

# Transcendence in Philosophy and Religion

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# Whose Philosophy? Which Religion?

Reflections on Reason as Faith

Merold Westphal

*Credo ut intelligam*

—Augustine

*Fides quaerens intellectum*

—Anselm

Metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct.

—F. H. Bradley

At the beginning of his Fourth Critique, Kant insists both that “morality does not need religion at all [*keinesweges*]” and that it “leads ineluctably [*unumgänglich*] to religion” (*Religion* 3 and 5). In this *keinesweges* and *unumgänglich* we have Kant’s adverbial definition of the best of all possible worlds. We can have our cake and eat it too. We can be religious without sacrificing autonomy. At one level, this has nothing at all to do with philosophy. Kant is emphatic that “neither science nor philosophy is needed in order to know what one must do to be honest and good” and that the idea of the good will “already dwells in the natural sound understanding and needs not so much to be taught as merely elucidated” (*Grounding* 16 and 9). But the point of departure for his version of rational religion is his own moral philosophy, not

moral common sense, so we can read him as also saying that moral philosophy does not need religion but leads ineluctably thereto.

Kant says almost the same thing about theoretical philosophy when he prefaces the second edition of his first *Critique* by saying that he has “found it necessary to deny *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*” by presenting a philosophy in which “all objections to morality and religion will be forever silenced.” The *assumption* of God, freedom, and immortality becomes permissible only when “speculative reason [is] deprived of its pretensions to transcendent insight” (*Pure Reason* B xxx–xxx). To use a metaphor from American football, theoretical reason is the blocking back that knocks down the opposing linebackers, while practical reason carries the ball into the end zone for the touchdown. “It was a team effort,” as they say in the postgame locker-room interviews.

So it is not just moral philosophy, but philosophy as such, as the teamwork of theoretical and practical reason, of which Kant can say, it has no need of religion at all but leads ineluctably thereto.

Is he right about this? Does philosophy lead to religion?

I will lay my cards on the table at once by answering with two questions of my own: Whose philosophy? Which religion?

Usually when someone answers a question with a question, to say nothing of answering one with two, the purpose is to deflect the initial question, to avoid an unwelcome inquiry by putting the questioner in question. It is a defensive reaction guided by the maxim that the best defense is a good offense. When my team is about to put the ball into the net or into the end zone, the other team’s chances of scoring are virtually nil.

In this case, however, I am eager to reply to the question, especially at a time when the notion that “reason” signifies a universal, secular neutrality is increasingly seen as a dubious dogma. These days, a healthy skepticism greets both the notion that thought can occupy the “view from nowhere” and the more specific claim that this is done by leaving God and religion out of the picture. No doubt there are delimited areas where such notions make sense, and we can be glad that there are few enthusiasts for Catholic chemistry or Methodist microbiology. But the attempt to force the whole life of the mind into this Procrustean bed, which we might call the rape of reason, is increasingly discredited, though it is not by any means dead.

It is not to avoid the question of whether philosophy leads to religion that I respond with my own questions, Whose philosophy? Which religion? It is, rather, to remind us that neither philosophy nor religion is one thing. But it is also to suggest that in all its varieties, and not just in the Augustinian/Christian versions, philosophy is faith seeking understanding. Or vision seeking articulation.

The faith of which I speak here is not necessarily religious faith, even in the broadest sense of the term, nor does it occur only in the context of religious reflection. It is, rather, the presuppositions with which philosophical reflec-

tion begins, on which it depends and from which it cannot free itself in any wholesale sense. These are the preunderstandings of Heidegger, the prejudices of Gadamer, the beliefs by virtue of which we find ourselves in the hermeneutical circle where reflection can begin. Just as human artisans do not create *ex nihilo* but make something out of something, so human thought is not the “Let there be light” that brings something out of nothing but the movement from somewhere to somewhere else. To speak of the somewhere where thought begins as faith is to remind ourselves of two senses in which thought’s presuppositions are not the products of rational reflection.

We can begin with the Wittgensteinian/Foucauldian sense. We bring prephilosophical beliefs with us to philosophical reflection. These beliefs, which fall along the spectrum from tacit to fully explicit, are tightly wedded to forms of life or practices in two ways. On the one hand, they arise out of the language games in which we become competent players. We come to hold them primarily by being socialized into the life of a human community;<sup>1</sup> on the other hand, these beliefs shape both our attitudes and our actions. In this way, they serve to reinforce and legitimize the life-worlds which are their bearers.

Such beliefs are part of our identity, and we can speak of them as commitments, though, of course, they may be shallow and ephemeral commitments. They represent the “opinions,” “traditions,” and “sedimentations” from which philosophy has tried so valiantly to extricate itself in order to be pure reason—but in vain. Thus, to speak of philosophy as faith seeking understanding is to recognize (negatively) that we can neutralize these prereflective beliefs and the practices in which they are embedded *keinesweges*, and (positively) that they insinuate themselves into our most sophisticated reflection *unumgänglich*. Human thought is always situated. Reason is never pure.

There is also a Plantingian sense in which philosophy presupposes beliefs that are not the products of rational reflection. Plantinga is a soft foundationalist.<sup>2</sup> He holds that while some of our beliefs depend evidentially upon other beliefs, some do not. These latter, “basic” beliefs may be grounded in experience of some sort, such as sense perception, but that is not the same as having other beliefs (or the propositions expressing them) as their evidential basis. To know that the rose I am looking at is red, I need experience but not evidence. In believing that the rose that appears to me to be red really is red, I may also believe that I am not color-blind. But I do not believe the rose to be red *on the basis* of my belief that my vision is functioning properly.

Classical (or hard) foundationalism seeks to erect the edifice of knowledge on a *fundamentum inconcussum* by restricting the domain of properly basic beliefs to those with an objective certainty (no mere subjective certitude) stemming from self-evidence or incorrigibility. Knowledge is built on knowledge. Faith plays no part.

