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Husserl and the Theological Question

Abstract:

Defending the ancient thesis, that being and the true, or being and manifestation, are necessarily inseparable, is at the heart of transcendental phenomenology. The transcendental “reduction” disengages the basic “natural” naïve doxastic belief which permits the world to appear as essentially indifferent to the agency of manifestation. The massive work of transcendental phenomenology is showing the agency of manifestation of “absolute consciousness.” Yet the foundations of this agency of manifestation are pervaded by issues which, when addressed, reveal that the question of a “second absolute” is basic and opens Husserlian phenomenology to metaphysical questions. This has to do not merely with the teleology of the agency of manifestation, i.e., the “whither” of the teleology of presencing, but also, in some sense, with the constituting “whence” of the transcendental I. Husserl argues for the teleology of truth pointing to both a divine subject as well as a divine entelechy.

Keywords:

the agency of manifestation, absolute consciousness, teleology, divine subject, divine entelechy, Husserl

1. Absolute Consciousness and the Relative Being of the World

Science, much of philosophy, and everyday life occurs in the “natural attitude.”¹ Modern science is in the “naturalistic natural attitude.” The basic implicit philosophical dogma of the natural attitude is that being is indif-

1) For the natural and transcendental attitude as well as Husserl’s critique of scientism and naturalism, see: Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und Transzendente Phänomenologie*, *Husserliana VI*, ed. Rudolf Boehm (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963).

ferent to mind. Thus for modern science “being” (*ens*) is not philosophically convertible with “the true” (*verum*). Indeed for most of science and life it is not essential to posit a tie between being and its display to mind. But for transcendental phenomenology’s basic attitude this connection is secured as essential to doing philosophy.

A philosophical error that lends support to the implicit dogma of the natural attitude is to think that true knowing of the world dispenses with the appearances, syntax, perspectives, etc. of things, e.g., as if the paradigmatic knowing were by a creative archetypal mind for which there are no appearances and no absences. But Husserl argues that if God knows the perceptual world as such then God knows things through appearances, i.e. where there is an interplay of present and absent perspectives, foreground and background, and so forth.²

One assumes the phenomenological attitude by disengaging the spontaneous, natural belief-allegiance to the transcendent being in itself. Instead one attends to how its appearing in this way is inseparable from one’s (or our) agency of manifestation. Assuming the phenomenological attitude does five things. Firstly, it secures, as the proper realm for philosophy, absolute consciousness and the realm displayed by its agency of manifestation. This realm of “immanence” is, in the transcendental attitude, “absolute” as not needing something outside of itself for it to be itself, i.e., its display is inherent to its own being and not dependent on something external, in contrast to the world the manifestness of which is relative to the agent of manifestation.³ Secondly, and inseparably, in this absolute realm of philosophy, being and display cannot conceivably be separated. Thirdly, it brings to light the ideal of an absolute givenness where there is adequacy of presence and no dubitability, because there are no absences due to the distinction between the appearing and what appears. Fourthly, it makes clear that in the realm of transcendent perceptual reality the distinction between what appears and its appearances is insurmountable. Fifthly, it undermines the dogma that the being of the world is properly thought of apart from display.

The phenomenological attitude’s “placing into parentheses” or “doxastic disengagement” of the world and things within the world enables the world to become the world as it appears to me/us. That is, the prior anonymous functioning and agency of manifestation by which the world and the things in the world appear, and appear the way they do, themselves become themes. But this “functioning” is not itself known or made present as something real in the world.

In interrupting this spontaneous belief allegiance one does not doubt the things or become skeptical, but one now lets them be as they are appearing to me/us. This is not to say that that they are because I am perceiving them or they are my perceptions. Rather, how they are “in truth” is inseparable from how my truthfulness toward them enables them to appear.⁴ Thus when we think or speak phenomenologically about what is, we have to do with things as they are presented to us as agents of manifestation. Husserl calls the source of this agency the transcendental “I.”

2. Teleology and Transcendental Phenomenological Truth

Absolute consciousness is ineluctably tied to the drive to display truthfully what exists. As especially the *Prolegomenon* to the *Logical Investigations* shows, a theory that makes truth or theory impossible cannot be a good theory.⁵ Much of modern scientific naturalism is such a bad theory. In spite of temptations to skepti-

2) Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Philosophie* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950 [1913]), §43.

3) See: *Ibid.*, chapters 2–3. For philosophical-theological analyses, see: Rudolf Boehm, *Vom Gesichtspunkt der Phänomenologie* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 84–105.

4) I have been helped by John Maraldo’s reading of this paper.

5) See: Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Philosophie*, §32, and the discussion of “psychologism” that leads up to this.

cism and cynicism, the desire for truth is ineluctable, and the truth of this claim is demonstrated in its various doctrinal defenses as well as in forms of denial. It is shown as well in the dynamic, teleological drift of conscious life as “intentional.”

