phenomenon in its singularity. Marion also explicates in far greater detail than Heidegger the importance of birth as an event that constitutes the saturated subject. Yet both death and birth are challenged, shaped, altered in the experience of the factory farm and slaughterhouse, and this, as a journalistic essay by Charlie LeDuff shows, violently changes the human relationship to the living and the dying animal in ontologically unsettling ways.31

In the essay, LeDuff has taken a job in the slaughterhouse in order to experience the work from the inside. He writes about his experiences on the “kill-floor”:

Kill-floor work is hot, quick, and bloody. The hog is herded in from the stockyard, then stunned with an electric gun. It is lifted onto a conveyer belt, dazed but not dead, and passed to a waiting group of men wearing bloodstained smocks and blank faces. They slit the neck,

31 Arendt’s *vita activa* provides another alternative for thinking the relationship between the products of labor, work, and action. The animal, on her account, would not be included in natality, and yet she may still provide an important account of how humans approach the task of slaughter as labor, and why this may be a task that leaves men bereft in some way.
shackle the hind legs, and watch a machine lift the carcass into the air, letting its life flow out in a purple gush, into a steaming collection trough (LeDuff 2003, 188).

LeDuff’s description captures several elements within the experience of the kill. The mechanized character of the process is reflected the blank faces of the men to whom this is not a singular event, but rather an everyday occurrence, at least until the men “fail to make quota” and are replaced by others. “The place reeks of sweat and scared animal, steam and blood. Nothing is wasted from these beasts, not the plasma, not the glands, not the bones. Everything is used, and the kill men, repeating slaughterhouse lore, say that even the squeal is sold” (LeDuff 2003, 188). The slaughterhouse thus completely objectifies the meat as non-flesh in Marion’s sense, and, further, deprives the event of the animal’s death of its essential quality as event. We see this because it is neither an event for the men nor for the animals. The hogs are utterly quantifiable and divisible, in the logic of the abattoir.32

For Marion, the fulcrum of the event is its temporality. The event is saturated in part because it reveals its uniqueness as a singular moment in time, inscribed by both the past and the future, yet demanding the recognition in the present as fully what it is. This is why both birth and death are such vital experiences of the event. Both carry with them a radical ability to awaken the subject to its place in time, and both are carried with the subject throughout its life in its historicity and futurity as Being-toward-death. In the slaughterhouse, the relationship to time is violently wrenched for the human subjects, and this renders the animal experience utterly void of its evental quality whether vis-à-vis humans or on its own. “People on the cut lines work with a mindless fury,” LeDuff writes, “There is tremendous pressure to keep the conveyer belts moving, to pack orders, to put bacon and ham and sausage on the public’s breakfast table. There is no clock, no window, no fragment of the world outside. Everything is pork” (LeDuff 2003, 188-189).33 Thus we have the animal as pure object.

32 Still, perhaps the death is something akin to an event for the animal, as it feels fear or terror. The work of Temple Grandin would seem to suggest that there are ways to make the death a less explosively terror-filled one for the animal.

33 Part of LeDuff’s argument has to do with the broad social repercussions of the slaughterhouse dynamics. I am not able to explore this here, but his text illuminates the devastating effects of the slaughterhouse environment for individuals and for interracial relations.
Yet death of the animal can be seen in two ways, and thus poses serious questions in the context of the analysis of the saturated phenomenon that takes the form of the event. We might envision two directions that can be taken: towards the impersonal, mechanized deaths of animals in factory farms on one side and the death of the beloved pet, in the other extreme. In both cases the death of the animal is phenomenalized, but in our encountering these events, there is a clear difference in our experience of them. It is this difference that awakens in us many difficult questions. Is our tendency to experience the death of the animal-pet as, potentially at least, akin to the death of humans, evidence that the death of the animal-pet is the death of a being that presents itself to us as saturated phenomenon while the death of the animal-carcass is not given to us as saturated? Or is the relationship more complex? In fact, I am asserting here that the complexity of the death of the animal requires me to reframe Marion’s analysis in several ways, since he does not consider death in relation to the movement from saturation to object-hood or back again.

