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Corporeality, Animality, Bestiality: Emmanuel Falque on Incarnate Flesh

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The question of the "flesh" or of human corporeality has become an important topic in contemporary Continental philosophy of religion. Although it does not seem obviously connected to discussions of the divine or of religious experience, most thinkers associated with this new field consider it at least to a certain extent and for some it is even central to their analysis. In Jean-Luc Marion, the flesh is one of the possible saturated phenomena, namely the one most intimate and immediate, which saturates and over-turns our sense of relation.[1] He also considers the flesh in his discussion of the erotic phenomenon.[2] In Jean-Yves Lacoste, the flesh and corporeality are discussed within the context of human liturgical "being-before-God," especially in terms of ascetic effort as a liminal experience.[3] Jean-Louis Chrétien devotes many reflections to corporeality on a wide variety of levels, but often intimately linked to the vulnerability and corporeality of the voice.[4] It is the central topic of Michel Henry's work, where the immanence of the divine life designates precisely the immediacy of our fleshly passions.[5] For Henry, even more

[1] For the fullest treatment of the flesh in Marion, see chapter four of his *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 82-103.
[2] Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), especially the fourth part (§§ 22-28).
[3] Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skeban (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), especially § 64 & § 65. See also his article, "Liturgy and Coaffection," in *The Experience of God: A Postmodern Response*, ed. Kevin Hart and Bruce E. Wall (New York: Fordham University Press, 200), 93-103, and the final two chapters of *La phénoménalité de Dieu: Neuf études* (Paris: Cerf, 2008), 179-227.
[4] Chrétien's most explicit reflection on the body is an examination of the *Song of Songs*, which is organized around various body parts (teeth, nose, lips, throat, eyes, etc.): *Symbolique du corps: La tradition chrétienne de "Cantique des Cantiques"* (Paris: Epiméthée, 2005). But many of his other works consider questions of corporeality and flesh. For a treatment in English see "Body and Touch," in his *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 83-131.
[5] The flesh is a central theme in all of Henry's work, but his most thorough treatments are *Philosophie et phénoménologie du corps* (Paris: PUF, 1965/1987) and *Incarnation: Une philosophie de la chair* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).

fully than for the other thinkers, we *are* (or live) our flesh. This tendency to speak of our innermost nature and identity in terms of the flesh is carried to a new height in an even more recent thinker, the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at the Institut catholique (Paris), Emmanuel Falque, who brings together many of these earlier discussions and carries them to a new level.

The question of corporeality or the human flesh is one of, if not *the* most, central question motivating and permeating Falque's writings on birth, death, suffering, and resurrection.[6] His work on the body is influenced by that of many of the aforementioned figures, as well as Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the invisible, but especially by Henry's phenomenology of the flesh and Marion's phenomenology of givenness. Falque goes beyond all these by stressing what he calls our "animality" and our "organicity," namely, on the one hand, our passions and impulses, and, on the other hand, our biological and chemical nature, our concrete "flesh and bones." For Falque, these insights are deeply connected to a religious phenomenology that is guided primarily by a phenomenological reading of medieval thinkers, such as Augustine, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Meister Eckhart and many others. The humanity, suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ, and an explication of the Eucharist and Christian marriage, is an important part of his analysis of our own humanity, suffering, and finitude. This does raise the question, however, to what extent his treatments of corporeality and animality can make a genuine contribution to wider phenomenology that might not subscribe to such heavily Christian (or even specifically Roman Catholic) parameters. Falque justifies this "confusion of genres" in the introductions to several of his works and also raises the issue in the preface to the English translation of *The Metamorphosis of Finitude* where he claims that "the basic statements of Christianity are also part of the unfolding of a more general culture" (MF, ix).[7] While philosophers can now feel free to address theological questions within philosophy and to be "at the same time" philosopher and theologian, "the real distinction to be made between philosophy and theology does not lie in a separation between works devoted specifically to their disciplines according to a separation of the corpus that is only too familiar in French phenomenology. It lies in the 'joint practice' of the one with the other, where we are all the better assured of their differences because they are acknowledged

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[6] Emmanuel Falque, *Le passeur de Gethsémani: Angoisse, souffrance et mort. Lecture existentielle et phénoménologique* (Paris: Cerf, 1999/2004), henceforth cited as PG; *Métamorphose de la finitude: Essai philosophique sur la naissance et la résurrection* (Paris: Cerf, 2004), translated by Georges Hughes as *The Metamorphosis of Finitude: An Essay on Birth and Resurrection* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), the English translation henceforth cited as MF; *Les noces de l'agneau: Essai philosophique sur le corps et l'eucharistie* (Paris: Cerf, 2011; English translation forthcoming with Fordham University Press), henceforth cited as NA; *Dieu, la chair et l'autre: D'Irénée à Duns Scot* (Paris: PUF, 2008), henceforth cited as DCA. *Dieu, la chair, et l'autre* was Falque's second thesis (as required by the French university system) and hence originally written before the other three works. His doctoral (first) thesis was on Bonaventure.

[7] For a fuller analysis of the ways in which Falque seeks to relate philosophy and theology and for more extensive summary of his writings, see the chapter on his work in my *Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 184-208.

throughout" (MF, x). His writing on the human flesh and body seems a particularly good locus for examining the ways in which this close connection between philosophy and theology can become both productive and problematic. The first part of this paper will lay out the progression of Falque's argument regarding human corporeality. The second part will seek to evaluate his account and raise some questions about it, especially in regard to the stark division he draws in his most recent work between human "animality" and the "bestiality" of all other creatures.

