

Theological Fringes of Phenomenology

This book focuses on the relationships between phenomenology and theology, which have been varied and complex but seem currently in an inconclusive and loosely defined state. Methodological rigor is not much in evidence, and the two disciplines continue to defy any authoritative synthesis. While both disciplines grapple with questions concerning the fundamental structures of human experience, their relationship is troubled by the elusive roles of Revelation and faith, which threaten the scientific autonomy of philosophy on one side and disable theologians for consistent philosophical discourse on the other. This volume revisits that conundrum from various perspectives, as it at once repristinates some of the most vibrant points of encounter and opens possibilities for new beginnings. It begins with the theological musings into which leading phenomenologists have been drawn from the start, with special reference to Husserl, Heidegger, and Michel Henry, as well as backward glances to Fichte, Schelling, and Blondel. A second section takes up specific theological themes and examines how phenomenological approaches can refine thinking on them. These include the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Eucharist, Grace, and Prayer. A dialogue between phenomenology and classical theologians is staged in the third section: Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Eckhart, and Karl Rahner. The closing section ranges more widely, discussing atheism, non-realist theology, and Hinduism from phenomenological angles, and showing how these topics too come within the ambit of theology.

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Edited by Joseph Rivera and
Joseph S. O'Leary

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Acknowledgments

“To the matter itself,” “*Zu den Sachen selbst*” has been the watchword of phenomenology since its inauguration by Edmund Husserl. Though this project began with all the methodological conscientiousness of “a rigorous science,” keeping religious concerns at bay, phenomenology has proved remarkably porous to religion, long before the celebrated “theological turn in French phenomenology.” Indeed, even Husserl and Heidegger often sound like religious preachers or prophets, as of course do Emmanuel Levinas and Michel Henry. This volume offers a picture of the ways in which phenomenology today opens out onto religious and theological territory. The variety of philosophical approaches may indicate that the “matter itself” has become more elusive than ever, while the theological concerns exhibit comparable pluralism. The intersection of the two quests does not issue in a master narrative but is accomplished in each essay as in a mirror dimly.

We would like to thank our contributors for their diligent efforts to renew the debate, both in revisiting established authorities both phenomenological and theological, and in sketching original paths of inquiry. The resultant dialogue, stretching across the centuries and across a global community of thinkers, will hopefully open more questions than it resolves.

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Introduction

Phenomenology, Experience, and the Spiritual Life

Joseph Rivera

I. Phenomenology and the Given

The present volume exploration of phenomenology and theology exists in spite of, and because of, Heidegger's 1927 declaration (in his widely-read essay "Phenomenology and Theology") that each discipline patronizes wholly distinct and thus self-contained "sciences." Theology occupies territory that is regional and is therefore affiliated more with "chemistry or mathematics" (Heidegger's imprudent comparison) than with the broad reach of philosophy. This may well be, argues Heidegger, because theology (like chemistry or mathematics) concerns itself with particular styles or kinds of beings and not *being as such*; theology remains in essence, again according to Heidegger's narrow definition of the discipline, ontic rather than ontological. The honour of "ontological" is conferred on philosophy and philosophy alone: thus "there are two basic possibilities of science: sciences of beings, of whatever is, or ontic sciences; and *the* science of being, the ontological science, philosophy."¹ Phenomenology, the science of being par excellence, must occupy neutral space unto itself since it does not devote itself to any particular set of beings like other disciplines do. Hence Christian phenomenology is no less ridiculous and illogical than Protestant mathematics.²

Phenomenology, framed in this manner, must design its approach in accord with the most basic structure of the universe of beings, and is therefore comparable to something like a science free of all prejudice or perspective. Dominique Janicaud infamously amplifies the Heideggerian rhetoric into a hardened conflict of the faculties in which no complementarity between theology and phenomenology is genuinely possible. As academic disciplines they "make two," since one is interested and the other is disinterested. The chasm that separates them runs so deep that they speak entirely foreign languages with no prospect of real communication. The uncompromising conflict here serves to inhibit dialogue between philosophy and theology, and this rule must be unassailable if each discipline is to survive with the kind of integrity each demands. Is the Heidegger-Janicaud doctrine of neutrality right?

It appears not. Their protests notwithstanding, that phenomenology and theology continue to evolve in intimate relationship with one another is a fact

impossible to deny. One need only to consult recent publications in the form of monographs, articles, and other media. The chief challenge, of course, remains, and will remain for some time, the question of phenomenology's parameters. Philosophy, and by extension, phenomenology is neither theology nor religious studies. Universities underwrite and employ different departments and faculties for a good reason. But the question nevertheless persists: just what constitutes the boundaries of phenomenology and why does it remain so fertile as a form of address for theological questions?

Phenomenology focuses on the unveiling of the intricate contours of experience, and more specifically, it sets its lights upon the domain of first-person experience. While it constitutes a not yet uncontested philosophical school ramified into a variety of individual theses embodied in classic texts like Heidegger's *Being and Time* or Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* or Marion's *Being Given*, the goal of such systematic writings assumes the rigor of a single-minded aim: to investigate the first-person dimension of all experience, however many properties and indices such a dimension entails.

I encounter a painting. How do I experience it? I love another person. How do I embody that love? I remember and recall a childhood experience. How do I enact or re-pristiniate that event in the temporal flow of consciousness? More properly, all experiences just noted have at their disposal the first-person point of view as the universal ground, and hence, as justification for what Heidegger called a universal phenomenological ontology.³ Subsequent thinkers like Michel Henry also depict phenomenology as a school of philosophy that prescribes a universal ontology, but it is one always already rooted in the irreplaceable experience of the first-person singular. In so doing it seeks to discover the very being of the ego, and the "universal which it shows forth is a concrete terminus which each region of Being presupposes. [The ego] is Being itself."⁴ Such proposals are examples of prodigious ambition no doubt. And such philosophers who make these proposals publish works that reflect an ambition that serves the function not so much of a totalizing and rigid conceptual scheme but of an open-ended analysis of the dynamic nature of experience as the very condition for the possibility of humanity.

Phenomenology, strictly speaking, is universal only because it takes its point of departure (*point d'appui*) from lived experience, from the ego as that which unfolds from experience. To be human is to undergo, to suffer, and to be experienced. I do not "have" experiences; I am myself known and felt in experience, of myself, objects, other egos, and the world as such. Experience involves myself in my inmost singularity as this me immersed in a network of things imbued with my subjective meaning. Never am I found in theoretical knowledge or generic categories of *humanitas*, but rather I am given or discovered or revealed only in and through the undergoing and enduring of lived experience.

The relational structure of experience signifies that it necessarily arises from the experience of a phenomenon or a series of phenomena. It is therefore not surprising that a frequent refrain detectable in the writings of

phenomenologists is that the task of interpreting experience is at the same time the elucidation of a phenomenon's subjective form of givenness. How is the phenomenon given to me? How do I receive or encounter or enjoy an interchange with the phenomenon in question?

To answer such a query is to formulate a circular statement about the nature of experience. That is, phenomenology arises from phenomena precisely in the sense that an analysis presumes that concrete touchstone of "my" experience which it explores theoretically. As Michel Henry notes once more, phenomenological method embodies a universal ontology because it rests on the basic givenness of human experience as "mine" whereby I give to myself as this "me"—again, which is also at the same time the ground on which an analysis of universal being occurs. The very idea that individual experience is the ground of the universal is already implied in human experience as the condition for its possibility.⁵ We all experience feelings of awe and ultimacy, fear and anxiety, satisfaction and joy, and those basic ground moods are sufficient to justify the purpose of phenomenology. Namely: to extrapolate from this first-person singular experience a theory about the structure of experience in general. The key that unlocks a proper understanding of experience is my own experience itself.

Husserl insists that the "descriptive character of the phenomena, as experienced by us, alone furnishes the criterion" of the treatment of the basic structures of manifestation of experience.⁶ In the famed "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science" essay, he roots the rigor of phenomenology in the priority granted to experience as that which *gives* the basic grammar of phenomenological research: "One must, it was said, take phenomena as they give they give themselves... we must take phenomena as they turn this way or that, transforming themselves, according as the point of view or mode of attention changes in one way or another."⁷ To unveil the structure of experience the attentive philosopher is to take phenomena as they give themselves and follow their course of action, their dynamic movement. The disclosure of the universal essence of the structure of manifestation validates the claim that experience accomplishes the rigor necessary for a philosophical research programme that explores experience.

Individual experiences that are uniquely mine, however marginal, disclose essential relations we enjoy with the world and thereby disclose decisive evidence concerning the domain of the universal structure of experience; here the careful phenomenologist can discover correlations between being and individual experience: "For phenomenology, the singular is eternally the *apeiron*."⁸ With this epigrammatic statement Husserl indicates that the singular holds within it an index of the universal structure of human experience. All experience is "interested" or dispositional, or simply put, first-personal, and yet, it points to something more, the possibility of what may give itself to me.

The philosophical pursuit of the fundamental structures of the first-person structure of experience, too, requires a systematic phenomenology that

knows no bounds in what it considers to be a form of the given. How could phenomenology restrict itself to a certain region or kind of “scientific” experience if it endeavours to unveil the universal or the fundamental or the ultimate, the apeiron? Certainly, spiritual experience, religious experience, and formations of transcendence would be excellent candidates for the apeiron, would they not?

How, then, do we restrict what experiences are to be counted within the bounds of phenomenological research? Husserl indicates clearly that no such restrictions are to be put in place. In the *Cartesian Meditations*, he says that we must follow the *clue of the given* arriving from the outside, whatever the “given” may be. The implications for the very structure of the ego are substantial: the ego arises in relationship with “*any object whatever*” or “an open horizon of possible *objects of any sort*, as objects of possible consciousness.”⁹ The idea of “any object whatever” reflects the philosophical position that ego does not exist in itself, *solus ipse*. A properly phenomenological account of the ego states that the ego is manifest, is truly an ego, only in relationship with a wide array of givens.

The conclusion to invoke here is decisive, namely, the “clue of the given” formulates the heart of the principle of principles of phenomenology. A further conclusion must be drawn. No one type of given can be necessarily prioritized over any other type. If the field of givens is open to analysis, then no prejudice may exclude aesthetic, moral, or theological givens to be counted among legitimate objects of analysis.

Turning to Heidegger more positively, phenomenology amounts to a philosophical method without a disposition toward any particular kind of content. While a wide-open phenomenology is latent in Heidegger’s observation, one may quibble with this claim.¹⁰ Perhaps we may agree instead with Levinas when he suggests that the phenomenon is the content of phenomenology. We may well be justified in proposing the inverse of Heidegger’s formula: phenomenology is an analysis of content without a method.¹¹ The method itself, to be more precise, remains tied to the content under analysis. Perhaps we may in point of fact confirm that Levinas is a follower not of Heidegger, but of Husserl, in that the heart of phenomenology lies in the clue of the given, and that its method takes its point of departure from the content. The circularity of phenomenology formulates its movement in just the manner of genealogy: experience is studied only from the point of view of experience as such. The method of phenomenology takes its bearings from the phenomenon given to manifestation, and the structure of manifestation reflects the phenomenon’s dynamic movement. No theory, no prejudice, and no method intervene here. The phenomenon itself provides or carries within its emergence its own method whereby the phenomenon can determine the parameters of its own meaning.

Yet, there is one widespread and alluring prejudice that often prevents honest analysis of phenomena, be they ordinary or extraordinary, immanent or transcendent. What remains crucial for the phenomenological investigation

of any phenomenon is that it be carried out with a “completely free spirit blinded by no naturalistic prejudices.”¹² Some disagree, and a “naturalizing” of phenomenology has gained ground in some philosophical quarters recently, and this occurring beyond the polemic of Janicaud. According to my reading of Husserl, and phenomenology in his wake, the “rigor” of its practice demands that it privilege experience unfettered by scientific or naturalistic prejudice. Certainly, such a critique of naturalism intends to return our analysis back to the domain of the first-person singular, which means it is impossible to naturalize phenomenology.

Experience, however, it is given, *is* the ground of a universal being. Such a claim can only invoke the very idea that phenomenology must encounter and thereby celebrate the first-personal context of all experience. The singular, we recall, evokes more than its singularity, for it serves as an index of the universal. Phenomenology, in this sense, remains an egology that is tied to a wider social community of practice. Husserl once more writes, “As Ego, and with my own pure conscious life, in and by which the entire Objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me. Anything belonging to the world, any spatiotemporal being, exists for me - that is to say, is accepted by me in that I experience it, perceive it, remember it, think of it somehow, judge about it, value it, desire it, or the like.”¹³ The world exists “for me,” and yet, simultaneously, the world unfurls as a stage of manifestation for us all (what Husserl names as an objective world). A first-person singularity involves at the same time a community of others, a transcendental social setting in which my ego relates to the other community of egos—to the point that the other ego and the world from which it emerges is pregiven to me as an always already given background horizon that shapes the ego from the inside out.

Husserl in the extraordinary Fifth Meditation (his phenomenology of intersubjectivity) of his *Cartesian Meditations* challenges head on the idea that first-person singularity should be obligated to obey the snare of solipsism.¹⁴ While phenomenology regularly restricts analysis to the stream of lived experiences unique to this individual “me,” such a consideration need not be reduced to the contemplation of an isolated ego.

In fact, isolation arouses only a temptation for those who imagine the self or ego in the first place to occupy a pure “I” marooned within itself. We should frame the self, according to Husserl, under the design of community, a transcendental community of others in which the “I” develops only in relationship with the “alter ego” or the other. If the “I” abstracts itself out from the world of things and others and, from there, should try to adopt the phenomenological attitude (the focus on the first-person singular or the primordial sphere of ownness), then it does not follow that the “I” can isolate itself truly. It finds itself always in face-to-face interactions with the other ego. Even thematic exclusion of the ego does not destroy or eliminate the other ego. Rather such an attitude (thematic exclusion) reformulates the experience of the other who is “alien” [*fremde*] to my sphere simply as an experience “for me” always embedded in the world: “When we thus

abstract, *we retain a unitarily coherent stratum of the phenomenon world, a stratum of the phenomenon that is the correlate of continuously harmonious, continuing world-experience.*"¹⁵ That is, the world itself, populated by others and layers of cultural meaning, remains always there, on hand, as a pregiven horizon of possibilities by which I constitute myself in relation with that horizon. The world consists of a continuing stream of experience given to me at all times (no matter if I attempt to exclude or bracket it). Husserl writes, "objects are always present for us, pregiven in simple certainty before we engage in any act of cognition."¹⁶

We are, in this basic manner, always embedded in the world. And this state of affairs indicates for us here the notable reality that all experience singles out or makes explicit what is already latent as a "preliminary presence" [*Voranliegen*] installed in the background of our field of consciousness.¹⁷

It remains true for this particular volume, with its focus on theology and spirituality, that the universal remains relative to one's (non)theological and (non)religious assumptions about the world. What remains a "preliminary presence" in the liturgy for me may well not be for you. Here the great challenge a phenomenology of experience must meet is that experience itself yields neither to objective criteria nor to individualistic whims. Experience is shaped by the complex weave of the environment from which it arises. Hence "the environment is copresent as a *domain of what is pregiven, of a passive pregivenness, i.e., of what is always already there without any attention of a grasping regard, without any awakening of interest.*" And it "is this *universal ground of belief in a world* which all praxis presupposes... which is not first the result of an activity of judgment but which forms the presupposition of all judgment."¹⁸ A spiritual experience or liturgical act or moment of prayer, an encounter of forgiveness or mercy or grace in the present of the other, each of these events affects me, but it always affects me inasmuch as it stands out from an environment in which such events remain genuine possibilities to be actualized. This provokes the very conceptual setting of this volume: the definition and scope of experience in light of spiritual and theological frameworks that are pregiven.

Experience: In Search of a Problem

A phenomenology of the pregiven world, a passive set of assumptions about the operation and structure of the world, necessarily consists of a reflection of what we think is most basic about the human condition. The present volume emerges from a variety of theological assumptions about the world. This "belief" or "certainty" about the world's nature and horizon of possibilities trades not on the passive acceptance of theological and spiritual realities, but rather on the conviction that spiritual experience reflects a genuine possibility of lived experience. Here, the naturalistic and scientific attitude fades into the background as no longer the dominant paradigm of meaning-making.

Just what is experience recast in this spiritual light? One may argue many angles of entry into this query. For example, life experience refers us to the history of many episodes in our past. Oscar Wilde's quip highlights this: "Experience was of no ethical value. It was merely the name men gave to their mistakes."¹⁹ Hence "life experience" indicates that one may well have tried time and again to master a particular skill or institution, and after many failures and victories, one becomes "experienced," a well-worn Aristotelian paradigm of experience.²⁰

Another interpretation of experience has to do with the mind's disposition toward sense impressions. For the mind to operate as it should, as a thinking thing, as a philosophical norm would have it, is for it to be capable of sensation. Hume in his *Treatise* writes in this vein: it is "certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical"²¹ Of course just what sense experience may indicate or denote is a matter of unlimited debate. Does the mind passively receive information from the impression? Does the mind formulate a transcendental pattern into which the impression must fit?

"Experience," however it is construed, shall remain for some time a mysterious problem that continues to invite scrutiny from early modern philosophy to the present, most noticeable in the schools of phenomenology and existentialism of the twentieth-century. Going beyond the narrow confines of empiricist sense impressions, the curation of experience undergoes a largescale paradigm shift from the mind's interaction with sense data to embodied subjective experience lived in light of cultural norms. No doubt the mind shapes and thereby constitutes sense impressions. However, how does such constitution occur? In what manner?

Heidegger advances a case for a holistic picture of the self: being-in-the-world together with the conception of facticity. This vocabulary involves necessarily our hermeneutical set of assumptions that invest all experience with pregiven pragmatic norms. In a famous later analysis on the "thing," Heidegger helpfully redescribes experience according to the subject's cultural repertoire. Here the thing is understood as "this thing" with "this meaning" only within an exchange between the subject and thing in which the accent is placed firmly on the side of the subject's particular context. Such contextual factors involve gender, profession, cultural identity, geography, religious practice, etc. No longer consisting of mere transcendental categories that form and fashion data into a unit of experience (à la Kant), the mind consists of a whole host of categories, prejudices, and embodied suppositions. The subject conceived in this way arises according to the individual's holistic way of life. For example, the sun, as an object, appears to the shepherd in a manner distinct in kind from the sun of the astrophysicist. Following Heidegger, we need not make the sun a mere thing at the disposal of a single individual, and thus a product of subjectivism or solipsistic individualism. Rather the sun is true as this kind of sun for the shepherd because the community of

shepherds have deemed it so. By the same token, the sun's distinct truth is true only due to the conditions of truth established by the astrophysicist's community of practitioners.²² The conclusion is that both types of sun are genuine and true, but they reflect epistemic conditions relative to a particular community's perspective.

Experience, consisting of a halo of objects I live through, is therefore richly varied and contextual. This means, more precisely, that the study of experience properly conceived is as much a study of objects in their givenness as it is an investigation of the subject who experiences them. Experience emerges in the exchange between the subjective life of the ego and the objective world of things. Should I attend, as a phenomenologist, to the manner in which God is disclosed in this field of experience, what actually becomes apparent is not first and foremost God as such but rather the change of the recipient's former ways of "seeing" how objects exist. Once I exploit my spiritual aptitude, objects may indeed point to God. Thus, as one commentator notes, the "phenomenology of 'God' turns out to be a phenomenology of the human 'sight' of God."²³ We are "partners" in revelation of phenomena, theological or otherwise, as Levinas wisely observes.²⁴

A final foray into one aspect of phenomenology is needed here as prelude: the classic distinction in between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. The twofold structure of experience signified by this German nomenclature illuminates further the complex and layered texture of experience.²⁵ Early publications in Husserl's body of work tend to focus on the mental lived experience of particular phenomena in the domain of the streaming flow of consciousness, known as *Erlebnisse*. In *Ideas Book I*, Husserl highlights these lived encounters as "immanent psychic events" that occur within the are mental perceptions we can metaphorically "swim after" as they proceed through the cognitive stages or interior "acts of consciousness."²⁶ He indicates that his domain consciousness, absolute in its self-contained aseity, may well move phenomenological analysis of consciousness toward an analysis of the absolute of God in theology;²⁷ however, Husserl steers clear of theology.

While he admits parallels between phenomenology and theology, Husserl exercises the philosophical instinct to state repeatedly that human experience unfolds within ego's powers to be conscious "of" an object, and that the act of perceiving the object lies on the side of the subject. That is: the ego "constitutes" or gives shape to objects. In its autonomy and power of constitution, the ego can stand apart from the world and its many objects. For the ego who grasps intentional objects and thus "experiences" (*Erlebnis*) objects immanent to itself, it appears that such an intentional act (*Erlebnis*) occurs in an egological domain independent of culture.. Such a transcendental interpretation of the ego fades from Husserl's later writings. In the 1930s, especially in the *Crisis of European Sciences*, Husserl almost entirely drops *Erlebnis* (such experiences are denigrated as abstract psychic experiences) in favour of *Erfahrung*, which is a domain of experience reflective of the cultural and linguistic lifeworld into which every ego is born and thereby fundamentally shaped.²⁸

This volume will not situate these two types of experiences in oppositional terms. There is no reason why the immediate concrete experience of *Erlebnis* cannot also be integrated within a public, culturally-laden context of *Erfahrung*. It remains a truism to say that all experience has its particular subjective manner of givenness. But what remains also clear by now is that this subjective manner automatically invokes a whole host of cultural, religious, bodily, historical, and other hermeneutical factors.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger is obligated to overcome the early Husserl by placing these two types of experience within a paradigm of mutuality: our everyday environmental setting (*Erfahrung*) comes prior to, and thus sheds critical light on, the “immanent perceptions” (*Erlebnissen*) we enjoy of objects.²⁹

The lived experience, immanent to me in my irreplaceable encounter with an object, say a chair in front of me, is concrete but no less conditioned by context. The concrete nature of experience in the form of *Erlebnis* simply means the object is given to me “in itself” or “in person” as the English translators communicate Husserl’s word *Leibhaftig*. We prefer the French tradition of translating *Leibhaftig* as “in flesh and bone” (*en chair et en os*).³⁰ This semantic emphasis intends to espouse the position that the chair I encounter is given before me just as it is, in flesh and bone, there in all its concrete totality before me. It does not reduce the lived experience to an immanent mental process isolable from context (whose chair? In what room is it situated? What kind of chair? Is it functional for sitting or is it a piece of art in a museum?). Rather it serves to emphasize that the lived experience relies on the concrete totality of my embodied encounter with the chair, and the publicness in which that takes place (*Erfahrung*).

Husserl declares that *Erfahrung* originates in prepredicative experience, a primitive layer of passive pregiven knowledge.³¹ This pregiven environment lay in the background of my cognition specific to an object. I grasp a particular object, say again, that chair in the corner of the room. The room, however, contains an expansive horizon of unknown determinations that open up further possibilities explicable once they are thematized. But even though the pregiven world is already apprehended in advance to a degree, it necessarily remains given only in part, and my experience or *Erfahrung* of the chair remains a mystery insofar as many more possibilities as yet undetermined can affect us, shedding further light on the chair. For example, we could say we know the chair is in a living room, so we surmise it is a sitting chair in the corner. We also know it is my grandmother’s heirloom chair made with special fabric, so we further surmise it reflects more of a decorative furniture piece than a functional sitting chair. That information is given to me without my intentionally grasping it. The background horizon of my knowing the chair’s context penetrates and thus fully frames the chair upon my encounter with it.

Imagine you are in a place where you can receive a sacrament, say bread and wine, as it is given in flesh and bone in a Christian liturgical setting. Or

perhaps you are under the force of an icon in a liturgical setting. What about the concept of God formed in the experiential context of community prayer? Such spiritual experiences, rooted in sacraments, liturgy, and religious practice, suggest that experience if properly interpreted, trades on the horizontal context in which it arises and takes shape. The subjective dynamic of a liturgy unfolds, phenomenologically speaking, as *Erlebnis* for the individual, not as private mental ecstasy, but as contextual experience, *Erfahrung*. Experience functions in this layered or tiered fashion, with horizons of possibilities that open up halos of particularity once the experience is thematized within the horizon.

Experience, then, assumes this layered semantic meaning in which lived experience unique to me (*Erlebnis*) is intelligible only within the broader pregiven context in which the object makes sense and is made manifest (*Erfahrung*). Spiritual experiences explicated in light of theology and phenomenology, or feelings of awe and wonder, secular though they can be, all involve both layers or tiers of experience. Indeed, the layered structure of experience brings to light the very expansive definition of the given that we seek to uncover in this volume. Not thematizable in the traditional sense, spiritual experience invites us to proceed backwards. The more we pay its debt, the more it increases. The more the mystery of the transcendent, the more mystery increases. By returning to phenomena which dwell at the limit, the immanent glows with the transcendent. This volume discovers a whole already pregnant with an irreducible meaning inherent in the particular. Experience reflects not a series of incomplete sensations between which retentions and protentions would have to oscillate, but rather the physiognomy of the landscape of mystery developing “in” the world.

Theological Themes, Figures, Debates

The volume analyses from a phenomenological point of view an array of themes, figures, and debates. Divided into these three subsections, many of the essays approach its topic from a Judeo-Christian perspective. However, we have included in a fourth section other religious voices as well as secular and religious studies perspectives. Some essays are of course more philosophical than theological, and vice versa.

The opening salvo comes from the pen of James G. Hart, an elder statesman in the tradition of phenomenological theology and an expert in Husserl studies. His sketch of lived experience fleshes it out in much more detail and proficiency than what has been discussed above, especially with reference to Michel Henry and Edmund Husserl. Section I overall is committed to the task of uncovering the basic relationship between experience and phenomenology and ultimately between phenomenology and spiritual/theological experience. Figures like Husserl, Heidegger, and Henry are explored in detail.

Emmanuel Housset’s essay mines untapped sources in Husserl in order to discuss the prospects of an idea of God in the founding father of

phenomenology; this essay is particularly important as a counterbalance to the generous attention paid to theological themes in Heidegger. Maria Vilella-Petit takes the reader on a journey through Christian ethics reframed from a Husserlian point of view. Shifting from Husserl to his student, Joeri Schrijvers invokes the later Heidegger (subsequent to the *Kebrer*) so that we may better grasp the relationship between Christianity, phenomenology, and the holy in this phase. Schrijvers consequently highlights just how Heidegger wrestled with Christian theology in a bid to reach a suggestive and furtive post-Christian conception of the holy. Joseph S. O'Leary's careful reading of Heidegger's critical gloss on Schelling's reflections on God and being enables the attentive reader to draw out important nuances about Heidegger's phenomenology of being. Frédéric Seyler continues with the comparison between German Idealism and twentieth-century phenomenology: Henry's recovery of Fichte's conception of the ego and God. The interplay between the two thinkers leads to a renewed understanding of the interior domain of the ego as a space in which the divine may well dwell—a phenomenology of the invisible.

The conceptual and thematic heart of the volume, [Part II](#), makes certain demands on the reader: some grounding in hallowed Christian doctrines is recommended. The eucharist, Incarnation, and Resurrection are covered in some depth. We also envisage that the reader be conversant with virtues like gift, suffering, patience, and joy, and with theological art and iconography.

Tamsin Jones' acute analysis of incarnation from a phenomenological vantage point articulates two competing paradigms of incarnate existence: the saturation of vision stated in the work of Jean-Luc Marion and the inward flesh of auto-affection, where Christ dwells in each of us, given voice by Michel Henry. Brian Robinette takes the resurrection narratives and the empty tomb moment as an event that is not historically verifiable or objectively reported, but rather eye-witness accounts open to phenomenological interpretation. Attentive to biblical studies and contemporary theology, Robinette's essay also engages with Marion's phenomenology of excess in this bold attempt to reframe the resurrection.

Christina Gschwandtner and Bruce Benson explore the sacramental dimension of lived experience occupied before God. Gschwandtner shows how phenomenology is the appropriate philosophical method to explore the experiential dynamics of ritual, especially the eucharist (as an exemplar among many other types of ritual). Benson discusses how a phenomenology of liturgy, informed by Lacoste and Chrétien, can enable each of us to become living works of art who improvise our identity within a given structure.

Jason Alvis explores the gift as a form of grace. Spanning several theological texts and phenomenological thinkers, the gift is given in a non-reciprocal manner so that personal connection, belonging, and freedom can be established, precisely because the gift is not abstract but rather an interpersonal phenomenon made concrete once exchanged between persons. Aaron

Simmons takes up the theme of patience and kenosis with a nod to our contemporary setting, all while appropriating three timeless figures in Henry, Kierkegaard, and Chrétien.

Jeff Bloechl articulates within the parameters of Husserlian phenomenology the distinction between pain and suffering. In this meticulous analysis, Bloechl argues that suffering needs to be neither meaningless nor grounds for dismissal of belief in God. Robyn Horner discusses the virtue of joy in light of both the Christian tradition and the phenomenologies of Lacoste, Chrétien, Marion, and Romano.

Part III invokes several important theological voices who are brought into constructive dialogue with the phenomenological tradition. Vincent Giraud utilizes several texts in Augustine to unearth a phenomenology of time, with some phenomenological reflections incorporated from Derrida and Romano in particular. Ysabel de Andia discusses the prospects of a phenomenology later in Denys the Areopagite. Jean Greisch's expansive essay on Meister Eckhart enables the reader to see connections between mystical detachment and phenomenological reduction. A modern giant, Karl Rahner, is judiciously investigated phenomenologically by Peter Fritz.

The final part reformulates phenomenology from a variety of angles of entry: religious studies, other religious traditions, and the otherness of the other in Derrida and Levinas. Jacob Rogozinski proposes that the being of God in the phenomenology of religion needs to orient itself toward the human call laid upon God. God does not so much call as us as we invoke God in prayer and petition. Figures like Marion, Henry, and Ricoeur are framed in light of invocation. Colby Dickinson reintroduces with fresh language the Derridean concept of religion without religion. Nikolaas Deketelaere offers the reader a pathway through the disciplinary debate of theology versus religious studies, and shows where the phenomenology of religion might be situated within that debate. And finally, Hinduism and phenomenology come into dialogue. While other religious traditions, especially Buddhism and Judaism, would have been welcome here in this section (and we did seek out contributions), Olga Louchakova-Schwartz highlights exemplarily how other religious traditions, especially non-western traditions, can shed light on the phenomenology of religion.

Notes

- 1 Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, trans. and ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 42.
- 2 Heidegger, *Basic Problems in Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 20.
- 3 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John McQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Blackwell, 1962), p. 62. Heidegger writes programmatically: "Ontology and phenomenology are, not two distinct philosophical disciplines among others. These terms characterize philosophy itself with regard to its object and its way of treating that object. Philosophy is universal phenomenological ontology,

- and takes its departure from the hermeneutic of Dasein, which, as an analytic of existence, has made fast the guiding-line for all philosophical inquiry at the point where it arises and to which it returns.”
- 4 Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 11.
 - 5 Henry writes, “Insofar as it is the application of the phenomenological method to the problem of the essence of the phenomenon, phenomenology moves in a circle. This is the sign of its absolute character. This absolute character of the problematic which it inaugurates does not mean that phenomenology is without presupposition. Rather it admits a fundamental presupposition insofar as this presupposition is the foundation itself, the absolute. Phenomenology is an inquiry which aims at clarifying its own foundation, it is a reflection upon itself. Phenomenology is its own object.” Henry, *Essence of Manifestation*, p. 56.
 - 6 Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Vol. 2*, trans. J.N. Findlay and ed. Dermot Moran (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 338.
 - 7 Husserl, “Philosophy as a Rigorous Science,” in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of philosophy*, ed. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 108–109.
 - 8 Husserl, “Philosophy as a Rigorous Science,” p. 116.
 - 9 Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p. 52.
 - 10 Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, p. 20.
 - 11 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), p. 81.
 - 12 Husserl, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” p. 119.
 - 13 Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 21.
 - 14 Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 89.
 - 15 Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, pp. 96–73.
 - 16 Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, trans. James Churchill and Karl Ameriks (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 19), p. 29.
 - 17 Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, p. 29.
 - 18 Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, p. 30. Obviously much can be made here also of Heidegger’s analysis of pragmata and environment in *Being and Time*.
 - 19 Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 52.
 - 20 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 111.
 - 21 Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 5.
 - 22 Heidegger, *What is a Thing?* trans. W.B. Barton and Vera Deutsch (South Bend: Gateway Editions, 1967), pp. 27–29.
 - 23 Claudia Welz, “God—A Phenomenon?” *Studia Theologica: Nordic Journal of Theology* 62 (2008): 4–24, reference on p. 18.
 - 24 Levinas, *Discovering Existence with Husserl and Heidegger*, trans. Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), pp. 97–99.
 - 25 Use Gadamer on “historical Sense” of *Erfahrung* versus *Erlebnis*, see Hans-Georg Gadamer *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), pp. 60–68.
 - 26 Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, Book I*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 2, 62. The swimming metaphor is p. 84.
 - 27 Husserl, *Ideas Book I*, p. 99.

- 28 Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 13, fn. 2.
- 29 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 226.
- 30 See, for example, Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1989), §40. The French version of the *Cartesian Meditations* translates the expression 'leibhaftig' as *en chair et en os* (in flesh and bone), while the English translates it as *in person*. The French rendering better preserves the idiomatic emphasis of *Leib* in German. See *Husserliana*, I, p. 139; *Méditations cartésiennes et les conférences de Paris*, trans. Marc de Launay (Paris: PUF, 1994), p. 157; the first translation of the *Meditations* into French was undertaken by Emmanuel Levinas in 1930, see *Méditations cartésiennes: Introduction à la phénoménologie*, trans. Gabrielle Pfeiffer and Emmanuel Levinas (Paris: Vrin, 1930). For the English, see *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, p. 109.
- 31 Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, pp. 28–40.

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Part I

**Phenomenologists in
Theological Mode**

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1 Lived Experience and Faith

Transcendental Phenomenological Prolegomena

James G. Hart

The theological tradition has a kind of consensus that God cannot be properly experienced or properly conceived. For example, it is rather commonly held that only God can know Godself; or that by reason we know that God is, not what God is; or that one can know what God is not, not what God is; or that if there is communication between human persons and God, e.g., a revelation, the initiative has to be with God; or that 'experience' properly is of sensible things in the world and God by essence transcends these. As a consequence of this consensus, we are thrown back on lived experience as the soil in which faith takes root. Much contemporary (after Blondel) Catholic theology already incorporates the phenomenological themes of horizontal knowing and lived experience in its explication of how there might be a fundamentally non-conceptual, pre-thetic, and pre-linguistic understanding of God whereby God's 'presence' may work in tacit implicit ways.

For St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure the great *ego eimi* of the Gospel of John (8:58; 13:19) as it echoed Exodus 3:14 found an indestructible trace in the human intellect as an image of God, an indelible structure darkened but never destroyed by sin. In modern theology, this *ego eimi* has again become relevant to the self-understanding of human persons.

For transcendental phenomenology the 'I' which remains intact after the reduction is a unique but fundamental 'datum.' But it is not *given* in the stream of acts nor is it an evident objective component of acts. Furthermore, not only is that which is manifest objectively present 'to me' but the entire array of mental acts is 'egoic' in the sense that although 'I' am non-objectively present, I still am 'this side' of all acts as the identical pole and agent of the acts. Each act shoots forth anew from me and my attending or regard goes through each act to that which is manifested.¹ In short the I is immanent throughout the life of intentionality by way of being the transcendent agent of this stream of activities and passivities. Husserl calls this a transcendence in immanence.

Thus consciousness is essentially first-personal or 'egoic.' For this reason, we may say that all second- and third-person experiences are always also first-person ones: In my loving you my attention is wholly directed toward you, not me, but this loving is not unconscious. Similarly, the scientist's

conducting (and/or articulating the meaning and results of an) experiment is utterly non-autobiographical. In love as well as in the case of the scientist, there is a concentration on what is other than oneself. In the scientific case, it is the concentration on the hypothetical, observational, conceptual, and concluding conformational moments of this experiment. Yet as absorbing as these moments are, they are not the achievement of a zombie or computer but of a thoughtful scientist 'unself-consciously' conducting the 'lived' but not objective moments of the experiment.

Consider how in our everydayness we speak of someone being conscious (self-present, capable of saying 'I') when we mean also 'awake' and 'being there,' not 'asleep' or 'out of it,' so the being-experienced of, e.g., a perception refers to the 'thatness' or 'thereness' of its being experienced by someone. Just as there is no intentional act, e.g., perception, which is not experienced by someone, the being-experienced of our intentional life suggests a peculiar self-presence of our intentional life, a non-objective 'thatness' and 'mineness,' i.e., its being experienced by me or what is experienced is present to me.

The person coming out of sleep or a coma 'comes to herself,' 'comes out of it' and is back, self-luminous and present with us. All these words here in scare-quotes suggest the odd sense of talking about that which is the condition for all normal senses of 'that,' 'there,' etc. This being alive to ourselves which consciousness or lived experience is reminds us of how the theme of 'wakefulness' like the themes of consciousness and manifestness go in advance of all other meaningful hetero-manifestations for the observer or phenomenologist.

The absence of consciousness (or of 'lived-experience') is the absence of our being in the world and of our existence. As we cannot make present our eventual non-being to ourselves so our being absolutely unconscious eludes being presented to us; but because our self-presence is the condition for everything else, singling out that which everything presupposes, i.e., the core sense of consciousness, requires odd and novel reflections and analyses.

We have said that experiencing as hetero-manifestation is always already an experienced-experiencing, a lived-pre-intellectual, pre-intentional manifestation of oneself as an agent of manifestation. The non-objective self-manifestation of oneself is a manifestation of the *knowability* of one's intellectual being in the world in the meaning-giving activity of intentional acts ('experiences'). The unique pre-givenness of the intentional act/experience as 'being-there' means it is there as a possibility for knowing. An essential feature of the life of the mind in intentional acts is that it is itself knowable. The lived experiencing itself is not yet this *knowing*. Rather the lived experiencing brings about the knowability by rendering the intentional experience (and sensations) as temporally extended objects. They are now, but the now when the past is still retained, there to be known just as the not yet now is 'protended' as not yet, and the present now is known now as what before was not yet known. Because the experience when past is retained and not annihilated, it is there still in the present for me to reflect on and know in

a proper sense, e.g., it is present as a substrate of predication. This temporal extension of the acts of the life of the mind is the work of the transcendental I's basic functioning, its world-experiencing life. This foundation of the world-life is the field of hetero- and self-presence brought into being by the primal I's letting stream away which is also a holding together.²

Thus this field (of the proto-presence of being) is always also an amazing fact of self-communing/communalization in as much as my present/presence is ineluctably the central setting for a flowing co-presence of the passing now (or what went before) and what is to follow. I do nothing to bring about this ever expanding and receding stream of self-presencings and co-presencings and absencings. Nevertheless, they are the intimate condition for 'my life,' my egoic being. Egoic being of necessity requires that I remain identically I, thus transcendent to the flow of my changing experiences, all of which have temporal duration and unity centered in my presenting my presents, retaining my no-longer presents, so that I can recall what I experienced and did. I am blessed with a consistency of the coursing and interlacing of the moments of 'my life' which is not of my doing but of which I am incessantly a beneficiary, even in my freely chosen inconsistencies.

The Lived Experience of the Divine Presence in Living

In *L'action* (1893) Maurice Blondel explored the dimension of the lived experience of life in a 'proto-phenomenological' manner that significantly affected much of Catholic philosophical theology. 'Action' in this 'phenomenology of experience' is co-extensive with life, in both its practical and theoretical dimensions. Here the 'restlessness of the heart' (St. Augustine) is brought to prominence by bringing out a dynamism deeper than intellect or will. This is manifest in a sentiment of the mystery of being always hinted at in what we make present and what is absent. Indeed, in this dynamism of living, we encounter an immense expectation in the form of a permanent absence. This absence does not appear, i.e., it is not something we can convert to a present presence, but without it the things appearing would not be, and yet without the appearing beings, we would not know this absence. It turns out that what we do, we do for something other than we think, and in all our doing there is a hidden surplus of intention.³ The motor of this dynamism of endless presencing and absencing Blondel called the 'willing will' which goes in advance of all acts of willing and thinking.

Husserl similarly is prepared to subsume all of life, including the life of the mind, under a general sense of will understood as a tendency or propulsion of spirit. Consciousness similarly is dynamic, a striving, tendency, and of course for both thinkers the life of consciousness is a constant synthesizing, of the appearings of what appears as well as of the desires, tendencies, and willings. Husserl called this position 'universal voluntarism.' As with Blondel, life is pervaded by a *latent general will* which accompanies each willing, each willed will, every act. In both thinkers this dynamism of the general will

aspires to include each and every intersubjectivity in a 'unified striving for perfection.'

The metaphysical foundation of this striving is named by Husserl the 'teleological idea(s) or 'ideal pole-idea(s).' The idea is not merely an ideal object which exists only in the mind, nor is it a mere projection or 'function' of the mind, as with the Kantian regulative idea, even though it is teleological and infinite in terms of the extension of its 'regulation' of the agency of manifestation as well as of practice. Indeed, one might argue that it is, *pace* Kant, not merely regulative but also constitutive of the very essence of mind in its intellectual and volitional capacities as well as of the ongoing emergent sense of 'world.' Like C.S. Peirce's 'true ideal' it is a 'Living Power' that attracts us irresistibly and not something non-actual and merely accounted for as a result of some inquiry or evolution process.⁴ Husserl transforms Scholasticism's notion of 'transcendentals,' i.e., *verum, unum, et bonum*, as the notions convertible with objective being (*ens*), and extends the sense of these transcendentals to also encompass the constitutive a priori of the intellectual informing of the transcendental I and consciousness. These transcendentals are that 'toward which each being is bound, and toward which all transcendental subjective life, as living toward a life constituting truth.'⁵ With Blondel Husserl names this underlying 'towards-which' of the deep will constitutive of human consciousness 'God.' For Husserl, its teleological status is signified by naming it the divine 'ideal pole-idea' and as absolute Logos and absolute Truth. This is not an essence as a finite determinate region of being, a *topos* within the larger horizon of the *kosmos noetos*; nor is it a morphological essence as an essential invariant emergent out of the flux of experience; thus it is not an *Eidos*, but something which is essentially in no relativity of situations, indeed an essence without horizontality which bears all true being in itself. Indeed it is trans-being *Über-Wahrheit, Über-Wirklichkeit*, i.e., what cannot become adequately present. It is exemplarily being and reality in ways not commensurate with all senses immanent within the infinite horizon of the world.

The result of being constituted by such a teleological idea with its analogous equivalents in terms of the true and the good, is that each person is 'theomorphic.' Although each is busy with the details of experience, evaluating, emoting, being pulled here and there, and planning, she *never arrives at a state of true and complete satisfaction*. The same must be said of the concrete actual historical communities of people living in the streaming of time and the world.⁶ The world comes to light through the agency of manifestation of wakeful persons; but this transcendental subjectivity itself is incessantly under the sway of this universal 'world-moving' will/Idea and this may be said to be what creates the world.

The key to Husserl's metaphysics as it emerges out of reflection on lived experience is the 'divine entelechy.' Entelechy is not merely a 'teleological idea' but is also an immanent formal constitutive principle within: *en-telechein*: Subjectivity has its *telos* within in a way which is not yet complete, The

phenomenological absolute of consciousness with its primal I constituting the world points to the absolute absolute or 'second absolute,' but phenomenology gets at it only from the functioning of divine entelechy as functioning at the heart of transcendental consciousness (the first absolute) in its constitution of the world. As the divine principle as Idea transcends subjectivity in a way transcendent to the transcendence of the world, so the divine absolute is absolute in a totally different way than consciousness is absolute, and transcendent in a totally different way than the transcendental I transcends (and is immanent to) the flux of experience.⁷ The conceptual difficulties come out especially when one learns that prayer is not directed outwards but within to the entelechial presence, i.e., to God as both the whence and the whither of transcendental life.

Transcendental human consciousnesses are informed by entelechies (see especially the texts in *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*) such that God creates the natural world and persons from below in a perpetual creating through a lure rooted in the infinite ideas. But this 'creating' from within and below is not explicitly *ex nihilo*. It is the grounding of the 'amazing' temporal coursing of 'my life' which is not of my doing but of which I am incessantly a beneficiary.

Thus Husserl can echo Aquinas in claiming that the religious person of faith has an 'original experienced relation to God' in the context of an original perception of values in the world whereby she knows herself to be addressed not by an external God, but rather, by God as intuited in herself as originally one with her. Therefore she knows herself as an 'embodiment of the divine light itself' and as a mediator of the proclamation implanted in her by the divine being.⁸

In the analyses of Blondel and Husserl, this religious articulation of the person of faith is adumbrated in reflection on one's lived experience of living one's life. Blondel invented the term 'agnition' for one's awakening to the mandate to live one's life authentically as a moral agent. This involves the necessity of recognizing the essential hierarchy of duties among the truths by which one ought to orient one's judgment in order to govern one's life. Indeed, this awakening is an affirmation of our directing ideas as these ideas lead thought spontaneously on the basis of the *nisus* of the willing-will, prior to any decision we are about to make.⁹

This parallels Husserl's retrieval of the Platonic and Augustinian notion of 'anamnesis'¹⁰ which is not a mere remembering, but, through reflection, a bringing to light the deep originating-guiding forces in play, especially what he calls the 'teleological infinite ideas.' This is an explication of the pre-reflective lived experience of life which brings to light the hidden workings of the general will in thinking and willing. Husserl observes that the process of life is one wherein one is constantly driven, desiring, wishing, striving after goals, fighting and resisting blind impulses, encountering the irrational facities and surds that pervade much of life, etc. In this reflection, there comes to light the necessary motivating functions of life in terms of the meaning

of the hidden striving and hidden tasks, obligations, and universal encompassing goal. Again foremost among these forces are the infinite ideas. This reflection for Husserl has also intrinsically to do with one's unique calling, one's 'absolute ought.' In the framework of the universal voluntarism (and the equivalent of the 'willing-will') this is the explication of the 'truth of one's will.' This has a unique epistemic status which admits of revisability, but always within the trajectory of authentic self-discovery of who one is and one's uniquely unique calling.

The Formal Motive of the Act of Faith and the Divine Entelechy

If the starting point is consciousness, and consciousness is consciousness of..., and this latter is always already a consciousness of being as what precedes and founds all acts of consciousness, i.e., as what is present in advance of all intentional acts and present in the very acts themselves as 'conscious,' lived, etc., then human consciousness is the original self-luminous agency of the manifestation of being; therefore there is an original unity between the radical intention or questioning or willing of being and being's original intelligibility or potentiality to be manifested by human consciousness. If one grants this, then from the very start consciousness has an infinite extension (by being constituted by a theomorphic entelechy in conformity with the constitutive infinite ideas). And yet, at the very start, it is without comprehension or intension, i.e., at the beginning embryonic stages it knows no beings as such even though its *nisus* is to the infinite truth of beings. Thus we may side with Heidegger and his followers: Human being in its latent general willing is fundamentally the question of being.

The teleological idea of infinite Truth is constitutively present as the 'light of being,' i.e., as the *a priori* by which we, as intellectual beings, are conscious, self-luminous, and inseparably conscious of..., and thus under the sway of 'first truths/principles' by and through which we bring beings to light truthfully. Thus there is the 'first truth' of being-conscious (self-luminous), which is always already and inseparably consciousness of being, i.e., it is aware indeterminately of true being in its infinite extension, and the first-truth is present implicitly from the start.¹¹

The notion of God as the 'First Truth' is at the center of St. Thomas' theory of the foundation of the act of faith. One's apprehending 'the First Truth' is the beginning of the act of faith. Thus the key philosophical-theological issue for Catholic theology is the lived experience of the 'formal motive' of the act of faith. This involves the creature presencing God in a way commensurate with the incommensurability which is the finite grasp of the infinite. The inextinguishable character of *imago dei* means there is a participation of the human intellectual light in the divine light, and thus a kind of divine-human connaturality. For orthodox Catholic theology, neither Barthian heteronomy nor atheist-agnostic autonomy are possible theological positions. For Augustine, Aquinas, and Bonaventure the evident position seems to be found at

least in the constitutive presence of truth, and thus, in some difficult, delicate, sense, God as the 'First Truth' is present to human consciousness.

St. Thomas focuses the issue with his understanding of: 'No one comes to me unless the Father draw him' (John 6:44). What does it mean to recognize the initiative of God's luring as such which requires a distinctive obedience by which the person freely gives her whole self to God upon experiencing this initiative. How is a person, gesture, experience, message, story, doctrine, command, etc., inerrantly perceived *as* certified by God? Vatican Council I (Session 3, [Chapter 3](#)) opposed the resolution by 'autonomy' when it proclaimed that faith, as the beginning of salvation, is a supernatural virtue. This virtue is the means by which, 'with the grace of God inspiring and assisting us, we believe to be true what He has revealed, not because we perceive its intrinsic truth by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of Godself who makes the revelation and can neither deceive nor be deceived.'¹² Yet surely the inerrant recognition of the truth that it is Godself revealing is not to be understood in the totally heteronomous sense of Barth whereby self-certainty is replaced by God-certainty, human truth by God's truth, and where presumably first-person awareness gives place to the certainty of the divine Other of Itself.¹³

St. Thomas wrestles with this matter in quasi-phenomenological ways. His solution to the question of the formal motive of the act of faith is that the person consents to being drawn 'instinctually' toward the First Truth as such. This notion of 'instinct' has layers of meaning but these may here be understood as 'empty intentions' analogous to and inseparable from the desire for happiness and truth, where both are present from the start in an implicit, indeterminate but constitutive way. That is, they are constitutive of the human spirit or soul. St. Augustine captured the essence of the human's essential dynamism as an empty intention awaiting consummating fulfilment with his exclamation (in *Confessions* I, 1): 'Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.' At the beginnings of wakeful consciousness, there is an indeterminateness in regard to the formal objects of truth and goodness (as transcendental modes of being) but there is no actual, proper determination of this indeterminacy, only the *nisus* toward such. That is, initially the *eros* of spirit is toward what is indeterminate and unlimited, because it (as yet) has no particular individual objects. Eventually, life is lived with filled intentions of what is true and good, but none of these adequately saturate the constitutive formal/ideal intention. The indeterminateness is suggested by Augustine with the familiar reflection: Think of the shifting and numerous candidates for happiness for any person in the course of her life. St. Thomas builds on this his own thought experiment: Consider the case of seeing and awaiting someone coming who happens to be Peter without knowing it is Peter. This may still be said to be a case of seeing and awaiting Peter coming. But the filling of the empty intention which enables its proper determination and recognition awaits the moment of Peter being present 'in person.'

For Thomas faith begins with the consenting to the gracious 'interior instinct' filling the empty intention. This resembles what Husserl means by the awakening in us of the 'transcendental infinite idea' rather than something whose fulfillment is tied to our biological life in the world. In phenomenological terms it is in a broad sense a 'drive' interwoven in the 'latent will-horizon' (which can be rendered also as *nisus* or calling). This is not a 'natural' instinct or impulse to the, e.g., divine presence or connection to this word or event but, for St. Thomas, here is the supernatural event of Godself's urging one's assent to a truth not accessible to mere reason or natural perception.¹⁴ Yet the person herself recognizes not only its indubitable truthfulness but also the goodness attached to assenting to it. Thus the moment founding faith is itself a 'mystical' event insofar as Godself, who alone can access the heart, will, and intellect, is identifiably lived in a deeply first-personal way. But we may say that 'God' is not present as an object but more like the way the true and the good are present pervading inevitably one's life in regard to one's innermost dynamisms (intellect and will). But here these are present with extraordinary exemplifications which merit ascription of the property of 'supernatural.'

One way to grasp this interplay of the natural and supernatural is to recall Aquinas' view that a free act as such, which the human response in the case of faith is, is not strictly itself that of an unmoved mover but rather, in terms of a creationist metaphysics, the act has an exterior principle which is both above and immanent within human consciousness, i.e., God.¹⁵ And even though a typical free act is moved by, e.g., deliberation, ultimately the cause of the motion of the will cannot proceed to infinity but stems from an 'instinct' of something exterior moving it; but what works within the will is both the will itself and the cause of the being of the will which is God alone. And the only object which moves the will necessarily is that with which the creator endows it and to which it moves with a natural inclination; this is the Thomist equivalent of the general will in correlation and response to the transcendental infinite teleological idea.¹⁶ Yet the gracious interior instinct to the First Truth builds on this natural teleological idea, and enables the person to act (e.g., permitting oneself to be drawn or to assent). Yet this act cannot be done without the gracious divine presence urging the will. Thus this gracious being drawn by the interior instinct is not only an experience of what otherwise is not possible but also present as a case of the 'blessed necessity of the Good.' And besides being an experience of what is 'supremely and surpassingly good for me' it is also a manifestation of the unique 'authority' of this witness. Thus the believer 'knows how good it is for him to give himself in this way to the truth of faith' as this goodness and truth are tied to, e.g., the preached message.¹⁷

Another way of saying this is that the grace of 'the light of faith' works through the natural light which is the necessary medium of consciousness itself and the first principles constitutive of it and which cannot be denied and compel our allegiance. God revealing Godself in the light of faith is

the First Truth and Principle by which we judge everything but now Godself is obscurely present as the creator of our self-luminosity and agency of manifestation.¹⁸

This light of faith must be thought of as part of God's drawing us to Godself. But it is also a manifesting of what is revealed without this light itself being something manifested. In faith's beginning, one responds freely to this attraction and lives its illumination non-reflexively and non-discursively. This implicit awareness of illumination is never completely separate from a potential propositional articulation of the light and attraction of the interior instinct. The divine presence is mediated by this 'truth' to which one assents as the supreme good. But it is present in a lived, intuitively felt, way, not on the basis of evidence gained from analysis or inference. This presence is not at all adequately given but suffused with absence, and it is present as what one must aim for, and for which one must hope. Because the grace of the interior instinct is so intimately joined to one's general will to the good and the true, it may be said to be tied to an experience of a 'connaturality': One always already participates in this divine light of being and one is always already drawn to 'the Good.' And although the grace of faith gives substance to the hopes which grace awakens and for which grace provides certainty in regard to the perceptually absent realities (Hebrews 11:1), nevertheless in the absence of prayer, but especially love, it is hollow and dead (1 Corinthians 13).

Notes

- 1 Husserl, *Ideen I*, §57.
- 2 See Klaus Held, *Lebendige Gegenwart* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1966), *passim*.
- 3 Maurice Blondel, *Action* (1893), Fr. 228; Eng. Trans., 218. For more detail, see my 'Husserl and Blondel: A Continuation of the Conversation.' *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 58 (1996), 490–518.
- 4 See Donna M. Orange, *Peirce's Conception of God*, (Lubbock, Texas: Institute for Studies in Pragmatism, 1984), 70.
- 5 Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, Husserliana XLII, 250.
- 6 Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität III*, Husserliana XV, 404–405.
- 7 See the hints at this position in Husserl, *Ideen I*, §58 and the note appended to §51.
- 8 Husserl, *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922–1937)*, Husserliana XXVII, 65; cf. also *Grenzprobleme*, e.g., 177 and 236.
- 9 Maurice Blondel, *L'action I: Le problème des causes secondes et le pur agir*, 261–262; and *L'action II: L'action humaine et les conditions de son aboutissement*, 410.
- 10 Husserl, *Grenzprobleme*, Husserliana XLII, 87 and 176–177.
- 11 'The truth by which the soul judges all things is the First Truth. For just as from the truth of the divine intellect there flows into the intellect of angels the innate species or quiddities of things according to which the angel knows all things, so there proceeds from the truth of the divine intellect into our intellect the truth of the first principles according to which we judge all things. And because of this we cannot help judging in accord with what is a likeness of the divine truth and so we may be said to judge all things according to the divine truth.' St. Thomas, *De Veritate*. q. 1, a.4, ad 5.

- 12 Henricus Denziger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 493.
- 13 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* V/1 222–223.
- 14 For an excellent discussion see Juan Alfaro, SJ, ‘Supernaturalitas Fidei iuxta S. Thomam,’ *Gregorianum*, 44 (1963), 501–542, 731–787; also Edward Schillebeeckx, OP, ‘The Non-Conceptual Intellectual Element in the Act of Faith: a Reaction,’ in his *Revelation and Theology*, II, 30–78.
- 15 St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 109, a.2, ad 1.
- 16 St. Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 22, art 9; but see also. art. 6–8.
- 17 See Schillebeeckx, *op. cit.*, 56 and his citation of St. Thomas *De Divinis Nomini-bus*, c. 7, lect. 5.
- 18 St. Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. 1, art. 4, ad 5.

2 Husserl and God

Emmanuel Housset

What Is at Stake in the Question

Husserl, born in 1859 in Moravia into a Jewish family quite indifferent to religion, read the New Testament in early adulthood under the influence of Thomas Masaryk. This left a mark, and several texts on ethics mention Christ and speak of love of neighbor. At 27 he received baptism in the Lutheran Church in Vienna. Husserl rarely discussed this decision, which some have chosen to see as just an act of prudence, but this is mere speculation. The various testimonies prohibit doubt as to Husserl's lifelong Christian commitment, even if he was very critical of all institutional forms of religion, sometimes not without a certain anti-Catholicism, especially vis-à-vis Scheler.

Husserl knew the work of Rudolf Otto, Max Scheler, and Jean Héring and he may have been surprised at the interest in theology of some of his pupils such as Adolf Reinach and Edith Stein, when nothing in his work seemed to open onto this. Nonetheless, for him, most of these attempts fail to rise to the novelty of transcendental reflection,¹ insofar as their study of the divine yields only a regional ontology. Husserl sees these attempts at the phenomenology of religion as precipitous and as falling back into the natural attitude and its associated realism and relativism. In other words, the question of God should not be asked from the 'everyday practical life which is naive,'² because as soon as we make the psychological ego the source of meaning, we lose access to the pure phenomenon and thus cannot grasp what distinguishes the notion of an infinitely perfect divine understanding that is the horizon of every subjectivity, namely that it is an intention without intuition, or at least without direct filling. Husserl's fundamental criticism of Scheler and some of his disciples is that they presuppose that philosophers can have an intuition of God, an intuitive content supplied by Revelation and tradition. Now, for phenomenological reasons, God is unrepresentable directly. In order to become aware of this, breaking with the outlook of naive life, it is necessary to bracket all worldly representations of God, including those that come from metaphysics, since all notions of an 'absolute reality' fail to make sense.³ Thus, to posit God from the outset as the absolute transcendent being is to miss the radicality of transcendental idealism and therefore it is to miss

the original meaning of God in a science of being that wants not to be dogmatic and for which being is a 'practical idea.'⁴ To be sure, Husserl himself recognized that his religious conversion had given the decisive impetus for his conversion to philosophy as a non-confessional path toward God,⁵ yet he was nonetheless very careful, in accord with his methodological atheism, not to accept any prejudice stemming from religion, nor any presupposition deriving from a dogmatic metaphysics. For Husserl, it is not a question of contesting the importance of the history of religions, nor the possibility of a phenomenology of religious experience, but this is only possible by the rigor of the reduction bringing all reality back to meaning and meaning to the acts of transcendental subjectivity. To start from God as the only absolute being, as a qualitative infinite revealing itself by itself, is an untenable dogmatic and metaphysical presupposition, and this is why only the reduction brings into view the idea of God belonging to every subjectivity. Even the history of reason proposed by Husserl in *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, which shows how we passed from myth to reason and from polytheism to monotheism as the fulfillment of the essence of God in history, presupposes an a priori elucidation of God. Philosophy does not seek to replace history of religions, religious anthropology, and theology, but has the task of elucidating the meaning of the word 'God,' which cannot be discerned by an empirical generalization, nor simply received by revelation.

Putting the Transcendence of God Out of Play

The task of the phenomenologist, based on the original giving intuition, is to pass from fact to essence and thus to make the matter itself the sole standard of his knowledge. As evidence becomes the a priori structural form of consciousness, the reduction is applied even to the transcendence of God. In a transcendental idealism, the 'eternal' 'I' is prior to the world and to God, inasmuch as God is but the result of my own actualization of consciousness. § 51 of the *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* can then show that God cannot be immanent in the sense of lived experience, nor transcendent in the sense of the world.⁶ Husserl thus opens the door to a phenomenological theology describing God's specific transcendence in relation to that of the world and to that of others, but only to close it immediately, because the primary task is that of a phenomenology of reason. Suspending the question of the existence of God is thus a necessary step for an idealistic study of what is meant by this word 'God,' and serves to avoid any kind of relapse into realism. For Husserl, it is a question of suspending the God of the historical religions, but also the God founding the activity of the 'I' and the eternal truths of metaphysics. He wants to situate himself, through transcendental reflection, above the opposition of the God of believers and the God of philosophers, in order to elucidate the meaning of God for every subjectivity. Husserl thus partly escapes the criticism of merely

proposing one more ontotheology.* Here the resources of phenomenology are put to the test, for if the reduction causes God to be lost, the phenomenological approach falls flat. Husserl remembers here the lesson of Brentano that any notion of God, even if it is not a representation, must be based on a representation. But under reduction God can be envisaged only as an ideal of intuition and of knowledge. Putting divine transcendence out of play frees us from any interpretation of being that starts from a supreme being. Thus, §§ 51 and 58 of *Ideas* open to a life of the subject without God, to an intentional life elucidating from the sole possibilities of transcendental reflection the meaning of the world and the meaning of history, and this with the goal of an ideal meaning and absolute value. The reduction, therefore, leads back to the givenness (not the presence) of God for every subjectivity as an ideal meaning aimed at knowledge and by the will. This God brought into view by the reduction is not a foundation, even as an absolute value, of the appearance of the world and of the life of the subject, and he is only the way in which the subject envisages itself as infinitely distant, its general ideality.

Husserl radicalizes Brentano's thesis⁷ that God is the ideal of a perfect knowledge, the ideal of a perfect will, or again is the ideal of all ideals and is thus a mathematical infinite and not a qualitative infinity. The God resulting from the reduction is therefore not the God of Descartes; Husserl read the third of the *Metaphysical Meditations* as a slippage into theology. The Cartesian thesis that atheism is incompatible with real science is unintelligible to Husserl. Even if Husserl read Descartes through the prism of Neo-Kantianism, it remains the case that he is at odds with Descartes' rejection of any idea of a constituting subject and his view of understanding as passive, in order to show that God is not an idea ahead of the subject, but is the source of natural light. From this point of view, Husserl is much farther from the God of religion than Descartes, since his conception of the autonomous subject forces him to see in God only an idea. For Husserl, the transcendence of God cannot be of a metaphysical type and one must rather put forward a non-metaphysical thinking of God, which does not make the intelligibility of God the condition of understanding oneself and the world. Husserl often states, notably in *First Philosophy*,⁸ his rejection of any dogmatic metaphysics and his demand for a philosophical speech free from a pre-understanding of God.⁹ From this point of view we must free the Lutheran vocabulary that he sometimes uses (Justification, renewal, vocation) of its theological sense.¹⁰ God as the ideal of all ideals is none other than the God of the transcendental ego, which is reached by bracketing the God of believers and the God of metaphysicians.

God Is the Human Infinitely to Come

Husserl having established in *Ideas* § 49 that consciousness in its purity is a system of being closed in on itself, it goes without saying that there cannot be an intuition of a transcendent God and that God is not immanent in the sense

of lived experience either, and therefore that God can only be a constitutive Idea of the life of the subject. God, by the reduction, is a pure identity of essence and is not at all what would be given in a synthesis of identification. Hence the intuition of God, if we do not want it to be totally empty, can take place only indirectly, by analogy. But the first grasp by analogy is that which begins from the experience of oneself. The first possible way to describe this phenomenon is to grasp it as a possibility of the ego: ‘So the human really is in the image of God. In a sense analogous to the way in which mathematics speaks of infinitely distant points, straight lines, etc. Infinitely distant, we can here use this figure: God is “the infinitely distant human.”¹¹ No need to denounce here the anthropocentrism of such an understanding of God, for it is the only idea of God that can accompany all consciousness, and by this analogy making God the distance of man, a representation of God becomes possible. Before any phenomenology of religious experience, for example, a phenomenology of glory, it is necessary outside of all Revelation to think about the transcendence of God in relation to the transcendence of the subject. There is no self-disclosure of God here, nor an irreducible opacity of the phenomenon, since God is brought back to his meaning for every ego. By leading God back to meaning and meaning to the activity of the ego, as he does for each phenomenon, Husserl reaches a faceless God who is the teleological idea of the ego’s fulfillment of its own essence. God is the name of an ideal perfection of the ego’s self-explication and is not here the fullness, or the excess, of a presence. For example, this is not a God appearing freely or eliciting trust from the humility of his incarnation. This God of consciousness appears beginning from the requirements of the subject and its goals. For a transcendental idealism, only the ego is a starting power. Thus God gives nothing to be seen or to be by himself alone, and he is the horizon of the life of the subject, which constitutes God.

Husserl can say that God is a pole located beyond the world and beyond humans,¹² but without renouncing reduction, since God is then an absolute polar idea that humans themselves place at the end of their path. The path toward God can only be understood philosophically as a path toward oneself, without any breaking of the enclosure of subjectivity. In § 18g of the *Phenomenological Researches for Constitution*, Husserl develops the idea of a unity of understanding between God and humanity making it possible to say that they see the same things according to the same phenomenality. This analogizing grasp of God both respects his transcendence as an idea—since he is neither a transcendent reality nor an image—and makes it possible to recognize God as another subject, an absolute subject, which would not have the limitations of the human. Such an analogizing grasp of God is not reasoning and must be understood as a mode of givenness. Of course, there is a first time when I discover this idea of God as the horizon of my consciousness, but then as soon as I think of God, I see an infinitely perfect being. Such an analogizing grasp leads us to understand God as a perceiving being to whom sensible things are necessarily given in sketches, since this mode of givenness

depends on them and not on the subject who is looking. To be sure, this is an a priori way of elucidating the essence of God and his way of being. In contrast, it is undoubtedly possible to understand Revelation as a rupture of the egological relation to God, but for Husserl philosophy cannot go what is possible to it.

God as Pure Act

The radicality of the reduction, regards the transcendence of God, is what allows us to turn our gaze toward the potentialities of intentional life animated by the active idea of God. This God as idea and goal is not an invention of the subject, nor is he an image produced historically in a culture. He is given in an apodictic evidence as the horizon of the activity of every consciousness, as the teleological meaning that animates the life-world. Transcendental idealism thus rejects both a realism making God an absolute reality, and a subjectivism reducing him to the status of an image. Since the idea of God is the idea of the infinite of intentional life, philosophy, for phenomenological reasons, can speak of God only starting from the teleology of the world. The gnoseological questions being always primary for Husserl, he first considers the teleology of the world and for that he interprets in a transcendental way the God as pure act of Aristotle's metaphysics, while keeping the same understanding of the relation of act to potency. This said, God is here not so much a metaphysical foundation as the theoretical anticipation of the possibilities of knowledge, and this is because the world gives itself according to both actual knowledge and potential knowledge. God is the anticipation of the ideal sense of the world. The idea of God is then inseparable from the subject, which is given to itself only according to the horizon of its possibilities. Every activity of the 'I' is directed toward its own *telos*. § 41 of the *Cartesian Meditations* states that being is a practical idea and that it is from there that the intentional transcendence of God can be thought. It is phenomenality itself which leads us to say that there is only one possible world and consequently only one God who is the absolute *logos*: 'The problem of God clearly contains the problem of absolute reason. as the teleological source of all reason in the world.'¹³ God is indeed the absolute polar idea which animates the theoretical and practical life of each subject and of the community of monads. He is the entelechy at all monadology.

Ideas § 58 showed that from all the teleologies that can be found in the empirical world, for example in the de facto development of the capacities of organisms, or the de facto development of cultures, it is by no means possible to establish the idea of a world oriented toward God, and that only a radical questioning of consciousness can give its true meaning to the idea of a teleological world. In other words, the idea of God cannot be deduced from the de facto world, and Husserl intends not only to denounce as nonsense every physico-teleological proof of the existence of God, but to show that the meaning of God can be elucidated only from consciousness. We can

therefore say that God speaks in the world, and is not an empty idea, that there is indeed an intuitive content that can be indirectly given beginning from the world, but this within the framework of a phenomenology of reason for which God is in a transcendental way the bearer of the absolute *logos*. To open oneself to transcendental reflection, discovering at least once in one's life one's transcendental ego, means to be able to turn one's gaze toward the problem of God, that is to say the problem of the meaning of the world, which is not limited to the world of perception, nor even to the theoretical world, but also extends to the cultural and social world. It is therefore also in the historical world, in this self-constitution of humanity with its successes and failures, that the idea of God can gradually gain in content and clarity, even if for each subject this absolute polar idea still remains in part an enigma because of its distance.

