Phenomenology of Religious Experience

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Phenomenology and the *Possibility* of Religious Experience

https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2017-0039
Received June 26, 2017; accepted September 11, 2017

Abstract: Work in what has been known as the theological turn in French phenomenology describes the way in which human beings are always, already open to a religious encounter. This paper will focus on Levinas as a proper transcendental phenomenologist as would be characterized by parts of Husserl and Husserl's last assistant Eugen Fink. What Levinas does in his phenomenology of the face/other (which gets tied up in religious language) is to describe an absolute origin out of which the subject arises. This point of origin structures the self in such a way as to always, already be open to that which overflows experience and, thus, makes possible the very experience of an encounter with the numinous. Such an approach to religious experience for which I am arguing simply takes Levinas at his word when he declares "The idea of God is an idea that cannot clarify a human situation. It is the inverse that is true." ("Transcendence and Height") Understanding the structure of the subject as open to that which cannot be reduced/totalized/encapsulated is to recognize that the human situation is ready for the possibility of religious experience.

Keywords: Emmanuel Levinas, Edmund Husserl, Eugen Fink, Dominique Janicaud, Theological Turn, Transcendental, Phenomenology, Religious experience

1 Introduction

Rudolf Otto's *Idea of the Holy* has been influential, most notably, in religious discussion for its fascinating phenomenological description of religious experience. Perhaps just as interesting is the manner in which this text offers a philosophical justification for religious experience, a justification with which Otto had been working for years and which is intended to avoid scientific explanations. Otto's major works clearly demonstrate his distaste for naturalistic explanations of distinctly religious engagement with the world. After going over several examples of early manifestations of religion in *Idea of the Holy*, which he terms "pre-religion," he declares that these do not constitute an explanation of religion proper, "rather, they are themselves only made possible and can only be explained from a religious basic element, viz. the feeling of the numinous."[1] The claim here is a strong one; naturalistic explanations cannot explain religious ideas because there is no possibility of making a religious claim from naturalistic categories. Working with an idea that had been expounded upon by J. F. Fries, the pupil of Immanuel Kant, Otto argues that human beings are

1 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 124.

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structured with a "religious *a priori*" that provides universal ground and justification for religious ideas.[2] In the manner of a Kantian *a priori*, the religious intuition arises with but not from experience. Reception of this idea was underwhelming. By 1922 Anders Nygren captured the consensus regarding the concept of a "religious *a priori*"; he compares it to a coin "that has lost its impression: each person attaches the meaning and value to it that seems fitting to him, or else declares it worthless."[3] The philosophical problem engendered by Otto is inspiring even if the Kantian-Friesian explanation of the basic religious element has fallen short. This essay takes up again the question of that human structure that provides a real possibility for religious experience. Phenomenological philosophy has gone beyond the Kantian metaphysical dualism and offers another explanation for this possibility via the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, who has been credited/blamed for the theological turn in phenomenology.

Work in what has been known as the theological turn in French phenomenology describes in less Kantian terms the way in which human beings are always, already open to a religious encounter. This essay will focus on Levinas as a proper transcendental phenomenologist as would be characterized by what Husserl was doing with time analysis and by Eugen Fink's broadening and deepening of Husserl's phenomenological analysis, which he did as Husserl's last assistant. What Levinas ends up doing in the maturation of his phenomenology of the face/other, which gets tied up in religious language, is to describe an origin out of which the subject arises.[4] This point of origin structures the self in such a way as to always, already be open to that which overflows experience and, thus, makes possible the very experience of an encounter with the numinous. Such an approach to religious experience for which I am arguing simply takes Levinas at his word when he declares, "The idea of God is an idea that cannot clarify a human situation. It is the inverse that is true."[5] Understanding the structure of the subject as open to that which cannot be reduced/totalized/encapsulated is to recognize that the human situation is ready for the possibility of religious experience. Demonstrating such an origin in Levinas's philosophy necessitates addressing the resistance any phenomenology receives when making religious claims, the proper characterization of transcendental phenomenology and how Levinas fits into this tradition, and how this transcendental investigation leads to the description of an originative structure that provides the possibility of religious experience.

2 God and phenomenology: admitting the inadmissible?

The relationship between phenomenology and declarations about God or religious ideas is, to say the least, complicated, and any discussion of how phenomenology might substantively contribute to religious claims requires a going back again to the beginning to ask the question: What is phenomenology? This echoes the question put forward by Merleau-Ponty in his Preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, which appeared first in 1945, but the question still seemed fresh by the time the book received its first translation into English in 1962.[6] Answering what phenomenology is remains apropos for this present essay due to

2 In 1909, Otto had published the original German edition of *The Philosophy of Religion Based on Kant and Fries*. Although his use of "religious *a priori*" was rare, and he even declared it "a rather unfortunate phrase, beset with misunderstandings," (*The Philosophy of Religion Based on Kant and Fries*, 18) it was clear according to a 1908 article that Otto meant to add to this philosophical notion ("Wissen, Glaube und Ahnung," 818 – 822). This idea remained with him in the 1917 production of *The Idea of the Holy*. For a recent discussion of Otto's relationship to the religious *a priori* and J. F. Fries, please see Dole, "Schleiermacher and Otto on Religion," 389 – 413. Therein, Dole argues that Otto's commitment to a religious *a priori* helps distinguish Otto from Schleiermacher.

