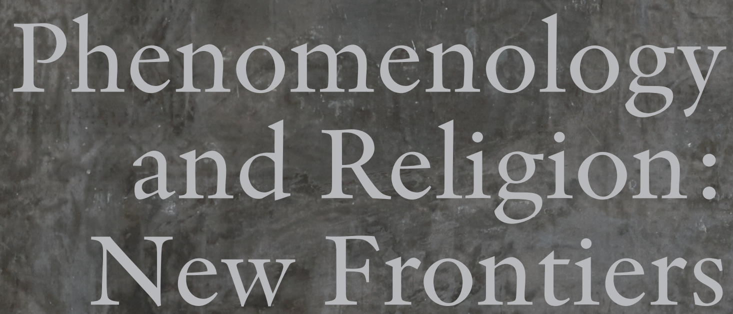

Phenomenology and Religion: New Frontiers

Edited by
Jonna Bornemark & Hans Ruin

SÖDERTÖRN
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PHENOMENOLOGY AND RELIGION:
NEW FRONTIERS

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Introduction

In a famous letter from Edmund Husserl to Rudolf Otto from 1919, Husserl comments on the strange effect that his phenomenological philosophy seems to have on the religious orientation of his students, it makes ”protestants out of catholics and catholics out of protestants.”[1] The phenomenological mode of thinking seems to opens up a space of reflection in which religious themes and concerns obtain a new philosophical weight and urgency, so as to bridge or at least make problematic the apparently strict separation between reason and faith. In Husserl's own intellectual development these two strands are already clearly intertwined, yet rarely thematized as such. In another letter from 1919, he even confesses that his own move from mathematics to philosophy ran parallel to and was inspired by his conversion from Judaism to Christianity, and in private conversations he is to have said that he saw his philosophical work as a path toward God.[2] The God mentioned in his philosophical writings is often a philosopher's God, a metonym for absolute rationality and intelligibility, as well as a name for a radical transcendence. But he saw the possibility of a renewed understanding of religion not in the construction of a rational theology, but rather in a radicalized exploration of interiority, through a return to the "inner life", as he writes in a letter to Wilhelm Dilthey on this matter. Thus he also ends his *Cartesian Meditations* with a quotation from Augustine, "in the interiority of man dwells truth." Against the standard image of orthodox phenomenology, as a philosophy of purified rationality and as a "rigourous science," we should instead be aware of the way in which the remarkably fecund

1. The letter is published in *Das Maß des Verborgenen. Heinrich Ochsener zum Gedächtnis*, eds. Curt Ochwadt and Erwin Tecklenborg, Hannover, 1981, 159.
2. Adelgundis Jaegerschmidt, ”Gespräche mit Edmund Husserl: 1931–1936” in *Stimmen der Zeit*, 56.

philosophical development initiated by Husserl already at the outset also sought to free new avenues for thinking the religious and its relation to the philosophical. Both in the work of Max Scheler and in Edith Stein, as well as in the great efforts of Martin Heidegger in his early years to establish a critical dialogue with Lutheran theology and its Pauline roots on the basis of his analytic of facticity, we can see how this original impetus led to developments which have transformed the way we can think about the religious and its reciprocal relation to philosophy, in ways which still remain to be fully articulated.

The special relation between phenomenology and religion was highlighted and brought into focus in more recent times through a critical book published by Dominique Janicaud in 1991, *The theological turn of French phenomenology*[3]. Referring to the phenomenological work of, notably, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry and Emmanuel Levinas, Janicaud argued that contemporary French phenomenology in its move toward the phenomenon of the inapparent was about to abandon the methodological atheism that he saw as a defining characteristic of its original ethos. Some years later Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo organized a symposium around the question of religion which led to the publication *On religion*, which in itself contributed greatly to the renewed interest in religious and theological concerns from the point of view of phenomenological and deconstructive analyses, notably in the work of John Caputo and Hent de Vries, among others.[4] In the decade following this publication there has been a rise of interest in the constellation "phenomenology and religion", from the point of view both of philosophers and of theologians and religious scholars.

In May 2008 the philosophy department at Södertörn University in Stockholm hosted an international conference on the theme "New Frontiers: Phenomenology and Religion." On one level its purpose was to bring together scholars from all of these fields to survey the present interconnectedness of phenomenology, post-phenomenology (deconstruction), and theology around the understanding of the

3. *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie français*, Paris: Éditions de l'Éclat, 1991; *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, trans. Bernard G. Prusak, et al., New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.
4. *La religion,* Paris: Seuil, 1996.

religious as such, its experience and articulation. It was also an experiment in a new kind of intellectual dialogue between philosophy and Christian theology which especially in the Swedish situation was something quite novel. But the core of the problematic had to do with the critical articulation of religious experience, as exemplified mostly, but not exclusively, to the Judeo-Christian tradition. In naming the encounter "New Frontiers" the question of limits and borders was highlighted. The point of the contributions and discussions was not to secure and establish borders, but rather to negotiate, displace, and explore new borders and border zones. In the face of a rising religious fundamentalism, it is more important than ever to develop the means of a critical and self-critical rationality that can bring to articulation the fundamental existential, linguistic and spiritual predicaments of the human subject in a non-exclusive sense. Herein lies the great promise and possibility of phenomenology, that it can through its very questioning of a realist or naturalist metaphysics, open itself to the articulation of such limit experiences.

Among the key themes in such an exploration is the dichotomy of immanence and transcendence, which obtains a central place in Husserlian phenomenology, and which continues to be renegotiated throughout the continued development of phenomenological and post-phenomenological philosophy. If phenomenology is the study of immanence, of that which presents itself to consciousness, what role can transcendence play in a phenomenological analysis? Is not transcendence, both in its realist and its metaphysical and theological sense, precisely that which phenomenology can not handle? Or is it in fact only through a consistent phenomenological analysis that the true *meaning* and significance of transcendence can be interpreted? The move from a positing and constituting subjectivity and its correlated object to a subjectivity which understands itself ultimately as the recipient of being as gift and event is not simply a move away from orthodox phenomenology, but a movement within its own interior logic, which at the same time transforms some of its basic categories. But the critical discussion of the ultimate legitimacy of these transgressive movements in the direction of the radically transcendent and other, is precisely what defines contemporary phenomenological research, which comes forth very clearly in several of the contributions.

It should be made clear that the purpose of the present collection is not to enhance or contribute to something that could perhaps merit the title of a theological turn in phenomenology, nor to abandon the specific ethos of a critical rationality in favor of a confessional identity. But it is to deepen the self-awareness and reflexive capacity of contemporary phenomenological and post-phenomenological thinking in a non-dogmatic spirit through a learning dialogue with and articulation of the religious experience. This means making less certain the limits between rationality and irrationality, as well as the secular and the non-secular and the religious and the non-religious, in the ultimate concern for a non-constrained and free thinking and the creation of new conceptual configurations.

In the first contribution, Laszlo Tengelyi provides a starting-point in giving a short background to the so-called "Theological turn" in French phenomenology, and the criticism formulated by Dominique Janicaud. Tengelyi claims that phenomenology, especially in the French tradition, was led to examine its own limits, as well as the limits of phenomena. The interest in theology and theological problems he interprets as following from these investigations, not from the presupposition of a God. On the contrary, the turn to religion can be seen as part of a revolt against a metaphysical and transcendent God, and as an argument for a radicalized sense of immanence. Both Jean-Luc Marion and Michel Henry have contributed to liberate theology from the impact of its metaphysical tradition. Yet Tengelyi prefers in the end to leave it as an open question if they have managed to transgress the limit between phenomenology and theology.

The relationship between phenomenology and religion is not limited to Christian theology, but has bearings on religious experience from many different traditions. Jad Hatem shows that a phenomenologist like Henry can be used in the reading of the philosopher, mystic, and Sufi, Suhrawardî, who thus can be understood as a proto-phenomenologist. Hatem's analysis is centered on the phenomena of Ipseity: the self that can never be seen, and can never be experienced "from the outside", but only through the life of the body and its immediate self-revelation. Both in Suhrawardî and Henry this ipseity is under-

stood as a pure light and related to God. Both of them also object to traditions that claim that God's knowledge is possible only through the element of exteriority, and that the separation of object from subject is necessary in order for the phenomena to show itself. Instead they both argue that the essence of manifestation is an ipseity and immediacy before any such separation.

The theme of religion within phenomenology is not limited to the so called "Theological turn" in the second half of the 20th century. In her contribution Jonna Bornemark argues that the preconditions for such a turn were present already in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and were explicitly developed by Max Scheler and Edith Stein, both of which can be read as precursors to the turn to religion in later phenomenology. Scheler for example develops a phenomenology of love that shows a richer structure of intentionality, and displays an openness for phenomena that escapes conceptual and cognitive thought. Both Stein and Scheler can be characterized in terms of a "mystical realism", arguing for an intentionality that transcends the ego and points towards the presuppositions that make subjectivity possible.

In the following contribution, Christian Sommer recalls another early dialogue between phenomenology and theology around 1920–30, between Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann. Through the example of the problem of sin, Heidegger's relation to secularization, as well as his debt to Christianity, is examined. Sommer claims that the early Heidegger could be understood as an Aristotelian and a secularized Lutheran. Heidegger's analysis is based on a certain type of atheism, it is a "turning away" from the God of the philosophers, which at the same time makes a return to the God of negative theology possible. But this does not lead to a common ground of phenomenology and theology, instead it forces us to go back to anthropology, and the "being human" as primary for being the philosopher and the theologian.

It is not only Janicaud who has perceived an inherent danger in a growing intimacy between phenomenology and religion; this was also a problem for Paul Ricoeur. In her article Morny Joy discusses how Ricoeur attempted to keep his philosophical work strictly separate from religious allegiance, and to stay "within the limits of reason alone". But nevertheless he became increasingly interested in areas

where philosophy and religion overlap, not least in questions on ethics and justice. In his analysis of love and the gift he could not avoid finding such overlaps between religious and philosophical language. Joy suggests that the discussions of the relation between phenomenology and religion would benefit from further readings of Ricoeur.

Both love and the gift are recurring themes in the turn to theology, and are central to the phenomenology of Marion. In her article Rosa Maria Lupo discusses Marion's conception of God as an erotic phenomena, and thus as the saturated phenomenon par excellence. This saturated phenomenon, which exceeds every egological intuition, shows itself as unconditioned and irreducible, and as a precondition for all subjectivity. It is a phenomenon that can never be reduced to the ego. Such a phenomenology thus brings about an inversion in the structure of intentionality, where the given turns out to be primordial to every ego. In the phenomenon of love the giving is the primary event, a giving from a "God without Being".

The relation between phenomenology and religion also has strong Nietzschean roots. Ludger Hagedorn follows a Nietzschean line of thinking and finds a *twofold* potentiality in religion: On one hand it has a tendency to close itself off from worldly questions and to block further questioning of its attempts to safeguard its own essence. But this is a tendency that is also present in modernity. On the other hand religion may allow us to rediscover the unthought side of rationality, since religion can never be reduced to a rational totalizing of certain worldviews. Here Hagedorn suggests that Jan Patočka offers a way to develop the idea of transcendence as an undoing of pre-given orders and static interpretations of the world. But this can only be done through accepting otherness as an integral and irreducible part of one's own identity.

The dangers of bringing religion back into the philosophical discussion are emphasized in the contribution of Fredrika Spindler. She takes her starting-point in Gilles Deleuze and offers a critique of phenomenology, and an alternative understanding of immanence and transcendence. With Deleuze, she understands the plane of immanence as the ground of all philosophy in its activity of creating concepts, an immanence without any need for transcendent values. Instead of contrasting immanence with transcendence, she contrasts it with chaos,

which is what irrupts as the un-grounding of thought. She finds in both religion and phenomenology an undeniable call for transcendence. Even though the phenomenological concept of transcendence emphasizes radical alterity and limitation of rationality, she suggests with Deleuze that transcendence always implicitly prepares the way for political order based on fixity and repression.

Marius Timmann Mjaaland, on the other hand, finds an opposite risk in a phenomenology that does not allow itself to talk about ultimates. He takes up a discussion with Derrida and takes his starting-point in the nominalist discussion on the name. He asks what there is in a name, and how something ultimately can be named. Timmann Mjaaland claims in three readings of one and the same passage, that Derrida's way of relating subjectivity to alterity is problematic. It tends to collapse the distinction between alterity and subjectivity, thus making the articulation of true alterity impossible. Instead he argues for the acceptance of an ultimate Otherness, *prior to* definition.

Derrida and his non-dual ontology is the theme also in Björn Thorsteinsson's article. But here the central theme is whether there is a future for justice and emancipation. This question leads him to explore the relation between materialism and religion today, together with their messianic dimensions. He claims that Christianity implies a Difference, a rupture of the homogeneity of time, but that it also has a tendency to close this gap. With Derrida Thorsteinsson proposes that this dualistic either-or situation could be resituated through a "hauntology" that makes it possible to think beyond the static opposition between being and non-being, and to think what is outside the present horizon. This leads to the possibility to do justice to what is not (yet). Thorsteinsson develops this further with help from Agamben, and claims that where Derrida tends to think about justice without an active subject, Agamben develops the hauntology into a more empowering version and opens up for a future of emancipation.

In Jayne Svenungsson's contribution both messianism, and the twofold character of religion is brought up. She states that reactive tendencies in religion, often referred to as "traditional" religiosity, are generally based on modern readings of the Bible. In contrast to such "traditional" religiosity she points to the continuous self-criticism that takes place within religious traditions. Her example is the idea of

the messianic in Judaism. This idea has two sides. It is both a fanatic idea of Judgment Day and an idea of history as open-ended. Drawing on Levinas she focuses on the temporality inherent in messianism: an analysis that shows that the self is never entirely present to itself, but must be understood as a promise of a future, and as a call for responsibility for its immemorial past. This idea of a critical messianism can contribute to the contemporary debate on religion, and one way of taking responsibility for the past is to struggle to restore previously unheard voices. The futural aspect of religion also shows that a tradition, in its promise to respond, does not already have a fixed answer, but always tries to answer anew.

This openness of religion is the theme of Arne Grøn's article. He claims that religion is about transformation and about seeing differently, and thus seeing beyond the obvious through taking the world differently. Grøn states that our seeing is always limited, and always has its horizon. The investigation of transcendence and the meaning of a "beyond," thus, has to be an investigation into the horizontal — which at the same time implies the limiting and the opening up of sight. The horizon constitutes our immanence, what is given to us, and the investigation of this immanence emphasizes the passivity and alterity that is involved in "having" a horizon. The theme of horizon opens up the question of immanence, and shows transcendence and immanence as problematic and intertwined concepts. In the problematization of these concepts he suggests that philosophy can be challenged by religion as a human concern.

The question of "beyond" is discussed in another way by Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, in a contribution that focuses on the phenomenon of immensity; the hugeness of the world as the experience of the "too big", that is, of a *beyond-within* measures and limits. She proposes that the discussions of the immensity of the world could make it possible to establish a common ground to discuss the relation between phenomenology and religion. Such a common ground would be a "before" the split between religion and philosophy, not in a chronological sense, but as the awakening of a certain feeling and attitude that precedes the distinction between phenomenology and religion. She thus develops a sensitivity to immensity as the creative shadow of the uncontrollable and incalculable.

A subjectivity in lack of total control plays a significant role also in Ola Sigurdson's contribution. Through an analysis of prayer, Sigurdson wants to examine the potential for a different kind of religious subjectivity than the one that we normally think of today. In prayer the human being responds to a primary action in which the subject receives itself. This way of relating to such a primary action is both embodied and social, and it is also a decentered act that renounces all claims of control over the addressee. It shows a transcendence that is not opposite to immanence, but rather a transcendence within immanence that breaks with the tendency to circle around itself. Starting out from such a subjectivity, religion would not have to be understood as inherently violent and as something that needs to be expelled from public life, but could instead contribute to it.

Prayer is also the theme of Hans Ruin's article that explores how an analysis of prayer can enrich the phenomenology of religion, drawing on the comparison between poetic and religious language, partly through a reading of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. Ruin shows how prayer can be understood as a way of calling forth an experience of selfhood that is not independent and autonomous, but dependent and belonging. Prayer shows itself as an experience of and with language, where language is not limited to propositional language. Prayer, as a poetic saying, cannot be true in the same way as propositional language, since it does not say "what is." But this does not simply place it outside of any truth-discourse. On the contrary, it has its root in an experience of letting truth happen. In the appraisal the praying person lets the gift come into being. Prayer shows the world as a gift, but a gift of meaning, and of language. The analysis of prayer is therefore important to the understanding of religion, as well as to the understanding of the finitude of human life.

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Hans Ruin and Jonna Bornemark
Stockholm, April 2010

On the Border of Phenomenology and Theology[1]

LÁSZLÓ TENGELYI

In the 1960s and 70s, phenomenology played no prevalent role. Even Ricœur and Levinas, who, at this time, wrote some of their major works, were largely disregarded.[2] At the end of the 1970s, Vincent Descombes presented a survey of the past forty-five years of French philosophy, attempting to show how the era of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty had been replaced by an epoch of structuralism and post-structuralism.[3] Not surprisingly, the last section of this book was entirely consecrated to Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze. We can add also the evidence of Alan Megill's *The Prophets of Extremity*, which is centered, after the two first chapters dedicated to Nietzsche and Heidegger, entirely upon Foucault and Derrida.[4] Since the 1980s, however, phenomenology has become, especially in France, once more an influential current of thought. Meanwhile, it has been largely reshaped and altered. The first to recognize the renewal and the transformation of phenomenology in France was Dominique Janicaud. In 1991, more than a decade after the appearance of Descombes's

1. The following considerations contain an abridged version of a contribution to *Phänomenologie und Theologie*, eds Klaus Held and Thomas Söding, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2009.
2. This is true of Manfred Frank's *Was ist Neostrukturalismus?*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984 [1983], as well as of Jürgen Habermas's work *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988 [1985]. In Germany, there is, however, at least one significant exception to this rule: Bernhard Waldenfels's *Phänomenologie in Frankreich*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987 [1983].
3. Cf. Vincent Descombes, *Le même et l'autre. Quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française*, Paris: Minuit, 1979.
4. Allan Megill, *The Prophets of Extremity*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1985.

book, Janicaud published his famous pamphlet on the *Theological Turn in French Phenomenology*.[5] The list of the thinkers at the forefront of this text is quite different from that contained, twelve years earlier, in Descombes's book. Besides the later Merleau-Ponty, Janicaud considers Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, and Jean-Louis Chrétien; he opposes to these thinkers mainly Paul Ricœur, but, occasionally, also one or another philosopher of the younger generation, above all Marc Richir.[6] Derrida is hardly taken into account; Foucault is not mentioned. At this time, even Deleuze is almost entirely disregarded. Of course, this is by no means a sign of any disparaging judgment upon the great post-structuralists. They are considered as almost classical thinkers, who, however, are not immediately concerned with recent developments.

As a diagnostic description of a profound change in the intellectual climate of France, the notion of a 'theological turn" has a certain convincing power. The French left, *la gauche*, which had dominated the intellectual life in Paris up until the second half of the 1980s, recoiled, to some extent, after 1989. In the 1990s, some original thinkers with great erudition came to the fore, and they were rather resistant to any kind of political radicalism and showed themselves committed to, or at least attracted by, the Christian religion. Firstly, I will mention a thinker who is not so much a phenomenologist as a historian of philosophy and mainly a specialist in Schelling, but who, as an expert on Husserl and Heidegger, is at least close to phenomenology as well. I am thinking, here, of Jean-François Marquet, who is one of the most learned and profound thinkers of our age in France.[7] The name of Jean-Louis Chrétien must be added, as well. According to a pertinent remark made by Janicaud, *le rayonnement d'une spiritualité* is characteristic of Chrétien.[8] Furthermore, Jean-Luc Marion must be mentioned; he is held by Janicaud to be the most creative among the thinkers whom,

5. Dominique Janicaud, *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française*, Combas: Éd. de l'éclat, 1991.

6. Ibid., 34f.

7. Cf. Jean-Francois Marquet, *Singularité et événement*, Grenoble: J. Millon, 1995; *Miroirs de l'identité. La littérature hantée par la philosophie*, Paris: Hermann, 1996; Restitutions. *Études d'histoire de la philosopohie allemande*, Paris: Vrin, 2001.

8. Dominique Janicaud, *La phénoménologie éclatée*, Combas: Éd. de l'éclat, 1997, 10.

in *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie français*, Janicaud describes, with a certain noble simplicity, as "our new theologians" (*nos nouveaux théologiens*).[9] Often, Jean-François Courtine and Didier Franck are considered as closely related thinkers to Marion.[10] Finally, the late Michel Henry deserves to be mentioned with a special emphasis. His example is unique and incomparable. Assuredly, from the early 1960s on, he adhered unswervingly to his special phenomenology of life, but, at the same time, endeavored to get into touch with other currents of thought. It is certainly a sign of the change of the times, that he chose as his main partner in dialogue Marxism in the 1970s, psychoanalysis in the 1980s, and Christian religion in the 1990s.[11]

However, more is meant by the notion of a theological turn in French phenomenology than just a diagnostic description of a recent change in the intellectual climate of our age. Retrospectively, in his book on *La phénoménologie éclatée*, Janicaud remarks that, in his pamphlet of 1991, he should have put the epithet "theological" in quotation-marks in order to prevent his readers from possible misunderstandings, since he had utilized it *ironiquement et presque par prétérition* (ironically and almost only allusively), without intending to indicate any veritable return to a *theologia rationalis* or to *sacra doctrina*.[12] As he now points out, the core of his whole enterprise resided in an attempt to show how the later Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Henry, Marion, and Chrétien had found themselves compelled to transcend the limits of the apparent. Janicaud recognized in this specific compulsion towards transcendence a phenomenologically motivated tendency leading up, under the particular circumstances of the 1980s

9. Janicaud, *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française*, 84.

10. See Jean-Francois Courtine, *Heidegger et la phénoménologie*, Paris: Vrin, 1990; cf. Jean-Francois Courtine, (ed.), *Phénoménologie et théologie*, Paris: Critérion, 1992. See also Didier Franck, *Chair et corps. Sur la phénoménologie de Husserl*, Paris: Minuit, 1981; *Heidegger et le problème de l'espace*, Paris: Minuit, 1986; *Nietzsche et l'ombre de Dieu*, Paris: PUF, 1998; *La dramatique des phénomènes*, Paris: PUF, 2001; *Heidegger et le christianisme. L'explication silencieuse*, Paris: PUF, 2004.

11. Recent works written by Michel Henry are: *C'est moi la vérité. Pour une philosophie du christianisme*, Paris: Seuil, 1996; *Incarnation. Une philosophie de la chair*, Paris: Seuil, 2000; *Paroles du Christ*, Paris: Seuil, 2002.

12. Janicaud, *La phénoménologie éclatée*, 9.

and the 90s, to what he describes as a "theological turn." It is a compulsion that may be expressed, more adequately, as having recourse to a term coined by the later Heidegger. Indeed, Janicaud speaks not only of a "theological turn," but also of different attempts to elaborate a "phenomenology of the inapparent."[13]

What he misses in these attempts is solely a methodological reflection upon the possibility of transcending the limits of what appears and shows itself, i.e., the limits of the *phenomenon* – and this not in a metaphysics, but in a *phenomenology*. However, Janicaud is far from excluding, from the outset, this possibility. What he insists upon is the requirement of a "methodological atheism"[14] formulated, for the first time, in § 58 of Husserl's *Ideen*[15] and accentuated, once again, in Heidegger's last Marburg lecture on Leibniz.[16] Taken in this sense, the notion of a theological turn does not mean anything other than a new inclination towards disregarding this methodological requirement.

However, formulated in this manner, the main objection raised by Janicaud against the new phenomenology in France is not entirely justified. Evidently, Michel Henry, for his part, does not care much about the methodological requirement just mentioned. Marion, on the contrary, takes it seriously. In his work of 1997, which has been published under the title *Being Given*, he considers it a rule to be followed up in every phenomenological enquiry.[17] Moreover, he is convinced that he did not violate this rule in his earlier work of 1989 on *Réduction et donation*, either. That is why he decidedly repudiates the objection raised against him by Janicaud.[18]

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13. Martin Heidegger, *Questions*, trans. J. Beaufret, F. Fédier, J. Lauxerois et G. Roëls, Paris: Gallimard, 1976; in German: Martin Heidegger, „Seminar in Zähringen", *Vier Seminare*, ed. C. Ochwadt, Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1977.
14. Cf. Janicaud, *La phénoménologie éclatée*, 43 (and *passim*): "athéisme méthodologique."
15. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, Vol. I, *Husserliana*, Vol. III/1, ed. K. Schumann, Den Haag: M. Nijhoff, 1976, 124f.
16. Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 26, ed. K. Held, Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1978, 177 and 211, note.
17. Jean-Luc Marion, *Étant donné*, Paris: PUF, 1997, 57: "athéisme de méthode."
18. Ibid., 103–108.

Therefore, the thesis of a theological turn in French phenomenology cannot be held to be generally valid, at least not without serious qualifications. It is, however, true that a new interest in theological problems — and in the problem of theology in general — is characteristic of the approach to phenomenology that has been developed in France since the 1980s. This assertion is true of the thinkers whom Janicaud describes as "our new theologians," but it is also true of other phenomenologists who cannot be described in these terms. It is true even of Marc Richir, whose concern with "political theology," whose enquiry into the "metaphysical and religious" meaning of a historical phenomenon like the French Revolution,[19] and whose quest of an "*incarnation* of community"[20] in modern ages is, as he himself points out, related to a "theological problem" — even if only in a "very enlarged and relatively undetermined sense of the word."[21] Authors like Henry and Marion, on the other hand, present works which are theologically relevant also in a narrower and more precisely determined sense of the word. However, the sense ascribed by these two thinkers to theology is itself quite unorthodox and far from being identical with the traditional one. It is a radically renewed sense of theology — a sense made discernible only by phenomenology.

The following considerations are aimed at showing what this renewal of theology by Marion and Henry amounts to. It is common to both thinkers to bracket or suspend the *transcendence* of God and to transpose theology on the basis of a *radical idea of immanence*. This idea of immanence, made plausible by the phenomenological method, is utilized by both thinkers in order to *liberate theology from the impact of the metaphysical tradition*. This tendency is perceptible as early as Marion's *Dieu sans l'être*, a work published in 1982. That is why I begin the present study with an analysis of this book. It is in the second part of my paper that I shall consider, then, Henry's turn to Christianity in the 1990s.

19. Marc Richir, *Du sublime en politique*, Paris: Payot, 1990, 468.
20. Ibid., 476.
21. Ibid., 83.

1. *God without Being*

"Both theism and atheism are related to an idol" — Marion says in *Dieu sans l'être*.[22] Therefore, the task he sets himself in this work does not consist in attacking atheism in the name of theism, but rather in finding a way from the idol that is common to theism and atheism to what is called by Marion an icon. Marion opposes idol and icon to each other in texts as early as *L'idole et la distance*, published in 1977. Whereas an idol is held to be mirroring our glance, an icon is said to invert our glance, by glancing at us in its turn. The task of finding a way to an iconic theology requires a confrontation with the metaphysical tradition. The metaphysical idea of God, in the sense of traditional onto-theology, has to be overcome. Moreover, a debate with the theological tradition is equally inevitable. As Marion puts it, "theo-*logy*" has to be transformed into "*theo*-logy."[23] Although the shift of the accent from the second part of this Greek word to the first one seems to be a minor alteration, in reality, it indicates a major change in content. What is required of theology by this change is far from an insignificant modification: theology has to "waive any claim to the status of a 'science' based on a knowledge through concepts."[24] It is true, however, that nothing is lost by this renunciation, unless it is a merely putative knowledge in the vein of old-fashioned metaphysics. Marion recognizes in metaphysical onto-theology an extreme form of idolatry. That is why he undertakes the attempt to grasp God without Being, or even "to liberate 'God' from Being."[25]

He is entirely aware of attacking, thereby, a powerful tradition within theology itself. This tradition is Neothomism, which was especially strongly represented in France by Étienne Gilson, a prominent historian of philosophy. Marion goes so far as to endorse Heidegger's opinion according to which "a God who must allow people to prove His existence is ultimately a very ungodly God and proving His

22. Jean-Luc Marion, *Dieu sans l'être*, Paris: Fayard, 1982, 87.
23. Ibid., 197: "La théologie ne peut accéder à son statut authentiquement *théo*logique, que si elle ne cesse de se défaire de toute théo*logie*."
24. Ibid., 121.
25. Ibid., 92: "libérer ‚Dieu' de l'Être."

existence amounts, at most, to a blasphemy."[26] How theologians of the neothomistic brand reacted to such opinions becomes perceptible if one reads Roger Verneaux's polemical writing on Marion's *Dieu sans l'être*.[27] However, Marion is convinced that the fight against onto-theology has to be carried on in the *scientia sacra*, as well as in philosophy, because theology has been subjected to the overwhelming impact of metaphysics. Marion even attempts to determine the very moment in which this impact becomes perceptible for the first time. He connects this moment with a decision taken by Thomas Aquinas to characterize "Being" [*ens*], in opposition to the position of Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita, as the first among all "divine names."[28] It is a well-known fact that Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita stands in the Platonic tradition which situates the Good or, as it is generally referred to in the epoch of Neoplatonism, the One, on the basis of a passage in Plato's *Politeia* (509 b), "beyond Being" (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας). Indeed, we are told in Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita's writing "On Divine Names": "The designation of God as 'the Good' alludes to [. . .] all manifestations of the cause of all things[29] and encompasses everything which is and which is not, transcending all being and not-being. On the contrary, the name 'the Being' encompasses [only] everything which is,

26. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Pfullingen: Neske, 1961, Vol. I, 366 (= *Nietzsche I*, in: *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 6.1, ed. B. Schillbach, Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1996, 327): "[. . .] dass ein Gott, der sich seine Existenz erst beweisen lassen muß, am Ende ein sehr ungöttlicher Gott ist und das Beweisen seiner Existenz höchstens auf eine Blasphemie hinauskommt."

27. Roger Verneaux, *Étude critique du livre* Dieu sans l'être, Paris: Téqui, 1986, 11f: "Et si les preuves de l'existence de Dieu sont des blasphèmes, saint Thomas est un blasphémateur et l'Église a eu grand tort de le canoniser." Verneaux quotes some decrees of councils in order to show the incompatibility of Marion's opinions with the Catholic faith.

28. Marion, *Dieu sans l'être*, 110.

29. As early as in *L'idole et la distance*, published in 1977, Marion attempts to show that, in Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita, the expression ὁ πάντων αἴτιος (cause of everything) does not refer to a first cause, but to that which is searched for, and strived for, by everything [*le Réquisit*]. Thus, it refers to God, insofar He is the aim of all striving and the addressee of all demands and prayers.

transcending all being."[30] Here, the name "the Good" is clearly preferred to the name "the Being." This preference is justified by the fact that the first name transcends not only all being, but also all non-being. Thomas Aquinas repeatedly reflects upon this work of Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita, by quoting passages from it in his *Summa theologica* and even by dedicating a separate commentary to it, but he is unable and unwilling to accept the Dionysian hierarchy of the two names. He adduces the example of the famous passage in the Bible (Exod., 3.14) in which, according to the text of the translation called "*vulgata*," God says: *Sum qui sum* ("I am who I am"). Thomas Aquinas claims that this name "designates God in the most adequate way" [*maxime proprie nominat Deum*].[31] In order to corroborate this assertion, he cites one of his most typical doctrines, according to which essence and existence in God are identical to each other. The name "the Being," he says, does not designate a particular form of God, but His "very Being"; however, "the being of God is His very essence" [*esse Dei sit ipsa ejus essentia*].[32]

Marion sees in this preference of Being over the Good a fatal decision which was to determine the whole later destiny of theology: it opened the way for an impact of metaphysics: "From this moment on, theology can place the inclusion of God in *esse* [Being] at the center of its work, and it can go so far as to 'include' (with Suarez) 'God' into the subject of metaphysics."[33] As Marion adds, it is with Thomas Aquinas that God takes "the role of the divine in metaphysics."[34]

In *Dieu sans l'être*, it is carefully shown that this turn can be rightly attributed to Thomas Aquinas. A rather old-fashioned contemporary of his, Bonaventura, still decided to prefer, among the divine names, "the Good" to "the Being." Indeed, in his *Itinerarium mentis ad Deum*, Bonaventura summarized his enquiry into the divine names, by

30. Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita, *De divinis nominibus*, V 1, 816 B (the edition quoted is *Corpus Dionysiacum*, vol. I, ed. B. R. Suchla, Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 1990); German translation: „Göttliche Namen", trans. J. Stiglmayr, München: Kösel & Pustet, 1933, 100.

31. Thomas von Aquin, *Summa theologica*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 11, resp.

32. Ibid.

33. Marion, *Dieu sans l'être*, 122.

34. Ibid., 122f.

claiming that "Dionysius follows Christ in saying: 'the Good' is God's main name."[35]

It would be a misunderstanding to see in Marion's passionate judgment upon Thomas Aquinas a position taken up in favor of Platonic tradition. That Marion is particularly attracted by the thought of Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita is a fact established, above all doubt, since the publication of *L'idole et la distance*.[36] But it is by no means the Platonism of this author that fascinates him. Marion's standpoint can only be understood if it is noted that he discovers within the controversy over the divine names "the Being" and "the Good" another controversy, that over Being and Love. Indeed, we can also find in Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita's work "On the Divine Names" some remarks on the relationship between Love and the Good. We are told: "This very Good is celebrated by the authors of the Holy Scriptures also as *beautiful* and as *Beauty*, as *Love* [ἀγάπη] and as *loveable* [ἀγαπητόν] [. . .]."[37] Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita adds that this Good proceeds from itself and it is "charmed by Goodness, by Love and the amorous" [οἷον ἀγαθότητι καὶ ἀγαπήσει καὶ ἔρωτι θέλγεται].[38] It is because of these ideas that, in his debate with Thomas Aquinas, Marion relies upon Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita. Through the formula "God without Being [*Dieu sans l'être*], he means nothing other than the God of Love, in the Dionysian sense, which is also that of the epistle of John (1 John 4.8: "ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν").

Marion says: "It is solely love that does not need to be."[39] We may interpret this paradoxical assertion, by looking back, once again, at the Platonic tradition. It is by no means an accident that Love [ἀγάπη] and the amorous [ἔρως] are attributed by Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita to the

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35. Bonaventura, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, V 2; German translation: *Pilgerbuch des Geistes zu Gott*, trans. J. Kaup and Ph. Böhner, Werli. W.: Franziskus-Druckerei, 1932, 60.

36. See Jean-Luc Marion, *L'idole et la distance*, Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1977, especially 177–243.

37. Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita, *De divinis nominibus*, IV 7, 701 C; German translation: 65.

38. Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita, *De divinis nominibus*, IV 13, 712 B; German translation: 75.

39. Marion, *Dieu sans l'être*, 195.

Good beyond Being.[40] For, in Neoplatonism, the One is at the same time considered as the Good, precisely because it is the source of a prodigious effect of surplus: it *gives* what it does not *have*.[41] Plotinus says: "It is not necessary for anybody to have what he gives."[42] Thus, the One beyond Being gives being to that which comes after it (in the first place: to the Intellect), without having it itself. However, such a prodigious effect of surplus is, as was clearly seen by Lacan, characteristic of love as well.[43] This effect makes of love a creative gift that engenders, by the very act of giving, that which it gives. As a creative gift, love is not bound up with Being, because it is not from Being, but rather from Nothingness that it takes what it gives. Of course, love could not take place if there were nothing and nobody; but it cannot be brought about as an existing relationship between existents, either. That is why Marion emphasizes that love goes beyond everything (beyond Being, as well as beyond existents).[44] He adds that love does not necessarily disappear with the decease of the beloved; it follows from this that "it is not in his or her character as an existent that the beloved lends him- or herself to be loved."[45]

The expression of these thoughts in *Dieu sans l'être* initiates a process of lengthy meditation on love. Even if this process cannot be pursued in this paper, I still wish to mention, before moving to Henry, that Marion remains faithful to the tradition founded by Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita in dedicating these meditations both to love [ἀγάπη] and to the amorous [ἔρως]. Marion assigns great significance to a phenomenology of eros for theology, because he takes for granted what he calls the "univocity of love."[46] Through this expression, he wishes to say that "love" in ἀγάπη and "love" in ἔρως are to be taken

40. Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita, *De divinis nominibus*, IV 14, 712 C; German translation: 76.

41. Plotin, *Enn.*, VI 7, 15, 19: „διδόντος ἐκείνου ἃ μὴ εἶχεν αὐτός" (the edition quoted is *Opera*, ed. P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

42. Plotin, *Enn.*, VI 7, 17, 1–6.

43. Jacques Lacan *Écrits*, Paris: Seuil, 1966, 618.

44. Marion, *Dieu sans l'être*, 155.

45. Ibid., 193.

46. Jean-Luc Marion, *Le phénomène érotique*, Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 2003, 334.

in one and the same sense. Marion says: "Not two loves are meant here, but two names among the infinitely numerous ones which we need in order to think and to say what a unique love is."[47]

2. *God as Life*

In *L'essence de la manifestation*, Henry devotes a profound analysis to the thought of Master Eckhart.[48] It is through this thought that he, as a phenomenologist of life, finds an access to Christianity for the first time. There is a striking similarity between the analysis of Eckhart in *L'essence de la manifestation* and the philosophy of Christianity elaborated by Henry in the second half of the 1990s. It is useful to point out some correspondences between the epochs, because, by contrast, these correspondences also make recognizable the very novelty of this recent approach. My interpretative hypothesis is that this novelty arises from the task of determining the relationship between *life* and *selfhood*.

In *L'essence de la manifestation*, Henry does not content himself with presenting Master Eckhart as a mystical thinker searching for a unification with divinity. On the contrary, Henry tries to show that what is at stake in Eckhart is not so much a unification [*unio*], but rather a unity [*unitas*], with divinity: as Eckhart says, "I and God are one and the same."[49]

It is this abyssal "indistinctness" [*Ununterschiedenheit*], this "still desert" [*stille Wüste*],[50] which Eckhart's thought is centered upon. If it is true that Eckhart is a mystic, it is no less true that he is a purely intellectual one. It is by no means an accident that Eckhart says: "It is not because God is good that I am blessed. [. . .] It is solely because God is intelligent, and because I recognize this fact, that I am

47. Ibid., 340.

48. Michel Henry, *L'essence de la manifestation*, Paris: PUF, third ed. 2003 (1963), §§ 39–40 and § 49, 371–419 and 532–549.

49. Meister Eckehart, *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*, ed. and trans. J. Quint, Zürich: Diogenes, 1979, 309 and 215: "dass ich und Gott eins sind."

50. Meister Eckehart, *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*, 316.

blessed."[51] Even the divine "spark in soul"[52] mentioned by Eckhart is something intellectual; it is the germ of thought, the idea which occurs to me and which it is not in my power to bring about arbitrarily.

However, Henry sees the core of Eckhart's intellectual mysticism in something else. Eckhart says that "it is the essence of the Father to engender the Son and the essence of the Son that I should be born in him and after him [. . .]."[53] It is in the idea of this chain of generation that Henry discovers the core of Eckhart's intellectual mysticism. It is this idea around which the whole analysis of Eckhart's thought in *L'essence de la manifestation* is centered.[54]

The same chain of generation is the main object of the considerations that, thirty years later, are brought together in the book *C'est moi la vérité*.[55] The philosophy of Christianity that is expounded in this work is based mainly on an interpretation of the gospel of John and not on Eckhart's works. But Henry remains faithful to the ideas developed, for the first time, in the analysis that was dedicated to Eckhart's thought in *L'essence de la manifestation*.

It is his phenomenology of life that serves as the basic clue to the interpretation of Christianity. Henry says: "The relationship between Life and the living is the central theme of Christianity."[56] It would be highly misleading to interpret this relationship between Life and the living as a kind of ontological difference, in the Heideggerian sense of the word. For, according to Henry, the metaphysical concept of being is "to be eliminated, without much ado, from the analysis of life."[57]

51. Ibid., 199: "Nicht davon bin ich selig, daß Gott gut ist. [. . .] Davon allein bin ich selig, daß Gott vernünftig ist und ich dies erkenne." These ideas are are close to those expounded by Eckehart in his *quaestio* "Utrum in Deo sit idem esse et intelligere." (See Meister Eckehart, *Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*, ed. by order of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Stuttgart 1936ff, Bd. V, 44.)
52. Meister Eckehart, *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*, 315f; cf. 215.
53. Ibid., 270. Cf. 258: "Er gebiert seinen eingeborenen Sohn in das Höchste der Seele. Im gleichen Zuge, da er seinen eingeborenen Sohn in mich gebiert, gebäre ich ihn zurück in den Vater."
54. Henry, *L'essence de la manifestation*, 415.
55. Henry, *C'est moi la vérité*, op. cit., 69.
56. Ibid.
57. Henry, *C'est moi la vérité*, 74.

Henry adds: "Life 'is' not. It happens and does not cease to happen."[58] Life assumes the character of an *event* which has its particularity: It is a "process of self-revelation," a "phenomenological process."[59] In Eckhart' terms, one could speak here of (re)cognition [*Erkenntnis*], and one could add: if being is to be attributed to Life, it can be done so only on the basis of this *Erkenntnis*.[60]

The idea of a self-revelation of life makes it possible for Henry to keep a distance from the metaphysical conception of being. That is why the relationship between Life and the living cannot be interpreted as a kind of ontological difference, either. Henry has another model in view: Eckhart's distinction between Divinity and God. If it is true that, in *C'est moi la vérité*, he contents himself with a few allusions to Eckhart,[61] it is no less true that he still carries on the ideas borrowed from Eckhart. In *C'est moi la vérité*, he says: "Life is more than the living. This thesis is valid for God as well."[62] Henry emphasizes that "in God Himself, Life precedes the living."[63] We may assume that by Life, written with a capital "L," Henry means still something like the Eckhartian abyss of indistinctness, this "still desert."

In *C'est moi la vérité*, it is clearly stated that Life, written with a capital "L," is "to be neatly distinguished from the object of biology."[64] This is because, in biology, living beings are considered, but life itself, as it manifests itself corporeally and affectively in the living, is precisely that which is not inquired into. Henry quotes the scientist François Jacob, who says: "In our days, in laboratories, life is no longer an object of research."[65] As a phenomenologist, Henry takes it for granted that life cannot be known on the basis of external observations, but only from within, on the basis of lived experience. That is why he poses the question: "Is it not paradoxical to turn to infusoria or, at best, to bees in order to find out what life is? [. . .] As if we ourselves were no

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., 75f.

60. Cf. Meister Eckehart, *Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*, Vol. V, 45.

61. See especially Henry, *C'est moi la vérité*, 132 f.; cf. 214.

62. Ibid., 68.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid., 47.

65. Ibid., 52.

living beings!"[66] From the outset, biology is characterized by an immense reduction: Life, in the phenomenological sense of the word, Life as a self-revealing instance, is, first, reduced to biological contents and, then, to physical and chemical structures. Henry contrasts his phenomenology of corporeal and affective self-manifestation with this preposterous reduction. Thereby, he indicates for phenomenological research a direction that is strictly opposed to scientific naturalism. Assuredly, he distinguishes between science and scientism.[67] Not sciences, but only scientists are committed to scientism (and not even all of them): "Science has never accomplished any reduction, if not a methodological one. Scientists preach officially the aforesaid reduction, by making science say what it, in fact, does not say."[68] Without hesitation, Henry adds: "They are the murderers of life [. . .]."[69]

The Eckhartian conception of a chain of generation encompassing not only God, the Father, and the Son of God, but also man (or human being in general) is not only taken up and carried on in *C'est moi la vérité*, but it is also supplemented, in this work, by a new idea. I think of the idea that *life engenders selfhood*. In *C'est moi la vérité*, this idea is deduced from the relationship between Life and the living.

The process of self-engendering which, according to Henry, is characteristic of Life, cannot be interpreted as a creation. Not "creation," but "birth," is the term which is used by Henry in his analysis of the Eckhartian idea of a chain of generation. In *C'est moi la vérité*, we are told: "We are faced here with the abyss that separates birth from creation."[70] But the proper question Henry raises in this work is related to the birth of *man* within the Eckhartian chain of generation. What is the difference of man from God, the Father, and from the Son of God?[71] This question brings with it the novelty characteristic of Henry's later philosophy of Christianity.

Not surprisingly, Henry understands the Son of God as "mediating"

66. Ibid., 63.
67. Ibid., 326.
68. Ibid., 54.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid., 131.
71. Ibid., 132.

between God and man.[72] Interpreting the chain of generation as a *filiation*, he conceives of Christ as the "Primal Son" [*Archi-Fils*] and defines man, who is equally a Son of God [*Fils de Dieu*], as a "Son in the Son" [*Fils dans le Fils*]. Here, the differences within the fundamental unity of God and man make their appearance. The articulation in different concepts based on the idea of filiation may be considered as an analysis of the relationship between Life and the living. The first task of this analysis is to shed some light on the birth of the Primal Son within the process of self-engendering that is characteristic of Life.

In *C'est moi la vérité*, some highly speculative considerations are dedicated to this task, which also contain, however, certain phenomenological insights.[73] Here, life is said to put itself in constant trial and to have a perpetual experience of itself. It is from this process of self-trial and self-experience that the self in its singularity is derived. From a phenomenological point of view, this attempt to understand the self is by no means inappropriate. What I call my "self" is, as is shown by Henry, precisely "this fact of experiencing myself."[74] The basis of my selfhood is not so much my self-awareness, or self-consciousness, as much as my constant feeling of being myself and no other [*Selbstgefühl*]. This feeling never leaves me.

However, experiencing oneself, putting oneself in constant trial amounts to suffering on account ofoneself. Being a self is a "charge" [*charge*]; it is even a "burden" [*fardeau*].[75] One is, once and for all, "loaded with oneself."[76] That is why selfhood is "not the mere identity of the ego with itself, not a mere self-identity," but rather "a fundamental and irremissible" attunement, an "affective tonality"—the "purely phenomenological tonality" in which the self finds itself "thrown into itself."[77]

What is peculiar to this fundamental attunement is a certain ambivalence, an insurmountable ambiguity, which is designated by

72. Ibid., 138.
73. Ibid., 75-80.
74. Ibid., 136.
75. Ibid., 251.
76. Ibid., 250.
77. Ibid., 250f.

Henry as "the antinomial structure of life itself."[78] On the one hand, it is an anxiety which may even turn into despair (Henry relies here on Kierkegaard); but, on the other hand, life constantly remains pleasure and joy.[79]

As an affective tonality of such an ambiguous character, selfhood proves to be an indispensably fundamental structure of life itself. Life, as a self-giving, self-affecting, and self-revealing event, cannot take place without assuming the character of selfhood. In other terms, selfhood belongs to "the self-generation of life as that 'in which this self-generation is accomplished as a self-revelation'"; it belongs "to self-revelation as the very instance that makes it possible."[80]

On this point, the difference between the life of God and the life of man becomes important. My selfhood is by no means the result of my own deed. "I am given to myself, but this self-giving of myself does not depend on me."[81] Rather, I receive my selfhood as a gift. Assuredly, this gift was not given to me in the sense "in which one gives somebody something, for instance a present, which goes from one hand to another," but was given to me in the sense in which life, or "the condition of living" as such is given to us: as "the happiness to have experience of ourselves in the self-experience which is Life [. . .]".[82]

Henry has a gift in mind that has nothing to do with creation. Just as, according to Eckhart, the "spark in the soul," the self is also *uncreated*. According to Henry, selfhood is a gift stemming from self-giving Life. This Life gives me "the condition of living," by generating the Primal Son. Henry says that it is only in the selfhood of the Primal Son that "the Father has an experience of Himself."[83]

It is with this assertion that the phenomenology of self-revealing Life assumes the character of a philosophy of Christianity. Indeed, it is precisely in this tenet that Henry discovers the distinctive trait of Christianity. That man is a Son of God is a conviction that is common

78. Ibid., 249.
79. Ibid., 251.
80. Ibid., 76.
81. Ibid., 136.
82. Ibid., 130f.
83. Ibid., 76.

to Judaism and Christianity;however, that man is a Son in the Primal Son is a belief that is peculiar to Christianity, even if one must also add that this conviction "is Jewish to the extent that a Messiah is expected in Judaism."[84]

Evidently, Henry's philosophy of Christianity does not lay any claim to orthodoxy. Henry rejects decidedly the idea of creation; he opposes to it the idea of a self-generation of Life. Similarly, he rejects the doctrine of a double — both divine and human — nature of Christ. He cannot make this doctrine his own, because he takes for granted what may be designated as the "univocity of life." This term amounts to saying that "*Life has the same sense for God, for Christ and for man.*"[85] This statement clearly shows that, in spite of all further articulation of the Eckhartian chain of generation, Henry adheres to the abyssal indistinctness of God and man. That is why he emphasizes that "there is only one and the same essence of life or, even more radically, there is a unique and singular life."[86]

Henry's phenomenology of life is not simply replaced by his new philosophy of Christianity. On the contrary, it remains the very instance that guides the interpretation of Christianity. The phenomenology of life does not give up its independence of Christian theology. It remains the very instance that urges Henry's theological considerations to proceed to the limits of heresy. Thus, it is no wonder that, even in the 1990s, Henry's philosophy of Christianity preserves its Eckhartian allegiance.

3. Concluding Remark

Marion and Henry try to develop a phenomenology that may contribute to a renewal of theology. The direction in which they move can be indicated in a few words.

Marion maintains that the phenomenological reduction requires nothing more than the bracketing of God as a *transcendent being*.[87] He

84. Ibid., 139.
85. Ibid., 128.
86. Ibid.
87. Husserl, *Ideen I*, 124.

adds that, in contrast with metaphysical theo-*logy*, non-metaphysical *theo*-logy procures an access to God in his "radical immanence for consciousness."[88] That is precisely why Marion strives to overcome traditional onto-theology in order to pave the way for a non-metaphysical reflection upon God.

It is equally a revision of tradition that, in the 1990s, made it possible for Henry to integrate Christianity into his phenomenological philosophy. His attempt to re-interpret Christianity is no less radical than Marion's. It is, however, true that the two undertakings are not nurtured by the same sources. Whereas Marion relies mainly upon Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita and Bonaventura, Henry joins the tradition of Eckhartian mysticism. However, in spite of this difference, both undertakings are animated by a common aspiration: like Marion, Henry endeavors to call God's transcendence into question and to base non-metaphysical theology on the idea of God's immanence.

Both thinkers use phenomenology as an alternative to traditional metaphysics. It remains, however, to be asked whether they simply transgress the border between phenomenology and theology, or whether they succeed in removing and retracing it.

88. Marion, *Étant donné*, 336.

Suhrawardi, a Phenomenologist: Ipseity

JAD HATEM

I

Suhrawardî is a philosopher and a mystic, a man from a faraway time (the twelfth century) and a thinker who belongs to an outdated intellectual context. Hence, his philosophy requires of us that we engage with it in an active manner. To call him a phenomenologist is a way of creating a link. If our approach is lively enough, we can avert the risks of anachronism.

There is already a convergence between Suhrawardî's philosophy of illumination and phenomenology, in that they both originate from the notion of manifestation. I suggest that our understanding of his intuitions could benefit from the insights of Michel Henry's material phenomenology.

Suhrawardî claims that a being is divided into light and non-light. Light is self-sufficient [*ghanî*]; it rests in itself. When it is not a quality for something other than itself, light is separate [*mujarrad*] and pure. When it is a quality for something other than itself, it is becoming [*nûr ʻârid*]. As for what is not light in itself, it is either not a quality for something other than itself, in which case it is called 'dark substance' [*ghâsiq*][1] that does not exist in itself (H, §111)[2]; or, alternatively, it is a quality for another than itself, in which case it is called obscurity [*zulmâniyyat*]. Bodies [*barzakh*][3] are what remain even when light has withdrawn. They are dark by essence, although in some cases, for

1. The word is from the Koran and connotes evil: "*min sharri ghâsiq idhâ waqaba.*" (113:3).
2. *Kitâb Hikmat al-ishrâq,* in Suhrawardî, *Opera metaphysica et mystica,* II, ed. H. Corbin, Tehran-Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, Téhéran-Paris, 1952.
3. Another Koranic word (23:100; 25:53; 55:20) which means, in context, barrier, interval, or isthm.

instance in the case of stars, light is never absent. In that event, however, these are considered a 'becoming' light for which the bodies are the support [*hâmil*]. This is to say that even though this light does not originate from them, it remains in them (H, §109–110). From whence does it originate, then? From a superior substance which is the giver of lights (H, §110).

As far as incorporeal or pure [*mahd*] light is concerned, this does not dwell in a body, and therefore does not call for a designation (H, §112). That is to say that it is less to be seized by the senses than it is by representation. Would it, therefore, be unconscious? No, answers Suhrawardî:

> Nothing that has an essence of which it is not unconscious is a being of the night, for its essence is evident to it. It cannot be a dark state in something else, since even the luminous state is not self-subsistent light, let alone the dark state. Therefore, it is a pure incorporeal light which cannot be shown.[4]

In the margins of the self-phenomenality of representation – which implies a gap – stands something else, an immediate self-seizure, a subjectivity that is directly informed by itself, a seeing that does not call for demonstration or deduction. We are, hence, in the vicinity of Michel Henry's philosophy. The Frenchman concedes luminosity to transcendent phenomenality, whereas he reserves the metaphor of the night for immanent phenomenality, the embrace of self-affection, since it operates without any distance, hence without any visibility (which seems more appropriate than a light that cannot be seen). However, one can wonder whether the title *phe*nomenality is appropriate to an act of showing that does not call for light, even if it be black. Can it be considered an act of showing? There is not even time here for a gesture or the figuration of a forefinger. Self-affection's absolute is given in one single blow each time. It is appropriate to make sure of the validity of the comparison – to know, in other words, whether the Persian truly refuses a transcendent phenomenality. The text continues in this way:

4. H, §114; Suhrawardî, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, Provo; BYU Press, 1999, 79 [mod].

> The self-subsistent, self conscious thing does not apprehend its essence by an image of its essence in its essence. If its knowledge is an image and if the image of its ego is not the ego itself, the image of the ego would be an 'it' in relation to the ego. In that case, that which was apprehended would be the image. Thus it follows that while the apprehension of its ego is precisely its apprehension of what it is itself, its apprehension of its essence would also be the apprehension of something else — which is absurd. (H, § 115, tr. 80)

The word *image* is a translation of *mithâl*, which connotes the idea of something similar, a similarity that implies alterity, and hence a dimension of exteriority where that which is alienated is deployed, since, as Henry explains, to make of oneself an image with the purpose of seeing oneself is not possible unless there is a phenomenological distance, meaning the opening of a horizon of transcendence in which occurs the schism between the watcher and the watched. The essence of phenomenality being reduced to ecstasy, the ordeal of oneself is left to the work of intentionality. Because the image of oneself is only produced within a distance from the self, it is not life itself that is shown, but its opposite. Indeed, there are only images within the world (MV, 131)[5] insofar as it is the center of the outside, by opposition to life which is forever constrained to immanence. Of the living, the image will always present the "external appearance, a content without content, at once opaque and empty" (MV, 276). We can see here the value of Suhrawardî's precision. The image's alterity makes of a self that is put into images a *he*, in other words, a simulacrum which can not be expected to give knowledge of that living, not even of an ipseity. And Suhrawardî specifies that to become an image of himself, is, for the knower, the equivalent of establishing a duality, which is impossible, since nothing becomes other than itself![6] This foreshadows Henry's theory of passivity, according to which ipseity is desperately related to itself.

Let us consider how Henry excludes, in his turn, all images from ipseity:

5. Michel Henry, *C'est Moi la Vérité*, Paris: Seuil, 1996.
6. Suhrawardi, *Kitâb al-mashâri' wa l-mutârahât*, 474.

> The self is only possible as pathetically submerged in itself without ever posing itself in front of itself, without proposing itself in some visible form (sensory or intelligible) or another. Such a Self, foreign to any apparition of itself in the world, is what we are calling a radically immanent Self, a Self neither constituted by, nor the object of thought, without an image of self with nothing that might assume the aspect of its reality. It is a Self without a face, which never lets itself be envisaged. It is a Self in the absence of any perceptible Self such that this absence of any perceptible Self or thought constitutes the Self's veritable Ipseity, as well as everything possible on the basis of it. It is only because no image of itself is interposed between it and itself, in the manner of a screen, that the Self is thrown into itself unprotected and with such a violence that nothing can defend it from that violence any more than from itself.[7]

Beneath the language of pathic violence, one should recognize the immediate revelation of the self that precedes all representation that led Suhrawardî to say:

> Moreover, if its apprehension of itself were by an image and it did not know that this was an image of itself, it would not know itself. If it did know that it was an image of itself, it must have already known itself without an image. How could something be conceived to know itself by something superadded to itself—something that would be an attribute of it?" (H, §115, tr. 80).

No acknowledgement without knowledge, no representation without presentation (which does not mean: no representation without self-representation). In Eckhart's terms, the morning knowledge (without images) is a condition for the vesperal knowledge (by image) (cf. EM, 412).[8]

What Suhrawardî calls subsistence in oneself does not, then, refer only to the subject's absoluteness or autarchy, but to the immanence to oneself as well. This explains what he says concerning self-luminescence as offering a self-knowledge that does not involve the exteriority of the image. Subjectivity [*anâ'iyyat*] is defined as the possession of

7. MV, 188–89; *I am the Truth, Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, 149.
8. Michel Henry, *L'Essence de la manifestation,* Paris: PUF, 1963.

immediate self-revelation (H, §116). One should specify that this parousia, as Henry would call it, does not have a character of discontinuity, as if self-revelation occurred on demand or on occasion. It is permanent and absolute, as is Henry's self-affection, since it is light in itself and cannot stop being so. Ipseity knows no syncope and undergoes no ellipse: "You are never unconscious of your essence or of your apprehension of your essence" (H, § 116, tr. 80). What about the body? Suhrawardî practices a radical phenomenological reduction (which he calls *tajarrud bi-l-dhât*,[9] ipseity abstracting itself from all that is not itself, from matter, for instance), and does so literally: he brings man to light (as the phenomenological *me*), and the latter does not include body organs.This Suhrawardî elucidates by calling for a sort of eidetic variation:

> Although you may cease to feel any or every part of your body, and some bodily parts may even become annihilated, yet a human being's life and perception does not decline on account of this [. . .] You may be cut off from any bodily or contingent perception but will remain cognizant of yourself and know yourself without recourse to any phenomenal thing.[10]

Is this not a sort of eidetic variation, of a Platonic type, that Suhrawardî uses?

> You never lack information about your own act of being. Even in a state of drunkenness, you lose awareness of your members, but you still know that you *are* and that you have an essence. Think again: where is your ipseity? How is it? What is it? You will be aware that you are not in the body, and that your essence is known to you without an intermediary through an immediate feeling.[11]

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9. Suhrawardi, *Kitâb al-talwîhât*, in *Opera metaphysica et mystica,* I, ed. H. Corbin, Istambul: Bibliotheca islamica XVI 1945, 115.
10. Suhrawardi, *Partaw-Nâmeh*, in *Opera metaphysica et mystica*, III, ed. H. Nasr, Téhéran-Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1970, 23, *The Book of radiance*, trans. Hossein Ziai Costa Mesa: Mazda publishers, 1998, 24.
11. Suhrawardi, *Bustân al-qulûb*, in *Opera metaphysica et mystica,* III, 363; cf. *Kitâb al-talwîhât*, 116.

It follows that in Suhrawardî's cogito, the apprehension of the self is continuous. (H, §116)[12] That is the phenomenological meaning and the condition of the science of presence [*'ilm hudûrî*] as an intuitive, anti-predicative knowledge, a principle itself of the knowledge that requires images [*'ilm suwarî*]. The feeling of the self based on the apodicticity of the *I am* rests no more upon a conversion of the spirit, or upon the subject's act of making of himself an object of thought, than it requires the services of the intellect as a peripatetic agent and of the act of abstracting things from their form, since it rests entirely on the identity of what is manifesting itself and of what is manifested [*huwa al-zâhir li-nafsihi bi-nafsihi*] (H, §116) — without any possible addition of thing or characteristics. Suhrawardî's immanent self-knowledge reminds us strongly of Henry's feeling of oneself — the identity between what feels and what is felt (EM, 580) — which is not less immanent. Will we find in Suhrawardî's work Henry's idea of affection revealing affection?[13] It is true that the term *shu'ûr* in the formula *al-jawhar al-shâ'ir bi-dhâtihî*[14] that could be translated as '*the substance that feels itself'* fits that role, but we must keep in mind the nuances of consciousness. However, if we search correctly, we find the equivalent of the affective cogito where Suhrawardî, in his effort to put aside the need for exteriority and of claiming the science of presence, declares that, when man feels pain, what he apprehends does not transit through the image of pain or that of the cut-off member: it is the ablation itself that is known.[15] "The truth of pain," says Henry, "is the pain itself" (EM, 677).

II

Henry calls ontological monism the theory, which he rejects, according to which the being is only a phenomenon if it is distanced from the self, so that alienation would be the essence of manifestation. That

12. Cf. aussi, *Hayâkil al-nûr*, *Opera metaphysica et mystica,* III, 86.
13. On love that feels itself, see EM, 580. What he reveals is himself and nothing else. EM, 693
14. Suhrawardi, *Kitâb al-mashâri' wa l-mutârahât*, 474.
15. Ibid., 485.

would tend to establish a "dualism of the being and of its own image" (EM, 83). That is true for man and for the cosmos; it is also true of God: "The being of God would be nothing else than the *Ungrund*, not only the most obscure but also the most abstract, and, as such, something totally unreal, if He weren't submitted in turn to the conditions that open and define the field of phenomenal existence and of true spirituality," if he did not produce "facing him [. . .] his own image." (EM, 84) For Henry as for Suhrawardî, God's self-revelation is produced in pure interiority. For Henry, this is self-affection, conceived as an embrace; for Suhrawardî, it is self-luminescence. Henry's words concerning God's exteriorization in an image implicitly draws on Fichte's *The Way towards a Blessed Life*. My feeling is that it would have been more judicious to call upon the work of Schelling with which Fichte is debating. Indeed it is in *Philosophy and Religion* that the thematic of the auto-revelation of God is formulated through an independent but almost rebellious image, a spectacular exteriorization that cannot be confused with a self-division,[16] since God means to unveil himself totally in his reflection.

To whom can we find Suhrawardî's intuition opposed? In other words, who, among his contemporaries, could appear as a promoter of ontological monism? The answer is: the greatest genius of all, Ibn Arabî, the Doctor Maximus. The idea is found in the first chapter of the Bezels of Wisdom, devoted to Adam (as a representative of the human species), where it is claimed that:

> God [*al-Haqq*] wished to see his essence [*'ayn*] in a universe that encompasses all of reality, so that his own secret is manifested to him. Indeed, the vision that a thing has of itself through itself is not similar to the vision it has of itself in another that stands as a mirror, because it appears then in an image offered by the watched support, without the existence of which it could not have been able to reveal itself.[17]

The support-mirror designates the world on which the image will be projected. It is clear that the image is that of God, but to be more precise, that of a deep reality of God, designated by the word essence,

16. Cf. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. VI (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–1861) 31–33.
17. Ibn Arabî, Fusûs al-Hikam, Cairo, ed. Afifi, 1946, 48–49.

a reality that is not visible without exteriorization, even though, as it is said in the same page, it would be that of God's countless Names. This allusion to the Names, added to the title of the chapter, shows that God's image is Man himself, the being in which the Names are reflected.

To give the reason for the creation of the world, the mystics usually refer to a *hadîth qudsî* (in other words, a divine speech reported by a prophet, but not part of a revealed book) according to which God said: "I was a hidden treasure; I desired to be known [*u'raf*], which is why I brought the creatures [*khalq*] to life, which made them know me." Although Ibn 'Arabî often makes use of this saying, and even though he has it in mind here, it is not what he is professing. In the *hadîth*, God is only the object of knowledge, whereas in the *Bezels of Wisdom*, he is at once the subject and the object of knowledge, the world and man serving merely as mediators. What matters to him is to be known by himself, and not to be known in general. But obviously he cannot reach self-knowledge without going through the element of exteriority, without alienating himself in an image of himself, which is precisely what Suhrawardî judges to be at once unworthy of God and impossible, since the essence lacks nothing, even in terms of knowledge, because the essence is itself that self-knowledge. But before considering the Persian's, the Andalusian's text invites us to explore one point. The word I have translated as essence in the sentence: "God [*al-Haqq*] wished to see his essence [*'ayn*] in a universe that encompasses all of reality so that so that his own secret is manifested to him" means also "source" and "eye." By *source*, what is suggested is that he desired to see his own origin, the power of absolute self-production. By *eye*, what is signified is that he projected the organ of vision in a way that the image sees him as much as he sees it, or, in other words, that God and his image are by turns both subject and object. But the idea that an image can see, is what Suhrawardî and Henry would find even more absurd. It simply matches identically the error of treating the self as a thing, furthermore deprived of its ipseity; here, it is the thing that is mistaken with a self. But what is not light does not have self-awareness, nor does it have an awareness of what is other, the former being a condition of the latter. (H, §121) Suhrawardî stands, then, in an ontological dualism (in Henry's sense) that separates the living from the non-

living and distinguishes their respective phenomenalities. Since whatever has no interiority is deprived of ipseity and hence of self-luminescence, its phenomenalization obeys another principle ruled by spatial-temporality, exteriority and representation. In Suhrawardî's words: "It is different [than in self-luminescence] when it comes to exterior things, because, in this case, the image and its object are both a *he* [*huwa*]" (H, §115). And these things, precisely because they cannot be revealed to themselves (Suhrawardî actually gives the example of body parts that can only be examined by means of a dissection),[18] require the help of the life of which they are deprived. The *barzakhs*, unable to produce each other, since they are "night and death," need the light that makes them particular and without which they would be nothingness (H, §111). But the words life, light, and self-revelation are interchangeable: "Pure light is alive, and every living thing is a pure light" (H, §121, tr. p. 84). "Anything that apprehends its own essence is a pure light, and every pure light is evident to itself and apprehends its own essence" (H, §118; tr. 82). No dissection here, because there is no self-division, no objectivity: "You can't part from yourself, and designate yourself as a *he*."[19] Being light, the phenomenon is also phenomenality.

III

A second enquiry would determine Suhrawardî's mystical ascension as a reduction to essence in spite of his presentation of the imaginal world. The meeting with the angel must be understood as a recall and an evidence for the weak self-affection, not as the space of an ecstatic intentionality. It would be the purpose of a third inquiry to proceed to a phenomenological approach toward Suhrawardî's God, designated as the Light of lights, a self-luminescent living (H, § 128) who, out of generosity [*jûd*], effuses on all support (H, §144). Since it possesses the original and absolute self-revelation (what Henry would have called the strong self-affection), this light can only produce light by itself (§ 135). We will, however, look at this another time.