The Ethical God

A third analogy follows on from the first two, in that the idea or goal animating the ego's life is also an ideal norm of action, an absolute imperative, which determines the human will. God is thus also the name of an Ought coming through the neighbor and announcing itself to every consciousness which awakens to itself. To lose God as a transcendent absolute reality is what makes it possible to find him again in his function as an absolute value determining the will. God is the anticipation of an absolute end, the aim of an absolute value, for the subject fulfilling its essence, especially its social essence. Thus Husserl takes up the idea of sacrifice,¹⁴ of the gift of oneself to eternal truths, which is the vocation of the philosopher, through a social teleology of very Christian inspiration. In a way, just as Thales and Pythagoras are the names that denote the scientific attitude, Christ becomes the name denoting the ethical life in which the subject moves toward absolute values while turning toward his neighbor: 'All the right paths lead in me from this me that I am to God—but passing through those other me from which I am inseparable—to God who is nothing other than the pole.'¹⁵ Love of neighbor thus becomes the perfect form of moral life, and we see that Husserl reads the New Testament through Kant¹⁶ and Bolzano. The various courses on ethics confirm that according to Husserl the accomplished moral person is the saint, defined in a somewhat unchristian way as the one who has overcome all sins and achieved perfection of the will.¹⁷

According to this perspective, there is no longer a leap between philosophy and religion, religion is no longer foolishness for human wisdom, for it fulfills the rational ideal and this leads to an ethical transformation of God, who is the supreme practical idea of a universal ethical life.¹⁸ Perhaps here more than elsewhere, one might think that to constitute God is to lose him, Husserl is quite aware of the danger, but he nevertheless maintains that this ethical idea is the only one that is constitutive of every subjectivity and that it is always by difference with it that God can announce himself in faith otherwise than

through the prism of our consciousness. This ethical God does not call me by my name, and he is the one who calls every consciousness awakening to itself. In a classical way, Husserl makes the search for the universal, the concern to make it visible, the true foundation of every human community, and this is why in the analogizing grasp I can see that for others also God is the absolute polar idea of their consciousness. Philosophy can show that humans unite in their aiming at God, but not that God by giving faith unites them in a quite different way.

Willing follows seeing, and the evidence of absolute value means that it can exist only to be willed. In this material and not merely formal ethics, the ethical God comes to establish that absolute values are given beyond realism and subjective idealism. God is not just a formal apriori, he is not just a holy will; he is not merely a way to represent to yourself your duty. In his permanent confrontation with Kant, Husserl's God is given as the supreme practical idea opening up to the pure possibilities of the ethical self. This is indeed an atheistic path to God. Here again, God is the idea necessarily accompanying the human who awakens to his absolute responsibility with regard to the meaning of the world, with regard to humanity, and who wants a peace resulting from sharing truth. Here again, to think of God is to anticipate without being able to deduce the future, without being able to predict. Every transcendental ego is polarized toward the future and God is the name of what is expected, hoped for by reason, namely the absolute good which is not a mere production of the subject, since the subject becomes aware of the givenness from its passive, affective and instinctual life, before willing it in rational life.

Phenomenology and Theology

Husserl, in function of his phenomenological project, was able, with reduction as a method of access to the phenomenon, to propose an apriori elucidation of the idea of God, which is presupposed by the entire history of religions and by all philosophy of religion. The evidence of God, the evidence of this idea of the infinite, constitutive of the life of the subject and thereby of the life of the world and of social life, is then what grounds a priori the possibility of theology. Of course, this phenomenological elucidation of the meaning of God is guided by the idea of science as formulated at the beginning of the *Cartesian Meditations*. Here again, it is always possible to wonder whether this passage from fact to essence, from the aposteriori to the apriori, does not encounter irreducible elements of facticity and whether the *eidōs* of religion that Husserl reaches is not merely the *eidōs* of a certain understanding of the Christian religion.

If the work of reduction is indefinite, it is also because one is never certain that there are no factual historical elements left unfounded in the pure activity of the transcendental ego. As always in the phenomenological procedure, there is the path that starts from below, from God as given in fact in existing

religions, to ascend by idealization to God as an object for all possible subjectivity. But there is also the path from above, from the self-elucidation of the transcendent ego. It is clear that for the first path, the one which starts from the fact and goes back to the subjective acts that make it possible, what Husserl says about religions remains very external and is not at all the equivalent of the work he does for Newtonian physics in *The Crisis of the European Sciences*. It is therefore most often the second path which allows the object God to become the guiding thread of a transcendental analysis that highlights the laws according to which the object of theology can be constructed. By showing how any subject, regardless of a particular culture, can access the evidence of the idea of God, Husserl emphasizes that this idea belongs to the structure of experience. Theology is then that which tends toward the idea of God, which unlike the world is not constantly confirmed in perceptual evidence. On the other hand, the world as an infinite practical idea of knowledge refers to God as an infinite idea of another kind. We can therefore say that theology supposes philosophy, which is the science of the essence of subjectivity.

For Husserl theology is not an invention of culture and imposes itself as a structural dimension of the elucidation of experience. Because through philosophy theology has become a more universal science,¹⁹ the principles of theology must be regulated on the mode of giving, and this is what makes the difference between rational theology and revealed theology. Of course, it is possible to object to Husserl that he was developing a relatively anhistorical and very essentialist thesis on religions, that the historico-intentional analysis elucidates better the history of science than the history of religions, or that he minimizes the irreducible historicity of the a priori. Finally, one may add that the passage from a static phenomenology to a genetic phenomenology, re-situating the approach to God in the subjective and intersubjective history of consciousness faces insurmountable difficulties. Nevertheless, all these objections risk missing their aim, for the reduction does not lead to one's becoming a theologian, but seeks to ground the possibility of theology by elucidating its object rather than by bringing to light the internal principles which govern it.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Husserl's letter to Edith Stein on July 17, 1931.
- 2 *Cartesiansche Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, 175.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 121.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 121.
- 5 Cf. the letter to Metzger, September 4, 1919.
- 6 *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, Erstes Buch, Husserliana III-2, Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1976, 96: 'Since a worldly God is obviously impossible and since on the other hand the immanence of God in absolute consciousness cannot be conceived as immanence in the sense which characterizes being as lived (which would be no less absurd), there must be in the absolute flux of consciousness and its infinities other ways for the transcendences to manifest themselves, than the constitution of thingly realities as units of concordant appearances.'

- 7 Cf. Franz Brentano, *Vom Dasein Gottes* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1980 [1929]).
- 8 *Erste Philosophie* (1923/24), erster Teil, Husserliana VII (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1956), 190–191.
- 9 In his letter to Rudolf Otto of 5 March 1919, Husserl also says that metaphysical prejudices cloud the gaze of the phenomenologist, blocking access to the essential possibilities of religious consciousness.
- 10 Husserl perhaps presupposes somewhat hastily that it is possible to free words from their historical roots.
- 11 *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, Husserliana VI, Den Haag, Nijhoff, 1976, 67.
- 12 Cf. *Aufsätze und Vorträge* (1922–1937), Husserliana XXVII (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), Beilage XVIII, 234.
- 13 *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, Husserliana VI, Den Haag, Nijhoff, 1976, 7.
- 14 Cf. *Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre 1908–1914*, Beilage 6 ‘Ethik und Moralphilosophie. Die Aufopferung vom Werten und die Tragik des Opfers’* (1909), Husserliana XXVIII (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988).*
- 15 *Aufsätze und Vorträge* (1922–1937), Beilage XVIII, Husserliana XXVII (Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1989), 234.
- 16 Cf. *Einleitung in die Ethik. Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1920/1924*, Husserliana XXXVII (Springer, 2004), 341.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 Cf. *Formale und transzendente Logik. Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft*. Husserliana XVII Den Haag, Nijhoff, 1974, 7.
- 19 Cf. *Aufsätze und Vorträge* (1922–1937), Husserliana XXVII (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), Beilage XVIII, 69–70.

3 Intersubjectivity, Ethics, and the Christic Dimension in Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology

Maria Vilella-Petit

With the publication of Husserl's copious manuscripts in the *Husserliana* series, we realize that his thought was not confined to abstract structures of consciousness but was animated by a constant engagement with ethical and even religious concerns. The focus on an isolated ego is overcome through the intensive exploration of intersubjectivity, and 'humanity in community' becomes central. The study of consciousness expands to the dimensions of the life-world and is integrated with a reform of practical reason, influenced by Fichte and Plato's Idea of the Good. Essential components of this phenomenological anthropology include personal development, teleology, ethical responsibility and self-awareness, corporeality, relationships, communication, empathy, love, and engagement with the cultural and religious other, all of which are communal in scope. Openness to the divine proceeds on the basis of empathy and loving communion and the figure of Christ emerges as the concrete embodiment of ethical love.

Thanks to the ongoing publication of Edmund Husserl's *Gesammelte Werke* (Husserliana) we now have a clear insight into the processes by which his vast oeuvre was formed. In his remarkable foreword to his recent translation of *Ideen I*,¹ Jean-François Lavigne recounts how Husserl was never fully satisfied with what he had written, but kept seeking to improve his philosophical thought, either by self-correction or by enhancing it with more rigorous analyses. Hence the series of supplementary appendices added to the text of *Ideen I* in a second volume. Husserl's self-revision affects even basic premises of his thought that had seemed long settled. Here I shall attempt to trace the course of his reflection on two interrelated themes, intersubjectivity, and ethics. This dimension of his thought occasionally opens onto the religious and can be taken as a prolegomenon to a phenomenologically grounded theology.

Plato and the Ethical Character of Philosophy

Initially a mathematician, Husserl embarked on philosophy under the patronage, in particular, as he himself tells us, of Plato and Descartes. As he

wrote in his 1922 lectures at the University of London, which bore the title ‘Phenomenological Method and Phenomenological Philosophy’²:

If I had to say today which philosophers, looking back on the whole historical development of philosophy, shine for me most illuminatingly, I would name two in particular, without thereby placing them in the same rank: in the first place the indeed quite unique Plato—or rather the incomparable double star Socrates-Plato, the creator of the idea of ultimate rigorous science, which coincides with the idea of philosophy. As a second name, I would name Descartes, without thereby wanting to consider him the greatest of moderns.³

His affinity with Plato is so considerable that in a text on ‘the Common Spirit,’ from about the same period, he goes so far as to assert: ‘My life and Plato’s are one. I continue his life’s work. The unity of his achievements is a factor in the unity of mine; his striving, his willing, his shaping are continued in mine.’⁴ His debt to Descartes centers on the discovery of the *ego cogito*, the subjectivity of the thinker. But already in the London lecture, he indicates what he rejects in Descartes: the absence of the ethical at the foundation of his thought: ‘I should like to characterize this subjectifying turn as both ethical and gnoseological (*erkenntnisethische*), although in Descartes it is not introduced as really ethical. With him, the specifically ethical side of Plato’s ethos is lost: theoretical philosophy becomes autonomous.’⁵ When ‘theoretical reason’ was thus rendered autonomous from ‘practical reason’ there were enormous consequences for scientific knowledge itself, where specializations dominated; and for our civilization, where ‘techno-science’ can create all kinds of deadly products.

In the London lectures Husserl stresses:

The human being—let that now always designate the individual or also ‘the human writ large’ (*Mensch im Grossen*), humanity in community—the human being, I say, cannot be satisfied to live so to speak naively into the day. He must at some time awaken ethically, reflect on himself, and take the radical resolution by which he first makes himself a real human being, an ethical human being.⁶

In all this reflection is present, as a *telos*, the ‘idea of the good.’ And, for Husserl, this has everything to do with the meaning of ‘philosophy.’ Philosophy must be constituted and unfolded under the reign of Truth, Beauty, and the Good, in other words in the light of Plato’s Ideas. From the start, Husserl brings in moral reform, as inseparable from philosophical reason. Practical life, in the philosophy inaugurated by the Socratic Plato, occupies a defining place:

What characterizes the reform of the moral life proposed by Socrates is that he interprets the truly satisfying life as one based on pure reason.

This means a life in which the human being, in tireless self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) and in a spirit of radical accounting, engages in a critique—a thoroughgoing assessment—of his life goals, and then, consequently, on this basis, a critique of his ways of life and of the means each time employed.⁷

In view of the true Good, each human being must engage in self-criticism so as not to give to the term ‘living well’ its current sense, centered on economic and social goods, in other words on ‘having.’

A few pages later, Husserl further reinforces Plato’s role by alluding to the fight he waged in his time against the Sophists in the name of reason: ‘One may say that it is only with Plato that the pure ideas: authentic knowledge, authentic theory and science, and—embracing them all—authentic philosophy, entered the consciousness of humanity.’⁸ And in this reflection he also underlines Plato’s role in social ethics (*Sozialethik*), which presupposes a reform of community life.

Overcoming Descartes

Before showing how for Husserl the principles of ethics are closely connected with Intersubjectivity in the sense of transcendental phenomenology, it is necessary to dwell on his attitude toward Descartes. Descartes’ *Meditationes de prima philosophia* is for Husserl the work that founds the new era of philosophy, and his own debt to them in giving subjectivity a fundamental role is attested in his *Cartesian Meditations*, lectures given in Paris in February 1929, which he presents as an ‘Introduction to Phenomenology.’

But Husserl wishes to make decisive ‘corrections’ to the way Descartes saw the human subject of the *ego cogito*. This is clear from his allusions to Descartes in *Erste Philosophie*. Descartes, he alleges, ignores the living character of the body, human and animal, since he sees the body as a material body cut off from the soul. ‘The pure ego he discovered is for him nothing other than the pure soul.’⁹ There is therefore in Descartes a blindness to the living body (*Leib*), the body proper to the human being, without which humans could not have any sensitive experience and therefore would have no knowledge of what is presented to them and that they are able to perceive. This reveals ‘the objectivist basic stance of Cartesian philosophy and its entire style of founding the sciences.’¹⁰ This critique of Cartesian dualism will be developed at greater length in the ‘Phenomenological Investigations on Constitution’ of *Ideen II*¹¹ and then in *Die Krisis*.

At different levels, the factors that condition the knowing subject, in the constitution of what appears to it, depend on the proper body of the one who is experiencing this constitution. We cannot, therefore, ignore ‘the meaning of psycho-physical conditionality at the different stages of constitution’: ‘What the subject has as a world in front of it depends on its body and on what is proper to the psyche.’¹² Or as he says a few pages later: ‘The body is

not at all merely a thing, but the expression of the spirit, and it is at the same time an organ of the spirit.¹³ He remarks further on the expressiveness of the body: 'The human being in its movements, actions, in its speaking, writing, etc. is not a mere connection, a mere tying together of one thing called soul with another called body. The body as body is through and through soul-filled body.'¹⁴

In a remark on the constitution of 'objective nature' Husserl already opens up the question of intersubjectivity:

The risk that the subject cannot at all, under the supposed conditions, arrive at the constitution of objective nature, is removed as soon as we remove the abstraction that we have maintained until now, and as soon as we take into account the conditions in which the constitution finds itself *de facto*: namely that the subject of experience, in truth, is not a *solipsistic subject*, but a subject in the midst of many other subjects.¹⁵

In other words: when it comes to 'world' I cannot be an 'I' without a 'Thou,' or better without several 'other' egos. What comes into play here is the human being envisaged as *person*. In § 34, entitled 'Necessity of the distinction between naturalistic attitude and personalistic attitude,' Husserl underlines:

What we have given as a human subject that is one with the human body in an apprehension of immediate experience is the human person, who has its spiritual individuality, its capacities and its intellectual and practical aptitudes, its character, its type of sensibility. This ego is undoubtedly apprehended as dependent on its body and not on the rest of physical nature, just as it is dependent on its own past.¹⁶

After having insisted on the role of touch in the insertion of the sensations which make the body a *corps propre*, a body that feels and moves, Husserl turns to the body as 'the organ of will, the one and only object which can be set in motion spontaneously and immediately by the will of the pure ego which is mine.'¹⁷ The sequence of all these very detailed thoughts about the personalistic attitude toward the human being, leads Husserl to consider, in § 46, the significance of empathy (*Einfühlung*, intropathy) for the constitution of the ego-human (*Ich-Mensch*). And through these considerations on the human being as person in the horizon of intersubjectivity—a person who feels, who evaluates, who acts—, a fundamental concern emerges, namely 'motivation.' The motives which lead the ego to act in such and such a way question the moral attitude of the human subject. If the ego gradually constitutes itself over the course of its life, it can also be brought into a real personal reflection on itself, leading to deeper self-knowledge, discovery of one's character and one's real motivations, and examination of choices made in the course of life.

Husserl is not unaware of what, in the life of the subject, is of the order of the unconscious, that is to say of what is 'obscure' in the 'foundation of the life of the spirit.' In connection with the 'sensitive sphere' of subjective life, he writes: 'the whole life of the mind is traversed by the actual "blind associations, drives, tendencies emerging in obscurity, etc., which determine the further course of consciousness according to 'blind' rules.'¹⁸ In *Krisis*, he will return to these 'unconscious' intentionalities.¹⁹ This yields a glimpse of the personal work that each must undertake in order to be able to lead a 'good life' in the ethical sense. But such work is also accomplished thanks to the influence, the testimonies of others. 'A person's development is determined by the influence of others, by the influence of foreign ideas, foreign affects suggested by others, foreign commandments.'²⁰ The ethical and incarnate condition of philosophical thought in Husserl brings him nearer to the style of theological thinking than the common misperception of phenomenology as a stance of pure disembodied, disengaged theoretical contemplation would lead one to expect.

Intersubjectivity and the *Lebenswelt*

In *Krisis*, Husserl seeks to shed light from various angles on what he denounces as the blindness of modern philosophy, beginning with the mathematization of nature by Galileo, which alienates us from the pre-scientific givenness of sensible experience, thanks to which we are in our life-world. The *Lebenswelt*, 'a domain of original evidence,'²¹ is bound up with intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is to be understood not only as the personal relationship between an 'I' and a 'Thou,' but also as the 'We,' of the community. From birth, everyone is in touch with their mother, father, close family and with the community to which they belong and subsequently with an increasingly larger cultural 'We,' which has a history stretching from far in the past and advancing toward the future. There are therefore cultural values to which each subject is the heir, but which with the gradual development of conscience and questioning he may want to challenge or to transform. One of the morally essential dimensions of Husserl's thought is not to 'lock up' communities within their limits. Husserl was more than aware that in the historical record such confinements have sometimes been catastrophic due to the conflicts they engendered. Now, according to the vision of transcendental philosophy, each community—while being a particular community—and which is changing—must remain open. And this opening has for its horizon humanity as such in its universality.

Husserl finds an ally in this outlook in an unexpected quarter. In three 1917 lectures on 'Fichte's Ideal of Humanity' he laments that the domination of science and technology in the mid-19th century beclouded the summits of German Idealism and brought a dissociation of 'theoretical reason' from 'practical reason,' something Fichte had always striven to overcome: 'The passion that moves his theoretical thinking is not the mere thirst for knowledge, not the passion of a purely theoretical interest. Fichte was much

rather a nature thoroughly oriented to the *practical*.²² ‘Once one’s sense for the style of this extraordinary personality is awakened, then not only is the heart opened for the greatness and beauty of the Fichtean Weltanschauung and the practical impulses radiating from it, but one also becomes aware that even behind the logical violence he challenges us with there lies a deeper significance, a fullness of great insights even if they are not yet scientifically ripened, quite like in the case of other great philosophers of the past, for instance Plato’²³ Going further than Kant Fichte asks ‘if there can be anything in subjectivity that it has not itself generated,’ and characterizes the subject as ‘a self-positing activity whence an unending sequence of ever new activities spring ... an endless chain of goals, aims, and tasks ... which must hang together in the unity of the telos ... the highest ethical goal.’²⁴ The task of philosophy is ‘to grasp the world as teleological product of the absolute ego,’²⁵ a human world, a world of free spirits, which are bound together in moral connections and, led by the exalted command of duty, realize a moral world-order. This ‘normative idea’ is ‘the world-creating principle, ‘the teleological cause of this world, in other words it is God,’²⁶ or rather, as Fichte’s thought deepens, God is the ‘infinite will’ that effects this world-order.²⁷ Husserl’s phenomenology encompasses in its further reaches such Platonic and Fichtean metaphysical reflection shaped by the Idea of the Good.

At the close of *Die Krisis* Husserl discusses ‘Philosophy as self-meditation of humanity, self-actualization of reason’ (*Die Philosophie als menschheitliche Selbstbesinnung, Selbstverwirklichung der Vernunft*), highlighting the task of reason in face of the different levels of personal life:

Personal human life unfolds on the various stages of self-meditation and self-responsibility, from isolated and occasional acts of this form up to the level of universal self-meditation and self-responsibility, and to the idea of willed decision, resolved to give the whole of one’s personal life the form of the synthetic unity of a life in universal self-responsibility; resolved also, correlatively, to give to oneself the form of the free, autonomous ego which seeks to realize the reason which is innate to it; but the individual personal reason comes to ever more perfect realization only as communal personal reason, and vice versa.²⁸

In the third part of his voluminous writings on Intersubjectivity, comprising texts from 1929 to 1935, Husserl develops several reflections on community life. Community life is based not only on understanding others who are close to me, but on understanding the surrounding world and how it is constituted. Life has its own *style* as a shared lifestyle, with its common customs and mores, as instilled from early childhood: ‘In my life, as regards everything, all perceptions, all memories (presentifications), I am in community with others, present, past, future.’²⁹

But this community to which we belong may eventually come into contact with communities which are foreign to it, and whose habits, values, and

mores differ widely from ‘ours.’ It is then necessary to elucidate ‘how, in a gradual way, an identical core is brought into relief as we move from incomprehension of the foreigner to understanding him, and how, finally, a common objective world is brought into relief—thus ultimately understood universally, as the same world for all known and unknown nations which are in actual and possible relation.’³⁰ These observations point us to one of Husserl’s major concerns, the *telos* of transcendental reflection, as envisaging the universality of humanity. When we think philosophically, beyond the differences of mores, morals, or particular ethics, we are opened to the essential structures of human life as such, and thereby to the attitude of transcendental ethics.

The Entry of God into Phenomenology

Distinguishing between a theology based on the natural light of reason, and one that leans on an ‘irrational’ foundation, that is, on the supernatural light of revelation, Husserl offers reflections on the former, following the thread of teleology, which leads to the possibility of a divine consciousness, embracing everything. ‘Naturally the total ego (*All-Ich*), which has every ego in itself and every reality in itself and nothing outside itself, cannot be thought as an empirical ego. It is infinite life, infinite love, infinite will; its infinite life is a unique activity; and since it is infinite fulfilling, it is infinite happiness. Every pain, every misfortune, every error, God lives over (*lebt nach*) in himself, and it is only because he co-lives and co-feels it in the strictest sense, that he can overcome its finitude and its tendency not to be (*Nichtseinsollen*) in the infinite harmony for which it is there.’³¹ Such projections are not the whole story if, as Angela Ales Bello remarks, ‘it is precisely empathy that allows to Husserl an opening toward God,’ referring to a text entitled ‘Empathy of external consciousness and the all-embracing divine consciousness.’³²

Husserl develops very significant analyses in the series of five articles he wrote for a Japanese journal *The Kaizo*, under the title *Fünf Aufsätze über Erneuerung*.³³ The ‘renewal’ (*Erneuerung*) in question is ethical. Thus, in the first article, Husserl showed what was essential for him and his philosophy by commenting on the meaning of his title: ‘*something new has to happen*; it has to happen *in* ourselves and by ourselves, by ourselves as members of the humanity that lives in this world, that configures this world through us, and us through it.’ But to effect this configuration consciously and with a view to the best, we have to renew ourselves by fighting everything that pushes us down, whether individually or at the plural level of the community. He asks: ‘Who will deny the possibility of continued ethical progress under the guidance of the ideal of reason?’

Without being misled by a feeble pessimism or a ‘realism’ without ideals, we shall not dismiss as impossible a ‘humanity writ large’ (*Menschen im Grossen*), wider and widest communities, and it is the same disposition to fight for a better humanity [*Menschheit*] and a truly human [*humane*] culture, which we must recognize as an absolute ethical requirement.³⁴

In order to promote an authentic rationality, he says at the end of article 2 ('The Method of Inquiry into Essence'): 'Our following essays in this review on "renewal as a problem of individual and as a social ethics," will attempt ... to submit the pure idea of ethical man to an inquiry into essence and prepare a principial ethics.'³⁵ At the start of article 3, 'Renewal as a Problem of Individual Ethics,' he returns to what *Erneuerung* means: 'The renewal of the human being—of the singular human being and of a communitarized humanity—is the highest theme of all ethics. Ethical life is, in its essence, a life which consciously stands under the idea of renewal.'³⁶ This presupposes a sort of conversion that is always in the process of becoming, never completed. Here, on the problem of individual ethics, Husserl already mentions the 'idea of God,' which is the absolute pole to which all human ethical effort is directed. In article 4, 'Renewal and Science,' dealing with the renewal of the culture of a community and of humanity itself, he even ventures to speak of 'original sin,' sin which strikes humanity because it 'belongs to the form of the essence of man.'³⁷

The last article, 'Formal Types of Culture in the Development of Humankind,' attempts to rank cultures according to their levels of religious consciousness. Religion emerges in history as 'the higher stage of mythical culture,' in which 'transcendent beings are absolutized into divinities, into fixers of absolute norms.'³⁸ Considering the religions developed in the great cities of the Middle East, marked by the 'progressive systematic' building of a theology,' he claims that the notion of 'divine revelation' was born, from which emanate the values and standards that should govern the people. It is, however, difficult for hierarchical religious cultures exercising political power to tolerate critical reflection, or religious freedom. Husserl does not hesitate to criticize, in the name of the freedom inherent in transcendent reason, Judaism and the rules of life it imposes. He also deploys a critique of the political governance of the Catholic Church and its dogmas. And from this we understand the reasons why, having approached Christ and Christianity, he asked for his baptism in the German Protestant Church.

Love

Intersubjectivity is already linked with empathy in *Ideen* I. Toward the end of that text, alluding to empathy, he vows to write a book about intersubjectivity. From the vast corpus of texts on intersubjectivity, I shall pick out one that considers the question of ethical love, and in which the figure of Christ emerges as central.³⁹ It is part of Text no. 9 in the second volume and was written in Freiburg in 1921 with the title *Gemeinschaft-Person, Personale Ganze, Personale Wirkungsgemeinschaften. Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft*.⁴⁰

Husserl begins with an analysis of the subject's most primary level, the instinctual level. At this level, there is no personal relationship between the subjects yet, no empathy and therefore no social acts as Husserl understands them. And he asks himself: 'How does the I-Thou relationship come about,

which is nevertheless the active personal relationship in the strict sense?⁴¹ He also turns to the question of communication in its different forms, including in the form of an order that must be accomplished by the Thou, when, in some communities the relationship between the two people becomes a master-to-servant relationship. He addresses this question in § 3 under the title: ‘The practical community of the will.’ In contrast, the relationship between those who become friends is that of a sharing of memories, aspirations, projects, even differences, but without rupture. But relationship between people can also occur through communication despite the absence of ‘contact, whether this communication takes place through writing or through memories preserved in a tradition. Or, as Husserl asserts in § 2: ‘I and Thou do not “touch” one another. Across a temporal stretch, they reach out the hand of the spirit; the past self is the subject of an act of communication, the giving subject; the subsequent, future subject is the receiving subject.’⁴²

Husserl then tackles the relationship of love, first at the bodily and psychic level in § 5, and then, in § 6, ethical love, love in its spiritual dimension. In considering intersubjectivity from the angle of love, Husserl, in § 5, reflects on the bond that is created between two people: ‘an active pleasure taken in the person of the loved one, ... in the carnal expression of his individuality, in general in carnal corporeality suffused with spirit (*an der durchgeistigten Leiblichkeit überhaupt*).⁴³ Then, under number 2, he speaks of the bond between two people as a community in an aspiration (*Streben*) that ‘traverses the whole of flowing consciousness.’ ‘The aspiration in its multiple modalities constitutes the life of the ego.’⁴⁴ He notes how the interiority of each lover is affected by that of the other: ‘We can say: Lovers do not live next to each other and with each other, but each other, currently and potentially. They also carry all the responsibilities together, are united in solidarity, even in sin and fault.’⁴⁵ Our interiority is thus not solipsistic. It can be reached and inhabited by what comes from the interiority of the other that I love; it thus makes me co-responsible for what he decides and undertakes. These analyses show how all aspects of personal life engaged Husserl’s attention.

At the start of § 6 on ‘Ethical Love’ he notes that what has just been analyzed still leaves other meanings unresolved. And he adds:

The love here described is perhaps sinful love, or it includes all sinful love within it. We naturally think here of the infinite love of Christ for all people, and of the universal human love that the Christian must awaken in himself, and without which he cannot be a true Christian.⁴⁶

Certainly, we should not understand this love of the Christian for the one who does not love him, as love for the evil in him. What Husserl insists on is that ‘there is in every human soul ... a vocation, a core carried towards good.’ Or as he also says: ‘There is, included in everyone, an ideal self, the “real” self of the person, which is only actually realized in the “good” action. Anyone who is awakened (ethically awakened) deliberately places his ideal

self within himself as an “infinite task.”⁴⁷ Husserl thus holds open the hope of a possible transformation of the human being, however wicked, a hope restored by the self-sacrificing love of Christ for sinners. In the short § 7 Husserl distinguishes love and community of love:

Christian love is at first, perforce, merely love. But it is bound up with a striving (necessarily motivated by love) to develop into a community of love in the greatest possible expanse. Thus a striving to ‘enter into connection’ with human beings, to open oneself to them and to open them for oneself, etc., all this according to practical possibility whose limits are ethical, and which are therefore themselves posed by ethical love.⁴⁸

This consideration about a community of love evokes an ecclesial community capable of bringing people together in a relationship of sharing, of love.

Though the life of the ‘I’ is singular, so that in this sense the ego is said to be absolute, its interior life always has a relation with an alter ego. So even a being who lives in isolation and all alone always has a relation to another; and, in the case of a hermit turned toward the Most High, a relation to God, when he prays, or to whom he speaks in silence.

Notes

- 1 Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die Reine Phänomenologie* (Husserliana III/1); 2. *Halbband: Ergänzende Texte (1912–1929)* (Husserliana III/2), ed. Karl Schuhmann (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1976); *Idées directrices pour une phénoménologie pure et une philosophie phénoménologique*, trans. Jean-François Lavigne (Paris: Gallimard, 2018).
- 2 In Husserl, *Einleitung in die Philosophie: Vorlesungen 1922/23*, ed. Berndt Goossens (Husserliana XXXV), (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002), 311–340, 58–60, 68–73, and 292–307. The London lectures were first fully published, without this ferrying back and forth between the parts that overlap with the Freiburg lectures based on them, in *Husserl Studies* 16.3 (1999). The Freiburg lectures of the 1923/24 winter semester continue the same theme and form the basis of *Erste Philosophie (1923/24): Erster Teil: Kritische Ideengeschichte*, ed. Rudolf Boehm (Husserliana VII), (Hague: Nijhoff, 1956). ‘The *Cartesian Meditations* [1929] are the *Erste Philosophie* in the form in which Husserl finally foresaw its publication’ (Boehm, *Erste Philosophie*, I, xxiv).
- 3 *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 313.
- 4 Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des Intersubjektivität. Zweiter Teil: 1931–1928*, ed. Iso Kern (Husserliana XIV), (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973), 198.
- 5 Husserl, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 314–315.
- 6 Husserl, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 58.
- 7 *Erste Philosophie* I, 9.
- 8 *Erste Philosophie* I, 12–13.
- 9 *Erste Philosophie* I, 73.
- 10 *Erste Philosophie*, 74.
- 11 Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*, ed. Marty Biemel (Husserliana IV), (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1952). This volume consists

- of texts from different periods (1912–1928) collected by Husserl’s students Edith Stein and Ludwig Landgrebe and partly revised by Husserl himself.
- 12 *Ideen II*, 75.
 - 13 *Ideen II*, 96.
 - 14 *Ideen II*, 240
 - 15 *Ideen II*, 78.
 - 16 *Ideen II*, 139–140.
 - 17 *Ideen II*, 151–152.
 - 18 *Ideen II*, 277.
 - 19 *Die Krisis*, 70. Here there is an indirect allusion to Freud.
 - 20 *Ideen II*, 268.
 - 21 *Krisis*, 130. ‘*Die Lebenswelt ist ein Reich ursprünglicher Evidenzen.*’
 - 22 *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1911–1921)*, ed. Thomas Nenon et Hans Rainer Sepp (Husserliana XXV), (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1987), 269.
 - 23 *Ib.*, 270.
 - 24 *Ib.*, 275.
 - 25 *Ib.*, 276.
 - 26 *Ib.*, 277.
 - 27 *Ib.*, 282.
 - 28 *Krisis*, 272–273.
 - 29 *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Dritter Teil: 1929–1938*, 398.
 - 30 *Ib.*, 436.
 - 31 See Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, ed. Rochus Sowa and Thomas Vongehr (Husserliana XLII), (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 168.
 - 32 Angela Ales Bello, *Husserl: Sul problema di Dio* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1985), 39.
 - 33 Of these five articles, *The Kaizo* published three, the first in German and Japanese, the second and third only in Japanese. The five texts are now in *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922–1937)*, ed. Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp (Husserliana XXVII), (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), 3–94.
 - 34 *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922–1937)*, 4.
 - 35 *Ib.*, 20.
 - 36 *Ib.*, 20.
 - 37 *Ib.*, 44.
 - 38 *Ib.*, 60.
 - 39 Angela Ales Bello says that Husserl ‘speaks insistently of ‘ethical love’ to indicate the maximal expression of love between human beings, identified with Christian love’ (*Husserl: Sul problema di Dio*, 43).
 - 40 *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität*, II, 165–191, including the *Beilage*.
 - 41 *Ib.*, 165.
 - 42 *Ib.*, 168.
 - 43 *Ib.*, 172.
 - 44 *Ib.*, 172.
 - 45 *Ib.*, 173–174.
 - 46 *Ib.*, 174.
 - 47 *Ib.*, 174.
 - 48 *Ib.*, 175.

4 The Later Heidegger and Theology

Joeri Schrijvers

One theme occupied Heidegger during his entire career: *being*. Whereas at first Heidegger wanted to address the event of being from out of one's own being, he later confronted this event head-on, as it were, speaking of being almost with no regard for beings. If there is a 'later' Heidegger, it is a Heidegger who no longer thought that 'the being that we ourselves are' is the primary locus to find an answer for the meaning or truth of being. Whereas at first, Heidegger's method was phenomenological through and through, he later needed no regular phenomenology to address this appearing of appearing, turning to poetry as the way to name this event of being and beings.

In what follows, I propose to delve into some of Heidegger's texts rather randomly, and so present Heidegger's *parcours* with regard to theology. I shall comment on those phrases of Heidegger that have given me more to think about than others.

1927 and What Comes After

Late in his career Heidegger gives credit where credit is due: whereas his work in the thirties was hostile toward Christianity (and Catholicism especially) in a text from 1953 to 1954 he acknowledges that his path of thinking could not have been pursued 'without its theological provenance.'¹ From the thirties onward there is no direct confrontation with theological matters or straightforward religious themes. Even in the twenties, Heidegger more often than not insisted on a strict separation between philosophy and theology. In a lecture delivered on March 9, 1927, he ranks theology as an ontic science which does not take part in the fundamental, ontological questioning that philosophy supposedly is. Just as physics posits and presupposes a knowledge about the being of nature within which its scientific approach works and is viable but which the science of physics itself cannot question, so also theology posits and relies on the 'Christianness' of its discourse.² For this discourse is similarly only operative within the basic faithful stance that adheres to Jesus Christ and understands history from out of the revelation that his crucifixion provides. Theology, then, will remain deaf when faced by the

questions that philosophy poses just as philosophy has (little or no) leverage against the positions that theology advocates.

Few people, however, believed that Heidegger's philosophy would be of no relevance to theology's questions. During most of the twenties, Heidegger himself entertained friendly relations with the theologian Rudolf Bultmann. They organized joint seminars and Heidegger was a major inspiration for Bultmann's work on the Gospel of John. The strict separation Heidegger advocated in the lecture mentioned above probably came to many as a surprise. Although Heidegger claimed to be neutral over and against theology, it is not hard to see that for theology this 'implies a decidedly inferior role.'³ A few years later in the 1935 lecture *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Heidegger again made clear that theology for him was not on par with a philosophy which alone posed the fundamental questions: 'Anyone for whom the Bible is divine revelation and truth already has the answer to the question "why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" before it is even asked: beings, with the exception of God Himself, are created by Him.'⁴ Theology is here scolded twice: first, it is reproached for having the answer to an age-old riddle that puzzles philosophy to this very day; and then it is punished for not even being able to ask the question properly; and it is Heidegger's *Sache* to show us how exactly (or: how not) to ask this question 'why beings at all?'

For Heidegger (at least in the twenties), *every* answer to the question of existence would fall short, whether this answer would be Buddhist, Christian, or humanist for that matter. This *primacy of questioning* would remain with Heidegger for the rest of his career. Heidegger would never settle for a systematic philosophy (or theology). When early on he breaks with religion—in a letter to Engelbert Krebs from 1919—it is exactly with the 'system of catholicism' that he breaks (although this is nonetheless his 'very beginning' from which one can never entirely break free).⁵ Around 1937 Heidegger suggested that his entire thinking was 'accompanied by a silent engagement with Christianity, an engagement that has never taken the form of an explicitly raised 'problem,' but was rather at once the preservation of my ownmost provenance—the childhood house, home, and youth—and a painful emancipation from it.'⁶

Heidegger's allergic reaction to theology's answer to the question of existence shines through in yet another passage of the 1935 lecture. Here Heidegger makes some barbed, even vicious, comments on a book that was quite popular at the time, the Catholic theologian Theodor Haecker's *What is the Human Being?* Heidegger writes: 'This question merely stands... on the book's cover. [But it] is not asked... because one already possesses an answer to the question, and an answer that at the same time says that one is not allowed to ask at all.'⁷

Let us turn to a magnificent version of the question late in Heidegger's thinking. 'We of today, despite our interest in metaphysics and ontology, are scarcely able any longer properly to raise even the *question* of the Being of beings—to raise it in a way which will put into question our own being

so that it becomes questionable in its relation to Being, and thereby open to Being.⁸

Here we have Heidegger at his best: the question of being should not lead to an answer, it should only ever allow us to be questioned ourselves, to be immersed in all that is questionable in existence. This is, for Heidegger as it was for the ancient Greeks, where philosophy starts: in wonder and in awe before the sheer fact of being. This, however, is also what Heidegger holds against all (philosophical and theological) systems. Their cold and bloodless theorizing kills wonder. It eradicates all *experience* when it comes to questioning. This emphasis on experiencing the very things he is asking about, be it anxiety in *Being and Time*, the nothing in *What is Metaphysics?*, boredom in *The Foundational Concepts of Metaphysics*, or even the sheer joy of homecoming in his readings of Hölderlin, will remain with Heidegger from early to late. The question that should be posed, when writing on Heidegger and theology, is therefore whether we are ready to experience anything of the sort when writing about the being of the Gods, their flight, and the coming of last God. We will see that Heidegger's stance toward theology changes once he realizes that what theology holds dear can enter just as well into the experience of questioning.

Changing Attitudes toward Theology

Heidegger often referred to this strict distinction between philosophy and theology. Students that followed a seminar with Heidegger in 1952 reported that he said that if he ever were to write a theology, the word 'being' would not even occur in it, implying that discourse on being would be miles apart from discourse on God.⁹ Yet, even though this leaves an inferior role to theology, there is a positive side to this distinction as well: it leaves to theology the things that are theological. There is good reason to believe that, early on, this was exactly Heidegger's intention: only theologians were to discuss the matter of theology. The true nature of faith could only be understood by the faithful themselves, a fideist strand of theology that is popular even today. The advantage of such a reading is that it opens a legitimate domain for theology and theological questions, its truth-claims, and its rituals, outside of philosophy. The disadvantage of this reading is that it leaves the theological terrain entirely *outside* of philosophical rationality: no dialogue would any longer be possible between the disciplines.

In a new preface from 1970 to the 1927 text on phenomenology and theology, one can read that theology has its own *Fragwürdigkeit*. Long gone seems the harsh claim that theology does not have the capacity to ask questions; long gone the somewhat naive theological view that all theology does is come up with answers, and long gone the relegation of theology to an 'ontic science' that would be, qua method and certainties, closer to physics than it would be to philosophy. Now theology seems a genuine endeavor tackling genuine questions. Theology, qua method, and qua questions would then be

close to the attitude and experience that is demanded of the philosopher. An ‘*erfahrendes Fragen*’ is a questioning that knows that the answer does not need to overcome the question, one that can find footing precisely in questioning.¹⁰ It will come as no surprise then that, as examples of the phenomenology of the holy he develops in the mid-thirties, and to which we will now turn, he mentions not only the godly ‘in Greek culture’ but also, and quite significantly, in ‘prophetic Judaism [and] in the preaching of Jesus.’¹¹

From Being-in-the World to Dwelling on Earth: The Thing

It is up to the mortals to meet the demands of being—Heidegger would say *Entsprechen*—and display, at least, a ‘care for the light’ a care, that is, for being’s concern for us.¹² Heidegger will never allow the possibility that beings other than humans can meet this demand. Here the central role of language is clear—only through words are beings revealed (and the demand of being ‘to be brought to speech’ is met).

For this retrieval, however, some sort of passageway between being and beings is needed. This passage-way makes for the fact that the address of being reaches out to us and advances toward us. Where in *Being and Time* this passage was secured by *Dasein* as ‘the being for whom being is an issue,’ this role as a mediator from 1935, starting from *The Origin of the Work of Art*, is reserved for the *thing*—*das Ding*. For the question on Heidegger’s relation to theology, it is important that with this *thing* the question of God and the gods also resurfaces in Heidegger’s work: the thing is intimately related with the fourfold of heaven and earth, mortals and divinities. The presence of a thing lingers; it lingers into the presencing of being and lets being’s advance toward us appear. Heidegger gives the example of a bridge: the water flows and this flow allows the banks of the river to appear as banks, etc. The water reflects the sky while flowing on the earth, etc. What appears through the materiality of the thing is a sort of relatedness of all with all. It goes without saying that Heidegger’s language in this regard is highly poetic.

A thing, however, abides only *for a while*. ‘First and foremost,’ there seem to be no things at all. The concept of the ‘while’ became important in Heidegger’s work in the forties and names the temporal interplay between being’s approaching beings and beings’ care for the concern being shows in their regard. The ‘while’ names the presencing of the thing, for instance, the happening of the artwork as a being ‘that never was before and never comes to be again.’¹³ The presencing of the thing, therefore, names an event and a beginning: something shows up that we had not seen in this way and will likely never see again in this particular way. The artwork *arrests* our attention. It, like every other thing, gathers the fourfold around its happening. Yet ‘appropriating the fourfold, it gathers the fourfold’s whiling into something that is there for the while [*in ein je Weiliges*]: into this thing.’¹⁴ It begins with a simple recognition: where *Being and Time* pointed out that we *are* this span of eighty-odd years between our birth and death, we now need to realize that

an expiry date comes along in all that appears. All of us are here together for a while only.

For now, one needs to realize that this happening, of truth, of being, of the truth of being (in which, through beings, we let our addiction to objects go for a while) is generally a joyful gathering, so much so that commentators wonder what happened to the anxiety so central to the work of a youthful Heidegger, although these joys and jublations never seem to occupy center stage as much as anxiety did.¹⁵ Yet, for Heidegger's relation to theology, it is important to know that Heidegger's thinking of the *Weile* is related to his readings of feasts and festivals in Hölderlin's poetry. One *sings and dances* at festivals: not something one usually does for the God of ontotheology, a cold *causa sui* that supposedly is the ground of all being.¹⁶

Beings Approaching Beings: A Word about What Comes Near

Heidegger will however always insist on *mediations* between being and beings—even if a God is to appear in being, this God will need to appear through the medium of being. This is obvious from his account of Being's *approach* to beings. This approach is such that Being *is* nowhere else than in the interplay between beings. Being is not a layer above or beyond beings. It is rather a dimension between beings (which, however, cannot be reduced to just a being).

To think the Being's *approaching* beings, not as a launch of an entity from elsewhere, Heidegger focuses once more on the temporal unity of time's ecstasy through present, past, and future.

From what source is the unity of the three dimensions of true time determined? [We] already heard: in the approaching of what is no longer present and even in the present itself, there always plays a kind of approach and bringing about, that is, a kind of presencing. We cannot attribute the presencing to... one of the three dimensions of time. [Rather] the unity of time's three dimensions consist in the interplay of each toward each. This interplay proves to be true extending, playing in the... heart of time, the fourth dimension, so to speak.¹⁷

We see Heidegger moving here *from* presence and the present *to* the presencing of such presence, *then* to the realization that this presencing in a given epoch is not free of time itself, and *lastly*, to realize that this presencing in different epochs itself comes from out of an interplay reaching through them all. This *experience*, one might say, is one of ultimate mediation. One might say: one never reaches purely into that which is reaching out to us. One can approach being's approach only through mediation. This is why the past and the tradition will become increasingly important for Heidegger. Thinking after the end of metaphysics cannot occur without incorporating what metaphysics has already thought. We need to take this question of mediation

seriously—especially if we are to consider Heidegger’s debate with Catholicism which is a religion of mediation if ever there was one.

This fourth dimension, then, is actually the first: it concerns what is most primordial since it concerns ‘the giving that determines all’: it is a ‘nearing nearness [that] keeps open the approach coming from the future by withholding the present in its approach. [The] giving that gives time is determined by denying and withholding nearness.’¹⁸ This giving arrives *like* the gods, who refrain from full-presence in the thing by not submitting to any of the subject’s constitutions or creations. It hovers alongside beings and refuses to become either present-at-hand or permanent presence which is the only eternity metaphysics could conceive: an eternity that is distilled from the now-point of time and projects what can be sustained from this moment onto what lasts forever.

This experience accounts in this way for a phenomenological gaze at beings. One should in effect appreciate that all ‘abiding is transitory on both ends, into and out of unconcealment’¹⁹: what ‘is’ is never ‘fully present,’ and what ‘is not’ presences all the same. What comes about, passes away. What passed away might still ‘presence’ toward us. Just as the future overrides the present, always, the past is present in more ways than the ‘constitution of the present’ can conceive.

To speak of these things, we need poets and philosophers: they summon, or are summoned rather, to bring this nearness into speech. This speech is peculiar: it is not the truth of the logician for whom snow is white if and only if snow is white.

Man, as the one who ek-sists, comes to stand in this relation that being destines for itself. [In] care he takes it upon himself and first fails to recognize the nearest and attaches himself to the ultranearest. He even thinks this is the nearest. Yet nearer than what is near, beings [*das Seiende*], is nearness itself: the truth of Being.²⁰

We need to look beyond beings and problematize their preponderance. This is what the thing does for us. Having been thus pointed beyond being into the event of being and time, it comes to the human being to bring such nearness to speech, for this ‘nearness occurs essentially as language itself.’²¹ This nearness ‘is not,’ it is not itself a being on which we can lay claim. Rather, and nonetheless *like* all beings, it is on the move, luring poets and philosophers into its occurrence: ‘The nearness that comes near is itself the *Ereignis*, by which poetry and thinking are directed into their nature.’²² What is the poet and the thinker to do, having so been brought into the nearness that touches him or her (without touching)?

Poets have nothing else before them than their directedness to ‘the preservation of the unconcealedness of beings.’²³ This might not seem much but in an epoch which, for Heidegger, has entirely forgotten the event of being and remains ‘attached’ to beings, this is a most urgent task. This task requires

poetics for 'Being only reveals itself in the word.'²⁴ Theologians should have noticed that Heidegger's being-in-the-world had slowly but surely been shifted into a *being-in-the-word*. Heidegger here repeats a crucial characteristic of biblical religion by transposing (and secularizing) God's creative action, through which beings are called forward through God's speech ('Let there be light') to the power of the poet's speech: 'no thing is where the word fails.'

Conclusion: Traditional Mediations and Revelations

It is time to focus on this nearing of the nearness of being. For Heidegger will more than once relate this to a revelation of sorts. This revelation, too, is not the irruption of something entirely new, just as the unconcealment of beings is not a spectacle that would leave nothing of these beings concealed. Rather, it seems that an old possibility is, in a sense, re-actualized and this is what Heidegger came to understand as a 'new beginning'.

We have already indicated that this hinting and *Winking* of the divinities *in and through* the materiality of the thing resembles a greeting. Heidegger is quite clear about this fact: 'at a departure, for example, waving [*Winken*] is a retaining of nearness despite an increasing distance and is, conversely, at arrival, the making manifest of the distance still reigning in a pleasing nearness.'²⁵ These gestures imply a sort of reticence and reserve: it is a kind of showing that is not yet a speaking for which Christ's *Noli me tangere* seems an appropriate example: a showing that this Christ still is present (in some way) but may no longer be touched immediately (as Thomas once desired).

Yet, in order to understand how such gestures of a pleasing nearness relate to revelation, we need to turn to Heidegger's *On the Way To Language*. Here the movement of these hints and gestures are shown in more detail. In the imagined conversation between a Japanese (J below) and someone who, more than a little, resembles Heidegger (R below), one reads:

R: Because what authentically bears, first bears itself to us [*uns sich erst zu-trägt*].

J: We, however, only bear our share towards it [*entgegentragen*].

R: Whereby that which conveys itself to us [*uns sich zuträgt*] has already registered our counter-bearing in what it conveys to us [*unser Entgegentragen schon in den Zutrag eingetragen hat*].

J: Consequently you name gesture: the gathering which originally unites within itself what we bear to it and what it bears to us [*Entgegentragen und Zutrag*].²⁶

We should notice here the play between conveying and counter-bearing which is equally a play of giving and giving back: what has been given to us, will need a response. However, such a response is already taken into account by that which has first given a gift. In a typical Heideggerian manner, Heidegger then lets us notice that this is not a play between two sides, as it

were, with being on the one hand and the human being on the other. Rather, there is *one* contingent event or *Ereignis* in which the event of being and time takes place. However novel all this might sound—it is written in a new language—it resembles at least two ways in which the Christian tradition has conceived God’s revelation to humankind and which Heidegger surely knew. On the one hand, there comes to mind St. Paul’s saying that ‘no temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it’ (1 Cor.10:13). Nothing will come, then, and be given to us, that we cannot receive. Aquinas, on the other hand, develops this in the dictum that God’s revelation to humankind always and already occurs according to the mode of the receiver (e.g., *Summa Theologica* 1a. q.75 a.5)—a dictum to which Heidegger’s discourse on being has, to my mind, always remained faithful. If being approaches beings, and if God is to gesture toward beings, then such a God will ‘take the hint’ as it were and, from out of a ‘pleasing nearness,’ accommodate to the conditions of the receiver, knowing well that the receiver will distort and, well, deconstruct this very approach. If God then chooses to appear (and this freedom, contrary to what theologians as Jean-Luc Marion think, is not contradicted here) then God will appear in being and as a being. The *Offenbarung* will therefore accommodate to the *Offenbarkeit* and unconcealment of beings.

For Heidegger, this would have been the start for a true theology of being. The spiral in being (from being to the holy to the divinities to the Gods to the Godhead) teaches not only a thing or two about mediation, it also teaches us what the best of the theological tradition already knew, that God in God’s essence is and must remain unknown. Yet, for this ‘unknown’ to be known, it must have reached us through the means available to us, through that which we are attached to the most, namely beings.

To these basics of fundamental theology, Heidegger adds one more thing to think about: it is ‘the *manifestness* of God [*Offenbarkeit Gottes*], not merely He Himself, [that] is secretive [*Geheimnisvoll*].’²⁷ God is not only incomprehensible in Godself, as an entire tradition of negative theology has shown, but also God’s appearance in being (as a being) is itself a riddle (and will need to *remain* a riddle).

This explains Heidegger’s wariness of all kinds of dogmatics: any system that, at one time or another, be it through ethics or through religion, thinks it could meet the demands of being by circumscribing these demands is an usurpation of their very time in being: needless to say that time will change how we assert ourself in being. No one can ever lay claim on what calls and is calling: ‘*Dunkel bleibt [...] auf welche Weise es in das Denken heisst*’ (‘It remains dark in which manner it calls toward thinking’).²⁸ Yet all of this might mean that, if theology is to learn from Heidegger, it will need to take this question of being seriously and start from the beginning as it were. All

Heidegger had to show, as a philosopher (which he did), is ‘that the address [*Anspruch*] of the divine, which is grounded in being itself, is taken up by man into dictum and sayings’ and thus that the ‘relation to the divine being belongs to being [*im Sein beruht*].’²⁹

It need not come as a surprise than that, in a time in which Heidegger was ready to speak more theologically, he described Jesus as a *sich offenbarende offenbarer*: ‘if God is only accessible as a being, insofar as he makes himself accessible as revealing himself as a revealer, then this means for the conception of Christian theology, that is essentially a theology of the New Testament, i.e. also a theology of God in history.’³⁰

Notes

- 1 See Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* (San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1982), 10 mod.
- 2 Heidegger, ‘Phenomenology and Theology,’ in *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 43.
- 3 Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 173.
- 4 Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000), 7.
- 5 As cited by Wolfe, *Heidegger and Theology*, 37.
- 6 Heidegger, *Besinnung*, GA 66 (Frankfurt a. Main: Klostermann, 1997), 415.
- 7 Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 151–152.
- 8 Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 78.
- 9 Heidegger, *Seminäre*, GA 15 (Frankfurt a. M.: Klosterman, 1986), 437.
- 10 The emphasis on the question is a constant in Heidegger. For this particular quotation, see *Brief über den Humanismus* (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 2000), 35. The two following clauses are paraphrases from *Was ist Metaphysik?* (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1998), 47 and *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (Indiana: Indiana UP, 1995), 161. The primacy of the question, of philosophy, or of truth, will be criticized by Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida for both of whom ‘justice precedes truth’: the other does not ask any questions but demands help.
- 11 Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, GA 7 (Frankfurt a. Main: Klostermann, 2000), 185.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 262.
- 13 Heidegger, ‘Origin of the Work of Art,’ 187.
- 14 Heidegger, ‘The Thing,’ 194 mod.
- 15 Richard Capobianco, *Heidegger’s Way of Being* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 32.
- 16 Reference is to Heidegger’s famous saying in *Identity and Difference* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2002), 72.
- 17 Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 15.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 15–16.
- 19 Mitchell, *The Fourfold*, 290.
- 20 Heidegger, ‘Letter on Humanism,’ 235 mod.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 236.
- 22 Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 90 mod.
- 23 Heidegger, *Parmenides* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1992), 78.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 99.
- 25 Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen ‘Germanien’ und ‘Der Rhein,’* GA 39.32.

- 26 Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 18–19.
- 27 Heidegger, 'Poetically man dwells,' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 220.
- 28 Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1971), 148. *Dunkel* is not a word Heidegger uses lightly.
- 29 Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 114 and 105.
- 30 Heidegger, *Geschichte der Philosophie von Thomas von Aquin bis Kant*, GA 23.221.

5 Phenomenology and Theology in Heidegger's Reading of Schelling

Joseph S. O'Leary

Heidegger's fascination with Schelling's *On the Essence of Human Freedom*¹ has largely to do with the degree to which this speculative treatise is porous to a phenomenological take on the issues it handles, including not only human freedom but 'the objects connected with it (*die damit zusammenhängende Gegenstände*),' namely, the will, evil, the nature of God, and as Heidegger particularly insists, the nature of being. Schelling begins his inquiry in a twofold perspective: the essence of human freedom is approached from the fact (*Tatsache*) of freedom, a matter of immediate feeling (*Gefühl*), but the concept of freedom is also connected with 'the totality of a scientific vision of the world (*Weltansicht*)' and is 'one of the dominant central points (*herrschenden Mittelpunkte*) of the system.' The 'two sides of the investigation converge in one,' Schelling declares (VII, 336), but it may be that this is a wishful postulate, given color only through highly speculative constructions rather than by phenomenological insight. In pursuit of the postulated unity Schelling sketches a capacious notion of a system that can comfortably integrate freedom, a system that is a variety of pantheism (set off from previous defective ones, all linked with the name of Spinoza), and in which the godhead itself has to be radically rethought.

But Heidegger's interest lies in the phenomenology of being and not in theological speculation, so that there is a mismatch between text and commentator from the start. He solicits Schelling's reflections toward the question of being, which for Heidegger poses the central phenomenological task—to let beings show themselves in their being, and to let being show itself in its truth. This leads him to underline at every point the tension between phenomenon and system, the irreducibility to any metaphysical frame of his own ever-deepening grasp of the phenomenality of existence and of the openness of being.

That tension is not mapped in a definitive, magisterial way, but in a flexible to-and-fro: Heidegger thinks along with Schelling in sympathetic complicity and then draws back so that the reader is often left wondering where Heidegger actually stands. In general, he would say that Schelling's thought goes as far as metaphysics can toward thinking the phenomena of freedom, will, evil, divinity, existence, being, but that it is necessary to wrest these

phenomena from the grasp of metaphysics, especially from the grasp of the modern metaphysics of subjectivity extending from Descartes to German Idealism. Schelling shook up one version of that metaphysics but nonetheless remained trapped in it. Another schema that will guide Heidegger's reading concerns the history of being (*Seinsgeschichte*), a construct still in the making at the time of these lectures: Schelling's place in that history is defined by his definition of being as will. Nietzsche will give this a further twist, making the need of a step back from metaphysics more palpable.

One commentator holds that 'Heidegger after 1930 gave up the phenomenological method of his philosophy' and that thereafter when he speaks of *Stimmung* (mood, attunement) he no longer deals with existential phenomena such as anxiety and boredom, but only with 'experiences of thought' connected with the relationship of 'thinking (*Denken*) and poetizing (*Dichten*) to Being,' and expressed in abstractions such as "Verhaltenheit (reserve)," "Scheu (modesty)," "Erstaunen (wonder)," "Erahnen (sensing)" as he gradually builds up his thinking of the historicity of Being.² Against this I would stress that Heidegger remained self-consciously a phenomenologist to the end; one of his very last essays is 'Mein Weg in die Phänomenologie (My Path into Phenomenology)' (GA 14.91-101).³ His understanding of phenomenology, as expounded in *Sein und Zeit* §7 (GA 2.36-52), has not changed much in 1954 (GA 12.125). It consists in letting the phenomenon, the matter (*Sache*) show itself, and perceiving (*aisthesis*) and articulating (*logos*) this in a receptive thinking, which must overcome received thought-forms, including those bolstered in metaphysics, in order to wrest the phenomena from concealment (*Verdecktheit*).

Heidegger's Schelling lectures of 1936, when first published in 1971,⁴ were gratefully received by the community of Schelling scholars, because of the deep respect and faithful attention which he brought to the text of Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* and because he vindicated Schelling's own self-understanding as saving German Idealism from the dead-end represented by Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Fatefully, Schelling published no substantial work from 1809 until his death in 1854, so that when he ascended from Munich to Berlin in 1841 he had to gesture portentously to his unpublished philosophy, and was easily dismissed as a has been who had long outlived his brilliant youth. Had he brought the sprawling *Weltalter* manuscripts to published form,⁵ or had he even published his penetrating critiques of Hegel when the latter was still alive,⁶ it might not have taken more than a century to rediscover Schelling as a powerful counterforce to Hegel rather than merely a stage on the trajectory toward Hegel.

What Heidegger Is Aiming at

The young Schelling was intoxicated with the idea of Freedom, and the Absolute, which he apprehended primarily by Intuition rather than through the abstract conceptual labor of Fichte or Hegel, was envisaged as

supremely free, even in the most abstract of his youthful essays. Paradoxically, it is Schelling's repeated failures to enclose his thought in a satisfying system that makes him so attractive to Heidegger. He sees both Schelling and Nietzsche as defeated by the immensity of their theme, a failure that is not negative but 'the sign of the emergence of something quite other, the summer lightning of a new beginning. One who truly knew and knowingly mastered the reason of this failure would have to become the founder of the new beginning of western philosophy' (GA 42.5). Such is the role Heidegger wants to claim. Whether he truly penetrated to the essence of what is afoot in Schelling and Nietzsche, or merely imposed on them his own narrative, is hard to say. He uses the Nietzschean image of a cloud, beginning to take form in Schelling's treatise, and hovering over us, pregnant with lightning (GA 42.6). His exegesis will be an entry into the cloud, in the manner of Moses, and the denser and murkier it becomes, the more it will attune the reader to the forces at play.

Schelling highlights the phenomenon of freedom: 'the fact of freedom, though the feeling of it is immediately imprinted in everyone, still nowise lies so much on the surface that a more than common purity and depth of sense (*Sinn*) is not required even to express it in words' (VII, 336; cited GA 42.24). *Sinn* takes us into the realm of intellectual intuition, but it makes Heidegger's phenomenological nose quiver. He distinguishes 'a) the fact of human freedom and the factuality of this fact; b) the feeling of this fact and the truth of a feeling in general; c) the interpretation of what is felt in this feeling and the conceptual mode of the concept grasping in this connection' (GA 42.25). Freedom is not given as a raw feel, but 'an uncommon purity and depth of sense is required in order to adequately feel the fact of freedom' (25). As to that 'sense' (*Sinn*), is it some kind of conviction (*Gesinnung*)? 'Is the certain feeling of freedom grounded in the right conviction or the reverse, or are conviction and feeling not yet the last, or first, instance that yields truth, and that means information, on freedom?' (26). Such preliminary questioning undercuts the conventional presuppositions of the usual discussions of free will. It is a standard procedure of Heidegger faced with any common theme, a procedure that can be named phenomenological.

Soon this questioning acquires a hermeneutical character: 'There are no pure facts; the immediate feeling always holds itself in an interpretation' (34). Schelling did not refer to interpretation (*Auslegung*) but to 'connection with the whole,' which alone gives 'its final scientific completion' to a concept (VII, 336, quoted, GA 42.34). The desire for systematic understanding, we gather, causes Schelling to overleap the hermeneutic task of allowing the phenomena to unfold their meaning. Schelling's utterances are solicited in a more self-consciously ontological direction in statements like the following: 'The concept of freedom has reality if being free as a mode of being belongs to the essence and ground of essence (*Wesensgrund*) of being. When that holds, then the concept of freedom is no longer just any concept' but 'a fundamental determination of being in general' (36).

The tension between freedom and system means nothing to us if we no longer see system as 'a necessity and an imperious demand' and 'freedom and its realization as the inmost need and widest measure of Dasein' (GA 42.39). Our indifference to system, Heidegger unexpectedly declares, is 'a necessary consequence of the dominant nihilism' and of the fact that 'the wish to think and to conceive in face of onrolling reality seems to us a hopeless effort' (41). Is Heidegger now a champion of metaphysics, even as a lost cause, rather than rejoicing in the chance to get back to the original phenomena, the 'matter itself' of phenomenology? No, he envisages an orderly disposition of phenomenological thought: 'System in the true sense is a, indeed the, task of philosophy' and even the unsystematic Greeks exhibit 'an inner disposition (*Fügung*) and order of questioning' (47). In Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* 'the Idealist formation of system become questionable from its own bases and drives beyond itself' (74). We have a concrete intuitive knowledge of 'being as a whole. We know: it is. We stand constantly in this knowledge about Being,' 'a knowledge of the non-objective, absolute' (80). This space of awareness claimed by German Idealism is one in which Heideggerian phenomenology can thrive.

'God is the leading idea of system in general Every philosophy as metaphysics is theology in the original and essential sense, that the conceptual grasp (logos) of being as a whole asks after the ground (i.e. the original matter [*Ur-sache*]) of Being and that this ground is named *theos*, God' (GA 42.87). We tend to think of onto-theo-logy as a schema to be read off mechanically from all metaphysical systems since Aristotle; but Heidegger rethinks the issue whenever it comes up, anxious to seize in a freshly concrete way every time what is going on in metaphysics. Heidegger does not confine his remarks to intra-philosophical theology but says that 'Christian theology is the Christianizing of an extra-Christian philosophy and only therefore can Christian theology be secularized again' (87). Heidegger's youthful engagement with Adolf Harnack's *History of Dogma* and its view of dogma as 'a product of the Greek mind on the soil of the Gospel,'⁷ along with Nietzsche's influence (Christianity as 'Platonism for the people'), underlie this rather caricatural diagnosis. Of the slogans, 'Philosophy is secularized theology' and 'Theology is applied philosophy,' he says: 'To say something true they need so many modifications that it is better not to utter such propositions' (88).

Heidegger now elaborates on the fundamental mode of philosophical knowing, in a descant on Schelling's invocation of Empedocles—'like is known by like'; the philosopher 'keeping the understanding pure and unshaded by wickedness grasps the god outside himself with the god within' (VII, 337, quoted, GA 42.90). Though still only on the second page of the *Abhandlung*, Heidegger is busily rewriting Schelling in his own language: 'Unfolding of the manifestedness of beings is only possible at all if man stands in a relation to beings, and indeed this relation of man to the being that he himself is not must again be different according to the mode of being of the being in each case' (91). Note how intellectual intuition is cashed as

existential openness, speculation as phenomenological differentiation, and the entire endeavor of philosophy as questioning after being, 'how man as being (*Seiender*) stands to being as a whole' (92). Heidegger lurches ahead to quote a passage that gives a dense account of what Schelling thinks he is doing, and impressively declares: 'To understand this passage is to grasp the entire treatise' (93). But the text quoted seems remote from Heidegger's language of being: 'In man lies the entire might of the dark principle and at the same time the entire power of the light. In him is the deepest abyss and the highest heaven, or both centers. The human will is the germ, concealed in the eternal longing, of the god as yet present only in the ground; the divine gaze of life locked in the depth, which God beheld when he assumed the will to Nature' (VII, 363). Here, says Heidegger, we run into 'the inconceivable (*das Unbegreifliche*)' as 'clear limit and veiling' (93).

Turning to the opposition of freedom and necessity, Heidegger restates it in terms of being. A later note says: 'In what follows, in accordance with the aim of the interpretation, a clear distinction is not made between: the thinking of the metaphysics of unconditioned subjectivity as onto-theo-teleology and the thinking through (*Erdenken*) of the truth of being' (99). Just here is where Heidegger's interpretation begins to go astray. Schelling's speculative struggles inspire Heidegger to splendid remarks on the task of philosophy as engagement with being: 'Philosophy as a highest willing of the spirit is in itself a willing beyond itself, a pushing of itself against the limits of being, which it goes beyond insofar as it questions beyond beings through the question after being itself. With the truth about being philosophy seeks a free open space (*will die Philosophie ins Freie*) and yet remains bound into the necessity of beings' (100). Rather sheepishly, Heidegger notes that what he has 'brought out in a sharpened way' is indicated by Schelling 'only in general terms and quite unnoticeably. That is often his style'; he wants to 'present his knowledge in a nonbinding bindingness. In this he reminds us of Goethe. Hence the interpretation must and can often mount beyond him' (101).

Another embarrassed later note admits: 'In what follows the bounds of *Seynsgeschichtlich* thinking and of metaphysics again run into one another, since the latter is to be illuminated by the former, which brings the danger of changing the meaning of metaphysics in general (*die Metaphysik überhaupt umzudeuten*)' (109). Schelling's question of pantheism is identified as 'the question after the ground of being as a whole, or more generally characterized: the theological question' (112). Resisting this ontotheology, Heidegger declares: "'Ontology" never means for us a system, a doctrine or a discipline, but only the question after the truth and the ground of being, and "theology" is for us the question about the being of the ground' (113).

This sentence well expresses Heidegger's ambivalent stance. Even at this late stage he has not yet formulated decisively his project of 'overcoming metaphysics,' which fully matures only in the later Nietzsche lectures. He still hankers after a transcription of metaphysics into phenomenological terms. Disengaged from confessional theology, he still wants to be a philosophical

theologian, though in a greatly reduced sense: ontology yields the ground of being and theology the being of the ground. Perhaps it is in these lectures on Schelling that he first realizes how irrelevant or damaging metaphysical thought-forms are to a phenomenological apprehension of being or the divine, increasingly abandoning Schelling to his theosophical musings in order to salvage what ontological insight can be gleaned from his energetic thinking. Schelling's inquiry so far is called 'a constant interplay between the theological question after the ground of being as a whole and the ontological question after the essence of the being as such' (113), and this understanding bestows the 'right and necessity' (114) to discuss his treatise. But this angle contributes more to Heidegger's aim to situate metaphysics than to a penetrating clarification of Schelling's actual argument.

'To have a feeling for the fact of freedom includes in itself a certain foregrasp of the whole of being' and vice versa (118). Here speculative onto-theology is conducted in the medium of a phenomenological feeling or sensing. 'For what is decisive for the originality of the feeling-through is how it is attuned (*abgestimmt*) as the basic attunement (*Grundstimmung*) of human Da-sein to being as such and as a whole' (124); this sentence is italicized, as marking Heidegger's breaking through Schelling's dreary discussion of pantheism to its core meaning, the human relation to being. The tawdriness of various forms of pantheism is traced to their 'misrecognition of the ontological question, in Schelling's words (VII, 341): "in the general misunderstanding of the law of identity or the sense of the copula in the judgement"' (GA 24.129).