Falque's Account of the Flesh

Reflections on the flesh in some form or another permeate Falque's work. His early book on finitude, suffering and death (*Le passeur de Gethsémani*) already raised the issue, it is considered again in the final chapters of *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, a third of *Dieu, la chair, et l'autre* is devoted to it, and it is the central topic of *Les noces de l'agneau*. *Dieu, la chair, et l'autre*, which engages nine medieval thinkers in phenomenological ways, was written first, although it was published after the first two volumes of the triptych. Falque devotes the middle part of *Dieu, la chair, et l'autre* to the topic of the flesh, which serves as a transition between "God" as the topic of Part I and "the other" discussed in Part III. He discusses the "visibility" of the flesh with the help of Irenaeus (chapter 4), its "solidity" relying on Tertullian (chapter 5), and speaks of its "conversion" in light of Bonaventure (chapter 6). These three treatments to a large extent preview his later writings on the flesh. Falque is interested in three issues: the experience of the flesh for the human being (for this he draws on Irenaeus' account of the first and second "Adam"), the experience of the incarnate flesh for God (for this he relies on Tertullian's discussion of the incarnation), and the experience of the flesh for the human who stands in intimate relation to the divine (for this he moves to Bonaventure and Bonaventure's reflection on St. Francis of Assisi). These claims about the flesh in us, in Christ, and in our relationship with the divine, are spelled out in much more detail in his three-volume series, where he reflects on the Paschal Triduum via an analysis of death, resurrection, and Eucharist. Central to his argument, even when it concerns the resurrection, is an insistent focus on *this* life and its earthy existence instead of a deferral to a heavenly afterlife that would have little connection to our real being in the world. A close analysis of the human flesh and its sufferings and joys figures prominently in this focus on our earthly reality here and now. Throughout all of his works he provides phenomenological analyses of traditional theological authors, topics, and texts. The account of our human fleshly existence is hence intricately linked to theological insights and draws on many different Christian religious sources.

Le passeur de Gethsémani first lays out Falque's fundamental argument about Christ as the pattern for what it means to be human. In particular he seeks to establish an intimate connection between Christ's suffering and death and our own finitude and fear of death. This book is especially in conversation with Heidegger, trying to refute the latter's claim that Christian theology cannot take death seriously in all its weightiness because it moves immediately to the promise of resurrection.

Falque reinforces his argument by focusing in this book entirely on suffering and death and considering the resurrection more fully only in his next book. He wants to take the incarnation seriously in all its fleshly carnality and explore its contemporary relevance as an affirmation of the flesh and human finitude, focusing on its meaning for the present, not some mythical future. Christ assumes our corruptible flesh with all its anguish, anxiety and suffering.[8] Falque insists especially on the indeterminacy of Christ's anguish. He had no assurance of the meaning and purpose of his suffering, but like us faced nothingness and its attendant fears. Based on various Gospel passages, Falque argues that Christ's anxiety is "existential" and not only "existentiell" in Heidegger's sense of those terms—it is a real anxiety over finitude in light of Christ's anticipation of his own death (PG, 85). Christ's agony in Gethsemane can serve as an exemplary paradigm for human experience. Christ feels not simply fear in Gethsemane, but genuine anxiety and anguish in a fully kenotic identification with us.

Falque turns more explicitly to the topic of the flesh in the third part of the book. Again, it is Christ's flesh that he takes as paradigm for our own experience. And Christ's anguish is most clearly incarnated in his flesh (instead of in a Heideggerian "virility" in face of death, which in Falque's view ignores the flesh). Christ lives a fully human life in this world and on this earth. Falque stresses especially the corruptibility of the flesh and its suffering (passion and passivity), both themes that will continue to be important for him in his more recent work. In doing so, Falque seeks to bring together Marion's emphasis on the absolute self-revelation of the phenomenon that destitutes the self and Henry's emphasis on the self-affectivity and radical immanence of the flesh. As the alterity of the Father is incarnated in the son (via self-revelation), so our humanity becomes incorporated into the alterity of the divine via self-affectivity (PG, 133). Like Marion, Falque argues that the flesh is singularized in love of neighbor (PG, 135). He repeatedly insists on taking Christ's "corruptible" flesh seriously and warns against taking flight into docetic interpretations that would dismiss its real suffering. This is evident, in his view, in the Gospel narratives about Christ's blood and tears in the garden and the cry of dereliction on the cross. Against Heidegger, who in his view does not take the suffering of the flesh sufficiently seriously, Falque tries to articulate a phenomenology of fleshly suffering in chapter 11 by focusing on touch and other modes of suffering and passivity. Christ's contact with the people he touched reveal different modes of being in the flesh. Christ's divine humanity is characterized by self-affectivity (of his own flesh in his relation with the Father), fracture of worldly sensations (in terms of human and divine ways of perceiving), and excess of incommensurability, which "consecrates incarnate suffering as an unavoidable move from the 'body' he *has* (or thinks he has) to the 'flesh' he *is* or definitively becomes, in Gethsemane as at Golgotha" (PG, 152). Christ's lived experiences of bodily senses is like ours and yet always means more; it is transmuted into compassionate action addressing a particular lack or concern. What

[8] Falque's central term *l'angoisse* is the French translation of Heidegger's *Sorge* and can mean both anxiety and anguish.