While affirming soft foundationalism, Plantinga rejects the classical version as a pipe dream motivated by unwarranted evidentialist assumptions

about warrant. This leaves us with belief systems which include at their foundations beliefs that are not the products of rational reflection, which are not accepted “on the basis of argument or inference or demonstration” (“Reason” 158). It is quite natural to say that such beliefs are products of faith rather than reason. But such an analysis gives no support to fideism, if by that term is meant something like what Peirce calls the “method of tenacity.” If someone points to (apparent) facts that (seem to) suggest that I am color-blind, I cannot appeal to Plantinga and respond that my beliefs are properly basic and thus immune to critical evaluation.<sup>3</sup>

We must notice two things about the belief systems described in this way. First, they are not necessarily religious in content. Among the beliefs that will stem from faith rather than reason *in this sense* are the belief in the reality of the external world, the belief in the reality of other minds, the belief that the past extends back further than five minutes, and the belief that the future will be like the past in the sense required by inductive inference. (What is distinctive about these particular beliefs is that philosophers, after long and futile effort, have become increasingly convinced that there are no noncircular proofs of them to be found.)

Second, and for our purposes more important, some of the belief systems that will have this structure will have the form of explicitly articulated theories, including philosophical theories. To say that philosophy is faith seeking understanding is to say not just 1) that prereflective beliefs, often more nearly tacit than explicit and deeply embedded in practices, play an ineliminable role in philosophical reflection, behind our back, as it were, but also 2) that basic beliefs take up visible residence within our theories without the benefit of propositional evidence, devoid of the imprimatur of “argument or inference or demonstration.” An example of this second case, to which I shall return, is the belief that philosophy should and can be presuppositionless, rigorous science.

Closely related to the idea that philosophy is faith seeking understanding, whether that faith has a religious content or not, is the notion that philosophy is vision seeking articulation. Who can doubt that the powerful hold of Plato’s *Republic* on subsequent European thought or of Spinoza’s *Ethics* on German thought during the *Goethezeit* stems more from a bold and captivating picture of things than from cogent, irrefutable argumentation. Postmodernism attempts to rehabilitate rhetoric vis-à-vis logic, and Richard Rorty claims, more specifically, that it is in literature rather than philosophy that we think through our deepest moral and existential questions. Postmodernism and Rorty remind us that pictures and stories have a power over our thinking that analysis and argument at times can only envy.

Philosophers, however reluctant to acknowledge this fact, are not blind to it. They paint pictures, invent images, and tell tales (sometimes tall tales that can be called metanarratives) in the effort to persuade their readers. Even when they would like to think that their rhetoric is in the service of their logic,

a closer look will often reveal that their arguments derive from and are in the service of a *Welt-bild* or *Weltanschauung* (which, in turn, as Wittgenstein and Foucault are eager to remind us, are embedded in some *Welt-Praxis*) more than vice versa. Here the notion that reason is never pure becomes the notion that philosophy is not capable of immaculate conception. Its most pregnant ideas are always already impregnated by symbols and stories that inform reason—that is, give it the DNA by which it will be shaped. The irony is that the “pure” reason which, according to a certain philosophical myth, sets out to enact the triumph of *logos* over *mythos*, of *noesis* and *episteme* over *eikasia* and *pistis* and *doxa*, is itself shaped by and in the service of that from which it promises to free us.

The notions of philosophy as faith seeking understanding and as vision seeking articulation give a certain specificity to the notion that neither philosophy nor reason is one thing. Some philosophies lead to religion; others do not. Those that do, do so in many different ways. There are many varieties of religion within the limits of reason alone, and quite a few different ways of insisting that religion should not be put in such a straitjacket. Hence the questions: Whose philosophy? Which religion? The preceding analysis provides us with helpful tools for analyzing these differences. We can ask:

1. *What is the life-world* out of which this philosophy emerges, and which of the former’s commitments have shaped the latter most decisively?

2. *What are the basic beliefs* of this philosophy, the ones that serve as its “axioms” or “definitions” or “control beliefs” (see Wolterstorff) or “inference tickets” (see Ryle)?

3. What is the *Weltanschauung*, or metanarrative, which is the whole to which these basic beliefs belong in a hermeneutical circle of part and whole?

These questions signify the profound truth in the notion that “metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct,” however irreverent and hyperbolic that formulation of *fides quaerens intellectum* may be. To the degree that we can answer these questions, we will better understand why certain philosophies do not lead to religion and, more important for the present discussion, why certain philosophies lead to the particular religions that they do. The “particular religion” in any given case might be some “organized” religion already on the scene as a more or less widely shared language game to which the philosopher relates more or less closely. But it need not be. It could just as well be a free-standing philosophical construct, such as, for example, Nietzsche’s Dionysian/Zarathustrian religion.

Before analyzing three philosophies and the religions to which they lead, I want to introduce a further element crucial for understanding the relation of philosophy and religion. Philosophy not only leads to religion, but often serves to critique religion. Thus, even before the first *Critique* makes room for faith, in the preface to the second edition, it announces the critique of religion in the preface to the first edition. In a familiar footnote we read,

Our age is, in especial degree, the age of criticism, and to criticism *everything* must submit. Religion through its sanctity, and law-giving through its majesty, may seek to exempt themselves from it. But then they awaken just suspicion, and cannot claim the sincere respect which reason accords only to what which has been able to sustain the test of free and open examination. (A xxii; emphasis added)<sup>4</sup>

We hear something quite similar when Heidegger discusses the relation of philosophy as phenomenological ontology to theology as an ontic, positive science that is “*absolutely different from philosophy . . . closer to chemistry and mathematics than to philosophy*” (“Phenomenology” 6).<sup>5</sup> Sounding very much like Johannes Climacus in Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments*, Heidegger emphasizes the dependence of Christian theology on revelation and faith as rebirth, eventually concluding that it is a “fully autonomous ontic science” vis-à-vis philosophy (9–12, 16).<sup>6</sup> Immediately, however, he takes this back: “If faith does not need philosophy, the *science* of faith as a *positive science* does” (17). Like every ontic science, theology “operates within the basic context of an ontology, firstly and for the most part hidden” (17). The clarification and explication of the ontological dimension of science is the task of phenomenology. In part, this is because philosophy is the ontological science, by contrast with all the ontic sciences. But there is another reason. Faith is the *Aufhebung* of “pre-faith-full, i.e., unbelieving, human existence” (18). For this reason alone, “all basic theological concepts . . . have as their *ontological* determinants meanings which are pre-Christian and which can thus be grasped rationally” (18).