This is hardly a very promising item for Heidegger's thinking of being. Nothing daunted, Heidegger pounces on the 'ist' in his usual style: 'The "is" signifies linguistically a mode of utterance of being, *on hê on* The theological question is necessarily transformed into an ontological one' (130). Is there a sleight here, as if one were to say that the copula in 'x is y' transforms algebra into theology? None of the frictions between Schelling's way of thinking and Heidegger's is allowed to become a deal-breaker, and Heidegger bravely concludes that 'the basis for reconciling pantheism and freedom and thus for the possibility of a system of freedom is an ontological one ... the adequate understanding of being and the basic determination of being, of identity. Thus we recognize the basic metaphysical achievement of the treatise on freedom: the founding of an original concept of being' (147). Again an uneasy note is added later: 'But this appears within the modern metaphysics of subjectivity. Here Schelling has progressed farthest' (147); the impressive encomium is greatly relativized.

'If God as ground reveals himself in what he grounds, then he can reveal only himself therein. The dependent must itself be a being that acts freely in itself, just because it depends on God' (150-1). Such is the somewhat pious upshot of the pantheism discussion. An ontological coloring is added: 'The dependent independent, the "derived absoluteness" [VII, 347], is not contradictory, but in this concept is grasped that which constitutes the bond

between the ground of being and being as a whole. God is man; i.e. man as free is in God, and in general only what is free can be in God; everything unfree, and everything insofar as it is unfree, is extra-divine' (151). Schelling may find this satisfactory, but one wonders what it can mean to Heidegger. What is lacking in this idealist construction of a 'system of freedom' is phenomenological concreteness: 'it has not and not yet grasped the fact of human freedom in its factuality (*Tatsächlichkeit*)' (42.157).

Schelling's 'higher realism' (VII, 351) consists in 'grasping Nature from the principle of freedom' (GA 42.160), and entails that 'there is in the last and highest instance no other being at all than willing. Willing is primordial being (*Wollen ist Ursein*)' (VII, 350, quoted, GA 42.164). Idealism, Schelling now objects, gives 'only the most general' and 'the merely formal concept of freedom. The real and living concept however is that it is a capacity of good and of evil This is the point of deepest difficulty in the whole doctrine of freedom' (VII, 352, quoted, GA 42.167). This concrete definition of freedom is the goal of the entire introduction and the basis of the main part (VII, 357-418), devoted to a metaphysics of evil.

Schelling's move to a more concrete, phenomenological apprehension of freedom as capacity for good and evil thrills Heidegger, but the subsequent tracing of this capacity back to the dialectic of ground and existence in God is less rewarding phenomenologically. 'There must be in God something that God himself "is" not. God must be grasped more originally' (GA 42.179). Again Heidegger shifts from this theological recitation to what most concerns him: 'Thus the original experience and the adequate thinking-through of the fact of evil pushes toward grasping being more beingly (*das Seiende seiender zu begreifen*)' (180).

Heidegger's hermeneutical stance blends different levels of inquiry: an effort to expound Schelling's thought on its own terms, emphasizing how it overcomes the Hegelian dominance of logic, and injecting it here and there with a supplement of phenomenological vitality and radicality, while soliciting it in the direction of the question of being, and registering how its metaphysical character impedes it from following through on this phenomenological and ontological awareness. The reader has as much trouble untangling Heidegger's skein as Heidegger had untangling Schelling's. And the reader may rise to the challenge as Heidegger did: by developing his own angle of vision and dragooning Heidegger and/or Schelling into its service.

Up to now, Heidegger has aimed 'to bring out the ontological question and to gather all questions toward the question of being' (185), an admittedly 'one-sided' take on Schelling's thought. 'But we must accept this one-sidedness given that it is the one-sidedness that is directed to the one decisive factor,' namely, 'the movement of questioning through which alone the true comes into the open' (185). The hermeneutical violence of this solicitation of Schelling's discourse is again corrected in a later note: 'Schelling does not pose the question of the truth of being—since metaphysics can never thus question' (185).

Schelling's distinction of ground and existence in every entity, which Heidegger dubs the *Seynsfüge* (188) or disposition⁸ of being (the keystone of his 'system'), is given a phenomenological hue: 'Ex-sistence, *what steps out from itself and in this stepping out reveals itself.*' Ground is 'precisely the nonrational' but not to be confused with 'the primeval swamp of the so-called irrational' (187). Heidegger offers a more precise account of this *Seynsfüge* than Schelling attempted (189), again emphasizing the ontological. Expounding the ground-existence distinction in God, Schelling recalls the 'causa sui, cause of itself as existing, as ground of its existence.' This Spinozan notion is merely conceptual and misses 'how this ground is ground' concretely, or 'how God comes to himself,' 'a God who becomes!' 'If God is the most beingly of all being then the most strenuous and greatest becoming must be in him' (GA 42.190). This ontogenesis of God is no concern of Heidegger as a phenomenologist of being. He laces it with existential diction: 'Man must be, so that God may be revealed. What is a god without man? The absolute form of absolute boredom. What is a man without the god? Pure madness in the form of the harmless. Man must be so that God may "exist" The conditions of the possibility of the revelation of the existing God are at the same time the conditions of the possibility of the capacity for good and for evil i.e. that freedom in which and as which man comes to be (*west*)' (207-8).

Returning to 'creation as (temporal) diffraction of God's eternal essence: the stepping out of itself and coming to itself of the absolute' (224), Heidegger states that 'we gain a certain easing of understanding through highlighting a question that resonates but is not posed specifically' (228), namely the familiar topic of the *principium individuationis*, of which Schelling is credited with 'one of the deepest and most fruitful presentations' (229). A manageable concrete referent is provided when the question of the constitution of created being is focused on the individual as 'always a determined, individual, this' (228). To keep the students' attention he promotes this as hugely important: 'This piece is besides the essential sketch of the mobile becoming of the absolute identity of the eternal spirit the metaphysically most important of the entire treatise' (229). Alas, the process is headily speculative, offering no phenomenological reward: 'The stirring of the ground to itself through the understanding signifies the stirring of the self-distinguishing to a specification and indeed to a specification that at the same time raises itself into the light, i.e. into the rule, and becomes determinacy' (230).

'What was said in the last lecture remained unintelligible,' Heidegger ruefully admits; 'this defect must be made up for as much as we are able'; but 'there is something unintelligible' in the matter discussed (234). This he ascribes to the depth of the questions rather than to Schelling's obscurity. He notes the unsettling character of Schelling's theology, which conceives 'God not as an old daddy with white beard, who manufactures things, but as the God who becomes. to whose essence belongs the ground, the uncreated nature that is not himself' (234). Heidegger is a bit lost here, unable to summon over against Schelling the classical Christian metaphysics of creation

and falling back on dismal caricature à la Richard Dawkins. The attempt at a clearer resumé, complete with a diagram (235-7), does nothing to make Schelling's theogony and cosmogony more cogent and persuasive.

The final pages on the actuality of evil (GA 42.254-85, on VII, 373-416) deal more lightly or tangentially with Schelling's text and rehearse rather banal existential topics. (He devoted 231 pages to 37 of Schelling's, and now covers the remaining 43 pages of the treatise in only 30 pages.) Heidegger highlights the existential aspect: 'Evil is nothing for itself, but is always only as historical, spiritual, as human decisiveness, which decisiveness as such must always be at the same time decision for and against' (255). But 'since he is such undecidedness in his essence' how can he 'step forth into decidedness for evil and be able to actually be as an evil one' (256). Stilted to begin with, this topic is pursued in an abstract reflection on possible and actual. Mounting with Schelling to an ultimate unity 'even before the duality of ground and existence,' the 'absolute indifference' that appears as 'nothingness' and that is called the '*Ungrund*' (VII, 406-8), Heidegger tries to bring this back to earth, by stressing 'the necessity of an essential step' that Schelling did not take, namely to recognize that 'the essence of all being is finitude, and that only the finitely existing has the privilege and the pain of standing in being (*Seyn*) as such and experiencing the true as being (*Seiendes*)' (GA 42.280). He recalls the phenomenological point of departure of Schelling's inquiry, which Schelling himself did not bring into clear focus: 'The fact of human freedom has for him a particular factuality Man is there experienced with a view into the abysses and heights of being, with a view onto the terror of the divinity, the life-anxiety of everything created, the sorrow of every created creating, the wickedness of evil and the will of love' (42.284). The phenomenological point of departure is rejoined but with no signal enrichment. 'Here God is not dragged down to the level of humans, but the reverse The human—that other, as which he must be the one through whom alone the God can reveal himself at all, if he reveals himself' (284). Here Heidegger has climbed down from Schelling's speculative heights, with which he has parted company in the latter stages of his exposition. His stress on man as experienced ekes out the experiential strand in Schelling's discourse, which seems in reality to have been choked by the speculative. And what he has to say about God is but the wisp of a metaphysical account and the lamest stab at a phenomenological sighting (not far from the vague utterances he makes in Zürich in 1951; GA 15.425-9). The final gesture is an evocation of Hölderlin, something of whose basic *Stimmung* is unconvincingly claimed to run through Schelling's treatise.

It is in his excited theologizing that Schelling is least helpful to Heidegger, since the prodigious proceedings afoot in the bosom of the divinity distract from steady concern with being and from the phenomenological attention that Heidegger seeks to bring to the ontological question. The more Schelling talks of God, the less Heidegger responds, not from any godless indifference but because he finds himself increasingly disenchanted with Schelling's

extravagant inventions, which he makes increasingly desultory attempts to recall to solid philosophical ground. Nor is theodicy his cup of tea. Yet the spectacle we have attempted to describe is not without a theological lesson. Phenomenology gives Heidegger a steady, grounded sense of what is living and what is dead in philosophical discourse, and when he runs up against metaphysical theologizing that has lost a genuine connection to the phenomena his judgment, even if expressed in silence, carries weight.

Notes

- 1 F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*, ed. Thomas Buchheim (Hamburg: Meiner, 1997). Standard pagination follows *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling (Stuttgart, 1856-1861), VII, 336-416. Heidegger's lectures on this text are in Martin Heidegger, *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809)*, *Gesamtausgabe* 42, ed. Ingrid Schüssler (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1988).
- 2 Romano Poci, *Heideggers Theorie des Befindlichkeit: Sein Denken zwischen 1927 und 1933* (Freiburg and Munich: Alber, 1996), 20.
- 3 See Jean-François Courtine, *Heidegger et la phénoménologie* (Paris: Vrin, 1990); *La cause de la phénoménologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007).
- 4 Martin Heidegger, *Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809)* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1971).
- 5 These are conveniently accessible in Vito Limone, ed., Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *Le età del mondo: Redazioni 1811, 1813, 1815/17* (Milan: Bompiani, 2013).
- 6 See the Munich lectures of 1827: *Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1959), 111-141, and the critical thrusts in the Berlin lectures: Manfred Frank, ed., *Schelling: Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), 127-139.
- 7 Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 3rd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 1.20. Christian Sommer, *Heidegger, Aristote, Luther: Les sources aristotéliciennes et néo-testamentaires d'Être et temps* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005). Heidegger occasionally sketches his own idea of what an authentic Christian theology should be, led by the revelation-event and forsaking such philosophical concepts as 'being.'
- 8 Joan Stambaugh in her translation—Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985)—renders this as 'jointure of being.'

6 From Love to Auto-affection

Divine Revelation in Fichte's *Religionslehre* and Michel Henry's Radical Phenomenology

Frédéric Seyler

The relations between philosophy and theology turn to a large extent on how philosophy addresses the question of divine revelation. There can be a discourse or logos on something only insofar as this “something” has manifested itself. Such manifestation could itself be seen as a form of logos, perhaps even as its most fundamental and primary form. In his *Essence of Manifestation* (1963),¹ Michel Henry makes indeed such a claim by laying the groundwork for a phenomenology of affectivity (or auto-affection), the latter being synonymous with this fundamental form of revelation that is Life taken as an absolute. Henry builds on Fichte's *Way Toward the Blessed Life* (1806),² as he radicalizes Fichte's concept of love by means of the phenomenological concept of auto-affection. Whereas for Fichte the standpoint of religion is still dependent on *both* love and knowing, in Henry religion becomes intrinsic to life insofar as love cannot be distinguished anymore from knowing in its most fundamental (i.e., affective) sense. This requires conceptualizing the logos of Life as the primary form of appearing, that is, as the manifestation of the absolute.

Fichte: Love and Knowing in the Standpoint of Religion

Fichte's 1806 *Religionslehre* is centered on both the concept of knowing (*Wissen*) and on that of love. As an *Anweisung zum seligen Leben* it is first a theory (*Theorie*) of the blessed life. And yet, it aims at showing that the true (and affective) possession of this theory is identical with the blessed life itself. This accounts for the structure of Fichte's lectures: The first two Lectures have an introductory character; Lectures three to five constitute the theory of the blessed life, whereas Lectures seven to eleven highlight what “the living possession of the theory” means.³ Furthermore, this structure also broadly overlaps with the twofold *conceptual* focus of the *Anweisung*, in which “knowing” is addressed in the first part and “love” in the second.⁴

Insofar as the blessed life resides in a viewpoint or standpoint taken on the world (*Ansicht, Weltansicht*), however, knowing enjoys a certain primacy. The religious standpoint, which is unsurpassable, is marked by the insight that “God alone is, and nothing beside him.”⁵ God, as the only reality, is

absolute. In the face of this all-encompassing absolute the whole world and the self are “annihilated” (*vernichtet*), that is, they have become only the appearance (*Schein*) of reality. The blessed life, therefore, unfolds within divine life. It has abandoned its former love of that which is manifold and ceaselessly changing for that which is one and eternal.

Religion, however, would be reduced to an empty abstraction if it were simply a matter of knowing. As “cold” and indifferent in nature, the understanding (*Verstand*) is unable to fill the religious point of view with life. This explains why the standpoint of science (*Wissenschaft*, here to be taken in the sense of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*) does not surpass that of religion: For science is necessary only in order to understand *how* the manifold of appearances derives from divine oneness, whereas the religious man already has the certitude *that* (*dass*) this is the case, and it is this certitude that is the condition for the blessed life. Moreover, the religious certitude carries within itself the love of God (*Amor Dei* or *Gottesliebe*), which is beyond knowing: Love, as Fichte writes, stands higher than all reason and necessarily escapes reflection,⁶ it is the origin and ground for any reflection, as is the eternal bond between God and the human, an arch-fact (*Urfaktum*) that can be conceived (*Begreifen*) only as inconceivable (*Unbegreifliches*). It is the recognition of this arch-fact that is lived through in the religious attitude, whereas science seizes it conceptually as it seizes the “how” of worldly appearing (*Erscheinen*).

The center of authentic (*wahrhaft*), i.e., blessed life, therefore, is love, while the point of view encompassing both divine oneness and worldly multiplicity in knowing is “only” the center of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. At each of the five standpoints that Fichte traverses the human creates an arch-image (*Urbild*) of the absolute as an object of love and nostalgia. But even an arch-image that represents the absolute truthfully (as in standpoints four and five) remains separated from absolute reality. Only the love of God manifested and expressed through the actions of those who are inspired of God can overcome such separateness. The 10th Lecture of the *Anweisung*, which poses love as the ground for reflection, seems therefore to make the blessed life dependent upon a revelation that lies *beyond* reflection.

The 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*, on the other hand, develops the understanding of reality as internal light (*Licht*) and life, but also as the “graveyard of the concept.”⁷ Insofar as the concept explicates one thing *through* another, it has the form of the unity of a multiplicity. This form, however, cannot account for the concept’s content as well as for its vivacity or living character (*Lebendigkeit*). Both must be grounded in the self-movement of absolute life, i.e., grounded precisely beyond any concept. Thus, while the concept “has nearly all the natural tendencies of life, [it is] nevertheless [...] in itself only death.”⁸ To separate love from reflection as well as light from concept, however, runs into the danger of simply opposing these terms and thereby of missing essential aspects of both the *Religions-* and the *Wissenschaftslehre*. As to the theory of religion, it develops a concept

of love as well as of life that does not negate the reflexive form of the I and of consciousness, but that provides a foundation for them. The concrete determinations of reflection cannot be as such opposed to love, since it is through the latter that they are filled with life: It is the power of love that lies at the core of a teleology that drives reflection toward the higher standpoints within the fivefold.

In order to annihilate itself in light of the arch-reality that is the absolute, the concept has to be posited and thought through. The limits of knowing—the inner life of the absolute—can only be brought to clarity in knowing itself. This complex balance between love and reflection, as well as between light and concept, is in turn closely tied to Fichte's theory of being (*Sein*) and existing (*Dasein*). For absolute Being (and Life) not only *is*, but—as an arch-fact that cannot be further disclosed—also necessarily exists (*ist...da*). Divine *Dasein*, however, is nothing other than knowing, which means that the abovementioned religious principle must be completed as follows: There is nothing besides God, except God's *Dasein* in the form of knowing.

From there it follows that Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* not only is the construction of the absolute, but also its self-construction. Likewise, for Fichte's Theory of Religion, the will of those inspired of God has become the divine will, such that it is God that lives and acts through a particular individual. The form of consciousness is thereby not annulled, but the division between divine and humane will, as well as between divine and human love, is. In the living religion,⁹ therefore, our love for God is identical with God's love for himself. This also explains Fichte's threefold account of logos as reason, form, and love in the Gospel of John: "In the beginning, before all Time and the absolute Creator of all Time, is Love."¹⁰ Taken from the point of view of transcendental philosophy, this means that the love of God is identified as original oneness and, at the same time, as a transcendental condition for any form of appearing. Fichte's approach, thus, aims at overcoming the dilemma encountered by every philosophy that, in its search for absolute unity, will not content itself with positing an irreducible dualism: "This is the difficulty with every philosophy that wants to avoid *dualism* and is instead really serious about the quest for oneness: Either we must perish, or God must. We will not, and God ought not!"¹¹ The reference to Spinoza is explicit here: How could an absolute that is neither life nor knowing but substance—i.e., in Fichte's terms: Being devoid of life—generate absolute knowing? For Fichte, the question of absolute knowing and its origin can only be solved from within the framework of a transcendental philosophy, in which absolute life is already understood as a condition of possibility for the act of knowing.

The centrality of love nonetheless raises a further, phenomenological question: How does love appear and what is it that appears through love? In terms of the *Anweisung*, love appears in human existence as blessed life, but, again, how is this love revealed to individual consciousness, since it is, according to the same text, beyond reflection and therefore beyond the divisions operated

by this very consciousness? It is consistent with Fichte's *Wissenschafts-* and *Religionslehre* to claim that the characterization of God's love for us cannot go further than to conceive of it as the eternal bond between God's being and its existing in human consciousness. But, why then is the experience of this love in finite existence characterized as "inward revelation" (*innere Offenbarung*)¹² and what is the mode of appearing of such revelation that fills those inspired of God with an absolute certitude? When the 1st Lecture further describes love as "enjoyment of itself"¹³ the question is only displaced. For one will have to ask how such enjoyment appears and what its essence is. In addition, one will also remember that love is, according to Fichte, present in all of the five standpoints, which means that it is not restricted to the sole standpoint of religion and to the specific inward revelation that accompanies it. The latter remains therefore undetermined as far as its mode of appearing is concerned.

The 9th Lecture further attempts such a characterization, when it describes an activity that, stemming from the standpoint of higher morality, generates the highest pleasure and a feeling of accomplishment. At the same time, however, the same lecture acknowledges the limitations inherent to such descriptions: "He to whom his especial Higher Vocation has revealed itself knows it as it at it is revealed to him; and he may conclude by analogy how it is with others to whom their Higher Vocation has also become clear and intelligible. But as for him to whom it has not revealed itself, to him no information on this subject can be communicated;—it serves no purpose to speak of colors to the blind."¹⁴ The discovery of one's "portion" or participation in supra-sensible Being¹⁵—here alluded to in the context of the third standpoint—remains therefore self-referential. This also means that any description endeavored in this respect has to remain external to both "inward revelation" and certitude as such. The use of language can only serve as an approximation for those to whom the same content has already been revealed in a fundamentally different way than that accessible through an external description. And, ultimately, it seems to implicate that the revelation of (God's) love is given beyond the objectifications and divisions of consciousness.

Love is thus "the source of all Certainty, all Truth, all Reality,"¹⁶ and as such it is certainty of God's *Dasein* in us. Beyond philosophical discourse, in "immediate Life,"¹⁷ there is no interpretation of such love. Instead, love is immediately present "as it is in itself, because it is in truth nothing else than the self-supporting Life of Absolute Being."¹⁸ This seems to confirm that love has to be given in a way that has to be distinguished eidetically from reflection. Nevertheless, in his theoretical works written during the same period and also in the 1806 *Religionslehre* itself, Fichte does not take the final step toward conceiving a form of *appearing* specific to love, an appearing that would amount to a material and qualitative givenness of the absolute. In the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*, appearing comes always with consciousness. As to the 1805 *Erlanger Wissenschaftslehre*, it seems to exclude even the possibility of any material-qualitative seizing of the absolute.¹⁹

Michel Henry's Reading of Fichte: Love as Auto-affection

Michel Henry has not only clearly addressed this apparent inconsistency in Fichte, he has also elaborated a specific answer to it, which would even become the distinctive trait of his phenomenology of life. While developing a phenomenology of pure or pre-intentional affectivity, i.e., of *immanent auto-affection*, Henry's comments on Fichte in *The Essence of Manifestation* represent an important part of the process through which he departs from the phenomenological tradition inaugurated by Husserl. Henry's radical phenomenology of life can therefore be seen as a potential development of Fichte's theory of the blessed life, though with major differences. A closer look into Henry's critical appraisal of Fichte's *Anweisung* shows that, for Henry, Fichte is both a representative of "ontological monism" and, at the same time, one of the few philosophers who anticipated the meaning of immanence as essence of the absolute, while nonetheless failing to conceptualize it as the essence of manifestation itself.

Henry's *Essence of Manifestation* is, generally speaking, both a phenomenological and an ontological inquiry into the essence of appearing. It is also the only book in which Henry discusses Fichte, a discussion limited to the 1806 *Anweisung*. In Sections 9 and 10 of the *Essence*, Henry identifies the two main ontological presuppositions of monism and characterizes their impact as far as the conception of the phenomenon is concerned. According to Section 9, ontological monism is characterized by the fact that it determines the essence of the phenomenon, i.e., the structure of phenomenality, as phenomenological *distance*: "Being is a phenomenon only when it is at a distance from itself. The work of phenomenological distance understood as ontological power [...] is precisely to institute the interval whereby Being can appear to itself."²⁰ Such manifestation of Being is also equivalent to its *existence*, which implies a splitting of Being (*dédoublement de l'être*) due to the prior notion of an irreducible phenomenological distance: "Because it bases itself upon distance, the existence of Being is different from Being itself. It differs from Being itself precisely because that which is at a distance from itself is Being itself, if you will, but at a distance from itself in its non-coincidence with itself, it is Being in difference."²¹ By positing distance as a necessity inherent to manifestation, ontological monism leads therefore, and paradoxically, to a dualism of Being and existence.

However, as Henry's analysis of the 3rd Lecture of the *Anweisung* shows, this difference is more subtle than appears at first: Not only is Being manifested through existence, but its being itself is one of manifestation. If, for instance, the existence of the wall is "*its Being out of its Being*,"²² i.e., an image and, as such, Being's exteriority with regard to itself, it is, in addition, a *necessary* manifestation insofar as Being has to exist (*soll da sein*). In Being, therefore, presence and alienation are intertwined: As far as ontological monism is concerned, "*the essence of presence is alienation*. The presence to itself of Being is the same as its separation-with-itself in becoming another,

it constitutes itself in the splitting of Being, a splitting in which the latter appears to itself and thus enters into the phenomenal condition of presence.”²³ Here, presence equals manifestation, but every manifestation is, at the same time, loss. In the very process through which Being is given it escapes this givenness. This is also why Being can be desired. But the desire to suppress this separateness from Being cannot be fulfilled, for separateness is the condition of givenness itself. Thus, there is oneness in duality: “Being exists only as Being-other, but the return of the other to the same, or rather the unity that binds them and which Fichte calls *life* does not suppress their duality but presupposes it as its ontological and phenomenal foundation.”²⁴

As condition of appearing, difference affects absolute Being itself, i.e., God, who accomplishes its manifestation by becoming other. Otherwise, it would remain “nothing more than the *Ungrund* which is not only the most obscure but the most abstract and as such something completely unreal if he in turn does not submit to the conditions which open and define the field of phenomenal distance.”²⁵ In accordance with his vocation that consists in revealing himself, God is “confused” with the conditions that define the phenomenal field, i.e., “he is the very movement which actualizes this vocation”²⁶. In other words: For ontological monism, the essence of the absolute is the essence of manifestation—or: An essence to manifest itself—, it is therefore identical with the movement of distancing itself and becoming other in existence. From this perspective, however, the essence of manifestation must remain veiled to consciousness, even if consciousness is the very accomplishment of manifestation. The latter is only known as “this or that,” i.e., under the form of finite determinations, never as absolute. Since the pure essence of manifestation actualizes itself only “in objectification under the form of finite determination,”²⁷ it is understood by Fichte as “the very advent of the world in its diversity,”²⁸ i.e., as the totality of ontic determinations. The loss inherent to phenomenality is therefore due to a transformation of oneness into multiplicity. As such, therefore, the absolute remains without revelation, a “non-revelation” that is paralleled by that of consciousness *as such*: “*Pure consciousness does not arrive at the phenomenal condition. Absolute consciousness is unconscious*”²⁹ or, as Fichte writes, “the form for ever veils the essence from us.”³⁰

Henry’s first conclusion on Fichte is therefore rather dismissive: Fichte’s transcendental philosophy “could save the absolute only by pushing it back into a ‘world-beyond’.”³¹ In Henry’s reading, such perpetual evanescence characterizes in addition Fichtean freedom, since freedom becomes actual only by indefinitely opposing its limits, thus making this opposition (and, hence, its limits) the very condition of its existence.

This first assessment, however, will be followed by a second one, in which, according to Henry, Fichte appears to have anticipated immanence as an *alternative* mode of revelation, namely through the reference to love in the *Anweisung*.

The essence of ontological monism resides less in objectification and mediation than in the fact that it confuses two different actions into one and the

same ontological structure: The action “whereby the essence renders a being manifest and the action whereby it manifests itself to itself.”³² In contrast, Henry’s transcendental “move” consists in ascribing a *duality* to manifestation, on the ground that the mode of revelation of beings cannot be identical to that of the essence, since the latter is the transcendental condition of the former. In other words: The essence can reveal beings only insofar as it has been itself revealed and this happens according to a mode in which there is no room for any mediation. Immediacy is therefore the ontological signification of immanence as defined by Section 36 of the *Essence of Manifestation*.

In what sense does Fichte anticipate this structure of immanence? In Henry’s reading, it is the distinction between love and reflection that enables Fichte to think of the absolute “not as a rising up and [...] becoming of existence in otherness, as the Being-exterior-to-self of Being, but rather as the persistence and maintenance of the latter in itself in the form of love.”³³ If love is both the active source of all reality and a figure of non-separation, reflection, while trying to seize love, merely succeeds in solidifying it through its divisions.³⁴ But, for Henry, such solidification is synonymous with the loss of love’s immanent essence as a unity devoid of *any* exteriority. Through the concept of love, however, Fichte inaugurates a “*new philosophy of existence*,” where existence rather designates “*that which cannot be surpassed and that which, thus not being able to surpass itself, can no longer return to itself in order to posit itself nor attempt to deduce itself nor understand itself.*”³⁵ Immanence, in this view, is incompatible with any distancing from itself. To introduce a phenomenological distance is therefore to break with the mode of revelation proper to immanence. Existence as defined through immanence thus constitutes the being of the absolute where being and existence are conjoined while their differentiation only exists for us.³⁶

Hence, for Henry, love is that which, in Fichte’s theory of religion, brings blessedness (*béatitude*): Blessedness is an experience, “a form of existence or rather existence itself such as Fichte now understands it insofar as it is nothing other than ‘the Absolute supporting and maintaining itself,’ nothing other than love.”³⁷ Love is here both the power of self-revelation of the absolute and its existence.³⁸ In other words: To exist means for the absolute to reveal itself through the immanent mode of manifestation that is love.

Nonetheless, the question of the particular structure pertaining to this mode of revelation still stands. According to Henry, Fichte precisely fails in this task and, instead of elaborating further on the specific mode of revelation of love, leaves its discovery in “*the indetermination of the night*” while returning to “*the dominant and traditional concept of phenomenality*,” i.e., to transcendent exteriority. When he insists that the mediation through an image of the absolute is a condition for *living* in the presence of the absolute, Fichte certainly does not contest the reality of absolute being *independently* of any particular image, i.e., even for those corresponding to the “lower grades of spiritual life.”³⁹ As long as it has not taken the form of an image for pure thought (*reines Denken*), however, the absolute remains *unrecognized*.⁴⁰

But, even if the image of the absolute recognizes divine life in us, it nonetheless distances itself at the same time from the immediacy of absolute life. This limitation is due to the structure of visibility itself, namely that of exteriority and transcendence that Fichte remains tied to.

In Henry's phenomenology of life, on the contrary, intentional consciousness and visibility are not only distinguished from immanent auto-affection, but also founded in it. Auto-affection is the phenomenological essence of living subjectivity as ipseity, without which there is no appearing and no horizon of the world. In Fichtean terms (as read by Henry): Love reveals itself to itself in a strictly immediate and immanent way, a mode of revelation that is also the foundation for reflection as well as for the intentional manifestation of beings in the world. But, one could ask in return, what is the foundation of ipseity itself? At first glance, it seems that the self-referential character of affective revelation prohibits such a search. In this case, singular and immanent experience (*épreuve*) in finite subjectivity would become the ultimate foundation for a phenomenology of life.

Since auto-affection, however, is shared by all living beings (*vivants*) as the mode of revelation proper to life, it possesses an essence that is common to them and that is, as such, not singular but universal. Life as the essence of manifestation is therefore not a theme that would only appear in Henry's Christian trilogy. It is in fact present in his work since the *Essence of Manifestation*. In *Material Phenomenology*, for instance, in particular in the third chapter titled "Pathos-with," Henry develops the concept of life as the foundation of community. On the one hand, auto-affection is the ultimate condition for individuation, because it constitutes the living self in its ipseity. On the other hand, it is precisely that which is common to the living and distinguishes them from mere things. The idea of an affective, hence invisible, community not only lays the ground for a phenomenological approach to intersubjectivity as immanent, it also puts into perspective the notion of solidarity within the community of the living (*communauté des vivants*), since auto-affection as pathos refers to a self-appearing that also is a self-enduring (*épreuve de soi*), i.e., an irreducible form of suffering (*souffrance*).

Two aspects are decisive here: First, the fact that auto-affection describes an adherence of subjectivity to itself from which there is, it seems, no escape. Second, and above all, the idea that such adherence further reveals to individual subjectivity that it is *not* its own foundation nor origin, which means that auto-affection entails the (immanent) experience of a *transcendence in immanence*. For Henry, however, this transcendence cannot be situated in an ontological realm "outside" of life, but rather in absolute life itself understood as the origin of the living. Life is that through which we live and in which we live. While transcending the individual living being, it is at the same time immanent to it. As ultimate and self-referential mode of appearing, auto-affection cannot be derived from any other form of appearing. As a consequence, however, the distinction between individual life and Life (*Vie*) as supra-individual, i.e., as absolute, can itself only be established within auto-affection.

In order to further characterize the idea of absolute life as “transcendence in immanence,” Henry distinguishes between a “weak” and a “strong” sense of auto-affection (*auto-affection faible/forte*).⁴¹ Taken in its strong sense, auto-affection refers to the unfolding of absolute or divine Life on which individual life—auto-affection in the weak sense—depends. Life is therefore given (*don*) to the living, but it is a givenness (*donation*) that both emphasizes the fundamentally passive character of the singular *épreuve de soi* and constitutes the irreducible pre-requisite to any subjective activity as conceptualized in the Husserlian “I can.” In this latter sense, auto-affection is limited and non-absolute, but at the same time it lives from absolute life, i.e., it is immanent to it.

Conclusion

Henry radicalizes Fichte’s concept of love through his own phenomenology of auto-affection. Whereas Fichte ultimately withdraws from the idea of love as a specific *and* foundational mode of appearing, Henry’s concept of auto-affection has precisely the meaning of a strictly immanent mode of *appearing*. For Fichte, love cannot as such be seized by an intentional gaze that would reflect on it. Love is, on the contrary, lived through in its self-referential and immediate presence. However, as the *Doctrine of Religion* makes clear, the standpoint of religion, in which love is *recognized* as the love of God, still is a form of *knowing* and, thus, knowing is required for such a recognition to take place. Divine revelation is therefore an inward “revelation” of God’s love and yet it would remain unrecognized by us, that is, it would paradoxically remain unrevealed, if we weren’t able to form, through reflection, an image of the absolute as that which transcends every particular image. In immanent auto-affection, i.e., in every living being, a *transcendence* reveals and manifests itself, namely the transcendence of *absolute* Life, i.e., of God. It is, however, a transcendence *in immanence*, an auto-affection “in the strong sense,” through which this revelation takes place. We can therefore (affectively) “know” about absolute Life without (intentionally or reflectively) knowing about it. This means that, for Henry, life is religious in its essence, even if it hasn’t accessed the Fichtean *stand- or viewpoint* of religion.

Notes

- 1 Michel Henry, *L'essence de la manifestation*. Paris, PUF 1963 (2nd ed., 1990). Engl. Trans. by G. Etzkorn, *The Essence of Manifestation*. The Hague: Nijhoff 1973. Abbreviated EM. Pagination French edition followed by that of the English translation.
- 2 Fichte’s works are quoted in the *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog 1962–2012. Abbreviated GA. The *Anweisung zum seligen Leben, oder die Religionslehre*: GA I, 9 followed by pagination in the German edition as well as in the English translation by W. Smith, *J.G. Fichte’s Popular Works*. London: Trübner & Co, 1873.
- 3 GA I/9, 129 (489).

- 4 With an emphasis on the 10th Lecture as far as the explicit topic of love is concerned.
- 5 GA I/9, 110 (458): “Gott allein, ist und außer ihm nichts”.
- 6 GA I/9, 166 (539).
- 7 Fichte, *Die Wissenschaftslehre. Zweiter Vortrag im Jahre 1804*, in *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1985. Engl. trans. by Walter E. Wright, *The Science of Knowing. J. G. Fichte's 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. Here : GA II/8, 120–121 (71).
- 8 GA II/8, 160 (87).
- 9 GA I/9, 86 (437).
- 10 GA I/9, 168 (540).
- 11 GA II/8, 114 (69).
- 12 GA I/9, 161 (522).
- 13 GA I/9, 79 (420).
- 14 GA I/9, 160 (520).
- 15 GA I/9, 160 (520).
- 16 GA I/9, 167 (538).
- 17 GA I/9, 167 (538).
- 18 GA I/9, 167 (538).
- 19 GA II/9, 229: “Das Absolute *als* Absolutes [nicht freilich material, sondern formal zu verstehen], wollen wir ergreifen: und zwar keineswegs in seinem inneren Sein, was uns wohl durchaus unmöglich sein dürfte ohne es selbst zu werden, sondern in seiner Existenz.”
- 20 EM 81 (66).
- 21 EM 81–82 (66).
- 22 GA I/9, 87 (427).
- 23 EM 87 (70–71).
- 24 EM 87 (72). Emphasis added.
- 25 EM 83–84 (68).
- 26 EM 84 (68).
- 27 EM 144 (117).
- 28 EM 144 (117).
- 29 EM 145 (118).
- 30 GA I/9, 111 (459).
- 31 EM 148 (120).
- 32 EM 346 (277).
- 33 EM 373 (300) where Henry refers explicitly to Fichte's 10th Lecture.
- 34 GA I/9, 169 (467).
- 35 EM 375 (301).
- 36 EM 376 (302).
- 37 EM 377 (303).
- 38 EM 378 (303).
- 39 GA I/9, 89 (431)
- 40 GA I/9, 89 (431).
- 41 Michel Henry, *C'est moi la vérité. Pour une philosophie du christianisme*. Paris: Seuil 1996, 135–136. Engl. trans. by S. Emanuel, *I am the Truth*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 2003.

Part II

Theological Themes

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7 Incarnational Phenomenology

Tamsin Jones

One of the primary sites of the intersecting engagement between phenomenology and theology is the notion of “incarnational experience,” or “existence in the flesh.” The analysis of incarnate existence—as well as its relation to Christian teaching on the Incarnation, which phenomenologists often point to as the exemplar of incarnate existence—follows two distinct trajectories within phenomenology. In both trajectories, a connection is made between the Incarnation as the foundational site of God’s self-revelation and the phenomenological description of incarnational experience. In one strand dominated by Jean-Luc Marion, God’s self-showing or manifestation in the Incarnation involves the excessive interruption of transcendence into givenness, whereas in the other strand dominated by Michel Henry, God is revealed through making possible the enfleshed-existence of the divine in an absolutely immanent auto-affection through which humans, too, come to know God. The first trajectory constructs phenomenologies of vision and language, whereas the latter will focus on embodiment and touch. How are such divergent views of incarnational phenomenology possible? It has to do with one’s understanding of phenomenology from the beginning.

Phenomenology is “the study of human experience and of the way things present themselves to us in and through such experience.”¹ The goal is to return to the “things themselves” as much as possible as they are “in themselves,” prior to any preconceived notion we might bring to them. For both Marion and Henry, an examination of phenomena which show themselves starting from themselves involves a critique of modern epistemology and results in a focus on excessive phenomena. They criticize both the “objectification” of phenomena in order to produce certain knowledge and the consequent limitation of the thing-itself to what can be known and spoken. Marion’s concern is that if we predetermine the limits of what can and cannot appear as a phenomenon, restricting the field of possible phenomena to those things that can be objectified or adequately conceptualized, then we exclude those phenomena whose very significant impact on our lives often exceeds that which we can conceptually control or manage. This kind of censorship is precisely what phenomenology, as a method, forbids: whatever gives itself in a showing or manifestation is legitimate by virtue of that showing.² For

Henry, the philosopher must get beyond phenomena that are defined by our concepts and language to that which precedes, the revelation of life which is an immanent experience of the flesh prior to our conceptual management of the experience of the world.³ Such excessive phenomena overwhelm (according to Marion) or precede (according to Henry) our cognitive capacities such that we cannot comprehensively understand the phenomena, or even bring them to full visibility; they veil as much as they disclose. For two different reasons, however.

On the one hand, for Marion this results in the fact that the phenomena give themselves from afar in a way that eludes our intentional constitution of them; he emphasizes the alterity, exteriority, and transcendent origins of such phenomena, despite appearing immanently. On the other hand, Henry's focus is the immanent self-revelation of phenomena which precedes all intentionality; we do not access life through thought, but rather life gives rise to thoughts. While Marion will talk about the revelation of an excessive phenomenon appearing from outside, transgressing and overwhelming our cognitive capabilities, Henry will consider the appearance of phenomena so intimate, interior, and immanent to our lived incarnate experience as also to escape the grasp of the subjective knower. Thus, for different reasons, both end up discussing the play between visibility and invisibility or manifestation and hiddenness through recourse to excessive phenomena—the primary site of which is, for both, *I/incarnation*.⁴

Incarnational Saturation: Transcendence and Givenness

For Jean-Luc Marion, phenomenology is primarily an examination of what shows itself phenomenologically, or more precisely “givens that show themselves.”⁵ Phenomenology is concerned with “the phenomenality of phenomena” or, the appearing of phenomena—the “how” as much as the “what.” Moreover, phenomenology “must enlarge the production of everything that can appear in the world as far as possible, hence especially what at first glance and most often *does not yet appear there*.”⁶ That is to say, phenomenology must not be content with resting on an examination of what is most easily manifest—objects and beings—but also consider those phenomena which resist objectification and subjective constitution while still succeeding in accomplishing their own manifestation: they show themselves starting from themselves. Marion emphasizes the sovereignty of pure givenness which gives itself on its own terms, according to its own conditions prior to any subjective intervention. In order to justify the inclusion of any “given that shows itself” Marion must establish the conditions of possibility of phenomena. In order to do so, he critically revisits and expands on the achievements of Kant and Husserl. Marion returns to the Kantian-Husserlian definition of the phenomenon as a matching or equating (*adequatio*) between that which appears and the appearance as such, between one's “concept” and the fulfilling “intuition” of it (*adequatio intellectus et res*).

Beginning with Husserl, Marion draws on his phenomenological “principle of principles” which posits that “every originarily giving intuition [*Anschauung*] is a source of right for knowledge, that everything that offers itself originarily to us in ‘intuition’ [*Intuition*] is to be taken simply as it gives itself, but also only within the boundaries in which it gives itself there.”⁷ Marion thinks this insight of Husserl contributes a great deal to phenomenology, but it does not go far enough: it points to the sovereignty of the givenness of intuition and then, immediately, limits it to the boundaries (or horizon) of givenness which is oriented and determined by the “I.” According to Marion this does not yet arrive at the pure possibility of the phenomenon. For that, one must posit a givenness without limit and without condition—that is, without the principle of a horizon or the transcendental I imposing themselves on the given.⁸ Thus, everything that offers itself as a given is a phenomenon. But how can we judge one to be true?

Saturated phenomena are characterized by the fact we do not experience them, but can only have a “counter-experience” of the phenomena whereby they are manifest through the marks and impact they leave on the recipient, by their unpredictable and overpowering arrival. The intuition of the saturated phenomenon is seen or received, but is “blurred by the too narrow aperture, the too short lens, the too cramped frame, that receives it—or rather that cannot receive it as such.”⁹ Thus, the deficiency which renders the phenomenon invisible, or un-experienceable, is not in the phenomenon which gives itself fully, but in the subject who receives it. For all of these reasons, the saturated phenomenon always possesses the quality of a “paradox”; namely, the phenomenon arrives in a manner counter to (*para-*) standard opinion and expectation (*doxa*) and, in this way, neatly circumvents the constitution of the phenomenon by exceeding and decentering subjective intentionality (226).

In his typology of the saturated phenomenon in *Being Given* Marion employs Kant’s categories of understanding (quantity, quality, relation, and modality) to consider what occurs when each is found in an excessive state: (1) according to quantity, Marion presents the phenomenon of “event” which is *invisible*—“it cannot be aimed at [*ne peut se viser*]” (199 emphasis original). (2) According to quality, Marion presents the phenomenon of the “idol” which is “unbearable”—here intuition is not blind, but “blinding” (203); it “bedazzles” the intentional gaze, thwarting its control. (3) According to relation, Marion presents the phenomenon of the “flesh” which is absolute insofar as it “evades any analogy of experience” (206)—no causality, as an event it is an “unforeseeable phenomenon” (207). (4) Finally, according to modality, Marion presents the phenomenon of the “icon” which is “irregardable” (212); it does “not ‘agree with’ or ‘correspond to’ the power of knowing of the I” (213). The saturated phenomenon comes of its own accord; it is not beckoned, produced, or invited by the subject. Moreover, once arrived, it can only be denied through self-delusion; it is a fact. The invisibility of the phenomenon is a result of the excessive and comprehensive manner of its

self-giveness in relation to the relatively limited cognitive capacity of our finite concepts. Finally, importantly, the impact this has on the recipient, the witness, is to feel the intentional constituting gaze inverted to turn towards the witness who is the one speculated on, gazed at, and judged.

Given this treatment, it is perhaps no surprise that Marion identifies revelation as the saturated phenomenon par excellence; revelation “saturates phenomenality to the second degree, by saturation of saturation” (235). Marion further specifies this to be a revelation in and of Christ Incarnate who takes each of the modalities of saturation at once—quantity, quality, relation, and modality—to the second degree.¹⁰ Christ becomes the paradigm of the saturated phenomenon—and thus, paradigmatic of the possibility of phenomenality in general—because here we have a phenomenon which is given without reserve. Despite, indeed, because of this unfettered givenness, Christ remains invisible as a phenomenon, at least invisible as a finite object or being; no “thing” or “object” is given and so “strictly speaking, there is nothing to see” (243). This is not because intuition is lacking, but because it is excessive; the revelation of Christ overwhelms, bedazzles, and blinds the one to whom it appears. God reveals Godself in Christ without reserve, kenotically, withholding nothing.¹¹ This pure givenness does not result in comprehensive knowledge of God, however—quite the opposite. In an inversion of the usual Christian argument in which faith supplements a lack of intuitive evidence, Marion declares that faith is required in order to make up for the dearth of human concepts to adequately match the powerful intuitive manifestation of Christ: “It might be that we should believe not in order to recapture a lack in intuition, but rather to confront its excess in relation to a deficiency of statements and a dearth of concepts.”¹²

Incarnate Existence: Immanence and Embodiment

In Henry’s hands, phenomenology becomes a philosophy of life which precedes any conceptual or linguistic understanding of life: “Life is not initially a concept; it is first a real life that is phenomenologically actualized.”¹³ In this precise way, Henry’s phenomenology offers an advance from classical philosophy which begins with the premise of a rational subject who knows the world through a correlation of the objects of the world with the capacity of the rational mind. This results in a hierarchy of the intelligible over the sensible which phenomenology seeks to correct, providing it accomplish, as Henry suggests, this further reduction to the flesh. Phenomenology accomplishes this by establishing “our own body as the principle of our experience of the world and thus as the true subject.”¹⁴ As a result, phenomenology is not concerned to show the relation between the world and our mind, for the world is always already the “world-of-life” given to us sensibly and passively prior to the adumbrations of the conceptual: “This incarnate subject related to the sensible world is the concrete situation that phenomenology... will constantly oppose to the classical description of an intellectual consciousness

dominating a world of scientifically known objects.”¹⁵ Here phenomenology has to do, singularly, with a lived, embodied, or better enfleshed¹⁶ existence—an incarnate existence. This incarnate existence will prove revelatory in a specific way.

Life finds phenomenality and yet its mode of phenomenalization differs so fundamentally from that of the world that Henry gives it another term: revelation. The revelation of life is absolutely immanent; like the fundamental impressions of pain and joy, there is no distance one can get from it.¹⁷ The flesh is the medium of these fundamental impressions; it is what receives the impressions of life immanently: “This ever-changing impressional totality is our flesh. For our flesh is nothing other than what suffers and undergoes, and supports itself and thus experiences itself and enjoys itself through continually renewed impressions.”¹⁸ The flesh is the medium of our impressions and these impressions provide the autorevelation of life in its ever-changing shift of modalities.

Because the revelation of life happens immanently, it is also radically invisible. As we have seen, Henry and Marion agree that life cannot be seen or objectified and before it one is passive; indeed, there is no self—and therefore no subjective intentionality to constitute phenomena—before the phenomenalization of life delivered through the reception of impressions on our flesh. As a result, like Marion, Henry will posit a givenness prior to subjective intentionality, one which renders us entirely passive.¹⁹ However, for Marion the excessive phenomenon is a blow that comes from outside, whereas, for Henry, this is an entirely immanent process:

The flesh provides our access to the body—whether it is to sensible bodies in the world, our own objective, sensible body, or even the intentional body itself. Yet, *our flesh can only provide access to this body and through this body to the world, because it first provides us with access to itself—because it is impressionally given to oneself where all self-givenness occurs, namely, in and through life.*²⁰

For Henry, our flesh is constituted by the dynamism of impressions that play over the flesh in a never-ending flow, and yet the flesh is given only through the self-givenness of life. But this is to beg the next question: where does life get its power from?

Here is where Henry ventures explicitly into theological, most specifically Christian, terrain. Our life lacks the ability to bring oneself into oneself, or self-generate; rather “only an absolute Life contains this ability within itself.... It alone can make life exist somewhere. All other lives are only alive in it—in this unique and absolute life that alone has the power to live.”²¹ Ultimately, then, this power comes “from above”—Henry cites Christ’s response to Pilate in this regard (John 19:10–11)—from God. Moreover, there is a direct relation between the self-givenness of life which is a given in the flesh and the revelation of life given in and through the Incarnation of Christ.²² If,

as Henry says, the “flesh itself... is revelation,” what precisely is flesh and what does it reveal? If flesh is a “mode of manifestation of the Word of God,” and, as Henry will also say, it is the same mode of manifestation as Life, both point to an Arch-intelligibility to be uncovered phenomenologically,²³ and from which one formulates a new definition of humanity: invisible and carnal, or “*invisible in so far as carnal.*”²⁴

As a systematic theologian in close conversation with phenomenology, Ola Sigurdson discusses the practical implications of the phenomenology of incarnation on the theological doctrine of embodiment, or somatology. Two other phenomenologists, Felix O’Murchadha and Christina Gschwandtner, turn to an examination of the practical implications for Christian life, providing a phenomenology of the ascetic life and the life of worship and liturgy, respectively. In all three thinkers, we find examples of the rich interplay between theology and phenomenology.

The value of the phenomenological approach to embodiment, according to Sigurdson, is that it helps theology guard against a doctrine of the body which treats the body instrumentally, as an object.²⁵ He argues that the Protestant conception of embodiment too closely echoes the modern, secular instrumentalization of the body as an object or tool for the mind. However, phenomenology isn’t perfect here: its preponderance to veer towards the ahistorical without taking into account the institutional, cultural forms of experience, means that it misses something of the social element of the body (36). For this reason, Sigurdson thinks the specific history of debates about the body and, specifically, the incarnate body of Christ, offer some greater historical texture and depth to the phenomenological discussions.²⁶

The earliest Christian arguments for the goodness and necessity of the body are constructed explicitly as corrections to the belief that Christ, as God, could not have actually been human, or had a body, as well as the belief that salvation required a release from the body—i.e., against Docetism and Gnosticism respectively.

Sigurdson argues that there is no unequivocal view of the body; indeed, it is much preferable to employ a multiplicity of metaphors and concepts. Theology should not aim at a universal, eternal abstract doctrine of the body synthesized from biblical and doctrinal accounts. Instead phenomenological accounts of embodiment should be correlated with “genealogical account of the traces of the body in biblical and theological texts as well as in religious practices such as prayer, liturgy, hymns, asceticism...” (40). Just such attention to lived bodily practices is found in both O’Murchadha and Gschwandtner.

Like Sigurdson, O’Murchadha looks to the history of Christian doctrine and practice in relation to phenomenology. In particular, he uses Henry to consider the impact of the Incarnation of the Word on our own excessive embodiment. Both the divine incarnation and the resurrection of Christ imply an inescapable meaning and value of the body for Christians: “All human—and

all creaturely—destiny is irrevocably tied to the body. The higher world, the world, of a ‘new heaven and a new earth,’ can only be understood, then, as a transformation of embodied being—not its destruction or domination.”²⁷ The Incarnation paradoxically brings, *and holds*, together transcendence and immanence, sky and earth, glory and hiddenness, the invisible in the visible.²⁸ Drawing directly on Henry, O’Murchadha argues that in order to “give phenomenological rigor to such a phenomenon it is necessary to think it from the experience of incarnate being, the experience of such being primarily in its self-relation, in its realization of its own incarnate being” (143). What the Christian understanding of the Incarnation of the Word and resurrection of the body implies for the specifically incarnate being of humans is the potential destiny of a transformed body—given not by nature, but grace. Grace does not transform our embodied being without our cooperation, however; rather, what grace gives is the power for us to transform our own embodied being through ascetical practices.²⁹ The Incarnation models and points the way to the ascetical life because it “allows flesh to appear as an articulation of itself and of being as created” (34). For this reason, in one’s own intimate relation to one’s own flesh, there can be had an intimate experience of all creation. Explicitly, the incarnate Christ demonstrates an “excessive embodiment” whose point is not to escape the body, but rather to bring it into one’s state of being towards God: “The body in this sense is never simply itself, but is a constant articulation of being, of its relation to other existents and to its own source of its own existence” (142).

This retrieval of the patristic tradition brings not only possibility but risk also. There is a danger of a slippage occurring whereby the specifically Christian understanding of creation, fall, and redemption, and the place of the Incarnate Word within that salvation history, becomes the model for a phenomenology purporting to be universal and secular.³⁰ However, guarding against this, Sigurdson demonstrates the way in which theology provides an important corrective to phenomenology precisely by historically particularizing its claims: “Theology’s contribution could be said to consist in both supplying a concrete, historical life-world for phenomenological investigation of embodiment and also, at the same time, reminding any particular phenomenology of its limits.”³¹

On the second point, incarnational phenomenology corrects the erasure of the body in the philosophy of religion and in the study of religion and theology more broadly. For too long, arising out of the dominance of Protestant thought in the field, religion was defined primarily by belief, and religious experience understood as a cognitive state of mind or feeling. In fact, however, religion is as much, if not more, occupied with the development of practical knowledge and bodily disciplines with the aim of social and ethical formation. To a large extent, there have been positive corrections of this bias in recent religious studies and theology; much less so within philosophy of religion, however.³²

Notes

- 1 Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.
- 2 See Jean-Luc Marion, “Metaphysics and Theology: A Relief for Theology” trans, Thomas Carlson in *The Visible and the Revealed* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008): “Against metaphysics, it won the right to make use of the ‘Return to the things themselves!’ which one might gloss ‘Prohibiting is prohibited!’ The sole criterion in phenomenology issues from the facts: from the phenomena that an analysis manages to display, from what the analysis renders visible. What shows itself justifies itself by that very fact” (60).
- 3 See Michel Henry “Incarnation,” trans. Scot Davidson, *Carnal Hermeneutics*, Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor (eds.), (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), in which he contrasts the appearing of the world which is “given in front of us and outside of us, as an ‘object’ or as ‘facing us’” with the more fundamental “revelation of life” which “does not have any separation within itself and never differs from itself...*Life reveals itself*” (129).
- 4 Note on terminology: I will employ Incarnation to denote the historical instance of the Christian claim that God becomes human in the person of Jesus the Christ, and incarnation to denote enfleshment, or enfleshed human existence, more generally.
- 5 Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 4.
- 6 Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner et al, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), xi.
- 7 Edmund Husserl, *Ideen I, Ideen zu Einer Reinen Phänomenologie und Phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch in Husserliana III* (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950): §24.
- 8 Marion, *Being Given*, 189.
- 9 Marion, *Being Given*, 215. Subsequent references made parenthetically in the text.
- 10 See Marion, *Being Given*: “The saturated phenomenon therefore culminates in the type of paradox I call revelation, one that concentrates in itself—as the figure of Christ establishes its possibility—an event, an idol, a flesh, and an icon, all at the same time” (241).
- 11 This is how Marion glosses Philippians 2: 5–11.
- 12 Jean-Luc Marion, “‘They Recognized Him; and He Became Invisible to Them’” in *Modern Theology* 18.2 (April 2002), trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing): 145–152.
- 13 Michel Henry, “Incarnation,” trans. Scot Davidson, *Carnal Hermeneutics*, Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor (eds.), (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 133.
- 14 Michel, Henry, “The Problem of Touch,” trans. Anne Bernard Kearney and Simone Kearney, *Carnal Hermeneutics*, 142.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Henry distinguishes between body (*le corps*) and flesh (*la chair*). Flesh is an entity that, unlike the body, cannot be separated into its discrete parts—limbs, organs, and atoms. Instead, one experiences the flesh as a living whole with and through what it suffers (*pathos*)—both pleasure and pain, joy and terror.
- 17 See Henry, “Incarnation”: “Riveted to itself and crushed under its weight, suffering does not allow one to establish any distance from it... Without any ability to put suffering at a distance, there is no possibility of directing one’s gaze toward it. No one has ever seen his or her own suffering, pleasure, or joy” (130).
- 18 *Ibid.*

- 19 Ibid: “We had to abandon the phenomenological status of intentionality for that of self-giveness. To the extent that none of the powers of our flesh brought themselves into oneself, they were delivered to the self without being willed and independent of its power” (135).
- 20 Ibid., 133.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 See Henry, *Incarnation: “The Incarnation of the Word is its revelation, its coming among us.* If we can thus enter into relation with God and be saved in this contact with him, it is because his Word was made flesh in Christ. The revelation of God to men is thus here the fact of flesh. The flesh itself as such is revelation” (15, original emphasis).
- 23 Ibid., 20.
- 24 Ibid., 19.
- 25 Ola Sigurdson, “How to speak of the body? Embodiment between phenomenology and theology” in *Studia Theologica* 62 (2008): pp. 25–43. See also Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies: Incarnation, the Gaze, and Embodiment in Christian Theology* (Eerdmans, 2016).
- 26 Attention to the historical permutations of Christian discourses on the body comes, for Sigurdson, from the stance that the body is both a biological and a discursive entity; one must take the realities of biology seriously while at the same time acknowledging the powerful way in which what societies and cultures assume and say about the body directly constitutes our understanding and experience of embodiment (29–30).
- 27 Felix O’Murchadha, *A Phenomenology of Christian Life: Glory and Night* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 2013), 142.
- 28 See O’Murchadha: “The incarnation gives divine sanction to desecration, to impurity. It denies the sacred logic of the world and explodes all hierarchies of sky and earth, affirming life by denying the ultimacy of death” (143).
- 29 See O’Murchadha: “...grace empowers, brings new powers—powers not in the nature of the body—to bear on the body. The response to this empowerment is a way of living in self-relation to the body, which we might call asceticism...” (142).
- 30 On this point, see Gschwandtner, 9–10.
- 31 Sigurdson, 40. I have made a similar argument recently regarding the regional specificity and historical contextuality of theology potentially offering a corrective to the ahistoricism of philosophy of religion.
- 32 For instance, black, womanist, feminist and queer liberation theologies have all paid more attention to embodiment and bodily practices than earlier systematic theology. Within religious studies, the work of Talal Asad, Amy Hollywood and Jonathan Z. Smith has been particularly important. Evidence of the tide shifting in the philosophy of religion can be seen in the excellent recent work of Niki Kasumi Clements: *Sites of the Ascetic Self: John Cassian and Christian Ethical Formation* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020).

8 A Phenomenological Reading of the Resurrection

Brian D. Robinette

An Opening: Testimony and Event

One of the most telling features of the New Testament witness to Jesus' resurrection from the dead is that it is never objectively portrayed. For all its significance for Christian imagination and speech—it is that 'event' without which Christian imagination and speech are inconceivable—there is no God's-eye point of view provided for the reader, only testimonies on the ground. The so-called 'appearances' of the risen Christ mostly consist of intimate exchanges, gestures of pardon and peace, the breaking of bread, and a commission to make disciples of all nations. The significance of Easter is not conveyed through narrative omniscience; it is situated and multi-perspectival, embodied and enacted, transmitted and received. What might this be telling us?

Minimally, it suggests that the New Testament witness to Jesus' resurrection never reached a stage of epic renarration more typical of formalized communal remembrance. If, as is customary for historical critics to point out, later narrative renderings tend toward embellishment and harmonization of detail, what we find in the New Testament is a notable *lack* of systematization. Although not haphazard, or without theological development, there is an adventitious character to their extant form. An embryonic and fragile quality is preserved in them, as though it were more important to convey the sensitive beginnings of Easter testimony rather than fortify it with majestic representation. As C.F. Evans observes, there is a marked contrast between the central importance of the resurrection in the New Testament and the 'almost fortuitous character' of the testimonies that support it. 'Whatever the Easter event was,' he surmises, 'it must be supposed to be of such a kind as to be responsible for the production of these traditions as its deposit at whatever remove.'¹

Seeking to discern the kind of 'event' Jesus' resurrection must be given the nature of its self-attestation, I ask what the peculiar modalities of its communication and reception within the primitive Christian community might tell us about its inmost content. This line of inquiry is phenomenological in attitude, insofar as it expects to learn a great deal more about Jesus' resurrection if we

‘read off’ the complexities, ambiguities, and surprising twists of the resurrection narratives rather than seeking to penetrate ‘behind’ them in search of a unifying historical kernel or conceptual substrate.² It is the latter approach that has dominated discussion of the resurrection in much of the literature over the past three centuries, whether of the apologetic or skeptical variety. Themes of doubt and confusion are already prominent features of the New Testament witness, and so questions of testimonial reliability are not to be written off as totally irrelevant or irreverent. But we should acknowledge how limiting, and in certain respects distortive, the tendency has been to treat the resurrection primarily in these terms.

To propose that we ‘read off’ the resurrection narratives—as they *give* themselves—is not to claim that we can do so from a neutral point of view, or that we have only to review the data at hand in order to arrive at a disinterested judgment. On the contrary, we will discover immediately how self-implicating any engagement with them truly is. It is of their very nature to provoke a new mode of perception and understanding. Rather than aiming for assent within a previously established horizon of intelligibility, at every point they appear intent upon inducing a shift in horizon, of reconfiguring what was previously imagined possible, of removing affective obstacles and uprooting cognitive resistances to radical novelty. The resurrection has everything to do with the ‘new creation,’ with the in-breaking of an eschatological imagination, and it is in this sense they are very much *interested*. Apologetics is not their aim; conversion *is*. And we will be in a much better position to appreciate their peculiar features if we grant them this interest from the outset.

In virtually every scene we are alerted to the shock and incredulity that initially accompanies the earliest witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection. In the Gospel of Mark, the women’s response at the empty tomb is one of ‘terror and amazement,’ while in John’s Gospel we are told of Mary Magdalene’s *misidentification* of the risen Jesus with a gardener. The Road to Emmaus story in Luke’s Gospel hinges upon a qualitative leap to new understanding, as the forlorn disciples recognize their accompanying ‘stranger’ in the breaking of bread. In all such cases, a previous and seemingly impenetrable cognitive horizon is blown open in the first stutter steps toward conversion. Rather than dismissing doubt, ambiguity, or decisional reticence as somehow an indication of dimwittedness or impiety, the resurrection narratives highlight them all the more as if to point out just how deep conversion really goes. The narrative form of presentation thus has everything to do with the extreme novelty of content.

Given this dynamic, it is far more fitting to approach the resurrection narratives by standing *in front* of the text rather than going *behind* it, to borrow from Paul Ricoeur. Instead of attempting to secure intelligibility and meaning in advance, or according to a prior understanding—a pre-understanding that already knows what it is looking for—the texts invite an attitudinal hospitality to something most unusual. Inasmuch as Easter entails the stunning

reversal and transformation of a horrific eventuality—the brutal lynching of a would-be messiah—so does it imply a dramatic transformation on the part of those beckoned by it. To this extent, what Ricoeur says of the genuine encounter with a text is especially true of the resurrection narratives: ‘As a reader, I find myself only by losing myself.... The metamorphosis of the world in play is also the playful metamorphosis of the ego.’³

An Immense Disturbance in Language

Although we are accustomed to associating the early Christian movement with the language of resurrection—Christian faith is justifiably described as a ‘resurrection movement’—we will not appreciate the surprising origins of that movement until we understand just how much Jesus’ ‘resurrection from the dead’ constitutes a *novum* in the field of language itself. Eberhard Jüngel highlights just this point, declaring Easter ‘an immense disturbance in the sphere of language. It reaches the very limits of incomprehensibility.’ It is an ‘unthinkable notion,’ for it affirms that the eschatological future of creation has *already* taken place.⁴ Jesus’ resurrection is not just an occurrence *within* the immemorial flow of time; it constitutes the final fruition *of* time. It intersects our history while ‘overarching’ it, as Karl Barth puts it. This means that while it is perfectly legitimate to say that Jesus’ resurrection is an event in the *past*, we must also say that it is the irruption of God’s absolute *future* here and now—in the *present*. Although not identifiable with just one moment among others, neither is it simply ‘beyond’ time. It is time’s fullness, its eschatological ripening. ‘Recollection of this time must also be the expectation of this same time,’ writes Barth. ‘Little wonder human language begins to stammer at this point,’ he adds, ‘even in the New Testament.’⁵

Hope for the resurrection long predated its Christian embrace, as is well known, and in fact, this prior horizon is what makes its Christian reworking so striking. For in all previous instances, hope for resurrection was for *all* the dead. It was a matter of general eschatology, inasmuch as the resurrection served as the precondition for God’s final judgment. Its main themes were justice and vindication, particularly in the face of overwhelming oppression from Israel’s occupiers. Although not all Jewish groups in the first century shared the same eschatological views—the disputes between the Sadducees and Pharisees make this clear enough—wherever belief in the general resurrection was operative, so too was an apocalyptic imagination whose defining elements included the anticipation of immanent historical upheaval, the contrast between this age and the coming age, the vindication of the righteous before Israel’s enemies, and God’s judgment of all the dead. All of these elements are tightly bundled together in the early Christian affirmation of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, giving the affirmation much of its explosive charge, and yet we will notice significant mutations in each of them.

Chief among these mutations is the affirmation of a single person rising *from* the dead (*anastasis ek nekrôn*), prior to and in anticipation of the

resurrection of all the dead (*anastasis nekrôn*). To describe this as a variation on the theme would be a considerable understatement. The novelty in affirming Jesus as risen from the dead *now* is so far-reaching that one might almost accuse the early Christians of rendering resurrection language meaningless, without any semantic anchorage at all. Maybe it was just metaphorical, we might say today. And yet when Saint Paul declares that our faith is vain if Christ is not *already* raised (1 Cor. 15:16), he is at once embracing the framework of a prior hope (one he previously held as a Pharisee) while announcing a momentous innovation in that hope. 'For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life' (v. 22). Here we see the fulfillment of eschatological expectation in strikingly *unexpected* ways. Jesus' resurrection is not conditioned by, or simultaneous with, the general resurrection; it is the precondition of the general resurrection. The new age is not just to come; it has already come, while the present age is passing away. Jesus is not himself under judgment; rather, his resurrection *is* God's verdict, and the risen Jesus now sits at the 'right hand of the Father.' Jesus is indeed vindicated before those who persecuted him, and yet his resurrection is the offer of eschatological pardon and peace, not the vehicle for apocalyptic retribution. At each point, we see the breakdown and reconstitution of the apocalyptic framework within which resurrection symbolism was previously housed.

It is worth asking why the earliest Christians were so attached to resurrection language in the first place. Why the centrality of resurrection symbolism in Christian proclamation as such, especially when its usage demanded so much from it, including the risk of confusion and incredulity?

Perhaps an obvious starting point is Jesus himself, inasmuch as his Kingdom of God proclamation within the context of first-century Judaism would have surely included hope for the resurrection as a constitutive element. Jesus did in fact refer to the general resurrection of the dead, as his debate with the Sadducees makes evident. He also spoke directly and indirectly of vindication during the latter phases of his ministry, particularly as it became apparent that the rising tide of opposition to his Kingdom of God movement put him in imminent danger. The special role of the Danielic 'Son of Man' title in Jesus' teaching gives this theme of vindication beyond death special valence. 'Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, we will find faith on earth?' (Luke 18:7-8). Yet though we will not find any contradiction between Jesus' ministry and the post-paschal kerygma on this score, we cannot but be surprised by the relative underdevelopment of resurrection imagery in Jesus' preaching.

Evans notes that the centrality of resurrection symbolism in Christian testimony is not explainable in terms of continuous development from the Hebrew Bible. 'There is no straight road here from the Old Testament to the New.'⁶ N.T. Wright likewise observes that if we zoom out of the first-century context and consider to what extent resurrection symbolism in the

New Testament exhibits strong continuities with the Old Testament, we will likely be surprised to learn just how disproportionate they are. For while there are indeed important references in the Old Testament that were carefully developed by the New Testament writers, including the crucially important Daniel 12, it is evident that ‘much of the Old Testament idea is, to put it at its strongest, deeply asleep, only to be woken by echoes from later times and texts.’⁷

‘He Has Been Raised; He Is Not Here’: The Empty Tomb and Critical Absence

What was it that virtually compelled the earliest Christians to adopt the specific language of resurrection whilst stretching it far beyond its previous semantic boundaries? What events on the ground catalyzed this massive metaphoric shift, even to the point of confusion and incredulity among those most motivated to proclaim it?

Recalling again that while we are not afforded a direct, quasi-objective portrayal of Jesus *being raised* from the dead in the New Testament, we can nevertheless point to the startling signs and situated effects of an ‘event’ that radically overflowed the perceptual, affective, and cognitive horizons of its witnesses. Without some degree of followability, without some meaningful plot points, such an event could not be properly shared or communicated. It could have no incidence, and thus nothing really to *give*. Sheer incomprehension would be its fate. What we must say, rather, is that the quality of excess of the Easter event was (and is) followable, but only through the *conversion* of its recipients; only through the elicitation of an inexhaustibly new way of imaging and desiring on the part of those formed by it.