Christ experiences or suffers is simultaneously experienced also by God (the Father) and by us (as humans). Suffering in its most excessive degree becomes accessible in the physical rupture of Christ's flesh on the cross.

What are the implications of Christ's experience for us? To what extent do Christ's suffering and tears have meaning for us? Falque analyzes our fear and tears in face of death (PG, 162ff.) and the vulnerability and weakness of the flesh (PG, 164) by focusing on the wounds that remain in Christ even after the resurrection (PG, 166). He thinks that the theological claims that Christ accompanies our suffering or that we suffer with Christ do not imply that Christ's suffering *substitutes* for ours or that we completely identify with his suffering. He explicitly criticizes Lévinas and the Jewish tradition in this context: We do not all become "messiahs" carrying the suffering of the world. Christ is a guide for suffering, not a substitute. It is the *meaning* of my suffering that has changed and the *modality* of my own life; they have not been eliminated or replaced (PG, 168). Most importantly, I no longer need to suffer alone.[9] Christ gives and delivers himself in the offering of his flesh. My own anguish and suffering gain new meaning by accepting that of Christ and following its path into the life of God. Suffering remains entirely mine and yet welcomes the other in me (and ultimately me in the other). Suffering itself does not have redemptive value and yet it can open me to the other and to God. Falque concludes this reflection on the "mineness" of the flesh and of suffering by connecting them to childhood and infancy through the story of Jesus' embrace of the little children—Christianity is ultimately about recovering this childlike state. Christ invites us to live otherwise, not without the flesh but within it in him. This is accomplished via the resurrection, as a different phenomenological mode of living, as Falque explores it in the following volume of his series.

In *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, Falque takes on Nietzsche's claim that Paul denigrates the body. He analyzes Paul's notion of corporeality and the way in which body and flesh are discussed in the Pauline letters. He argues that both "flesh" and "spirit" are ways of being in the body and do not constitute a withdrawal from corporeality (MF, 54).The resurrection is a new relation to the body, not a removal of it. The flesh is a manner of being in the body, which is given by God (MF, 56). Resurrection, then, is a transformation of the body that does not lose sight of the body (MF, 58). He analyzes Paul's discussion of the kinds of "glory" associated with the body and argues that they are types of phenomenality. The ways in which the Scriptures speak of the body are manners of depicting various types of corporeal phenomenality. In the "resurrected" body, God's light shines in our flesh (MF, 61). Falque refers to Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "the incarnation changes everything" in order to claim the same for the resurrection, while assuring the reader that he does not intend to confuse theology and philosophy (MF, 63). Over and over he stresses that his analysis of Christ applies to this earthly life and to our genuine humanity. It shows a new phenomenological modality of being here and now, not a rejection of this world. The fleshly mode of being of the Son is conjoined with the Father's

[9] He speculates that "eternal suffering" (i.e., in hell) may mean precisely a refusal to allow Christ to share my suffering, a final rejection of the other in the self.

spiritual mode of being. Falque insists that this is not a negation of bodily being, but a different mode of consciousness of the lived experience of the flesh transposed "into the lived experience of consciousness of his own Father" (MF, 67). The Father experiences the suffering of the Son and the Son is transformed via resurrection into the life of the Father through the work of the Spirit. Falque insists that the "spiritual" resurrection body is in direct continuity with the "physical" body. Body and flesh go together. This close connection between body and flesh is central to Falque's analysis and he chides contemporary thinkers for focusing so exclusively on the flesh that they have forgotten about the body: "The massive *stampede toward the flesh*, characteristic of contemporary thought, neglects Husserl's attachment to the *body*, to the point sometimes of *dis-corporating* the flesh" (MF, 77; emphases his). For Falque, Christ accepts our body entirely and transforms it into a new mode of life, which changes our perception of space and time, the world and its horizons. Through the resurrection we become incorporated into the divine life, both bodily and spiritually in a dynamic fashion. This, Falque suggests, requires a phenomenology of resurrection, to which he devotes the final part of the book.

Falque claims that the resurrection transforms our experience of the world, of time, and of our body phenomenologically: the world becomes other, time turns into eternity, and the body is reborn. In this way, the world can be reconstructed "bodily." In this context of a "phenomenology of resurrection," Falque interprets the body (in the final chapter of his treatment) primarily in its capacity for rebirth. Our birth and childhood are constitutive of us and are evidenced in our flesh (MF, 128). In a somewhat problematic account he distinguishes between the "flesh" provided by the mother and the "name" provided by the father. He then applies this account to the resurrected body where its corporeality is again provided by the "mother," namely the Church, and the name by the "father," namely God (MF, 136). Christ takes on our material, biological body and we participate in his resurrected body. Yet the biological and the resurrected body are not completely identified. Rather, they refer to two different "ways of living" (MF, 138). The lived experience of the body, which is the flesh, is not merely physical and does not follow normal rules of appearance, otherwise Christ's post-resurrection appearances would simply be a kind of superstitious "magic" and the texts could have little meaning for us today. He also does not suggest that we spiritualize the texts away but must read them and take seriously how they have been understood for centuries. The resurrected body is a different way of living the flesh that is not corporeal in exactly the same fashion. It still has texture, wounds, stigmata, flesh and bones (MF, 144). Yet Christ no longer has an objective body but instead appears to the disciples' consciousness. Falque wants to maintain that this is not a fantasy (or phantom), but rather a transfiguration of the body into lived flesh, lived bodiliness. These accounts, he contends, can help us experience each other's flesh. Our pathos is identified with that of Christ's flesh and leads to a unification of the flesh in the Church (MF, 151). The analysis of Christ, then, provides us with a phenomenological paradigm for our own bodily existence. This intentional bringing together of physical and spiritual is central also to his most recent work.

