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THE POLITICAL AS SATURATED PHENOMENON:
MARION'S GIVENNESS AND THE IRRECONCILABILITY OF
POLITICS AND LOVE

“In politics, love is a stranger,
and when it intrudes upon it
nothing is being achieved except hypocrisy.”
- Hannah Arendt¹

Liebe deinen Nächsten. Love your neighbor. The 2013 FPÖ candidate for chancellor of Austria, H.C. Strache, was sharply criticized for the politicization of the command of love in the service of a political agenda that insinuated the governmental “preferential option” for Austrians over immigrants. Attempting to employ love as a political device is not new. The tired platform that “you can’t legislate love” is seemingly opposite from the aforementioned example, yet its employment of love is simply more surreptitious. For despite the rhetorical jettisoning of love from politics, love is furtively employed as a ground for a political agenda, this time in the form of a campaign to limit government in a flourish of free individualism, presupposing that only free subjects are capable of loving. These two hyperbolic instantiations exemplify, if nothing else, that an image of love (which likely has very little to do with love in the first place) can be wielded as a powerful tool for political purposes. Given the possibilities of such abusive misuses of love, it is no wonder that Arendt wished to quarantine love, which she understood to be a private and selective process, from politics, a space for social action in the political life world.

There are indeed good reasons for wishing to keep love separate from politics, as those two concepts, especially at first glance, appear dialectically opposed. On the one hand, love, as Marion demands, can only occur independent of reciprocity, regulation, and self-interest. As necessarily a form of a gift, love demands a hope for the benefit of the other or beloved at all times, demanding nothing in return. Love, by definition, thrives only in so far as it postpones self-seeking. While on the other hand, politics (as distinguished from what today is known as the “political”), at least when understood economically, concerns the

¹ Hannah Arendt, “The Meaning of Love in Politics: A Letter by Hannah Arendt to James Baldwin”. November 21, 1962, *Zeitschrift für Politisches Denken* 2:1 (2006).
<http://www.hannaharendt.net/index.php/han/article/view/95/156>

interest and *telos* of a society towards a fair and even regulation of goods and services. The *polis* is in the service of the public and it acts according to a just collection and redistribution of wealth to the benefit of that public, more generally. Political systems thrive only when they can carburete reciprocity with fairness; a carburetion predicated upon a form of self-seeking as it draws its force from individual and public standards and regulations. Under these qualifications, it appears that love and politics can only remain beyond one another's discourse and conditions.

The problem with these extremes concerning love and politics is that both temptations – either to harmonize love and politics, or to keep them in direct opposition – can indirectly result in a denigration of the general features of both. This paper seeks to find a way to understand *the kind of relationship* love and politics *could* have without such denigration, and does so by employing the work of Marion in order to further reduce those terms to “gift” and “economy” in order to see better the implicit tensions at work in the love/politics relationship. This will involve two steps, the first being the independent reduction of the two concepts of politics and love to aspects of their most originary elements of gift and economy. The second step will be to see how this reduction ultimately sheds light on the *kind of relationship* love and politics could have. There are of course a number of different strata from which one might seek to understand politics, and this essay simply focuses on aspects of its economic status.² The paper relies on a constructive application of Marion's understanding of the primacy givenness – and consequentially, love – over economy, which may, at least in some regards, correlate with politics. This is indeed an attempt to apply and test Marion's work in a way he has yet to do, and it hopes to not transgress or contradict Marion's work in these regards.³ In a nutshell, I wish to ask: what would the relationship between politics and love look like if we applied Marion's work to thinking that relation?

It is no easy task to employ Marion's work to consider politics, a topic that is not found in his vast corpus of writings. This may appear especially odd, as Marion was a student in Paris during the famous May of 1968, the month to which virtually every French Philosopher of this time refers as their most important political and philosophical “event.” While he of course is not obligated to discuss the political, its omission appears to be

² This is not to be conceived as an attempt at a phenomenology of the political as such. Others, most recently Held, follows Arendt and claims the unburdened phrase “political world” to refer to that which can be conceived through a phenomenological optics. See also Klaus Held, “Towards a Phenomenology of the Political World” in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*, ed. Dan Zahavi. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³ Since the German word *Politik* can refer both to policy-making and politics, the use of the word “politics” in this paper will refer to its more general use, which also systematically, at points includes the acts of policy making.

intentional, perhaps due to the ways in which the topic would have taken his life work in entirely different directions; directions he has been indeed keen to avoid. Although there may be political implications of his work, it is taken for granted here that Marion neither presents a political system, nor hides a subliminal, political machinery throughout his phenomenology.

I. Žižek and Badiou on *The Love/Politics Relationship*

Marion's refusal to write about politics could also be associated with his resistance to his work being categorized as postmodern or poststructural. On the topic of politics, postmodern thought generally falls in line with its structuralist forefathers, who demanded that the individual subject is first conceived as a political subject. Louis Althusser (who coincidentally, once was a teacher of Marion) is one whose work falls somewhere between those two organizations of thought. He was compelled to demand that ideology is an unavoidable aspect of any "social totality," and is necessarily a system of representation, which sutures the subject to its political institutions.⁴ The inherently political nature of poststructuralist philosophy generally is taken for granted today given its inextricable link to tearing down ideological structures of domination and challenging respective political situations.⁵ However, this demand that one's thinking is inextricably *linked* to one's political structure has spawned an *ideology about the political as such*. Just as all human interaction necessarily is connected to being "political," the very qualification or definition of "Politics" often gets reduced to being *any* human interaction or encounter with "the Other," i.e., the social. This, it seems, is an unnecessary abstraction of the way in which the phenomenon of politics is lived out in everyday actuality. This may be another reason why Marion has resisted qualification as

⁴ See Louis Althusser. *For Marx*. trans. Ben Brewster. (New York: Pantheon Publishing, 1969), 231-232. Heiner Müller crudely reflected this sentiment in 1979, confessing: "I cannot keep politics out of the question of postmodernism." Heiner Müller, "Reflections on Postmodernism," in *New German Critique* 16(1979), 58.