In keeping with the notion of formal indication that he developed in the period before *Being and Time*,<sup>7</sup> Heidegger emphasizes the formal character of ontological explication. But now he sounds more like Hegel than like Kierkegaard. Philosophy possesses a purely rational, formal knowledge that theology “needs”—for guidance, for codirection, and, nine times in two pages, for correction (“Phenomenology” 19–20).

There are philosophies that do not lead to religion but only critique it, though these may be fewer than they seem. We need only to think of Nietzsche’s religion, already mentioned, the religion which Bertrand Russell calls “a free man’s worship,”<sup>8</sup> and Marx’s 1843 claim that the criticism of religion “ends with the doctrine that man is the highest being for man” (69). Of more interest presently is the fact that philosophies that do lead to religion lead not only to some particular religion, but in the process inevitably and, for the most part, not just implicitly critique other particular religions or types of religion. So the question of how and in what ways philosophy leads to religion has as its flip side the question of how and in what ways philosophy criticizes religion. The defense attorney in one case is the prosecuting attorney in another.

\* \* \*

Kant's philosophy leads to religion. So does Hegel's. But, while both purport to be religion within the limits of reason alone, the religions to which they lead are far more different from each other than is Protestantism from Catholicism or Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from each other. Let us explore this difference in terms of our three questions: about the life-world horizons of their thought, about the basic beliefs within each system, and about the symbols and stories which make up the big picture that stands in a mutually constitutive relation with the parts of the system.

That human reason should and can be autonomous is a basic belief shared by Kant and Hegel. This belief arises out of the life-world of a cultural elite roughly identified as the Enlightenment, into which both Kant and Hegel were socialized; and it belongs to the grand narrative of the Enlightenment about "the emancipation of the rational subject" (Lyotard xxiii). In general, it means that reason can and should be pure, *episteme* uncontaminated by *doxa*.

There are two theological corollaries to this belief. First, essential, proper religious knowledge cannot be dependent on faith as the reception of divine revelation in the traditional senses of these terms, namely, that we need to know what we cannot discover with the resources of unaided human reason, that God gives us what we cannot provide for ourselves, and that faith is (in part) the trusting reception of this gift.<sup>9</sup> This gift, this epistemic grace, is not compatible with the self-sufficiency of human reason signified by the autonomy claim.

Second, historical narratives cannot, as such, be essential to the content of religious knowledge, for 1) reason cannot generate anything historically specific from itself, and 2) if it is to remain autonomous, it can be expected only to recognize universal, essential truths in historical narratives. Thus, for Kant, such narratives can serve as "examples" or "vehicles" of what pure practical reason knows without their help. Like the diagrams that Socrates draws for the slave boy, narratives can be pedagogically useful but not philosophically ultimate. It is not necessary to quarrel over the historicity of such narratives, for if we think of them as parables or myths they can do their job just as well. For example, in the stories of Jesus,<sup>10</sup> we are dealing with "*The Personified Idea of the Good Principle*. . . . We need, therefore, no empirical example to make the idea of a person morally well-pleasing to God our archetype; this idea as an archetype is already present in our reason . . . [and] is to be sought nowhere but in our own reason" (*Religion* 54, 56–57). Of course, Kant does not deny the existence of Jesus, but Jesus' existence is no more necessary to the proper moral use of his story than is that of the Good Samaritan.

Being more historically oriented, Hegel treats the actual existence of Jesus as theologically important, but only because of its role in triggering a *Wesensschau*, in helping us to see that the human and divine natures are one, not uniquely in Jesus but universally. It is this universal truth that is the proper content of theology, and Jesus helps us to recollect it. To return to the "slave

boy” analogy, the diagrams are now necessary to the recollection, by Hegel’s account, but the truth recollected is not about them. The doctrine of the Incarnation is not about Jesus but about the relation of two essences, human nature and divine nature. The content of theology, as it is for Kant, is universal truth; historical particularity as such remains scandalous. It is clear 1) that the religions to which the philosophies of Kant and Hegel will lead will not be any version of orthodox Christianity, Eastern or Western, Catholic or Protestant, and 2) that their philosophies will be critiques, sometimes very sharp, of all such theologies for refusing to stay within the limits of reason alone.

Beyond this common ground, it is necessary to speak of the religions—plural—to which the philosophies of Kant and Hegel lead, because they are very different indeed. On the one hand, Kant finds radical evil in human nature, not moral weakness but the free choice of an overriding evil maxim which permits the triumph of inclination over duty whenever the costs of doing one’s duty get too high or, to say essentially the same thing, whenever the benefits of following inclination get high enough to “warrant” the substitution of *prudent* for *wrong*.

By contrast, and in keeping with his affirmation of the essential divinity of human nature, Hegel finds an innocence that would almost make Nietzsche happy and that permits Kierkegaard’s Climacus to say that the system has no ethics (*Postscript* 119, 121, 145, 307, 327, 346). The Fall is inseparable from the Creation and turns out to be a fall upwards, from animal immediacy to human mediation, the awareness of a cognitive lack, the need for truth. “Humanity ought not to be innocent” (Hegel 3:298).<sup>11</sup> To say that humanity is by nature evil is to speak not of fault but of finitude, and cognitive finitude at that. It is to say that at the outset we have not yet achieved our cognitive destiny, absolute knowledge.

We have before us the following awkward situation: out of one side of its mouth, presumably pure reason says that there is radical evil in the human will, while out of the other side of its mouth it tells a totally different story. We are forced to ask, when reason makes these announcements, whose reason is speaking? Kant’s *drama* is dramatically different from Hegel’s.