Let us take the example of the death of the animal in the meat-processing plant. Despite the primary place that givenness has, Marion asserts that givenness is hidden when the phenomenon is received as object, because then “its intuition is limited to its concept” (Marion 2002a, 321). In this situation, the “coming forward” of the phenomenon “submits to constitution, and therefore represses the self according to which its givenness would be outlined” (Marion 2002a, 321). In the death of the animal in the meat-processing plant, it is precisely the movement from life to death that allows for the easy grasping of the animal-carcass as object rather than a self according to which its own givenness might be outlined. This seems fundamentally troubling, since it implies that our stance as human beings toward these other beings in created in this movement, one instantiated by us (the slaughter) rather than being in some sense prior, instantiated in either some ontological reality or some well-reasoned ethical position.

Yet how are we to explain the vastly different relationships that human beings have toward the dead animals? Viewing the death of the animal precisely as event, an event which may create an

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34 Here I am stating as one possible outcome that which Heidegger outlines as the universal relationship that Dasein has to its dead. The dead Dasein becomes an object to the living Dasein immediately following the moment of its death (Heidegger 2008, §§46-47)
object (either a corpse for honor and burial or a carcass for eating) should lead us to see that the death is not reducible to what remains after the event has taken place. The event of the kill itself might be considered the true center of the event. The act of slaughter—blood spurtng, machines moving, nearly swallowing up the workers who, were they not so dazed, might be swept up in the cogs and pulleys as Charlie Chaplin’s character is in “Modern Times”—is an act that robs both the human subject and the animal subject of access to their givenness, and thus, their subjectivity as adonné. Unlike Chaplin, these workers are blank-faced, not panicked; their very emotion is snuffed.

The kill, then, is excessive but not in a glad or aesthetically enthralling way. Rather, the workers are held captive by its excess, until they are released in some way when the workday is over. It is left to the one who happens upon the event—perhaps here, the reader transported via LeDuff’s prose—suddenly to be overcome with shock, to have the extent of the violence force him or her back upon herself, wondering about what is truly being done to these animals by these others beings, of whom she is one? The technologization of the death heightens its sense of alienating power.

At the other end of the death spectrum is the death of the animal that has been a beloved pet. Here, the relationships that we have to animals can alter dramatically but they may also take on the implicit sense that there is, indeed, a mutuality in our relationship to the animal as other. While this mutuality may seem to take us along the path of saturation, wherein the saturated phenomenon turns on us as subject, adonné itself, this is no guarantee of seeing the other as adonné. Rather, we seem just as likely to see the animal-pet that is dying as Dasein sees the death of other Dasein in Being and Time, falling into the status of object once dead (Op. cit.).

It’s worth noting that there is a tremendous amount of play in Marion more generally and here on the event as sublime. In The Erotic Phenomenon, jouissance plays a vital role in revealing the subject to itself as adonné, with regard to its enfleshedness, its singularity, and its evental experiences. There is certainly a connection here to the sublime in Lacan and Žižek. However, by keeping the conversation focused on the event, we can see more easily, I would argue, why the death in the slaughterhouse tends toward non-event, and thus seems almost too divorced from the human subjects themselves to be truly considered sublime, since they are numbed, nearly unable to experience it as death or even pain. Elsewhere LeDuff speaks of how after receiving so many cuts on one’s hand when working at removing meat from the bones, the hands stop hurting. Something like this numbness is pervasive in the factory slaughterhouse experience. One might be tempted to take up the Kantian sublime as a model for Marion, but my own sense is that Marion is far more concerned with beauty in the saturated phenomenon as opposed to the sublime.
Of course, if it is both animals and human alike that become objects for us in some way upon death, the idea of a mutual subjectivity with animals would be be open to the same difficulties as the relationships amongst humans. Raimond Gaita illustrates this difficulty beautifully in his work *The Philosopher's Dog*, where he discusses the ways the different ways that we treat pets’ bodies and human bodies reflects our philosophical conundrums. For Gaita, one of the most difficult paradoxes we face in encountering animals is the violence with which animals can harm one another (and sometimes, us.) The notion of the icon helps us to understand how we might find the animal exceeding our understanding when we encounter its gaze.