⁵ As Wellberry put it more specifically, "Postmodern aesthetic experimentation should be viewed as having an irreducible political dimension. It is inextricably bound up with a critique of domination." David Wellberry, "Postmodernism in Europe: On Recent German Writing," in *Postmodernism: An international survey*. Ed. A. Trachtenberg. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 229-250, here 235. And then in 1991, Linda Hutcheon demanded that "while postmodernism has no effective theory of agency that enables a move into political *action*, it does work to turn its inevitable ideological grounding into a site of de-naturalizing critique." And that "all cultural forms of representation - - literary, visual, aural - - in high art or the mass media are ideologically grounded, that they cannot avoid involvement with social and political relations and apparatuses." Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 3.

"postmodern," avoided the topic of politics in general, and has not breached any application of his work on love to the topic.

Recent figures, however, such as Žižek and Badiou, have been quick to consider the relationship between politics and love. Irrespective of their often-pejorative remarks on postmodernism, they generally are in agreement with the aforementioned conclusions concerning the subject as necessarily – perhaps first and foremost -- political. Their projects are each in their own way unique, yet they generally start with a Marxist ideology that presumes the hegemony of political structures over individual ones, and then end with the intention of dismantling neo-liberal political structures (Capitalism, i.e.) for the sake of achieving a truly communistic society. It is such a starting point that prefigures both Badiou and Žižek's conceptions of the love/politics relationship.

In 2009 Badiou released a collection of interviews on the topic under the title *Éloge de l'amour* (surely an *hommage* to the film maker Jean-Luc Godard), translated as *In Praise of Love* in 2012.⁶ Under his assessment, both love and politics are *conditions* of philosophy. Love is a separate condition from politics, which also keeps politics and love separate, more generally. On the one hand, politics concerns the State. Society is guided by a kind of Rousseauian "sense", a collective and shared will of mobilizing towards a unified – e.g. communistic – cause of action. Politics is the space for discussing ethics and civic moralities. While on the other hand, love occurs between two people who respond to an unpredictable event or encounter taking place between them by trying to remain faithful to that event and to one another.⁷ Love is not ethical, but "evental." It is not clear to what degree love remains a condition of philosophy, but at the very least the two somehow are sutured to one another.⁸

While Badiou generally wishes to keep love and politics separate, there remains one possible point of contact, namely, in theatrical

⁶ Badiou's *St. Paul and The Foundations of Universalism* is another source of interest on this topic of love. There, love is the universalizing of a non-literal law, "love alone is the life of truth," or more abstractly, "love is precisely what faith is capable of." Alain Badiou. *St. Paul and The Foundations of Universalism* trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 91 and 90 respectively.

⁷ Alain Badiou. *Éloge de l'amour* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009). What Badiou calls an evental love stands opposed to ethics. In this recent text of Badiou's, he refutes Levinas' demand that an experience of the other imposes an ethical position upon us. Badiou's concludes that the other does not impose these demands upon us because the other is inherently opaque. As he puts it, "In my view, there is nothing particularly 'ethical' about love as such. I really don't like all these theological ruminations inspired by love." Alain Badiou (with Nicolas Truong) *In Praise of Love* (New York: New Press, 2012).

⁸ As such, this may entail that philosophy hold a privileged position over love.

performance. This is because theatre is a form of social engagement out of which the ethical and evental might join causes. Theatre maintains a “communist nature” whereby the actors join together for a grander purpose, which has the implicit political model of social action whereby something like love – what we might call a form of “raw” or uncooked communism – can take place. This is because love is “subversive with respect to law,” and thereby maintaining an inherently explosive or violent element. In this sense, love, as Badiou would have it, is another “great figure of social engagement..[and] ..the minimal form of communism.”⁹ This entails that love is, in this sense, a player in the grander, more lofty scheme of achieving communism. While Badiou generally seems to prefer the sharp distinction between politics and love, it seems that, provided a conflict between the two, love would be in the service of communism as one of its forms, not the other way around.

Whereas Badiou attempts to distinguish between the various forms of potential engagement between love and politics, Žižek, in his characteristically hyperbolic style, goes to the opposite extreme. In a 2013 presentation “love as a political category” he explicitly attempted to show “How can love be used politically,” and in beginning with a dialectical reading of love, demands that it entails an inherently transgressive violence.¹⁰ This is a manifestation of Žižek’s oft-repeated frustration at what he blames to be postmodern society’s demands for self-improvement and preservation, which no longer encourage “true love,” but rather a narcissistic appropriation of others. Thus, he claims, “More and more, passionate love is emerging as something dangerous and precisely subversive....[and] I cannot imagine a more violent experience today than that of love.”¹¹ This is because

⁹ As both Žižek and Badiou would have it, love is traumatic, because to “fall” in love is to lose control, and thus to “be” in love is to live in a state of emergency. As Badiou puts it in an interview “love and politics are the two great figures of social engagement. Politics is enthusiasm with a collective; with love, two people. So love is the minimal form of communism.” And he continues “it’s necessary to invent a politics that is not identical with power. Real politics is to engage to resolve problems within a collective with enthusiasm. It’s not simply to delegate problems to the professionals. Love is like politics in that it’s not a professional affair. There are no professionals in love, and none in real politics.” Alain Badiou quoted in “Alain Badiou: a life in Writing” in *The Guardian*, 2012.

<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/may/18/alain-badiou-life-in-writing?newsfeed=true> (accessed 12.02.2018)

¹⁰ Žižek confesses to have borrowed this concept from Badiou.