Already in this text Falque points out briefly twice that Christ shares our "animality" (MF, 76, 137). Yet he does not explore this claim any further in this particular work. It is only in *Les noces de l'agneau* that this theme becomes an important part of his treatment. This book, the most recent of Falque's works to date, is explicitly concerned with the body in view of formulating a phenomenology of the Eucharist and of marriage (hence the "nuptial" metaphor in the title of the book). He recognizes that his earlier works did not go far enough in their treatment of body and flesh (NA, 25, note 2). He seeks to remedy this through an even more radical focus on our "animality" and "organicity" and a strong insistence that Christ shares fully in this human condition via a complete embrace of animality and the organic. (The figure of the "lamb" in the title stands for this animality, which is not denied in or excluded by the incarnation, although it does not mean that Christ becomes an animal but rather that he assumes our animality.) These questions are explored within the context of fundamentally Christian (and even explicitly Roman Catholic) analyses of redemption, Eucharist, and marriage. The insights about flesh and corporeality are deeply connected to these more theological concerns. Indeed, they are inseparable in his text.

Falque begins by picking up the claim made already briefly in *The Metamorphosis of Finitude* that ancient philosophical types of dualism between the physical and the spiritual or the body and the soul have been re-instituted at a different level in contemporary phenomenological thought. The material and the organic have effectively been forgotten or suppressed in favor of an emphasis on the "lived" body, the flesh, or our inner conscious experience (NA, 23). Similarly, contemporary theology has spiritualized Christ's body. Falque seeks to respond to these deficiencies by a rigorous philosophical and theological analysis of the abyss and chaos of our earthly passions, the genuine organic nature of our flesh and bones, and our erotic drives and desires. For this a full analysis of our animality, organicity, and of sexual difference is required. Furthermore, Christ must be affirmed to share this experience to the fullest, while also transforming it and hence helping us move from chaos and anguish to eros and agape. Falque identifies the middle part of his book as a philosophical account, although it still contains many theological references, especially by being framed as a philosophical analysis of the incarnation and Christ's genuine humanity with the explicit goal of developing a convincing phenomenological account of the Eucharist. I will focus here especially on chapters four (on animality) and five (on organicity).

Falque stresses that animality matters. It is not just our evolutionary origin, but our current condition. Our existence is characterized by the threatening chaotic abyss of our passions and impulses (or drives), which threaten us and unsettle us. We share these with the animals and to that extent the animal can be said to be within us. Our biological nature is an animal nature. These human realities of anguish, death, chaos of passions, instinctual impulses, and so forth, are taken on by Christ and first "humanized" and then deified, but not thereby erased. We appropriate this transformation via the Eucharist, which is a consuming of body, flesh, and blood. Falque stresses repeatedly that animality or organicity are not "sinful" or evil, but part of what it means to be human. He also draws (in the title of

the chapter and briefly within its content) on Derrida's analysis in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, pointing especially to his account of our nudity before animals, which Falque compares to our nudity before God. Consistent with much of the theological tradition, Falque situates us half-way between animals and angels. We share our bodily nature with the animals and our consciousness with angels. We hence have potential in both directions: we can become reduced to "bestiality," namely to be *mere* animals, or we can raise our animality into the divine life. This becomes possible first of all through sexual difference, which culminates in loving communion.

Falque argues that the early Hebrew and even Christian tradition was much more aware of our animal nature and did not draw radically exclusive distinctions between humanity and animality. Only with Augustine's denial of voice or speech to animals, the theology of the *imago dei*, and especially in Descartes and his followers, do animals become defined as utterly other than us, not even capable of sensation or suffering, pure machines. Humanity becomes completely separated from animality and forgets its own animal nature. This is continued to a certain extent even in contemporary thinkers. Heidegger's censure of Schopenhauer and Rousseau for reducing the human to the animal "forgets that we are first fleshly—made of flesh as lived body, but also of body in its objectivity, indeed of an ensemble or mass of tissues and organs" (NA, 167). The forgetting of being and the forgetting of our animality seem conjoined. Falque agrees with Didier Franck that Heidegger excludes the lived animality of the human being and hence disincarnates us. Flesh and body disappear in favor of being. Yet he suggests that Heidegger's account of empathy may well prove useful for a recovery of our fleshly pathos. Our organs and capacities are not deficiencies, but an intimate part of what we are. Knowing our fleshly animal nature fully helps us embrace every aspect of who we are.