18. Suhrawardi, *Partaw-Nâmeh*, III, § 27; *Al-Alwâh al-'imâdiyyat*, § 30, in *Opera metaphysica et mystica*, IV, 50.
19. Suhrawardi, *Al-Alwâh al-'imâdiyyat*, § 31.

Henry dedicates a part of the *Essence of Manifestation* to Meister Eckhart, whom he presents as a thinker of immanence (Husserl thought he could annex him too).[20] I hope I have shown that Suhrawardî could also pass for a precursor on a decisive point of radical phenomenology. A Henrian reading of the Persian contributes toward finding him a place within contemporary thought. I endorse the just appreciation that Gabrielle Dufour-Kowalska makes of Henry, as a reader of Eckhart:

> When the philosopher appropriates somebody else's thought, and grants him/her within his own thought a privileged field of resonance, he is then capable, more than any other, of liberating a discourse that is prisoner of the past and of restituting its internal creativity.[21]

20. In Dorian Cairns, *Conversations with Husserl and Fink*, Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1976, 91.

21. Gabrielle Dufour-Kowalska, *Michel Henry. Passion et magnificence de la vie*, Paris: Beauchesne, 2003, 199.

Max Scheler and Edith Stein as Precursors to the "Turn to Religion" Within Phenomenology

JONNA BORNEMARK

> Das Gegebene ist unendlich reicher als der Teil des Gegebenen, der im strengen Sinne der sogenannten Sinneserfahrung entspricht.[1]

The relationship between phenomenology and religion, which today is often polemically phrased in terms of the "theological turn" described by Dominique Janicaud, in fact constitutes one of the basic tenets of the first phase of phenomenology, as can be seen in the pioneering work of Max Scheler and Edith Stein. Born Jews, just as Husserl, they both converted to Catholicism, whereas Husserl became a Protestant. Their religious background should not be seen as mere biographical facts — Scheler was indeed portrayed as the new hope for his Church during the early 1920s, and Stein became a nun a decade later — but enters into the very substance of their respective philosophies: the idea that givenness exceeds what is given in the originary mode is not only an epistemological problem, but already contains the seeds for a "theological turn" within phenomenology.

The contemporary problems of givenness and radical alterity are constantly present in these early discussions, as well as the topic of non-cognitive intentionality. A re-reading of the writings of Scheler and Stein will show that the question of the *limit* of phenomenology — a limit that conventionally has been understood as the border between philosophy and its other — was present from the very beginning, even that the reflection on this limit was not something that phenomenology

1. Max Scheler, *Vom Ewigen im Menschen*, Gesammelte Werke. Bd 5, Bern: Francke Verlag, 1954, 250. Henceforth referred to as VEM.

would eventually *encounter*, but was part of its very idea. In this questioning of its own limits phenomenology necessarily opens towards similar themes in religion, and the contributions of Scheler and Stein remain decisive not only for an understanding of the early phase of phenomenology, but also for the future prospect of a dialogue between philosophy and religion.

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Since the beginning of the 1990s the idea of a turn to religion within phenomenology has become widespread. A key writer in establishing this concept is Dominique Janicaud, even though his aim was to criticize this tendency within French phenomenology. Similarly to phenomenologists and theologians that take their point of departure from such a "turn", Janicaud states that this turn originates in Heidegger. It was Heidegger who turned to a phenomenology of the non-apparent and abandoned the phenomenology of originary givenness. Such a phenomenology of the non-apparent exceeds the intentional horizon, and would thus, according to Janicaud, be something totally different from Husserl's investigation of constitution.[2]

What I would like to suggest is that Janicaud overemphasizes the importance of Heidegger and has too narrow an understanding of Husserl's phenomenology. The necessary pre-conditions for a "turn to the non-apparent" are implicitly already present in Husserl, not least in his analysis of inner time-consciousness, passive synthesis, and intersubjectivity. Husserl scholars, such as Rudolf Bernet and Dan Zahavi, have (following in the footsteps of Aron Gurwitch) shown the richness of the concept of horizon in Husserl's philosophy, and others, such as Klaus Held and Eugen Fink, have discussed the anonymity and opacity of the self. Bernet suggests that Husserl's analysis aims at a "metaphysical" and transparent result, whereas that which he describes "often runs counter to his metaphysical understanding of himself."[3]

2. Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2000, 29ff and 94.

3. Rudolf Bernet, "Is the Present Ever Present? Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence," *Research in Phenomenology*, 12, 85–112, 1982, 101f.

An important case of this is Husserl's analysis of inner-time consciousness, which Husserl himself considers to be the deepest foundational analysis, and thus should offer the self-evident base of immanent consciousness. Instead this analysis leads to an increasingly apparent "transcendence" and a givenness that exceeds Husserl's own understanding of intentionality. (This transcendence also becomes more and more explicit: it is more present in *Bernauer Manuskripte* from 1917/18 than in the lectures on inner time-consciousness from 1905, and more explicit in the C-manuscripts from 1929–1934 than in *Bernauer Maniskripte*).[4]

The analysis of inner-time consciousness is developed further by, for example, Held and Fink. Held's expanded version of Husserl's phenomenology has also been the starting-point for a Husserlian theology, developed mainly by James Hart, who just as Held, begins from Husserl's analysis of inner-time consciousness.[5]

I have cited these examples in order to point to readings of Husserl that portray him as a philosopher of overflowing intentionalities. In the following I will not pursue these investigations, but instead turn to Scheler and Stein as two critical readers of Husserl, who by criticizing as well as continuing Husserl's thoughts come close to many themes that have become important in the so-called turn to religion today. But in order to do this, we first need to take a brief look at how some central aspects of the turn to religion have been formulated.

Jayne Svenungsson has for example stated that Heidegger provides thought structures and a set of concepts in which the concept of God can return: One key thought in the later Heidegger is that being neither can nor should be made into an object, but always escapes human thought. Being is thus something that exists and is given "before" our thinking. Svenungsson also points to Heidegger's concept of a "divine

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4. Edmund Husserl, *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein, (1917/18),* Hua XXXIII, ed. Rudolf Bernet and Dieter Lohmar, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001. *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929–1934). Die C-manuskripte*, Hua, Materialien Bd VII, ed. Dieter Lohmar, Dordrecht: Springer, 2006. *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, Hua X, ed. Rudolf Boehm, Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966.
5. See *Essays in Phenomenological Theology*, eds. Steven W. Laycock and James G. Hart, New York: State University of New York, 1986.

God" prior to any conceptualized God, which leads to the conclusion that theologians in conceptualizing God make him into a graspable object, and thus no longer God.[6] As we will see, all of these themes are present in both Stein's and Scheler's phenomenology. I thus agree with Svenungsson in her description of these themes of the turn, but I would like to broaden the perspective in order to include other early phenomenologists.

Another important trait in Stein and Scheler as well as in Heidegger is their criticism of Husserl's epistemological foundationalism — a theme that has been pursued by Levinas and Derrida, as well as by Jean-Luc Marion, who criticizes Husserl for having a concept of givenness that focuses exclusively on presence. It could be argued that givenness and visibility have received a much broader treatment in later phenomenology, for instance in Derrida, who has pointed to the necessity of blindness for vision,[7] and whose work has continually explored various facets of radical alterity and otherness.

Even though Husserl discusses the non-given as given through horizons, intersubjectivity, and inner time-consciousness, he focused on the ideal positive given. This is obvious also on those few occasions when he explicitly discusses the concept of "God." In the *Bernauer Manuskripte* the idea of God arises from the potentiality of all knowing, i.e., the possibility to turn the not-yet-given and no-longer-given into something originally given.[8] But what has been highlighted by later phenomenology in this analysis is instead a dimension of loss, the impossibility for intentionality to fully grasp the past as exactly the same, as well as the impossibility to fully grasp the self. The self always slips away from the grasp of reflection and intentionality. In emphasizing the non-given of every givenness, this type of analysis allows a radical alterity to appear. The "God" that appears in later phenomenology is thus closer to negative theology.

6. Jayne Svenungsson, *Guds återkomst: en studie av gudsbegreppet inom postmodern filosofi*, Göteborg: Glänta, 2004, 71, 77f.
7. See Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-portrait and Other Ruins*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
8. See for example Husserl, *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewußtsein*, §8, 45ff.

Janicaud claims that this is exactly the point where phenomenology goes wrong. He proposes that where Levinas, Marion, Henry, etc., went astray, Merleau-Ponty remained on the right track. He formulates a shibboleth that bears on the difference between an invisible *of this world*, and an *absolutely invisible*.[9] This way of putting it is, however, misleading since what he calls "absolutely invisible," and what I propose to call the non-givenness of the given, is by no means an invisible of *some other world*, but rather implies a broader understanding of visibility.

These questions lead us to the core of Scheler's as well as Stein's phenomenologies of religion. They both strike a balance between on the one hand an objectified and (in Heidegger's vocabulary) theological God, and on the other hand analyses that connect their philosophies to the tradition of negative theology. In the following I will explore some fruitful aspects in Scheler and Stein that point in the later direction and that can be understood as precursors of later phenomenological discussions.

An Alternative Concept of Intentionality: Scheler and Ordo Amoris

Towards the end of Scheler's life he and Heidegger became allies in their critique against Husserl's claim for the primacy of an intentionality based on knowledge, which in their view had led Husserl to preserve a Cartesian and solipsistic immanence.[10] Heidegger points towards Scheler's richer concept of intentionality, which gives primacy to the

9. Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn,"* 34.

10. Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffes*, GA 20, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1979, § 10, 124ff, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik,* GA 26, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978, 164–8. In Scheler we can find an explicit criticism of Husserl's epistemological understanding of the problem of intersubjectivity already in the preface to the second edition of *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, XII, Halle: Verlag von Max Niemeyer,. For a discussion on the relation between Scheler and Heidegger during Scheler's last years, see Mark Michalski, *Fremdwahrnehmung und Mitsein: Zur Grundlegung der Sozialphilosophie im Denken Max Schelers und Martin Heideggers*, Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1997, 24ff.

lover over the knower, as an alternative to Husserlian phenomenology. In *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffes* Heidegger states that the cognitive grasping of the given object is only one specific kind of act, and that it can be contrasted with the act of love in which the lover lives *in* the beloved.[11] In this kind of intentionality the loved one is not objectified and put at a distance, as is the case in cognitive intentionality. This also gives an opportunity to understand one's own self in a different, non-objectifying, way. Heidegger continues, stating that even if Husserl's phenomenology constitutes a first step away from an objectification of the self, Scheler reinforces and develops this movement further.[12]

Scheler thus claims that the world is not opened through rationality, but through love.[13] Love is the primordial giving act in which an object can be given to us. Love is not blind, but the premise for all seeing; it is the interest that guides every gaze and creates the possibility of perception and judgment, as well as of memory.[14] Love should not be understood as some emotional chaos, but nor can it be understood through the logic of reason: it is an order through which we live with our whole being in the other, and not only with our mental capacities. Thought must inversely be understood as the result of our love and hate, our striving and sensing, and not the other way around. This

11. Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffes* §10, 135.

12. In *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993, §10, 47–49, Heidegger argues for the similarity between Scheler and Husserl on this point, whereas in *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffes*, 175ff, he turns Scheler against Husserl.

13. Love is a central theme throughout Scheler's writings. His first phenomenological work from 1913 is *Zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Sympathiegefühl und von Liebe und Haß*. Halle: Verlag von Max Niemeyer, 1913. A second edition of this book was published 1923 as *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie,* 1927 (and this is the version I will use in the following hereafter referred to as WES). In 1916/17 he wrote the famous article "Ordo Amoris" (hereafter refered to as OA), that was published first in *Schriften aus dem Nachlass, Bd III, Philosophische Anthropologie*, Bern: Francke Verlag, 1987. The highly Catholic essay "Liebe und Erkenntnis" was published for the first time in 1916, and is also published with other essays in *Liebe und Erkenntnis*, Bern: Francke Verlag, 1955. In his last, and post-Catholic, period he wrote on the concept of love as eros, texts that have been published in *Schriften aus dem Nachlass, Bd III, Philosophische Anthropologie*.

14. "Liebe und Erkenntnis," 18, 26

does not, however, imply that the order of love would amount to something subjective, for in fact it constantly transcends the subject (OA 244 ff). It is through her being as *ens amans* that the human being also can be *ens cogitans* and *ens volens*. As *ens amans* she is transcending, because love is an original act through which a being, without stopping to be this being, leaves itself in order to intentionally take part in another being. The human being is thus always "out of herself" (OA 238).

Scheler refers to Brentano when he talks about love as an act and a movement, but unlike Brentano he claims that love, instead of being act of knowledge, is the very presupposition of knowledge. Knowledge is not love since it demands a distance that is alien to love (as well as to its opposite, hate) (WES 170f). Love is, thus, a more primordial givenness upon which the givenness of object-knowledge can be built.

In this understanding Scheler claims that love is not a social relationship (WES 173), it is not a feeling directed towards something or someone that I know, but must instead be related to the transcendence of the beloved. It is not primarily a response, but a spontaneous and creative act (WES 164 ff).

Love is directed towards something other, not however the other as a finalized object that the lover can grasp, but "in the direction of its specific perfection of value" (OA 237).[15] Love is bound to and directed towards values. But values are not some Platonic ideas, no fixed categories or regulative ideas, instead they are something that can be characterized as a "more." With Karl Jaspers, Scheler suggests that values are not discovered through love, but that everything *becomes valuable* in love (WES 178, footnote 1). The value is what draws us towards it, that of which we want more, and what constantly shows itself as transcending us. Love lives in its direction towards the value (the valuable), and a fulfilled love would be a dead love: "love would never be fulfilled. For the transcending of given positive values towards a 'higher' belongs to their phenomenological essence" (WES 225).[16]

15. "die Richtung der ihm eigentümlichen Wertvollkommenheit". All translations from the german are mine.

16. "die Liebe wäre nie erfüllt. Denn das Transzendieren der gegebenen positiven Werte in die Richtung 'höher' gehört zu ihrem phänomenologischen Wesen"

Values continually show a higher co-given side as their center. But this center is always partly transcendent and the values can thus not be reduced to how they are given to human beings — they always exceed their givenness: "Thus, it belongs to the essence of love, that that, which it loves, which is phenomenologically 'given' in the act, is always more than what the loving one immediately feels in relation to values" (WES 221).[17]

To be in love means that the loving person

> allways lets the gaze of the movement of love extend a bit beyond the given. Precisely through this, the movement unfolds — especially in the case of personal love — the person, in her specific dimension of ideality and perfection, principally into infinity. (OA 241)[18]

Love and values belong together; love is directed toward values and values are visible only through love as a "more" of the beloved (WES 182ff). But he also tends to separate the given from its co-given values. He thus suggests a reduction in which we can look away from the given being that carries the values and reach a pure sphere of values. Such a sphere would be the divine (WES 179). The transcending movement in Scheler's thought can therefore be understood in two ways: 1) As if we turned away from the human being as a given being and turned to the co-given value as something separated or even cut off from the given. 2) The values as an intensification of the human being who, as a person, is always transcending, which thus allows the person to appear in a different light.

Both of these interpretations are present in Scheler's text, and even if he does not explicate this distinction, it is one of importance in our understanding of the similarities to the contemporary turn to religion in phenomenology.

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17. "Es gehört so zum Wesen der Liebe, daß das, was sie liebt, was im Akte phänomenologisch 'gegeben' ist, immer mehr ist, als was der Liebende an Werten gerade jetzt fühlt"

18. "läßt den Blickstrahl der Liebesbewegung immer ein wenig weiter über das Gegebene hinausspähen. Die Bewegung entfaltet — im höchsten Falle der Personliebe — eben hierdurch die Person in der ihr eigentümlichen Idealitäts- und Vollkommenheitsrichtung prinzipiell ins Unbegrenzte."

One argument for the latter interpretation can be found in relation to art. In *Ordo Amoris* Scheler claims that love means a "listening going along" [*ein Horchende Entlanggehen*] (OA 247). This going-along returns as a loving-going-along in relation to God: As an anti-Platonist he states that the transcendent holy, infinite, and good should never be understood as an idea of the Good, since such an idea needs to be objectified, whereas values can never be fully objectified since they are constantly transcending (WES 176). He thus claims that since something like the Good or God can never stand in front of us, it cannot be loved on its own. The highest form of love is consequently not a love to God as an object, but a co-enactment [*Mitvollzug*] of God's love to the world. To love the world, *amare mundum*, would in fact mean what St. Augustine called *amar in deo*, to love the world in God (WES 187ff). There is, thus, no love for God "beyond," or "without" the world. But that does not make the concept of God superfluous, since the world is constantly transcending its givenness. To love the world *in* God would then mean to love the world in its transcending.

But can such love be the task of philosophy, or is it exclusively the task of faith? Would Scheler and Stein claim that philosophy is restricted to an objectifying and cognitive intentionality?

Faith and Phenomenology as Parallel Paths

In her later phase Stein proposes that philosophy has strict limits: it is characterized by proofs of God, sharp concepts, and the power of deduction. The clarity of philosophy is therefore also the limit of philosophy. In Stein's view, philosophy can never investigate the non-apparent, since it needs to objectify and give full visibility to every concept (EES 60). Philosophy can, thus, never get out of the paradigm of a differentiating visibility. Faith, on the other hand, Stein says, is where God shows himself as the creator and preserver. Her argument shows that her understanding of faith can lead to an objectification of the non-givenness, and as such take us into theology. This theological position has, as we noted earlier, been thoroughly criticized by Heidegger. He claims that this type of objectification goes beyond the phenomenological findings. In his discussion of the call of conscience,

he suggests that the scientific fallacy lies in the conclusion that what cannot be brought forward as an object cannot be at all, whereas the religious fallacy resides in the conclusion that what *is* also needs to be present-at-hand.[19]

The inability to admit non-objectifying intentionality is thus located differently by Heidegger and Stein. When Stein has the need to formulate an intentionality different from the cognitive, she takes a step away from philosophy and enters into faith. As spiritual, faith is always a movement and "doesn't allow its knowledge be caught in rigid definitions, but must itself be a continual movement and find afluid expression" (KSJ 99).[20]

She also claims that faith is that which shows being as dependent and as pointing beyond itself. It is through faith that she can relate to the non-given. But this non-given is not a radical alterity, but a beyond *in which we move*: "This obscure intuition gives us the incomprehensible as the inescapably close, in which we 'live, move, and exist,' but as the Incomprehensible" (EES 61; Stein's footnote reference to the quote is to *Acts*, 17, 28).[21]

It is only through faith that we can relate to this ungraspable closeness: faith as a non-cognitive relation to a necessary, but ungraspable, transcendence in the world. In Scheler we find a related concept of faith. In order to make this concept clear we could compare his discussion of faith with his analysis of the phenomenon of shivering and anxiety.[22] To begin with, shivering with cold is both a symptom of a person being cold, and at the same time a response to, for example, cold air. In making the body move, shivering tries to regain some warmth. In a similar manner, anxiety is also a symptom or spontaneous reaction to a situation; it is a consequence of something that has already happened. But in Scheler's analysis, it is at the same time a response that makes another future possible, a response that counter-

19. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §57, 275.

20. "läßt sich seine Erkenntnis nicht in starre Definitionen einfangen, sondern muß selbst fortschreitende Bewegung sein und sich einen fließenden Ausdruck suchen"

21. "Dies dunkle Spüren gibt uns den Unfaßlichen als den unentrinnbar Nahen, in dem wir 'leben, uns bewegen und sind', aber als den Unfaßlichen"

22. Analyzed in the article "Reue und Wiedergeburt" in VEM.

acts the negative experience and releases the person from its preservation as a bad conscience. In this way anxiety ties the past and the future together through a transcending movement in which we can supersede our past and create a different future (VEM 54). Faith follows a similar pattern: the original event in faith can be compared to the experience of one's own non-knowing. The non-knowing of faith is the consequence or symptom of the limitation of all knowledge. Just as the shivering reveals the cold to us, faith reveals our not-knowing, the not-given of the co-given. But the other side, and the response to this not-knowing, is a positive faith: we always believe in *something*. Just as shivering immediately counteracts the cold, faith is immediately filled with a content. Scheler calls this the sphere of the absolute, which the capitalist fills with money, the nationalist with the nation, and the religious person with God. But he also claims that God is the most proper way to fill this sphere, since God, in contrast to other values, is always transcending and can never be completely grasped (VEM 262 ff). In this case, God is neither a complete absence nor something fully given — God is instead the touching of that which cannot be grasped. God is not something that can be seen, nor something to which we are totally blind — but that which can only be touched, as Descartes already noted. This is the touching of a limit, which at the same time separates and connects.

Faith, here, is a way for the finite being to relate to its finitude and its horizons of co-givenness and non-givenness. From the perspective of a phenomenology that investigates the phenomenon of limits and the relation of co-givenness and non-givenness, testimonies to such a faith would be more interesting than most types of philosophy and theology. Both Scheler and Stein also relate phenomenology to different religious structures, and in the following I will look more closely at some of these strategies.

The Transformation of Wesensschau to Visio Beatifica

Stein wants to locate several similarities between phenomenology and various Christian techniques. She formulates two ways, one positive

and one negative. The positive way deals with foundational *forms*, that which is unchanging in our changing experience. These foundational forms emerge through eidetic variation or *Wesensschau*, and they are what are intended in the concept of *transcendentals*. This *Wesensschau* is made possible by the free movement of the human spirit through memory and fantasy—it is the movement of the inner eye across experience as a whole (EES 241).

We can understand this as a static analysis in Husserl's sense of the term, an analysis that aims to grasp the most general way in which being can be understood. The transcendentals are in this sense the emptiest forms of being as they stand in front of us. But, as Stein suggests, being is revelation to spirit, and the other necessary investigation would then aim to understand *revelation* or *appearance*. This type of investigation would come closer to a genetic analysis of how beings show themselves.

This is the project that Stein undertakes in "Was ist Philosophie? Ein Gespräch zwischen Edmund Husserl und Thomas von Aquino."[23] Stein sets up a discussion between Husserl and Thomas on whether the means of knowledge themselves can be fully known. The difference between them would be that Husserl claims that such knowledge would be an immediate knowledge in pure immanence, whereas Thomas (and Stein) claim that being and knowledge always fall apart in human knowledge. To Stein and Thomas such an immediate knowledge can only be found in and through God (EuG 30).

If the human being follows such a religious path, she can reach what Stein calls immediate insight. The immediacy of these insights does not mean that they are the most obvious, i.e., they are not something that would not need any preparation. Instead, they are foundational and thus hidden truths. These insights are not deduced from something else, they are the origin of deduced truths. They are co-originarily given, or co-given with deduced truths. This means that deduced truths are what is given first, chronologically. Thomas as well as Husserl search for these immediate insights on which the empirical is built. And they both suggest that we need to investigate our own

23. Published in *Erkenntnis und Glaube*, Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1993. Henceforth referred to as EuG.

existence in order to reach these insights. According to Stein they both agree on three possible means necessary to deduce knowledge:

> 1. The light of understanding [*Verstand*], by virtue of which we know.
> 2. Forms, shapes, or categories through which understanding knows a being.
> 3. Objects through which we can experience other objects, for example mirror images. (EuG 44)

The first one of these three is necessary for the other two. Thomas claims that this light of understanding is intimately connected to the soul. The soul is not one being among other beings but that being through which the others are given. Stein therefore understands Thomas's concept of soul as a parallel to Husserl's concept of the pure I. Like Husserl, Thomas claims that our intentional acts are originally directed to other or outer objects.[24] The knowledge of the "directedness" itself, i.e., intentionality, is thus, just as knowledge of our own existence, won through a self-reflection of intentionality. But knowledge of the soul also demands categories (the second means enumerated above), since the soul must also understand itself as one kind of being among many. But in knowing oneself in categories, something is also not grasped. That which slips away in the grasping of subjectivity when it is turned into an object of knowledge is what Stein calls the divine:

> for the divine essence is not known through specific species, unlike created beings [. . .] God is the light and communicates this light to the blesses, and in this light, they beholdthe light, but in different degrees, corresponding to how much has been communicated to them. Only God himself is knowledge, in which knowledge and object thus fully coincide. (EuG 45 f)[25]

24. Intentionality is of course a central concept that binds the scholastic tradition and the Husserlian tradition together, but I will not develop this theme here.
25. "denn das göttliche Wesen wird nicht wie die Geschöpfe durch besondere Species erkannt [...] Gott *ist* das Licht und teilt *von* diesem Licht den Seligen mit und in seinem Licht schauen sie das Licht, aber in verschiedenem Maß und Grad, dem Maß des Mitgeteilten ensprechend. Nur Gott selbst *ist* die Erkenntnis, in der darum Erkenntnis und Gegenstand völlig zusammenfallen."

God cannot be understood through any means since he *is* the most foundational mean, the light of reason. This light of reason is used in order to make distinctions. All positive knowledge about the world uses this discriminating power, which makes it possible to discriminate one thing from another. Immediacy can only be ascribed to what she calls divine knowledge, in which the interior is not separated from the exterior, means are not separated from content, the subject not from object, and so on. As the light of reason, this knowledge exists in human knowledge, but is only negatively known, it is only co-given. If *Wesensschau* or eidetic variation is what this immediate knowledge "does," then Stein claims that there is another kind of vision that relates differently to immediate knowledge. With Thomas she calls this *visio beatifica*. Through this type of vision the human being can take part in the immediate knowledge of God. When a person sees an object in *visio beatifica*, she simultaneously beholds its origin and givenness in God, or light of reason. This *visio* at the same time includes human discriminative knowledge about the "what" [*res*] of the object, and its state of indivision from, and origin in God. The holy person beholds these at the same time. In the terminology I have used here, this could be expressed as a simultaneous vision of the given and its non-given origin. In the *visio beatifica* these two moments are seen at once, but as soon as they enter language they are immediately split up and one of them is brought forth at the expense of the other. The vision and its arrival to language is a process of falling apart, just as every piece of human knowledge necessarily includes such a falling apart.

Stein claims that Husserl as well as Thomas follows this process. But to Husserl the light of rationality needs to find its own immediate ground within immanence, which Stein understands as within the human mind itself. It is in this immanence that a ground must be located, where the object and the subject can be one and the same. Stein suggests that Husserl keeps believing that such a fusion takes place in the reflection on inner time-consciousness. And with Thomas she objects that such a oneness would be possible in human immanence (just as later phenomenologists have claimed that Husserl's own analysis does not acknowledge the gap of inner time-consciousness). In Scholastic thinking this immediacy can only exist in God. And in

visio beatifica, the visionary person "borrows" such an immediacy from God and thus needs to go beyond herself (EuG 44 ff). Human knowledge could never be transparent and see its own origin:

> In every finite and temporal act, the act of knowledge and the known fall apart, even when that which is known is an act of knowledge and is known in a reflection, which is the consciousness that accompanies it and temporally coincides with it. Therefore we must say that every final act of knowledge transcendence itself. (EuG 50)[26]

But this transcendence is at the same time a touching upon what slips away, since it is its product. In Stein's terminology this non-given origin is God, in Husserl's terminology it is the living stream of subjectivity.

When Stein says that the holy person can "borrow" immediacy from God, it means that there is no transparency. We must instead understand "God" as including the opportunity of *receiving* a possibility to touch immediacy. "Borrow" would then point towards the passivity within the reception of such an immediacy. This touching can be understood as the possibility of being aware of Husserl's "living stream" without objectifying it.[27]

Because of this non-transparency of knowledge, Stein argues for a necessary difference between Being and the understanding of Being. (And she criticizes Heidegger for not acknowledging this difference; see EES 499, footnote 146.) Like Scheler she wants to accept a givenness of the non-given that prevents the understanding of Being from including all of Being. And Stein claims, just as Scheler, that philosophy needs faith in order to be able to see the limits of its own

26. "Bei jedem endlichen und zeitlichen Akt fallen Erkenntnisakt und Erkanntes auseinander, selbst wenn das Erkannte ein Erkenntnisakt ist und wenn es in einer Reflexion erkannt wird, die das ihn begleitende und zeitlich mit ihm zusammenfallende Bewußtsein ist. So muß man sagen, daß jeder endliche Erkenntnisakt sich selbst transzendiert."
In her dissertation *Zum Problem der Einfühlung*, Halle: Buchdruckerei des Waisenhauses, 1917, she still has faith in a coincidence in vision and reflection on vision, for example, see 111.

27. On this point Stein comes close to Michel Henry's discussion on immanent consciousness, as a non-objectifying intentionality.

knowledge. Faith shows being in a new light and shows that which cannot be seen in a paradigm of knowledge (EES 30 f). But faith is not another kind of knowledge:

> faith gives us something to understand, but only to point toward something that remains incomprehensible to us. Since the ultimate ground of all beings can not be grasped, everything which is seen from out of this ground steps into the 'obscure light' of faith and secrecy, and everything comprehensible acquires an incomprehensible background. This is what P. Przywara has called "reductio ad mysterium". (EES 32)[28]

This obscure light does not produce any new knowledge, but makes all knowledge look different.

Reduction as Negative Theology

Scheler similarly relates phenomenology to negative theology. In this way, the eidetic reduction does not mainly produce the givenness of essences as visible objects, but rather peels off every graspable character. The essences are not given "in an eternal life of spirit in the 'essentials' of all things, but in an eternal fading away" (VEM 68).[29]

Reduction is not a method for grasping a sphere of essences, but a method to continually lose such a grip. And through this the spirit that makes things visible comes to touch itself. But what is touched in this movement is not only the human spirit as active, but at the same instant that which goes beyond every constituted spirit, the spirit in its passivity. We could speak here of a mystic realism in Scheler as well as in Stein. They both objected to the transcendental idealism of Husserl and suggested that reality must be separated from what can

28. "Er gibt uns etwas zu verstehen, aber nur, um uns auf etwas hinzuweisen, was für uns unfaßlich bleibt. Weil der letzte Grund alles Seienden ein unergründlicher ist, darum rückt alles, was von ihm her gesehen wird, in das 'dunkle Licht' des Glaubens und des Geheimnisses, und alles Begreifliches bekommt einen unbegreiflichen Hintergrund. Das ist was P. Przywara als "reductio ad mysterium" bezeichnet hat."
29. "in einem ewigen Leben des Geistes im 'Wesenhaften' aller Dinge, sondern in ewigem Absterben zu sehen"

be known. Knowledge can never provide an object with a definite and finished definition, since this would imply that the object could be completely exhausted by the human spirit. If the object did not exceed its mode of givenness to a human being, it would not be something separate from this human. It would be completely given without any sides co-given as non-given. To be undefinable is thus the sign of every real essence, since it transcends the epistemological subject. Scheler also claims that the existence or reality of an essence increases with its undefinability (VEM 167ff). The more non-givenness that is co-given with the given, the more reality there is.

The divine, as the highest value or essence, is in Scheler's understanding the life of the human spirit, but as such it also exceeds this human spirit. As spirit, the divine is the living stream through which every thought and experience is given. The highest essence cannot be conceptualized and grasped since it is the movement of conceptualization and of grasping. To be conceptualized means to be brought back to other concepts, but there are no other concepts to which the divine could be brought back. Scheler thus claims that the search for graspable essences is a search that sooner or later will come upon an undefinable essence through which all other concepts come forth (VEM 167).

The divine is thus reached only through a "peeling off," only through a negative method. Scheler states that such a movement from a rationalistic point of view would be totally unfruitful since it does not "see" anything: no shape comes forth. Nevertheless, he claims that this negative movement directs the gaze in another direction; it is not purely negative but opens another kind of seeing. What is reached is the hyper-conceptually given, as a necessary ground for everything that is conceptually given. The negative movement tries to direct the gaze towards the non-given of the co-given. The movement beyond every image or concept does not imply a movement toward absolute emptiness; it is rather a reduction to the movement of a *giving*, not a reduction to something *given*. Is it at the same time the limit of knowledge and the origin of all knowledge.

Phenomenology and negative theology thus have a common method. Scheler therefore claims that the phenomenological method was first used in Christian neo-Platonism, as a method to make all

images dissolve. It is a negative method, but a negative method that at the same time provides the possibility for every affirmation. "Faith" is the name of the relation to this negativity, a relation that always takes the shape of affirmations (VEM 163ff, 174).

Giving can here not be reduced to a giver and a receiver but is a loving movement. It does not include an objectification of the value that is loved, which as we have seen would be the end of love, but a taking part in it. Scheler claims that being is much richer than what is possible to objectify, and he suggests that we are able to take part of a "being of act." This act-being is in Scheler the being of the person. A person is not what can be represented, but at its core that which is immediately lost in any representation; it is the *experiencing*, but not the *experienced*, the unity of every experience, but not a substance.[30] We can only take part of this being through co-enactment (VEM 71f).

What is real for Scheler is thus what is given but exceeds man and his knowledge. The real also goes beyond the given and is given as a co-originary non-givenness. This non-givenness is however not something that is totally unrelated to the human being, and the real is not something beyond human knowledge that would make the latter unreal. But real knowledge always *also* exceeds what is known. Negative theology and Scheler's version of phenomenological reduction as a peeling off are loving movements that are more interested in the excess of the given than in cutting off the given from this excess. That is why I have called it a "mystical realism." This excess is also the true nature of the human being; we are always in the midst of such a movement.

The Dark Night of Lived Reduction

Let me, as a final analysis, discuss Stein's reading of John of the Cross, which also has been compared with the phenomenological reduction.[31]

30. The concept of person is one of Scheler's most important concepts. It is developed most fully in *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, Halle: Verlag von Max Niemeyer, 1927, 385ff.

31. Both Herbert Hecker and Rolf Kühn have seen Stein's interest in the mystic tradition in her late years as a fulfillment of her phenomenological intentions of

But here the mystical moment appears as a fuller embodiment of the phenomenological movement. Step by step John leaves the constituted world and turns to its constituting origin. The famous "night" of John's journey thus conceptualizes the turn toward transcendental presuppositions that in the end always transcend their givenness; it is a change of direction of intentionality. The night is, in Stein's words,

> invisible and formless. And yet we perceive it, it is much closer to us, than all things and forms, it is much more intimately connected with our being. Just as the light allows things to appear with their visible properties, the night folds back on itself and also threatens to engulf us. That which founders in the night, is not simply nothing: it remains, although indeterminate, invisible, and formless as the night itself, or shadow-like and ghostly, and thus threatening. Here our own being is not just threatened from without, from the dangers hidden in the night, it is effected in its innermost self by the night. (KSJ 33)[32]

Stein discusses how John reaches this transcending presence. Step by step he leaves all natural knowledge to enter, or focus on, its co-given origin. He does not only take leave of the givenness of sense knowledge, but also of the givenness of every specific memory and image (KSJ 71ff). This is called "night," since it makes the soul acquainted with something that cannot be seen, and the wonder of this night is exactly that it is *possible* to be acquainted with something that cannot be seen — that such non-seeing, which is also called *visio dei,* is possible as an experience of the limits of oneself. Also what she formulates as the

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her early years. See *Phänomenologie des Christlichen bei Edith Stein*, Herbert Hecker, Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1993, 379f, footnote 78, and Rolf Kühn, "Leben aus dem Sein," in Waltraud Herbstrith, *Denken im Dialog. Zur Philosophie Edith Steins*, Tübingen: Attempto Verlag, 1991, 118–132.

32. "unsichtbar und Gestaltlos. Und doch nehmen wir sie wahr, ja sie ist uns viel näher als alle Dinge und Gestalten, ist mit unserem Sein viel enger verbunden. Wie das Licht die Dinge mit ihren sichtbaren Eigenschaften hervortreten läßt, so verschlingt sich die Nacht und droht auch uns zu verschlingen. Was in ihr versinkt, das ist nicht einfach nichts: es bleibt bestehen, aber unbestimmt, unsichtbar und gestaltlos wie die Nacht selbst oder schattenhaft und gespenstisch und darum bedrohlich. Dabei ist unser eigenes Sein nicht nur durch die in der Nacht verborgenen Gefahren von außen bedroht, sondern durch die Nacht selbst innerlich betroffen."

goal of this *visio*, God, is himself a darkness since the eye is not adjusted to his extreme light. It is a dazzling light in which we cannot see, and it can be understood as darkness to the extent that we, within its luminosity, are blind, since it is the origin of all visibility (KSJ 38).

Love is what makes this movement possible; through the movement and directedness of love everything can be abandoned. This also implies that this love is a love without knowledge of its goal (KSJ 60). Finally, the last and darkest moment of John's journey differs from previous steps in that it is no longer a change of direction of intentionality. The last moment is instead a taking leave of intentionality, where not even God is understood as something to which we could be directed (KSJ 109f). In this condition of a total night, Stein with Johannes claims that darkness becomes a burning love (KSJ 114). This experience could be understood in relation to Heidegger's phenomenological description of anxiety as the place where every being loses its meaning and the possibility of an access to the totality of beings is opened up. Here what we could call a non-discriminating light comes forth. Beyond intentionality there is still being, and this experience hovers in the background of every other experience.

After this experience the burning love or wholeness is no longer understood through comparisons and images. The order is reversed and every image is instead understood through the experience of burning love, i.e., every image, concept, and specific being is known through its origin. (KSJ 214) The end of John's journey is however a return to the multiple world. But it is a return that entails a different way of seeing, where God no longer is understood through insufficient images, but John realizes that the beings of the world can only be seen through God.

Conclusion

In all of these examples the investigation has, from different angles, explored the limits of knowledge. Scheler formulates love as a primary intentionality, necessary for the intentionality of knowledge. Faith appears in both Stein and Scheler as the intentionality through which the givenness of the non-given appears, beyond the clarity of philosophy. Phenomenology however turns out to be a parallel path

that leads us to the limits of knowledge. Stein develops *Wesensschau* into *visio beatifica* and Scheler connects reduction to negative theology. Finally Stein's analysis of the dark night of the soul has been understood as the concrete experience of a reduction in which love turns out to be a parallel to anxiety in its possibility to give access to the totality of beings.

Phenomenology from its very beginning questioned its own instruments of knowledge and discovered its limits, and in this task stumbled on the transcending aspect of the given. Janicaud's shibboleth, that I discussed earlier, was formulated as the difference between an invisible *of this world*, and an *absolutely invisible*. But what if an absolutely invisible is given in this world? Phenomenology needs to discuss the co-given of givenness, as well as its co-givenly non-given sides. The step between co-given and non-given should not be overemphasized; every co-given has a non-given side to it, otherwise it would be pure givenness. In pursuing this task phenomenology can be related to other similar tasks within traditions labeled as religious. Stein and Scheler connect to the Christian scholastic, as well as mystic, tradition but the phenomenological tradition can, and has, also been connected to, for example, the Mahayana Buddhist or Sufic traditions. I would say that it is not phenomenology that turns to religious questions, but that some religious traditions are trying to come to grips with questions that we can formulate as strictly phenomenological.

Nevertheless I still would say that we can find a shibboleth *within* Stein's and Scheler's works. For them it was unproblematic to align themselves with the Catholic Church, whereas later phenomenologists have found this more complicated, or at least felt the need to strictly separate their philosophical and theological work. This difference can be related to a central phenomenological point that I would like to emphasize: phenomenology always needs to keep the connection between the non-given and the given through which it is given. Any attempt to cut off the non-given from the given immediately leads to an objectification of the non-given. This means that *the non-given can only appear as non-given through the given*.

Through Theology to Phenomenology, and Back to Anthropology? Heidegger, Bultmann, and the Problem of Sin

CHRISTIAN SOMMER

1. *Between Phenomenology and Theology: The Problem of Sin*

I will enter into our problematic through an archeological analysis of a particularly significant case of thinking during the twentieth century, where we can find, albeit in a highly entangled way, New Testamentarian and/or theological elements within a philosophical framework: Heidegger's *Being and Time* published in1927. To make manifest this complex interrelation between philosophy and theology, which perpetuates a Western tradition that begins at least with Augustine's reception of late Ancient Greek philosophy, I would like to isolate, in Heidegger's text and subtext, an exemplary phenomenon that we may call the "circuit of lust." I will then question this operation of transposition or transfer of theological elements and discuss its legitimacy in Heidegger and beyond.

Heidegger's analytics of "falling" or "fallenness" [*Verfallen*, *Verfallenheit*] will be our starting point. In §38 of *Being and Time*, the general mode of phenomenalization of the "mobility of falling" [*Bewegtheit des Verfallen*] of human being or Dasein in its everydayness is characterized by the term "whirl," or "turbulence" [*Wirbel*]:

> This constant tearing away from authenticity and into the "they" [*das Man*] (though always with the simulation of authenticity) characterizes the mobility of falling as a *whirl*.[1]

1. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* [SZ], Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001, 178; *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, New York: Harper & Row, 1962;

This whirl disperses the human being among the glories of the world, tearing it into "the tranquillized supposition that it possesses everything, or that everything is within its reach,"[2] as Heidegger writes, and thus brings the existence away from its highest possibility, this means: away from its possible authenticity or own excellence and fulfillment [*Eigentlichkeit*], as it can be represented, for example, by the ideal of a philosophical life.[3] This mobility of falling is a fleeing from the possibility of authenticity, which human being, when it is dissolved in the world of diversion, in the sense of Pascal's *divertissement*, does not want to see, or cannot see, and thus constantly represses:

> The absorption of *Dasein* in the "they" and in the "world" of its concern reveals something like a *flight* of *Dasein* from itself as an authentic potentiality for being itself [. . .] In this flight, *Dasein* precisely does not bring itself before itself. In accordance with its ownmost characteristic of falling, this turning away leads *away from Dasein*.[4]

With his doctrine of the mobility of falling, Heidegger incorporates in his book of 1927, in a very ambiguous manner that I would like to question later, certain results of his phenomenology of temptation developed in his lecture course on Augustine's *Confessions* in 1921; some traces of this work can be found in *Being and Time* with the notions of entanglement, alienation, temptation, and tranquillization, all characterizing *Dasein*'s everyday mobility of falling.[5]

Being and Time, trans. J. Stambaugh, Albany: SUNY Press, 1996. The term "whirl" could be a reference to Augustine, *Ep. Io. tr.*, II, 10 on 1 John 2.16: *Volvit te amor mundi ? tene Christum*. I have chosen not to burden this text with a scholarly apparatus; for documentation and further elaboration of some parts of it, the reader can refer to C. Sommer, *Heidegger, Aristote, Luther. Les sources aristotéliciennes et néo-testamentaires d'*Etre et Temps, Paris: PUF, 2005.

2. SZ [1927], 178.

3. Cf. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* [GA], 19 [WS 1924/25], 169 on Aristotle, *Met.* V, 16, 1021 b 20; GA 18 [SS 1924], 46, 99; Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* II, 5, 1106 a 15; I, 6, 1098 a 15; IX, 9, 1169 b 33; X, 7, 1178 a 5. On *Eigentlichkeit = agathon/eudaimonia*, cf. GA 18 [SS 1924], 75, 77; *Eth. Nic.* I, 3, 1095 b 14.

4. SZ [1927], 184. On this movement of "turning away", cf. SZ [1927], 135–136, 139, 184, 253–259, 425; on the movement of flight (*Flucht*, *fuga* . . .), cf. GA 17 [WS 1923], 284–288; GA 20 [SS 1925], 391–393; SZ [1927], 184–185, 257–258; GA 24 [SS 1924], 193.

5. GA 60 [SS 1921]; SZ [1927], 177-178; GA 20 [SS 1920], 389.

The mobility of falling is a constant "fall" [*Absturz*] into the "nothingness" [*Nichtigkeit*], or vanity, of the inauthentic, "worldly" existence, into the discursive mode of opinion [doxa] und falseness [*pseudos*] of what Heidegger calls *das Man*, and is therefore a falling away from the authentic self articulated by a truth-saying *logos*. This, I want to argue, is a phenomenological conceptualization of Martin Luther's description, in his commentary of the Book of Genesis,[6] of the excessive and "hyperbolic" nature of sin (Rom. 7.13) as a movement of flight that turns away from God.

Heidegger gave a two-part talk on *The Problem of Sin in Luther* in Rudolf Bultmann's seminar on Paul's ethics (1923/24) on February 14 and 21 of 1924 in Marburg, with a large part of it on this Lutherian commentary, especially on the exegesis of Genesis 3.[7] Let us remember what happens there. The "man" and the "woman" hear the sound of God walking up and down in the garden, and they try to hide themselves from the presence of God among the trees (Gen. 3.8). Then God calls Adam and says to him: "Where are You?" (Gen. 3.9). In his commentary, Luther writes:

> This is the description of the trial. After Adam has become terrified through the awareness of his sin, he avoids the sight of God and realizes that not only Paradise but the entire world is too narrow to be a safe hiding place. And now, in that mental agony, he reveals his stupidity by seeking relief from sin through flight from God. But he had already fled too far from God. Sin itself is the real withdrawal from God, and it

6. Martin Luther, *In primum librum Mose enarrationes = Enarrationes in Genesin, Exegetica opera latina*, curavit Elsperger, I, Erlangen, 1829 / *Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [WA], Weimar, 1883, *et sq.* (reprint Graz, Böhlau, 1964 *et sq.*) 42, 127–131; *Lecture on Genesis*, in *Luther's Works*, tr. G. V. Schick, ed. J. Pelikan, vol. 1 (chap. 1–5), Saint Louis: Concordia, 1958.

7. M. Heidegger, *Das Problem der Sünde bei Luther*, in B. Jaspert, *Sachgemässe Exegese. Die Protokolle aus Rudolf Bultmanns Neutestamentlichen Seminaren 1921–1951* (Marburg: Elwert, 1996) 28–33; *The Problem of Sin in Luther* [PSL], trans. J. Van Buren, in Heidegger, *Supplements*, ed. J. Van Buren, Albany: SUNY Press, 2002, 105–110. I tried to comment Heidegger's commentary of Luther's commentary in Heidegger, *Luther et le problème du péché (1924)*, in *Alter. Revue de phénoménologie*, 12 (2004), 255–288. We can find some traces of this talk in SZ [1927], 179f, SZ [1927], 306, n. 1. Luther's commentary is quoted in SZ [1927], 190.

> would not have been necessary to add any further flight. Thus it happens and this is the nature of sin that the farther man withdraws from God, the farther he still desires to withdraw; and he who has once fled and apostatized keeps on fleeing forever.[8]

The source and the beginning of all perversity and all fallenness is, of course, the original sin, the Fall. Man turns away from God and falls away from his original faith. The meaning of sin is this apostasy, this godlessness and remoteness from God, and it could be described, as Heidegger does, as a fundamental dynamic category of human being in the world. After having underlined that for Luther, the very essence of man is corruption (a doctrine that we can recognize in the concept of "guilt beyond lack" [*Mangel*] and *privatio* in *Being and Time*), Heidegger comments:

> Luther turns his attention to the movement that sin [*Bewegtheit der Sünde*] as a mode of the being of man bears in itself: One sin begets another and drags man down even deeper. The real sin is *incredulitas*, i.e., unbelief, *aversio dei* [turning away from God].[9]

This dynamic can be said to be hyperbolic because this sin is a sin that "might become sinful beyond measure," exceedingly sinful (Rom. 7.13), in such a manner that the "real meaning of sin is this": "He who flees once flees in such a way that he constantly wishes to distance himself further, he keeps on fleeing forever."[10]

Heidegger's interpretation is very close to the interpretation of his friend and colleague Rudolf Bultmann — Heidegger and Bultmann were together in Marburg from 1923 to 1928 and regularly worked together — who also insisted, in an article published in 1925, on the importance of the movement of fleeing in Luther's commentary of Genesis 3:

> Adam thinks he is able to flee before God; but by the flight, God's claim and address [*Anspruch*] is not cancelled [. . .] how right Luther is when

8. Luther, WA 42, 128f.
9. PSL, 108.
10. PSL, 109.

> he says that the natural man flees before God and hates God. By fleeing the reality of his concrete existence, he precisely seeks to flee from that in which only he can find God.[11]

It is important to hear this *Anspruch* and to be able to respond to it by faith, to have some chance of being justified by God's transforming action, of being brought to my authentic self through inauthenticity, through the "world" and my sinful condition. This is also what Heidegger means when he says in his commentary:

> And nonetheless the situation of man in which he distances himself from God is a relation to God that shows itself in a certain looking back on man's part in the sense that God is rejected as *auctor peccati*, in the sense that man says: 'God is not God'. And this situation of man is effected by God, insofar as it is the *summa gratia* [highest grace] that he did not remain silent after the Fall but *loquitur* [speaks].[12]

The situation of the sinful and corrupt human, fallen away from God, is the very work of divine grace. The state of sin, which is, strictly speaking, alienation from God, is correlated with the redemption of sin by the grace of God as a happening or an event that occurs without my will. For Luther, a close reader of Paul, grace is not granted on the ground of merits and works, as shown in (Eph. 2.8–9): "Because by grace you have salvation through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is given by God: Not by works, so that no man may take glory to himself". Grace is granted on the ground of sin (Rom. 5.20): "where sin abounded, grace overabounded." In other words, I first have to get lost to get saved: "whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8.35).[13]

But let us concentrate on this hyperbolic fleeing as the meaning of

11. Bultmann, "Welchen Sinn hat es, von Gott zu reden?" [1925] in *Glauben und Verstehen* [GV], 1, 1933, Göttingen: V&R, 1993, 28, 30. Cf. also "Die liberale Theologie und die jüngste theologische Bewegung" [1924], in GV, 1, 1–25, spec. 18; "Römer 7 und die Anthropologie des Paulus" [1932], in *Exegetica. Aufsätze zur Erforschung des Neuen Testaments*, ed. E. Dinkler, Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1967, 198–209.

12. PSL, 109.

13. Cf. also Luke 17.33, Matt. 10.39, John 12.25.

sin that could be called the compulsive, pathological "circuit of lust" in the sense of "concupiscence"; in other words, what in Heidegger's *Being and Time* is called the everyday mobility of falling. The very matrix of this circuit is the New Testamentarian principle pronounced by Christ himself: "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again" (John 4.13). And this principle could also be found in other religious traditions, for example in the first Buddhism, in the Buddha's *Sermon of Benares*, where the "thirst" or "greed" for being is given as the main reason for wandering in the "long night" of the samsaric cycle.

In the later Christian tradition, this circuit of lust, or desire [*concupiscentia*, *cupiditas*, *libido*, *appetitus*, *epithumia*], was often and forcefully described, for example by Bernard of Clairvaux in his *De diligendo Deo*:

> The wicked, therefore, walk round in circles [*in circuitu impii ambulant*], naturally wanting whatever will satisfy their desire [*appetitus*], yet foolishly rejecting that which would lead them to their true end.[14]

And the young Luther, in the Proof of his Theological Thesis XXII in the *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), describes also the endless circuit of desire through the term "dropsy" or "water-addiction" of the soul:

> desire cannot be satisfied by the acquisition of those things which it desires. Just as the love of money grows in proportion to the increase of the money itself, so the dropsy of the soul becomes thirstier the more it drinks. [. . .] This holds true of all desires. Thus also the desire for knowledge is not satisfied by the acquisition of wisdom but is stimulated that much more. Likewise the desire for glory is not satisfied by the acquisition of glory, nor is the desire to rule satisfied by power and authority, nor is the desire for praise satisfied by praise, and so on.[15]

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14. Bernard of Clairvaux, *De diligendo Deo* (1132/1135), VII, 19, in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 5, Treatises II ("On Loving God"), Washington: CPC, 1974 [trans. mod.].

15. Luther, *Disputatio Heidelbergae habita* (WA 1, 350–374); *Heidelberg Disputation*, tr. H. J. Grimm, in *Career of the Reformer*, 39–70, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, ed. J. Pelikan / H. T. Lehmann, Philadelphia: Concordia, 1957.

As a remedy for curing desire, Luther recommends the extinction or destruction of the addiction, a remedy which is precisely the "wisdom" which is folly considered from the point of view of the world. First, I have to understand that if I grasp greedily after pleasures which finally cause me pain, it is because I take some good for some evil and some evil for some good, and instead of walking forward on a straight path, I remain in a vicious circle. This confusion of the wrong good, which I greedily chase, with the real good (for example, the possibility of an excellent, "authentic" life), is simply called in the Bible, as we know, the "knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2.17, 3.5), and means the new ability which man misuses through his sin, which is, in reality, a state of mental confusion and fallenness instituted through my worldly desire, through my love for the world.

Therefore, we could say that the "old man," or the falling *Dasein*, driven from his worldly desire, and slave of his own circle of sin, has to be destroyed to give place to the "new man." This means that the basic direction of my fundamental "desire," which is one and the same force (Matt. 6.24), the fundamental direction of my "care" [*Sorge*: *cura*, *orexis*], as Heidegger calls it in his existential-ontological transposition, has to be redirected and *converted*, a fundamental New Testamentarian structure that also functions in *Being and Time*.

The fundamental orientation of my care is split into two antagonist and conflictual directions: towards "spirit" and towards "flesh" (Gal. 5.17, Matt. 26.41), as the New Testament would put it. In *Being and Time*, these two fundamental movements of human being in the world, as the movement of turning to . . . and the movement of turning away from . . . [*An- und Abkehr*],[16] are precisely conceptualized in the temporal and dynamic antagonism between fleeing as falling [*Flucht*, *Verfallen*] and anticipation [*Vorlaufen*], two modalities of care which refer to the possibility of destruction of *Dasein's* being, ie. the possibility of death.

Heidegger's central concept of "anticipative resolution" [*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*] of death, as a counter-movement against the movement of sin, transposes the structure of faith: resolute "courage" facing the fear of death reverses the intentional direction of care. The

16. SZ [1927], 135.

practical everyday business [*Besorgen*], and also the theoretical attitude, which are both referred to worldly beings, now turns to the mortal being of *Dasein*, in a philosophical *meditatio mortis*. Heidegger's concept of authentic *Dasein* philosophically aware of its mortal condition, hearing the call of its own finitude, secularizes therefore the "new life" (Rom. 6.4) of the New Testament that responds to the call of God by faith. Before the life in faith, the *homo vetus* lives as a "debtor" (Rom. 8.12) to the flesh, "sin" [*Schuld*] and "death" [*Tod*], under the sign of "fear" [*phobos*]. In the life according to the flesh, "sin revives" (Rom. 7.9) and enslaves the *ego* (Rom. 7.17–20). Destroying the old ego, faith obeys freely (Gal. 5.13) the Word of the Cross, and sin and death are defeated and overcome (2 Cor. 4.13).

In this context, "sin" means that, because of a defective direction of my fundamental desire or care, I miss the possibility of excellence of my life as the anticipated goal or target, in the sense that Aristotle defines *hamartia* ("sin") as a "'missing' of virtue" that is situated between excess and deficiency. If I want to accomplish life in its highest possibility, the intentional direction of my care has to be brought *from* worldly beings *to* the authentic self (*through* the tribulation and passion of anxiety where *Dasein* is reduced to "nothing"), from the "things of the world" towards the "things of the Lord" (1 Cor. 7.32–34).

This is a conversion, or revolution, of the direction of my entire life, from lust or concupiscence to love or agape: the "love for the world" and for its transitory goods becomes now the love of God, as John proclaimed it in the first letter, and as Augustine will describe it later as the triple concupiscence or lust in Book X of his *Confessions* (30, 41):

> Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever (1 John 2.15–17).

And "doing the will of God" means nothing other than to follow the commandment of love — a difficult, almost impossible task — and to follow the commandment of love means to destroy the circle of worldy

craving and the fear of death on which it relies. Perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4.18). "Love" [*caritas, amor, dilectio*], as Augustine in his treatise on fear formulates it (*De div. qu. 83*), reduces the craving or desire to possess temporal goods or ephemeral things (q. 33). Perfect love is precisely the absence of fear (q. 36), and thus exemption from the pathological and obsessional adherence to the permanent "mobility" to the "fatal mutability" of the world and to the false and sinful *ego* which desires this vanishing world.[17]

2. Beyond Theology and Phenomenology: Secularization, Detheologization, Anthropologization

After our short description of this circuit of lust and its theological backround, situated, it has been argued, in the very heart of the conceptual framework of the early Heidegger (the Heidegger from 1919 to 1929, *before* his "turn" to neo-paganism and National Socialism), I would like now to question the *modus operandi* of this transfer of New Testamentarian and/or theological elements. In order to do this, I will first turn to Heidegger's lecture *Phenomenology and Theology*.

In this lecture, presented on March 8, 1927 in Tübingen, and repeated in Marburg on February, 14, 1928, Heidegger questions the relationship between phenomenology and theology as a relationship between two sciences, beyond the traditional distinction or opposition between faith and knowledge, revelation and reason. According to Heidegger, theology is a positive science, and as such, therefore, is absolutely different from philosophy. I will not examine this thesis in detail here; I will only focus upon one aspect of it: the operation that makes possible Heidegger's position between, or beyond, theology and phenomenology. This operation takes us to the heart of our

17. In Heidegger, mobility [*Bewegtheit*] translates, in an Aristotelian context, *kinèsis* [*metabolè*]; cf. for ex. GA 22 [SS 1926], 170; GA 9 [1939], 243. On the notion of "mutability" [*mutabilitas*, *vanitas*], which could translate Heidegger's mobility and inscribe it in a larger conceptual field, cf. Augustine, *Io. ev. tr.*, XCIX, 5; XXXI, 5; *De civ. Dei*, XIII, 10; *Conf.*, XII, 8, 8; 15, 21; 17, 25; Boetius, *Consol. Phil.*, II, 1, 10; 15; 2, 14; Thomas, *S. theol.* I, q. 9, art. 2; II–II, q. 57, art. 2; *In ep. ad Rom.*, VIII, lect. 4 (in v. 21), *666* with ref. to Augustine, *Contra Maximinum*, II, XII, 2 and Aristotle, *Phys.* VIII, 1, 252 a.

problematic, since it brings up the question of detheologization and phenomenological (re)conceptualization, and, more generally, the question of the legitimacy and the limits of this kind of phenomenological "secularization."

In this lecture, Heidegger claims that the object of theology is Christianness, distinguished from Christianity, following Kierkegaard and Franz Overbeck, Nietzsche's friend. And the essence of Christianness is faith, described in a very Pauline-Lutheran view: faith is a possibility of existence "that the touched [*betroffen*] Dasein cannot master on its own, in which Dasein became a servant, brought before God and thus born again."[18]

Heidegger characterizes faith as rebirth ("*Glaube = Wiedergeburt*").[19] And in this faithful Christian existence, the pre-faithful/atheistic existence of *Dasein* is *aufgehoben*, sublated, not removed, but lifted up into a new form in which it is kept and preserved, as Heidegger insists: "the sense of the Christian event as rebirth is that *Dasein's* pre-faithful, i.e., non-faithful, existence is sublated [*aufgehoben*] therein."[20] The pre-Christian existence is abolished and preserved in the Christian existence.

But what Heidegger says of the sublating relationship between Christian existence and pre- or non-Christian existence is exactly what happens in his own phenomenological analysis of *Dasein*: he sublates the Christian existence into the analysis of *Dasein* concretely understood as performed philosophical existence. More precisely, through the experiences and phenomena of Christian existence and life-world [*Lebenswelt*], Heidegger operates a phenomenological and ontological conceptualization of the pre- or non-Christian existence detached from all faith and revelation. But it is important to see that Heidegger uses implicitly, by formalizing it, the paradoxical operation through which he describes the Christian existence in faith as resurrection, which we can find at the heart of *Being and Time*, namely the transition from inauthenticity to authenticity through the specific mutation that happens in the annihilating experience of anxiety.

18. GA 9 [1927–28], 53.
19. GA 9 [1927–28], 53.
20. GA 9 [1927–28], 63.

Let us have a look at this crucial operation in its double dimension. On the one hand, Heidegger indeed uses the Lutheran *theologoumenon* of the paradoxical operation of God [*opus alienum et proprium*] hidden in tribulation [*Anfechtung*], or, as we could say, the very logic of the Cross: God *takes* the world to *give* the grace. The illusion of the *securitas* of the *vita activa* and of the *vita contemplativa* is destroyed and annihilated by the intervention of the "strange work of God" [*opus alienum Dei*]: the old man has to die to be reborn and to come back to God [*opus proprium*]. *Deus tentat nos*: the strange work of God leads the homo vetus to despair, leaving him only the possibility of hope, referring him, as Heidegger puts it in his talk on Luther in 1924, to the only possibility of a "persisting [*Durchhalten*] in the world," or in the secularized reformulation of his unpublished treatise *The Concept of Time* of 1924, to the possibility of "holding out in anxiety." *Dasein*, in its "*being* that is anxious about *itself in front* of the nothing," lets itself [*lässt sich*] be reduced to itself.[21]

On the other hand, in the Second Book of Aristotle's *De anima*, Heidegger, in his lecture course of 1924 on the basic concepts of Aristotelian philosophy, finds the conceptual structure of a special pathetic alteration that does not destroy or corrupt, but "saves" the power of *hexis* towards a positive state of realization [*energeia*, *entelecheia*] by way of a salvation, conservation or preservation [*sotèria: Aufhebung*].[22] What happens to me and alters me in a pathetic experience

21. PSL, 106 ; GA 64 [1924], 81. Cf. also SZ [1927], 370.

22. Cf. GA 18 [SS 1924], 262; GA 18 [SS 1924], 196: "Something happens with me in a manner that this experience or suffering [*Erleiden*] has the character of the *sozein*. Through the fact that something comes to my encounter, that something happens, I am not annihilated, but it is only then that I reach myself the authentic state [*eigentlicher Zustand*], i.e. the possibility which was in me becomes now authentically real. Under the expression 'sublation' ['*Aufhebung*'], Hegel took the phenomenon of *sozein* in Aristotle"; Aristotle, *De an*., II, 5, 417 b 2–4 (trans. W. S. Hett): "Even the term 'being acted upon' is not used in a single sense, but sometimes it means a form of destruction of something by its contrary, and sometimes rather a preservation of that which is potential by something actual which is like it, in accordance with the relation of potentiality to actuality"; b 10–20: "That which produces development from potential to actual in the matter of understanding and thought ought not to be called teaching, but needs some other name; and that which, starting with a potentiality for knowledge, learns and acquires

[*Erfahrung*, *Leiden*] can also save me: in this case my weakness is my force, as we could say with Paul (2 Cor. 12.9).

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger exploits this double phenomenal complex to articulate the transition from inauthenticity of fallen *Dasein* to its authenticity through the annihilating experience of anxiety: the *Ent-schlossenheit* [resoluteness, dis-closedness] modifies [*Ent-*] the privation [*Un-*] of *Eigentlichkeit* that is *Un-eigentlichkeit* and therefore realizes its nature (which is "life" in its philosophical modus). This modification is a sublation [*Aufhebung* = *tollere* + *conservare*], as Heidegger says it again in "The Concept of Time": "The authentic being of *Dasein* is what it is only so that it is authentically the in-authentic *Dasein*, i.e., that it 'sublates' it in itself."[23] Because, as he repeats in *Being and Time*, authentic existence, *Dasein's* highest possibility of being, is "nothing that floats above fallen everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified grasp of it."[24]

As we can see through this example, there is a complex play in Heidegger between Aristotle and Luther, between Greek philosophy and the New Testamentarian tradition. Heidegger is, in a certain way, guided by the Lutheran project of a return to the proto-Christian experience of the New Testament by way of a destruction of "pagan wisdom," i.e., a destruction of Greek philosophy and especially of Aristotle, the "blind and pagan master"[25]: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise" (1 Cor. 1.19). The Heideggerian *Destruktion* of Aristotle develops this initial impulse of the Lutheran *destructio* which wants to dismantle the scholastic architecture considered as "theology of glory," which has turned away from the experience of cross and passion.[26]

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knowledge from what is actual and able to teach, either ought not to be described as 'being acted upon,' as has been said, or else there are two senses of alteration, one a change to a negative condition, and the other a change to a positive state, that is, a realization of its nature."

23. GA 64 [1924], 81. Cf. also SZ [1927], 370.

24. SZ [1927], 179. Cf. also GA 24 [SS 1927], 130, 243.

25. Luther, WA 6, 457.

26. The *destructio*, as the *ruina* and *annihilatio* of sin and human wisdom, is central in Romans that Luther considers as the "heart piece" (WA DB 7, 2) of the NT; cf. WA 56, 157 on Romans 1.1.

But it is important to note that it is also in the young Luther that Heidegger finds a positive impulse to access a primordial Aristotle without passing through the "scholastic doctors": "It is highly doubtful that Aristotle's thought can be found in the Latins," as Luther affirms in the thesis 51 of his *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* (1517).[27] In fact, Luther reads Aristotle — as we can see for example in his commentary (*Divi Pauli apostoli ad Romans epistola*, 1515/16) of Rom 12, 2 where he borrows terms of Aristotle's *Physics* to articulate the process of justification[28] — to find in his philosophy what could be useful for theology.

My guiding hypothesis here is that the program of the early Heidegger could be read as fundamentally configured by the New Testament filtered through Luther's *Theologia crucis*[29] and Aristotle: two correlative matrices (categorial structures and operative presuppositions) of Heidegger's conceptuality. The name "Bultmann" stands here for one dimension of this program: Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* is a secularized New Testamentarian, especially Lutheran, anthropology.[30] But it has to be completed and thus complicated by the Aristotelian dimension, which is precisely to say, the secularizing operator: Heidegger reads Aristotle, the "culminating point" of ancient thought, very intensely between 1922 and 1926, and retrieves some of Aristotle's fundamental concepts to articulate the life-world of the New Testament, translating both into the conceptuality of *Being*

27. Luther, WA 1, 226.

28. Luther, WA 56, 441f.

29. In the foreword of his lecture course of 1923, Heidegger indicates: "Young Luther has been my companion through my search. Aristotle, whom Luther hated, was my model. Kierkegaard spurred me on and Husserl implanted eyes in me to see" (GA 63 [SS 1923], 5); GA 63 [SS 1923], 106.

30. Cf. G. W. Ittel, "Der Einfluss der Philosophie M. Heideggers auf die Theologie R. Bultmanns", *Kerygma und Dogma* 2 (1956), 108: "Further, according to Bultmann [letter 13/5/1955], Heidegger's 'existential analysis of *Dasein* appears to be nothing more than a secular philosophical presentation of the New Testamentarian view of human *Dasein*"; 92: "Bultmann underlined several times that Heidegger himself was influenced by the New Testament, and Heidegger himself 'never made a secret of the fact that he was influenced by the New Testament, especially Paul, and Augustine, and particularly Luther.'"

and Time.[31] Heidegger's phenomenological conceptualization is close to Bultmann's demythologization [*Entmythologisierung*] understood as the hermeneutic and anthropological reconduction of a mythological text, i.e., the New Testament, to a historical and thus repeatable possibility of human existence.[32] But the Bultmannian demythologization works without the Aristotelian reconceptualization that gives a central axis to Heidegger's analytics of *Dasein*.

But we should nonetheless question the legitimacy of Heidegger's complex phenomenological "secularization" and "detheologization" of theological and/or New Testamentarian structures. The problematic might focus on three interrelated aspects concerning secularization, atheism, and anthropology.