¹¹ And Žižek continues: “be faithful to yourself” and “don’t fixate yourself on certain stable identities, and so on.” As he notes, *Eros*, or passionate love, is an obstacle to potential self development, and thus the crucial element of love is disappearing. The alternative society tries to offer us is to “how to find yourselves in love without falling in love.” In other words, Žižek is opposed to this idea of love without its dangerous element. And through a radical reading of G.K. Chesterton, Žižek ultimately praises what he calls “Christian love” for its violent introduction of difference, as a love whereby the beloved is elevated to

love provides an obstacle to narcissistic self-development. Žižek here is in favor of love for the other, as a commitment beyond oneself.

But then Žižek comes to reflect on love as a political category, claiming that Agapeic love implies an emphatic, universal “yes” to all of humanity, and as such, is necessarily a *political love*.¹² He goes on to claim that the Holy Spirit presents an unconditional, equal society; the very core of Christian insight is that love unplugs us from our social inequality, giving way to a Radical egalitarian collective that violently opposes social hierarchy. Žižek concludes by demanding that love for the neighbor *can serve as the basis* for political love through envisioning an egalitarian and emancipatory social order whereby the “total alienation” of capitalism is eradicated.¹³ As he would have it, this is a “universal love that doesn’t keep a distance. But fully falling into it...losing oneself without reserve...[to]attach yourself to the end...with all the risk this involves.” For Žižek this means that *when we love we must become radical, political activists*.

Žižek problematically employs love only as a categorical tool at the service of the political, resulting not in the usefulness of love, but rather in its deposition. In love’s becoming subsumed under politics, it can only serve *to function as an agent* of repair in the grander machine of a broken political superstructure, and thus losing other potential expressions.¹⁴ From the explicit subsuming

the supreme absolute thing. The selectivity of love comes at the expense of others, yet it reveals the depth of dedication for “the one” as opposed to the lifeless, desireless neutrality he demands to be present in – his characterization of – Buddhism. As Žižek would have it, Jesus forsook eternity for the difference of others whom he knew to be miserable sinful beings. See Slavoj Žižek. “Love as a Political Category,” public presentation at the *Subversive Conference*, Zagreb Croatia, May 16, 2013.

¹² “Which political regimes in the 20th century legitimized their power by invoking love for their leaders?” the totalitarian ones.” These regimes put forth the view that “the only way to overcome the self, is total subordination to leaders.” Ibid.

¹³ For further commentary on love, see also Žižek’s *The Fragile Absolute* where he demands that “only a lacking, vulnerable being is capable of love: the ultimate mystery of love is therefore that incompleteness is in a way *higher than completion*. On the one hand, only an imperfect, lacking being loves; we love because we do *not* know all. On the other hand, even if we were to know everything love would inexplicably be higher than completed knowledge. Perhaps the true achievement of Christianity is to elevate a loving (imperfect) Being to the place of God – that is, of ultimate perfection.” Slavoj Žižek *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London, New York: Verso, 2001), 147.

¹⁴ In another analysis, Žižek’s reflection upon the politics/love relationship leaves out an important analysis of love as it does/does not relate with “gift.” For example, “gifts” that come from the abundance of The State, like a subsidized apartment or flat, do not necessarily constitute gifts as such. Like the child who receives an abundance of luxuries from her wealthy, yet absentee father, these

of love under the political in Žižek, to the attempt to disassociate love from politics in Badiou, neither option appears to offer love its own status as a concept independent of politics.

II. *The Aporia between Gift and Economy*

The potential relationship between love and politics indeed stands as both a theoretical *as well as* practical *aporia*; one strikingly similar to another that was theorized over two decades ago by Derrida, and therefore one to which we must here return -- the *aporia* between “the gift” and “economy.” As the albeit brief history of “gift theory” has taught, from Mauss to Levi-Strauss, the gift generally is understood in contradistinction to economy (thus the notion of “gift economy” is a contradiction of terms).¹⁵ The polarity between these concepts came to a head in Derrida’s *Given Time*, as he theorized that gift, in order to be gift “as such”, must establish itself independent from any concepts gained from economy, reciprocity, exchange, and in some instances, even logic as a calculative enterprise. Even thankfulness for a gift (as a kind of return gift) nullifies that gift, and damns it back to the status of economical exchange. But a gift can “happen” as an event, so long as it isn’t phenomenologically identifiable; it “is something you do” says Derrida “without knowing what you do.”¹⁶ Therefore, this automatically nullifies the possibility of any reciprocity in gift giving. Instead, reciprocity is one of the founding features of economy, starting its circle of exchange.¹⁷

The result of this supposed polarity between gift and economy is an *aporia* that demands the instability of its dialectic, and ultimately an “undecidability.” On the one hand, the circle of exchange or economy wishes to seize control of the gift, while on the other, gift chaotically disrupts the steady flow of economy and predictability. This *aporia*, Derrida demands, is perhaps *the most basic of all aporias*, as the relationship between gift and economy must “exceed the limits of [...] even philosophy.”¹⁸ But the results of this conclusion appear to be most damning for the gift, leaving it impossible and ultimately unnameable. This damning of the gift is both practical and theoretical.

II.1. *Between Gift and Eros*

supposed “gifts” only proliferate the problem of absence that the father has created. The State, like the wealthy and absentee father, is incapable of expressing love in this important sense.

¹⁵ Marcel Mauss’ emphasis on the voluntary and subjective actions of giving in community *in order* to contribute to a functional society came under fire by Levi-Strauss, who played structural pressures and concerns against Mauss’ voluntarism.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *God, The Gift, And Postmodernism*. Eds. John Caputo & Michael J. Scanlon. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 60.

