PHENOMENOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL THEORY IN CONVERSATION

BACK TO EDUCATION ITSELF

Edited by
Patrick Howard, Tone Saevi, Andrew Foran,
and Gert Biesta

Phenomenology and Educational Theory in Conversation

Phenomenology and Educational Theory in Conversation challenges the abstract-technical understanding of education to orient the reader to the importance of relationality, intersubjectivity, and otherness to renew and reclaim the educational project.

This book treats education as a matter of existence, relationality, and common human concerns. It offers readers an alternative language to reveal and challenge the humanistic encounters that often disappear in the shadows of neoliberalism. The phenomenologists, and educational theorists featured here, offer insights that connect fully and concretely with the everyday lives of educators and students. They offer another language by which to understand education that is counter to the objectifying, instrumentalist language prevalent in neoliberal discourse.

This book will be of great interest for academics, researchers, and post-graduate students in the fields of pedagogy, phenomenology, educational theory, and progressive education.

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Routledge
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Acknowledgements

As editors of this eclectic collection we invited contributors to dwell on what it means for education to "get back to the things themselves." This project took shape over cups of coffee at kitchen tables, and during late-night chats at conferences in Norway, Canada, and the United States. It was born out of chance meetings and meaningful conversations during airport layovers. The seeds germinated in dialogue with friends and colleagues deeply concerned with the *state of things* in our field and a sense of urgency to reconnect education with the experiential, the whole, the personal, and what it may mean to *get back to education itself*. This book has its own history connected to people, place, time, and our individual phenomenological journeys. It can be traced to teachers, mentors, individuals, and formative texts that orient us to lived experiences foundational to our becoming philosophers, phenomenologists, and educators.

We are thankful for those in our lives who nurtured this project and who encouraged us to question the taken-for-granted in a complex world, and to determine what is most essential in education. We are forever grateful for our students who give us reason to push back against neoliberal ideology in its many forms.

Introduction to book

Globally, over the past four decades, education has become almost synonymous with learning, achievement, and the attainment of predetermined outcomes, with schooling practices cloaked in quantifiable indicators of knowledge, skills, and attributes in the guise of personal growth. On hearing the premise for this collection, an esteemed colleague asked incredulously, "Hasn't that been done? Is there anything new that can be said?" Certainly, there is an impressive body of research that explores neoliberal effects on contemporary educational discourse. Many writers have taken up the critique of educational reforms which have dramatically altered the goals and purposes of education to align with economic and national–political interests. And there is considerable research that exists describing how powerful agendas, often external to schools, serve to standardize curricula, increase competition to achieve higher test scores, regulate greater accountability in classroom practices, and fundamentally transform what we understand about teachers and students in the complexity and richness of the pedagogical relationship.

In response to our colleague, the editors and the contributors in this collection, believe something new, and important, remains to be said. Contemporary educational discourse shaped by neoliberalism, along with globalization have moved beyond hegemony to become a dogma, the unquestioned public orthodoxy that operates as if it were objective reality (Patrick 2013, p. 1). From a societal perspective, one might now question, if neoliberalism has become part of the natural attitude; our taken–for–granted assumptions and experiences relevant to education. And now due to persistent conditioning, educators are simply no longer able to rise to the level of reflective awareness. Giroux (2019) argues that neoliberal ideals, and ways of knowing and being, have become "normalized" (p. 34). The project to commodify education, regulating learners, producing knowledge workers has resulted successfully in our understanding of education in strictly economic terms. However, Giroux (2019) goes a step further to say neoliberalism has provided a foundation on which an emergent authoritarian social order is being built, and this post–neoliberal "fascist populist political formation" (2019, p. 27) is increasingly evident around the world. Thus, neoliberalism continues to threaten liberal democracies and

remains interested in hyper–individualism, competition, and instrumentalist approaches to education. Yet, it is not merely interest, neoliberalism is obsessed with education: fixated with measurement and quantification with the ultimate end of education being the creation of the knowledge worker and ultimate control of the democratic power of education.

