PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN TRANSLATION

The publication of this book in America has a special importance in my eyes—obviously because, having taught and lectured for more than fifteen years in the United States, I find that many of my conversation partners are located on this side of the Atlantic, but especially because as a professor invited for several years now to teach at the University of Chicago, I wrote a great part of this work in Hyde Park, presented many of the arguments to students in the classrooms of Foster Hall, Swift Hall, or Classics, and discussed it with my friends and colleagues here. I am obliged to thank this great university for having thus accepted me into its great tradition and also my students, who have been as cordial as they are demanding, for having helped me more than they know. Among my colleagues, I want to thank in particular Dan Garber and David Tracy, who, in very different ways, supported me in a work that seems to me, even now that it is done, well above my abilities. Thus, appearing in America, Etant donné in some ways returns to its place of origin.

The essential points having been said, I will indulge myself by adding two points of clarification.

It behooves me to emphasize that Etant donné is inscribed, today, in a triptych, begun in 1989 with Réduction et donation: Études sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie¹ and completed in 2001 with De surcroît: Essais sur les phénomènes saturés.² The first work tried to stay within the history of philosophy applied to phenomenology; it was an inquiry into the method actually followed by Husserl and Heidegger, with an eye toward disclosing the possibilities open, for the future, to this school of thought. It succeeded in rethinking the classic operation of the reduction as no longer dedicated only to securing objects (as in Husserl) or disclosing beings (as for Heidegger), but more radically to opening a still more originary determination of the phenomenon—the given. This is summed up in a formula: “So much
reduction, so much givenness.” It happened that, contrary to all expectation, this formal and methodological work incited much discussion, indeed passionate debate. In any case, it called for clarification and development—which demanded nothing less than passing from a factual and historical inquiry to conceptual and organic research: the phenomenon as given in terms of givenness, the gift itself reduced to givenness, the determinations of the given, the saturated phenomenon as given par excellence, and finally the gifted (the figure of “subjectivity” granted to and by givenness). After ten painful years, *Etant donné*—and, in the wake of its publication, the discussion of even stronger objections followed (Ricoeur, Derrida, Franck, etc.). But this work was still abstract, at least in its presentation of the givenness of saturated phenomena, which were sketched formally and too quickly. Hence a final series of studies, *De surcroît*, designed to go into the details of the saturated phenomena, including the phenomenon of Revelation. This collection aimed to make possible a revival of phenomenology by freeing it from two horizons whose limits had become obvious to me (objectness, Being), without losing the radicality of a method whose fruitfulness was proven throughout the century just ended, a fruitfulness that remains one of the great trump cards held by a philosophy that means to think after and thanks to the end of metaphysics. I hope that others will make greater progress in this direction.

But *Etant donné*—at least it seems to me in retrospect—resumes questions left in suspense by a previous book, *Dieu sans l’être*. There, it was a question of uprooting the question of God not only from metaphysics (and the fate of the “Death of God”), but also from what made possible an investigation that had become as obsessive as imprecise into the “existence of God,” namely, the unquestioned horizon of Being as supposedly the sole frame of his presence. The critical portion of this essay was accomplished within the field of philosophy, but I could not, at that time, glimpse its constructive side (access to charity) except through recourse to theology (hence the second part, “Hors-texte”). What was lacking was a nonmetaphysical method of philosophy—phenomenology, but a phenomenology thoroughly secured. It took twenty years for me to hope to succeed, at least in part. And in fact, *Etant donné*, with the inventory of saturated phenomena, completes, in the particular case of the phenomenon of Revelation, a sketch of what *Dieu sans l’être* bluntly intended through direct recourse to theology. I hope thus to shed some light on the relations, at once essential for the future and poorly illuminated in the past, between phenomenology and theology.
There remains the most agreeable obligation of thanking those who made this translation possible. The editor first, Helen Tartar, who took a risk and made the decision to give a new life to this book. The translator next, Jeffrey L. Kosky, who, no beginner in this difficult task, showed exceptional dedication, precision, and virtuosity. I appreciate the extent to which one must oneself be a real philosopher to have rewritten, therefore rethought, a book word for word. In his case, this is proven by his expert examination of the very issues I mention above (the relations between phenomenology and theology) in the case of Emmanuel Levinas. He has my deepest gratitude and most sincere admiration.

JEAN-LUC MARION

Chicago, 10 May 2001

My work on this translation is dedicated to my grandparents: Lillian and Irving Kosky and Sadie and Julius Fialco. Not everything that merits acknowledgment happens in the public eye, and the most important probably never does. I will always remember what we have shared in the still, quiet moments.

JEFFREY KOSKY

Chicago, March 2002
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