¹⁷ And anything that belongs to economy is only able to appropriate that which is first already known, conceived, thought, or desired.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida. *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. (Chicago IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 30.

While Marion is sympathetic to the needs of removing and keeping the gift out of economy's control, he has a different approach to the supposed *aporia* between the two. In *Étant Donn * (*Being Given*), he counters Derrida's arguments by offering a *redux* version of Husserl's "givenness" (*Gegebenheit, donation*), which comes to act as an inconspicuous medium between that which is given ("the gift") and that which "gives" in every experience.¹⁹ Givenness thus becomes its own telic end, or purpose of the gift. This subtle move allows Marion to believe that he subsequently can rescue a *kind* of presence; a presence in the sense of something in which I can trust and be confident. Also in this text, Marion makes the case for a "reduction" of givenness that is to take place *prior* to a thing's thinkability, allowing him to claim temporality as irreducible to permanent presence, and similarly, to assert that givenness can maintain its own non-derivative sense of "possibility." Like Derrida, Marion holds that gift always play the role of *disrupting economy*. But Marion's solution, of course, involves the *fashioning of what he believes to be a greater role for gift*.

As for love, Marion recently confessed in his 2012 autobiographical interviews that his book "*The Erotic Phenomenon* logically completes [the] phenomenology of the gift [or given] and saturated phenomenon..."²⁰ But it was as early as 2005, in the introduction to *The Erotic Phenomenon* that he originally, yet subtly mentions that a reformulation of the topic of "love" has been behind his now decades of work on gift and givenness, forming the center of his phenomenology. Unfortunately until now, his *The Erotic Phenomenon* has been highly underestimated for its importance in his overall *oeuvre*, and as a result of this oversight, the relationship between gift and love in his work has remained largely unacknowledged.²¹

¹⁹ Marion's "givenness" is not only a *part* of the phenomenological reduction, but also – like love – is its *telic end or purpose*, located in the fold between the thing that shows itself, and its being-shown, as the place of manifestation. Kosky translates the French "*donation*" into English as "givenness," but there are some facets of this French word that are necessarily lost in this translation. This "*donation*" is the *act* of giving or creating. Givenness is a calling; it is an appeal to a thing to show itself, and that which "shows itself first gives itself." It is always that which is beyond-the-horizon, and this fold of givenness "articulates a process with a given; even if the given must, by definition, give a sense of its donative process." Jean-Luc Marion. *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Trans: Jeffrey Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 68.

²⁰ "*Le Ph nom ne  rotique* compl te logiquement une ph nom nologie du donn  et du ph nom ne satur  [...]" Marion continues, suggesting that *the Erotic Phenomenon* (as text and as theory) is able to do so "...because the given other performs the saturated phenomenon par excellence...." ("[...] car l'autre adonn  accomplit le ph nom ne satur  par excellence [...]"). Jean-Luc Marion, *La Rigueur des Choses: Entretiens avec Dan Arbib* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 201

²¹ The importance of "love" for Marion's phenomenology has strangely gone overlooked. Yet the question still remains: if Marion abandons the *aporia* between gift and economy and attempts to keep those two

While love and givenness are by no means tautological, there are four outstanding instances in which they are deeply intertwined in Marion's work. First, much like givenness, love is more primordial than economy. Love is not based upon the structure of economy and possibility in the first place for, like givenness, it maintains its own separate logic and jurisdiction. Second, although love is not *based upon* the Gift and givenness, they provide a theoretical basis for allowing one to answer the question as to whether or not one might be confident in the radical surety that one is loved and is capable of loving. Third, love is capable of being practiced without being appropriated by economy. This is in contradistinction from Derrida, who demanded that love (at least when it enters into communicative discourse) falls into economy, thereby naming it necessarily "narcissistic." Marion was motivated to save the gift in a very particular way, so that love could also be safeguarded. This reveals how Marion believes that the fates of love and gift are in fact intertwined, allowing us to conclude that *if love (the motivating principle for givenness) becomes damned to the jurisdiction of economy, then the gift goes along with it* and vice versa: if there is no possibility of an ego capable of giving a gift, then love is indeed absorbed by economy. And fourth: Love is, in a sense, a "type" of gift, but in another sense, pumping through the veins of givenness itself. Love operates *not necessarily according to givenness, but often in harmony with it.*

When we read the topic of love back into an association with his phenomenology of givenness, we find more reason to realize the necessity of love's being sharply distinguished from economy. Love and gift cannot *be based upon* exchange/economy and still escape any *reliance upon principles of reciprocity or calculation.*²² What Marion pejoratively names a "happy" love "could not remain love" precisely because it involves the implicit attempt to get something in return, and to avoid the risk of not receiving something back.²³ This is actually economy, and any true act of

terms purely distinct and in no relationship whatsoever, then is Marion also abandoning an essential aspect of deconstruction, a term he occasionally uses?

²² This logic comes from an "elsewhere" other than the lover. It is important to recall, also, the role that "the other" plays in the coming/stalling of the gift. For Derrida, "the other" is another cause for the ruptures between gift and desire. But for Marion, though the other plays an important role in phenomenology, it is givenness – not the other – that first causes this rupture. For Marion, the gift need not have a giver (nor does it always need a recipient). So *perhaps* we could say that the other causes the second rupture. But this may lead to major concerns for Marion's understanding of philosophy, for as the love of wisdom, there must be some relation with logic and reason, and therefore calculation.