And perhaps, it may not be overstating matters to express a sense of urgency in saying that this book is yet another stand against the attacks on education at all levels. To do so, we turn to educational theorists and phenomenologists who understand education as an existential project of human life. Existential education is a moral interest in the lifeworld of children and young people, and in adult attention to the lived meaning of the pedagogical relationship with the young. The existential dialogue of education never ends. It is an ongoing commitment and responsible attention to human life and its concerns. The editors of this book, and the invited contributors, support a phenomenological-existential orientation that offers another vision for education. Van Manen (2016) says the original sense of phenomenology did not reflect an erudite, philosophical pursuit uncoupled from people's lives and daily concerns. Phenomenology was

> the source for questioning the meaning of life as we live it and the nature of responsibility for personal actions and decisions . . . to struggle to dislodge and confront unexamined assumptions of our personal, cultural, political and social beliefs, views, and theories.
>
> (p. 13)

The contributors in this collection see beyond education as the skills, knowledge, and dispositions obtained by attending school. Rather, education is a matter of existence, relationality, common moral and human concerns, concerns for that which is more than human, for life as the human condition. Pedagogy is not mere instructional strategy, but an embodied practice of being oriented to the life of the child and young person in a thoughtful sensitivity for what is in their best interest. This book has an orientation counter to the doctrine of the abstract, technical rationalism dominant in contemporary educational discourse. Teachers, parents, students, and all those deeply interested in education require a new language through which to re-imagine the educational project. Over the past four decades neoliberal values and social relations have normalized ideas of human capital, students as consumers, and knowledge as that which is consumed. Teaching is facilitation, education is learning, and teachers meet learners' needs narrowly defined as prescribed inputs designed to reinforce pre-specified outcomes (Biesta 2011).

Different voices – existential conditions

The orientation of the writers is rooted in Continental education that is a broad moral, complex, and multidimensional inter-generational discipline and

practice. For example, Mollenhauer (1983) purposely, in his thinking and writing, keeps a distance between school and education. He posits schools have become specialized institutions and education has become a branch of science. The result is that the threads of upbringing, of human becoming, have been gathered in too few hands and are no longer shared in the common texture of culture. Today, this concern is truer, and education in the Western cultures has been made over; it is hegemonic, monocultural and now infused with the last of Anglo-American neoliberal ideals (Biesta 2011). Today's educational practice has forgotten the existential and original aspects of pedagogy; thus, we start anew to understand what education is actually about (Masschelein 2011, Saevi 2012).

While we *believe* we know what education is about in contemporary evidence-based research and practice, we do not really know much about how children and young people inherit, transform, and recreate society, cultures, and common life. In fact, much of what we believe we know for sure in life is not sure at all, but as Lingis (2018) invites us to realize,

> all the major events in our lives are due to chance – our birth; a teacher who captivated us and engaged us in mathematics or nursing, music, or football; the person we happened to meet and fall in love with; the job opportunity that abruptly opened; our child who was born or who was autistic or who died; the car crash that crippled us; the tumor that grew silently in our inner organs. There is . . . an element of chance and risk in every relation with another human being. We never really know what someone might think or might do. We can only trust him or her. Chance is the unpredictable, the incalculable, the incomprehensible, surprise, shock, good, or bad luck.
>
> (p. 6)

Nevertheless, we continue to determine, rationalize about, and attend to causalities that may promote or hinder our wellbeing and plans. We transfer to our children the attitude that life should be manageable and successful, and if not, then something is wrong *with* them or *in* them.

The counter movements to the rationalized "knowledge society" intend to revive traditions of rich plurality and complex indefinite discourses and practices that were traded away by European governments 20 years ago in the 1999 Bologna Declaration followed by Quality Reform 2003, and the work of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on reforming general education through its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). The OECD effort has resulted in a world-wide functional and economically based system aiming at educational control and success. "The cultural-existential discussion that used to be the point and the end of education, increasingly found solutions in a specialized interdisciplinary and professionally oriented education locked up in educational institutions" (Saevi 2012, p. 180).