**The Face of the Animal**

When my younger sister was quite small, our family had rescued a little brown dog from the local pound; we all loved our dog but my sister had a special bond with her, and called the dog her “twin sister.” One winter night, with half-melted snow on the ground, our dog, Lady, chased a rabbit around the backyard. She caught it, toyed with it, and finally killed it. My parents were worried that my sister would see the blood in the snow and be devastated at the rabbit’s death; they knew how tender her heart was toward animals and were afraid that she would be even more horrified that her beloved pet had done the killing. “Don’t tell her,” they said to me. “Let mom do it.” After breakfast, my mother tried to break the news: “Lady killed a rabbit last night,” she said gently, “but dad buried it.” My little sister immediately turned to our dog, knelt down and put her arms around it, wide-eyed. “Was that bunny chasing you?” she asked sympathetically.

On the one hand, my sister’s childhood relationship to our dog captures the view of our animals as almost substitute humans that pervades in accounts of pets. This is the view wherein the gaze into the face of the animal-pet does not recognize the fully excessive givenness that encounters us there. If we are to see the animal as like the Marion icon or idol, it may return a gaze to us that unsettles us profoundly. It may be that the dog enjoyed eating the rabbit, that the dog may eat its owner’s decomposing remains, or that a dog that seems friendly toward its own family will viciously attack a neighbor’s child. These are quotidian examples, but they serve here to illustrate the real difficulty of acknowledging the autonomy of the animal, all the more so when we have attempted to
domesticate it. There is something that makes us recoil. And yet, as I discuss in the conclusion below, it is partly this encounter with the saturated phenomenon, of which I have argued animals comprise a compelling example, that constitutes us ontologically. When we lose the relation to the animal as saturated, we set aside something that contributes to our own sense of groundedness in the world and in community with other beings.

On the other hand, what my young sister was able to articulate in her experience of the animal was a childlike attempt to sense the event from the perspective of the animal. Despite the impossibility of this, the child’s stance is one that does not hesitate to consider and believe that the animal had a specific response to the situation. Even the rabbit, on this account, is allowed to have been active in chasing the dog. This stance is one that is made impossible by the slaughterhouse kill. In killing the rabbit, the dog unsettles any attempt on our part to think of itself animal as either human or meat. Yet in so doing, the one animal (the dog) treats the second animal (the rabbit) as, precisely, meat. This objectification within the realms of animals is unsettling, as it provides most explicitly a contrast and resonance with the event of encountering animals as humans.

The fact that reason does not enter into the experience the child has of the animal should not then be a point in its disfavor. In his Meditations on Hunting, José Ortega y Gasset argued that nothing impeded attempts to understand the human/animal encounter in hunting as much as attempts to “involve reason in its definition” (Ortega y Gasset, 59). Speaking precisely on this resonance between man’s killing and animals’ kills, Ortega y Gasset discusses how hunting reveals the precarity of reason in our account of human being. Finally, Ortega y Gasset indicates that the moment of hunting exemplifies something of this relationship I have been describing above: this evental merging between man and animal as jointly given. “The hunter,” he writes, “while he advances or wait crouching, feels tied through the earth to the animal he pursues, whether the animal is in view, hidden, or absent” (Ortega y Gasset, 131). This is, he says, a kind of “mystical union with the animal, a sensing and presentiment of it that automatically leads the hunter to perceive the environment from the point of view of the prey, without abandoning his own point of
view” (Ortega y Gasset, 132). This description captures perfectly the mutual givenness that I believe Marion’s thought offers us in understanding the human/animal encounter.