The general mode of wakeful engagement of something is a kind of tending and attending to it. It is an act of “intentionality.” In so intending something there is a basic belief in its being. As such, properly speaking, it is not yet a question of “truth.” Truth surfaces in connection with my entertaining something proposed for my assent/belief, as in a statement (a proposition): “There’s a lion in the hall.” What the statement enables me to make present is itself not first-personally present to me; it is not given in a “filled intention.” The proposed proposition may be a string of concepts which say much, little or nothing; even if I understand the terms, I myself may not see for myself that what is being said is really so. “There is a lion in the hall”; “These lymph nodes have metastasized.” Both of these propositions may be empty and inauthentically assented to, i.e., I may assert them as true without I myself knowing them to be true. For example, I assert them because I trust the expert making the declarative sentence. In such cases the state of affairs is not given in a filled intention to me but I assent to what I presume is given in a filled intention to another. If I simply assent and pretend to myself and perhaps to others that I am a knower, in the robust sense of having the evidence myself, then it is inauthentic.

The goal of knowing as truthful is always the adequate presencing or givenness of what is first empty intended. Consciousness in its desiring, questioning, doubting, verifying etc. is pervaded by a *nisus* to fill intentions at both the cognitive as well as emotive and conative levels. But there is a difference between the truth of the absolute immanent realm and that of the transcendent world.

Everything that we know perceptually in the world, what Husserl generically calls a “thing,” is present as an interplay of empty and filled intentions in the context of an ever wider horizon which solicits our interest. That is, things present themselves as fully there “themselves” and yet there are spatial and temporal absent aspects that we co-mean but are not directly given.⁶ Our life is lived in the tension of having to do presently with what must remain essentially always inadequately given. We intend things but they show up inadequately, e.g., as the person appearing to me from this side, but not that, or speaking her mind but my hearing only this part of her thought, e.g., hearing her now is after what she just said and before what she is about to say. Much of conscious life, as musing, questioning, believing, reading and hearing about, desiring, fearing, dreading etc. is soaked with empty intentions. But as questions head toward answers, so desires and fears resolve themselves in forms of filled intentions or the cancelling of the empty intention. But even the answers and the satisfied desires always have unfilled, co-intended horizons which themselves are presumed capable of fulfillment.

There is not only the fact that there are hidden aspects, but the anticipation of these may be mistaken, as in the other side of the building not being Neo-Gothic too, but surprisingly turning out to be Byzantine. The previously unseen but anticipated other sides/aspects of, e.g. the person, when no longer anticipated but given in a filled intention, will affect the truth or falsity of my prior knowing of what it is I am now perceiving and have perceived. (“He is not so easy to get along with as I previously thought.”) All worldly truths are necessarily corrigible and pervaded by vagueness.

Perception, and larger senses of knowing, are not only an interplay of presence and absence, identity and difference, given and co-meant, filled and empty etc., but there are nestled layers of appearings of what appears, of immanence and transcendence. At the bottom level there are the temporalizings of aspects, the primal pres-

6) In this section we rehearse basic themes from Husserl’s major works; for excellent introductions, see: Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Robert Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

encing of their appearings Now which emerge out of protended Not Yets and elapsing into No Longers, all passively synthetically connected together. Founded on these are the (immanent) given sides or aspects of sides of e.g., the building, that is transcendent to the appearing aspects. As given, they are related to what is not (yet) given or beyond the given, e.g., the (transcendent) whole building, the inside of the building, or the building behind this one. The whole of the building “itself” is given only inadequately in this present side, and “it itself” transcends each presentation through a side or aspect. Thus we perceive wholes, even the transcendent whole of the world, but we see them through the (immanent) aspects which present partially the whole.

And as all the aspects adumbrate or profile the “thing itself” (e.g., the cathedral), so the apperceived, i.e., marginally perceived, world is incessantly profiled by not only the things but also by the spatial and temporal aspects of these things, and by the raw *sensa* or constitutive basement of these things. And world is transcendent to any thing and all things, just as the things transcend their sides and aspects, and these transcend the ongoing pulses of temporalizing. Of basic importance for Husserl’s religious-philosophical position is to grasp that although the “constitution” of the world is interlaced with I-acts like judgments, for which one is responsible, these build on and presuppose the pre-reflectively lived *Wunder*, “miracle,” and “grace” of proto-rationality.⁷ This means that each I-act is passively-synthetically based on layers of sedimented prior achievements, but also passive-synthetically integrated into ever larger temporal and conceptual identity syntheses and wholes. And this universal synthesis of “world” happens incessantly on its own without I myself doing anything. As we shall see, at the same time, this gracious happening is a pervasive teleological necessity: *beata necessitas boni*.