3 Nygren, *Die Gültigkeit der religiösen Erfahrung*, 16.

4 Those familiar with the works of Levinas in French or in translation are aware that the word *other* is sometimes capitalized and sometimes not. While some convention has been made in translations to give a capital *Other* for instances of *autrui* and a lower case *other* for instances of *autre*, it is equally the case that Levinas does not systematically follow this convention (See Lingis's translation of "L'absolument Autre, c'est Autrui" as "The absolutely other is the Other" where Lingis follows the convention and Levinas does not. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39). Consequently, this essay will simply not capitalize *other* except in cases of a direct quotation from a source that does.

5 Levinas, "Transcendence and Height," 29.

6 Merleau-Ponty, "Preface," *Phenomenology of Perception*, vii-xxi.

two clear statements, one made by Edmund Husserl and the other made by Emmanuel Levinas. In *Ideas I*, § 58, Husserl makes clear that the transcendent, which would seemingly include any discussion of God or the wholly other, should be placed under the *epoché* and bracketed off. Levinas appears to echo this very same sentiment by declaring that God is an "inadmissible abstraction."[7] Prima facie statements of these sorts would suggest that the purpose of this investigation is misguided and from Husserl to Levinas there is simple agreement about the inadmissibility of God in phenomenological inquiry. Nevertheless, Dominique Janicaud clearly fingers Levinas as the beginning of a wave of "new phenomenologists" who appear to be doing this very thing that has been described as *verboten*. Understanding how Levinas both follows Husserl's *epoché* of the transcendent while inspiring a theological turn in French phenomenology will necessitate a proper engagement with what phenomenology is.

Bernard Prusak begins his introduction to *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn"* by discussing the Husserlian position of two philosophers who post warnings against the combination of theology and phenomenology: Jean Hering and Dominique Janicaud. While Janicaud will take the central focus of the introduction, Hering's warning regarding phenomenology becoming "*a la mode*" and the origin of "psuedophenomenological literature" that is improperly used for theological-political ends begins the discussion of theological impropriety.[8] Hering, however, was not opposed to the use of phenomenology for the description of experience with the transcendent. His published thesis, *Phénoménologie et philosophie religieuse: Étude sur la théorie de la connaissance religieuse*, in the words of Samuel Moyn, "interpreted phenomenology as the science of the transcendent infinite (divine rather than human)."[9] This would mean that Janicaud is simply wrong to believe that Levinas transformed the French phenomenological scene into something theological because French phenomenology would have always had such a streak of the transcendent. Nevertheless, Prusak is not wrong to join Hering and Janicaud together in his introduction to the *"Theological Turn"* on account of the Husserlian position the two philosophers take rather than the theological one. Hering's focus on the "principle of all principles" and Janicaud's emphasis on eidetic ideas and the reduction place both of these thinkers well within the Husserlian tradition, at least the tradition that dates up until 1913. Janicaud clearly argues how Husserl's philosophy during this time would problematize any admission of the transcendent.

Janicaud's insistence on a proper reduction based on the early Husserl emphasizes the *cogito* at the center of phenomenological description.[10] Any intention of transcendence within such a field appears as a "paradoxical revelation."[11] Janicaud attempts to align himself with Merleau-Ponty and the latter's claim that "intentional analysis is the search for the concrete."[12] Consequently, Janicaud's concrete analysis of the intersubjective involves a description of the intertwining relationship of bodies exposed to one another. He does not miss, however, that intersubjective structure is "inseparable from the texture of the world,"[13] and such a structure is not immediately given to intentional analysis. Roads diverge, and Janicaud describes a choice between the phenomenological method of Merleau-Ponty, as Janicaud interprets him, and the approach of Levinas. Merleau-Ponty offers ever greater "elucidation" by deepening the sensible. This method, then, emphasizes the concrete and approaches that which escapes phenomenality as something to be meticulously brought to view. Levinas, by contrast, introduces an element of unrecoverable alterity that cannot be engaged in the phenomenal and, consequently, receives the name of other, wholly other, infinity, and even God. For Janicaud, this transcendence crosses the line set out by Husserl in *Ideas I* and requires a theological presupposition. "All is acquired and imposed from the outset, and this all is no little thing: nothing less than the God of the biblical tradition. Strict treason

7 Ibid. This claim appears in 1962, shortly after the publication of *Totality and Infinity* in 1961.

8 Prusack, "Translator's Introduction," 4.

9 Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics*, 38.

10 Janicaud, "Contours of the Turn," 21. In describing the "shock" to the Husserlian system, Janicaud declares that Merleau-Ponty concedes that for phenomenology "the *cogitatio* continues to play a central role."

11 Ibid., 23. In this sense Janicaud would agree with Otto that any connection to the religious cannot be made with natural categories, and the reduced "I" does not allow for anything else with Janicaud.