²³ Jean-Luc Marion *The Erotic Phenomenon* Trans: Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 69-70.

love must be devoid of calculation, and the establishment of *fair practices*.²⁴

II.2. Between Politics and Economy

It is perhaps a more risky proposition to relate this theoretical conception of economy with politics. This will be done through a reliance on Marion's work on "economy" as a generative, theoretical source. The relationship between politics and economy as here conceived does not quite represent a tautology, but more so as a derivation, as central aspects of politics are reliant upon economy. Presuming that as a preliminary basis, economy is the attempt to create a circle of even, reproducible, and reciprocal exchanges between individuals or parties. As Marion would have it, "reciprocity sets the condition for the possibility of exchange" and is that which "renders economy reasonable."²⁵ This is a reciprocity that is the basis of an automatic oscillation between persons. Economy "bases its decision on a determination of fair price...", implying that the outcome of an action is measurable.²⁶ Further still, "in the realm of exchange.. the agents deal in objects.. about which they make calculations, and the prices of which they may set."²⁷ This is economical in so far as it relies upon a supposed reciprocal exchange that presumes a commonality more or less preferable, more or less fair and reasonable to both parties. Economy, in this sense, goes beyond fiscal or monetary concerns, and extends into the management of resources – human, fiscal, or otherwise – the calculation of possibilities, and the hoped-for prediction of future events. The reach of economy is as wide as it is deep, extending to "calculation", for even logic and enjoyment, as a way of getting something in return, can be seen as predicates of economy.

Although at first glance "politics" seemingly is banal for its more functional or governmental connotations, it is here preferred over the more abstract "political," which in contemporary theory often gets reduced to human power relations. Both "politics" and "the political" maintain a deep well of shared insight and specificity,

²⁴ As Marion asks, "[...] could such a 'happy love,' closely controlled by reciprocity, remain happy? In any case, it could not remain a love, because it would fall directly under exchange and commerce. It is for a radical reason that love cannot condemn itself to reciprocity nor base its decisions on a determination of fair price: the loving actors have nothing to exchange (no object), and thus cannot calculate a price (whether fair or not); in the realm of exchange, by contrast, the agents deal in objects, [...] about which they may make calculations, and the prices of which they may set. Thus it is necessary to reject reciprocity in love, not because it would seem improper, but because in love reciprocity becomes impossible – strictly speaking, without an object. Reciprocity sets the condition for the possibility of exchange, but it also attests to the condition of love's impossibility." (Ibid., 69-70, then 115)

²⁵ Ibid., 69-70, then 79.

²⁶ Ibid., 69-70.

²⁷ Ibid., 69-70.

one that might be bracketed temporarily in order to trace a more economic conception of politics, and thereby avoid its reduction to less specific concepts of “society” or “community.”²⁸ “Politics” in everyday life, is not conceived simply according to “human interrelation” or “encounters with otherness;” spheres of human life and action that could also occur independent of political action. While “Politics is *concerned* with our public lives in the *polis* – with the communal bonds that at once unite and separate us as citizens..”, such bonds and their separation should be thought according to a set of economical actions and interactions.²⁹ Conceived as such, politics, in its economical register, thrives upon its *instrumental capacities*, and might be reduced to six actions: assessment, collection, redistribution, governing, law, and policy. Each of these six concepts can be *associated directly with the aforementioned definition of economy and exchange*, but further still, as therefore derivative of economy.³⁰

The first three instrumental activities of assessment, collection, and redistribution are all explicitly fiscal, and therefore are attempts at economical appropriation. Assessment is the first analysis, and appraises what it does and does not possess. Collection is the active management of that which is or is not deemed to be possessed in the stage of assessment. And redistribution is the mode of activity that takes that which was entrusted to it, apportions it, and attempts to fairly circulate it. These actions within the political structure employ *predictions* that presume a series of exchanges as the cycle of demand, collection, and distribution are overseen by the supposed reliability of their economies, and they each thrive only in so far as they are entrusted by the public to do so fairly.

The last three structural movements in the political machinery of governing, law, and policy also are based on economy as earlier construed, as they manage assets or “human resources” in efforts to achieve their intended results, purposes, or telic ends. The goals of governing are indeed based upon fair, just, and balanced societal interactions whereby its members accept its oversight on the grounds that it maintains a level of peace. This relates to the state of obligation that those within the public take upon themselves in the form of law; the obligation of which is to not break bonds with the economic circle of giving and receiving. This commitment to such economic relations sets the stage for policy, the supposed prudence or wisdom of its actions, which

²⁸ There is an important, understood distinction today between “political theory” and “political science.”

²⁹ Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation: the Ethical Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 9 (my emphasis).

³⁰ This “institution of total services”, suggests Mauss, “doesn’t merely carry with it the obligation to reciprocate presents received.” But it also obliges one “to give presents, and...to receive them.” Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* trans: Ian Gunnison (New York: Routledge, 1990), 13.

continue to support the aforementioned management of the public and its ends. These functions, in general, are economical in the sense that they draw their energy from the mutual (though generally unspoken) commitments between (e.g.) the governing and the governed to mutually contribute to the fulfillment of these goals. They also are economical in that they seek to be well determined upon structures of calculation, which harbor intended, predicted results.

Thus, not only is there a correlation between love and gift, but as here demonstrated, one between politics and economy. So far this further propagates the wager here that love forms solidarity with the gift, and politics is another kind of manifestation of "economy" at work in society. These are two separate yet -- as it will now be argued -- somehow *related series*. With this background in place, it is now possible to consider more closely the specific relationship love and politics might have.

III. *Can Love and Politics Be Reconciled?*

In a different context, Derrida approached the question of economy in his *Politics of Friendship*, whereby he effectively showed the often interchangeable nature between "friend" and "enemy," drawing attention to the *aporia* inherent to understanding them. In an analysis of Cicero's "Oh friends there are no friends", Derrida drew from the vat of German resources ranging from Schmitt to von Clausewitz, in order to see what drives politics more generally. Politics is not an independently moving structure, but one that gets nourished by the *aporia* of this friend/enemy distinction.³¹ The *aporia* was essential to Derrida's life work, as it draws attention to the responsibility of negotiating and traversing along the border of ecstatic "differences." Such differences – as he revealed later in the *Rogues* essays – must remain irreconcilable, for any attempt to tear them down, to disrupt their "binarism" ultimately would end in an authoritative *hierarchy*. Derrida's concerns over hierarchies, genesis, and origination govern his thinking about the gift/economy relationship. For him, gift and economy remain in an irreconcilable, fundamentally *aporetic* impasse.

