Phenomenality in the Middle
Marion, Romano, and the Hermeneutics of the Event

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"The Reason of the Gift" is part of Jean-Luc Marion's broader phenomenological project, which begins from his critique of the traces of a constituting subject retained by Husserl and Heidegger. While Marion's phenomenology of givenness (donation) eliminates these traces, it does so only by reducing the subject to a passive recipient on whom phenomena impose themselves. In contrast, Claude Romano (another contemporary French phenomenologist) responds to the same concerns about Dasein's subjective character without limiting the subject to pure receptivity.² By comparing these two responses to the issue of a constituting subject, I will draw attention to some of the limitations in Marion's account, and highlight the importance of hermeneutics in phenomenology.

Marion argues that neither Husserl nor Heidegger breaks free of certain fundamental presuppositions that undermine the Husserlian project, and that belong to a line of thought running back to Kant and Descartes. In Marion's view, both Husserl and Heidegger reduce phenomena within limits dictated by and for a sovereign subject: "Metaphysical (in fact, Cartesian) egology is a paradigm that always haunts the I, even reduced, even phenomenological" (BG, 187/ED, 262; cf. BG/ED, §§1–3, §19, §25). Thus, in Heidegger's Being and Time (BT),³ Dasein's projection and possibility take on an increasingly dominant position. As a result, the world is more a characteristic of Dasein's own self-projection than the referential totality in
which *Daesin* finds itself always already disposed and thrown (*BT*, §14, 92/64; cf. *BT*, §18, 119/86; *BT*, §18, 121/88). In *Reduction and Givenness* (*RG*), Marion concludes that while *Daesin* is in many respects a “destruction” of the ego, it depends on an implicit “I am” that is an “heir” of the cogito’s “I think” (*RG*, 106/RD, 160; *BG*, 261/ED, 360).

Marion’s response to the shortcomings he sees in Husserl and Heidegger is to center his own phenomenology on the givenness of phenomena. He insists that phenomena must be seen as *given* rather than as constituted in any way, and consistently applies his principle of givenness to exclude any suggestion of phenomena appearing under conditions imposed on them by a subject. Instead of the appearing of phenomena being conditioned, Marion asserts that a phenomenon *gives itself* of itself (*BG*, 138/ED, 196), and appears by imposing itself on a recipient (*BG*, 201/ED, 282).

Thus, in “The Reason of the Gift” Marion uses gifts as a paradigm for phenomena in general, and argues that no reason can be given to account for a gift apart from the gift itself. If a gift is explained as the effect of a cause, then it is either given in response to something that has been received or given to achieve an end. In either case, it is no longer simply gratuitous; the gift is assigned a value in an economy and becomes an object of exchange. Marion maintains that a gift is possible only beyond the metaphysical domain that is ruled by the principles of causality and of sufficient reason. His phenomenology of givenness sets out this nonmetaphysical domain, within which a phenomenon appears purely as given and on its own horizon—a phenomenon reduced to givenness.

At one point in *BG*, Marion suggests that *Daesin’s* facticity should be understood in a “middle voice where I am neither the author nor the spectator of the phenomenon” (*BG*, 147/ED, 207). Here, he is echoing the introduction to *BT*, where Heidegger situates phenomenality in the context of the middle-voiced verb φαίνεσθαι, indicating that phenomena cannot be understood either as the activity of a subject or as a purely passive experience of that which happens to us (*BT*, §7, 51/SZ, 29). Marion’s critique of the traces of subjectivity and agency retained in *Daesin* supports a conclusion that the subtle nuance of this middle voice eludes Heidegger (at least in *BT*). However, the same assessment can be made of Marion himself—though in his case the emphasis is on the “self” of the phenomenon, and therefore the passive voice dominates.
In this chapter, I highlight Marion’s failure to sustain a middle voice by comparing him with Romano. Romano shares Marion’s concerns about Husserl and Heidegger, concluding that consciousness has an “absolute priority” for Husserl, and that because Dasein “remains the measure of all phenomenality” for Heidegger, it conserves “the prerogatives conferred on the modern subject since Descartes” (L’événement et le monde [EM], 30). Romano responds to these concerns by developing an account of the event, which is one of the phenomena also considered at length by Marion. However, unlike Marion, whose account of the event marginalizes hermeneutics, Romano makes hermeneutics central to his account. I contend that Romano’s focus on hermeneutics allows him to describe the appearing of phenomena as a genuine encounter between the perceiver and the perceived. That is to say, he comes closer to a “middle voice” than does Marion, although Romano himself does not describe his project in exactly these terms.