The phenomenological conceptualization and reinvestment brings the pre- or non-Christian existence, through formal indication, into light, i.e., the "neutral" human existence that, as such, does not depend on Christian faith and revelation. Thus the phenomenological and Aristotelian "secularization" of theologies, especially the Lutheran *theologia crucis*, as a reconduction of existential structures that organize human life to their being, is at the same time a "detheologization"[33] of the theologumena and a dechristianisation of the Christian content.

31. Cf. GA 29/30 [WS 1929/30], 53; GA 26 [SS 1928], 11. Among the latent Aristotelian "possibilities" that Heidegger repeats and integrates in his own conceptuality in the 1920s, we could indicate for example the problem of the sense of philosophical conceptuality [*Begrifflichkeit*] (GA 60 [WS 1920/21], 89); the problem of mobility [*Bewegtheit*] as movement and rest in *Phys.* (GA 18 [SS 1924], 314, 379; GA 31 [1930], 59); the apophantic structure of *logos* in *De interpr.* (GA 21 [WS 1925/26], 168f); the concept of privation [*sterèsis*] in *Phys.*, I, 7 and *Met.*, V, 22 (GA 33 [SS 1931], 110); the negativity of human discursive power [*dunamis meta logou*] in *Met.*, IX, 2 (GA 33 [SS 1931], 154); the negativity of *a-lètheia* (GA 26 [SS 1928], 159; GA 27 [WS 1928/29], 79); the doctrine of passions [*pathè*] and fear [*phobos*] in *Rhet.* (GA 18 [SS 1924], 178; GA 20 [SS 1925], 393); the doctrine of chance [*tychè*] and hasard [*automaton*] in *Phys.*, II, 4–6 (NB [1922], 70); the concepts of *dunamis* and *energeia* (GA 33 [SS 1931], 81) . . .

32. Cf. Bultmann, "Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung" [1963], *Glauben und Verstehen*, 4, 1965, 51993, 128–137.

33. On *Enttheologisierung*, cf. GA 63 [SS 1923], 26 (ref. to Kant, *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*); GA 17 [WS 1923/24], 156–157, 159 (with ref. to Descartes, *Med.* IV, AT 76); SZ [1927], 49.

In this sense, Heidegger wrote in his lecture of 1927–28: "All theological concepts contain necessarily *this* understanding of being that human *Dasein* as such has from its own."[34] But this understanding is necessarily based on a certain kind of "atheism" of phenomenology.

Is this Heideggerian "atheism" of phenomenology a Nietzschean *gaya scienza*[35] after the so-called death of God? Or is this form of atheistic phenomenology, this phenomenology "without God,"[36] a subtle exoneration of God? Should "atheism" in this sense be understood as a gesture that consists in turning away from the "God of philosophers" (simple object of speculation for a theo-logy of glory whose *logos* is only idolatric *Gerede*, gossip, about God) and turning towards the "God of love"? From this perspective, the "turning to" would operate in the very heart of the difficult experience of tribulation, temptation, sin, and the point of maximal distance from God (a-theism) would therefore also contain the possibility of a return to God. And thus, this atheistic phenomenology would be close to the theological silence of a via negativa, such as the one prescribed by Pseudo-Dionysus, who asked theologians to "honor the ineffable with a wise silence" (*De div. nom.*, I, 3, 589b).

Finally, I would like to question the essential anthropological dimension in this phenomenological conceptualization. Through the "crossed" or chiasmatic reiteration of Aristotle and the New Testament (Luther), of these two sources of European tradition, it is possible to articulate neutral and universal anthropological basic structures of human existence. This view, of course, is only possible when we re-anthropologize the analytics of *human Dasein*, against Heidegger's initial intention, exploiting its anthropological potential. Is it not possible to consider that phenomenology and theology could therefore encounter each other on the neutral field of science, and that this science, as overcoming the disciplinary limits of both, indicating "new frontiers," could be a phenomenological anthropology, since its object is the primordial phenomenon of "human being" as life [*Leben*: *zoè*, *bios*, *psuchè*]? As Löwith went on to remark in 1930:

34. GA 9 [1927–28], 63. Cf. GA 61 [WS 1921/22], 154; GA 21 [WS 1925/26], 233.
35. Cf. GA 20 [SS 1925], 109f.
36. GA 23 [WS 1926/27], 77; 220.

> More primordial than the subsistance of theology and philosophy is the existence of theologians and philosophers, and more primordial than the being-theologian and being-philosopher is for both the being-human [*das Menschsein*]. That's why the difference between theology and philosophy will be clarified only on the common ground of *anthropology* i.e. by going back to that which at the same time lets eventually an unfaithful human being become a Christian and lets eventually a faithful Christian become a philosopher.[37]

37. Karl Löwith, "Phänomenologische Ontologie und protestantische Theologie" [1930] in *Sämtliche Schriften*, 3, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985, 31f.

Paul Ricoeur, Solicitude, Love, and the Gift

MORNY JOY

Introduction

Throughout his life Paul Ricoeur strove to keep his work on philosophy strictly separate from religious allegiance. Nonetheless, religion has always featured as a backdrop, even in its putative absence. Of Protestant Huguenot background, he acknowledged that the principal influence on his philosophical orientation towards religion was Immanuel Kant. Ricoeur often referred to Kant as his guide — quoting often the distinction between thinking [*Denken*] and knowing [*Erkennen*]. For Ricoeur, *Denken* refers to thought of the unconditioned, whereas *Erkennen* refers to empirical knowledge of objects. In this way Ricoeur posits that religion cannot claim to have knowledge of the unconditioned.

In an interview with Charles Reagan he remarked:

> I am well aware that this creates a problem of duality — if I can say this — by a set of writings and by the interpretation that follows from these writings, and choosing them. . . . I prefer the difficulties created by this duality than the confusion born of inter-mixing. I prefer the risk of schizophrenia to the bad faith of pseudo-argument.[1]

Ricoeur feared arguments from authority — such as proofs for the existence of God — as being dogmatic in intent and not open to the type of dialogical exchange that he considered to be the hallmark of his preferred approach of hermeneutic phenomenology. Influenced by

1. Paul Ricoeur in Charles Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur: His Life and Work*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 126.

Heidegger in his early forays into hermenenutics, he was also extremely hesitant to identify the Being of Greek philosophy with the God of the Christian tradition,[2] and thus was "mistrustful of ontotheology."[3] He refrained from theological statements of any variety, referring to his own writings on the scriptures, both Hebrew and Christian, as those of "an amateur of enlightened exegesis."[4] He even confined his reflections on these religiously inspired writings to modes of commentary on what he termed the polyphonic voices that he appreciated as conveying multiple modes of witness. Ricoeur is quite discerning in his approach to scripture, where he describes himself as taking a theological hermeneutic approach:

> The naming of God, in the originary expressions of faith, is not simple but multiple. It is not a simple tone, but polyphonic. The originary expressions of faith are complex forms of discourse as diverse as narratives, prophecies, laws, proverbs, prayers, hymns, liturgical formulas, and wisdom writings. As a whole, these forms name God. But they do so in various ways.[5]

Ricoeur also worried about the tendency of philosophy and theology to homogenize this vibrant plurality into uniform concepts. He acknowledged that hermeneutic phenomenology had abandoned the dream of total mediation. In this connection, he also observed: "If we are not Hegelian, we are not in the regime of totalization."[6] In his

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2. Yvanka Raynova, "All that Give Us to Think: Conversations with Paul Ricoeur," in *Between Suspicion and Sympathy: Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*, ed. A. Wiercinski, Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2003, 686f.
3. Ricoeur in François Azouvi and Marc de Launay, *Critique and Conviction: Paul Ricoeur*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, 150.
4. Ricoeur in Lewis Edwin Hahn, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, Peru, Ill.: Open Court, 1995, 448.
5. Ricoeur, "Naming God," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer; ed. Mark Wallace, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 224.
6. Ricoeur in Raynova, "All that Give Us to Think," 686. See also Ricoeur in Hahn, *Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 567: "My repeated critique of all the facts of totalization, on the practical, ethical, political and ecclesiastical plane, as well as on the plane of theory, can be constructively placed under the auspices of the Kantian idea of the limit that reason itself exerts with respect to the claims of understand-

dealings in the philosophy of religion it is Kant who is his principal mentor when he undertakes a philosophical hermeneutic approach.

One of the major motifs of Kant's philosophical hermeneutics of religion is to give an account, within the limits of reason alone, of the interweaving of the confession of radical evil and the assumption of the means of regeneration. And consequently, to the extent that this interweaving is constitutive of the motif of *hope*, we can say that hope is the specific object of the philosophical hermeneutic of religion.[7]

Ricoeur remained a man of hope throughout his life, despite the many travails he suffered. The problem of evil, particularly from a Kantian perspective, continued to preoccupy him. In the latter part of his life, he became especially concerned with evil as violence, particularly as it manifested itself in the unmerited suffering he observed human beings inflicting upon one another. Yet, as did Kant, he believed in the inherent goodness of human beings and the possibility of regeneration. Despite the awareness of mortality which he notes "traverses everything through and through" in his own work,[8] he continued to radiate a sense of wonder at the magnificence of life. In an interview with Sorin Antohi, Ricoeur declares:

> [When I wrote *Fallible Man*] . . . I concluded my book with the idea of assenting to finitude. I was an avid reader of Rilke and I ended with the verse: *Hier sein ist herrlich*: "Being here is sumptuous, wonderful, magical." Now, in my old age, with the proximity of death, I repeat again: *Hier sein ist herrlich*.[9]

Ricoeur then continues with the advice not to become submerged by what Spinoza termed the "sad passions," but to live animated by what Descartes nominated as the first of all the passions — wonder. He also found a kindred spirit in Hannah Arendt, specifically in her concept

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ing to objectivize the unconditional."

7. Ricoeur, "A Philosophical Hermeneutics of Religion: Kant," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer; ed. Mark Wallace, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 77.

8. See Ricoeur in Sorin Antohi, "Memory, History, Forgiveness: A Dialogue Between Paul Ricoeur and Sorin Antohi," *Janus Head*, 8.1 (2005): 20.

9. Ibid.

of natality as an affirmation of life in this world. He described his initial positive reaction to this term as being one of "a certain amazement."[10]

In his later work, from *Oneself as Another* (1992) onwards, he struggled to express ways of alleviating the continuing suffering of humanity. He pondered about this form of evil as a "primordial suffering which appears to be inseparable from the human condition."[11] His response was a preoccupation with ethics and with the associated issues of recognition and pardon, as part of a marked commitment to justice. He acknowledged this change in a phenomenological study he undertook of both the suffering and acting aspects of human existence — the phenomenon of human capability, or what he termed homo capax:

> I would like . . . to underscore my emphasis, since Oneself as Another, on the importance of the idea of *homo capax* as integrating a wide conceptual field. With this theme I have tried to bring together those diverse capacities and incapacities that make human beings acting and suffering human beings. If the notions of poiesis and praxis were given ample development in my earlier work, those of being acted upon and suffering were less so.[12]

It was in the final years of his life, without abandoning completely his division between philosophy and religion, that Ricoeur became fascinated with exploring the way the languages of each of these two areas could overlap, and he wondered how and if they could inform one another in a productive way, most particularly in the relation of the phenomenon of the love to justice.

As a result, Ricoeur's work offers many rich and wise observations that are of relevance for this conference and that merit being explored in more depth. I cannot but scratch the surface in this presentation of the valuable contribution that he could make to further deliberations on the nature of the relationship between phenomenology and religion. I have thus chosen a number of specific topics as illustrative

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10. Ricoeur in Azouvi and de Launay, *Critique and Conviction*, 157.
11. Ricoeur in Hahn, *Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 49.
12. Ricoeur, "A Response by Paul Ricoeur," in *Paul Ricoeur and Narrative: Context and Contestation*, ed. M. Joy, Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1997, xxiv.

of his work in connection with religion that I will explore in this paper. These are: intersubjectivity and recognition; responsibility, solicitude, and justice; evil and regeneration, conscience and the gift.

Intersubjectivity and Recognition

Beginning with *Oneself as Another*, the notion of intersubjectivity becomes prominent in the work of Ricoeur. It is intimately involved with the project of recognition. Ricoeur appeals first to a form of interpersonal relationship which is influenced by Hegel's understanding of recognition, with its dialectical interaction — although for Ricoeur there is no final *Aufhebung*. Such a dialogical movement is refined by Ricoeur, however, by means of further exchanges with the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas. As a result, recognition, in Ricoeur's adaptation, will embrace both solicitude for one's friends and a passion for justice of those who are at a distance. Ultimately, Ricoeur appreciates that it is this revised version of mutuality that can constructively inform a human being's expansive relationship of responsibility towards all human beings — both personally and, by extension, collectively in the public realm of justice. Such an empathetic and even liberatory interpretation of recognition helps to modify one of the customary ways that recognition has been interpreted since Hegel's time. (This is the situation where the "other," encountered in the movement of negativity or differentiation, has tended to be subsumed in the dialectic process.)

Kelly Oliver, in her book, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, voices the problematic aspects of this understanding of recognition, often assumed as a battle leading to assimilation, if not supremacy. Oliver has described "recognition as it is deployed in various contemporary theoretical contexts" as "a symptom of the pathology of oppression," insofar as it "simply endorses the dominant culture's superiority." Thus, "If recognition is conceived as being conferred on others by the dominant group, then it merely repeats the dynamic hierarchies, privilege and domination."[13] Ricoeur's own model of recognition,

13. Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 9.

proposed as a caring and self-reflexive responsibility for all others, can respond to this criticism. Recognition would then no longer reinforce modes of subjectivity that reflect paternalistic or elitist ways of granting admission to established echelons of privilege once certain criteria are met.

Responsibility, Solicitude, and Justice

Toward the conclusion of Study 9 in *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur reflects on the nature of recognition and the process of "imputation" — a key term in his development of an ethics of intersubjectivity. Imputation actually involves two processes: that of a critical self-estimation (or self-esteem[14]) and that of responsibility (accepting accountability for an activity).[15] Ricoeur states:

> If . . . I had to name a category that corresponded to the categories of imputation and responsibility . . . I would choose the term *recognition*, so dear to Hegel in the Jena period and throughout the subsequent course of his work. Recognition is a structure of the self reflecting on the movement that carries self-esteem toward solicitude and solicitude toward justice. Recognition introduces the dyad and plurality in the very constitution of the self.[16]

It is also in *Oneself as Another* that Ricoeur describes various phenomenological dimensions of the capable self [*homo capax*]. In Studies 2 and 4 Ricoeur depicts the different aspects of speaking and acting.

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14. Ricoeur also notes: "We call *self-esteem* the interpretation of ourselves mediated by the ethical evaluation of our actions. Self-esteem is itself an evaluation process indirectly applied to ourselves as selves." Ricoeur, in Peter Kemp and David Rasmussen, eds., *The Narrative Path*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, 99.
15. Ricoeur has described this relationship: "Imputation and responsibility are synonymous, the only difference being that it is actions that are *imputed* to someone and it is persons that are held *responsible* for actions and their consequences" (Ibid.,101). Ricoeur's use of this term is influenced by Kant. He undertakes an examination and reclamation of "imputability" and its Kantian origin in *The Just*, trans. D. Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 13–19.
16. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. K. Blamey, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 296.

In Studies 5 and 6 he documents various dimensions of the narrative self and the capability of identity-formation he investigated previously in the three volumes of *Time and Narrative* (1984–88). It is in Studies 9 and 10, however, that Ricoeur expands on the term "imputation," and its association with self-esteem as a mode of self-reflection. As such, it is tantamount to an exercise of self-evaluation, or a form of a hermeneutics of self-suspicion.[17] Ricoeur situates this final exploration within the wider framework of an Aristotelian-influenced teleological ethical project: "The wish to live well with and for others in just institutions."[18] Such a project for an ethical existence within a community can only be realized, according to Ricoeur, if the self-esteem resulting from personal accountability is connected with a sense of solicitude and responsibility that are exercised at the personal and interpersonal levels respectively.

Ricoeur begins by connecting the interpersonal dimension of solicitude—which he appreciates as arising from a "benevolent spontaneity"—with the notion of self-esteem, so that they can mutually reinforce and correct one another in a system of critical checks and balances. Ricoeur's understanding of solicitude thus revises and enhances Heidegger's basic postulate of care, which is basically concerned with realizing one's "ownmost possibilities" and also with not hindering others from realizing their own: "To self-esteem, understood as a reflexive moment of the wish for the 'good life,' solicitude adds essentially the dimension of *lack*, the fact that we *need* friends."[19] In addition, according to Ricoeur, "Solicitude adds the dimension of value, whereby each person is *irreplaceable* in our affection and our esteem."[20] This demanding exercise, involving the need of others, tempered by solicitude, and further enhanced by a judgment of self-accountability as self-estimation, is rendered feasible

17. Ricoeur termed Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx as the "masters of suspicion" and thus introduced what he termed the "hermeneutics of suspicion." In his hermeneutic work, this indicated that no text was to be regarded as innocent, or that human consciousness was as much in control of its conscious thoughts and actions as was believed.

18. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 180.

19. Ibid., 192.

20. Ibid., 193.

only in the light of the revised mode of mutuality that Ricoeur recommends:

> I cannot myself have self-esteem unless I esteem others *as* myself. "As myself" means that you too are capable of starting something in the world, of acting for a reason, of hierarchizing your priorities, of evaluating the ends of your actions, and having done this, of holding yourself in esteem as I hold myself in esteem.[21]

This mode of intersubjectivity indicates that, according to Ricoeur, each person must be held in the same inestimable regard as one holds oneself. In this way, affirming the integrity of the other as actually different from myself is also paramount. It is from this exacting mode of reciprocal relationship that Ricoeur derives the title of his book, *Oneself as Another*. Ricoeur here describes the change from his early work in hermeneutics where he had first posited a non-egoistic or non-imperialistic self who stood before a textual other so as to be receptive to its meaning. After many further detours in his explorations of personal identity in connection with narrative, and then with ethics, he states that the return of a self to itself, as a thinking and capable subject, is now completed. Once again, however, the self cannot impose its own agenda on the other. This time, instead of a text, that featured in hermeneutics, the other is, in this instance, a fellow human being. For Ricoeur, it is this demanding mode of inter-relationship with fellow human beings that has definite consequences for one's actions in both ethical and political aspects. Ricoeur states:

> The passage from recognition-identification where the thinking subject claims to master meaning, to mutual recognition, where the subject places him- or herself under the tutelage of a relationship of reciprocity, passes through a variety of capacities that modulate one's capacity to act, one's agency. [translation amended][22]

Ricoeur is aware, however, that this interpersonal model of friendship cannot be expanded on a grand scale to deal with communal, let alone

21. Ibid.

22. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. David Pellauer, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005, 248.

international, issues. He is acutely conscious that in this sphere justice must operate in such a way that it will accord people publically an integrity similar to that bestowed in friendship. In contrast, however, this will now occur by means of institutional recognition. As citizens, people must deem others worthy of the same rights as they demand for themselves. "Without institutional mediation, individuals are only the initial drafts of human persons. . . . Citizens who issue from this institutional mediation can only wish that every human being should, like them, enjoy such political mediation."[23]

Ricoeur then describes the form of recognition that he would encourage to be implemented in the public domain where it would be linked with justice. He believes that there should be an extension at this level of plurality of a mode of justice that concerns itself with those, in his words "who have been left out of the face to face encounter of an 'I' and a 'you' and have remained third parties."[24] The influence of Emmanuel Levinas is obvious here. But rather than Levinas's exacting summons to absolute personal responsibility for the other, Ricoeur prefers to explore a dimension of recognition that needs to be incorporated into the public forum. Firstly, he describes the dimension of equality needed.

> The corollary of reciprocity, namely equality, places friendship on the path to justice, where the life together shared by a few people gives way to the distribution of sharing in a plurality on the scale of history, politics and community.[25]

He then provides a finely tuned analysis of the relation of such equality in a communal setting to intersubjective solicitude:

> *Equality*, however it is modulated, is *to life in institutions* what solicitude is to *interpersonal relations*. . . . Equality provides to the self another who is an *each* [*sic*]. . . . The sense of justice takes nothing away from

23. Ricoeur, "Ethics and Human Capability," in *Paul Ricoeur and Conemporary Moral Theory*, ed. John Wall and William Schweiker, New York: Routledge, 2002, 10.

24. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 195.

25. Ibid., 188.

> solicitude, the sense of justice presupposes it, to the extent that it holds persons to be irreplaceable. Justice in turn adds to solicitude, to the extent that the field of application of equality is all of humanity.[26]

As in personal relations, the other must be regarded as irreplaceable. Thus, treating the other as a peer or equal, whether in the reciprocal recognition of friendship and solicitude, or in the public recognition of the other as a subject of rights, surpasses the more general Kantian injunction to not treat another human being as a means. Personal solicitude transmutes into a concern for justice as embracing the welfare of humanity. It is a high-minded and perhaps even visionary evocation of the conditions attendant on acknowledging the equality of all human beings, involving, for Ricoeur, both concern and activist conduct in the cause of justice. Ricoeur is aware that there is a marked difference in his own approach from that of Levinas, which he feels the need to describe. As he remarks in an interview:

> The Other, who has a face, can become a friend. And this is the problem of intersubjective relations. I believe that Levinas is the thinker of this relationship to the Other with a face. But we always have to keep in mind the relation with an Other who has no face for us. For me, the Chinese over there somewhere will never become friends. But I have relations with them through institutions. We have a shift from the concept of friendship to the concept of justice. *Oneself as Another* puts both relations on the same level—friendship and justice. I define, moreover, the first ethical relation in the following terms: "To aim at the good life with and for others in just institutions." Consequently, the idea of justice concerns my relations to the Other without a face. It is here that the institution makes the relation and not intersubjectivity. This is why I would react against a narrow personalism that would reduce everything to relation: 'I–you.' There is a you, but there is also an 'each one.' . . . 'To each his or her right.'[27]

I think that Ricoeur's intention in maintaining such a definite emphasis on the "irreplaceability" or the "eachness" of every person at the communal level is a form of caution. Firstly, it cautions the practitioners of theory—in their philosophical, political, and judicial

26. Ibid., 202.

27. Ricoeur in Raynova, "All that Give Us to Think," 674.

deliberations concerning justice and rights—to always keep in mind their responsibility to the actuality of living and breathing human beings about whom they pronounce judgments. Secondly, that in discussions of pluralism and multiculturalism, something more than a perfunctory abstract nod in the direction of diversity is needed. Instead of appealing to moral requirements as a way of attempting to account for this recommended conduct towards others, Ricoeur will call upon the resources provided by conscience.

Conscience

It is in Study 10 of *Oneself as Another* that Ricoeur first analyzes carefully Heidegger's notion of conscience, which he acknowledges has influenced him, but from which he will ultimately differ. He quotes Heidegger from *Being and Time*: "In conscience *Dasein* calls itself."[28] It is a call that "comes from and yet from beyond me and over me."[29] For Ricoeur, this call is indicative of a certain primordiality and summons to one's authenticity and also marks, as he observes, "the complete immanence of *Dasein* to itself."[30] What troubles Ricoeur in this depiction by Heidegger is "the absence of authentic forms of being-with, upon which a different approach to conscience could be grafted."[31] In the same paragraph, Ricoeur notes that "It is not that all reference to others is lacking, but others are implied only with respect of the 'they' and on the inauthentic level of concern. . . . The major theme is the separation of the self from the 'they' [*Das Mann*]."[32] What Ricoeur discerns as missing in Heidegger is any summons emanating from the other as a necessary part of any intersubjective ethics. (Again the influence of Levinas is palpable.)

From Ricoeur's perspective, however, Levinas's own position is also not without problems. He regards Levinas's summons that comes from the other as a necessary call to responsibility, but as being definitely one-sided. For Ricoeur, Levinas places too much emphasis

28. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 348.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 348n60.

on the dimension of otherness. By way of comparison, in Ricoeur's estimation Heidegger is too preoccupied with the subjective dimension. Ricoeur's own understanding of the relationship involved in intersubjectivity is one of mutual recognition, where each acknowledges the integrity of the other. Ricoeur's following discussion of the comparative merits of Heidegger and Levinas is quite dense, though he will not dismiss either of them out of hand, acknowledging he has learnt much from both of them. Perhaps the best account of his own position occurs in a late interview with Richard Kearney:

> Here I try to explore the possibilities of an ethical ontology beyond the Heideggerean model of *ontology without ethics*, and the Levinasian model of *ethics without ontology*. By trying to think ethics in terms of action (*praxis/ pragma*) and action in terms of being as potency and act [*pace* Aristotle], I am seeking ways beyond the either/or of Heidegger/Levinas. The ultimate purpose of hermeneutic reflection and attestation, as I see it, is to try to retrace the line of intentional capacity and action beyond the mere objects (which we tend to focus on exclusively in our natural attitude), so that we may recover the hidden truth of our operative acts, i.e., of *being capable*, of being *un homme capable*.[33]

In his ethical ontology, conscience is a guiding principle for Ricoeur, summoning, as it were, a person to act according to his or her capabilities with solicitude, respect, and responsibility — all encapsulated in his adaptation of the term mutual recognition — towards others. Ricoeur elaborates further on his understanding of conscience in an article, "From Metaphysics to Moral Philosophy."[34] Here he describes conscience as an "inner forum" that is not beholden to any idea of an inherent moral law. At the same time, without employing the full panoply of the Hegelian system, he nonetheless observes:

> With the Hegel of the sixth chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, I affirm the primacy of the "spirit certain (*gewiss*) of itself" over every moral vision of the world, where the active and judging consciousnesses, confessing the limit of their respective points of view, and renouncing their respective partiality, mutually recognize and absolve each other.[35]

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33. Ricoeur, "On Life Stories (2003)," in *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*, ed. R. Kearney, London: Ashgate, 2004, 167.
34. *Philosophy Today*, 14/4 (1996): 443–58.
35. Ibid., 454.

To this he will add the previously mentioned Heideggerian call of *Dasein* addressing itself "from the depths of itself, but also from higher than itself."[36] He then proposes an understanding of conscience that melds these two philosophical characterizations:

> In the light of these two well-known analyses, conscience appears as the inner assurance that, in some particular circumstance, sweeps away doubt, hesitation, the suspicion of inauthenticity, hypocrisy, self-complacence, and self-deception, and authorizes the acting human being to say: here I stand.[37]

There is also a further reference to conscience's regenerative powers and the admission that at such times a human being is not necessarily in control: "This is something that comes upon us, like a gift, a grace that is not at out disposal."[38] It would seem that, in this discussion, Ricoeur's portrayal of the moment/movement of conscience is pushing philosophical reflection as far as it can go. At the same time, he is loath to make an attribution as to the source of such an inner force. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur adamantly refuses to indicate any religious connections that may be involved. He concludes his particular study of conscience in this book by a poignant and steadfast reiteration of his agnostic stance in regard to the wellsprings of conscience:

> Perhaps the philosopher as philosopher has to admit that one does not know and cannot say whether this Other . . . is another person, whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is nor representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God—living God, absent God,—or an empty space. With this aporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end.[39]

Thus it appears that while Ricoeur broaches the borders of holy ground, it remains a space that, insofar as he speaks as a philosopher,

36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 455.
39. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 355.

he declines to cross.[40] This entire examination of solicitude and justice in *Oneself as Another* has been carried out within the purview of philosophy — and, indeed, Ricoeur would not have it any other way, as he has distinctly stated that this was his intention for this particular volume. He had in fact eliminated two sections that had religious implications, putting them aside for a later volume. He discussed this deliberate omission with Charles Reagan:

> As I say in the preface [to *Oneself as Another*], I cannot deny that there may be religious motivations in the very fact that I am interested in the self. But there is no self-interpreting motivation, although there may be some connection; but for the arguments, there is no recourse to any biblical argument in the whole work, even in the ethics section.[41]

Evil and Regeneration

Ricoeur's explorations in ethics in *Oneself as Another* constitute the first steps in his development of a contemporary ethical ontology. He deems that this is necessary in order to try to counter the destructive effects of evil and suffering rampant in the world. What becomes obvious in Ricoeur's work is a fascinating oscillation between his seemingly inherent hopefulness and his anguish at human suffering — both personal and collective. On the one hand, there is his seeming optimism about the inherent goodness of humanity that derives from Kant. He writes about Kant's remarks on the capacity for the regeneration of the will in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*: "As radical as evil may be — radical as first of all the maxims concerning evil — it is not original. Radical is the 'propensity' [*Hang*] to evil; original is the 'predisposition' [*Anlage*] to good."[42] He then continues:

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40. Ricoeur later remarked about this declaration: "In the final pages of *Oneself as Another*, I risk the formulation of a philosophical agnosticism concerning the radical injunction speaking through the voice of consciousness [conscience]. . . . I have had occasion to speak of 'freedom within the horizon of hope': related to this are reasonable expectations concerning living well, civic peace, and a world order answering to the Kantian idea of perpetual peace. Philosophy can extend that far", Ricoeur in Hahn, *Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 570.

41. Ricoeur in Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur: His Life and Work*, 120.

42. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, Chica-

> It is in the "original predisposition to the good," that the possibility of "the restoration of its power" resides. I would say that under this modest heading — the entire project of a philosophy of religion centered on the theme of the *liberation of the ground of goodness* is veiled and unveiled.[43]

Ricoeur understands that this revitalization proposed by Kant refers to the capacity of the will to be restored to a constructive mode and to choose to act upon maxims derived from this innate predisposition to the good.[44] This undertaking can counteract even an established disposition, not just the propensity to evil: "However radical it may be, evil cannot bring it about that we cease being open to the appeal of conscience. In this sense, evil remains contingent, albeit always already there. This paradox could be called the 'quasi-nature of evil'."[45] At the same time, however, Ricoeur graphically portrays the horrors of the history of Europe: "The history of Europe is cruel: wars of religion, wars of conquest, wars of extermination, subjugation of ethnic minorities, expulsion or reduction to slavery of religious minorities; the litany is without end."[46] The question then becomes how Ricoeur can even begin to suggest that his ethical program could succeed, for he seems philosophically unwilling to follow Kant's own intimations that some kind of grace would seem necessary for a transformative change to take place within an established evil disposition. Ricoeur still remains reluctant to move beyond the bounds of reason to posit any transcendent source to account for this inexplicable moment or movement of renewal.

At this stage of his work, Ricoeur still prefers to look to conscience as providing the needed the impetus for change. Yet he will also

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go: University of Chicago Press, 2004, 491.

43. Ibid., 492.

44. Ricoeur will acknowledge that this regeneration involves "the restoration or the establishment of a capable human being, one capable of speaking, of acting, of being morally, juridically and politically responsible", Ricoeur in Azouvi and de Launay, *Critique and Conviction*, 156.

45. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 80.

46. Ricoeur, "Love and Justice," in *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, ed. Richard Kearney, London: Sage, 1996, 9.

acknowledge that: "The promise of a regeneration of power, of the effective capacity to live the good life, of the reign of justice and peace, this promise is of another nature. It belongs to the economy of the gift that announces itself at the borders of philosophy, at once beyond its limits and within its limits."47 It is the gift that will henceforth feature as a major element in Ricoeur's later work and that will induce him to explore previously uncharted terrain.

The Gift

The gift will begin to figure prominently in Ricoeur's discussions on religion and it is evident in his two final major works: *Memory, History and Forgetting* (2004) and *The Course of Recognition* (2005). At this final stage of his work, conscience is a gift which acts as a spur to change, yet remains of inscrutable provenance. He is still vigilant, however, as he does not wish any explicit religious references to intrude into a philosophical discussion. Yet, he does now concede that there is something of an overlap in the language that both religion and philosophy use in connection with certain topics. He wonders if there could be some kind of productive interchange resulting from this shared language. He muses about this in an interview:

> One of these [intersections] is probably compassion [solicitude]. I can go rather far, from a philosophical point of view, in the idea of the priority of the other, and I have sufficiently repeated that the ethical is defined for me by the desire for the good life with and for others, and by the desire for just institutions. Solicitude assumes that, counter to all cultural pessimism, I pay credit to the sources of goodwill—what the Anglo-Saxon philosophers of the eighteenth century always tried to affirm in opposition to Hobbes, i.e., that man is not simply a wolf to man, and that pity exists. It is true that these are very fragile feelings and that it is one function of religion to take charge of them and recodify them in a way.[48]

This reflection sets up the terms of reference by which Ricoeur will begin to approach religious language, but still tentatively from behind

47. Ricoeur, "Reply to Bourgeois," in Hahn, *Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 570.
48. Ricoeur in Azouvi and de Launay, *Critique and Conviction*, 159.

the cordon of philosophy. It is in *Memory, History, Forgetting* that there is a subtle change. Here Ricoeur waxes lyrical about the "free gift" (*le don sans retour*)[49] of love, which also features as a central element in his reflections on memory and justice and their connection with pardon.[50] This notion of the gift, given without any expectation of return, here rescues human interactions from the required reciprocity that governs the protocol of giving in most exchanges. It is a free gift in that it surpasses all calculations of return or reward. It also has definite resonances with Ricoeur's understanding of recognition.[51] For Ricoeur, the well-spring of this gift of love has a suprahuman dimension in that it goes beyond what can be normally expected from a human being's own resources. Yet, as a philosopher, Ricoeur still remains hesitant to acknowledge a supernatural source. Nevertheless, in admitting: "Love, for example, it belongs to a poetics of the will,"[52] Ricoeur allows that love is thus intimately related to the realm of religion, which he has identified as having a distinct affinity with poetics. Love is thus one of the principal exemplars of the intersection of the word and worlds of philosophy and religion. In an interview with Yvanka Raynova, he refers to his article on "Love and Justice" (1996), where he demonstrates just such an interaction between love and justice.

> What I wrote on the relation between love and justice . . . [is that] love has a religious source, in the widest sense; it is the sacred of the human person and it speaks poetically. But it acts on justice by asking it to be more just, more respectful to persons. In this way justice, which is a fundamental philosophical subject since Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, right up to Kant and Hegel, is always under the eye, the pressure and inspiration of love.[53]

It is then fascinating to follow Ricoeur as he explores the similarities and differences involved in this overlap of love and justice, with specific reference to his earlier depiction of recognition. It is the good as an

49. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 480.
50. Ibid., 481–6.
51. Ricoeur, *Course of Recognition*, 219–46.
52. Ricoeur in Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur: His Life and Work*, 120.
53. Ricoeur in Raynova, "All that Give Us to Think," 683–4.

aspect of justice — particularly expressed as a recognition of the rights of others, according to an exercise of respecting the irreplaceable integrity of another — that is of interest to Ricoeur as he attempts to build a bridge between "the poetics of love" and "the prose of justice."[54] For Ricoeur they intersect with one another around the basic issue of human action — respectively making claims as to the modes of conduct that are efficacious or appropriate, if not even incommensurate in the case of love. As one exemplar of good conduct, then, there is the golden rule, which Ricoeur describes as operating according to "a logic of equivalence."[55] Justice, in one sense, can be seen as an institutional enactment of this good. In contrast, love, within an economy of the gift — as described earlier by Ricoeur — works in terms of "a logic of superabundance."[56] Yet Ricoeur does not hold that these two logics need necessarily be viewed as incompatible. Their intersection can foster a deeper awareness of the dimensions of the categories involved. Ricoeur's favored manner of dialectical exchange figures prominently in their interaction. He describes a specific instance:

> In this relation of living tension between the logic of superabundance and the logic of equivalence, the latter receives from its confrontation with the former the capacity of raising itself above its perverse interpretations. Without the corrective of the commandment to love, the golden rule would be constantly drawn in the direction of a utilitarian maxim whose formula is *Do ut des*.[57]

Ricoeur then continues with an expansive depiction of the benevolent influence on the part of the logic of superabundance as it is associated with the gift:

> This economy of the gift touches every part of ethics, and a whole range of significations confers a special articulation of it. At one extreme, we find the symbolism, which itself is quite complex, of creation, in the most basic sense of an originary giving of existence. The first use of the predicate "good" applied to all created things in Genesis 1 belongs to

54. Ricoeur, "From Metaphysics to Moral Philosophy," 32.
55. Ibid., 34.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.

> this symbolism: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good (1.31)."[58]

Yet even this deeply felt study of the intersecting words and worlds of philosophy and religion does not suggest to Ricoeur any need for the intrusion of, or a capitulation to, a religious framework, even as a guiding principle. It is but one form of language investigation, even if it is a highly evocative and resonant one. Ricoeur further explains his standpoint:

> There is no doubt that the religious experience expressed in stories, symbols and figures is a major *source* of my taste for philosophy. Acknowledging this is not a source of embarrassment for me, inasmuch as I do not believe that a philosophy can be stripped of presuppositions. One always philosophizes from somewhere. This affirmation does not concern simply the fact of belonging to a religious tradition, but involves the entire network of cultural references of a thinker, including the economic, social, and political conditions for his or her intellectual commitment.[59]

What needs to be remembered is that Ricoeur, even in this undertaking, has definite reasons for demurring from writing what he calls a "religious philosophy." This is evident in his response to Raynova who specifically questioned him on this topic in an interview that took place in the late 1990s. He replies:

> What you call religious philosophy is a philosophy that has an opening towards religion. But I shall, at the same time, resist identification of a God who is a name and prayed to in the Psalms and in the prophecies, with the word 'God' in philosophy, which is the presupposition of a culture that is no longer ours. . . . what we name God in philosophy is not somebody to whom we can pray, it is not somebody with whom we can enter into relation, but a concept.[60]

Ricoeur does not believe that only one religious philosophy could emerge from the Jewish and Christian heritage,[61] let alone the other

58. Ibid., 32.
59. Ricoeur, "Reply to David Stewart," in Hahn, *Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 445.
60. Ricoeur in Raynova, "All that Give Us to Think," 683–4.
61. It is from this pluralistic perspective too that Ricoeur acknowledges that there

various philosophies that have informed western culture. He regards these now as "fragmented and dissociated," and thus difficult to reconcile, let alone amalgamate. He expresses his reservations on this matter:

> There is no thought that can combine all of these because we have already two domains split up in themselves, and for a stronger reason, because they intersect. This is what I've learned from hermeneutic thought, it is a fact that we always aim at totality and unity as a horizon, but that our thought always remains fragmentary. This means that we cannot transform this horizon into a possession.[62]

In many ways, Ricoeur's invocation of the gift of creation by God would seem to be a theological reference. Yet Ricoeur will still regard all such discussions as remaining on an epistemological level, even if the terms of discussion range freely on the notion of God. It remains an inquiry into possible interchanges and enrichment. Ricoeur is quite adamant about this in his interview with Raynova:

> I continue to protect the autonomy of philosophy, firstly because the founding texts of philosophy in no way have the canonical character of a religious or denominational confession. They are open to everybody; there is no Church around a philosophical text. And secondly, they constitute a language of communication between believer and unbeliever.[63]

Finally, Ricoeur seems to issue a kind of warning about the problems of trying to combine philosophy and religion:

> The last attempt was that of Hegel, who is the only one who has attempted totally to combine religious philosophy and philosophy of

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are different approaches to religious texts: "kerygmatic interpretations are also multiple, always partial (in both senses of the word), varying according to the expectations of the public, itself shaped by a cultural environment bearing the imprint of the epoch" (Ricoeur in Azouvi and de Launay, *Critique and Conviction*, 144). He also states, as if in support of his position: "It is within the kerygmatic readings — or, if you wish, with the theologies of professions of faith — that the opposition between Jerusalem and Athens is the sharpest" (144).

62. Ricoeur in Raynova, "All that Give Us to Think," 686.

63. Ibid., 683.

> religion within the philosophy of spirit. But at what cost? The cost, exactly, of reducing religion to a gnosis, that is, to a wisdom that ignores its rules, that ignores what is figurative in abstract thought. Then it *is* necessary to a philosopher to tell religion what it is without knowing it. Thus I find that there is more violence in this integration of religion with philosophy than in the recognition of their specificity and the specificity of their intersections.[64]

Conclusion

Towards the end of his life, in perhaps what was one of his very last interviews with Richard Kearney, Ricoeur remarked: "I am not sure about the absolute irreconcilability between the God of the Bible and the God of Being (understood with Jean Nabert as 'primary affirmation' or with Spinoza as '*substantia actuosa*')."[65] This would not appear to be a retraction of his previous work on philosophy and religion, or "religious philosophy," as such a statement would take his own further explorations in quite a different direction from traditional metaphysics with its attempted reconciliations between Athens and Jerusalem. Unfortunately, Ricoeur did not live long enough to undertake such further explorations. It is in his later work on love, however, that the magnanimous heart and spirit that informed Ricoeur's long itinerary in both philosophy and religion became most apparent. His constant references to the gift in its different manifestations in his final works are also revelatory. It seems that whenever Ricoeur reaches the limits of whatever philosophic reflection and speculation can expound, and something more than the merely human is required, the gift is introduced. It is emblematic of a further resource and the token of a mystery that exceeds explanatory powers. At times, then, Ricoeur seems to teeter on the brink of toppling into religion. Yet it seems finally that he is reluctant to impose his own Christian allegiance and, as a result,

64. Ibid., 688.

65. Ricoeur, "On Life Stories (2003)," 169. Ricoeur expands further on this insight: "If the mainstream and official tradition of Western metaphysics has been substantialist, this does not preclude other metaphysical paths, such as thse leading from Aristotle's *dunamis* to Spinoza's *conatus* and Schelling and Leibniz's notions of potentiality (*puissance*)," ibid., 166.

offers to his audience the munificent gift of choosing freely. He allows us to decide for ourselves whether we acquiesce to, or withhold our assent from, his own deeply held sense of hope in the promises he believes have been made. In following this trajectory of Ricoeur's profound explorations, however, we can emerge the richer and wiser as a result of his particular depictions of the pitfalls and the insights that can be gleaned from such endeavors.

God — Love — Revelation
God as *Saturated Phenomenon* in Jean-Luc Marion's Phenomenology of Givenness

ROSA MARIA LUPO

> Aimer surpasse l'être d'un excès sans aucune mesure avec lui, parce qu'il ne se reconnaît aucun contraire, ni aucun envers. [. . .] Aimer sans l'être — cela définit l'amour sans l'être. La simple définition formelle d'aimer inclut sa victoire sur le rien, donc sur la mort. L'amour ressuscite — il faut l'entendre comme une proposition analytique.
>
> Jean-Luc Marion, *Le phénomène érotique*, 118

1. God as frontier-space between philosophy and theology

With respect to the present research in its aim of investigating new possibilities of a relationship between philosophy and religion, I will try to focus on Jean-Luc Marion's position from a very particular point of view. I will discuss Marion's conception of God — and the related phenomenon of His Revelation — as a case of a *saturated phenomenon* (*phénomène saturé*), and in particular as the *saturated phenomenon par excellence* in His way of being an *erotic phenomenon*. In doing so, I will attempt to show how Marion's position opens up a possibility that phenomenology might rethink its relationship to the experience of faith, and therefore to religion. In this context, it is my intention to examine neither the implications for phenomenology of Marion's radical proposal of a phenomenology without ontology — his *phenomenology of givenness* — nor to present his phenomenological perspectives and operations if they are not specifically relevant for the investigation.

In the context of this research, the specific theme of God as *phénomène*

saturé or *phénomène érotique*[1] is given prominence not only because it represents the heart of Marion's phenomenological perspective, or rather the final aim to which the whole development of his speculation tends, more or less implicitly or explicitly.[2] Rather, this theme is of great significance in itself, because it represents the frontier-space, the limit, the middle course, the metaxý between philosophy and theology, between the sphere of philosophical reason and the ambit of religious faith.

In regard to the human possibility of talking of Him, God is in some sense a place of convergence, an open place of the crossing of different ways, of several perspectives and *Weltanschauungen*, of distinct and dissimilar visions, of points of view that can also be in absolute opposition. In this way the talking of God (in both meanings: in the objective and in the subjective meaning) is the place of the opening of the dialogue between philosophy and religion, between the forms of philosophical rationality and the religious and theological dimension, defining theology, here, as the rational systematization of the religious experience of faith.

From ancient times and subsequently, the space of the divine, of deity, has been considered in terms of a limit-zone, a frontier-field, in

1. Even if the concepts of *phénomène saturé* and *phénomène érotique* represent two different moments in Marion's phenomenological path of thinking—the erotic phenomenon is an example of a saturated phenomenon, but not every saturated phenomenon is erotic—in reference to God, both forms of phenomenality imply the same movement, the same act of donation, which is the Revelation of God. Because God is an erotic phenomenon, He is a case of saturated phenomenon, but only because His constitution is that of a saturated phenomenon can he be grasped in His structure as erotic phenomenon. In any case, both expressions have an equivalent value, if they are referring to God, and, in saying one, the other is implied equally.

2. In *Le phénomène érotique*, which is one of his latest works (2003), Marion declares at the beginning of the book: "Ce livre m'a obsédé depuis la parution de *L'idole et la distance*, en 1977. Tous ceux que j'ai publiés ensuite portent la marque, explicite ou dissimulée de cette inquiétude. En particulier, les *Prolégomènes à la charité* ne furent publiés, en 1986, que pour témoigner que je ne renonçais pas à ce projet, bien que tardant à l'accomplir. Tous, surtout les trois derniers, furent autant de marches vers la question du phénomène érotique" (Jean-Luc Marion, *Le phénomène érotique*, Paris: Grasset, 2003, 22–23).

which different approaches enter into relation with each other. The ancient Greek experience is an exemplary case: the gods populate mythology as protagonists and continue to exercise a central role in the age of tragedy in the fifth century B.C., which is nevertheless by then critical of "the false gods."[3] Parallel with mythological and tragic poetry, philosophical rationality absorbs or rejects divinity in accordance with its own structures. Plato's dialogues regard the mythological stories as ways to access truth, recognizing the didactic and allegoric value of myths.[4] Aristotle's philosophy elaborates an alternative concept to that of popular polytheistic religion, but maintains the necessity of traditional polytheism in ethical and political spheres. However, Aristotle configures the idea of a divinity that retains the typical traits of the mythological gods: eternity and the condition of happiness derive from the incorruptible nature of the being of *theòs*.[5] These two examples already indicate that in the history of thought the investigation of the divine allows philosophy and theology to touch each other and opens up a comparison between the philosophical way of

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3. Dante Alighieri, *Divina commedia*, *Inferno*, I canto, v. 72 ("*al tempo delli dei fasi e bugiardi*").
4. As examples of the importance myths have in Plato's dialogues one recalls the myth of Theuth in the *Phædrus* or the myth of Eros in the *Symposium,* or equally the mythological figure of Demiurge in the *Timæus*. For an analysis of the relationship between philosophical and mythological knowledge and the role of the myth in Plato's thought cf. the works of Luc Brisson, *Platon, les mots et les mythes*, Paris: La Découverte, 1995 second edition, and *Introduction à la Philosophie du mythe*, Paris: Vrin, 2005 second edition, as well as the remarkable study of Kathryn Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
5. There is however an essential difference between Aristotle's conception of *theòs* and the polytheistic vision. The gods of the polytheism of ancient Greece are in their immortality in a similar condition to humans, because they have the same feelings, emotions, passions, psychological states. They are the result of an anthropomorphic conception of divinity, while the Aristotelian god as unmoved mover is free of human traits, and its condition of happiness, which appears in *Met*. XII, is more the cipher of a descriptive metaphor than a subjective state of the soul as it is (exists) for humans. For a confrontation between Aristotle's conception of the divine and the popular polytheistic theology in its presence within Aristotelian speculation cf., Barbara Botter, *Dio e divino in Aristotele*, Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2005.

conceiving God and the religious-theological experience of thinking about Him.[6]

Concerning the philosophical way of addressing the question of God, it is also interesting to remark, in accordance with Xavier Zubiri's analysis, that even forms of atheist thinking are correlated with the problem of God, because the decision not to have anything to do with such a question, or not to accept God's existence always implies that one has assumed a precise position and therefore has given an answer to the problem. In the introduction to *El hombre y Dios Zubiri* clearly shows that it is impossible for an atheist philosophy to free itself from confrontation with the question of God. Rather, atheism and agnosticism represent alternative ways of dealing with this question, as they meet the need to make a decision about the phenomenon of God by choosing, respectively, either to deny it or to suspend the question.[7] Even more, a philosophy which opens itself to God as its

6. Although one cannot find an exact correspondence between the religious way of referring to God and the rationalistic way of theology, it is in any case interesting to see how these two paths to an experience of God stay in front of each other in a non-parallel way. While religious faith does not need theological support, i.e. the help of rationality, it is necessary for theology to believe in the God about whom it discusses. Even the forms of negative theologies (for example that of Dionysius the Aeropagite, which keeps silent about God's essence) arrive at this result not through faith, but through a rational process.

7. Cf. Xavier Zubiri, *El hombre y Dios*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1984, 11–13. Three points are interesting in Zubiri's introductory considerations. He recognizes immediately that he wants to consider God in the sense of "divine reality" and not from the specific point of view of a particular religion like Christianity. Then he explains that God is only the "title of a problem" which can have different solutions: theism (a positive solution), atheism (the negative solution) and agnosticism (a suspending solution). What defines theism, atheism, and agnosticism as solutions to the same problem is properly that for all three forms it is not enough to have a "state of belief; " they need, in addition, an "intellectual justification." He affirms that the problem of God is a constitutive question of the human condition as such. This problem in itself is therefore properly "*teologal*" — and not "*teológico*" — in the sense that human existence implies this question in a formal and constitutive way. In this sense, the human dimension is itself "*teologal*," i.e., structurally open to the divine reality and to its experience. These are three important aspects because: 1) Marion's position offers the possibility to explore the experience of God as such: even if Marion's God is "the Catholic God," what

own theme of reflection places itself in the middle of this frontier-space between philosophy and religion, between the grounds of philosophy and the grounds of religion, in other words between the requirements of rationality and those of faith. In this way the theme that appears to occupy a central place in Marion's speculation — i.e. a precise idea of God without Being as expressing the horizon of a pure phenomenology that leaves metaphysics behind — leads directly to this limit-zone where faith and philosophical rationality can sometimes mingle with each other.

2. *The methodological and thematic opening of Marion's phenomenology to God and His Revelation*

In accordance with my thematic aim, I will not dwell upon the debate concerning contemporary French phenomenology and the question whether it represents a kind of theological thinking. Nevertheless, the place occupied by Marion's thought in this frontier-field needs to be clarified. In the context of the present paper, I do not consider it crucial to assume a definite position in the debate mentioned above since, as I already said, we move in a space which cannot be easily attributed to the domain of philosophy nor to that of theology, at the interface between what is typical of philosophy and what is characteristic of religion. My considerations will be aimed, rather, at understanding Marion's phenomenological act of liberating God from metaphysics and highlighting the importance of the theme of "Revelation" in his conception of the phenomenological task. In others words, I will clar-

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he elaborates is a structure of phenomenality that is in one sense common to the different monotheistic religions. 2) As phenomenon God is introduced by Marion at the outset of the investigation as a case of saturated phenomenon, i.e. as the cipher of a problematic and paradoxical condition of phenomenality that phenomenology has to understand. 3) In the phenomenological horizon of Givenness — with Marion's sliding from "the given" to "the gift" — it is possible to appreciate the gratuity of the "donation" [*Gegenbenheit*].The human being is situated with respect to God in an inverted relationship, in the sense that the human being, as the subject of the relationship, in front of God, as the object of his intentionality, becomes the object of a gratuitous givenness, donation, that pairs the human with Transcendence in an inseparable relation.

ify that the opening to transcendence (and thus to God) along Marion's path is produced by his wish to preserve both the phenomenological method, i.e. an investigation of phenomena, and its object, i.e. phenomena in their phenomenality.

It is well known that Marion's thought plays a central role in the contemporary phenomenological panorama. One of the most controversial questions about him is whether he, together with Levinas, Henry, and Chrétien, should be considered a provoker of the so-called "tournant théologique" of phenomenology.[8] Many agree with this opinion of Janicaud, but if we accept the principle that every author has the right to assent or to dissent with someone else's interpretations of his own thought, we cannot ignore the fact that Marion himself keeps a sort of distance from such a reading of his position.[9] We can

8. Cf. Dominique Janicaud, *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française*, Combas: Éditions de l'Éclat, 1991. For Janicaud the opening to the invisible, to the Other (*l'Autre*), as origin of a pure donation ("*archi-révélation*") determines the theological turn, even if he shows the different ways in which this turn works in various authors. But he specifies at the beginning that such a determination does not immediately imply any negative or positive judgement (cf., 8). Janicaud manifestly defends his definition in another work, *La phénoménologie éclatée*, Paris: Éditions de l'Éclat, 1998, where he explains the meaning of his expression: "Sans doute, en toute rigueur, l'épithète «théologique» aurait-elle dû être placée entre guillemets, puisqu'elle était utilisée ironiquement et presque par prétérition. À aucun moment je n'ai prétendu que les phénoménologues critiqués étaient devenus, au sens strict ou technique du terme, des théologiens, ni comme exégètes de la Révélation ni comme s'ils professaient directement une théologie, rationnelle ou mystique. Si j'ai utilisé une fois «nos nouveaux théologiens», c'est évidemment *cum grano salis*. Le sens littéral eût ôté tout le sel de l'affaire qui consistait justement en ce que le tournant subreptice vers l'Autre, l'arch-originaire, la donation pure, etc. se produisait au sein même des prétentions phénoménologiques les plus affirmées" (9). Regarding the question of the theological turn of French phenomenology it is interesting to read the reply of the French authors in the volume *Phénoménologie et théologie*, Paris: Clarion, 1992. Both texts are available — as witness of an intense dialogue — in English translation: Dominique Janicaud, Jean-François Courtine, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion and Paul Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

9. When Marion puts emphasis on the pure phenomenological character of his work and explains that the eventual theological repercussions initially have no

see this in the preface to *Le visible et le révélé*, in which Marion explains the reasons for his attention to the phenomenon of Christ's Revelation. For Marion this phenomenon is "un événement qui, dans l'histoire et dans le présent, apparaît, *apparaît* de plein droit et même comme un phénomène par excellence."[10] He explains the necessity for phenomenology to investigate such a phenomenon, suggesting a sort of *phenomenology of the revealed*: Revelation makes, in fact, every phenomenon *visible* in a new way, "révèle tout phénomène a lui-même."[11] But in this way phenomenology has to consider the inevitable question of Revelation. For this reason, in Marion's view phenomenology approaches the phenomenon of Revelation independently from a theological or religious will.[12] Moreover, while theology can choose to investigate this phenomenon or not and in which way to do so, for phenomenology — Marion is very resolute on this point — it is quite different. Phenomenology cannot relinquish the examination of this phenomenon if it is to accomplish its task entirely, as "phenomeno-*logy*," as research of phenomena:

> La phénoménologie doit, pour devenir ce qu'elle prétend être, élargir aussi loin que possible la mise en scène de tout ce qui, dans le monde, peut apparaître, donc surtout de ce qui, de prime abord et le plus souvent, *n'y apparaît pas* encore. Mais, spontanément et suivant sa ligne de plus grande pente, elle ne cesse de se replier sur ce qui lui apparaît le plus aisément et le plus rapidement — les *objets* que l'on peut constituer et, dans le meilleur des cas, les *étants* qui sont. Pourtant les phénomènes ne manquent pas qui, ni objet, ni étant, ne cessent de revendiquer leur manifestation et, sans autorisation de la philosophie, réussissent à l'accomplir de fait. Au nombre de ces phénomènes, que nous appelons des phénomenès saturés, ne devrait-on pas aussi compter les phéno-

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connections with his original purposes, he expresses a very stark opinion about the history of phenomenology too, in the sense that his first aim is to keep phenomenology safe from the risks associated originally with Husserl's and Heidegger's position.

10. Marion, *Le visible et le révélé*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2005, 9.

11. Ibid.

12. The light of the Revelation — Marion asks — "[c]elle où se déploie la phénoménologie révélante ou une toute autre, celle où se révèle la Révélation? Ou foudrait-il n'en admettre qu'une seule, qui rendrait toutes choses visibles, aussi différentes qu'elles apparaissent?", ibid., 9.

> mènes de révélation, qui seuls correspondent formellement à ce que prétend accomplir la Révélation?[13]

The choice of Christ's Revelation as a theme of phenomenological research is a trait that quite clearly qualifies Marion's position among others in the phenomenological (not only French) world. There is, for example, if one looks in another direction than France, the phenomenological path of Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, which approaches the theme of the divine by taking as a starting-point the analysis of the human soul. Even if her work contains an evident opening to Transcendence as indicated by the "presence of the Witness" in the soul,[14] her approach remains anchored to the horizon of immanence. The soul is, in fact, conceived essentially as the determination of the human being as existence and as life in the world. In this way, Tymieniecka is closer to Husserl's project of a transcendental eidetic of consciousness, because it is always necessary to understand human life, essentially, as

13. Ibid., 10. Marion comes to the conclusion, in fact, that "[i]l se pourrait au contraire qu'élargir la phénoménalité même aus phénomènes de révélation, en sorte de faire droit à la *possibilité* de phénoménaliser (selon ses modalités propres) de la Révélation accomplisse aussi essentiellement la phénoménologie, qu'elle ne libère les droits de la théologie. Il se pourrait enfin que le refus de vouloir voir ou même de pouvoir voir ne disqualifie pas ce qu'on dénie, mais bien celui qui le dénie", ibid., 11.

14. For Tymieniecka the presence of the Divine in the human soul appears in the form of the Witness that shows himself as a radical form of otherness: "As a matter of fact, the Witness that emerges in an intuition journeying through all the fluctuations of the life of the soul, affirms himself 'in his presence' absolutely distinct from the soul, as radically other. Radically other because he cannot identify himself with any living being, with anything known and with nothing that could be known, because he introduces himself as other, radically other, not only in relation to all that is present, but also to all that which is possible; in this way he introduces himself at the peak of being and of becoming, and knowing all, penetrating all, he is somehow aware of all. Thus present in the soul, the Witness is able to understand the human attitude in its totality as such and particularly that of the soul which invokes him", Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, *From the Sacred to the Divine*, in *Analecta Husserliana* XLIII, 17. In a way, this position shares a common element with Levinas' conception of the opening to the Other as absolute Transcendence that determines my Self as "hostage" of the Other in my responsibility for Him.

a living soul that aims at grasping the divine, which itself enters into a relation of intentionality with the soul. By contrast, from Marion's point of view, the act of constitution of the ego is a process *a posteriori*, in the sense that the phenomena (and the erotic phenomenon especially) are makers of the ego itself, which finds its constitution in the act of donation to which it is destined.

Thus, the concept of "saturated phenomenon" introduces a paradox into phenomenology. In its Husserlian origins , phenomenology could guarantee the *Selbstbewusstsein* as a movement of the pure ego that grasped itself as its own object. In this way, the foundation of subjectivity was still an immanent operation of consciousness. With the concept of saturated phenomenon, subjectivity is constituted by the phenomenon because intuition is no longer a noetic operation of which the subject disposes. The ego itself is delivered over to an intuition that then becomes free of the conceptual forms with which the subject fills its own intuition of the object given in intuition:

> Nommons cette extrémité phénoménologique [*scil.* the saturated phenomenon] un paradoxe. Le paradoxe ne suspend pas seulement la relation de sujétion du phénomène au *Je*, il l'inverse. Loin de pouvoir constituer ce phénomène, le *Je* s'éprouve comme constitué par lui. Le *Je* perd son antériorité et se découcre pour ainsi dire destitué de la charge de la constitution. [. . .] Lorsque le *Je* se découvre, de constituant qu'il restait face aux phénomènes de droit commun, constitué par un phénomène saturé, il ne peut s'identifier lui-même comme tel qu'en admettant la préséance sur lui d'un tel phénomène. Ce renversement le laisse interloqué, essentiellement surprise par l'événement plus original qui le déprend de soi.[15]

The peculiar aspect of the saturated phenomena is thus their excess, their form of phenomenality that cannot be enclosed in the subjective ways with which the object — given to the ego — is measured and reduced. The saturated phenomenon exceeds intuition and therefore cannot be closed off or conceived of in the conceptual or categorical forms of the subject.[16] Because of this kind of exceeding of egological

15. J.-L. Marion, *Le visible et le révélé*, 69–70.

16. The power of the saturated phenomenon is the breaking of conditions of possibility which are imposed by the intuition of the subject. As Marion explains at

intuition, the saturated phenomenon appears unconditioned and irreducible. Because of the impossibility of articulating here a detailed analysis of the saturated phenomenon,[17] I present only traits that are relevant to arrive at a determination of God as the saturated phenomenon *par excellence*. I try, therefore, to show why, in my opinion, Marion's thought characterizes itself much more as a form of phenom-

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several moments along his path, Husserl's principle of all principles ("Am *Prinzip der Prinzipien,* daß *jede originäre gebende Anschauung eine Rechtsquelle der Erkenntnis sei,* daß *alles, was sich uns in der "Intuition" originär* (sozusagen in seiner leibhaften Wirklichkeit) *darbietet, einfach hinzunehmen sei, als was es sich gibt,* aber *auch nur in den Schranken, in denen es sich gibt,* kann uns keine erdenkliche Theorie irre machen", Husserl, Edmund, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Philosophie, Erstes Buch*, *Husserliana* III/1, The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977, 51, imposes very closed conditions on the givenness of the phenomena. I recollect these conditions into one: the given cannot give itself to the vision of consciousness without an intuition which proposes itself to the given from its own side. In a very stark and deep sequence of arguments Marion elucidates how the whole formulation of Husserl's principle of phenomenology is in itself contradictory. It aspires to present the phenomenality of the given as unconditioned, but phenomenality is completely conditioned by the egological intuition. Marion notes this point very clearly: "La donation de phénomène à partir de soi à un *Je* peut à chaque instant virer vers une constitution du phénomène à partir et par le *Je*. Même si l'on ne surévalue pas cette constante menace, on doit admettre au moins que la donation, précisément parce qu'elle garde sa fonction originaire et justificatrice, ne peut rien donner et justifier que devant le tribunal du *Je*: transcendantal ou non, le *Je* phénoménologique reste l'attributaire, donc le témoin et meme le juge de l'apparition donnée; c'est à lui que revient de mesurer ce qui se donne et ce qui ne se donne pas intuitivement, dans quelles bornes, selon quel horizon, suivant quelle intention, essence et signification. [. . .] «Le principe de tous les principes» libère certes par l'intuition originairement donatrice les phénomènes du devoir de rendre une raison suffisante de leur apparition. Mais il ne pense cette donation elle-même qu'à partir de deux déterminations qui en menacent le caractère originaire—l'horizon et la réduction. La phénoménologie se condamnerait ainsi à manquer presque immédiatement ce que l'intuition donatrice lui marque pourtant comme son but propre: libérer la possibilité de l'apparaître comme tel," J.-L. Marion, *Le visible et le révélé*, 42–43.

17. The secondary literature has given much attention to the saturated phenomenon. I limit myself here to quoting one of the newest works on Marion's thinking: Rosaria Caldarone, *Caecus Amor. Jean-Luc Marion e la dismisura del fenomeno*, Pisa: ETS, 2007, which offers us a very good explanation of this typical structure of phenomenality.

enological rather than theological thinking, even if its theological consequences contain the opportunity of creating a profound dialogue with religion.

3. Marion's defence of phenomenology and the phenomenality of the saturated phenomenon

According to Marion, the basic principle of Husserlian phenomenology generates a self-contradiction. Thus, it is necessary to rethink the structure of phenomenality in its relationship to the intuiting subject. Together with this need, Marion introduces the question that becomes so central to his thought. He asks whether it is possible to have a phenomenon that is absolutely unconditioned, irreducible and autonomous, a phenomenon that cannot ever be reduced to the ego, a phenomenon the intuition of which is unconditioned. This kind of phenomenon exists — Marion says — and it is, precisely, the saturated phenomenon.

With the question of the existence of the saturated phenomenon Marion realizes an operation that is much more radical than it may seem at first. Although the saturated phenomenon presents itself as an extraordinary phenomenon in the sense of its irreducibility,[18] Marion lets us understand that every phenomenon is in itself somehow "saturated." In showing the risk associated with Husserl's position (i. e. the loss of the original way in which the phenomenon presents itself) Marion's work indicates that the mode of presentation of the *Gegebenheit* must be reconsidered.[19] The act of subtracting the

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18. Marion formulates the principle of phenomenology in these terms: "*Autant de réduction, autant de donation*", *Étant donné. Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation*, Paris: PUF, 19982, 23, which can be considered as the alternative to Husserl's and Heidegger's thesis of "*autant d'apparence, autant d'être*." This means that the *Gegebenheit* is always proportional to the reduction, i.e. to the intuition of the subject. However, the problem is to understand what happens when we have a phenomenon which cannot be reduced to our intuition, because it appears to us, but not through the egological reduction.

19. In brief: the risk of Husserl's phenomenology is to become a sort of idealism that is very close to that of Fichte, in which *das Ich* posits by itself *das Nicht-Ich*. The egological intuition would posit givenness by itself and so would be no long-

phenomenon from the condition of the subject is a preservation of the way in which the phenomenon manifests itself, so that the subject is not able to affect it anymore. It means respecting the phenomenon in its own right of showing itself. It means, furthermore, freeing the transcendence of the Gegebenheit from the immanence of the subject. If the fact that the phenomenon specifically shows itself as "saturated" means that the intuition of it remains poor, devoid of a concept, of an adequate conceptual representation, it is also true that every phenomenon comes as a matter of fact from a radical otherness. And only if the subject maintains a distance from this otherness, can it guarantee to the phenomenon the capability of showing itself by itself.

It is essentially for this reason — i.e. because of Marion's strong will to preserve phenomenality — that Janicaud's criticism against Marion seems to me to be not entirely pertinent. When he says that abandoning the horizon of immanence in favor of Transcendence becomes a "virage théologique" which impugns the phenomenological neutrality which Husserl wanted to guarantee,[20] Janicaud does not recognize the phenomenological inversion which Marion effects in the structure of intentionality in regard to saturated phenomena, or rather in the elimination of the risks implied in Husserl's position. Janicaud would prefer a fidelity to Husserl's idea of the transcendental reduction — for him, the "inspiration fondamentale de Husserl," — which consists in the fact that "l'essence de l'intentionnalité est, à rechercher, par la réduction phénoménologique, dans l'immanence phénoménale."[21] But the so-called "third reduction"[22] of Marion demonstrates that

er the cipher of a given which has its existence from out of the subject.

20. Cf. Janicaud, *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française*, 53.

21. Ibid., 25.

22. In this way Marion himself conceives at the end of *Réduction et donation. Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie*, Paris: PUF, 1989, 303–305, the operation with which he describes the process which will later open, in *Étant donné,* his determination of the given (*das Gegebene*) as gift (*die Gabe*). In the secondary literature it has become, by now, customary to talk of three reductions, beyond the specific significance that Husserl gives to the the word "reduction". The "first" reduction would be that of Husserl (or of Descartes and Kant too), i.e. the reduction of the phenomenon to the given to the consciousness. The "second" would be that of Heidegger — a so-called ontological reduction — in which the

Husserl's reduction is not able to fully explain the structure of phenomenality. From this perspective Marion transforms the *givenness* in *donation*, and from this point he embarks on the analysis of those events in which otherness exceeds the subject as a form of phenomenality of something that is absolutely different, absolutely other, like God.