12 Ibid., 25.

13 Ibid.

of the reduction that handed over the transcendental I to its nudity, here theology is restored with its parade of capital letters."[14]

In Levinas's terms, the unrecoverable alterity of the intersubjective ends up as a description of transcendence toward the other, meaning that Janicaud rightly describes Levinas's position regarding the interweaving of the intersubjective and the texture of the world and its description as a transcendence tied to divine terms. However, Janicaud's negative critique is determined by two phenomenological assumptions: the centrality of the *ego* and transcendence as inadmissible (which he ties explicitly to Levinas's use of religious language). Let us look at two familiar descriptions of the face-to-face encounter to tackle these problems. According to Levinas, the intersubjective encounter, as tied to the horizon, conditions the subject prior to conscious grasping. We will expand this argument later with respect to Levinas's relationship to transcendental phenomenology, but the first response to Janicaud is that the relationship between the *ego* and intersubjective condition must occur in a moment of the self's absolute passivity. The subject in this instance cannot be identified with the powerful, world-constituting *ego* of consciousness, but, in fact, embodies its etymological meaning. The subject is sub-jected, thrown under, put into question and called to account without asking, "What then is it to me? Where does he get his right to command? What have I done to be from the start in debt?"[15] This debt appears as a debt to an other that Levinas casts in clear religious language. Indeed, Levinas does appear culpable of admitting his "inadmissible abstraction," declaring forthrightly that "the distinction between transcendence toward the other man and transcendence toward God should not be made too quickly."[16] In truth, right before declaring God to be inadmissible, Levinas declares, "The notion of God – God knows, I'm not opposed to it!" Could it be that Levinas is the victim of his own duality, both Jew and phenomenologist, such that while attempting to properly bracket off the idea, he insufficiently removes the presupposition?

Theological language comes into play on account of a difficulty that Husserl recognizes in his work *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, which interestingly begins in the early period Janicaud seems to prefer. Husserl, in his explication of time as "absolute subjectivity" expresses the problem that "absolute properties" are to be "designated metaphorically" and "for all of this, we have no names."[17] Perhaps unexpectedly, one finds that the earliest uses of God as a phenomenological metaphor does not come from the French but from Eugen Fink. Fink wrestles with the idea of bringing the absolute into view, but such a program drives philosophy to metaphorical hyperbole: "philosophy is the manifestation of God in us. God is not a transcendent idol, but rather is the me-ontic depth of the world and existence."[18] Any such disclosure of the me-ontic would bring about an "un-nihilating of the Absolute" which Fink characterizes as "true theogony," or witnessing the birth of "God."[19]

Fink's use of God in these descriptions count as Husserlian metaphor on two counts. First, as R. A. Mall explains, if God can even be a phenomenological object, "The God of phenomenology in comparative contrast to that of philosophy and theology has to be a noematic correlate of a noetically lived experience," with the expectation that God would be understood with traditional theological concepts as "infinity, unity, simplicity, incorporeality, etc."[20] However, Fink's understanding of God does not construct a divine ipseity as a noematic correlate. It is a descriptor of the absolute that cannot be brought to view in the first place, and so does not disclose God in any theological sense. Second, adding to the failure of disclosing God, Bruzina adds that Fink's approach to God through recognition of a cosmological origin could only end up in "meontic paradox," the realization that the disclosure of the absolute can never be made directly.[21]

14 Janicaud, "Contours of the Turn," 27.

15 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 87.

16 Levinas, "Philosophy and Awakening," 87. This originally appeared in 1976.

17 Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, 370. The focus on time as a problem of the absolute doesn't occur until after 1908.

18 Fink, *Aus Mappe* Z-IV 36a.

19 Fink, *Aus Mappe* Z-VII XIV/4a.

20 Mall, "The God of Phenomenology in Comparative Contrast to that of Philosophy and Theology," 13.

21 The meonitc paradox would seem to be a reversal of Meno's paradox wherein the investigator knows exactly what is being sought but knows the object of the search can never be looked at.

Fink expounds on Husserl's call for metaphor by declaring such disclosure would necessarily involve a "λόγος ἁμάρτικος," a logic of foundering or forever coming up short. [22] All language directed at the origin fails and designates only as a trope, just as "God" does for Fink's cosmological religion at the origin. The emphasis for us here, in response to Janicaud, is that certain liberties are necessary with regard to certain phenomenological descriptions, and these liberties could entail the introduction of religious language when approaching the issue of something absolute.

At this point, a short primer is necessary regarding transcendental phenomenology as the methodology for giving a description of the absolute. Fink declares in his notes that "The Absolute is Origin." The origin, however, is not to be understood as something at which one can look and entertain in *noematic* relationship. Objects are present to perceivers as the perceiver is conscious *of* the object that appears *to* the individual, but no object resides in a vacuum. Rather, objects reside in the world surrounded by other objects, just as the computer in front of me is in relationship with the desk underneath it, the wall behind it, the ceiling above it, and books to the side of it. These other objects that provide context for the computer appear in the horizon, to use Husserl's term. One might be tempted to draw the conclusion that by describing all of the objects that surround the computer, one has given a complete description of the horizon as well, but this is not the case. The horizon not only "holds" all of the objects present to the perceiver but holds the objects AND the perceiver in a particular manner, conditioning the intentional perceiving in a certain way. The manner of conditioning, however, is never present to view, for the horizon does not act as a being that conditions other beings.[23] For this reason, the phenomenology of this conditioning structure is discussed in terms of origin and absolute. It is origin because it produces the structure of the horizon, but it is absolute in two senses of the term: 1. it is absolute as foundation, and 2. it is absolute in an etymological sense of being loosed from. The absolute is free from being grasped as an intentional object. Consequently, transcendental phenomenology works at regressively describing the absolute by looking at the objects that can be perceived as conditioned and disclosing the manner of that condition as best as possible. This occurs for Fink with regard to the *meontic* absolute as a cosmological ground and for Levinas with regard to the other as an ethical ground. While these two are attempting to disclose entirely different absolute, originative conditions, the logic of both is structurally similar and dependent upon the transcendental phenomenological method outlined here.