Marion, however, is not concerned about such hierarchies, and ultimately demands not just the theoretical, but also the practical *primacy* of givenness. This only can mean one thing: reciprocity and economy are not directly opposite to, or on equal footing with givenness, but are rather derivative concepts, somehow under its hierarchy. One does not experience the pure force of a stand-alone economy in and of itself, but only the *feedback* of economy after it

³¹Carl Philipp Gottfried von Clausewitz' 1823 *Vom Kriege* is most known for the statement that has had an extensive, generative affect on German political theory: "War is a continuation of politics/policy by other means." Thanks to Nicolas de Warren for a conversation bearing this reference.

has first of all been *given*. As more primordial, givenness is not threatened by economy. To take Marion's hierarchy for granted, alongside the thesis just proposed concerning the relationship between economy and politics, this is the necessary -- and seemingly risky -- conclusion: *politics, as derivative of economy is ultimately a derivative concept of love and givenness*, and it is therefore under their "intertwining union" of kingship, which necessitates that politics should be conceived according to what Marion calls "saturated phenomena."³² There are two steps that must be made in supporting these claims.

The first step involves understanding Marion's theory of difference. In general, his phenomenological approach to difference comes by considering any phenomena according to its level of saturation.³³ This saturation, or pregnancy of the concept, presupposes that within the phenomenon *and prior to it*, there is an element of givenness that "gives" that thing *in the first place*, and then can give itself over and again in a multiformity of ways. Along with this givenness, which gives to the extent that the "reduction to givenness" is employed (recall Marion's famous words: "The more reduction, the more givenness"), comes the motivity of love as the hope and engagement of the reduction of givenness. Givenness is a "giver" so to speak of even the very *conceptuality* of phenomena, a concept that holds its logical, indeed economical tendencies, first to be given.

A close reader of Marion's work might object to this. For alongside Marion's development of the saturated phenomena there are also such things as what he calls "common-law" or "poor" phenomena, which effectively are *not* saturated. How does one know that the concepts of reciprocity, economy, and politics are in fact saturated, and not on the "poor" or common

³² Thanks also to Jean-Luc Marion for in-depth conversations addressing these claims.

³³ Love always occurs through the experience of what he calls "the flesh," which is one of the "saturated phenomena" he began exploring years prior to the writing of this particular text. "Saturated Phenomena" represent and mark the immeasurability and ineluctability of givenness, which ultimately frees these phenomena from being-objects, and "being" in general. They cannot be grasped by intention, but come as the *excess of intuition*. That is, in saturated phenomena, intuition exceeds the donee's intention, and thus the "gifted" cannot predict what these phenomena will give -- for as saturated, they *drip with the excess* of intuition -- and not all phenomena offer the "same degrees of givenness." See Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 99. Every time one experiences saturated phenomena, one has the sense that the experience is always lacking in its totality; that is, one can never take it all in at one moment, and is therefore required to come back and "see it again." It "begs to be seen and reseen" Jean-Luc Marion. *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* Trans: Jeffrey Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 233. See also Marion's chapter entitled "What Gives" in *The Crossing of the Visible* Trans: James K.A. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 33.

level? Despite the little attention Marion pays to his development of the poor or common-law phenomena, this objection does demand further attention.

In responding to this concern we are led to the second step of supporting the overall claim. One need not prove that economy and politics *are* in fact saturated phenomena, *but only that they are not* common or poor phenomena. If possible to do so, this would give warrant to account for economy and politics as saturated phenomena. In which case, they would need to be filed under one of Marion's four, already existing saturated phenomena, *or* they would need to become their own fifth category of saturated phenomena.

Poor phenomena are "poor" in that they are limited to having but a formal intuition, only a bare or basic intelligibility. In them, there is no variation of content. Examples of these more eidetic, non-material entities would be the "formal intuition in mathematics, or a categorical intuition in logic, in other words, a 'vision of essences' and idealities."³⁴ The poor phenomenon prohibits any further accomplishment or excess of givenness, and thereby are limited to "giving themselves" or appearing in and of themselves. Under these conditions, it seems clear that politics and economy are far too complex to be poor phenomena. Calculation alone, and the economical principles it bears, appears entirely pregnant with potential for thinking, which plays a significant role in the process of Marion's givenness. Far from lacking in variation, the phenomena of politics appear in terms and contexts that are full of intuition. One might observe the intuitive potential in political events such as the Cold War, which resounded with repeated calls for political and individual reflection.

But "poor phenomena" are slightly different from Marion's "common-law phenomena", which are, more generally, lacking in intuition, and when intended, "give" exactly what one might expect.³⁵ They are common-law in the sense that they are dealt with in an everyday fashion, like a coffee mug or bookshelf. In the case of these phenomena, givenness is delayed as we predetermine their use as objects or concepts. This theory is consistent with Marion's view on objectification. One finds in the work of Marion that the *more* a thing is objectified, the *more* common it is, while the *less* a thing is reified, its commonality is *less* likely. For him, "In the realm of the reduction, the gift is accomplished all the better when it is not reified in an object."³⁶ In

³⁴ See *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Trans: Jeffrey Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 222 (*Étant donné*, 310).

³⁵ Common-law or poor phenomena are common or poor because they lack intuition (cf. *ibid.*, 234).