The origin of this kind of phenomenality of the other cannot, therefore, be maintained within the intentional structure of Husserl's "*originär gebende Anschauung*."[23] This is not possible because in Husserl's way of thinking the relationship between the subject of intentionality (consciousness) and the object as given to it, the condition of givenness (*Gegebenheit*) is always subordinated to a reduction to the forms of the subject. One might, therefore, say that

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phenomenon is the being. Marion's reduction consists, instead, in the substitution of the given (*das Gegebene*) with the gift (in this way much closer to the idea of the *Gabe* which is the manifestation of the phenomenon), in order to avoid the limits of Husserl and Heidegger. This operation is a possibility which derives from the principle "*autant réduction, autant donation*."

23. In this possibility of conceiving every phenomenon as a saturated phenomenon, it becomes clear how the phenomenon is determined by Marion as a gift. The gift declares that its original condition escapes the subject. The gaze of the subject is inactive and has no responsibility for the gratuity of the gift. In this way it is possible to understand two aspects better: 1) Marion's position is not that of immanence — and this is Janicaud's critique — however this is, precisely, the strong point of his phenomenological proposal which Janicaud does not accept; 2) this safe-keeping of the transcendence of the phenomenon — transcendence seen as the origin of the phenomenon — is the way of remaining loyal to the aims of phenomenology as a way that respects themanifestation of the phenomena in themselves. Husserl's conclusion that the phenomenological reduction is the liberation from any form of transcendence, cf. Husserl, Edmund, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, *Husserliana* II, The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973, 9, must be turned into its opposite: it is necessary for *Selbstgegebenheit* that the transcendence of the given remains. Paragraph 7 (*Un retour de transcendance?*) of *Étant donné* is a pointed answer in which Marion defends the role of transcendence in phenomenology without the necessity of a theological referent, affirming that "la notion de donation n'a nul besoin, depuis Husserl, d'une charge théologique quelconque pour intervenir en phénoménologie: elle y joue d'emblée de plein droit, a demeure et comme chez elle," *Étant donné*, 105. Thus, transcendence is not immediately for Marion a reference to God, but the space which is taken by the origin of donation.

Husserl's position is unable to surpass Kant's thesis of the human impossibility of knowing the essence of the thing as noumena, but only its phenomenon. Thus, if Husserl's *Gegebenheit* remains conditioned by the subjectivity — depends on it — and it is not free from the egological way of reduction,[24] what Husserl loses, by comparison with Kant, is the autonomy of the given before the ego. At this point the ideal answer of Husserl to Kant — that our knowledge of the phenomenon corresponds to the knowledge of the essence of the thing — closes up the possibility of the thing itself as something given to the ego, i.e. as something that the ego receives from outside itself, that exists independently from the forms with which the subject grasps the thing.

But Marion's lesson is, in my opinion, unexceptionable from a phenomenological point of view. This lesson says that we need to turn away from subjectivity, to break with its predominance, if we want to be able to think givenness as such, the phenomenon as such, as what gives itself to the subject without the subject realizing any apriori limitation of the given, any prior operation on it. This means that it is necessary to break with the predominance of vision, of the subjective and the unidirectional looking-at.[25] Only in this way can the phenom-

24. Husserl himself always defines as "transcendental" the work of phenomenology: phenomenology has to investigate the conditions of the possibility of knowledge. It means the elaboration of an eidetic science of the ego, which exhibits the forms with which the object/given is originally given to consciousness, i.e. sensibility and intuition.

25. With regard to the problem of the subject, I do not think that Marion wants either to deny the importance of the subject for the intentional relation or operate a destruction of subjectivity. It is the existence of the saturated phenomena that imposes a rethinking of the intentional structure and of the mode of givenness. Marion's aim is not the negation of subjectivity, but its replacement before the gift. What he writes at the end of the complex path of *Étant donné* is emblematic: "La phénoménologie de la donation en finit radicalement — à nos yeux pour la première fois — avec le 'sujet' et tous ses récents avatars. Elle y parvient pourtant, justement parce qu'elle ne tente ni de le détruire, ni de le supprimer [. . .]. Pour en finir avec le 'sujet,' il ne faut donc pas le détruire, mais le renverser — le retourner. Il se pose comme un centre: on ne le lui contestera pas; mais on lui contestera le mode d'occupation et d'exercice du centre qu'il revendique — à titre d'un 'je' (pensant, constituant, se résolvant); on lui contestera qu'il occupe ce

enon appear by and in itself. Only in this way is it possible to understand that the *Gegebenheit* is originally a donation; it is a process that does not depend primarily on the laws of the ego, even if it is always the pure ego that has to operate the phenomenological epoché. Thus: every phenomenon, being a gift, is also saturated, because the subject can neither dispose of the original act of the donation, nor decide about the phenomenality and the self-showing of the phenomenon. In other words — or rather using Husserl's words — the content of the *cogitationes* gives itself by itself to the *cogito* and it appears, before all else, not as *cogitatum*, but as gift for the *cogito*, as possibility for the *cogito* to be as such, as *cogito* in the act of its *cogitationes*.

This structural operation of Marion is very interesting, referring to the revealing opening of God to humans. Christ's Revelation to the human being always escapes from the forms of the egological *cogitatio*. The "more," the "surplus" of phenomenality and donation which allocates God beyond the human sphere of understanding, which creates a sort of deep shade in the human being's conception of God, is exactly this excess (*saturation*) of His phenomenality. Revelation is completely independent of the intentional gaze of the human being. The human being searches for God, but he can find Him only because God, even in the silence, in the absence, in the absolute distance, always is: He is already "there" for the human being, comes to him, makes Himself visible to the human being. A strange visibility, however: the human gaze is not able to arrest itself before Revelation; the human eyes cannot remain steadily looking at God, because the light of His manifestation is too strong.[26] From this point of view only

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centre comme une origine, un *ego* en première personne, en 'mienneté' transcendantale; on lui opposera qu'il ne tien pas ce centre, mais qu'il s'y tient seulement comme un allocataire placé là où se montre ce qui se donne; et qu'il s'y découvre lui-même donné à et comme un pôle de donation, où ne cessent d'advenir tous les donnés. Au centre, ne se tient nul 'sujet,' mais un adonné; celui dont la fonction consiste à recevoir ce qui se donne sans mesure à lui et dont le privilège se borne à ce qu'il se reçoive lui-même de ce qu'il reçoit," 441–442. The new determination of the subject as the "adonné" which receives itself from the gift is another operation of Marion that shows the constitution *a posteriori* of the spectator of the phenomena.

26. For example, in Christianity, only through the body of another human being,

faith can declare what the eye of reason cannot conceive. Perhaps because of this, Marion leaves to theology the duty of ensuring the reality of Revelation, while he, as a phenomenologist, illustrates the ways of possibility for God as saturated phenomenon.

4. From saturated phenomenon to erotic phenomenon: God as Love

At this point it becomes more and more evident in which way Marion's position offers the great privilege of an access to God through a trait of His that is common to several monotheistic religions: His Revelation.[27] This trait of Revelation allows Marion to inaugurate a "non-idolatrous" thinking of God, a thinking that wants to be extremely respectful to God, recognizing His absolute otherness.

It is possible to appreciate Marion's very distinct position in one of his first important books: *L'idole et la distance*. In addition to its challenge – the removal of God from the idolatrous thinking of metaphysics and onto-theology – the phenomenological aim is peculiar in this work. The idol is discussed by Marion as an imitation, a false image of God, because of its inaptitude to reproduce what it is structurally impossible to reproduce. The point is not whether the image is exact or not, similar or not, true or not. The problem is that

only through the traits of another human being (Christ), are humans authorized to look at God. Only because God makes Himself similar to the human being, is it possible for the human eye to return God's gaze. But in spite of this "movement" of God, who takes flesh in Christ, the human does not acknowledge God in this corporeal condition, and does not understand God's absolute otherness in Christ's bodily presence.

27. This possibility is evident in Marion's way of presenting Revelation – not only within the specific case of Christianity, but as an element typical of religion itself: "La religion n'atteint à sa figure la plus achevée qu'en s'établissant par et comme une révélation, où une instance, transcendante à l'expérience, se manifeste pourtant expérimentalement; une telle expérience effective au-delà (ou en deçà) des conditions de possibilité de l'expérience s'assure non seulement par son constat en des individus privilégiés ou désignés, mais par des paroles ou des énoncés accessibles en droit à tous (écritures saintes); la révélation tient sa force de provocation de ce qu'elle parle universellement, sans que pourtant cette parole puisse se fonder en raison dans les limites du monde," J.-L. Marion, *Le visible et le révélé*, 14.

this image, in its being an idol (*eidolon*), is a substitution, pretending to be what it is not. The idol is a reduction of God to the measure of the human gaze. The icon is able to maintain the distance that separates the human being from God, but the distance and the separation of Transcendence do not mean the impossibility of the experience of God, the impossibility of a meeting between God and the human being. What is active here, I would say, is the diacritical function of the difference that, for example, is so significant in Plato's dialectic: only, the difference here is what allows for individualization.

In going beyond the onto-theological tradition and a phenomenology that remains bound to the forms of ontology — which, according to him, is still the case in Heidegger's phenomenology of Being — Marion releases God from the most typical ontological and metaphysical — *idolatrous* — determinations: God as the highest expression of *substantiality* [*ousia*], as *summum ens* and *causa sui*.[28] As Marion declares, with the purpose of "pulling out" God from metaphysics and from the destiny of "God's death," articulated within the metaphysical horizon, he wants to consider "God without Being" as a pure Donation of Love. This consideration is, of course, a faithful reading of the Christian message centered on *caritas*.[29] In the climax of his path of thinking,

28. In this way one can consider as parallel, Marion's work on the metaphysical tradition and principally on Descartes (cf. especially *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes. Constitution et limites de l'ontothéo-logie cartésienne*, Paris: PUF, 1986) which represents, effectively, an overcoming of the onto-theological ways that are still present in phenomenology.

29. Concerning the abandoning of the ontological determination of God, Marion writes in the preface to the Italian translation of *Dieu sans l'être*: " Does the title *God without Being* insinuate that God is not, that He does not exist? Absolutely not: God is, He exists. The problem does not concern the divine capability to reach Being, but vice versa the capability of Being to reach God's dignity: Have we to say about God, above all and first of all, that He is? Is Being the first and the most excellent name of the divine names? Does God give Himself to contemplation and to love since He is, or is it in a different way? Does God love us and save us in Jesus Christ since He is, or is it in a different way? It is not to contest any relationship between God and Being, but to discuss whether the sole and the highest relationship possible (or the most desirable) consists in their identification," Jean-Luc Marion, *Dio senza essere*, Milano: Jaca Book, 20082, *Avvertenza alla prima edizione italiana*, 11.

Marion moves beyond the metaphysical view of God by thinking God as a giving act of Love. If we try to see Marion's speculation from a retrospective point of view,[30] the continuity of his whole project becomes much more evident — an ambitious project, with the aim of redefining phenomenality, the basis of which Marion lays in *L'idole et la distance*.

If ontological determinations are, thus, idolatrous representations of God, it is necessary to find another access to Him. However, at this point Marion holds that we already have this opportunity of access in front of us, or rather that we are able to live our experience of God because this possibility originally opens itself for us. What Marion grasps is that the opening of God to us and our access to God correspond exactly to the movement of the phenomenality of the saturated phenomenon. Therefore, if this kind of phenomenality becomes understandable for us, it is possible to try to articulate a comprehension of the relationship "God/human being" — a relation that is properly phenomenological. In my opinion, this aspect allows the possibility of understanding why Marion is convinced that theology can demonstrate the obligation of phenomenology to rethink its method:

> La phénoménologie ne peut donner son statut à la théologie, parce que les conditions de la manifestation contredisent, ou du moins diffèrent de la possibilité libre de la révélation. Mais il n'en résulte pas nécessairement un divorce, puisqu'une dernière hypothèse reste envisageable: la théologie ne peut-elle pas, en vertu de ses exigences propres et en vue de seulement les formuler, suggérer à la phénoménologie certaines modifications de méthode et d'opérations? En d'autres termes, ne pourrait-on pas s'enquérir des conditions (inconditionnelles) auxquelles la méthode phénoménologique devrait souscrire pour accéder à une pensée de la révélation? Inversement, les exigences de la théologie pourraient-elles permettre à la phénoménologie de transgresser ses propres limites, pour atteindre enfin la libre possibilité, qu'elle pretend, dès l'origine, viser?[31]

30. This operation is suggested by Marion himself, when he says that *Le Phénomène érotique* can be considered the result of the project that has its beginning with *L'idole et la distance*.

31. J.-L. Marion, *Le visible et le révélé*, 29–30.

As already seen, the new definition of the appearance of the phenomenon not only liberates phenomenology from the risks contained in Husserl's position, but also opens up a phenomenality which presents the given as gift. Marion often responds to the critique of Derrida and others, who remark that it is not possible to have a donation as a gratuitous exchange, by pointing out that if we want to think the gift as such, we must avoid every economic concept, like that of "exchange." Gratuity is the form, the peculiar trait of donation, and donation is the structure of our common life; it is a "purview" that is always active in human life.[32] In the ambit of the experience of God, of the relation between the human being and God, this structure operates extraordinarily, without any exception. For this reason, Marion's phenomenology also has a theological character: Revelation, which shows God's gift to the human being (i.e. God gives Himself to the humans through Christ), is the first form of an absolute and unconditioned phenomenality.

A very strong observation of Simone Weil can help here to catch the heart of Marion's position concerning God as gift of love, without entering into a very precise analysis of this theme. In the figure of "*decreation*" she describes the kind of divine movement with which God renounces His essence (His omnipotence — this means that evil has its origin in this self-subtraction of God) for the love for the human being. Delivering the human being to his freedom, God

32. With these words Marion describes the donation, speaking to students of the *Scuola di Alta Formazione Filosofica* in Turin in November 2006: "Let us come to the gift. It is not a class of acts which regard only a part of the everyday life. We always give without considering, in every meaning of the word, and incessantly; we give in the same way we breathe, from morning till evening, in every moment, in every circumstance. Only seldom we are in a situation in which we can say that we do not give: we give when we teach, when we speak with somebody. Further, we give without limit because there are not reasons which allow our giving at the beginning or which let it cease. The gift is not a limited moment in time, but it is an activity which encloses the totality of the experience. At least, we give — and this is the most curious thing — without consciousness of giving; more incredible is the fact that this unawareness does not at all diminish nor dissolve the gift; it makes the gift more powerful, i.e. the gift is the more disinterested, the less one is conscious of giving; in a word, the gift is evident," Jean-Luc Marion, *Dialogo con l'amore*, Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2007, 53–54.

chooses to not exercise His power, God renounces His peculiar determination, destroys Himself for his creature, and abdicates His own power. Creation is the visibility of God's love making Himself invisible in the created so that the created can realize itself. The creation is the "*decreation*" of God:[33]

> L'inflexible nécessité, la misère, la dêtresse, le poids écrasant de besoin et du travail qui épuise, la cruauté, les tortures, la mort violente, la contrainte, la terreur, les maladies — tout cela c'est l'amour divin. C'est Dieu qui par amour se retire de nous afin que nous puissions l'aimer. Car si nous étions exposés au rayonnement direct de son amour, sans la protection de l'espace, du temps et de la matière, nous serions évaporés comme l'eau au soleil. [. . .] La nécessité est l'écran mis entre Dieu et nous pour que nous puissions être.[34]

The perspective of God as gift clarifies the opening of God to the human, which Weil calls a "descending movement" [*mouvement descendant*] of God in the direction of the human. In fact, this relationship between the divine and the human is possible not because the human has the capability of discovering God, but because God comes to him. If the distance between God and the human being is radically absolute, infinite, then the human possibilities remain always limited and cannot fill the space of the distance. Instead, God has the power to make the distance insignificant, inoperative. In this way, it is God who moves Himself toward the creature, not a movement from the created: the movement of crossing between the divinity and the human is *descendant* and never *montant*. Equally, the gift covers the same descending itinerary from the one who gives to the other who receives. But this crossing allows the human eye to perceive the light of the

33. In this way Weil affirms that God's presence happens at two levels: God is in act present at the moment of the creation, but He remains present without the possibility of our seeing Him in the created, because of His constant "decreation:" "Présence de Dieu. Cela doit sentendre de deux façon. Pour autant qu'il est créateur, Dieu est present en toute chose qui existe, dès lors qu'elle existe. [. . .] La première présence est la présence de création. La seconde est la présence de dé-création," Quoted from the French section of French-Italian volume Weil, Simone, *L'ombra e la grazia*, Milano: Bompiani, 2002, 68.
34. Ibid., 58.

phenomenon (God in the body of Christ too), without the possibility of looking properly at it. Impossible to be looked at, and therefore invisible, God becomes visible.

This visibility does not realize itself in the way of an object. The human gaze does not perceive God as something that is in front of him like any object. Here, in my opinion, lies one of the most powerful results of Marion's thinking. The removal of God from the ambit of objectivity depends on the same basis that determines Marion's phenomenological turn: 1) every given no longer appears as an object (*Gegenstand* — which is still a measure of subjectivity) according to the new way of understanding phenomenality within the paradigm of *saturation*;[35] 2) by the force of phenomenality as *saturation* and because of Marion's refusal of onto-theological thinking (with its ontological categories, which are always measures of the predominance of the subject) the visibility of God does not appear in the idolatrous figures of the tradition, which are always ways of making God an object.

The metaphysical formula *cogito ergo sum*, which declares the primacy of Being and of subjectivity, is replaced by Marion with *amo ergo sum* through the choice of the erotic phenomenon, the experience of Love as the exemplary condition of the saturated phenomenon. In the erotic phenomenon, in fact, a new kind of reduction takes place, which Marion calls "erotic." The erotic reduction gives the certitude of existence not as"epistemic reduction" (in which the thing is ascertained as an object, or in the case of the ego as a subject — this is the form of Husserl's reduction of the transcendental ego) and not in the way of an "ontological reduction" (in which the thing is grasped as a being in

35. One of the final conclusions by Marion is the removal of the condition of the *Gegenständlichkeit*. This condition is for Husserl the guarantee for the phenomenological method of reduction to reach a kind of knowledge which is universal and objective, because the given is grasped as an "object in the flesh." But already with Heidegger — and Marion follows him — it becomes evident that the *Gegenständlichkeit* is the condition according to which the phenomenon is seen as *vorhanden*, as an object in front of which there is a subject. This is only a representation [*Vorstellung*] and not the thing in itself. The presence of the given is thus never the *Vorhandenheit*, but the *Anwesenheit*.

its Being — as in Heidegger).[36] The assurance that is produced by the question "Am I beloved?" does not depend on the self-certitude of the ego in its *Selbstbewusstsein*, but opens onto an original assurance that is always in the other. I am beloved, and this implies the importance of my existence for the one who loves me. I am certain of my existence because there is someone who loves me; I exist as beloved. But this passivity transforms itself in the activity of loving. Although someone loves me, and does so unconditionally (i.e., for example even if I do not love him) — because as a saturated phenomenon love is without measure, is irreducible — nevertheless the one who loves me, giving me his love as gift, asks me somehow to love. The gift of love seeks to generate another gift, i.e. my love as gift. This reciprocal crossing is not the same as an exchange. My love cannot be measured by the love of another. True, therefore, in this sense, is our common saying that everybody loves in his own way. And if I am because I am beloved, I exist even more because I love, and I definitely exist because I love as the first loving.[37]

According to this formulation of the phenomenon of donation which love is, God as the highest expression of phenomenon of love is le *phénomène saturé par excellence*. This means that He is also the ultimate case of *donation* (Christ's sacrifice on the cross). His phenomenality, i.e. His Revelation, is an absolute kind of Self-showing and Self-giving,

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36. Cf. *Le phénomène érotique*,cit., §3, 37–48. About the erotic reduction, in the lectures contained in *Dialogo con l'amore*, Marion expresses himself in a way that notes the necessity of transcendence in givenness (also as the origin of the ego itself): "Thus, it is to try a *third reduction*: So that I can appear rightly as a phenomenon, it is not enough that I recognize myself as a certain object, or as a being which is properly being; it is necessary, indeed, that I recognize myself as a given phenomenon, i.e. as a phenomenon that comes from a donation and that is, consequentely, *gifted* [*adonato*, *adonné*], which is able to assure itself as a datum without vanity. [. . .] Asking to assure my certitude of being against the grey attack of vanity means asking: 'Does someone love me?'. Here we are: the form of assurance which is appropriated to the given *ego* (and gifted [*adonato*, *adonné*]) lets an *erotic reduction* operate," 126–127.

37. Marion says explicitly: "Asking whether someone loves me, I have no longer to inquire about my assurance: I enter into the kingdom of love, in which I receive immediately the rôle of he who can love, of he whom is possible to love and who believes that he must be loved–the *lover*," *Dialogo con l'amore*, 132.

which both exceeds and surpasses any measure in their paradoxical nature.[38]

For Marion, the possibility of God as saturated phenomenon *par excellence*, as absolute experience of givenness, as a release of God from metaphysical, idolatrous thinking, is also an original access to God's phenomenality and givenness. He performs two operations, saving the thought of God from what he takes to be the limitations of both Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology: the reduction of the given to the structure subject-object (Husserl) and the reduction of the given to Being— *Ereignis* as the cipher of the phenomenality of Being, which for Marion is not an original givenness because it remains subjected to a preliminary condition, to the ontological difference and, thus, to the irreducible relationship between Being [*Sein*] and being [*Seiende*].

However, nothing could be more telling than what Marion writes at the end of *Le phénomène érotique*, where God appears, for the first time in the book, in His Transcendence not according to Being, but as a phenomenon of love, donation of love, as the pure and perfect form of love, placing Himself at an infinite distance from the men whose way of loving is defective:

> Dieu ne se révèle pas seulement par amour et comme amour; il se révèle aussi par les moyens, les figures, les moments, les actes et les stades de l'amour, de l'unique et du seul amour, celui que nous aussi pratiquons. [. . .] A une infinite différence près. Quand Dieu aime (et il ne cesse en effet jamais d'aimer), il aime simplement infiniment mieux que nous. [. . .] La plus haute transcendance de Dieu, l'unique ne le déshonore pas, ne tient pas à la puissance, ni à la sagesse, ni même à l'infinité, mais à l'amour. [. . .]
>
> Dieu nous précède et nous transcende, mais en ceci d'abord et surtout qu'il nous aime infiniment mieux que nous n'aimons et ne l'aimons. Dieu nous surpasse au titre de meilleur amant.[39]

38. The visibility of God as invisible is emblematic of this paradoxical phenomenality, so that we say that God is not looked at, but revealed.
39. *Le phénomène érotique*, 340–342.

5. A possible dialogue

I will, very briefly, try now to draw some conclusions that seem to me to be strictly connected to the theme of this study. Marion has never concealed his Catholic faith; he has never repudiated his friendships in the Catholic world, within which, of course, he has often found profound attention paid to his thinking, and all of this at a time when the philosophical panorama after Heidegger has suggested the assumption of an atheistic attitude, frequently without a proper understanding of Heidegger's silence about God.[40] But Marion's Catholicism does not mean that his description of the phenomenal structure of Revelation has validity only if one assumes the theological presuppositions, contents of faith, and dogmas of Catholic theology.

Marion's thinking locates itself in the intersection between faith and philosophy. In this way, it is not at all a dogmatic position, and, in my opinion, occupies a very central place in the investigation of the relationship between philosophy and religion precisely because his operations are strictly phenomenological. Revelation is not a figure or a way of opening that concerns Christianity only. Where a religious discourse on God begins, we always find a revelation to guarantee this discourse; there is always a reference to an otherness that is invocated as an origin, to a transcendence to which one becomes witness.

The fact that Marion distinguishes the duty of phenomenology from that of theology is very interesting, because he resolutely says that investigating Revelation's content is the work of theology and not of phenomenology, and the help which phenomenology offers is the possibility of clarifying the structure of the phenomenon of Revelation, without touching upon the doctrinal content of faith.

We know very well that in the history of thinking the relationship between religion and philosophy, or rather between theology and philosophy, is characterized by the difficulty each have in respecting each other within their own spheres. The tendency of each to capture

40. In this regard it is important to note Marion's initial quotation from Heidegger: "S'il m'arrivait encore d'avoir à mettre par écrit une théologie — ce à quoi je me sens parfois incité — alors le terme d'*être* ne saurait en aucun cas y intervenir. La foi n'à pas besoin de la pensée de l'être," *Dieu sens l'être*, Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1982, 5.

the other in its ambit has its origin not in the fact that God represents a frontier-field, but in the claim of both disciplines to be the sole guardians of the truth. Even today it remains difficult for philosophy and for religion to have a rich and fecund dialogue ,because both have a bent for destroying the presuppositions of the other, the value of the insight that the other brings.

What Marion offers, instead, is a different paradigm. His speech moves within the frontier-line between philosophy and faith, and he recognizes this with the consciousness that a frontier is something that separates but at the same time unites. Marion's phenomenology follows this line, in dialogue with theology, without claiming to place itself back into the space of theology and maintaining the right of autonomy over its own speculative operations. However, from this point of view it seems as if Marion has shifted the limit, the frontier between philosophy and theology/religion, opening a new space of reflection which demands that theology listen to the lessons of phenomenology by abandoning the traditional ways of conceiving God, and that phenomenology become respectful of the emergence of the theological question in human life and give attention to transcendence. This attention in Marion defines his work as a further step in the reflection that begins with Levinas, Derrida, and Henry, authors to whom Marion recognizes himself as owing a debt. But Marion understands that, in order to receive the phenomenality of transcendence, it is necessary to attempt a reformulation of the phenomenological establishment, of its tasks and aims, even if it means realizing a sort of "parricide" of Husserl.

What we see, then, is a singular situation. Phenomenology can maintain its distance from theology only if it realizes itself completely by analyzing the phenomenality of the given as otherness. In this way it can, in fact, define its own field of research, declaring itself as an investigation of the conditions of possibility and not of the content of faith. But during this investigation it finds itself in front of theology and cannot come back, otherwise it would lose what it has conquered. Here, phenomenology and theology stand before one another as at a frontier block.[41] It happens that Marion's thought supports Catholic

41. A frontier block belongs to both limit states, which are so near to each other that they touch, but in this co-presence they are, equally, in opposition.

faith in its content and that, perhaps, theology appropriates this benefit. Vice versa, it happens that faith grants philosophy the opportunity to explore a sphere that is usually considered the possession of faith, so that in this way philosophy can develop itself.

In any case, Marion's phenomenological perspective provides the chance of bringing together two ambits that are normally seen in opposition to each other, or else subordinate one to the other, without needing to resort to the sort of compromise that philosophy of religion can sometimes become.

The proposal of, and the wish for cooperation and dialogue between philosophy and religion are not something new. What is new in Marion's perspective is that he asks that both, theology and philosophy, abandon their typical ways of thinking – which are, however, common (the idolatrous for Marion). In this request, theology and philosophy are forced to collaborate with each other as much as possible, because the experience of one can help the other in a field that is unknown to both.

Marion's phenomenology, which renounces the primacy of human reason in favour of the phenomenon itself, or of a reason that is absolutely other (*Logos*), is a concrete proposal, a real attempt of philosophy to talk with religion. It is now up to religion to respond in turn to this renunciation by philosophy, recognizing the reason for the operation of philosophy, respecting its rights within the dialogue.

Auto-Immunity or Transcendence: A Phenomenological Re-consideration of Religion with Derrida and Patočka[1]

LUDGER HAGEDORN

> Dieu en nous sanctionne notre finitude.
> *Jan Patočka*

I. Auto-Immunity and Transcendence

As Nietzsche showed, nihilism is not simply the overt turning away from all meaningful life structures. Rather, nihilism is already and preeminently present in the pretensions of universalist and essentialist worldviews. It resides in the spirit that wants *to come to an end*, that wants to overcome problems "once and for all," whatever the "solution" that might be envisaged. In short, it resides in the attempt to escape the tensions inherent in and constitutive of human life.

This Nietzschean diagnosis of the origins and the rise of nihilism is a crucial point of reference for philosophical ventures attempting to avoid the abyss of either dogmatic essentialism or hopeless relativism. But what does this approach add to the question of religion and its place in the modern world? For Nietzsche, "religion" signifies the Judeo-Christian heritage of European thinking together with corresponding tendencies ("metaphysics") that can be found in Western philosophy since Plato. He understands it as the main source of the "devaluation of all values" and the consequent rise of nihilism. In my view, this Nietzschean verdict does describe a certain aspect of religion,

1. Important parts of the article are the result of a close collaboration with Michael Staudigl, Vienna, whom I would like to thank for the collaborative effort and his immense contributions to the argument. James Mensch was a great help and support to both of us in formulating these ideas.

namely its tendency to close itself off from worldly questions and, hence, to devalue them. Religion has a tendency towards dogmatism and radicalization as is so amply illustrated in the history of religious fundamentalisms.

In his essay on religion,[2] Jacques Derrida refers to exactly this trait of religious thinking when he speaks of its inherent striving for "auto-immunization." In biology, this term is used to describe the body turning its immune reaction on itself. Systems designed to protect the body turn inward, attacking their own structures. "Allergic reactions," for example, are understood as the body attacking itself in its attempt to preserve itself from the allergen. For Derrida, all essentialisms, including the religious one, suffer this fate in their attempts to protect themselves. Thus, Christianity, with its focus on charity and loving one's neighbor, has often violated its own teachings in its efforts to preserve the purity of its doctrines. In religious wars, persecution of sects deemed heretical and of others stigmatized as sinful or evil, attempts at self-protection have often violated the very doctrines that most distinguish them. For Derrida, this notion of "auto-immunization" is altogether generalizable. Since it is more of a phenomenological description than a judgment of moral philosophy, it, in fact, allows for a reformulation of Nietzsche's critique without recourse to moral rage or Nietzsche's general dismissal of religion. It discloses the blindness of essentialism and its auto-immunizing either-or, but does not restrict this criticism to what Nietzsche calls the Platonic and Christian "netherworlds." It rather makes visible similar patterns of thought that are present in religious worldviews, but by no means only in religion. The same destructive tendency, a tendency towards "auto-immunization," also plays a crucial role outside the sphere of religion. Derrida, for example, sees it at work in the American response to the threat of terrorism.[3]

Blind essentialism and radicalism, violence and cruelty have not

2. Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar, New York and London: Routledge, 40–101.

3. Cf. Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

been overcome with the rise of secularism and rationalism but may even appear to have increased. The contrast, at least, between the purity and sobriety of the "rational age" and its orgiastic outbursts of violence is no less striking than the apparent conflict of Christian religious wars with the gospel of love and charity. In one of his *Heretical Essays*, Jan Patočka refers to exactly this aspect of modern civilization when he writes:

> War is . . . the greatest undertaking of industrial civilization, both product and instrument of total mobilization . . . , and a release of orgiastic potentials which could not afford such extreme of intoxication with destruction under any other circumstances. Already at the dawn of modernity . . . that kind of cruelty and orgiasm emerged. Already then it was the fruit of a disintegration of traditional discipline and demonization of the opponent — though never before did the demonic reach its peak precisely in an age of greatest sobriety and rationality."[4]

What is so interesting about these sentences and what fascinated Derrida — in his *Gift of Death* he almost exclusively refers to the fifth *Heretical Essay* by Patočka already quoted — is not only that their explanatory power of destruction and self-destruction comes close to Derrida's own notion of "auto-immunization." They also tackle the question of Christianity and its meaning for the history of modern Europe, the complex relationship of religion and the modern secular-scientific worldview, undermining the traditional contrast of faith's obscurity on the one hand and enlightened thinking on the other — all of which bears a strong resemblance to Derrida's attempt to understand religion *beyond the dichotomy of myth and enlightenment*.

For Patočka, this was a life-long theme. As early as in a major project on the philosophy of history, which he was working on during the Second World War, but which remained a fragment, he declares that the main focus of his work is the attempt to understand the shift from a Christian to a post-Christian epoch that took place in Europe between the 15th and 18th to 19th centuries.[5] Patočka argues that modern

4. Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, Chicago: Open Court, 1996, 114.

5. The most important of these studies have been published in German in:

history, from the late middle ages until the rise of nihilism in the late 19th century, exhibits the unfolding of two kinds of radicalism: a religious escapism with an accompanying inflation of the Christian doctrine of salvation on the one hand, as witnessed in the eschatological movements of early modern times, and modernity's enforced implementation of objectified and rationalized techno-scientific reductionism on the other. What is lost in these exclusive totalizations is the tension arising from the divergent and conflicting worldviews that prevailed throughout the middle ages. The two main influences on the medieval mind, Christianity, with its dramatic stress on inner life, and the ancient heritage of objectivism and rationalism, never really melted into one coherent view. Instead they maintained a certain tension that was not "dissolved" but stabilized. Patočka calls this a "strained harmony," a balance in tension.

In fact, both positions, a radicalized and aggressive belief as well as the radicalized attempt to overcome the question of faith, are typically modern. Viewed in this light, the tendency to "auto-immunization" indicates nothing other than the attempt to get rid of and finally solve the inherent tensions of the religious and the secular worldview. Historically, the result was the mutual exclusion of faith and knowledge that characterizes modernity. A sign of this exclusion is the rise, within virtually all world religions, of fundamentalism with its essentially hostile reaction to the secular-scientific worldview. Today, Islamic fundamentalism is only one more example of the "auto-immune" reaction on the part of religious consciousness. The consequent difficulties are not, however, limited to it.

"Auto-immunization," therefore, can serve as a label not only for religious orthodoxy but for all kinds of radically unifying models that restrict themselves to just one level of interpretation, one dimension of life, thereby avoiding the tension of opposing claims. Thus, the commitment to rationalism or science and their all-encompassing "solutions" can be described as resembling the radical universalism of fundamentalist traits in religion. Its very "contamination" with religious claims and expectations can be seen as an example of its own

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Patočka, Jan, *Andere Wege in die Moderne*, ed. Ludger Hagedorn, Würzburg: Königshausen, 2006.

tendency to "auto-immunization," that is, to a violation of its own innermost essence. In this context, it is especially characteristic of modern times that both the religious and the secular worldviews understand their universality as exclusionist.

A phenomenological account of religion and religious thinking, therefore, should certainly address the tendency towards "auto-immunization." This, however, is hardly a *sufficient* description of what is distinctly religious. Moreover, to limit oneself to this characterization would, as I see it, completely miss a certain potential of religion, a potential whose actualization implies the opposite of Nietzsche's critique of it as the source of the nihilistic devaluation of all values. Positively regarded, it could be argued that religion includes the possibility of the renewed awakening of meaningful life structures and, concomitantly, the shaking of our ordinary routines.

The related philosophical question concerns our post-modern age, conceived as that which follows the age that supposedly saw the triumphant success of the scientific worldview. What does a phenomenon like the fiercely debated "return of the religious" mean in this context? In spite of the hopes of certain religious dogmatists, it probably does not signify the revival of some imagined past. Philosophically, such a return can only be thought of in terms of a thorough *revision of the self-conception* of modernity, including its tacitly assumed dichotomy of myth and enlightenment. As Derrida notes, the return of the religious is not the revival of something criticized and attacked, e.g., not a continuation of the battle between faith and knowledge under new conditions. Rather, for our time, it urges us to reassess the relation as such.

In this sense, the return of the religious indicates the (re-)discovery of something unthought of, a recurrence of the suppressed side of rationality and a challenge to its self-conception. It also relates to the question of how today's worldview might overcome a nihilistic approach, that is, its tendency towards a universal devaluation. It is here that the religious sphere shows its crucial importance: Despite the Nietzschean verdict and some obvious tendencies in this direction (i.e., despite its tendencies to "auto-immunize" itself), religion *per se* can never be reduced to a rational totalizing of certain worldviews. On the contrary when we examine its own self-conception, we see that

religious experience can be understood as an encounter with another side of life, one that can never be integrated or functionalized. Religion, in other words, has an intrinsic ability to "open up" and to transcend the boundaries of fixed worldviews. Religion is about *transcendence* – that is more than a self-evident platitude, especially if the emphasis of this transcendence is put not on the transcendental as such but on the capacity for transcending, on its potential of "shaking."

This intrinsic potential does not only affect our notion of rationality but also the relationship between different religious traditions and their respective cultural settings. Religion, therefore, does not have to be seen as one more auto-immunizing institution doomed to compete with other worldviews, be they divergent creeds or our modern rational-scientific culture. Rather, it can be considered as an outstanding manifestation of and testimony to the inner tension of human life itself.

Within the predominantly secular realm, religion represents the most radical potential to articulate some kind of *protest*, a protest that is directed against the merely anthropocentric world of individual and social self-affirmation. The religious perspective, in its very transcendence, involves a critical distance to this world. As such, it implies a critical challenge to a superficial satisfaction with human finitude, as expressed in the short quote by Patočka that provides the leitmotif for this article: "Dieu en nous sanctionne notre finitude"[6] ("God within us sanctions our finitude"). Religion, in this sense, can be seen as one of the most powerful challenges to the deification of the human, all too human, world. Today, the rights of rationalism seem to be unshakable. Such a view, however, neglects the other side of the scale. In fact, the familiar "crisis of liberalism" might be explained by the fact that rationality, taken as the only guideline and principle of human life, has nothing in common with what could be called a final decision, i.e., with a relation to the ultimate limit of "the all too human." It may well be that rationality, particularly in its secular-scientific version, cannot subsist as a single leading principle, that it is insufficient for

6. Patočka, Jan, *Liberté et sacrifice. Ecrits politiques*, trans. Erika Abrams, Grenoble: Millon, 1990, 23.

the demands for completion and fulfillment that characterize human life.

II. Transcendence — Where to?

As argued above, religion is both the suppressed side of rationality as well as its ultimate and unattainable challenge. Only a reflection that accounts for the pivotal role of transcendence in the process of self-constitution — i.e., for the mystery of human incarnation, vulnerability, and finitude — can, in fact, offer a sufficient explication of the ambivalent options of interpretation and action implied in our openness to transcendence. A certain moment of transcendence, of the self-overcoming of the empirical human being in the direction of something unconditioned, seems to be part of human existence.

It is the phenomenological tradition in particular that has proven to be most capable of dealing in philosophical terms with religion and transcendence. Max Scheler, Edith Stein, or Karol Wojtiła might be mentioned as just a few famous examples of philosophers within this tradition who dedicated significant sections of their work to questions of religion. Recently, the so-called "theological turn" of French phenomenology, a label referring to authors such as Jean-Luc Marion and Michel Henry, has been widely discussed. In one of his earlier articles, Marion almost paradigmatically underlined this specific potential of phenomenology: "Kurz, die Phänomenologie wäre in ausgezeichneter Weise die Methode der Manifestation des Unsichtbaren auf dem Weg über seine anzeigenden Phänomene — und somit auch die Methode der Theologie."[7]

Nevertheless, this "theological turn" has also given rise to some doubts and reservations. Bernhard Waldenfels, to name one of the most prominent critics, has made a distinction between a *phenomenology of the religious* (a mere description of religious phenomena and their "categorization") and a *religious phenomenology*, exemplified by thinkers

7. Marion, Jean-Luc, "Aspekte der Religionsphänomenologie. Grund, Horizont und Offenbarung," *Religionsphilosophie heute*, eds. Alois Halder, Klaus Kienzler, and Joseph Möller, Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1988, 92 (quoted from the German translation; the French original apparently remains unpublished).

such as Marion and Henry, which to him is on the verge of turning into an esotericism speaking solely to "initiates and fellow believers."

Waldenfels does not hold that phenomenology should ignore or neglect religious experience. He would agree with Marion that the "phenomenological method" or the phenomenological path is the most suitable one for philosophically entering the religious field. The tasks and outcomes of such an approach can, according to him, be best compared to a phenomenology of art,[8] but with an extra difficulty that is characteristic of any attempt to grasp religious experience. Waldenfels defines the "dilemma" of any phenomenology of religion: either it presupposes certain structures and horizons within which religious phenomena appear, thereby taking the allegedly unconditioned and extra-ordinary (God, the Holy, etc., as exceeding any categorization) as something conditioned and ordinary, or it turns things around, as Marion does, and takes religious phenomenon as an "unconditioned giving," thereby potentially implying a loss of phenomenological provability and turning the addressee into a mere passive recipient of this gift. With respect to this second approach Waldenfels explicitly speaks of a "fundamentalism." Given the concept of auto-immunization outlined above, we could also characterize it as a kind of philosophical auto-immunity, as a gesture that tries to "open up," to liberate,[9] but in a paradoxical result "closes off" itself, turning the liberating move into a tool directed against the original idea.

The main task arising from this critique would be the attempt to formulate a philosophical approach that comes to terms with the exclusive either—or of the dilemma described.[10] Waldenfels offers

8. "Religiöse Erfahrung bedeutet eine bestimmte Weise der Erfahrung, in der Unsagbares sagbar wird. Sie gleicht darin der Kunst, die gerade in ihren modernen Varianten darum bemüht ist, Unsichtbares sichtbar, Unhörbares hörbar zumachen . . . ", cf. B. Waldenfels, "Phänomenologie der Erfahrung und das Dilemma einer Religionsphänomenologie," *Religion als Phänomen*, eds. Wolf-Eckart Failing, Hans-Günter Heimbrock, and Thomas A. Lotz, Berlin/ New York: de Gruyter, 2001, 77.

9. Cf. Marion's statement: "Die Phänomenologie befreit . . . die Möglichkeit. Sie eröffnet also das Feld den eventuell von Unmöglichkeit gekennzeichneten Phänomenen", op. cit., 8.

10. This does not mean to "solve" the problem ("Es gibt Dilemmata und Parado-

only a very brief sketch of such a venture, which he characterizes as a "phenomenology of responsivity." Its guideline would be the attempt to grasp religious phenomena in terms analogous to Levinas's concept of the other and the epiphany of the human face. Accordingly, the character of religious experiences would then be best described as a fundamental disruption, as an excess that radically questions the existing (finite) order but that still cannot be separated or detached from the order that it exceeds. It is something that withdraws itself but is present even in its withdrawal. The role of the "subject" or "Ego" (to use these inadequate traditional terms) would then be one that is not doomed to the bad dichotomy of either omnipotence or impotence.

Against this background, the work of Jan Patočka opens up a potentially helpful line of debate. In the first instance for a rather "technical" reason: the underlying concept of his philosophy is a non-subjective one that thwarts the unconditional constitutional power of the "Ego" and its "self-centeredness." It "opens up" the ground for alterity and an encounter with something external, strange, not disposable. Yet at the same time, this move in Patočka does not go to the other extreme of a mere receptiveness and passivity. Methodologically, he wants to maintain what he calls a "phenomenological provability." Second, it seems that it is precisely the field of religion, the "openness to transcendence," that deserves special attention. Patočka's repeated references to Christianity are, as Karfík observed, by no means the "accidental excursion"[11] of a philosopher into the realm of religion. His sometimes almost intimate relationship to Christianity is even more of a surprise, if one takes into account the biographical background: Unlike other philosophers of religion who — at least at certain points of their lives — often had strong personal inclinations to religion as "believers," Patočka was always more or less distant from the church and practicing religion. In his philosophy of history, he speaks of the "Post-Christian epoch" as the lived European reality at least since the 19th century, and it seems that this epoch is a matter of fact

xien, deren Auflösung schlimmer ist als diese selbst." Waldenfels, op. cit., 84), but to be aware of its tension and the shortcomings of any "immunizing" vaccination.

11. Karfík, Filip, *Unendlichwerden durch die Endlichkeit. Eine Lektüre der Philosophie Jan Patočkas*, Würzburg: Königshausen, 2008, 31.

to him, something that he takes as given, without any undertone of either triumph or regret. Therefore, the "intrusion of belief" into the pure field of science that generally seems to be a problem area for many critiques is not an issue as far as Patočka is concerned. The following observations are meant to open up the field for a closer discussion of his understanding of Christianity, an intellectual potential that Patočka sees as constituting a profound challenge to philosophy and its continuing allegiance to Greek ("metaphysical") patterns of thinking. Far from wanting to give a full account of this problem in his thought, these reflections will draw attention to an understanding of religion that takes up its move to transcendence and its quality of transcending without necessarily linking it to the transcendent deities or "netherworlds." The title of Karfík's book mentioned above describes this as "Unendlichwerden durch die Endlichkeit," obtaining in-finity by and through finitude. As a short sketch of this feature of Patočka's philosophy will show, this concept in the end also gives a concrete goal, a *telos*, to the transcending move.

Surveying Patočka's philosophical development from his early transcendental idealism up to the late concept of a movement of human existence, Karfik discerns one characteristic and distinguishing mark of his philosophy: "ein Zug der Transzendenz, einer Selbstüberschreitung des empirischen Menschseins auf ein *anhypotheton* hin . . . " (31). This is already true of the young, 28-year-old philosopher who emphatically states:

> Part of the finitude of our actual life is to experience a need for some external support, for salvation. Salvation is the sustenance of our life by an external, absolute power. Philosophy, however, suggests a reversal of that situation: finitude cannot naïvely find "support" in absolute power simply because the absolute itself is wholly contained within the finite. . . . It is not possible to rely on the gods, because the absolute is not outside but within us. Man stands in a closer and more intimate relation to God than is either safe or pleasant.[12]

12. Quoted from an article that bears the significant title "Some comments concerning the extramundane and mundane position of philosophy," cf. Patočka, Jan, *Living in Problematicity*, ed. Eric Manton, Praha: Oikoymenh, 2008, 26.

One could argue that such formulations, especially the reference to the intimate and yet unpleasant relationship to God, are accidental, that they take up an old religious language for mere rhetorical or historical reasons. And, indeed, the statement above comes from an article that reflects on the role of philosophy. What is the "god within us" but another formulation for a theoretical activity that takes into account the *whole* of our life-world or, as one could say with Husserl, another word for the operation of the transcendental Ego? This seems to be a valid objection, but as we will see, there is indeed something in this "sanctioning of our finitude" that is far more than theoretical activity or transcendental reflection.

The Patočka of the 1960s, critically distancing himself from Husserl and paying close attention to Heidegger, understands human existence as a being-in-the-world that is stamped by finitude and historicity. But — and this is the decisive difference — his main intention in the end will not be to retain finitude, but to overcome and transcend it. The framework here is Patočka's concept of the movements of human existence, which can be seen as his most original contribution to phenomenology. Without going into detail, it is enough to mention that he distinguishes three basic or fundamental movements of human life: first, one that is oriented to being accepted, being rooted in the world; second, one that he calls "self-prolongation," that is the attempt to maintain and assert one's position in the world, this includes work, fighting, self-assertion; and, finally, the third, and the one that is most important and also most decisive in our context, Patočka calls the movement of "transcendence," of giving oneself away or of devotion to others. How can this last and somewhat mysterious movement be explained?

Patočka speaks of the world as having its "trans," its beyond.[13] But this beyond, in fact, is a mere negative one, a negative transcendence. It shows that every movement in the world is just a relative movement. Patočka also relates this third movement explicitly to Heidegger's ontological difference, as the movement that refers to Being instead of beings and to appearance as such, phenomenality as such instead of

13. Patočka, Jan, *Die Bewegung der menschlichen Existenz*, ed. Klaus Nellen, Jiri Nemec, and Ilja Srubar, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991, 140 (cf. Karfík, 77).

the act of appearing. But at this point, when he seems to be closest to Heidegger, Patočka's philosophy of the movement of human existence leads in another direction. The allusion to ontological difference seems to be merely a preliminary step towards the idea that the third movement, the movement of transcendence, has its own clear orientation: it is the movement of giving oneself and of giving oneself to others. The following quotation nicely brings out this double step of a "shaking," of a mere negative transcendence, and the concomitant "manifestation" of a true life in self-transgression:

> Thus at the center of our world the point is to reach from a merely given life to the emergence of a true life, and that is achieved in the movement that shakes the objective rootedness and alienation in a role, in objectification — *at first a purely negative movement*, one that shakes our bondage to life, setting free without revealing anything further; *then with a movement that positively presents the essential* — as life universal, giving birth to all in all, evoking life in the other, a self-transcendence toward the other and with him again to infinity.[14]

This transgression towards the other and through the other (or *with* the other — "Mitsein") is to be understood as a mutual event. The two participating entities, I and the other, cross each other and open up the space for a mutual enrichment:

> I constitute myself in creating the other, as he in creating me, and no stage is possible in which there would be no way from one to the other and back. In the case of a struggle, I gain no higher self-awareness than the negative one that I am no thing and, in general, no objectivity; in the case of giving, devoting myself, I gain the *awareness of myself as essentially infinite*, reproducing the whole in each part, generating another being beside myself, not only a finite but a nonobjective one. I evoke in the other the same movement, while the other remains free and nonobjective by doing as much for his other, myself. I demonstrate my not-being-finite by giving up my finite being, wholly giving it to the other who returns to me his being in which mine is contained. (ibid.)

14. Patočka, Jan, *Philosophy and Selected Writings*, ed. E. Kohák, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 262f (italicized by LH).

Such descriptions are made very much in the Husserlian tradition of problems of constitution and intersubjectivity, being at the same time deeply indebted to his analyses but also trying to overcome their criticized self-centeredness of subjectivism. In this sense, the "self-transcendence" can be understood against a "pure" phenomenological background. But there is something else: a certain emphasis on existential "truth," a certain holistic vocabulary ("life universal, giving birth to all in all"; "infinity") that cannot be ignored and is generally quite characteristic of Patočka. One could, for example, refer to his studies on literature where he describes exactly such phenomena as the reciprocal gift of constitution and creation outlined above. It is the process of self-affirmation that is, ultimately, also a self-overcoming, that can be found in literature, in Dostoevsky's novels, for example. Here the breakthrough to a new life is mainly incited by the "other," as in the case of the encounter of the ridiculous man with a little girl.[15]

But this is not only the case in Patočka's view of literature — it seems that his view of history and politics (one of the main fields of his interests and philosophical writings) is also stamped by a similar approach. Once again we see the structure of a double movement that initially and negatively breaks with routine and established values, secondly "opens up" to or "transcends," becoming something new and positive. In his late writings like the *Heretical Essays* this is analyzed as the "shaking" that becomes especially manifest in historical crises, wars, and generally in the conflicting positions and perspectives that are an essential part of the political world. It is the loss of all meaningful life-structures. But as the often quoted "solidarity of the shaken" indicates, this loss is not the last word. The solidarity of the shaken is the manifestation of an "authentic transindividuality" (131) that does not formulate programs but is an answer, a *positive* reply to the abyss of problematicity that was opened up by the shaking.

So what about religion? Obviously, religious experiences are the privileged field of the phenomena described. It is here that the shaking

15. In his last essay, written just before his death, Patočka mainly refers to *Brothers Karamazov* and *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, cf. "Die Sinnfrage in der Epoche des Nihilismus," *Tschechische Philosophen im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ludger Hagedorn, Stuttgart: dva, 2002.

and a concomitant loss of the world as well as the transcendence and gaining of a new life have their original meaning. Nevertheless, it seems that there is nothing exclusively reserved to the religious dimension that could not also be experienced elsewhere. The comparison of religious experiences with the field of art, as Waldenfels suggested, would then be fully justified and adequate. And, indeed, this also seems to be Patočka's position: the third movement of human existence is laden with allusion to religious experiences[16] but it is quite easily imaginable without any such reference to and loans from religion. History and politics, art and literature fully bear witness to the same phenomena.

But then it is only here in Patočka that a special subtext of Christian motives comes into play. Heretically, one could say that it is a Christian message after the end of Christianity, an intellectual challenge that can only be taken up after Christian belief is in decline. Corresponding to the double shape of the third movement there is also a doubling of the significance of Christian themes: one relates to *the source or the motivation* for this movement, the second gives a name to its concrete *outcome* and its manifest change.

As for the first reference, Christianity to Patočka is characterized by one central trait that has strong (anti-)philosophical implications: the truth for which the soul struggles is not the truth of intuition but rather the truth of its own destiny; that leads — as Patočka puts it — to an "abysmal deepening of the soul" and makes Christianity "thus far the greatest, unsurpassed but also un-thought-through human outreach" (*Heretical Essays*, 108). Christianity has a sense of problematicity that can be compared to the Socratic questioning that once gave birth to European philosophy and history. But it seems that, for Patočka, the strongest challenge to regaining this philosophical quest is not philosophy itself but the Christian heritage. In a discussion with students he says:

16. It is not only a vocabulary like *metanoia* [conversion], universal life, self-sacrifice, etc., that is strongly reminiscent of a Christian context. If one thinks e.g., of Rudolf Otto's description of the "trembling" in relation to the *Holy*, it becomes obvious that also the basic figure of "shaking" is very close to an originally religious meaning,

> In the end, you have this with all the Christian thinkers. St. Paul starts with this, the *sofia tou kosmou* [wisdom of the world]: the more you strain, the more futile it is, and what Man cannot do is easy for God—therefore we must believe. . . . But *he* knows about this problematicity, this desire to escape is based on it.[17]

It is, as if the two thousand years of Christian history and the Western metaphysical tradition are contained in those three little dots. And in a move similar to Nietzsche's return to the age of tragedy, Patočka suggests jumping back over these three little dots and recovering the original Christian input and its abysmal deepening.

The second powerful loan from Christianity concerns the movement of transcending. It is set within the frame of the self-affirmation and self-overcoming with and through the other already outlined. Therefore, it is no surprise *to where* this movement leads. But, ultimately, Patočka gives it a well-known name: "The strength of the transubstantiation of life is the strength of a new love, a love yielding itself unconditionally to others. Only in this love does individuality become itself without maintaining the other in a self-alienation."[18]

Love is the ultimate name for the transubstantiation of life that is brought about with the third movement of human existence. This love is obviously not meant as an objective set of rules and values, not as *ordo amoris* in the sense of Scheler, but more of a lived through discovery of a new horizon. It is an answer that is not pre-given but gained in the exposure to meaninglessness and nihilism. It is an authentic overcoming of finitude that is more of a religious *metanoia* than of a philosophical intuition, "for we know in part, and we prophesy in part" (1 Cor. 13.9). In this sense, the reference to Christianity means the acknowledgement of its disruptive force, of its challenge to the philosophical order that it exceeds, thwarts, and provokes as the "other" of reason. The consequence would be an understanding of transcendence that does not see it as a threat to autonomy (human being as *adonné*), but as thought provoking. In one of the Nachlass manuscripts from the time of the *Heretical Essays* Patočka writes:

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17. Patočka, *Living in Problematicity*, 67.
18. Patočka, *Philosophy and Selected Writings*, 267f.

> Like the old gods, the Christian God, too, is dependent on men, that is what Eckhart, that is what the German idealists were trying to say, the Christian mystics, too. The history of Christianity is the entry of the Suffering God into History, of His unique triumphal march and of His withdrawal in a world incapable of transformation.[19]

This is maybe more of a systematic account of Christianity than a historic one: its "entry" into the world being as necessary as its "withdrawal."

III. Religion's Twofold Potential

Religion might be said to harbor a twofold potential for shaping our encounters with otherness and, hence, with the other of reason in general. One potential of religion is its tendency to auto-immunity. In the attempt to protect its view of reality, it seeks, as an integral and constitutive part of its own identity, to escape from encountering otherness. The result is not just a deformation of its own character. It includes, as well, the possibility of an "immunizing" reaction to such otherness. Religion's second, positive potential consists in its capacity to transcend the relative autonomy of pre-given meanings. Here, it allows the shaking of our pre-given interpretations of the world by accepting otherness as an integral and irreducible part of its own identity. We believe that unless we address both these potentials, as well as their dialectical relationship, the basic phenomena of religion will remain unintelligible. The negative potential of religion can be put in terms of its ability to one-sidedly restrict our openness to transcendence, and, hence, to bind us to a potentially universal point of reference for integrating the relativity of mundane meanings. But when we analyze the bond between selfhood, sovereign identification, and the exclusion of otherness, the second, positive potential of religion is uncovered, namely that of offering "invitations to transcendence." It does so by offering us a standpoint beyond the "economy" of the world.

19. Translated from the German original in *Péče o duši III*, Collected Works vol. 3, Praha, 2002, 452.

This capacity is similar to, but not the same as, that of art, politics, and philosophy. Art offers a new vision of the perceptual space we live in. Philosophy does the same as far as the meanings we take for granted. The result of such questioning, Patočka writes, is "an upheaval aimed at the former meaning of life as a whole." It is a shaking of our worldview. A similar shaking occurs in political life as different perspectives and interests confront each other in open debate. What distinguishes the shaking brought about by the religious perspective is the radical transcendence that is at its root. The basis of the religious perspective, however, is inherently transcendent. As such it affords us the possibility of calling the world itself into question. Doing so, it undermines our preconceived ideas about how to overcome the relativity of the meanings that mark the earthly economy. It thus takes us beyond the familiar ways we reanimate the existing bonds of collectivity and re-collection to gain a worldly, yet non-relative, absolute perspective. Confronting us with the alterity of the absolutely other, it undermines our unspoken conviction that we can overcome the relativity of meaning by positing or acknowledging an absolute sense of the world.

This, however, does not imply a loss of our capacity to overcome relativism. Rather, that capacity is retrieved insofar as religion sensitizes us to the experience of otherness in its exceeding our constitutive intentions. This experience, it claims, is available in this world, concretely, in our encounter with the other. Overcoming relativism here becomes a function of our dependence on this other. Thus, if relativism involves taking oneself, one's group, or one's culture as the "measure of all things," in particular, as the measure of one's response to the other, overcoming it involves our taking the other as the measure of our response. By realizing that an adequate response to the excessive appeal of the other requires a transcending of ourselves, self-transcendence thus becomes an ethical and existential task. Religion, in making us sensitive to the otherness within us and to the possibility and scope of self-transcendence, thus establishes a renewed understanding of the other: Recognizing the other as the measure of our experiences, self-becoming loses its solipsistic quality. In its dependency on the other and the reassessment the other provokes, it comes to be seen as the process of reassessing oneself as a self-in-transcendence.

This clearly shows religion's twofold potential. In its inherent exposure to the radical transcendence of alterity, it can be seen as engendering meaning and proposing new ways of understanding. It can, however, also be seen as destructive of those alien structures of meaning that challenge our practices of identification and self-preservation, that is, those that endanger the absoluteness these strategies protect.

The biological and allegorical concept of "auto-immunity" proves to be a powerful metaphor for describing what is so characteristic of essentialist worldviews and their exclusionary attempts to preserve themselves. As we know, this — necessary and obligatory — protection of the body tends to turn inward, attacking itself, when the "outward enemies" lose their power or disappear. This metaphor says quite a lot about religious and other "purifications." But at the same time, one could argue that precisely the potential outlined above for a "shaking," i.e., the special openness to self-transcendence, might enable religious worldviews to redirect their immune systems and to overcome their aggressive auto-immunity. The final conclusion of this article, that started off with Nietzsche's critique of religion, might therefore be quite a Nietzschean one, though with a very different understanding of religion: to endure or, even better, to enhance the tensions and contradictions between reclaiming the "truth" for one's beliefs and suppositions while at the same time shaking their general validity in accepting perspectivism. Is that asking too much of a religion or of a belief? It is at least very difficult to imagine. But it is an attempt to think "beyond the opposition of religion and reason."

And what about secularism? The proposed perspectivism is not any less demanding for the secular worldview than it is for any religion. Religious belief is and must be a challenge or even a provocation to it. It might be a necessary one, though, to save it from its own auto-immunizing police system. The God within us sanctions our finitude.

Gilles Deleuze: A Philosophy of Immanence

FREDRIKA SPINDLER

> It may be that believing in this world, this life, becomes our most difficult task, or the task of a mode of existence still to be discovered on our plane of immanence today. This is the empiricist conversion (we have so many reasons not to believe in the human world; we have lost the world, worse than a fiancée or a god). The problem has indeed changed.[1]

In order to activate Deleuze's thinking in the context of the current discussion on philosophy, phenomenology, and religion, we need to rehearse again his understanding of immanence, or more specifically "the plane of immanence". It is with reference to this specific concept that he at a certain point distinguishes philosophical from religious thinking. The aim of the present essay is to present an overview of this theme, as a preparation for a more sustained discussion of the religious from the point of view of Deleuze's thought. Together with the concept of "event," immanence constitutes one of the most central and recurring topics throughout the whole of his work. In *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*, and in the books co-written with Félix Guattari, *Anti-Œdipus*, *A Thousand Plateaus*, and *What is Philosophy?*, immanence is a key theme; it is both the measure, the condition, and the criterion of what for Deleuze constitutes philosophy itself. But the concept is also emblematic for Deleuze's readings of other philosophers, especially those with whom he claims particular affinities and between whom he establishes a philogenetic connection: Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Bergson. They are all read through the lens of immanence, their

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 75. (Hereafter, WP.)

thinking estimated and measured in relation to their capacity for thinking immanence, where Spinoza occupies a very specific position. He, whom Deleuze calls "the prince of philosophers,"[2] and even "the Christ of philosophy,"[3] is the one philosopher (possibly together with Bergson in the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*) who managed the impossible; that is, instituting *a pure plane of immanence*. While these claims certainly demand a further explication — for what does it mean to institute a plane of immanence? — they have the merit of pointing towards an explicit standpoint: the concept of immanence, as understood and worked by Deleuze, should be seen as pivotal in his own philosophy, and in his relation to the history of philosophy. However, immanence is thus also a very complex concept since it works on several levels in his thought: immanence, as a measure or an instrument in his *reading* of other philosophers; immanence as a measure or instrument of *evaluating* philosophy (immanence as a value); immanence as the *internal condition* of philosophy itself — indeed, immanence as philosophy, as it were — but thereby, also, immanence as the measure and instrument of the *concepts philosophy forges in relation to, but also against, other forms of thinking*, with their preference for transcendence. Immanence is a complex notion, not only because it is at play at various levels, but also, as we will see, because it appears to serve a double purpose. On the one hand, it is claimed as a key concept and an ontological, foundational notion, and as such its investigation must be immanent within Deleuze's own problematic.[4] On the other hand, it also constitutes a means of response, resistance, and positioning towards something else, towards its other: immanence, in the end, as the *pierre de touche*, is thus to be located as the core of philosophy's internal problem. In the following, I will attempt to clarify some of the relations between these levels and how they are put to use in Deleuze's work by investigating the relation between immanence and

2. WP, 48.
3. WP, 60.
4. The critical reading, as Deleuze often remarks, is pointless if it does not start out from the problem specifically posed by the text (rather than the reader). On this subject, see, for instance, "Qu-est-ce qu'un entretien" in *Dialogues*, Paris: Flammarion, 1977.

what for Deleuze constitutes the activity of philosophy — namely, the creation of concepts — in order to subsequently develop the analysis of the relation between a Deleuzean understanding of immanence and transcendence.

The importance of the concept of immanence is manifest through the whole of Deleuze's work, but it is not until *What is Philosophy?* that it becomes the object of a specific investigation. It is here that immanence, or to be more precise the *plane of immanence*, is formulated as the horizon out from which thinking as such can take place, and thus constitutes the internal condition of thinking: "it is a plane of immanence that constitutes the absolute ground of philosophy, its earth or deterritorialization, the foundation on which it creates its concepts" (WP, 41). From this definition, the plane of immanence is thus affirmed as fundamental, in literal terms (grounding that which otherwise precisely has no ground — no foundation as such or in itself), for thinking as such. Deleuze has always claimed that what is specific to philosophy is the *creation of concepts*. The concepts created by philosophy should not be understood as abstract terms or representations referring to universal entities such as soul, consciousness, reason, subject or object. Rather they constitute what Deleuze calls "intensive events," where thought crystallizes into a specific formulation responding to the specific problem at stake for the philosopher, such as Idea for Plato, *Cogito* for Descartes, and *Dasein* for Heidegger. As events of thought, or with another term used by Deleuze, *haecceities*,[5] the concepts are always multiple and composites: cogito, for instance, is composed by a specific relation between a certain idea of thinking, being and the self. Also they function not only as answers to specific problems, but as tools rendering possible the elaboration of the problem in question. However, precisely because they have to be created rather than found (just as the problem is a specific construction rather than a pre-existing, universal question), these concepts require some-

5. On the use of this scotian term by Deleuze, see Philip Goodchild, "Why is philosophy so compromised with God?," and Daniel. W. Smith, "The doctrine of univocity. Deleuze's ontology of immanence" in *Deleuze and religion*, ed. Mary Bryden , London/New York: Routledge, 2000, 160; also François Zourabichivili, *Deleuze. Une philosophie de l'événement,* Paris: PUF, 1994.

thing, a ground, a soil, or rather, a milieu, out from which they can be created, and this for Deleuze is *the plane of immanence*. The relation between the concepts and the plane of immanence is that of a mutual condition — no concepts can be created without the plane of immanence which grounds them, yet, the plane of immanence itself cannot be thought without the concepts that inhabit it. This is why it must be seen as pre-philosophical — not in terms of something pre-existing before philosophy, but as that which constitutes the unspoken, the un-thought internal conditions of thinking itself: "It is presupposed not in the way that one concept may refer to others but in the way that concepts themselves refer to a non-conceptual understanding" (WP, 40). However, the presupposition differs from one period to another, from one thinker to another, and most of all, from one problem to another. Each plane is outlined in its own specific way, depending on the nature of the question (implicit or explicit):

> in Descartes it is a matter of a subjective understanding implicitly presupposed by the "I think" as first concept; in Plato it is the virtual image of an already-thought that doubles every actual concept. Heidegger invokes a "preontological understanding of Being," a "preconceptual" understanding that seems to imply the grasp of a substance of being in relationship with a predisposition of thought. (WP, 41)

That which is pre-philosophical is what cannot be thought as such, and yet, it is constituting. The plane of immanence is *the image of thought* — not a method (since every method concerns the concepts and always already supposes a plane of immanence). Nor is it a state of knowledge in scientific terms, nor the general opinion of what thinking means or what mission it has, but rather what *pertains to thought by right*, separated from the various accidents that may occur to thinking scientifically or historically. For Deleuze, that which pertains by right to thought, and that which constitutes its internal conditions, is *infinite movement*. This is both what constitutes it (movement as thought itself) and what must be handled by thought (the creation of concepts).[6] As such, it is of great importance not to confound the plane of

6. WP, 37.

immanence with the concepts themselves, nor to make it the concept underlying all concepts, but to understand it as an *infinite and absolute* horizon making possible the *consistency* that thought requires. It is infinite and absolute because it is not the relative horizon of a subject (which can only be posited as, precisely, a concept), but the horizon of movement as such: "it is the horizon itself that is in movement: the relative horizon recedes when the subject advances, but on the plane of immanence we are always and already on the absolute horizon" (WP, 38).