When Levinas discloses the horizon of the other as the transcendent condition of ethical subjectivity, he names the ground God. "God is not involved *as an alleged interlocutor*," Levinas claims. "The reciprocal relationship binds me to the other man in the *trace of transcendence*."[24] In parallel with Fink God can be used as a *name* for the absolute ground of subjectivity because God is an enigmatic term that has the connotation of transcendence.[25] Levinas's rhetorical use of God operates here as God signifies what cannot show as a signified. To see, though, that Levinas intends to honor his claim that "it is not theology that I am doing, but philosophy,"[26] we must take seriously the non-theological connections he makes between God and other philosophical transcendence. While God acts as a model for that which overflows the I and does not bend to integration into the same, what reveals God as such a model is the parallel between God and the Good that appears in Plato. Levinas makes constant reference to Plato's *Republic*, which posits a Good beyond being. In the desire to reach for the other and respond to the ethical demand there is a

22 Bruzina, *Edmund Husserl and Eugen Fink*, 384.

23 If one were to treat the horizon as though it were a being, then the same criticism that Fink lays upon Heidegger could be registered here. When Heidegger discloses the conditioning of the world through *Dasein*, he encounters the logical question of how that which is in the world, *Dasein*, also stands as condition of the world. See this critique as explicated by Bruzina, *Edmund Husserl and Eugen Fink*, 340.

24 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 158.

25 The parallel between these two thinkers must be understood in the way the name of God is used for that which is originative. The *meontic* absolute that Fink designates as origin of a properly horizonally conceived life-world is purely metaphysical, the primacy of which Levinas questions in any instance. However, Levinas's own use of the other as a non-being (*meontic*) irrecoverable by consciousness yet acting as originative horizon of the ethical self suggests a similar structural conditioning. Transcendence, for Levinas, designates that unrecoverability of the horizon as a direct object of perception.

26 Levinas, "Transcendence and Height," 30.

hollowness that accompanies the reaching. This hollowness is another descriptor of the experience of a kind of affecting absence. According to Levinas, "The true desire is that which the desired does not satisfy, but hollows out. It is goodness."[27] The Good beyond being operates in the same manner as the infinite God. As the intentionality of the I directs the self towards the other, the self becomes overrun by the ideatum of infinity, hollowed out by the Good. Both God and the Good operate rhetorically to describe the encounter between the other and the I and not to operate as objects to be understood in an ethical or ontological sense. If God is akin to the Good and is of the sort that is so utterly beyond, then it is easy to see why Levinas will claim that his philosophy, while inundated with religious vocabulary, represents an "austere humanism."[28]

Undoubtedly, the use of religious language by Levinas, which was utilized in kind by other phenomenologists of the French phenomenological movement, has caused serious concerns for the reception of this philosophy. In comparing his two major works, Roland Blum remarks in 1985 that "Levinas's subtle interweaving of themes inspired by Edmund Husserl and Jacques Derrida leads him, in *Otherwise than Being*, to a 'deconstructed' view of the self which cannot be harmonized with the ethico-religious concerns fundamental to *Totality and Infinity*."[29] With regard to all those associated with the theological turn, a frustrated Žižek asks in 2003 if those who go "beyond the ontotheological God" really "believe in some form of the divine or not."[30] It is clear that the religious nature of the language is in question. So far, the argument of this paper is that Levinas has utilized religious language for the purpose of addressing an absolute condition that cannot be meticulously brought to phenomenal description, even though that condition is NOT, in fact, God. Consequently, the inadmissible is not admitted, but we have only begun to suggest a phenomenology beyond Janicaud's insistence of a *cogito* at the center of the reduction or a description that supports religious experience. In order to bring Levinas's subjective condition into stark relief and to go beyond Janicaud's preference for the early Husserl, we must place Levinas squarely within the transcendental work of phenomenology.

3 The other at the origin

Just as with the difficulty of explicating Levinas's use of religious language as, in fact, not theological, a similar difficulty arises with aligning his philosophy with a phenomenologically transcendental method.

> The transcendental method consists always in seeking the foundation. "Foundation" is, moreover, a term from architecture, a term made for a world that one inhabits; for a world that is *before* all that it supports, an astronomic world of perception, an immobile world; rest *par excellence*; the Same *par excellence*.[31]

For Levinas, the idea that a transcendental analysis leads to the Same equates to the accusation that a transcendental ground is still fully within the purview of the *cogito*. Janicaud appears to suggest this is a *good* thing. The consequence of this, however, includes one of two options: 1. either the transcendental is lost as the *cogito* continually brings more and more into the horizon, as Janicaud espouses Merleau-Ponty to do, or 2. the investigation ends up as a Kantianism "when the transcendental is maintained by the discovery of mental operations."[32] As Peperzak suggests, if Levinas is to surpass any "founding, planning, and constructing," then Levinas would have to "disregard its [transcendental method's] connection to a transcendental and foundational consciousness."[33] Not only can this be done, insofar as a foundational consciousness is overcome, but it is Husserl who shows how.