We can begin to sense the liberating strangeness of this ‘event,’ and why resurrection language is indispensable in naming it, by first considering the empty tomb narratives. In Mark, upon visiting the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body with spices, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome are besieged by a shocking absence. Expecting to carry out the tender yet sorrowful act of ritually preparing a body for the future resurrection, the women are overwhelmed with panic well beyond the original grief of Jesus’ death. This was a loss upon loss, actually, for even the consolation of proper burial was now denied them. But as they ventured further into the tomb, their gaze was arrested by the sight of ‘a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe’ (Mk. 16:5). The angelic figure says to them: ‘He has been raised; he is not here’ (16:6). This twofold expression signals an absence that coincides with a qualitatively new presence. Without anything to grasp, not even a corpse signifying death, the women at the tomb were at once deprived and galvanized by expectancy. ‘But go and tell his disciples and Peter; there you will see him, as he told you. So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid’ (v. 8).

Much scholarly discussion has convulsed around the starkness of this ending. Did the Marcan author really intend to end his gospel this way? Does the women's silence suggest that they failed in their task? Did the author know of an appearance tradition associated with Galilee but not include it? Whatever the value of questions like these, it is far more telling to 'read off' the text and allow the unexpectedness to declare itself. As Francis Watson astutely observes, we should read these narratives as meaningful 'precisely *in* their fragmentariness, and not *in spite of* it.' Even more, we should consider their extant form as 'included within the sphere of the event itself, so that the generation of an appropriate testimony to itself would be integral to the event.'⁸ The terror and amazement, the deferral of representation, the summons to behold, the crisscrossing of expectation, the passage from grief to bewilderment, the call to community, the hesitancy and speechlessness: together these features participate in, without in any way exhausting, the 'event' they manifest.

The empty tomb reveals that the silence of death, but more specifically the silence of suffering and victimization, has given way to a new silence, one brimming with eschatological potency. The starkness of the empty tomb presages eternal life, and it does so by also conveying an ongoing 'absence' that permanently resists the tendency to appropriate that 'presence' on the community's own terms. When reading the empty tomb and appearance narratives together, what we find is that they incorporate 'major tensions between presence and absence, legitimations and subversions.' The empty tomb in particular reminds us that the risen Christ is cannot be 'absorbed' into the community's agenda. He has been raised; *he is not here*. Presence does not negate absence but graciously includes it.

'I Have Seen the Lord': The Appearance Narratives and Strange Presence

Without the cognitive shock of the empty tomb, it is challenging to account for the centrality of the resurrection symbolism in Christian imagination and speech. This hardly amounts to any kind of 'proof' for the resurrection, of course, which is not at all my aim, and yet a certain kind of absence is one of the two most decisive ingredients for understanding something of the immense disturbance in the field of language that Christian kerygma exhibits. The second of these factors concerns a strangely new *presence*.

Turning to the empty tomb scene in John's Gospel, we learn of Mary Magdalene's panic as she runs to inform Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple of a disconcerting disappearance. 'They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him' (Jn 20:2). Finding only burial clothes inside, Simon Peter hurriedly returns home while Mary lingers outside the tomb, in tears. (The Beloved Disciple, we are told, came at once to believe [v. 9]). 'Woman, why are you weeping,' ask the two angels flanking the tomb. Again, she exclaims: 'They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where

they laid him' (v.13) But upon saying this, the question at once rebounds to her, this time from a gardener. Or so she thinks. 'Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him' (v.15). Still inhabiting an imagination constrained by death and grief, she is unable to recognize what is manifestly in front of her. Or, better, what is actually *given* to her turns out to be so demandingly counterintuitive that her nonrecognition amounts to a *misrecognition*. It is not as though no frame of reference exists for her in this moment. She 'sees' the gardener, after all. And yet her frame of reference has not yet metamorphosed so as to discern in even barest outline just *who* is speaking to her. Not until he calls her by name—'Mary!'—is her pre-paschal imagination ruptured, and along with it a deeply established pattern of feeling, knowing, and acting. 'Rabbouni!,' she responds in joyous recognition, with the clear implication that only in being addressed *by* the risen Jesus—by the self-attesting Other—is her imagination readied for something unspeakably new (v.16). Readied, but not yet transformed; for as Mary reaches out to embrace him, she ultimately seeks to *grasp* him, quite as though Jesus' death had merely been annulled. Hovering between a pre- and post-paschal imagination, the risen Jesus leads her into deepened understanding by graciously giving her the slip. 'Stop holding on to me,' he tells her, 'for I have not yet ascended to the Father' (v.17). Here we are made to understand that only a nongrasping attitude is capable of receiving and responding to what the risen Jesus is revealing. Only through the hollowing out of desire's acquisitive edge, we might say, its grasping tendency, can desire itself be freed for what elicits it into being.

As Sandra Schneiders has shown, the subtlety in John's account constitutes a mature theological reflection on the transition of Mary Magdalene—and thus the early Christian community—from one dispensation to another. Mary's initial misrecognition (gardener), followed by her partial recognition ('Rabbouni'), mark the thresholds of conversion toward a dispensation in which traumatic loss gives way to unspeakable gain. The loss is not merely undone, inasmuch as Jesus is no longer 'present' in the manner prior to his death; and yet that loss is decisively transfigured, inasmuch as his resurrection and ascension open up the abyssal depths of the Father while reconstituting the community in sacramental mediation. 'Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, "I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God"' (v.17). Unlike the Marcan account, which is content to leave the commission in the mode of stark *apophasis*, the Johannine account follows Mary to her next destination—to manifestation-in-community. 'Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and what he told her' (v.18). As Schneiders comments: 'The place where Mary will now encounter Jesus as he really is, glorified and risen, is the community. Mary must pass over from the pre-Easter to the Easter dispensation. Her proclamation to the other disciples makes clear that she has indeed made that transition. She

no longer speaks of “Rabbouni.” As the first apostle of the resurrection she proclaims “I have seen the Lord”.⁹

Most of the key elements of an appearance in the New Testament can be found in this remarkable account. Whether considering the subsequent narratives in John’s Gospel or the appearance traditions in Matthew, Luke-Acts, and the Pauline epistles, the following features are quite typical. The first is that the risen Jesus freely initiates these encounters; or just as often, the risen Jesus is made ‘to appear’ by the power of God. There is an objective quality emphasized throughout, not in the sense that Jesus appears to disinterested observers, but in the sense that the initiatives originate from beyond the constrained horizons of its witnesses. An unmistakable *alterity* suffuses the appearance narratives—a decisive sense that a gulf unbridgeable by the recipients themselves is graciously traversed through a free act of *self*-manifestation. The priority is with the risen Jesus himself, in the *dynamis* of God, and not the result of any conjuration that could only amount to as an *ersatz* presence, i.e., a mere function of the witnesses’ subjectivity. This point is further clarified by the second main element in all the appearance stories, namely, that the witnesses find themselves caught quite off guard. Depicted as gripped by fear, sorrow, guilt, and overriding despair, the encounters with the risen Jesus are characterized by initial alarm followed by the influx of peace, of *shalom*. In one of Luke’s accounts, for example, the disciples are at first startled upon hearing ‘Peace be with you,’ and even suspect a ghost (Lk. 24:36–37). But reassurances immediately follow as the risen Jesus reveals to them his corporeal identity, however, transformed. Such recognition of Jesus’ identity shifts their affective registers from self-contraction to pacific openness, from alienation to renewed relationship.

The third element is that the appearances are never depicted in terms of intellectual insights that use imagistic, auditory, and tactile elements as mere ‘symbolic’ vehicles for expressing some inner content. While there may be a strong desire among some to interpret these ‘bodily’ elements away, perhaps due to embarrassment or incredulity, any effort to demythologize the narratives can never really proceed without fundamentally altering their meaning. Whatever else we may want to affirm about the ontological status of the risen Jesus, or the nature of the ‘risen body,’ there is no question that the appearances include sensually-mediating factors such as vision, sound, and touch as essential to their mode of communication. Such encounters are situated, intersubjective, and incorporative of the full range of embodied human experience. But more than this, such sensually-mediating factors prove essential to the content of Easter itself. For although Jesus’ resurrection means that he transcends the limits of what we ordinarily think of as history and corporeality, at all points we are made to understand that such transcendence includes, while eschatologically transforming, our history and corporeality. The immediate implication here is that no fulfillment of creation is really possible if it does not embrace and finally redeem all that constitutes it. The

manner of the resurrection's actual givenness is thus included in the meaning of resurrection itself.

The final element worth highlighting is that all of the appearance stories depict the regathering of community as crucial to ongoing communication of the Easter event. While the period of time in which Jesus appeared to his followers is circumscribed—the appearances do not keep occurring indefinitely, for example—the encounters consistently show Jesus' followers being directed to one another in the establishment of a community whose mission is to 'embody' the risen Jesus in history. Whether through direct commands, as with the Marcan and Johannine examples above, or in longer narrative form in which the disciples 'recognize' the risen Jesus in the breaking of bread, as with the Lucan Road to Emmaus story, we are made to understand that Easter is not only that catalytic moment launching an eschatological community; it is also this community that now mediates the presence of the risen Jesus through the animating power of the Holy Spirit. While not strictly identifiable with that presence, as our earlier consideration of the empty tomb narratives make clear, the resurrection of Jesus is one of gathering and sending, of assembling and dispersing in mission. Constituted by the breaking of the bread, the reading of the scriptures, and the commission to proclaim the 'good news,' the *ecclesia* is a resurrection movement that participates on the inside of an 'event' still in the making.

Believing and Not-Seeing

Returning now to the theme that opened up this essay, if only by way of coda, it is all the more evident that the manner of testimony is crucial to the kind of 'event' that Jesus' resurrection is. Though by no means identical, as though Jesus were risen *into* the kerygma, strictly speaking, the abiding *alterity* of the risen Jesus is nevertheless generative of an immense disturbance in the field of language that invites our participation in the act of proclaiming it. The affirmation of Jesus' 'resurrection from the dead' is not a placeless utterance but a communal one. It is not possessed by any community, and yet its ongoing act of communication implies an interpersonal process by which its members are inducted into its meaning—a meaning that is not so much secured propositionally as enacted through a shared way of speaking, imagining, desiring, and relating. This active induction entails conversion, as we have seen, and thus a thoroughgoing metamorphosis of the 'selves' we once imagined being. In this precise sense the resurrection narratives are performative; they mean to declare while 'showing how' the earliest Christians themselves underwent this process of change, the demanding depths and far-reaching implications of it. Given how layered these narratives are with this performative content, we will never succeed in getting 'behind' them to the 'real' thing. But neither do we need to. Whatever is genuinely real about them is to be 'read off' of them—as they *give* themselves. As the Gospel of John puts it, 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe' (Jn 20:29).

Notes

- 1 C. F. Evans, *Resurrection and the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1970), 130.
- 2 I develop this approach to the resurrection narratives more at length in my *Grammars of Resurrection: A Christian Theology of Presence and Absence* (New York: Crossroad/Herder & Herder, 2009), 67–115.
- 3 Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, vol. 2, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 86.
- 4 Eberhard Jüngel, *Death: The Riddle and the Mystery*, trans. Iain and Ute Nicol (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 85–86.
- 5 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, I/II, The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. G.T. Thomason and Harold Knight, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 115–116.
- 6 Evans, *Resurrection and the New Testament*, 77.
- 7 Wright, N.T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003. Wright, 85.
- 8 Francis Watson, ‘He is Not Here’: Towards a Theology of the Empty Tomb,’ in *Resurrection: Essays in Honour of Leslie Houldon*, ed. Stephen Barton and Graham Stanton (London: SPCK, 1994), 99.
- 9 Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM, ‘The Resurrection of the Body in the Fourth Gospel: Key to Johannine Spirituality,’ in *Jesus Risen in Our Midst: Essays on the Resurrection of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 55–56.

9 A Phenomenological Approach to Ritual Practices

Christina Gschwandtner

Continental philosophy, especially phenomenology, has prided itself on paying close attention to the lived experience of human existence and has indeed engaged in extensive analyses of affect or corporeality and of various other aspects of our experience. Yet, even in the phenomenological treatments of religion there is very little consideration of concrete religious experience of a sort that would be recognizable to the average person actually involved in religious practices or communities. Instead, these discussions are often heavily focused on methodological questions regarding the right manner of speaking of the divine within philosophy. If examples of religious experience are given, they tend to be of intense mystical manifestations (e.g., Eckhart or Teresa). The sort of regular experience that characterizes the lives of adherents to religious confessions, such as personal prayer or other expressions of devotion, churchgoing and communal gatherings with likeminded people, or the more obvious markings of belonging at important life moments, such as baptism, weddings, and funerals, is rarely considered. Religious experience is most commonly expressed in and fostered by concrete religious practices and these practices are frequently of a ritual nature. Yet ritual or liturgy has rarely been taken seriously in philosophical approaches to religion.

Yet, phenomenology is actually well suited to explore such more ordinary, regular expressions of religion, partly because they offer far more to analyze in terms of concrete, repeated, and variable experience, and partly because they are so fully embodied and characterized by rich sensory and affective elements, thus providing plenty of “data” for phenomenological investigation. Religious ritual deals with some of the deepest and most fundamental aspects of the human condition. Here I shall discuss how phenomenology can analyze even mundane religious adhesion and practice, thus pushing some of the contemporary philosophical approaches beyond their disregard of religious ritual practices, while at the same time subjecting ritual and liturgical practices to a more rigorous philosophical approach. The first section will try to lay out what a phenomenological approach to ordinary religious experience of liturgy and ritual might entail, the second will focus more fully on the methodological parameters as they apply to ritual, the concluding section will take the celebration of the Eucharist as a paradigmatic case of such a liturgical phenomenon.

Phenomenology of the “Ordinary”

Although Edmund Husserl is generally considered the “father” of phenomenology, his student Martin Heidegger was really the first to pay close attention to more ordinary or regular human experience. He famously begins his phenomenological analysis of the human condition vis-à-vis “Being as such” in *Being and Time* with what he calls average, ordinary, everyday, even “vulgar” experience in order to penetrate to the most primordial structures of human existence (§9). Our ordinary unreflective ways of being in the world are revelatory of deeper and more fundamental aspects of the human condition that ground and make possible these everyday manifestations. He shows this in respect to our temporal (§67–77) and finite (§46–66) being in the world (§14–24) together with others (§25–27) via affectivity (§29–30), understanding (§31–33), and language (§34) in the care for our existence (§39–44).

But Heidegger is often unable to maintain his distinction between average everyday experience and profound primordial structures consistently. To give just one example: he often asserts that authentic and inauthentic being are equally primordial, equally fundamental, and that no judgment, especially no moral censure, is implied in labeling one “inauthentic” (e.g., §9, §45). Yet when he actually examines the structures, the inauthentic is regularly associated with the ordinary, average, even derivative, “deficient,” or “vulgar” expressions (e.g., §27, §35–38, §51–52), while the authentic is consistently ascribed to the originary, primordial level (e.g., §40, §53). It seems fairly clear that, even if it is our common, shared, ordinary, usual, and indeed first experience, inauthenticity means a kind of falling away from the primordial authentic self (§38) that ought to be recovered (via “disclosure” and “discovery”) through a radical separation from the crowd and rigorous pursuit of the self, where one comes to “own” oneself decisively (§41, §54).

These telling slippages and inconsistencies in Heidegger’s account make one wonder whether the strict distinction between ordinary and primordial can be maintained, given that he himself is constantly negotiating its boundary lines and relations. In addition, his treatment raises serious questions about normativity and primordially, notions that are always colored by a particular thinker’s or culture’s predispositions to regard its own as normative or most authentic. Yet, a purely empirical approach is equally unsatisfying, especially if it insists on the impossibility of making any broader judgments. Can a phenomenological analysis of the ordinary and everyday be pursued that would help us analyze the structure of human existence without thereby subjecting the ordinary to censure or introducing a strict separation between it and the primordial?

Heidegger situates religion on the “positive” or “ontic” level, rather than on the primordial or “ontological” level, to which only phenomenology gives access. Theology would then be concerned with the particular life of faith rather than the experience of Dasein as such.¹ Yet, when Heidegger examines the consciousness of the believing communities to whom Paul’s letters

are addressed he points to the primordial structures one can see revealed in their experience of time and other aspects of existence.² In these early lectures Heidegger makes little distinction between the “Dasein” of the Colossians and Thessalonians and the “Dasein” examined in *Being and Time*, on which he was beginning to work at the time of delivery (1920–1921). To set aside religious experience as a peculiar and optional preoccupation of the few to be examined by a specialty science, such as theology, also disregards the fact that religious practice—especially in ritual form—has been part of all human cultures of which we are aware. There are no good theoretical reasons for why religious belief or practice should not be considered as much a part of the primordial structure of human existence as other aspects of the human condition.

Ritual experience lends itself to phenomenological analysis in at least three respects: it is more open to phenomenological reduction than other types of religious experience, it is more available for categorical intuition and imaginative variation because of its repeatability and highly sensory manifestation, and it is a communal experience that protects against some of the charges of idealism and mere subjectivity often lodged against phenomenological analysis. Let us briefly examine each of these in turn.

Phenomenological Reduction

The phenomenological “bracketing” or setting aside of the “natural” or naive disposition is eminently useful for an examination of religious experience but has to be handled with care. Such bracketing means not a suspension, erasure, or dismissal of the religious experience to be examined, but a step back from full immersion in it, a shift in attitude. Husserl devotes significant attention to describing this new attitude or shift in perspective, as one that is no longer preoccupied with establishing the existence of the object in the world or the correspondence of some external object to an image in the mind, but instead focuses on the experience itself directly, as it is given within the stream of consciousness. This means that, if it can be applied to religious experiences, the point cannot be to prove the existence of the divine or of a particular religious phenomenon or even to validate it as “authentic” in the sense of originating from a divine source. Such considerations are set aside, just as the reduction sets aside a concern with the existence of objects in order to focus on the experience of phenomena as they appear. Similarly while one cannot have the phenomenological perspective when one is fully immersed in the experience itself (in the “natural” attitude), the step back does not imply that the experience is now dismissed or regarded as false, but rather that one “looks at” it with a different lens, has a different attitude toward it, namely one focused on its meaning, one that seeks to examine its broader structures rather than focusing on the particularities of its present expression (except inasmuch as those might help uncover something about its nature or general forms of manifestation). Consequently, a phenomenological attitude toward religious experience must be devoted to examining its structures

or its meaning, seeking to identify the kind of experience it is and what makes it this sort of experience rather than another. It is devoted to it as an experience of human consciousness rather than depicting it as a manifestation of the divine.

This methodological procedure is much easier to apply to something like ritual or liturgy, where the bracketing or “step back” does not erase the experience but can still hold it up for examination. It is possible to shift one’s perspective in regard to ritual in a way that is much more difficult to accomplish with other religious experiences, such as mystical or contemplative experiences for instance. Ritual thrives on recognizable and repeatable structures, indeed, would be impossible without them. It is also usually a communal experience, while mystical experiences tend to be solitary and deeply personal in a way that makes them difficult to access for an observer. Given its overwhelming nature, it is also often impossible to extract oneself from full immersion in the mystical experience without destroying or at least ending the experience. Mystical experience is itself so ecstatic, that stepping back from it erases this element of ecstasy and hence something of its essential nature, something that is crucial to the sort of experience it is.

In contrast, while liturgical or ritual experience can certainly sweep one up in abundant emotion, especially on a festal occasion, it is rarely the sort of experience that would be destroyed by one participant stepping aside for a moment or observing it from the sidelines. Someone who has experienced the ritual repeatedly, when given the requisite philosophical tools, can certainly analyze previous experiences of the ritual, even anticipate future ones, without full immersion at the moment of analysis. While the ritual might not have the same effect if one shifts one’s attention during its practice and takes a different attitude toward it, that does not eliminate or destroy the ritual itself, but only pulls the person from full immersion at that moment. Abandoning the philosophical attitude for re-immersion into more immediate experience is generally possible.

This sort of back-and-forth movement between immersion in the experience and phenomenological distance from it is denied by at least some of the contemporary analysis of religious experience. For Marion, for example, the Eucharist—and religious experience more generally—is primarily an example that illustrates his notion of the saturated phenomenon and his kenotic and apophatic conception of the divine. He argues that it is a phenomenon that gives itself fully to the point of wholly abandoning itself in an abundant kenotic self-giving.³ In this regard it becomes the supreme and paradigmatic example for all saturated phenomena, inasmuch as they cannot be predicted, come entirely from themselves, overwhelm us with their dazzling and blinding abundance, and then abandon themselves to us. Yet, Marion’s description of the Eucharist does not actually tell us anything meaningful about it as a religious experience. Much of his analysis is tied to his insistence throughout his work that God must take all of the initiative in any encounter and that all we have to do is to receive it (even the conditions of reception are given by

God).⁴ The Eucharist is not about the social bonds of the community or the community's identity as the body of Christ, but about the abundant divine kenotic self-giving.

Yet, this abundant gift really need not be Eucharist. Marion employs identical language for the encounter with a painting or cultural event or any number of other saturated phenomena. The saturated phenomenon is so overwhelming, so bedazzling, so blinding, that it cannot really be identified. Eucharist is thus indistinguishable from mystical experience or any other rich cultural experience (opera, drinking fine wine, smelling the scent of a perfume, etc.).⁵ It is also not clear that one can "step outside" the experience of a saturated phenomenon or gain any sort of phenomenological distance from it. Although Marion employs the language of reduction more heavily than other phenomenologists, it is actually not at all clear that bracketing is possible in the encounter with the saturated phenomenon. It is such an overwhelming and immersive experience that extricating oneself from it becomes inconceivable. Reception is the only possibility; a reflective shift in attitude seems forbidden by definition.

Imaginative Variation

Ritual experience occurs over and over again; it thrives on repetition; indeed, its repetitive nature is part of its ritual character. Thus, it has variation and continuity inscribed into its very essence or nature. Remembering is a crucial element of ritual. Rites often employ memory strategically; many rites include narratives of previous practices or initiating events. Even within a specific rite, retention, and protention (to employ Husserlian terminology) are an important element. While one cannot usually anticipate what is coming in a mystical experience, such anticipation is part of the present experience of the ritual. One is always oriented toward past and future within the experience itself.

Most rituals depend on a long tradition of practice in which the ritual does not change in fundamental fashion, although smaller alterations can certainly take place. Ritual gains in meaning by antiquity and tradition. Its predictability and repeatability is an important element of the phenomenon, part of what makes it what it is. Take away the repetition, the sense of "always having done it this way" and something important is lost. This is especially true of the Eucharist, which is posited and experienced as a memorial meal.

Again, this repeatability is rarely acknowledged by contemporary phenomenologists. For Lacoste, the Eucharist is the paradigmatic example of the complete displacement and disruption the encounter with the Absolute operates on ordinary being-in-the-world, revealing the gap between our present existence and the liminality of the eschaton. The Absolute cannot be experienced, is not confined to space and time, and therefore we catch only the barest glimpse of the eschatological anticipation, no real religious experience ever takes place in the here and now. There is no continuity, for Lacoste, between the present and the "to come," between our human finitude and the

divine abundance, thus imaginative variation or categorial intuition would be impossible. Lacoste's account of "liturgical" experience is so extreme—albeit for him in the sense of kenosis and liminality rather than in the sense of abundance and excess—that it is not at all clear that any account of its phenomenality can be given. Indeed, he insists repeatedly that it is not an experience and that he does not wish to provide an account of religious experience. Rather, encounter with the Absolute suspends place and time, disrupts and undoes ordinary life; it allows a glimpse of the eschaton, even if only momentarily. Liturgical existence is utterly liminal and kenotic, on the verge of madness (he explicitly appeals to holy foolishness), incommensurable with any ordinary being. This is an account of ascetic experience in the extreme; it cannot—and does not wish to be—an account of regular ritual experience. Part of the problem is that although Lacoste relies heavily on Heidegger, he thinks that being-before-God is utterly different from and wholly disruptive of being-in-the-world. While Heidegger gives a good account of "ordinary" being, in his view, he serves only as foil inasmuch as all aspects of his account have to be overturned and undone for the liminal existence before the Absolute. But is liturgy really so utterly disruptive of our ordinary lives and our broader human existence? Here theological assumptions about God's alterity and an utterly apophatic approach are simply imposed on the analysis as presuppositions.

The Phenomenological "I" and Communal Experience

Much phenomenology (and especially phenomenology of religion) has focused on personal or individual experience, but it is eminently more useful for broader communal experience. The extent to which phenomenology is a solitary endeavor or requires a first-person perspective was at stake from the beginning. From the early explorations into the phenomenon of *Einfühlung* (empathy) by Husserl, Scheler, Stein, and others, via Heidegger's, Sartre's, and Merleau-Ponty's insistence that we are always already with others in the world, to Levinas' account of alterity, providing a phenomenological account that treats others as selves and not merely as objects of my own consciousness was urgent. Yet, oddly, many of the contemporary approaches to religious experience think of it as such an excessive and extraordinary experience that it becomes impossible to conceive how such experience might be shared. Marion's saturated phenomenon, by definition, cannot be a plural experience. Lacoste does attempt to give an account of co-affectivity, especially in liturgical experience, but does not get much beyond arguing that there are no "subjects" in liturgy and insisting on the need for love and peace.⁶

Yet, the communal dimension is absolutely crucial to ritual experience on several levels. For example, speaking of both the church and the bread as "body of Christ" is an important dimension of the celebration of the Eucharist. Ritual involves experiences where other people not only happen to be present, but where the plural dimension is constitutive of the very nature and experience of the phenomenon. Take away the plural dimension of a feast,

for example, and it is no longer festal. Moreover, ritual shapes communal identity and fosters social bonds. It is intricately connected to the meaning of tradition, culture, and historicity for many groups of people. Finally, one might say that many ritual practices encourage empathy to an unusual degree, both in the technical phenomenological and the more common popular sense of the term. The ritual structures themselves promote identification with others and mutual sharing in experience.

Heidegger argues that experience is always already shared, that we experience ourselves as “with others,” although he does little to work out what this might mean for plural experience. Although Levinas provides a strong account of alterity, this is definitely not shared experience. Michel Henry does insist on communal experience but in a way that seems to collapse any interpersonal distinctions. Here ritual experience might help push phenomenology to broaden and deepen its account of the communal dimension. In fact, even non-religious ritual, such as the rites and traditions associated with sports performances and political gatherings require the communal dimension for a depiction of how such experiences function phenomenologically. Many social dimensions are incomprehensible on a purely individual account. Although Heidegger repeatedly emphasizes that *Dasein* is, phenomenologically speaking, always first and in each case *mine* (which is of a piece with his insistence on “ownness” or authenticity), he acknowledges that we always already live in a shared world and that meaning (via understanding and language) is prior to the personal apprehension of it, because it is constituted by the totality of the world.

This element of Heidegger’s analysis fits ritual experiences well. Ritual acts occur within the context of a liturgical “world.” They are encountered as meaningful because they belong within a broader context of meaning in which items connect, belong together, and have signification within a meaningful whole. Such meaning is given to the ritual by the community, but not in arbitrary fashion by any particular member. Rather, the meaning is encountered as always already there; ritual acts and ritual objects are already “weighted” with significance, even if such meaning cannot always be stated clearly or even fully discerned. Within the meaningful world of the liturgical occasion, the particular rite has a specific space and time, employs tools and other things, is encountered as healing or broken. One can “go along” with a ritual act, go with the crowd, do what everyone else does and, indeed, that is necessarily the first way in which ritual is encountered. Yet the ritual only functions as it ought if it is appropriated, made one’s own, if one participates in it with some sort of decisiveness or commitment.

Liturgical Experience and Eucharist

Even just the elements Heidegger highlights as part of the *Dasein* of human existence—the use of implements that are meaningful within a broader context, spatiality and temporality, being with others, solicitude, affectivity,

understanding, communicability, anxiety, death, conscience, and so forth—are all relevant to ritual experience, which often grapples with our finitude and anxiety over death. We can add to this the analyses of corporeality, emotion, alterity, givenness, or aesthetic dimensions that other thinkers, such as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Marion, and others, have added to the phenomenology of human experience. All these are eminently applicable to ritual, which is a fully embodied experience, often displaying strong affect and emotion, and rich in artistic and cultural elements.

For example, ritual is an ecstatic experience of time. It focuses on the present moment, not as literal or historical present, clock time or calendar time, but as living memorial and anticipation, in which past and future are part of the present experience. Similarly, liturgical space is not geometric or purely physical space, although the space and time of liturgy are not completely incommensurable with “regular” or “ordinary” time and space. Rituals are always embodied and usually involve rich sensory elements, such as candles, water, flowers, food stuffs, oil, and so forth. They engage the body and the emotions: bowing, swaying, reaching out hands, prostrating, dancing, and so forth. Singing or other musical elements play an important role. Many rituals are rhythmic, not just in their regular and periodic recurrence, but also in their own structure, and in the music they employ. The use of rhythm further undergirds the structure of tradition and repeatability, the cyclical nature of the ritual. The gestures, postures, and movements of the ritual immerse the body within it and allow the meanings to be expressed not solely in verbal, but also in affective and corporeal fashion. Tears and prostrations, for example, express repentance much more vividly and more viscerally than words of apology. Thus, the bodily dimension of the ritual not only provides rich ways of manifestation of the phenomenon but is also an important element of the experience.

Let us again take the Eucharist as an example, given that it is such a popular topic in the French phenomenologists and so central to Christian liturgical experience. Eucharist occurs within the particular setting of the mass, the divine liturgy, the Sunday morning service, the liturgy of the sacrament. It involves the liturgical space and liturgical “things” connected to Eucharist: at the very least, a table or altar, an altar cloth, a cup or chalice and plate, the bread and the wine, and often any number of other implements. It requires the priest, pastor, or minister, and—at least under usual circumstances—a congregation who will participate to a greater or lesser extent by saying or chanting words in response and coming forward for the reception. Eucharist involves the congregants’ bodies: they are standing or kneeling or embracing at various points. In fact, Eucharist requires lots of movement and various postures: coming forward for reception (in most Christian traditions), reaching out one’s hands or opening one’s mouth, consuming, swallowing, and so forth. Eucharist is food and is ingested: either a recognizable piece of bread or a small wafer and a sip of wine (or occasionally grape juice). Thus, smell and flavor matter, not only seeing and hearing.

Sharing in the same cup is significant for the communal experience of the meal: it is felt as something that binds us together, that makes us “one” (whatever that might concretely mean). The symbolism of all eating from the same bread and drinking from the same cup is seen and touched and performed; it is not abstract. Eucharist is by its very nature plural and it could not be Eucharist if it were not. Even a eucharistic participation on a sickbed signifies only in the broader ecclesial experience in the context of which the host was first blessed. It can be shared with this individual because it was the first part of the communal celebration.

For Eucharist, the temporal connection to Christ’s own offering of the meal and of his life is significant. It is recalled in the institution narrative read or adapted in most Christian traditions. Saying the words “This is my body, given for you” shapes the ceremony and makes sense within its context. Understanding, language, and affectivity function together here for the experience of eucharistic meaning. At the same time, the absence of the body also signifies: Christ is not physically present in any observable form. The bread could not function as “body of Christ” if he were; it would be a wholly superfluous token. It has meaning only because it is the only “body” we can actually observe and touch and taste. This is not to make a theological claim about “real presence” or “transubstantiation” but simply to observe the phenomenological point that the only tangible experience of Christ, if there is such experience, is in the elements of bread and wine and that they are taken as such by those who direct themselves to Eucharist with the intention that it signify as body and blood of Christ. To what extent is this intention fulfilled in intuition? It is fulfilled, obviously, only partially. Intuition provides the “look” and “taste” of bread and wine, but also the experience of veneration or even adoration within the whole context of the liturgical celebration. Intuited is what is seen and heard and touched and smelled and tasted, all much richer than the mere taste of the bread. Thus, intuition is colored by the affectivity, mood, and tonality of the liturgical context, by the sense of awe or veneration, by the joy of celebration, by the seriousness of confession. Eucharist means only in that broader context.

If Eucharist conveys God’s presence and is in some way “body of Christ” as the tradition claims, then this is a material body and a material presence that signifies through its visceral and concrete matter. It is not merely a feeling or a thought (or a theological claim). Eucharist cannot be experienced or accomplished without the physical bread and wine. At the same time, it is very clear through the experience itself that it is not merely physical: one does not treat something purely physical in this manner. The “symbolic” weight of Eucharist is felt, even by small children, even if the meaning of the symbol might not be transparent to any given observer or participant. That does not mean that every moment of the rite must be consciously deliberate; it is not a purely cognitive exercise. Rather, the rite relies heavily on affect and emotion; it moves us. Every rite comes with a mood, a tonality; we find ourselves within it, either at harmony with it or in variance with it. That is

to say, it is possible to have our mood conflict with the tone set by the liturgical or ritual occasion, to be depressed on a festal occasion or feel lonely in a celebrating crowd.

Conclusion

Ritual experience is an important part of the human condition. For religion it is an ordinary, everyday, “average” phenomenon in the sense that it is the most common and most widely shared expression of religious practice. Most rites are repeated over and over again, one participates in them regularly, and they do not require special training or extraordinary exertion (though some particularly intense rituals do). For many people, they are the most ordinary and deeply habituated expressions of their religious practice, conviction, and emotion. They are the time and space where religion “takes place,” where it is experienced. At the same time, ritual practices also point to deeper and more fundamental primordial structures of human experience: our need for belonging, our need for giving meaning to our lives, our orientation toward others and the divine, our fear of death, our sense of our own inadequacy and failures, the recognition of our finitude. Phenomenology permits us to depict these ordinary and everyday expressions of religion, while also helping us uncover the deeper meaning of such practices for the human condition.

Notes

- 1 See especially the famous lecture “Phenomenology and Theology” but also the methodological comments in *Being and Time* (§10). An English translation of the lecture can be found in *The Religious*, ed. John D. Caputo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 49–65.
- 2 *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).
- 3 See especially several of the essays on the Eucharist in his *Believing in Order to See* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017). Two earlier reflections on the Eucharist are included in *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), [chapters 5](#) and [6](#).
- 4 See especially his Gifford lectures, *Givenness and Revelation*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- 5 See especially the important essay “The Banality of Saturation,” in *The Visible and the Revealed* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 119–44.
- 6 “Liturgy and Coaffection,” in *The Experience of God: A Postmodern Response*, ed. Kevin Hart and Barbara Wall (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 93–103.

10 Becoming Living Works of Art

A Phenomenology of Liturgy

Bruce Benson

The practice of the liturgy means that by the help of grace, under the guidance of the Church, we grow into living works of art before God, with no other aim or purpose than that of living and existing in His sight.¹

That passage comes from Romano Guardini's short but powerful book *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. Although Guardini does not cite Romans 12:1 his statement echoes the Pauline exhortation: 'I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.' If we changed 'living sacrifice' to 'living, sacrificial work of art' this would accord well with the idea that God has created each of us and now calls us to help shape and mold what he has created.

As creators alongside God (though I will shortly modify this way of speaking to something I take to be more phenomenologically accurate), we are called to be creative in all that we do, as opposed to living a life of sheer industrial labor. So God calls us to be artists, not in some specialized sense but in our very being. Our very lives are works of art, and our very beings are constituted by our creative acts. This idea that we should view ourselves as works of art become even clearer when we consider Eph. 2:10: 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.' The word translated as 'workmanship' could quite easily—and very literally—be translated as 'work of art.' For the Greek term is *poiema*, which is the noun form of the verb *poiein*. *Poiesis* is used to denote the kind of knowledge involved in making art. As God's artworks, we have been 'created in Christ Jesus for good works,' and we fulfill God's intentions for us when we 'walk' in those good works.

Perhaps this might seem like a new way of thinking, but it is a very old way of thinking in the Christian tradition, and long before the dawn of Christianity. The ancient Greeks saw the individual self as something like a work of art. Indeed, the word 'cosmetic' goes back to the Greek verb *kosmeo* (to arrange, with positive connotations of arranging well). The idea here is that, in using cosmetics, one is more fully arranging one's body to reflect the order of the cosmos or universe. The Greeks sought to bring the entire self—including the mind—into an ordered whole that reflected the order of the universe.

While this notion of seeing oneself as much like a work of art has more recently been picked up by such philosophers as Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, early Christians such as Clement of Alexandria and the Cappadocian fathers were affected by this Greek way of thinking. They realized that to cultivate ourselves required spiritual disciplines or exercises.

Living Liturgically

Becoming living works of art is something done *liturgically*. Of course, use of the term ‘liturgy’ has some difficulties. As Alexander Schmemmann puts it: anyone who merely mentions the word liturgy ‘is likely to get involved in a controversy.’² Some have very definite ideas of what liturgy should look and sound (and even smell) like. Even members of the same denomination can get very protective about their own ways of worshiping and quite critical about other ways. Those who consider their own churches to be ‘non-liturgical’ are apt to associate ‘liturgy’ with meaningless repetition, canned prayers, and showy formality. Faced with such dissension, we need to step back to the original meaning of liturgy.

The word *leitourgia* is composed of two words, *leitōs* and *ergon*. It is often translated as ‘the work [*ergon*] of the people [*leitōs*].’ *Leitourgia* described the service of affluent members of society who performed liturgy in ancient Greece by contributing money for religious and sporting events. Such persons were called ‘liturgists’ [*leitourgoi*]. Ancient Greek citizens performed *leitourgia* when they paid their taxes, for they were performing a service to the state. In its religious use, the word can be translated as ‘public worship’ or ‘service to God.’ Of course, since the state was so closely connected to worship of the ancient gods, even paying taxes had religious connotations. The New Testament uses the term multiple times, normally in the sense of service or ministry. For instance, Paul praises the Philippians for their ministry (*λειτουργίας*) to him (Phil. 2:30) and the Corinthians for their financial *λειτουργίας* (2Cor. 9:12). So it is really a matter of *service* (which is why we call church meetings ‘worship services’). Yet Luke at one point uses the term in a way very close to the way we use it today, for he describes the church in Antioch as worshiping (*λειτουργούντων*) the Lord (Acts 13:2).

Though people talk about ‘liturgical’ and ‘non-liturgical’ churches, there really are no ‘non-liturgical’ churches, since when believers gather together on Sunday, or on a weekday, that very assembly is a liturgical act. The main difference between so-called liturgical churches and others is that the former normally have a long tradition of specific practices on which to draw. We can say that such churches are heavily ‘scripted.’ Even though there is no schema common to all churches, there is a general pattern that many follow, technically known as the *ordo* (Latin for ‘order’). Dom Gregory Dix speaks of ‘the shape of the liturgy’ and, indeed, there is a kind of ‘shape’ or form common to many expressions of worship.³ In *Experience and the Absolute*, Jean-Yves Lacoste takes us far beyond the ‘standard’ view of liturgy [which he defines

as ‘order and ceremonies of divine worship’], claiming that liturgy is ‘the logic that presides over the encounter between man and God writ large.’⁴ He positions himself against Heidegger, since, for Lacoste, entering into liturgy marks a break with our everyday being-in-the-world. He also believes that ‘liturgy proves the possibility of a suspension in a way that returns us to the world,’ so that the break with the world is not complete.⁵

The theologian J. J. von Allmen describes Jesus’s own life as follows: ‘A superficial reading of the New Testament is sufficient to teach us that the very life of Jesus of Nazareth is a life which is, in some sense, “liturgical.”’ He goes on to say that the life Jesus led was ‘the life of worship.’⁶ Christians live liturgically. John Chrysostom thinks of us growing in grace as analogous to the way that paintings or pieces of sculpture develop. He advises parents are commended to rear their children as if making artwork. He also encourages catechumens—those preparing for baptism and entry into the church—to consider their souls to be paintings.

As therefore happens in the case of painters from life, so let it happen in your case. For they, arranging their boards, and tracing white lines upon them, and sketching the royal likeness in outline, before they apply the actual colors, rub out some lines, and change some for others, rectifying mistakes, and altering what is amiss with all freedom. But when they put on the coloring for good, it is no longer in their power to rub out again, and to change one thing for another, since they injure the beauty of the portrait, and the result becomes an eyesore. Consider that your soul is the portrait; before therefore the true coloring of the spirit comes, wipe out habits which have wrongly been implanted.... Correct your habits, so that when the colors are applied, and the royal likeness is brought out, you may no more wipe them out in the future; and add damage and scars to the beauty which has been given you by God.⁷

Baptism here is likened to adding coloring to a piece of canvas: before the color can be applied, the sketch lines must be straight and true.

The idea that one saw one’s own person as an artwork was common, whether one was a pagan, a Jew, or a Christian. The question ‘What would Jesus do?’ is fairly new, but its form is quite old. The ancient Stoic philosopher Epictetus writes (in the second century AD): ‘When you are about to meet someone, especially someone who seems to be distinguished, put to yourself the question, “What would Socrates or Zeno have done in these circumstances?”’ The point of studying ancient texts was to become different persons. As Peter Brown observes about readers in late antiquity, ‘the Classics, a literary tradition, existed for the sole purpose of “making [persons] into classics”’: exposure to the classics of Greek and Latin literature was intended to produce exemplary beings, their raw humanity molded and filed away by a double discipline, at once ethical and aesthetic.’ The goal was to find exemplary authors and figures to be emulated—and then to do so.

Artistic Improvisation

Artistically, our response to being called by God as artists is that we become improvisers with God and with each other. Unlike the modern conception of the artwork as ‘finished,’ improvisational art is constantly open to being performed anew. Because artistic improvisation is a continual development of what we have been given, there is a sense in which it constantly grows and moves beyond itself. Or, put differently, we grow and move beyond ourselves as constantly improvised works of art. The improvisational artist is in effect the alternative version to the artist who creates *ex nihilo*. Most ancient accounts of creation assume *ex nihilo nihil fit*—from nothing comes nothing. Such is the collective wisdom of the ancients. Thus, the creation accounts found in various ancient Mesopotamian texts are always from something.

Yet, whether we go with the *ex nihilo* account or the ‘from something’ account, God is an improviser. For creation is precisely God setting in motion a reality of ‘ceaseless alterations’ (to cite John Milbank).⁸ Thus, the very being of life is improvisatory—by which I mean that it is a mixture of both structure and contingency, of regularity and unpredictability, of constraint and possibility. Further, if God is indeed still at work in the world, then God is likewise part of that improvisatory movement.

Gadamer’s concept of ‘play’ (*Spiel*) also goes a good way toward helping us think about how artistic improvisation takes place. Play might seem to be merely something we do as recreation, but Gadamer suggests that play gives us a clue to human activity in general. Note that the German term *Spiel* can be translated into English as either ‘play’ or ‘game.’ If we take the latter meaning, we can say that to play is to take part in an activity that exists apart from the single player. Gadamer thinks of the making of art as beginning in the to-and-fro of play but ending in what he calls ‘transformation into structure.’ At some point, what was the play of experimentation starts to become more ‘stable’ as a structure. The beginning of a musical phrase turns into a full melody. Some lines hastily drawn on a canvas get more and more definition as other lines are drawn. A piece of stone moves from being a square block to an increasingly defined shape. But how does all of this happen? Here there can be no simple answer, for pieces of art come into existence in different ways over varying lengths of time.

Friedrich Nietzsche (in)famously insists that ‘life itself is essentially a process of appropriating.... “Exploitation” does not belong to a corrupted or imperfect, primitive society: it belongs to the essence of being alive.’⁹ Certainly, all art-making is essentially appropriation. The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘appropriation’ as ‘taking as one’s own or to one’s own use.’¹⁰ A simple example of this is that poetry and novels rely upon you ‘appropriating’ words from some language. Since language is owned by no one in particular, you are quite free to do so. But improvising art requires more than just borrowing from language. It requires appropriating from life, from the world of ideas, and from the ‘language’ of painting or film or sculpture, or

dance. Indeed, it is so basic to artistic improvisation that the novelist Margaret Drabble (1939–) boldly admits that ‘appropriation is what novelists do. Whatever we write is, knowingly or unknowingly, a borrowing. Nothing comes from nowhere.’¹¹ At least for human improvisers, we are constantly appropriating.

It shouldn’t be difficult to see that defining the role of artists in terms of improvisation changes pretty much everything. If artists are indebted to one another, there can be no ‘lone’ genius, disconnected from the community. Instead, we are all improvisers together, quoting one another, saying the same thing in different ways, and giving different perspectives on the same things. There is an ever-shifting balance between quotation and originality, between old and new, between you and me. Some of what I say is more ‘mine’; some is more ‘yours’; some is more ‘tradition.’ Although the idea that we are made in God’s image—the *imago Dei*—has been used in many ways (some of them questionable), it seems clear that part of what it means to be creatures that bear the divine image is that human beings are likewise artisans. Yet what does that mean? The creation narrative depicts God as the artisan par excellence. J. Richard Middleton points out that ‘it is due precisely to God’s exercise of royal power that there is a stable, dependable cosmic structure.’ What that means for us is that ‘humans are like God in exercising royal power on earth’ and also that ‘the divine ruler delegated to humans a share in his rule of the earth.’¹² The very process that God has set in motion is one in which human beings are able to share.

We improvise with each sentence that comes from our mouths and every action that we do. Even though we have rituals for greeting and eating and worship, we are constantly improvising upon them. We might simply say that we dwell in the world improvisationally. In all that we do, we are engaging in *creatio ex improvisatione*. We are working on ourselves as pieces of art.

Intensive and Extensive Liturgy

Charles Price and Louis Weil distinguish between ‘intensive liturgy’ and ‘extensive liturgy.’ Intensive liturgy is ‘what happens when Christians assemble to worship God.’ Within intensive liturgy, Christians meet the living Christ by way of the word and sacrament. Through intensive liturgy, they are taught, sustained, and fed. Extensive liturgy is ‘what happens when Christians leave the assembly to conduct their daily affairs.’ They are sustained and fed precisely in order to go out into the world. These two kinds of liturgy are wholly dependent upon one another, and we cannot have one without the other. ‘As our intensive liturgies drive us into the world to do our extensive liturgies, so our extensive liturgies bring us back week by week to the Christian assembly.’ There is a kind of play between intensive and extensive liturgy, with each leading back to the other.¹³

What does this mean in terms of living artistically? Here I want to connect *leitourgia* with two other ancient Greek terms that are similar in

important ways. One term is *mousike*, which we translate as ‘music.’ Although ‘practicing music’ can mean to compose or perform music, *mousike* also has the much broader meaning of cultivating the soul. The term *mousike* brings together the narrow sense of being an artist—creating paintings, pieces of sculpture, or works of music—and the broad sense—becoming a work of art oneself. In the Socratic conception *mousike* concerns the cultivation of the soul. As Pierre Hadot reminds us, for ancient Greeks and early Christians, philosophy was equivalent to practicing the spiritual disciplines, or *askesis* (the ancient Greek term for spiritual exercises), so that we ‘let ourselves be changed, in our point of view, attitudes, and convictions. This means that we must dialogue with ourselves and hence do battle with ourselves.’ Clearly, *askesis* is a thoroughgoing process that involves our very being. Hadot describes the result of *askesis* as ‘a conversion which turns our entire life upside down, changing the life of the person who goes through it.’ The Christian word for ‘conversion’ is *metanoia*, which literally means a change of mind but indicates a 180-degree turn—an utter reversal of the direction of one’s life.

While there are differences between the terms *mousike*, *askesis*, and *leitourgia*, they all involve living a certain way in which we are changed. Of course, *leitourgia* adds the crucial dimension of living our lives in service both to God and to our neighbors. Moreover, it puts particular emphasis on communal nature: we minister to members of the body of Christ as a community. Here the extensive and intensive meanings of ‘liturgy’ meet: they feed upon one another. To be living as godly works of art means that corporate worship and the worship rendered to God by daily living mingle with each other so it becomes impossible to separate them. And the liturgy of both types is closely connected to the arts.

The Call and the Response

Lurking in the back of all that I’ve said so far is the idea of call and response, which we could say is the most fundamental structure of our lives. Given its centrality in our lives, it’s not surprising that it’s virtually everywhere in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. Consider how the world comes into being: God says “‘Let there be light,” and there was light’ (Gen. 1:3). So the very beginning of the world is the result of a call—God calls, and the world suddenly comes into existence. The pattern continues on into all of God’s dealings with the world. God calls to Adam and Eve in the garden (his call to them after partaking of the fruit is particularly poignant, for now, they are reluctant to respond). In Gen 22 we get both the call and the classic form of the response. God calls out: ‘Abraham!’ And Abraham responds: ‘Here I am’ (Gen 22:1). Abraham gives what turns out to be the standard biblical reply, saying (in Hebrew) *hineni*. But what does *hineni* mean? In effect, Abraham humbly says: ‘Here I am, your servant. I am at your disposal. Tell me what you want me to do!’ What God commands is shocking: ‘Take your son, your only son

Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you' (Gen 22:2). But Abraham does what God tells him to do, and this confirms his status as the exemplary man of faith (as in Heb 11:17).

Black spirituals and jazz well illustrate what takes place in the call and the response. Let me consider three principal points: (1)the call always *precedes* me; (2)in responding, I do not speak entirely on my own behalf but on my behalf and on behalf of others; and (3)the improvised response is always a repetition and an improvisation.

The first characteristic, then, is that the call always precedes me. It is not just that the response is a response to a prior call; it is that even the call in these songs echoes a prior call. That call can be spelled out in terms of the previous performance of these pieces. But it can likewise be traced back to earlier calls. For these songs are, in effect, echoes of echoes—going back to the call from God at the beginning of the world. Or consider Jesus's call to his disciples. Jesus says to Peter and Andrew: 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people' (Mt 4:19). That call is, in turn, broadened by the Great Commission, in which the disciples—and, by extension, *the Christian community*—are called to 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.' Here Christians become explicit messengers of God's call to the world. Those who follow Jesus do not call in their own name, but 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Mt 28:19). This is why Jean-Louis Chrétien speaks of it being 'always too late for there to be an origin,'¹⁴ for the origin of the present call far precedes it.

We do not *first* call; rather, we call because we have already been called. To improvise in jazz, then, is to respond to a call, to join in something that is always already in progress. One becomes an improviser by becoming part of the discourse of jazz. While it would take considerably deeper analysis than we have time for here to explain what is involved in becoming a jazz musician and learning how to improvise, we can briefly summarize what happens as follows. Speaking with Pierre Bourdieu, we might say that one must cultivate a *habitus*—a way of being that is both nurtured by and results in what Bourdieu terms 'regulated improvisations.'¹⁵ They are 'regulated' precisely by the constraints that make jazz 'jazz'—and not something else. One becomes habituated into this habitus by *listening*. Learning to listen is the precondition for all future improvisation—especially when one improvises with others. We can say that each improvisation is like a response to improvisations of the past. To become an improviser, one must have an intimate knowledge of past improvisations and the possible conditions for those improvisations (i.e., the conventions of improvising). To be able to improvise means one is steeped in a particular tradition and knows how to respond to the call of other improvisers. Although we tend to think of, for instance, jazz improvisation in terms of spontaneity, that quality of improvisation—while undoubtedly present—is usually greatly exaggerated. It is also remarkably paradoxical. Not only are many 'improvisations' often heavily 'scripted,' but

spontaneity is only possible when one is well prepared. It takes a great deal of work to be spontaneous. It also takes a significant knowledge of improvisations of the past, for they provide the guidelines for improvisations of the present and future.

In jazz, knowing the past is what makes the future possible. In the same way, learning to be a *Christian* improviser, one must know the entire context: Scripture and the ways in which Scripture has been interpreted in the past. In short, one must be part of a *community* of improvisers. Of course, in realizing the debt to and dependency upon the past, the jazz musician is aware that any response to the call is made possible by a *gift*. The call is a gift to us, something that comes—like life itself—ultimately unbidden and simply disseminated. Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams reminds us that art ‘always approaches the condition of being both recognition and transmission of the gift, gratuity or excess.’¹⁶ There is, of course, a long tradition (both inside and outside the Christian tradition) in which the ability to paint or sculpt or improvise has been seen as a gift, something simply bestowed upon one that calls for responsibility on the part of the receiver to cultivate, nurture, and exercise. In this sense, both the ability and the products that arise from that ability are gifts. Yet, if one takes that gift character seriously, then one senses a kind of responsibility for exercising artistic gifts. Although it is theatrical rather than jazz improvisers who speak in these terms, the call is like an ‘offer’ that can be either ‘accepted’ or ‘blocked.’¹⁷ To ‘accept’ the call is to respond in kind, to say ‘yes’ to what is being offered and thus develop the call in order simultaneously to send it back and send it forward.

Second, my response is never mine alone. To be sure, I speak for myself, yet also for others and in their name. To improvise is always to speak to others, with others (even when one improvises alone), and in the name of others. Given that the call precedes me, I do not begin the discourse, nor do I bring it to a conclusion. For instance, if I’m playing one of the perennial standards of jazz, I do so along with so many others—whether those playing alongside me, or those playing the tune in some other corner of the world, or all those who have played it before. Jazz musicians typically have a sense of what the author of Hebrews calls ‘so great a cloud of witnesses’ (Heb 12:1). Moreover, when I play a tune, I am never simply improvising on that tune alone. I am improvising on the tradition formed by the improvisations upon that tune—what literary theorists call its ‘reception history,’ or how a particular piece of literature or music has been received in history. Whereas in regard to literature, Harold Bloom has spoken of ‘the *anxiety* of influence’—which is the desire to be new, fresh, and original—jazz musicians would rather speak of ‘the *joy* of influence.’¹⁸ Bloom’s talk of ‘anxiety’ stems from the romantic paradigm of art, with its drive to be ‘original.’ The primary artistic goal in the modern, romantic paradigm is to carve out a place for oneself by overcoming the influence of previous artists. One wants to become (to use Bloom’s language) a ‘strong poet’ who stands out as unique and thus distances oneself

from the tradition. But jazz provides an entirely different model for the artist. As a jazz improviser, one becomes part of a community of improvisers. As an improviser, one works with material that already exists rather than creating *ex nihilo*; one is aware of being wholly indebted to the past; one speaks in the name of others. Chrétien opens *The Call and the Response* with a quotation from Joseph Joubert that captures these aspects perfectly: ‘In order for a voice to be beautiful, it must have in it many voices together.’¹⁹ My voice is always composed of many voices and so is never simply ‘my own.’ When I speak, I am always speaking on behalf of others. My voice contains their voices. Chrétien says that ‘every voice ... bears many voices within itself.’²⁰ What emerges in this improvisation upon improvisation is an ever-evolving hybridity in which identity and ownership are often stretched to their limits.

This question of identity naturally leads to my third point, which is that my response is always both a repetition and an innovation. Chrétien writes of the strange logic of improvisation (even though he is hardly thinking explicitly of improvisation, let alone jazz): ‘Our response can only repeat. It starts by repeating. Yet it does repeat by restating.’²¹ He goes on to explain this enigmatic claim by saying that there is kind of space that is opened up *in ourselves* that gives us a voice so that we can pass on the call without mere repetition. We hear the call and we translate it into an idiom of our own.

Conclusion

Christians see their lives as works of art that they—working with the Holy Spirit—are constantly improvising. Schmemmann reminds us of an important meaning of *leitourgia*: ‘It meant an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals—a whole greater than the sum of its parts.’²² Yet, sadly, the highly specialized use of the term has virtually overtaken the more original meaning of living life in ministry and service to God and neighbor. Living out the liturgy is the way we become living pieces of art. Here Leo Tolstoy is quite right: ‘In order to correctly define art, it is necessary, first of all, to cease to consider it as a means to pleasure, and to consider it as one of the conditions of human life.’²³ Art is not something ‘tacked on’ to life that is only for pleasure or only possible given an advanced culture. Instead, art flows from us precisely because we ourselves are works of art. In this sense, that our souls and bodies are artworks is far more fundamental than the kind of art sketched on a page or painted on canvas.

Notes

- 1 Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. Ada Lane (New York: Continuum, 1998), 71.
- 2 Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 2nd ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 25.
- 3 Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, new ed. (New York: Continuum, 2005).

- 4 Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skeban (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 2.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 6 J.J. von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (London: Lutterworth, 1965), 21, 23.
- 7 John Chrysostom, *Instructions to Catechumens*, trans. W.R.W. Stephens and T.P. Brandram, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1889), 2.3.
- 8 John Milbank, “‘Postmodern Critical Augustinianism’: A Short *Summa* in Forty-Two Responses to Unasked Questions,’ *Modern Theology* 7 (1991): 227–237; 227.
- 9 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norma (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), §259.
- 10 *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. ‘appropriation’.
- 11 Margaret Drabble, *The Red Queen: A Transcultural Tragicomedy* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2004), x.
- 12 J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei of Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005), 81, 83.
- 13 Charles Price and Louis Weil, *Liturgy for Living* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 297.
- 14 Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005) 5.
- 15 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 78.
- 16 Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2005), 163.
- 17 ‘I call anything that an actor does an “offer.” Each offer can either be accepted, or blocked.... A block is anything that prevents the action from developing’ (Keith Johnstone, *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1979), 97).
- 18 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973) and John Murphy, ‘Jazz Improvisation: The Joy of Influence,’ *Black Perspective in Music* 18, no. 1/2 (1990): 7–19.
- 19 Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, 1.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 22 Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 25.
- 23 Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 49.

11 Phenomenology of the Gift (and Grace)

Jason W. Alvis

What is meant by “given,” “givenness”—this magic word for phenomenologists and a ‘stumbling block’ for everyone else?

Heidegger¹

If “the question of the gift, posited as the question of givenness, is phenomenology’s grounding question”² and also “one of the rocks on which our societies are built,”³ then might the question of grace, of an encounter with Divine lavishness, be not only Christian theology’s grounding question but also a means of subversively countering the depraved aspects of calculation? And consequently, if phenomenology hopefully is an approach that helps us overcome our preunderstood assumptions and false dialectics about the human condition, then how might we conceive of how gift and grace hold necessary, yet distinct relationships with their opposites of “economy,” “nature,” or “law?” And finally, what might a phenomenology of the gift have to contribute to a reflection upon grace that other theological approaches have not already developed?

Husserl and the Founding of Givenness

As the study of appearance (*phainesthai, erscheinen*), phenomenology begins with Husserl as a “method” or approach that is trained on the modes of variation of *Gegebenheit*, disclosed when one tries to *constitute* what appears. Givenness is co-essential to phenomenology. Husserl’s “principle of principles” states “that every primordial dator [presentive] Intuition is a source of authority (*Rechtsquelle*) for knowledge, that whatever presents itself in ‘intuition’ in primordial form (as it were in its bodily reality), is simply to be accepted as it gives itself out to be, though only within the limits in which it then presents itself.”⁴

Having already established that things are *given* as correlatives to noetic acts, whereby a subject simply directs her awareness toward those things, Husserl here gives one license to accept that whatever it is that is given in consciousness is capable of being described *as it truly is*; that is, with the right

amount of effort and attention. And each thing given has a kind of structure, style, or way—a givenness—of appearance to intuition whose “intentional structure” we indeed can determine. The linking-up of the “way” and “what” is the job of the one thinking and describing phenomenologically.

It should be mentioned from the outset that some have found this approach too positivistic and in the end even naive. As we will see in a moment, Derrida critiques that Husserl overlooked how the subject also needs to be “reduced,” and Marion likewise worries that such an approach places far too much responsibility upon an individual, intentional consciousness who constitutes its world as the sole discoverer and pioneer of supposedly “pure” things. Those who have studied the gift in recent years have tended to think that the constitution of phenomena is not simply the result of a synthesis between intuition and intention and that, further still, transcendental consciousness can neither *deliver* nor *preclude* something’s being given.

Given Husserl’s greater emphasis upon intentionality over intuition, of activity and constitution over what “is given” or appears without the aid of the subject’s focused attention, some have determined that he overlooked the role of intuition. Yet it is clear that he indeed sought to account for how things affect, stir, awaken, or stimulate activity in us. This affectation or excitation of possibility comes from an originary and passively experienced “field of pre-giveness” (*Vorgegebenheit*, which often gets translated as “data”) that is always already “there” before one comes to engage it intentionally. The intentional “activity of perception” indeed “presupposes that something is already pre-given to us,” and what is given “is not mere particular objects, isolated... but always a field of pre-giveness” that excites us to perception. All cognitive activity, all turning toward a particular object in order to grasp it, presupposes this domain of passive pre-giveness.⁵

A question we might be asking ourselves now is this: how do we even talk about some pre-given field, and is it actually possible to be able to offer a comprehensive description of it? Husserl speaks of the (im)possibility of “absolute givenness.” “Absolute givenness” concerns the utopic hope that particular evidence or comprehensive knowledge can be attained by a subject about *things* given within her consciousness. Husserl later came to prefer other terminology to “absolute givenness” following his realization that knowledge, like “infinity,” could not be given in any comprehensive way. Although he confessed that “absolute givenness... is an unattainable ideal,” we do indeed intuit givenness “adequately,” via “modes” or “forms” of givenness.⁶

It, of course, is possible to call into question even the degree to which we can attain any “adequate givenness” if we do not perform a reduction upon the subject herself, for the subject’s givenness plays perhaps the most important role in the what and how of things being given. But we can thank Husserl for starting phenomenology down a path of studying how “things give themselves” (*Selbstgebungen*), namely, to one’s “inner” experience, and for motivating the phenomenological discourse on how a gift can be given.

Heidegger radicalized the phenomenological thinking of givenness. He claims in *The Basic Problems in Phenomenology*, “in the end something is given which must be given if we are to be able to make beings accessible to us as beings and comport ourselves toward them, something which, to be sure, is not but which must be given if we are to experience and understand any beings at all.”⁷ That is, there is a givenness of beings that “is not” or does not present itself statically, yet still has some kind of phenomenality. For the later Heidegger the “it gives” (*es gibt*) of *Ereignis* (event, appropriation) is the most basic, yet the overlooked structure of ontological experiencing. Since the very “beginning of Western thinking” we have focused upon how “Being is thought, but not the ‘it gives’ as such. The latter withdraws in favor of the gift that ‘it gives.’ The gift is thought and conceptualized from then on exclusively as Being with regard to beings.”⁸

Derrida and the *Aporia* between Gift and Economy

Derrida’s engagements on the gift extend beyond phenomenology as a formal discipline, transcending its philosophical confines by drawing important connections between the gift with topics such as receptivity, memory, justice, death, or time. Here phenomenological meditation on givenness begins to intersect with, and clash with, anthropological observation of the gift.

Despite the modern assumption that “gift” and “exchange” can coalesce into what some have called a “gift economy,” or the more “postmodern” belief that they are antithetical, the Proto-Indo-European roots of “gift,” *ghabh*, actually did not originally differentiate between giving *and* taking. This reinforces the notion of a mutual relationship and the social bond of shared values between persons and groups. Similarly, the French *donner* (given/to give), with roots in the Hittite *dô* (give) and *dâ* (take), has given rise to *cadeau* (gift), which originates in the idea of a fundamental bond, *catena* or “chain.” Such a bond or chain is socially *established* (but not *contractually* agreed upon) by the giving of gifts. It makes good sense to study “givenness” at this most basic level. What at first may sound straightforward actually is far from it, as a number of perennial challenges tend to reappear in different ways whenever scholars study the gift: can there even be a reflection upon “the gift” without some thought to its supposed dialectical opposite—economy?

Extending Heidegger’s fundamental ontology of how the *es gibt* had been falsely crystalized as a “permanent presence,” Derrida points to how our Western “logocentric” heritage makes of givenness merely a *sign* that is supposed to point always and only to something else, some *eidos*. Yet gifts can come into play at any instance, and without our control, disrupting our otherwise stable conceptions of presence and absence, “becoming” and “arrival.” Husserl’s givenness is too restricted to “presencing” in part because one wills it or intends its coming-to-be. Derrida conducts a number of thought experiments upon the gift, reducing it to its core, and driving it to its limits. For

Derrida, “As soon as a gift—not a *Gegebenheit*, but a gift—as soon as a gift is identified as a gift, with the meaning of a gift, then it is canceled as a gift. It is reintroduced into the circle of an exchange and destroyed as a gift. As soon as the donee knows it is a gift he already thanks the donator and cancels the gift.”⁹ Any “desire to give” cannot bring about the gift because “desire” is an economical and calculative faculty.¹⁰ For these reasons, he ultimately refers to the gift as “impossible.” Even the concept of “possibility” is economic and exchange-driven, for it is affixed by our intending, willing, “meaning” and desiring. Derrida’s gift cannot enter phenomenality.

The gift’s lack of identifiability, however, does not signal its weakness, but rather its strength and importance. The gift has an “experientiability” as an *event*, unfolding in a horizon beyond any intent to give, and within the forces of language.¹¹ It “is something you do...without knowing what you do, without knowing who gives the gift, who receives the gift, and so on.”¹²

When a gift event takes place, it acts as a “dis-placer” of Being and “the transcendental horizon that belonged to it,” further dissociating—following the all-important Heideggerian distinction—the relationship between “Being” and “beings.” As a displacer, the gift draws attention (like *Khōra*, the “desert in the desert”) to what is absent or “out of joint,” effectively taking or covering-over something in a phenomenal experience. There is an important “aneconomy or anarchy of the gift” that is “beyond this economical conciseness...”.¹³ Such unpredictable “events” (*l’avenir*) indeed are a part of our everyday lives. But it is *not* up to us to make claims upon gifts.

Marion and the Givenness of the Self

Where Derrida conceives of desire as incapable of bringing about a gift, Marion believes it is an important key. Derrida does not establish a hierarchy of the gift over economy, though for Marion the gift retains primacy over economy because it always exceeds the desire of the individual subject. Where Derrida thinks phenomenology privileges the “possible,” which belongs to an economical conceptualization that inhibits the arrival of the gift, Marion is convinced that phenomenology’s bracketing and active suspension of phenomena actually entails that desire *actively* becomes passive and *receptive*, thereby making any cognitive directedness upon a things’ “possibility” a second-order *ratio*, only after the experience of a thing’s revealability. And where Derrida thinks love has inherently “narcissistic” qualities because it begins in “one’s own” desires, thereby appropriating “the other” toward those ends, Marion conceives of love as a gift *par excellence*, in part because it serves to establish, in a way like no other experience, a union between persons.

One of the most consequential moves Marion makes to overcoming some of the difficulties raised by Derrida and others on the gift is through deconstructing even further the notion of subjectivity. Despite Derrida’s attempts to mount a full-on deconstruction of a strong “subject,” denying that desire

or intentionality are capable of bringing about the gift, he inadvertently limited the possibilities of the gift because of his assumption that the autonomous, desiring subject is a controller of meaning. By conceiving of the subject now as “the given,” as also a gift in and of herself, Marion is able to see her as always in a passive state of reception. Thus any act of desire or intent on her part will be inherently *responsive* to an already given gift or mediatory givenness.

“So much reduction, so much givenness.”¹⁴ The more we suspend our presumptions in the natural attitude, *and* the more we tune ourselves into the “what” and “how” within intuition, then the more we might experience the yield and produce of phenomenal experiences. Building upon Husserl’s “passive pregiveness,” we find that such a reduction itself is *imbued already* with givenness, so the reduction finds an internal reality that *has been given*. As myself “a given,” my very consciousness also is a product of givenness. Thus, the first part of the dictum “so much reduction” is not a promissory “condition” for the second part “so much givenness.” Givenness redounds upon the reduction itself, and requires reflection upon the subject, who is “the given.” Givenness operates in the fold between becoming *conscious-of-something*, and its arrival or *coming-to-someone*.¹⁵

This emphasis upon “givenness” has raised some theological concerns. Some (such as Derrida in their 1997 debate) have expressed worries that Marion’s understanding of givenness implies a transcendent giver. As Gschwandtner, Jones, and Hart have successfully (in my view) demonstrated, although theological interests may inspire Marion’s phenomenology of the gift, it is not necessarily corrupted by them. On the contrary, it may be that Marion actually has over-compensated toward a philosophical interpretation that disacknowledges the theological heritage of the gift. Nevertheless, Marion’s *Being Given* provides a response to this concern of a certain “theomania” of the gift.

Being Given responds to other concerns as well. Some think that a study of givenness is merely a regional study that only corresponds directly to the topic of how gifts are given concretely, and not to the whole of reality or phenomenality. Marion makes his case that in order to do justice to *any* particularity or any manifestation, we need to study how givenness is implied within it. What is this “givenness?” It is a calling to creativity and an appeal to turn attention to how a thing can show itself: that which “shows itself first gives itself.” By shifting thought to givenness, we are able to see how it “articulates a process with a given; even if the given must, by definition, give a sense of its donative process.”¹⁶

The gift can be unhindered by the causal constraints of calculation, economy, reciprocity, and exchange because any “extrinsic” and visible qualities of appearance are non-determinable through causal logics or sufficient reasons. Phenomena now can *give* themselves freely and without restriction as “noncausal, nonefficient, and nonmetaphysical.”¹⁷ Givenness is a kind of Secular Revelation: it does not indicate how things simply banally appear,

but rather that they fundamentally *impact* us in mysterious, unrepeatably, and unpredictable ways. The gift *arrives* or is appresented (partially presented or indicated) as the “final trait” of givenness. Yet this arrival remains dynamic and *renounces* concretization, thereby avoiding a Derridean critique of a “metaphysics of presence.”