All of conscious life is pervaded by a founding temporal streaming presencing which passively synthesizes all of what we experience, and which accounts for the organic unity of temporal-spatial parts and wholes, the immanences and transcendences of what we perceive. Our perception of the world or any spatial-temporal thing is comparable to hearing a melody, a more or less melodic whole where the present occurrences (sounding notes, noises, words, and so forth) are “immanent parts” of the (transcendent) “melody.” Of course it typically is a spatial-temporal event (as the passing sides of the barn evident from my moving car). These notes/parts themselves are informed by what immediately preceded and by our ineluctably anticipating what is to follow. This all occurs “on its own” apart from my active responsible agency.

The present (note of the melody or aspect of the barn) is thick with the absent past (notes or aspects) and future (notes or aspects). We may say that this temporal flow is a proto-doxastic undercurrent where the truth of experiences, e.g., this building having a Neo-Gothic style not only here but also on the other side, is presumed quite automatically in our ongoing perception. And if it does turn out to have such a side, then the next coming side that is contiguous with it will likely have such and such a style of, e.g., window, arch, and tower, and so forth. If it does not so turn out then there is an automatic cancellation of the respective prior anticipations and the surfacing of questions.

The world is present as that within which we continuously perceive things that are constantly in flux. Yet it is always the same ultimate setting or horizon, analogous to the perception of a building which we are passing. As “the building” is the context for the sides and aspects directly now perceived as “sides of this building,” so every thing is present within and a presence of the world. But in contrast to things within the world which individuate one another, there is no evident external horizon to world individuating it, even though there might be some religious-philosophical reason to think of the world itself as having a *telos* or ideal transcendent to the actual world.

7) Edmund Husserl, *Erste Philosophie (1923/24)*, Vol. I, *Husserliana VII*, ed. Rudolf Boehm (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), 394. See: Iso Kern, *Husserl und Kant* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964).

A teleology pervades one's life in the world. This is founded on a general "latent will-horizon" which is the motor of the *Wunder* of all intentional life, not just the appetitive, conative, voluntary and cognitive, but also the founding streaming primal presencing's passive syntheses. Indeed, individual and communal consciousness themselves are a striving, prior to any individual or communal acts of intellect or will, for what may be explicated subsequently as a perfect unity and synthesis of all acts of manifestation and will. In the social order this ideal is an eutopian "godly person of a higher order." But humans individually and communally are consigned never to arrive at a state of satisfaction.⁸

3. The First Truth of Phenomenology

In disengaging the naturalness of the natural attitude Husserl retrieves ancient Aristotelian themes, e.g., that a task of metaphysics is the study of being as the true. Furthermore, metaphysics has to do with the first principles upon which everything depends and yet at the start are hidden from us because they are what we most take for granted. Thus bringing them to light already presupposes them. The transcendental reduction purports to bring to light that by which and through which everything else is brought to light and which is always already presupposed in all making sense and bringing to light. Yet properly, as transcendental phenomenology, it only brings to light the process and agency of articulating the world and the principles at play in this articulation, i.e., that through which the world appears and what is anonymous in the natural attitude. It attends to the essential features of that "through which" the world is displayed but neglects (pre-supposes) the "from which" of the display itself, i.e., that beginning principle of luminosity which intentional consciousness, meaning etc., presuppose and upon which they may be said to "depend."

Even though the "through which" (transcendental I's directed agency of manifestation) is, as presencing what is present, not strictly "present" or "given" but rather lived (*erlebt*) and that to which, from which, and by which everything is given or manifest, still we may attend to it as manifest in a way that any spatial perspectivalty makes no sense. And its manifestness is such that any modalization, e.g., doubting, of it makes no sense. Here the pervasive life of pursuing truth as a striving to fill empty cognitive intentions, is preempted in a manifestation wherein the distinction of knower and known is nullified. Whereas every other belief, truth-claim, state of affairs can, in a thought-experiment, be mentally eliminated, cancelled, modalized, and submitted to radical doubt, this manifestation of the "first truth" may not be so cancelled or modalized.

Further, whatever consideration we bring to mind may become an essential consideration, as an *eidōs* or essence, and may be so entertained without its necessarily enjoying actual existence. In contrast, the *eidōs* of the transcendental I as the agency of manifestation is not able to be thought of without its necessarily actually existing. Thus here there is a kind of "ontological argument" for the first principle of phenomenology.⁹

The necessity of the I is tied to its being necessary for the present display and displaying. All the necessities and contingencies it displays are necessarily related back to the manifesting transcendental I – who is a primal fact, but not a fact in the same sense as facts in the world. This facticity eludes elucidation. One simply is given, yet I can lay no claim to responsibility for it/me nor can I get beyond it/me.

8) Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität*, Vol. III, *Husserliana XV*, ed. Iso Kern (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 404–405. For "personality of a higher order" and religious-philosophical aspects of Husserl's theory of community, see: James G. Hart, *The Person and the Common Life* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992), chapters III–V.

9) Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität*, Vol. III, 385–386; Edmund Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, *Husserliana XLII*, ed. Rochus Sowa and Thomas Vongehr (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 122.

As the agent and dative of manifestation and as the lived, non-reflective source-pole and presupposition of all that is given, the transcendental I is not what we ever can strive for. Because it enjoys an ineliminable and ineluctable nearness its presence is exemplarily “adequate” in so far as there is no possible distance or disagreement between meant and given. Indeed, the very theme of adequation is out of place here because the self-givenness of oneself to oneself is never in question, never an empty intention needing to be filled. If the ideal of evidence is apodicticity and the filling of what was meant in its absence as it was so meant, i.e., “truth,” we here have, in the case of the self-luminosity of the transcendental I or absolute consciousness the first truth and an evidence that, of necessity, always goes in advance of all evidences, and where the possibility of error, hallucination, deception and etc., are excluded in principle.¹⁰ This is the “first truth” and clearly it is not a truth of or in the world.

It is typical of all other truths that they may be shown to be true by the display of other subsequent and/or prior considerations or manifestations. But there is no such demonstration of this truth because all manifestation always already presupposes it. Manifestation and/or manifestness of the primal presencing is a “fact” and any effort to demonstrate this fact already presupposes it.¹¹

Further, whereas every other belief or being or event, even that of the world itself (as Husserl shows in thought-experiments) may be presented as having come to be and as no longer, e.g., it is necessarily true that it will have been, this first truth of manifestness cannot conceivably be present to oneself as coming to be or passing away, for all manifest becoming happens within its horizon. There is no horizon within which it is true that manifestness will have been.

Similarly, all persons whom I take to be other I’s die, and I believe that I, as incarnately presentable other to the other I, will die. Yet I, first-personally lived in the transcendentially reduced attitude, am non-ephemeral and non-destructible; my beginning and ending are not able to be presenced. Of course, it may be that I die without my being able to presence it, that I die without my knowing it. This would seem to mean that manifestness may be extinguished unmanifestly and the “being” of this extinction and all being thereafter undisplayable, where “thereafter” cannot then be meaningful or be displayed.¹²

The transcendental I as the first phenomenological truth is, as self-luminous manifesting, necessary to the world manifested and is the absolute substance upon which the displayed world rests. But it does not give itself to itself. It is an odd fact and not one in the world. Yet that it is, and is transcendentially manifesting, is a fact.

The transcendental I myself is always also an incarnate person who is radically contingent and historically enmeshed with Others in the world. As such I am amenable to a “definite description,” but which “eidetic singularity” cannot capture the radical singularity or unique essence of what/whom “I” refers to. “I” refers to

10) Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer Reinen Phänomenologie und Phänomenologischen Philosophie*, *Husserliana III/2, Ergänzende Texte*, ed. Karl Schuhmann (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 632. These are all themes orchestrated in Michel Henry’s writings, e.g., Michel Henry, *C’est Moi La Vérité* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 2006).

11) For the topic of “metafact” I have been helped by Jerry J. Valberg, *Death, Dream, and the Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), especially 192–195.

12) The reflections on the beginninglessness and endlessness of the transcendental I are scattered throughout the *Nachlass*. See: e.g., Edmund Husserl, *Analysen zur Passiven Synthesis: Aus Vorlesungs und Forschungsmanuskripten (1918–1926)*, *Husserliana XI*, ed. Margot Fleischer, (Dordrecht: Springer, 1966), 377–381; Edmund Husserl, *Transzendental Idealismus*, *Husserliana XXXVI*, eds. Robin D. Rollinger and Rochus Sowa, (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), 141–146; Edmund Husserl, *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929–1934)*, *Husserliana Materialien*, Vol 8, ed. Dieter Lohmar (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 96–106, 417–430, 435–443; Edmund Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt*, *Husserliana XXXIX*, ed. Rochus Sowa (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 224–230; Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 1–25, 78–82. See also James G. Hart, *Who One Is*, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), Book 1, Ch. VII–VIII; also James G. Hart, “Phenomenological Time: Its Religious Significance,” in *Religion and Time*, eds. Anindita Niyogi Balslev and J. N. Mohanty (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 17–45.

me without the need of any third-person non-indexical terms. “I,” as transcendental I-pole of the agency of manifestation, am not a universal “agent intellect” but an individuality *per se* and not *per accidens*, a radical singularity, a “pure, non-sortal *solus ipse*.” In contrast I, considered as embodied in the world, am distinguishable by being endlessly individuated by acquiring properties.¹³ “World” too is *per se* individual, and is at once fundamentally “my world” but also profoundly sortal, and, through appresentation, profoundly intersubjective, communicable, and shareable.