Before directly comparing Marion and Romano, I set out the account of the event given by each of them, with particular emphasis on the place they assign to hermeneutics, and on their account of the subject as the adonné and the advenant, respectively.

Marion’s Phenomenology of the Event

Events fascinate Marion because, rather than persisting in presence as objects do, they happen. Events well up in appearing, and impose themselves as a fait accompli. They cannot be planned, produced, or foreseen. Marion uses the happening of events to support his insistence that phenomenology must attribute the initiative in appearing to phenomena—and not to any cause that might explain them metaphysically, nor to any consciousness for which they appear. Marion emphasizes this initiative by inverting the normal understanding of both causality and intentionality in the appearing of events. Thus, rather than events being dependent on a cause, he presents them as phenomenological facts that have priority over any cause, and are even uncaused. Likewise, rather than events being the “objects” of a subject’s intentional act of consciousness, he proposes that they impose themselves on a perceiver, and thus reveal the “self” of a phenomenon. Marion’s emphasis on this “self” of a phenomenon leads him to redefine the subject as the adonné, who is defined by receptivity. After outlining these two inversions, I argue that they make the adonné’s role essentially passive, and that this passive receptivity is

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reflected in Marion's restriction of hermeneutics to acts of interpre-
tation after an event has actually happened.

Marion makes a sharp distinction between the "facticity" of the
event and the "actuality" (effectivity) of an effect, which can be re-
duced to the predictable product of known causes. In doing this, he
argues for the phenomenological priority of the effect (that appears)
over its cause (whose presence he relegates to metaphysics). He
argues that an inquiry into the causes of an effect relies on metaphysi-
cal presuppositions that are inadmissible in phenomenology.
Therefore, to remove phenomena from the metaphysical domain,
they should not be considered as effects, but simply as "faits accom-
plis."

Marion's key argument for the phenomenological priority of facts
is that it is possible to ask about what caused a phenomenon only
after it has already happened. So, even though a cause might have a
metaphysical priority over its effect, the fact of a phenomenon's ap-
ppearing has a phenomenological priority over whatever may have pro-
duced it. On the basis of this temporal priority, Marion inverts the
normal relationship between cause and effect, so as to "construe the
cause as the effect of the effect" (BG, 165/ED, 252). He argues that,
considered phenomenologically, "the event precedes its cause9 (or
causes)" because any knowledge of its cause as cause can come only
after the event has happened, as an effect (BG, 165/ED, 233).

Marion is aware that giving the effect (as event) priority over its
cause contradicts the principle of causality, and he reinforces this
contradiction by comparing the event of the given phenomenon to
God, who is the classic exception to the principle of causality. As an
event, a phenomenon is a "quasi (non-)cause (causa sui)" that shares
the divine privilege of "not having to respond to the question that
enjoins all other beings to offer a reason [rendre raison] for their exis-
tence and their appearance" (BG, 160/ED, 227). Therefore, if phe-
omena are to be understood as "event[s] without cause or reason,"
then the universality of the principle of causality must itself be put
into question (BG, 161/ED, 227). Describing phenomena as events
rather than objects is part of Marion's strategy to remove them from
the metaphysical domain in which the principle of causality is valid.

