

I. Perception, Transcendence and the Experience of God

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God is admittedly no thing.

And when he dares be present in the world as a thing (Hegel uses the word ‘thing’ about the Catholic conception of the Eucharist), he does so in the sense perception perceives only as a *sacramentum*: the *res* is unperceivable.

These two inaugural sentences are not meant to suggest that a phenomenology of perception has no relevance for us. And to show that in fact it does have relevance, I propose a few steps towards a concept of divine transcendence. I shall show, first, that sense perception, in the Husserlian account, deals organically with transcendence. I shall then observe that the realm of phenomena is larger than the realm of perceived entities, and ask a few questions about what appears to us in affective experiences. Finally I will suggest one or two things about the way God appears while transcending his present apparition.

Res semper major

Two points are remarkable in Husserl’s account of perception in the 1905–06 lectures on epistemology.¹ The first is that

¹ See E. Husserl, *Wahrnehmung und Aufmerksamkeit: Texte aus dem Nachlass*, XXXVIII *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. T. Vongher and R. Giuliani (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004), pp. 3–67.

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perception is an authentic acquaintance with things. The second is that the nature of things makes it humanly impossible to come to any total or perfect perception.

No reader of the *Logical Investigations* may feel any surprise when taught that perception deals with things themselves and, therefore, that we can be (in a most anti-Russellian fashion) acquainted with things. In the Husserlian treatment of perception there is no need to 'describe' a cube in order to know it. We see the cube, though sensation 'presents' only part of it to us. No need, let us be more precise, to *say* that 'the object which is now visible to me is a cube'. The cube is here 'in the flesh', *leibhaft da*. And yet what is presented here and now is not the whole thing. It is the thing as a (here-and-now) visible entity: when I say that I see the cube, or rather the cat or the pipe, I admit implicitly that I do not touch or smell them – and that my perception is alarmingly partial. But when I claim that I do see the cat or the pipe, my claim is phenomenologically (that is, philosophically) justified, as it would be justified if I did not see the cat or the pipe. One must go further. 'Perception' does not denote a punctual experience; rather it denotes what we might call perceiving life, or a slice of life. There are punctual or quasi-punctual perceptions: Husserl uses the example of a flash of lightning illuminating a landscape at night. But we perceive in time; and we can say that time is given to us ('us' means here the addition of consciousness and a sensory apparatus) to enable what Husserl calls 'synthetic' perception. I am seeing a house from a distance, and then near, and then nearer, I can eventually walk around the house, etc. Moreover, perspectives, different distances etc., all that is not to be considered as constituting different discrete perceptions, but as moments to be synthesized in a global perception. I am right to say that I see the house when I see it from afar, as well as when I walk around it. But we need no phenomenology, and only some common sense, to remark that one can see the same thing differently – in Husserlian terminology, one sees differently, but with the same *Wahrnehmungssinn*, in different acts of perception endowed with the same reference or denotation. Perceiving is a synthesis

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of 'adequate' and 'inadequate' perception. In the experience we are briefly describing, it is the synthesis of a present perception of the thing as it is now presented to us by sensation and of past perceptions of the thing as presented to us by memory. And in non-temporal (that is, not necessarily temporal) perception, it is the synthesis of what is now presented to us by sensation and what it 'alludes to' ('symbolic' perception) – I see an armchair, but its back is not adequately perceived.

This leads us to the second point. The wholly adequate perception, viz. the perceiving act the content of which would be the whole of the thing, or the whole of its perceivable reality (perception of atoms is impossible, and Husserl knew this) is an ideal and only an ideal. We can try to describe it and prove that ideality is no impossibility. This assertion needs to be qualified, though. The comprehensive experience of an object, in fact, has only the possibility of an infinite experience. And even if we admit that almost no perception is strictly instantaneous, and therefore that perception, as a synthesis, involves sensation, memory, and even expectation, it will be wise not to embark upon the task of comprehensive perception without a previous knowledge that what is perceived now will perhaps be forgotten, or distorted by memory, when we perceive another aspect of the same thing. Sensations present fragments of reality. Perception synthesizes these fragments. But the temporal limits of perception are obvious. Fink in his sixth *Cartesian Meditation*, pictures an ego, or a consciousness, endowed with the power of perceiving comprehensively – this over-dimensional transcendental ego is nonetheless no human ego (a fact Fink readily admits). Contrariwise, Husserl's concept and description of consciousness, in 1905–1905 (and later, indeed) are the concept and the description of human consciousness. And such a consciousness cannot be acquainted (Husserl speaks of *Bekanntheit*) with the whole of the thing (or the whole of the perceivable thing). We are well acquainted with many things: our cat, our pipe etc. But even with these old acquaintances, no eschatology of perception is conceivable. No *human* eschatology of perception.