From the transcendental phenomenological perspective this first principle (“absolute substance” and “absolute consciousness”) is phenomenologically ultimate. It has its ground in its “groundless being.” This absolute substance as ultimate necessity is the concretum with respect to which everything else is abstract. It is that within which everything else is brought to light and within which all acts, considerations, moments, modes etc., of necessity inhere.¹⁴

4. The First Truth of Phenomenology and the Theological Question

The facticity of this ultimate self-grounding phenomenological necessity raises questions about a deeper theological possibility. But the “necessity,” “facticity” and “contingency” of the primal presencing as the first principle of phenomenology may not be thought of in terms of the necessities and contingencies that are present for it within its horizon, that of the world.

As the source of all display of being, nothing can be given behind or prior to the “metafact” of this Whence. This is because everything about which we can say, “it is,” must be something appearing for or “in” or “to” this absolute consciousness. This is not to say that everything of a supernatural, theological, nature is to be ruled out. But if God may be said to “exist” in some sense, God can only be presented to, and God’s manifestness grounded in, the agency of manifestation or the display by absolute consciousness. “God” is not “there” in any sense unless somehow manifest to, articulated by, absolute consciousness. This is the only path open for our knowledge of any intentional presencings of whatsoever consideration.¹⁵

Husserl’s reflection on God borrows from the cultural inheritance of the Abrahamic religions. God, i.e., as a being within or part of the world would be “impossible” in the sense that it would be commensurate with the world and inferior to absolute consciousness. God must be transcendent in a way surpassing even the world’s transcendence. And, similarly absurd or impossible would be to think of God as immanently present (“constituted”) in absolute consciousness as an “experience” within the stream of consciousness. And yet if God “exists” God must at once “constitute” and surpass the transcendence in immanence of the pure I of the agency of manifestation. As the I is at once immanent within all of the stream of consciousness as the “owner” and yet transcendent to any of the ingredients or moments of the stream, similarly, God would have to transcend the I of absolute consciousness and yet somehow account for this I. Thus God would be absolute “in a totally

13) See Hart, *Who One Is*, book 1, especially chapter VIII, for Husserl on the radical singularity of “I.”

14) Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität*, Vol. III, 386, 668–669; Husserl, *Transzendental Idealismus*, 70–72; Iso Kern, *Die Idee und Methode der Philosophie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975), 339–341; James G. Hart “A Précis of an Husserlian Philosophical Theology,” in *Essays in Phenomenological Theology*, eds. Steven W. Laycock & James G. Hart (New York: SUNY, 1986), 130–132; James G. Hart, “Husserl and Fichte,” *Husserl Studies* 12, no. 2 (1995), 146–148.

15) A particularly good but dense text presenting transcendental phenomenology’s claim to be absolute and where theological implications are tacitly subsumed under the foundations of transcendental phenomenology, is Husserl, *Transzendental Idealismus*, 70–72; e.g., “Consciousness shows itself to be the ultimate principle, as the ἀρχή, which preserves and bears all other Being in itself and yet bears Being in itself not as a piece or part or moment, and even less as something fictionally projected.”

different sense from the absolute of consciousness, as on the other hand, it would be transcendent in a totally different sense than that of the world.”¹⁶

Thus for God to be God for transcendental phenomenology God must account for, be “shown” to be more basic than, the absolute consciousness or absolute substance and thus be a second or ultimate absolute consciousness or substance that accounts for the whence of all display – and thus must be absolute in a way that is different than absolute consciousness. Yet this absolute is only able to be manifested within absolute consciousness’ agency of manifestation. Thus for Husserl, God is a theme only through this agency of manifestation: “Even God is for me what God is by way of my own achievement of consciousness...”¹⁷ The luminosity of self-awareness or absolute consciousness is the “metafact” founding or presupposed by all other displays even the displays of the supernatural transcendent realm. But this luminosity cannot itself be displayed, by something outside itself, but only presupposed. “Only when the nature of transcendental consciousness is understood, can the transcendence of God be understood.”¹⁸ All religion is naïve until it permits its doctrines to be measured against absolute consciousness.