Although Marion is known for his explication of so-called “Saturated Phenomena,” it is not just a special class of things that can be reduced to their “being given” and “unfolded starting from the fold of givenness.”¹⁸ Givenness applies to any and all phenomena, as “the fold” between the thing that shows and the thing that is shown. All given things carry a “call,” and the answering of that call marks the intuitive openness toward receiving more and experiencing more.

Yet again, *first* one is “the given,” or “*l’adonné*,” Marion’s redux of the Cartesian *ego*, the Kantian “self,” the Husserlian “transcendental ego,” and Heideggerian *Dasein*. The experience of givenness amounts to a synthesis between *surrender* and *passion*, making *l’adonné* both the “master and servant” of the given. Givenness is generous and excessive from out of itself and overwhelms any intentions of “the gifted” without overcoming her agency. Marion’s work on givenness is not for the sake of simply redeeming phenomenology, but for reconceiving the human condition according to “love.” Love is a concept that is “non-intentional” without being emptied of all volition, is accessible to “the self” without constituting “a subject” who thereby controls the given, and is capable of having self-interest without being reduced to an economic function. It is on these terms that Anthony Steinbock recently has made some contributions that moves these debates on the relationships between gift and love forward in a productive way.

Steinbock and the Shift from Givenness to Love

Although Steinbock has relied upon the work of Marion and others in thinking about the gift and givenness, his work has provided some important correctives by reemphasizing the concrete experiences of everyday life that make any such research *relevant* in the first place. For example, he points to how “surprise” is a kind of “diremptive experience” of calling the self into question, one in which “I am given to myself as in tension with a basic sense of myself as before another or others.”¹⁹ This being-given-to-myself helps prove to me that I indeed am “not self-grounding”²⁰ and therefore my very existence foremost is one of *reception* and transcendental openness, keeping me from believing in the myth of self-sufficiency. In a nutshell, “I am simply given to myself, receive the gift of myself to myself as a projection beyond myself.”²¹ So far, this being-given-myself does not significantly diverge from Marion’s conception of “*l’adonné*”—the self as given.

Yet Steinbock then disparages the widely held view that a phenomenology of the gift involves a “surprise” beyond imagination. The belief structure of “surprise” actually still retains a fundamental relationship with *expectation*,

for it still assumes that even if one does not get what one expects or projects, the *intention* is that one gets *something*, possibly even believing, deep down, that one *deserves* that something. Surprise is a “startle reflex” that involves the “protention” that projects parts of the past onto the future. It “looks back” in order to project. To save the possibility of experiencing the unexpected, we need something “beyond surprise and nonsurprise”—humility.²² Humility helps eliminate expectations by establishing an “openness toward and a reception of what is given.”²³

This approach is distinct from Marion’s in another important way. Instead of beginning to think about the gift first, then love second as a *kind* of gift, he reverses the order. By beginning with love, we are on better footing to emphasize not only the concrete *relevance* of givenness, but importantly, its interpersonal significance, which “is oriented toward the liberation of other persons.”²⁴ What is actually meaningful about *any discussion* of the gift is that it should direct us to see the intricacies of love: “the gift only becomes the gift in the context of interpersonal loving.”

Marion brackets entirely “the empirical transcendencies (or reality or being) of the givee, the giver, and the gift” to the point that some of the parts become irrelevant to the “givenness” in the experience.²⁵ This results in a taxonomy that loses touch with the “lived experience” of these intertwined phenomena and taxonomy breeds a calculative approach to thinking the gift that in effect is highly economical. Since the gift is an *essentially* interpersonal phenomenon, the only way to vouchsafe love is to dispense with the focus on its “givenness”: the gift itself effectively *annuls* its relevance in the “sphere” of loving.

Behind Marion, Steinbock’s deeper critique it directed at Heidegger. Heidegger sought to direct our attention not to concrete givers or receivers, but the shared *Ereignis* (“sheer eventing... sheer destining”²⁶) or event of being appropriated by a phenomenal experience that then withdraws into a kind of anonymity. Steinbock finds this all rather unconvincing, in part because religion and morality are essential to responsibility and love, which are incarnated in personalism and thereby antithetical to pure anonymity. Even the giving of alms or doing of good deeds (as we might learn from the Jewish *Mitzvah*) spring from a liberative love representing “direct concern with the other person, from the other, for the other person—and *not a concern with the gift as such*. There is a direct ‘relation’ with the other person that allows the gift to emerge as gift, for me as lover, and for the other as beloved, in humility.”²⁷

The Adumbration of Grace (In Christian Thought)

Much can be learned also about grace by conceiving it as a response to the lived experience of “calculated recompense.” *Charis* (Χάρις, grace) is one of the most context-relevant words in the entire New Testament, as it can refer

to thanks, blessings, favor, or even just kind words. This has led to some fascinating inter-cultural translations and iterations, such as how “*charis* is almost always translated with the coined expression *kasih karunia* (literally ‘love-gift’)” in the 1972 Indonesian translation of the New Testament.²⁸ This serendipitous translation of grace as “love-gift” helps unfold how they indeed are sutured to one another. Although the New Testament depicts *charis* more generally an “unmerited favor” (if a gift is merited, then it is justice), the word is used in reference to nearly every aspect of the Christian life. It represents a divine power that becomes internalized in persons (Eph 2:8; 1 Cor 15:10). There is a “common,” social grace that operates on the cultural level by sustaining creation and restraining evil, and a specific, salvific grace (Rom 3:23) that works to establish relationships and encourage persons to believe that God graciously works on their behalf (Titus 2:11).

Further, graciousness is an attribute (1 Peter 5:10) or ontological key to God’s status or action (1 Peter 1:13) in this world. Grace is the bestowal of the Holy Spirit (Heb 10:29), of purpose and ministry (Rom 12:3) through spiritual gifts for serving others (Eph 4:7). Grace sustains us (2 Cor. 12:9; 1 Peter 5:5), not only spiritually, but also with/as material blessing (2 Cor. 8:1). Grace is the conduit by which we experience: redemption (Eph 1:7), election (Rom 11:5), justification (Titus 3:7) sanctification (Heb 10:14), the calling to salvation (Gal 1:15), hope for salvation (2 Thess 2:16), strength in times of weakness (2 Tim 2:1), and a promise of eternal life (Rom 5:21). Relevant to each of these theological claims is how Jesus is the incarnated personification of grace, and thereby the inverter and destroyer of rule domination.

Grace, then, it is a multifaceted concept that connects to every doctrine of our various Christian Traditions.²⁹ A thorough phenomenology of (Christian) grace would need to take these aspects into account in a way that I, of course, am incapable of doing here.³⁰ Yet it is possible to learn something new about the fundamental features of at least the *human side* of the *experience* of grace through applying the aforementioned phenomenologies of “the gift,” and without overstating or overemphasizing our theological presuppositions (even though they are always already operative in our thought).

First, grace is the experience of a fundamental incongruence that sows self-discord, namely, between what I believe I deserve (what I, as a “capable” human, might receive then in turn give and pass on to others) and what I do not (what is unimaginable to receive and thereby pass on to others). This feeling of incongruence poses a disturbance in *who* I believe myself to be, to the point of even giving a sense of having committed wrongdoing. Yet Grace’s disturbance of what I believe I deserve comes in contrast to a (perhaps cruel) calculation and economy. In this sense, then, Grace is a matter of dis-earning: it shakes the foundations of my calculative projections about myself, thereby rendering questionable the degree to which I have even inadvertently participated in a *corrupt*—perhaps even cruel, seductive, or perverted—economy, self-government, and law.

Second, building upon this incongruence and self-discord, an experience of grace serves to build bridges between persons through an asymmetry, over-abundance, and imbalance in reciprocity. That is (a) lavishness is essential to the phenomenality of grace, and (b) an experience of grace can heal wounds and build bridges because reciprocity is by necessity *unequal* between persons (one party gives over-abundantly to the other).

Third, an experience of grace is one of both *belonging* (exchange) and *breakthrough* (gift) that establishes freedom and independence, while simultaneously building reciprocity and moral responsibility. As an experience of belonging, grace is the binding glue of unity between parties. As an experience of breakthrough, grace represents possibility, conversion, and change in a living faith that resists the temptation to establish new laws, doctrines, and mechanisms (what Illich critiqued as a smooth, but deadly “efficiency”).

And *fourth*, Grace is not a free-floating, virtual, or abstract phenomenon of “givenness” from an entirely anonymous giver, but rather—following from its status as an inter-personal phenomenon—is experienced as a gift from a specific person, with specific, although non-calculable reasons. The abstract phenomenality of a general “givenness” cannot obscure the *specific* nature of experiencing a personal *event* with grace. If grace is somehow *only* ambiguously integrated within our life world, then the possibility of intending to experience it more deeply is diminished. Further, this “personal” aspect of grace serves to enhance its redemptive quality of restoring relationships. Grace creates accord, not *in general*, but between specific persons.

Notes

- 1 Martin Heidegger, *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (1919/20), ed. Hans-Helmuth Gander in *Gesamtausgabe* 58 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1993), p. 5.
- 2 François-David Sebbah, *Testing the Limit: Derrida, Henry, Levinas, and the Phenomenological Tradition* (Stanford UP, 2012), p. 98.
- 3 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 4.
- 4 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas I: General Introduction to Phenomenology* (London, New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 43.
- 5 Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press 1973), p. 30.
- 6 Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana* II, p. 31. See Husserl’s *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian (The Hague, Netherlands: Nijhoff, 1964), p. 24.
- 7 Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 10.
- 8 Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (New York, Harper and Row, 1972), p. 8.
- 9 Jacques Derrida, “On the Gift,” in *God, The Gift and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 59.
- 10 See Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 162.
- 11 As interpreted by Marion “Derrida concluded that for the gift to remain a gift it must be unfolded in the horizon of gratuity and would therefore be neither visible

- nor conscious”; Jean-Luc Marion, *La Rigueur des Choses: Entretiens avec Dan Arbib* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), p. 133.
- 12 Jacques Derrida, “On the Gift,” in *God, the Gift and Postmodernism*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 60.
 - 13 Jacques Derrida, “How to avoid Speaking: Denials,” in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 308, note 8.
 - 14 Marion first mentions this dictum in *Reduction and Givenness*: “Finally, what role is played by givenness, explicitly used but nonetheless never determined as such? These shortcomings led me to propose a fourth and last formulation of a possible first principle of phenomenology: ‘so much reduction, so much givenness’” (Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998], p. 203).
 - 15 Jean-Luc Marion, “Sketch of a Phenomenological Concept of Gift,” in *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought*, ed. Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 131. This text is an essential starting point for Marion’s work on the gift, and gets reworked as a section of *Being Given*. It first appeared as “Esquisse d’un concept phénoménologique du don” in *Filosofia della rivelazione*, ed. M. Olivetti (Rome: Biblioteca dell’Archivio di Filosofia, 1994).
 - 16 Jean-Luc Marion. *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 68.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, p. 74.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, p. 118.
 - 19 Anthony Steinbock, *It’s not about the Gift: From Givenness to Loving* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), p. 16.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
 - 22 Steinbock, *It’s not about the Gift* 21.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
 - 24 *Ibid.*, p. 123. cf. pp. 110–113.
 - 25 *Ibid.*, p. 109.
 - 26 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
 - 27 Steinbock, *It’s not about the Gift*, p. 130.
 - 28 See Daniel Arichea “Translating ‘Grace’ (*charis*) in the New Testament,” in *Practical papers for The Bible Translator* 29.2 (1978), p. 201.
 - 29 As Joseph S. O’Leary puts it “To the believer, grace is the defining attribute of God, and all the other divine attributes and the relations between God and creation are parsed in terms of it.” Further “Grace is a transcendental notion; it is not merely a theme in the Christian symphony, but the key in which the symphony is written” (“Grace Before Being,” *Archivio di Filosofia* 64 (1996): 121–134; pp. 122–123). O’Leary has reflected more deeply than most on the philosophy of gift as it relates with the theology of grace: “If in theology the notion of grace has expanded to envelop and surpass the solid substantiality and sharp definitions of traditional dogma, in phenomenology the notion of givenness (donation) has expanded to embrace and surpass Being. The notions of grace and givenness share certain strengths. They are unitary notions: all the other key notions of theology and phenomenology respectively can be parsed and ordered in reference to them. They are critical notions: they serve to dismantle reifications and dissolve metaphysical blockages. They are charged with immediacy: led back to grace and givenness, theological and phenomenological thought is set in a fresh relationship to its theme and converted away from the merely theoretical to an existential engagement with the given in its givenness”; Joseph S. O’Leary, “The Gift: A Trojan

Horse in the Citadel of Phenomenology?” in *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*. Ed. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 136.

- 30 Robyn Horner has undertaken a fascinating study of God’s self-giveness, also discussing it as a grace. She employs work from the debates on the gift: “the question with which I have been occupied throughout this study is a theological one: how is it possible to speak of God as gift? (*Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* [Fordham UP, 2001]).

12 Kierkegaard and the Phenomenology of Patience

J. Aaron Simmons

Although we often hear that “patience is a virtue,” a quick glance at the immediacy that defines our material existence would suggest that Matthew Pianalto is right to refer to patience as a “forgotten virtue” (Pianalto 2016). We pay more for the two-day delivery option from Amazon because regular shipping speeds are just too slow; we can’t be bothered to spend time cooking a meal, but are content to get it in the drive-thru at stores that guarantee it as “hot and ready” without any pre-planning needed to make sure it is there when we arrive. We have become a society devoted to immediacy—to hastening the future. Our global society is increasingly defined by different cultural manifestations of consumerism, egoism, individualism, libertarianism, and increasingly vicious nationalisms. Everything about this model of human social life is antithetical to patience. We want what we want “now.” We don’t know how to be patient except in relation to determinate ends. We know how to wait for the item on backorder at Amazon, or for the two-week vacation coming up next summer, but we do not know how to inhabit patience as a constitutive aspect of invested temporal existence. We can be patient for x , but yet we struggle to live ... *patiently*.

Although there is not much in the contemporary philosophical literature that specifically considers patience, those thinkers that do all focus on the way that patience, as a mundane phenomenon, has a very determinate relation to time and desire (see especially Pianalto 2016). For example, Joseph H. Kupfer claims that, “Patience is the disposition to accept delays in satisfying desires—delays that are warranted by circumstances or the desires themselves” (Kupfer 2007: 265). Building on Kupfer’s account, though taking issue with the specifics of it, Michael R. Kelly offers a specifically phenomenological consideration of the temporality of patience and concludes that

The patient person wishes for some future now delayed or deferred by some interruption, obstacle, requirement, etc., and she now waits calmly, with equanimity and an understanding of the value of some good that transcends her own rational desire and the timely satisfaction of it. By contrast, the agent’s desire to actively assume control—however

impotent ...—will reflect impatience, which ... is riveted to the present and the present that frustrates the self's realization of its wishes.

(Kelly 2020: 92)

David Kangas speaks to the way that patience is nested in a lived projection into the future that effects a dispossession of oneself in ways that is both upbuilding and also deconstructive. Drawing on Kierkegaard specifically, Kangas notes that

to speak of an intending of the future, in expectation for example, is to identify a modality in which consciousness becomes doubled-up upon itself: vis-à-vis the future, consciousness finds itself in a struggle with its own essential ambiguity, for the difference between the future apparent to anticipative foresight and the absolute future, which remains essentially *in abscondito*, will never be reconciled. Indeed, consciousness itself “is” that very difference, how then could it overcome it? Here the “groanings of creation” may be heard, a patience enjoyed, but also the emergence of an exceptional expectation.

(Kangas and Kavka 2011: 130)

Interestingly, Kangas's comments here are offered as part of an essay that emerged from an extended email exchange with Martin Kavka. In putting forth his ideas, Kangas presents them as in the expectation of a response from Kavka. Yet, unlike the immediacy of spoken dialogue, in the email exchange, the utterances are presented and then one waits. How one waits is unclear, though. We might wait in impatient anxiety for the email about test scores or a job interview, say, or we might wait in patient appreciation that the written reply of the other is something that is not very similar to an Amazon order—it is not conditional on our whim, but on their investment. Impatience, in this case, would be to refuse to allow one's ideas to be (trans)formed by the temporal space—the relational duration—that conditions the conversation itself. Expecting the response from Kavka, Kangas can only write in anticipation, but also, due to the patient awaiting of the future in which Kavka will have written and Kangas's views will be impacted as a result, he can never write, and therefore never speak, *finally*.

Patience is characterized by the revisability of hope in light of embodied humility; impatience is marked by the arrogant refusal to let hope be hospitable to what is not yet the case. Impatience, as Kelly rightly notes, is a matter of attempting to control the present in a statement of defiance to the future—to be self-sufficient instead of relationally dependent. Patience is a willingness to humble oneself in relation to the response of the other that cannot fully be determined ahead of time insofar as it, despite our best attempts to guess at its possible contours, “remains essentially *in abscondito*.”

Kangas's distinction between what is legitimately a matter of anticipatable foresight and that which is a matter of the absolute future is a crucial

recognition that patience is not simply a matter of indeterminacy, but instead (as noted in various ways by Kupfer, Kelly, and Pianalto) a matter of deferral in light of what is known all too well. Kierkegaard's upbuilding discourses on patience teach that patience is fundamentally about our souls (who we are and who we are becoming) begin to speak with new urgency. Kierkegaardian patience helps us to see patience as more of an existential condition than as an episodic contingency.

Henry and Chrétien: Kenotic Phenomenology

Michel Henry rejects the idea that life is a matter of objectivity, social status, and external identity. Henry's phenomenology of life is ultimately an account of the way that subjectivity is not reducible to a story about intentional consciousness and its objects. Instead, what makes object-oriented knowledge possible in the first place is the "very fact of experiencing oneself in each point of one's being" (Henry 2012: 10). In a decidedly technical conception of "life" that has little to do with biology, but everything to do with the felt presence of one's own living, Henry suggests that

Life alone has the ability to unite with the power of the hands and to identify with them, to be what it is and to do what it does. It alone possesses *a knowledge that merges with this power because it is nothing other than its continual experience of itself—its radical subjectivity.*

(Henry 2012: 12)

Inviting us to think more carefully about the affective dimension of selfhood as the very substructure of phenomenal awareness, Henry understands experience to be revelatory not only of what is true about the "world," but what conditions such truth: life itself. We might say that his encouragement is not simply to read/interpret phenomena, but also to allow such phenomena to reveal/read us insofar as they non-intentionally disclose the truth of Life (and its relation to lived subjectivity) as always deeper than the truth of the world (and its reduction of meaning to objectivity).

It is in this kenotic context of actively receiving oneself from God that we should read, and be read by, Kierkegaard's comment at the end of *Either/Or II*: "In relation to God we are always in the wrong—this thought puts an end to doubt and calms the cares; it animates and inspires to action" (Kierkegaard 1987: 353). Far from passivity, far from quietism, far from resignation, when we allow ourselves to "be read" in relational dependency on God and others, we gain the strength to continue forward because even when isolated, we are never completely alone. Kenosis is not simply about humility, but about the fact that humility is always a relational virtue.

In the preface to *Under the Gaze of the Bible*, Jean-Louis Chrétien similarly suggests that the ultimate task of reading is to allow oneself to be read. For Chrétien, reading is fundamentally about reception—reception not just

of the *content conveyed* by the author, but of *oneself as exposed* in the act of reading itself. This is hardly a striking claim given Chrétien's basic notion of the Call/Response structure that serves to frame not only his phenomenological philosophy, but also his account of human existence, as such (see Chrétien 2004). It might seem, however, that understanding oneself as a response to a prior call, and viewing reading as receptive openness rather than interpretive agency, would lead to a decidedly passive conception of selfhood. But Chrétien's account of what it means to "be read" stresses active investment in humility and hospitality: "It is not a matter of assuming a passive attitude, a kind of reading 'quietism,' but of a *lively patience* and the active self-discipline that consists of relinquishing our arrogance" (Chrétien 2015: x, emphasis added). Harkening back to his influential account of prayer as a "wounded word" (see Chrétien 2000), he suggests that reading is also a practice of becoming "wounded" and states that it "lays bare, for better or worse, the finitude of the reader being read" (Chrétien 2015, x). Such "wounding" is not simply a tragedy, but a blessing in what it conditions as lived possibilities. When we allow ourselves to be transformed, it may come at a painful cost to who we were (or at least to our self-narrative), but open spaces for becoming ourselves more truly as ruptured by God and others. Notice that all of these claims reveal an almost kenotic logic operative at the heart of subjectivity. To be oneself in fullness requires being dispossessed of a narrative of self-sufficiency.

For Henry and for Chrétien, we are neither primarily active agents nor passive spectators, for both options would be situated such that the world determines our meaning, rather than our being meaningful as the condition of the world's signification. Instead, these phenomenologists offer us an account of selfhood as invested in the significance that conditions us and yet that we constitute in our lived engagement with it.

Chrétien's account of being read and Henry's account of auto-affection invite us into what I call a *kenotic phenomenology*. In both cases, their proposals for fulfillment and meaningful existence are not that we achieve self-sufficiency, but that we admit of our relational dependency. "We speak for having heard. Every voice, hearing without cease, bears many voices within itself because there is no first voice"; we are dependent on "the whole thickness of the world whose meaning my voice attempts to say, meaning that has gripped it and swallowed it up, as it were, from time immemorial" (Chrétien 2004: 1). The relational humility that Henry and Chrétien describe, and advocate, is not a matter of self-debasement, but of appropriate self-love in relation to God and others.

Almost anticipating the counter(dynamic)-intentionality of kenotic phenomenology, Kierkegaard reminds us that "there are things in life into which we should not seek to poetize our thoughts but from which we ourselves should learn; there are things in life over which we should not weep but from which we should learn to weep over ourselves" (Kierkegaard 1990: 209). Henry, Chrétien, and Kierkegaard invite us to look again at what we think

we see. Anyone who does much hiking or backpacking can tell you that getting lost is terrifying. However, what is often the most dangerous thing is to be moving through the woods thinking you know where you are when you do not—all the while getting more and more off course. Only when we admit that we are lost can we begin to do the hard work of finding our way. The phenomenological revelation here is that Kierkegaardian patience is not a given to be assumed, but an invitation to be undertaken.

Patience in the *Upbuilding Discourses*

Over the past decade, there has been increasing scholarship bringing Kierkegaard not only into conversation with phenomenology but reading his work as, itself (proto)phenomenological. Of particular note is the influential edited volume in which Jeffrey Hanson (2010) invited us all to engage in “an experiment” whereby we think about “Kierkegaard as phenomenologist.” Although the specific arguments in favor of such a phenomenological Kierkegaard (and the criticisms of such arguments) are beyond the scope of this chapter, I am content simply to proceed with the assumption that Kierkegaard can be read phenomenologically and as a decided resource for contemporary phenomenology. In particular, Kierkegaard’s account of patience in three upbuilding discourses published in 1843–1844 stands as phenomenologically fecund for where we now find ourselves.

Kierkegaard offers something of a trilogy of the lived temporality that attends patience as a task for selfhood in his discourses entitled: “To Gain One’s Soul in Patience,” “To Preserve One’s Soul in Patience,” and “Patience in Expectancy.” The movement from gaining, to preserving, and ultimately to expecting traces the way in which patience is essentially tied to the temporality of lived experience. Only having gained our soul can we preserve it, and only as preserved can our soul be defined as expectant of a future into which it lives, moves, and has its being. The key to Kierkegaard’s account is that gaining, preserving, and expecting are all disruptive of self-sufficiency. Kierkegaard shows that patience is a dispossessing virtue. In line with a kenotic phenomenology, patience depends on humility and encourages hope—but with the goal of being upbuilt, rather than deemed successful in the eyes of those who find meaning to lie in pragmatic achievement and external recognition.

Always the philosopher of paradox, Kierkegaard opens “To Gain One’s Soul in Patience” by admitting that the idea of “gaining one’s soul” is an odd thought: who, exactly, would be gaining such a soul if not someone already ensouled? In this initial framing, Kierkegaard is repeating a common refrain in his authorship: selfhood is a task of becoming, not an assumption of being. “Life must be gained,” Kierkegaard notes, and “it must be gained in patience ... because patience is a soul-strength that everyone needs to attain what he desires in life” (Kierkegaard 1990: 160). Gaining one’s life is not about getting the house on the hill with a Porsche in the garage, but about being invested in the passionate task of becoming a self.

So, why is patience the condition of such becoming, such gaining? Because patience is not a means to an end, but instead the context in which the ends signify at all. Kierkegaard is clear that patience is not embraced due to an instrumentalist calculation.¹ To the instrumentalist, i.e., the person who practices patience because it facilitates eventual obtainment of some external object or status, Kierkegaard offers the following rebuke: “he is not really gaining patience but gaining what is coveted” (Kierkegaard 1990: 161). That which one must really desire is patience itself, and yet what facilitates such desire is precisely patience. Patience is a matter of internal transformation, not external manifestation. As such, we must not think of “gaining” one’s soul as a kind of external achievement whereby one now possesses what one formerly did not (and that some others still do not)—such a conception would present the soul as a kind of value ripe for comparative judgment rather than inner reflection. Only via the eternal is there “no such self-contradiction” between already possessing what one still attempts to gain (Kierkegaard 1990:162). In other words, we possess our soul when we are fully oriented—in patience—toward gaining it. Yet, such possession is actually a being possessed by the eternal, rather than a temporally distinctive attribute that distinguishes people in a social context.

Doubling down on the kenotic logic that supports the phenomenology of patience, Kierkegaard explains that if we aspire “to possess the world” rather than to gain our souls, then it is we who are ultimately possessed by that desire: “The world can be possessed only by its possessing me” (164). In demonstrating patience only insofar as it facilitates possessing the world, then we never are “in” patience, but simply deploy it as a calculative behavior to elevate our position in relation to externals. Such externals are, Kierkegaard says, by definition “imperfect” due to their being exclusively temporal objects (165). In a phenomenological vein we might say that they are *merely* phenomenal rather than *saturated* phenomena. Alternatively, the “perfect” is the eternal and “a person is able to possess the perfect when he also possesses himself” (165).

We are both ill-equipped to be alone with ourselves and we inhabit a society that makes being alone with oneself very difficult due to the lack of time and space to enact it. We too often need the outside world to give us definition (we must be important if lots of people follow us on Instagram, etc.). When faced with extended isolation, as during the Covid pandemic, with the seeming permanence of the present in light of the deferral of the expected future, we no longer are able to live the lie that external affirmation is ultimately soul-building. Kierkegaardian patience is not about finding the energy to await something that is simply delayed, but about becoming oneself only insofar as one no longer tries to hold onto the social construction (our Facebook narrative, our Snapchat profile, our Twitter handle, our job title, the letters behind our name, etc.) that, ultimately, undermines who we hope to become if we allow it to define who we are.

Listen to the following from Kierkegaard:

It is a question not of making a conquest, of hunting and seizing something, but of becoming more and more quiet, because that which is to be gained is there within a person, and the trouble is that one is outside oneself, because that which is to be gained is in the patience, is not concealed to it so that the person who patiently stripped off its leaves, so to speak, would finally find it deep inside but is in it so that it is patience itself in which the soul in patience inclosingly spins itself and thereby gains patience and itself.

(Kierkegaard 1990: 171)

Rarely have I found a better account of what haunts my students so often: the need to live up to the image of themselves that they attempt to construct as aesthetic social objects. Kierkegaardian patience is not a matter of sticking it out, or staying with it, until the payoff comes; not a matter of waiting without agitation for the passing of some burden of one sort of another, but a matter of being content with who one is (and who one is becoming) regardless of whether the expectations are fulfilled in objective ways. That said, Kierkegaard does indicate that there is at least one way in which patience is likely to yield objective outcomes: we will become “more quiet.” Patience teaches us learned silence, invested listening, attentive engagement, and disciplined embodiment, but it does not result in a situation where patience is no longer necessary. Being “in patience” is, thus, a matter of possessing oneself by realizing that one will never arrive, but only ever be on the way. This is definitely not something that is going to sound good to people who are always only interested in the profit rather than the process, people who see education as a matter of getting certifications (narrated by “learning outcomes”) rather than truth, and people who view others as obstacles to their freedom rather than as neighbors whom we are called to love. Again, Kierkegaardian patience is kenotic in that it is disruptive of who we have allowed ourselves to become because it challenges who we think we *should* be.

In this way, Kierkegaard’s discussion of *gaining* one’s soul opens on to *preserving* it “in patience.” Patience is not a temporally discrete virtue, but one that fills all of temporality itself. To be virtuous as a finite being is to be patient—because you are simultaneously never done with life so long as you remain a “poor existing individual.” Kierkegaard is unambiguous that if we are not diligent to remain invested in who we are becoming, then we are likely to again slide into the impatience that is bred by inattention. “If a person does not use the help of patience,” he writes, “he may, with all his efforts and diligence, come to preserve something else and thereby to have lost his soul” (Kierkegaard 1990:187). Consistent with Kierkegaard’s notion of “purity of heart” as willing one thing with the complete passion of one’s interiority, here we see that we are always preserving something—but

the question is whether we are preserving our souls, or allowing our souls to be overtaken by the immediacies of external concern. When we grow impatient with the slowness, the quiet, and the solitude that patience requires us to cultivate (which doesn't mean withdrawing from society, but reframing our relationship to its significance in our lives), we begin to see everything as in our way, as it were, rather than being humble enough to admit that neighbor-love means admitting that we are often in the way of others (195–196).

As we have seen, Kierkegaardian patience is not about having, but about dispossession. We gain and preserve our souls when we recognize that we are not resting on our own strength to get what we seek, but by expecting “victory” regardless of external conditions (see, “The Expectancy of Faith,” Kierkegaard 1990, 7–29). It is important not to miss the theological import of Kierkegaard's account here. His kenotic phenomenology emerges from his kenotic theology whereby God is a “God of patience—because he himself is patience and is nowhere far away from us” (199). “Every truly expectant person,” Kierkegaard suggests, “is in a relationship with God” (221). Two things to note here. First, by “expectant,” Kierkegaard is not suggesting someone awaiting the mundane arrival of some hoped-for outcome. Instead, “expectation” is an idea that shows up frequently in Kierkegaard's work as what we might term an eschatological alternative to the teleological focus of a profit culture. Rather than simply expecting-X, we live in expectancy. Here we see, again, that Kierkegaard's kenotic account of expectancy/patience is pushing us deeper than the ordinary mode in which awaiting/patience is primarily considered in the philosophical literature. Second, does Kierkegaard mean to indicate that non-Christians are unable to be patient? Even if he does, we do not need to follow him in this conclusion. Instead, what I think we can learn—whether Christian or not—is that we should all avoid the idolatry of thinking that “God” names human power. “God” is the name for what humility, patience, hospitality, and hope look like when perfected. Due to our finitude, we are not perfectible in that sense, but we can continue to live in the expectancy of faith such that the weak are made strong, the poor made rich, the downtrodden get elevated, and the broken are healed. Having the patience to live toward such an expectation requires that we not be defined by specific outcomes (even though we strive toward them in our personal, professional, and political lives).

Instead, pressing toward the goal is what continues to allow the goal to signify as worthy of our time, our energy, and our effort. Living expectantly “in patience” means that we are dispossessed in relation to God (whether in a theological or purely phenomenological sense) because the task is not our own elevation, but a humble, yet hopeful, embrace of the “upbuilding” thought that in relation to God we are never ourselves finished with becoming who we hope to be ... for ourselves and for others.

Unlike the idolatry of coveting specific phenomena, desiring the eternal while resting in God facilitates genuine self-relationship because we are

defined as-seen, rather than as seeing the object. When one is “in-patience,” the intentional direction gets flipped such that by abandoning the imperfect world in order to desire the eternal we possess ourselves by recognizing that it is God who possesses us. Kenotic phenomenology, in this sense, attends to the way in which that which is given inverts the ordinary flow of power and status and identity. We possess our souls by realizing that our souls are always only ever to be gained as we move ever closer, ever deeper, into the relation with God—the giver of good gifts, including ourselves. “Consequently,” Kierkegaard concludes, “he gains ... *his soul from God, away from the world, through himself*” (Kierkegaard 1990, 167).

Matthew Pianalto speaks to the practical importance of patience as a foundational virtue in one’s life. “The person who remains patient,” he notes, “as opposed to giving into anger or despair, is perhaps better able to attend to the details of her circumstances, and thus is in a better position to make good judgments about when and how to act in carrying out her duties and pursuing her other projects” (Pianalto 2014, 95). Resonating with Kierkegaard, Pianalto demonstrates that a life grounded in patience is likely to be one that is better equipped to undertake the phenomenological necessity to pay attention to the way that the world presents itself and respond in appropriate ways:

In this respect, patience supports mindfulness, diligence and constancy of commitment, as opposed to a distracted, hurried kind of living in which we lose sight of ourselves and the things that we think should matter most to us.

(Pianalto 2014: 95)

As Pianalto notes, when we cultivate patience, not just for this or that particular end, but as a Kierkegaardian way of life, we are better able to remain related to what matters most. Patience interrupts the common tendency to take the world, and the values assumed therein, for granted as fixed, objective, and final. Pianalto is exactly right to say that impatience causes us to lose sight of “ourselves.” With all due respect to Eminem, it is problematic that we lose ourselves in the hurry, that we lose ourselves in the speed, that we lose ourselves in the noise, and that we lose ourselves in the crowd. Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Sartre all warned against the seduction presented by the “they,” the “public,” the “herd,” and the “hell” caused by the unreflective expectations of social life.

It should be stressed again: phenomenology is fundamentally about paying attention and invested attunement. Patience cultivates that ability in importantly embodied, committed, and relational ways. Phenomenology helps to equip us for existence by providing us with the weapons, as it were, needed to fight well the battle for our soul when faced with the speedy inauthenticity of impatient existence.

Note

- 1 Interestingly, here Kierkegaard is at odds with Kupfer (2007) who suggests that patience is essentially an instrumentalist virtue, but in line with Pianalto (2014) who contends that patience is “complex” in ways that resist any reductive instrumentalism.

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13 The Enigma of Suffering in Phenomenology and Theology

Jeffrey Bloechl

Theology is never far from the general problem of evil, nor the particularly troubling variant that shows up in human suffering.¹ Yet it may happen that a theological response, with the best intentions, can miss the problem entirely or even make it worse. One thinks, for example, of certain theodicies that purport to resolve the mystery of untimely death by appeal to a transcendent principle said to be all-powerful and good. God does not wish the death itself, we are told, but death nonetheless is an ingredient to the prevailing order of things, both metaphysical and natural, that unfolds from God's will. In this way, what occurs strictly in the concrete, which is to say singly and uniquely, is submitted to an interpretation that remains strictly abstract unless a medical or pastoral worker takes the added step of claiming that indeed—*horribile dictu*—God does will this particular calamity. Philosophy offers us one means to resist such abstractions in the form of phenomenology. After all, it belongs to the excellence of the well-worn call *Zurück zu den Sachen selbst* that it works immediately against every temptation to systematize, totalize, or generalize in our account of human experience. This is enough to raise questions of considerable importance. What would be the meaning of suffering before it is submitted to theodicy? What would be the nature of the theology that is capable of welcoming it?

From Pain to Suffering

It is necessary to distinguish suffering from pain. The latter has been an important theme in phenomenology since Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. It comes under consideration for technical reasons that call for brief attention here. As early phenomenology struggled to sort out the relation between emotions and sensations, pain was taken up as an especially suggestive example, since it seems to involve some of each. The discussion was already long underway in pre-phenomenological work when in the Fifth Investigation (§ 15) Husserl took the view that pain must be approached through a distinction between non-intentional feelings at the level of sensation and intentional feelings founded on the presentation of sensations. One may feel pain at a low and indistinct level, but one may also feel the same pain distinctly, and in a

particular location. The dull ache that had infiltrated my awareness without appearing as such may surface as distinctively back pain. Both are possible and the difference between the two lies in an intentional act by which one takes up a conscious relation to the pain. According to Husserl, the latter does not alter the experience, but only brings it into view. This must mean that the former is in some way seeded with the objectivity that emerges in the intentional relation since otherwise our attribution of a cause or source would only be arbitrary. When one feels pain in one's lower back, one takes up a relation to the sensations in which their original location and indeed their meaning are now expressed.

Saulius Geniusas concludes that for Husserl the phenomenon of pain is 'stratified' in that it exhibits simple sensory and complex intentional components.² In the relation between these strata, we recognize the difference between a pain that has not claimed our attention and a pain that does so and thereby is identified. We also find a reason to think of the composite experience in terms of thresholds. Pain claims our attention when it reaches either a certain general degree or else a certain distinct intensity. In Sartre's example of feeling pain in one's eyes while reading, the pain remains indistinct until it commands the reader's attention, at which point its source in his or her body stands out. Sartre concentrates on the difference between consciousness of a page or a sentence that occurs in relative comfort and the amorphous feeling that shows up only as letters blur or the narrative disintegrates, and he takes this to mean that the feeling itself is without any object.³ Consciousness of pain—pain at the fully intentional level, we might insist—introduces a split between one's body as prethematic insertion in a world and body as foregrounding this or that part that now stands over against oneself. It is not only a body part that pain may bring to light, but an entire world. When one's eyes make reading difficult, one is thrown back on oneself so that the world that had conformed to a previous wish is now called into question. The book stands out as no longer enjoyable, and curtains must be drawn after all, and what had until now been the pleasant chirp of birds outside have become aggravating. These make up the terrain in which one's own body is now an obstacle and a burden.

Conspicuous pain is pain that demands meaning. To be sure, one sometimes can see pain coming, anticipate it, and in that way pre-comprehend it. But when one is unprepared, a sudden jab or an unexpected blow may cause pain that strikes before one could have summoned any means to give it a context or submit it to a higher purpose. It is this way with bumping one's head in the dark or grasping an unexpectedly hot pan, and any number of other familiar experiences. Yet all of them are without difficulty recuperated into a world of identifiable causes, a persistent order, and finally a general comfort.

A Heideggerian interpretation of pain as attunement, as more than merely ontic but as determining our being-in-the-world, does not cause us to lose sight of the body, as widespread criticism of Heidegger's near-silence on that theme might suggest. We are instead led to recognize that attunement is disclosed in the body, and perhaps even most primordially there. The shortness

of breath and rapid heartbeat often accompanying anxiety—Heidegger's signature theme—must be taken seriously, confirming Merleau-Ponty's claim that 'The body is our general medium for having a world.'⁴ The lived body, after all, is not the purely organic body scrutinized by modern science. It projects meaning from an attunement that shapes its manner of adequation with the material that it encounters.

One has only to free oneself of a bias in favor of mechanistic explanation in order to see that when someone who has sustained severe tissue damage protests that it is 'unbearable,' there is often more at stake than an intense surge of discomfort. The protest may also signal that the available frames of reference are collapsing, so that what one feels is increasingly without context. Confronted by this, physicians are no doubt right to recognize the physiological and psychological dimensions of pain, but on shaky ground when they set aside the psychology in order to address themselves to what they judge is the real source of the problem. Human beings do not experience pain as such, but always in a manner that is inscribed in personal history and culture, a set of relationships, and, to be sure, relative physical capacities that they have learned to anticipate and manage.

Persistent pain may overpower every faculty and resource by which the subject has hitherto borne it. These will have included the various forms of meaning, from pre-intentional awareness through clarity about location and source, to reflective understanding and moral or religious interpretation. At that point, it is not only that pain has become omnipresent in the life of the subject, but also that it has become so intense as to require, only for the effort simply to withstand it, withdrawal of energy from commitment to anything and everything else. When this goes so far as to collapse what has gone into maintaining distance from the feeling itself, subjectivity becomes only the singularity of an undergoing that cannot in any sense be escaped or even expressed. There is a degree of pain that reduces a human being to cries and palpitations, and that is given meaning only by those who witness it.

We speak appropriately of 'suffering' to the degree that pain approaches the impending destruction of the subject as a free and meaning-giving being. In a great many cases suffering sooner or later singles us out singly and inescapably (it is mine, and mine alone), and in its extreme form it robs us of the possibility even to grasp an explanation or interpretation. This strikes directly against systematic theories of suffering, putting universal claims to the test of experiences that are singular. It raises the possibility that suffering may simply be more powerful than any theory whatsoever, not least of which those that are intent on defending the ascendancy of the good.

Being as Suffering

Arguments for the divine justice of suffering place an extraordinary burden of acceptance on individual human beings. They render suffering unrecognizably abstract. What is essentially new and personal each time it imposes

itself immediately loses its originality when one commits it to language. The theology that becomes theodicy begins only here, which is to say too late. But then, claims for theodicy do not appear intent on fidelity to the thing that is suffering nearly so much as an authority in rational dispute. Leibniz coined the term in response to Bayle's charge that in his natural philosophy, Leibniz overstated claims for a preestablished harmony consistent with the divine will. For Bayle, a strong argument for disharmony can be drawn from the experience of evil. For Leibniz, both the case for harmony and its particular application to the problem of evil depend on recognizing that the perfect God is good and all-powerful, and thus that such a God's will is without limit or defect. This cannot mean that there is no evil—no destruction and no suffering—but instead that what there is of it is an ingredient of the best of all possible worlds such as, by definition, the perfect God wills. The problem for the theology that would take this on is twofold: it is unclear how one's own suffering is part and parcel of what simply must come to pass, and there is nothing personally consoling about the God to whom one would expect to turn.

God does speak personally to the one who suffers in the biblical theodicy narrated in the book of Job, and in fact this occurs only after the failure, in dialogue, of attempts at theodicy. Job is resolute in his conviction that he does not deserve any of it. Yet his friend Elihu appears to be right when, in a speech that presages what God, too, will say before long, he warns against the pride that would issue in diatribe with the God who is beyond our own every measure (Jb 33:12–13). If Elihu's warning is apt, and if the meaning of God's own speech in rebuke of the diatribe that Job nonetheless undertakes does express essentially the same view, then it is the teaching of the book of Job that we cannot know why we suffer and indeed sometimes out of all proportion with merit and deserts. To protest, as Job finally does, is to commit the offense of pride. Suffering is simply a mystery, though one that should cause us only to cleave to the God who is the source of any true deliverance. The accompanying conception of life is austere: we can neither escape suffering nor overcome it, but in faith and hope we must not cease to strive against it.

It has been among the achievements of Schopenhauer to show what our humanity must be if we take the further step of abandoning all such faith and hope. Without them, being is only willing. And since this willing would be insatiable, it is necessarily suffering. How to face it? Schopenhauer is unflinching: 'Unless suffering is the direct and immediate object of life, our existence must entirely fail of its aim.'⁵ There are not many alternatives. He recognizes in music and in aesthetic contemplation a suspension of ordinary cognition and the willing that otherwise afflicts us, but of course this is only fleeting. The closest he gets to theological principle is when he advocates ascetical renunciation, by which we are to understand a refusal of the will to live until achieving a blissful stillness. One misunderstands Schopenhauer, softening his central claim, if one proposes that hope abides in the renunciation. For Schopenhauer, recourse to any principle of provision and salvation is all

too clearly an exercise in self-deception and the vanity that pretends to have found its own way out of our true condition.

At once quite close to Schopenhauer and insistent on a crucial nuance, Michel Henry's philosophy of life proposes to place on an equal footing with suffering (*souffrance*) in one's very being the joy (*joie*) of being oneself. Suffering is the impotence by which one is handed over solely to oneself, but it does not extinguish a simultaneous feeling of belonging to oneself. To the contrary, it is in the suffering that one is oneself, just as it is in the joy of being oneself that one also suffers.⁶ In no case, for Schopenhauer, does joy belong among the first facts of our being. When for his part Henry contends that it does, understanding it to be equiprimordial with suffering, he opens the door to a theological claim. If joy is the inner relation of life to itself—its feeling of itself by itself—then it is 'the shining forth, the presencing of Being' from its hiddenness in itself.⁷ We are to envision a joy that feels itself in its solidarity with the fullness of being, and in that way transcends the suffering that otherwise singularizes the one who suffers.

We find a similar account of suffering and joy in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Schopenhauer, Henry, and now Levinas agree that the primary condition of our being is an impotence that is felt as suffering. But whereas Henry goes so far as to identify this strictly with our original affectivity, both Schopenhauer and Levinas hold fast to the idea that it is a matter of willing. In his existential ontology, especially in the earliest works, Levinas comes remarkably close to Schopenhauer's basic thesis that willing is insatiable and thus that being is suffering. In *Existence and Existents*, being is understood as effort. Fatigue and an inclination to indolence do not only trouble our relation to work and its purposes, but cling to existence itself.⁸ Each present moment is an achievement won out over the constant possibility of unraveling, only to slip away so that one must assert oneself anew.

The joy that one feels in taking nourishment from the elements is only an inner qualification of a suffering that never truly ceases. Not even God removes this from our condition, and indeed for Levinas the God who we believe will do so is not God at all, but only a projection of our egocentrism. In no sense can the means for salvation be found in the subject, for whom everything is here. But it can come from elsewhere, in the advent of the other person—gift of a presence from beyond anything centered on me.⁹ The face of the other, Levinas famously insists, interrupts the train of subjective being, and shakes it out of self-assertion into the contrary possibility of original responsibility. Here we begin to see a phenomenological basis for a possibility we caught sight of earlier: the one who suffers for the other person gives meaning to a life that has become incapable of doing so for itself. In the worst of cases, this is the *only* possibility. For Levinas, it is the condition of any meaning that is oriented to the good.

Now if Henry has saved the thought of divine providence by identifying in our very suffering the ground for joy, Levinas has done considerably more to address suffering in its concrete occurrence, where it weighs heavily on

subjects in a world. Henry's philosophy is protological. It concentrates on affections that are already the site of our willing, and envisions a salvation from suffering that is already given as a possibility of our being. But this salvation neither needs nor awaits anything other than our own insight into our beginnings. In contrast, Levinas's philosophy is eschatological, albeit with a striking ethical inflection: the messiah, proper object of hope, is the other person. In neither case has phenomenology found a means to ground our possible successes dealing with suffering simply in actions taken at the subject's own initiative. This conclusion was to be expected, but its implications can be unsettling: we are exposed to suffering, even find ourselves in it, but are not ordered by our natures to the good that would transcend it.

What of Christian theology? Conducted in view of all of this, it must consider that the same God who does not intervene in experience and history also does not insure that our natures include every provision for triumph over this evil that is closest to us. The fullness of human suffering urges the death of a certain God—and, it is important to add, not only the one reduced by Leibniz to the principle of sufficient reason. And yet, nothing in what we have argued here prevents one from believing that a different sort of God remains present, only accompanying us in what comes to pass, rather than causing or requiring it. If a living relation with this more biblical God does not include a means to resolve the *mysterium doloris*, it does enable the faithful to give meaning to it, within the horizon of a relation that is enduring and eternal.

Meaningless Suffering

Meaningless suffering is suffering that requires so much of our energy and attention in order simply to bear it as to destroy our capacity for anything else, and indeed in that important sense destroy our very subjectivity. Such a condition tests the limits of what it means to say that one is 'bearing' one's suffering. We may also anticipate its implication specifically for theology by recognizing questions that are likely to appear first in pastoral care. How is one to speak of God's presence—we have just proposed accompaniment—for someone who can neither see nor feel nor hear anything but pain? Here the theme of the 'presence' of God cannot be reduced to the theme of the 'existence' of God, where it is always necessary for the theologian to affirm that God is God whether or not human beings know it or believe it.

Let us consider the form and then the implication. Rather than pretending to get inside of meaningless suffering, one must rely on the evidence of things that happen only short of the destruction of the subject. These would include, in no single order, loss of control over one's own body, loss of mental autonomy, loss of moral dignity, loss of relation, and loss of a world. Seeded among these would also be the collapse of capacities for sensation, language, and attention. Consider, to begin with, one's relation to one's own body. We have already observed that trauma and disease can dissolve a habitual comfort in one's body with waves of pain that claim all of one's attention. The

result may be the appearance of a dualism of body and mind that is anything but Cartesian: the body now stands over against the mind as the source of an extreme discomfort that one struggles to keep at a distance. In addition to the pain, of course, there is also organ dysfunction, which is expressed in uncontrolled spasms, discharge of fluids, swelling, discoloration, and so forth. These physical problems inevitably bring mental autonomy into question, and between the two there is also a strong threat to personal dignity, especially in those of us who place great value in self-control. In turn, one's capacity for relating to others is diminished, as one withdraws from others both out of shame and in order simply to commit oneself to bearing the pain. With all of this, there may also be diminishment of capacities for speech and even for sensation, until the loneliness of the one who suffers becomes sealed in a body that does not work but also does not expire.

To the phenomenologist, these can appear as so many reductions leading from the spontaneous mode of life back to truths that it forgets. One does not know what it is to live one's body until that body becomes the site of disturbance and begins to break down. One assumes sovereignty for one's mind, and is startled to find that it can be occupied or shattered by physical impulses. One does not realize how invested one is in a sense of dignity unless or until it is challenged, and takes for granted the support of any number of other people in one's life until it seems that they can be of no help. And under ordinary conditions, one listens almost without question to the report of the senses and the music of a language that one has already entered into. For these to begin to fail is most deeply for the movement that sustains them to approach exhaustion. It is by that movement and the energy that drives it that we have a world in the phenomenological sense of the word. The subject truly in danger of destruction is a subject on the verge of losing its world.

In this way, we are led from the thought that subjectivity is defined by its activity and engagement to a clear sense that activity and engagement respond to a prior vulnerability. It takes only another moment to see that to be destroyed by suffering would be for it to strip us all the way down only to this, to a pure undergoing in which there is no longer any difference between the origin of the pain in a particular location and its arrival in the consciousness of the subject who must bear it. Meaning would be impossible here because the drive for it has been immobilized.¹⁰ And this, finally, lies outside the reach of phenomenological interpretation—or rather, it appears just beyond the available evidence. One is left to only propose that we recognize it in certain signs that defy any other understanding: jaws and lips that move without appearing even to shape words, eyes that react to light but do not maintain focus, limbs that twitch and hands that clutch and unclutch to no end, all without loss of at least some form of consciousness or cessation of biological process. To be precise, this is no longer a phenomenological description or interpretation since one does not have access to the thing itself. It is narration, in the most general sense. One situates what cannot be grasped in relation to what can be grasped, under a strange requirement to admit, as

a matter of proper rigor, that the best account of meaningless suffering only surrounds it with proposals and hypotheses.

The conclusion is a thorn in the side of any philosophy of human existence that would claim to account for every eventuality. But it is not small thing to learn from meaningless suffering that death is not the only absolute calamity that might befall us. Indeed, the insight may function as a limit concept for the psychotherapy that is intent on preserving and then building up a patient's capacity to give meaning to the ravages of pain and disease. The ethical preoccupations of Levinas also return here, as one comes to the thought that all there is to be done is uphold the goodness of the one who cannot do so himself or herself. These, we must conclude, are forms of pathodicy, the giving of meaning to a suffering that cannot be grasped, let alone justified.¹¹ It is not impossible that as philosophy abandons theodicy, this is what remains.

As for the theological implication, we have already reviewed the difficulties awaiting justification of human suffering, and taken the view that they call for a return to the relational God of the bible apart from certain metaphysical interpretations. Naturally, this only highlights the more specific question of God's manner of relating to those who have fallen into what we have understood as meaningless suffering. The outline of a response can be found in Paul Ricoeur's conception of lamentation.¹² We must be ready first to invoke a learned ignorance against any temptation to theodicy. The God of love could not wish the fate of those who are destroyed by their suffering. This does not rule out the practical importance of complaint, both because that possibility is sealed in the covenant between God and the faithful and because the complaint is still an expression of religious hope. However, it is desirable that this gives way to a faith that does not in any way turn from the suffering at hand, and thus does not at all reduce to bad faith.¹³

At such a point, one would profess faith in God *in spite of* even the most profound suffering. This is already a great deal, and those who might prove capable of it would no doubt need the support of a community and nourishment from its accumulated wisdom. The few who may advance further help us to see clearly what is essential in this faith, for in leaving behind any inclination to complain, so that their faith is no longer even 'in spite of' all suffering, they live entirely in the hope that does not grasp at anything other than what is given. For Christians, this kind of hope, precisely insofar as it is fully aware of the fact of profound suffering, cannot fail to resemble that of Jesus on the Cross—Jesus who was immersed in suffering himself, until in its final paroxysm he abandoned every worldly understanding of it. Theologians do not necessarily agree that every Christian is called this far into the depth of the Passion. What seems incontestable is that one finds in it the living accomplishment of what it means to think that God is love. One also finds reason to think that Jesus himself has known something of what befalls those whose suffering has consumed them. It is true that Jesus has chosen his suffering, whereas patients in hospital beds have not. Yet what he has undergone is still close enough to what they now do to support the thought that the God of

love truly is close even to those of us who have fallen into the direst of states. Everything else comes down to solemn observance.

Notes

- 1 Throughout this essay, the words ‘pain’ and ‘suffering’ refer to the human experience. For a more extensive consideration of the questions addressed in the present essay, see my “The Enigma of Suffering between Phenomenology and Theology, forthcoming in the *Journal for Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*.
- 2 See S. Geniasus, *The Phenomenology of Pain* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2020), p. 57.
- 3 J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. H. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 308–309.
- 4 M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 146.
- 5 A. Schopenhauer, ‘On the Sufferings of the World,’ in *The Meaning of Life*, ed. E.D Klemke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 45.
- 6 M. Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, §70, trans. G. Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), pp. 660–661.
- 7 Henry, *Essence of Manifestation*, p. 661.
- 8 See E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1978), pp. 24–29.
- 9 Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 93.
- 10 Viktor Frankl only seems to make the same suggestion when, throughout his *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), he associates meaning with purpose. Frankl’s observations are worked out, with unquestionable moral authority, at the level of psychology. The ‘drive’ that I invoke here is ontological.
- 11 I borrow this term from Frankl, but once again from outside his psychological perspective. V. Frankl, ‘Homo patiens. Versuch einer Pathodicee,’ in *Der leidende Mensch. Anthropologische Grundlagen der Psychotherapie* (Bern: Hogrefe Verlag, 2018), pp. 161f.
- 12 My next few sentences adapt P. Ricoeur, ‘Evil, A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology,’ trans. D. Pellauer, in *Figuring the Sacred. Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Augsburg / Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 260–261.
- 13 See above, note 3.

14 The Gift of Joy

Robyn Horner

Discussions of “the good life” often focus on happiness, and not joy, as the ultimate goal—even if what happiness means in this context is frequently qualified by the habits of virtue. Yet from a particular perspective, it is joy that is the aim of the *Christian* life. As Augustine writes: “The happy life is joy based on the truth. This is joy grounded in you, O God, who are the truth, ‘my illumination, the salvation of my face, my God’ (Ps. 26: 1; 41:12). This happy life everyone desires; joy in the truth everyone wants.”¹ An experience of joy can be understood as a foretaste of the fulfillment of an impossible hope, of life liberated by the presence of God.

Inspired by the characterization of “expansive joy” by Jean-Louis Chrétien, as well as various reflections by Jean-Yves Lacoste, I seek to explore the phenomenon of joy and how it is given to experience.² Central to this examination will be the question of the intentionality of joy. Faced with Lacoste’s distinction between intentional and non-intentional joy, I draw from the work of Jean-Luc Marion and Claude Romano to show that joy can be thought as an event that interrupts experience. I argue that joy can be given pre-predicatively to the affect and recognised by its transformative effects in the self. Further, I maintain that these effects are open to being understood in terms of divine encounter.

Deep Joy

Few writers bring out the experience of such joy so vividly as Chrétien:

As soon as joy wells up in us, everything expands. Our breathing becomes more ample, and our body suddenly stretches out of its self-confined corner and quivers with mobility. Feeling more alive in a vaster space, we want to leap, skip, run, or dance. Our tight throat expands in order to give way to a cry of delight, a song, or a burst of laughter. Whether we are prompted to laughter or to tears, and whether we yield to tearful laughter or shed laughing tears, no matter! We respond to the very excess of what is happening to us. Our face opens up, and our gaze brightens. What is it that is happening to us? That which is to

happen—the future. The future in this case, however, is not what has already been plotted, calculated, anticipated, or imagined. The future is what wells up here and now. And everything expands precisely because here and now cannot possibly occur at a single point.³

For Chrétien, joy is the experience of “dilation.” Joy is an expansion of the heart, an expansion that takes place inwards as well as outwards.⁴

Joy arises suddenly and in an overpowering surge, an unexpected release, an overflow from within. With body and soul thoroughly in tune, breathing “becomes more ample,” as if only now one recognises how shallow and restricted it has been previously, and as if, quite abruptly, air becomes sweet and clean and medicinal for lungs that have hitherto been deprived of real oxygen. The body stretches and discovers itself able to reach further than before, with fingers extending as if beyond their tips. There is a felt memory of muscles, once young, restored to vitality, ready to spring.

Joy wells up—as a response to someone or something. Joy responds to the future; it thus responds to that which does not give itself as any object or entity or thing, but to what cannot be foreseen, as an event. Chrétien foreshadows this possibility in his discussion of Augustine on dilation: “God alone prepares in us the space that will welcome Him. He alone opens up the space of joy in which He will dwell and move (I will walk in your midst). The event itself of His arrival is what provides the ground of its possibility.”

In his 2020 study of joy and happiness, Michael Summa draws from the phenomenological analysis of joy by Moritz Geiger—one of Husserl’s former students—to argue for a distinction between the experience of enjoyment (*Freude an etwas*, “joy in something”) and that of rejoicing (*Freude über etwas*, “joy about something”): the experience of joy, Geiger maintains, more properly belongs to the latter.⁵ While Summa places a degree of importance on the distinction between “joy in” and “joy about,” as these terms are translated from the German, the distinction he seeks to make might actually be better reversed in English (joy about something versus joy in something). In any case, he relates his distinction usefully to a difference he finds in the works of both Robert Nozick and Philippa Foot, which is the difference between “ordinary joy” and “deep joy”:

An ordinary experience of joy is something like a positive emotional response to an event or state of affairs—a response which, however, remains confined to the present and does not impinge on how we relate to ourselves and the world we experience in a more encompassing way. Precisely this bigger impact in terms of meaningfulness of the event or state of affairs about which we rejoice is characteristic of the experience of deep joy.⁶

In drawing a distinction between ordinary joy and deep joy, Summa cuts across what a number of other writers observe of the relationship between

joy and happiness.⁷ He has already described this relationship using time as a reference point: “Joy has an episodic character, whereas happiness refers to larger segments of one’s own life or even to one’s life as a whole”; nevertheless, we see in the quotation above that it is only ordinary joy that is “confined to the present.”⁸ He has also earlier contrasted the spontaneity of joy with the reflective or evaluative stance of happiness.⁹ Yet in speaking of deep joy, Summa casts it in life-changing terms, as having a “bigger impact in terms of meaningfulness.”¹⁰ This suggests that it is not simply a momentary experience but one that has a lasting effect. Indeed, he writes:

With respect to temporality, we can observe that deep joy is characterized by both a sense of the uniqueness of the episode and by a sense of abidingness, which somehow lets the feeling irradiate into the past and the future. Deep joy is related to moments of fullness and expresses a feeling of self-sufficient unity with what one is experiencing. The feeling of completeness, of unification with what one experiences, and of integration of the present moment within one’s own life are certainly among the most characterizing aspects of joy.¹¹

What he describes as “a sense of abidingness” and the feeling of “integration of the present moment within one’s own life” is certainly more suggestive of a joy that “irradiate[s]” past and future. More strongly, Summa also proposes that the present of joy is linked to the presence of eternity: “we can somehow experience that present moment as eternal.”¹² I understand this to mean that if eternity is a present or a “now” devoid of time, it is also present to every moment *in* time. Present joy can thus coincide, as it were, with the joy that is eternal.

Joy could appear to come from the self. There are, indeed, many biblical references to the command for believers to rejoice (see, for example, Lev 23:40; Phil 4:4–9). Moreover, this is echoed in the distinctly Protestant figure of joy identified by Adam Potkay, who observes that while joy is understood to be a gift of the Spirit, rejoicing is also to be practised as an obligation.¹³ However, Chrétien is insistent that joy is a gift that cannot be produced by the recipient in any way. In analysing the work of Francis de Sales, he observes:

What matters most essentially is the clear affirmation that dilation is by no means a motion through which I enjoy myself and rejoice wholly in myself, which is to say a motion in which I extend myself and increase through my own effort. Rather, dilation comes from a momentous encounter that opens my heart. It is the Other who dilates me, who transforms me and assimilates me to him.¹⁴

Further, he notes that the one who is so gifted with joy might wish to increase that joy through personal effort. “The contemplative who rejoices that God is joy is prompted by dilation to want to increase what cannot be

increased. He is prompted to want to give to the one who gives everything—losing all mooring and sense of proportion in a jubilatory synergy.”¹⁵ To try to add to joy would be like trying to add time or number to infinity, like the efforts of a child trying to give (back) life to its mother and father.

Thus far, we have seen that even when considered from very different perspectives, the meaning of joy bifurcates. On the one hand, joy is a momentary pleasure that can be considered a lesser form of happiness. On the other hand, joy is a peak experience that overwhelms and transforms its recipient in the longer term. In the first instance, it can be prized as a possession; in the second, it can be thought only as gift. From a phenomenological standpoint, an important question is how we understand the intentionality of joy.

The Experience of Joy

In seeking to describe joy in phenomenological terms, we come up immediately against the question of how we are to understand it as an “experience.” As is well known, for Husserl, experience is primarily described in terms of mental states relating to objects of consciousness or intentionality: what the self is “living through” in any given instance (*Erlebnis*). In contrast, for Heidegger, experience is usually described in terms of encounter (*Erfahrung*). With tacit awareness of these two senses of experience, Lacoste distinguishes between “intentional” joy—which he describes as akin to pleasure and which is exemplified in “joy in rediscovering a friend, joy in reading a good book, and so on”—and “non-intentional” joy, which he describes as “joy in being.”¹⁶ Of the latter, he writes: “We find ourselves in joy as (perhaps) we find ourselves in the clutches of anxiety, boredom, or stress. To this joy, we cannot assign a cause, save perhaps occasionally... we find ourselves joyous, and can even be joyous about nothing, save joyful to ‘be.’”¹⁷ How are we to understand these two types of experience? Joy is a feeling: in what sense can we understand feelings to be intentional?

Husserl argues that feelings, such as joy, have their own intentional objects: “Many experiences commonly classed as ‘feelings’ have an undeniable, real relation to something objective. This is the case, e.g., when we are pleased by a melody, displeased at a shrill blast etc. etc. It seems obvious, in general, that every joy or sorrow, that is joy or sorrow about something we think of, is a directed act.”¹⁸

The history of phenomenology is strewn with debate about the intentionality of feelings. The aforementioned Moritz Geiger actually challenges his former teacher’s understanding of affective intentionality in articles published in 2011 and 2013.¹⁹ There, he argues that feelings cannot be intentional: first, because feelings are not (theoretical) representations; second, because feelings are usually bound up with bodily sensations; and third, because feelings tend to diminish in prominence as a focus on their theoretical correlate increases.²⁰ Geiger promotes the view that that feelings are to be understood as states of affairs, observing additionally that with states of affairs, “consciousness can

dismiss any relation to objects.” Geiger reacts to Husserl’s distinction between feeling and sensation, between “feeling-acts” in their distinction from “feeling-sensations.” The latter, Husserl argues, are “at best presentative contents of objects of intention, but not themselves intentions,” whereas the former are clearly intentional in the sense of being really (and continuously) directed towards some content or other.²¹ The real problem in relation to Geiger, as Husserl sees it, is the need to show that the character of consciousness is *thoroughly* intentional.²²

While Husserl allows that feelings are a type of intentionality, in his view, they require a particular relationship to theoretical consciousness in order to qualify as intentional. Husserl understands acts of consciousness to be either objectifying or non-objectifying: acts of presentation and judgment are understood to be objectifying but acts of feeling are understood to be non-objectifying, and he maintains that non-objectifying acts rely on objectifying acts in order to be constituted. In other words, he maintains that feelings depend to some degree on theoretical presentation in order to appear.²³ Levinas disputes the need for this supplement of theoretical intentionality, arguing for a genuinely affective intentionality which has a sense without being constituted theoretically: “The characteristic of the loved object is precisely to be given in a love intention, an intention which is irreducible to a purely theoretical representation.”²⁴

Let us agree that it is possible to constitute intentionally the type of “joy-as-pleasure” that arises out of the reading of a good book. But if we attempt to think of “rediscovering a friend” in the same way two problems arise. First, recalling that Husserl and many others encounter difficulties thinking through the possibility of constituting another person in intentionality, and that Levinas ultimately maintains the complete inability of consciousness to constitute *Autrui*, one wonders whether the intentional feeling of joy that has another person as its object is ethically possible, since it would involve the indulgence of possession and egoistic pleasure at the expense of the other. Second, Lacoste’s example of the rediscovery of a friend prompts me to ask whether it would be an example of ordinary joy or deep joy. It might be ordinary in the sense that it is joy (as pleasure) in reacquaintance with a former schoolmate, and perhaps that might also qualify as intentional. However, it might be deep in the sense that it is joy in the rediscovery of a friend once thought lost or dead or in grave danger. There is evidently a continuum implied in the very distinction between ordinary and deep joy, which in itself is problematic, unless it is explained in terms of a very flexible use of language. Moreover, I am coming to form the view that any joy worth its salt actually bears an intrinsic relationship to the impossible. Joy does not “well up” unless one has stared into the abyss of complete hopelessness. Joy cannot be a response “to the very excess of what is happening to us” unless what happens to us is excessive, unless what happens to us cannot be imagined even in our wildest dreams. In being directed towards its fulfillment in some object intuition, joy does not yet seem to be sufficiently well-characterized.

Lacoste accepts Heidegger's view that affectivity is basic to *Dasein's* being-in-the-world, that is, that knowing is always coloured by affection and that these moods are disclosive. However, challenging the notion that *angst* is the fundamental, pre-eminently disclosive mood of *Dasein*—that is, what reveals *Dasein's* being to itself most fully by bringing it face to face with the totality of being—Lacoste suggests that there are other fundamental moods that are equally but differently disclosive, such as being-at-peace, joy, and innocence.²⁵ Lacoste calls these moods *counter*-existential phenomena and maintains that they are *en*-static rather than *ec*-static. To the extent that moods do not constitute any intentional *object* as such but modify the way of being of the one experiencing them, Lacoste argues that they are non-intentional.

Heidegger observes that not only are moods primary in disclosing the world (“the possibilities of disclosure belonging to cognition fall far short of the primordial disclosure of moods in which *Da-sein* is brought before its being as the there”) but all at once, they disclose *Dasein* as well: “in being in a mood, *Da-sein* is always already disclosed in accordance with its mood as that being to which *Da-sein* was delivered over in its being as the being which it, existing, has to be.”²⁶ Claude Romano's description of *Er-fahrung* sheds valuable additional light here, where he writes: “if experience teaches nothing, in the sense of making knowledge available, this is because it is not itself ‘knowledge’ but is rather a way of understanding oneself. More precisely, it is a way of understanding events in their singularity....” Further on, he continues: “if experience is a way of understanding, then, inversely, understanding, in its properly evential dimension, is always experience, to the extent that it is inseparable from a transformation of the one who understands through events, which he understands, and from which he understands himself.”²⁷ This means that we can potentially describe non-intentional joy as an event that transforms the self-understanding of the one who experiences it.²⁸

In explaining what Michel Henry means by non-intentional feeling, Lacoste gives the example of the self's experience of being flesh. “We ‘are’ a flesh,” he notes, “and our best experience of ourselves is the very simple experience of ourselves as making the tiniest bodily effort. The self therefore is not a ‘*cogitatum*.’ The self is ‘felt.’ This feeling is not intentional.”²⁹ Lacoste again clarifies this experience in relation to the distinction between the enstatic and the ecstatic. “Anybody who has submitted Henry's proposal to the test of fair description will admit that there are enstatic experiences. We are here on sure ground. The phenomenon of pain, or the parallel phenomenon of joy, is not (primarily) pain of something or experience of something joyful. Such experiences, if we pay them the attention they deserve, *put no object into play: they put me into play, they disclose me to myself (as a suffering self, as a joyful self, etc.)*.”³⁰ Referring by way of example to the pain of toothache, Lacoste suggests that this enstatic experience actually “deconstitutes” intentionality: in toothache, he argues, I “feel myself in a non-intentional way.”³¹

It seems to me that non-intentional joy is inherently deep. What might this mean in Lacoste's terms? For a start: "joy in being, always lived in the present, is deprived of known causes in consciousness."³² Joy comes from nowhere (or elsewhere) and like the rose, has no reason ("joy in being is to itself its own reason").³³ Next: "joy—and this is what matters—appears to us as reflecting on everything inhabiting the world and on all dealings with the world."³⁴ In other words, in affecting me, joy lights up all being rather than any particular object. Further: "When joy seizes us ... it does so with traits of the highest phenomenon. Evidently precarious, it proposes itself as unsurpassable. To think a beyond of joy is impossible for us...." Joy is unimaginable, without scope and dimension. Finally: "the 'I am' that is affirmed [in joy]—and it is for this reason that we cannot bypass such a phenomenon—is bearer of a word of gratitude and benediction of which it says that it is its most exact or most 'proper' word. Joy recaptures for itself the divine words saluting the achieved creation: it is good."³⁵

Jean-Luc Marion's major innovation in phenomenology relates to the ways in which he thinks about phenomena that resist intentional constitution by the self. He calls such phenomena paradoxes, and describes them as "saturated," because of their complete saturation of intuition: they precede the transcendental subject in all its constitutive, theoretical power, instead constituting *l'adonné*, the gifted one who merely *responds* to the pre-predicative, phenomenal call or address. Saturated phenomena actually signify by means of this response, however partial that response might be.³⁶ They signify in the very *resistance* (to be read metaphorically, as electrical resistance) of *l'adonné* to what is given: it is *l'adonné* who transforms the given to visibility by means of this resistance and who it given to itself in that process of transformation.³⁷

Saturated phenomena are also known in Marion's work as "counter-experiences":

[the saturated phenomenon] is always a contrary experience or rather one that always counteracts. In contradicting the conditions of experience of an object, such an experience does not contradict itself by forbidding the experience of anything at all; rather, it does nothing but counteract experience *understood in the transcendental sense as the subsuming of intuition under the concept*.³⁸

In other words, saturated phenomena *counter* experience as *Erlebnis*: theoretical consciousness cannot get any purchase, as it were, because saturated phenomena defy intentional constitution as such. Their being-given, however, can also signify in their felt effects in *l'adonné*: those effects mentioned explicitly by Marion include "alteration, disappointment, and resistance" and suffering, as well as immobility, terror, or obsessive rumination.³⁹ If we borrow Lacoste's words, counter-experiences can thus signify affectively: they "put no object into play: they put me into play, they disclose me to myself." It

thus seems that counter-experiences are located at a point where *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* touch, or pivot, one to the other. Now, after a series of analyses, we are finally able to articulate more clearly how joy relates to experience, and how we might speak phenomenologically of joy in a sense that opens the possibility of God's affective presence to the self.