Arguing for the event as a phenomenological causa sui allows Mar-
ion to emphasize the "self of the phenomenon" (BG, 159/ED, 226).
Some such concept of self is implied by his recurring language about
"that which shows itself" and "that which gives itself."10 However,
beyond describing it as "original" (JE, 51/DS, 36), Marion never
specifies exactly what this self is. His concern is not so much with the phenomenon’s self per se, but rather with his claim that “in the appearing, the initiative belongs in principle to the phenomenon, not the gaze” (BG, 159/ED, 225; cf. IE, 30/DS, 35). He insists that the appearing of phenomena is not a metaphysical actuality produced by something else that acts as cause or constituting agent. Rather, the appearing of a phenomenon is a phenomenological fact in which “the self of the phenomenon . . . comes, does its thing [survient], and leaves on its own; showing itself, it also shows the self that takes (or removes) the initiative of giving itself” (BG, 159/ED, 226). Far from being constituted, the phenomenon “imposes” itself (BG, 201/ED, 282; emphasis added), so that “the gaze receives its impression of the phenomenon before any attempt at constituting it” (BG, 159/ED, 225).

By ascribing a “self” to phenomena, Marion seeks to add credibility to his claim that the event of a phenomenon’s appearing does not result from a perceiving subject’s action: “If the phenomenon really gives itself, then it obligatorily confiscates the function and the role of the self, and therefore can concede to the ego only a me of second rank, by derivation” (IE, 48/DS, 53f.). If there must be a “self” in order for there to be action in the world, then Marion believes this self must belong to the phenomenon. Thus, if one of the roles of a “self” is to be the source of an intentional act of consciousness, he contends that, in the fact of an event, “intentionality is inverted: I become the objective of the object” (BG, 146/ED, 207). Instead of making the phenomenon, I am made by it; as a fait accompli, it accomplishes not only itself but me as well. To indicate that I receive myself in receiving the phenomenon, Marion designates this recipient the adonné—the one who is given over in the giving (BG, 322/ED, 441f.).

Marion maintains that the receptivity of the adonné “mediates” or “goes beyond” passivity and activity (BG, 264/ED, 364; IE, 48/DS, 57)—a claim that supports his view that Dasein’s facticity should be understood in the middle voice (BG, 147/ED, 207). Moreover, he ascribes great significance to the adonné’s receptivity, in its role as that which transforms the given into the shewn, and thus makes it a phenomenon (BG, 264/ED, 364; IE, 49/DS, 58f.). However, Marion is so concerned to avoid producing another heir to the Cartesian ego that the balance of his thought tends strongly toward depicting the adonné as passive. In both the instances where he proposes a receptivity that is beyond activity and passivity (BG, 264/ED, 364; IE, 48/DS, 57), Marion immediately elaborates that receptivity by describing
the adonné as a “screen” on which the given “crashes” in order to manifest itself (BG, 265/ED, 365; IE, 50/DS, 59). In this image, there is no sense of activity in the reception, nor even of “mediation”—the adonné seems to be simply passive.

The passivity of the adonné corresponds to the emphasis Marion places on the “self” of the phenomenon. He repeatedly insists that the phenomenon gives itself and shows itself on the basis of itself—the phenomenon of the gift even “decides itself” (BG, 112/ED, 161). One of the risks in placing such an emphasis on a “self” of the phenomenon is that, far from overcoming or mediating the distinction between passivity and activity, the distinction is simply repeated in an inverted form. Indeed, Marion often describes phenomena in terms that ascribe to them something very close to the active role previously assigned to the subject. Thus, in place of phenomena being constituted by a subject, he sees phenomena as imposing themselves on a subject, who is in turn constituted as receiver by this imposition. Marion’s phenomena often seem to be acting as agents, imposing themselves on the passive recipient of consciousness into which they crash. There is no question that the primacy Marion accords to givenness removes the vestiges of Cartesian or Kantian sovereignty from the subject. However, in many instances this dethroning seems to be accomplished simply by enthroning a new sovereign rather than by overturning the dominion of sovereignty as such.