It seems transcendental phenomenology cannot offer a demonstration of “the second absolute” which would account for the contingency of the (first) “absolute substance” uncovered by transcendental phenomenology; it cannot manifest the foundation of the contingent fact of the self-luminous self-awareness upon which all manifestation is based without presupposing this very “metafact.” But Husserl believes transcendental phenomenology shows a kind of divine teleology and necessity in the heart of this metafact upon which the inexorable agency of manifestation is based. Thus the ultimate focus of Husserl’s philosophical theology is not in displaying “a second absolute substance,” or why there is “the luminously true” clearing of meaning rather than dumb dark meaningless black silence. Rather Husserl’s focus is the rational-teleological way in which rational presencing occurs, and the transcendental-transcendent conditions for the possibility of this presencing.

A consequence of this is that the first truth of phenomenology must give way to the ideal of truth and of all truths, i.e., to the idea that all truths must be tied to an absolutely necessary, not factual, I that has all truths in its self-presence and who/which is an intellect that can be the origination of all possible truths and all I’s. The ideal of truth becomes eventually the ideal of a necessary subject of all truths.¹⁹

16) Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Philosophie*, §58. There are many hints at Husserl’s philosophical phenomenological theology scattered throughout his writings, but the chief texts perhaps are the very brief sketches in *Ideas I*, §§51 and 58. Now one can consult the excellent collection of texts in Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie* along with the editors’ fine introduction. Hart, “A Précis of an Husserlian Philosophical Theology,” 89 ff. attempts a systematic synthesis. Cf. also: Stephen Strasser, “Das Gottesproblem in der Spätphilosophie Edmund Husserls,” *Philosophisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft*, 67 (1959), 130–142; Stephen Laycock, *Foundations for a Phenomenological Theology* (Lewiston/Queenston: Edwin Mellen, 1988); Hart, *The Person and the Common Life*, chapters III and IV; James G. Hart, “Entelechy in Transcendental Phenomenology,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (1992): 189–212; James G. Hart, “The Study of Religion in Husserl’s Writings,” in *Phenomenology of the Cultural Disciplines* eds. Mano Daniel and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), 265 ff.; Angela Ales Bello, *The Divine in Husserl and Other Explorations, Analecta Husserliana, Vol. XCVIII*, 2009.

17) “aus meiner eigenen Bewusstseinsleistung.” That this is remote from Feuerbach is evident in what Husserl goes on to say: “Even here I must not look aside for fear of a supposed blasphemy, but rather must see the problem. Even here, just as in the case of the alterego, the achievement of consciousness will hardly signify that I invent and create [*mache*] this highest transcendence.” Edmund Husserl, *Formale und Transzendente Logik* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 58.

18) Dorion Cairns, *Conversations with Husserl and Fink* (The Hauge: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 46; cf. Hart, “A Précis of an Husserlian Philosophical Theology,” 102–103.

19) Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 172–173; but does this not stand in tension with the critique of Kant’s archetypal intellect? See discussion at n. 2 above.

5. Phenomenological Metaphysics and the Divine Entelechy²⁰

Phenomenology, as pure eidetic transcendental phenomenology, deals with the essential structures through which world is displayed. Yet Husserl was always concerned with how this realm of essence, ideas, and essential possibility fit with and emerged out of facticity. A discipline was needed which wrestled with what he called the “destiny of reason.” He called the pure eidetic *a priori* science “first philosophy” or ontology. “First philosophy’s” application to, or synthesis with, facticity and contingency, was named “second philosophy” or “metaphysics.” The latter was concerned with how the *a priori* forms and rationality of transcendental subjectivity amount to, mesh with, and survive the facticity of empirical nature so that there results a “nature” as described by natural science. If transcendental phenomenology uncovers the essence of consciousness and rationality how do we think about teleology in non-conscious nature (how does nature have ends without having purposes?); and how to think of infant, anomalous, and animal consciousness, to which we normal adult humans have no first-person access? Of special interest for “metaphysics” is the facticity of transcendental subjectivity’s own proto-rational beginnings in instinct and the emergence into the forms and the logos of the higher-order achievements. Likewise: how to understand within the essential unity of transcendental subjectivity itself for the antipodes of facticity and necessity, irrationality and rationality?

“Metaphysics” chiefly accounts for how the world with its realm of essences, necessity and causality is founded on, constitutionally, the hyletic facticity of the primal streaming; how what is *propter hoc* can be founded in a realm of contingent *post hoc*.²¹ This world-building with its teleological dynamism toward ever greater synthesis and harmony is not absolutely necessary. But, nevertheless, in spite of and on the basis of this facticity there is *de facto* a world laced with necessities and values all integrated into a relative harmony tied to a unifying world-pole.