Marion thinks about the event as a saturated phenomenon in two ways: first, as a determination of every given phenomenon, and second, as a specific type of given—a saturated phenomenon of collective historical or intersubjective phenomena. He claims that the saturated phenomenon of the event is given from itself, without reason or cause, and is characterized by unrepeatability, excessiveness, and possibility (or unforeseeability). However, he also comes to see the event as paradigmatic of each of the other types of saturated phenomena. While Marion has always seen the event as characteristic of all phenomenality, more recently he has come to see that it is actually predominant in his typology.⁴⁰ This means that the phenomenon of the event saturates negatively not only according to quantity, but also according to quality, relation and modality. It also means that the phenomenon of the event possesses all the same saturating qualities as those he ascribes to the phenomenon of revelation.

In Lacoste's work, we learn about the event in the context of a consideration of the Heideggerian "thing." Things appear, Lacoste writes, "charged with a symbolic power that others do not possess."⁴¹ Moreover: "wherever things appear to us, and wherever we make them appear, the world is put between parentheses or ... we have left the world behind. What things do for us, as soon as there are things, is to allow a horizon to open up that is not the world's horizon."⁴² For this reason, Lacoste suggests that we speak of the thing in terms of the *event*. In *The Appearing of God*, he writes that "to speak of this or that as an 'event' is to distinguish the fact that something is, from the fact that some aspect of it is given."⁴³ An event contrasts with an object because an event is not at one's disposal and because it 'happens' rather than perdures. While an event may be repeatable to some extent, it is never entirely so, since one is never the same (in time, in mood, in intention) at the point of repetition.⁴⁴ For Lacoste, an event exceeds our capacity to grasp it, and—as Marion and Romano affirm—we are never contemporaries of the event but only ever interpreters, which opens the perpetual possibility of our misunderstanding its significance.⁴⁵ According to Lacoste's understanding, it is not simply a question of perception, but also or even more so a question of *affection* by an "excess of appearance" or "exorbitant experience" that the thing (or, we could argue, the event) reveals with the material cooperation of the existent.⁴⁶

We are thus able to approach the event of joy not only from the direction of *Erlebnis*, where deep joy would be a saturated phenomenon coming from "right out of the blue" and defying one's ability to constitute it, but simultaneously from the direction of *Erfahrung*, where an encounter with joy would deconstitute intentionality as such. From Marion's direction, joy would be

excessive, “exorbitant” experience. By this I do not mean that it would not be recognisable as *joy*, but that it would be joy without an object, without a cause, absolute and without dimensions. From Lacoste’s direction, joy would somehow relate to an “experience of non-experience.” The meaning of non-experience takes a little longer to discern.

Lacoste speaks of non-experience in relation to knowledge of God:

It will certainly not be denied that the absolute can be the subject of affective knowledge, on condition that a somewhat precise hermeneutic of the latter (i.e. a ‘discerning of spirits’) can be undertaken. It will ... be denied that this knowledge must confirm conceptual knowledge.... Could it be that the highest knowledge overlaps with ‘nonexperience’ or ‘inexperience,’ and even with the *highest inexperience*?⁴⁷

Elsewhere, he characterizes non-experience in terms of poverty:

Non-experience in cause, in effect, is not the pure and simple annulment of all experience (the experience of knowledge survives affective unknowing), but a precise mode of experience: an experience that does not possess what we would like to possess, from which all enjoyment is refused, which is presented in this way as a poor experience, but about which we must remember that it has no right to the presence of God and must be content with what it receives—in the instance, from the disposition to believe. To love, in fact, can suffice.⁴⁸

Of course, Lacoste is right to express that non-experience “does not possess what we would like to possess.” He is also right to observe that “all enjoyment is refused” from this experience, since as we have already observed, enjoyment relates to possession and gratification. At the same time, this does not exclude that the presence of God might be recognised in deep joy, in a way that is in some manner analogous to the experience of divine love.

Notes

- 1 Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press/World’s Classics, 1992), X.xxiii.33, 372–373.
- 2 “[Dilation] has been used centrally and eloquently to describe the phenomenon of expansive joy.” Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Spacious Joy: An Essay in Phenomenology and Literature*, trans. Anne Ashley Davenport (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 3.
- 3 Chrétien, *Spacious Joy*, 1.
- 4 Chrétien, *Spacious Joy*, 4, *passim*.
- 5 Moritz Geiger, “Beiträge zur Phänomenologie des ästhetischen Genusses,” *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Phänomenologische Forschung* 1, no. 2 (1913), <http://www.ophen.org/pub-102960>; Summa, “Joy and Happiness,” 418.
- 6 Summa, “Joy and Happiness,” 419.

- 7 For example, Hilary Sloan reinforces this view when she says of happiness, in contrast to joy, that “we do not talk about a particular moment in time, but instead of the state of life as a whole.” Sloan, “Joy,” 420.
- 8 Summa, “Joy and Happiness,” 417.
- 9 “Different from joy, which is an immediate response, happiness entails an evaluative and judgmental stance.” Summa, “Joy and Happiness,” 417.
- 10 Summa, “Joy and Happiness,” 420.
- 11 Summa, “Joy and Happiness,” 420.
- 12 Summa, “Joy and Happiness,” 420.
- 13 Adam Potkay, “Spenser, Donne, and the Theology of Joy,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 46, no. 1 (2006): 44, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2006.0010>.
- 14 Chrétien, *Spacious Joy*, 90.
- 15 Chrétien, *Spacious Joy*, 93.
- 16 Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Être en danger* (Paris: Cerf, 2011), 197, 98.
- 17 Lacoste, *Être en danger*, 197.
- 18 Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2, §15a, p.107.
- 19 Moritz Geiger, “Das Bewusstsein von Gefühlen,” in *Münchener Philosophische Abhandlungen: Theodor Lipps zu seinem sechzigsten Geburtstag gewidmet von früheren Schülern*, ed. Alexander Pfänder (Leipzig: Barth, 1911); Geiger, “Beiträge zur Phänomenologie.”
- 20 In this, I am following the very helpful analysis in Michele Averchi, “Husserl and Geiger on Feelings and Intentionality,” in *Feeling and Value, Willing and Action*, ed. M. Ubiali and M. Wehrle, *Phaenomenologica* (Switzerland: Springer, 2015), 71, 75. Averchi is able to draw from Husserl’s unpublished notes in response to Geiger.
- 21 Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2, §15b, p.110.
- 22 Michele Averchi’s article is very helpful in this regard.
- 23 Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2, V, §41, p.167.
- 24 Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, trans. André Orianne, 2nd ed. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 45.
- 25 Lacoste, *Être en danger*, 7.
- 26 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 127 (Heidegger 34).
- 27 Claude Romano, *Event and World*, trans. Shane Mackinlay (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 148.
- 28 If we are looking for a corollary, Romano describes grief as an event.
- 29 Lacoste, “Marginal Remarks” (paper presented at the Contemplative Self After Michel Henry, Symposia online, 10.9.2017), § II.
- 30 Lacoste, “Marginal Remarks,” § IX. Emphasis added.
- 31 Lacoste, “Marginal Remarks,” § X.
- 32 Lacoste, *Être en danger*, 198.
- 33 Lacoste, *Être en danger*, 200. On the rose (of Angelus Silesius), see Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).
- 34 “La joie en tout cas, et c'est ce qui doit compter, nous apparaît comme rejaillissant sur tout ce qui peuple le monde et sur tout notre commerce avec le monde.”
- 35 Lacoste, *Être en danger*, 199.
- 36 Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 266.
- 37 Jean-Luc Marion, “In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of It,” in *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 50–51.
- 38 Jean-Luc Marion, “The Banality of Saturation,” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 401. Emphasis added.

- 39 Marion, "The Banality of Saturation," 403, 404; Marion, "In the Name," 162.
- 40 From the reflective standpoint of *The Rigor of Things*, he concedes: "I have increasingly come to think that the most determinative of all the saturated phenomena is found in the event, and thus that all the other types of saturated phenomena turn out to be governed each in their own way by eventness [événementialité]." Jean-Luc Marion, *The Rigor of Things*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 169.
- 41 Lacoste, *Être en danger*, 90.
- 42 Lacoste, *Être en danger*, 89.
- 43 Lacoste, *Appearing of God*, 135/14.
- 44 Lacoste, *Appearing of God*.
- 45 Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Recherches sur la parole* (Louvain: Peeters, 2015), 103.
- 46 Lacoste, *Être en danger*, 98, 100.
- 47 Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 142.
- 48 Jean-Yves Lacoste, "Quand je parle de dieu," in *Dieu en tant que Dieu: La question philosophique*, ed. Phillipe Capelle-Dumont (Paris: Cerf, 2012), 226.

Part III

**Phenomenological Readings
of Theological Classics**

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15 Temporality and Signification

The Augustinian Constitution of Time

Vincent Giraud

Here I shall argue that the full scope and coherence of Augustine's analysis of time in *Confessions* XI comes to light only if we accept the following thesis: *time is the locus of the deployment of signification*. The *constitution* of time, in the Husserlian sense of the term, comes about in Augustine through the constitution of temporal *signs*.

Obvious but Puzzling: The Slipperiness of Time

“What then is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain to one who asks, I don't know” (*Conf.* XI 14, 17). The difficulty of grasping time with thought, of saying what it is, is matched only by the self-evidence of our experience of it. “Nothing more obvious and more common; yet they remain very hidden, and their discovery is something new” (XI 22, 28). Augustine re-examines the aporias of time, taken chiefly from the skeptical tradition, on the basis of the certainty, dictated by the common use of language and human experience itself, that time is not something which thought can easily dismiss as unreal or dispel as illusory.

That time exists cannot be taken for granted. We recognize three dimensions: past, present, and future. It is the being of these three dimensions that Augustine first investigates: “These two times, then, the past and the future, how ‘are’ they (*quomodo sunt*), when the past already is not, and the future is not yet? As for the present, if it was always present, and did not pass into the past, it would no longer be time but eternity. so that we cannot truly say that time is, unless because it tends not to be” (XI 14, 17). If time exists, it is under the paradoxical form of passing—not a stable essence, but the very movement of appearing and disappearing. The present, which “passes in such rapid flight from future to past ... does not have the slightest extent of duration (*nulla morula*),” and “has no space (*nullum spatium*)” (XI, 15, 20). With the reduction of the present to a mere crossing point, devoid of any extent, the last possibility of according a reality to time vanishes.

“And yet ... we sense the intervals of time; we compare them with each other, and we call some longer, others shorter. We also measure how much one time is longer or shorter than another” (XI 16, 21). This objection is

twofold. It points our *experience* of time: since I perceive a duration, time is not nothing *for me*. It also notes the strange fact that we can *measure* time. If time were nothing, measurement of it would be impossible since one cannot measure what is nothing? So while the purely speculative analysis of time, fed by skeptical arguments, has revealed the inessentiality, and so to speak, the unreality of time, its reality returns in the form of an experience (the sense of time passing) and a fact (the measurement of time). Faced with this insistence, it becomes necessary to substitute for a strictly speculative approach one that may be called phenomenological, in that it seeks to discern the essence of time by attending to it exclusively not as a (speculative) object of thought, but as it is given to a consciousness which experiences and measures it.

We measure times. And yet, we do not measure what is no longer (past), nor what is not yet (future), nor what has no extent (present), “unless perhaps someone one has the audacity to say that we can measure what is not!” (XI 16, 21). What then do we measure when we measure time, if not this very *passing* (*praeterire, transire*) from what is not yet, to what no longer is, via what is without extension? It is by restoring time to its own dimension of movement and passage that we can find a way out of the aporia concerning the measurement of time: “At the moment therefore when time passes, it can be sensed and measured” (*ib.*). The future is not yet, the past is no more. How can a passage take place if the future and past are nothing? To resolve this difficulty we must observe precisely what is happening in the mind of those who experience and measure time, says Augustine, and this first of all by modifying our way of expressing ourselves about time: “Neither things future nor things past are, and it is incorrectly that we say: there are three times, the past, the present, and the future. But perhaps we could say in the proper sense: there are three times, the present of the past, the present of the present, and the present of the future. There are indeed in the soul, in a certain way, these three modes of time, and I do not see them elsewhere: the present of the past is memory; the present of the present is vision (*contuitus*); the present of the future is expectation” (XI 20, 26). If “we measure the times as they pass” (XI 21, 27), this very passing is only made possible if it is understood as taking place in the soul.

Now there are not three realities here, says Augustine, but *three acts*: expecting, seeing, remembering. Time passes only for a mind which simultaneously performs these three acts. Simultaneously, because it is from expectation becoming vision and then memory that my experience of time comes. In place of past, present, and future we now have three presents, which are three acts: the present of the future (the actual act of my tension in expectation), the present of the present (the actualization of the expectation in vision), the present of the past (the act of holding present what comes out of the vision). Thus the speculative derealization of time, far from leading to its absolute negation, opens onto its subjective reconstruction according to the requirements of a phenomenological examination attentive to the acts of consciousness.

The Signifying Vein of Time

The triple act of the *distentio animi* (XI 26, 31) is the point of departure of our own reading. Only the present in the proper sense is given in a perceptual vision (*contuitus*). But this is only a flash without duration, and indeed would be nothing at all without the *distentio* that weaves its lasting presence. It is therefore from these two other forms of presence—derived from the act of the mind—which are the present of the past and the present of the future that we must expect the material of the “present of the present” itself. “If future things and past things are ..., wherever they are, they are not there as future or past but as present” (XI 18, 23). The crucial question is then how these *praeterita* and *futura* are present: *quomodo sunt* (XI 14, 17). The Augustinian response can be summed up in one word: signification. Signification is the mode of being of time as a persistence or announcement of presence starting from or coming before the flash of the present *contuitus*.

Let us first consider the “present of the past,” that is to say the past becoming in the mind the object of a presence to which it is by nature resistant: “When we recount things that are true, but past, it is from memory that we draw, not the things themselves, which have passed, but the words conceived from the images (*ex imaginibus*) that they fixed in the mind (*in animo*), as traces (*vestigia*), passing through the senses” (XI 18, 23). Let us leave aside the words (*verba*), which constitute the matter of the narration in the example Augustine employs. Note, however, that it is important in this example that the story be true; otherwise, things from the past would not be evoked, but things only imagined, never having taken place, and therefore unrelated to time. It is in the rest of the sentence that the essential element is found: the past, properly understood, only exists in the *memoria*, its “images” and its “traces.” Unlike the trace an animal leaves on the ground, mentioned in *De doctrina christiana*, this trace is located in the mind itself.

The term *vestigium*, which Augustine is careful to associate with that of *imago*, actually suggests something quite different. Two aspects are involved in it: the imprint left in the matter of memory by the thing perceived, but also, a point rarely noticed, the character of *referral* of the imprint to its original model. What remains even in the most faithful memory is not in fact the entire past of the thing, the totality of its “adumbrations” (*Abschattungen*) allowing a complete restoration of its contours. Rather, it is a signifying impression, by which the real totality is *evoked* from one or more of its aspects subsisting in the mind. When I remember something I saw, this is not the complete mental vision of the object offered to me. I indeed recall it, but in a vague approximation radically unlike a faithful photograph. To call memories images implies a summary psychology that cannot distinguish between a reproduction and an evocation. A memory is always *less* than the image (lacking its sharpness), but this is because it is *more* than it (by the emotional or historical experience that it carries, the halo of meaning surrounding its appearance). Signification, as effected by memory, is thus always richer than

representation. It extends infinitely beyond the latter, and allows us to speak of the “vast palaces of memory” (*Conf.* X 8, 12).

What about the future? “Is there a similar (*similis*) cause for the predictions of the future such that things that are not yet are perceived in advance in their images already existing?” (XI 18, 23). This “similar” explanation rests again on signification. Here Augustine refers explicitly to “signs”: “When we say that we see things future, we do not see the things themselves, which are not yet, since they are future, but perhaps their causes or signs (*eorum causae vel signa*), which already are (*quae iam sunt*); and they are not future but already present to those who see them, on the basis of which are predicted things future conceived by the mind (*animo concepta*)” (XI 18, 24). Things present exhibit aspects that allow one to anticipate what they will be. This refers not only to the word of prophets but to the relation to the future as we constantly experience it.

Seeing the first glimmer of dawn, I am able to tell in advance (*praenuntiare*) that the sun is going to rise. It is not yet present, but the brightness that precedes it is a sure sign of its imminent coming. Unlike the *vestigium* found at the level of mind, the *signum*, in its materiality, is in this case external to me. It is the phenomenon which is sign, and the outside which is a signifier. Its being-sign, however, does not depend any less on the mind which inscribes it in a series of which the phenomenon constitutes only one of the moments. Then comes into play a faculty that will make it possible to bring together the *signum* relating to the future and the *vestigium* referring to the past. This faculty which makes a sign of the phenomenon is the imagination: “However, this rising itself I could not predict (*praedicere*), if I did not imagine it in my mind (*animo imaginarer*), as at this moment when I speak of it. But neither this dawn that I see in the sky is the sunrise, although it precedes it, nor this imagination that I have in my mind. Both are perceived as present, so that this rising may be proclaimed in advance” (XI 18, 24). The future sunrise is present in me as future through a representation of the imagination, which constitutes it from the current perception of the dawn established as a sign insofar as it is its cause.

Just as the *vestigium* of memory relied on the notion of *imago*, the *signum* of anticipation rests on the notion of *causa*. However, the latter should be understood in a broad sense, as a phenomenon immediately preceding another within a unified process, and not in the strong sense of an efficient cause producing an effect. It would indeed be meaningless to assert that the dawn is the “cause” of the sunrise, but it remains correct to see it as the internal link in a continuous process of which it represents one of the moments.

Augustine’s example leaves out a fundamental dimension of anticipation thus conceived. In order for me to be able to infer that the sunrise is to come immediately, I must have already experienced this phenomenon at least once, or at the very least heard about it. In addition, the memory of what I know must accompany my present perception of the dawn in order to anticipate with certainty its result: the appearance of the sun. Habit, finally, allows

knowledge and memory to be linked in the immediacy of perceptual experience, and thus plays a substantial role in the way anticipation signifies. It seems evident that memory plays a role even in the anticipation of *futura*. In the case of remembering, the image present in memory was itself a sign, because a trace. In the present case, the memory trace (the sunrises seen, or recounted) does not itself act as a sign, but feeds the work of the imagination, which in turn produces a new image that it imposes as a continuation—or a consequence—on the phenomenon currently perceived. The mental image itself is no longer the sign, it is the signified of which the current phenomenon is the signifier. The future is the significant extension of perception in the image generated by the imagination.

We must therefore double the “vestigial image” of memory with an “anticipating image” of imagination. In both cases, the locus of signification is the mind which, through the mental image discovered or produced, proceeds according to two distinct signifying operations: opening the abyss of traces or completing the suggestion of phenomena erected into signs; the one has the present arise from a past and the other opens up a future for it. No doubt aware of how risky it is to rely on just two examples, and anxious to establish the validity of his discovery for temporality in general, Augustine proceeds to a series of analyses bearing on the passage of sound.

Here we deal with a most banal phenomenon which can easily pass as representative of our common experience of time. “Here, for example, is a sound that comes from a body: it begins to resound, it resounds, it resounds again, and now it is finished; there is already silence, the sound has passed, there is no more sound” (XI 27, 34). How does this simple example verify the theory of vestigial image and anticipatory image? The difference with the previous analyses is obvious: there is no longer an old mark in the memory or a future effect to be expected with certainty. A wider field of application opens up.

Forcing things a little, one could say that Augustine considers here a memory without recollection and an expectation without knowledge. Memory without recollection, because there is no trace that precedes as something older the arrival of the sound. Expectation without knowledge, because ignorant of what will happen. Memory and expectation are here only those of the sound insofar as it resounds, that is to say has already resounded—if only enough so that I can hear it—and will resound—otherwise it would already be finished. The most common sound, non-musical, non-verbal, in its temporality, in the very present from which I consider it and where it reaches me, already carries with it a past and a future. These are given to me with it, in the present of listening: a presence whose dilation is due only to its retention in the immediate past and its anticipation in the immediately to come. Retention is the easiest to pinpoint: it is the trace (*vestigium*) left in me of what, of the sound, has already resounded. It thus ensures the continuity of what, without it, would only be a pointillism of “fugitive particles,” a sort of sonic Eleatism in which no perception can stand. This trace, however, is not the sound itself; it makes only its signification subsist in the mind, the

fact that *this* sound has resonated *for* a given time—which, moreover, can be quite vague.

In terms of anticipation, contrary to appearances, things do not unfold fundamentally differently than in the case of sunrise. True, what sounds in the present of perception offers no certainty about its duration or alteration, in the way in which it was certain that the sun was going to rise. Yet the present of sound *beckons* toward its own duration to come. It does not carry within itself the seeds of a perception of its arrest. This is the reason why a shrill ringing bell, which we later realize has not even sounded for thirty seconds, can seem so unbearably long. This is also why, no matter how long we desire to see it cut off, we are always surprised when this suddenly happens. Sound—and, let's say it now, all perception, even the most seemingly transitory and precarious—beckons toward its own future. *Signum* of itself and of nothing else, the most summary perception is perceived by the perceiving subject only at the cost of a constant wager on its indefinite perpetuation. Though I *know* that it *must* stop, or change in some way, this does affect the inherent quality of the temporal perception, which is *signifying in its essence, because always ahead of itself*. This testimony that the present bears in favor of its own future only ceases with the perceived object itself. Perception, so to speak, does not have the time to lie, and never bears “false witness.”

Mental *vestigium* and external *signum*, vestigial image and anticipating image make up the very tenor of time, both drawing on the flash without duration of the perceptual present in the punctual *contuitus*. Understood thus, what holds of sound turns out to be perfectly applicable to any other sensation, whether visual perception, the experience of a pain in the body, or of an emotion, or even of a thought considered in as perceived by the thinking which thinks it. It is then time in its entirety that admits such an understanding, since human time is never anything other than the passage of what is sensed, experienced, or lived. The *sentire* by which we experience or undergo time is identical to the successive sensing of what passes through our consciousness temporally, and this passage is a flow of signs.

Dissemination

From what has been said one may draw six conclusions.

- 1 The *distentio animi* can be grasped fully, if we start from its vestigial-significative basis, as an immanent process of signification and interpretation. Time, dilated in the triple act which orders its human grasping in sensing, is signification. And not in an incidental way, according to the more or less significant events of which it would be the bearer, but in essence, because consisting in *signa* and *vestigia* which make up all its sensed fabric. This sensing, in turn, is interpretation, since it presses the signs posed in the mode of memory and expectation, and expresses the presence they attest in the course of duration.

- 2 By deepening this first discovery, we reach the assertion that the activity of the soul (the three acts of memory, attention, and waiting) is “passive interpretation.” There is here a real act of “constitution” of signification, an act Augustine puts at the service of making sense of temporal experience. The soul makes (*agit*) time, but it is to the very extent that it endures it. If the act of *intentio* makes the times pass, the passivity of *distentio* interprets them, and this is *one and the same* mental process, since *distentio* is made up of precisely the three acts of *intentio*. The mind is both temporalizing and temporalized, but it is so insofar as it is signifying-interpreted. The immanent interpretation, which makes of any phenomenon the continuation of the trace of what it was and the precursor of what it promises to be, is at work, let us note, even before language comes into play as a filter or an ideal framework imposed on experience. It is the sensing *itself* that rests on the interpretation of the signs that memory and expectation accord.
- 3 Though the subjective experience of what passes does not have the precision or reliability of clocks, there is nonetheless a measure in it that allows me to pronounce on its duration. We witness here a unification of the psychological dimension of *distentio*, the work of which was until now only abstractly divided into experience and measure. More precisely, objective measurement relies on a subjective measurement, which is that of sensation itself as it evaluates what is given to it in the light of its intrinsic judgment.

In *De musica*'s analyses of rhythm and of what their perception implies, Augustine reaches a definition of sensation which implies an act of evaluation in it, solidary with conscious attention: “The soul seems to me, when it senses in the body, not to suffer in any way from it, but to act with more attention (*attentius agere*) in the passions of the body. These actions, whether they are easy because of their fittingness, or difficult because of unfittingness, do not remain hidden from it: all this is what is called sensing” (*Mus.*, VI 5, 10). The word *convenientia* designates the judicative root of sensing by which the latter *acts* what happens to it, that is to say, what receives, constitutes, and judges, measuring the sensed real according to the “numbers of judgment” (*numeri iudiciales*) which are immanent to it (*Mus.*, VI 8, 20) and from which pleasure or displeasure is decided.

It is because I can judge the correct measure of a sound (for example in a melody) that I can sense it as too long or too short. The temporal measure, which is the very experience of human time, is therefore based on an axiological measure that constantly interprets its relevance. In the case of any auditory perception, not melodic, and even in the absence of any sound, this axiological judgment is indeed without an object on which to pronounce in terms of fittingness or discord, but it does not cease for all that to exert itself “This natural power of appreciation (*naturalis vis iudicaria*) inherent in the ears does not cease to exist in silence” (*Mus.*, VI 2, 3).

Have we left the firm ground of the interpretation of the *signa* and *vestigia* in the name of a higher, axiological interpretation, involving the act of reason? Indisputably. However, it is less appropriate to separate two independent and autonomous strata than to perceive their joint act within a hierarchy. It is already in terms of *vestigia*, anticipating the language of *Confessions* XI, that *De musica* discusses the temporal sensible datum offered to the soul. We must “track down the imprints (*vestigia*)” of “these brief intervals which charm us in song and in dance” (*Mus.*, I 13, 28). The auditory sensation (*affectio*) itself, in the present of resonating sound, “is like a trace imprinted in water, which does not form until one has sunk the body in the water and no longer subsists when it is removed” (*Mus.*, VI 2, 3). Beyond the thought, common in antiquity, of sensation conceived as imprint, one finds here an element missing in the *Confessions*, namely the conception of the present itself in the mode of the *vestigium*. What persists in the present is what insists in the imprint. The present itself is (only) a sign. It is doubly a sign, a “horizontal” one through the object it holds and a “vertical” one by the harmony it reveals and which judges it. In both cases, the mind is receptacle only because it is judge, and its capacity as an imprint holder comes only from its “power to judge” (*vis iudicaria*). The *vestigium* is temporal only because it is the *vestigium* of the eternal, and time itself, since it passes, teaches eternity. Time is the time of the mind in measuring and experiencing the sensible, but this is because the human mind senses only through the intermediary and according to the spontaneity of a reason.

- 4 Only one moment still resisted the reduction to the sign that had struck the past and the future; it was the present and its *contuitus*. Now, this turns out, no less than the two others, in the evanescence of its passing, to be a sign, as the present *vestigium* of what imprinted its mark on it. What is given is never the thing, but the *affectio*, which Augustine thinks in the mode of trace. “The impression (*affectio*) that things in passing (*res praeteruntes*) make in you, remains there after their passage, and it is this that I measure when it is present, not those things which have passed to produce it.” This obviously does not mean that nothing ever appears to us, but that what is shown to us is never given in the mode of presence. The *distentio animi* carries over from presence to act. But we now know that this act is one of signification and interpretation conjoined. Augustine’s analysis of time is akin to a long and patient *reduction of the phenomenon to the sign*, passing via the act and its passive correlate, experience. Constantly undergoing this very temporality that it is in so far as it acts, the ego is inscribed in a field of signification of which it is both the organizer and the interpreter. Dispossessed of the phenomena, it remains the holder of their signs. Time is the very collapse and arising, at the heart of the ego, in which manifestation is deferred while signification is declared.
- 5 The human condition as Augustine conceives it, is thus in a strong sense a “hermeneutical condition.” Time, in its signifying and interpreting

dynamic, is essentially hermeneutical. The opposite of hermeneutical time is found only in eternity, which is without signs. It is precisely because humans are deprived of any pure present, and know only a present that is deferred in the triple act of *distentio*, that they are thrown from the start among signs. Their *conditio* is indeed temporal in the strictest sense, for the act of their divine *conditor* posits “temporal man” (*homo temporalis*), whom God “made in time (*in tempore condidit*)” (*Civ. Dei*, XII 15). This hermeneutics, which is “active” in its spontaneously signifying capture of the phenomenon, but also in many respects “passive,” since it does not require awareness of one’s act, nor the reflective discipline of the interpreter, makes time a tissue of signs and its passing a process of interpretation.

- 6 The *dispersio* of the fallen creature is that of the times, and therefore asserts itself above all as a scattering of signs. To say that time has nothing to do with *dispersio* holds true only of the creature before sin. For the human who is *aversus*, the *distentio* constituting time becomes synonymous with *dispersio*. The *distentio* is the *dispersio* considered in the temporal mode. *Confessions* XI uses the term *distentio* in two very distinct senses: mental and psychological, on the one hand, *distentio animi* reflecting the intimate essence of time (XI 26, 33); “existential” and moral on the other: “behold, my life is distension (*ecce distentio est vita mea*)” (XI 29, 39). Taking the sign into account dispels this ambiguity and reveals the basic homogeneity of the notion of *distentio*. The existential *distentio* having for its object individual life can be understood as *differance*, and *distendere* as a synonym of *differre*. The same holds of the mental *distentio* which has for its object time according to the mental process which engenders it. This time is that of sinful humanity, so it is unsurprising that it does not preserve a pure abstract structure but involves the very life of the one who enacts the deferring/differing grasp of it. The continuous arising of signification without presence, in which human temporality consists, is at the same time a dispersion of oneself in the inability to totalize the presence which is realized] only in eternity.

In conclusion: *Signa* and *vestigia*, the signifying stuff of time, also furnish its basic multiplicity, which underlies the *distentio vitae*: “We who live as multiple by the multiple across the multiple” (XI 29, 39). The multiplicity of times is that of signs, and dispersion, the fruit of distension, asserts itself as *dissemination*. If my life always escapes me, it is because it consists in this uncertain and fleeting fabric of signs that my desire arouses, stirs, and scatters, those of my memory, those of my expectation, those, finally, of a present which never holds up and of a thing which never gives itself in person. The *Confessions*, taken in this sense, are nothing other than Augustine’s effort to bring together the signs of his own life, and to unify it by bringing to light the pure aim that secretly animated it. A life, any life, can only be understood at the end of a retrospective recollection of the scattered signs that dot and constitute its duration. The self’s dispersal in various times (“*at ego in tempora*

dissilui”) concerns the time of sin as the flow of signs. The self’s interpretative facticity must decide for possibilities, but this decision engages the field of temporal signs in which its past lingers, its present is imprinted, and its future shines. Hermeneutical facticity (moral-existential *distentio*) has as basis a temporality that is itself hermeneutical (mental-temporal *distentio*). The self’s unification must be awaited, then, from a thoroughly hermeneutical operation, in which the decisiveness of desire works to overcome the corrosive and disseminating power of time.

16 Denys the Areopagite among the Phenomenologists

Ysabel de Andia

Denys the Areopagite has attracted phenomenological thinkers who find in him not an inflated rhetoric or a slavish reproduction of the speculative structures of Proclus, but a vital engagement with the ‘matter itself,’ the phenomenon of the divine in its light and darkness, and in its iconic manifestation in the Cross. Husserl’s student Edith Stein comes to him from the rich mystical world of St John of the Cross. Jean-Luc Marion, the foremost representative of post-Heideggerian French phenomenology, is inspired by him in discerning the phenomenon of God beyond being, God manifested as love. Jacques Derrida, finally, engages with the aporetic and paradoxical aspects of Denys’ negative theology, extending them to an interrogation of language and phenomena in general.

Phenomenology discovered affinities with the 16th-century master of apophatic theology, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, in the writings of a Saint (Edith Stein), a protagonist of ‘the theological turn in French phenomenology’ (Jean-Luc Marion), and the master of Deconstruction (Jacques Derrida). I shall examine how these three thinkers have given a modern face to Denys, confirming that his mystical philosophy, which held the Middle Ages in thrall, can still prompt searching reflection.

I. Edith Stein

Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, wrote *The Ways of Knowledge of God: The Symbolic Theology of Dionysius the Areopagite and its Presuppositions* at the Carmel of Echt, in Holland, in the year before her death in Auschwitz on 9 August 1942. Following Denys (MT III, 1033 AB), she distinguishes affirmative theology (the divine Names), symbolic theology, and mystical theology, corresponding to three different relationships with speech: speculative theology is in the domain of *logos*, speech, symbolic theology in that of *polulogia*, the abundance of words, and mystical theology in that of *alogia*, the absence of words. ‘Negative theology climbs the ladder of creatures, to point out at every level that this is not where the Creator is.’ Finally, the step beyond affirmative and negative theology ‘makes space for mystical theology.’ Affirmative theology ‘corresponds to the similarity of

creatures and the Creator, the analogy explored by Thomas Aquinas with the aid of Aristotle,' and negative theology to the 'greater dissimilarity' between creatures and Creator. However, when she passes to symbolic theology, Edith Stein forgets the relation of the symbol with the negation which is the crux of Denys' symbolic theology.¹

The two texts on the symbol that she studies are *Epistle 9* and the *Celestial Hierarchy*. The former text poses the question of the symbols of Scripture, 'This symbolic language calls for interpretation,' she notes, 'because one could be grossly mistaken about its meaning if one took literally expressions such as: the "bosom of the Father" from which the Son proceeds or the "breath of his mouth" or the "wrath of God," his "drunkenness" or his "sleep"' (2, I).

Denys seeks to 'unveil' the symbols which 'hide' the divine reality they represent, by the purification of negation. The veil is the sensible; the revealed reality the intelligible, The sensible corresponds to the 'passible part' of the soul; the intelligible to its 'impassible part.' Edith Stein mentions two images: the 'image of fire' (CH 121 BC), which is for Denys the symbol of divinity in the same way as darkness, and the image of the 'cup' or rather the 'crater of Wisdom' (Prov 9:2) (*Ep.* 9 1109 CD). But she shifts from Dionysian thought to what may be called a phenomenological analysis: she envisages the symbol from the point of view of its 'genesis': what constitutes the symbol is 'lived experience' (2.II). She suggests that the symbol can be reduced to a kind of image. 'Symbolic theology' would then be a particular case of the great 'theology of the image' that she develops in chapter VII of *The Finite Being and the Eternal Being*, on 'the image of the Trinity in Creation 'God is 'the author and archetype (*Urbild*) of all finite being'² and, according to Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, spiritual and material creatures are images (*imagines*) and vestiges (*vestigia*) of their Creator

This reduction of the symbol to the image again reveals the difference between the 'symbol' of the Areopagite and the 'symbol as image' of Edith Stein. The world of symbols, for Denys, is that of Scripture and the liturgy: the words of the sacred authors, the 'theologians,' and the ritual acts of the Church 'symbolize' the mystery of God and his 'theurgy.' The world of symbols, for Edith Stein, is indeed that of Scripture (she does not mention the liturgy), but, by reducing the symbol to the image, she insists on the ontological character of the similarity of creatures to their Creator.

In *The Science of the Cross*³ she analyzes the symbols of the Cross, the Night, and the Bride in John of the Cross. To show the difference between the Cross and the Night, she uses the distinction between sign and image (*Zeichen und Bild*): 'The image charged with meaning (*Sinn*) is a symbol (*Sinn-Bild*). The image let's see what is figured, the model (*Abbild*), thanks the intimate resemblance to this thing.'

There are different 'nights' in the *Spiritual Canticle* of John of the Cross: the 'peaceful night,' the 'dark, ardent night of a love full of anguish,' the night of faith, and the 'night more lovable than the dawn,' where the encounter

with the Beloved is near. Unlike the Dionysian ‘Darkness’ which is the Darkness of the divinity for the intellect that enters it (Ex 20:21), the Sanjuanist ‘Night’ is anthropological or psychological: it touches the soul and the body, while the Cross remains the Cross of Christ, it is the place of the union of the soul with God.

The two symbols of the Night and the Bride are relational: the first relationship is cosmic, the second is bridal. But in the *Spiritual Canticle*, the universe is the image of the Beloved and love has both a cosmic and a mystical meaning. The face of the Beloved is reflected in the ‘crystal fountain’ and the ‘desired eyes’ are the ‘rays’ that draw him deep into his being. The beloved soul calls on the Spirit to ‘awaken her loves.’ ‘In the breath of the Spirit,’ says Edith Stein, ‘the Son of God communicates himself to the soul in a very sublime way.’ The union or ‘spiritual marriage’ takes place under a tree, the ‘apple tree’ of the Song of Songs which is the tree of the Cross; this is why espousals are inseparable from the Cross, the new tree of paradise which yields a fruit not of death, but of life.

Edith Stein carries out a phenomenological analysis of the symbol, whereas Denys relates the symbol to the negation which discovers the meaning of the sensible by suppressing the sensible in order to make the intelligible appear: ‘Thus those who realize a preformed statue remove everything superfluous that hinders the pure vision of the hidden form and manifests, merely by this suppression, *beauty in itself and by itself* which was concealed there’ (MT II, 1025 B).

II. Jean-Luc Marion

The figure of Denys the Areopagite presides at the beginning of Jean-Luc Marion’s theological reflection, in *L’idole et la distance* (1977), and has accompanied it as a model or vis-à-vis throughout its development via *Dieu sans l’être* (1982)⁴ and *De surcroît* (2001) to *Certitudes négatives* (2010). *L’idole et la distance* offers a new reading of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*,⁵ in the wake of Hans Urs von Balthasar. The interpretation uses a terminology (Cause = Requisite) and a philosophy of gift and givenness that connect it with the Phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger. This conditions not only the precedence, but the supremacy which it accords to the Good, origin of the gift, over Being. While the Good is certainly the first of the divine names, it is not above the other divine names, Being or the One, which completes ‘the hymnology of divine names’ (DN 589 D).

Marion does not note the distinction of two Greek terms for negation, *apophasis* which is opposed in some way on the same level to affirmation, *kataphasis*, and *aphairesis*, which is negation as a surpassing that opens onto transcendence (*hyperochè*) and the way of supereminence. This underlies the difference between Denys and Thomas Aquinas on the status of this *via eminentiae*. Marion says, like Denys, and unlike Aquinas, that there is no ‘third way.’ It should be noted that *L’Idole et la distance* was published in 1977,

at a time when the great French works on Neoplatonism and in particular Proclus, from which this notion of *aphairesis* comes, had not begun or were not known. Marion was influenced by Levinas and Balthasar: ‘Goodness is qualified as hyperbole in DN IV, 10, 708 B, that is to say “goodness is transcendence itself” (E. Levinas). We mobilize here the concept of “distance,” which commands the present work in its entirety, in reference to what H. Urs von Balthasar has called “the Areopagite feeling of distance,” which he describes as “a preserving (*wahrende*) distance.”’⁶

The statement that ‘God is dead’ raises the question: who is this God who died? ‘What dies in the “death of God,” if not something that cannot in any way deserve the name of God?’ (18). Conceptual atheism refutes the concept of God it gives itself. ‘Those who most decisively meditated on the ‘death of God,’ Hegel, Hölderlin, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and a few others, read in this utterance something other than a refutation of the (existence) of God. They recognized there the paradoxical, but radical manifestation of the divine’ (19). In the passage from God (*Gott*) to the idol (*Götze*), the idol is the visual image of the divine that the idolatrous worshiper produces. ‘In the idol, the human experience of the divine precedes the face that this divine takes on’ (22). The idol ‘delivers’ the divine to us and ‘enslaves’ us to it. The icon, for its part, offers us the face of Christ, ‘icon of the invisible God’ (Col 1:15), a visible in which the Invisible gives itself to be seen. The ‘distance’ from visible to invisible is preserved in ‘the invisible depth of an unsurpassable and open figure.’ This is what Marion calls the ‘negative theophany’ of the icon (26).

From there, he ‘interprets’ the concept or concepts of God as idols (27). The metaphysician gives a name to the divine: ‘the Good’ according to Plato, *noêsis noêseôs*, according to Aristotle, and he equates this with God: Kant speaks of ‘the existence of a moral foundation of the world, that is to say of God (*Critique of Judgment*, § 87). Likewise in the Five Ways of Thomas Aquinas, which do not lead directly to God, ‘the idol remains conceptual: not only does it not refer like the icon to the invisible, but it no longer offers any face where the divine looks at us and gives itself to be looked at’ (35). We must be silent, ‘when it comes to God, even merit his silence’ (36). The word of the Apostle must be taken seriously: ‘Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?’ (1 Cor 1:20). To take seriously that ‘philosophy is madness’ is ‘to take seriously that the God of onto-theology has the value of a rigorous idol’ (37).

What is the madness of the speech of the Cross? It is not a matter of questioning Christianity from onto-theology, but from its Nietzschean completion. ‘By the Nietzschean threshold, we will enter into commerce with other territories bordering onto-theology, Hölderlin and Denys the Areopagite. These three authors mark a “distance” from onto-theology. For the latter, the distance is “liturgical.”’

Paul’s speech to the Athenians enacts the crucial overthrow of the idol. The Apostle enters a city ‘given over to idols’ (Acts 17:16) and addresses ‘the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers’ (Acts 17:18), speaking to them of

the ‘unknown God’ (Acts 17:23), whom he will reveal to them. From pagan idols, Paul passes to the icon of the dead and risen Christ, attracting laughter and mockery from the Athenians, as happens every time that Christ arises ‘as a figure of revelation and unique standard’ (45) Only Dionysius, called the Areopagite, followed him.

The distance of the Requisite chimes with the discourse of praise. It is necessary, says Denys, to ‘divinely hear divine things’ (DN VII, 2 869 A), this is why ‘distance imposes as a censorship and a condition that one think of a double unthinkable by excess (supremacy over being in general) and by default (withdrawal as insistence, without being’ (184). Thought ‘fails’ before the Unthinkable; it is the Unthinkable himself who ‘delivers’ his Name to us. ‘More essential than the predication that we (cannot) exert on the Unthinkable, appears the gift of the Name, with which the Unthinkable gratifies us silently and abundantly, in all its distance’ (187). One must be dispossessed of meaning. ‘In his own way Denys did not attempt anything else in what is known as “negative theology”’ (189). Thus ‘negative theology’ appears as the obverse of the ‘gift of the Name’: it is not a question of affirmation or negation of what is said, but of dispossession of the one who speaks in front of what is given to him.

But ‘negation, if it remains categorical, remains idolatrous’ (192), After discussing the ‘three ways’ of affirmation, negation, and eminence (190–192) Marion quotes Claude Bruaire: ‘Negative theology is the negation of all theology. Its truth is atheism.’⁷ For Marion, ‘negation clears and emphasizes a silhouette, far from opening a void’ (192) and he cites the illustration given by Denys himself and which comes from Plotinus (*Enneads* 1.6.9) of the sculptor who makes the statue appear by cutting and removing blocks of marble (MT II, 125 B see also *EP* I, 1066 A and *EP* V, 1073 A). Negation, according to Denys, denies ‘by transcendence and not by deprivation’ (DN VII, 2, 869 A). Negation, far from ‘congealing in denial,’ ‘is poured into the transcendence of the thing itself, until it becomes its equivalent’;... “in the negation and transcendence of all things” (DN VII, 3, 872 A)’ (194). This is why ‘the transition to eminence does not open any third way’ (195).

It is as Cause (Αἰτία) of all things that God is praised. There is no proper name for God, not even a negative one. It is ‘Goodness that has become synonymous with the transcendence of the Cause’ (200). This identification allows Marion to interpret ‘distance’ along with the Unthinkable as a manifestation of love, and it is again love that governs participation, as Denys declares, quoting the saying of Christ about the repentant sinner: ‘she has loved much’ (Luke 7:47) to indicate that the gift he gives her is proportional to the love she showed (DN IV, 5, 700 D-701 A) (204). The ‘praying request’ makes its plea to a Requisite, which is the Cause (Αἰτία).

As there is a gift commensurate with the capacity of the recipient, there is an ‘analogical ascent’ to the giver (208). This is the ‘hierarchical path.’ ‘The aim of the hierarchy, says Denys, is conformation and union with God, as much as possible’ (CH III, 2, 165 A) and the completion for each of the

beings in the hierarchy, it is to go back, according to their own capacity, toward likeness to God. Now this 'sacred' (*hieros*) or this 'holiness' that every hierarchy transmits is a gift that calls for the transmission or the tradition (παράδοσις, μετάδοσις) of this gift. 'Man receives the gift as such only by welcoming the act of giving, that is to say, by repetition in himself giving' (212) and by giving himself: the mediator becomes 'in person' 'gift' (214). Finally the economic dispensation of the divine is transmitted by the immediate mediation that is the hierarchy. This has two principles: Christ and the Thearchy that Marion identifies with the Trinity.

The Scriptures are the only foundation that can validate a speech about the Logos or about God, as Denys says at the beginning of the *Divine Names* (DN I, 2, 640 A). 'To include the *logia* in the practice of language, in the hierarchical game of distance, amounts to treating them as an icon. The icon combines in itself the immediacy of the relation to the Requisite and the mediation of an insistence that the withdrawal underlines. The icon shows only the invisible, because only it is visible, and therefore language will return to the unspeakable' (230). The passage from saying to praise is a passage from speech to prayer. Marion quotes Maxime the Confessor's remark, taken up by H. Urs von Balthasar: 'When it comes to God and the divine, the word ὑμνεῖν almost replaces the word "say."' ⁸

But how can prayer be a rigorous language? The 'discourse of praise' involves the speaker (the one who demands) in the statement (the demand). Marion admits some of the characters that allowed Wittgenstein to establish 'language games' and cites Wittgenstein's conclusion of a list of language games (241): 'Translate from one language to another. - Solicit (*Bitten*), thank, curse, greet, pray (*beten*)' (*Philosophical Investigations* I, § 23).

At the end of Paul's 'speech on the Areopagus,' what 'Dionysius' and a woman by the name of 'Damaris' (Acts 17:34) understood is 'what the practice of the discourse of praise teaches,' as formulated, by the Church, in the Pater and the Credo.

At the beginning of the *Divine Names*, Denys the Areopagite places the name of Good before that of Being and shows the relation of the Good and *agapê*: 'This same Good, the holy theologians also praise it as beautiful (*kalon*), as beauty (*kallos*), as love that loves (*agapê*), as love that is loved (*agapêton*) and all the other divine denominations that befit this splendor filled with grace that makes everything beautiful' (DN IV, 7, 701 C). Marion adds: 'the good inspires and nourishes *agapê* (as also *erôs*). We are therefore justified in reading, in the debate between *ens* and the Good, in a sense, the debate between *ens* and *agapê* which surfaces there' (112). St John's definition of God: 'God is love' is therefore privileged over that of Exodus 3:14 in its Greek rendering and the 'metaphysics of the Exodus'⁹ which it engendered. This is the basis of Marion's debate with Thomas Aquinas (111–123), for whom the name of the Exodus, 'He who is,' is 'the most proper name of God' (ST I, q. 13, a. 11) and who argues against Denys' thesis of the primacy of Good over Being.¹⁰

III. Jacques Derrida

According to Derrida, it is necessary to deconstruct ‘the double claim of so-called “negative theology”: to deconstruct God and nevertheless to reach Him.’ Derrida makes three objections 1. Negative theology could be assimilated to a Christian philosophy in what is most Greek about it. 2. It is inscribed in the horizon of being. It is a ‘metaphysics of presence.’ 3. It leads to a quasi-affirmation: that of the third way or the *via eminentiae*. As for mystical theology, it moves toward a non-predicative speech, the prayer of praise (ὕμνεϊν), opposed to prayer as petition (εὐχή).

The two questions of the metaphysics of presence and negative theology, which have no precise definition, have intersected, in Derrida, since his 1967 lecture on ‘Différance’:

And yet what is thus marked of *différance* is not theological, not even of the most negative order of negative theology, the latter having always endeavored to bring out, as we know, a supra-essentiality beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence, and always hastening to recall that if the predicate of existence is denied to God, it is in order to recognize to him a superior mode of being, inconceivable and ineffable.¹¹

In the lecture ‘Au nom ou comment le taire’ (Villanova University, 1997),¹² Marion responds to Derrida’s objections in ‘Comment ne pas parler. Dénégations’ (1986).¹³ Derrida’s error, says Marion, is not to have thought of a third way: ‘what is the use, for Derrida, of denying the third way and of sticking to a frontal opposition of affirmation and negation?’ ‘The third way intends precisely to go beyond their duel.’¹⁴ Contrary to Derrida, Denys distinguishes three ways: ‘the position of everything, the negation of everything, and what is above all negation and affirmation (ἡ πάντων θέσις, ἡ πάντων ἀφαίρεσις, τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν καὶ ἀφαερῆσιν καὶ θέσιν) (DN II, 641 A). The same distinction is made by Aquinas (ST, Ia, q. 13, a. 2 c and 3 c.) and Nicolas of Cusa (*De docta ignorantia* I, 26). ‘So a negation, says Marion, is never enough to make a theology, any more than an affirmation. Strictly speaking, of God, there is never a proper or appropriate name. The multitude of names is equivalent to anonymity.’¹⁵ This is what Denys says: ‘He who is praised multiply (πολυύμνητον) under multiple names (πολυώνυμον), the Scriptures say he is ineffable and anonymous (ἄρρήτον καὶ ἀνώνυμον)’ (DN VII, 1, 865 C). As for the third way, says Marion, ‘the ὑπὲρ restores neither essence nor knowledge, but transgresses them with a view to praise of what precedes and makes possible all essence.’ When Paul speaks of ‘knowledge that surpasses all knowledge,’ he is asking us to be ‘rooted and grounded in charity’ (Eph 3:18–19) (176).

Marion returns to Derrida’s fourth objection, namely that ‘the prayer of praise (ὕμνεϊν) must be disqualified as a disguised predication, since it always

praises as..., therefore by naming, whereas a pure and simple prayer (εὐχή) would have no need to name, nor even to deny a name.’¹⁶ This objection, Marion replies, presupposes that to assign a name to an interlocutor implies to identify it with his essence. But the proper name is never the name of the essence. Moreover, pure prayer (εὐχή) cannot be accomplished without naming: ‘without invocation, prayer would become impossible.’ ‘Thus, praise and prayer are accomplished in the same operation of an indirect aiming at the αἰτία.’ This is in line with Levinas’ statement: ‘The essence of speech is prayer.’¹⁷

‘God knows himself in all things and also apart from all things,’ says Dénys. God is known by knowledge and also by unknowing... and thus the most divine knowledge of God as that which know Him by unknowing (ἡ δὲ ἀγνωσίας γινωσκομένη) (DN VII, 3, 872 A). The requirement not to name or know God ‘according to presence’ runs through all of Christian theology. Marion quotes the Apologists, the Alexandrians, Basil and the Cappadocians, John Chrysostom, John Damascene, Augustine: ‘Si enim comprehendis non est Deus,’ St Bernard and Thomas Aquinas: ‘Illud est ultimum cognitionis humanae de Deo quod sciat se Deum nescire.’¹⁸

However, naming does not lead to a ‘metaphysics of presence,’ but to a ‘theological pragmatics of absence’¹⁹: the ‘name God gives Himself, which gives itself as God’ has the function of ‘protecting’ Him. ‘The Name does not name God as an essence; it designates that which goes beyond any name.’ In Judaism, the Tetragrammaton should not be pronounced as a proper name. At baptism, ‘we enter his unpronounceable name so that we also receive our own in addition.’ ‘This theological pragmatics is actually deployed under the figure of the liturgy...] where it is never a question of speaking of God, but of speaking to God in the words of the Word.’ ‘This passage, with regard to God, from the theoretical use of language to its pragmatic use is accomplished in the ultimately liturgical function of all theo-logical discourse.’

In the last analysis: ‘The Name—one must dwell in it without saying it, but letting ourselves be said, named, called, in it. The Name is not said by us, but it is it that calls us.’ And nothing frightens us more than this call, because ‘it is a dreadful thing for us to name by our own names the One to whom God has given the name above all names (τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομάτων) (Phil 2:9).’²⁰

Derrida returns to the questions of negative theology in *Sauf le nom* (first published in an English version in 1992²¹), which is supplemented by two other essays, *Khôra* and *Passions*. Published as a set by Éditions Galilée in 1993, their relationship is described in an author’s note as follows:

Despite everything that separates them, they seem to correspond to each other and maybe clarify each other within one and the same configuration. Under the mobile syntax of these titles, one might read three

essays on a given name or on what can happen to the given name (anonymity, metonymy, paleonymy, cryptonymy, pseudonymy), therefore to the name received, even to the name due, on what perhaps one owes (to give or to sacrifice) to the name, in the name of the name, or to the surname, and in the name of duty (to give or to receive).²²

It takes several voices to speak. ‘When we speak of apophasis, in other words according to the white voice, the voice of so-called or supposedly negative theology,’ the ‘voice multiplies itself: it says one thing and its opposite, God who is without being or God who is beyond being.’ Apophasis, which is a negative statement about God, ‘sometimes resembles a profession of atheism so much that it can be mistaken for one.’ Heidegger recalls what Leibniz said about Angelus Silesius (Johann Scheffler, 1624–1677): ‘There are some passages in these mystics which are extremely bold, full of difficult metaphors, and almost inclining to godlessness, as I noticed in the German poems—beautiful by the way—of a certain man who calls himself Johannes.’²³ It is this 17th-century mystic that Derrida himself chooses as a fitting interlocutor, asking: ‘Does he or does he not belong to negative theology in the strict sense?’ The dialogue Angelus Silesius stages proceeds among several ‘voices’: if ‘apophasis inclines to atheism,’ one voice says that apophasis ‘testifies to the most insatiable desire of God,’ while ‘the other apophasis, the other voice can remain radically alien to all desire.’ But: ‘who is speaking to whom?’

The general tendency of Derrida’s remarks on these ‘voices’ is to pluralize and problematize the traditions of negative theology and to resorb them into his ongoing reflection on the functioning of language itself. Mystical phenomena of presence or absence symptomatize the structure of language as *différance*, always reaching toward the longed-for but permanently elusive ‘transcendental signified’ and always thrown back on its own play of ‘traces,’ which can sometimes take the form of a dialogue of ‘voices.’

Conclusion

The 20th-century phenomenologists we have briefly surveyed here focused on two aspects of the thought of the Areopagite: his symbolic theology, but especially his negative theology, which rises toward that ‘beyond’ which is God, or which puts under erasure or crosses out Being or the name of God. They also meditated on how the affirmation of God, like his negation in the ‘death of God’ and atheism, must be rethought beginning from a negative theology, which itself is evolving. Negative theology is first defined in relation to what is, and it goes on to play with language. Not only God, but the real itself, retreats, since language itself becomes a ‘bottomless collapse,’ an ‘endless desertification.’ Yet the very effort of articulation and the ordeal of deconstruction seem to be bearers of a mute religious conatus.

Notes

- 1 See René Roques, 'Symbolisme et théologie négative chez le Pseudo-Denys,' *Structures théologiques: De la Gnose à Richard de Saint-Victor* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), 164–179; Y. de Andia, 'Symbole et mystère selon Denys l'Aréopagite,' *Studia Patristica* 37 (2001): 421–451; reprinted in *Denys l'Aréopagite: Tradition et métamorphoses* (Paris: Vrin, 2006), 59–94.
- 2 Édith Stein, *L'Être fini et l'Être éternel: Essai d'une atteinte du sens de l'être*, (Leuven: Nauwelaerts, 1972), 355.
- 3 Édith Stein, *Kreuzeswissenschaft: Studie über Joannes a Cruce*, ESW 1, Louvain, 1950; *La Science de la Croix. Passion d'amour de saint Jean de la Croix*, Paris-Louvain, 1957.
- 4 J.-L. Marion, *Dieu sans l'être* (Paris: PUF, 2018; first édition, Fayard, 1982).
- 5 Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite, *Les Noms divins*, trans. Y. de Andia, SC 578–579 (Paris, Cerf, 2016). See also Y. de Andia, *Denys l'Aréopagite: Tradition et métamorphoses*, (Paris, Vrin, 2006).
- 6 J.-L. Marion, *L'Idole et la distance*, 245–246, quoting Levinas, *Totalité et Infini* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971), 282, and Balthasar, *La liturgie cosmique: Maxime le Confesseur*, 138 and 190.
- 7 C. Bruaire, *Le Droit de Dieu*, Paris, 1974, p. 21.
- 8 H. Urs von Balthasar, *Liturgie cosmique. Maxime le Confesseur*, p. 158.
- 9 The formula of Étienne. Gilson, 'Dieu et l'être,' *Revue Thomiste*, 1962, republished in *Constantes philosophiques de la question de l'être* (Paris, 1983), 211 and 377.
- 10 The Good presupposes Being to which it is 'superadded by importation': *Commentary on the Sentences* I, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3, *resp.*; *De Veritate*, q. 21, a. 1, ad 1 (*superaddere*); *S.T.*, I, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1 (*importare*).
- 11 J. Derrida, *Marges: De la Philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), 6.
- 12 J.-L. Marion, *De surcroît* (Paris, PUF, 2001), ch. VI. *Au nom ou comment le taire*, 161–203.
- 13 Derrida, *Psyché: Invention de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), 535–595; English translation by Ken Frieden: 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,' in Harold Coward and Tony Foshay, eds., *Derrida and Negative Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 73–142.
- 14 J.-L. Marion, *De surcroît*, p. 171 et 173.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 174 et 176.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 178 et 181.
- 17 E. Levinas, « L'ontologie est-elle fondamentale. [...] ce qui est nommé est, en même temps appelé », *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* (1051,1).
- 18 Thomas Aquinas, prologue to the *Commentary on the Divine Names*, in *Opuscula omnia*, ed. Mandonnet, Paris, 1927, vol. 2, p. 221 and *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 5, ad 14.
- 19 J.-L. Marion, *De surcroît*, 195–197.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 203; Basil of Caesarea, *Contra Eunomium* II, 8, 585 B, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
- 21 'Post-Scriptum: Aporias, Ways and Voices,' trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., in Coward and Foshay, eds. *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 283–323.
- 22 J. Derrida, *Sauf le nom*, Avertissements, 12.
- 23 M. Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957), 68.

17 To Live and Think without Why

Eckhart's Affinities with Phenomenology

Jean Greisch

In a manner very appealing to phenomenologists, Eckhart stepped back to immediate contemplative awareness, and beginning from there both radicalized and overturned the structures of scholastic philosophy and theology. The *Abgeschiedenheit* and *Gelassenheit* (detachment and serenity) that he practiced implied a radical imperative: *to know nothing, to want nothing, to have nothing*. This can be seen as a triple reduction that brings the mind back to the phenomena of being and of the divine presence. The different layers of Eckhart's thinking of the divine in terms of being culminate in the anabasis of negative theology which ventures into the wilderness of Deity itself, of which one can only speak in terms of nothingness. This is not abstract speculation but is led by a concrete feel for the phenomena, a well-grounded mystical contemplation.

Phenomenology is an *Erfahrungswissenschaft*, a science of experience, but in a completely different sense from that given to it by classical or contemporary empiricism. Husserl sought to reground philosophy by stepping back to the original data of experience, in their immediate givenness and evidence. Eckhart stepped back to immediate contemplative awareness, and beginning from there both radicalized and overturned the structures of scholastic philosophy and theology. For Eckhart, as for Husserl, true experience is interior, and words and concepts have validity only to the degree that they refer back to it: "What can truly be put in words, that must come out from within and move by the inner form. It must not come in from the outside; rather it is from the interior that it must come forth. It properly lives in the inmost part of the soul. This is where all things are present to you and inwardly alive and seeking and are best and are highest" (*Pr.* 4, 1: 50).¹ This level of experience, immediate and inward, is the criterion of all validity and truth for Eckhart.

One of the originalities of Eckhartian thought is the close connection between being and appetite, thwarting contemporary interpretations that would reduce his thought to the Lacanian "gap." There is a universal hunger and thirst for being, which determines the relationship of the creature to God: "insofar as we are, we are only through being, and as beings, we nourish ourselves with being. So all beings feed on God as being, and all beings thirst for being" (*LW* II, pp. 275–276).² The finitude of the creature is

manifested in the fact that it has to beg of God, who is being itself, the being that it cannot give to itself.

Like St Augustine before him, Eckhart identifies the desire for beatitude with a desire for eternity, the highest expression of which is *the desire to be in God*. God is for Eckhart “the being in which our life lives” (*Pr.* 8, 1: 98). The metaphysician’s ontological passion for the universal is transformed into a religious passion, for the most universal is also what brings man closest to God. A central problem of spiritual life is to grasp God in his very being and to understand oneself in the being of God: “Whoever thus possesses God in his being grasps God according to the mode of God, and for him God shines forth in all things, for all things taste like God to him, and he sees his image in all things” (2:49).

The thesis that “the union of the soul with God is a union in being” aroused theological unease, which Eckhart dispels by alleging the Augustinian orthodoxy of his doctrine, which forbids making the soul an entity so united to God that it would merge with him. Even if we reject the pantheistic misunderstanding, the affirmation of the ontological union of the soul with God remains rather dizzying, as the following formula shows: “There, God is for the soul as if he [were] God [only] to be for the soul; for were it the case that God withheld from the soul something of his being or of his beingness (*istikait*), by which he is himself, were it only so much as a hair, then he could not be God, he could not be God; so totally is the soul one with God” (*Pr.* 64, 1:672).

Being, in virtue of its universality, delivers us from our conceptual idols which fixate us on the singularity of a *this* and a *that*. To unite with God, the soul that is aware that “it is proper to God that nothing alien befalls him, nothing is imported, nothing added” (*Pr.* 44, 1:472), must waive any particularity. “If you want God to be your own, make yourself his own and keep nothing but him in your sights; then, he is a beginning and an end of all your action, just as his deity lies in this, that he is God” (*Pr.* 14, 1:170).

Gelassenheit and Abgeschlossenheit

In an undelivered lecture course on the philosophical foundations of medieval mysticism (1918/19), for which the notes are found in *Gesamtausgabe* 60:303–343, Heidegger set himself the task “to bring back to pure consciousness and its constitution the phenomena genuinely elucidated and intuited as genuinely original” (303). He lists a large number of phenomena that a phenomenology of religious life must take into account: prayer, adoration, grace, thanksgiving, temptation, tribulation, community, tradition, etc., each of which poses specific problems of interpretation.

In the same context, he mentions two key items of Eckhart’s vocabulary, which he will later dragoon into the service of his own post-metaphysical thought: *Abgeschlossenheit* and *Gelassenheit*, each of which poses formidable problems of translation and of interpretation.

In his treatise on *Abgeschiedenheit*, Eckhart makes it the greatest of virtues, still greater than humility, mercy, and even love, because, beyond all desire, it makes the soul receptive to God alone. The austere term *Abgeschiedenheit* expresses a demand for separation and a radical detachment which takes to heart the declaration of the Synoptic Christ that he came to bring the sword on earth (Lk 12:21), “in order to cut off and separate all things.” The spiritual and intellectual challenge is not then to bring everything together in a botched synthesis, but first to detach and separate.

Eckhart makes this demand one of the fundamental themes of his preaching: “When I preach, I usually speak of detachment and that man must be deprived of himself and of all things. Second, that one must be inwardly formed into the simple good which is God. Third, that one think of the great nobility that God has placed in the soul, so that human being may come to God in a wonderful way. Fourth, of the pure clarity of the divine nature; the brilliance that there is in the divine nature is inexpressible. God is a Word, an unexpressed Word” (*Pr.* 53, 1:564).

In these four basic propositions, the preacher has his listeners pass from the evangelical requirement of poverty, to a fundamental law of the interior life, and to his idea of the nobility of the intellectual soul, and finally to his conception of the divinity of God.

Sermon 52 develops in all its intransigence a triple demand: *to know nothing, to want nothing, to have nothing.*

To want nothing: this demand is directed against ascetic voluntarism. Eckhart treats the champions of asceticism and mortification as donkeys, because they fail to understand that, far from delivering them from their own self, asceticism only exalts it. As long as there is still a willing subject, mortifying himself, proud of his ascetic performances, true spiritual poverty remains at the door.

To know nothing: one must free oneself from all *libido sciendi*, which also remains, more or less, a desire for possession, mastery, and control.

To have nothing: we must strip ourselves of all forms of possession and property, not only of external material goods, but also of what, in a certain way, is identical with our own being: the self, and even God in it, as an intentional object of mystical desire.

The requirement of detachment implies the radical renunciation of everything that, near or far, clings to a singularity, including that which is expressed in a proper name. Not that Eckhart would advocate a general indifference that would prevent him from thinking of others. But for him, the best way to care for others is to practice forgetting oneself and all humans by pouring into Oneness for them (*Pr.* 64, 1:672).

The term *Abgeschiedenheit* refers to the radical separation of death. Eckhart does not shy away from the most drastic consequences of the exhortation to die to the world in order to be reborn in God. Mortification is more than a mere ascetic exercise, for the soul must die a total death in the incomprehensible wonder of the Deity.

The spiritual maxim “Detach and separate” also has a metaphysical stake. It spells an exodus from the realm of the accidental, where “this” and “that” reign: “turn away from all things and hold yourself nakedly in being; for what is exterior to being is accident, and all accidents are whys” (*Pr.* 39, 1:427).

Eckhart’s use of the notion of *Abgeschiedenheit* presents a strong analogy with the phenomenological reduction of Husserl, in whose eyes the implementation of the reduction supposes the radical renunciation of any *Weltkindschaft*. Anything that is accidental is a matter of temporality. In God, who is the fullness of being, there is nothing accidental and all alteration is foreign to him.

Just like those of *Abgeschiedenheit*, the connotations of *Gelâzenheit* are revolutionary: “one who thinks to obtain more from God in interiority, recollection, sweet abandonment, and a particular grace than near the fire or in the stable, does nothing else than to take God and wrap a cloak around his head and push him under a bench. For whoever seeks God according to a mode, grasps the mode and leaves God, who is hidden in the mode. But whoever seeks God without mode, takes him as he is in himself, and that person lives with the Son and he is life itself” (*Pr.* 5b, 1:70)

Gelassenheit bears on everything to which the human heart is attached: the goods of the world, property, success, fame, well-being, etc., which are all obstacles to inner freedom. The task is so arduous that it is doubtful if anyone apart from Christ has fully carried it out—all the more so in that it is not a way of doing but a way of being. It is not just a matter of detaching oneself from creatures in order to cling only to the Creator. *Gelassenheit* further implies a radical renunciation of any pictorial representation one has of God, by learning to “abandon God through God himself” (2:346).

Precisely these New Testament and theological topics are overshadowed by Heidegger’s interpretation, according to which *Gelassenheit* means letting be the self-revelation of Being understood as *Ereignis*.