Marion’s insistence on the initiative and selfhood of phenomena prevents him from finding a middle way between the active and passive voices—though where Heidegger is inclined to the active, Marion is inclined to the passive. Consistent with this restriction of the recipient to a passive role, Marion excludes acts of interpretation from the actual happening of events. In place of Heidegger’s ontological (or existential) sense of hermeneutics, where hermeneutics is intrinsic to the actual appearing of phenomena, Marion confines hermeneutics to a marginal and derivative sense of “subsequent interpretation”—after phenomena have already appeared.

Marion responds to critics of the place he gives to hermeneutics by protesting that his “interpretation of the phenomenon as given, not only does not forbid hermeneutics but demands it” (IE, 35n/DS, 59n). However, this protestation of innocence is somewhat disingenuous, because although he proposes “a hermeneutic without an end in time” (BG, 229/ED, 319), this is only hermeneutics in its derivative sense. On the two occasions where he specifies a role for her-
meneutics in relation to events, Marion describes a future series of epistemic acts that interpret an event subsequent to its happening (BG, 229/ED, 519; IE, 33/DS, 39). At no point does he make any concession to the more fundamental ontological sense of hermeneutics that Heidegger proposes as primary.

Marion concludes his protest by correctly identifying that the point at issue is not the necessity of hermeneutics but its "phenomenological legitimacies" (IE, 33n/DS, 39n). However, he does not actually discuss this key issue, which determines the place hermeneutics is assigned in phenomenology. In short, does the phenomenological domain limit hermeneutics to epistemic acts in the way Marion suggests? Alternatively, as I am arguing, is not all phenomenology necessarily hermeneutic, because of the hermeneutic character of phenomenality itself?

A condition of possibility for any act of cognition or consciousness (including the epistemic type of hermeneutic interpretations admitted by Marion) is that there be some relation between consciousness and whatever is given to it as phenomena. Because this relation shapes the ways we interpret the meaning of both consciousness and phenomena, it can properly be referred to as hermeneutic—and, if it is hermeneutic, it is hermeneutic in a fundamental sense.

Romano's Eventual Hermeneutics

Romano agrees with Heidegger that the fundamental phenomenological structure of the subject's encounter with phenomena is itself hermeneutic (in the primary sense). Thus, Romano describes the "subject" (which he calls the advenant) as a self-projecting agent who acts, makes decisions, and exercises freedom in a hermeneutic structure of possibilities (EM, 51). Likewise, he designates the interpretation of this advenant as "eventual hermeneutics [herméneutique événementielle]" (EM, 54). However, Romano avoids the subjectivist aspects of Da-sein, and does justice to Marion's concern for the genuine transcendence and otherness of phenomena that give themselves as themselves. In Romano's account, the advenant has a "possibility . . . [that] precedes the distinction of active and passive" (EM, 99), and that could equally be described as a "middle voice."

Romano's principal critique of Heidegger is that in insisting on everything that happens to Da-sein being understood as one of Da-sein's own possibilities, Heidegger reduces phenomena to "modalities" of the Being of Da-sein. By doing this, Heidegger restricts his account to

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one single event—"the sole event that is Dasein itself, the event of its Being" (EM, 27). There is no Other, and therefore no possibility of becoming other, because everything that happens is a possibility of Dasein, which it always already is.

Romano views Dasein as limited to an empty playing out of its own already existing possibilities, and introduces the possibility of the genuinely new by distinguishing between two types of events. Understood in the ordinary "evental [événementiel]" sense, events happen as an actualizing or factualizing of a possibility that is already present in the world, and are described by Romano as "innerworldly facts." Essentially different from these are "events in a properly evental [événemential] sense," whose happening is a radical arriving (advenir) that upends the preexisting possibilities and thus reconfigures the world. Romano's distinction has some parallels to Heidegger's ontological difference, in that innerworldly facts are very much ontic actualities, while evental events not only reveal the fundamental significance of the happening of events, but also are the origin of the structures within which innerworldly facts can themselves arise.