V. Conclusion: Toward a community of the *adonnés*

This language of saturation and givenness brings us very far from Singer’s approach to ethics. In her essay “Eating Meat and Eating People,” Diamond explores ways that Singer’s model “makes it hard to see what is important either in our relationship with other human beings or in our relationship with animals” (Diamond, Eating Meat…, 467). She focuses on the question of eating animals, but in her attempts to address that puzzle she aims to open up other aspects of the human/animal relationship as well. Diamond makes it clear that she finds the animal to be “more an object of contemplation than of observation” but Diamond cautions that she is “not suggesting it is a matter of intuition” (Diamond, Eating Meat…, 470). In this way, she poses the question of what kind of relationship this is. What would it mean for this relationship to be one of contemplation but yet not of “intuition?” Given the centrality of a kind of “intuition” for Marion’s formulations, we must first ask what Diamond’s negative characterization of intuition vis-à-vis contemplation implies for those seeking to take up Marion’s saturation. Following that, it is important to think about the role of contemplation in relationality and thus to ask about what it might add to Marion’s stance.

As a kind of foundation for Diamond’s own ethics of animal-human relations, seeing the animal as an object of contemplation rather than observation begins to correct Singer’s approach to the animal. By evoking the contemplative stance, Diamond helps us to turn away from purely rational understandings of the relationship between us and animals and possibly begin to rethink how we live with animals. By calling for contemplation without intuition, I read Diamond as seeking to emphasize the importance of viewing and encountering without emphasizing the role of reason. In this, I believe she has more in common with Marion than might be evident from her turn away from “intuition.”

Both her contemplation and Marion’s intuition seem to de-emphasize reason in favor of the
encounter with others. What Diamond’s approach does not do is tell us how we might begin to judge whether particular actions are justified or not. Does Marion get us further in this regard? He does—and this precisely through his relationship to intuition.

Marion’s concept of intuition, as I have discussed it above, is crucial in the operation of the saturated phenomenon. While intuition is received (via givenness) in all relations between human subjects and other phenomena, the excess of intuition that is received in the encounter with the saturated phenomenon is, as we have seen, crucial in the manifestation of the human subject as an adonné. Thus, in encountering saturated phenomena, a crucial step for human subjectivity is facilitated, called into being, instantiated. Without this, the movement toward being an adonné is arrested, and we risk as humans a key experience that opens up our access to both the other saturated phenomena indeed, to other humans as members of our joint community, and centrally, to ourselves.

This is putting in very abstract terms the conclusion that preserving the encounter with animals as saturated phenomena is important because it is vital to our own ontological foundation. This does not tell us whether or not we ought to kill and eat any animals or none at all. But it does tell us that those technologies, practices, and habits which tend to objectify the animal prevent us from an important ontological encounter. This line of argument would then imply that our reliance on pets and our tendency to anthropomorphize certain animals is a symptom of this overall imbalance in how we relate to animals as saturated phenomena. This is not to say that we should not have pets. But, rather, that in the experience of pets we risk emphasizing certain aspects of animals’ givenness at the expense of others.

My argument here implies that we ought not to stand back in contemplation of the animal as phenomenon, but rather put ourselves in a place where we can properly recognize the excess of intuition that is confronting us as givenness. This is precisely what cannot happen in the commercialized factory farm and slaughterhouse, although the experience there is certainly one of excess. Yet it is not the excess of givenness, but rather the excessive experience of the animal seen as pure object, not allowed to gaze on the human, bred for the sole purpose of becoming meat. To
have set this up as a system is to have already stopped allowing the possibility that there is more to
the animal than we can comprehend or control. While we may have our relationships with dogs and
cats to save us through the experience of saturation, this is only true on an individual level. From the
standpoint of politics, it is our systemic refusal to see some animal bodies as potentially anything
other than objects that opens up the possibility for us to do the same to ourselves.