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This allows us to introduce cautiously a concept of transcendence. The word is absent from the 1905–06 lectures, where Husserl only reminds us that nothing appears except to consciousness, and that we cannot describe what does not appear to us – and this leads to the classical Husserlian concept of transcendence. We shall easily concede that there is no phenomenology without phenomena, and it will look tautological. But is it? The case of perception proves that it is not, or more precisely that ‘appearing’ is more than ‘being presented by our senses’. Perception precisely deals simultaneously with what appears (what is presented by our senses) and what does not appear (what is not presented by our senses). We perceive the cube and not the ‘side’, *Seite*, of the cube, which is now visible to us. And as soon as we have said that we perceive the cube, though we do not perceive it ‘adequately’, we must add that the invisible is part of what we perceive. We do not see the invisible. But we perceive the invisible: the visible refers (‘symbolically’) to the invisible. Perceiving what is presented by sensation and what is presented symbolically must not be confused. I was perceiving a computer while writing this essay: a computer, and not the part of the computer my eyes and hands allowed me to perceive adequately. This, let us add, was a unitary perception: ‘adequate’ and ‘symbolic’ perception must neither be confused nor be separated. And nonetheless it was an incomplete perception. The computer was partly appearing, partly unappearing. But the experience was in no way frustrating: we are natively used to the fact of things being never adequately perceived.

All this means that we are natively familiar with the fact of things always transcending their actual phenomenality. Most of the furniture of the universe is now absent from the field of my consciousness, and this does not matter. But what appears to me is partially absent as well, and this does matter. This does matter because it discloses a major law in the logic of experience. This law may be spelled out shortly: perceptive experience deals simultaneously with the phenomenal and the non-phenomenal. Or, more adequately: perceptive experience deals also with the non-perceived. Let us here take a closer look.

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First point: we perceive more than our senses present to us. Describing implies necessarily a knowledge of the invisible (the inaudible, etc.), and this knowledge is granted to us by the visible. That is, the visible lets the invisible appear. Second point: one ought to be careful not to demand too exact a knowledge of the invisible (the inaudible, etc.). Husserl is careful to remark, in English, that the logic of *belief* is never far from the logic of perception. No visual sensation does present to me now, the back of my chair. I sit on it, and have sensation plus perception of its back. And yet I quite normally believe that this limited perception allows me to be conscious of sitting on the chair I normally sit on when working with my computer. But insofar as perception only is involved, this is belief. (I can reason and come to the conclusion that it is 'justified as true belief' – but this is another problem.) The first epistemological fact, in Husserlian terms, is well known, 'the originary ground of belief': it describes our relation to phenomena as well as our relation to non-phenomena. We have gone further in our reading of perception. What we face in the case of the non-appearing is a second-order belief. The first-order belief is that there are things outside the field of consciousness. the second-order belief is that what appears to us lets the non-phenomenal appear as well. It seems that Janicaud made a major phenomenological blunder when he assumed that phenomenology deals only with the visible (the audible, etc.), and that the play of sensory 'matter' and intentional 'form' gives access to the visible and the visible only.² No phenomenon, indeed, without a quasi-appearance of the non-phenomenon. Or in other words: there is no perception of the visible without a co-perception of the invisible. Or again: perception grasps – *Auffassung* – simultaneously the visible and the invisible.

This is not enough, and one could easily object to my assumptions. The so-called 'symbolic' perception or quasi-perception

² D. Janicaud, 'The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology' in Janicaud *et al.* (eds), *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), pp. 16–103.

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of the invisible may turn out to be a non-perception. What I perceive as a cube may very well not be a cube. What I perceive from afar as a house may very well turn out to be a theatre setting. Verification, of course, is (almost) always possible: I just need to have a closer, longer look at things. But what am I doing when I am having this closer look? It seems I am refusing tacitly a fundamental phenomenological law, namely the primacy of intuition. 'As much intuition as possible, as less understanding as possible.' But if we have a closer look at what is going on when I have a closer look, we shall easily come to a counter-conclusion: to have access to the thing, I must have understood that perception (not only sensation but perception as well) may perpetually deceive me. Therefore, more intuition is needed. And thus, we are driven back to perception as a temporal process. And if such a process is 'required', we must conclude that the invisible has very often to become visible to be perceived.