Romano singles out four key phenomenological differences between innerworldly facts and evental events. Innerworldly facts (1) are impersonal, (2) happen within a world, (3) are subject to causal explanation, and (4) are inscribed in a datable present. By contrast, evental events (1) are addressed to particular entities, (2) reconfigure the world, (3) cannot be explained by causes, and (4) occur with a "structural delay" that opens a future.

(1) Innerworldly facts, such as a bolt of lightning, are fundamentally impersonal events that do not affect any entity in particular (EM, 37). An evental event, on the other hand, such as grief, is always "addressed" to a particular entity, so that "I am in play myself" in its happening (EM, 44).

(2) Innerworldly facts always appear within the horizon of a pre-existing world. Romano understands this "world" in a very Heideggerian sense, as a hermeneutic network of possibilities within which human subjects interpret meaning, understand themselves, and project their own possibilities in action (EM, 51). Evental events differ from innerworldly facts in that they do not happen within the already established horizon of a preexisting world, but rather reconfigure the world by upending (bouleverserent) its possibilities, and thus appearing on their own horizon. Far from being innerworldly, these events are "world-installing [instaurateurs du monde] for the advenir" (EM, 56). When an evental event happens to me, my world is "reconfigured"
and made "new"; none of my possibilities and projects remain unaffec-
ted. In fact, "the event is [emphasis added] this metamorphosis
of the world in which the very meaning of the world is in play [se jouer]
(EM, 95). Importantly, while the world opened by the event is genu-
inely new, it results from a reconfiguration of the existing world
rather than from a radically new creation.

(3) Because an innerworldly fact is an actualization of a preexist-
ing possibility in an already established horizon, it is foreseeable
within this horizon and subject to causal explanation (EM, 64).
Eventual events, on the other hand, do not appear within any preex-
isting horizon, and are therefore not explicable as the effects of
causes within such a horizon. Thus, Romano characterizes their wel-
ing up as "an-arhic"—a "pure beginning on the basis of nothing
[un commencement à partir de rien]" (EM, 58). To illustrate this, he dis-
cusses the event of the first meeting that begins a relationship be-
tween two people. As a fact, its actualization is entirely explicable, in
terms of how the two people came to cross paths, and even in terms
of personality characteristics that might dispose them toward friend-
ship. However, as the event in which a new relationship opens up
in my life, a meeting "radically transcends its own actualisation, it
reconfigures my possibles articulated in a world, and introduces in
my own adventure a radically new meaning, which makes my adventure
tremble, upends it from top to bottom, and thus modifies all my
previous projects" (EM, 59). From this perspective, events are rad-
cially inexplicable. Indeed, far from being explained as the effect of a
cause, an event is its own origin: "It is pure bursting out from itself
into itself, unforeseeable in its radical novelty, and retrospectively in-
stalling a rupture [élosion] with all the past" (EM, 60). This bursting
forth establishes a new horizon of meaning, with a different range of
possibilities on which I can project myself. The event "retransfigures
my world" (EM, 61), "obliging the advent to understand otherwise
both himself and his world" (EM, 62). Because this shift in under-
standing takes place within the new horizon that an event opens, it
becomes possible only after an event has already happened. Conse-
quently, eventual events have a "structural delay," such that they are
encountered only retrospectively (EM, 64), and thereby open me to
the past (EM, 69).

(4) The final phenomenological difference between facts and
events arises from this structural delay, and concerns temporality. An
innerworldly fact is a "fait accompli" that "is produced in a datable
present, a definitive present where all is accomplished" (EM, 64). It

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is simply a fact, with no unactualized potential, and is therefore located at a specific time. An event, on the other hand, is not datable for Romano: "It does not so much inscribe itself in time as open time, or temporalise it" (EM, 65). An eventual event is never encountered in the present of its happening, but only retrospectively, from the future that it opens.