Where do we want to go or where *can* we go with this new educational reality? Education has become a commodity and a means for economic interests; therefore, the alternative response might be seen as a moral, existential one for the humanity of the next generation. Historically, European education "had stronger structures of a rather contradictory human existential reflection on what education was and should be, and a certain moral hesitation toward how we as educators influence and socialize the child" (Saevi 2012, p. 180). This hermeneutic attitude to life, life forms, actions, and intents is a quality also of the re-imagined existential education represented in this volume. An educational hierarchy is not one of dominion, of human resources as knowledge and skills, but of educational structures that give "priority of human existence and humanity above objects and issues, personal responsibility above social conventionality, and the experiential common moral distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil" (Saevi 2012, p. 182).

A new language is required to name, challenge, and reveal that which disappears as common sense to educationists overshadowed by neoliberalism. The phenomenologist and educational theorists featured here reject objectifying language in ways that connect fully and concretely with the everyday lives of educators and students. Language that is evocative and rich restores the unique, dismantles the technical articulations designed to control education processes, and offers instead a language that engages us, involves us, and opens spaces for self-reflection, so we may see more clearly the neoliberal landscape we face in our relationships with broader social forces. Reflection is not just thinking and it is never enough just to think critically. We need to be moved and motivated to understand education, classrooms, schools, and the pedagogical lives of children and youth differently than on offer by the neoliberal narrative.

This book opens a space for reflection by allowing us to reclaim human *becoming* at the heart of the educational project. In contributing an alternative language for education, we believe something new can be said.

Structure of the book

The book has been structured as four distinct parts to feature phenomenologists and educational theorists responding to overarching themes that speak to education as central to the human story in all its contingencies and messiness. Education and how we speak of it is inherently dialogical – an intergenerational and complex process. So, too, is this book designed to be attuned to the dialogical nature of hermeneutics. Educational theorists and phenomenologists problematize contemporary socio-political educational change and offer an alternative story for education and raise important questions to bring the practical, every-day life world of educators and students into recognizable focus.

Authors representing a diversity of theoretical/philosophical and phenomenological approaches contribute chapters to each of the four sections organized around general themes. One of the unique features of this volume is that

each of the sections is introduced to the reader in a manner that explicates and contextualizes the contributions as not simply theoretical endeavours but truly practical conversations that open up new avenues of interpretation and inquiry, to re-imagine a new language for education by taking up Husserl's call of going "back to the things themselves" (Husserl 2001, p. 168) and re-engaging with that which is originary in education, to what it means to educate, to teach, to learn, and thereby bring up the next generation.

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Part I

On education

The phenomenon of education reconsidered

Gert Biesta

It may seem obvious for a book on education to start with a section on education and, for a book that seeks to bring education and phenomenology into conversation, to start with a section on the *phenomenon* of education. Some may argue that this is actually not needed, because education is such a widespread and omnipresent phenomenon that we already know what it is, and that from there we should swiftly move to the study of education rather than focusing on the phenomenon that is supposed to be studied. Others may argue that a book on education should not pay that much attention to education, because what really matters nowadays is not education but learning.

The first line of argument will be familiar to readers in the English-speaking world and in countries influenced by developments there, because in the English-speaking world the study of education, at universities, colleges, and other institutions, is generally seen as a multi-disciplinary effort that has "education" as its object (see Biesta 2011). In those countries and settings, therefore, the psychology of education, the sociology of education, the philosophy of education, and the history of education have become established ways to conduct the study of education. While these approaches have generated and are continuing to generate interesting insights, the question that is often "forgotten" is what education "itself" is actually about or, to put it differently, what kind of assumptions need to come into play before education can actually become an object of study.