One must be careful of interpreting anything in the corpus of Husserl as orthodox doctrine. While Husserl appeared sure in his analysis of psychologism and western science as it was practiced, he remained

27 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 57.
28 Levinas, "Loving the Torah more than God," 145.
29 Blum, "Deconstruction and Creation," 293.
30 Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity,* 5.
31 Levinas, "Questions and Answers," 88.
32 Levinas, "Intentionality and Metaphysics," 123.
33 Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 232.

a perpetual beginner, and none of his published works act as proferring an alternative with which Husserl was satisfied. Husserl revisited *Ideas I* with some trepidation of the errors he found himself making (e.g. finding that the whole book is still written in the natural attitude). Husserl's works are bold beginnings and nothing more.[34]

The *cogito* at the center of the reduction appears to be an inescapable primacy; however, as has been noted, Husserl's realization that a horizonal absolute cannot be theoretically named but only referenced by metaphor gives the first indication that not everything can be reduced to a theoretical claim, or said in another way, brought to eidetic resolution by a reduced *ego*. Let us take a brief look at Husserl's discussion of time from *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, specifically his analysis after 1908. After this date, Husserl recognized a problem with the interplay between transcendent and immanent realms. His earlier description utilizing these concepts required a mediating datum between consciousness and object, which he connected by introducing the idea of a phantasm in memory, the present or past of which is designated by conscious modes of apprehension – a particularly Kantian imposition.[35] With his more critical analysis, consciousness contained both a constituting dimension and a dimension that was both wholly constituted and immanent. One might expect that with the investigation of time now taking place solely within the immanence of consciousness the previously featured modes of "now-perception," "primary memory," and "primary expectation" would play a larger role. This, however, does not take place, but takes a new shape. To be sure, "memory" and "expectation" remain within his vocabulary, but they are replaced for the most part by terms that will remain with Husserl for the rest of his studies: "impression," "retention," and "protention."

Husserl's three new aspects of time consciousness were not to be seen as created by the contents of perception or by the mode of conscious perception. The phenomenologist would need a way of seeing the relationship between intending and intended in immanent consciousness as a unified structure rather than as something to be viewed from one side or the other. Husserl advanced just such a *topos*. Retention, impression, and protention, as features of consciousness, allow us to predicate temporality with respect to immanent objects so that we can recognize the beginning, enduring, and ceasing of a temporal perception like a single violin tone, his favorite example. The structure of consciousness itself, however, is not perceived as a temporal object so that temporal predicates "cannot be meaningfully attributed to them."[36] Consequently, even when describing the form of consciousness that is retention, protention, and impression we are barred from saying that these three exist simultaneously, co-temporaneously, or any such designation. Because this formal structure of consciousness (and by now we must realize it as such) conditioned all objects within consciousness, the structure could not condition itself and must, therefore, be absolute: "the absolute time-constituting flow of consciousness." Husserl has now come both to a breakthrough and a stumbling block, for while he recognizes the flow of absolute consciousness as that which conditions all temporal experience, he also realizes that his reference to this structure as protention and retention and impression are, strictly speaking, improper. "This flow is something we speak of in conformity with what is constituted, but it is not 'something in objective time.' It is absolute subjectivity and has the absolute properties of something to be designated metaphorically as 'flow' . . . For all of this, we have no names."[37]

The absolute flow of consciousness, consequently, cannot be adequately described with objective predicates, for it never appears as a transcendent object intuited within immanent perception. Nevertheless, Husserl uses terminology that is descriptive of immanent, temporally constituted correlates with the expectation that a distinction can be kept between the immanent objects and the absolute flow. He writes, "the consciousness of time itself <requires> time; the consciousness of a duration, duration; and the

34 This theme of beginnings figures prominently in Bruzina, *Edmund Husserl & Eugen Fink: Beginnings and Ends in Phenomenology*.

35 Husserl makes clear that he rejects placing any work of temporality in the object, writing that "I am inclined to transfer this difference into the mode of apperception," *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, 174. This will change, although not in the manner of transferring temporality to the object but, rather, to a transcendental condition.

36 Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, 370.

37 Ibid., 371.

consciousness of a succession, succession."[38] Therein, the use of "time," "duration," and "succession" improperly disclose temporality, being proper objective descriptions of the experienced flow.[39] Reaching this always, already temporal condition in even a metaphorical way requires that it be studied via – and regressively from – that which is the most intimate feature of having consciousness, its temporalized flow (i.e. only by the experience of the conditioned can the features of the condition be brought to relative disclosure).

The problem Husserl encounters with the absolute flow of temporality is investigated much later by Husserl's last assistant, Eugen Fink. While Husserl's phenomenology has passed through several iterations between the writing of *Internal Time Consciousness* and the context of the *Cartesian Meditations* within which Fink works, the logical problem of absolute disclosure continues. Fink clarifies the application of language chiefly used to describe ontic experience to the disclosure of the absolute in the following way:

> "Absolute" being is not in any way a being that would be found alongside of or outside that-which-is. Rather it is only accessible at all from the ontical as a point of departure. It is, in a certain way, the ontical itself, but inquired into so radically that it is the ontical, in a certain way, before its εἶναι. – The relation of "the absolute" to the ontical we shall call the "origin. " "Origin" is not an intra-worldly beginning but is seen in an intra-worldly way always *according to* that of which it is precisely the origin. "Origin" has an antecedency τῇ φύσει [by nature], and not πρὸς ἡμᾶς [to us].[40]

With the preceding in mind, Janicaud's desire to follow what he believes to be Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological insight, an allegiance to the "concrete," simply fails at the level of transcendental condition. Ever greater descriptions of protention, retention, and impression can be made, but according to Husserl, ever greater descriptions still fail to objectively disclose the temporal flow, ultimately leading to Fink's "logic of foundering."[41]