Like Marion (and Heidegger), Romano gives the "subject" a new name—"the adventant," reflecting his understanding of how subjectivity arises and is reshaped in the happening of the event. Basic elements of Romano's concept of subjectivity are comparable with Heidegger's account of Daedal in Being and Time. Thus, Romano understands selfhood as the capacity to appropriate possibilities in a world. However, in a crucial departure from Heidegger, there is no sense in which Romano's "subject" is itself the origin of its possibilities; rather, its possibilities are opened to it in the opening of a world that is the happening of an eventual event. For Romano, subjectivity is coming to (ad-vent) oneself in the happening (advenant) of an event in which one is implicated.

This perpetual coming to (a-venture) myself of the advenant precludes any possibility of claiming sovereignty, either over myself or over the world of possibilities in which I project myself. Romano insists that I always come to myself from an origin other than myself, and that this is true from the very beginning of my existence. This insistence is reflected in the central place that he gives to birth in his analysis: it is the event "that opens the world of the advenant for the first time" and that, "before any project of his and before any understanding . . . makes possible [possibilité] all his possibles and the world" (EM, 96). Though my birth happens to a "to whom [à qui]," strictly speaking, "I" am not present until after I am born. I am never the origin of that which I am, and which I am from my very beginning (i.e., originally). Birth thus establishes a structural delay at my very origin; according to this delay, I can project myself only into future possibilities that have been opened by an event that itself always lies in the past. Romano's account of this delay allows him to describe the advenant as being born into a dynamic that makes it essentially temporal while precluding any suggestion that the advenant is itself the origin of this dynamic.

Romano's insistence that the advenant is not the origin of itself, nor of the world in which it projects its possibilities, leads him to introduce what he calls an "eventual possibility [possibilité éventuel]," which is the opening of a world, with its horizon of projectual possibilities,
in the happening of an eventual event (EM, 117; emphasis added). As the opening of a world, eventual possibility is that which makes these projectual possibilities possible, and in which a future is opened that is not limited to an ultimately sterile playing out of the "dead possibilities" of my present (EM, 119). Eventual possibility reconfigures my world, and opens me to a possibility for myself that I have not myself projected, and that is therefore genuinely other than what I already am (EM, 121f.).

Marion in Light of Romano

Marion and Romano make similar critiques of the priority Husserl gives to consciousness, and of Heidegger's understanding of Dasein as self-projecting Being-in-the-world—especially with respect to the Cartesian tendency that survives in some of Heidegger's analyses. For both Marion and Romano, Heidegger does not do justice to the appearing of phenomena in their own right, but reduces them to a projection of the subject. This leads both thinkers to place a strong emphasis on the appearance of phenomena as themselves, imposing themselves within their own horizon rather than on a preexisting horizon established by a subject. Much of Romano's description of eventual events closely parallels Marion's description of events: an eventual event "is produced on the basis of itself" (EM, 4; cf. BG, 138/ED, 196); it appears as "its own origin" and on "its own horizon" (EM, 60; cf. BG, 229/ED, 318f.); it cannot be explained as the effect of any preceding cause, and is therefore "an-arthic" (EM, 58; cf. BG, 160/ED, 227), "unforeseeable" (EM 60; cf. BG, 199/ED, 280f.; IE, 33/DS, 38), and even "im-possible" (EM, 122; cf. BG, 172/ED, 243f.).

However, despite their many similarities, there are significant differences. Most significantly, Romano is far more cautious than Marion in attributing selfhood to events. While both ascribe the initiative of its happening to the event itself, and speak of its occurring "on the basis of itself," only Marion directly refers to "the self of the phenomenon" (e.g., BG, 159/ED, 226; IE, 34–38/DS, 40–45). In contrast, Romano takes great pains to distance himself from any suggestion of the event's having selfhood as such by situating it firmly in the context of its happening to a human subject: "The event, in the eventual sense, is rightly [justement] nothing other than this reconfiguration of my possibles, by which it is given to me to understand myself otherwise" (EM, 75). The "new world" that is installed by this reconfiguration remains "my world" (e.g., EM, 61; emphasis added). For Romano, the
new horizon of possibility opened by the event is always a horizon for the understanding and projection of the advenant to whom the event happens (EM, 60–62). The event brings an excess of meaning and of possibility into my world, but these are clearly meaning for me and possibilities for me (EM, 61).

