



The Erotic Phenomenon

Jean-Luc Marion, Stephen E. Lewis (Translator)

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While humanists have pondered the subject of love to the point of obsessiveness, philosophers have steadfastly ignored it. One might wonder whether the discipline of philosophy even recognizes love. The word *philosophy* means “love of wisdom,” but the absence of love from philosophical discourse is curiously glaring. So where did the love go? In *The Erotic Phenomenon*, Jean-Luc Marion asks this fundamental question of philosophy, while reviving inquiry into the concept of love itself.

Marion begins his profound and personal book with a critique of Descartes’ equation of the ego’s ability to doubt with the certainty that one exists—“I think, therefore I am”—arguing that this is worse than vain. We encounter being, he says, when we first experience love: I am loved, therefore I am; and this love is the reason I care whether I exist or not. This philosophical base allows Marion to probe several manifestations of love and its variations, including carnal excitement, self-hate, lying and perversion, fidelity, the generation of children, and the love of God. Throughout, Marion stresses that all erotic phenomena, including sentimentality, pornography, and even boasts about one’s sexual conquests, stem not from the ego as popularly understood but instead from love.

A thoroughly enlightening and captivating philosophical investigation of a strangely neglected subject, *The Erotic Phenomenon* is certain to initiate feverish new dialogue about the philosophical meanings of that most desirable and mysterious of all concepts—love.

The Erotic Phenomenon Details

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From Reader Review The Erotic Phenomenon for online ebook

B. says

The first 60-70 pages or so of this book were torture, full of unjustified claims to 'obviousness' and circular arguments and such with no clear sense that there might eventually be a payoff. The ideological bias of his Christian thought is quite clear throughout the book, which is at times not much more than a thinly veiled attempt to offer a rationale for the dogma of his Church. That would be fine if the book wasn't presented as pure philosophy. Church dogma may be divinely inspired, maybe even 'true', but philosophy it isn't.

Eventually, however, some interesting ideas do start to take shape. They are still occasionally undermined by the ideological influence, but there is clearly some meat to his ideas, even some moving, poetic moments, though even these moments sometimes threaten to dissipate into sentimentality. I kept thinking while reading that he might have achieved more success if he had written it as poetry, condensing it from 222 pages into something closer to 10. In the end, I can't say that it was worth the considerable effort it took to sort out the meaningful from the meaningless.

Moses Allen says

Jean-Luc Marion's new book "The Erotic Phenomenon" is not a phenomenology of human sexuality. The connotations to the translated title may be very misleading for the American audience. Readers should be aware of this.

At the University of Chicago, I was fortunate enough to hear Marion speak upon the topic of his new book. He argues that love cannot be explained with a metaphysics, therefore he pursues it phenomenologically. He lays out a wonderfully crafted juxtaposition on various accounts of love (e.g. augustine, hegel, keirkegaard, et al.) He claims that love is a defining characteristic of humanity. He refurbishes Descartes' famous "Cogito ergo sum" (I think therefore I am) into his own "Amo ergo sum" (I love therefore I am).

Μαρ?α says

"Γ?νομαι ο εαυτ?ς μου και με αναγνωρ?ζω στη μοναδικ?τητ? μου ?ταν ανακαλ?πτω και παραδ?χομαι επιτ?λους ποιον επιθυμ?. Αυτ?ς και μ?νο μου φανερ?νει το πιο μυστικ? μου κ?ντρο-αυτ? που μου ?λειπε και μου λε?πε ακ?μα, αυτ? του οπο?ου η φωτειν? απουσ?α εστ?αζε απ? μακρο? τη σκοτειν? παρουσ?α μου στον εαυτ? μου. Η επιθυμ?α μου μο? λ?ει ποιος ε?μαι δε?χνοντ?ς μου τι με ερεθ?ζει...τη στιγμ? αυτ?, ο ?λλος μου γ?νεται μια προσωπικ? υπ?θεση και μου φα?νεται διαφορετικ?ς απ? ?λους τους ?λλους, φυλαχμ?νος για μ?να ?πως εγ? γ? αυτ?v. Με προορ?ζει για τον εαυτ? του και με εξατομικε?ει μ?σω αυτο?. Με αναθ?τει στον εαυτ? μου αναλαμβ?νοντ?ς με. Αυτ? που εξατομικε?ει περαιτ?ρω τον εραστ? ε?ναι η αιωνι?τητα ?, τουλ?χιστον, η επιθυμ?α αιωνι?τητας..."

Andy Stager says

Probably the hardest to read book about a simple fact in the history of literature. You can't be unless you love. I love, therefore I am. A very rich book. Hard. But rich.

????? says

Allyne says

St John the Theologian tells us -- twice in the fourth chapter of his first epistle (verses 8 and 16) that 'God is love.' Not 'God is loving,' nor 'God loves.' No, God simply is love. So it shouldn't be surprising if a priest or theologian says the same thing. But the most splendid explication of this from a philosophical perspective has recently been published -- Jean-Luc Marion's *The Erotic Phenomenon* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Marion is a Roman Catholic layman and arguably the leading philosopher in France today. Although he has written on a number of philosophical topics, including his important work on Descartes, he is best known in theological circles for his *God Without Being: Hors-Texte* (University of Chicago Press, 1995). In that work he argued that most philosophical and even theological discourse about God is irredeemably metaphysical, i.e., it speaks of God in the language of 'being.' As a result, much discourse about God is guilty of 'conceptual idolatry.' The proper name for God, Marion argues, is Love. His affinity to the apophatic tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy was immediately apparent upon reading his book, and he is, in my opinion, the most important living philosopher and the one whose work is most congruent with the Orthodox worldview.