³⁶ "[...]it must be suggested as a fundamental rule that the more considerable a gift appears, the less it is realized as an object and by means of a transfer of property. Only simplistic gifts, and the poorest

which case, “givenness” would all the more be freed to express itself independent from materiality.

Under these qualifications, it is clear that Marion’s “common-law” phenomena also cannot account for economy and politics. Neither politics nor economy are usable like objects or tools, material or otherwise, and although they both deal in material goods, the value of those goods vary according to the global context (the rise and fall of the dollar or euro, e.g.). Thus, we might rightly determine that what is needed is an account of economy and the political as saturated phenomena.³⁷

These conclusions furnish two findings, provided that we still wish to remain consistent with Marion’s account of the primacy of givenness. The first is that both economy and politics are ripe, pregnant, and saturated with givenness, and should not be quarantined or damned to “the natural attitude”, as one easily and quickly might be inclined to do. These phenomena are able to give themselves in differentiation. This indeed poses problems in thinking politics – as intimately related with economy, which bears the status as self-seeking – without that status reaching the dubious limit of a Rousseauian *amour de soi* or *amour-propre*, which would contradict the very definition of love. Wanting something “in return” would need to be conceived as having a level of saturation, but taking into account the various degrees of saturation, love (without seeking something in return) demands primacy.

The second conclusion (which is beneficial to our purposes here) is that economy and politics, as both overflowing with givenness, also flow *from* givenness, and are capable of being related intimately with love as the basic motivity or privileged question of the reduction to givenness. Such a relation might allow for a non-aporetic, non-dialectical relationship between love and politics without subjecting love to a supposed thralldom of economy. Further, it would do away with what Derrida demanded to be a permanent, yet productive stand-off between the equally powerful concepts of gift and economy, thereby enthroning givenness (and with it, love) as the giver of politics’ intuitive saturation. Assuming the validity of Marion’s conclusions concerning givenness, love, and economy, then as we have seen, this can also be applied to politics.

ones, coincide perfectly with the transfer of an object; it is not even self-evident that all commercial transactions (excluded from strict givenness) can be exhausted in this simple transfer. Or: the more the gift is radicalized, the more the object is reduced to the abstract role of support, occasion, symbol.” (ibid.,106)

³⁷ Ibid., 234. Marion reminds us that not all phenomena offer the “same degrees” of givenness. It is not yet clear as to whether or not economy and politics should fall under one of the four different “types” of saturated phenomena, or if they should deserve their own treatment as a fifth.

IV. Conclusion

Reconceiving the kind of relationship politics and love might have comes due to a dissatisfaction with the two options mentioned earlier. It need not be the case that love and politics remain quarantined from one another, nor is it necessary that love remain in the service of political agendas. In supposing that the love/politics binary corresponds to that between gift and economy, it indeed is necessary to consider how these concepts are not polarized, or reducible to an aporetic structure. Marion's phenomenology of givenness allows for the claim that gift/love is ontologically prior to that of economy/politics, and this ends in a hierarchy.

These conclusions furnish the opportunity to propose that *under Marion's phenomenology of givenness*, politics, like its generative fathers economy and reciprocity, would ultimately be derivative of givenness and love. If the presumed battle between love and politics can be reduced to that between gift and economy, one might conclude that this is a false dialectic. Givenness and Love are more primordial to economy and politics, and this provides one way of getting around the impasse of these terms being at odds. But the hope here has been to begin to test the value of Marion's work for this field or concept of politics, and since his work has love at the very center, then that is where one must begin. Such a phenomenology of politics requires that one go beyond the assumption that love *cannot* enter into political space, but this requires a concept that does not leave love in the service of politics, nor politics as antithetical to love.³⁸

Marion's avoidance of the question of the political in his work should not be presumed to be a silent acceptance of its unimportance. By comparison, Husserl's work focused on the subjective, inner experiences in consciousness, leading him through the problems of subjectivity and intersubjectivity: While the conscious subject is the primary source of meaning in the world, that subject gains his consciousness precisely from and *in that world*.³⁹ Perhaps it was this problem that many of his early followers took upon themselves to apply phenomenology to political philosophy. It is unclear as to whether or not Husserl closely reflected on political matters in some lectures and early manuscripts, yet it not debatable that most of his early followers

³⁸ Under this thesis of politics as saturated phenomena, we can no longer quarantine politics to the realm of "the natural attitude", or of "ideal experience" (see *ibid.*, 90.), and we must come up with a way to consider it beyond an ontological estimation of these phenomena.

³⁹ For a recent exploration into this problem see Steven Crowell's "Transcendental Phenomenology and the Seductions of Naturalism: Subjectivity, Consciousness, and Meaning" in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*, ed. Dan Zahavi (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012).

were stirred to political reflection.⁴⁰ From Edith Stein's wager that any interpersonal interaction presupposes life in community, to Adolf Reinach's account of the structure of "social acts," which he deemed to be human activities necessarily connected to the basic ways in which one "addresses" and is addressed, the political remained significant for Husserl's early followers.⁴¹ So perhaps, although Marion has avoided speaking of the political dimensions of May 1968 and has kept politics out of his phenomenology, this does not presuppose that his work cannot harbor a radical potential for political theory.