To be detached and separate is to leave the register of “why,” which not only determines a certain style of questioning, but which is linked with a number of behaviors and attitudes. For example, the attitude underlying the intentionality of the prayer of petition, which Eckhart suspects is concealing some kind of idolatry: “When I ask for something, I ask [in fact] nothing; when I ask for nothing, I am praying properly. When I am gathered where all things are present, those that have passed and those that are now and those that are to come, they are all equally near and equally one; they are all in God and they are all in me. There, one cannot think of Konrad or Heinrich. If someone asks for something other than God alone, we can call that an idol or an injustice.... When I am praying for nobody asking for nothing, then I am praying in the most correct way, because in God there is neither Heinrich nor Konrad” (*Pr.* 65, 1:680). This criticism not only upsets the traditional hierarchy of forms of prayer, which subordinates the prayer of petition to the prayer of adoration; it also calls into question a certain representation of God.

Only a radical conversion makes it possible to rediscover the essential poverty in which, for Eckhart, human dignity consists: “Humanity is as perfect in the poorest and most despised person as in the Pope or in the Emperor, because humanity in itself is dearer to me than the human I carry with me” (*Pr.* 25, 1:292).

Ultimately, the detached soul no longer even needs to pray to draw near to God, who is himself the supreme detachment, having neither accident nor alteration. It is in this context that there arises an affirmation that some have wanted to interpret as expressing a masked atheism: “we pray to God to be free of God and to take hold of the truth and to enjoy it eternally, where the highest angels and the fly and the soul are equal, there where I stood, and wanted what I was, and was what I wanted” (*Pr.* 52, 1:554).

How Speak of God without Betraying Him?: Three Discursive Registers

Negative or apophatic theology, which has long had bad press with theological orthodoxy, is arousing today a craze all the stronger in that some see it as the best lifeline for a theology seeking to extricate itself from the ruts of ontotheology. Eckhart, who exhorts us “not to make noise about God” (*Pr.* 83, 2:190) and to prefer silence to incontinent theological chatter, has a surprising combination of cataphatic and apophatic: throughout his work he resorts to three different registers, more complementary than alternative, in speaking of God. Stanislas Breton speaks in this regard of a triple metamorphosis of religious language, from *basis* to *metabasis* to *anabasis*.

The first register, which constitutes Eckhart’s basic language, is that of the ontological naming of God, which identifies God with being and vice versa. This entails a reflection on the ontological status of created being. The main characteristic of this basic language is its full positivity and the privilege granted to the attributive proposition.

Not that Eckhart is insensitive to the relational language of the Bible, speaking of the Covenant between God and the people. But he is keenly aware of the pitfalls of an anthropomorphic language that risks reducing divine transcendence to a human all too human image of God. The privilege accorded to propositional over relational language has religious significance, in that it corresponds to an ascetic demand for purification. In subjecting affirmative discourse to the purifying double fire of the negation of the negation it reaches the “marrow” of pure affirmation: “*Negatio negationis quae est medulla et apex purissimae affirmationis*” (*In Job.* n. 207).

The second language, the register of metabasis, takes a distance from the ontological lexicon, by placing the divine Intellect above the being of God. In the first *Parisian Question*, which defends the thesis of the superiority of the divine Intellect over being, Eckhart also makes use of a third even more radical language, the *anabasis* of a negative theology which ventures into the wilderness of Deity itself, of which one can only speak in terms of nothingness.

Rooted each time in mystical and spiritual attitudes, these three languages engage fundamental operations of thought, to which we can match three faces of difference: the ontological difference of being and beings and the radical ontic difference which separates the Creator from the creature, for the first; the difference between the *Verbum* and the adverb, for the second; the “met-ontological” difference of the Uncreated Nothingness of Deity and the created nothingness of the soul, for the third.

Each language relates to a particular hermeneutical locus. The revelation of the divine Name in Exodus 3:14, for the first; the Prologue to the Gospel of John, for the second; Isaiah 45:15 (“Truly you are a hidden God, O God of Israel, the Savior”), for the third.

The Originality of Eckhart’s Ontotheology

“What is proper to God is to be.... This is why it is only in being that all that is anything resides. To be is a primary name. Everything that is defective is a falling off of being. Our whole life should be one being. As far as our life is a being, so far is it in God. As much as our life is enclosed in being, so much is it related to God” (*Pr.* 8, 1:98). These formulas, revealing a unitive mysticism, are backed by an original interpretation of Exodus 3:14.

The verb *sum*, taken in its function as the verb of existence, is not predicated of God *per inhaerentiam*, but *per identitatem*. God is not the subject of being, he is Being itself. Eckhart does not content himself with stating: “*Deus est esse*,” he reverses the proposition into: “*Esse est Deus*,” paving the way for the Rhenish-Flemish spirituality of “*being God in God*.”

The thesis “*Esse est Deus*” was suspect to the judges of Cologne, for if God does everything in being and through the being that he himself is, this undermines the artificialist and demiurgic representation of creation *ex nihilo* as a production *ad extra*. “We must not falsely imagine that God projected or created creatures outside of himself in a kind of infinity or void.... God created all things not so that they stand outside of him, next to him, or in addition to him, in the manner of other craftsmen, but he called them from nothingness, that is to say from non-being to the being that they would find, receive, and possess in him, for he is being” (*Prologus generalis* n. 17, 2:478).

Eckhart’s ontology of creaturehood is an ontology of begging. As a mere creature, man must beg from God the being that he does not have and cannot give to himself. Like a burden, every creature, including man, carries change, which is always a source of suffering, on its back. Speaking of wood which is “weathered” by fire, Eckhart says that “weathering is the way, imperfect and unlike, and so to speak with a murmur of resistance and vexation against the form and being of fire” (*In Sap.* n. 100).

Eckhart distances himself from a summary identification of God and being, by rehearsing the mystery of divine Ipseity announced by the Augustinian name of *Idipsum* which suggests that God is the Self par excellence. “‘Ego’, the word ‘I’,” he declares, “is proper to no one but God alone in his

unity” (*Pr.* 28, 1:322–324). The reduplicative expression *sum qui sum* connotes “the reflexive conversion of being itself into itself and onto itself and its dwelling (*mansio*) or stability in itself” (*In Exodum* n. 102).

Mystical Anabasis: The Desert of Deity and the Unknown Depth of the Soul

Just as there is no reason to oppose the basic language and the language of metabasis, the ontological naming of God and the metaphysics of the Word, one cannot put the language of anabasis and negative theology in competition with the other two discursive registers. The anabasis which exceeds the other levels of expression reflects the lifestyle referred to by the terms *Abgeschiedenheit* and *Gelassenheit*.

Sermon 71 completes the reference to the hidden God of Isaiah with a reference to the blindness that struck St Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:8). Saul, who had not yet become Paul, no longer saw anything (*nihil videbat*), because, with his eyes wide open, he saw the divine Nothingness: “the light that is God contains no mixture, no mixture falls in it. It was a sign that he saw the true light where there is nothing. By light he means nothing other than this: with his eyes open he saw nothing. In that he saw nothing, he saw divine nothingness” (*Pr.* 71, 2:74–76).

The language of supereminence, which speaks of God only in the superlative, obscures the kenotic motif of the “lowered God” (*enthöheter Gott*), “stripped of his elevation, not absolutely, but inwardly” (*Pr.* 14, 1:168). Detachment and kenotic stripping come together not only in the human soul, but also in God.

However much Eckhart protests that when he affirms that God operates above being and prior to being he is not denying being to God, but raising being into him (*Pr.* 9, 1:106), the radicality of his conception of divine transcendence, which places God above being and above all names, will make some theologians shudder. Quoting a pagan master, Eckhart said that “the soul that loves God... takes him under the coat of goodness,” while the intellect “takes him naked, stripped of goodness and being and of all names” (110).

The divine attributes themselves, which are only “co-beings” (*mitewesen*) “which constitute something foreign and distant” (*Pr.* 77, 2:142), are effaced before the requirement of purification which carries the mystic toward the pure essence of the Deity. And Eckhart concludes: “I once thought on the way that man must be so detached in his aim that he should not aim at anyone or anything but the deity in itself, neither bliss, neither this nor that, but only God as God and the deity in itself, for whatever else you are aiming for, all of this is a co-being of the deity. Therefore, detach yourself from all co-being of the deity and take it nakedly in itself” (144).

If the basic language is rooted in a mysticism of the Burning Bush and the language of metabasis in mysticism of the birth of the divine Word in the soul, the language of anabasis refers to a mysticism of the Desert. It is

this image that Eckhart privileges when he speaks of the divine uncreated Nothingness.

The deity that transcends the divine Intellect goes hand in hand with a particular conception of the human soul, different from that of Thomas Aquinas. The proper name of the soul is as unknown to us as the nature of God.

Only a radically separated soul can welcome everything into itself. This noetic theme, common to many medieval thinkers, is charged with strong mystical connotations in Eckhart: "there is a power in the soul that neither time nor flesh touches; it flows out of the mind and abides in the mind and is spiritual in every way. In this power, God tirelessly arises and burns with all his richness, with all his sweetness and with all his delights" (*Pr. 2, 1:30*).

To speak of it, Eckhart multiplies metaphors ("rampart of the spirit," *Seelenfünklein*, "light of the mind," etc.). Just like Husserl, speaking of the constitutive temporality of consciousness, he is obliged to admit that the words to say all this are lacking. "He is free of all names, destitute of all forms, deprived and free just as God is deprived and free in himself. He is as fully one and simple as God is one and simple, so that in no way can we cast a glance at him" (34). That the depth of soul is ineffable is all the less surprising as the depth of the Deity is so too (*Pr. 17, 1:200*).

The soul says Eckhart, "is ineffable and wordless; when perceived in its proper depth it corresponds to no word and no naming, no word can apply at that depth, for there it is above names and words" (*Pr. 77, 2:140*). Its abyssal depth transcends the logos itself, for the same reason that Deity is higher than the divine Intellect: "it is named by what is most naked and because it is most limpid, and yet it does not touch not the bottom of the soul. God, who is nameless - he has no name - is ineffable, and the soul at its core is also ineffable, just as he is ineffable" (*Pr. 17, 1:200*).

The language of metabasis remains a power of determination which still imposes a veil on divinity, just as love does. Both, one might say, "dress" God with human meanings, whereas the naked soul meets the divine essence in its nakedness.

To speak is to perform. Words to talk about God and his works are (relatively) easy to find, while it is not at all sure that there are words to speak of the transcendent One. Even if words are lacking to say this "we don't know what" (*neizwas*) which allows the soul to come into contact with the "naked God," we must not give up speaking of it in a metaphorical language: this ineffable inner depth called the *scintilla animae*, the *Seelenfünklein*, is the "interior desert" where "God blossoms and grows green with all his deity" (*Pr. 2, 1:4*).

The pure receptivity of *Gelassenheit* and *Abgeschiedenheit* involves a doctrine of "suffering God" (*Gotliden*) which, very early on, was suspected of supporting a radical quietism, even a morbid dolorism. With Eckhart, it is rather a radical passivity which is at the same time the highest form of action. To act does not follow being, as the scholastic adage claims (*agere sequitur esse*) it is one with being. The dichotomy of action and contemplation

symbolized by Martha and Mary must be overcome, since the intention of God is the fruitfulness of action in the unity of contemplation.

If absolute receptivity to God is the main characteristic of the unknown depth of the soul, escaping the grasp of the intellect, then feminine symbolism, rather than the masculine symbolism of the agent intellect, seems best to express this radical passivity. “‘Woman’ is the noblest name that can be attributed to the soul,” for unlike “virgin” it signifies fertility (*Pr.* 2, 1:26). Eckhart boldly adds that what holds for the soul must hold also for the hidden abyss of the Deity. “Where does fatherhood have a maternal name?” he asks, commenting on Ecclesiastes. And he replies: “Where it performs a maternal work, where the personal Intellect bends towards the unity of nature and unites with it. It is there that fatherhood has a maternal name and performs a maternal work, for it is a properly maternal work to receive where the Eternal Word springs forth. In essential memory, there maternity has a paternal name and operates a paternal work.” (*Sermones et Lectiones super Ecclesiastici*). A both phenomenological and theological God-talk must avoid speaking of the Divine only in masculine terms.

Transcendence and Immanence: The Phenomenality of God

Husserl’s emphasis on the living present has an equivalent in Eckhart’s insistence on the fact that God never withdraws from man, but always remains close to him, even if man withdraws from him (*Tr.* 2, 2:384). “God is a God of the present. He takes and receives you as you are, not for what you have been, but for what you are now” (*Tr.* 2, 2:373). No Present and no Presence is more living than that of God. Therefore, those thinkers who share Derrida’s critique of the living present and establish a strong relationship between this critique and negative theology miss a central mark in Eckhart’s mystical theology.

“Who are those who honor God?”: This question admits of no other answer than: “those who have fully gone out from themselves and are looking for absolutely nothing of what is theirs in anything, whether large or small, who do not consider anything below oneself nor above oneself nor beside oneself nor in oneself, who aim neither at property nor honor nor amenity nor pleasure nor utility nor interiority nor holiness nor reward nor celestial kingdom, and have come out of all this, of all that is theirs; it is from these people that God receives honor, and these honor God in the proper sense and give him what is his” (*Pr.* 6, 1:76).

It is not enough for this to constantly think of God; on the contrary, we must constantly turn to him and aspire to him. A God who is merely thought of is only a conceptual idol, for thoughts are transitory. It is an essential God, a truly divine God, transcending human thought and every creature, that one must strive to encounter, so that he may shine in all things and all things taste of God. This sort of “taste” is the phenomenological hallmark of the fact that the human soul has indeed encountered the divine matters themselves.

The phenomenality of God is mainly recognized by the fact that his essence is self-communicative: “The sun gives its radiance and nevertheless remains in its place, the fire gives its ardour and nevertheless remains fire; but God communicates what is his, for he himself is what he is, and in all the gifts he gives he always gives himself in the first place. He gives himself, such as he is, in all his gifts, according to the measure that is in those who wish to receive him” (*Pr.* 9, 1:108).

For the soul that espouses this perspective, “every work of God in the creature is grace, and the act or gift of God alone is grace,” grace that is freely given (*gratis data*) and that makes gracious (*gratum faciens*) (*Sermo* 25.1, *LW* 4:235) which, for the one who receives it, results in a transfiguration such that he participates in “a certain boiling of the giving birth of the Son, having its root in the depth of the bosom of the Father” (*Sermo* 25.2, *LW* 4:239).

In Eckhart’s Sermons, we find several references to living “without why”: “If someone asked life for a thousand years: ‘Why do you live?’ if it had to answer, it would say nothing other than: ‘I live, because I live.’ This comes from this, that life lives from its own ground, and flows out from its own; the reason why it lives without why is that it lives for itself” (*Pr.* 5b, 1:70), and in such a way that the depth of the soul is the same as that of God.

“*Deus et per consequens homo divinus, non agit propter cur aut quare*” (*Sermo* 4.1, *LW* 4:22). The possibility of living without why has its foundation in the Thuringian master’s idea of the infinite bubbling of intra-divine life, *in se fervens et in se ipso et in se ipsum liquescens et bulliens* (*In Exod.* n. 16; *LW* 2.21). It is perhaps in this respect that Eckhart poses the keenest challenge to contemporary phenomenologists, many of whom prefer to focus upon linguistic data rather than the phenomenon of life itself and its specific mode of givenness.

Notes

- 1 *Meister Eckhart*, Deutscher Klassiker-Verlag, vol. 1 *Predigten*, vol. 2 *Predigten, Traktate*, Frankfurt a.M., 2008.
- 2 *LW* = *Die lateinischen Werke*, Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 5 volumes. Stuttgart: Konrad Weill, 1935.

18 The Prospects of a Christian Phenomenology in Karl Rahner

Peter Joseph Fritz

Beyond the 1930s, it becomes difficult to establish direct genetic connections between Karl Rahner's theology and phenomenology. It is widely known that he got somewhat of a dose of phenomenology with Martin Heidegger in the mid-1930s.¹ Michael Purcell attempts to draw out links between Rahner and later phenomenologists such as Emmanuel Lévinas, Michel Henry, and Jean-Luc Marion.² Purcell addresses criticisms, actual and possible, that Rahner lacks a rigorous phenomenological method.³ He defends Rahner, arguing in favor of an understanding of the reduction that exceeds the confines of Edmund Husserl's accounts of the noetic-noematic structure of intentionality while retaining privilege for concrete experience. Rahner's method of *reductio in mysterium* is the linchpin of his phenomenological rigor.⁴

To define the prospect of a Christian phenomenology in (or from) Rahner, one must trace the theme of the reduction in his work and in that of phenomenologists whose thought resonates with his. We will follow the track of the *reductio in mysterium* and find along the way that this is Rahner's way of pursuing *die Sachen selbst*. First, we must define *reductio in mysterium* as the methodological anchor of Rahner's corpus. Second, we will attend to the professor with whom Rahner studied Husserl, Fritz Kaufmann, whose phenomenological thinking on imagination bears resemblance to Rahner's metaphysics on the basis of the imagination. Third, we turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, with whom Rahner has no direct connection, to discuss sensibility, motility, concupiscence, and a reduction to "flesh"; Mayra Rivera's critical reading of Merleau-Ponty provides signposts for further possibilities. Fourth, we treat Emmanuel Falque, with whom French phenomenology is making a Rahnerian turn toward the primacy of the "poor" phenomenon; his provocation presses another re-rooting of phenomenology—an enterprise always claiming radicality—in the rubble of everyday life.

The Reduction

In August 1969, Rahner delivered a series of three lectures on theological method at an international symposium of theologians in Montréal.⁵ The question of method cannot be separated from the situation of pluralism and "gnoseological

concupiscence” in which contemporary theologians do their work (RM 70, 73). During prior periods, Catholic theologians had a set repertoire of questions, topics, and procedures; nothing could be thought but “logical explicitations and articulations of propositions already given,” and even these would take “place on the periphery of the system of ideas” (RM 71). Now, theology must face up to the possibility of fresh questioning following a trajectory toward the faith’s center. Rahner recommends “indirect methods” for pursuing it. They would offer individual adaptability and situational suppleness, promising flexibility for navigating gnoseological concupiscence (RM 75).

Indirect methods would provide insights into the matter itself (*Sache selbst*) (RM 76). Rahner adds, “In the long run theological methodology will only be convincing when it brings man into immediate contact with the subject-matter itself, and in the last analysis this is, once and for all, not faith and the theology that goes with it, but that which is the object of faith” (RM 84). The standard for method is a return to the thing itself. The locus of rigor for theological, as with phenomenological, science is subjectivity. The subject in question is not understood on the model of *consciousness of* objects, but as *being communicated to* by God (RM 91–92). The *Ur-Sache selbst* that gives itself to the subject is God’s self-communication, which addresses “itself to the finite spirit to the point of being immediately present and proximate to it at its very roots” (RM 92). Radical subjectivity is the possibility out of which historical actuality emerges and the standpoint from which phenomena qua possibilities are best described.

Rigorous methodology helps a scientist avoid illusions; for theologians, practicing *reductio in mysterium* avoids the illusion that God may be fully cognized. If theological science can never fully grasp its very own object, this is “not a regrettable imperfection in theology, but rather its proper essence” (RM, translation modified). “The dogma of the incomprehensibility of God is in itself enough to show that comprehensive knowledge is a deficient mode of knowing when measured by that knowledge which is beyond all doubt the highest, the most intensive, and that which bestows the deepest blessing upon us, that which takes place in the immediate vision of the incomprehensibility of God” (RM 104).

Theology’s method of *reductio in mysterium* is to refer all propositions of the faith back to the “single indefinable mystery and the ultimate and grace-given experience of this” (RM 111). This method must be pursued with an “attitude of trembling and silent adoration which is intended to beget these statements, and this belongs to that deathly silence in which man’s lips are sealed with Christ’s in death” (RM 112). The propositions of the faith “must be borne with in patience and hope in respect both of their necessity and of their incommensurability, in which they attempt to utter the ineffable” (RM 112). Theologians must avoid both rationalism and arrogant schismatism (RM 113). Above all, they must “have a little trust in the power of the reality itself which is being referred to, i.e., in the one single mystery of the

proximity of the incomprehensible God who sets all things free to come to himself and to be drawn into his infinitude” (RM 114).

This all may seem rather regional to theology and, even more narrowly, theology’s examination of doctrines. But if we return to the idea of indirect methods, we can see a broader applicability for *reductio in mysterium*. Nicholas Healy helpfully considers how indirect methods allow for theology to treat a variety of material situations or, we could say, phenomena.⁶ What is needed is a robust account of the imagination that arises out of radical encounter with mystery; this would ground a phenomenology that proceeds by imaginative variation.

Rahner and His Freiburg Professors

Rahner’s doctoral study in philosophy at Freiburg during the auspicious years of 1934–1936 is tantalizing. He and fellow Jesuit Johannes Lotz studied with Heidegger at the height of his powers as a thinker *and* at the nadir of his political-cultural judgment. Rahner attended key lectures like *Introduction to Metaphysics*; Heidegger’s first course on Hölderlin’s poetry; and courses on the history of being in Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and Schelling.

Rahner published an essay on Heidegger in French in 1940.⁷ The final section asks whether Heidegger’s existential analytic presents a stark option between God or the nothing, whether the analytic’s sense is radically atheistic or profoundly religious. Does Heidegger effect a reduction to the mystery of cruelty (à la Nietzsche) or to the mystery of love?

Rahner subtly spars with Heidegger as phenomenologist in *Spirit in the World* (1939). Phenomenology traces how phenomena (*Er-schein-ungen*) come to light (*Schein* \equiv *Licht*). Heidegger’s phenomenology of the world’s disclosure to *Dasein* and Rahner’s account of the process of knowledge significantly overlap. Phenomena come to light in the imagination, Rahner’s Thomistic interpretation of which maps relatively neatly onto Heidegger’s discussion of the schematism of the imagination in the first edition of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Rahner differs from Heidegger, however, regarding what drives the imagination. For Rahner, intellectual light reflects and anticipates the infinite light of God, which undergirds all objects’ appearing.⁸ Heidegger, committed to finitude as the milieu for phenomena’s self-showing, would find this unacceptable.

Hearer of the Word (1941) responds to *Being and Time* §7, which Rahner paraphrases as saying that material things that constitute the world, insofar as they “are objects of a receptive knowledge, they must show themselves by themselves.”⁹ Objects give being to the subject, who is a *receptive* knower, but who is also active, inasmuch as the subject anticipates (*vorgreift*) pure, unlimited being.¹⁰ Here again Rahner diverges from Heidegger. The self-showing of phenomena occurs against an infinite horizon, rather than against the backdrop of “transcendence... toward the nothing.”¹¹

Rahner commented decades later on Heidegger as a teacher. Heidegger “has taught us *one thing*: that everywhere and in everything we can and must seek out that *unutterable mystery* which disposes over us, even though we can hardly name it with words.”¹² And on another occasion, “I learned from Martin Heidegger the love of the question about the question.”¹³ The question leads to the incomprehensible mystery (*unbegreifliche Geheimnis*).

Rahner took one course with Fritz Kaufmann (1881–1958): “Exercises on Husserl and the Phenomenological Movement” (summer semester 1935), for which he wrote a slim protocol from an undated session.¹⁴ It summarizes Husserl’s *Ideas I* §56–62, on phenomenological reductions. We can get some sense of the perspective through which Rahner was introduced to these sections (and *Ideas I* generally) by investigating the work that Kaufmann composed around the same time.

Kaufmann’s phenomenology is aesthetic. He revises Husserl’s view of intentionality, conceiving of it “as a relation between the factual life of a self and the historically situated world of this self, which is ultimately characterized ... through an ontologically conceived ‘openness,’ the form of which can be traced to Aristotle’s *noein* (*Vernehmen*).”¹⁵ Kaufmann shares Husserl’s search after a primal stratum of experience. He finds it in ontological openness, coded aesthetically, with Aristotle’s *noein* translated as *Vernehmen*, hearing. The aims of the phenomenologist and the artist as roughly the same: “The leading impulse and principle of phenomenology is to revise and to vivify the, perhaps, merely verbal significations, the more or less empty intentions and the traditional positings of our actual life by means of going back to the source of their original constitution and their authentic fulfillment in self-giving evidences. We may compare this aim of the philosopher with the achievement of a proper vision of life and the world in the work of the artist.”¹⁶ Both perform a reduction.¹⁷ Kaufmann calls the imagination the “organ of phenomenology,” which propels its description and analysis.¹⁸ Phenomenology and art center on imagination, as the organ that enacts the reduction.

Imaginative reduction ventures into the unknown. Art “is imaginative in the sense of creating an image ‘of things unknown,’ of producing in a sensory figure what was imperceptible before.”¹⁹ One finds “in the arts a presentiment of perpetual happiness, a *splendor veritatis* ... which hints at the truth of divine existence.”²⁰ Kaufmann’s phenomenology is open not simply to being, but to the divine as well. While Rahner was studying with him, Kaufmann was researching the phenomenology of art and Judeo-Christian tradition.²¹ “Art and Religion” (1941) asks, within the framework of the phenomenological reduction, “How far is there genuine structural analogy between religious and aesthetic or artistic experience?”²² In both experiences, “one has a sense of contact with something ‘absolute’ or even with ‘the Absolute’ itself, ‘in person.’”²³

Kaufmann proposes that, rather than *animal rationale* or theoretical cognizer, the human being might be better understood as *animal imaginativum*

or existential re-cognizer.²⁴ An imaginative process of founding and finding sense (*Sinngebung und Sinnfindung*) defines human life far more than reason. The human person's symbolic character orients him "toward a highest form of being which transcends all his present and future capacities, but to which he tries to assimilate himself."²⁵ Striving toward the highest makes the human person "*homo Dei*."²⁶ Kaufmann's account of the imagination accords remarkably with Rahner's idea of the *Vorgriff*. Rahner calls the final part of *Spirit in the World* "Metaphysics on the Basis of the Imagination."²⁷ His metaphysics may evoke Heidegger, but it sounds much more like Kaufmann.²⁸

The reduction leads to the primacy of free imaginations over sense perceptions.²⁹ The phenomenologist accesses the wide field of eidetic possibilities, the proper field for phenomenological description, "only by virtue of the plastic power of imagination."³⁰ Phenomenology "ventures out into a new possibility for existence," a richer and more meaningful life driven by the productive imagination.³¹ For Kaufmann, the phenomenological adventure could bring greater rootedness for individuals, better community among people, and an increased sense of wholeness for all who join the adventure. For Rahner, the free activity of the imagination, which allies with an anticipation of absolute, divine being, can bring similar rootedness—in a world that God has entered in the person of Jesus Christ.³²

Rahner, Merleau-Ponty, and Flesh

Robert Doud suggested four decades ago that Rahner and Merleau-Ponty may be a fruitful combination, since both present human cognition and being in the world as "incarnational in structure."³³ Rahner tells how the human person arrives at knowledge through an iterative process that begins with sensibility's intuition of objects, traverses intellection's objectification of them, and returns to sensibility. His theology of conation and appetition finds that concupiscence "is the general human condition, morally neutral, of sensibility as the emanation and suspension of spirit in matter, without the actuality of complete self-retrieval and perfect luminosity."³⁴ Spirit and body cross; the friction between them is concupiscence. Sensibility and concupiscence in Rahner pair with perception and motility in Merleau-Ponty.³⁵

Merleau-Ponty's never-fully-completed chapter from *The Visible and the Invisible*, "The Intertwining—the Chiasm," with its reduction to flesh, can illuminate similar reductions in Rahner: to the imagination, "the fountain and root of all the senses (*fontalis radix omnium sensuum*), and even to mystery."³⁶ Merleau-Ponty finds that the one who senses cannot be foreign to the world that he senses, that the one who senses must be "of the world."³⁷ Rahner nears Merleau-Ponty in "The Body in the Order of Salvation" (1967).³⁸ He treats seven central Christian beliefs about embodiment. Most pertinent is the resurrection of the flesh (*Fleisch*), not the body (*Leib*).³⁹ Flesh is a biblical word that signifies the "very unity" of body and soul, the "whole person."⁴⁰ Rahner plays in the same field as Merleau-Ponty, who dismantles

classical binaries: “What we call our inwardness is the inwardness of bodily, concrete spirit, an incarnate spirit. And what we call man’s outwardness is the outwardness of this very same incarnate spirit.”⁴¹ Inward and outward are interlaced. While they may be distinguished, as is traditional, they may not be separated. Rahner draws lessons for Christian life: sublime spiritual heights are always embodied; all outward things always belong to the realm of spirituality. All things may be reduced to the Mystery of God, through the element of flesh.

It is often rightly observed that Rahner’s formulations mostly remain highly abstract, even when he discusses the body—or flesh. Some defend Rahner by concretizing his insights. Jon Sobrino reimagines the *reductio in mysterium* as a *reductio in pauperes*.⁴² Carmichael Peters traces the decolonial and liberative possibilities of Rahner’s existential-phenomenological theology for releasing the energy of black rage.⁴³ Susan Abraham reads post-colonial theory through Rahnerian eyes, and vice versa, regarding issues of identity and (non)violence.⁴⁴

Though not directly related to Rahner, Mayra Rivera’s theopoetic study of Merleau-Ponty can deepen these efforts. She tells how Merleau-Ponty understands the body-world relation as a “corporeal schema,” an account of the body’s functionality in and malleability with respect to the world it inhabits.⁴⁵ The corporeal schema generates the insight that my flesh adheres to the world, but does not become it.⁴⁶ The corporeal schema is lured by the world, expands into the world by being “‘transplanted’ into things and ‘incorporating’ them.”⁴⁷ The experience of expansion into the world is, however, particular to people afforded high social status: with Merleau-Ponty, the male, white, European philosopher. Rivera explains that for Frantz Fanon, who as black and colonized experienced violent subjugation, flesh feels different(ly). Threat or attack from the world, rather than expansion and harmony with the world, is primary. Rivera, following Fanon, proposes the “epidermal schema” as a corrective to Merleau-Ponty’s corporeal schema. It considers concrete experiences of racialized peoples—or, the global majority—whose very skin (hence “epidermal”) exposes them to threats that impede corporeal expansion.⁴⁸

Rahner operates within the corporeal schema: “Through bodiliness the whole world belongs to me from the start, in everything that happens.”⁴⁹ But the next sentence mentions skin (*Haut*); recalling that it is not a “sack” for the body, but rather the site at which body opens to the world. This view of skin can open beyond the corporeal schema if we combine it with an earlier sentence from the same essay: “Flesh means *that* person who is on the one hand the frailty, the threatenedness, the inexplicableness, the weakness, the obscurity of this concrete individual and who at the same time knows and fears this.”⁵⁰ Rahner is still underrecognized as a thinker of the human being threatened by the world, vulnerable, exposed.⁵¹ To enact Rahnerian phenomenological prospects regarding the flesh, such thinking in Rahner must be amplified with ideas like Rivera’s epidermal schema.

Phenomenology and the Rahnerian Turn

Jean-Luc Marion's preference for a strong, even conflictual view of revelation, the breaching of this world's horizons, and certainly for a type of glory that may be felt through Eucharistic adoration chimes with Hans Urs von Balthasar's robust accounts of apocalyptic, the scandal of the incarnation and cross, and high-liturgical sensibility.⁵² With Marion's former student Emmanuel Falque, French phenomenology makes a clear Rahnerian turn. Whereas Marion calibrates phenomenology to the "on-high," the "saturated," even the "flesh without body," all in the service of openness to revelation from above, Falque takes a different tack: "We do best... to stick to what is most basic, because we experience ourselves first of all as beings of the 'very low'—that is to say, not as coming from God, even were He the 'Very Low,' but as belonging to the 'world,' to 'time,' and as 'simply man,' as a kind of *précis* or abstract of finitude, waiting to be *transformed* or *metamorphosed* by the resurrection."⁵³ Between Falque and Marion emerges a *combat amoureux*, a loving struggle between differing phenomenologies based on which type of phenomenon, "poor" or "saturated," is exemplary.⁵⁴ Falque maps the difference between Marion and himself onto two related yet different mystical theologians: Dionysius the Areopagite and Bonaventure. The former presents a way of bedazzlement and excess that befits Marion's phenomenology. The latter travels a way of renunciation and poverty, on which Falque models his phenomenology. Falque relates this duality to Balthasar and Rahner.⁵⁵

Falque suggests that Bonaventure's idea of *perscrutatio* presages later phenomenology.⁵⁶ Bonaventure describes theology as a fathoming the mysterious depths of the manifest God, which entails a method designed for "allowing the depth of mystery to unveil itself without destroying it."⁵⁷ Bonaventure holds that the *habitus affectus* is the locus out of which arises the proper theological method, or the *modus perscrutatorius*.⁵⁸ In this way, Bonaventure's theological *modus operandi* bears similarities with Heidegger's definition of the phenomenon and phenomenological method, which centers on an account of *Befindlichkeit* (often translated as "state of mind," but better understood in terms of affectivity or mood).⁵⁹ Bonaventure holds that the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of theology. The claim is made on phenomenology's border, as Bonaventure claims that the Holy Spirit causes theology by moving through the theologian's affective power.⁶⁰

The Rahnerian method of *reductio in mysterium* may in fact take inspiration from Bonaventurian *perscrutatio*. Bonaventure's own *perscrutatio* is less modest than Rahner's; the medieval saint finds that all the arts lead back to theology in a more direct way than Rahner, under conditions of gnoseological concupiscence, could claim.⁶¹ But a Rahnerian phenomenology, should there be one, would combine Bonaventurian and Husserlian (Merleau-Pontian, Falquean, etc.) insights to effect a dual reduction to Mystery (God) and to experience of mystery through human imagination and

affect. Rahner's retrieval of the Christian spiritual senses tradition relates to this, and has been amply studied.⁶²

We should add more in this vein regarding Rahner's 1934 essay on *ecstasis* in Bonaventure.⁶³ Rahner attempts to clarify Bonaventure's language to differentiate between two different levels of mysticism: extraordinary-privileged and ordinary experience. The word "*raptus*" pertains to the former, and "*ecstasis*" to the latter. These are distinguished further from the *visio beatifica* as the "wages" of heaven. Notably, Rahner associates Dionysius the Areopagite's account of mysticism with *raptus*, and Bonaventure's with *ecstasis*; a parallel-before-the-fact with Falque.⁶⁴ *Ecstasis*, for Bonaventure, and for Rahner, "names each mystical phenomenon."⁶⁵ This immediate experience of God occurs in the "deepest ground of the soul," a "layer of being (*Seinsschicht*) deeper than the intellect and the will," the *apex affectus*.⁶⁶ We can discern a slightly different lesson than Rahner means to teach here, but which correlates with his later thought. Rather than adjudicating specifics of mystical life, we can gain insight into the God-bound configuration of ordinary life. The *apex affectus* is an ontological structure out of which the faculties of intellect and will unfold, the *sine qua non* that conditions their activity. It belongs to all human beings, not just privileged spiritual masters. Affectivity enlivened by God makes possible all investigation (*perscrutatio*) and free activity (*perscrutatio* of its own sort), which in their turn phenomenalize God.

The upshot of such a claim becomes clearer in a later meditation, "An Ordinary Song (*Ein kleines Lied*)" (1959). Rahner contrasts the great songs of high ecclesial culture with the songs composed of "the wise, kind, and sincere words of everyday life."⁶⁷ These are songs of people's own making, which they sing and whistle to themselves as they go about daily business, "as if they rang like an echo of their own hearts through mind and sense."⁶⁸ Great hymns of high liturgy are necessary for tradition, but so too are these little songs, which contain all the meaning and feeling that one needs. Ordinary songs reveal the whole person, when they flow from their seat in the affect as breath through the lips, play about the ears, and rise from the throat, while hands do work and feet move about. Description of the ordinary song (a poor phenomenon) can venture to express God's phenomenality; it can make *sense* of how the Word made flesh endured "the narrow limits of our routine."⁶⁹ In concert with Rahner, Falque argues that a "phenomenology of the ordinary dares... to call the unlimited—which we know only to a vanishing degree, at least for now—back to the limit(ed) which constitutes us."⁷⁰ Such a phenomenology tracks the path of the Incarnation, through which God the Word takes on our constitutive limits.⁷¹

Rahner contends that "theology must be built out of a living experience of faith which is given... when hope transcends particular expectation and is enveloped by a promise deeper than words, when responsibility is freely accepted and borne, even without the explicit ratification of utility or success, when freedom is lived and death is grasped as the entry into the unimaginable

assurance of salvation. Everyone must dig out his own experiences of this sort from the rubble of his daily activity.”⁷² A Rahnerian phenomenology, following the *reductio in mysterium*, maintaining the human subject’s character as the enfolded and exposed *animal imaginativum*, would take the daily rubble as its exemplary phenomenon for *perscrutatio* of all things. Like the Bonaventure who viewed Christian life through the prism of Francis, *il poverello*, it could be pushed further than Rahner himself went with “An Ordinary Song” to something like Ivone Gebara’s theology “between noise and garbage,” a further development of Sobrino’s *reductio in pauperes*.⁷³ So opens a prospective, complicated path toward the *Sache selbst*.

Notes

- 1 Major books on the subject include Thomas Sheehan, *Karl Rahner: The Philosophical Foundations* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987); Jack Arthur Bonsor, *Rahner, Heidegger, and Truth: Karl Rahner’s Notion of Christian Truth, the Influence of Heidegger* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987); Peter Joseph Fritz, *Karl Rahner’s Theological Aesthetics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014); Hue Woodson, *Heideggerian Theologies: The Pathmarks of John Macquarrie, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Karl Rahner* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018); an especially helpful article is Otto Muck, “Heidegger und Karl Rahner,” *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 116, no. 3 (1994): 257–269.
- 2 Michael Purcell, “Rahner amid Modernity and Post-modernity” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 195–210.
- 3 Purcell, “Rahner between Modernity and Post-modernity,” 196, draws connections between Joseph S. O’Leary, *Questioning Back: The Overcoming of Metaphysics in Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis: Seabury, 1985) and Dominique Janicaud, “The Theological Turn in French Phenomenology” in *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate*, ed. Dominique Janicaud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 3–105. One could relate these as well to Karen Kilby’s anxieties about Rahner’s concept of the *Vorgriff* and his tendency toward transcendental arguments, which prompt her to re-read him along non-foundationalist lines. See Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- 4 Purcell, “Rahner between Modernity and Post-modernity,” 207–208.
- 5 Karl Rahner, “Reflections on Methodology in Theology” in *Confrontations 1, Theological Investigations 11*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1974), 68–114. Hereafter cited parenthetically as RM.
- 6 Healy, “Indirect Methods in Theology,” 622.
- 7 Karl Rahner, SJ, “Introduction au concept de la philosophie existentielle chez Martin Heidegger,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 30 (1940): 152–171; “The Concept of Existential Philosophy in Heidegger,” trans. Andrew Tallon, *Philosophy Today* 13 (1969): 126–137.
- 8 Rahner, *Spirit in the World* 163–173.
- 9 Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word: Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Joseph Donceel, ed. Andrew Tallon (New York: Continuum: 1994), 121.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 11 *Ibid.*

- 12 Karl Rahner, S.J., "Preface: On Martin Heidegger" in Sheehan, *Karl Rahner: The Philosophical Foundations*, xi–xii.
- 13 Karl Rahner, "Martin Heidegger zum 75. Geburtstag," SWR (Südwestrundfunk) Archiv, video available online.
- 14 The original text of the protocol is accessible at the Karl-Rahner-Archiv in Munich, part of the archive of the German province of the Society of Jesus: ADPSJ 47-1010 (KRA) IV, A, 86. A transcript of it is published in SW 2: 427–430.
- 15 Christian Lotz, "Fritz Kaufmann (1891–1958)" in *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, ed. Hans Rainer Sepp and Lester Embree (New York: Springer, 2010), 177–180; Lotz cites Fritz Kaufmann, *Das Reich des Schönen: Bausteine zu einer Philosophie der Kunst* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960), 18.
- 16 Fritz Kaufmann, "Art and Phenomenology" in Marvin Farber, ed., *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 187.
- 17 "As an exploration of the hidden depths of feeling in which life and the world are originally related, art bears comparison with phenomenology as converting the natural attitude toward the experienced world into the transcendental attitude toward one's experience of the world." Kaufmann, "Art and Phenomenology," 189.
- 18 Fritz Kaufmann, "On Imagination," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 7, no. 3 (1947): 372.
- 19 Kaufmann, "Art and Phenomenology," 189.
- 20 Hans H. Rudnik, "Fritz Kaufmann's Aesthetics" in *American Phenomenology, Analecta Husserliana (The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research)*, volume 26, ed. E.F. Kaelin and Calvin O. Schrag (Dordrecht: Springer, 1989), 23.
- 21 Rudnick, "Fritz Kaufmann's Aesthetics," 20.
- 22 Fritz Kaufmann, "Art and Religion," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 1, no. 4 (1941): 463.
- 23 Kaufmann, "Art and Religion," 463.
- 24 I have combined thoughts from Kaufmann, "On Imagination," 370 and "Art and Religion," 463.
- 25 Kaufmann, "On Imagination," 372. Kaufmann borrows from Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), 26.
- 26 Kaufmann, "On Imagination," 372.
- 27 Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, 387–408/286–300.
- 28 This is particularly true in the section "The Possibility of Metaphysics." Rahner *Spirit in the World*, 393–400/290–294.
- 29 Kaufmann, "On Imagination," 373; Kaufmann alludes to Husserl, *Ideas I*, §70: 158–159.
- 30 Kaufmann, "On Imagination," 373.
- 31 Kaufmann, "On Imagination," 374.
- 32 See Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, 408/300.
- 33 Robert E. Doud, "Sensibility in Rahner and Merleau-Ponty," *The Thomist* 44, no. 3 (July 1980): 374.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 376.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 379, see also 386–387.
- 36 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible, Followed by Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130–55; Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, 106/89.
- 37 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 134–135.
- 38 Karl Rahner, "The Body in the Order of Salvation" in *Jesus, Man, and Church: Theological Investigations 17*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 71–89.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 77–78.

- 40 Ibid., 77.
- 41 Ibid., 8 (translation modified).
- 42 Jon Sobrino, *Spiritual Writings* (Modern Spiritual Masters Series), selected with an introduction by Robert Lassalle-Klein (New York: Orbis, 2018), 112–113.
- 43 Carmichael Peters, “A Rahnerian Reading of Black Rage,” *Philosophy & Theology* 15, no. 1 (2003): 191–215.
- 44 Susan Abraham, *Identity, Ethics, and Nonviolence in Postcolonial Theory: A Rahnerian Theological Assessment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
- 45 Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 66–67.
- 46 Ibid., 73, 77.
- 47 Ibid., 121.
- 48 Ibid., 122.
- 49 Rahner, “Body in the Order of Salvation,” 87.
- 50 Ibid., 77 (translation modified).
- 51 See Peter Joseph Fritz, *Freedom Made Manifest: Rahner’s Fundamental Option and Theological Aesthetics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2019), 180–235.
- 52 The opening pages of Marion’s Gifford Lectures are a case in point; Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness & Revelation*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–4.
- 53 Emmanuel Falque, *The Metamorphosis of Finitude: An Essay on Birth and Resurrection*, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 40.
- 54 Ibid., 43.
- 55 For these contrasts, see Emmanuel Falque, *The Loving Struggle: Phenomenological and Theological Debates*, trans. Bradley B. Onishi and Lucas McCracken (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 101–02, 117, 132.
- 56 Emmanuel Falque, “The Phenomenological Act of *Perscrutatio* in the *Proemium* of St. Bonaventure’s *Commentary on the Sentences*,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10, no. 1 (2001): 1–22.
- 57 Ibid., 22, 9.
- 58 Ibid., 18, 10.
- 59 Ibid., 19.
- 60 Ibid., 22.
- 61 See St. Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, trans. Emma Therese Healy, C.S.J., revised translation, introduction, and commentary by Zachary Hayes, O.F.M. (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1996).
- 62 Two prime English-language contributors are Stephen Fields, S.J., “Balthasar and Rahner on the Spiritual Senses,” *Theological Studies* 57, no. 2 (1996): 224–241; and Mark McInroy, “Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 257–274.
- 63 Karl Rahner, “Der Begriff der *ecstasis* bei Bonaventura,” *Zeitschrift für Aszese und Mystik* 9, no. 1 (1934): 1–19.
- 64 This begins with Rahner, “Begriff der *ecstasis*,” 3 n. 7.
- 65 Rahner, “Begriff der *ecstasis*,” 2.
- 66 Rahner, “Begriff der *ecstasis*,” 16.
- 67 Karl Rahner, “An Ordinary Song” in *Everyday Faith*, trans. W.J. O’Hara (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 193.
- 68 Rahner, “Ordinary Song,” 193.
- 69 Rahner, “Ordinary Song,” 194; see also idem, *Encounters with Silence*, trans. James M. Demske, S.J. (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1965), 45–47. Cf. Falque, *Loving Struggle*, 100.

70 Falque, *Loving Struggle*, 125.

71 See Falque, *Metamorphosis of Finitude*, 157 n. 12.

72 Karl Rahner, "Foreword" in *Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology: Theological Investigations 16*, trans. David Morland (New York: Seabury, 1979), xi.

73 Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*, trans. Ann Patrick Ware (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 10.

Part IV

**Reaching out beyond the
Theological Enclave**

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19 Invoking the God, Welcoming the Stranger*

Jacob Rogozinski

What we call “God” is made visible in *belief* phenomena, which themselves are part of a religion, meaning a *belief apparatus* (*dispositif de croyance*): a set of representations, ritual practices, and texts handed down through tradition. Each of these apparatuses reflects a particular manifestation of the “God” phenomenon, which appears only in this way—except perhaps in madness, there is no such a thing as a “private religion” that would have nothing to do with existing apparatuses. Religious traditions give us access to this phenomenon always in different ways, and nothing allows us to favor one over the others. Indeed, a phenomenological approach entails ruling out a pre-existing adhesion to any specific belief. If we submit to this *epoché*, it is impossible to refer to a “true religion” in opposition to “false religions.”

The old word “God” is too well-known not to be misunderstood: it is so laden with sedimented meanings that enunciating it is enough to nip critical thinking in the bud. Unfortunately, we have no other name by which to call this phenomenon; terms such as “the divinity” or “the divine” are too impersonal and indeterminate. This is why I have opted to use it myself here, albeit having deprived it of its capital letter and added an article, which is effectively closer to the Greek and Hebraic usages (respectively, *ho theos* and, more rarely, *ha-elohim*) as well as the writings of Hölderlin. I hope the reader will forgive me for this decision of naming *the god* in this manner: it is I believe a necessity in a text that precisely addresses the question of the naming and of the decision through which a god comes to appear.

The Three Prejudices of the Phenomenology of Religion

Ricoeur urges that we must “start from the place where we initially stand,” to then move on to other traditions. I will therefore start here from the one that was passed down to me—the Hebraic Bible—as well as from the neighboring tradition of the Gospels, to consider the main prejudices of the phenomenology of religion today. These three prejudices relate to three authors: Jean-Luc Marion, Emmanuel Levinas, and Michel Henry. These

* Translated by Jean-Yves Bart

phenomenologists—whom I respect and am hugely indebted to—indeed presuppose: (a) the *priority of the divine call* over all human responses (Marion); (b) the *infinite alterity* of the god (Levinas); (c) its *non-ipseity*, as a result of which it cannot be an ego or an I (Henry).

According to Marion, all phenomena are characterized by the precedence of givenness “over every other instance (including and above all the I).”¹ Yet, “poor” or “common-law” phenomena easily let themselves be subjected to the power of a constituting I, unlike the “saturated” phenomenon, which radically exceeds that power, so that “the I loses its anteriority as egoic pole” and must admit “the precedence of such an unconstitutible phenomenon.”² The Revelation of Jesus Christ is the saturated phenomenon *par excellence*, the most eminent example of a givenness that precedes the I, leaving him “stupefied.” To Levinas, the other is indeed the “wholly-other,” but God is “other than the other,” more other than he is, “transcendent to the point of absence”: its alterity is that of a He beyond the You and the face of the other.³ In Henry’s analysis, “the essence of life is God,” but that life is an “absolute Life,” “absolutely other” than the life of the finite ego; and this divine Life, which is the Father, is not an ego.⁴

It is possible to show that these three theses are intertwined. In each case, we are dealing with a phenomenon that radically exceeds the ego and in doing so eliminates its authority: the unity of the three theses lies in an orientation that is shared by several contemporary thinkers, the aim to demote the ego, which I call *egicide*.⁵ I shall attempt to assess whether these theses are faithful to what the Torah and the Gospels tell us about the god. Obviously, I am in no way looking to admonish these authors in the name of some orthodoxy; my goal is to confront their work with the tradition they have claimed as their own.

“Here I Am, Answering”

Through the flames of a burning bush, a god calls Moses, who answers, *hineini*, “here I am.” Upon first glance, the god appears to take the initiative of the call: he summons the subject, who responds passively. This is however only a partial interpretation of the episode, which overlooks the context of the broader narrative on the fate of the Hebrews in Egypt: “And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried; and their cry came up to the god by reason of the bondage. And the god heard their groaning, and the god remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And the god looked upon the children of Israel, and the god had respect unto them.” (Ex 2:23–25). In the following verse, the narrative brings us to the slopes of Mount Sinai where Moses the shepherd meets YHWH. It is therefore not the divine call that comes first: it is preceded by the groans of the people under bondage. Their call precedes his, summons him, invites him to answer: *it calls on the divine call*, so that indeed the god is *obligated* to answer. Moses’s *hineini* appeared to mean that man only ever answers an initial

call from the god; here, however, the god answers men, as if the place of the respondent could be occupied in succession by a man or by the god himself.

This god is not the Absolute, the Almighty, the All-Knowing god of rational theology: he is, on the contrary, characterized by his non-almightiness, his non-knowing, as he depends on men's call to become this god that remembers, sees, and knows. We now understand what gives the impression that he is calling in the first place. He is not answering Moses's call, but *another call*, crying out from the House of Bondage. Those who call and the man who receives the god's answer are not the same people: this discrepancy confers an unexpected, enigmatic aspect on his manifestation, which make his answer seem like a call.

The Bible features other examples of this paradoxical situation in which, as he calls someone who had not called out to him, the god is, in fact, heeding an earlier call from other persons. When young Samuel hears a voice calling out to him in the sanctuary at night, he does not immediately recognize it as the voice of YHWH; indeed, he could not have recognized it as he himself had not called out to the god. It was Hannah, his barren, humiliated mother, who had begged him—nearly inaudibly, the Bible says—to grant her a child (1 Sam 1:10–16). The reason why YHWH summons him to make him his prophet is that she had promised to give him to the god even before he was born. His vocation as a prophet and his very existence are the answer to a call that preceded the divine call. In some cases, unlike in those of Moses and Samuel, the caller and the one who is called are the same person. A fanatic named Saul for instance travels to Damascus to hunt down the disciples of Jesus the Nazarene. When he hears a voice saying to him “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?,” he does not recognize it and asks “Who are you, Lord?.” When he “breathed out threats and murder” against the early Christians (Acts 9:1), he had not considered that his hatred was already a veiled call to the one whose disciples he was persecuting.

The original phenomenon is therefore not the god's call, but that of the humans who call out to him. Following Ricoeur we name this initial call an *invocation*. Invocation entails the mediation of language, the breath of a voice, the trace of writing, but it is not limited to verbal language: it starts with silent prayer (like Hannah's), inarticulate complaints, interjections, cries of suffering or rage. It may involve praise and blessings—most Jewish prayers begin by “Blessed be YHWH”—but also lamentations, or even curses and blasphemies. It may likewise involve rituals, a sacrificial offering, the study of Scripture, mystical ecstasy, asceticism, singing, dancing, and many other ways to address a god. While the god is invoked in different ways, his ways of answering are also very diverse. They do not necessarily come in the form of a “sublime” phenomenon, saturated by an excess of phenomenality, unconditional, unbearable, unwatchable. Sometimes, he manifests himself not in a great wind or an earthquake, but “in a still, small voice” (1 Kings 19:11–12). If *kenosis* occurs, if the god empties himself by renouncing his divine form, then the world will not recognize him as a god and his people

will not welcome him. This non-recognition is an essential possibility of his manifestation.

I Am the One Who Says “I Am”

If the god is the invoked party in an invocation, this calls into question the three theses of the phenomenology of religion; not only the one that asserts the precedence of his manifestation, but also those that, respectively, characterize him as infinitely-Other, and deny him an original ipseity. Let us now focus on the latter two assumptions. If the god were the “wholly-Other,” separated from us by an infinite distance, how could the invocation of a human even reach him and elicit an answer? And how, in turn, could his answer reach the one invoking him? How could they *form a covenant*, as the god of Israel and his people did? In the Torah, on the solemn occasion of expressing the Ten Commandments, the god introduces himself in this manner: “I am YHWH your god, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the House of Bondage” (Ex 20:2). Even before he defines himself as the Liberator of the enslaved, he introduces himself in the first person, by saying *I am*. Significant in this utterance are the affirmation both of a relationship—“I am your god”—and of an I, a living singularity, capable of answering. The god had already manifested himself in this manner to Moses, answering the question pertaining to his name with the enigmatic sentence *ehyeh asher ehyeh*. This sentence has been translated in various ways and there are several ways to interpret it. Most philosophers have understood it as the affirmation of an ontological identity between the Being and “God” (“I am the one who is”), while others have perceived it as a refusal to answer (“I am who I am” ... and that is all I am going to say about this!). Since the mood of the verb here is the imperfect, a kind of future, it should rather be translated as “I will be who I will be” (or “how I will be”). From the Talmud to Rashi, Jewish tradition has read this as a promise to be *with*, a promise of support and of a covenant (“I will be with you in this ordeal, just as I will be with your people in the ordeals to come”). Most notably, here, the god introduces himself in the first person, and this is what this sentence expresses first. When asked to name himself, he answers “I am the one who says *I am*”: the one who, as he speaks, says “I.” Among many possible translations, the most appropriate could be the one proposed by Cassirer: “I am the I am”⁶—or maybe Lacan’s riskier version: “I am what the I is.”⁷

The privilege of saying *I am* does not belong to the biblical god alone: it is a fundamental possibility at the disposal of every human I. Descartes, the philosopher who highlighted the original truth of the “I am,” also concurrently noted its strange similarity to the god’s self-revelation, using formulations reminiscent of the Revelation at Mount Sinai. In *A Discourse on Method*, he wrote of “this I, the Soul by which *I am what I am*.”⁸ When, in the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, he asserts the absolute evidence of the ego, this is followed by a sentence that can be recognized as a variant of this

statement.⁹ Does he mean to suggest that the new principle (Cogito) disposes the old one (God) of its privilege of saying *I*? Or does he simply mean that the distance between them is not so great, which makes us humans, as he wrote to Queen Christina, “in some way similar to God”?

This paradoxical similarity indicates that god and humans share the same mode of utterance, are rooted in the same original truth, in the self-revelation of a singular ego. By saying “I,” as I do, the god reveals that he too is an ego: another ego, different from me, yet who resembles me in his ability to say “I”—an *alter ego*. In a different context, Derrida made a similar point against Levinas and his conception of the other as a wholly-Other. He favors the Husserl-inspired affirmation of the “irreducibly egoic essence of experience,” mine and the other’s both, so that “the Other is not myself, ... but it is *an Ego*” and “the passage from Ego to other as an ego is the passage to the essential, non-empirical egoity of subjective experience in general.”¹⁰ It follows that *there is no such thing as the wholly-Other*, and the argument remains valid whether it pertains to the other human or to the god, as they are both expressed in the form of “I”; they present themselves to me as another ego. Accordingly, I do not concur with Henry when he claims that absolute Life is not yet an ego and that only the “Arch-Son” would allow it to be individuated. The god who reveals himself to Moses—or Muhammad—does not need to father a son to be able to say “I.” Nor do I agree with Levinas when he characterizes the god by its *illeity*, arguing that his transcendence is so radical that it lies beyond the face-to-face interaction, beyond the face, and can no longer be expressed by a You and even less by an I, but only by a He, a pronoun that signifies distance and absence, like the Latin *ille*. According to him, “the Thou becomes He in the Name, as if the Name belonged simultaneously to the righteousness of being addressed as Thou and to the absolute of holiness,” thereby widening the gap separating it from the I.¹¹ The inverse journey is described in a fundamental text of Jewish tradition, the *Zohar*. Instead of a distancing, it presents an approach in which the god, in the movement of his self-revelation, tears himself away from the bottomless and the nameless. His procession leads him from the Nothing to the He, then to the Thou, and eventually to the I, the supreme phase of his manifestation, in which he finally utters the word *ehyeh*, “I am.” Levinas’s thought might be considered more suitable to an age characterized by the withdrawal and the silence of a god who is “transcendent to the point of absence.” The *Zohar*’s vision might also be seen as too speculative or too mystical, as making an excessive claim to know the Unknown. It does, however, remain faithful in its way to the affirmation of a god who introduces himself by saying *I*.

One might object that to approach the god in terms of his saying “I” is to miss him, on the grounds that he does not let himself be encapsulated by any human language, or relates to language only insofar as he radically transcends it. This might be the case, but it applies to every ego, mine and the other’s, whose living singularity cannot be reduced to its linguistic marks. Supported by enunciation, the god phenomenon also depends on the hospitality of a

language, its syntax and its words, and first and foremost on that shortest of words, “I,” which conveys our call and his response. If we have been created “in the image and likeness” of this god, this is primarily because we have the same power to say “I.” We share with him this vocal breath that allows us to say this pronoun in all human languages. This is probably why the *Zohar* refers to the pronoun “I” as the “word of words,” where “all things above and all things below” unite.

The Name of the Call and the Forgetting of Vocatives

Having found that the god phenomenon always presents itself as the invoked party in an invocation, it is worth looking into what the Bible tells us about this initial call. It tells us that it is underpinned by an *emotional intensity*, that it is addressed by a *singularity* to another singularity. Whenever the god answers and his answer is heard and reported, it transpires that it is not aroused by the Logos (there is none more silent than the “god” of philosophers), but by affect, by the cries of a people under bondage, the prayer of a humiliated woman, or the rage of a persecutor. Why does the god preferably answer to a pathetic invocation? When the Bible evokes his anger, his love, his jealousy, his repentance, are those merely images, tainted by a regrettable anthropomorphism? Perhaps these metaphors point to a god that is not Logos and Noesis, but life affected by his own emotional intensity.

All invocations involve the naming of an invocable name, which I will refer to as a *vocative* in what follows. The question of how to name the god accordingly has major implications, and takes a tragic turn when the god refuses to reveal his name. Jacob is confronted with this non-answer, when, having struggled with a stranger all night long, he says “Please tell me your name.” “Why do you ask my name?” the stranger answers, and leaves without telling him. Then, “Jacob call[s] the place *Peniel*, ‘face of God,’ because I saw the god face to face and yet my life was spared” (Genesis 32:30–31). As he names this place, he also names the stranger, giving him the name “El,” meaning “god.” When the god—assuming that was actually him—has left, it is up to the man to make up for the lack of a vocative: to answer the god’s silence and departure by giving him the name he refused to provide.

We modern Westerners look down on those from past eras or cultures who believed in the power of names and the artifices they used to conceal a person’s or god’s most intimate name. We do not understand why Jacob, Moses, and Paul are so eager to know the name of the one who manifests himself to them, or how, by telling Moses his name, YHWH makes the liberation of the people under bondage possible. In our disenchanting world, the old gods have been replaced by common names—Money, History, the State, the Nation, Humanity ... —and we cannot invoke those, since an invocation is always a singular call addressed to another singularity. The vocatives began slipping away from us a long time ago. Perhaps this already started when the Greek philosophers ceased to invoke Zeus or Apollo to refer to divinity in general,

identifying in it as the One, the Good, or the First Cause. They lost ground at the same time, albeit in another way, when the name YHWH became unpronounceable, and then disappeared altogether to the benefit of common names such as “the Lord,” “the Father,” “the Creator,” or simply “God.” In fact, the liberating Name only partly disappeared, as the Jews continued to invoke it without being able to pronounce it: by spelling only its consonants “Y.H.W.H.” and precisely referring to it as *ha-shem*, “the Name.”

Whenever, in the extreme intensity of prayer or joy, wonder or jouissance, suffering, anguish or despair, someone cries out “oh my God!,” they invoke what has long become a common name as a singular divine name. Linguists call this transformation of a common name into a proper name (or the other way around, as this is a reversible process) *antonomasia*. In this case, the generic term referring to the divinity, the old word “God,” regains the spark of a vocative. The god could possibly be *polynymous*, meaning that every word in the language can be transfigured and become one of his proper names. More modestly, the Talmud tells us that the terms *El* and *Elohim* used to refer to “the god” in Hebrew should not be considered as common names.

If You Believe in Him

This is how it goes because the Bible is not a philosophical treatise. Divine names are featured in it only for the purpose of being invoked—an invocation that summons its addressee. This is affirmed in the Torah—“In every place where I cause my name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you” (Exodus 20:24)—in the Gospel—“For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them” (Matthew 18:20)—as well as the Quran: “I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon me” (surah 2, 186). What is this power of making a god appear by summoning his name, or, similarly, by gathering “in his name”? The addressee of the invocation, this singular phenomenon we call a god, differs from those that are manifest in perception or its derivatives in that it is a *belief phenomenon*. To be sure, perception already involves a “perceptual faith,” a belief in the fact what we are perceiving actually exists as it is perceived.¹² One should however distinguish—Husserl did not—between two very different modes of belief: *believing-that*, which is limited to observing without certainty, and *believing-in*, which is a performative affirmation.¹³

Are we to infer from this that a god does not truly exist outside of a belief in him? The best answer to this question was given by Luka, the messianic tramp in Gorky’s *Lower Depths*: “if you have faith in God, there is a God. If you haven’t, there isn’t.” This ties in with one of the boldest statements in Jewish tradition. A midrash gave the following comment on Isaiah’s verse “You are my witnesses, declares YHWH, and I am God”: “this means: if you are my witnesses, I am God, and if you are not my witnesses, I am not God.”¹⁴ A similarly bold claim was made by one of the major thinkers of Christianity: “In my birth all things were born ... I am the cause of God’s

being God: if I were not, then God would not be God.”¹⁵ There is nothing arrogant or delusional about such statements: they are only making the meaning of the belief phenomenon explicit. As he invokes him, the believer attests to the existence of his god, without which he could not invoke him. He does not need to look for rational evidence of his existence, as philosophers do: it is enough to believe in him, even if it may seem absurd (or *because* it is absurd ...). It matters little whether he exists outside of this belief or not: he merely has to manifest himself to whoever believes and calls.

In this analysis of the phenomenon of invocation, we have discovered that it founds a *community of egos* between the person(s) invoking and the addressee. Indeed, the god and the invoking party both use the same word “I,” occupy the same places of caller and respondent in turn, and both can say to the other “here I am.” This points to the horizon of all belief apparatuses, their mystical element, the ultimate point at which the “I am” of the human subject and of the god become indistinguishable, where the god and I are one. Such claims are so extreme that they overcome the safeguards established by priests and states. Those who, like Hallaj, Eckhart or Artaud—and possibly the Nazarene already—were bold enough to assert their identity with the god all paid the price. The shared experience of believers must take place only on a lower plane. In that, it resembles the experience of the Hebrews at Mount Sinai, who kept themselves from stepping over the line drawn by Moses at the foot of the mountain, “otherwise many would die.” Keeping one’s distance to refrain from indulging in ecstatic fusion requires the invocation to maintain both a sense of proximity and distance. Thus the way in which the god presents himself to one of his prophets: “Am I only a god nearby, and not a god far away?” (Jeremiah 23:23).

Is it possible to go further and in spite of everything to try to grasp this equally near and remote phenomenon, this other who says “I” as I do while being profoundly different? In my daily experience, I constantly encounter a similar phenomenon, another ego who resembles me and is different from me. This *neighbor*, from which I am separated as if by a chasm, is the other human being. Shall we say, as Levinas did, that the “Other ... resembles God”?¹⁶ The biblical commandment to treat the vulnerable stranger—the runaway slave, the exile, the persecuted—“like the native-born among you” and to “love him as yourself” (Lev 19:33–34) might be extended to the god himself in his foreign, vulnerable, precariousness. Invoking him and welcoming the stranger are one and the same thing.

Does this affinity between the god phenomenon and the other phenomenon carve a path to get closer to the god? This is not certain, as what sets them apart is just as important as what brings them together. To evidence the nature of this difference, let us commit to an imaginary variation. I cannot imagine a world without the other: it wouldn’t even be a world, but a series of sketches, admittedly consistent, but deprived of any form of intersubjective validation. On the other hand, I can very well imagine a world from which the god would have taken leave temporarily or forever—and such a

world desperately looks like ours. The god phenomenon does not contribute to the intersubjective constitution of the world because it is not a part of our transcendental experience of the world on a basic, eidetic level. Unlike the other person, he is a stranger in this world. Admittedly, the other person also presents himself to me as a strange ego, but the god's strangeness is more radical than his.

This difference between the other phenomenon and the god phenomenon may reside in their different modes of givenness. Indeed, the other's mode of givenness is based on an intuitive presentation. According to Husserl, the perception of a likeness between his body and mine allows for an "analogical transfer" of my flesh and its inseparable ego to this foreign body in which the alter ego will be "appresented" to me. In the case of a god, this primordial recognition is missing and our likeness will always slip away, even if the god has renounced his divine form to manifest himself in a human form. Merely seeing a crucified body is not enough to recognize it as a god's: this requires an act of faith. No phenomenon that is given in intuition presents or appresents the god, which is given only as a belief phenomenon, without any other mooring in experience. He is therefore *more precarious* than the human other, seeing as he depends entirely on the invocation to which he responds.

Notes

- 1 *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. by Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 187.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 217.
- 3 "God is not simply the 'first other' or the 'other *par excellence*' or the 'absolutely other,' but other than the other, other otherwise, and other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other, prior to the ethical obligation to the other and different from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence"; *Of God Who Comes To Mind*, trans. by Bettina Bergo, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 69.
- 4 *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 67.
- 5 Here I build on the critique of the main contemporary egocides that I pursued in *The Ego and the Flesh: An Introduction to Egoanalysis*, trans. by Robert Vallier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).
- 6 See *Language and Myth* (1924), trans. by Susanne K. Langer, New York: Dover, 1953, p. 77.
- 7 Seminar XVI, *D'un Autre à l'autre* (1968–69) (Paris: Seuil, 2006), pp. 70–71.
- 8 *A Discourse On The Method* (1636), trans. by Ian Maclean (Oxford: Oxford University Press), Book IV, §2, p. 29 (emphasis mine).
- 9 "...*sim ego... qui... sum*," *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), Book II, §5.
- 10 "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 162–163 and 187.
- 11 "The Name of God according to a few Talmudic Texts," *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, translated by Gary D. Mole (1994), p. 151.
- 12 See Husserl's analysis of "acts of belief" and the "position-takings" underpinning them in §§103–105 and 115 of *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and*

to a Phenomenological Philosophy (The Hague/Boston/Lancaster: Nijhoff, 1983 [1913]).

- 13 On this distinction, I point the reader to an analysis by a friend who left us too soon: Marcel Hénaff, “Rites, prières et actes de langage,” in *Dire la croyance religieuse* (Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 121–154.
- 14 *Sifre Devarim* (2nd century CE), cited in A. LaCoque and P. Ricœur, *Penser la Bible* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), p. 337 note.
- 15 Meister Eckhart, Sermon 87 (1324–1327), *The Complete Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans. by Maurice O’C Walshe (New York: Herder & Herder, 2009), p. 424.
- 16 *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague/London/Amsterdam: Nijhoff, 1979), p. 293.

20 Religion without Religion

Colby Dickinson

The Modern Possibility of a 'Religion without Religion'

The famed translator and interpreter of Friedrich Nietzsche's writings, Walter Kaufmann, once accused 20th-century theologians, especially Paul Tillich who was his explicit target in this context, of engaging wholesale in 'double-speak.' As Kaufmann saw things, theologians often had little philosophical ground to stand upon in making their claims for a dogmatic faith, a situation that led many of them to complete a redefinition of essential terms like 'faith and heresy, atheism and revelation' in such a way as to efface their original meaning—in fact, so as to contradict their definitions completely, and so appear to say the exact opposite of what these terms traditionally had been understood to mean. Kaufmann's concern was that theologians utilized such double-speak in order to 'say A to the one, and not-A to the other,' mirroring St Paul's efforts to be 'all things to all men' (1 Cor 9:22).¹ This paradoxical dilemma, he felt, was brought about in more recent times by those modern critiques of religious faith that had forced theologians into a contradictory, and impossible, situation: either redefine religious faith so that it becomes palatable to modern, critical inquiry while also thereby removing the historical content that brought about belief in the first place, *or* blindly cling to increasingly untenable positions through sacrificing one's use of reason.