Even if one is able to find a school, college or university – which may have become more of a challenge nowadays given the way in which schools, hospitals, prisons, shops, and office blocks have become almost indistinguishable from each other; they all seem to be based on a similar architectural grammar – there is still the question what one would focus on, and why, if one has the intention to study the education happening in those buildings. Should the focus be on teachers and, if so, how can they be identified? Or on students? Would it be relevant to include janitors? Should the building itself be brought in as an educational actor? Is everything that teachers do educationally relevant? Such questions show that the study of education cannot skip over the question of education itself and, more specifically, the question of the phenomenon of education.

Yet here the second line of thought comes to the fore, as many nowadays would argue and do actually argue that education is all about learners and their learning. The "learnification" (Biesta 2010) of educational discourse and practice has indeed been hailed by some as a liberating paradigm shift (see, for example, Barr and Tagg 1995) that has helped education and educators to focus on what really should matter in education. That this shift is seen as liberating is particularly due to a prevalent but nonetheless misleading idea that education can only be enacted as a process in which teachers control students, where teachers and their teaching are seen as the major culprit and the turn towards learners and their learning as an emancipatory "escape" from this set-up.

While it cannot be denied that people can learn and do learn, the simple fact that people can do so and will do so without education and without the efforts from educators already indicates that learning is not enough if we wish to capture what education is about. One might say that it only takes one to learn, but that it takes two for education to happen: an educator and what in some languages, but not that often in English, is referred to as an "educandus," that is, the one being educated or receiving education. What the "educandus" is supposed to do with the education that is directed at him or her, what the relationship between educator and educandus actually is and is about, whether these are necessarily relationships between human beings or whether other actors can come into play, how intentional or not the actions of educator and educandus are or should be, what the purposes are that should "frame" the interaction, are all questions that need to be asked in order to begin to get a sense of the phenomenon of education, particularly when we acknowledge that this phenomenon "occurs," so we might say, beyond learning (Biesta 2006).

All this is not helped by the fact that the English word "education" carries an ambivalence with it, as it can refer to a process, to an (intentional) activity, to a practice, and to an institution, to name but a few options. It is particularly the difference between education as process and education as (intentional) activity that matters here, because when we use the word education to refer to a process, it is quite easy to claim or suggest that this is essential to a process of learning. Bearing in mind, therefore, that education can also refer to an intentional activity – something an educator does – it becomes possible to see a difference between education and learning and thus to raise different questions about the phenomenon of education itself.

It is for all these reasons, then, that this book opens with four chapters that seek to focus on the phenomenon of education, providing some groundwork against which other contributions in this collection can be read. Gert Biesta opens this section with a chapter on the "givenness of teaching," in order to move closer to an "encounter" with the educational phenomenon. He does this against the background of the recent turn in educational theory and practice towards the *language* of learning and towards the *practice* of learning, where the learner has been put in the centre of the educational endeavour and the teacher has been moved sideways. In his contribution he argues that the

educational phenomenon cannot be captured in terms of learning but needs a notion of teaching and, more specifically, a notion of teaching that stands on itself and cannot be reduced to or deduced from learning; a notion of teaching, therefore, as something that is radically *given*. In his chapter he tries to argue why this is so and why this matters educationally. In his discussion on the work of Jean-Luc Marion he also shows why the question of the givenness of teaching goes to the heart of phenomenology itself so that, through the exploration of the givenness of teaching, we may actually come closer to an encounter with the educational phenomenon itself.

Scott Webster's contribution, "Uncovering what educators desire through Kierkegaard's loving phenomenology," situates the discussion with the impact of neoliberalism on contemporary educational practices; an impact, as he argues, that actively marginalizes *education* and opposes democracy. The expansion of the neoliberal agenda is not only being achieved by authoritative top-down policies being imposed upon educational institutions, but the agenda is also being furthered through educators themselves, perhaps unknowingly. As with all ideologies, neoliberalism can be embodied, and demonstrated by those who willingly enact reform requirements with their incentives, desiring to attain personal advantages and rewards for successfully doing so. By drawing primarily on Kierkegaard's understanding of phenomenology as repetition, involving love as a way-of-being, Webster argues that his insights can be utilized to confront any inadvertent self-interested ontology of *homo economicus* which may have become embodied by educators.