Further, the employment of Marion's work to defend the conclusion that love is more primordial than politics bears at least two potential applications for contemporary religious discourse and the so-called post-secular debate. First, the relationship between politics and love stands as a certain conditional motif especially for Political Theology (which recently has regained attention), harboring an implicit attempt to reconcile the political, the economic here and now, with love, the unaccountable, unable to be accounted for search for extra-rational sense and meaning. If love, as the most fitting name the Apostle John attributes to God, were capable of being brought under the authority of a political agenda, or were to be, by necessity, dispersed and infused within such politics, then the face of love could no longer bear, in and of itself, its own effective influence *apart from* politics. It was, after all, certain *fin-de-siècle* German theological attempts to make God relevant to culture, that culture ended up subsuming God to politics, leaving God in the folds of its cultural and economic concerns, and tilling the cultural soil for National Socialisms to come.⁴²

⁴⁰ As Keith Thompson and Lester Embree claim, in his early lectures Husserl "reflected on political matters such as the nature of the state, community, and rule, albeit in a rather unsystematic form, throughout the many phases of their philosophical developments." Keith Thompson and Lester Embree, "The Introduction" to *The Phenomenology of the Political* (Dordrecht et al.: Kluwer, 2000), 1. For secondary resources exploring Husserl's relationship with politics, see also René Toulemont, *L'essence de la société selon Husserl* (Paris: P.U.F., 1962), Karl Schuhmann, *Husserl's Staatsphilosophie* (Munich: Alber, 1988). But for more systematic attempts at assessing these reflections, see James G. Hart, *The Person and the Common Life: Studies in a Husserlian Social Ethics* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992), as well as Yves Thierry, *Conscience et Humanité selon Husserl: Essai sur le sujet politique* (Paris: P.U.F., 1995).

⁴¹ Edith Stein. "Individuum und Gemeinschaft," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* Vol. 5 (1922), 1-283. See also Edith Stein's "Eine Untersuchung über den Staat," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* Vol. 7(1925), 1-123. The list would also include the Austrians Hans Kelsen and Alfred Schutz, as well as the works of Felix Kaufmann, and Tomoo Otake. For Reinach, a "Promise" is a basic social act. See Adolf Reinach, "Die apriorischen Grundlagen des bürgerlichen Rechtes" (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1913).

⁴² For more on how modern theology prepared the way for German support of the National Socialist regime, see Mark Lilla's *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Knopf, 2007).

Instead, then, an understanding of love as the basis of politics – and perhaps even of power – can be used to address contemporary attempts in Political Theology to seek *theological* ways of understanding power in order thus to challenge political liberalism in ways that secular humanism has failed. Political Theology, in following Schmitt, seeks to show how individual communities perceive and trust the powers that create, sustain, destroy, and renew their community and political life world. Political Theology typically is centered on understanding non-derivative political authority, revelation of divine power, and obedience to sovereignty. Yet, such attempts also are found in Political Philosophy, and this demands that Political Theology distinguish itself from the former by holding a more theological definition of power, a more theological interpretation of how, as Levinas claimed, “the political is always spiritual.”

It may be the case that the supremacy of love over political power could be used as an explicitly theological lever for seeking a non-derivative form of divine power that could, in continuing to follow the Apostle John, be reduced back to love. To reduce divine power to divine love would not disregard political power (*potentia*) but come to understand it differently as an eschatological force (*dynamis*) capable of denouncing and overcoming sovereignty and its logics. Love might be understood as precisely such a force that is subversive to power, namely, for its openness to determinacy. Love, as unconditional, surrenders to power, but does so by redirecting it. Such a love would need to be something of a “weak force,” a force without power that can, at any point in the future, not take over power, but come to dismantle or expropriate it.⁴³ Love, as more primordial than an economic politics, would then be essential to attempts in Political Theology to show politics its true grounding via St. Paul’s triadic formula in I Corinthians 13: It would rest upon faith, which might be converted to knowledge; hope, which is enacted via obedience; and love, the greatest of the three, which inexhaustibly breaks apart the surface of time, subverting past, present, and future. This certainly would not be a simple plea for people to be more loving, as we are generally prone to think. Such a love does not “free” the individual (in the liberal sense of the term) to do as one *whims*, but to do precisely the opposite: to tame and discipline, to take love as the necessary self-subversive element.

⁴³ Weak force is different from “forceful force,” in that it represents, as Derrida suggests, the paradigm “in which the greatest force and the weakest simply change places.” The other-to-come, this potential other, requires a “certain unconditional renunciation of sovereignty.” As such, it “presupposes that we think at once the unforeseeability of an event that is necessarily without horizon, the singular coming of the other, and as a result, a *weak force*. This vulnerable force, this force without power, opens up unconditionally to what or who *comes* and comes to affect it.” Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), xiv.

Another implication that a subversion of politics to love could have for post-secular discourse would not end in a simple challenge to liberalism, but in a complex reformation of it. An adaptation of liberalism to this principle would need to begin at the basis of civilization and its attempts to achieve political reason in order to argue for the possibility of the subject's self-governing of life to become loving, and how this could overpower the more "natural" drives of hedonism and aggression, which political structures are ever promising to tame and discipline.⁴⁴ In other words, internal, subjective acts of love are more primary elements of change than the disciplinary and external acts of the political. If liberalism were to be amended and revived, it would need an understanding of love that is not self-seeking, but self-altering.

Relying on Marion, love must be understood as self-defeating. Such a love would be everything but associable merely with the tropes of self-affirmation, tenderness, and pleasure. Although love in the 20th century has fallen into an obscure romanticism, it is instead a concept that retains an affective, critical, and indeed dynamic edge capable of transcending idiosyncratic subjective projections, and marching towards darkened, realist landscapes. If love were to be more primordial than politics and the ambitious *will to power*, it would need to be capable of *enacting* power through a dynamic subversion of it. Only then could it act as the stark, unknowable force that doesn't just give shape, but also takes it away. When considered in the context of such love, the sovereign who powerfully "claims a state of exception" is not blessed but tormented. And the inversion of political power relations is not the impetus, but the product of loving your neighbor. *Liebe deinen Nächsten*.

⁴⁴ See here Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Vol. 1* Eds Marcus Bullock, and Michael W. Jennings. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 234-238.