What typically transpired, Kaufmann noted, was that theology engaged in double-speak in order to survive, while thereby also removing the actual contents of faith, hollowing out religion from the inside out so to speak. Historical beliefs were constantly being upended so that logical, reasonable structures might prevail—a position that led, inevitably, to the ironic reversal wherein those who doubted such beliefs but understood their structural necessity might, in fact, perpetuate belief in another guise altogether. In his summation, 'It turns out that the man who accepts the ancient beliefs of Christendom, the Apostles' Creed, or Luther's articles of faith may well be lacking faith, while the man who doubts all of these beliefs but is sufficiently concerned to lie awake nights worrying about it is a paragon of faith.'² But, as Kaufmann indirectly suggests, could this person really be 'a paragon of faith'? And if this is a type of faith, what sort of faith would it be, especially if

such faith was only achievable through appearing to speak out of both sides of one's mouth?

What sense are we to make of Kaufmann's critique, moreover, when we pause to contemplate the subsequent philosophical embodiment of this double-speak, in Jacques Derrida's reconceptualization of a potential 'religion without religion' that appears to suggest exactly what Kaufmann was castigating? We would first have to assess whether or not Derrida's position was that of a so-called double-speak, and what exactly would such a consideration imply philosophically speaking. This is a matter not as clear as might first be suspected. For Derrida himself, trying to isolate and adhere to what he called a 'religion without religion' would, in fact, prompt him to identify at times throughout his career with the figure of the Marrano (the historical Spanish Jew living in secret as a Christian), the 'last and the least of the Jews,' one who 'rightly passes for an atheist,' as a somewhat negative theologian but without any commitment to a particular, historical tradition and as a champion of a messianic force that would see every identity, institution or representation hollowed out from within—a process that Derrida would refer to on occasion as the 'endless desertification of language.'³

The force of the messianic that Derrida had championed throughout his many writings was one that remained forever open toward a horizon upon which nothing could be foreclosed. More justice will always have been possible in any given context, and this reality means that a force of the religious forever exceeds whatever historical religion has been established and transmitted throughout time. In essence, then, the messianic, as Derrida formulated it, provides us with a glimpse of what a 'religion beyond religion'—as the structure of religious desire beyond its formalized, doctrinal, and historical content—looks like.⁴ His development of the messianic follows somewhat on the heels of Walter Benjamin's presentation of a 'weak messianic force' moving throughout history, appearing as an ephemeral acknowledgment of those who had lost to the victors within a given historical narrative.⁵ It is at least clear why such a proposition might be found appealing, as the violence latent within every totalizing tendency, both religiously and politically, is exposed through such an effort to reduce humankind's dependency upon particular historical configurations and contexts.⁶

These positions help us to understand why Derrida had utilized various formulations to describe his religious identity so as to make clear that he was both betraying religious identity while also being more faithful to it than anyone who might attempt to bear it themselves. Seemingly playing out Kaufmann's worst fears, in an ironic reversal of appearances, to deny one's religious identity became for Derrida the only genuine way to be loyal to it. Though there is a truth latent in such an approach that always deconstructs every representation while also recognizing that there is nothing outside of these representations that we might claim as an authentic 'presentation beyond representation,' there is also the sense lingering in Derrida's deconstructionist act that the justifications for any religious belief have also been

permanently eroded. In the context of describing Derrida's 'religion without religion,' for example, Christina Gschwandtner concludes that 'The name of God can serve as an inspiration for hospitality and forgiveness, or even as a reminder of responsibility and obligation, but it does not make possible any sort of direct access to God.'⁷ Though there are those theological voices that seek to illuminate how Derrida's willingness to face the abyss of identity and representation opens up new dimensions of religious understanding, those tending mainly toward the mystical and apophatic, there is also the possibility that all historical religious content has been undermined from within.⁸

Despite this potential problematic which Kaufmann had very accurately critiqued, one of the things that Derrida's focus upon a 'religion without religion' makes possible is that anyone who follows this path of inquiry is able to see the deconstructive challenge to every institutional order take center stage within this philosophical project. The various quests for reformation that are part of every religious tradition's history are now capable of being perceived not as external challenges brought about by those who would delight in a religion's demise. They are rather 'heretical' and 'deviant' elements working from *within* a given tradition's sense of itself in order to bring potentially more justice to bear on a given situation.⁹ In other words, Kaufmann's frustration with the double-speak inherent to modern theological conversations is the very force that has been active within religious traditions since their inception. It is not simply a denial of religious belief altogether; it is what accompanies religious faith throughout its every embodiment.

It is in this light that one of Derrida's most ardent admirers and interpreters, John Caputo, lodges his various contentions with organized, institutional religious faith. As Caputo has phrased matters, opting for a 'religion without religion' is the cornerstone for any possible, or rather 'impossibly possible,' faith, which, in turn, becomes the 'possible impossibility' that truly lies within the heart of every religious claim (and which also always exceeds every religious tradition, community or institution). In his words, 'I will dare to say, with the earnest hope of provocation, that the question of deconstruction and religion comes down to the question of deconstruction *as* religion, as the repetition of religion without religion, as "the religious (in the spirit of a certain Kierkegaard) without religion, as the messianic without messianism, as the nondogmatic doublet of messianism."¹⁰ There is, in Caputo's reading, a way to read Derrida's thought as a 'negative propheticism' that cries out for a justice that will never be fully, historically embodied, but must nonetheless be relentlessly sought after. In point of fact, the moment one claims to have such a justice fully and forever embodied, we can rest assured that this is rather some new form of oppression.

The cry for justice that deconstructionism brings to the forefront of every conversation is one that can never become fully, historically embodied—it is always an abstract call for a justice that is forever yet 'to come,' never actually present as such within an established, lived context. Inasmuch as religion often claims to signal an embodied messianism, complete with potential

Messiahs who try to enter the historical record, it falls short of what deconstructionism is ultimately after: a purely spectral messianism that must always, and only, remain spectral, and so non-embodiable. It is in this fashion that Derrida, as he himself would claim, *outdoes* negative theology by being more apophatic than it could ever be since negative theologies are essentially connected to a particular historical religious tradition, replete even with various canonical texts and doctrinal claims. What Derrida is rather trying to articulate is a space free of such religious content *so that* more justice might possibly enter our world (though, again, never fully, never in an exhaustible, embodiable form). In this sense, his philosophy utilizes many apophatic gestures that characterize negative theology, likewise not in order to enter a wholly nihilistic space touting only the loss of all identity, but precisely to resist any totalized and totalizing forms.¹¹ The safeguarding action here is then as political as it is religious.

Despite this reading of a nearly avoided nihilism, such a space made possible through a 'religion without religion' is what Caputo, again following Derrida, has called 'the nihilism of grace.'¹² It is a destruction of identity that comes about so that a more proper experience of something like grace, or a love *beyond* established relations, might become possible. As Caputo has made clear in his own writings, this makes those searching for a potential 'religion without religion' more religious in their efforts than those defending the orthodoxy of religious traditions.¹³

A potential critique of Caputo's reading of a possible 'religion without religion' becomes apparent, however, as it could be claimed too that his attempt at a 'religion without religion' never actually manages to become itself an embodied position, capable of identifying with any particular, historical religious tradition.¹⁴ As Joeri Schrijvers has argued, the 'without' that Derrida and Caputo use is always haunted by the 'with' of embodied, and even metaphysical, positions, something both authors are at times loath to mention.¹⁵ Though Caputo has himself made the argument that one must have a historically embodied religious faith even though one cannot justify their specific choice for faith over any other tradition, his suggestion does little to stem the devaluation of traditional religious truth claims.¹⁶ How is one to justify a particular historical religious tradition over any other in light of such claims? And what exactly is the relationship of history to the structures of reason within such a formulation of religion without religion?

The Philosophical Structure of a 'Relation without Relation'

In his early study of Husserl's methods, Derrida made clear that the limitations of Husserlian phenomenology were exposed in its analysis of an idea of infinity that was itself derivative of a metaphysics of presence. Infinity, for Husserl, was a teleological goal toward which every distinction was aimed, causing phenomenology itself to be indebted to a metaphysical presumption that undermined the recognition of a genuine alterity functioning within

finitude. It would be Derrida's quest to locate the 'infinite *différance*' precisely as finite that would point a way beyond these phenomenological limitations, though it would also signal at the same time a new, deconstructivist approach to a form of alterity that was itself the embodiment of the infinite.¹⁷ Indeed, the infinite was shown to be nested *within* the finite, leaving metaphysics as historically an attempt to want 'to hear oneself speak' that only reduplicates the dynamics of an infinite *différance* within finitude and even risks mistaking *différance* as the infinite. As Derrida will summarize the situation: 'The history of metaphysics is the absolute wanting-to-hear-itself speak.'¹⁸

There is in Derrida's formulation a metaphysical re-doubling of speech, or of speech trying to speak itself, that parallels the rise of an enlightenment logic of thought thinking itself (and which also gives us a new perspective to review Kaufmann's suggestion of double-speak). In the former, it is a metaphysical temptation to establish oneself, and in the latter it is the foundation of all critical thought. What we encounter is a situation where these two elements are opposed to each other at the same moment that we also witness how they are inseparably bound together. The one, we might say, in fact, gives birth to the other. Tracing the roots of this problematic relationship, Derrida refers to the radical initiative of Hegel in trying to formulate a notion of the absolute that is thought thinking itself vis-à-vis Husserl's disclosure of a metaphysics of presence as speech trying to speak itself.¹⁹ This tension, as I will elaborate on further in my concluding remarks, is at the heart of understanding our discussion of a religion without religion as well as of Hegelian dialectics.

Comprehending the dynamics involved in this tension allows us to comprehend as well why Derrida, in his homage to the Jewish philosopher, *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*, acknowledges his indebtedness to Levinas for providing the structure for any possible 'religion without religion.' To be clear, Levinas' formula is actually parallel to Derrida's own investigations of phenomenological methods and so a point that arises essentially in unison with Derrida's own philosophical developments. That is, through his own critique of Husserl, Derrida is himself quick to recognize how the infinite is played out within the finite in a way that will resonate in the explicitly Levinasian idiom of a 'relation without relation' whose ideal structure is best exemplified, for Levinas, by the term 'religion.'²⁰ Nonetheless, Derrida attributes this specific articulation of a 'relation without relation' to Levinas who develops it within his own phenomenology.

In his early masterwork, *Totality and Infinity*, for example, Levinas persistently reflected upon the nature of the Infinite vis-à-vis the structures of existence. The Infinite, always embodied in the presence of an O/other whose alterity cannot be reduced, is what disrupts every attempt to construct a totality in any guise. When the force of the Infinite no longer resides in a transcendent being, but within the finite structures of human existence, as modern thought indicates in general, we get a wholly new reading of every human structure: 'For the relation between the being here below and the transcendent

being that results in no community of concept or totality—a relation without relation—we reserve the term religion.²¹ Somewhat akin to the theologian Johann Baptist Metz's simple definition of religion as 'interruption,' there is here a disruption of any attempt to establish an uninterrogated concept or totality through the relationship of the same and the other.²² Since this non-reducible context is the domain proper of religion, the structure of the infinite is revealed most directly. As Levinas will further clarify: 'Religion, where relationship subsists between the same and the other despite the impossibility of the Whole—the idea of Infinity—is the ultimate structure.'²³

For Levinas, these considerations lead to a radical calling of oneself into question, 'a critical attitude which is itself produced in face of the other and under his authority.'²⁴ In short, the 'relation without relation' that Levinas describes, and which Derrida embraced and tried somewhat to embody, is an attempt to preserve the alterity of the other, to allow the otherness of the other to remain as what disrupts any efforts to exhaustively identify it. In other words, it is what preserves the space for an encounter that does not reduce the alterity of the other, such as what is seen in their face, to a simple form. The relation without relation retains a proximity to the other, but without reducing the other to a representation formed in our own mind's eye.²⁵

Some years later, in his subsequent study *Otherwise than Being*, and as a response to Derrida's critique of his work, Levinas would contend that religion 'orders me in an anarchic way, without ever becoming or being made into a presence or a disclosure of a principle,' here stated much as Derrida would critique the history of a metaphysics of presence within western philosophical thought.²⁶ Levinas depicts the force of religion in terms parallel to how Derrida had once spoken of the religious as the messianic, with both characterized in contrast to established, historical religious traditions. This take reveals too how Levinas' position is really one of critical self-reflection, leading to the thinking about thought itself, which is the otherness lurking within thought's own propensity to sameness. This perception, in turn, reveals the project of modernity becoming ever more critical of itself throughout the (post)modern period at precisely the same time as it discerns how sovereign forms perpetuate violence through their efforts to speak themselves into being. If speech speaking itself is, as Derrida had put it, an attempt to include oneself within the activity one is engaged in, from Levinas' perspective 'The reflection of discourse on itself does not include it in itself.'²⁷ This crucial difference is what allows critical thought to surface in the first place and it is that which drives this entire line of inquiry, attempting to find an internal space from which to critique whatever structure exists.

What we witness in the thoughts of both Derrida and Levinas is the way in which a structure, such as religion, plays out the tensions between sameness and difference, in such a way as to provide the ground upon which to critique any existing historical structure, representation, identity, tradition or community. It was this strand of Levinasian thought, for example, that motivated Paul Ricoeur to develop a conception of 'oneself as another,' as the sameness

that constituted the self to be undone by the alterity always already present within it.²⁸ This potential for an unending reconfiguration of identity is what had likewise prompted Derrida to adhere to a messianic force active within every religious tradition while simultaneously abstaining from locating it as embodied within any historical religious tradition. This was what his critical vision of a ‘religion without religion’ entailed above all else. It also made any return to the defense of a historical religious tradition as difficult for Derrida as it had once been for Kant who circled around some of the same terrain in his own efforts to delineate a religion within the boundaries of mere reason. The Kantian resonance is not wholly improper either, as Kant too reduced religion to an ethical principle, much as Derrida’s critical gestures portrayed religion as welcoming hospitality, and infinite respect for alterity and otherness, though all done at a certain remove from any embodied historical religious tradition.

These suggestions yet leave us to ask: do not Levinas and Derrida merely replicate the Kantian criticisms of religion and the inward ethical turn of his Second Critique as the site of something like a ‘true religion’ devoid of any historical embodiment?²⁹ What way is there forward for those historical religious traditions that cannot but try to speak themselves into existence—often through revelations and scriptures that typify an effort of speech to speak itself—when confronted with the spectral, critical force of thought itself thinking about the structures of human existence?

Concluding Remarks: The Importance of Hegelian Contradiction

In the writings of Slavoj Žižek we find a related call for a ‘materialism without materialism’ that is, he suggests, the *true* materialism, ‘in which substantial “matter” disappears in a network of purely formal/ideal relations.’³⁰ The paradoxical formulation of this suggestion is that the only true materialism can appear when we have crossed over into the terrain where matter itself disappears, though not in such a way as to necessarily invoke a space beyond materiality. Rather Žižek imagines a movement wherein materiality is itself exposed as ‘not all’ there is to reality, even though there is nothing necessarily beyond the finite, material realm. Indeed, echoing both Derrida and Levinas, for whom the infinite is to be located within the finite, Žižek describes how this paradox ‘is grounded in the fact that, today, it is idealism which emphasizes our bodily finitude and endeavors to demonstrate how this very finitude opens up the abyss of a transcendent divine Otherness beyond our reach.’³¹

The only viable way to understand how a ‘materialism without materialism’ or a ‘religion without religion’ does not drift off into a spectral indifference to the material conditions of reality, including the various communities and traditions (religious ones included), is to determine how the shortcomings and failures of any representation, religion or materiality are the key to seeing what lies ‘beyond’ these things, though any ‘beyond’ must also be qualified as really something inherent to finite, material existence itself. That

is, the only path forward is through the brokenness, precarity and vulnerability of the representation itself.

When Žižek mirrors these fundamentally Derridean insights, it is no coincidence that he inevitably, and frequently, turns to the Hegelian ‘negation of negation’ as the key to understanding how the redoubling of thought thinking itself can be reformulated both as the solution to the absence of any material, historical conditions for a ‘religion without religion’ and as the way ‘beyond’ the impasse itself, all while somehow managing to never fully exit the tension itself. What we witness in such reflections is the way in which the negation of negation fulfills the philosophical legacy of trying to think about thought itself, providing another redoubling (again, as potential redefining of Kaufmann’s double-speak) that is indicative of the structure of self-reflexive thought and which is always accompanied by an opposing effort on the part of speech to speak itself into being. This is a tension that can never be eradicated, try though we might—and frequently will—to do away with it. Much as Hegel had understood there to be nothing outside of the unresolvable contradictions of dialectics (and which, I would wager, is directly related to Derrida’s claim that there is nothing outside the text), we have reached an impasse between the historical conditions of representation, identity, tradition and community *and* the source of all critical thought—an abstraction of thought thinking itself that is the *sine qua non* of deconstructivist philosophy and enlightenment rationality alike.³² Though such an impasse or contradiction is exceedingly tempting to circumvent or solve, this is precisely the temptation to be resisted, as it is only through the negation of negation that we might locate any possible position ‘beyond’ where we currently stand.

For someone like Theodor Adorno these operations entailed engaging in a negative dialectic that would always provoke some form of an ‘inverse theology’ that threatened to undermine the entire history of metaphysics. At the same time, however, it was the only way to avoid the violence that had given rise to horrific events like those that took place under the name ‘Auschwitz.’ As Adorno noted, ‘a negated negative is not a positive’ and yet what appears to us as a thoroughly nihilistic gesture must be defended so that what appears as contradiction might actually point us toward a justice we have not yet known.³³ As he would put it, and in terms that speak directly to Kaufmann’s concern at the outset of this essay, we are now faced with a situation wherein ‘one who believes in God cannot believe in God’ and where ‘the possibility represented by the divine name is maintained, rather, by him who does not believe.’³⁴

What all of this is gesturing toward can be captured by the paradox and irresolvable contradiction that Žižek considers as the zero ground of the sacred within our world. In his formulations, when an event transpires within human history that clears the terrain of everything once thought to divide the sacred from the profane—an act then of an absolute profanation that abolishes even the categorizations that had structured our world, and what I have been calling a negation of negation—we are bereft of the very coordinates by

which we had structured reality, though we are also returned to the basis of what the sacred might be in the first place. That is, in what appeared to discard the difference between the sacred and the profane, we have an absolute profanation that is, in truth, indistinguishable from an absolute sacrality.³⁵ This contradiction, as an instance of the Hegelian negation of negation, is as impossible to eradicate as it is fundamental to human existence. If we can grasp what this means and its significance then we can also understand why Derrida would suggest that he ‘rightly passed for an atheist’ while also claiming that he was ‘the last Jew,’ as the last ‘real believer,’ whatever such a thing might be in the end and though this was something we will never actually know.

Notes

- 1 Walter Kaufmann, *The Faith of a Heretic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 122.
- 2 Kaufmann, *The Faith of a Heretic*, p. 119.
- 3 See, among other places these matters are discussed, Bettina Bergo, Joseph Cohen and Raphael Zagury-Orly, eds., *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida*, trans. Bettina Bergo and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007) and Jacques Derrida, ‘Circumfessions,’ in Geoffrey Bennington, ed., *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- 4 On the messianic, see Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 5 Walter Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History’ in Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, eds., *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2003).
- 6 See the commentary given in Steven Shakespeare, *Derrida and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), pp. 130–140.
- 7 Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 82.
- 8 See the use of Derrida, for example, in Karmen MacKendrick, *Divine Enticement: Theological Seductions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).
- 9 See the suggestions put forth by Joeri Schrijvers in his *Between Faith and Belief: Toward a Contemporary Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2016), p. 168.
- 10 John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 195.
- 11 William Franke, *A Philosophy of the Unsayable* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), p. 279.
- 12 John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013).
- 13 See the main argument put forth in John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).
- 14 Schrijvers, *Between Faith and Belief*, p. 299.
- 15 Schrijvers, *Between Faith and Belief*, pp. 14–15.
- 16 John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001).
- 17 Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomena: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, trans. Leonard Lawlor (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), p. 87. See also the arguments put forth in Jacques

- Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
- 18 Derrida, *Voice and Phenomena*, p. 88, de-emphasized from the original.
- 19 Derrida, *Voice and Phenomena*, p. 87
- 20 Jacques Derrida, *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 28–29.
- 21 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 80.
- 22 Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Crossroad, 2007).
- 23 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 80.
- 24 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 81.
- 25 See the commentary offered in Joeri Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings? The Decentering of the Modern Subject in Recent French Phenomenology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011), pp. 96–100.
- 26 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, Or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2006), p. 168.
- 27 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 171.
- 28 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- 29 See his remarks on the demise of historical religion in his *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, eds. and trans. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially p. 151.
- 30 Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014), p. 5.
- 31 Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, pp. 5–6.
- 32 Todd McGowan, *Emancipation After Hegel: Achieving a Contradictory Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), p. 55.
- 33 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Continuum, 1973), p. 393.
- 34 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 401–402.
- 35 Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012). In this context, Žižek himself refers to a work by Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone, 2007).

21 Phenomenology, Theology, and Religious Studies

Nikolaas Cassidy-Deketelaere

The “phenomenology of religion” originates in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s understanding of religion: the essence of religion, as he puts it in his *Speeches* (1799), is an “intuition of the universe,” which he later, in his dogmatics *The Christian Faith* (1830), defines more specifically as “the feeling of absolute dependence.”¹ This accomplished precisely what Immanuel Kant ruled out: the discussion of religion in terms of a properly “religious experience” and thus a “phenomenology of religion.” Yet, the latter phrase has come to mean wildly different things. This, I would suggest, both results from and continues to emphasise—like a pebble in a shoe—the extremely nebulous nature of the former phrase: its meaning is often taken to be self-evident by whoever uses it, yet for that very reason it often only serves to paper over a host of ambiguities and possibly unjustifiable assumptions. How you understand “religious experience” determines what you consider “phenomenology of religion” to be and decides whether it is thought of as a valid scholarly pursuit, either as what is often called “the academic study of religion” or as Edmund Husserl’s “rigorous science.”

In what follows, I distinguish between three different ways of doing “phenomenology of religion” in order to provide—for the theologically interested philosopher or the phenomenologically interested theologian—a schematic overview of the different intellectual projects this phrase can be applied to. The first concerns what is currently understood as the comparative “science of religion” or “religious studies”: in its attempt to ascertain the essential characteristics of religion across traditions. The second concerns a movement within contemporary French philosophy that has taken to analysing instances of divine revelation and which therefore led Dominique Janicaud to refer to it derisively as phenomenology’s “theological turn.”² Finally, a third way of doing phenomenology of religion is practiced by several contemporary phenomenologists who reject “religious experience” altogether, instead following Martin Heidegger in performing an analysis of “religious life” (e.g., Jean-Yves Lacoste, Emmanuel Falque, George Pattison).

The Experience of the Sacred: From Rudolf Otto to Mircea Eliade

Schleiermacher's language of religious sentiment resounds most clearly amongst the early twentieth-century authors providing the methodology for "religious studies," a discipline of which he is therefore sometimes said to be the father.³ However, it would quickly be replaced by that of Rudolf Otto's influential book *The Idea of the Holy* (1917). Otto proposes that "holiness"—'the holy'—is a category of interpretation and valuation peculiar to the sphere of religion,⁴ which manifests itself as so-called "numinous" experience. Like Schleiermacher, for whom "religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling,"⁵ Otto locates religion in a realm proper to it, in an experience that is *sui generis*. With this idea, "religious studies" as an autonomous discipline is born: if religion has a realm or experience *of its own*, then it equally requires an explanation proper to it, and is thus *irreducible* to explanations offered by other fields (e.g., sociology, psychology, history, or biology). "The holy," Kristensen summarises, "is an element *sui generis* and cannot be expressed in intellectual, ethical, or aesthetic terms."⁶ It must be expressed *in its own terms*—i.e., in terms of the experience itself—, meaning that it requires a *phenomenological* explanation.

Phenomenology of religion is seen as a science because it investigates what is *essential* to religion (i.e., a transcendental concept of "religion" as such) by analysing diverse religious phenomena or data (i.e., the manifold positive or empirical world religions): "Phenomenology of Religion is the systematic treatment of History of Religion," Kristensen writes, meaning that "its task is to classify and group the numerous and widely divergent data in such a way that an over-all view can be obtained of their religious content."⁷ So, much like biology, rather than simply taking stock of empirical diversity, "phenomenology tries to gain an over-all view of the ideas and motives which are of decisive importance in all of History of Religion."⁸ Phenomenology's over-all view of the history of world religions allows it to perceive the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be considered "religion" in what they all have in common: namely, an experience of the sacred. Eliade phrases this more succinctly: "But the important thing for our purpose is to bring out the specific characteristics of the religious experience, rather than to show its numerous variations and the differences caused by its history."⁹

Secondly, the phenomenology of religion is a science of religion due to its *independence* from other disciplines, especially theology. The phenomenologist of religion stands *outside* any positive religious tradition and instead oversees the whole from a scientifically appropriate distance, according to Kristensen:

But the historian cannot understand the absolute character of the religious data in the same way that the believer understands them. The historian's standpoint is a different one. There is a distance between him

and the object of the research, he cannot identify himself with it as the believer does.¹⁰

In other words, the discourse of the science of religion is separate from its object; the discourse of theology, meanwhile, participates in and contributes its object's development: the of theologians itself constitutes the history of the development of Christian doctrine.

Now, the reflexivity of its discourse gives theology an immediate methodological advantage over the science of religion: a theologian comparing two colleagues' respective conceptualisations of prayer knows that comparison is possible, that their colleagues are providing competing accounts of the same phenomenon, because the category of "prayer" is defined by the very discourse everyone is participating in; the scientist of religion, meanwhile, has no guarantee that the category of "prayer" is salient across traditions, that that same transcendental concept is in fact diversely though necessarily expressed in all empirical world religions.

The Necessity of Metatheory: Gavin Flood

Phenomenology, as a transcendental investigation meant to ground the subsequent empirical one, always served to secure the validity of positive science.¹¹ It is then unsurprising that the science of religion turned to phenomenology to secure its categories. In his *Beyond Phenomenology* (1999), Gavin Flood therefore makes a remarkable observation: the science of religion has been largely uninterested in developing its methodology to a high degree of sophistication and its analyses consequently remain naïve.

The erosion of phenomenological terms' technical meaning reaches its zenith in the various textbooks introducing the study of religion. For example, James C. Livingston's *Anatomy of the Sacred* depicts phenomenology and its reduction as follows: "It introduces the concept of *epoche* (from the Greek verb *epecho*, "I hold back"), or a suspension of judgement, to indicate the "bracketing" from inquiry all attempts at explanation or all philosophical or theological questions of a religious phenomenon's truth."¹² This erosion leads others to propose highly uncritical conceptualisations of religious experience as entirely separated from religious truth. On Ninian Smart's influential account, for example, "religious experience involves some kind of "perception" of the *invisible* world,"¹³ regardless of whether that invisible world actually exists:

I am not concerned here with those who deny the existence of such an 'invisible world' (...). Whether or not such an invisible world exists, it forms an aspect of the world seen from the point of view of those who participate in religion. It is believed in. (...) [It] is not here our task to pass judgement on the truth or otherwise of religious conceptions.¹⁴

The reduction would thus mean the permanent disregard for the ontological status of religious experiences, turning phenomenology from a genetic investigation concerning the constitution of phenomena into a straightforward description of the contents of religious consciousness: “The intention is to describe,” Smart warns, “rather than to pass judgement, on the phenomena of religion.”¹⁵ Van der Leeuw likewise claims that phenomenology “has, in fact, one sole desire: *to testify* to what has been manifested to it.”¹⁶ This is a remarkably impoverished conception of science.

Now, while this might be “phenomenography,”¹⁷ it is not phenomenology: rather than merely *describing* the empirical contents of consciousness, phenomenology aims at *explaining* how these phenomena are constituted by identifying the relevant transcendental structures of consciousness. A *science* of religious experience must be able to distinguish actual religious experience from delusions by way of a critical definition of that core *sui generis* concept. Without such a definition, it risks corrupting the very phenomenon it purports to study scientifically: as a science, the phenomenology of religion must account for religious truth or value, explain why a certain experience (e.g., hierophany) is considered to be “religious.” In other words, it needs to justify why the experiences of religious people require an independent account whilst those of schizophrenics do not, even though they both involve perceptions of things invisible.

On what basis does the science of religion see fit to uncritically accept purportedly “religious” experience as exactly that? The answer is: *empathy*. The only way to take a religious experience on its own terms, bracketing all judgements regarding its truth, is to empathise with its subject: in the phenomenology of religion, Kristensen writes, “there is an appeal made to the indefinable sympathy we must have for religious data which sometimes appear so alien to us.”¹⁸ The phenomenologist of religion must engage in the “imaginative reexperiencing of a situation strange to us,” meaning that “by means of empathy he tries to relive in his own experience that which is ‘alien’.”¹⁹ The methodological principle of empathy with the religious subject thus pre-emptively defers critical questions concerning the ontological status of religious experiences, thereby limiting the task of phenomenology to a naïve description of them: it renders phenomenology unable and unwilling to consider both the veracity of so-called “experiences of the sacred” and their validity as essentially “religious” experiences.

Now, though description might be a worthwhile enterprise in itself, Flood observes correctly that “empathy does not provide a sufficiently rigorous theoretical basis on which to build an academic discipline.”²⁰ He therefore advocates for more profound methodological reflection or “metatheory” within religious studies, precisely because the recourse to “religious experience” or “religious data” is not self-justifying but requires critical interrogation and reflexive definition: “a metatheoretical perspective is a critical perspective,” Flood explains, “the metatheorist would argue that data are not transparent and that the fault-lines within a research programme can be brought into the

open; a metatheoretical perspective is therefore a reflexive perspective.”²¹ For example, when Kristensen tries to distil a transcendental concept of “prayer” from the various empirical forms that express it, which specific phenomena are taken into account presupposes an understanding of what prayer is. According to Flood, that presupposition ought to be made explicit and interrogated by *contextualising* the account “within a specific social, historical and, indeed, political time-frame.”²² It is that context, rather than anything about the data or the experience itself, that comprises its “religious” character: i.e., secures its ontological status as distinct from a mere delusion and its transcendental validity as essentially religious. Flood explains:

The question concerning the ontological status of religious appearances to consciousness is (...) an impossible question in the study of religions when approached from a perspective that claims neutrality (...). From both the phenomenological and the hermeneutical perspectives the question of the ontological status of religious appearances (...) cannot be asked outside of specific contexts and traditions. The path through this thorny problem is, for me, stated in bald terms, to argue for the total contextualization of religious truth within language and tradition and to disclaim any privileged access to the question, for example on empirical grounds.²³

In what follows, I show how “phenomenology of religion” in the second sense is complicit with the science of religion in its unjustifiable presupposition that religion is found in empirical data alone, whilst its third incarnation resolves this issue along the lines suggested by Flood: a thoroughly contextual account of religious experience, where what is “essentially religious” is not the experience itself, but the context that makes it thus.

The Revelation of God: Jean-Luc Marion and Michel Henry

In “The Possible and Revelation” (1988), Jean-Luc Marion asks: “Can phenomenology contribute in a privileged way to the development of a ‘philosophy of religion’?” Put differently, “can ‘philosophy of religion’ become a ‘phenomenology of religion’?”²⁴ Whereas the authors just discussed conceived of it as an independent scientific method, Marion’s phenomenology of is thus a distinctly philosophical enterprise, taking its cue from Husserl’s account of the transcendental constitution of experience. Indeed, Marion bases phenomenology as such on a phenomenology of religion rather than the other way around: “the religious phenomenon poses the question of the general possibility of the phenomenon.”²⁵ That religious phenomenon is not an essentially “religious” and intercultural appearance of the sacred (hierophany), but the appearance of God (theophany) as understood by the Christian religion (Revelation through Incarnation): specifically, the Revelation of Christ.²⁶ In short, the Revelation or appearing of God (*theo-phanein*)

exemplifies the structure of all revelation or appearing as such (*phanein*). Marion's approach is paralleled and complemented by Michel Henry's, who understands the phenomenological "incarnation" of Husserl's "givenness in the flesh" (*leibhaftige Gegebenheit*) of phenomena—i.e., their appearing to consciousness—along the lines of the Incarnation of God (*verbum caro factum*).²⁷ By thus understanding phenomenological terms (appearing) by way of theological ones (Revelation and Incarnation), Marion and Henry align phenomenology entirely with theology. The latter, for example, defines the objects of phenomenology as "givenness, showing, phenomenalisation, unveiling, uncovering, appearance, manifestation, and revelation," noting immediately "that these key words for phenomenology are also (...) key terms for religion, or theology."²⁸ Phenomenology (the "revelation" or "incarnation" that is the appearing of phenomena) thereby becomes only preparatory to theology (the Incarnation of God as his Revelation) and understood on theology's terms: appearing itself (phenomenology) is identified with revelation (theology). Janicaud therefore rightly accuses Marion and Henry of theologising phenomenology: theology and phenomenology, he insists, make two; the *leibhaftige Gegebenheit* of phenomena cannot be elucidated by referring it to the *verbum caro factum* of God's self-revelation.²⁹

Marion rejects this charge, however, claiming that his argument is made on entirely philosophical grounds. Specifically, he frames it as a critique of Husserl, in contrast to whom Marion proposes a more fundamental understanding of phenomenality: the mere *givenness* of phenomena to consciousness. He considers the phenomenon of Revelation to be the prime example of this, since its givenness would exceed or saturate all possible intentional horizons.³⁰ Indeed, as the unconditional givenness (Marion) or pure phenomenality (Henry) of the saturated phenomenon,³¹ the theological turn discovers a phenomenality of *the absolute* (i.e., saturating givenness) that is immediately identified with the phenomenality of *God* (i.e., theophanic Revelation). Yet, just like we could not establish why the feeling of absolute dependence (Schleiermacher) or the experience of the wholly Other (Otto) should be considered "religious" without taking its context into account, we will likewise fail to establish on merely empirical grounds why the experience of the absolute should equal the experience of God. The *religious specificity* of "religious" experience (i.e., its theophanic character) remains in doubt: talk of the unconditional or absolute is not, in itself, talk of *God*.³² The problem here, again, is the refusal to think beyond the empirical given: the role of the context in which it is experienced (e.g., whether one confesses to a particular religion oneself) might very well determine whether the experience of the absolute is subjectively qualified as an experience of God.

This question has left several atheist critics scratching their heads: though they might admit to having certain "absolute" experiences—like Schleiermacher's "intuition of the universe"—, why should they recognise these as divine Revelation, as experiences of *God*? Jocelyn Benoist, for example, asks

Marion: “what will you say to me if I tell you that where you see God, I see nothing or something else?”³³ Because the givenness is supposedly unconditional, Marion cannot explain this seeing differently and resorts to accusing Benoit of a bad faith refusal to acknowledge what undeniably gives itself to be seen by anyone: “To be sure, claiming to see is not sufficient to prove that one saw. Yet the fact or the pretense of not seeing does not prove that there is nothing to see. It can simply suggest that (...) it is necessary to learn to see otherwise.”³⁴ In doing so, Marion seemingly assumes that any experience of the absolute is self-evidently an experience of God.

That inability to speak to those without religion, resulting from the false assumption that religious experience is universally available, equally blights the science of religion’s methodology. The most egregious example of this probably being Livingston’s contemporary textbook, the very first sentence of which makes “the observation that religion is a universal and abiding dimension of human experience.”³⁵ It implies stereotypical understanding of man as “*homo religiosus*,”³⁶ which understands the essence of humanity as religiosity: “religion is both universally common and unique to our species.”³⁷ Yet, faced with our contemporaries—like Benoit—who claim to have no religion, this assumption treated as a self-evident observation is outdated and absurd. Nevertheless, it forms a shared methodological postulate of the first two ways of doing phenomenology of religion: “The reader is invited to direct his mind to a moment of deeply-felt religious experience,” Otto writes, “Whoever cannot do this, whoever knows no such moments in his experience, is requested to read no farther.”³⁸

That practicing phenomenology of religion would require personal religiosity actually follows directly from religion’s definition as a *sui generis* phenomenon: “For if there be any single domain of human experience that presents us with something unmistakably specific and unique, peculiar to itself,” Otto writes, “assuredly it is that of the religious life,”³⁹ which therefore “cannot be expressed by means of anything else, just because it is so primary and elementary a datum in our psychical life, and therefore only definable through itself.”⁴⁰ We may summarise this argument’s necessary consequence, which forms the implicit methodological principle of the first two ways of doing phenomenology of religion, as follows: *as a sui generis phenomenon, religious experience is meaningful only to the religious* (i.e., empathy is necessary); *consequently, whoever wants to develop a science of religion or a phenomenology of religious experience, must presume that everyone is religious, for only then can that experience be considered universally available or unconditionally given* (i.e., objectively describable). No contemporary phenomenologist can accept this principle, for it defers the phenomenological problem relevant today: given that different people see things differently, we need to account for this seeing differently; given that there is no religious *datum*, we need to account for how the context of experience constitutes it as specifically religious for some.

The Orientation of Life: Jean-Yves Lacoste, Emmanuel Falque and George Pattison

As a movement within contemporary philosophy, the third way of doing phenomenology of religion runs parallel to the second. Yet, its approach could not be more different: Jean-Yves Lacoste, Emmanuel Falque and George Pattison all develop their phenomenologies primarily by interrogating Heidegger rather than Husserl; and, instead of taking it as paradigmatic for the analysis of all experience, they are highly suspicious of any appeal to religious experience.

Starting with Lacoste, whose attack on religious experience targets Schleiermacher explicitly.⁴¹ The problem is again the supposedly “religious” experience’s religious specificity (or theophanic character): “every variety of religious experience contains vaguely delineated events that allow no certainty of what it is the ‘religious man’ (*homo religiosus*, as defined by these experiences and without reference to God) confronts.”⁴² Lacoste, too, attributes the remarkable persistence of this nevertheless ambiguous notion to the fact that “‘religion’ is commonly understood, in the philosophers that treat of it sympathetically, all of which are inscribed in Schleiermacher’s legacy (...), as a native dimension of the humanity of man, as an essential capacity for ecstasy or (...) affectivity.”⁴³ He considers the latter position untenable today,⁴⁴ and therefore rejects the universal availability of religious experience in principle: “It is obvious here that neither being-in-the-world (...) nor even the earthly reality of existence makes us a priori capable of experiences that can be interpreted only by introducing the name God.”⁴⁵ This, in turn, leaves unsecured any possibility of “religion” being somehow empirical:

We may attribute any emotion that we call ‘religious’ to the presence of God, but when we try to analyse it, we shall quickly learn that we can hardly know what it is that has moved us. (...) And when our feeling lays claim to ‘religious’ powers of revelation, yet cannot tell us what it is that it reveals, it is an elementary precaution to hold back provisionally from crediting it with the power to signal divine presence.⁴⁶

Indeed, referring to Otto’s numinous experience in particular, and all “such possible experiences that seem to meet the desire for first-hand knowledge of God, but create more ambiguity than they resolve,” Lacoste asks whether they do not “leave the Holy faceless,” since “they tell of a much-attested presence, but who can say with a cool head that it is God’s presence, and only God’s?”⁴⁷ In reference to the early twentieth-century phenomenologists of religion, Pattison likewise notes that the conception of “religion as a basic phenomenon of human existence” has become untenable: “religion is not a ‘primal datum’ but a cultural construct,” not so much given in experience as formed by the context in which it is experienced.⁴⁸ For him, too, this means turning away from “privileged moments of intense religious experience.”⁴⁹ Falque equally wants to provide an analysis intelligible to people without

religion, which he does by providing a purely natural account of the human condition in terms of its finitude.⁵⁰ By rigidly sticking to this horizon of finitude, he too rules out any possible “extraordinary” experience, like Marion’s saturated phenomenon, which would supposedly transcend the limits incurred by the human condition.⁵¹ However, particular to Falque’s project is the attempt at grounding this phenomenological perspective in the Christian theological tradition, which would itself preclude any “appearing of God” as such: “We have no other experience of God than the experience of (the) man (*l’expérience de l’homme*),”⁵² Otherwise put, in virtue of his Incarnation (assumption of the human form) and the *kenosis* (self-emptying of the divine form) this entails, God appears only insofar as he disappears: he appears *as* a man, rather than as God; the divinity itself is never *given* to be seen.

This conclusion results from a fundamentally different phenomenological methodology, one that has much more in common with Heidegger’s than Husserl’s, and is summed up by Lacoste as follows: “Experience is a function of our historicity,” i.e. our finite existence in the world determines our experience.⁵³ This switch from Husserl to Heidegger thus entails a switch from the language of *givenness* in the analysis of religious experience to that of *existence*.⁵⁴ For his part, Heidegger himself refused to teach a course in philosophy of religion, understood then as a philosophy of religious experience, precisely because it lacks the sufficiently “radical analysis” that recognises “the ‘*historical*’ as determinative element” of that experience.⁵⁵ As indicated by his preparatory notes for a review of Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy*, Heidegger’s problem is again the insufficiently established religious specificity of supposedly “religious” experience through its empirical given alone: “The ‘noumenous’—the ‘special element’ in the holy *minus* the ethical and rational moments. On what is the attachment of the latter to the holy grounded? And does this attachment belong somehow to the originary structure of the noumenous?”⁵⁶ Heidegger is doubtful, suggesting instead that it may be a result of the historical context the subject of this experience finds itself in, namely their confessional faith or already religious existence: “the holy may not be made into a problem as theoretical (...) noema, but rather as correlate of the act-character of ‘faith,’ which itself is to be interpreted only from out of the fundamentally essential experiential context of historical consciousness.”⁵⁷ He therefore rejects the universalised and decontextualised understanding of religious experience: “The view that then the supra-historical sphere of essence as such—given in intuition—would be an immanent heightening of the respective experience itself, is to be energetically dismissed.”⁵⁸

If the empirical given cannot itself ground the religious specificity of supposedly “religious” experience, how then are we supposed to do phenomenology of religion? Well, by looking at what Schleiermacher calls “the imagination,” Flood understands as “the context” of experience, and Heidegger now refers to as “our experiential comportment to God,” for it “gives direction to the specifically *religious* constitution of ‘God’ as ‘phenomenological object.’”⁵⁹ So, instead of providing a phenomenology of religious experience, Heidegger

provides a *phenomenology of religious life*: “religion” is not primarily a matter of experience, but rather of existence or life. In other words, given that the religious specificity of “religious” experience cannot be established on the basis of empirical givenness alone, it must be a question of how what gives itself is subsequently experienced by those for whom it amounts to religion: the phenomenologist of religion should consider the “religious life” that forms the basis on which things are “lived” in experience as “religious” (the *Leben* implied by any religious *Erlebnis*).

This means taking a renewed interest in what Marion bracketed so radically in the name of universality and unconditionality: namely, the *intentionality* through which what gives itself is phenomenalised by a historically or existentially situated subject, the *conditions* under which something is experienced *as* religious. Heidegger explains:

Religion is the specifically religiously intentional, emotional reference of each content of experience to an infinite whole as fundamental meaning. *Devotion*: original streaming in of fullness, without restraint, letting oneself be excited. *To lead back* the respective experience into the inner unity of life. Religious life is the constant renewal of this procedure.⁶⁰

Phenomenologists of religion ought to execute this reduction of lived-experience to the life that makes it possible. Pattison, for example, sets up his phenomenology of the devout life in this way: he understands devotion as “the intentionality of Christian life,” the way in which Christian life is characterised by a “desire to orientate one’s life in relation to God.”⁶¹ It is this (religious) orientation of life (*Leben*), in terms of which things are therefore lived in experience (*erlebt*), that makes for (religious) experience (*Erlebnis*). Otherwise put, the experience cannot be considered “religious” outside the context of a religious life, a life *already* oriented towards God. By “moving away from the early twentieth-century focus on experience,” Pattison thus wants to refocus phenomenology on “what presents itself as a lived commitment.” Rather than a phenomenon experienced, religion is a life lived, what Pattison calls a certain “practice of the self,”⁶² which makes for the experience by contextualising it as meaningful in terms of a particular existence.

In conclusion, contrary to naïvely describing the contents of religious consciousness (the first way) or unfolding the phenomenon’s various modes of givenness (the second way), only as an investigation of the various possible ways of life on the basis of which what gives itself can be lived in experience (the third way) is the phenomenology of religion able to account for the real seeing differently between those who confess a religion and those who do not. In other words, only as a phenomenology of religious life can it move away from an exercise in naïvely *describing* the discernment of invisible realities by religious people and instead start *explaining* how they come to these perceptions. In sum, only as such can the “phenomenology of religion” be a

“science of religion” in any meaningful way today (when religion is no longer regarded as essential to what it means to be human). However, that would require jettisoning the notion that continues to be a pebble in the shoe of anyone who tries to walk phenomenology’s “path of thinking” (*Denkweg*), namely: *religious experience*. Indeed, we would do well to abandon this notion and replace it instead with *religious existence*.

Notes

- 1 Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 24; *The Christian Faith*, 17.
- 2 Janicaud, “The Theological Turn in French Phenomenology.”
- 3 For examples, see: Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 9–10; James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 27; Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 23–24.
- 4 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 5.
- 5 Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 22.
- 6 Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, 15–16.
- 7 Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, 1.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 9 Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 16.
- 10 Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, 7.
- 11 Husserl, *Crisis*; Heidegger, “Phenomenology and Theology.”
- 12 Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 25.
- 13 Smart, *The Religious Experience*, 10.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 3–4.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 16 Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 677–678.
- 17 Pike, *Mystic Union*, 166–168.
- 18 Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, 10.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 20 Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology*, 4.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 170–171.
- 24 Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 1.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 26 Marion, *Believing in Order to See*, 142.
- 27 For this Husserlian notion, see: Husserl, *Hua II*; Franck, *Flesh and Body*. For Henry’s argument and a profound critique, see: Henry, *Incarnation*; Falque, *The Loving Struggle*, 141–173.
- 28 Henry, *Incarnation*, 23 (translation modified).
- 29 See Janicaud, “The Theological Turn,” 99–103.
- 30 See Marion, *Being Given*.
- 31 See Henry, “The Four Principles of Phenomenology.”
- 32 Bultmann, *What Is Theology?*, 64–65, 70–75, 89.
- 33 Benoist, *L’idée de phénoménologie*, 102. For a similar critique, see Nancy and Marion, “Débat,” 262–263.
- 34 Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 124.
- 35 Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 1.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 4; Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 209.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 38 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 8.

- 39 Ibid., 4.
- 40 Ibid., 9. A contemporary phenomenological version of this argument can be found in Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 134–135.
- 41 Lacoste's distaste is clear from his *Histoire de la théologie*, which gives only the bare minimum of space to the discussion of Schleiermacher.
- 42 Lacoste, *The Appearing of God*, 34.
- 43 Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, 101.
- 44 See Lacoste, *Le monde et l'absence d'œuvre*, 23–54.
- 45 Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, 101.
- 46 Lacoste, *The Appearing of God*, 180.
- 47 Ibid., 181.
- 48 Pattison, *A Phenomenology of the Devout Life*, 48.
- 49 Ibid., 44.
- 50 Falque, *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, 14 (translation modified).
- 51 Falque, *The Loving Struggle*, 97–140.
- 52 Falque, *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, 15 (translation modified).
- 53 Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, 49. See Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 244: "One of the most meaningful, *founding* elements of meaning in religious experience is the *historical*."
- 54 Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, 1; Falque, "For a Phenomenology of Religious Life"; Pattison, *Heidegger on Death*.
- 55 Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 246.
- 56 Ibid., 252.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Ibid., 245.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ibid., 243–244.
- 61 Pattison, *A Phenomenology of the Devout Life*, 1.
- 62 Ibid., 20.

22 Hinduism and Phenomenology

Olga Louchakova-Schwartz

The radical difference between Hinduism and phenomenology lies in how they place the notion of the real, which, especially in Vedānta (the leading monotheistic philosophy of Hinduism), is compassed toward the self rather than the objects of its knowledge. Occidental philosophies have long attempted to derive a cosmic Absolute out of consciousness but failed. It would be an overreach to say that Hinduism came up with a wholly unquestionable picture of reality, but Hinduism's picture certainly widens the scope of self-evident intuitions that every science needs in order to claim the truth. By limiting perception, Occidental metaphysics might have removed from consideration "wide fields of real being."¹

According to Indian Vedānta, the mind is not unreal in the sense implied by phenomenology but is as if superimposed on reality and "covers" the truth in the self. Hence, the mind's means of knowledge must be assessed for their capacity not just to know the world but to know the self. This incentivizes the Indian taste for modifying the mind and for reductions directed at uncovering the self. The central reduction is called "the differentiation between the seer and the seen."² Like phenomenological reductions, it leads to transcendental reflection. However, this transcendence is directed inward: that is, away from the vertical or horizontal transcendencies that define the nature of consciousness in phenomenology.

To examine these options in experience, one needs to excavate them from under the reigning etic interpretations of Hinduism. All such interpretations take Indian ideas in isolation from their grounding forms of awareness. According to these interpretations, Hinduism provides a freer, wiser, more straightforward, and nondual version of monotheistic theology. This view goes back to Paul Deussen, an Indologist intellectually influenced by Schopenhauer and Swāmī Vivekānanda. To the West, Vivekānanda's Neo-Vedānta promised much-sought proofs that the soul is indeed immortal; that a self-absorption favored by mystics delivers the ultimate metaphysical truth; that the human person is not just God's image and likeness but is identical in essence with Divine Selfhood.

For perennialists, such as Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, or Huston Smith, syncretic forms of Hinduism provided a refuge from postmodern deconstruction

of the self. However, relativistic deconstruction also proved useful by encouraging new scholarship with a more true-to-life view of Hinduism. As the myth of Vedāntic ur-revelation crumbled, the exalted hermeneutics of Hinduism came into the light, particularly that of Śaṅkara (Śaṅkarācārya), who handled Upaniṣads as a mixture of ritual, mythos, and abstraction that needed to be sorted out in order to ground monotheistic religious claims. His monumental interpretive effort aligned ritualistic injunctions with the datum of introspection and, out of the quilt of the Upaniṣads, extracted a philosophically unifying thread.

Fiercely diverse and polytheistic, Hinduism derived its abstraction out of the milieu of rituals. In the rituals, *Brahman* is their sacred formula, and Brahmin (a man of the sacred formula) is a priest. When the messy Vedic symbolism becomes abstracted into “technologies” for attaining power and immortality, the meaning of the sacred formula on one hand transforms into the Absolute, and on the other transfers onto the human self, equalizing the two. Under the soteriological intent, one wants to know this newly born equation not dispassionately, as a philosopher would, but as a man whose hair is on fire wants to jump into a lake (a traditional simile of Vedānta). One also declares (paraphrasing Śaṅkara): “On the level of the body, I am Your servant; on the level of the soul, I am Your lover; on the level of the self, I am You.” The “You” in question is the cosmic Absolute, who is also the Lord of worlds gross and subtle.³ Recognizing/realizing this Absolute within oneself turns into the highest worship.⁴

The Identity Claim

To seekers of immortality, Hinduism offers a choice between paradise and self-knowledge. The paradise is not timeless: the duration of stay there depends on the results of past actions (karma). By contrast, self-knowledge is independent of time and karma-independent and ever happy.⁵ Obviously, the body dies: in a search for immunity from death and suffering, the early Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad analytically breaks the person into parts in search of something self-subsistent.⁶ Other Upaniṣads follow suit: part by part, they conduct an ontological destruction of the person until finding a baseline that cannot be discarded—which is the self, or consciousness, the first given. Compare, in Husserl:⁷

The subjective a priori precedes the being of God and world, the being of everything, individually and collectively, for me, the thinking subject. Even God is for me what he is in consequence of my own accomplishments of consciousness; here, too, I must not look aside lest I commit a supposed blasphemy, rather I must see the problem.

However, where Husserl saw the problem, the Upaniṣads saw a possibility. Ideas of the rituals become transformed: for example, the earlier Kāṭha

Āraṇyaka describes a magic Vedic ritual that provides its sponsor with a new body after death, and in the later Kāṭha Upaniṣad, this concrete magical idea of the ritual turns into the more abstract idea of the immortality of the self.⁸ The Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad makes the cosmos anthropomorphic and then makes consciousness into a universal “foundation,” immortal by default. Such transformations of symbolic forms of the ritual are pervasive to the whole corpus of Upaniṣadic texts, and only a few of them has been studied yet.

Amalgamated with symbolism and unsystematic, these evolving abstractions lacked convincingness.⁹ Gradually, through many debates and cycles of practice, the know-how of self-realization was born. Not one, but many, these human technologies are aimed at the inward recognition that one’s individual self-consciousness (*ātman*) is, in truth, the self-subsistent, timeless, and limitless (i.e., immortal by nature) Reality (*satyam*) of this Universe (*Brahman*, defined as *sat-cit-ānanda*, “truth/existence-consciousness/limitless fullness”), whereby all manifestation is (a) conditioned on the being of this Self, and (b) time- and space-bound, and thereby unreal (*mithyā*)—or some variation thereof. Let us call this position the Identity Claim (IC).

Realization of the IC requires redirecting the sense of reality away from all the objects and onto the subject of consciousness. According to Śaṅkara’s theory of illusion/dependent reality, *māyā*/illusion needs to be removed from the self: the mind needs to be convinced that in reality it doesn’t exist. This, however, doesn’t wipe out the whole of cognition; it changes a single mental mode known as the “I”-maker, *ahaṅkāra*. This is a type of relationship by which one’s self-awareness becomes identified with the body, thoughts, or senses. One can easily stop thinking of oneself as the body—but then one has to think of oneself as something else. Hence, in realizing the IC, *ahaṅkāra* has to detach itself from all the mental “coverings” of the self and attach to pure self-awareness. (See more on the ontological reduction of self-awareness in the next section.) Most methodologies agree that at the end of the process, if it is successful, the universe and one’s self-awareness appear as one:¹⁰

[W]hen, by *śruti* [canonical texts taught in the oral tradition], by the master’s favor, by practice of Yoga, and by the Grace of God, there arises knowledge of one’s own Self, then, as a man regards food he has eaten as one with himself, the Adept Yogin sees the universe as one with his Self, absorbed as the universe is in the Universal ego which he has become.

The teaching begins with the vision of Vedānta delivered in the form of good news (something like “Do not be afraid to die, troubled ego; not only are you already immortal, but nothing can harm you. You are the Self of this universe”).¹¹ In the absence of a straightforward record of revelation, the Vision is the most problematic area in the teaching. Traditionally, the Vision

is expressed as “*ātman* [the individual self] is *Brahman* [the cosmic Self],” or “I am That” in a colloquial rendition.¹² But the idea delivered by this so-called *mahāvākya*, “great saying,” is far from revelatory: not only, as already mentioned, is it connected with the abstraction of rituals or interpretive errors, but it may also have grammatical roots. *Brahman*, the sacred formula, resonates with *Brahmin*, the man “of the sacred formula” (i.e., the priest/); and on the other hand, *Brāhman* (a noun of neuter gender, stressed on the first syllable) grammatically becomes *Brahmán* (a noun of masculine gender, with stress on the second syllable): that is, a god.

Ontological Reductions: Finding Ātman

A famous idea of Hinduism is that one can control one’s mind by means of various internal practices.¹³ In the cultural transfer to the West, these practices were reduced to a mere work of attention known as meditation. But *in situ* of the tradition, these practices modify one’s sense of reality. For example, the *Vijñānabhairava* of Kashmiri Śaivism describes one hundred and twelve practices that are all dedicated to discerning Reality.¹⁴ While all such practices reconstitute the sense of reality by directing it toward the ego pole, empirically it feels more like discernment between the real and the unreal. In Vedānta specifically, one also has to recognize that this newly posited reality, while indivisible, can be defined as existence/truth, awareness, and limitless fullness, which all pertain to the same ipseity of the self.¹⁵ Then, the self *empirically* turns into an absolute truth in the existence of all contingent cognitions, and thereby into God:¹⁶

To Him in the effulgent form facing the South, whose light, which is Existence itself, shines forth entering the objects which are almost non-existent, —to Him incarnate in the Guru who instructs the disciples in the Vedic text “That thou art”; —to Him who being realized there will be no more return to the ocean of *saṃsāra*, to Him [Śiva] be this bow.

Consequently, a reduction that uncovers such a self needs to reach it not in an objectification by a theory but as one’s individual, lived, first-person essence distilled out of the mixture with “almost nonexistent” objects. This distillation is made by the so-called differentiation between the seer and the seen, *dṛg-dṛśya-viveka*.¹⁷ The *viveka* (discrimination) element of this negation also separates the real from the unreal. The aim of this reduction is to “find *who* the seer is”¹⁸—that is, find the self that can fit with the IC:¹⁹

I am not the body, nor the sense-organs,
nor Prana, nor the mind, nor the intellect;
for these are all embraced by the “my”-thought,
in the playground of the “this”-thought.

Dṛg-dṛśya-viveka and other ontological reductions toward the pure subject do not lead to a single, specific experience. Rather, they uncover a horizon of possibility for the showing of the pure ego.²⁰ Within this horizon is the experience of awareness being aware of itself (*nirvikalpa samādhi*); experiences of unreal cognitions against the backdrop of a real ego (*savikalpa samādhi*); the shifts between the presence and absence of the psychological ego; and so forth. In all such experiences, the ego pole appears as real against the rest of the phenomenal field, which is experienced either as unreal or as dependent in its existence on the ego pole. This realization is also supported psychologically: for example, Śrī Ranjit Maharaj, a Master in the Central Indian Inchehiri traditional lineage of teachers, used to say *Forget yourself*: that is, cancel all memory in favor of being the self. Here is an example of satsang [‘association with truth,’ a gathering during which one asks questions and receives clarifications from a teacher who realized the IC] with Śrī Ranjit Maharaj:²¹

- Questioner:* If there is no right and no wrong, then are there any mistakes from your point of view, or is everything always correct?
- Maharaj:* When everything is nothing, what will be correct? There is nothing, so what is correct? What is real exists. It is called the Reality. One thing is real, but it is not even a thing also, so we say everything is He. Knowledge starts from where? From Zero. It starts from Zero, so how can it be true? Nothing is true. When nothing is true, then nothing can ever be correct also. It is the mind’s work, or thought, when you say this is good and this is bad, or this is true or this is a lie. So, anything that happens can never be true. But your mind says true, what to do?

In differentiation between the seer and the seen, the ego pole first comes to life as the witness consciousness—that is, sustaining the ego’s intentional thrust. However, in contemplation, one can temporarily cancel cognitions: the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad refers to folding them like “a piece of leather,” starting with the intuition of space.²² Then the ego pole stops being a witness, because there is nothing to witness. The obtained ego is empty of cognitions but not empty of knowledge. This knowledge, *aparōkṣa*, is the self’s knowledge of itself by itself,²³ without objectification. Thus, Vedānta posits the self as the pure, nonsensory intuition that is like the sun, is self-luminous. It can illumine the objects of knowledge, but in itself, it doesn’t need another light to be light. The mind makes use of this grounding intuition “by superimposition”: this intuition functions within the layers of the mind—as apodictic certainty in *buddhi* (the intellect) and as assertoric judgments in *manas* (the uncertain psychological mind).

Inner Evidence

In reduction, the first-person character of the self comes to the forefront as real, dimensionless and boundaryless, and, so to say, filling up the perceived universe. Bhagavan Śrī Ramana Maharshi, a famous Vedāntic sage, said on his deathbed to his disciples as they were mourning his imminent departure: “Where can I go? I am here.”²⁴ The tradition stresses that

the Upanishadic seers did not rest satisfied with an objective direction of the mind, as is usual in the path of devotion and duty, or subjective withdrawal, as is done in *yoga*. They combined the two processes and reaped the highest benefit in the form of *aparokṣanubhūti* of the self as Brahman, of the microcosm as the macrocosm. Their life’s goal lay not in the mere realization of an isolated Self, but in realizing their identity with God in all His Fullness—in His transcendence and immanence.²⁵

The question is, then, How does the residue of reduction, even so purified of any intentional directedness, reveal such an Absolute? As Vedānta says, one finds the *ātman*/self but doesn’t know what it is. One has yet to firmly recognize *ātman* as *Brahman* by reasoning, *manana*: Vedānta brings in reflective logic, which demonstrates, analytically, this kind of self as the Absolute. “In me, in the space of awareness, rises this celestial city called the world. Therefore, how am I not Brahman which is all knower and the cause of all?”²⁶

One reflects on the properties in the self-appearance of *ātman*, such as fullness, constancy, sentience, its relationships with objects, and so forth. Then judgments are made that if *ātman* is this way, it must be the cosmic *Brahman*. The problem, however, is that all such reasoning requires a preexisting assumption that there is a universal Absolute of sorts, to be called *Brahman*. This depends on the revelatory authority of the Upaniṣads. But as already stated, the Upanishadic *Brahman* is, *de facto*, a synthetic *a priori* generated out of the transformations of language and the symbolism of rituals. In other words, *Brahman*/the Absolute metaphysically may or may not be: there is no textual revelation with God speaking or revealing himself in any way: the only reference one finds is ruminations that there must be some kind of first cause behind everything.

Paradoxically, a logically incompletely determined *ātman* gives itself with absolute certainty. This certainty doesn’t need any synthetic activity from the ego—it is existence itself, an absolutely homogeneous, stable, and ever-present foundation that the mind can always return to. The teaching tradition uses the metaphor of a falcon always returning to its perch on the falconer’s glove. It is “a stateless state,”²⁷ “hard as a rock,” indivisible “like a crystal of salt”—in other words, absolutely certain.

Consequently, there emerges an interesting situation. According to Husserl, the sense of certainty arises from intentional fulfillment. At the same

time, “[T]his ego—that I, understood as the ultimately constitutive subjectivity, exists for myself with apodictic necessity.”²⁸ In Husserl, these two statements read as a contradiction: if intentionality and its objects are *a posteriori* of the apodictic certainty of the ego, how can the idea of truth arise from intentional fulfillment (unless truth and apodictic self-giveness are two different things—which they develop to be, in the late Husserl). This contradiction, which arises out of the attribution of truth to intentionality and its fulfillment, doesn’t exist for Vedānta, because Vedānta identifies the sense of truth with *ātman* per se. One feels an apodictic certainty of truth when one experiences the unveiling of *ātman* from under the layers of the mind. In other words, whenever we experience a moment of the luminous certainty of truth, the mind becomes transparent to *ātman*, which is what we experience as truth. Indeed, an instance of complete apprehension of an ideal mathematical truth—for example, in the study of imaginary numbers—feels exactly the same as the pure *ātman* obtained by reduction.²⁹ So, Vedāntic predications have an effect of truth simply because they intend on the principle of truth itself: the cure, so to say, is in the cured.

Making the allegedly nonexistent ego pole into the central atom of truth, Vedānta uncovers a unique metaphysical principle: it is both ideal (in being the essence of truth) and real (as the empirical first-personness); it is always self-identical and, as pure intuition, harbors a totality of cognitive possibilities. Most importantly, one can apprehend it in a direct intuition of oneself.

Hinduism’s Edition of the Ontology of Consciousness

For Occidental philosophy, Husserl’s reductions were a rare, groundbreaking innovation. Reductions revealed that consciousness consists of structured relationships and that these structures can be either visible or hidden, anonymous or languaged, analyzable as parts or wholes, and subjected to philosophical determinations of sense. Ordinarily, in explaining knowledge one has to account for connections between the external and the internal, or the mental and the physical. Reductions solved this explanatory difficulty by wiping out metaphysics and treating consciousness as a complex of ideal relationships with a rigor of nearly mathematical formalism. Getting rid of the ontological status in favor of formal analyses didn’t affect presentations of the objects of knowledge, because objects have properties. However, the subject of knowledge—the empirical ego pole—doesn’t have properties in the sense that objects do; it is already hardly visible, even in the natural attitude. Hence, reductions simply wiped it out.³⁰ On account of the absence of this relatum, relationships with objects were deemed nonordinary. But somehow these nonordinary relationships themselves retained qualities,³¹ and the ghostly ego even managed to keep it all together by syntheses of an “intimately fused unity of a peculiar character.”³² Reductions had nothing to say as to *what* was synthesized out of *what* and by means of *what*. The question of “what” had to be disposed with,³³ replaced by a focus on pure

phenomena—presentations. From here, the ontology of consciousness had to be caged within the limits assigned to it by reductions; and reductions themselves were rooted in the implicit empiricist, realistic metaphysics. The attitude created by reductions carried the traces of his realistic metaphysics despite claims otherwise.

Hinduism followed an altogether different trajectory. Proceeding not from the natural/scientific attitude of twentieth-century Europe but from extremely heterogeneous, symbolic, ritualistic consciousness, its epoché early on focused on the self. The array of themes was thus condensed into a single eschatological aim, to escape from death. With stakes that high, tradition experimented with many practical reductions and attitudes. This created, down the road, different ontologies of consciousness. In its focus on revealing the ego pole, Hinduism contradicts the phenomenological ontology of consciousness; and in reverse, applying the formal phenomenological theory of intentionality to (e.g.) Vedānta turns the IC into a work of fiction. Their mutual annihilation is based on the content and direction of reductions: what is visible under one reduction disappears under the other.

All ontologies of consciousness in Hinduism (not only those mentioned in this paper) provide inner evidence to their philosophical claims, and all such evidence can be described and thereby subjected to phenomenological analysis. Imaginal variations of Husserl's method appear to be quite a fitting tool for this; however, one should remember the mutually opposing nature of reductions. The juxtaposition of such ontologies of consciousness highlights an astounding fact that not only perceptions but formal maps of consciousness, the ideality of its essences, depend on how one places the notion of reality. Vedānta declares that what is a day for a *jñānī* (knower of the self) is a night for the *ajñānī* (one ignorant of the self), and vice versa. The other “real,” of the self, extends into infinite pure certainty, fulfilled and immortal—good news for living and dying with dignity, “instead of being,” as Swāmī Dayananda Saraswati used to say, “a victim of every passing bug.”

Notes

- 1 Cf. Husserl's criticism of skeptical theories that “try to limit human knowledge considerably and on principle, and especially if they remove from the possible knowledge wide fields of real being” (*Logical Investigations*, 1:76).
- 2 *Dr̥g-dr̥śya-viveka*; see also Menezes, “Is Viveka a Unique Pramāṇa?”
- 3 Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad, in Śrī Aurobindo, “Letters.”
- 4 Śaṅkara, *Nirguṇa Mānasa Pūja*.
- 5 Śrī Ramana Maharshi, *Who Am I?*; Śaṅkarācārya, *Atma-Bodha*.
- 6 See in Hume, *Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 152–153.
- 7 Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 251.
- 8 Witzel, *Katha Aranyaka*.
- 9 For Śaṅkarācārya's apologetics of *Brahman* as the Absolute, see, e.g., *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, 20; as the self, *ibid.*, 29, 126.
- 10 Sankaracharya, *Dakshinamurti Stotra*, 1, sections 14–15, 8.
- 11 Swāmī Dayananda Saraswati, *In the Vision*; Shastri, *Avadhut Gita*.

- 12 Śrī Nisargadatta Maharaj, *I Am That*.
- 13 Buddhānanda, *Mind*.
- 14 Singh, *Vijñānabhairava*.
- 15 Vidyāraṇya, *Pañcadaśī*.
- 16 Sankarcharya, *Dakshinamurti Stotra*, 3, 53.
- 17 Śaṅkarācārya, *Drg-Drśya-Viveka*.
- 18 Lemkin and Godman, *Call Off the Search*.
- 19 Lakshmidhar, *Advaita Makaranda*, 19, verse 8. For the earlier, related concept of *neti-neti*, “not this, not this” (Br̥U 2.3.6), see Diwaka, “Upaniṣadic Method.”
- 20 Cf. Singh, *Vijñānabhairava*.
- 21 Śrī Ranjit Maharaj, *Illusion vs. Reality*, 135–136. For egocentrism in Vedānta, cf. “I am the most significant”; “I am timeless awareness-fullness”; “I am what I want to be” in Swāmī Dayananda Saraswati, *In the Vision*, Table of Contents, unpaginated.
- 22 Hume, *Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 411.
- 23 Śaṅkarācārya, *Aparokṣhānubhūti*.
- 24 Hartel, *Sage*.
- 25 *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, xxxvii.
- 26 Lakshmidhara, *Advaita Makaranda*, 13.
- 27 Śrī Siddharameshwar Maharaj, *Amrut Laya*.
- 28 Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 251.
- 29 Personal experience of the author.
- 30 Cf. “in our description relation to an experiencing ego is inescapable, but the experience described is not an experiential complex having an ego-presentation as its part” (Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2: 101); Paul Natorp, quoted by Husserl, *ibid.*, 103: “If anyone can catch his consciousness in anything else than the existence of a content for him, I am unable to follow him.”
- 31 Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2:119–121.
- 32 Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 1:192–193. For limitations of the mereological account of identity, see Cameron, “Composition.”
- 33 For the phenomenological dismissal of metaphysical reference, see Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 1:178: “This ‘clearing up’ takes place in the framework of a phenomenology of knowledge, a phenomenology oriented, as we saw, to the essential structures of pure experience and to the structures of sense [*Sinnbestande*] that belong to these. From the beginning, as at all later stages, its scientific statements involve not the slightest reference to real existence: no metaphysical, scientific and, above all, no psychological assertions can therefore occur among its premises.”

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