If we are led to suspect that neither is the voice of pure reason, we can ask about the life-worlds out of which these basic beliefs about human nature arise. In the case of Kant we cannot doubt the lasting impact of the Pietism to which he was exposed in his youth, both at home and at school. The pure practical reason of the mature Kant was never so pure as to be beyond the shaping influence of this Christian life-world, however hostile he was to the church’s doctrines and rites. Hegel, at least during his gymnasium and seminary days, was exposed to a Christianity more toward the rationalist than the Pietist end of the spectrum. Even more decisive, it would appear, is a later phase of his formation, his socialization into a community of three (with Schelling and Hölderlin, after their years together at Tübingen Seminary) for

whom the idealism of Fichte's 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre* provided the framework for a decisive break with theism through its essentially Spinozistic character.<sup>12</sup> Such a community easily—one is tempted to say automatically—becomes Gnostic in its religion, taking the highest human task to be speculation rather than the rectification of the individual's perverse will.

Corresponding to these very different life-worlds inhabited by Kant and Hegel at decisive stages in their formation are two very different metanarratives, containing the Pelagian and Gnostic soteriologies, respectively. For Kant, the Enlightenment myth of progress is not only the grand story of the emancipation of the rational subject, but also the eschatological narrative of the building of *ein ethisches gemeines Wesen*, the invisible church of those striving for moral perfection without the "benefit" of creeds or rituals or the clergy who accompany them, and with only such divine assistance as they merit after having converted themselves, not to God but to the Good Principle.

By contrast, Hegel's eschatology is the speculative metanarrative, as Lyotard has labeled it, the logical, phenomenological, and ultimately historical story of the emergence and triumph of Science: Absolute Knowing. This knowledge is the highest task of human beings; as the discovery of humankind's essential divinity it is the deepest meaning of "Christian" reconciliation.

From within these different metanarratives, Kant and Hegel will develop different critiques of religion. For example, Kant will find the creeds of the church deeply problematic, because in telling us what to believe about God they distract us from the only truly religious task, acting rightly toward other human beings. By contrast, Hegel's critique of the creeds will be that they are in the language of the Understanding and are not adequate to the reality they intend, unlike his own System, which speaks the voice of Reason.

Depending on whose philosophy and which religion one finds most persuasive, these metanarratives (and the critiques they imply) will be seen as perfections or parodies of the traditional Christian metanarrative to which they constantly allude.<sup>13</sup> Each is the whole within which the parts of its respective theology take their place. As Schleiermacher reminds us, whole and part stand in a relation of "mutual determination" to each other (see 149). Because this hermeneutical circle can never be closed, because the event of mutual determination can be terminated only arbitrarily, and because the totality whose transparent possession would represent the only nontemporary, nonarbitrary completion of the process always exceeds our grasp, we dwell in one or another of these hermeneutical circles by faith and not by sight. In their own way, Kant and his orthodox Christian predecessors emphasize this fact. In denying it, Hegel looks bold, arrogant, laughable, even desperate, but not convincing. If one wanted to argue that philosophy is the finding of bad reasons for what one believes upon instinct, would there be a better case at hand than Hegel's claim that human thought can be infinite by achieving, not merely anticipating, totality? In the debate between Kant and Hegel and,

perhaps, Augustine, we have a conflict of interpretations rather than the conquest of the Idea. Or, to put it a bit differently, we have different faiths seeking understanding.

From the Augustinian tradition we can briefly introduce Kierkegaard into the mix to extend our comparison in a different direction rather than in greater depth. Like Kant's, Kierkegaard's prephilosophical life-world is that of Protestant Pietism. This shows up in the intensely personal and inward relation of the individual to God, in the understanding of sin as willful refusal to live "before God," and in the corresponding rejection of any "pantheistic" definition of sin that takes it to be "something merely negative—weakness, sensuousness, finitude, ignorance, etc." (Kierkegaard, *Sickness* 96).

This last point decisively separates Kierkegaard from Hegel. But he distances himself equally from Kant by finding no need to filter Pietism's understanding of radical human evil through the article of faith most basic to both Kant and Hegel—the autonomy axiom. The faith of his childhood, to which he returned before becoming an author, had *credo ut intelligam* as its motto, not *sapere aude*. Human reason is not self-sufficient—precisely because of sin. Not only because of finitude, but especially because of the noetic effects of sin, human reason not only lacks the power to discover by itself what we need to know for our salvation, but it finds dependence on divine revelation to be offensive, paradoxical, absurd, madness. Faith is not the *pistis* of Plato's divided line or its descendent, the *Vorstellungen* of Hegel's scheme, a deficient mode of knowing that philosophy can make good; it is, rather, the humble courage that is willing to be taught by God what recollection is unable to recollect.<sup>14</sup>

Nor is the human will able to be self-sufficient, except in defiance. Sin is like jumping into a hole too deep to climb out of. Only prevenient grace can effect reconciliation. Thus the paradox that the one who can help "is himself the one who seeks those who have need of help, he is himself the one who goes around and, calling, almost pleading, says: Come here. . . . He does not wait for anyone to come to him; he comes on his own initiative, uncalled" (Kierkegaard, *Practice* 12). In these words we hear Augustine confessing to God, "You converted me to you" (VII:12).

The meganarrative implicit in Kierkegaard's analysis of sin and its forgiveness is a story not of the triumph of the will but of the triumph of that grace which overcomes not only the willfulness that refuses to return to the Good (because it is too busy establishing the Truth), but also the willfulness that insists on converting itself to the Good. Thus there is a critique of the religions of Hegel and Kant. But the most poignant critique of religion that Kierkegaard develops within the framework of this grand narrative is the one known as the attack upon Christendom. It protests, in a Pietistic tone of voice, that life lived before even the most gracious God is far more strenuous than Christendom would like to think and that the complacency that converts grace into "cheap grace" is sin and not faith.