Levinas's own philosophy explores just such a phenomenological approach, which is captured in his essay, "The Ruin of Representation."[42] He declares in this essay that the horizonal structure of consciousness suggests a phenomenology beyond theoretical determination and maintains that the realization of horizons provides a new ontology in which consciousness is founded upon the very thing that it constitutes: "A new ontology begins: being is posited not only as a correlative of thought, but as already founding the very thought that nonetheless constitutes it."[43] In the same manner that time could be a correlative of thought as well as absolute condition in Husserl's analysis of time, Levinas recognizes that phenomenological analysis must include a recognition of an element that imbues the ontic with meaning, and thus is, in some sense, present to consciousness; however, this present-to does not provide an adequation on account of the fact that the meaning found within epistemological givenness (such as temporal meaning) is always already constituting the very givenness. Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* provide fertile ground for Levinas on the matter, and Levinas quotes the *Meditations* generously in the aforementioned essay to summarize his direction:

> Every *cogito* as consciousness, is, in a very broad sense 'the meaning' of the thing it intends, but that 'meaning' *exceeds*, at each instant, that which at that very instant, is given as 'explicitly intended.' It exceeds it, that is, it is laden with a 'more' that stretches beyond. . . . *This exceeding of the intention in the intention itself*, which is inherent in all consciousness, must be considered as essential to that consciousness (*Cartesian Meditations*, 46). . . . The fact that the structure of all intentio-

38 Ibid., 192.

39 Brough, "The Emegence of an Absolute Consciousness in Husserl's Early Writings on Time-Consciousness," 322ff.

40 Fink, *Aus Mappe*, Z-IV 112b.

41 Bruzina explains that "foundering" is often used by Fink in his notes, and Bruzina references specifically Z-IX 12a as an example. The characterization of this foundering as a logic of failure comes from Z-V VI/32a. For explication of these ideas, see Bruzina, "The Transcendental Theory of Method in Phenomenology; the Meontic and Deconstruction," 82.

42 This particular essay uses the translation "representation" for the German *Vorstellung*. While this translation appears in several translations of Husserl, it is generally agreed that the proper rendering should be "presentation." Let us ignore the difference and the ways in which an understanding of *Vorstellung* as re-presentation misrepresents Husserl, for our purpose here is to go beyond what is present to the *cogito* and toward what affectively conditions it. Historically interesting in this argument is the fact that Levinas actually finds his critique of Husserl's "representation" aided by reference to Husserl.

43 Levinas, "The Ruin of Representation," 116.

> nality implies a 'horizon' prescribes an absolutely new method to phenomenological analysis and description (*Cartesian Meditations*, 48).[44]

Insofar as Levinas's own phenomenological work expresses a "more" that exceeds the intention in such a way that he discloses a particular condition of the intention itself, then Levinas will be doing an analysis that attempts to get at a particular origin (more Fink's language than Husserl's) of conscious experience. Levinas's description of the other accomplishes just such a task, the analysis of which demands the use of metaphors.

What we have sketched, heretofore, regarding Husserl's recognition of the absolute of intentional analysis can, in no way, be described as a phenomenological program inscribed by his philosophy.[45] It is, rather, a potential outgrowth that arises from the implications of what Husserl was doing rather than from the proscribed program he begins again and again. Levinas explicitly declares himself to be in line with Husserl's work and yet going beyond it at the same time.[46] Going beyond Husserl entails two movements for Levinas: 1. he finds the encounter with the other to indicate an overwhelming of intentionality as suggested in the *Cartesian Meditations*, and 2. he turns the greater part of his phenomenological eye from the encounter with the other to the very experience of conscious intentionality itself, an attempt to look at the manner in which the constituting *ego* and the other, interact within a formal structure of consciousness. The other, at this point, as an intersubjective otherness, is not the object of Levinas's investigation. Instead, it is what is disclosed as the beyond of intentional consciousness; when intentional consciousness meets with the reduction, the other is disclosed as its condition. What follows is only the briefest of sketches of these movements in Levinas.

An exceeding of the intention by the intention itself occurs, for Levinas, in his description of the relationship between the I and the face. The presentation of the face begins with the ontic revelation of the face's expression: "with the total uncoveredness and nakedness of his defenseless eyes, the straightforwardness, the absolute frankness of his gaze."[47] In addition to these facial features, the expression of the face also includes what the face expresses, its speech. These manifestations, however, are not, in themselves, that which oppose the totalizing gaze of the I. "Defenseless eyes" do not present any theoretical resistance to conscious epistemology. Rather, they present an ethical resistance. For Levinas, this institutes a new relationship with the I that dismantles the power of freedom, the ability to turn the other into the Same. The face, from which the ethical demand eschews, opens the door to infinity, the absolute, the irreducible other. Levinas attempts to unveil, through the veil of the face, an ethical realm, which he calls metaphysics, over against the ontological. Levinas's first major work, *Totality and Infinity*, utilizes religious language that connects the other to God and infinity. In a section titled "Transcendence and the Idea of Infinity," Levinas reiterates the major points of "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity": "Infinity is not the 'object' of a cognition . . . but is the desirable, that which arouses Desire, that is, that which is approachable by a thought that at each instant *thinks more than it thinks*."[48]

On the simple level of a relationship with the other that sparks Desire and a relationship with transcendence, Levinas has encountered the same problem as Husserl with respect to time, a pitting of the transcendent against the immanent. However, the realization of an exceeding of an intention, designated by the attempt to think more than can be thought, inspired Levinas to reconceive the ethical relationship in such a way that the transcendent quality of the relationship, which defies theoretical principle, could not be located in reference to immanent consciousness or the other as transcendent irruption. He tweaked

44 Ibid., 115. The translation of the *Meditations* comes from the D. Cairns translation. It, of course, comes as no surprise that the *Meditations* are formative for Levinas given his work as co-translator of Husserl's text. It appeared in French translation in 1931, although it was completed somewhat earlier.