'Transcendence', therefore, sounds like the apt word. Experience (one at least, perception) is fragmentary. Not only because it deals only with this or that, but also because this or that appears always partially, and appears in such a way that perception may perpetually be deceived. Things are here and appear 'in the flesh'. But to be faithful to what sensation presents to consciousness, 'signs' and 'symbols' must be interpreted (the interpretation is tacit and intuitive, of course) with care or 'flair'. Does what is presented to me point to the presence of a house? No hasty 'conclusion' is allowed.³ Signs and symbols may always be pseudo-signs and pseudo-symbols. And we may eventually take leave of pure perception, and ask reasoning to come to the help of the party, to decipher them.

These are no grounds for despair. We believe originarily in the transcendent existence of the world and of things in the

³ 'Conclusion' means here what it can mean, according the late Husserl (namely in *Experience and Judgment*), in the case of antepredicative experience. There is no need to add that *Experience and Judgment*, though Landgrebe edited the work in 1939, uses much earlier manuscripts.

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world, and we know originally, or natively, that perceptive comprehension is forbidden to us. Each perceptive experience, therefore, provides us with an opportunity to acknowledge its fragmentary nature (I feel the chair I am sitting on, I do not see it, etc.), to acknowledge that the thing transcends what is presented to me here and now. In this way we have already noticed that we cannot rely on the time which is given to us. Everything available to sensation transcends perception. Everything is critical of my perception of it: *res semper major*.

Fühlen von etwas

This was not a conclusion but my first point. And let me haste to add that phenomenology is definitely not to be reduced to a theory of sense perception. Phenomenology deals with phenomena, and it belongs to the definition of the phenomenon that it 'appears'. But what does 'appearing' mean? A quick look back at the distinction between what is 'presented' to consciousness and what is 'grasped' by consciousness will be enough to prove that the field of phenomenality is wider than the field of perceivable entities. Things appear, but other entities appear, that is, are presented to consciousness in one way or another. Numbers appear, though they are devoid of any perceptibility. Values appear (something Scheler is not the only phenomenologist to have noted). The ego appears to itself (always partially, and we do not need a psychoanalyst to say so). And if it is phenomenologically axiomatic that consciousness is always intentional, the 'aboutness' of consciousness implies that perceivable entities are only one subset among the set of appearing entities; and that proves that non-perceivable entities are as transcendent to consciousness as perceivable entities are. I began with remarks borrowed from Husserl's 1905-06 lectures; my last observations lead us back to the *Logical Investigations* and even to the *Philosophy of Arithmetics*. (And, as a matter of fact, Husserl never forgot, even in his last works, that he had written the *Logical Investigations*.)

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Phenomenology started its career with an anti-psychologism battle-cry. And although the ‘thing’ came later, in the post-Second World War Heidegger, to receive a highly determined and idiosyncratic meaning, its Husserlian meaning is undetermined through and through: a value is a ‘thing’; a number is a ‘thing’; the Other Man is a ‘thing’; etc. Things so appear to consciousness (this is a redundancy, of course: appearing is appearing to consciousness). Things, on the other hand, are no products of consciousness. A logical law is not a psychological law. A number is not reducible to my awareness that $2+2=4$. The *modus ponens* or number 2, when they appear to me, is of course immanent to consciousness. But beware! Their existence in the field of consciousness is pseudo-existence (an non-Husserlian term), and the originary task of phenomenology is to stick to their real, extra-psychological existence.

I have just made use of a very broad concept of existence, and said that numbers, logical laws, values etc. ‘existed’. This was unobjectionable, for one reason: numbers and values have the same right to appear to us that cats and pipes also have. Segregation here would be a bad starting point, because phenomenology is interested in all phenomena, however they appear to us. This may be eventually objectionable, though, and I have just said why: because there is not a unique and uniform way of appearing. The cat appears to me, the logical law appears to me (we have only, to make such an assertion, to purify ‘appearing’ from all visual connotation). But I perceive the cat, and I do not perceive the logical law (I can perceive logical symbols, but there is no need to prove that they are not the logical law). In both cases, the cat and the *modus ponens*, I can speak of acquaintance, *Bekanntheit* (Russell, by the way, is ready to speak of ‘acquaintance’ in the case of certain mathematical objects). What is self-evident, though, is that we are dealing here and there with very different modes of phenomenality. And if there are different modes of phenomenality, we need only to take one step in order to suggest that there are different modes of phenomenality because there are different modes of being.