Joris Vlieghe and Piotr Zamojski continue the discussion with a further attempt at "approaching education on its own terms," as they put it in the title of their chapter, offering a phenomenological analysis. Vlieghe and Zamojski follow Hannah Arendt in her attempt to address the central question in philosophy of education: *What is the essence of education?* Put in more phenomenological terms this question reads: what exactly does it mean to educate and to be educated? They show that this question can be approached from two radically different and mutually opposed perspectives, and that it makes an immense difference which side one takes. The opposition, so they argue, is one between transcendence and immanence – a distinction they explore through the work of Giorgio Agamben. Although the transcendent perspective is today the most dominant, Vlieghe and Zamojski suggest that phenomenology can help to counter this dominant (meta)theoretical position that regards education merely as a means. In relation to this, they make an attempt at fleshing out what it would mean to approach education from a purely immanent perspective, which they briefly illustrate through a discussion of three essential educational issues: schooling, freedom, and love for the world.

Andrew Foran, in his chapter on "Pedagogical Practice," concludes the first section of the book. Taking his starting point in the observation that hundreds of years of institutionalized education have solidified a global hold on how children and young people are schooled, he argues that this comparative and

competitive educative process has impacted significantly on the teacher's world, absorbing educators by *everydayness* in competing professionalized tensions and pressures of standardization. He shows that teacher education in Canada has tended to ignore pedagogical practices in teacher preparation in favour of government initiatives that promote the value of testing scores and government-controlled curricula. For the last 25 years, teacher education thus has shifted from building a practice on relational encounters with pupils to that of being a manager directing learning services. As a result, teachers are largely ignoring the personal and non-professional significance implied in the term "*pedagogy*." By reviving a pedagogical practice in teacher education, and exploring the lived experiences of teachers, phenomenology can position pedagogical priorities over social and psychological norms and academic outcomes, precisely because a phenomenological examination will challenge an outcomes-based and assessment driven education that is not oriented to an open future for the child but forecloses on multiple possibilities by insisting on pre-established criteria, percentiles, and performance norms. In his chapter he focuses on what many teachers still will claim as essential in the educational exchange – pedagogy – namely the value of relationality between teachers and pupils.

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Chapter 1

On the givenness of teaching

Encountering the educational phenomenon

Gert Biesta

Introduction

When, about ten years ago, I coined the word 'learnification' (see Biesta 2009), it was first of all to denote the problematic impact of the rise of the 'new language of learning' on the discourse and practice of education. My main concern at the time was that the emergence of notions such as 'learner,' 'learning environment,' facilitator of learning' and 'lifelong learning' were all referring to education in terms of learning, without asking what the learning was *about* and, more importantly, what it was supposed to be *for*. It was particularly the absence of a vigorous debate about the purpose of education that worried me most. It prompted me to propose that education should always be concerned with and orientated towards *three* domains of purpose, which I referred to as qualification, socialisation and subjectification respectively.

I think that, ten years on, the learnification-thesis still stands.[1] Talk about learning is still rife in educational circles, new expressions such as 'deep learning,' 'brain-based learning' and 'machine learning' have entered the conversation, and policy makers continue to produce remarkable sentences such as that schools should "deliver at least one year's growth in learning for every student every year."[2] While there is evidence of a growing interest in the question of the purpose(s) of education (see, e.g., Hattie and Nepper Larsen 2020. Onderwijsraad 2016), much of what can be found in policy, research and practice continues to have a rather one-dimensional focus on learning, also due to the dominance of the frameworks promoted by the global education measurement industry.