What might this mean practically? I suggest the following principles. First, we must examine
whether animals are being afforded the chance as phenomenal subjects to see, contemplate, or be
seen by other phenomena. Are we completely foreclosing the possibility for an animal to achieve the
status of adonné? The point is not that we can determine whether or not animals have consciousness,
souls, or whatever other concept we use to accord “worth” to them. Rather, in which conditions do
they live and do they have, in the context of their existence, the freedom to encounter other
phenomena as freely given subjects?

I am not saying here is that we should never eat any animals. At the very least, that position
cannot be extracted from Marion’s concept of the saturated phenomenon. (There are other, stronger
justifications for vegetarianism and veganism.) Once death has occurred, the animal body can easily
transform to an object in our views, as Diamond’s example of the little girl and the hare in the
Walter de la Mare poem indicates. Yet this is not simply to say that all objects that take the form of
meat are worth eating. The injunction against eating certain kinds of meat that exists in multiple and
diverse cultures indicates some wrestling with questions of restraint and symbolism in our
relationship to what we eat. That these injunctions see the restricted meat in opposing ways is all the
more interesting. In order for one group to see a certain meat as unclean, while another sees it as
permissible, both must have cast their relationships to animals such that they can remain open to the
possibility that animals constitute some more meaningful part of their world than just as mere
objects.

“No doubt…all beings appear only as given” (Marion 2002a, 321) Marion’s claim is bold but
he tempers it with the realization that not all given phenomena will show themselves as such. “But
not every given shows itself reciprocally as a being. The majority of the time, it manifests itself
precisely beyond or without the ontic categories” (Marion 2002a, 321). Encountering phenomena will always require us to pay attention to how they are presenting themselves but also how we as subjects are encountering them. Because it is not always the case that the givenness grabs each of us fully (nor, and here I perhaps move beyond Marion, is it the case that it might call to each of us equally.) Thus he cautions that

From now on, it is necessary that we learn to see what shows itself simply and strictly inasmuch as it shows itself, in the absolute freedom of apparition. There is nothing easy about this apprenticeship, for what shows itself first gives itself and to see what gives itself, we must first renounce constituting and ‘grasping’ it (in the Cartesian sense), in favor of simply receiving it. But to receive, in philosophy as elsewhere—what could be more arduous? (Marion 2002a, 321).

But this arduous receptivity that we must enact is the only way to attempt to enact “the phenomenology of givenness [that] follows the paradigm of the unconditional given, quite possibly saturated with intuition and therefore unobjectifiable” (Marion 2002a, 321). And it is only in this way that we might be able to “therefore do justice to the unconstitutable, which constitutes for us what is essential in our world (the idol, event, flesh, and face), indeed in what passes beyond it” (Marion 2002a, 321). As we encounter animals as jointly saturated with us, we might find that the very phenomenon of the animal itself contains aspects of destabilizing givenness that reconfigure our ability to make rationally certain judgments as thinking subjects. What the animal encounter might force us to realize is the way that the encounter with thinking subjects like ourselves is not the only kind of encounter that might compel us personally, politically, socially, or aesthetically.

Throughout this essay, I have considered the problem of considering human being in relationship particularly to the animal as other. The additional layer of Marion’s notion of the saturated phenomenon recasts how we think of the other. If the animal other is conceived as another saturated phenomenon as, indeed, we are ourselves, then we can think of the human/animal relation as characterized by a shared experience of phenomenality, one that, even if it does not imply a new form of politics, adds an additional layer to our current understanding. While we may never be able to experience the fully mutual experience of being joint adonnés with animals, as we do not know
how they encounter our faces, flesh, selves, we can see in their saturation as we encounter it a fuller account of subjectivity than the rational political subject that Singer uses as his measure. Most of all, considering saturation will compel us to reconsider the myriad ways that our lives and relationships with animals mask not only their saturation, but ours as well. As we struggle to understand how we might account for animals within our political communities, we can be challenged by our joint givenness to account for the ways we already exist in subjective relationality with animals as saturated, something revealed by a closer look at the practices most antithetical to a joint understanding of life (such as slaughtering) which tend to obscure both animals’ and humans’ saturation.
Works Referenced