A first point of interest for us here is that Deleuze, at least to begin with (and this is certainly no coincidence, but a vital order), does not define the plane of immanence against or even in relation to its traditional counterpart: transcendence. This relation will certainly play an important role—and how could it not?—and I will return to this in short. However it appears that at this point, this relation will be one of consequence rather than a dichotomous pre-condition. In the text where Deleuze, together with Guattari, elaborates the notion of immanence and its absolute value, the term that constitutes its first counterpart or, more accurately, its conterweight, is *chaos*: if immanence is what makes possible the consistency (that is, securing some aspects of infinite movement while keeping it infinite), chaos is precisely what has no consistency, and that which constitutes a continuous dissolution of consistency; flashlightnings of speeds that dissolve, transform, disappear before they can be thought or grasped; to understand in analogy with what a not-yet formalized will to power would be for Nietzsche (power/force without direction). Chaos is perpetually present, is a continuing origin, where nothing has yet taken form neither as thought nor nature, and that in the same way threatens to dissolve once again all that is formulated and wrought into form: "Chaos is not an inert or stationary state, nor is it a chance mixture. Chaos chaotizes and undoes every consistency in the infinite" (WP, 42, transl. mod.) It is from this background, and still continually immersed in this chaos that thought begins precisely by the instituting of the plane of imanence that, in Deleuze's words, constitutes a section of chaos, a sieve retaining or rather selecting a certain number of chaotic determinations, but at the same time requires them to be retained as absolute movement: "abstracted of all tempo-spatial coordination,

brought back to their pure expressible sense by the verbal infinite"[7] (verbal infinite since the proper of the event is to be uninclined[8]). In other words, what we call thinking occurs as a relation of tension between chaos and immanence, where chaos ungrounds [*effonde*] thought, and where immanence makes possible its grounding and yet maintains chaotic speed. However it is precisely this relation of tension that allows us to understand the way that which we might be tempted to simply call "the horizon of thought" or "the plane of thought" as a manner of figurative speech (the famous "image") in reality can only be qualified in terms of real *immanence* and nothing less. By letting thought be formulated as a tension (and this tension understood as a continuous, never-ceasing state of tension) in relation to chaos, it becomes obvious that what is literally at stake here is a fundamental, must we even perhaps say, *essential*, groundlessness that is that of philosophy or the act of thinking; there are, according to Deleuze, for thought, no fixed points and thus no *given* questions, concepts, or problems. In other words, what constitutes the horizon of thought is the very absence of givenness, of either "world," "subject," "consciousness," or "God." Immanence, for Deleuze, has this first and formal signification: thought is not inscribed in a vertical order where it could be a question of pulling order and form from a chaotic unformulatedness in such a way that the concepts, in the end, would correspond to an under- or overlying real order that chaos was just obstructing and obscuring. On the contrary, it is the question of the effort of subtracting from chaos specific, high-intensive composites on the horizon that has no other guarantee but its own strength of resistance against the chaos of infinite speed. Immanence, thus, in a Spinozian sense,[9] as what is boundaryless (absolute horizon, as opposed to the relative, cf. supra), since there is nothing to delimit from or border against: the idea of a "beyond" is invalidated from the very beginning, since it, too, must be understood as one of many concepts created and operating from the plane of immanence itself. This, in

7. F. Zourabichvili, *Le vocabulaire de Deleuze*, Paris: Ellipses, 2003, 58.
8. Cf. *Mille Plateaux*, 10, "Souvenirs d'une heccéité."
9. The substance, which has no outside, expressing itself by its own affections: see Spinoza, *Ethics*, I.

turn, means that we may not think the Deleuzian plane of immanence as a transcendence or a transcending of chaos: chaos is neither hither nor beyond the plane of immanence since it is not experienceable or thinkable other than through and by the plane of immanence: indeed, in the words of Zourabichvili, "the 'real' experience begins with the section or the instituting of a plane. Chaos, thereby, is rather thought than given."[10] The plane of immanence is immanent precisely because it is by and through it that what we call world comes to be in the first place as thought and nature: "The plane of immanence has two facets as Thought and as Nature, as Nous and as Phusis" (WP, 38). The plane of immanence, in short, is what enables meaning—the creation of meaning, against the background of the chaotic non-meaning that underlies all life.

It is only now, having approached the specific nature of the plane of immanence, that it is possible to understand not only its relation to transcendence, but also the essential distinction made by Deleuze between philosophy and religion. What must be noted is, as we have seen, that immanence for Deleuze is defined as constituting the internal conditions of thinking and that thought, as well as experience, takes place within the plane of immanence that thought itself must institute. But this also implies that the significance of the *plane of immanence* is actually not to be found within the traditional and somewhat overdetermined opposition of transcendence/immanence. In a certain sense, the correlatedness of the terms is short-circuited by the notion of the plane of immanence. According to Deleuze philosophical thought in itself should not accept any given. It has to create its own tools corresponding to each specific problem, which outrules from the very start any reference to another transcendent order, be it God, the Good, or the Ideal:

> There is not the slightest reason for thinking that modes of existence need transcendent values by which they could be compared, selected, and judged relatively to one another. On the contrary, there are only immanent criteria. A possibility of life is evaluated through itself in the movement it lays out and the intensities it creates on a plane of immanence: what is not laid out or created is rejected. (WP, 74)

10. Zourabichvili, ibid., 60.

The legitimacy of this claim can, of course, be discussed, but it for Deleuze it is an absolute claim, and one to which I will return. However, the relation of immanence to transcendence (and vice-versa) is not even to Deleuze this simple and clear-cut. Following an initiated and interesting investigation of Daniel W. Smith in his article "Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought,"[11] we can distinguish at least three different realms, or regions, all of particular interest to Deleuze in which the problematics of transcendence/immanence are concerned: subjectivity, ontology, and epistemology. In the tradition of subjectivity, immanence can be understood as referring to the sphere of the subject, whereas transcendence refers to that which transcends the field of consciousness immanent to the subject (the transcendent here as the Other in Husserl or the world in Heidegger); or, in Sartre's idea of a transcendence of the ego, a transcendental subject which itself is already transcendent in relation to experience.[12] In the field of ontology, the reference to transcendence marks the relation to a hierarchy of Being — God, the Good, or the One — or more specifically, a beyond, an outside-of, an ungraspable that exceeds and determines whatever immanent sphere there might be (beings, subjects, consciousnesses, and so forth). At last, in the field of epistemology, the Kantian distinction between immanence and transcendence posits the whole project of the first Critique as a transcendental philosophy seeking immanent criteria: indeed, he says, "We shall entitle the principles whose application is confined entirely within the limits of possible experience immanent, and those, on the other hand, which profess to pass beyond these limits, transcendent."[13] Here, what pertains to understanding (and thus, reason), belongs to the realm of immanence, whereas the metaphysical illusions go under the term of transcendence. The project of a critical philosophy must thus, in terms of pure epistemology, be understood as a question of immanence, however Kant, as is well

11. Daniel W. Smith, "Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought," in *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, eds. Paul Patton and John Protevi, London: Continuum, 2003.

12. Smith, 47. I thank Jakob Nilsson for drawing my attention to this article.

13. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 295–6/B 352, 1929.

known, reintroduces transcendence understood as traditional metaphysical ideas in terms, for example, of regulative ideas (God) and practical postulates (eternal life). Considering these three realms, it is not difficult to see where Deleuze consequently chooses the immanent version rather than the transcendent. Concerning subjectivity, Deleuze explicitly rejects the idea of a given subject which is transcendent or even transcends: the reason for this is simply that the subject, as consciousness, is a concept highly operative as such, but that nevertheless is created from a plane of immanence rather than constituting it. Concerning ontology, Deleuze, who, himself, claims to be a pure metaphysician[14] not only refuses to embrace the problem of an end or an overcoming of metaphysics, but, as Smith puts it, actively sets out to *do* metaphysics (hence, for instance, the whole development of the notion of difference) by showing how ontology itself is constituted immanently.[15] This is why it, in itself, cannot respond to transcendent notions or values and why it resists the idea of hierarchy, being itself, as any concept, anarchy (also in the sense of *an-archè*), resisting the idea of a Beyond. Concerning epistemology, Deleuze devotes not only an important part of *Difference and Repetition* to the elaboration of an immanent theory of the idea. Moreover, he introduces a dissonance in the whole philosophical claim of being a project of establishing the conditions of possible experience, and thus of knowledge, by expressing, throughout his work, an interest in real experience.[16] This is also why the categories of truth or the good give place to the categories of the Interesting, the Important, the Remarkable.[17] From all of these perspectives, and still following Smith's analysis, there is little doubt

14. *Negotiations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, 88. Cf. also in Villani, *La Guêpe et l'orchidée*, Paris: Belin, 1999, 130.
15. Thereby, as Smith also notes, while acknowledging utmost interest in the question raised by Heidegger, he refuses to side with him: "The project of *Difference and repetition* is to provide an immanent analysis of the ontological difference in which *the different is related to the different through difference itself.* [. . .] Deleuze is not often thought of as a Heideggerian, but *Difference and Repetition* can be read as a direct response to *Being and Time* from the standpoint of immanence: for Deleuze, Being is difference, and time is repetition" (ibid.).
16. Cf. Smith, 58
17. Deleuze, WP, 82, DR, 189.

that Deleuze prefers immanence to transcendence. However the question itself always requires a more specific formulation (immanent to what? transcendent to what?) than the simple dualistic one. Yet, the opposition, clear-cut or not, does not appear to be what is really at stake in Deleuze's questioning of immanence and transcendence. The concern would rather be of a genealogical order, ontological surely, ethical, or even, as Nietzsche would have it, a matter of *taste*. If indeed philosophy is about creating concepts, answering to real and specific problems, and if all creation of concepts requires a plane of immanence, immanence thereby imposing itself as the proper milieu of thought itself (at least all thought that, from Hume to Kant, Nietzsche, Husserl, or Sartre, claims to be *critical*),[18] the question would rather be why the very notion of immanence always becomes such a burning issue — why it must become what has to be disguised, obscured, and, not the least, denied? This is why the Deleuzean question, formulated throughout his work, concerns what is expressed, in philosophy, by immanence, to what inclination it answers, to what problems it responds, to what it is a threat, and what it must resist; but even more, in what ways it is transformed, what mutations it undergoes — in short, and in more explicitly Deleuzean terms: how immanence deterritorializes itself, and how it is reterritorialized.

For obvious reasons, this question must always be retraced back to the heart of philosophy. Referring to Jean-Pierre Vernant's discussion in *The Origins of Greek Thinking*, Deleuze states that philosophy indeed has its origins in ancient Greece, since it was there that thinkers, for the first time, understood themselves as something other than sages. The beginning of philosophy is not about instituting a rationalism versus a mythology — rationality, or reason, is for Deleuze nothing but a specific concept among others, however powerful — itself originating from most irrational grounds.[19] Instead it is precisely about instituting a plane of immanence instead of referring to a transcendent order:

18. And, as Smith also notes, "the radicality of a critique of transcendence above all stems from the theoretical interest to expose its fictional or illusory status — this has been a constant in philosophy from Hume to Kant to Nietzsche, its 'demystificatory' role," 61.
19. WP, 43.

> In short, the first philosophers are those who institute a plane of immanence like a sieve stretched over the chaos. In this sense they contrast with sages, who are religious personae, priests, because they conceive of the institution of an always transcendent order imposed from outside by a great despot or by one god higher than the others. (WP, 43).

Philosophy is thus what is characterized by its relation to immanence — and Deleuze explicitly claims that each philosophy has its beginning in the institution of a plane of immanence. However, this is also the reason why its relation to religion gets more complicated, as it appears that philosophy *in itself* has an inner tendency to re-implement the transcendence that the instituting of a plane of immanence outrules. Indeed, says Deleuze, "whenever there is transcendence, vertical Being, imperial State in the sky or on earth, there is religion; and there is Philosophy whenever there is immanence" (ibid.), but this distinction is not simple or evident, as in, for instance, making religion to be about God, and philosophy to be about something else (knowledge, reason, or even truth). The problem here still lies in the relation of thought to chaos, or more precisely in the difficulty of this relation, where we, following Deleuze, on the one hand, can see the task of philosophy in the necessary upholding of the infinite speed of chaotic determinations while giving them consistency at the same time and, on the other hand, the unavoidable tendency or temptation to "freeze" them, make them static and fixed, an object for a inquiring or contemplating subject.

This is precisely what happens whenever philosophy institutes a plane of immanence but finds itself unable to support its weight, thus transforming it into an immanence belonging *to* something else: to a consciousness, to a bigger whole, to the One, and so forth. In other words, philosophy tends to introduce transcendence into immanence — on to the plane of immanence — and it is then, and only then, that transcendence becomes the poisonous counterpart of immanence. It is in this sense that Deleuze reads the history of philosophy as the history of a *dative immanence* (WP, 44), which thereby displaces thought to the genealogically speaking altogether different region of faith. This analysis is, for Deleuze, in close analogy with Nietzsche's in *On Truth and Lie in Extramoral Sense*: philosophy creates concepts, but forgets that they are created and displaces their signification as created singu-

larities to eternal, transcendent universals — consciousness, subject, object, soul, and, not least, truth. This is the same thing that occurs whenever the plane of immanence is confused with the concepts, making it thereby a concept that, in turn, must be understood and referred *to* something else. Deleuze also effectuates a diagnostic analysis of how this scheme can be found through at least three paradigms of Western philosophy. Interestingly enough, we can see how the three paradigms correspond to the three traditional realms of the relation transcendence/immanence as proposed by Smith, but in fact complicate them since several of the realms are at play simultaneously within each paradigm. In the first one, starting with Plato and continuing through Neoplatonism, transcendence, on both an ontological and an epistemological level, is superimposed on the plane of immanence as its double: "Instead of the plane of immanence constituting the One-All, immanence is immanent 'to' the One, so that the other One, this time transcendent, is superimposed on the one in which immanence is extended or to which it is attributed." In the second paradigm, Christian philosophy, in what concerns ontology, subjectivity, and epistemology, develops as a real battle against immanence, which becomes synonymous with the highest risk and danger within philosophy, tolerated only in exceedingly small doses, strictly controlled and enframed by a highly emanative and creative transcendence. Turning to Bruno, Cusano, and Eckhart, Deleuze points out how philosophers, often with their own lives at stake, must prove that the degree of immanence injected into the world and thought does not compromise the transcendence of a God to whom immanence can be attributed only secondarily. If from the beginning it is not clear why immanence appears as such a threat, it becomes clear throughout history *that it is* considered to be a threat, engulfing "sages and gods" (WP, 45). In the third paradigm — modernity, where once again all three realms: ontology, subjectivity, and epistemology are concerned — Deleuze shows further how the plane of immanence, via Descartes and Kant, is yet again reclaimed by transcendence, and how it, through the *cogito*, is now allowed to be immanent to conscience itself. And as the last step of the analysis comes phenomenology with Husserl,[20] who transposes

20. Deleuze only makes brief references to Husserl in *What is Philosophy?*, but

immanence from consciousness and the subject to a transcendental subjectivity, thereby transposing transcendence within immanence[21] itself. For Deleuze, then, it is clear that even, or perhaps in particular, with phenomenology, as if responding to the compelling call of a *necessary* (and always *desired*) Beyond, one of the deepest concerns appears to be precisely the overcoming of immanence once and for all, even in one of the most meticulous attempts to institute a critique of transcendent, mystificatory values. Whether the Deleuzean critique of phenomenology here is fully valid remains, naturally, an open question, recently and most fruitfully discussed by several commentators, among others Alain Beaulieu whose *Gilles Deleuze et la phénoménologie*[22] contributes largely to the question, in this specific case by carefully distinguishing the various levels of immanence at stake in Husserl's work. If most studies devoted to this particular relation agree that there remains in phenomenology a call for transcendence, thus establishing a relation to religious thought, the question still remains concerning Deleuze's own claim concerning pure immanence. This is a more worthwhile discussion than the rather pointless debate concerning whether Deleuze in fact inscribes himself in the phenomenological tradition (for instance, as an atheist phenomenologist,[23] a title which Deleuze himself would probably have interpreted as based on a strong desire for annectation) or if he is "guilty" of the transcendence he himself rejects; important because it points to the problem immanent to philosophy itself, that is, how immanence reterritorializes itself in transcendence not only by *taste*, but perhaps by *necessity*. One could of course point to the fact that the very use of terms such as "absolute," "pure," and "unthinkable," pertaining to Deleuze's notion of the plane of immanence, inscribes immanence itself within a certain frame of value that is claimed by all transcendent discourses — an unavoidable compromise of philosophy with God, as Philip Goodchild point-

proposes a lengthy discussion on the subject of Husserl's idea of the conscience and the transcendental field in *Logic of Sense*, series 14–16.

21. The formulation being Husserl's own, cf. Hua III, 138.

22. Alain Beaulieu, *Gilles Deleuze et la phénoménologie*, Mons: Sils-Maria, 2004.

23. Cf. Beaulieu, 67, and R. Tejada, *Deleuze face à la phénoménologie* (1), Paris, Les papiers du collège international de philosophie, nr. 41, February 1998, 68.

edly puts it.[24] One could also, as Beaulieu remarks, question the hypothesis of a pure immanence.[25] It is difficult to conceive of an immanence of thought since there is necessarily always a transition, a change, a loss,[26] the *becoming* so clearly claimed by Deleuze himself, rendering impossible totality, identity, and whole, and this is nothing but Deleuze's own magistral thesis of difference. After all, is there not, in all of Deleuze's own concepts, an unmistakable odor of transcendence? But here, the question once again needs to be specified. If what is at stake in transcendence were only about opening up the otherwise closed and stale, about introducing a radically other and unknown dimension surpassing the self and its dirty little secrets,[27] if it was about injecting into the strict measure of rationality an incommensurability, then naturally Deleuze would be adhering to a transcendent philosophical project. Indeed, if that were the case, then transcendence would be the real issue of philosophy, acting with the same force as poetry, as referred to in the conclusion of *What is Philosophy?*:

> people are constantly putting up an umbrella that shelters them and on the underside of which they draw a firmament and write their convention and opinions. But poets, artists, make a slit in the umbrella, they tear open the firmament itself, to let in a bit of free and windy chaos and to frame in a sudden light a vision that appears through the rent — Wordsworth's spring or Cézanne's apple, the silhouettes of Macbeth or Ahab. (WP, 203–204)

But in all this; the *surpassing*, the *strange*, the *becoming*, relate to *chaos*, and not to whatever mission transcendence, in history and in philosophy, has always assumed. For Deleuze, the role of transcendence has always had clear political, ethical, and precisely genealogical dimensions, all of which have to do with repression, control, and sadness. And, as he repeatedly points out, whenever immanence is attacked, it

24. Goodchild, "Why is philosophy so compromised with God?", in *Deleuze and Religion*, ed. Mary Bryden, London/New York: Routledge 2000
25. Beaulieu, 71.
26. On the Deleuzean cogito as the "have been", see *Logique du Sens*, Paris, Minuit 1969, 360, and Zourabichvili, *Le vocabulaire*, 62.
27. *Dialogues*, 58.

is with moral arguments.[28] This is why immanence must be understood as a non-negotiable claim. Immanence is a form of resistance to the different forms of transcendence, by consequence, but also ontologically and genealogically. Immanence is the upholding of the non-religious, first as the upholding of the concept as singularity over and against the universal, secondly as the upholding of infinite speed over and against stationary transcendence. Immanence is thus what Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, referring to Blanchot,[29] investigate as a strange form of infinitive, always impersonal, "a life" – "a" life, rather than "the" life or "life" itself, and of which he says the following: "it is not in something else, it does not belong to anything else, does not depend on an object and does not belong to a subject."[30] But perhaps even more important is the understanding of immanence on a more formal level, immanence as a standard of value, a measure, and a criterion. The value of a concept, or the truth of a concept, can only be measured immanently according to Deleuze, that is, according to the specific architecture or problematics from which it issues forth: "we always have as much truth as we deserve in accordance with the sense of what we say" (DR, 154). It is thus not surprising that philosophy, as an activity, cannot be understood or realized as *polemy* or *discussion*, or yet more important, why its issues cannot be thought of in terms of reaching a *consensus*.[31] All philosophy, as a system and as a construction, is immanent. Immanence thus is the measure in all respects. This is why immanence is pronounced as the formal philosophical requirement, a requirement of rigor, honesty, and even possibility.

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28. DR, 132.

29. *Mille Plateaux*, Paris: Minuit, 1980, 324.

30. "L'immanence: une vie" in *Deux Régimes de Fous,* Paris: Minuit, 2003, 360.

31. For this analysis, I refer to extensive treatments in, among others, *What is Philosophy?*, *Difference and Repetition*, and *Dialogues*.

Supposed God is There: Derrida between Alterity and Subjectivity

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> L'horizon de la vérité ou du propre de l'homme
> n'est certes pas une limite très déterminable.
> Mais celui de l'université et des Humanités
> non plus.
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> *Jacques Derrida*

If a thinker is deeply concerned with *not* speaking about something, this is most likely one of his deepest concerns. This is all more the case when it comes to ultimate conditions. Ultimate conditions are always difficult to define, since they are conditions of discourse, thoughts, and rationality under discussion. It is neither merely coincidental which name is given to an ultimate condition, nor entirely decisive. Different names could be given, and in fact have been, such as the One, the Origin, the Logos, Nature, First Cause, Self, Freedom, Spirit, Being, and Difference. I will give it another name, which is equally old, equally ultimate, but nevertheless appears under new philosophical conditions: the Name of God.

A discourse on ultimates is a discourse on time and place. If an ultimate is not one particular thing among others — it never was — then two questions immediately appear: *how* may it be recognized and defined, and *where* is it localized? The latter is the question of topology, the former epistemology. And, finally, there is ontology: Is there such an ultimate? What would "Being" imply with reference to an ultimate if it is not a particular? Is it Being itself? Could it be? Is not, rather, the question of Being again put into play by another ultimate?

Radical Nominalism

There can be no analysis of ultimate conditions without a nominal approach. The analysis of a given as given and a universal as real does not allow room for a discourse on the Ultimate. The Ultimate remains hidden as a precondition for the discourse on givens. There would never have been a Descartes or a Luther without the questions raised by the nominalists in the 13th century.[1] The question "What's in a name?" opens up a critical discussion on what words signify and how they relate to the signified. The gap between the signifier and the signified is determining for any discussion on ultimates. In this sense, Jacques Derrida is a philosopher of ultimate conditions in modernity from the outset. And he is a nominalist. His nominalistic approach to highly significant philosophical questions is in this case what interests, and aggravates, me. One of his essays on negative theology carries the characteristic title: "How to Avoid Speaking?"[2]

Derrida is not only a nominalist, he is a radical nominalist. Every question of Being, Origin, Method, and Structure is thrown into the destabilization of nominal questioning. "There is nothing outside the text" has become a slogan that shows the *comprehension* of his *theory*, but the radicality of his approach becomes obvious when he describes the origin of phenomena, i.e., of phenomenality and meaning *in general*:

> The unheard-of difference between the *apparaissant* [the appearance] and the *apparaître* [the appearing] is the condition of all the other differences, of all the other traces, and it is already a trace. Accordingly, this latter concept is absolutely and *de jure* "antecedent" both to every physiological problem connected with the nature of the organic trace left on the brain, and to every metaphysical problem connected with the meaning of that absolute presence whose trace we must decipher. In reality, the trace is the absolute origin of meaning in general. Once again, this amounts to the affirmation that *there is no absolute origin of*

1. Cf. Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003, 354.
2. Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking?" trans. Ken Frieden in *Languages of the Unsayable*, eds. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, 3–70.

> *meaning in general*. The trace is the *différance* [deferral] which opens up the *apparaître* and the signification.[3]

Différance is Derrida's concept for the ultimate condition which is indefinable, which is neither mental nor physical, neither presence nor absence, neither voice nor writing, neither signifier nor signified, and hence "antecedent" to all these theoretical opposites. Absolutely and *de jure* antecedent, that is prior to judgement and according to judgement. Only by pointing out this scission as *prior to* any original presupposition will Derrida avoid the most obvious continuation of the history of metaphysics. The *interior* scission of the *logic* of metaphysics, redoubled, reiterated, and deferred throughout the *history* of metaphysics, is captured by his emphatic concept of *différance*, which he insists is not even a concept, nor a rhetorical figure, since it evades the order of conceptually regulated discourse.

According to this logic, Derrida would not even be a nominalist, since he would deny such a position. *Différance* is no less antecedent to the difference between realist and nominalist than to any other differences. And still, there remains a nominalism which is more comprehensive than the classical or medieval position under that name, and that is signified by the questioning of any being as "Being" by altogether avoiding the question of existence. This avoidance inserts a *void* where the "Thing" used to be, suspending the definition of some*thing* as Being. Theory boils down to analyses of texts, of traces, of writing — which is a methodological choice of priority, not of exclusion. Hence, writing is of interest as a *trace* of presence, and of language, which is out of control. Thereby, the notion of consciousness is put into question, and, again, the *meaning* is altered by the deferral, transference, and translation in time. The question of limits, concepts, and differences is thereby opened up for reconsideration, often by way of a rigorously formalized discourse. That is what I call radical nominalism, and it applies to Derrida's metaphysics of absence.

Departing from a *difference* between nominalism and realism, Derrida *defers* the distinction by focusing on the *noumena*. He would

3. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1976, 65. Translation modified.

not affirm that a particular thing *is*, i.e., exists, but neither would he affirm the opposite metaphysical position, that a particular thing is *not*. The question of being, even when it comes to particulars, is therefore answered neither in the positive nor in the negative. Thus, his radical nominalism consists in questioning the *root* [*radix*] of this distinction. Concerning the question of existence, Derrida is not willing to speak. He is in fact careful to *avoid* speaking, as far as existence concerns. But it is the radical nominalism that enables him to pose *conditional* questions in the first place. This ultimate discourse opens up for the *critical* enterprise of Derrida. On the same account this enterprise is worth a renewed critical analysis, exposing the deep *crisis* of deconstruction.

Difficulties Defining God

In almost every published volume of Derrida up to 1972 (including *Marges de la philosophie*) we find references to and discussions of the concept and name of God — sometimes in passing, often polemically, and frequently in order to prepare a critical argument against *logocentrism* and traditional onto-theology. The first kind of argument is against an *ontic* understanding of (the being or non-being of) God,[4] the second against a *positive infinity* defining God in terms of trancendental *a priori* (or even "pure otherness"),[5] and the third against reference to God as origin and *telos* of the History of Being.[6] The polemical thrust is double-edged; it reveals a consistent case against the reference to God in philosophical terms as the ultimate justification of Being as presence, as *ousia* or *parousia*, defining the *ground* and the *unity* of philosophy. This is in line with the philosophical *program* of writing, grammatology, and *différance*, which Derrida launches in the texts in the 1960s. They do however also betray a deep and persistent concern with the Name of God; that it might also have *another* meaning, a meaning that is not reducible to the three mentioned alternatives.[7]

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4. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 98 and idem, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, London: Routledge, 1978, 142–143.
5. Cf. Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 114–116; 149-151.
6. Cf. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 71.
7. Cf. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart (eds.) *Derrida and Religion: Other Testa-*

With the later Derrida, the question of God becomes a major topic, designating one of the focal points in his philosophy. This is not because he has withdrawn the critique, but because he inquires further into the *différance* which is already inscribed upon the Name itself, deferring and questioning its meaning and consequently the meaning of the discourse. The first critical scission, establishing a separation between the postmodern discourse and the theological aspirations of (pre-)modernity, is supplemented by a double scission, where the critical questions concerning the meaning of "God" are repeated *within* the text. God's absolute Otherness *beyond* reason reappears inside the limits of the text, thus breaking it open from within. Hence, the peculiar logic of the Name of God seems to have anticipated the de-construction of metaphysical discourse from within that very tradition.

The questions of the Other, of responsibility and sacrifice, of *Khôra*, of negative theology, of the Name, of prayer, of religion, and of the Law, all come back to this *topos*. His *double* reflection on the Name of God never comes to a close; it remains split by itself and in itself, but exactly this split opens up the field of philosophy as a *question*[8] and reveals a persistent *crisis* in the Humanities. In *On the Name* he even gives an explicit reference to Husserl's *crisis* as an example of apophatic discourse in modernity, although not without questioning the very concept of a critique and its transcendental presupposition:

> Apophatic statements represent what Husserl identifies as the moment of *crisis* (forgetting of the full and originary intuition, empty functioning of symbolic language, objectivism, etc.). But in revealing the originary and final necessity of this crisis, in denouncing from the language of crisis the snares of intuitive consciousness and of phenomenology, they destabilize the very axiomatics of the phenomenological, which is also the ontological and transcendental, critique. Emptiness is essential and necessary to them.[9]

ments, New York: Routledge, 2005, 37.

8. Cf. the suggestion proposed already in *Writing and Difference*, 78: "Henceforth, so that God may be, as Jabès says, *an interrogation of God,* would we not have to transform a final affirmation into a question?"

9. Derrida, *On the Name*, 50–51.

Derrida's analysis of the concept of God is, however, alternately very *general*, even formalistic, and very *intense*, exploring the experiences with and possibilities of an *intensive* infinity. Methodologically, this duplicity is of particular interest, and I would actually speak of a *method* in this case; a double way (Greek: *hodos*) of formalization and deconstruction, in spite of Derrida's persistent criticism of method in Husserl, Hegel, and Descartes. Hence the description of a methodical approach in *On the Name*:

> these two "places," these two experiences of place, these two ways are no doubt of an absolute heterogeneity. One place excludes the other, one (sur)passes the other, one does without the other, one is, *absolutely*, without the other. But what still relates them to each other is this strange preposition, this strange with-without or without-with, *without*. The logic of this junction or of this joining (conjunction-disjunction) permits and forbids at once what could be called exemplarism. Each thing, each being, you, me, the other, each X, each name, and each name of God can become the example of other substitutable X's. A process of absolute formalization. *Tout autre est tout autre*.[10]

Some aspects of the formalization do in fact bring to mind Husserl's transcendental reduction. Derrida's double strategy of describing certain *experiences* and formalizing *concepts,* pursues some phenomenological concerns also discussed in the *Krisis*: The formal reduction is transcendental insofar as it calls attention to the *constructive* gesture involved in naming God, including the possibility of naming otherwise.[11] Derrida's *formal* reduction includes a pluralization of possible meanings, and thus Husserl's non-ambiguity and universal totality is replaced by the suggestion of a universal but plural "*supposed* . . . ." When it comes to *meaning*, however, Derrida underlines that it is *necessary* to choose the best of these examples, hence the absolute Good, the *agathon*, even when it is Good beyond Being, *epekeina tes ousias*. But then again, he points out that it is "the best *as example*: for what it is and what it is not, for what it is and for what it represents, replaces,

10. Ibid., 76.

11. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie*, third edition, Hamburg: Meiner, 1996, 42–44.

exemplifies."[12] Does the abstract formalization necessarily infer from an extremely *general* hypothesis? I think it does, in particular when the term "God" is taken in its most general meaning. Derrida is playing with the Name of God and thus extending the space between alterity and subjectivity.

First Reading: I Call Myself God

Let me therefore draw attention to a passage in Chapter Four of *The Gift of Death* where Derrida discusses the distinction between alterity and subjectivity in an exemplary manner. It is a passage that is typical for the later Derrida insofar as he gives a detailed account of the concept and the name of God as a name for ab-solute alterity. In order to distinguish different layers, I will suggest three readings of the same passage; according to its non-sense, its con-sense, and its dis-sense.

Derrida's point of departure is Matt. 6, where Jesus talks about giving gifts in secret so that the Father who sees in secret will reward you. He criticizes the promise of reward, since the gift thereby becomes inscribed in a retributive economy, but he embraces the radical *interiorization* of thinking God. He even goes one step further and will sacrifice *any* thought of God as "someone," up there, or transcendent, who might see the most secret interior places. He suggests an alternative definition, running as follows: "God is the name of the possibility I have of keeping a secret (*la possibilité pour moi de garder un secret*) that is visible from the interior but not from the exterior."[13]

This is perhaps a possible definition or re-definition of "God," but it does not strike me as a very good one. Secrets may of course be kept in the name of God, but just as well in any other name. God may be seen as a condition of possibility for keeping secrets at all, but I must admit I am not convinced about the importance of this qualification. Taken as a definition that is supposed to replace other definitions and images ("idolatrous or iconoclastic simplisms") of God, it is certainly questionable. Hence, this is where I find it necessary to draw a first line of separation from the deconstructive approach of Derrida.

12. Derrida, *On the Name*, 76.

13. Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 108; *Donner la mort*, 147.

My questions do not only concern this isolated definition, though, but the conditional relationship between subjectivity and alterity. Derrida points out that subjectivity cannot be defined by the subject alone, neither by self-determination nor in terms of social position. He sees the origin of subjectivity in a call from the Other, the Other who as wholly Other is beyond my power of definition.[14] Hence, alterity has become written into the structure of subjectivity as such; i.e., one cannot know Oneself unless one can hear the call from the *Other*. Analyzing the difference between Self and Other as an *interior* distinction, however, is a critical undertaking, since the *difference* between alterity and subjectivity seems to become less significant. Derrida appears to have problems maintaining the distinction at all when he introduces the question of God's existence—based on the production of "invisible sense":

> Once such a structure of conscience exists, of being-with-oneself, of speaking, that is, of producing invisible sense, once I have within me, *thanks to the invisible word as such*, a witness that others cannot see, and who is therefore *at the same time other than me and more intimate with me than myself*, once I can have a secret relationship with myself and not tell everything, once there is secrecy and secret witnessing within me, then what I call God exists, (there is) what I call God in me, (it happens that) I call myself God [*(il y a que) je m'appelle Dieu*]—a phrase that is difficult to distinguish from "God calls me" [*"Dieu m'appelle"*], for it is on that condition that I can call myself or that I am called in secret. God is in me, he is the absolute "me" or "self," he is that structure of invisible interiority that is called, in Kierkegaard's sense, subjectivity.[15]

But the reference to Kierkegaard in the last sentence is rather strange. It gives the impression that Kierkegaard should have argued for God as the absolute "me" or "Self" and defined God as a "structure of invisible interiority." Such a position is not only criticized but even ridiculed by Kierkegaard, in the *Postscript* as well as in *The Sickness unto Death*. The absolute "Self" is thus called "subjectivity," and it is called so by Kierkegaard—but only when he is ironical or polemical (or both). The very point of Kierkegaard's discourse on subjectivity and

14. Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 67.
15. Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 108f.; *Donner la mort*, 147.

truth, in particular when related to God, is that the subject seeking truth in itself, notably as "absolute" me or Self, will find itself tangled up in untruth.[16] Given that Kierkegaard, whom Derrida counts as a witness of truth, witnesses against Derrida in his attempt to redefine God, what should we think of his more radical claim; that as soon as there is secrecy, then "what I call God exists, (there is) what I call God in me, (it happens that) I call myself God . . . "?

If we would presuppose a strong alterity here, the statement could have been interpreted subtly and taken in its best sense as an interruption of subjectivity, but the tenor of the affirmation is quite plain and simple: This is the point where alterity breaks down — in the name of alterity — and is reduced to a question of self-difference and self-identity. Hence, Derrida's language speaks for itself, verging at the limit of non-sense. His linguistic definition of the Other comes closer and closer to the edge of nonsense, and this point is where it tips over the edge and identifies the Other with the Self in calling himself God. I would even go one step [*pas*] further and say that *die Sprache* (*ver*) *spricht sich* and betrays the speaker: Calling oneself God is the oldest hubris of humanity — and the inability to distinguish between the One and the Other a typical example of the "fantasms" of the Self which Reiner Schürmann analyzes in *Broken Hegemonies*.[17]

A similar position is discussed by Kierkegaard (under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus) in *The Sickness unto Death*, reaching a preliminary peak at the end of part one: "The self is its own master, absolutely its own master, and that is the despair . . . even if this self does not go so far into despair that it becomes an imaginatively constructed God."[18] If not the latter is precisely what happens to happen when I call myself God?

The confusion of oneself with God is the definitive symptom of the sickness and crisis of modernity which Kierkegaard analyzes as

16. Cf Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 207–210; *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, Vol. 7 [*SKS* 7], Copenhagen: Gad, 2002, 190–193.

17. See Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, 343–349.

18. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 69; cf. *SKS* 11, 182.

despair.[19] Thus, Derrida's text not only analyzes but at the same time *expresses* such a crisis in the Humanities. Like in Hegel's and Husserl's phenomenologies, the definition of the Other has been reduced to a definition of my Self, to a "structure of invisible interiority." The *interference* and *absolute difference* between Oneself and the Other has collapsed and alterity is weakened to the extent that it is re-constructed (or re-invented) by the Self, levelled down to a question of "secrecy."

In her book on the return of God in postmodern philosophy, Jayne Svenungsson accuses Derrida of making the alterity too *radical*, with reference to the *tout autre est tout autre* in *On the Name* and *The Gift of Death*. [20] Hence, a problem, which the early Derrida has criticized in Levinas in the essay "Violence and Metaphysics" (1963), recoils on the later Derrida. I am not quite convinced that Derrida's otherness is that radical, however, at least not when compared to Levinas or Kierkegaard. On the contrary, it is formalized and general; it becomes *extensively* disseminated and thus very abstract. Hence, I suspect that the problem Svenungsson and e.g. Richard Kearney have pointed out has to do with the opposite: With a lack or even *collapse* of alterity in Derrida's own analysis.

Second Reading: A Prior I

But let us now attempt a *second* reading from a different angle. This time I will focus on the second aspect of the passage, namely what it signifies that "what I call God exists, (there is) what I call God in me . . . "? What does it mean that "God exists" or that "God is there"?

The Being or Non-being of God has become a topic in American postmodern theology and philosophy. The theists have always argued for God's existence and God's classical attributes, his Goodness, etc. — and thus the postmodern a/theists argue against this very idea. Among the non-theists there is in fact a remarkable new "con-sense"

19. Cf. Marius Timmann Mjaaland, *Autopsia*, 266–272.

20. See Jayne Svenungsson, *Guds återkomst*, Göteborg: Glänta, 2004, 200. She refers to a similar argument by Richard Kearney but the emphasis is certainly her own. I will soon return to this question of alterity.

or consensus based on the *a priori* assumption that God cannot Be, from Mark C. Taylor to Kearney and Caputo.[21] Despite some points of internal discussion concerning Taylor's a/theology, Caputo's radical or even more radical hermeneutics, and Kearney's suggestion that God who Is not, still "may be," their theories are based on the same formal argument, which in fact is rather simple: God cannot possibly exist, since the concept of God is so different from the conceptual definition of other beings, that God cannot be a being among beings. The suggested alternatives span from a sceptic a/theology to the confession of a God *beyond* Being, emphasizing spatially the *beyond* and temporally the *possible* (in spite of its impossibility) as the origin and *telos* of religious discourse.[22]

Rhetorically, these definitions of God have much in common with Derrida's texts from the 1980s and 1990s, at least as long as "rhetoric" is defined as a question of form (Husserl again), of strategies, of different ways of expression. They all refer to God as the Other, as possibility beyond the impossible; qualify God as Good beyond Goodness, etc. Hence, they intend to leave the questions of onto-theology behind and finally move beyond the closed history of metaphysics. But that history has not been closed by an act of will and will neither be closed by a particular rhetoric, nor by omitting the wrong words. The *right* words have already betrayed the speaker, since the expectance of the Other in *Beyond* and *In Coming* presuppose that *there is a God* — after all. Moreover, this Other is a very *precise* Other, confined by limits of goodness and weakness (passive and powerless) and conforming to the ideals of liberal left-wing politics. He (or She) is, in short, *a prior* I, the I every philosopher with a good heart would like to be and/or could imagine to define *a priori* as a Good heavenly Father (or Mother). Moreover, there is a strong fascination for and influence by negative theology and the mystics — e.g. Dionysius, Angelus Silesius, Meister Eckhart — and Kierkegaard!

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21. Cf. Richard Kearney, *God Who May Be*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001; John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics,* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987; Idem, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000; Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
22. Cf. Kearney, *God Who May Be*, 3–4.

Despite several similarities with Maître Jacques, two aspects of his reflections are remarkably absent in the American discourse. One is the *formalization* of the problem, the abstract reflection on different possibilities and thus the destabilization of one's own position. There is thus a coincidence between the strong *a priori I* defined in terms of *intensive* infinity, and the rhetorical I defining a prior I in the image of God, and I cannot imagine that it is entirely coincidental. No wonder, therefore, that e.g. Richard Kearney complains about an alterity which is too strong, since the principal reflection on a strong alterity interferes with and disturbs his argument for an incarnate God who "may be."[23] Derrida's alterity is not strong, but neither is it stable or predictable. And this instability disturbs Kearney and Caputo, not primarily their concept of God, but their concept of human Self. That is where we find the blind I of their hermeneutic procedure. But if the formal and principal aspects of that alterity were to be pursued rigorously, the consensus would fracture from within.

The second aspect which seems to be overlooked is the *spacing* of the discourse, notably as analyzed in Derrida's text on *Khora* in Plato's *Timaeus*, but recurring in a series of other texts on language and negativity, e.g. "How to Avoid Speaking?" The spacing of the discourse establishes an attempt to reflect upon the "third term" in philosophy, neither mythos nor logos, neither Being nor Non-being, neither cosmos nor chaos, which eludes temporal definition and therefore opens up a space for thinking otherwise, even on that which is not graspable: God, Totality, Origin—and of Oneself (facing death).

Ambiguities

In Derrida's texts, the question of God never comes to rest, thus a return to the scission between polemics on the one hand and possible repetitions of *the Name* on the other, will open the text for a third reading, based on an interior *dis-sense* and a *dissension*.[24] Derrida does in fact not only criticize the reference to God's existence (as *ousia* and *parousia*), but also the argument *against* God's existence. Thus he seeks

23. Kearney, *God Who May Be*, 76–77.

24. Cf. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 38.

to avoid the dialectical trap of Being and Non-being by withdrawing from realism to nominalism, to a "pure" discussion of the Name. The *question*, however, remains as an interrogation of God.

With his nominalistic approach, Derrida continuously gets involved in an interference with the question of Being, i.e., the fundamental questions of ontology. Following his own programme of *différance* and dissemination, Derrida often adopts an ambiguous position to the question of Being, where his own presuppositions are crossed out by the negation of any position at all. But even other differences such as that between interior and exterior and that of subjectivity and alterity are at stake in his discourse on the Name. These differences are then destabilized by a *différance* that "includes ontotheology, inscribing it and exceeding it without return."[25]

The question about the Being or Non-being of God is thereby kept *in suspenso*, and this suspension is likewise the *dissension*.[26] Suppose that God is *not* there, and humanity and every human being would in the strictest sense be *abandoned* by God. The question of absolute Otherness then becomes a question of how "I" define my relationship to the Other, i.e., to what extent I am willing and able to *name* and *define* this otherness, and then respond to it; either to the "split in the I" or to the possibility of "secrecy." But would not such naming and defining be necessary even if God were there?

Suppose conversely that God is there, and the alterity of God calling for response will break up subjectivity from within, opening up an abyss in the given and a horizon for unexpected possibility. But would not that abyss open up and the unexpected occur even if God were not there? Anyway, if we keep both alternatives open and read the text with this *dissension* in mind, we would in fact presuppose subjectivity in Kierkegaard's sense.

Before we consider the passage a third time, I will therefore take a detour to a text on forgiveness, which Derrida approaches in the extended version of his essay on hospitality. The question of forgiveness concerns the limit between Self and Other. In Matt. 6 we read, directly succeeding the prayer: "For if you forgive men when they sin against

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25. Quoted from the essay "Différance" in Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 6.
26. Cf. Derrida, *Writing and Difference,* 38–39.

you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." The presupposition for such forgiveness is that there is *Another* who may forgive, or rather, that every sin and guilt one may be responsible for in face of the Other concerns that Other as much as it concerns me. But who is able to say "I forgive," who is entitled to speak these words?

In the second session of "Hospitality" Derrida discusses the problem of asking for forgiveness even for one's Being-there [*être-la*] and concludes that no one is entitled to forgive unless he is able to become a subject, not as "subjectum" or "substantia" in the classical sense, but as a *subjection* to the law that is above him: "this is indeed submission, subjection, sub-jection of one who is who he is only insofar as he asks for the forgiveness of the other."[27] Derrida takes this *original* grounding or constitution of the subject back to a "cogito" even prior to the Cartesian cogito: "as soon as I say *I*, even in solitude, as soon as I say *ego cogito*, I am in the process of asking for forgiveness or being forgiven, at least if the experience lasts for more than an instant and temporalizes itself."[28]

What may seem surprising is that Derrida ascribes an *ontological* significance to such an "event" of forgiveness. Quoting an early text of Levinas, he discusses how this ontological event of everything that is being, such as "being forgiven" or "being there," receives its ontological qualification by breaking with traditional ontology, inscribing the "I" in a *leap* into a temporalized structure where the Self is redefined by its relation to the Other.[29] Formulating this being temporally as "being-there" interrupts and redefines the task of ontology, as Derrida does in this late text.

In Kierkegaard, the possibility of forgiveness becomes similarly significant considering the diagnosis of the sickness in the Self—i.e.,

27. Derrida, "Hospitality," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar, London: Routledge, 2002, 388.

28. Derrida, "Hospitality," 391.

29. "Reaching the other is not something justified by itself; it is not a matter of shaking me out of my boredom. It is, on the ontological level, the event of the most radical breakup of the very categories of the ego, for it is for me to somewhere else than my self; it is *to be pardoned*, not to be a definite existence." Derrida quoting Emmanuel Levinas from *De l'existence à l'existant* (Paris: Vrin, 1990), 144 (emphasis added) in "Hospitality," 391.

its *crisis*.[30] A weak alterity implies that the only *Other* left is an Other which is constructed and "appropriated" (Hegelian *Aneignung*) by the Self; hence the possibility of forgiveness is reduced to the call to *forgive Oneself*.[31] This is, however, no forgiveness at all, i.e., it renders forgiveness impossible and—in a wider perspective—renders impossible the radical possibility of otherness. The only supposition which could interrupt the process of continuous constructions of reality is the Other being there, an absolute Other who binds the I to necessity, to the irreducible necessity of *being-there*, of *being-oneself*, and as such of responding to the Other. This would in fact be subjectivity in Kierkegaard's sense, but then as subjectivity *in crisis*, separated from God in "the most chasmic qualitative abyss."[32]

Supposed God is there, as Derrida does when reflecting upon forgiveness, we are still facing the problem of defining the limits between Oneself and the Other. In late modern Europe, we may probably presuppose that the "I" speaking is already abandoned. But this destiny also carries the seed of new possibilities:

> If forgiveness can be asked for by me but granted only by the other, then God, the God of mercy, is the name of he who alone can forgive, in the name of whom alone forgiveness can be granted, and who can always abandon me, but also—and this is the equivocal beauty of this word abandonment—the only one to whom I can abandon myself, to the forgiveness of whom I can abandon myself.[33]

Third Reading: Dissension

If we therefore return to the description of God who is *at the same time Other than me and more intimate with me than myself* and presuppose subjectivity in Kierkegaard's sense, this Otherness opens a "chasmic qualitative abyss" within the Self, disparate from itself and devoid of any firm ground. The Self not only abandoned by God, but abandoned even by itself, is searching for identity, for borders and necessity; for

30. Cf. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 25; *SKS* 11, 141.

31. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 13; *SKS* 11, 129.

32. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 122; *SKS* 11, 233.

33. Derrida, "Hospitality," 389.

the opportunity of being *Itself*, submitted to the Other. There is no self-identity to find. But the investigation of one's *limits*, i.e., the limits of possibility and the necessities confining and restricting one's *Lebenswelt* would in fact establish the first step [*pas*] and denial [*pas*] in defining the limits towards *the Other*. In that sense Derrida is certainly right: The only qualitative difference defining a new beginning would presuppose a *limit* drawn between the possible and the impossible. Interior or exterior, abandoned or being there, it would be the limit towards the Other.

Hence the *dissension*, the original split or abyss, which is at work in deconstruction, which produces differences to be analyzed without offering itself to phenomenological analysis, would also reopen the abyss of the hidden God to the possibility of self-abandonment in mercy. The abandonment would be to a God who is already there, anterior to self-construction, but *not there* in the sense of total causality and inductivity. It would announce itself in everyday experiences, though it remains hidden in its very infinity. This is, in the final analysis, a question of ontology and topology, of "where" and "God" and "is" —supposed that God is there, even when "I" is abandoned.

Read from this point of view, it is also a text about limits, about how to draw decisive limits, or rather, how to trace the limits which are already there. This is a *critical* and *confessional* task of the Humanities, their "profession of faith," as Derrida defines it.[34] Since Husserl, phenomenology has *made aware* of a crisis in these disciplines, but Husserl's response was an attempt to *consume* metaphysics by way of the phenomenological method. Derrida confines himself to the task of analyzing the crisis. It is a task that is urgent, decisive, and pervasive. As we have seen, it even goes through Derrida's philosophy and becomes the *crisis* of his own texts.

These limits are not to be drawn out there in the universe, between an alleged immanence and a questionable transcendence; thus far Derrida is certainly right. The limit of transcendence—if there is such a limit, if there is *transcending*, *transgressing*, and *excess*, if there is decisive *difference* and *différance*—goes through the very *act* of drawing limits,

34. Derrida, *L'université sans condition*, 78.

of defining, confining, circumscribing, and of formulating hypotheses, of applying categories and differences, of claiming an *a priori*, etc. And that is exactly the *topos* of a deep crisis in the Humanities in the early 21st century: On the one hand as an unacknowledged crisis in the Human Sciences insofar as they take the limits for *granted* or *given*, thus not allowing for a reason to question them. On the other as an unacknowledged crisis in the continuous flow of constructions, where *any* distinction is possible and applicable, and thus no limit decisive.

In these language games, though with a critical and suspicious eye, the "work" of deconstruction takes place, as a work of tracing limits back to their origin, of translating these limits into other languages, of questioning the limits, but also of making aware that *some limits are decisive* and may not be overlooked, even though they may be equivocal. Supposing that God is there, the crisis of the Humanities is a crisis concerning alterity and subjectivity, hubris and humility, response and responsibility, and (*pace* Parmenides) the limit between the One and the Other.

No matter which genealogy of the modern Self we apply, the relationship between alterity and subjectivity remains a determining problem in the Humanities. Any text study, any inquiry on ethics, on gender, on power structures, on violence, on religion, even the work of translation, is based on a certain preliminary decision concerning the relationship between oneself and the other (person, text, culture, religion), in most cases an implicit one. What generally signifies modernity since Descartes is that the critical instance for distinguishing between the one and the other is captured by the subject itself, even though this conquest of the power of definition is followed by a chronic doubt and later suspicion concerning (i) the presuppositions handed over from earlier generations and (ii) the ability of the modern subject to judge critically between true and false. Such suspicion has increasingly been directed towards the construction and identity of the "I," as is also the tenor in Derrida's criticism of logocentrism, self-presence, the priority of the voice, and "onto-theology."

The problem involved in such discussions is evident: Even when priority is given to the Other, as in Levinas's philosophy, the Other is constructed or "invented" by the one who defines, through negation and differentiation, even when we admit that we do not and cannot

fully understand the Other in his or her Otherness. The relationship between Oneself and the Other is most convenient when it is regulated by a foreseeable economy, with restrictions and mutual obligations, with duties, justice, and gestures of politeness. Thus symmetry or a stable asymmetry may be established as basis for the relationship — and alterity has been reduced to the logic of the Same, to the expectation that every other is similar to myself and is constructed and reconstructed "in my similitude."

In Derrida, the discussion on alterity and subjectivity is kept in suspense. But as we have seen, this suspense without equilibrium is also the *topos* of a *crisis* in Derrida's philosophy — a crisis at times dominated by the empty "production" of Selves and Others and at times by the collapse and levelling of the difference as such, between alterity and subjectivity. In order to resist this levelling of alterity, there ought to be presupposed a space for Otherness *prior to* the definition, situated in the very act of defining. As long as this commandment is observed, as the first commandment of deconstruction, the discourse on Self and Other will remain open for the possibility of an interruption, for a revolt, interference or break-down of discourse, properly opening the gap of alterity. Given there is such crisis: How could we avoid speaking of an ultimate condition of discourse?

The Future of Emancipation: Inheriting the Messianic Promise in Derrida and Others

BJÖRN THORSTEINSSON

In our times, the reluctance to engage in any type of radical re-evaluation of socio-political values seems almost all-pervasive. Of course, such a broad claim immediately calls for numerous qualifications and caveats — implied and invited by the modest but important word *almost*. First of all, the reluctance in question is, not unsurprisingly, limited to the well-off and those reveling in luxury. In other words — at the risk of sounding naïve, vulgar, and simplistic — it only applies to *us*. Second, the discourse calling for new sets of values is evidently not completely absent. Some might even argue that it has already attracted too much attention; the "alarmists," we are told, are gradually becoming the reigning prophets of a "new orthodoxy." Third, even if the reluctance is strong, even if the forces of suppression constantly acquire new reinforcements and ever stronger technological means, one will never completely avoid encountering, in one of its guises, what I might term, following Alain Badiou, *the unnameable of the current situation*:[1] the elements that escape the reigning hegemony, those (officially) overlooked by bio-power, those that, quite simply, are not counted. The dispossessed, the slum-dwellers, the "illegal immigrants," the women and children sold as slaves. When will they stake their claim on us — when will they come to haunt us? When will those who do not count make themselves counted? When will we be made accountable to them? Or, even worse, when will they turn the tables

1. See, for example, Alain Badiou, "Philosophy and truth", *Infinite thought: Truth and the return to philosophy*, trans. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens, London and New York: Continuum, 2005, 49.

on us and demand to settle the accounts — when will *we* turn into *them*?

One of the guiding lights, if not regulatory ideals, of this excursion will be what is referred to as "justice." What is justice? Much, possibly everything, hinges on the way in which we answer that question. Has justice arrived, has it been achieved on this earth? Have we arrived at the summit, have we reached the end — have we come as far as we can go? These are relatively simple questions, and as such they are tainted with an unmistakable tone of interrogation, demanding a categorical answer: yes or no. Such an alternative, in all its ruthlessness, may not be to the liking of those who strive to deconstruct apparently absolute oppositions — but we would do well to bear in mind that the *system of justice* to which we belong never abstains from employing such oppositions *in practice*, regardless of what "we," whoever we are, may think of them. So, again, what is justice? What is its relation to *this moment*, to the "here and now"? Is it here in the fullness of its plenitude, or is it not — yes or no? Or, in other words, what, if anything, does the future harbor for us — is there any time, any *real time*, remaining? Is there a future for emancipation, does it still have a chance, or have its resources already been exhausted?

What will be offered here, in the pages that follow, is an attempt to come to terms with these issues in the company of four thinkers: Walter Benjamin, Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Derrida, and Giorgio Agamben. First, we will make an excursion into the way in which Benjamin and Žižek envisage the relation of (historical) materialism (understood as a theoretical-practical attitude towards human emancipation) and theology (chiefly in the guise of a messianic promise). Then we will move on to an account of Derrida's attempts to come to terms with the legacy of materialism, and finally we will take a brief look at Agamben's recent contribution to the issues at stake, focusing above all on his criticism of Derrida. What attempts to articulate itself here, in the ongoing debate in which the above-named thinkers have played a significant part as well as in this paper, is the question of the part to be played by the subject in the time that remains.

Benjamin and Žižek: Materialism and Theology

Walter Benjamin quite famously opens his much-quoted *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, also known (perhaps more accurately) under the title *On the Concept of History*, by presenting the reader with something in the order of a parable:

> The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called "historical materialism" is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight.[2]

Let us, once more — assuming that we have done it before — read these words carefully, especially the last two or three sentences. The philosophical counterpart to the device, which only *appears* to be an "automaton," a chess computer before the fact that is *supposed to be* absolutely (and automatically) invincible, would be an apparatus where the puppet is played by something called "historical materialism," and the dwarf, the hidden midget that, according to Benjamin's German, is so small and ugly (*klein und häßlich*)[3] that it is just as well that we do not have to face it, is to be played by theology. In other words, historical materialism, by which term we are doubtless expected to conjure up images of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Lenin, and even Stalin — let us keep in mind that the text dates from the very last years of Benjamin's life, i.e., 1939–40 — can only fulfill its own ambition, so aptly described by Benjamin as "winning all the time," *if* it takes

2. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the philosophy of history," *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zorn, London: Pimlico, 1999, 245. Henceforth, page references to this text are given in parentheses in the main text.

3. See Walter Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschicte," in *Sprache und Geschichte: Philosophische Essays*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Stuttgart: Phillip Reclam, 141.

theology into its service, if it places theology inside its machine, in the engine room, as it were. The *automatic* victory of historical materialism can only be ensured, says Benjamin, if it deploys the resources harbored by theology. Why theology? Before turning to that question, let us try and elucidate a little the question of the automatism. At issue here is no less than the key question concerning Marx's legacy — the feverishly debated topic of economic determinism versus subjective activism.[4] If capitalist society carries the seeds of its own destruction, if the forces of production are bound to be to an ever greater degree hampered by the relations of production until an eruption or explosion occurs and a novel type of society comes into being — then where does that leave presently living individuals — workers, intellectuals, or, perhaps most appropriately, the proletariat? What should be the task of the subject, revolutionary or not, while we all wait for the inevitable to happen: the arrival of the new society, whatever its shape and structure? Or, in more concise terms, *how should we wait*?

Keeping these questions in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that Benjamin found it necessary, or strategically important, to seek recourse in theology — for, to put the matter somewhat bluntly, are not the adherents of religions, at least of the messianic mould, precisely experts in waiting? And, perhaps more importantly, are not Judaic and Christian theology inherently torn between different modalities of waiting — an active and a passive one?[5] It is well known that Benjamin closes his *Theses* by referring to the Jewish belief that "every second of

4. One way of throwing a light on this issue would be by recourse to Georg Lukács, whose 1923 book *History and Class Consciousness*, as we know, had a formative impact on Walter Benjamin. For an illuminating discussion of Lukács, see Slavoj Žižek, "Postface: Georg Lukács as the philosopher of Leninism," in Georg Lukács, *A Defence of* History and Class Consciousness: *Tailism and The Dialectic*, trans. Esther Leslie, London and New York: Verso, 2000.

5. A middle ground between these two alternatives — the middle voice, as it were — is represented today by Christian sects that, somewhat impatiently but also with a tangible degree of satisfaction, accumulate the signs of the oncoming "rapture." A case in point is the so-called "Rapture Index," which is calculated daily and made public at the website raptureready.com. The higher the index, the better we are doing: the greater the odds that the Second Coming is upon us. At the time of writing, the index is at 168 points; according to the website, this amounts to the recommendation that we should "fasten our seat belts."

time was the straitgate through which the Messiah might enter" (255). This idea, according to Benjamin, prevented Jewish believers from succumbing to the opinion that time was "homogeneous" and "empty." It is precisely such a conception of time — which Benjamin relates alternatively to historicism and to (social-democratic) conformism — that he sets out to combat in his *Theses*. What is wrong with such an attitude towards time is, among other things, that it essentially comes down to a justification of the present situation, or, in other words, it only contributes to the dominant interpretation of history — the history of the victors. The historicist, for example, sincerely believes that "nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history" (246). This stance ultimately boils down to the standpoint that we, in our present situation, have no obligations towards the claims of the past. For us, past generations are gone, but they are no more lost than anything else; they are safely preserved in the grand museum of history, and therefore we do not need to pay any attention to them other than as curious artefacts. Implicit here is a naïve and uncritical (and doubtless familiar) idea of progress (252) — an idea that inevitably serves as "a tool of the ruling classes" (247). Against this subservient and impotent attitude, Benjamin advances another conception of time — an essentially messianic conception that he wants to relate to historical materialism *in order for the latter to become what it truly should be*. We can regard materialism in this context to refer to a certain sympathy with the victims, with the slain and the fallen in the process of history. If there is ever to be a genuine redemption of mankind as such, and not only the ultimate and categorical triumph of the victors (the strong, the mighty, the wealthy), the downtrodden need to be rehabilitated, as it were. This can only happen through the "dialectical leap" into the unknown, the "leap in the open air of history" that Marx termed revolution. The revolution inescapably has to take place "in an arena where the ruling classes give the commands" — which entails, among other things, that the notion of history that is prevalent, in this arena, is the conformist-historicist one. Revolution entails, precisely, that "the revolutionary classes" (253), or in other words "the struggling, oppressed class" (251), makes "the continuum of history explode" (253). To make the opposition between the historicist and the historical materialist even clearer, let us reproduce Benjamin's Thesis XVI in its entirety:

> A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism gives the "eternal" image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past. The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called "Once upon a time" in historicism's bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history. (254)

The reason why the historical materialist "remains in control of his powers" is precisely that he resists the temptation to depict history as a homogeneous continuum of internally indiscernible "events" which follow each other in smooth procession. Against this harmless and watered-down conception, he is conscious of the fact that there is a certain danger at work: "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (247). In the face of this threat, the historical materialist strives to "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (247). This entails an awareness of the way in which a particular "historical subject" can appear in the form of a "monad," in which "thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions" (254). In this moment of history condensed into a monad, the historical materialist "recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past" (254). And it is precisely in virtue of this notion of specific "condensed" moments — which Benjamin also calls "chips [*Splitter*] of Messianic time" (255) — that the historical materialist severs himself from the impotent conformism of the historicist. Or, to sum up the *proper* materialist conception of history in one phrase: "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]." (252–253)

Now these remarks will have to suffice, for the moment, on Benjamin's reconsideration of the relation between materialism and messianism. To further elucidate the question of historical materialism and theology at present, nearly seventy years after Benjamin wrote his *Theses*, let us turn our attention to the way in which one self-proclaimed inheritor (and proponent) of the materialist tradition, Slavoj Žižek,

responds to this issue in one of his recent books. Needless to say, Žižek's interest in theology is deeply connected with his overarching interest in reformulating and reopening the potentialities of materialism. In this respect, of course, he can be seen as a dedicated inheritor of Benjamin, even if he rarely acknowledges this debt in any explicit or detailed way. It is safe to say, in any case, that this affiliation is nowhere clearer than in the book entitled, precisely, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, in which, as the title implies, Žižek directly takes up and reinterprets —albeit rather briefly—Benjamin's parable from the *Theses*. Or, to be more exact, Žižek reverses the roles of the major "actors" in the parable: the puppet, we learn, should now be played by theology, whereas the role of the dwarf that is to drive the machine but stay out of sight should be assumed by historical materialism. Why is this reversal necessary according to Žižek? Of course, the answer that immediately springs to mind, prompted and supported by an overwhelming dominant discourse, is that anything called "historical materialism" would do well to keep a low profile at present; but, for Žižek, this cannot be the whole story. As it turns out, he wants to relate theology and historical materialism because he locates a certain "subversive kernel" in Christianity and claims that this core element is not only of great value for a materialist approach but that it is also uniquely accessible to such an approach:

> My claim here is not merely that I am a materialist through and through, and that the subversive kernel of Christianity is accessible also to a materialist approach; my thesis is much stronger: this kernel is accessible *only* to a materialist approach—and vice versa: to become a true dialectical materialist, one should go through the Christian experience.[6]

What is this element of Christianity, then, with which one needs to get acquainted if one is to become "a true dialectical materialist"? As it turns out, Žižek offers several formulations of this "hidden core" in his book. For example, referring to the myth of the Fall, he raises the

6. Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2003, 6. Henceforth, page references to the book are given in parentheses.

issue of "what cannot but appear as the hidden perverse core of Christianity: if it is prohibited to eat from the Tree of Knowledge in Paradise, why did God put it there in the first place?" (15). Further, he recounts the story of the exchange between Jesus and Judas at the Last Supper, where the former responds to the latter's question as to whether it is he that will betray him, simply by the words "You have said so" —a "disavowed injunction" if there ever was one, according to Žižek (16). He goes on to comment:

> Here I am tempted to claim that the entire fate of Christianity, its innermost kernel, hinges on the possibility of interpreting this act [the utterance "You have said so"] in a nonperverse way. [. . .] The problem, the dark ethical knot in this affair, is thus not Judas, but Christ himself: in order to fulfill his mission, was he obliged to have recourse to such obscure, arch-Stalinist manipulation? (16)

In other words: if God is omnipotent, why did he invite, if not explicitly arrange for, the Fall, and why did he sacrifice his son? For an answer to these questions, Žižek finds support in such thinkers as Hegel (who famously interpreted Christ's death on the cross as, quite simply, the *fact* that *God is dead*[7]) and the English conservative thinker G. K. Chesterton; for, as the latter wrote, commenting on Jesus' cry from the cross, we "will not find another god who has himself been in revolt," or, in other words, we "will find [. . .] only one religion in which God seemed for an instant to be an atheist."[8] In other words, still following Chesterton, Christianity is "terribly revolutionary. [. . .] Christianity is the only religion on earth that has felt that omnipotence made God incomplete."[9] In a way, God dies in order to signal that he is *not* omnipotent, and, thus, that he needs *us* to make up for this lack.

Žižek seizes upon this issue of God's apparent despair and self-contradictory limitation to elaborate on the notion of Christian love.

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7. For this claim, see e.g. G.W.F. Hegel, "Glauben und Wissen," in *Jenaer Schriften 1801–1807 (Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, Volume 2), Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp 1971, 432.
8. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995, 145 (as quoted by Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 14).
9. Ibid. (as quoted by Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 15).

Comparing Buddhism and Christianity, Žižek notes that love, in Christianity, always implies a certain degree of betrayal. The Christian community is founded upon a division between the community of believers on the one hand and non-believers on the other hand — even if this border is by no means static and fixed, but rather essentially expandable (and, presumably, retractable as well). Christianity, thus, is a religion of difference, whereas Buddhism, on the other hand, is a doctrine of indifference, or, as Žižek, referring to the Buddhist doctrine of the fleeting character of (what most of us call) reality, quite poignantly puts it: "if external reality is ultimately just an ephemeral appearance, then even the most horrifying crimes eventually *do not matter*." (32) By contrast, "Christian love is a violent passion to introduce a Difference, a gap in the order of being, to privilege and elevate some object at the expense of others" (33). In other words, Christianity revolts against the leveling-out of reality and, consequently, against the homogeneity of time, introducing, instead, a rupture, a cut, or a separation into the order of being — an order which, however, always seems to have a tendency to fold in on itself and strive to close the gap. As a matter of fact, Christianity itself, no more than any other product of the human spirit, has not escaped the regime of such tendencies. Žižek criticizes such "perversions" of the original and real essence of the legacy of Christ, inviting us instead to follow Lacan's one and only ethical maxim on striving not to compromise one's desire even if that may seem impossible — if not the impossible *as such* — in modern consumerist society:

> for Lacan, the status of desire is inherently ethical: "not to compromise one's desire" ultimately equals "do your duty." And this is what the perverse version of Christianity entices us to do: betray your desire, [...] and you are welcome to have all the trivial pleasures you are dreaming about deep in your heart! (49)

Against such a "perverse" reading, Žižek wants to propound, as we have seen, a notion of love as difference which clearly resonates with Benjamin's concept of historical materialism. In a world abounding in "special offers" to betray the cause, to give up the messianic stance towards temporality, we should strive to keep alive the call of justice, the awareness of the incompleteness of the present situation inspired

by the memory of past victims. But let us now pass on to the next phase of our discussion, which will engage with a thinker with whom Žižek has repeatedly taken issue in his writings.[10]

Derrida on Inheriting — Hauntology and the Promise

In his *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida proposes a new way of thinking which, he claims, surpasses any type of ontology in its capacities and scope. Not inappropriately, Derrida terms this new thinking "hauntology," playing, of course (in a quintessential Derridean way) on the phonetic similarities at work here — for, after all, the French term *hantologie* sounds *almost exactly* like *ontologie*. What, then, is hauntology? To answer that question, we will turn to the source itself, i.e., to *Specters of Marx* — but first, a very cursory glimpse at Derrida's general mindset may be helpful.