45 The task of outlining this approach in programmatic form fell to Eugen Fink. A helpful introduction to which is found in Ronald Bruzina's introduction to Fink's *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, vii-xcii.

46 Levinas explicitly claims this going beyond as opposed to a correction in "Philosophy and Awakening" after discussing what he believes to be the true meaning of the phenomenological reduction when it is applied to intersubjectivity. *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, 87.

47 Levinas, "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity," 55.

48 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 62.

the notion of beyond being so that it is beyond the world, not in the sense of a realm opposed to being but in the sense that it is "beyond every disclosure."[49] This beyond appears as an absence, which has a unique relation with the other, a relation that strikes a harmonious chord with Fink's absolute. "The other proceeds from the absolutely Absent, but his relationship with the absolutely Absent from which he comes does not indicate, does not reveal, this Absent; and yet the Absent has a meaning in the face."[50]

Now that lived experience suggests something more than what can adequately be described in conscious reflection, Levinas has his first indication of something horizonal to consciousness. The face discloses a mark or trace of the beyond, of what no longer is present, of the now absent. In this case, more precisely, it is the presently present mark of what never was or can be present. Levinas finds this trace leading to the I as passive subject rather than active *ego*, to that which is "merely something preparatory to the distinction between subject and object, a pre-thematization, a pre-knowledge."[51] Husserl dubs the pre-reflective lived experience as the primal impression, which, as the name implies, is not in line with the intentional activity of consciousness but bespeaks a passivity prior to conscious thematization. It is to this moment of passive affectedness that Levinas turns; here is the nascent undergoing preceding all experience.

Attempting to disclose the full impact of the primal impression upon the subject, Levinas has to forego a step often taken by phenomenology as the science of all science, and that is phenomenology done entirely in immanent reflection. Because the nature of the primal impression is to be precisely *arché* and condition for conscious experience, it does not occur within the conscious experience; thus it cannot be viewed in immanent reflection, but only by a regressive move beginning from immanent reflection to the condition that imbues the experience with meaningful possibility. What Levinas attempts, then, is a phenomenology that describes an apodictic principle, that is a principle both indubitable and known but without adequate evidence. Husserl admits to the possibility of a phenomenology of the apodictic beyond adequation in the *Cartesian Meditations*, stating that "adequacy and apodicticity of evidence need not go hand in hand."[52] From the nature of Levinas's investigation beyond adequation, we see the possibility of a self not reducible to consciousness but a consciousness that depends upon the reversal of intentionality that subjects the self to the manner of the world before there is a conscious I to comprehend relationships and designate subject and object.

The subject of conscious reflection cannot realize its own passivity, for no active subject exists in passivity to perform any reflection. To speak of that which cannot be reflected upon or represented, to discuss the subject without self-assurance and self-affirmation, is to signify otherwise than as knowledge. Here, Levinas discloses the condition for the nascence of identity and the very moment of crisis for identity, when the self is precisely in the world and in question, or as Levinas states, "The proud priority of A is A . . . is also the advent of humility."[53] The *ego*, then, does not posit itself in order to take control over the passive attitude. The passive attitude of the subjected subject must answer to the reversal of intentionality - answering with an I. The world captivates the subject; the self receives in passivity the moment of primal impression, and the self is summoned, called forth by the other. Being summoned, however, places the subject first in the accusative case conditioning the self's first act as a response rather than a grasping or comprehending. In this move away from self-affirmation towards the summoned self, Levinas believes he has the beginning of responsibility, a being not only manifest but ethical as well.

From Husserl and Fink's model, our discussion of Levinas's phenomenological analysis takes into account the subject as both transcendental ground and transcendentally constituted, which is accomplished in the double-sided analysis of responsibility. As transcendentally constituted, Levinas claims that "the self is the sub-jectum; it is under the weight of the universe, responsible for all."[54] The sub-ject, then, etymologically describes the nature of the self as having been conditioned, thrown under the world by the

49 Levinas, "Meaning and Sense," 59.
50 Ibid., 60.
51 Levinas, "Philosophy and Awakening," 85.
52 Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, §9.
53 Levinas, "From the One to the Other," 143.
54 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 116.

world, in such a way as to engage the world in ethicality. However, as under the world, the subject supports the world and engages the intersubjective milieu as presenting an ethical call, which is the trace of the ground that constitutes the world as meaningful. Now we have both sides of the reduction in place with regard to the self as the self grounds that which precedes and constitutes, but not in terms of a theoretical *ego* but in terms of the good: "The self is goodness, or under the exigency of an abandon of all having, of all one's own and all for oneself, to the point of substitution."[55] Substitution, for Levinas, is an ordering of oneself for the other, an other that exceeds our conscious intention.