By insisting that this interpretation of our condition is a product of faith

that does not even try to establish itself by appeal to some presumptive universal, neutral reason, Kierkegaard suggests that it is presumptuous indeed for Kant to claim that his faith is *grounded* in *pure* practical reason and for Hegel to claim to have gone beyond faith, which everyone has, to knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

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I have been suggesting that the ways in which philosophy criticizes religion are often the flip side of the ways in which it leads to religion. So I return to Heidegger's previously mentioned claim that theology, as the science of faith, needs philosophy for guidance and *correction*—partly because of its intrinsic interest for our topic and partly because it brings us closer to the question of whether the relation of philosophy to religion is different when that philosophy is phenomenology.

We have seen that for Heidegger, faith is the *Aufhebung* of “pre-faith-full, i.e., unbelieving, human existence” (“Phenomenology” 18). As the science of this recontextualizing reinterpretation, or, if you like, the teleological suspension of unbelieving experience, theology is accordingly “*absolutely different from philosophy*” and, moreover, it is a “fully autonomous ontic science” vis-à-vis philosophy (16; see also 6 and 18). This is what one would expect from a hermeneutical phenomenology according to which the basic beliefs of Christian faith are circularly embedded in a life-world arising from and giving reinforcement to a distinctive combination of practices on the one hand and a meganarrative on the other.

We can only be puzzled when Heidegger exempts phenomenology as ontological science from this *Aufhebung* and leaves it as an independent variable from which Christian theology is to receive both guidance and correction because it is a source of meanings “which can thus be grasped purely rationally” (“Phenomenology” 18). Here we have returned to the Husserlian ideal of philosophy as the rigorous science that can lay the foundation for all of the other sciences. This ideal, as its Cartesian heritage testifies, is a version of the autonomy axiom we encountered in Kant and Hegel and arises within the life-world of the Enlightenment project.<sup>16</sup>

When we turn from this formal claim to the substantive correction that Heidegger offers to theology from this position of authority, we encounter the beginnings of what he will later call the critique of onto-theology. It is a triple critique. First, when philosophical theologies or theological philosophies seek to understand the whole of being with reference to a highest being, they remain in the ontic realm of beings and fall into philosophy's most original sin, *Seinsvergessenheit*. But this is fatal to theology:

Only from the truth of being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word

“God” is to signify. . . . How can the human being at the present stage of world history ask at all seriously and rigorously whether the god nears or withdraws, when he has above all neglected to think into the dimension in which alone that question can be asked? But this is the dimension of the holy, which indeed remains closed as a dimension if the open region of being is not cleared and in its clearing is near to humans. (“Letter” 267)

The *Seinsmystik* which comes to expression in the claim that the thinking of being must precede the thinking of God, and not vice versa, has its home in the life-world of Romanticism rather than that of Enlightenment. We hear the voice of Hölderlin now, rather than that of Husserl. Much of Romanticism, both English and German, can be seen as a religious quest for a deep source of meaning that exceeds conceptual grasp but is decidedly not the Christian God and, *a fortiori*, is not to be found in the Christian church. But Enlightenment and Romanticism are perhaps best seen not simply as mortal enemies but as the two souls that dwell within the breast of a Faust that we have come to call modernity. Just to the degree that these two souls dwell, as we are now noticing, in Heidegger’s breast, we have a thoroughly *modern* Martin.

Jean-Luc Marion is understandably indignant. *Quid juris?* With what right does this hybrid modernity, which comes in postmodern wrapping to be sure, dictate the horizon within which we should think of God? Is not the primacy of being over God a second idolatry, more nearly like than unlike the onto-theologically constituted metaphysics Heidegger critiques (chaps. 2–3)?

Marion’s protest is well taken. Heidegger’s basic belief in the priority of the being question arises out of two not entirely compatible life-worlds which, in any case, are just that, life-worlds, with all the particularity and contingency that implies, but none of the overarching authority that Heidegger presumes.<sup>17</sup>

But there is another dimension to Heidegger’s critique: the second part. In the lecture of 1927–28, we find a sustained critique of theology as a purely theoretical enterprise. “Theology is not speculative knowledge of God” (“Phenomenology” 15). Not only does theology arise out of faithful existence, a life-world of intertwined belief and practice, but it has faithful existence as its goal. “Every theological statement and concept addresses itself *in its very content* to the faith-full existence of the individual in the community; it does *not* do so subsequently, for the sake of some practical ‘*application*’” (“Phenomenology” 12).

In the later, third part, of the critique, this polemic is further specified. God-talk sells its soul to the devil, thereby becoming onto-theology, when it fails to resist the hegemony of philosophy, according to which “the deity can come into philosophy only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines that and how the deity enters into it” (*Identity* 56). It turns out that philosophy’s terms for lending its prestige to God-talk are that God should serve as a means to its end, the project of rendering the whole of being intelligible to human understanding.<sup>18</sup> It is of the god who has been sold into this slavery that Heidegger says, “Man can neither

pray nor sacrifice to this god. Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god” (*Identity* 72).

This complaint is very different from the *Seinsvergessenheit* critique. We hear the voices of Pascal and Kierkegaard and are reminded of Heidegger’s immersion in the New Testament, Luther, and Kierkegaard during the gestation of *Being and Time*. Heidegger has encountered a life-world that is part pre- and part postmodern, but decidedly neither Enlightenment nor Romanticism. And while we cannot say that he really dwells in this life-world of faith, he has become a sufficiently competent player of this language game to be able to speak to us out of it. Now his targets are Aristotle and Hegel, and his critique is the negative moment in the way his philosophy leads to the piety of thinking that is his Romantic religion. Still, if we cannot exactly say that his philosophy leads to the theology of Augustine, or of his Catholic sons Aquinas and Bonaventure, or of his Protestant sons Luther and Calvin (before whose God people do bow in awe, pray and sacrifice, sing and dance), we can say that he opens up a space for their theologies by giving the kind of critique of onto-theology that each of them would welcome, in his own distinctive, nonromantic way.<sup>19</sup>

Biblical, theistic faith has good reason to join Marion in rejecting one dimension of Heidegger’s critique, but equally good reason to welcome its other dimension. Any philosophy or theology that would lead to faithful Christian existence needs to affirm divine mystery in the face of onto-theological hubris, a point we can learn not only from Pascal and Kierkegaard, but also from Augustine, from Aquinas and Bonaventure, or from Luther and Calvin.