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And here, a differentiated concept of existence becomes necessary. If I may take leave of Husserl for a few instants, let me remark that Heidegger has names and concepts for many modes of being; for ‘existence’, which is the mode of being proper to humanity; for ‘life’, which is the mode of being proper to the animal; for ‘being-at-hand’, which is the mode of being proper to objects; and for ‘subsistence’, which is the mode of being proper to mathematical objects. The list is Heidegger’s, and in no way exhaustive (what of the mode of being proper to the angels, or to God?). But it is certainly sufficient for our purpose. Let us say, then, that number 2 subsists, and that the pipe is ‘objectively present’:⁴ two very different entities, two very different modes of being. We have already noticed that the pipe does not appear as number 2 appears. Conclusion, therefore: each mode of being has its own mode of phenomenality. I am sorry, here, to be immensely trivial. My conclusion is not to be found *expressis verbis* in the Husserlian corpus, but it is a well-known Husserlian axiom that ‘to any fundamental form of objectivity . . . belongs a fundamental form of self-evidence’. And as self-evidence is a property of phenomena, I am adding nothing to my sources. A pity. I shall not have to be pitied, though, if we remark that this has its bearings on the phenomenological status of transcendence. Here and there, in the realm of perception or in the realm of non-perceivable phenomena, we are facing transcendence: transcendence of the number, transcendence of the pipe, etc. But do we exactly deal with transcendence, singular? If I am right, we do not: we deal with transcendences, plural. The pipe and the cat are out there, but nobody will believe that numbers are out there – nobody, even the most aggressive Platonist among philosophers of mathematics. There is no place to locate numbers. They subsist

⁴ ‘Objective presence’ translates *Vorhandenheit* in J. Stambaugh’s translation of *Sein und Zeit* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996). Robinson and Macquarrie say ‘presence at-hand’. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

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nowhere, and first of all not in our mind. As Desanti once said, 'mathematics belong neither to the earth nor to heaven'. And this electivity of mathematical objects is a mode of transcendence, more precisely a mode of transcendence mathematical entities do not share with any other set of entities. Modes of being, plural, modes of appearing, plural, modes of transcendence, plural. I think that my conclusions, though I have argued quickly, are only a short gloss in the margins of Husserl.

Let me hasten to add that I have bracketed an embarrassing case. We have assumed, while having a first glance at phenomenality, that phenomenality was a property of the other – and, for that matter, of any other. And therefore, no theory of phenomenality could be constructed without the help of a concept of transcendence. But what about myself? That I am acquainted with myself is obvious (which does not imply that I am perfectly acquainted with myself). That any experience of some other thing is a co-experience of myself is also obvious. But though things keep appearing to me, they appear in the sphere of immanence of consciousness (an elementary fact which will eventually enable me to describe them faithfully without the slightest interest for their transcendent reality – one speaks of 'reduction' in the case of such descriptions). That the transcendent becomes immanent in so far as it acquires phenomenality raises no major problem or no problem at all. One could call perception to the dock and suggest that the unachievable task of perceiving provides us with an argument in favour of the transcendence of things. The question is still here, nonetheless: can we say that the self appears to himself? Existence of course can always appear to existence (in the Heideggerian *Fürsorge*, in the Levinasian 'epiphany', etc.). More humbly, intersubjectivity (in the Husserlian sense) is always possible. And here and there, an other man appears as criticizing his (always possible) reduction to the status of the intentional object. But do I appear to myself? As I have just said, I am certainly acquainted with myself. I can also perceive myself. Pain, for instance, enters the field of consciousness as well as a pipe or a tune enter it. Perceiving, suffering, feeling etc.: wherever consciousness is present, inten-

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tionality is also present, and no intentionality is deprived of an object – of course.