In the fifth chapter, Falque digs even deeper by going beyond our animal nature of passions and drives, to our material and organic nature. (He claims that this organic body is distinguished in the Scriptures from the flesh.) We struggle for life on a daily basis with viruses, microbes, and various bodily chemicals. Even our affections and emotions are grounded in a deeper corporeal reality (e.g., via neurotransmitters). One is not possible without the other (NA, 184), as is particularly evident in the experience of sickness (NA, 196). Our biological life is expressed in our organs and this substrate of our reality cannot and should not be denied or ignored. Again, Falque attacks traditional and contemporary radical divisions between soul and body or spiritual and material. They must be held closely together, both philosophically and theologically. The Eucharist is an organic transplantation and blood transfusion: Christ lives in me. Not only does Christ have bones and muscles like us, but Christ's and our body permeate each other within the eucharistic meal (NA, 191). The substance of the body enables the force and energy of the spirit at work in us (NA, 193). We are "never *only* body, but always *first* body" (NA, 202; emphasis his). Falque draws on Husserl's distinction between the physical and the biological, the lived and the corporeal body, the spiritual and the phenomenological body, in order to articulate four degrees of body: the physical

body (*Körper*) in the natural or scientific sense, the biological body (*Leib/chair*) in an ordinary sense, the lived body (*Leib-körper*) in the sense of the place for reflection and habit, the corporeal and spiritual body (*Leib*) in the phenomenological sense (NA, 204). All these need to be brought together and none of them can be neglected. For Falque such integration occurs most profoundly in the Eucharist, where body and flesh become one, where Christ is really present in his "flesh and bones," that is, in person (NA, 212). Christ assumes everything and gives himself fully; we can then choose to appropriate this gift and to be transformed by it. Falque argues that such integration that preserves distinction is most fully experienced in the love of man and woman.[10] The conjugal pair imitates the Trinitarian relations, as the "marriage supper" is patterned on the eucharistic meal. Our flesh, our body, and our erotic desires are assumed, transformed, and transubstantiated into the Trinitarian perichoresis. The final part of the book draws theological implications from these (ostensibly) philosophical insights for an analysis of the Eucharist and a Christian phenomenology of marriage.

Questions for Falque's Account

Falque certainly gives much more space to the topic of corporeality and the flesh than many other Continental philosophers of religion, such as Jean-Luc Marion or Jean-Yves Lacoste. He also goes much further even than the ones for whom this topic is more central, such as Jean-Louis Chrétien and Michel Henry. Falque's writings as a whole are much more attentive to the ways in which our human flesh is grounded in biological, organic nature. He also seeks to tie our experiences of finitude and suffering more fully to the body. Body and flesh, animality and consciousness are held closely together by Falque. He is explicitly concerned to overcome the remnants of dualism he detects in many phenomenological thinkers and the singular focus on the lived experience of the flesh that often comes at the expense of an analysis of the biological and chemical substrates of our experience. Instead he takes seriously the genuine physicality and organicity of our fleshly bodies.

In particular, Falque's treatment is helpful inasmuch as it remedies some of Henry's rather extreme statements about science that seem to dismiss any attention to our biological existence in its organicity and animality. Henry draws an absolute and uncompromising distinction between a scientific account of life (usually identified with Galileo), which is always deceptive and constitutes a complete denial of real Life, and a Christian or biblical account, which has the only genuine access to the Truth of Life. These strict distinctions unfortunately serve to reinforce stereotypes about the supposed opposition of science and religion. While Henry's critique of technology is important and illuminating, the complete dismissal of any insights from science for understanding our life and phenomenological existence is too extreme. Even our interior passions and joys—the focus of Henry's analyses—

[10] Again, this draws on rather traditional gender distinctions, although Falque makes a genuine effort to portray them as equally as possible, both here and in his later chapter on marriage.

cannot be depicted authentically without a full depiction of their materiality and "organicity."[11] In this especially Falque goes further than Henry in not simply dismissing scientific insight about corporeality, but incorporating it into a genuinely phenomenological account of the ways in which pleasures and pains are intimately linked to flesh and bones, chemicals and neurotransmitters. At the same time he seeks to maintain a strong emphasis on the phenomenality of the body and its concrete lived experience. Falque's account here is truer to our actual experience of the reality of the world and our bodies within it, including their complete dependence on nutrition, respiration and so forth. A phenomenological account attuned to our real experience of materiality can certainly not be reduced to neurotransmitters, cells, and chemical processes, but it can also no longer ignore these insights entirely. Although Falque is much more explicitly religious in his analysis than Henry, Chrétien or Lacoste, his account of the flesh at the same time pays far more attention to "secular," especially scientific, insights. This might allow for the possibility of a much more productive phenomenological conversation with contemporary science.

On occasion, Falque explicitly criticizes Henry's account of self-affectivity and Chrétien's more poetic considerations of corporeality.[12] He chides both of them together with other thinkers for forgetting our organic and animal nature by being too narrowly concerned with the flesh (NA, 26). Both focus too strongly on forms of perception in their phenomenological analysis and do not pay sufficient attention to the chaos of our existence in the "medley of sensations" of our corporeal life (NA, 55). This is particularly evident in the little attention they pay to these basic drives and desires. Falque suggests that "the true proof of corporeality, when the organic flesh is manifested or rather manifests itself, is then not first of all that of a *Self* capable of affecting itself (Henry), but that of a *Non-Self* of which one paradoxically becomes the powerless or even disinterested spectator" (NA, 197-98; emphases his). Especially in the case of illness our fleshly limits become obvious to the point where we become "strangers to ourselves." The ways our bodies are affected in concrete physical (and chemical) fashion influences our passions and emotions. Bodily corporeality and the experience of the flesh hence must be more fully reconciled. A truly incarnated being should "not forget anything" (NA, 205).[13] The "vitalist or organic tradition of the 19th century" must be brought together with the "phenomenological and self-affective tradition of the 20th century" (NA, 206). Much of Falque's discussion is trying to accomplish precisely such a reconciliation. In these ways his work raises important questions about the contemporary discussion of corporeality and the flesh and provides new insight on this topic by

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[11] I have explored this in much more detail in my article "What About Non-Human Life? An 'Ecological' Reading of Michel Henry's Critique of Technology," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* XX.2 (2012), 116-38.