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I turn finally to Dominique Janicaud’s protest against the “theological turn” in French phenomenology. I have been arguing that philosophy, in spite of its recurrent urge to be pure insight, cannot be presuppositionless, rigorous science. In particular, when it comes to religious matters, it is not pure reason that we encounter in Kant, or Hegel, or Heidegger, but in each case a faith seeking understanding. Is that the case because the first two never knew and the third abandoned the methodical rigor of transcendental phenomenology? Can phenomenology fulfill the dream of being rigorous science if only it remains sufficiently faithful to Husserl? Is the reduction the proper corrective to Descartes’s methodical doubt which finally enables us to succeed where he failed? Is eidetic intuition the scene of those clear and distinct ideas which are in fact, as promised, born of immaculate conception?

I think not, and I express my skepticism in a series of questions that will not be surprising in the light of the preceding analysis.

Is not the idea that philosophy can and should be rigorous science itself an article of faith that seeks understanding in transcendental phenomenology? Is

it not rooted in an existential desire for security that precedes reflection?<sup>20</sup> Does not this desire arise within an Enlightenment life-world (ancient or modern) that, like the desire to which it gives rise, precedes reflection in its historical particularity and contingency and quickly becomes the tradition that would free thought from tradition? Is not its prejudice against prejudice a dogma (in the nonpejorative sense, a doctrine taught by a church to its initiates) which fails to justify itself by the principle of principles?<sup>21</sup> Is it not, like the verification criterion of meaning in logical positivism, an a priori control belief that cannot satisfy its own requirements?<sup>22</sup>

Another way of asking these questions is to ask whether the history of phenomenology has not been the continual (re)discovery that the ideal of rigorous science is a pipe dream. Does not the almost immediate conversion of transcendental phenomenology into existential and hermeneutical phenomenology show that those who studied Husserl most carefully and took him most seriously were unable to stay with him on this point? Nor is it a matter simply of the rebellion of sons (and grandsons) against the father. Does not Husserl's own development teach us the same lesson? Having discovered the life-world as the horizon of intentional meaning, he tries desperately to neutralize the implications of this discovery by keeping the life-world on the noema side of the equation as a phenomenon to be investigated. But does he not keep discovering, however reluctantly, that the life-world keeps showing up on the noesis side of the equation, insinuating itself into the transcendental ego, giving to it (and thus to philosophical reflection) a historically specific identity, and depriving it of the naked neutrality that Husserl wanted it to retain?<sup>23</sup>

What then, do we find as Janicaud introduces his complaint with a brief history of phenomenology in France? At the beginning of the initial reception, we find the work of Sartre and the early work of Merleau-Ponty. There are two noteworthy features in Janicaud's account. First, he recognizes significant departures from a strict Husserlianism, but these departures do not bother him. On the one hand, he recognizes that there are genuine problems and ambiguities in Husserl's work that generate these departures. In any case, "*Faithful or unfaithful* to the first inspiration, intelligent and provocative works were produced" (21; emphasis added). Second, the atheism of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty does not bother him either, although he explicitly alludes to it. He praises "the limits of the first French phenomenological 'breakthrough'" (17) without any tirade against, say, *Being and Nothingness* as a "rupture with immanent phenomenality" (17). The same tone continues in the brief discussion of the later work of Merleau-Ponty.

But all hell breaks loose when we come to a work contemporary with *The Visible and the Invisible: Levinas's Totality and Infinity*. As Bernard Prusak puts it in his introduction to the English translation of *The Theological Turn*, Janicaud puts Levinas on trial, charged with corrupting youth—namely, the "new phenomenologists," Marion, Chrétien, and Henry (3). Janicaud acknowledges that Levinas is "responding to the same deficiency of Husserlian phenomenol-

ogy” (25) as is Merleau-Ponty and that in both cases the tactics “consist . . . in being more faithful to the spirit of phenomenology than Husserl himself” (26). Yet it is only to Levinas that Janicaud attributes “an attitude which loftily affirms itself” (25).

The rhetorical barrage intensifies as the contrast is drawn:

Between the unconditional affirmation of Transcendence and the patient interrogation of the visible, the incompatibility cries out; we must choose. But are we going to do so with the head or the heart—arbitrarily or not? The task, in so far as it remains philosophical and phenomenological, is to follow the sole guide that does not buy itself off with fine words. . . . [Merleau-Ponty’s] way presupposes nothing other than an untiring desire for elucidation of that which most hides itself away in experience. . . .

On the contrary, the directly dispossessing aplomb of alterity supposes a non-phenomenological, metaphysical desire; it comes from “a land not of our birth.”<sup>24</sup> It supposes a metaphysico-theological montage, prior to philosophical writing. The dice are loaded and choices made; faith rises majestically in the background. The reader, confronted by the blade of the absolute, finds him or herself in a position of a catechumen who has no other choice than to penetrate the holy words and lofty dogmas. (26–27)

We are reminded of Philip Rieff’s commentary on Freud:

It is on the subject of religion that the judicious clinician grows vehement and disputatious. Against no other stronghold of repressive culture are the reductive weapons of psychoanalysis deployed in such open hostility. Freud’s customary detachment fails him here. Confronting religion, psychoanalysis shows itself for what it is: the last great formulation of nineteenth-century secularism, complete with substitute doctrine and cult. (281)

If we ask what has triggered the replacement of detachment with such vehemence and open hostility in Janicaud’s narrative, the answer is not far to seek. Levinas tells us that metaphysical desire is “for the absolutely other [*Autre*]” understood as “the alterity of the Other [*Autrui*] and of the Most-High” (34). What is here “imposed from the outset,” Janicaud tells us, is “nothing less than the God of the biblical tradition” (27).