As is well known, Derrida's thinking is defined, more or less, by a relentless critique of so-called "metaphysics of presence" which, according to Derrida, has dominated not only Western thought since Plato (or even further back), but also, and more generally, the mainstream of Western religion, culture, and history. To resume in the extreme, Derrida's critique of the metaphysical tradition seeks to unveil how it is always, in the final reckoning, defined by stubborn and static oppositions (such as nature/culture, male/female, presence/absence) which, ultimately, *fail to do justice* to the dynamic multiplicity of the world within which we *really* live. Alas, this does not mean that the injustice implied by the tradition's overly simplified (and binary) view of reality has no effect on the world. It is quite important to realize how Derrida's mode of thinking is, in this respect, deeply phenomenological: his objective is, quite simply, to combat a certain crisis which has befallen Western culture due to the imposition of a limited and limiting, and thus false, world-view. Be that as it may, but where exactly, then, does Derrida locate the problem with traditional metaphysics and its concrete socio-historical effects?

10. For revealing remarks about the relation here at stake, namely between Žižek and Derrida, see the "Glossary" in Slavoj Žižek, *Interrogating the Real*, eds. Rex Butler and Scott Stephens, London and New York: Continuum, 2005, 360.

In fact, when it comes to that question, the keyword has already been spoken: it is justice. In Derrida's view, metaphysics and, more specifically, ontology, comes down to the forceful application of simple categories to an irreducibly dynamic multitude. And it is precisely this *irreducibility* which is the common source, in Derrida's thinking, for hope, resistance, and justice. Faced with the ontological exclusive alternative *par excellence* — Hamlet's question, "to be or not to be," being present or being absent — Derrida proposes another type of thinking which pays no heed to the supposedly absolute alternative of the opposition but takes into reckoning what we might call a difference of degree with regard to being and non-being, presence and absence: namely, "a *hauntology*," that is, a "logic of haunting" which would be "larger [*plus ample*] and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being."[11] The wideness of its scope and its power would derive from the fact that it would be, quite simply, less exclusive with regard to phenomenality in its most general sense — for what is it that really appears to consciousness in our everyday being-in-the-world? What is it that needs to be accounted for by an ontology? For Derrida, the answer is clear: hauntology surpasses any traditional ontology in its accountability towards not only whatever or whoever is immediately present, here and now, but also towards whatever or whoever is *outside* the present horizon. It comprises the present and the absent, both those things that are and those things that are not (in the traditional sense of the terms). In this manner, the very meaning of "is," the very meaning of being, is confounded and upset — to be or not to be, being present or being absent, being alive or dead. The phantom takes the place of the phenomenon, or, at the very least, starts to haunt it. And it so happens, according to Derrida, that our reality, not least our techno-scientific world with its apparently endless possibilities for intermingling presence and absence, is *in fact* one in which this new

11. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, New York and London: Routledge, 1994, 10; Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: L'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*, Paris: Galilée, 1993, 31. Henceforth, page references to the book are given in parentheses in the main text, providing both English and French pagination.

type of thinking, this "thinking with" the phantom, the ghost, or the spectre, is more pertinent than ever. Pertinent—that is to say, also, *just*—and it is with this in mind that Derrida writes, in the "Exordium" to *Spectres of Marx*, the following words:

> If I am getting ready to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain *others* who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us, it is in the name of *justice*. [...] It is necessary to speak *of the* ghost, indeed *to the* ghost and *with* it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible or thinkable and *just* that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet *there*, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born. (xix/15)

Now we should recall that these formulations are made in the opening pages of a book on Karl Marx, originally published in French in 1993. As it turns out, the concept of hauntology plays a major part in the text, not least in its attempts to come to grips with Marx's legacy—that is, to deploy Derrida's own parlance, with Marx's ghosts. But the issue of justice towards those who are not present, of speaking to ghosts and of being-with them, in their company, is also at the forefront of Derrida's renowned and relentless attack, in *Specters of Marx*, on the neo-conservative thinker Francis Fukuyama's ideas on "the end of history" and the accompanying common consensus that "Marx is dead." In a nutshell, Derrida's charge against Fukuyama amounts to the claim that *any* type of thinking that not only posits that there will be an end to history, but goes on to claim that this end-of-history is already a reality, turns out to be deeply deficient and fundamentally unjust. For such a thinking cannot, for one thing, account for the suffering and the injustices of the world—past, present, or future. In other words, such a hypothesis flies in the face of the *evident* flaws in the present situation, but more than that, it also neglects the *claim* staked on us by those who are not "presently living," those who "are no longer" or "are not yet *there*." Or, to put the same point differently, such a "closed" thinking fails to uphold the messianic promise—the promise of emancipation which is also the call of justice. Strictly speaking, a thinking of this mould would leave us without a future in the proper

sense of the word — which Derrida names *l'avenir* (sometimes spelled *l'à-venir*), rendered in English as future-to-come; it would entail an endless repetition of the current situation without any possibility of transformation, a boundless *status quo* which would essentially amount to a disregard of past and present suffering, as well as of injustices yet to come. To return to the difference between ontology and hauntology, ontology focuses exclusively on *what is (present(ly))*, founding whatever justifications it may offer on what is at hand — rendering, accordingly, any claims based on *what is not* as directly misconceived, if not *false*. Hauntology, on the other hand, upholds the necessity (and urgency) of letting *what is not* also have a voice, of letting *what is not (counted) also be counted*, of giving its due to what is outside of the current horizon. And, to reiterate, it is important to realize that in this sense, hauntology is *at once* descriptive and normative; it is a description of reality which is more accurate than bipolar ontology, but since this assertion by itself does not suffice to, as it were, put this same ontology to rest, hauntology also has an essential normative dimension: in a situation always at least partly, if not completely, dominated by traditional ontology, there is a constant need for hauntology to reassert itself. The double meaning here at issue is quite adequately captured by the adjective *just*: it is just (right and proper — and *good*) that we justly (correctly) describe reality (in hauntological terms).

But what should we surmise, then, about the ethico-political *effects* of hauntology? For Derrida, it is quite clear that this type of thinking demands a vivid awareness of injustices committed and of the claims of the dead upon the presently living. In other words, hauntology is essentially linked with the memory of the past and with the promise of redemption, of human emancipation, of the coming of justice.[12] And this, precisely, is the common thread by which Derrida wants to link up with Marx — a certain "'spirit' of emancipatory Marxism" (167/264), as Derrida puts it, which is inextricably and inherently related to theological issues:

12. For a comprehensive account of these issues, see Matthias Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin and Derrida*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2005.

> Now, if there is a spirit of Marxism which I will never be ready to renounce, it is [. . .] a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any *messianism*. And a promise must promise to be kept, that is, not to remain "spiritual" or "abstract," but to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth. (89/146–147)

In other words: we should inherit, in an *active* way, the messianic promise contained in the Marxist doctrine. This means that the promise cannot make do with remaining on the "spiritual" or "abstract" level, the promise needs to promise to be kept — but such a formulation quite clearly invites an insistent and poignant question: *will it be kept?* And, in any case, what is its content — what is it that it promises, and in what way can we contribute to its being kept? It is precisely in relation to this question that Derrida severs himself from Marx — or, at the very least, from the Marxist tradition. Admitting, as we have already indicated, that there is always *more than one* spirit of Marx in the sense that "inheriting Marx," like any other inheritance, "is never a *given*, it is always a task" (54/94), Derrida feels compelled to choose between the spirits on offer, as it were, in such a way as to leave out anything that remotely looks like a determinate *content* — an ontology, a system or — that word again — materialism. For, as Derrida writes, there is, again, a certain "*spirit* of the Marxist critique, which seems to be more indispensable than ever today" and needs to be distinguished "at once from Marxism as ontology, philosophical or metaphysical system, as 'dialectical materialism,' from Marxism as historical materialism or method, and from Marxism incorporated in the apparatuses of the party, State, or workers' International" (68/116–117).

It is with such a spirit of Marx — which, it must be said, looks rather skeletal since it has been stripped of most of what is usually associated with Marxism[13] — that Derrida wants to have commerce. However,

13. For a relentless critique of Derrida's reductive reading of Marxism, as well as a forceful reply by Derrida to his accusers, see the articles gathered in Michael Sprinker (ed.), *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's* Specters of Marx, London and New York: Verso, 1999.

when reading further we immediately learn that this does not mean that we should hastily equate this indispensable and currently relevant spirit of "Marxist critique" with what Derrida wants to call "a deconstruction," inasmuch as the latter "is no longer simply a *critique*" and, in any case, it has never "been in a position either to identify with or especially to oppose symmetrically something like Marxism, the Marxist ontology, or the Marxist critique" (68/117). Deconstruction seeks inspiration from this particular aspect of Marx's legacy, but the former should by no means be reduced to the latter, no more than it should be seen to situate itself in direct opposition to it.

Be that as it may, but still the question insists: in what way are we, then, to address and respond to this particular spirit of Marx containing, as it does, the messianic core so dear to us? We have been given a fair idea of what we should *not* do: we should abstain from Marxist ontology, the Marxist system, and from materialism in the Marxian vein, be it historical or dialectical. At this point, it is difficult to resist the temptation to ponder a little about the overtones of this reductive adherence to Marxism—is this not, in some respect, idealism's ultimate revenge on Marx? After all, Marx surely *wanted* his theory to be something more than a mere "spiritual" element, a "critique" that can inspire scholars haphazardly but remains devoid of any actual *practical* dimension or, what is worse, of any claim to be a *scientific* description of the workings of history. What can ever be the effective emancipatory force of such a "critical spirit"—not least when we keep in mind that it should not let it self be "incorporated in the apparatuses of the party, State, or workers' International"?

As it turns out, however, Derrida really *does* propose, in *Specters of Marx* as well as in his book on the *Politics of Friendship*,[14] a new type of community destined to fight the ruling hegemony. Thus, early on in *Specters of Marx*, he gives a brief description of an "alliance of a rejoining without conjoined mate, without organization, without party, without nation, without State, without property (the "communism" that we will [...] nickname the new International)" (29/58). Even if Derrida somewhat surprisingly relates this new alliance to "communism," it is quite clear that what he has in mind differs radically from what is

14. See Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, Paris: Galilée, 1994.

traditionally meant by that term — for, after all, Derrida's new International, which is even described as "[b]arely deserving the name community," belonging "only to anonymity" (90/148), is marked above all by a categorical opposition to any type of established doctrine. It is to be, as Derrida writes:

> the friendship of an alliance without institution among those who, even if they no longer believe or never believed in the socialist-Marxist International, in the dictatorship of the proletariat, in the messiano-eschatological role of the universal union of the proletarians of all lands, continue to be inspired by at least one of the spirits of Marx or of Marxism (they now know that there is *more than one*) and in order to ally themselves, in a new, concrete, and real way, even if this alliance no longer takes the form of a party or of a workers' international, but rather of a kind of counter-conjuration, in the (theoretical and practical) critique of the state of international law, the concepts of State and nation, and so forth: in order to renew this critique, and especially to radicalize it. (85-86/142)

As these formulations clearly imply, the new International can hardly be called anything more than a loosely constructed, and inevitably disparate, assemblage of people interested in social justice, working, each on (more or less) their own terms, to transform existing institutions. The *revolutionary* dimension has clearly gone amiss — in other words, there is no revolutionary subject in Derrida's conceptual scheme, an agent that would assume the task of radically altering the situation; there is only a critical attitude towards existing institutions, destined to improve these from within. Of course, this does not mean that Derrida's overall stance, founded as it is on hauntology, is marked by unwillingness to respond to the claims of the past or of the downtrodden of all ages. The will is there, but the conceptual apparatus seems to be lacking in a crucial respect. Even if the promise of emancipation is to "promise to be kept," it is an unavoidable fact that, according to Derrida himself, we can never claim, nor should we believe, that the promise really *has* been kept. The crucial issue at stake here is what we might term the attitude which will, *concretely* as it were, characterize our waiting for the fulfillment of the promise. In Derrida's own terms, this attitude should come down to what he calls, in French, *attente sans attente*, which can alternatively be rendered in Eng-

lish as "waiting without expectation" or "waiting without waiting."[15] Now, our complaint would be — to put it in somewhat crude terms — the following: if we are to wait without expectation, or "wait without waiting," which surely does not fall far short of waiting for nothing in particular, or even waiting for *nothing at all*, how are we to guard ourselves from falling asleep?

Consequently, the all-important theoretical question becomes the following: how does this awareness, which is a *sine qua non* of the Derridean idea of justice and of the related idea of a democracy-to-come, alter our attitude in the present moment, here and now? It would seem that what it robs us of is, precisely, the access to what Benjamin calls *Jetztzeit*, the "moment of the now" when we realize, all of a sudden, that now the time has come to make a move, to make the "tiger's leap" which, of course, is also, irrevocably, a moment of real danger.

In this way, *malgré lui*, Derrida comes dangerously close to succumbing to what Benjamin terms historicism or conformism — providing an account of temporality and of historicity which, in the final reckoning, neglects the chance of the *Jetztzeit* and for that reason runs the risk of becoming "a tool of the ruling classes." However, it must be admitted that such a reading of Derrida would not be altogether fair and just — for, in *Specters of Marx*, we find Derrida already protesting against this type of charge:

> Permit me to recall very briefly that a certain deconstructive procedure, at least the one in which I thought I had to engage, consisted from the outset in putting into question the onto-theo- but also archeo-teleological concept of history — in Hegel, Marx, or even in the epochal thinking of Heidegger. Not in order to oppose it with an end of history or an anhistoricity, but, on the contrary, in order to show that this onto-theo-archeo-teleology locks up, neutralizes, and finally cancels historicity. It was then a matter of thinking another historicity — not a new history or still less a "new historicism," but another opening of event-ness as historicity that permitted one not to renounce, but on the contrary to open up access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic

15. For the French *attente sans horizon d'attente*, the English translation gives "awaiting without horizon of the wait" (65/111) and "a waiting without horizon of expectation" (168/267).

> and emancipatory promise as promise: as *promise* and not as onto-theological or teleo-eschatological program or design. (74–75/125–126)

In this way, as we have said, Derrida's willingness to combat a cancellation of historicity is patent: by his very effort to fight "onto-theo-archeo-teleology," he joins the ranks of thinkers of the Benjaminian mould. Nevertheless, our question persists and continues to haunt us: if we are to insist on the promise "as *promise*," and never on *any type* of "program or design," this surely reduces the strength of the promise itself. In this way, Derrida's abhorrence of anything that remotely looks like a dogma or, in more positive terms, a carefully formulated theory on the concrete ways in which the current situation can be radically changed, simply takes him too far, preventing his hauntology from achieving the fullness of its potential strength. Let us, finally, turn to Giorgio Agamben for a brief elucidation of these issues.

Strengthening Hauntology —Agamben and a Missed Rendez-vous

As the above-made remarks indicate, the crucial fault of Derrida's thinking seems to be the lack of an effective theory of subjectivity—such a theory would be the *tiny* addition required for the theory *really* to work the way intended by its author. And, as Giorgio Agamben demonstrates (in passing) in his book *The Time That Remains*, this is precisely what Derrida could have, and should have, learned from Marx—and, one might add, from Benjamin. Such a subjective element, Agamben suggests, could have been provided by revoking Marx's concept of class, which, as Derrida's above-quoted formulations more or less betray, is almost completely neglected in *Specters of Marx*. In this respect it is important to realize that Marx's concept of the proletariat is precisely that of a class beyond classes, a class which is no more a class in the traditional sense, a class which is more, or less, than a class. A class which plays, to use the term coined by Badiou and Jacques Rancière, "the part of no part" and has, *literally*, nothing to lose but its chains. It is quite clear that Derrida's idea of the new International, in all its indeterminacy, is by no means sufficient in this regard: however,

it should be admitted that it provides, at least, an outline which could be useful if developed further. What is missing, in this respect, is precisely the *properly messianic* stance towards time.

As Agamben explains, Marx quite purposefully adopts the word *Klasse*, derived from Latin, to name what previously had been re-ferred to as *Stand*, "estate" in the standard English translation.[16] The reason for this strategic change of terminology derives from the etymological resonance between *Klasse* and the Greek *klêsis*, which is the word used by Saint Paul to designate those who live under the heading of the "as not" (*hôs mê* in Greek; see e.g. 1 Cor. 7.29–32).[17] More explicitly, what is at issue here is the community of those who have been called upon to take up a vocation beyond any particular (pre-established) vocation – or, in other words, those who belong to the *Klasse* beyond any *Stand*. It should be noted that, as these re-marks imply, Agamben draws a direct parallel between the early community of Christians (*ekklêsia*) and Marx's idea of the proletariat.[18] To further demonstrate his point, Agamben quotes Marx's response to the question of the possibility of emancipation (in the occurrence, the emancipation of the German people) in the latter's *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Where should we look for emancipation according to Marx? The answer reads as follows:

> In the formulation of a class with *radical chains*, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no *particular right* because no *particular wrong*, but *wrong generally*, is perpetuated against it; which can invoke no *historical*, but only *human*, title; which does not stand in any one-sided antithesis to the consequences but in all-round antithesis to the premises of German statehood; a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the *complete loss* of man and hence can win itself only through the

16. See Giorgio Agamben, *The time that remains: A commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. by Patricia Dailey, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, 29.
17. Ibid., 23.
18. Ibid., 31.

> *complete re-winning of man*. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the *proletariat*.[19]

Now, the thrust of Agamben's argument is that when responding to the emancipatory promise contained in these words, we should take care not to be overly atheological. Messianic temporality, the thinking of the *Jetztzeit*, is what is needed to empower the Marxian heritage — at least in the present situation. This is the lesson we should learn from Benjamin — a lesson which, alas, Derrida seems to have missed. An indication, which does not fall far short of a proof, is provided by a footnote in *Specters of Marx* which is the only place in the book where Derrida shows an awareness of Benjamin's *Theses* — referred to, in the footnote, as "a text that interests us here for many reasons, in particular for what it says, at its beginning, about the automaton" (180/95n). Evoking a few passages from the text, Derrida, in the end, comments that

> [w]e should quote and reread here all these pages — which are dense, enigmatic, burning — up to the final allusion to the "chip" (shard, splinter: *Splitter*) that the messianic inscribes in the body of the at-present (*Jetztzeit*) and up to the "strait gate" for the passage of the Messiah, namely, every "second." (181/96n)

The straightforward reaction to these remarks is simply to exclaim "Yes, we (or, more accurately, *you*!) should have done that, we should have quoted and reread the *Theses*, especially here, in the context of the deconstructionist attempt to rework the legacy of Marx!" To reiterate, such an effort on Derrida's part would have resulted in a *more powerful*, and *more empowering*, version of hauntology — precisely through a more thorough and careful adoption of messianic elements. In this context, we may note how Agamben criticizes Derrida, implicitly, for *lack of faith* — for, according to the former, "[f]aith consists in being fully persuaded of the necessary unity of promise and realization."[20]

19. Karl Marx, *Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm, accessed 2 May 2008.
20. Agamben, *The time that remains*, 156.

Accordingly, Derrida proves to be unable to relate to what should really have been the major force of his line of thinking: what Agamben terms the *operational time* of messianic temporality. Thus, in his insistence on keeping the promise *as* promise, on keeping the promise "pure" and "intact," Derrida betrays his own predilection for suspecting purity. Hence, the openness of the thinking of the trace, of the thinking of *différance* which, as we know following Derrida himself, is inseparable from his later idea of justice,[21] becomes practically indiscernible from the historicism and conformism so recklessly torn to pieces by Benjamin in his *Theses*. The time of deconstruction, with its thoroughgoing predilection for the *indecidable*, becomes "homogeneous and empty," just like the time of historicism. Keeping Žižek's description of Christian love in mind, we could say that, in his overarching emphasis on *différance*, Derrida neglects to exercise the difference which is a necessary precondition of love. In accordance with all these charges, Agamben therefore seems quite justified when he mercilessly summarizes Derrida's thinking by saying that "[d]econstruction is a thwarted messianism, a suspension of the messianic."[22] Or, as Agamben writes, referring to the difference between chronological time (the time of historicism) and messianic, operational time (the time of historical materialism joined by messianism):

> Whereas our representation of chronological time, as the time *in which* we are, separates us from ourselves and transforms us into impotent spectators of ourselves — spectators who look at the time that flies without any time left, continually missing themselves — messianic time, an operational time in which we take hold of and achieve our representations of time, is the time *that* we ourselves are, and for this very reason, is the only real time, the only time we have.[23]

The final word, here and now, for the time being: let us have time, let us be haunted, let us address the ghosts — and inherit, as we can, in the

21. For the interrelation of these key terms of Derrida's oeuvre, I take the liberty of referring the reader to my book *La question de la justice chez Jacques Derrida*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007.
22. Agamben, *The time that remains*, 103.
23. Ibid., 68.

name of justice — upholding the promise *as promise* while keeping the faith in — and *concretely working towards* — its (possibly) imminent realization. And there will be a future for emancipation.[24]

24. Thanks are due to the following for helpful remarks and constructive criticism during the preparation of this paper: Sigrún Sigurdardóttir, Geir Sigurdsson, Hans Ruin, Ola Sigurdson, and Jayne Svenungsson. Thanks as well to all the participants at the colloquium on phenomenology and religion at Stockholm in May 2008. Needless to say, any shortcomings or misgivings in the text are the sole responsibility of the author.

Tradition and Transformation: Towards a Messianic Critique of Religion

JAYNE SVENUNGSSON

Anyone who has experienced the less-attractive sides of religious life and practice knows that the concept of tradition can be a powerful tool by which deviating ideas and convictions are efficiently quelled in order to uphold unanimity within the community. But also in the wider debate, as moral or social issues are discussed, proponents of different religious communities often underpin their arguments by pointing to tradition, to the "traditional" Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or other, view. An illustrative example is the present debate on same-sex marriages in Sweden, where representatives of all the major Christian churches have renounced the proposition that the term marriage should be extended to same-sex partnership. Although the details of the arguments vary, a common denominator is the recurrent reference to "the traditional" Christian notion of marriage, built on a complementary view of the sexes.

There are, however, also other voices present in the debate. Both laypeople and professional theologians have been arguing in the opposite direction, pointing at the complexity inherent in the notion of marriage, not to mention in our understanding of the sexes. Not unexpectedly, these voices are commonly refuted as "liberal" or even "depraved" by those people who claim to represent the traditional (or "classical") view. Behind this refutation lies, of course, the conviction that there is such a thing as a tradition that speaks with a univocal and timeless voice.

Interestingly, this conviction is shared — although for quite different purposes — by much of the populist critique of religion that presently is sweeping over Europe and North America. In order to demonstrate that religion is and remains by definition incommensurate with modern democratic ideals, authors such as Michel Onfray, Christopher

Hitchens, and Richard Dawkins convey an image of religious traditions as static and hopelessly archaic. Religion in general and the Biblical religions in particular are consequently portrayed as inherently anti-intellectual, misogynist, homophobic, and anthropocentric (posing an imminent threat to environmental consciousness). What is worthy of attention here is the way in which these authors deal with those expressions of religion that seemingly contradict their own hegemonic conception, e.g., the strong ecologist, feminist, or sexual orientation equality movements within all the major religious traditions. Michel Onfray offers a telling example in his scornful repudiation of those trying to articulate a moderate or feminist Islam, insinuating that they are, in fact, betraying true Islam (which by definition is anti-democratic and androcentric). Rather, Onfray argues, we have to read the texts on which the religions are based "historically" and not close our eyes to the violence and oppression that they actually encourage.[1]

This is, of course, an extremely naïve view, and a view which ironically brings Onfray close to fundamentalists within each of the Abrahamitic religions, who are generally keen on stressing the "historical" or "literal" reading of the texts as the authentic and traditional one. However, if we take a closer look at the tradition – I am in this case restricting myself to the Christian tradition with which I am most familiar, although I believe much of the same could also be said of Judaism and Islam – we will discover that what here is held to be a traditional view of the Scriptures is a thoroughly modern one, which can be traced back to seventeenth-century Biblicism. If we go back further in history, considering ancient and medieval hermeneutics, we will, on the contrary, find a developed sensitivity for the complex nature of religious texts and their different layers of meaning.[2]

Another striking example of the same problematics is offered by the question I referred to at the outset, the supposed traditional Christian

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1. Michel Onfray, *Traité d'athéologie. Physique de la métaphysique,* Paris: Grasset, 2005. See especially part IV, where Onfray explores what he terms "selective exploitation of the texts."

2. For a good overview of these hermeneutical developments in the Christian tradition, see Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1991.

view of marriage, in the name of which same-sex marriage is rejected. Once again, if we take into account the actual nature of the tradition, we will soon discover that there is no such thing as a timeless Christian view of marriage, and even less so of sexual difference. First, it is worthwhile reminding ourselves that in antiquity and in the Middle Ages the highest ideal of the Christian life was celibacy. Only with the Reformation was marriage elevated to a rank equal to, and henceforth regarded as an equal calling with, celibacy. Still, during this period, we do not yet find an appeal to the complementarity of the sexes when marriage is argued for; rather the arguments (e.g., for Luther) are of a pragmatic nature, regarding marriage as the most suitable calling for the majority, given man's lustful nature. The complementarity argument did not appear until the Enlightenment, when the idea of a fundamental difference (biological and social) between the sexes successively took shape. From this time on, the notion of the complementary qualities and roles of the sexes serves as a major component in the understanding of the meaning and purpose of marriage within many Christian contexts. And it is precisely this — highly contingent — notion of sexual difference which in the present debate is being superimposed onto Biblical texts (in particular the creation story in Genesis 2) written in a completely different cultural context and subsequently presented as the "traditional" view.[3]

In contrast to such a-historic notions of religious traditions — whether put forth by conservative forces within religion or by a certain kind of demagogic critique of religion — it will be the contention of this article that any serious discussion of religion has to admit that religious traditions, by their very nature, are dynamic and self-exceeding. Traditions, in other words, are evolving by being actively interpreted and reinterpreted by their adherents in every new time. This is where the notion of critique and self-critique comes into the picture. Precisely because traditions are the products of contingent choices by human individuals — individuals who always run the risk of confusing their own choices with God's will or commandment — they are in constant need of cri-

3. See further Jane Shaw, "Reformed and enlightened church," in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin, Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, 215–229.

tique. It is my conviction, however, that a pertinent and constructive critique of religion is most successfully achieved when undertaken from within the religious tradition itself. Such a critique from within could be carried out in various ways, drawing on the so-called prophetic vein present in the Biblical religious traditions.[4] In what follows, I shall highlight one aspect of this prophetic vein, i.e., the messianic motive. In line with Emmanuel Levinas' phenomenological reading of the messianic (or perhaps rather messianic reading of phenomenology), my aim is to outline what could be termed a messianic critique of religion.

The twofold idea of the messianic in Judaism

At first glance, it might seem somewhat remarkable to propose a messianic critique of religion. For many people, rather, "messianism" evokes precisely those expressions of religion that most urgently need to be criticized: fanatic Judgment Day sects proclaiming the imminent coming of the Redeemer, or charismatic figures even claiming to *be* the Redeemer. One might also come to think of evangelical Christians zealously supporting (equally zealous) Jewish settlers in the occupied territories of the West Bank, convinced they are thereby bringing nearer the second coming of Christ. Messianism within religion, in other words, seems to be linked to irrational convictions that tend to nourish violence and blind fanaticism.

That messianism carries with it a violent potential also becomes clear when one considers its secular counterparts in modern times — utopian political projects willing at any time to sacrifice the present in the name of some golden future. One could even pose the question of whether it is not precisely the messianic or apocalyptic element so deeply embedded in the religious heritage of the West that has ultimately given fuel to the totalitarian political movements of twentieth-century Europe. This question has been answered in the affirmative by a number of thinkers during the last century, perhaps most notably by Karl Löwith and Eric Voegelin.[5] Löwith's famous

4. Cf. Jayne Svenungsson, "Transcending tradition: Towards a critical theology of the Spirit," *Studia Theologica*, 62:1, 2008, 63–79.
5. See Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History. The Theological Implications of the Philosophy*

secularization thesis — partly taken up by Voegelin — suggests that the utopian political ideologies of Western modernity could ultimately be seen as the secular outcome of the apocalyptic impulse of the Jewish and Christian theological heritages. The utopian dream of the perfect society, the pure race, etc., characteristic of totalitarian movements, are in other words nothing but previous eschatological goals turned inwards, towards history itself.

From this perspective one could, of course, rightly question the critical potential of the messianic idea. There are, however, other, more constructive interpretations of the significance of the messianic idea in the Western tradition, interpretations presented at about the same time as those of Löwith and Voegelin, but which nevertheless stand in clear contrast to them. I am referring in particular to the analyses of Ernst Bloch and Jacob Taubes.[6] Rather than drawing a direct link from messianism to the violent ideologies of the twentieth century, these authors detect in the messianic idea the key to the revolutionary dynamic present in Western history in the positive sense. If what ultimately characterizes totalitarianism in its various shapes is its desire to make everything present, proclaiming heaven on earth, as it were, genuine messianism teaches us, rather, that there is always more to history, more to hope and strive for, and thus urges us never to grow complacent with the present state of affairs. Messianism, in this light, appears more like the counter-force to dangerous utopias, which is the exact opposite of what Löwith and Voegelin claim.

How, then, is it possible to interpret the messianic idea in such diametrically opposed ways? The answer is certainly to be found in the ambiguity inherent in the very phenomenon itself. In one of the most influential analyses of messianism in modern times, Gershom Scholem's famous essay "Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism," a distinction is made between the apocalyptic and

of History, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949, and Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952.

6. See Ernst Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985 (1935), and Jacob Taubes, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, Bern: A. Francke, 1947. Still other names could be added, e.g., Franz Rosenzweig and Walter Benjamin; see further Pierre Bouretz, *Témoins du future. Philosophie et messianisme*, Paris: Gallimard, 2003.

rationalistic tendencies within Jewish messianism. Pointing at the experience of the exile as the soil out of which the messianic idea grows in the first place, Scholem links the origins of messianism to apocalypticism — to the urgent longing for redemption from suffering to manifest itself at any moment. There is thus an essential link between the sense of loss of historical reality and the acute expectation of a different world order to be established, which is why Scholem also states: "Jewish Messianism is in its origins and by its nature . . . a theory of catastrophe."[7] This "theory" has survived throughout Jewish history, time and again inciting radical apocalyptic and utopian currents particularly deeply rooted in popular forms of Judaism.

In order to understand the more rationalistic tendency within Jewish messianism, it is important to recognize the anarchic element present in these apocalyptic currents. By proclaiming the radical novelty of the messianic times due to begin, apocalypticism creates a momentous tension with the rabbinic world of *Halakhah* — the tradition of continuous preservation and development of Jewish law. The response from those who throughout history have felt repulsed by the anarchic and sometimes violent expressions of apocalyptic messianism has thus been to stress the restorative rather than the utopian element of the messianic idea. This rationalistic tendency is paradigmatically expressed in the strongly anti-apocalyptic interpretation of messianism undertaken by Maimonides in the twelfth century. In Maimonides' comments, the restorative element — understood as the re-establishment of a Davidic kingdom in which the Jewish people could finally live in peace — is pushed into the foreground, whereas the utopian element is reduced to a minimum: the prophetic promise of an expanded, universal knowledge of God. Maimonides accordingly knows nothing of messianic signs or miracles and makes it quite clear that neither the law of moral order (revealed in the Torah), nor the law of natural order should be abrogated with the inauguration of the messianic age.[8]

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7. Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, New York: Schocken Books, 1971, 7.

8. Ibid., 24–33. See also René Lévy, "Le messianisme de Maïmonide," in *Cahiers d'études Lévinassiennes, n° 4: Messianisme*, 2005, 151–176.

It would, against the backdrop of Scholem's distinction, indeed be possible to conclude that it is the apocalyptic tendency that is at the root of the utopian and sometimes violent potential that messianism contains, whereas the rabbinic, rationalistic counter-tendency alone offers a conception of the messianic which could be used for the critical purposes which Bloch and Taubes, among others, point out. This would, however, be too hastily drawn a conclusion. Above all, as Scholem stresses, it is important not to overlook that it is precisely the apocalyptic form of messianism that in times of gloom and oppression has offered the Jewish people hope and strength to resist. It is thus rather within apocalyptic messianism that one finds the source of the driving force beyond the messianic critique — i.e., the recognition of something truly transcendent in the name of which the present state of affairs is contested — while, on the contrary, a too rationalistic account of the messianic, stressing the restorative element, risks becoming purely conservative, caught in a paralyzing nostalgia for the past.

Still, as a number of examples throughout history remind us, apocalyptic messianic movements tend to run amok when cut loose from the sober halakhic tradition. One could thus conclude — in line with Scholem's own conclusion — that a critical messianism in the full sense of the word lives and thrives in the very tension between the restorative and the utopian, between past and future, between memory and hope. It is also important to note that both elements are distinctly present in the rabbinic literature. Discussing an apocalyptic and a rationalistic tendency respectively is thus a matter of where one places emphasis, rather than of pointing out two mutually exclusive veins within Jewish messianism.[9] Even a thinker such as Emmanuel Levinas, who explicitly places his commentaries on messianism in the rational-

9. This aspect is too often overlooked in contemporary discussions of messianism. An example is the way in which Fredric Jameson pits "the apocalyptic" (exemplified by Francis Fukuyama's pronouncement of the end of history) against "the messianic" (linked to Jacques Derrida's critical re-reading of Marx), failing not only to do justice to Derrida's more sensitive reading of the messianic, but also to acknowledge the apocalyptic as an essential part of messianism itself. See Fredric Jameson, "Marx's purloined letter," in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's "Specters of Marx,"* ed. Michael Sprinker, London: Verso, 1999, 63–64.

istic tradition,[10] clearly develops his thought in the tension between both tendencies, as I shall attempt to demonstrate in what follows.

The phenomenology of the messianic

In one of Levinas' most famous comments on the messianic — one of the few that appear in his phenomenological works — he states:

> Truth requires both an infinite time and a time it will be able to seal, a completed time. The completion of time is not death, but messianic time, where the perpetual is converted into eternal. Messianic triumph is the pure triumph; it is secured against the revenge of evil whose return the infinite time does not prohibit.[11]

Taking these words as a point of departure for a discussion of the messianic in the thought of Levinas, one might well ask whether he actually remains faithful to the rationalistic, Maimonidian tradition in which he inscribes himself.[12] Does not this confident announcement of the messianic triumph rather evoke the utopian impulse characteristic of apocalyptic messianism? If one transfers the question to a more philosophical level — more precisely to the post-Husserlian phenomenological tradition within which Levinas is working — one can equally ask whether he remains true to his own phenomenological premises.[13] In other words, does not the announcement of a completed time

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10. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme*, third edition, Paris: Albin Michel, 1976 (1963), Le Livre de Poche: 95–96, n. 1. English translation: *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990, 59, n. 1.
11. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'exteriorité*, La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961, Le Livre de Poche: 317; English translation: *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Eteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969, 284–285.
12. Cf. note 10 above.
13. Cf. Fabio Ciaramelli, "Un temps achevé? Questions critiques à propos du messianique chez Lévinas," in *Cahiers d'études Lévinassiennes, n° 4: Messianisme*, 2005, 11-19. The wider question of Levinas's relationship to phenomenology has been extensively debated over the years; for an introduction to this discussion, see Janicaud, Dominique, et al., *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French*

betray the dream of total presence, of a final closure of time where all desires are fulfilled and the subject enjoys unmediated self-presence?

Still, those who are familiar with the thought of Levinas know that all of this runs counter to the very nerve of his philosophy: the indisputable priority of alterity, of the other. As a matter of fact, Levinas' entire philosophical enterprise could well be summarized as an attempt to establish *subjectivity* in a different way, breaking with the dominant Odyssean conception of Western philosophy.[14] Whether in Neo-Platonic, Hegelian, or Husserlian shape, the characteristic of this conception of the subject is that it ultimately comes from itself (unity, identity) and returns to itself. Levinas, however, strongly contests that there is any such original safe haven from which the subject departs and to which it returns. The Garden of Eden, to use a more Hebraic metaphor, contains inherent tensions already in its original design. Accordingly, the very presence of the other reveals the possibility to betray—ultimately, to kill. Yet this very possibility simultaneously evokes another possibility, the possibility of responding to the commandment inscribed in the other's face: "Thou shalt not kill." In other words, the very possibility of annihilating the other calls the subject to the responsibility *not* to do so, and it is precisely this responsibility that makes us human in the full sense in the first place. Expressed in more philosophical terminology, this is to say that from the very beginning, alterity is inscribed in the self; it is part of the very constitution of subjectivity. In phenomenological terms, Levinas' aim is accordingly nothing less than to divulge a more original level of the transcendental self, a pre-reflexive, pre-intentional level where the self appears in the accusative, as pure passivity—as called to responsibility.[15]

Defining subjectivity in terms of pre-reflexive, pre-intentional responsibility is to suggest that subjectivity is intrinsically bound to a specific kind of temporality. This brings us back to the initial question of whether Levinas, in the quoted comment on messianic time, does

Debate, trans. Bernard G. Prusak, et al., New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

14. This becomes clear in his late essay "Philosophie et transcendance" (1989), see Emmanuel Levinas, *Altérité et transcendance*, Paris: Fata Morgana, 1995, Le Livre de Poche: 27–56.

15. Levinas, *Altérité et transcendance*, 29–47.

not betray the phenomenological conception of the self as perpetually mediated, as never entirely present to itself. I believe the answer to this question is no, and that the key lies precisely in the sense Levinas ascribes to *messianic time*. Before I develop my argument further, it is worthwhile considering the lines that follow the already quoted words: "Is this eternity a new structure of time, or an extreme vigilance of the messianic consciousness? The problem exceeds the bounds of this book."[16]

Levinas might well be right, in that we do not find an answer to this problem within the present work — which is that of *Totality and Infinity*, one of his two major phenomenological works. If we turn to his Talmudic, Jewish works — especially the "Messianic Texts" of *Difficult Liberty* — some interesting light is shed on the problem, however. Already at the outset of these commentaries, Levinas makes it clear that messianism, in the sense that he ascribes to the concept, has little to do with belief in a person who will appear one day and miraculously put an end to the violent structures that inhere in this world.[17] This is a good indication that messianic time, as Levinas understands it, should neither be confused with the mythological idea of a different eon of eternal peace that will suddenly appear, nor with the philosophical concept of identity or unity, of a state where difference and deferral are overcome.

How, then, are we to understand messianism, and in what lies its critical potential? Levinas' answer, developed in close dialogue with a number of Talmudic passages, suggests that it is first and foremost a matter of our existence here and now, of *subjectivity* and *temporality*: "Messianism is . . . not the certainty of the coming of a man who stops History. It is my power to bear the suffering of all. It is the moment when I recognize this power and my universal responsibility."[18]

The statement, which is made in connection to a rabbinic commentary on the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.4, suggests that the mes-

16. Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, 318; Eng. trans., 285.

17. Levinas, *Difficile liberté*, 95; Eng. trans., 59. It is worthwhile to notice that these commentaries are written at about the same time (1960–61) as *Totality and Infinity* is accomplished.

18. Levinas, *Difficile liberté*, 139; Eng. trans., 90.

sianic is to be situated in the very innermost being of the singular subject. Levinas even goes so far as to claim that each self is the Messiah, in the sense that it is summoned to be the righteous servant who takes upon himself the suffering of the other. And it is precisely this status of being called to responsibility for the one who suffers that defines human subjectivity as such; thus we recognize the phenomenological argument referred to above.

Still, one can ask whether the messianic subjectivity Levinas seeks to elaborate upon does not run the risk of winding up at the opposite end of what he is aiming for. In other words, does not the subject's "power" to bear the suffering of the other run the risk of being perverted into power *over* the other, the power of paternalism, where compassion is merely an expression for a hidden desire to gain control over the other? This critique, I believe, is possible to launch only if one neglects the crucial role temporality plays in Levinas' argument. It should thus be emphasized that the responsibility that Levinas situates at the heart of subjectivity is a responsibility placed on me *before* every conscious engagement or vow — even preceding self-consciousness. It is, in other words, a responsibility for an *immemorial past*; for that which was never my fault, never even in my power to influence, but which nonetheless concerns me.

Levinas is hinting at the tensions inherent in human existence, pointing to the fact that my very presence in the world, the very *Da* of my *Dasein*, always already implies usurpation, the risk of occupying the place of another who is driven into exile into some "third" or "fourth" world. This picture of the human predicament would indeed be a pessimistic or even cynical one, had it not been for its correlate in a *prophetic future*, equally beyond the grasp of subjective intentionality. Thus, Levinas argues, the call to responsibility for an immemorial past ultimately derives from a prophetic future, which is to say that the responsibility to which I am called is carried out not only as commemoration of the victims of the past, but also as constant faithfulness to a prophetic promise.[19]

Against this backdrop, we can finally begin to decipher the full sense of "eternity" or "messianic time" in the thought of Levinas. It is an

19. Levinas, *Altérité et transcendance*, 49–56.

announcement of a temporality that does not allow the subject to be judged merely in relation to its present historical situation; rather, the subject is at any moment ready for *absolute* judgment. In this respect it is, as Pierre Bouretz argues in his monumental study *Témoins du Future*, possible to place Levinas in a significant line of Jewish thinkers in the twentieth century, whose common denominator is that they all turned against the idealistic notion of history itself as the ultimate court of universal judgment. Among these thinkers, Franz Rosenzweig was perhaps the one who most clearly saw the potential danger in Hegel's immanent theodicy, according to which — in principle — anything could be justified in terms of its actual success on the stage of history. If there is nothing beyond the immediate historical horizon, then in what name do we question this horizon when it becomes perverted?[20]

Rosenzweig, as well as Benjamin, Bloch, and Levinas, thus seek a vision that allows for the possibility of something beyond the immediate historical experience, and in different ways they all find such a vision in the Jewish messianic heritage. Messianism, in other words, points to a sort of *transcendence* in relation to the apparent logic of the events of this world — and thus to the possibility to judge rather than be judged by history. It should be made clear, however, that the transcendence referred to in this context has little to do with invoking a divinely revealed Law or announcing the disruption of history by a sudden apocalyptic event. Rather, we come back once more to the distinction between the restorative and utopian elements within Jewish messianism, where the critical potential of messianism lies precisely in the tension between the two elements. Accordingly, transcendence — as the term is used notably by Levinas — is first and foremost defined in terms of temporality: the continuous disruption of the present by, on the one hand, an immemorial past to which we

20. See Pierre Bouretz, *Témoins du future*, op. cit. Cf. Also Stéphane Mosès, *L'ange de l'histoire: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, second edition, Paris: Gallimard, 2006 (1992). This critique of Hegel, articulated predominately by Jewish thinkers, can, of course, be challenged. See e.g,. Jean-Luc Nancy's inspiring reading of Hegel as a thinker driven by the "restlessness of the negative": *Hegel: L'inquiétude du négative*, Paris: Hachette, 1997. I am grateful to Björn Thorsteinsson for bringing this text to my attention.

are called to respond, and, on the other hand, by a prophetic future which we cannot foresee, but which nevertheless calls us to responsibility for the yet unborn.

Messianism, as a critical philosophy, amounts precisely to this constructive restlessness — a way of thought which does not lead us to any promised land and which refuses the grandiose utopias of the last century, but which nonetheless, as Daniel Epstein remarks, could be qualified as a certain form of *utopism*: "Utopism would then not designate a new ideology, a new land of abundance where milk and honey flow, but rather the impossibility for each and everyone to shut oneself up in one's shell, '*de demeurer chez-soi*'."[21]

Towards a messianic concept of tradition

Let me finally outline in what sense I believe this critical messianism can contribute to the contemporary debate on religion. As I pointed out at the outset of this article, this debate has serious shortcomings, in that it tends to be dominated by simplistic conceptions of what religious traditions are — whether put forth by populist critics of religion such as Richard Dawkins or Michel Onfray, or by conservative or fundamentalist voices within religion. Common to both of these factions is a desire to uphold an image of tradition as static and hegemonic. Furthermore, both develop their argument by way of a certain dialectics between the present and the past. Accordingly, a selective and often a-historic reconstruction of the past — what is held to be "traditional" — serves as justification for a restricted and exclusive definition of the present content of religion.

This abuse of tradition, where the notion is used to suppress complexity and deviating convictions within the tradition, is of course nothing new. A quick glance at the history of the Christian tradition, for example, reminds us that it, to a significant extent, has been the history of *orthodoxy* being opposed to *heterodoxy* or *heresy* — divergent interpretations, whose advocates over the course of history have been condemned, excommunicated, persecuted, tortured, or even executed.

21. Daniel Epstein, "Contre l'utopie, pour l'utopisme," in *Cahiers d'études Lévinassiennes, nº 4: Messianisme*, 2005, 102 (my trans.).

Until very recently, even secular historiography has, to a large degree, continued to tell the victor's version of this tale, ignoring the fact that those other voices — the mystics, the prophets, or popular movements such as the Cathars — were most often expressions of healthy reactions of the dispossessed layers of society against an all too wealthy and powerful Church. In the past four or five decades, however, an important shift in focus in these matters has taken place. A good example is the intense research that is currently being done on the Cathars. Formerly depicted as violent troublemakers, heretic movements influenced by oriental dualist ideas, the history of the Cathars is currently being uncovered as the history of simple village people who strived to live according to what they believed to be a more authentic interpretation of the Christian Gospel, closer to the ideals of poverty and charity that they found expressed in the Gospel narratives, but which they believed were betrayed in the power and wealth of the present Roman Catholic Church.[22]

These important shifts in historiography can be seen against the background of more general developments in Western post-war thought, where significant changes have taken place in the way in which we regard our historical past; changes which have entailed a new attentiveness to formerly unheard voices and perspectives.[23] Against this background — against these decades of refined critical thought — it is even more remarkable to observe the turn that much of the European and partly North American debate on religion and religious traditions has recently taken. The problem with this turn resides not only in the way in which it correlates the present and the past in order to maintain the status quo with regard to contemporary religious belief and practice (thus quelling the plurality and ambiguity which actually

22. For a good overview of the present research on the Cathars, see Anne Brenon, *Le choix hérétique. Dissidence chrétienne dans l'Europe médiévale*, Cahors: La Louve éditions, 2006. Cf. also Robert I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950–1250*, second edition., Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007 (1987).

23. I am referring, in particular, to the groundbreaking works of Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau and the significant research that has been done in the wake of these authors.

characterize living traditions).[24] There is also a problematic correlation between the past and the future, between the claims that are made upon the historical past, upon our common traditions and memories, and the future we are to expect. To use more concrete terms, I believe the inclination towards exclusive or reductive constructions of our historical past has its correlate in visions of the future which tend to be just as exclusive and one-dimensional – be it in the form of quasi-religious visions of a renewed Christian Europe as heard in certain factions within the contemporary debate on European identity, or in ultra-secularist dreams of a society purified from religion.[25]

It is in contrast to such utopian visions, and the hegemonic account of religious traditions that they presuppose, that I wish to propose a messianic notion of tradition in line with Levinas' reflections on messianic time referred to above. More precisely, this would imply regarding traditions as inclined to *transcendence* in the temporal sense which Levinas ascribes to the concept. A tradition is thus continuously defined as being temporally open to otherness; to a historical past which will always to some extent escape us, as well as to a prophetic future, which is equally out of our grasp, but which nonetheless calls us in the form of a promise to fulfill.

Considering the historical aspect, let us recall that Levinas' announcement of a messianic time in several respects can be seen as an endeavor – in the wake of Rosenzweig – to break free from an idealistic view of history. The problem with this view, which to a high degree has influenced modern Western historiography, is among others its tendency to replace the multiple voices within history with the one overarching version presented as History. Being temporally open to the past in a critical way, however, implies being suspicious both of the very endeavor to grasp History (or Tradition) in any essential way, and of the belief that there exists such a thing as History (or Tradition) in the singular. In other words, confronting our historical past means

24. Cf. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.
25. See further Jayne Svenungsson, "Europa, das Christentum und die Säkularisierung," *Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F.V.S. Netzwerk Magazin*, http://www.toepferfvs.de/netzwerk-magazin.html, accessed 15 October 2005.

confronting, in a significant way, our own finitude by recognizing that the past always remains ungraspable to a certain extent; that no matter how thorough and meticulous our studies are, we will always gain only a selective picture and one which is colored to a considerable degree by our own imaginations and expectations. Thus, in the thought-provoking words of Rowan Williams: "Good history makes us think again about the definition of things we thought we understood pretty well, because it engages not just with what is familiar but with what is strange. It recognizes that 'the past is a foreign country' as well as being *our* past."[26]

On the other hand, this recognition must not prevent us from being attentive to the plurality of the past. Thus, an important aspect of taking responsibility for the past in a critical way is the struggle to restore formerly unheard voices and let these voices challenge and alter our image of the Tradition. The aforementioned research on the Cathars—enabled by the recent availability of the Inquisition reports since the opening of the Vatican archives—once again offers a good example, not to mention the significant historical research that is currently being undertaken from feminist and queer perspectives.[27]

This work of uncovering the vast plurality of the past within the tradition makes it at once more difficult to justify a narrow and one-dimensional conception of the tradition in its present state. Rather, it teaches us that traditions—religious or other—always exist in the plural, in the present time as well as in the past. Against this backdrop, cultivating the heritage of a tradition would thus be less a matter of disclosing and preserving an authentic truth or core hidden beyond the manifold layers of history, and more about actively responding to the various forms of alterity that constantly infringe upon the limits of the tradition. A tradition, in other words, survives and thrives by continuously reinterpreting and renegotiating its limits through the

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26. Williams, Rowan, *Why Study the Past: The Quest for the Historical Church*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005, 1.
27. See e.g., Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Sexuality, Philosophy and Gender*, Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, and the excellent collection of historical essays edited by Gerard Loughlin in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, op. cit.

encounter with what is *other* — in the past as well as in the present; but equally, within, as well as outside of, the tradition (although it is not always obvious where this line should be drawn). Considering the latter aspect, I believe the new multi-religious situation, which the extensive migration the recent decades has brought about, not only offers unique possibilities for, but also necessarily calls for, this kind of critical renegotiation of the limits of each singular tradition. However, in order for this to be achieved in a constructive way, it is important to underline that such renegotiation not only entails the challenge of recognizing oneself in the other (and the other in oneself), but also of discovering and respecting what is essentially other in the other tradition.

Let me finally touch upon the futural aspect of Levinas' messianic argument. This aspect, I believe, reminds us that religious traditions always exist, in a certain way, on *promissory* notes. In other words, it reminds us that a tradition does not consist of a completed set of truths and convictions to preserve and guard, but rather of a promise to respond to continuously. Such a perspective has important implications for what claims we make in the name of the tradition — as well as for how we make these claims. To state that a tradition lives on promissory notes is to admit that even though we intend the perfect and infinite with our claims, most of the time they deliver the finite. This is precisely, as I pointed out at the outset of this article, why traditions are constantly in need of critique and self-critique — affirming the distance between the finitude of the present and the infinite promise that is embedded in the idea or vision towards which the tradition strives.[28]

Furthermore, there lies in this perspective an important ethical dimension, which brings us back to Levinas' refusal to accept the idealistic notion of history itself as the ultimate court of universal judgment. Stating that a tradition lives on promissory notes accordingly implies never giving in to the idea that our convictions and the

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28. Cf. John D. Caputo, "Temporal transcendence: The very idea of *à venir* in Derrida," in *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Fordham University Press, 2007, 188–203.

acts which we draw from them could ever be justified merely by way of their seeming success or failure in a larger historical (or eschatological) perspective. The history of religion — not least of all Christianity — knows too many examples of this dangerous logic, emblematically expressed in the commandment of the papal legate Arnauld Amaury at the arrival in Béziers — an important nest of resistance for the Cathars — in 1209: “Kill them all — the Lord will recognize His own” (in the end, about 20,000 men, women, and children were slaughtered). Contrary to this logic, the messianic conception of history emphasizes that each moment of history contains its own judgement; that in each moment we are called to respond to the prophetic command for justice. Thus, in Levinas’ perhaps most famous words on the messianic: “Man can do what he must do; he can master the hostile forces of history by helping to bring about a messianic reign, a reign of justice foretold by the prophets. The waiting for the Messiah marks the very duration of time.”[29]

29. Levinas, *Difficile liberté*, 50; Eng. trans., 26.

Beyond? Horizon, Immanence, and Transcendence[1]

ARNE GRØN

Religion: Beyond

”Lord, help us to see beyond what we see.” This prayer was uttered by a South African ex-convict, in the moment of seeking, almost without hope, some sort of reconciliation with his own family, his closest relatives whom he had not only let down but horrified and terrified almost beyond imagination. When I heard these words, some years ago, watching a BBC-program, they struck me as telling something crucial about what religion is about. Yet, even if they do this, the question is not left unaffected by the answer.

What is religion about? It seems to go without saying that religion is about "beyond": something beyond, a world beyond, or even *the* Beyond. Apparently, this is also the answer we get from the prayer invoking a "beyond." But if we have a second look at the opening sentence, it does not simply point to something beyond. Rather, the prayer indicates a movement: *seeing beyond* what we see. Even if it does not perform this movement, but hopes for it, the prayer is about a *movement* beyond. This movement is paradoxical, and it is so in terms

1. As I do not mention phenomenology in this article, let me briefly indicate how it relates to the question in the title of the conference: "Phenomenology and Religion: New Frontiers." The article is not *about* phenomenology but is an exercise *in* phenomenology. It is about religion, or even about what religion is about. It argues that an answer to the question of what religion is about requires an indirect approach that both re-opens the question and shows the problematic character of the key notions of transcendence and immanence. This indirect approach is phenomenological and hermeneutical. The article can be taken as an argument for the claim that phenomenology must be hermeneutical.

of addressees: "we" are the ones to see beyond, but beyond what we see. The movement beyond points back to us seeing.

If we take this lead, religion is not just about a "beyond" or the "beyond." Rather, it is about seeing beyond, that is: seeing differently in the radical sense of being transformed. Seeing has to do with being. This means that religion, in invoking a beyond, is about how humans see the world in relating to the world as the world in which they live their lives. The further implication is that religion is about how humans take themselves in relating to their world. How then should we understand this: "seeing beyond what we see"? What is religion about? How is it about what it is about? Anticipating what I am going to argue for, I'll suggest the following answer: Religion is about a self-transformation which humans themselves cannot bring about, although it can only come about through what *they* do: through their ways of seeing and relating. What would that mean in terms of "beyond"? Or, rephrasing the question in terms of addressees: what would *we* see if we came to see beyond what we see? If we would qualify this in terms of something beyond, the question follows: beyond what? Beyond is itself qualified by *seeing what we see*.

Before moving on let us look once more at the question: what is religion about? It is difficult not only to find an answer to the question, but also to see what an answer would amount to (despite the fact that this is what approaches to religion have tried to offer). We cannot do justice to the varieties of religion[2] by simply or directly stating what religion is about. We might even question that religion is "about" something. There is something impossible about the question itself. How would it make sense to deal with religion in asking what it is about? Religion itself does not deal with something in the same way theory does. Even though religious traditions can put forward doctrines, these seem to be part of human ways of "taking the world" which makes it difficult to say what it is all about. It is about "all": the world, or rather ways of relating to the world. Thus, we can give at least two kinds of reason for the counter claim that religion is not "about" something. First, religion is not theory, but practice in a deep

2. I use "religion" in the definite-indefinite form in order to explore possibilities more or less attached to religions.

sense: it is about "taking the world." Second, it is not about "something," because it is about what it is "all about." In a sense there is too much "about" in order to specify what religion is about. The two kinds of reason seem to go in opposite directions: human practice and infinite totality. Yet, if practice is how we "take the world," and if religion is about this "taking the world," the second point can be qualified in terms of an infinity which encompasses and at the same time goes beyond human affairs. This leads us back to the question of "beyond." Although there is something impossible about the question what religion is about, the problems we face tell something about religion. Religion is reflective in the sense that people taking themselves to see the world from a religious point of view can talk about what this means, and they do so in terms of "beyond." They do claim to have an idea of what religion is all about.

Asking what religion is about is to look for what makes it into religion. If we ask what religion as religion is about, we face the question of beyond. If we seek to capture philosophically what religion is about, the notion of transcendence seems to lend itself to an answer: religion is about transcendence. But transcendence implies immanence; it is transcendence in relation to immanence. Thus, the difference between immanence and transcendence seems to offer itself as a clue for a philosophical approach to religion. It seems to capture what religion itself claims when talking about "beyond."

As obvious as this approach might appear, it turns out to be problematic. If the difference between immanence and transcendence is to serve as some sort of answer to the question about what religion as religion is about, it opens up questions that make the answer all but obvious. The difference itself is philosophically enigmatic. If transcendence is transcendence *in relation to* immanence, how is it *transcendence*? What does immanence mean if it can be turned into some sort of sphere (either *vis-à-vis* transcendence or excluding transcendence) or some sort of option (either transcendence or immanence)?

Already in reflecting on the character of the question about what religion is about, we are engaged in a philosophical inquiry. Yet, a philosophical approach to religion can also prevent us from asking questions that need to be asked. This happens when it turns itself into something natural telling what there is to religion, in claiming, for

example, that religion simply is human projection or social construction. The notions of transcendence and immanence have gone into our ways of dealing with religion so that we tend to take them for granted. Religion has come to be preconceived in terms of transcendence. We may think we capture what religion is about when we use this notion without asking the questions that the problematic character of this approach invites us to ask. We do not actually see what religion is about, but we think we know, because we all know that it is about transcendence and what this means.

How then should we begin a philosophical inquiry? Precisely by reflecting on how the difference between immanence and transcendence is philosophically enigmatic.[3] This opens up questions of transcendence and immanence in terms of horizon, experience, interpretation, passivity, and selfhood. In following this line of argument it is my aim to show how a philosophical approach to religion can be fruitful in understanding religion as a human concern, and that in dealing with religion we are challenged to rethink philosophical key notions and insights.[4]

Transcendence and Immanence

Talking about transcendence only seems to be another way of talking about beyond. Transcendence is what is beyond, or transcendence is the movement beyond. Immanence then is implied already in talking about beyond. It is what makes it possible to talk about beyond. Immanence is that which beyond is beyond.

Talking about immanence and transcendence, however, seems to suggest that we have two spheres. This can be taken in terms of two worlds: this world and a world beyond, an otherworldly world. But if beyond is a world beyond this world in which we ask about what is beyond, it reproduces that which it is beyond: it is this world made

3. I have addressed this enigmatic character in, e.g., "Subjectivity and Transcendence: Problems and Perspectives," in *Subjectivity and Transcendence*, eds. Arne Grøn, Iben Damgaard, and Søren Overgaard, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007, 9–36.
4. Cf. my "Religion as a Philosophical Challenge," *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalsskrift* 2002, 134–139.

perfect thereby pointing back to this world as not being what it should be. Taken in this way, so-called transcendence does not give genuine transcendence. This is a critical point in Hegel's way of reformulating metaphysics. Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics as duplicating this world and placing the truth elsewhere, in another world, opens up for the attempt of re-appropriating this world, thereby calling for transcendence in order to affirm this world as immanence.

The point, however, can be put in a more critical manner. If immanence and transcendence were (as it were) two worlds, then the question would be: where are we in choosing between immanence and transcendence? If the answer is: in this world, of course, the very possibility of having immanence and transcendence before us belongs to our being in this world. Immanence then is where the question of transcendence can show up. But this does not turn immanence into transcendence. On the contrary, it points to a critical feature of our being in this world: as the condition on which we can talk about transcendence.

In order to see this more clearly let us go back to the opening sentence: "seeing beyond what we see". As noted from the beginning this is paradoxical. We are the ones to see beyond what we see. This is impossible because we cannot see beyond what we see. Why not? Precisely because we are the ones seeing: in seeing we carry ourselves with us. This is captured by the notion that our ways of seeing are bound by our horizon. We are finite beings.

Could we then specify immanence in terms of horizon so that immanence is what is within our horizon? The implication seems to be that immanence is the sphere of what we know or understand or think. We are "in" immanence in being within our horizon, which is the limit of what we know or can know. Transcendence then is what is beyond our horizon. Would that not be to qualify "beyond" in terms of our seeing? What does it mean to see and to understand within a horizon?

Horizon: Finitude

If we are standing on a beach, looking out at the open sea, it is as if our vision reaches out indefinitely. We know that this is not so.

Something can come up on the horizon that we did not see before. We know that there are limits to what we see. We are seeing within a horizon.

Metaphorically speaking, we can look out into a future that is more or less open. As we always see within a horizon, we live within a horizon. Suddenly something comes up "on the horizon." Something happens to us which opens up new possibilities, or changes what we took to be our possibilities.

What does this mean: "within" our horizon? Horizon means that there are limits to what we see and experience, but something also comes up "on" the horizon, even possibilities of changing our lives. Still, we are seeing and living within a horizon. We understand the world within a horizon: taking the world to be . . . . What can come up on the horizon depends on where we stand and in which direction we look. Horizon has to do with the history we embody, what we carry along, and the way we do so. Our ways of relating are embodied. In relating, we are ourselves situated. Thus, our horizon is an index of our finitude.

Yet, our horizon is also more or less open. Something unexpected can happen. This is precisely part of our finitude. Although we look into the future, we cannot foresee what will come. At least, we will have to wait and see whether it will be as we expect. We will have to experience what happens. The finitude implied in talking about horizon has to do with the fact that we do not know what will come up within our horizon. We can expect and anticipate, but still it is a matter of experiencing what comes up.

How then should we understand this: "within" our horizon? If horizon is taken in terms of what we expect, it appears to be a horizon of familiarity. But if what I have just said is right, what is within our horizon is not simply familiar to us. Rather, the question is whether what comes up "on the horizon" *will be* familiar to us. The question of familiarity itself can arise or come up *within* our horizon. It might even happen that what we thought was familiar to us turns out not to be so. Familiarity can be questioned. We can come to ask ourselves: do we actually understand what we think we understand? Things can change so dramatically that what we thought we understood appears to be beyond understanding.

Horizon thus has a peculiar double nature. It is both limiting and opening. These are not two distinct features. Rather, the distinctive feature of our horizon of finitude is precisely how the two go together: a horizon opens in limiting. The fact that there is something more to come (limiting what we now see) opens up experience. Furthermore, the horizon itself is open in the sense that it is not simply a horizon of expectations that turns the unknown into something known. Rather, our expectations themselves might be changed. Horizon is open in the strong sense that it is itself at stake in our history.

What we encounter then is not simply within our horizon. When we try to make sense of what happens to us, we do not simply move within our own interpretations. Rather, there is a slip between encounter and interpretation that can open up or even question our ways of interpreting. Not that we have two distinct phases: encounter and interpretation. Rather, interpretation itself is an open process in the sense that we not only *come to* understand, but also can come to ask whether we *actually* understand what we encounter — or what we thought we understood. Thus, experience is not simply interpreted, but a matter of interpretation. When something happens to us or maybe even within us, we might have a hard time trying to come to terms with it. Again, horizon is not simply a sphere of familiarity — rather it is a question of familiarity. If we will maintain the idea that we see and understand within a horizon, something happens or takes place "within" our horizon. Horizon implies a history in which it, itself, can change.

This also means that we do not simply move within a horizon. As we move, our horizon follows us. If we come to see the world differently, not just in the sense that we come to hold different views or opinions about the world, but in the sense of our being transformed, ourselves, in our ways of relating to the world, our horizon is changed. This does not mean that we change our horizon. Rather, our horizon being changed reflects that we have changed.

If our horizon reflects our ways of understanding the world, it seems to be not only horizon in the sense of where something can come up, but also how we take that which comes up. I will return to this distinction in a moment. In order to understand the character of our horizon of understanding, it is important to see that *what* we encounter

cannot be reduced to how we take it. Even when we would tell ourselves: "Oh, this is just . . . " (for example, this is just how things are), taking it to be this (this is just) implies that it is more: it is *that which* we take just to be . . . .

Understanding the world does not take the world as an object. The world is not an object next to others, even if this were another world. Rather, it is the world within which we understand that which we are dealing with. Yet, it is possible to speak about experiencing the world. There are different layers to this. A "deep" experience is where the world itself stands out. What I have in mind is not so much situations where something does not work and familiarity in dealing with the world seems to be broken[5] or situations where one in anxiety becomes aware of one's being in the world.[6] Rather, it is where we come to face ourselves as interpreting the world. What happens to us, what comes up "on the horizon," can affect us in our ways of orienting ourselves in the world so that we cannot contain it within our world. There are human experiences that we only can articulate by saying that the world of the one affected has broken down. What does this show? Our world does not just break down — rather it "stands out" in situations where we cannot contain what we experience within our world. This tells us something not only about marginal situations. Rather, it shows that our ways of understanding the world are accompanied by the possibility of losing orientation. To put it differently, our experiences can question our ways of understanding the world so that in our understanding the question can come up whether we can contain within our world that which affects us. Horizon is here turned into a question: how can a loss of familiarity with the world take place within a horizon as our "take on the world"? There must be some sort of minimal grasp or take on the world, maybe a grasp of the world as the world losing its familiarity or breaking down.

The question of horizon harbors the question of subjectivity. We are ourselves implied in seeing and understanding: as the ones seeing and understanding. Therefore we cannot just see and understand differently

5. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, [1927], Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1971, §16.
6. Cf. Ibid., §40.

from how we do. That there is a horizon to our seeing and understanding has to do with this. Our horizon can change—because we are ourselves implied in our ways of seeing others and the world. What we experience can affect us in ways that make us see differently, and yet, we are the ones seeing. We do not just decide to see differently from how we actually see, just as we do not move our own horizon.

In which sense then is our horizon ours? We are the ones to experience what comes up. We might be surprised or overwhelmed by what we encounter. If our horizon is defined as a horizon of expectations, what comes up might be unexpected. And it might change the way *we* see things coming up within our horizon. That is, it might change our horizon. Our horizon then is itself at stake within our horizon. Horizon, as index of our finitude, is reflective, not in the sense that it is a matter of reflection. Rather, we are ourselves being reflected in relating to our world. If our horizon reflects our ways of understanding the world, it seems to be not only horizon in the sense of where something can come up, but also how we take that which comes up.