I do not claim to have given an answer to the problem of ‘self-appearing’. But we have noticed at least a telling case: the case of feeling. When we speak of feeling, a fortunate native speaker of German will have two concepts at his or her disposal: *Gefühl*, that is, absolute feeling (‘I am feeling well’) and *Fühlen von etwas*, that is, intentional feeling, feeling endowed with an object – for instance a ‘value’, if we agree here with Scheler. We are feeling well, or we are feeling alone, or we are feeling a pain, or we are feeling that this music is beautiful, or we are feeling that this behaviour is morally shocking, etc.: we can legitimately use the same word. We are affected by music ‘as’ we are affected by a toothache and as we are affected, to give a non-Schelerian and non-Husserlian example, by the threats of nothingness as disclosed by anxiety. Scheler, nonetheless, makes an important point when he proposes his distinction between *Gefühl* and *Fühlen von etwas*. To the concept of feeling, it does not belong to have an object. Heidegger, to come back to him, distinguishes fear – which is always *fear-of* – and anxiety, which has no object. We can disagree and argue that anxiety has no object only because it has no limited object – but that it has as its object a reality (nothingness) that transcends all objectivity. But never mind (here). The unforgettable lesson we have to receive, not from a *consensus phenomenologorum* which we could not trace, but at least from the main tenets of all phenomenology, is fairly clear: between ‘intentional’ and ‘non-intentional’ feeling, we ought to draw a dividing line, but we are unfortunately unable to do so.

Am I feeling ‘something’? A preliminary answer is that some entities can only be felt (‘aesthetic’ values are the best example), and/or that affection (‘affection’, to translate Heidegger’s *Befindlichkeit*⁵) has a genuine cognitive power. This unfortunately is not enough, and we must add that this cognitive power

⁵ I follow Emmanuel Martineau, as we ought all to do. See his *Etre et temps* (Paris: Authentica, 1985), p. 310.

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is not something we can rely on whatever appears to us. Values, for instance, are remarkably vague entities which, in most cases, appear only to the member of this or that community: Schönberg's music will not appear to the musically uneducated as it appears to a modern music addict; and what appears to me as wicked will not appear as morally evil to the standard Islamic terrorist. Values, moreover, can be deprived of any phenomenality. The philistine, looking at a work of art, may very well perceive only an object among all objects and feel nothing except the presence of an object to be compared with any other – and which is not more 'valuable' than any other. And which is more, what I feel may be only myself, or rather my being an existing entity, that is, my being-in-the-world, in one or another way. Feeling at ease, feeling lonely, feeling anxious, these affective tonalities disclose nothing except myself (and we can claim, at least, to know here how to understand the problem of 'self-appearing'). Affection may be cognitive – I readily admit that it is. But this does not mean that things or entities perpetually affect me. I may be affected by myself or by the world (and both may be equivalent). Being affected, therefore, may very well mean becoming acquainted with this or that. But it may also mean being acquainted with myself and/or the world. And if affection disclosed purely our finiteness to us, as it does in the phenomenon of anxiety, it will inevitably lead us not to be affected by the work of art which is now presented to us, but which we do not 'let appear' as it is. I am anxious, and therefore I feel 'nothing'. Feeling 'nothing', viz. the paradoxical presence of nothingness, I do feel indeed. And in so far as I do feel, I cannot co-feel, if I may say so, what I am only able to see or to hear. Values, thus, perhaps appear to us, but we have also to make them appear to us. And this task, which belongs roughly to 'attention', requires often more than attention: one needs more than attention to get rid of anxiety and let the work of art appear to us as a work of art and not as an object among all objects.

Again, do I feel 'something', or do I feel myself as (in most cases but certainly not in all cases) being-in-the-world? We very

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often cannot decide. We certainly would like to decide whether what happens in us comes from us (from a sphere of radical immanence) or transcends us. It would be unwise, though, to become the preys of some 'phenomenological purism'. What appears to us in the course of our affective life, and when we scrutinize this life, is rarely pure presentation of the self and his world to himself, or pure presentation of a transcendent entity to the self. There are cases of pure presentation: perfect attention to the work of art will bracket everything but the work of art and its appearing. But there are cases when we cannot have a sure opinion about what is appearing to us – and these cases are certainly more interesting for us today. I may feel something, I may feel the transcendental conditions of experience (that is, what Heidegger calls the 'world'), I may be affected by the world while hearing this or that, but I cannot both feel myself as being-in-the-world and feel some transcendent entity. And, which is worse, I very often cannot decide what the 'meaning' (the Husserlian *Sinn*) of my feeling is. Before Husserl, Meinong had noticed that emotions 'presented' something to consciousness. It must be clear, by now, that the case of sense perception and the case of emotive perception are not analogical. The disanalogy is obvious. In the first case, we can always give a name to the object of our experience. In the second, we cannot do it always. A pity for W. Alston, who would like to convince us that 'Christian Mystical Experience' (his words) is as reliable as sense perception and perfectly analogous to it.⁶

Parousia

It is high time to ask whether we can make room for the Absolute, or God (as German idealism is dead, we can use safely the concept of the Absolute), in the problematic we have

⁶ W. P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell, 1991). For a better understanding of Alston's argument, see his *The Reliability of Sense Perception* (Ithaca and London: Cornell, 1993).