This is a highly dubious claim. Whether one is thinking of the Jewish or the Christian Bible, one cannot, without a lot of wishful thinking, find the God of the Bible in a text that tells us, “It is our relations with men . . . that give to theological concepts the sole signification they admit of. . . . Everything that cannot be reduced to an interhuman relation represents not the superior form but the forever primitive form of religion” (79). Both Jewish and Christian scriptures make it clear that we cannot truly love God unless we *also* love our neighbor, but neither reduces the former to the latter.

But this is beside the point. Whether rightly or wrongly, Janicaud is convinced that Levinas has introduced the biblical God into philosophical discourse, and this is the cause of his apoplectic accusation: “Strict treason of the

reduction that handed over the transcendental I to its nudity” (27). The earlier questions recur. Does not the desire for philosophy to be carried out by the transcendental I in its nudity itself arise prior to philosophical writing? In the project of transcendental phenomenology are not the dice loaded and choices made in favor of reason’s autonomy? Does not a certain “faith rise majestically in the background” so that we find ourselves addressed as catechumens (or perhaps heretics)?

A second kind of question arises. When Levinas’s (alleged) theism is denounced as treason against the reduction rather than as “patient interrogation of the visible” and as “an untiring desire for elucidation of that which most hides itself away in experience” (27), why is the atheism of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, which is far less ambiguous than Levinas’s theism, given a free pass? When we are told that religious belief compromises rational objectivity but that religious unbelief does not, is this the voice of pure reason or the voice of the life-world of Enlightenment secularism into which a particular speaker has been socialized?

The story is told of a boy who told his father of the narrow escape his dog had when chased by a very angry and much larger dog. The smaller dog just climbed up a tree to safety. In response to the father’s protest that dogs cannot climb trees, the boy responded, “But Daddy, he just got to.” It has always seemed to me that there is a lot of “But Daddy, he just got to” in the Husserlian project of philosophy as rigorous science. What persuades is not the clear vision of the dog in the tree, the intuition of the actualization of the ideal, but a desperate vision of the psychologism and historicism that will befall us if the dog cannot climb the tree. So, in response to the evidence (a good Husserlian term) that the transcendental ego is not naked after all but thoroughly wrapped in psychological and historical contingencies of life-world and meganarrative proportions, the true-believer [*sic*] replies, “But it just got to be naked!”

One cannot simply ignore this vertigo of relativity that has terrorized philosophers at least since Plato. Is the only alternative to complete transcendence of the cave sophistry, cynicism, even nihilism? I think not, and conclude with the briefest sketch of what I think philosophy can be if it cannot be the nude dancing of egos so transcendental that they raise new questions about the identity of indiscernibles.

Philosophy will be perspectival rather than pure. As interpretation rather than intuition, it will continue to be what it has always been, the conflict of interpretations. But this need not reduce us to the method of tenacity. If thought has the finitude implied in the impossibility of being pure reason, then each of us has good reason to think that we might learn something from the other, and this is the best rationale for conversation that is not chatter but a serious meeting of the minds.

Conversational reason is dialogical rather than monological; correspondingly, the emphasis shifts from taking a concrete individual and making it [*sic*] abstract (nude) to the ethics of intersubjective relations. The ethics of such

conversation is no doubt a virtue ethics. Habermas reminds us of the virtue of fairness.<sup>25</sup> Gadamer reminds us of the virtue of open-mindedness.<sup>26</sup> Linda Zagzebski gives major attention to both of these virtues (among many others) in her virtue epistemology. When our interpretations are in conflict, the possibility of my learning from you presupposes that I enter the conversation with a considerable degree of these two virtues.

But in this conversation I am both teacher and learner, and I am responsible for presenting my own interpretations as faithfully as possible to the other, whom I must presuppose to be both fair and open-minded. This involves articulation and testimony. By articulation, I mean what I hinted at in the earlier reference to vision and articulation—namely, spelling out the whole of which this or that belief is a part as fully as possible, giving the big picture in pictures, where appropriate, as well as in arguments that display the inner logic of my position. Thus, for example, while Kierkegaard's Climacus sees Christian faith as opposed to worldly understanding, his Anti-Climacus speaks of "faith's understanding" (*Practice* 78), and Kierkegaard's entire corpus, pseudonymous and not, is best read as a setting forth of the inner rationale of Christian faith and practice (which, to repeat, knows itself to be faith and not pure reason). The intellectual virtues at issue here are clarity and honesty: clarity in making my perspective as transparent as possible and honesty in not compromising that transparency by hiding anything.

By testimony, I mean presenting my perspective as a first-person report, saying, "This is how it looks from where I stand, which, of course, does not afford the view from nowhere; if you look carefully, can't you see pretty much the same thing?" I do not purport to be the judge or jury, much less the Supreme Court. I am simply one who has taken the stand to tell what I have seen and to answer questions, both friendly and hostile, as best I can. The intellectual virtue at issue here is obviously humility.

This is, as promised, only a sketch. These themes need much fuller exploration, and, important as I believe them to be, I do not for a moment think that they exhaust the nature of conversational reason. My own view is that the project of spelling out the middle ground between absolute knowledge and cynical nihilism is and has been a major preoccupation of twentieth-century philosophy across a variety of traditions and vocabularies. That task is anything but completed. My persuasion is that we are best equipped to understand and contribute to that conversation about conversation when we realize the degree to which reason is always already faith.

## NOTES

1. The complexity, and even incoherence, of these beliefs stems from the fact that beginning with our most immediate family, we are socialized into a variety of communities that are not necessarily compatible; we gain competence in many language games.

2. For the views sketched below, Plantinga, "Reason"; *Current Debate*, especially chapter 4; and *Proper Function*, especially chapter 10.

3. Peirce introduces this notion in “Fixation” (235). To avoid having his theory identified as fideism in some such sense, Plantinga prefers to say that when basic beliefs are true and the product of a properly functioning cognitive apparatus of the right sort and in the right circumstances, they are products of reason.