There was, however, a further dimension to the learnification-thesis which was less prominent in my initial argument but which, over the past decade, has become an important strand in my thinking, writing and teaching. The key point here is the insight that teaching (and the whole spectrum of intentional educational endeavours more generally) *should not necessarily result in learning*, which also means that teaching *should not necessarily aim at learning*. The idea, in other words, is that there is more to teaching than learning, just as there is more to education than learning. In order to bring this 'more' to the fore, it is important to 'free' teaching from learning (Biesta 2015). I found helpful

suggestions for exploring this dimension of the learnification-thesis in work from American analytic philosophy of education which, interestingly, largely predated the rise of the new language of learning.

The most explicit position here was taken by Paul Komisar who argued that "learning is not what the 'teacher' intends to produce" (Komisar 1968, p. 183) but that the intention of teaching might better be captured in terms of the 'awareness' of an 'auditor' – not a learner or student for Komisar – "*who is successfully becoming aware of the point of the act* [of teaching]" (Komisar 1968, p. 191; emphasis in original). And this awareness may cover a whole range of different responses, of which learning is only *one* possibility, but neither the sole nor the only destination. One important reason for creating a distance between teaching and learning has to do with the fact that there is more to *life* than learning. There is a range of ways in which human beings exist and the task of education should rather be about opening up this range of 'existential possibilities' (Biesta 2015) for our students, rather than only providing them with the position of the learner. The point here is also political, particularly with reference to attempts by policy makers and politicians to force people into 'the learning position,' most notably through the 'politics' of *lifelong* learning (see Biesta 2018).

It is against this background that, in recent years, I have started to make an explicit case for the re*dis*covery of teaching, which I also see as a recovery of teaching (Biesta 2017a). This is partly in order to restore teaching to its proper place in the educational endeavour – to give teaching back to education[3] (Biesta 2012) – and not see it as something outdated and of the past that we should be embarrassed about. And it is partly in order to highlight that what is distinctive about education is *not* the phenomenon of learning – which, after all, can also happen outside of education and can occur without teaching – but precisely the presence of and the encounter with teaching. Whereas learning is *accidental* to education, teaching, so I wish to suggest, is *essential* to education, albeit that the question what teaching is and how it might or should be enacted does, of course, need careful consideration in order not to fall back on narrow and naive notions of teaching as one-directional instruction or teaching as authoritarian control.

Whereas learning in some way always originates from the learner, that is, from the one who seeks to acquire knowledge, skills and understanding and approaches the world as a 'resource' where this can be found – like an act of foraging – teaching moves in the opposite direction as it comes to the student from 'elsewhere' (and again the question of what this 'elsewhere' is requires further consideration, also because it is not necessarily the teacher who is the origin of teaching; on this see also Prange 2005). Earlier (Biesta 2013), I have explored the latter dynamic in terms of the *gift* of teaching, arguing that it is important to make a distinction between *learning from* (someone or something) and *being taught by* (someone or something). In this chapter I wish to extend the exploration of teaching, by highlighting three dimensions of the way in

which the 'givenness' of teaching manifests itself and by showing why and how this givenness matters educationally. In my earlier explorations writings from Levinas, Derrida and Kierkegaard have been particularly helpful. In the next section I will discuss some ideas from the work of Jean-Luc Marion who, in my view, provides a helpful and important 'next step' in the philosophical discussion at stake.

Being given

Over the past four decades Jean-Luc Marion has made major contributions in a number of fields, including the history of philosophy, theology and phenomenology. Even a proper reconstruction of Marion's contributions to phenomenology – articulated in three main volumes and numerous other publications (see particularly Marion 1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2011, 2016) – lies well beyond the scope of this chapter. More modestly, I will pick up one theme from Marion's writing and will utilise one particular 'way in,' in order to shed light on the phenomenon of givenness which, for Marion, also has to do with the givenness of the phenomenon.