4 The possibility of religious experience

At this point, an argument has been made that Levinas's use of religious language is a metaphorical description of the ethical condition that calls forth, acts as origin for, the human self's engagement with the world. For a paper dealing with religious experience, it would not be surprising if the same accusation were made here as of Levinas, himself, who declared, "We have been reproached for ignoring theology."[56] In his own defense, Levinas declares that discussion of such can only take place after a "glimpse of holiness."[57] Just such a glimpse occurs in one of his oft cited Biblical texts: Exodus 33:18-23. Moses asks for God to show the divine glory to him; however, God only agrees to pass this glory by Moses while holding him fast in a rock, only to release him in time to catch a glimpse of that which has already gone by. Glimpses, traces, absence, and otherness mingle together in Levinas's vocabulary for a description of the passive subject's calling forth into the world, but is there a real glimpse of holiness that can be used more than just metaphorically? Is there anything that ties the self to something truly religious? Žižek's question about whether any of the new phenomenologists actually believe in God or not comes to the fore.

The glimpse of holiness is the glimpse of the ethical condition. However, in order not to fall back into metaphorical descriptions of absolute conditions, it is necessary to hear the work of another French philosopher, Descartes. Levinas takes special note of Descartes's own turn from the "certainty of the *cogito*" that appears in the Second Meditation toward a subordinating of the same *cogito*: "the Third Meditation announces that 'in some way I have in me the notion of the infinite earlier than the finite – to wit, the notion of God before that of myself.' The idea of the Infinite, *Infinity in me*, can only be a passivity of consciousness."[58] Levinas is not concerned with the proofs for the existence of God, but rather with the way in which the infinite overflows and yet remains an idea within consciousness, which is simply another description of the condition that transcendentally constitutes and yet leaves a trace of itself as an object of consciousness. When Levinas discusses the relationship of infinite to finite, of the condition to the self, he emphasizes the "in" of the infinite as withinness along with its expected meaning of negation.

The more than intentionality, the horizonal ground for consciousness lies in the infinite as condition for human emergence as ethical. While the arrival of the face in *Totality and Infinity* suggests an initiation of the infinite, such a reading must be resisted. Even in this first major work, Levinas utilizes Descartes's description of infinity and the manner in which it overflows the subject. This connection would suggest that, even though the face appears to institute a transcendental ground, a structural condition was to be realized in the subject itself. What the approach of the other does is to bring about the conscious realization of an overflowing of the intention and make possible a regressive disclosure of the intersubjective condition from which the self emerges. The horizon of the intersubjective under intentional analysis reveals a passive subject that originates in a milieu of excess that cannot be reduced. It makes little difference, now, whether one's lived experience is of a human other or a divine other of religious experience. Such a structure does nothing to argue for the existence of a divine other, it simply argues that the very idea that humanity is structured to be open to excess makes possible a lived connection to either.

Indeed, among those classified by Janicaud as "new phenomenologists," an argument could be made

55 Ibid., 118.
56 Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, ix.
57 Ibid.
58 Levinas, "God and Philosophy," 136-137.

that all are working upon something phenomenologically originative in the same manner as Levinas and attempt to produce a description of the connection to the divine other. Jean-Luc Marion's saturated phenomenon, Michel Henry's life, and Jean-Louis Chrétien's call and response each encounter an overwhelming of an intention within the intention itself that pushes each of these phenomenologists to express their analysis in terms like unto Levinas's own sense of an absolute. Let us take a brief sampling: 1. For Marion, "The icon summons sight in letting the visible . . . be saturated little by little with the invisible."[59] 2. For Henry, "One who is born of life finds actions capable of satisfying him only if this action suits his condition . . . There is no 'I Can' except in life."[60] And 3. For Chrétien, "In order to constitute, the call destitutes. In order to give, it takes away. In order to create it deletes all that would boast of self-sufficient being."[61] However, what separates these descriptions of origin from other transcendental analyses is their connection to Levinas, whose work makes possible a connection with the transcendent through the structure of a self that is always, already open to excess. Transcendental conditions typically orient the subject within theoretical consciousness making possible meaningful experience in a world graspable by consciousness. Levinas's origin that conditions the self to responsible engagement with that which *exceeds* conscious comprehension makes possible meaningful experience with the ungraspable. Insofar as Marion, Henry, and Chrétien attempt the same, they have Levinas to thank for their direction.

5 Conclusion

There are several instances where a reader sympathetic to Levinas, such as myself, has to admit that Janicaud is right. 1. The transcendent is an inadmissible abstraction under the phenomenological auspices as laid out by Husserl; however, Levinas does not cross this line, using religious language in a metaphorical sense rather than theological one. 2. The phenomenological reduction that leads to *egoic* consciousness cannot be used to achieve religious claims; however, Levinas does not cross this line, either. He does, though, follow phenomenology beyond the science of the eidetic towards a science of the absolute, which appears as rooted in Husserl's phenomenology from early on. 3. Levinas is responsible for the "new phenomenologists"; however, not insofar as he begins a theological movement in French phenomenology but only insofar as he discloses a proper ground from which an actual grappling with the transcendent can take place, namely the self as originated in intersubjective excess that calls for a response, wherein such response is the achieving of the human as human in meaningful conscious existence. As so constituted, the self is always already open to an other, any other that overwhelms and exceeds meaningful experience, but the possibility of this relationship begins with the intersubjective: "It is our relations with men, which describe a field of research hardly glimpsed at . . . that give to theological concepts the sole signification they admit of."[62] Perhaps Rudolf Otto would be pleased.

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59 Marion, *God Without Being*, 17.
60 Henry, *I Am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, 170.
61 Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, 22.
62 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 79.

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