4. At A 738 = B 766 we read, “Reason must in all its undertakings subject itself to criticism; should it limit freedom of criticism by any prohibitions, it must harm itself, drawing upon itself a damaging suspicion. Nothing is so important through its usefulness, nothing so sacred, that it may be exempted from this searching examination, which knows no respect for persons.” In a surprisingly Habermasian tone of voice, Kant continues, “For reason has no dictatorial authority; its verdict is always simply the agreement of free citizens, of whom each one must be permitted to express, without let or hindrance, his objections or even his veto.”

5. In keeping what has here been called the Wittgensteinian/Foucauldian theme, Heidegger notes that the *positum* of Christian theology, as a positive science, “is come upon in a definite prescientific manner of approaching and proceeding with that which is,” that “this disclosure is prior to any theoretical consideration,” and that it is “already illuminated and guided by an understanding of Being—even if it be nonconceptual” (“Phenomenology” 7).

6. Heidegger even adds that faith “is in its innermost core the mortal enemy of the *form of existence* which is an essential part of *philosophy*. . . . Faith is so absolutely the mortal enemy that philosophy does not even begin to want in any way to do battle with it. This factual *existentiell opposition* between faithfulness and a human’s free appropriation of his whole existence . . .” (“Phenomenology” 20).

7. Helpful discussion of this motif is found in Van Buren, *Young Heidegger*, and Kisiel. See also Van Buren, “Ethics.”

8. In the chapter of that title in *Why I Am Not a Christian*.

9. We have already seen Heidegger, following Kierkegaard’s Climacus—and, for that matter, Augustine and Paul—link faith in this sense to rebirth. This distinguishes it from the *pistis* of Plato’s divided line (and much Enlightenment thinking) which is merely a defective form of knowing. For this tradition, treating faith as a defective form of knowing has its analog in Aristotle’s treating woman as a defective form of man; it signifies a violent hegemony.

10. Both Kant and Hegel find it necessary to relate their theologies to biblical narratives, contrasting their hermeneutics of reason with unenlightened interpretations.

11. Cf. 307 and Addition 3 to ¶24 of the *Encyclopedia Logic*. I have discussed this matter in greater detail in “Hegel.”

12. I have discussed the crucial correspondence of 1795 in “*Von Hegel bis Hegel*.” On 26 January 1795, Hölderlin wrote to Hegel, “[Fichte’s] Absolute Self, which equals Spinoza’s Substance, contains all reality; it is everything, and outside it, is nothing. There is thus no object for this Absolute Self, since otherwise all reality would not be in it. Yet a consciousness without an object is inconceivable. . . . Thus, in the Absolute Self no consciousness is conceivable” (*Hegel: The Letters* 33).

13. The traditional Christian story is a grand narrative indeed, but it is not a metanarrative in Lyotard’s sense for at least the following reasons. 1) It is not a meta-discourse but a first-order discourse, kerygma not apologetics. 2) Its proper function is not to legitimize modernity’s practices of knowledge and politics but to delegitimize all human practices not completely in harmony with the Kingdom of God (which is not a

human production). Accordingly, 3) it is told by prophets and apostles, who make no pretense to being the voice of human reason, rather than by philosophers, who do.

14. It is of interest in this connection that in the concluding paragraph of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes Absolute Knowing in terms of recollection. Cf. the passage in which Augustine describes what he did *not* find in the books of the Platonists, which leads him to describe Platonic wisdom as “presumption” rather than “confession” (*Confessions* VII:9 and 20).

15. Hegel tells his students, “Religion is for everyone. It is not philosophy, which is not for everyone” (1:180). Cf. the polemic against going “beyond faith” in the preface and epilogue to Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*.

16. The surprisingly Cartesian character of Heidegger’s thought shows up in another way in his analysis of guilt and the call of conscience in *Being and Time*, ¶¶54–60. The ontological analysis, according to which the call of conscience is the call of *Dasein* to itself, is both prior to and the condition for the possibility of ontic understandings of conscience as the voice of God, or of parents, or of society at large. But this means that *Dasein*’s relation to itself is prior to and the condition of its relation to the Other, human or divine, a Cartesian thesis that would be hotly contested by such diverse thinkers as Hegel, Kierkegaard, Levinas, and Sartre, for whom there is no immediate self-presence and for whom the Other always stands between me and myself. The inner sanctum of the prereflective cogito has always already been invaded by the Other.

17. In due course, when the critique of onto-theology comes to be named as such, Heidegger will also articulate the *Seinsgeschichte*, the metanarrative to which his basic belief belongs.

18. The analysis of representational and calculative thinking in such texts as *The Principle of Reason* and *Discourse on Thinking*, and *The Question Concerning Technology* is a sustained critique of this project.

19. If Aquinas’s God, for example, were nothing but an Unmoved Mover, he might well be convicted of onto-theology. But in a Hegelian fashion, as we move through the *Summa*, that abstract initial description is continually concretized, personalized, and rendered fit for genuinely religious worship. And the last thing that any of these theologies do is use God to make the whole of being fully intelligible to human understanding. I have discussed the issues raised by Heidegger’s critique in greater detail in “Overcoming Ontotheology.”

20. Thus Adorno suggests that “the totally unobvious need for absolute spiritual security . . . [is] the reflex to real powerlessness and insecurity” (15). Cf. Derrida’s claim that the lack of foundation “is basic and nonempirical and that the security of presence in the metaphorical form of ideality arises and is set forth again upon this irreducible void” (7).

21. The “prejudice against prejudice” (against prejudgment or, perhaps, faith as I’ve used the term) formula comes, of course, from Gadamer (see 270). Husserl’s Principle of All Principles is given in ¶24 of *Ideas* (44).

22. Thus Feigl explains that the empiricist criterion of meaning “does not fall under its own jurisdiction” because it is to be understood “as a proposal and not as a proposition” (15). For the long narrative which leads, ever so reluctantly, to this conclusion, see Hempel.

23. For this narrative, see Landgrebe. This essay should be read with the Hempel essay cited in the previous note.

24. This is a citation from Levinas 33–34.
25. Like most analytic epistemologists he speaks in a deontological tone of voice. I am suggesting that his norms can be read as descriptions of a virtue.
26. Risser highlights this dimension in *Hermeneutics*.

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