What I have said—and in particular the claim that horizon is at stake within our horizon—suggests that we should make a distinction between horizon as opening a field of vision and understanding where something can come up, and horizon as our ways of taking the world. Let me explain:

1. When we are standing on a beach looking out at the open sea, the horizon seems to be out there. What is in between is our field of vision or experience. When something comes up "on the horizon," it is within our *field* of vision. We can see it, yet we might not understand what it is: we are still to see and understand. If we then take horizon in terms of time and understanding, something not only comes up in the field in between: something takes place. What comes up, might affect us. It can even affect us in our ways of seeing and understanding the world. Horizon in this first sense opens up a history in which we ourselves can take part, and in which our ways of understanding can be changed. We can still describe this as a field in which something takes place that we are to see and to understand, but in seeing and understanding we are ourselves involved in a history.

2. Horizon as horizon of understanding implies that we do not simply understand what comes up. We only understand in having a

pre-understanding of what we are to understand. This condition of understanding can be taken in terms of *framework*. This already seems to be implied when we consider the opening example of standing on the beach: What can come up on the horizon depends on where we are standing and in which direction we look, and this depends on the history which we carry along. Horizon in this second sense concerns our ways of understanding the world or our "take" on the world: how we take that which comes up. It is horizon in this second sense that is at stake in horizon in the first sense.

If we are to take understanding in terms of horizon, it is important to make sense of the question: do we understand what we encounter "within" our framework? If our framework determines the ways in which we take that which we encounter, "within" our horizon means that what we encounter is already taken within our framework of understanding. But this taking within presupposes that what we take has come up "on the horizon" (in the first sense as our field of experience).

"Within" our horizon we encounter other horizons (in the second sense). We are facing other ways (the ways of others) of seeing and understanding the world we see. We are not just within our ways of seeing the world, but in relating to others we can come to see that we see the world differently — from others. Yet, we do not have other horizons "within" our own. Rather, we encounter the peculiar character of horizon: limiting and opening. In relating to others, our own ways of understanding are reflected. Horizon is not a limit that we can approach and maybe go beyond. Going beyond would take a horizon, and yet, we are not just within our horizon. Horizon is both opening (we are not just within, but have our horizon in relation to others) and limiting (we carry our horizon in our ways of relating).

Time, Passivity, and Selfhood

The peculiar character of horizon implies that there is passivity and alterity involved in "having" a horizon. If we seek to explain immanence in terms of horizon, immanence itself is turned into a question. Let us look more closely at the passivity in question — in order to understand the paradox implied in "seeing beyond what we see": we are the ones to see beyond what *we* see.

We do not move our horizon. As we move, it follows us. Yet, our horizon can change as we change. This indicates that we do not have horizon without time. Is horizon in time, or is time itself horizon? Understanding seems to take time as horizon. In order to understand what happens to us, we project possibilities into the future and in so doing we carry our past with us: the past in which we have come to see and understand as we do. But time also affects us in what we are: being ourselves the ones seeing and understanding and seeking to come to terms with what happens to us.

In time we change. Changing is an undergoing, and yet it has to do with our ways of relating and doing. Is it then something that we do: change? This of course depends on what it means that *we* change. We can change a lot, if possibilities are offered: position, for example. Although we can more or less identify ourselves with what we change, this does not mean that we change. That we change requires that our ways of seeing, understanding, thinking, living are changed. We are changed *in* seeing, understanding, thinking, and living. That is, we come to understand and to take ourselves differently. We can decide to change in this way, and we can do a lot in order to change, but whether we actually will do so (as we decide), we will have to wait and see. If we do, we *come to* see and think differently. How we are what we are, ourselves, is a matter of how we relate to the world, to others and in this relating to ourselves, yet in a crucial sense we will have to experience ourselves.

Still, in the course of time we can change our situation and even our life. In projecting ourselves into the future, we can transcend what we already are in terms of our past. However, if we follow Sartre[7] and take our transcending in time as what makes us human, we encounter this as a "fact" of freedom (we are doomed to be free). As humans we do not make what makes us human.

If we understand transcendence as our transcending in time, this movement of transcendence implies a passivity, which we tend to overlook. First, in transcending ourselves, we are involved as the ones a-changing. If this movement that we perform is going to change us, it requires an undergoing: it requires that *we* change. Second, it is only

7. Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, Paris: Gallimard, [1943] 1977.

possible to transcend ourselves in time because time already affects and changes us. That is, in transcending we are ourselves transcended.

This makes it even more manifest that we do not have a horizon without time. Yet, we do not need to turn time itself into a horizon. Rather, time has to do with *how horizon is horizon*. We are "in" time in the sense that time already moves and affects us in our being ourselves: in our relating to the world, to others and to ourselves. This means that we are never simply within a horizon. Time already enters our horizon as field of vision. Horizon in this first sense is finite and open in that something can come up on the horizon which we did not see before. Furthermore, we are still to see what it is that we see: we are still to understand what we encounter.

I have argued that horizon does not encircle or delimit a sphere of immanence. Rather it opens up a field of vision and understanding in which our ways of seeing and understanding can be challenged and changed. Humans can even lose the sense of the world as their world. This critical feature of horizon — that our ways of understanding the world are at stake — points back to time and history. Being "in" time does not amount to a kind of immanence. Rather, time comes to us:[8] it happens to us and affects us in what we are. Time changes us — without us changing ourselves, and yet, it changes us *in* our relating, doing, and thinking: we change. We are ourselves in time, relating to time, and yet, in time we escape ourselves.

Before again turning to religion and the question of selfhood implied in "seeing beyond what we see," let us briefly reconsider horizon as a question of immanence and transcendence.

Horizon: In-finity

Horizon does not simply imply immanence; rather it opens the question of immanence. It is difficult to account for the peculiar character of horizon (limiting and opening, and opening a field of understanding in which understanding can be questioned and changed) without a notion of transcendence. If time has to do with

8. This is brought out both in Kierkegaard (Danish: *det til-kommende*) and in Heidegger (*Zu-kunft*).

how horizon is horizon, we can ask whether our understanding of the world does not take the form of a double in-finite movement: a transcendence of time in time.[9]

The movement of immanence is also a movement *towards* immanence. This can be seen in Nietzsche. In order to affirm this world as immanence transcendence is required. But there is more to it. The question of horizon and transcendence can be raised from within, taking our point of departure in Nietzsche's critique of the metaphysics of two worlds. The radical significance of the death of God is measured in terms of horizon: as our horizon of orientation disappearing. We are facing "Horizontlosigkeit." Yet, this loss of horizon is in itself something that happens to us. It opens up the world as a world of infinite interpretations. The death of God means that interpretations are set free. This "event" can be seen as an opening of horizon. Thus, the paragraph preceding § 125 on the death of God in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* bears the title: "Im Horizont des Unendlichen." The event of setting interpretations of the world free does not mean that we now set the stage. On the contrary, we are not just looking out at the open sea: we are ourselves situated at the open sea, in the horizon of the infinite. This is frightening. Not only because we now have to project ourselves anew, but also because we are situated in a world of an infinity of perspectives. The world is not just open for our interpretations; it also escapes us as infinitely interpretable. This infinity is not so much infinite possibilities at our disposal as an infinity that imposes itself upon us, overwhelms us, and makes us without ground, travelling in life at the open sea (as we do also according to Kierkegaard). Thus, transcendence takes place in the horizon of the infinite imposing itself upon us. The fact that we cannot escape interpreting the world does not turn the world into our interpretation. On the contrary, as a world of interpretations it escapes us.[10]

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9. For this suggestion, cf. my "Zeit und Transcendenz," in *Der Sinn der Zeit*, eds. Emil Angehrn, et al., Weilerswist: Velbrück, 2002, 40–52, discussing Michael Theunissen, *Pindar. Menschenlos und Wende der Zeit*, München: C.H. Beck, 2000.

10. To this all too brief section cf. my "Jenseits? Nietzsches Religionskritik Revisited," *Nietzsche-Studien* 34, 2005, 375–408, and "Im Horizont des Unendlichen. Religionskritik nach Nietzsche," in *Kritik der Religion*, eds. Ingolf U. Dalferth and Hans-Peter Grosshans, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006, 145–162.

Religion: Beyond Ourselves?

Let us now return to our opening sentence: "Lord, help us to see beyond what we see." Why "help us"? As we are the ones seeing, why do we not just see differently, as we wish, if we wish? Imagine someone responding: "You are the one seeing. If you want to see differently, just do it!" Why not? Because selfhood means that we are selves in what we are doing and undergoing. Embodiment is serious. We cannot just see the world in one way and then in another. Of course, we can imagine what it would be like to see the world in another way. We can play with ways of seeing the world. But imagining seeing is not actually seeing, that is: embodying our way of seeing the world. In imagining we can make efforts to see for ourselves what is implied in seeing the world differently. The implication of these implications however would be to live a life in facing or bearing the implications. Actually seeing the world in this way would also imply that if we wanted to escape the implications we would then be the ones escaping.

That is why the opening sentence is paradoxical: we cannot see otherwise than we do. Something must happen to us if we are to come to see differently. The crucial point implied in the paradoxical character of seeing beyond what we see can be put in terms of horizon: we cannot see beyond what we see because we ourselves carry our horizon with us. If we imagine what it would be like to see the world differently, from a different perspective, we can make the effort to enter into a new horizon, but in doing so we bring our own perspective along. We can only go beyond our own horizon in taking it with us: it is also the horizon of our transcending our horizon. However, in this movement our horizon might change.[11] Imagining other ways of seeing the world can affect the way we see the world. But we do not ourselves decide how it in fact affects us. Even though our way of seeing the world is reflective, we cannot enter into a position in which we are in control

11. Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of fusion of horizons (cf. *Wahrheit und Methode*, [1960], Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1975, 289f) reflects that we are not simply within our horizon, but that we "within" our horizon encounter horizons foreign to us, and that there is a history of horizon: fusion of horizons happens to us. However, the question is whether this should be described in terms of *fusions* of horizon.

of the way we see the world. Our horizon escapes us precisely because it is a matter of how we ourselves see the world.

When reading the opening sentence the question is not only: why "help us"? There is also a second question: "seeing beyond what we see"—could this not just be a matter of time? This would make the paradoxical character disappear: what "we" wish for, namely to see beyond what we see, is a future possibility. We cannot now see beyond what we—now—see, but then—in some future—we shall come to see beyond what we now see. In a sense, this is in fact so. The prayer is about *coming to* see differently. Yet, it not only invokes a future possibility. The prayer is about being transformed *as* the one now seeing.

But there is more to it. Implied is not only the impossibility in principle—here and now—to see beyond what we see. The situation in which the prayer was uttered is one of mutual deadlock. "We" are people (the South African ex-convict and members of his family) seeing each others in ways in which they themselves are caught. They are precisely not seeing the world, others, and themselves in the same way. In the prayer a common "we" is invoked, which is only to be hoped for (if it is), but which also seems to be beyond repair. One might even get an uneasy sense that the one uttering the prayer seeks to make the others see differently, others who have good reasons for not doing so.

What makes the prayer "seeing beyond what we see" paradoxical, then, is not only that it is impossible, in principle, for us actually to see otherwise than how we in fact see, because we are the ones seeing. It is also the context in which the ones seeing are locked up in their ways of seeing. To see beyond what "we" see would mean not to be at this deadlock. But what is it to be at a deadlock in the sense that one is locked up in one's way of seeing others, the world, and oneself? We *are* locked, we suffer from being so, but we are locked up *in* our ways of seeing. We have not only been locked up, due to what has happened to us (so that we have been "made" locked up), we have also locked up ourselves. Not in the sense that we have decided to do so, but in responding to what has happened to us. And we keep or maintain ourselves in this state, in seeing others, the world, and ourselves as we

do.[12] "We" in the prayer refers to people being locked up in seeing *each other*.

Thus, in the intricate relation of seeing and being, passivity and activity are intertwined in complex ways. It is a matter of selfhood: passivity and activity are ways of being a self, oneself. Although we are the ones seeing as we do, there is passivity in our seeing. Not only in the sense that seeing implies being affected. There is also passivity in being the one seeing. We cannot just see differently. We see as we do, "with ourselves," as the selves we are. Passivity in self-relating implies an undergoing. This becomes clear when we come to see differently. What it means to see the world as we do (that it appears to us in this way) is something we ourselves have to bear. We do so in our ways of relating.

In seeking to understand what religion is about this strange passivity in our relating can come into the foreground. Religion is about "our take" on the world: how *we* see the world and how we can and should *come to see* the world differently and thereby change. In the optics of religion, the question of selfhood in self-transformation is intensified. We cannot simply change ourselves because we are who we are. If we are to change, *we* are to change, that is, to change our lives and ways of seeing the world. But this self-transformation is only possible "despite oneself." It takes time and it takes "oneself": patience and will. Religion is about self-transformation which humans themselves cannot just bring about, although it can only come about through what *they* do: through their ways of seeing and relating. Religion can bring this passivity in our relating to the world into the foreground because it directs our eyes towards experiences of being overwhelmed and being transcended ourselves.

Is religion just "about" self-transformation? Is it not about a "beyond the self"? Indeed. That is why it can be about self-transformation "despite oneself." Religion invokes a beyond the world of

12. That we are in this sense "making ourselves unfree," also in keeping ourselves in a state of ignorance or blindness, is a key point in Kierkegaard's redefinition of sin (cf. esp. *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Concept of Anxiety,* and *The Sickness unto Death*). It is in particular to be seen in his notion of self-inclosing reserve [*Indesluttethed*] in contrast to inwardness or interiority [*Inderlighed*].

humans, but in doing so it deals with this world (even when it calls for some sort of denial of this world). Religion can be about changing the world, but in changing how humans relate to the world, placing this change under the command: begin with thyself! Transforming the world not only must, but should, begin somewhere, with oneself seeing the world. Of course this does not exclude that religion can be turned into some sort of instrument to make others change and to leave oneself unaffected. As a human concern, religion is human, all too human.

When we talk about self-transformation it is easy to imagine a scene where we stage ourselves. Religion can of course be used as means to self-transformation, but it also offers possibilities of reflecting on the implications and problems implied in self-transformation. If self-transformation is something we ourselves perform, on a stage as it were, we are not really ourselves transformed. Self-transformation is not simply about transforming oneself, but about becoming oneself transformed: in one's ways of doing, seeing, and understanding. This passivity of selfhood is in a sense what religion is "about," although not in the sense that it conceptualizes this. Rather it articulates human experiences and ways of seeing that can bring forms of passivity of the self into our focus. This might challenge us to be sceptical about what we are doing when we promote ideas of self-transformation.

Conceptualizing

In concluding, let us consider the question implied in what I have said: what happens when we move from religion speaking of beyond to philosophy speaking about transcendence? It seems to go without saying that in making this move we capture what religion is (about). But what happens, then, is that we conceptualize religion in such a way that we take ourselves to be saying what religion is: it is talk about transcendence. This influences how we deal with religion. It is placed in a sphere of its own (although religion is about "all"). Even when we seek to modify this picture in speaking of some sort of religious immanence, we still think in terms of a schematic and manageable difference between transcendence and immanence.

Yet, what is the meaning of conceptualizing philosophically? What

does a philosophical approach do to religion? What is the link between religion and philosophy in philosophy *of* religion? Conceptualizing originates in an awareness of a problem we encounter. Taking our point of departure in the opening sentence, we face the problem: how is it possible for us as humans to invoke a beyond that is beyond ourselves? Where are we — in doing so? Conceptualizing is already at work in turning the problems we face in understanding into an explicit question: what is religion? Religion is conceptualized in the moment it is a problem for us. Formulating the question is in itself to address the problems we have in understanding what we call religion. The "is" in the question ("What is religion?") gathers problems each of which can be formulated as a question unfolding the implications of the question: what is religion? But if we take conceptualizing as an answer that captures what religion is, something is changed. "Is" in the answer then does not hold different questions together, as it does in the question.[13]

What does all this amount to? I think we should revise what we take philosophical conceptualization to do. In using the concept of transcendence we do not simply capture what religion is (religion is about transcendence). Rather, the point in conceptualizing philosophically is *to capture the questions* implied in talking about beyond (as in seeing beyond what we see). This can be done in terms of horizon, time, passivity, and selfhood (as in this article). In dealing with religion the philosophical challenge is to unfold the questions we face as humans.

When we try to capture what religion is about in terms of transcendence and immanence, these concepts themselves turn out to be problematic. "Beyond" in our example indicates a movement of seeing beyond which points back to us: as the ones to see beyond ourselves. But the problems we encounter when using the concepts of transcendence and immanence are illuminating. They can help us to articulate our awareness of the problems we as humans face in understanding our world and ourselves. Reflecting on the enigmatic difference be-

13. To put it differently, when we take ourselves to be *saying* what religion is, the question is: is this what we are *showing*? How do we let religion appear in our ways of dealing with religion? In conceptualizing, how do we "let be seen" (*sehen lassen*, to use Heidegger's phrase, cf. *Sein und Zeit*, 32f) what we think we conceptualize?

tween immanence and transcendence thus offers a fruitful approach to religion. We need the notions of immanence and transcendence as problematic notions. Philosophy of religion should not be a philosophy (e.g., of horizon) being applied to religion (as a sphere or region of its own), but philosophy being challenged by religion as a human concern.[14]

14. Thanks to Claudia Welz for comments on an earlier draft of this paper. This study was funded by The Danish National Research Foundation.

On Immensity

MARCIA SÁ CAVALCANTE SCHUBACK

All things swept sole away
This — is immensity [1]
Emily Dickinson

1. *Introduction*

The relation between phenomenology and religion can be discussed following different paths and in distinct manners. Considering the history of the "phenomenological movement" grounded by Edmund Husserl, one may refer to various attempts to develop a phenomenology *of* religion, in which the principal aim is to investigate in its transparency the phenomenon of religion or religion's phenomenality, beyond pure subjective and objective views, beyond empirical and intellectualist positions, beyond psychological and logical prejudices. Such attempts aim to liberate religion from philosophical and theological views in order to recover the meaning of religiosity as lived experience. Another way of approaching this relation is to discuss phenomenology *and* religion by considering them as two realms of human experience where one can clarify and offer critical views towards the other. In this sense, the title "phenomenology and religion" would represent a renewed debate about the relation between reason and faith on the basis of the phenomenological critique of modern rationality and its naïve ontological basis. Both directions of investigation are important and necessary considering the historical conditions of our contemporary claim for such a questioning. However, it seems to me that whichever position we may take when discussing this relation, it is necessary to

1. Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, Boston/Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1960, poem1512, 635.

clarify the "hermeneutical situation" and thereby clarify from which position in the cosmos contemporary man addresses such questions.

The "position of contemporary man in the cosmos"[2] can be described as the position of an immeasurable human power over being and life. A main feature of the global technological era is the conviction that human power has immeasurable capabilities for "producing" being and life. I would like to qualify this position as "modern," even if the term "modernity" can be considered surpassed in some aspects. If new attempts to describe contemporary society prefer to insist on it as "post-modern"[3] or even "alter-modern"[4] it is still in a decisive reference to "modernity" that these terms are described. The modernity of this position lies in a conviction about humans' immeasurable power over being and life. But how can this immeasurable power be defined? In a lecture held in 1938, Heidegger described it as the conquest of the world as an image or a picture [*Bild*] of a representational production.[5] Heidegger centers his critique of modern rationality on the way modern man assumes this "position in the cosmos," referring to Scheler's well-known book. Modern man's position in the cosmos is a *position of power* through which the world becomes the image of representational production [*vorstellenden Herrstellen*]. This position of power does not mean, however, that man transforms the whole of reality into an image of his own rationality and "worldview." It is rather a paradoxical position in which man becomes the slave to his own power and freedom. This happens when the position of human

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2. The expression "man's position in the cosmos" will be used here evoking Max Scheler's book *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, Bern/München: Francke Verlag, 1983.

3. See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*, Paris: Ed. Minuit, 1979.

4. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

5. "*Der Grundvorgang der Neuzeit ist die Eroberung der Welt als Bild. Das Wort Bild bedeutet jetzt: das Gebild des vorstellenden Herrstellens*." Martin Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes," in *Holzwege*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950/1980. This lecture was held 9 June 1938 with the title "Die Begründung des neuzeitlichen Weltbildes durch die Metaphysik" in the form of a seminar organized by the Society for Art, Natural Sciences, and Medicine in Freiburg in Breisgau.

power reaches a gigantism of power that recovers the sum of all levels and realms of existence. That is why Heidegger affirms, in this same lecture, that "*ein Zeichen für diesen Vorgang ist, daß überall und in den verschiedesten Gestalten und Verkleidungen das Riesenhafte zur Erscheinung kommt.*"[6] The fundamental event of modernity, the event of human power over being by which man becomes a slave to his own power and freedom – i.e., the conquest of the world as image – appears when hugeness, gigantism becomes manifest. Hugeness, gigantism becomes manifest in relation to both the infinitely big and the infinitely small, in the conquest of galaxies and of atoms. Heidegger insists that, as a sign of the fundamental event of modern man's position in the cosmos, this hugeness and gigantism, this *Riesenhaft* shall not be understood as merely the empty quantitative nor as the striving towards producing anew and anew that which has never existed before. Gigantic hugeness is not simply a sign of the striving after infinite production and exploitation of all possible fields and realms of existence; it appears where quantity becomes quality and thereby an outstanding kind of greatness.[7] If every historical era has its concept of greatness [*Größe*], modernity, in the large sense of modern rationality that includes its "post-" and "alter-modern" features, defines greatness as gigantic hugeness, transforming quantity into the quality of every possible quality. This means, however, that the calculable becomes incalculable, control becomes uncontrollable, and every image of human power is followed by what can be called the shadow of the incalculable and uncontrollable. Heidegger refers to this shadow as an "invisible" shadow, indicating how difficult it is to the see in the modern position of man in the cosmos, the uncontrollable and incalculable of his global control and calculation over the cosmos. Showing itself through the sign of gigantic hugeness, the "time of the world-image" [*die Zeit des Weltbildes*] describes more than ever our to-day. Our time is a time of worldwide hugeness. Gigantic hugeness can be assumed as sign of our "hermeneutical situation": too much information, too much knowledge, too many images and signs. Our hermeneutical situation can be further described as the difficulty to see given the modern position of

6. Heidegger op.cit., 92.
7. Ibid.

man in the cosmos, the "invisible shadow" of the uncontrollable and incalculable of his global control and calculation over the cosmos. This "invisible shadow" refers to a "too big," to a "beyond measures." It indicates the "unmeasured power" and the paradox of being controlled by one's own power. Too big, gigantic hugeness, and measures mean paradoxically beyond measures, beyond calculation and control. They refer to the paradox of human and worldly measures beyond worldly and human measures. They touch on questions about infinity and immensity. They further touch on the problem concerning what usually is called "mystery" and the question of a beyond this world. We encounter here a central issue concerning the relation between philosophy and religion, namely, the question of a "beyond" the world and man and of a world and God beyond.

From rational points of view, religion is considered an escape from the world, appearing as enchanted alienation. Philosophy appears, in its turn, as an escape from alienation, as a disenchanting enlightenment of the world. Although in opposite senses, both religion and philosophy are, usually, understood as a "moving beyond." Religion is presented as a claim for moving beyond the world towards a world beyond, and philosophy as a demand of moving beyond the world towards a truer world. It is as a moving beyond that Husserl, at the end of his *Cartesian Meditations*, assumed phenomenology as the task of thinking beyond worldly appearances in order to win back, through "*Selbstbesinnung*," (self meditation) the phenomenon of the world as appearing.[8] In this sense, we should admit that this simple particle, the "beyond" in the expressions "beyond the world" and "world beyond" shows itself as a common "source" for those, in several aspects, quite opposite experiences called "phenomenology" and "religion." However, what is challenging is not merely to describe the phenomenological meaning of the particle "beyond" but its central issue, namely, the "world." Thus, it is from the world that a beyond the world and a world beyond can be evoked. We re-encounter here the phenomenologically challenging question of how to grasp the world as world, that

8. "Mas muß erst die Welt durch *epokhé* verlieren, um sie in universaler Selbstbesinnung wiederzugewinnen, *Noli foras ire*, sagt Augustin, *in te redi, in interiore homine habitat veritas,*" in Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Hua VI, 183.

is, in its worldliness. To address this question in very radical ways and to extend it to its most foundational problems can be considered one of the most important contributions of phenomenology to the history of modern Western philosophy. To this central question, phenomenology has showed that the world as world, the world in its worldliness, cannot be grasped as worldly things can be grasped, either as corporeal or mental things. The "world" means, further, a whole that neither can be grasped as a sum of existent things. The world appears as a whole that is more than and beyond the sum of its parts yet does not exist apart from the parts. Being beyond but not apart, the world appears as a strange *beyond-within* and not as a beyond outside. As beyond-within, the "world as such" brings to stake the experience of a "beyond" worldly things, beyond boundaries and measures being nevertheless within, not apart, not outside. This beyond boundaries and measures of things of the world reveals the world as experience of a worldly "too big." If religion is to be assumed as a movement beyond the world it should then mean that it moves beyond the beyond-within of the world, being strangely a beyond the beyond measures, and in this sense a beyond the too big of the world. In this sense, a clarification of possible meanings of a "world beyond" as a common motive of different religious experiences should depart from the experience of the too-big of the world. I would therefore argue for a provisory suspension of the vocabulary of transcendence and immanence, comprehensibility and incomprehensibility, knowable and unknowable in order to bring to a focus the experience of the world as experience of the too big, that is, of a *beyond-within* measures, boundaries, limits, of the world's immensity. My proposal here is to show that departing from the question about the "immensity of world" we may find a common ground to discuss the relation between phenomenology and religion. My central claim is, therefore, that through re-addressing the question about the phenomenality of the world in its immensity, possible or impossible that encounters between phenomenology and religion can find a new basis. Doing so, it becomes possible to bring phenomenology and religion to a previous state, to a *before* phenomenology and a *before* religion rather than to an after phenomenology and an after religion. This *be-fore* shall not be understood in *chronological* terms as inquiry about ages of history that precede the advent

of philosophy and religion in different civilizations. This before shall be understood in *aspectual* terms such as inquiry about the dispositions, feelings, and attitudes that move human existence towards phenomenology (here understood as the *pathos* of philosophy itself) and towards religion. This be-fore is the point of view of the *awakening* of a certain feeling and attitude that precedes the distinction between phenomenology and religion. My claim is that we should depart from the experience of the awakening of such a previous feeling in order to develop the question proposed in this volume.

2. Phenomenology, Religion and the "Oceanic Feeling of the World"

How should we approach the experience of the too big of the world? It is not based on a previous knowledge nor on a simple awareness of the world. Rather, it is based on a *feeling* of the world, a *Weltgefühl*, to use an expression of Eugen Fink. The "feeling of the world" touches on the difficult question about the *cosmic experience of the world*. That is why, Fink wrote in some notes dated from 1931, that "in the threefold problematic of cosmology (Ontic, Eidetic, Cosmology), the interpretation of a world-feeling, *Weltgefühl*, plays a very central role."[9] In another manuscript, Fink defines the expression *Weltgefühl* stressing that it has nothing to do with an affective relation to something that exists in *front of* a subject or is given *to* a subject. It is rather closed to what Heidegger discussed as "attunement."[10] In Fink's own words, "The world-feeling is not a relation in the way of a distancing, an

9. Eugen Fink, *Phänomenologische Werkstatt*. Teilband 1: Die Doktorarbeit und erste Assistenzjahre bei Husserl, ed. Ronald Bruzina, Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2006, 416. Zu "Weltgefühl ," cf. Z-XIV II/2b, VI/Ia, VIII/1a, 10a-b and XIV/2a in EFGA 3,2 and also Z-XIX II/4b amd Z- XXII 32 in EFGA 3.3. Fink criticizes the use of this concept in the Philosophy of Life (Z-XII 4c (EFGA 3.2).
10. As Ronald Bruzina, the editor of the above-mentioned volume of Fink's *Gesamtausgabe* remarked, we can find a related expression in Georg Misch, *Lebensphilosophie und Phänomenologie* (Berlin: 1938), 308, based on his readings of Wilhelm Dilthey: "So enthält das Pathos der Diesseitigkeit [. . .] seine Ergänzung in einem stimmungsmäßigen, Gemütsverhalten' zur Welt, wo dann schließlich die Religiön eine Stelle haben kann [. . .]," 417.

Abständigkeit, but in the way of a *sich Hinaushalten über alles Seiende*, a suspending beyond all beings in the unlimited wideness of the world, being a relation to indeterminacy, a diverging intentionality, an 'oceanic feeling.'"[11] The feeling of the world is an *oceanic feeling*, says Fink, using the well-known expression of Romain Rolland that Freud discussed in the introductory paragraphs of "*das Unbehagen in der Kultur*."[12] "Oceanic feeling" defines for Romain Rolland the source of religious conviction and consists of a "sensation of eternity, as of something limitless, unbounded, as it were 'oceanic.' This feeling [. . .] is a pure subjective fact, not an article of faith."[13] "Oceanic feeling" describes for Rolland on the one hand the feeling of the limitless, unbounded, immensity of the world as *source* of religion and what precedes religion as an article of faith and, on the other hand, the feeling of an indissoluble bond, of "oneness with the universe."[14] This feeling is oceanic

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11. "Das 'Weltgefühl' ist kein Verhalten-zu im Modus der *Abständigkeit*, kein Verhalten zu einem Gegenüber, sondern ein sich *Hinaushalten über alles Seiende* in die grenzenlose Weite der Welt, ein Verhalten zum Unbestimmten, eine divergierende Intentionalität, ein 'ozeanisches Gefühl.' Das Weltgefühl als *ständiges*, wenn auch unausdrückliches, Grundverhalten des Menschen. (Vgl. Heidegger Lehre von der 'Transzendenz.')," Fink, op. cit., 417.

12. Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur, und andere kulturtheoretische Schriften,* Frankfurt am Main, Fischer-Tasch-Verlag, 1994; *Civilisation and its Discontents*, trans. J. Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1975. Freud discusses critically Romain Rolland's expression. Responding to the letter of Romain Rolland from 5 December 1927, Freud writes: "My dear Friend,Your letter of December 5, 1927, containing your remarks about a feeling you describe as 'oceanic' has left me no peace. It happens that in a new work which lies before me still uncompleted I am making a starting point of this remark; I mention this 'oceanic' feeling and am trying to interpret it from the point of view of our psychology. The essay moves on to other subjects, deals with happiness, civilization and the sense of guilt; I don't mention your name but nevertheless drop a hint that points toward you. And now I am beset with doubts whether I am justified in using your private remark for publication in this way. I would not be surprised if this were to be contrary to your wishes, and if it is, even in the slightest degree, I should certainly refrain from using it. My essay could be given another introduction without any loss; perhaps it is altogether not indispensable."

13. This is the way Freud understood Rolland's definition of this expression. Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, op. cit., 64–65.

14. Freud criticizes Rolland saying that this feeling is rather an intellectual percep-

because in articulating *limitlessness* and *oneness with the universe* it encounters what we can call the *immensity* of the world. It is this encounter with the articulation of limitlessness and oneness with the universe which we are calling "immensity" that Eugen Fink defines as the before, as the "source," of philosophical inquiry. This encounter is, as he insists, the very "*Ergriffenheit des Philosophen*," the being grasped and seized of the philosopher by the immensity of the world This encounter brings the philosopher to face the all of Being and to confer to his philosophical question the wideness of the cosmological question about the world.[15]

Describing the feeling of the world as an "oceanic feeling," a "diverging intentionality," and further as "*Ergriffenheit des Philosophen*," Fink refers to a *certain way* of experiencing the worldliness of the world. This way corresponds tothe experience of the world as being "beyond" — mental and corporeal things not being apart from them — and being a whole "beyond" the sum of the parts. As an oceanic feeling, the feeling of the world reveals the beyond-within of the world and contains the distinct sense of the idea of universal horizon that orients Husserl's phenomenology of the world. According to Fink, the possibility to grasp the meaning of the oceanic feeling of the immensity of the world as the "source" of phenomenology is based on a critique of Husserl's phenomenological description of the world. The core of this critique is the attempt made my Fink, to develop a cosmological perspective to the phenomenological description of the world.

3. The Immensity of the World under the Light of Fink's Cosmological Critique of Husserl's Concept of World

Husserl's idea of phenomenology is essentially connected to the huge and difficult task of a systematic analysis and description of the world

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tion followed by a sentimental tone. He suspects the claim that this feeling can be assumed as *fons et origo* of every necessity of religion, ibid.

15. Fink, op.cit. "'Das "Weltgefühl' als Ergriffenheit des Philosophen, weil er so vor das Ganze des Seienden gebracht seiner Frage die Weite der Weltfrage geben kann," 417.

in its way of givenness.[16] The starting point is a "destruction," as Heidegger would call it, of the natural attitude in which the world appears as external world to a worldless consciousness. The belief of the being in itself of things and of consciousness is radically questioned in the phenomenological admission that "*Gegenstände sind für mich und sind für mich was sie sind, nur als Gegenstände wirklichen und möglichen Bewusstseins*."[17] This means that the world gives itself with worldly things not giving itself as a worldly thing. The non-givenness of the world as a thing gives itself in the various ways things in the world are given to us. This means that in each intentional experience several other possibilities of presentation are being co-given. The co-giveness of the world as world in the givenness of things as things was described by Husserl as an experience of horizon. According to Husserl, the world appears as world in three fundamental senses and can be characterized correspondently in three decisive features: the world appears as a substantial encompassing unity, constituting a universal field or horizon. "*Welt is das Universalfeld, in das alle unsere Akte, erfahrende, erkennende, handelnde, hineingerichtet sind.*"[18] As universal horizon, the world is not given as an object may it be corporeal or mental and neither apart from wordly objects, being a beyond things not apart from things. "*Der Welthorizont ist nur als Horizont für Seiende Objekt bewusst und kann ohne Sonderbewusst Objekte nicht aktuell sein*."[19] Not being an object but not being actual without objects, the world gives itself apperceptively and non thematically, as correlated and co-given

16. Hua XXIX, 426. For a very clear exposé of Husserl's concepts of the world and its difference in regard to Fink's cosmology, see Roberto Walton's "El Mundo como Horizonte y Continente" in *Acta do I Congresso de Fenomenologia Luso-brasileira*, Lisboa, 2007, and the article "Worldliness in Husserl's Late Manuscripts on the Constitution of Time, *Veritas*, Revista de filosofia, Porto Alegre, vol. 51, nr 3, 2006, 142–145. See also Hans Rainer Sepp, "Totalhorizont- Zeitspielraum. Übergänge in Husserls and Finks Bestimmung von Welt," and Yoshihiro Nitta, "Der Weltanfgang und die Rolle des Menschen als Medium," in Anselm Böhmer (ed.), *Eugen Fink*, Würzburg: Könighausen & Neumann, 2006.

17. Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Hua I, § 30, 99.

18. Hua VI *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, ed. Walter Biemel, second edition, 1976, 147.

19. Ibid.

in the natural and practical attitude, appearing lifewordly. World appears therefore as an idea, figure, or correlate to a transcendental analysis. From this threefold characterization — world as horizon, as apperceived and co-given world-with, and as phenomenological, regulative idea — the world appears fundamentally as a correlate to a consciousness. It is this "metaphysical" co-relatedness that constitutes for Fink the most critical point of Husserl's description of world's phenomenon. The challenge of the phenomenological "discovery" of the world as universal and total horizon lies in the task of understanding the being of the world as a beyond things that is not apart or separated from things. There is an asymmetry in this co-relatedness, a presence of "negativity" at stake in the world's "beyond" that, according to Fink, Husserl's phenomenology was not able to grasp. For Fink, it is a misunderstanding of the non-objectivity of the world and its relation to innerwordly objects that does not allow Husserl to grasp what Fink will conceptualize as the cosmic dimension of the world.

As universal horizon, the world is understood by Husserl as what cannot be objectified, thematized, appearing *ad marginem* in relation to the objects of the world in the ways of being co-apprehended and co-meant. As universal horizon, the world is conceived as an intentional modification of the consciousness about things and objects. Horizon is understood as a non-thing in the sense of something unfinished, that we can approach again and again insofar as it distances itself again and again when we come closer. The image that orients Husserl's descriptions is that of a navigator coming further and further towards a horizon that becomes farther away again as soon the navigator gets closer. What Husserl calls "universal" and "total" corresponds in fact to an idea of infinity. Fink will demonstrate that this idea of infinity relates however not really to the infinity of the horizon but to consciousness itself. What appears as infinite is consciousness's approaching and accessibility, is consciousness's conviction that "I can grasp the ungraspable."[20] The world appears as infinitely graspable, as

20. "In the 'I can' what is constituted is the extension of aceessibility but never the world, that is, the inacessible, of the Uneinlösbare," manuscript quoted by Ronald Bruzina in "Redoing the Phenomenology of the World in the Freiburg Workshop, 1930–1934," *Alter*, nr 6, 1998, 66, and commented by Robert Walton

a being able to be grasped through variations of experiences, further and further. In this sense, horizon becomes a metaphor of consciousness's infinity. As universal horizon, the ungraspable of the world qua thing appears rather as consciousness's infinite striving for grasping, and the beyond is rather understood as the infinite "further and further." The non-graspable of the world appears as what cannot be grasped completely and finitely but only incompletely and infinitely, and therefore again and again, from one limit to another, further and further, *more and more*. The "non"-graspable of the world-horizon orresponds to the more and more of the "I can" access, inherent to consciousness. Husserl's phenomenological model of variations and modifications of a primary perception is a result of consciousness's infinite striving for further and further, for more and more.[21] According to Fink, defined as universal horizon for all appearing, Husserl's concept of the world masks rather than reveals the world as appearing. Thus, the infinity of the world, its non-thinghood, is in fact understood as the infinite becoming object for a subjective consciousness. It is therefore consciousness's conviction of an "I can grasp the ungraspable, grasping it 'more and more'" that appears as the "stage" of the universal appearing of beings. In this sense, the transcendental consciousness to which the universal horizon of the world is given is still assumed as worldless, that is, as itself beyond the world. Fink's critique of Husserl follows Heidegger's in its general traits. The problem lies in the way Husserl understands "appearing" as co-relatedness between subjectivity and being. For Fink, it is not consciousness that is beyond the world, but the world that is beyond consciousness. The task will be for him to describe this beyond of the world in the sense of a think-

in the article given in footnote 16.

21. Fink criticizes Husserl's model of eidetic variations for assuming sense-perception as the prototype of all awareness and therefore for claiming a universal use of it. According to Fink, the prototypical role of sense-perception is due to the fact that Husserl assumes material to be non-transparent and the solid body to be the prototype of all kinds of appearances, neglecting the cosmic sudden character of the character. As Fink asks: Is it possible to see the flash of lightening through eidetic variations, that is, in a further and further , greater and greater succession of apprehensions? See Fink, "Bewußtseinsanalytik und Weltproblem," in *Nähe und Distanz*, Freiburg /München: Alber, 2004, 293.

ing experience of the world that is not dependant on an analytics of consciousness. This means, moreover, to ground the cosmological perspective of the world as an *asubjective* perspective. The central question of Fink's cosmology will be then to ground a knowing from and of the world rather than a knowledge about the world and thereby a knowing beyond an ontology of things and an analytics of consciousness, however relating me-ontologically to both. Studying Fink's cosmological phenomenology and relating it to Heidegger's phenomenology of the unapparent, it may become clear that, in regarding the knowing from and of the world, the philosophical task of the "destruction" of the modern concept of infinity becomes necessary. The immensity of the world is not the same as the infinite wanting of a consciousness about the world.

The critique developed by Fink in regard to Husserl's description of the worldliness of the world as universal and as infinite horizon has some parallels to the critique Paul Valéry addresses to the famous phrase of Pascal: "the eternal silence of these infinite spaces fill me with dread," [*le silence éternel des ces espaces infinis m'effraye*].[22] Valéry called this phrase a "poem" rather than a "thought" or rather even than "poetry."[23] It is a poem in the sense of a piece of eloquence, a pirouette of oratory, compared by him to a dog barking at the moon. Who barks, in this phrase, is the modern isolated subject for whom the too big of the universe appears as infinite spaces, as the empty infinity of a more and more, a further and further. Because Pascal treats the too big of the world as the empty infinity of spaces, it barks at the moon as a scientist of the moon and the universe, leaving out of circuit "the emotional system of his being," to quote Valéry. The emptiness of this modern concept of infinity — by which the too big of the world is being defined — becomes clearer when compared with ancient views of the world as a cosmic space. For the ancient Greeks, universe is not infinite but eternal, forever living. It is never silent but sounding, sounding beauty. For Jews and their profound experience of the universe as the might of the night, universe is also never silent. The universe sings and praises the glory of the Lord. Valéry observes

22. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 91, Oeuvres, Paris: Ed. Pléiade, 1954, 1113.
23. Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres I*, Variation, Paris: Ed. Pléiade, 1957, 458–73.

that Pascal's night and universe are, on the contrary, eternally silent, neither sound nor song, neither offering nor praise. That is why the feeling experienced by the isolated barking modern observer of the too big of the world can only be dread, tremendous anxiety, *effrayement*. It is the dread towards the empty infinity of a further and further, of a more and more, towards the gigantic hugeness of countable and controlling infinity. More important than to judge Pascal with Valéry's poetical rigour, putting on him the label of modern insensible scientificism, is to envisage the problematic of the modern concept of infinity as a "further and further," a "more and more" of consciousness's accessibility and the consequent concealment of the phenomenological meaning of the beyond or transcendence of the world. This is the core of Heidegger's and Fink's critiques of Husserl's concept of the world. The great phenomenological "discovery" of the world as the "stage" of the appearing of all beings and the All of Being lies, according to both Heidegger and Fink, in its description of the world as horizon and thereby as the imaging of the beyond or transcendence of the world as a horizon. Husserl looses, however, the world when concealing the beyond of the horizon with the modern and empty concept of infinity. Thus, the beyond of the horizon appears more radically as a sliding away, as a play of concealment and unconcealment, as the aletheological play [*Spiel*] of truth. This is indeed the phenomenological "illumination" that both Heidegger and Fink will each follow and develop in a proper manner.

Coming closer to the line of horizon, the line of the horizon slides away. Horizon implies, thus, not only and firstly a consciousness of the how to access but also and even more so a consciousness of its own sliding away, retraction, inaccessibility. The sliding away of the horizon does not appear in terms of infinity, of an again and again, further and further, more and more, that is, in terms of a beyond that is still within boundaries of vision. The sliding away indicates, on the contrary, beyond boundaries, what cannot be seized through the measure of accessibility, of an "I can" but only, in a sense, as an "I cannot," as a beyond all measures and limits. In this sense, Fink will insist that the world cannot be seized from an idea of horizon *qua* an "and so on, and so on" but only through an idea of horizon qua *Übersprung* of a prec-

edent totality.[24] The meaning of "precedent" is, however, the one of sliding away, of unconcealing in concealing and not of something pre-existent that, in the impossibility of being seen frontally, would be grasped through variations and modifications of a frontal vision of things. The totality of the world is vertiginously foregoing insofar as it can never be given successively but only suddenly, in the way of a flash of lightning. The sliding away of a horizon is vertiginous not only because it slides away but insofar as it appears precisely in its disappearing, according to a flash of lightning that time and space measure. It indicates a beyond *all* measures and limits, insofar as it indicates a flash of lightning of *immensity*, an appearing while sliding away. Indeed, horizon is not firstly the seduction of infinity, of accessing more and more or further and further, but the meeting of heaven and earthly ocean, the meeting of two faces of immensity. If we admit, in a sense still to be grounded, that the "oceanic" feeling of the world is precedent — in Fink's meaning of "*Übersprung*" — it would be possible to affirm that the "oceanic feeling" of immensity is precedent to the consciousness of infinity. Or in more "concrete" terms: things do not appear to a consciousness if they would not appear in the in-between heaven and earthly ocean, in-between light and night, an in-between that indicates the pre-philosophical meaning of cosmos. It is from this *cosmic* appearing of the world that things in the world can appear for a consciousness *as if* they only existed to and from a consciousness. For Fink, the experience of the meeting of heaven and earthly ocean, of light and night, is foregoing to a consciousness of horizon and it is on the basis of the feeling of these immensities, of such a cosmological feeling, that it is possible to be aware of something like a "universal and infinite horizon." Following Fink in this cosmological feeling of the world, we could say that, more primordial than the distinction between infinite and finite is, therefore, the distinction between infinity and immensity, the distinction between an oceanic feeling of the world's immensity (cosmological feeling) and the consciousness of its infinity. Heidegger wrote once that the "being-covered-up is the counterconcept to phenomenon, and such concealments are really the

24. Fink, op. cit, 30.

immediate theme of phenomenological reflection."[25] In this sense, we could say that the idea of infinity covers up and conceals rather than unconceals the phenomenon of the world. In order to understand the beyond-within the world it then becomes necessary to distinguish infinity and immensity. This distinction seems decisive in order to describe the cosmic feeling of the world and its consequent *asubjective* perspective. For the sake of distinguishing infinity and immensity, it is, however, important to ask how they are confused.

4. The Confusion Between Immensity and Infinity

In order to clear up the confusion between immensity and infinity that occurs in Husserl's description of the world's phenomenality as a universal and infinite horizon, we should step back and discuss a moment in modern philosophy when the theme of immensity is thematized in connection with infinity. This moment finds its paradigmatic philosophical expression in Kant's *Analytic of the Sublime*.

Kant called sublime "what is absolutely great."[26] He distinguishes greatness from magnitude, separating what is beyond all comparison (great) and what can only be apprehended through comparison (magnitude). The sublime refers to a *non comparative magnum*, a greatness that is incomparable because it is "comparable to itself alone," and "in comparison to which all else is small." The sublime expresses for Kant immensity. This cannot be given in nature, that is, as an object of the senses, neither as a telescopic hugeness nor as a microscopic smallness. No thing can be called sublime, absolutely great, that is, immense, because the sublime refers to a *feeling* found exclusively in the subject. This feeling is understood by Kant as a "striving in our imagination towards progress *ad infinitum*," a striving that awakens while reason demands absolute totality, that is, absolute fulfilment. Kant adds further: "the same inability on the part of our

25. Martin Heidegger, GA 20; english translation *Prolegomena to the History of the Concept of Time*, trans. Theodor Kiesel, Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992, § 9, 86.
26. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, english translation *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. Meredith, Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1978, §25.

faculty for the estimation of the magnitude of things of the world of sense to attain this idea [of absolute totality] is the awakening of a feeling of a supersensible faculty within us."[27] The sublime in Kant refers therefore not to things, be they corporeal or spiritual ones, but to the capacity of thinking that attests to the going beyond and transcending of senses. Kant acknowledges that the sublime feeling of immensity has two sides: a mathematical and a dynamic, to which correspond estimations of magnitude and estimations of power or might.

Kant's discussions are concerned with a *feeling* that strives or desires beyond the senses and, in this meaning, includes a striving beyond nature. Nature is assumed by Kant both in theoretical as well as in practical and aesthetical concerns as that which is viewed from an intentionality of objects, whether as object for perception, for concepts, for pleasure or displeasure, and in contrast to morality. Nature in Kant is a large title for the intentionality of objects, of what a "thing" is. The discussion about the sublime is therefore a discussion about the beyond nature as an intentionality of objects, of forms. Kant distinguishes the sublime from beauty insofar the sublime is a feeling related to reason and beauty a feeling related to understanding [*Verständniß*]. Understanding is faculty of conceptual representation, which is related to sensibility and in this sense to conditions of possibility for intending things as objects. Reason, on the contrary, is a demand for absolute totality, dealing with ideas, that is, with what cannot be represented by concepts insofar as it cannot be intended as an object. It is therefore not astonishing that Kant connects both religion and war to the feeling of the sublime. The sublime refers to ideas of reasons that cannot represent through concepts and neither can be expressed by language but that give a lot to think about.[28] The sublime is related to different levels of a beyond — beyond conceptual

27. Ibid., § 25, 97.

28. Ibid., §49, "by an aesthetic idea I mean that representation of the imagination which unduces much thought [*viel zu denken veranlasst*], yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e, concept, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with or render completely intelligible," 175–76.

representation, beyond language, even beyond imagination because beyond all measures. Nature shares the sublime "only in its chaos, or in its wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation," where it gives "signs of magnitude and power" that "excites the ideas of the sublime."[29] Kant recognizes as sublime the feeling of absolute greatness which, transcending and going beyond the senses, confronts us with our own limitation to conceive and even to imagine things. He discusses not only the mathematically sublime as that which has the capacity of thinking and imagining the beyond-every-comparative measure but also the dynamically sublime found in nature, where we encounter our own limits in nature's immeasurableness. But here, that is, precisely in the encounter with our own limitation for "adopting a standard proportionate to the aesthetic estimation of the magnitude of its realm," "we also find [. . .] another non-sensuous standard, one which has that infinity itself under it as unit, and in comparison with which everything in nature is small, and so found in our minds a pre-eminence over nature even in its immeasurability."[30] Encountering the feeling of immeasurability, our mind [*Gemüt*] encounters the limits of conceptual representation and conceptualization. But it is, however, in this very limit of conceptual representation that our mind [*Gemüt*] discovers the power of infinity as "pre-eminence over nature." The immeasurability of nature's might, the sublime that nevertheless can also be found in nature, faces us with the helplessness of our own nature discovering, though, at the same time, human pre-eminence above nature. Kant will therefore admit to call nature sublime "merely because it raises the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can make itself sensible of the appropriate sublimity of the sphere of its own being, even above nature."[31] The feeling of immensity discovers negatively the infinite power of consciousness, the infinite power of an "I can grasp" further and further, more and more, by which infinity becomes the measure of thought.

For Kant, immensity can only be thought of from the standard of infinity. That is why he also affirms that "a feeling for the sublime in

29. Ibid., §23, 92.
30. Ibid., §28, 111.
31. Ibid., §28, 112.

nature is hardly thinkable unless in association with an attitude of mind resembling the moral."[32] In this sense, it seems quite natural for Kant to affirm that there are two things that fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and respect the more that reflection is concerned with them, namely, the starry heaven above and the moral law within.[33] The confusion between immensity and infinity that orients Kant's *Analytic of the Sublime* turns around the feeling of pre-eminence above nature that strangely awakens from within the limitation of perceptual presentation (not being able to perceive but still feeling) and from within the limitation of conceptual representation (not being able to conceive but still ideating and imagining). The not being able to grasp does not deny accessibility according to Kant but reveals another sense of the graspable, a sense that enables the mind to grasp beyond limits, beyond forms. We find here a very strange moment in Kant's *Analytic of the Sublime* because he touches a strange point where the radical limit of accessibility touches infinite accessibility. It is here that the confusion between immensity and infinity occurs. This touching point or con-fusion, where opposites coincide, was seen by Kant. It is this Kantian sight of the confusion between opposites that can help us in grasping the proper meaning of immensity. Kant touches this con-fusion or touching point when he says, in §29 of the *Critique of Judgement*, that the sight of the starry heaven can be called sublime only by putting into (Kantian) brackets all conceptual representations of stars and heavens. This sight is sublime in its way of "striking the eye: as a broad and all-embracing canopy."[34] The same occurs in the sight of the ocean. Only by putting into (Kantian) brackets conceptual representations of the ocean we may be able to see sublimity in the ocean "as the poets do," as Kant himself claims. This poetical sight of the sublimity of heaven and ocean emerges when conceptual representations are suspended and "the impression upon the eyes," in Kant's own terms, reveals "in its calm, a clear mirror of water bounded only by the heavens, or, be it

32. Ibid., §29, 120.
33. Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, conclusion.
34. Ibid., §29, 122.

disturbed, as threatening to overwhelm and engulf everything."[35] Here too we find an "oceanic feeling" of the world in Kant, related to a sight of the sublime immensity of the world rather than to the infinity of a universal horizon. Kant does not speak about horizon but about the "clear mirror of water" in which heaven and earthly ocean appear not as opposites but, we could say, as the non-other of each other.

To some extent, we could affirm that the confusion between immensity and infinity lies in the *con-fusion* that is intrinsic to immensity. Immensity means the immeasurable of a co-fusion. In immensity—such as of heaven and of an earthly ocean—what frightens and seduces is con-fusion, is the feeling that all is one, *hen kai pan*, and that the one is itself differentiated, *hen diaferon heauton*, to remember the oldest philosophical expressions of immensity in Western philosophy. This feeling of the sublime immensity in which all appears as one at the same time that the one appears as in itself differentiated, is the feeling that Fink called the "oceanic feeling" of the world; it shows itself to be a cosmological feeling and was understood by the Ancients as enthusiasm and admiration. It is also in these terms that Kant describes the "negative pleasure" that accompanies the feeling of sublime immensity. To the negative pleasures of admiration and enthusiasm, Kant adds another, namely, respect [*Achtung*]. What respect, admiration, and enthusiasm reveal as negative is their difference from any feeling of well-being and harmony. This indicates the shaking experience at stake in the feeling of sublime immensity which draws the mind [*Gemüt*] beyond a life in harmony and towards a life that could be called, with the words of Jan Patočka, a "life in amplitude." This explains why Kant speaks so frequently in his *Analytic of the Sublime* about the awakening [*Erweckung*] and shaking [*Erschütterung*] of the mind [*Gemüt*].

5. *The Cosmological Feeling of Immensity as a Knowing of Non-otherness*

The sublime image of the "clear mirror of water" showing heaven as the openness of the ocean and the ocean as the abyss of heaven,

35. Ibid.

showing heaven and ocean as the non-other of each other, brings to our reflective memory the role the sight of the immensity of heaven and ocean play in the awakening and shaking of both philosophical inquiry and religious experience. What awakens here is the cosmological feeling of immensity that enables a shaking from which a *moving towards* phenomenology and religion can be described. In the Kantian confusion between immensity and infinity, sublime immensity expresses a moment where opposites coincide, when the awareness of human extreme limits touch the awareness of consciousness's striving for infinite and unlimited knowledge beyond limits. What sublime immensity reveals is this particular coincidence of opposites in which differences appear not as sameness but as the non-other of the other. The cosmological feeling of sublime immensity is an awareness of sameness as non-otherness, where heaven touches ocean as a non-other, human limits touch non-human boundless as a non-other, where smallness touches hugeness, where the all of Being touches the nothingness of beings. It shows a knowing *from* and *of* the world rather than knowledge *about* the world, a knowing where "all things swept sole away."

This cosmological feeling of sublime immensity was pronounced as a birth of a way of life guided by a sight of immensity which defines the philosophical life in ancient Greece. The sight of the immensity of heaven is a sight of the above, an inclining of the head and the eyes towards the above. The sight of the starry heaven is a philosophical sight not only in the sense of a parallel source for the philosopher but as a primary source for thinking, when we remember Thales of Mileto, the first philosopher, the one to whom we attribute the first philosophical sentence — *hen kai pan* — "all is one." Looking above, looking to the immensity of the starry heaven, Thales fell on the ground, becoming for "common people" the Quixotesque figure of a philosopher alienated from the world, searching for measures beyond the world. But the sight of the heaven above us is not only a source for philosophical thinking. It seems also to be a source for religious feelings. Most religions place the divine in the above of the heavens. Metaphysical religions are religions of heaven we could say, mirroring themselves in the abyssal hells of oceans and deserts. "Hands touch each other in prayer towards heaven; in heaven, the eyes find either a

refugee or perdition; it is heaven that shows the finger of a prophet or of the one who consoles, certain words fall from heaven and it is from heaven that trumpets can be heard," recalling again some words of Valéry.[36] Furthermore, it was while regarding the heaven above that reason discovered the science of nature, numerals, and the reasoning of eternal beings, *ta aei onta*, geometrical and axiomatic principles. But the sight of a starry heaven cannot be disconnected from the sight of a pure night. It is the *sight* of the night and the might of immensity. The sight of heaven, of the starry heaven above us, is the sight of very distant objects that appear to be completely disconnected from our own bodies. Directing our eyes toward heaven, we direct our eyes above but in a different manner than simply directing our eyes towards the ceiling. Directing our eyes to heaven we accomplish the defocusing or "depresencing" proper to every sight of an above, in which things close to us become "invisible," sensible things become "intangible." At such moments we share, with those people who are blind or who do not have sight, the traits of movements of touching and non-touching. Directing our sight to above "*nous flottons loin de nous*," "we flight distant from ourselves"(Valéry). What distinguishes the sight of an above from the sight of the starry heaven above us is the vision that what binds us to heaven is precisely what separates us from it. We can count the stars, and in the night the stars are everything to us, but at least from our limited perspective to them we signify nothing. This unreciprocal and asymmetrical relation between a heaven signifying everything for us and we signifying nothing to it binds together, in a shaking and admiring way, what we see in heaven and what we find in the depths of ourselves. Still keeping Valéry in mind, we could say that here we experience the coincidence of "heaven lightning up beyond our representations and productions and the depth of ourselves living beyond our expressions." In this unreciprocal and asymmetrical coincidence, we experience how and when the attention to what is most distant from *each one of us* and the attention to what is closest to *each*

36. Valéry, op.cit., "C'est vers le Ciel que les mains se tendent; en lui que les yeux se ´refugient ou se perdent; c'est lui que montre le doigt d'un prophète ou d'un consolateur; c'est du haut de lui que certaines paroles sont tombées, et que certains appels de trompettes se feront entendre," 476.

one of us appears as non-other of each other. Immensity of heaven meets at once, as if in a flash of lightning, the community of "us" and the extreme solitude of each one as non-other, beyond oppositions. In the sight of immensity it becomes possible to say as poets do: "I am all and part," *Je suis tout et partie*, (Valéry), "immensity enlightens me," *m'illummino d'immenso* (G. Ungaretti). What appears here is another sense of difference beyond a dialectics of oppositions. This other sense of difference constitutes rather a me-ontological than an ontological difference, something that the neo-platonic tradition has tried to think of and that Nicolau of Cues has formulated in terms of non-otherness, *non-aliud*. The cosmological feeling of sublime immensity awakens human sensibility and thought for a non-oppositional view of differences. Starring at the immensity of the starry heaven above each one of us, the humanity of power which images the world according to the measure of gigantic hugeness touches as its non-other the smallness of human freedom in the cosmos. In Valéry's words, "an immense opening of perspectives is confronted with the reduction of our own power. We lose for some time the familiar illusion that things correspond to us. Our image becomes the one of a fly that cannot trespass a glass."[37] The sight of the immensity of the starry heaven above appears as the sight of this con-fusion where the all meets the one, where the feeling of being all, the feeling of the world, meets the experience of being nothing, the experience that the immensity of the world cannot be measured by the units of things. The sight of the heaven above is *at once* the sight of the depth of oceans and of the solitude of human life. It situates the human knowing life in the in-between of both. Both Valéry and Kant allude to a certain physics of the human soul that, facing sublime immensity and the suspensive in-between-ness in which man is situated, tends to protect itself, searching for ways of resisting wholeness. It looks for ways not to escape from it but to resist it through religion and philosophy, through the order of the heart or the order of the spirit. In this experience of being at once all and part, dissolution in the all and solitude from the all, nothingness touching the all, non-being touching being, where extreme opposites coincide, it becomes possible to experience horizon as a sliding way, as uncon-

37. Ibid.

cealing in concealing, as the rhythm of non-otherness in each one. In intimate consonance to central views of Schelling, Fink understood the position of man in the cosmos in the position of a "medium" or "symbol," in the sense of a mirror of the immensity of cosmos. Following those diffuse cosmic thoughts of both, we could then say that in immeasurable power over being and life, which characterize the position of contemporary man in the cosmos, the cosmos's immensity is mirrored and appears as an inverted image of it. Gigantic hugeness is as an inverted image of the immensity of the cosmos, showing paradoxically in human gigantism its own smallness and solitude. If the gigantic hugeness of man's power over being and life can be considered a resistance to the immensity of the cosmos and thereby as the most arrogant conviction on the pre-eminence of man over cosmos, we discover, paradoxically in this infinite hugeness, immensity beyond infinity. At this moment, it becomes possible to discover, as Fink proposed, the solitary fragility of human freedom touching the immensity of the cosmos as its non-other.

To resist means not only to resist against but also to resist in the sense of sustaining and keeping attuned to this *Ergriffenheit*, to this feeling of the immensity of the world. If philosophy and its phenomenological pathos may seem so charged by the hugeness of its knowledge by the industry of its academic products it is perhaps paradoxically in the hard experience of the charge of this gigantic hugeness that the cosmological feeling of immensity may break through. This can be understood as the moment where thinking meets poetry, as even Kant acknowledged when he said that the sublime feeling of immensity cannot be thought in concepts but gives much to think, much that should be thought as poets do. In terms of the question concerning the relationship between phenomenology and religion, departing from the cosmological feeling of the immensity of the world, we have still to address the question concerning creative imagination as the basis of poetical thinking. I think it was in this sense that Heidegger affirmed, in the already-quoted lecture, that the human soul perhaps can only experience the "invisible shadow" of the uncontrollable and incalculable in creation, which involves the double reflective movement of questioning our concepts of creation and searching for a creative questioning. It seems that it is here that the human soul can be

transposed to an in-between in which she belongs to being remaining a stranger to beings.[38] Maybe the question is not really about a new meaning of both phenomenology and religion (and further of their relation) but rather is a question of "seeing" the invisible shadow of the uncontrollable and incalculable — the creative shadow of world's immensity — in the human's belief about his or her power over being and life.

38. I am interpreting the following passage from *Die Zeit als Weltbildes*, op.cit, 94: "Wissen, d.h. in seine Wahrheit verwahren, wird der Mensch jenes Unberechenbare nur im schöpferischen Fragen und Gestalten aus der Kraft echter Besinnung. Sie versetzt den künftigen Menschen in jenes Zwischen, darin er dem Sein zugehört und doch im Seienden ein Fremdling bleibt." In the posteriorly added remark to this passage, Heidegger writes "Dieses offene Zwischen ist das Da-sein, das Wort verstanden im Sinne des ekstatischen Bereiches der Entbergung und Verbergung des Seins," 110.

Prayer, Subjectivity, and Politics

OLA SIGURDSON

Recently, the relationship between religion and politics once again has come to be a debated subject both in its practical societal dimension and in terms of its philosophical and theological reflection. In relation to the traditional liberal doctrine of the distinct separation between the public and the private sphere, religion has come to be seen both as a threat to the stability of society and as an opportunity for a new conception of the liberal democratic project as a whole. Often, the discussion about the relationship between religion and politics has relied on a quite abstract and privatized understanding of religion as such — religion as having neither body nor voice. In the wake of recent phenomenologically inspired criticisms of this reductive understanding of religion, there has been a growing interest in different forms of concrete religious subjectivity embodied in liturgies, prayers, hymns, etc. This article will explore prayer as a particular form of subjectivity and some of its political implications in relation to contemporary political philosophy. I begin with taking up some frequently articulated worries about the inherent authoritarian structure and violence of religion(s), move on to a discussion of the relationship between prayer, subjectivity, and transcendence as a way of refuting some of the presuppositions of these worries, and end with some short reflections on what this thus modified understanding of religion means for the relationship between religion and politics.

Violence and the Concept of Religion

Religion is inherently violent. This is a recurring refrain in recent political discussions of religion and its place in relation to politics, and it has been a common objection against religion at least since the Enlightenment. The arguments for the truth of this claim are, as one

could expect, of several kinds. One of the most repeated objections against religion has to do with monotheism. A recent example of a quite violent (in tone) critique of monotheism and its conception of God could be taken from the British scientist Richard Dawkin's bestseller *The God Delusion* (2006) where Dawkins, speaking of the God of the Old Testament, claims that this God is

> arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.[1]

In other words, not a very nice person, as one perhaps would put it, wishing to be polite. Besides the theological problem with Dawkin's portrayal of God as "a being", which goes against the grain of almost all pre-modern, modern, and post-modern concepts of God with their emphasis that God does not fit into any category and therefore transcends any finite categorization of any kind, I think the quote from Dawkin's book illustrates a contemporary fear that a divine bully bullies his followers on earth to bully their fellow human beings into accepting, without question, the absolute will of the divine monarch. This means that not only are the critical faculties of human thinking in peril, but also in peril are deeply held liberal-democratic values such as freedom, tolerance, and human rights. Religion, and especially monotheism, is a threat to a democratic politics, since its followers are bound to a revelation that gives no room for negotiation.

Dawkin's version of this fear takes a quite crude form. Among historians, philosophers, and theologians it is well known that the origin and growth of democratic values such as human rights are not just a development *against* religion, but that the roots of these values also lie within different traditions of religion itself. The idea of human rights, for example, could be understood as a secularized version of the biblical and theological notion of the human being as a being created in the image of God, and already has its beginning in the medieval

1. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006, 31.

tradition of canon law to which such liberal fathers as Hugo Grotius and John Locke are likewise connected.[2] This does not necessarily mean that any contemporary reference to human rights is a religious reference in disguise, but it means that the history of democratic politics is a much more complicated history than the positing of a mere dualism between religion and politics will allow. Some philosophers, such as John Gray in his recent book *Black Mass* (2007), goes so far as to claim that "modern politics is a chapter in the history of religion."[3] There are a lot of variations on this theme and different ways of telling this story, but for my purpose here it will be enough to say that this more complex history does not, in itself, do away with the understanding of religion as something inherently violent.

Consider, for instance, Mark Lilla's interesting but still problematic book *The Stillborn God* (2007) where the American intellectual historian claims that Thomas Hobbes stood for an intellectual revolt against all Christian political theologies with his "Great Separation" between religion and politics, which is the most distinctive feature of Western political life today.[4] This great separation amounts to "a way of separating claims to religion from our thinking about the common good" (90). Politics could then be a matter of human experience rather than divine authority, and through this differentiation between the different spheres of religion and politics, politics became autonomous and, thereby, free. Philosophers such as John Locke and David Hume then developed Hobbes's "Great Separation" in a more liberal manner. In essence, their contribution was the attempt to extinguish, not religion as such, but rather all political theologies. Lilla recognizes the Christian roots of Locke's idea of tolerance, for instance, so it is not a matter of denying that there might be theological ideas that were helpful for putting this great separation to use, but it means that such a theological help is no longer needed.

2. Cf. Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law 1150–1625*, Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001.
3. John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, London: Allen Lane, 2007, 1.
4. Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007.

Or almost. Lilla's book is also the story of how political theology returns in liberal theology and then in dialectical theology. The religious impulse in human beings is too strong not to be acknowledged, and the return of religion to politics was almost inevitable. Sometimes it takes different forms than institutionalized religion, as in revolutionary France, and sometimes it is an expression that comes from within traditional religion, as in different suggestions about how to reform Christianity from Immanuel Kant to Karl Barth. In his last chapter Lilla also recognizes that this interconnectedness between religion and politics is actually the norm, globally, and the Western great separation the exception. So the "Great Separation was never a fait accompli, even in Christian Europe where it was first conceived" (299) but nevertheless Lilla regards it as a fortunate experiment, since it opened up at least the possibility of a political sphere independent from all claims of religious authority. The challenge for modern liberal democracies today, according to Lilla, is to recognize the continuing force of religion for human beings, without giving up the ideal of the great separation. For Lilla, there is nothing inevitable in the dimension of secularization that concerns the differentiation between spheres, and so there is no grand force of history that moves in a linear direction from religion to modern politics. The great separation is today as much as ever an ideal and not a historical law. The distinction between religion and politics is not a description of some a-historical essence of religion or politics as such, but a normative and political ideal that was made possible in our part of the world by a fortunate historical accident, and if we would like to keep the separation, it must be actively cultivated.