[12] He also criticizes their strong emphasis on abstract art and rejection of more figurative painting (NA, 89) and contends that Henry's concept of the flesh has very little to do with the ways in which the Bible speaks of the flesh and especially with biblical discussions of the Eucharist (NA, 178).

[13] He makes a similar argument in response to Henry's account of desire, which explicitly excludes the biological and chemical, but for Falque has to go *through* our animality and organicity instead of ignoring them (NA, 277).

integrating the biological and chemical substrates of our passions and emotions more fully into an account of the lived experience of the flesh.

There are two aspects of his treatment, however, that appear rather troubling. The first might be called a hermeneutic concern, the second an ecological one. First, Falque's strong link of his account of corporeality with such explicitly Christian themes as Christ's incarnate flesh and the broken body of the eucharistic bread makes the treatment theologically fruitful, but philosophically problematic. It is not clear to me how the important theological claim that Christ shows us what it means to be truly human could be substantiated philosophically. Here a firmer distinction (certainly than Falque himself draws) between a philosophical and a theological analysis seems called for. While a rigorous phenomenological analysis of the flesh can certainly shed light on and be employed for a theological reflection on Christ's incarnate flesh or possibly even for speculation about human resurrected flesh, it is not entirely clear how an analysis of Christ *per se* can be useful philosophically. This is not to say that the medieval or other explicitly religious authors could not provide helpful phenomenological insights. The unease here is primarily about a phenomenological analysis of Christ's *own experience*—to which it seems to me phenomenology has no direct access—not to gaining philosophical insights from texts that speak about various experiences including making claims about the incarnation or other traditionally theological doctrines. As Ricoeur used to say, the texts are there for anyone who can read and therefore open also for a philosophical reading. Drawing philosophical insights from texts with theological concerns or topics seems to me much less problematic than making claims about the specific phenomenological experience of an individual, whether a saint or Christ. Falque (and indeed Marion and other Continental philosophers of religion) needs to make much clearer how we gain access to such experiences. Are they a hermeneutic analysis of how certain texts speak of such experience? That would be substantially different, however, from a direct phenomenological analysis of such experience. It is not Christ's experience *per se* that gives us insight about our own finitude but the hermeneutic portrait of Christ's finitude as described by a particular author—Paul or Luke or the Johannine community. How Christ is *depicted* to grapple with his pain and suffering may well provide interesting phenomenological insight, but that is not the same thing as a claim about how God *does actually experience* our animality. These important hermeneutic distinctions do not seem to me made sufficiently clearly in Falque's text. In fact, my impression is that Falque consistently wants to affirm the latter more directly phenomenological position instead of the former hermeneutically informed one. In a purely theological discussion, where Christ's divinity might be treated as a given, this would be a much less contentious claim, but in a text that often self-identifies as philosophical this appears far more problematic.

Moreover, even apart from this hermeneutic worry, it is not entirely clear from Falque's account that his analysis of Christ's experience really is phenomenologically (and not only theologically) fruitful—even if direct access to Christ's experience could be had. Falque throughout makes claims about Christ's genuine humanity and the ways in which it can serve as a paradigm for our own

humanity. He consistently moves from Christ toward us rather than the reverse. While this might be quite acceptable theologically, it appears questionable phenomenologically. Indeed, Falque's claims about Christ's humanity all seem based on scientific and phenomenological insights about the human condition or human experiences, even when they are interpretations of certain biblical passages. This is maybe most evident in his analysis of Christ's anguish in the garden of Gethsemane, which is basically a Heideggerian reading of the biblical accounts, even if phrased as a critique of Heidegger's claims about them. Similarly, while Falque's strong stress on deification or human incorporation into the divine brings Eastern Orthodox theological insights to bear on Western theological affirmations, it is far less evident how this transformation of the human via resurrection or deification can be helpful for a less explicitly Christian phenomenological account. Although Falque wants to contend that resurrection is not about an afterlife but about a different phenomenological mode of life here and now, he does not explicate what that might mean in more secular terms. It may well be useful for Christians to reinterpret theological and biblical accounts of resurrection in that fashion, but it is far from clear how this provides genuinely novel phenomenological insight. In fact, I strongly suspect that the heavy Christian language of the treatment would prevent most phenomenologists from taking it seriously or exploring its phenomenological potential more fully. Regardless of whether an analysis of Christ's experience can be substantiated phenomenologically, much more work needs to be done to show how and why such an analysis would be philosophically fruitful and desirable, apart from any purely theological gain.