Marion's concern to exclude any suggestion of a constituting subject prevents him from admitting any great significance for the one to whom a phenomenon appears. He describes the appearing of a phenomenon as its “imposing” itself on a receiver (BG, 158/ED, 196), whose receiving shows the phenomenon simply as it gives itself (like an image on a screen [BG, 265/ED, 365] or the illumination of an indicator lamp [BG, 217/ED, 303]), and who even receives himself in this receiving—and is therefore the adonné (BG, 282/ED, 390). Not only does the subject have no constituting role, but the phenomenon is received as an already completed package—a “fait accompli” (BG, §18). The adonné’s reception of this already accomplished fact has no significance for the phenomenon other than allowing it to be shown. This implies that, in Marion’s account, nothing about the adonné affects phenomena other than this capacity to transform givenness into manifestation, and that therefore a phenomenon can appear indifferently to any adonné whatsoever, while remaining essentially the same phenomenon. For Marion, there is no sense of an encounter between the adonné and that which is given, but simply a transfer of a predetermined package.

At first sight, Romano gives a similar impression, especially when he says that the event “has opened a new world” (EM, 55; emphasis added). However, he is clear that this world is “new” only in that “it is no longer, properly speaking, the same world” (EM, 55). More often, he describes the event as that which “upends” (EM, 45; emphasis added) and “reconfigures my possibles articulated in a world” (EM, 59; emphasis added), and leads to a “metamorphosis of the world and its meaning” (EM, 93; emphasis added), a “mutation of meaning” (EM, 95; emphasis added), or even a “transition from one sense of the world [evental] to the other [evental]” (EM, 94; emphasis added). All of these descriptions make clear that while the event brings something genuinely new for the advenant, it is not a creation ex nihilo that is received on a blank screen, and to which the particular advenant is irrelevant. Rather, the event happens in the context of an already existing totality of possibilities for meaning and projection, and its happening is the upending and reconfiguring of this very totality. The result of such an upending or reconfiguring depends fundamen-
tally on the particularities of what is appended and reconfigured. In Romano’s account, the world opened by the event is genuinely new, but not a radical origin.

This fundamental interrelatedness of the *advenant*, the world, and the event is central to Romano’s thought, and means that each of these concepts can be understood only in terms of the others. The *advenant* is the one who is always arriving in the events that open his world; the world opened by events is the totality of possibility for the *advenant*; and events themselves are the reconfiguring of the *advenant’s* world.

One point in Marion’s account where the lack of interrelatedness between the *adonné* and the world is particularly striking is in his description of birth. Here, Marion is very close to Romano, describing birth as the event that “is accomplished without me and even, strictly speaking, before me” (*IE, 42/DS, 49*), and that “happens [advenir] only insofar as it has given me a future [advenir]” (*IE, 42/DS, 50*). However, for Marion, birth is simply about *me*, understood in a very narrow sense: it “determines me, defines my *ego*, even produces it” (*IE, 42/DS, 50*). Even though he describes this *ego* as one “that receives itself from what it receives” (*IE, 43/DS, 51*) and for whom birth opens “innumerable temporal intuitions” (*IE, 43/DS, 52*), Marion makes no acknowledgment that my being born is the opening of a world in which I play myself out as an event of projecting toward meaning-filled possibilities. In the absence of this fundamental and constitutive interrelatedness between me and my world, the *adonné* remains separated from the world by a gulf that he is unable to bridge—the passive and isolated recipient of the intuitions that are imposed on him.