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sketched. A preliminary question must be answered: can God ‘appear’ to us, or be ‘presented’ to us, viz. to consciousness? Can a phenomenal ‘content’ have the Absolute as its definite ‘reference’, *Sinn*? And, therefore, can we be acquainted (is *Bekanntheit* possible) with the Absolute? Let us not forget that acquaintance, in phenomenological terms, is an offspring of intuition and not of a discursive-conceptual work (that it is ante-predicative acquaintance). And let us remember that in the mainstream of the Christian tradition (the one I know reasonably well), intuition of God, ‘vision’, is an eschatological event: that here and now we do not see, but believe (if we are wise enough to do so). What of these objections and of their consequences?

We may give a first and negative answer. Some experiences, of the emotive variety, claim to have God as their object. And against them, we can easily develop a strategy akin to John of the Cross: ‘if you feel, this is not God’. This is a good strategy, and it leads to an important point. What we feel in ‘religious’ experiences may be described as the sacred, or the (Heideggerian) proximity of ‘divine beings’, more adequately than the Absolute. And even the chief believer in the existence of a *sensus divinus* innate in human beings is careful to say that this sixth sense allows us to know for sure that there is a God, and not that we feel it. To John of the Cross and his followers (myself included), though, we may nonetheless object that we have no right to forbid the Absolute from appearing to us, and from doing so in the realm of affection. I concede that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob cannot be conceived of as a potential intentional object. But we have a right to describe, first, and then a right to have a respectable concept of divine transcendence. A well-known God cannot appear to us: the God known as Wholly Other – probably Plotinus’ *thatéron*, certainly not Augustine’s *valde aliud*, of course the modern *ganz Anderes*. And it is very unfortunate for Otto’s descriptions (and, as a matter of fact, for Barth’s early theology) that they can find names, concepts and contents of experience to identify the presence or proximity of this God. A Wholly Other God, after

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all, ought to appear as ‘numinous’ and yet beyond the numinous, as fascinating and yet as beyond all fascination, etc. He ought to appear as Other and Non-Other, *valde aliud* and *non aliud*. He ought to criticize every experience that claims to be an experience ‘of God’ (he does it in Barth, of course – and he does it in Balthasar, who, very surprisingly, bores us with *das Ganz Andere* throughout his best small book⁷). And this suggests that the concept of abstract otherness, or abstract transcendence, can lead us nowhere. I am not reneging on what I have just said, or said elsewhere; the ambiguity of feelings and emotions is still perfectly valid. Can God nonetheless, despite the disanalogy between perception and affection, appear to us, if I may say so, ‘in the flesh’? I think we can argue in favour of this hypothesis.

In an all-important passage of *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes affection, *Befindlichkeit*, as endowed with cognitive abilities. He then praises Scheler for having rediscovered these abilities, following impulses by Augustine and Blaise Pascal. And there, in footnote 3 to section 29, he quotes both Augustine and Pascal. According to Augustine, *non intratur in veritatem nisi per caritatem*:⁸ one does not reach truth except through love. And according to Pascal, who develops Augustine’s maxim, ‘in the case we are speaking of human things, it is said to be necessary to know them before we can love . . . But the saints, on the contrary, when they speak of divine things, say we must love them before we know them, and that we enter into truth only through charity.’⁹ We can prove *ab absurdo* the rightness of the argument. Could God appear to us and not be loved? Can we figure an experience of a non-lovable God? Otto’s *mysterium tremendum et fascinatum*, admittedly, is no lovable object. The primal experience in Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith* (that is, the feeling of absolute dependence) makes no

⁷ See *Glaubhaft is nur Liebe* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1963). A surprising thing in a book devoted to prove the kind of cognoscibility belonging to a God who reveals himself.

⁸ Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum libri triginta tres, Opera Omnia*, PL 42, 32.18.

⁹ *Sein und Zeit*, tr. Stambaugh, 403–4.

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room for love. And I am ready to admit that in such experiences, if we stick to interpreting them from a theological point of view, God hides himself more than he discloses himself. What I have just said, nonetheless, was no slip of the tongue, and I intend to suggest that God can appear, paradoxically, as a hidden God – or more precisely, that it belongs to God’s disclosure that his hiddenness is ever greater.