My second worry concerns Falque's strict divisions between the "animality" of humans and the "bestiality" of all other creatures (referring mostly to non-human animals in this case). Already in *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, Falque argues that our flesh is fundamentally different from that of animals (MF, 54). In this text the reference to animals appears a couple of times in the form of an assurance that he is not conflating humans with animals, but they are otherwise not mentioned. Both the connection and the distinction become much stronger in *Les noces de l'agneau*, where he employs the figure of the "lamb" to speak of Christ. To some extent he revises his account in this book by arguing for a much fuller embrace of our animality and organicity, hence apparently bringing human and non-human animals much closer together. Yet in many ways the distinctions he draws actually become much starker. Animals are reduced to "bestiality," a state to which humans can also sink if they choose sin over salvation, a body of flesh instead of a body of spirit. This is not an untraditional account, but one made by many theological thinkers.[14]

[14] In a popular version of this, C.S.Lewis suggests both in *The Magician's Nephew*, which describes the creation of Narnia, and in *The Last Battle*, which depicts its demise and recreation, that the talking animals who have been elevated above the other beasts will return to their bestiality, if they choose to disobey Aslan. When he has first awakened Narnia and chosen certain animals, Aslan says to them: "The Dumb Beasts whom I have not chosen are yours also. Treat them gently and cherish them but do not go back to their ways lest you cease to be Talking Beasts. For out of them you were taken and into them you can return. Do not so." See *The Magician's Nephew* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 118. This comes to a dramatic head in the final book when Ginger, the cat, who collaborates most fully with the enemy, loses its identity as a talking creature: "What followed was rather horrible. Tirian felt quite

Yet that hardly makes it more palatable today. And it is more problematic in Falque, precisely because he seeks to take animality seriously and chides the tradition for its neglect of animals and for drawing the distinctions between animals and humans too firmly. Rather than drawing out the important implications of this admonition and overcoming these radical separations, Falque repeatedly reinforces them in his account.

Despite his thorough analysis of animality, Falque maintains strict distinctions between animals and humans in several ways. He claims that a complete identification of humans with animals would be "pagan" (NA, 70).[15] He also repeatedly contends that animality is taken up in the human and carried to a new level. The human comprises the entire animal world and other creatures are ultimately contained in the human (NA, 74). This is also an ancient theological idea (grounded in Plato and other Greek thinkers), which sees the human as the microcosm, the one who stands at the boundary line between physical and spiritual and combines all within it. This idea has been taken up especially in Eastern Orthodox theology of the past century, which speaks of humans as "hypostasizing" all of creation.[16] Falque claims that this is a superior philosophical account that does not deny evolution but takes it up theologically (NA, 83). He argues that this must be thought more fully metaphysically and theologically. In Christ, our animality is assumed and transformed. While our own animality may seem indistinguishable from that of other animals, this is due to the fall. Christ shows us what it means (or originally meant) to be truly human: namely a transformed animality that becomes true humanity. "*Neither God nor the human are animals*, the former because he

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certain (and so did the others) that the Cat was trying to say something: but nothing came out of its mouth except the ordinary, ugly cat-noises you might hear from any angry or frightened old Tom in a backyard in England. And the longer he caterwauled the less like a Talking Beast he looked. Uneasy whimperings and little sharp squeals broke out from among the other Animals. 'Look, look!' said the voice of the Boar. 'It can't talk. It has forgotten how to talk! It has gone back to being a dumb beast. Look at its face.' Everyone saw that it was true. And then the greatest terror fell upon those Narnians. For every one of them had been taught—when it was only a chick or a puppy or a cub—how Aslan at the beginning of the world had turned the beasts of Narnia into Talking Beasts and warned them that if they weren't good they might one day be turned back again and be like the poor witless animals one meets in other countries. 'And now it is coming upon us,' they moaned" (*The Last Battle* [New York: Macmillan, 1970], 109). Here the ability to "Love. Think. Speak." (*Magician's Nephew*, 116) elevates the chosen animals above the "dumb beasts" and sinful action lowers them back to such bestiality. This is a fictional account of exactly what Falque describes for the relation of human animals to the divine, on the one hand, and to the "beasts," on the other.

[15] This is also an ancient Christian fear, very evident in early Patristic texts, yet probably more relevant at a time when paganism of that sort was still a significant part of the surrounding culture. Falque actually explicitly appeals to (and applauds) the decisions of the Council of Trullo in 692, which forbid portraying Christ as an animal.

[16] Most popularly by Sergei Bulgakov and John Zizioulas, but it has become pretty much an unquestioned assumption by contemporary Orthodox theology and is often taken up also by Western thinkers. It is grounded in the Cappadocians' and Maximus' accounts of the human, which rely on Plato's notion of humans as microcosm and explicate it theologically with the notion of the *imago dei*. I have explored some of the problematic aspects of this in regard to Zizioulas in my piece "Creativity as Call to Care for Creation? Between John Zizioulas and Jean-Louis Chrétien," in *Creation, Creatureliness, and Creativity: The Human Place in the Natural World*, ed. Bruce Benson, Norman Wirzba, and Brian Treanor (New York: Fordham University Press, forthcoming).

specifically assumes our humanity (God becomes human), the latter because we find ourselves always metaphysically already humanized, and even belonging theologically to the divine more than to the realm of the animal" (NA, 127; emphases his). Although Falque consistently warns of a refusal or forgetting of our animality, he just as often warns of becoming *only* animals. A sinful humanity descends into the chaos of the abyss and becomes bestial. We have two choices before us: deification (theosis) or bestiality (NA, 135). To speak of redemption of animals directly, in Falque's view succumbs to animism (NA, 150). Animals are to obey the human and God speaks to them only through us. Animals are fully recapitulated in the human. There is no direct salvation for them, rather they are redeemed via the human being (NA, 151).