Husserl believed the rationality and teleology of the constitution of the world and the constituted world required a transcendent power. This power informed the facticity which was at both the constituting basement (primal presencing) as well as in every subsequent phase of the world’s presence. Classical accounts of God (e.g., Aristotle and Brentano) tend to describe God in human terms and work from the teleology of the realm of natural things or man-made things. They thus apply this teleology to the divine mind. In contrast, Husserl saw the proper task to see in the immanent first-personally lived teleology of transcendental subjectivity and intersubjectivity the divine as the key to meaning in the individual, history, and nature.²²

Here the (Aristotelian) concept of “entelechy” becomes the explanatory principle of phenomenological metaphysics. There are here two basic considerations, “form” and “*telos*.” “Entelechy” explicates the basic formal style of transcendental life: life lived by the egoic *nisus* toward filling empty intentions (“truthing”) and toward the horizon of the ideal world-pole. It also explicates the I-pole as principle of the whence informing the lived factual passive synthesizing presencing.

Entelechy is constituted by both form and *telos* (or goal). “Entelechy” is the way the end-pole (*telos* or perfection) of the being is present and possessed actively (*hechein*) within (*en*) the I-pole in a way which is not yet complete. The proper perfection or actuality (*entelecheia*) of the egoic form of being is essentially related to an already, or not yet, realized potentiality or possibility (*dynamis*). Husserl points out that the analogy of

20) For “divine entelechy” see: e.g., Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 102, 166, 176, 242, 336, 450.

21) Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität*, Vol. I, *Husserliana XIII*, ed. Iso Kern (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 357; see Hart, “A Précis of an Husserlian Philosophical Theology,” especially 124–129.

22) cf. Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 209–211; Hart, “A Précis of an Husserlian Philosophical Theology,” 116.

entelechy here limps because, in contrast to developing organisms (e.g., acorns→oaks), the telos of transcendental subjectivity is an open infinity of infinite ideals and not a finite perfection of a form.

Think of reason as the way egoic life is enabled to make present essential looks (*eidé*) which are joined by, for example, “this on account of that,” “this reminds me of that,” and entailments as ideal part-whole relations, all of which are interplays of presence and absence, filled and empty intentions, and identity and difference. “Entelechy” accounts for why such achievements of reason suffuse the presencing of being and why the particular achievements are part of an infinite nisus to an ideal pole of synthesis in which are joined *ens, verum, et bonum*.²³ The primal streaming bears witness to consciousness’s wondrous linkages of the formal necessary unifications riding on the contingent presencings.

Teleology is “the form of all forms.” This is not because it is for us the first form to which all being must make reference and which is manifest in all beings of experience. Rather, it is, in the order of appearing, for us last, but in itself it is first, i.e., we are drawn first of all to given forms, but because being is most basically absolute transcendental subjectivity, particular forms must be understood ultimately in the light of this subjectivity as informed by a universal creative will. This “divine” will is in tension or “contradiction” with itself in so far as entelechy renders the being ex-sisting at once in relative true being and in relative not yet or non-being with regard to the world of monads that it informs. In any case this divine will encompasses the totality of forms into itself in its work of “eternal creation... from the nothingness” of relative non-being, i.e., from the realm of dormancy or only potentially conscious wakefulness to the matters of truth and falsehood.²⁴

Yet Husserl also claims that God is utterly transcendent. Only transcendental naivety would think that there could be an infinity of possible worlds. All such worlds are declensions of the world that is valid for us. This world of transcendental intersubjectivity is founded in the one God who is uniquely singular and necessary, a being who is not an *eidós*, but a super-actual essence, who bears in Godself all true being beyond all relativity of perspectives and horizontality.²⁵

Leibniz’s universal monadology with its analogy of more or less self-aware, striving substances under the sway of the divine monad of monads was an inspiration for Husserl’s metaphysics. Throughout the all of monads is a universal teleology anchored first of all in the divine will manifesting itself in a system of *a priori* “instincts” which propel monads prior to conscious purposes and prior to a self-conscious embrace of the universal *telos*. For transcendental reflection, each absolute monadic consciousness exhibits a self-constituting entelechy under the sway of the overarching divine entelechy.

The basic latent will-horizon is the core of Husserl’s theory of “God” both as super-essence as well as divine entelechy because it reveals the lived dynamism toward the One, the True, and the Good. As a general “latent will” it refers to the transcendence in immanence of the I-pole, a “retroscendence” (*vis á tergo*). At the same time, “latent will-horizon” indicates the radical transcendence towards which the will is drawn, thus a *vis á fronté*. These are two moments of the one divine dynamism which at once is a divine and human achievement.

Thus the divine is both beyond the transcendence of the world and immanent to the transcendent immanence of the transcendental I which indwells every moment of *my* stream of consciousness as the dative and nominative pole without being a part or a content of the stream. The divine is thus the *ne plus ultra* transcendence toward which each monad moves through knowing, desiring, loving, or imagining i.e., it is that than which nothing more beautiful, true, good, perfect, can be conceived or aspired to. At the same time the divine is immanent as informing the I’s primal streaming and higher-order acts.

23) Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 250.

24) Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität*, Vol. III, 380–381.

25) Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 251.

6. The Absolute Ought and Faith

This transcendent-transcendental divine will works at the foundational levels of the consciousness of inner time. And it works also in the higher founded layers of the individual and intersubjective acts by which one responsibly and reflectively constitutes both a unified world as a common good and oneself as an agent within it in tune with the “truth of will” or “absolute ought.” These are key aspects of Husserl’s moral theory.²⁶

It is not possible that God be an object of a possible experience, as another person or a thing. But given Husserl’s theory of divine entelechy, God would be pre-reflectively experienced or lived “in each belief that believes originally-teleologically in the eternal value of that which lies in the direction of each absolute ought and which engages itself for this eternal meaning.”²⁷

Husserl speaks of the divine will as “the universal absolute will, which lives in all transcendental subjects, and which makes possible the individual-concrete being of the transcendental all-subjectivity...” The divine will presupposes the total monadic intersubjectivity, but not as if transcendental intersubjectivity preceded it as possible without the divine will (as one might think the soul presupposes the body), “but rather as a structural level without which this divine will cannot be concrete.”²⁸ (Here we draw near to a panentheism, while passing over in silence the question of whether the theological ultimate is a “second absolute” that creates from nothing the absolute of transcendental intersubjectivity.)

Existentially-ethically the core revelation of the divine will is in what Husserl calls the “absolute ought” wherein the single individual experiences attunement to the divine entelechy in “the truth of will.”²⁹ Persons are called to a blessed life. The chief feature of so living is responding to the call to an authentic constitution of oneself in the world with Others. A marker of this authentic response is a vocational choice with which one identifies in a way that will be free of regrets. Another essential aspect is a discernment of the revelation of the “absolute ought,” or “the one thing necessary,” i.e., of what one must do if one is to live with oneself, in the midst of the crises and irrationalities of life. It is a form of filling the massive empty intention of the drift of one’s life and embracing a value that is not able to be surpassed or absorbed by any other.

“Metaphysics” becomes quotidian in the challenge to the “absolute ought” by death and other surds. Whereas the annihilation of the world is a frequent thought-experimental theme in Husserl, the threat of ultimate meaninglessness, due to life’s real irrationalities, shadows all radical reflection. Yet I cannot pursue a life of meaning unless I can believe that what matters most to me and my community is realizable. I must be able to believe, and believe myself capable of appropriate thought and action in the face of threats of possible extinction and universal decay. I must nurture an attitude that fate is not essentially hostile to me and humanity. In the face of the appearance of total disaster it is permissible to strive to overestimate the probabilities in a way which in theory is reprehensible. Edification and encouragement from the example of heroes and saints must be our daily bread.

Here Husserl combines an appropriation of the traditional notion of grace and an endorsement of “perhaps Kant’s greatest discovery,” namely the theory of postulates: We must always postulate any beliefs that keep open the world’s horizon as a hopeful space for meaningful, engaged agency.³⁰ This desire and “will to believe” is not

26) See the last half of Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 183 ff.; also Hart, *Who One Is*, Book 2, Ch. V.

27) Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 242.

28) Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität*, Vol. III, 381.

29) See n. 22.

30) See Kern, *Husserl and Kant*, 302; the letter to Cassirer is April 3, 1925. The best analyses and statements of Husserl’s application of the theory of postulates are perhaps Edmund Husserl, *Erste Philosophie (1923/24)*, Vol. II, *Husserliana VIII*, ed. Rudolf Boehm (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959, 336–355 and Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie, passim*, perhaps especially 253–256, 400–407.

a voluntaristic caprice, rather “I believe from the necessity of being I and a member of humanity, and existing in regard to my actual surrounding as a beneficent agent.”³¹ I must believe in order to be who I most fundamentally am called to be and want to be. If I want to be informed by true and absolute values that are free of sin and error, I must be able to believe that everything serves the Good and that good intentions count for something in the ultimate scheme of things. But to do all this I must believe in the divine teleological power holding sway over life and the world. Thus to believe in myself and my power to develop into my true self, I must believe in God, and “as long as I live in faith and in the direction of my calling, God’s power lives in me.”³²

Here Husserl acknowledges the grace of “faith” as the source of the strength of one’s life. But upon reflection one may think of it as a postulate of practical reason functioning naively prior to philosophy and theology which offer grounds for one’s faith. This is not to say faith’s so functioning is thereby rendered nugatory.³³

31) Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 407.

32) Ibid.

33) Ibid., 254–255; it must be noted that some of the “popular” writings of Fichte played a role in Husserl’s philosophical-theological meditations.

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