Now, more than a decade later, Marion returns to his theme in an extended philosophical reflection upon and account of love in many forms -- but all, at root, as having to do with God. While the book is not a light read, it is a rewarding one, and I believe it is a timely one for Christians. As a reviewer for *Le Monde* wrote, 'In attempting to place love at the center of things, Jean-Luc Marion wishes to escape the reign of heartless reason.' While I don't have the time or space here to reprise the contested nature of reason today, particularly religious reason, I do want to give you a sample of Marion's work. Here is the better part of the work's last two paragraphs.

'When God loves (and indeed he never ceases to love), he simply loves infinitely better than we do. He loves to perfection, without a fault, without an error, from beginning to end. He loves first and last. He loves like no one else. In the end, I not only discover that another was loving me before I loved, and thus that this other already played the lover before me (§41), but above all I discover that this first lover, from the very beginning, is named God. God's highest transcendence, the only one that does not dishonor him, belongs not to power, not to wisdom, not even to infinity, but to love. For love alone is enough to put all infinity, all wisdom, and all power to work.

'God precedes and transcends us, but first and above all in the fact that he loves us infinitely better than we

love, and than we love him. God surpasses us as the best lover.'

nora walid says

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Majed AlShehri says

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the gift says

this is a later addition: i have upped the rating to a five, put it on my favoritephilosophy shelf, because it seems most immediately practical, that it is useful in ethical behaviour, i have recommended this to another who was reading kierkegaard, then have used this to understand my own motives, my fears, my doubts, when someone expresses apparently honest love for me. this is not skepticism of the other but of myself. this is a most conscious attempt to use philosophy to know real life. maybe this is the wrong situation, the wrong measure, or simply too intellectual. i read sections of this book attempting to understand, but it is the question of healthy emotional development that is perhaps not fully explored, the how rather than the that, which is engaged in emotional response. the 'question of being' that so absorbs heidegger, is here the 'question of love'...

first review: this is a four, as the entire experience of reading wildly ranges between 3 and 5, though indeed perhaps this changes more reading of this philosopher, more reading of this text. for I really doubted certain assertions through laying groundwork, psychological philosophy or philosophical psychology... that can be expressed in his style of rhetorical questions, even as the range of erotic phenomenon goes from self to other to child to god, and is characterized by moving from erotic reduction- recalling phenomenological reduction- of the chain of questions, from 'does anyone out there love me?', to the reversed claim of advancing 'I love you' first, to 'here I am', to denying self-hatred by learning 'another loves me more than I hate myself', but these seem to me based on shifting, uncertain, grounds of the way he defines 'ego'- is it impossible as he claims to love oneself? is the flesh of the other only activated through love? is it so very unusual to precede the other in saying 'I love you'?...

but this concept of 'erotic reduction', this idea that it is not 'I think therefore I am' but 'I love therefore I am', is greatly explored in describing the varied sorts of love we humans can create, can experience, can only in this way know infinity through our finite selves, even if I do not know if this psychic exchange or advance is truly so independent of any 'economy' or transcends and/or ignores 'reason', even whether there is ultimately the need for a third view to validate our love, a child borne of love, a god who insists in loving us, but his exploration, his movement, from love to fidelity, of how it is always the lover and not the beloved who gains

the most existentially, blindly, completely, suffering- this stuff is great. this makes the act of love, the advance, transcend all reciprocity and reason, all infidelity or lying, this is the way some of us love to believe love is the final, the ultimate, the eternal or infinite gift, we humans may know...

so do not be frustrated by the first fifty or sixty pages, do not worry that your answers conflict with his rhetorical questions, it does get better, or at least more understandable. this is an 'application' of phenomenology, that best works if you have read a few phenomenological philosophers, this is the style I like to think, this is encouraging me to think, this ends on a high point, even if I do not see it or just do not find it necessarily leading to belief in god... well yes we would all like to be affirmed, erotically assured, in our lives, but I think most of us sort of muddle through without the low points of hatred of one to another, of one to oneself, of all to all- or the high points of being because we love, are loved, exist eternally in love... I think we are all, usually, somewhere between these extremes...

final note: I suggest the use of 'flesh' in Marion's work is very different from Merleau-Ponty, in that it is not ontologically defined as what we and the world are both styled of, but this flesh is only activated, found, in human to human expression, interaction, and is clearly not simply of the world, of 'objects', hence there is subject/object, which is surpassed in his 'erotic reduction'...

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Joseph says

Wow! Has anyone noticed how indebted Marion's discussion of the "flesh" in the second half of the book is to Michel Henry's notion of flesh? It is weird that Marion does not footnote Henry at least once!

Eslam Saqqa says

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hope mohammed says

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Joseph says

Philosophy is hard.

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