Lilla's version of the narrative of Western secularization is interesting not only because it is aware that the differentiation between religion and politics in the West is a political ideal (for some) rather than an inevitable outcome of history, but also because it is well aware that the awakened interest of religion for politics "is not a tale about the children of darkness rising up against the children of light" (302) — as for instance Dawkins and other right-wing atheists would have it.[5]

5. On the new missionizing right-wing atheism, see Tina Beattie, *The New Atheists: The Twilight of Reason and the War on Religion*, London: Darton, Longman and

There are good arguments both from defenders of the differentiation and from those who, today, view it with more suspicion. But what is striking with Lilla's book is that it still subscribes to a (contemporary) version of the Enlightenment story of secularization which suspects religion of being inevitably authoritarian and inherently violent, although his account is more nuanced than many others. One of the reasons for this suspicion might be that Lilla, for all his philosophical sophistication, collapses at least three different levels of religion into each other: the individual experience of religion, its institutional form in a church, synagogue, or mosque, and its theoretical self-reflection in the form of religion. Especially the second level, that of the institutions, is largely missing from his account. This is an unfortunate lack, as I hope to show, since it makes religion void of its embodiment, but still understandable, since understanding religion as, in essence, something mental or disembodied has been a quite common story in the modern period. And this, in a nutshell, is also one important reason that religion so often is regarded with suspicion from a secular political philosophy.

The story of the gradual disembodiment of religion deserves a longer elaboration than this article allows, but let me provide the bare outline of such a story. It is a story about inner-ecclesial developments as much as broader political movements, but essentially it has to do with the (mostly, but not only) Protestant urge to find the essence of religion that underlies all different historical manifestations of religion, as well as the increasing disciplinary power of the nation-state which strives to reduce religion to a private sentiment so as to cause no competing social body within the body politic of a particular nation-state. The essence of religion then became something universal but also something private. Leading authorities were such philosophers or theologians as Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and G. W. F. Hegel, but the different pietistic movements and theologies contributed to these understandings of religion as in essence not dependent on any set liturgies, buildings, or practices, becoming more popularly embraced. A definition from the famous psychologist William James, although distinctly later (1903), sums up the result of this development

Todd, 2007.

in a lucid way: "Religion [. . .] shall mean for us the feelings, acts and experiences of the individual men in their solitude."[6] Religious institutions are seen as something secondary, something that grow out of individual experiences rather than that constitute these experiences. Religion is, essentially, a private commerce between God and the soul. For pre-modern theologians or philosophers, however, there was no such concept of religion. It is a concept that is historically developed and that fits quite well with the modern ideal of separation between religion and politics, where the nation-state takes care of the body but leaves each conscious person free to think and believe whatever he or she wishes. To be a believer is no longer defined by belonging to this or that institutional religious tradition or to practice religion in this or that way, but to have certain religious feelings or sentiments and ascribe to certain values. A consequence of this is that religion per definition is understood as something irrational, something that could or should have no public voice since this voice could never be the voice of reason. Compare this to, for instance, Augustine or Thomas Aquinas, for whom this very definition of religion as something private and as such not able to take part in public debate would be impossible to understand, let alone to practice.

But when religious institutions disappear from the view of philosophy or theology, and private experiences and public discourse are what remain, the lack of an intermediate social body or institution also means that the questions of how religious experiences are mediated through their material conditions and how religious texts and doctrines should be interpreted also disappear. The political blessing of the reduction of religion to something private also becomes a political curse, as religion, when defined as something irrational, cannot but understand authority and revelation as something in contrast to a public reason. "Fundamentalism" is a concept very hard to define, but if there is any meaning to this concept when it comes to religion, it is as a child of modernity, as its ideas of unequivocal revealed propositions as well its claims for infallible knowledge are dependent on the

6. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, Centenary Edition, London/New York: Routledge, 2003, 29f.

disappearance of intermediary social bodies.[7] My suggestion, in this study, is that the impression and expectation — in the construction of religion as the "negative other" of secular modernity — that religion is inherently violent has to do with a peculiar configuration of religion as a concept and phenomenon (with its conjoining understanding of human subjectivity) which has had negative consequences not only for a political view of religion but also in terms of different religious self-perceptions. To escape from this cul-de-sac we need to recover a philosophical and theological sense for the embodied and institutional dimension of religion. My angle of approach to this will be to investigate the relationship between prayer — as a specific religious practice or phenomenon — and subjectivity and transcendence.

How to Pray

My claim above is that one of the arguments that is quite often heard in the political-philosophical debate from partisans of secular modernity against religious pretensions within the public sphere is that any such claims would amount to a political threat against a pluralistic society. If God has spoken and thus made the divine will clear, there is no space for compromises between differing views and values, since these pretensions for universality not only are guaranteed by an authority but by Authority as such. The critical objection against religious claims for universality or political authority springs from the suspicion that these imply a kind of short circuit between the perspective of the believer and universality as such. While I would not deny that such suspicions sometimes are right — i.e. there are examples of people who mistake their opinion for the very voice of God — I nevertheless would contend that from a theological perspective such claims could be shown to be an example of ideology or bad faith. There are good *theological* reasons for the insight that all claims for knowledge — political or otherwise — are provisional and therefore open to revision. I will give an example here that concerns the relationship

7. Cf. the discussion in Shmuel N. Eistenstadt, *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Revolution: The Jacobin Dimension of Modernity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

between prayer and transcendence. My example will be taken from the Christian tradition, but I would suppose it might — *mutatis mutandis* — be valid for other religious traditions as well.

The point of departure for my argument is that the claim for truth, transcendence, and universality in the Christian tradition should not be understood as an attempt to explain God or the world without regard to the position of the subject in the world or its position towards God. Some theologies, especially modern theologies, could, to be sure, be understood as attempts to describe a "world-picture" without regard to the subjectivity of the human being, a picture of the world that spreads out before her like an object to her inquiring gaze.[8] But then you already assume a particular modern notion of the autonomous subject as a self-centered and self-determined subject rather than a created, socially responsive and wounded subject, more akin to the historical theological tradition and also to several strands of contemporary philosophy.[9] Sometimes this takes place thanks to the more or less naïve notion that theological reflection, or any other reflection, takes place regardless of space and time, but from the hermeneutical insight of the dependence of a particular context for a particular theological inquiry follows the insight that any theoretical endeavor implies a certain kind of attitude and/or comportment towards the object of inquiry. In other words, a theological inquiry implies a certain kind of subjectivity. A theoretical activity such as theology or philosophy involves a certain way of being in the world. Any epistemology implies a certain relation to the world as such.

Traditionally, theology has defended itself against the suspicion that it is but a report from the seats for spectators, so to speak, where the drama between God and human beings has been played out in front of the theologian who only had to take notes on what is happening on stage. The very concept of God has been an obstacle to any such atti-

8. Cf. Martin Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes," *Holzwege*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, Sixth edition, 1980, 73–94.

9. Cf. Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submission: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender,* Challenges in Contemporary Theology, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, and Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, London/New York: Verso, 2004.

tude, as the attempt to conceptualize God as an object for the inquiring gaze of the theologian would be a clear case of idolatry. If God should be reduced to something, some *thing* or "a being," which would fit into the frames of the territory of human experience, it would be we humans who set the limits or the conditions for what it is to be God, or at least for that of God that could be manifested into human experience. Pre-modern theology has therefore tried to take care of this insight for instance through its claim that theology begins and ends with prayer.[10] This might take a tangible form through the writer directly addressing God — one of the most famous examples here would probably be Augustine's *Confessiones* — and thereby establishing a *persona* in the text that is not an example of the all-knowing author but rather a receiver, an interpreter, and an intermediary of the divine message. This is a consequence of the theological insight that also the knowledge of God is a form of grace and that the possibility of such knowledge is established by what traditionally is called God's revelation. Even so-called "natural theology" would not, in pre-modern theology, be established without grace, and thus leaves no room for a modern, epistemologically autonomous subject. My thesis is that prayer as a central religious practice or religious phenomenon could be understood as paradigmatic for how religious human beings relate to claims for transcendence and universality without having their subjectivity being crushed by the metaphysical weight of transcendence. In other words, prayer is a form of subjectivity that makes us aware of this subjectivity as such in its relation to these claims. To study prayer as a form of human subjectivity in relationship to transcendence makes us aware, not in the first hand of the content of such claims to universality but of their form. It makes us aware of their *how* rather than their *what*. A phenomenological study of prayer concerns, therefore, *how* the human subject relates to the event of truth.

But what is prayer? To answer this question in a truthful way it is important to realize that prayer is a phenomenon that takes different forms and expressions in different religions, within the same religion, and even in ways of living that are not religious in any conventional

10. Cf. Karl Barth's discussion of Anselm's *Proslogion* in *Fides quaerens intellectum*, Gesamtausgabe 13, Second edition, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1986.

meaning (compare the prayers of Friedrich Nietzsche and Jacques Derrida, for instance). There are many forms of prayer: praise, thanksgiving, intercession, supplication, confession, petition, etc. Prayers could be formulated as anything from short interjections over the elaborate and poetical to the wordless and contemplative. Prayer could be something that could take place in private, but it could also be part of a social liturgy. My point here would, however, not be to give a comprehensive overview of all possible forms of prayer. For my purposes here and now it would suffice to give a short definition that fits well with the Christian practice of prayer: "prayer is action that communicates between human and divine realms."[11] Both as a private act of devotion and as a collective act of worship the Christian prayer is directed towards God and is a part of a ritual context that aims at communication with God. But the very word "communication" could be misleading if it is understood as a purely instrumental delivery of a message from human beings to God; the act of communication in prayer is also an act of communion, i.e. an act of communion with God that could but not necessarily must be expressed in words. Prayer is not by necessity a logocentric act, which is not least shown by the central place that contemplation or "silent prayer" has had and still has within the Christian tradition of prayer. What I am interested in here, however, is not the different forms of prayer but principally how prayer positions the person praying in relation to God — i.e. a kind of phenomenology of prayer.

Let me take a short example how this could work with the help of a couple of lines from a prayer that according to most scholars is formulated by Jesus himself.[12] The prayer "Our Father" has deep roots in Jewish traditions of prayer, and it has since the beginning of the Christian church been a central part of both private and collective acts of prayer as well as its theological reflection. I shall quote it in the

11. Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski, *Prayer: A History*, Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005, 5. Originally in italics.

12. For an exegesis of this prayer, see Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus: Matt. 1–7,* First volume, Evangelisch-Katolischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, Bd I/1, eds. Josef Gnilka, Hans-Josef Klauck et al, Fifth edition, Zürich/Braunschweig/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger Verlag/Neukirchener Verlag, 2002, 432–458.

version that we find in the Gospel of St. Matthew, chapter 6, verses 9–13 (in the NASB translation):

> Our Father who is in heaven,
> Hallowed be Your name.
> Your kingdom come,
> Your will be done,
> On earth as it is in heaven.
> Give us this day our daily bread.
> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
> And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.[13]

The prayer begins by the person praying directing her- or himself- towards heaven — a spatial metaphor that should be understood as a circumscription of God himself — and thereby occupying a position of dependence towards the "Father." "Father" (in Arameic *abba*) is an address that inevitably carries patriarchal connotations, but which nevertheless aims at signifying an intimacy between the person praying and God; she places herself in the presence of a "You" and thus abandons the orbit round her own self and her solipsistic aspiration for security. Here it must be pointed out that the person who in prayer positions herself towards a "You" thereby also positions herself in relation to this "You" and lets herself be taken into account: "here I am." This is a recurrent theme in Biblical narratives of praying persons, for instance of Samuel, one of the judges of Israel (1 Sam. 3) and Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1.26–38). Further, the praying person directs herself towards God not as a solitary and private self but rather as a part of a community when she prays "*Our* Father." Prayer, in general, is considered to be an action that establishes relationships and ties the individual together with the community of prayer.

The position that the praying person takes in relation to God is further accentuated by a threefold prayer — "Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done" — that places God at the center of the praying person's interest rather than the praying person

13. The doxology — "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." — which usually is read after Our Father is not a part of its original formulation but came into use very early. Cf. Did. 8.2 and also 2 Tim. 4.18.

herself. Phenomenologically this could be described as a decentering of the praying person(s).[14] It is not the human self or the human community that is at the center of the act of prayer, not even, to begin with, in the form of prayer as a petition that asks God to grant the will of the praying person. This decentering does not exclude the activity of the praying person, however, as if prayer was a way of coming to terms with an unavoidable fate or a way of looking forward to God's will being realized at the end of time but not now. Rather, it would be correct to understand the praying person as the active partner of God. But the threefold prayer is at the same time not a disguised imperative; the emphasis is on human action as a *Nachfolge* of divine action, as a response to God's primary action of creation and salvation. Our own will as human beings is thus thematized by Our Father more explicitly first at the end of the prayer, through the three prayers for "our daily bread," for forgiveness and for the deliverance from evil. God becomes in this final part of the prayer also the source of quite mundane goods and the prayer itself becomes an exercise of trustful expectation that God eventually is the giver of all good gifts. But even here the activity of human beings is emphasized in the prayer for forgiveness where it is expected from us as praying persons that we also will "have forgiven our debtors."

The very order of the prayer Our Father could also be said to have a decentering function in that it starts with the wish that God's will should be made manifest "on earth as it is in heaven," goes on to ask God for the possibility of discipleship and first after that continues with a prayer that more directly concerns our own will as praying persons, a prayer concerning the reception of quite ordinary things. This implies a plan where we as human beings no longer are our own conditions of possibility, but rather have to accept our lives as a gift from God. Prayer does not make human action redundant—as Kant believed—and neither is it a form of flight from action, but rather it

14. See Merold Westphal, "Prayer as the Posture of the Decentered Self," *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy, eds. Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, 13–31.

describes and effects a position of human action in respect to God.[15] The prayer Our Father has, on the whole, been a paradigmatic pattern for the Christian tradition of prayer and describes in words the position of the praying person that is also enacted in the very act of prayer.

I have in my short exposition of Our Father interpreted this prayer as a positioning of the praying subject towards God, but this far above all interpreted it as a mental attitude. It is, however, important to recognize that mental prayer usually is accompanied and guided by embodied comportment: genuflection, folded hands, raised hands, prostration, certain techniques for breathing, etc. Prayer is not just a mental activity but an activity that concerns the entire human existence — even if the embodied conditions, to the detriment of the praxis of prayer, has been neglected in a modern Western tradition that has emphasized "soul" and "consciousness" as a contrast to "embodiment." The comportment of prayer could nevertheless be understood as "an active self-manifestation to God" with our entire human existence, body, and soul.[16] To give a more substantial description of the different versions of embodied comportment of prayer here would by far exceed my possibilities for now, not least given their immense plurality, but I think my point is valid in any case, namely that it would be a mistake to limit the understanding of prayer to a mental activity. The essence of prayer, if I may be briefly permitted to speak about essences despite myself, could not be reduced to an inner monologue. Prayer should rather be described as a way of stretching out towards and addressing God with one's entire existence — "here I am" — and as a response to a divine address that has an irreducible priority; it should be an address that is a truth-event that breaks with the order of being and never could be reduced to it.[17] To speculate how

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15. Immanuel Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, Werke in zehn Bänden. Bd 7. ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983, 870–874.
16. Jean-Louis Chrétien, "The Wounded Word: The Phenomenology of Prayer," *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2000, 150.
17. I here use the language of Alain Badiou, but for the same point in a more theological vein, see Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For,*

the prayer has an influence on its divine addressee is of course awkward, but what perhaps is obvious from what I have put forward this far is that prayer is a medium that influences its human sender which has been observed by theological reflection from Augustine to Søren Kierkegaard. Through prayer the praying person becomes, so to speak, more visible to her- or himself in the recognition of how she or he is dependent on God and by implication also on the rest of creation for her or his daily livelihood. The positioning enacted by prayer does not only result in an inner relationship between the human subject and God that excludes the outer world. On the contrary, prayer ties the subject together with the rest of humanity and creation. According to the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, you never pray for yourself.[18] Even if that could be said to be an exaggeration, at least in relation to the Christian tradition, Lévinas has a point in that prayer as such does not estrange people from one another but ties them together through the intercession for others as well as the prayer to Our Father to learn to forgive as oneself has been forgiven. Even the private devotion is usually, in the Christian church, understood as a part of a tradition of prayer, as a part of the common prayer of the church. Prayer is a part of the liturgy of the church.[19]

Further, prayer has often been portrayed in Christian tradition as a struggle or even as a conflict. Not because prayer has to struggle to change God's will but rather because prayer involves a becoming visible of one's own person so that the truth about one's own self is at stake. Prayer could thus be a transformative process through which the praying self in a manner of speaking earns a higher degree of self-knowledge by being estranged from her- or himself. Prayer is, in other words, both a decentered and a decentering act. Prayer becomes decentered also because prayer is never a technique that one learns to master — as St. Paul declares in Rom. 8.26: "we do not know how to

translation: Jeffrey Bloechl, New York: Fordham University Press, 2002.

18. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. Michael B. Smith, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, 181.

19. Cf. Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan, New York: Fordham University Press, 2004, §§ 13, 25.

pray as we should" — but rather a deed of delegation where the human sender renounces not only all claims of control over the addressee but also over the medium as such.

Prayer, Subjectivity, and Transcendence

I have above described the address "Father" — *abba* — as in intimate speech act. The prayer's address to God presupposes and cultivates, in the middle of its struggle, a faith in God as the source of all good gifts. To understand this intimacy that the praying subject cultivates through prayer as the possession of a predicative knowledge of God would, however, be a mistake. Prayer is a way of cultivating the understanding of God's transcendence. Transcendence should here not be understood as a spatial distance that either can or cannot be overcome through prayer — that would imply a mythological understanding of God. What the concept transcendence denotes in this context rather is the experience that God withdraws from any definition that aims at a representation of God before the tribunal of the subject.[20] It is first when transcendence is understood as a node on a scale that stretches from immanence to transcendence or from finiteness to infiniteness and thereby becomes a part of a hierarchy that the concept becomes potentially alienating.[21] Then transcendence will be understood as a contrast to immanence. The conceptual pair transcendence and immanence is part of a modern notion from the 19th century and is not a part of the conceptual repertoire that was at hand for theology from its beginning. It has probably played theology an unwelcome trick as the associations more or less inevitably lead to a contrastive relationship.[22] But as I have already mentioned above, transcendence and

20. The contemporary literature on the concept of transcendence is immense. Here I would like to mention Emmanuel Lévinas, a.a., 27–89 and Merold Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul*, Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004.
21. Cf. Walter Lowe, "Second Thoughts about Transcendence," *The Religious*, ed. John D. Caputo, Malden, Mass./Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, 241–251.
22. See "Transzendenz," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd 10, eds. Joachim Ritter och Karlfried Gründer, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998, 1447.

immanence — if these at all are appropriate concepts in this context — should not be seen as each other's rivals. According to Christian tradition God can be immanent, to put in a simple way, just because God is transcendent. The transcendence of God should not be understood as a distance that must be overcome but rather as the freedom of God as the condition of possibility for created human freedom. The difference between God and human beings that sometimes is signified as transcendence could be described as a fundamental asymmetry where human beings are dependent on God for their existence, but where God does not need the existence of the world to exist as God. In this context, the transcendence of God could perhaps best be described as a truth-event that does not annihilate human subjectivity but rather breaks with its persistent tendency to circle around itself and destroys its infantile narcissism.[23] The subjectivity of human beings becomes like the moon, in a beautiful image suggested by Jean-Louis Chrétien, as it receives its light from elsewhere.[24] This is also the reason why Christian tradition has been eager to distinguish prayer from magic, prediction, and manipulations, as these often could be understood as ways of taking control. Prayer is about learning to inhabit human existence as a gift, not a part of an utilitaristic calculus or the game of human manipulation.

To some readers the very notion and phenomenon of prayer might not be immediately familiar. Let me therefore try to explain what I mean through some analogies; there are other human phenomena that remind us of prayer as far as the kind of subjectivity they imply. One such phenomenon is humor. Humor, like prayer, is of course a very ambiguous phenomenon, but if we follow the British philosopher Simon Critchley in regarding humor as building upon "a disjunction between the way things are and the way they are represented in the

23. The association to Thomas of Aquinos' notion that "grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it" (*Summa theologiae*, I. q.1 a.9) is intentional. But cf. also Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969, 171: "His alterity is manifested in a mastery that does not conquer, but teaches. Teaching is not a species of a genus called domination, a hegemony at work within a totality, but is the presence of infinity breaking the closed circle of totality."

24. Jean-Louis Chrétien, "The Wounded Word," 162.

joke, between expectation and actuality," we find an understanding of humor that reminds us of prayer.[25] For humor can accomplish a somewhat similar decentering of the human subject through its insight in the shortcomings of the human condition. Humor is also a way of making human existence less familiar by seeing it in a new and different light, and thereby it is also potentially critical of all ideologies by showing that there are alternatives to the prevailing circumstances. To understand the world in a certain way is not a necessity implied by the facts but a historically contingent organization. Humor is, further, neither a stranger to the historical church (even if there of course are exceptions without any sense of humor with disastrous results, as shown for example by Umberto Eco in his novel *The Name of the Rose*) nor to the religious world on the whole.[26] Critchley does mention the temptation that a religiously inspired humor becomes an escapist way of turning away from this world and so miraculously—as it were—be delivered from all its shortcomings.[27] But his critique alerts us to the risk that humor itself—and probably most human practices—in a similar way could become escapist in jokes about ethnicity and in the malicious delight in other people's misfortunes. Without taking the similarities between prayer and humor too far, I would like to claim that prayer reminds us of humor insofar as both are phenomena that call into question a certain neurotic desire for control which human beings are capable of displaying (the anthropological correlate to a God that suffers from a compulsory and paranoid despotism, Dawkin's bullying God) and so directs critical attention to our very attitude towards existence and to our comportment within existence.[28]

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25. Simon Critchley, *On Humour*, Thinking in Action, London/New York: Routledge, 2002, 1.

26. See M. A. Screech, *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross*, London: Penguin, 1999; Peter L. Berger, *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience,* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997; and Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Laughter: A Theological Reflection*, trans. John Bowden. New York: Continuum, 1994.

27. Critchley, ibid., 16–18.

28. What, then, is the difference between prayer and humor? Could it perhaps consist in the way humor too easily becomes concerned with itself, that humor in the form of irony is doomed to circle around a nothingness, which evokes the

Could prayer, then, be a protection against any short-circuit between the perspective of the believer and universality as such? One critical objection would be that modern or post-modern theology unlike pre-modern theology never or almost never starts or ends with prayer — especially the kind of academic theology that would like to pursue its interests without regard to confessional considerations. This might be true. But against such an objection that this prayerful attitude at least could not be valid for contemporary theology in its academic form, an argument could be put forward that the notion that the practice of theology (as any other academic subject) is always contextual leads to a certain humility regarding its own claims for truth given that it catches sight of itself as a practice and not only a theory. Moreover, even in the *ethos* of contemporary scholarly work there are dimensions that remind us of prayer, for instance the attention to details and its will to suspend judgment as far as possible. According to Simone Weil "absolutely unmixed attention is prayer," and she is very clear about her view that schoolwork as well as scholarly work are activities that could be regarded as a training of one's attention.[29] In other words, the difference is not absolute if or rather when contemporary theology — in many ways thanks to the critique against the prevailing practice of theology from liberation theology and feminist theology — becomes aware of its actual dependence on different ways of being in the world that are rooted in the particular life-worlds. In so far as the ideal that the autonomous self and the autonomous exploration in the arts and sciences no longer enjoys the status of a self-evident truth, the dependence of the inquiring subject on her or his life-world as well as the very form of subjectivity that is implied by the inquiry makes us aware that all kinds of study are, in a way, spiritual endeavors, although not necessarily in any ordinary religious sense of the word. In an analogous way prayer could be said to be, at least

desire for another world — or a better version of this world — through its very absence? Prayer, on the other hand, aims at letting the subject win itself by giving up itself. But prayer as well as humor do not have any eternal essences, and the question then also becomes how they relate in praxis.

29. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, quoted from Norman Wirzba, "Attention and Responsibility: The Work of Prayer," *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, 88.

metaphorically, a way of being in the world that might permeate all human practices — as in the practical realization of the Pauline exhortation to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5.17) — and which is expressed in attention and responsibility.[30] If you regard academic practices as well as other human activities in the same way as prayer, you will discover that they also imply a certain kind of habituation and a certain attitude and comportment towards the world, in other words a certain form of subjectivity. Concerning academic work, even though the meaning of the concept "theory" has changed since ancient times, one could actually claim that academic inquiry still is imbued by a certain *ethos* and that philosophy still is a certain "way of life," although perhaps not always as reflexively aware of itself as in ancient history.[31]

To return to the question of prayer as such, attention to this phenomenon makes us aware that any human experience of transcendence is mediated through the created world. This should be no surprise to theology, as it is an immediate implication of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation — that God took human flesh in Christ — which means that the message of God always is thought to be mediated "in, with, and below" the concrete material circumstances of any particular situation. The doctrine of the incarnation means, among other things, that the believer is not thought to be somehow mysteriously transported out of this world to enjoy the unmediated presence of God (not even in mysticism, but that is something that I have to leave for now). You could perhaps say that the doctrine of the incarnation suggests that mediation and representation receives a divine sanction.[32] It is, however, a fact that the material mediation of transcendence fell into disrepute as a consequence of the modern Western (especially Protestant but indeed also Roman-Catholic) disembodiment of the Christian tradition where the central relation between the believing subject and God came to be understood as a private commerce between God

30. Wirzba, ibid., 88–100.

31. Cf. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

32. See Graham Ward, "Transcendence and Representation," *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*, ed. Regina Schwartz, New York/London: Routledge, 2004, 142.

and the soul, and where liturgy and prayer came to be instrumentalized at the same time as the sacrament of communion and the Bible were reified.[33] The idea that revelation consists in a communication of divinely sanctioned facts made, as I suggested in the first part of this study, the material form of the act of communication "invisible" in that it had no particular theological importance as such, and thus also hid how the message was connected to the medium as well as the relationship between God and human beings. From this it followed that God and human beings were regarded as each other's contrasts, and their relationship understood as a distance between transcendence and immanence that had to be overcome somehow. This implies a conception of subjectivity where God as well as human beings are conceived as two autonomous centers of subjectivity, self-present and transparent. The *what* of all religious claims for universality then becomes, through a short-circuit between God and human beings that disregards mediation, divorced from the *how* of all claims for universality, and so the fear arose, almost inexorably, that a religion that is not private must be authoritarian and perhaps also violent.

To regard prayer as a central religious phenomenon and a central theological theme is to return to an attention to the medium; prayer is not a farewell to embodiment in the struggle for something sublime, prayer is a struggle for the transfiguration of the body and its structures of desire. If prayer informs theology about a possible and also appropriate relation of human beings to the divine, and therefore also informs about which kind of subjectivity that is presupposed by such a relationship, theology then becomes not primarily an abstract speculation about universality, not a world-picture that the inquirer could comprehend as a map of existence in its entirety, but rather a kind of itinerary for the journey towards God. The function of religious language would then not be to "mirror, master, grasp, or encompass the divine reality."[34] The focus of such a theology would not only be

33. This is a history that is recently narrated by Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, Mass./London: Belknap Press, 2007, esp. 146-158, 221–269. Cf. also my book *Himmelska kroppar: Inkarnation, blick, kroppslighet*, Logos/Pathos 6, Göteborg: Glänta, 2006, 373–378.

34. Merold Westphal, ibid., 117.

what is said but also how it is said and also the relation between "the what" and "the how." The goal for religion is then not apodictic knowledge but doxology. Biblical religion becomes, instead, a protest against all attempts to usurp universality. It opens up a critical distance between its own particular position and truth or universality as such without giving up all claims to universality as such.

The Return of Religion to Politics

Prayer is but one of many religious phenomena that implicates a certain kind of subjectivity that might draw attention to the embodiment of religion and also the reflexive awareness of the contextual nature of its claims for truth and universality. It would also be possible to move into discussions of other parts of the liturgy, and also about works of charity, and so on, but I hope that it might be accepted that for the scope of this paper I will limit my focus on the implications of a prayerful religious subjectivity to a final, and very brief, discussion about the relationship between religion and politics.

The embodied and contextual nature of prayer implies a subjectivity that does not claim to master reality by having a world-picture that legitimates its owner to disown other, conflicting ways of being in the world. The prayerful attitude does not short-circuit the relationship between God and the human being so that any religious person or group could so to speak hide beneath revelation disregarding their own responsibility of, in theory and practice, interpreting this revelation. Instead, any particular way of living as a disciple of this divine revelation must in a prayerful and therefore also critical vigilance be aware of the limits of any such particular path—nevertheless without giving up any public truth-claims as such. In the embodied mediation of prayer lies a different way of conceiving the relation between religion and politics than in the quite simple differentiation of secular modernity between private and public. The British theologian John Milbank puts forward the need for a more complex understanding of space that breaks with the illusion of being able to differentiate between private and public as two distinctive spheres:

> there is no such thing as absolute non-interference; no action can be perfectly self-contained, but always impinges upon other people so that spaces will always in some degree "complexely" overlap, jurisdictions always in some measure be competing, loyalties remain (perhaps benignly) divided.[35]

If there is no neat distinction between private and public, the meaning of politics will change. A certain kind of liberal modernity that in the name of political consensus has strived to remove all conflict from politics through relegating competing claims for ways of living and thinking to a private space must give way for a more pluralistic understanding of public life, wherein conflict becomes a political reality and not just a private matter of different lifestyles. This change does not primarily have to do with religion and its return in political life as such, but rather with the suspicion that a certain kind of liberal and secular modernity presupposes a much-too-thin account of the subjectivity of citizenship to be plausible in a world not built around the idea of ethnically and religiously homogenous nation-states. In the formulation of the theologian Charles Mathewes, "pluralism is a central problem for modern states not because of pluralism, but because of modern states."[36] To deal with the question of authoritarianism and violence in today's politics in a truthful way, there is an urgent need to leave models construed for a quite-other political situation behind and to formulate models that will accept this pluralism as inevitable and search for ways of peaceful rather than violent conflict. Any politics that wish to avoid religious traditions at all costs take the risk of becoming escapist, as they try to deny the quest for more than formal and consensual truth, transcendence and universality.

The relationship between prayer and subjectivity would be an example of a way of thinking that might be worth exploring, as prayer actually is a way of dealing with the problem of pluralism without reducing everything to the same. In the relationship to a God that is

35. John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*, Oxford/Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997, 281.

36. Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 155. One may here also think of such political philosophers as Chantal Mouffe or Slavoj Žižek.

irreducibly transcendent, the Christian tradition, as well as other monotheistic traditions, the human subject confronts not just another human being but a more radical form of otherness. Prayer could be seen as a practice that avoids reducing human subjectivity to a search for a stable and autonomous identity, but instead acknowledges the need for change in confronting rather than avoiding the other. In this, it recognizes what the American philosopher Judith Butler has termed the "precariousness of life" and is a way of dealing with the vulnerability of one's own as well as the other's existence. Our embodiment means that we are fundamentally social, which means that we are "already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own," and to deny this is also to deny the fundamental vulnerability of human life, which, perhaps, is the reason that we need a politics at all.[37] Butler sails—intentionally or not? —very close to a Christian and perhaps also a Jewish doctrine of creation, and in these religious traditions, prayer is precisely the therapy through which the constant human temptation to flee from our precarious condition is exposed for what it is: escapism.

If, then, prayer and also religion could be ways of dealing in a truthful way with embodiment, responsibility, and vulnerability, religion should not be seen as a threat to the values so often celebrated, at least in principle, by a secular modernity: freedom, tolerance, and human rights.[38] It might be that these values have to be renegotiated, and also sometimes fought for in the face of a secular modernity as well as in the face of authoritarian religion, when these movements in a violent way try to secure a sphere, whether political or religious, beyond human vulnerability. But religion is not only a threat but also a resource for any future politics of human subjectivity, and so the first lesson for a secular modernity would be to discord of the kind of resentment of religion that construes it as its negative other and so not only does not recognize its plural and dynamic character but also represses the unavoidably interdependence of all embodied life. What is needed in public life is more religion, but of a richer, more-nuanced kind.

37. Judith Butler, ibid., 28.

38. For a more thorough exposition of these claims, see my forthcoming book *Det postsekulära tillståndet: Religion, politik och mänskliga rättigheter*.

Saying the Sacred:
Notes Towards a Phenomenology of Prayer

HANS RUIN

> Oh Einsamkeit! Du meine Heimat Einsamkeit! Zu lange lebte ich wild in wilder Fremde, als dass ich nicht mit Thränen zu dir heimkehrte!
>
> Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra III*

Introduction

On the first page of Augustine's *Confessions*, the author turns to God in a gesture of prayer. "Great art though, O Lord, and greatly to be praised."[1] And a few lines further down he calls out the famous words: "Grant me, Lord, to know and understand what I ought first to do, whether to call upon thee, or to praise thee? and which ought to be first, to know thee, or to call upon thee?" Before he begins to speak of God and of the many questions and themes to which the *Confessions* are devoted, the writer calls out to the transcendent other, to grant him the power and ability to speak and to think. The premise here is that human finite reason cannot hope to grasp the nature of the divine, unless it has already been granted this ability by the very same divinity, in an event of grace. Before claiming to understand, reason must first open itself to the possibility of a gift of understanding, in an act of faith. This faith is manifested in an act of praise and of prayer, of a manifested devotion toward that same divinity, which reason is at the same time trying to understand. In an exemplary way Augustine thus establishes the configuration of faith and reason, as mutually implicative of one another, in a way that will resonate all throughout the philosophy of the middle ages.

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1. St. Augustine's *Confessions*, trans. W. Watts, Loeb Library, London and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989, 3.

How can a speaker be sure that what he prays to and what he praises is indeed the true divinity, or indeed that there is such an addressee in the first place? This is the hermeneutic riddle and paradox of all belief, that the believer cannot simply claim to *know* God, what he or it is, and what a proper relation to the divinity amounts too. There can be no certainty on this territory, except in the hardened minds and eyes of dogmatic preachers. The believer must rely on and pray to a God, the nature of which he cannot be certain, but the relation to which is at the same time established in the very act of devotion and reliance. To show devotion in prayer is literally to seek a God, and to seek to establish a relation to this God, but without certainty that what is prayed to is indeed what the believer thinks it is, or that it is something at all. One could go even further and suggest, that the extent to which a God is present in a human life, is ultimately manifested in the praying act of devotion itself. For praying is an existential comportment in and through which man establishes a relation to what he holds to be divine, indeed, the mode in which this relation comes to presence, in all its precarious uncertainty. In all religious cultures, throughout their differing liturgies and metaphysical narratives, the presence of prayer, of devotional, vocative discourse appears to be a constant. The meaning of the divine, and thus the meaning of the relation between man and the divine can hardly be determined outside this space of lived devotion in prayer. To explore and explicate prayer, in a phenomenological spirit, thus appears to be a central issue for any phenomenology of religion.

Supposing we cannot hope to understand and articulate either the meaning of the sacred, nor what we commonly speak of as "a religious experience," apart from the activity of prayer, then the phenomenology of prayer emerges as a key theme for anyone seeking to explore the meaning of religion. Its exploration does not, however, necessarily restrict us to what is commonly recognized as the sphere of the religious. In fact, it opens up a larger field of questions, concerned with what we could tentatively speak of as "devotional discourse," but also "inspirational discourse," in which the writing subjects turn from a descriptive to a vocative mode, in the search for its own voice and for expanded possibilities of articulation. In a beautiful passage in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Book III, "Before sunrise," Zarathustra calls out to

the "sky above me," speaking to this sky: "and when I wandered alone. For whom was my soul yearning when it had gone astray in the night? And when I climbed the mountains, whom was I seeking, if not you." In this discourse, Zarathustra is seeking to "fly into" that which can also permit him to become this sky, to be part of its blessing, as itself a blesser, whose message it is that "no eternal will wants something over and through them." In this non-theistic discourse, the voice of the speaking subject seeks itself in and through a devotional gesture of praise and hope. Or more correctly, it drifts seamlessly between different discursive modes, between analysis, satire, reflection, narration, and praise.

The question of the *what* of prayer cannot be handled only within the confines of an economy of theology, nor of philosophy for that matter, but it carries over into the larger problem of poetic language as a whole. In a recent study, partly inspired by the new phenomenological theology of John Caputo, a scholar of eighteenth century literature, Lori Branch, explores the rise of the so-called movement of "free prayer" which followed upon the reformer's dismantling of the traditional liturgy of the English church. She traces the emergence of a whole literature of methods of free prayer, in which the individual, spontaneous expression of communion with God is called upon by Christian reformers.[2] She explores this literature as the root of a more-literary-oriented culture of spontaneity, issuing from Shaftsbury, up

2. Lori Branch, *Rituals of Spontaneity*, Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006, 45 passim. Branch also has a good argument about how the so-called religious post-modernity, or the influence of post-modern thought on theology has opened up, not only a possibility to return to an intellectual exploration of religion, but also to the nature of the secular, implying that it is part of the critical-deconstructive approach, that it brings to awareness the situated and embedded nature of the secularism itself found in a Christian modernity. So it is from within the self-critique, and self-awareness that a new discourse and dialogue can emerge, as the exploration of and for the new, which is not a restoration, but a development of religious thinking. She sees Caputo's work as a promise, in the sense that it tries to articulate a basic premise of belief, a kind of pre-religious, or rather pre-confessional belief, which has to do with having a future. This analysis, in many ways inspired by a phenomenological approach, destabilizes the idea of clearly demarcated space of secular reason and language.

to the romantics.[3] The historical connection between free prayer and poetry had been explored already earlier, notably in Brémonds *Prière et Poésie*, from 1926, which took a more psychological perspective on this constellation.[4] The more specific search for a phenomenology of prayer has also been explored recently, e.g., in an anthology from 2005, *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, building partly on the work of Jean-Louis Chrétien, but also on Derrida, Caputo, and Marion. I will return subsequently to several of the articles in this volume.

The movement of the present text runs as follows. It starts with discussing in broader terms the task of a phenomenology of religion, eventually focusing on Heidegger's lectures from 1920. The next section initiates a discussion of prayer in more general phenomenological terms, starting with Aristotle's distinction between propositional and non-propositional discourse, and the problem of truth. It leads over to an analysis of the specific disclosive comportment of the one who prays, which compares it to begging and trading. Eventually the analysis insists on the central role of praise in prayer, as a way toward a different kind of existential posture, whereby the subject turns him- or herself into a recipient. Through a discussion of an essay by Merold Westphal, praying is explored as a way toward a de-centering of the subject and of the self, a paradoxical receptivity through emptying, and an affirmation of an existential vulnerability. In the fourth and final section this argument is brought to bear on the experience of inspiration as articulated by Nietzsche in regard to the writing of *Zarathustra*.

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3. From the perspective of this contextualization of the expressive poetry of romanticism, she can also challenge the inherited view of a discontinuity in the work of Wordsworth (as well as in several of the other romantics) between an early embrace of spontaneous expression of feeling and a later embrace of ritual and traditional liturgy. See ibid., 177.

4. In Brémond's analysis, poetry, in a qualified sense, was seen as equivalent to the mystical experience, in a shared sense of catharsis. Brémond interpreted this equivalence in psychological and epistemological terms, inspired by both Jungian psychoanalysis and Bergson's philosophy of intuition. Poetry and mysticism is thus described as the practice of a certain psychological mechanism, which brings us intuitively in relation to the real through a fusion of the masculine and feminine spirit, the animus and anima.

I

Let me first formulate a few principal points concerning the general premises for a phenomenology of religion. I do not speak from a confessional standpoint. But neither do I speak from a clearly defined non-confessional, or principally atheist position, supposedly associated with the ethos of a modern rationality. Neither is the purpose one of trying to reintroduce religion, through phenomenology, into philosophy again. The analysis seeks to be true to the ethos of phenomenology, in trying to bring concrete experience to articulation, by following in thought the movement of life in a sympathetic hermeneutic-historical disclosure of its inherent meaning. The task of a phenomenological explication of experience is to access and follow it from within its lived concreteness. Phenomenology, as Heidegger writes in *Sein und Zeit*, is a *legein ta phainomena*, a speaking of that which shows itself from within itself. But the route to this experience is never guaranteed.[5] Life is closest and at the same time furthest away from itself. This is the formulation of Heidegger, but it is already a profound lesson in Husserl, who calls us to practice a reduction in regard to inherited presuppositions in order to access the field of lived intentionality.

In the introductory remarks to his lecture course on the phenomenology of religious life from 1920, Heidegger emphasizes that the phenomenological question of method is not a question of an appropriate methodological system, but precisely of access, that passes through factical [*faktische*] life experience.[6] A phenomenology of religious life is not a theory *about* the religious, conceived of as an object of study in the standard mode of a science of religion, but rather as a way of entering, in understanding, the religious as a type of meaning-fulfillment or enactment. It is not a psychological theory of religious experiences, but an explication of the meaning of religion, which therefore does not immediately need to take sides along confessional lines. Instead the confessional, as the meaning of devotion, is itself among the phenomena to be investigated. Nor does it take a definitive stance in regard to the distinction between rationality and irrationality, as if the

5. *Sein und Zeit*, [1927] Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984, §7.

6. *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens*, Gesamtausgabe vol. 60, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1995.

religious, once and for all, could be located in the latter. The phenomenological understanding, as Heidegger rightly emphasizes, lies beyond this distinction.[7] In a phenomenological analysis belongs the preparedness to allow that the basic, organizing concepts, remain undecided. This is the case not only of "reason," or "rationality," but also, of "the religious" as such. It is on the condition that we do not force a conceptuality onto a phenomenon that this phenomenon can begin to speak and have sense on its own terms. Such an explication can also permit the non-understandable to be understandable, precisely by letting-be [*belassen*] its non-understandability.[8] Speaking in the terms of Husserl, we should try to investigate these phenomena in "bracketing" their realist, or metaphysical, implications.

Such a mode of analysis is of course very precarious. First of all, it can easily be equated with simply a psychological theory, just as phenomenology was and is still often misunderstood only to constitute a theory of psychic life. But the critique of psychology, in the sense of a study of the human psyche, lies at the root of phenomenology, as developed by Husserl earlier in *Logical Investigations*. A phenomenology of experience is *not a theory of the psyche* in the ordinary sense of psychology, but an exploration of experience in terms of the *how* of its meaning-fulfillment. This is the great achievement of phenomenology: that it developed a conceptual articulation of the life of the *psyche*, which is not reductive in the sense of modern science and psychology, but which at the same time does not commit us to the domain of the esoteric. Phenomenology provides the most consistent vocabulary to give word to the life of the spiritual, and in this sense it is the natural meeting ground for contemporary work in theology, religion, humanities, as well as in the arts. For I think it is also very important when we discuss the religious, this vast and amorphous territory, that we do not forget that this is also a territory of the aesthetical. Literature, music, architecture, and art are the principal forms in which what is recognized as divine has been brought to a living presence throughout the history of religious practices.

In attempting to approach phenomenologically the Christian, reli-

7. Ibid., 79.
8. Ibid., 131.

gious experience, Heidegger takes the exemplary case of Paul's letters, in which he traces its basic existential comportment primarily in terms of its relation to the past, present, and future. Faith is understood as a mode of relating, from within which existence articulates its historical position. The Christian experience is a mode of living time, as Heidegger also writes.[9] The premise for this kind of explication of meaning is that the conceptual resources of philosophy are not totally fixed in advance, but, on the contrary, that they can, on the one hand be generated from within the problematic itself, but also that we can realize them as indicative concepts, which do not pretend to objectify their matter, but rather function as pointers in the direction of a fulfillment of a meaning. It is also important not to mix this approach with that of an *Einfühlung*, as Heidegger remarks.[10] Rather it is a question of articulating the character of the *situation* from within which, e.g., Paul speaks to his congregation in the making. To this situation belongs precariousness, that it is without certainty, that he does not speak from within knowledge, but from within hope, wakefulness, apprehension, etc. In this way Heidegger works himself towards the meaning of the Paulinian discourse, as characterized by a temporal horizon of the *parousia*, not primarily as a theological dogma, but as a lived meaning horizon. It requires that we set aside the traditional interpretations, as well as the dogmatic explications, and listen instead for an experience as it takes shape.

Only from the standpoint of such an understanding is it possible to develop, also in a critical sense, the meaning that is realized here. Just as phenomenology in its Husserlian sense presupposes a bracketing of the dogmatic and realistic interpretation of phenomena in order to experience their meaning, so Heidegger also works in relation to the fulfillment of a religious existence. We set aside the question of dogma, and permit the meaning of the explication to unravel itself. The premise here is that religious dogma is rather to be seen as the posterior elaboration of the themes as they are first articulated. Furthermore dogma can also be critically assessed in relation to a tentative explication of the meaning of the phenomenon in question. This strategy is

9. Ibid., 82

10. Ibid., 88.

very visible in Heidegger's reading of Paul, who is not seen as speaking in a theoretical-dogmatic way in the first place, and also inversely, that it is only from within Paul's articulation of Christian life experience that the very genesis and significance of subsequent dogma can be interpreted.[11]

In his reading of Paul, Heidegger focuses primarily on the eschatological temporality of the early Christian life experience, and in his subsequent reading of Augustine he turns his interest primarily to the themes of temptation and various modes of falling. In both cases we can trace a close connection to his own existential ontology or analytic of facticity as this is elaborated during the same time. He does not, however, take an explicit interest in prayer as something indicative of Christian life experience, despite the fact that the role of prayer is emphasized in several of the letters, e.g., in 1 Thessalonians and in Romans, where Paul speaks of a praying without ceasing, and of a persevering in prayer.[12] This lacunae in Heidegger's reading has been addressed by Benjamin Crowe in an essay entitled "Heidegger and the prospect of a phenomenology of prayer."[13] Crowe stresses how central prayer is to the evangelists, as well as to Paul. His point is that the emphasis on eschatology and wakefulness before the uncertainty of the *parousia*, precisely as explored by Heidegger, is in fact concretized in the way in which the congregation is encouraged to pray, to keep awake, alert, and prepared. Summarizing his analysis, Crowe writes of how we, through Heidegger's own analysis, can understand the meaning of prayer in the early Christian community as part of a whole new life orientation, in which it becomes "part of a whole pattern of life, a pattern that is best understood as a joyful response to the gift of freedom and new intimacy with God."

In Crowe's reading, Heidegger's criticism of the standard objectifying mode of understanding implies, in the end, that the interpreter also lives the concepts that are to be understood. So an authentic hermeneutics of prayer also will be a call to prayer.[14] However, in say-

11. Ibid., 112.
12. Ibid., 129.
13. In *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, eds. B. E. Benson and N. Wirzba, 2005.
14. Ibid., 131.

ing this, he moves too quickly in the end. It is one thing to conclude, as he also does, that religious concepts, make sense only as "practice," and that their meaning dawns on us in living them out. But the work of the phenomenological analysis is to bring this enactment-meaning, this meaning-to-be-enacted, to explicit articulation, not just to give way to their adopted practice, and especially not simply to affirm their dogmatic, theoretical extension. An unfortunate aspect of some of the work in the recent upsurge of the phenomenology of religion, not just in Marion, but also in the writings of Caputo and Vattimo, is a tendency to use a phenomenological explication to justify in the end an affirmation of Christian and theistic doctrine. It is in the detailed working out of the enactment-meaning of what is supposedly a religious concept or a religious practice, that phenomenology can contribute to the understanding of religion, and in the end also open a philosophical space of discourse on the nature of the sacred. And this presupposes that no fixed theological framework is established, or re-established exterior to the experience itself, but that rather it can be understood from within its enactment. Only through such an approach can we see how the existential-hermeneutical interpretation of prayer can also give way to an understanding of the confessional, which itself is not confessional. It is toward such a precarious attempt that the notes presented here are directed, still in a very tentative way.

II

Let us now take one step back and address first in more principal terms the phenomenon of prayer. What is prayer? A common reference in the writings on this topic is the brief passage in Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* (16b), which defines the sentence, the *logos*, as the meaningful speech, *phone semantike*, which is an affirmation or a denial, *apophasis* or *kataphasis*. Not all sentences, however, can rightly be called "propositions," which is the standard translation of Aristotle's *logos apophantikos*, a showing or demonstrating speech. For to be a proposition implies that it can be true or false, in the previously defined sense of saying how it is, or how it is not. As an example of a sentence which is not *apophantikos* Aristotle then mentions prayer, *euche*, from *euchomai*, meaning to pray, wish, or vow, but also to declare. It is not obvious by

means of what term Aristotle's remark should be translated, by prayer, vow, or proclamation. But the general point here is that these types of sentences, which do not aspire to truth or falsity, fall outside the scope of his investigation in this particular treatise. He explicitly says that they belong to another domain, namely that of poetics and rhetoric.

The historical and principal importance of this analysis can hardly be underestimated. It establishes a strict distinction between that which can have a truth-value — to speak in modern Fregean terms — and that which cannot. A prayer, of whatever kind, is not a sentence that aspires to truth since it belongs to a whole different kind of discourse. In Aristotle's terminology, as it is commonly understood and transmitted, truth and falsity have to do with being, or with how it is. In *Metaphysics* (1051b) he writes: "To say that what is is, and that what is not is not, is true." In other words, truth has to do with being, with saying being, how it is. In speaking the truth, our words give words to being, or perhaps one should say that they let being be what it is in words. Taken in a strict definition, prayer is precisely what cannot be true, for it does not say how it is. Instead it expresses a wish or a hope, of how it should be. And a wish cannot be true in the sense that a statement about what is the case can be true. This is undoubtedly so. And Aristotle's famous definition has also proven to be surprisingly stable. Truth has to do with being, with how it is, as accounted for in speech. This is also how Husserl and Heidegger reconnect to the ancient tradition in their respective discussions of truth. Yet starting with Husserl, and developed much further by Heidegger, it is precisely in and around the issue of *truth* that phenomenology opens up an avenue for discussing language and, being so, makes room for a more differentiated understanding of what we could call the truthfulness of non-propositional discourse, including prayer.

Husserl's phenomenological analysis of truth is developed primarily in *Logical Investigations VI*, to which Heidegger would often refer with great respect. Summarizing in very brief terms the point of his analysis, it seeks to explore the intentional structure of the acts by means of which something is made to appear as true. Through intentional analysis, Husserl can transgress the standard, static correspondence theory, where truth is only the correspondence or correlation between statement and fact. Instead he can show how truth has to do

with the very emergence of the object as true, in and through a system of intentional acts. It is on the basis of this analysis that phenomenology can also be spoken of as an *aletheiology*, a discourse on the becoming of truth, as a discourse on appearing in general. From the phenomenological standpoint we can never take for granted the existence and nature of an objective world in itself, except as an ideal correlate of our acts. The world is the world as manifestation, as appearing, as coming to presence, in and through the active participation of subjectivity.

Husserl's analyses in the sixth logical investigation serve as a premise also for Heidegger, as can be seen from his positive remarks in §44 of *Sein und Zeit*. But in Heidegger's case the phenomenological-existential reformulation of truth takes its lead also from Aristotle, but not the Aristotle of the correspondence theory in *Metaphysics*, but from the famous line in *Nicomachean Ethics Book VI*, where he speaks of the different ways in which the soul has truth, or brings about truth, *aletheuein*, not just in *theoria*, but also in *phronesis* and *techne*. For the development of the existential ontology of Heidegger the interpretation of this line is pivotal. It permits him to connect the intentional analysis of meaning-enactment to the ancient, logical, tradition in the exploration of human existence as a living disclosure of being. Man does not have truth only to the extent that he has access to correct propositional sentences representing reality. The movement of life is a movement of understanding, and of disclosure, of making true, in a way that can eventually coalesce in discourse and theoretical statements. And the understanding which is brought about in the course of life is an understanding which is never only theoretical but also always attuned in a comportment, a *Befindlichkeit*.

Through this analysis, which is here summarized in extreme brevity, the strict distinction between the truthful and the non-truthful, elicited from Aristotle's formulation in *Metaphysics*, and implied in the brief remark on prayer in *De Interpretatione*, is not cancelled, but made problematic in a new and more differentiated way. If we look upon scientific and theoretical discourse as one mode in which the disclosing concern, the *Sorge* as *Erschlossenheit*, is lived, then we have a very different situation for interpreting various types of discourses, compared to when the propositional in a strict sense is what defines what can have truth. Not least does it open up the possibility of discussing art

in general, and poetry in particular, precisely as modes of making true. In the analysis of the seminal essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" from 1935, this is precisely how Heidegger approaches the question of art, beyond the traditional aesthetic categories of form and matter, namely as a way of making true, of bringing about an opening in and through which being is made manifest.

In what way could prayer be explored as also a way of making true, of bringing about truth, or letting truth happen? This seems to me to be the most appropriate way of posing the question of prayer from an existential-phenomenological perspective. In the following section I try to develop an answer, first in more Husserlian terms, searching for the intentional act-structure of prayer.

III

What kind of act is prayer? At a first level it would seem to be an intentionality that relates to a non-present object in the mode of want or desire. In praying for something, we ask for that which we do not have, happiness, wealth, health, for ourselves and for our kin, etc. This is the most elementary form of prayer. Structurally it would seem similar to asking someone to give us something, and to give it for free. Another name for this is begging. Seen from the outside prayer would seem to have the intentionality of begging. The beggar cannot compensate for the demanded gift in any other way than through humbling himself, showing his gratitude in gestures of subjection and exaggerated asymmetrical respect and praise. The subject desires what it does not have, thus placing it in a position of servitude in regard to the one that has what oneself does not have.

In a secular setting the role of the beggar is that of the miserable man, for whom it can be a virtue among the more affluent to feel and express pity, but whose own existence is looked upon as wretched. But in many religiously defined cultures the role of the beggar has also been raised to the level of a human ideal, as in the practice of beggar-monks, who live the life of the wretched and dispossessed as a freely chosen fate. In this case the role of the one who needs and who is prepared to receive the help of others is inverted into an ideal. The fact of this ideal is one way to approach further the phenomenology of

prayer. In the case of the monk, the kind of subjectivity which manifests itself in expressed need and exposure, cannot be understood along the lines of the intentionality of begging in the first, everyday sense. For whereas the beggar, who begs from within a desperate need, is a wretched being, the monk manifests his spirituality through *askesis*, training, as a free choice, to live a life in need.

Let us now look closer at the phenomenon of prayer in the religious sense, and see how it differs from the attitude of the beggar as the one who simply cannot pay for what he wants. In prayer the words are directed towards a being who is not an equal human being, but of a totally different standing and nature. It is of course possible to interpret and even to live this prayer in the mode of inter-human begging. We can direct our prayers to God, as little children, in which we express our wishes and try to think out how we, with our very limited means, can pay for what we ask, for example by performing good deeds, or simply by delivering something of ourselves in return, in other words to sacrifice something of ourselves, e.g., our desires. Already in *Eutyphro* Plato ridiculed this form of prayer as a kind of misplaced trading skill between men and Gods.[15] In this mode of prayer, as a negotiation of deeds and things, we are still in a closed economy, which produces sacrifice and violence, in the end on the self. But if we take the analysis one step further, we can see that the phenomenon of prayer is not restricted to such an economy of exchanges with an asymmetrical other, modeled on the experience of begging, or for that matter, trading.

First of all we must note what many analyses of prayer emphasize, and which can also be easily exemplified, namely that prayer tend to be divided in two distinct modes: that of praise, and that of asking for a gift of supplication. A prayer is often both, as in the case of Augustine, who turns to the Lord, in praise — "great are thou o Lord" — and then in the next line, asking for a gift, in this case a gift of understanding: "great are thou o Lord, and grant me to understand." The same movement is followed in the the prayer "Our Father", which opens with the lines "Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name" and which then continues with a supplication for bread and for

15. *Eutyphro*, 14e.

forgiveness. Also Zarathustra's prayer in the third book opens also with praise: "O, heaven above me, so pure! so deep! You light-abyss" ["*Oh Himmel über mir, du Reiner! Tiefer! Du Licht-Abgrund*"].[16]

To praise is on one level to enter into a relation of evaluation, where value is conferred to that which is being bespoken. But the deeper existential sense of praise, in the case of prayer, would seem to have to do with the transformation of the one who praises, rather than with the determination of the object praised. For in praising, the praiser also opens his being to the presence and gift of this value. He does not simply conclude and note it, but he lets it come into presence. To praise is to give something, to give recognition, to give appreciation and love, but as such it is also and at the same time to make oneself available for that which is being praised. Such is the logic also of a discourse of love and friendship, that it cannot be understood only from a solipsistic standpoint, as one relating to another, but also as making oneself available to the life of the other.

In a contribution in the volume on *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, James R. Mensch tries to approach prayer in terms of giving way to the sacred, through a kind of emptying, oriented by the *kenosis*, mentioned by Paul in Phil. 2.7. In Paul this is the act of God emptying himself into the world in the shape of a slave. In one sense the sacred is beyond the region of phenomenality, and as such in principal beyond the reach of a phenomenology. But in another sense the sacred is precisely that which comes into the world, taking place and shape, in other words becomes incarnated. The crucifixion can then also be interpreted as a second such emptying, in which the most valuable and laudable takes on the meaning of nothingness, and precisely in this self-sacrifice manifests itself. The point of the argument here is that in order to have an encounter with such a divinity, man must perform a kind of second emptying, one that opens itself to a different kind of receptivity.[17] This emptying, in order to provide space for the holy and

16. *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Kritische Studienausgabe IV, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988, 207. English trans. G. Parkes', *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 141.
17. "Prayer as Kenosis," in Benson, Bruce and Norman Wirzba, eds., *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, 67.

for the other, is then also interpreted along the lines of enacting a sympathy, a suffering with and for the other, so as to make room for him or her. The sacrifice of Christ, the absolutely innocent victim, becomes the model for this kind of existential comportment, which imitates the divine kenosis, so as to "share the unfathomable generosity of God's kenosis."[18]

This argument has a limited value for a more general interpretation of prayer since it presupposes in too high a degree a specific mythical interpretation of the passion of Christ. Yet, it points to an important existential aspect of prayer precisely in the theme of self-emptying as a way towards a different kind of receptivity. As a mode of discourse prayer would then not be seen as fundamentally concerned with asking for something, but rather as a way for subjectivity to give way, to transcend its self-centeredness, to open itself up to a gift. In another contribution to the same volume, Merold Westphal addresses this theme in less definitive terms, showing how prayer can point the way toward what he speaks of precisely as a "decentered self."[19] He refers to a formulation by Jean-Louis Chrétien about prayer as a form of speech whereby we present ourselves before an invisible other. In his elaboration of this theme, he shows how this presentation of oneself is also at the same time a transcendence with regard to oneself, and as such an emptying, a kenosis. The self that asks in prayer for forgiveness is not asking to be without guilt and thus restored in its self-assuredness, but it is a self that seeks to be more deeply "de-centered," as he writes.[20] This de-centering he understands primarily from the perspective of the intersubjectivity of prayer. As long as prayer is a prayer for something that should satisfy or strengthen one, it works in the region of self-centeredness. But, when it is addressed to a You, as Chrétien also writes, it changes the posture of the praying subject. It is no longer a desire to have somebody as one's object, but instead to demonstrate one's vulnerability in the face of another, of an alterity.[21]

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18. Ibid.
19. "Prayer as the Posture of the Decentered Self," in Benson, Bruce and Norman Wirzba, eds., *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.
20. Ibid., 26.
21. Ibid., 29.

At this point, however, Westphal too turns his finely tuned phenomenological discourse into a more confessional mode, asking concretely what this means in terms of the relation established between man and God in prayer. He writes: "Let us return to the supposition that the you to whom I address these words is God."[22] But we should be careful to let the analysis slip into this mode of affirming the nature of the addressee. For the important point that he then makes is that the You, to whom prayer is often directed, is not a person to be *had* by oneself, but rather the one to which one hopes to *belong*. As Westphal formulates it: "But the only way to take this gift is to place ourselves at God's disposal, to give not this or that but our very selves to God."[23] He comments also on how both Kierkegaard, Derrida, and Marion, in different ways touch upon this paradox of taking through giving, of receiving through dispossession of the self. He sees it as a miracle, and a transubstantiation, which ultimately escapes full conceptual comprehension, and also the ability of the will.

In this thoughtful analysis, Westphal brings us close to a core phenomenon, which deserves careful reflection and whose lead we can follow while bracketing its dogmatic content. Religion has to do with living in gratitude, in hope, and in need, in a sense in "sin," understood as the recognition of one's finitude. The voice of prayer could be interpreted as the living linguistic expression for this life. It incarnates an existential predicament, setting the subject in motion, opening up its capacity for experiencing this predicament. Who has never prayed, who has never been moved by prayer, who has never rejoiced in gratitude and wonder at what is, and who has not at the same time profoundly experienced the limited nature of all creatures, their desperate exposure and loneliness before the totality of it all, will perhaps not be able to enter this space. But this is not to say that one has to belong to a confession or congregation in order to access and thus to be able to reflect on this experience.

22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.

IV

In Nietzsche's autobiography *Ecce Homo*, there is a passage, relating to the writing of Zarathustra, in which he discusses the experience of "inspiration." I quote the long passage, for it speaks so eloquently of an experience which is not only at the heart of his philosophical-poetic expression, but which also relates in profound ways to the core phenomenon of prayer as it emerged in the previous section.

> Has anyone at the end of the nineteenth century a clear idea of what poets of strong ages have called inspiration? If not, I will describe it. — If one had the slightest residue of superstition left in one's system, one could hardly reject altogether the idea that one is merely incarnation, merely mouthpiece, merely a medium of overpowering forces. The concept of revelation — the sense that suddenly, with indescribable certainty and subtlety, something becomes visible, audible, something that shakes one to the last depths and throws one down — that merely describes the facts. One hears, one does not seek; one accepts, one does not ask who gives; like lightning, a thought flashes up, with necessity, without hesitation regarding its form — I never had any choice. A rapture whose tremendous tension occasionally discharges itself in a flood of tears — now the pace quickens involuntary, now it becomes slow; one is altogether beside oneself, with the distinct consciousness of subtle shudders and of one's skin creeping down to one's toes; a depth of happiness in which even what is most gloomy does not seem something opposite but rather conditioned, provoked, a necessary color in such a superabundance of light; an instinct for rhythmic relationships that arches over wide spaces of forms-length, the need for a rhythm with wide arches, is almost the measure of the force of inspiration, a kind of compensation for its pressure and tension. Everything happens involuntary in the highest degree but as in a gale of a feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity — the involuntariness of image and metaphor is strangest of all: one no longer has any notion of what is an image or a metaphor: everything offers itself as the nearest, most obvious, simplest expression. It actually seems, to allude to something Zarathustra says, as if the things themselves approached and offered themselves as metaphors.[24]

The passage offers itself to a long commentary and interpretation. Here I will only make a few remarks. What is being described here? It

24. *Ecce Homo*, trans. W. Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1969, 300f.

is not simply an experience of joyful exaltation, of psychic intoxication. It touches the core of what it means for a subject to be open to the world and to an otherness, and as an event that involves language. In this situation of openness and receptivity, the world is a gift, but a gift of meaning, of meaningfulness, of language. “Everything offers itself as expression,” he writes. What Nietzsche claims to be describing is “poetic inspiration,” and the condition under which certain parts of *Zarathustra* came into being. And as he says, if one had only the least bit of “superstition” in oneself, it would be interpreted as being the medium of overpowering force. For everything offers itself at this stage as “freedom and power, and as divinity.”

But what is inspiration? It is, etymologically, to be inhabited by spirit, by *spiritus*, to be filled by the breath or the *pneuma*, so as to make oneself the recipient, who in receiving is also able to give. The phenomenology of inspiration is, it seems to me, inextricably bound to the experience and practice of prayer. For in prayer, if we take it in the direction suggested by, among others, Westphal, we can see it as the linguistic practice, whereby the subject opens itself, through the dual gesture of praise, and receiving. In the prayer of Zarathustra, the poet calls out to the “sky above me,” speaking to this sky as to a “you”: He searches this you, in order to make room for it in himself, in order to permit him to become this sky, to be part of its blessing, as itself a blesser. In this non-theistic prayer we nevertheless see the two elements that have been pointed out earlier as key components in prayer, namely praise and supplication. As in the tentative analysis above we saw how praise in the case of prayer is not primarily connected to recognizing and ascribing the value of something. Rather it serves as a preparation for stepping out of one’s own self-possessed sphere of valuation, in a recognition of the finitude of one’s own existence.

Supplication can be understood as the deepening of this experience. It does not ask in the expectation that it will be obeyed in its demand. The supplication in prayer is more connected to showing oneself as prepared to receive a gift, as a grace, as something that cannot be controlled, checked, and certainly not required. The prayer is thus also a prayer to be released from the entrapment of the self and its egoistic desires. It is connected to the transformation of subjectivity itself in

the direction of its openness, also to the needs of others. We could therefore speak both of an ontological and an ethical dimension of the posture of prayer, connected to its two central features of praise and supplication. Ontologically, prayer points in the direction of a conception of the self, not as independence and autonomy, but as dependency and belonging. Ethically, it points in the direction of the subject as openness to the need, suffering, and simple being of the other.

I would venture to say that in this strange, in the end unknown experience of inspiration, in the sense of giving way, in order not simply to receive, as the beggar, but also in order to be able to place oneself in the role of the giver of loving praise we also discover an elemental form of prayer. But the subject cannot give unless it can receive; this is also the secret economy of prayer: that we must recognize our need, our finitude, in order to speak. Both of these elements are also present in the Lord's Prayer, as first presented in Matt. 6.7, which starts out with praise, and then turns to supplication, but a supplication not only for ones's life and survival, but also for a composure of forgiving, in regard to the other, as connected to the ability to be forgiven oneself. In prayer, the subject recognizes its moral finitude in recognizing its sins, but asking not only to have them cancelled, but also to relate them to the ability to forgive what is sinful and deficient in the other. Thus we could venture to describe prayer, ideally, also as a song of finitude, as the recognition, in poetic speech, that we are not the full masters of our own fate, and that only on the condition that this finitude is recognized can we also enter into a living, thinking relation to our predicament.

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PHENOMENOLOGY AND RELIGION:
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The last two decades have witnessed a rising interest from philosophers in the phenomenological, hermeneutic, and continental tradition in questions concerning religion, religious experience, and the relation between faith and reason. The essays in this volume, written by philosophers, theologians, and religious scholars engage in a dialogue concerning these new frontiers. They retrace the earliest roots of phenomenological reflection on religion in the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and Stein, and they address contemporary debates, not least the much discussed "theological turn" in phenomenology, in the work of Marion, Derrida, and Henry. Among the themes treated are transcendence and immanence, immensity, prayer, and the messianic. The essays trace new paths and open up questions of relevance for all those interested in what it means to think religion from a philosophical position today.

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