The question Marion has been pursuing consistently in his writings is whether and, if so, how we can make sense of givenness – although even phrasing the question in that way raises a problem, because if we really try to make sense of givenness, then such givenness does precisely *not* depend on our acts of sense making. This already indicates, first, that Marion's question has an epistemological dimension, namely whether knowledge is constructed by us – either fully or partially – or given to us. Second, Marion's question has a theological dimension, which has to do with the question whether revelation is possible or whether everything that comes to us from 'beyond' is in some way of our own making. This indicates, third, that Marion's question also gets us into the field of hermeneutics in terms of whether the human being is first and foremost an interpreting being – a meaning-making animal, as some might say (see, e.g., Burke 1966) – or whether there is something that precedes and must precede our acts of meaning-making. This, fourth, means that Marion's question is also the question of phenomenology, starting from Husserl's ambition to go back to the things themselves rather than our interpretation of these things. Which, and this is the fifth dimension, also raises the question whether everything starts from the 'I' or whether something 'precedes' the 'I.'

One has to admire Marion for his ambition to engage with this cluster of questions, because they are not only the big questions of modern philosophy but perhaps first and foremost the big questions of human existence itself. In one sense, they therefore are of all times, but they also speak to major contemporary issues. They speak, for example, to neoliberalism by asking whether the self is indeed in the centre of the world and the world is just there for the 'I' to conquer and master – which means that Marion's questions speak both to the ecological crisis and the crisis of democracy. But they also ask

whether a religious worldview, a 'belief' in transcendence, is outdated superstition, or whether the encounter with transcendence is more difficult to shrug off than many might think. And from an educational perspective, Marion's 'intervention' is important because it asks whether teaching is actually possible, or whether the reduction of everything educational to learning is inevitable.

On givenness

One of the shortest formulations Marion provides of his thoughts on givenness is through the 'principle' that "everything that shows itself must first give itself" (Marion 2011, p. 19).[4] The phrase already contains an important epistemological point, because it suggests that before any intentional 'act' of knowing can take place, something must have given itself to the knower. Marion emphasises that his principle does not articulate an interest in *what* is given but in the *how* of givenness. Marion is interested in "givenness as *a mode of phenomenality*, as the *how* or *manner* of the phenomenon" (Marion 2011, p. 19). This is not about "the immediate given, the perceptive content, or the lived experience of consciousness – in short, of some*thing* [emph. GB] that is given, but instead of the style of its phenomenalization *insofar as* it is given" (Marion 2011, p. 19). This means that Marion is after a phenomenology of the phenomenon of givenness, so to speak, not an ontology or metaphysics of givenness (see Marion 2011, p. 20).

   An ontology or metaphysics of givenness would not only try to specify the exact nature of the 'what' that is given, but would also try to specify *what it is that gives* this 'what.' The problem with such an ambition is that it goes 'beyond' givenness itself and would therefore cease to be an 'account' of givenness. Moreover, it would, in its ambition to go 'behind' the phenomenon of givenness, deny the very idea that what shows itself must first give itself. It would, in a sense, *refuse* givenness. This is why givenness 'needs' a phenomenology, so to speak.

   What is exciting about Marion's work is that he pursues this 'agenda' in the strictest way possible. One important line of argumentation challenges the (epistemological) assumption that everything that shows itself is supposed to show itself to a pre-existing consciousness. It will not be too difficult to see that on such a view the phenomenon begins to disappear – or actually disappears completely – because its manifestation, its givenness, is made totally dependent upon the activities of a knowing consciousness. This is the Kantian view of knowledge which starts from a 'transcendental ego' that comes 'before' the world and that sees phenomena as objects that appear according to the conditions of experience (see Marion 2016, p. 47). That is why Marion argues that taking givenness seriously means that we have to assume – or perhaps 'accept' is a better word here – that the phenomenon "shows itself in itself and from itself" (Marion 2016, p. 48) which also means that it "gives itself from itself"