On the other hand, Romano presents birth precisely as the original opening of a world of possible meaning and projection. In his view, from its very beginning, the “I” who is born can be understood only in terms of an interrelatedness with my world (*EM, 97f*). This mutual interrelation between the *advenant* and the world in which he arrives at (*ad-vient*) himself, which is almost completely absent in Marion, is critical for Romano: “The world only opens *for an advenant*, who only happens *through and on the basis of the world* [s’advent par et à partir du monde], who only takes place there where the event wells up, who is the ‘place’ of the taking-place of the world as such” (*EM, 95*).

On the basis of this interrelatedness, Romano succeeds in understanding the *advenant* as actively implicated in the way an event hap-
pens, without placing him in a constituting role, and while still ascribing the initiative for their happening to events themselves. The lack of such an interrelatedness in Marion’s thought leaves him with the essentially adversarial structure of a subject over against an object. To remove the constituting role from the subject, he inverts this structure by ascribing a quasi selfhood to phenomena and relegating the adonné to being the passive recipient of whatever already accomplished object might happen to crash into him.

Romano’s description of the advenant is far closer to our experience of ourselves than Marion’s description of the adonné or, indeed, Heidegger’s description of Dasein. Romano’s account of the advenant’s adventure is a thoroughly human story, built around my striving to realize possibilities by means of action, decision, projection, and understanding in my world. One of the features of Romano’s account that assures this humanness is the central place he assigns to meaning. From the outset, he designates the horizon of the world as “a hermeneutic structure” — a horizon of possible meanings that can be understood and interpreted, and thus provide a basis for meaningful projection and action (EM, 51). For Romano, an original characteristic of the advenant, opened in birth, is the endeavor “to understand the meaning of one’s adventure” (EM, 96). Consequently, the advenant’s adventure in a world is itself hermeneutic, and Romano’s account of the advenant is fundamentally (or even ontologically) hermeneutic. Unlike Marion, Romano does not view hermeneutics as a subsequent interpretation of what has already happened. Rather, the very happening of the event reveals a fundamental and hermeneutic interrelatedness of event, world, and the one who comes to himself in that happening. Moreover, Romano is faithful to this very Heideggerian sense of hermeneutics while consistently avoiding Heidegger’s tendency (in Being and Time) to establish Dasein as a self-originating self-projection.

Conclusion

Marion and Romano succeed in decisively moving phenomenology away from the Cartesian and Kantian legacy of constitution by a subject. By placing events at the center of their account of phenomena, they emphasize that phenomena do not persist in presence, as objects do, but appear as something that happens.

I have argued that Marion’s account of events overlooks a fundamental hermeneutic dimension, and have highlighted this by con-
trasting Marion’s understanding with that offered by Romano in his eventual hermeneutics. Because of his appreciation of the importance of this hermeneutic dimension, Romano comes closer than Marion to a middle voice for describing the encounter between the immanence of consciousness and the transcendence of the objects of experience. By recovering some of the features of Dasein as Being-in-the-world, without repeating Heidegger’s tendency to reduce the world to the subject’s own self-projection, Romano can describe the advenant in very human terms of projection toward meaningful possibility. By contrast, Marion’s insistence that the initiative of a phenomenon’s givenness and appearing belong to it alone leads him to present the appearing of phenomena as more of a forceful imposition on the advenant, who passively receives them.

However, Marion’s phenomenology of givenness is far broader than Romano’s eventual hermeneutics in two respects. First, while Marion’s account is clearly concerned with phenomenality in general, Romano makes a sharp distinction between eventual events and innerworldly facts. This distinction could be conceived as a “swinging middle,” in which an essentially Heideggerian account of self-projection is occasionally interrupted by the self-imposition of eventual events reconfiguring my world. Second, while Romano considers only one type of phenomenon (events), and then moves on to focus on temporality, Marion considers the particularities of an extraordinarily broad range of phenomena. It would be especially interesting to apply Romano’s eventual hermeneutics to some of the other phenomena already analyzed by Marion, such as works of art, the face, and revelation.