Let us say, first, that all varieties of ‘religious experience’ are vague occurrences, the affective ‘content’ of which does not allow us to decide whether the religious person is facing God or an idol, or rather God or the sacred, as immanent to the Heideggerian ‘Fourfold’. And let us suggest that it is illegitimate to believe that some criterion or some conceptual distinction (for instance, Levinas’s distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘holy’) could allow us always to draw a boundary between experiences which ‘grasp’ in some way the Absolute and experiences which fail to do so. Here again, one cannot interpret the logic of feeling if one does not perceive this intrinsic vagueness. In many cases, of course, our object is not vague: to take an example, ‘pagan spiritualities’, which are by no means dead, they are not disclosures of God however – they disclose the earth, both in the precise Heideggerian meaning of the word and in the simple, non-conceptual meaning contemporary pagans give to the same word. In many other cases, though, and these are the theoretically challenging cases, vagueness is essential to experience. Such experiences are certainly ‘religious’. But do they stand under the protection of God? We cannot exclude the possibility that the experience into which Schleiermacher was initiating the reader of his *Speeches* can disclose God in some way – but we cannot exclude the possibility that this experience hides God more than it discloses him. This is our problem.

Nevertheless, let me suggest, and this is my second point, that it belongs to any truthful experience of God to be infinitely partial. This is a truism. Truisms may be useful, though. The old motto, *Deus semper major*, has an eschatological meaning: though generations of Latin theologians have used the word, we

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shall never be *comprehensores*. It has also a historic content, and we shall focus on it. Let us say, then, that a partial experience of God is nonetheless an experience of God. Properly understood (that is, with a generous use of the principle of charity), Schleiermacher's 'feeling of absolute dependence' presents God to the subject of this feeling: partly, but adequately. But the religious or Christian person, does not learn from affection only: Scriptures and creeds teach us more than affection does. But we are feeling animals, all presence is meant to be felt and, as I have said, the God we would deprive of the right to be felt would be a weak God. If God is to be thought as the Infinite, a very apt concept in our context, his disclosure cannot be a *parousia*. Disclosure nonetheless, and disclosure in the field of affective life, must be accepted as a perpetual possibility. Most disclosures after all are partial – any analysis of intersubjectivity would provide us with ample material.

The idea of a process of disclosure-and-hiding, or hiding-in-disclosure, then, ought not to raise any theoretical problem. Sense perception 'grasps', but wholly 'adequate' sense perception is only an ideal. Aesthetic emotion 'grasps' the beauty of a work of art, but it does not take possession of it once for all. And if no experience can make the Absolute available to us, though the Absolute may be truly presented to us here or there, then God's hyperbolic transcendence may be elucidated, *juxta modum*, as we elucidate any transcendence – that is, any non-divine transcendence provides us with a pre-understanding of divine transcendence. Another suggestion: should we not say that we have to wait until God is (affectively) present to us to know clearly what transcendence means after the Husserlian breakthrough? This second suggestion is probably the right one. I have spoken of God being here 'in the flesh', and this was no allusion to an incarnation. It meant, simply, that we might be conscious of his presence and no other – which God may appear to us, not according to the laws of theophanies, but in the modest way of his presence being felt. Peter's presence does not provide me with a 'comprehensive' affective knowledge of Peter: I just know that this one is Peter; I am acquainted with

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him though I keep discovering new aspects of his personality, etc. Peter is visible and God is invisible. But in both cases, we are not dealing with an apocalyptic disclosure of any sort. It will take years to become ‘perfectly acquainted’ with Peter, if it is possible at all. And can we say it is possible to become ‘perfectly acquainted’ with God?

We are again back to the problem of ‘phenomenology and the invisible’, with the surprising conclusion that a phenomenology which would deal exclusively with what is presented to consciousness would be a short-lived enterprise. We have come to say that the Absolute may be felt as present – the Absolute in the flesh – but that his presence is no *parousia*. The God ‘the heart can feel’ (the words are Pascal’s) is therefore is both present and absent. It would not raise any difficulty, moreover, to prove that our feeling of his absence grows in proportion with our feeling of his presence: to paraphrase loosely the Fourth Lateran Council,¹⁰ to prove that *non potest praesentia sentiri, quin etiam major sit absentia sentienda*. No ‘God’ is at our disposal except the idol. And the fact that the heart may feel both God’s presence and absence, and always a greater absence, is the cornerstone of all hermeneutics of so-called ‘religious experiences’. God is unfelt more than he is felt. Anticipations of his eschatological presence, that is, his *parousia*, may very well be granted to privileged witnesses. But in the everydayness proper to our experience of God, we have to be satisfied with sheer non-eschatological presence. This does not mean, of course, that we have to bracket all *knowledge* of God being immensely more than we feel he is, or to bracket all desire to ‘see’ what is presently ‘invisible’, viz. to feel what is presently out of reach of affection. God’s presence, in so far as ‘presence’ is understood as present to the ‘heart’, is essentially frustrating. Anticipations may be enjoyed, but the God whose presence we