Falque hence phenomenologically re-appropriates certain traditional theological claims about salvation, sin, and genuine anthropology. These, however, seem deeply problematic when they begin to ground our superiority over animals in a way that almost always leads directly to a role of governance over them and hence often (though not always) licenses an exploitative attitude toward them and the lands on which they live.[17] This radical distinction between humans and other animals seems deeply problematic for both biological and ecological reasons. Although humans are certainly different in some or even many ways from other animal species or particular individual animals (not some generic "animal" which does not exist or if it does includes the human), they are not distinct from them in some absolute fashion. Any marker that has been used to define human uniqueness (emotion, reason, upright posture, capacity for moral behavior, ability to communicate, mourning of the dead, etc.) has been shown to be applicable to some other animal species at least to some extent. Almost any boundary line we might draw will either include some other animals or exclude some humans.[18] Genetically we are also very close to some animals species (especially the great apes) and indeed far closer to them than these species are to other "animal" species. The differences between human and non-human animals seems more an issue of degree than absolute either/or distinctions. Furthermore, such absolute distinctions have often been used as license to exploit other species and their habitat without any concern for their needs and desires. We operate on a "might makes right" morality in regard to the rest of nature and this is often justified precisely by appeal to our inherent superiority. There is no need to perpetuate this attitude on a planet in peril.[19] Many contemporary eco-phenomenologists have questioned our assumption of superiority

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[17] While I was working on this paper, *The New York Times* reported on a new individual-specific practice of infecting mice with a person's tumor (mostly for cases of cancer) and then testing various medications on these infected mice in order to find a cure for that particular patient. It was never questioned in the piece (or apparently the practice) whether such use of other creatures on a single individual's behalf could possibly be morally justifiable.

[18] This is particularly obvious in discussions surrounding animal rights from a variety of perspectives, such as those maintained by Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Kenneth Goodpaster and many others.

[19] Least of all by a heavily theological account. Instead, we would be better served theologically by re-affirming God as creator of and in relation with all of creation. Much contemporary theology has worked hard to highlight all the ways in which the Christian message of redemption is cosmic in scope and not focused exclusively on human beings.

over other animals and tried to give phenomenological accounts more attentive to nature and the other beings with whom we share the planet. Falque's eucharistic account runs the danger of perpetuating certain traditional (and deeply problematic) Christian claims about soteriology as narrowly focused on humans instead of being for the benefit of all of God's creatures. Philosophically it continues a similar assumption about fundamental distinctions between mind and body in modern philosophy, an account that Falque precisely seeks to overcome.

Falque does on one occasion speak of the need for empathy with other creatures.[20] Most importantly, drawing on the work of biologist J. von Uexküll, he suggests that animals are subjects of their own "world" and that human world and animal world can overlap and interact with each other. Falque insists that the animal has a world of its own (and different animals inhabit different worlds, as subjects within those worlds) as do we, yet these worlds can to some extent be open to each other. The animal is "a subject of a conscious life by which it constitutes its world," which does not necessarily refer to self-reflection or culture but to the animal's experience of or aim at a world via its flesh in terms of sensation and pathos (NA, 171). These various corporeal worlds can interpenetrate, because humans as animals share the basic knowledge of the flesh via sensation and pathos. This unfortunately rather brief discussion not only speaks of animals as subjects in their own right instead of merely objects, but more importantly opens the possibility of taking seriously the various particular worlds of animals and to treat them as having meaning and significance. It might even ultimately allow us to find ways to value animals for themselves and on their own terms, possibly even to argue for the importance of preserving and protecting their particular "worlds." Yet, Falque ultimately argues that we can have empathy for animals only because and when we come to terms with our own animality and allow God to indwell and transform it. Christ shares our instinctual drives and passions and ultimately transforms them via the Eucharist. He stresses forcefully again that Christ does not become an animal, but only takes on our *human* animality. Christ assumes "our flesh" but not that of animals more generally (NA, 175).[21] This strong emphasis on transformation seems to deny the earlier possibility of independent (and valuable) animal worlds. Although Falque himself consistently claims that this is not a rejection of animality but only its metamorphosis, one still wonders how much genuine animality remains in such transformation, considering how often it is described as deification and

[20] It is rather unfortunate that his primary example for this, however, is the hunting dog—a creature so heavily bred by humans that it is hardly representative of animals more generally, who in fact are precisely hunted and killed by this creature or the human who employs the dog. He also points out that Christ's empathy is never directly with animals but with our "animality," i.e., our passions and drives. (NA, 168.)

[21] Although much of the theological tradition would probably agree with this as self-evident, it is a far from obvious claim if our evolutionary and ecological connection with the rest of the animal world is taken seriously. And at certain times within the tradition, some theologians have argued for much wider interpretations of the incarnation. Most famously, John of Damascus asserts against the iconoclasts that *all of matter* is holy and valuable because Christ assumes earthly matter in the incarnation. We can portray Christ with earthly pigment and on wood, because he became a material and earthly being and the incarnation hence constitutes an affirmation of all of materiality.

opposed to a descent into bestiality. The nuptial act of the Eucharist, finally, draws the human "out of animality" and makes us fully human by allowing us to participate in the divine life; "certainly and fortunately we do not remain animals" (NA, 322). Yet why is it so terrible to "remain" an animal? Why are all non-human animals "mere beasts"? Why should other animals not be able to participate in the divine life, if it is so desirable for humans to do so? These traditional assumptions—both philosophical and theological—must be explored (and challenged) much more fully today. Falque is to be lauded for focusing much greater attention on our "animality." Unfortunately while doing so he perpetuates radical distinctions between humans and all other animals on a new level.[22]

[22] This is not to say, of course, that no distinctions between humans and other species exist. But we need to think much more carefully about how to depict such distinctions *among* (not *from*) animals.