¹⁰ See the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) document *Constitutiones*, 2: *De errore abbatis Iochim*. For the Latin text with English translation, see N. P. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1: *Nicaea I to Lateran V* (London: Sheed & Ward; Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), pp. 231–3.

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enjoy is more to be desired than to be enjoyed. And consequent quietism (though I do not think any historical form of quietism has been that consequent) could be accused of ignoring the way the Absolute is presented to us, both in disclosure and in hiddenness.

We perceive houses, though only part of the house is adequately presented to us. We feel the presence of God, though nothing more than presence, and no parousia, is given to us. We shall be wise not to think that the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is equivalent to the mystery of God (might an experience of a faceless mystery be an experience of God?). We shall concede, perhaps, that a 'feeling of absolute dependence' is a sure index of the presence of God: and this will mean that Schleiermacher's God discloses himself when he is present as the Almighty. We shall not concede, of course, that God is only (or first of all) presented to us as the Almighty. And we shall certainly refuse the right for any particular kind of experience to be paradigmatic of an affective experience of God. God is not *only* the Almighty – this is the *articulus stantis et cadentis* of any theology (not only Schleiermacher's) with a starting point in affective experience. It is true; nonetheless, that God only is the Almighty. But we cannot spell it out in both a philosophically and theologically respectable way if we do not confess the essential partiality of affective life.

And so we are back to the logic of love and the paradoxical priority of love over knowledge. It is not necessary to insist on an elementary fact: love is affective, but affection cannot be reduced to the experience of love. The same Heidegger who quotes Augustine and Pascal on the cognitive power of this precise affective experience – *love* – does not describe in the following sections of *Being and Time* any experience involving 'love' or 'charité'. Nor does Heidegger feel any need to mention the love of God. This is a puzzle for the historian of philosophy, and we have no time here to solve it. But we can make suggestions (and it will not be detrimental if they turn out to be at least partly correct).

The first is that love desires what theology calls 'vision', and

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what we have called ‘parousia’ – nothing less. This sounds innocent. But does it not imply that love knows, or feels, precisely, that God’s presence in the world is only presence, and that more than presence is needed to give rest? Love, needless to say, is intentional through and through. I do not love: I love Peter, Paul or God (or the three of them together, of course). If I love Peter, I desire Peter’s presence (and we must admit that this desire, too, is doomed to be frustrated: Peter’s presence is not parousiac, *pace* Levinas). But, more importantly, if I love God as he is present to me in the world, I can but know that he transcends every ‘side’ – every Husserlian *Seite* – of himself that is here disclosed to me now.

A second point, or a corollary, is that we can refuse implicitly the transcendence of God and, therefore, love an idol. Could we not suspect that realized eschatology, in all its forms, from Hegel to Bultmann, is guilty of idol-worship? Hegel’s knowledge of God is unsurpassable. Bultmann’s experience of God is unsurpassable. Here and there, no room for a *desiderium videndi Deum*, no acknowledgement of God’s ever greater divinity: a fact which proves, perhaps, that Hegel and Bultmann know no other love of God than an *amor Dei intellectualis* – or that they love theology more than God. And if we think that God is *offenbar*, and/or when we have no room left for hope, I suspect, again, that idolatry is not far off.

A third point, then, by way of a rough conclusion: God may be presented to us in intentional affective experiences is both *de jure* and *de facto*. That God, or the ‘divine god’, criticizes all affective grasps, is a matter of common sense. And that he is affectively present to us in a non-parousiac way is also a trivial matter of fact. To say it more simply: God’s phenomenality cannot be understood if we do not understand that God transcends his phenomenality. Parousia, to be sure, does not contradict presence. But we cannot understand divine presence, that is, that this presence is divine, if we do not look for parousia. And I suggest that love only understands, first that presence is presence, and second that presence is only presence.