



Phenomenology of religion: Levinas and the fourth voice

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In the last ten years or so, many efforts have been made to revive the project of phenomenology of religion, started by Rudolph Otto and Max Scheler roughly a century ago.¹ Inspired by Husserl, those involved in the project aim to give an account of religious experiences without any presuppositions. According to Twiss and Conser,² pioneers in phenomenology of religion may be divided into three groups, each with its own distinct aims and methods, and each contributes a “voice” in the overall harmony that is the phenomenology of religion. Recently, the project seems to have run aground. Nowadays, The phenomenological voices are barely heard. There are several reasons for this. According to Louis Dupré, the “decline of interest may partly be due to the fact that [practitioners] totally sidestepped the ontological problems in an area where those problems were most pressing.”³ By “ontological problems,” Dupré means the problems relating to the object of religious experiences. James Smith goes much further, claiming that in trying to determine how the object of religious experiences is objectively constituted in consciousness, the phenomenologists of religion attempt to do the impossible, namely “constituting and objectifying that which can neither be constituted nor objectified.”⁴ However, both Dupré and Smith still believe in the phenomenological project, and believe that it can be resurrected. In attempting to solve the “ontological problem,” Dupré turns to Henry Duméry and Smith to Heidegger. In what follows, I shall draw on the writings of Levinas and argue that the ontological problem cannot be solved. This does not mean that we have to abandon the phenomenological project. But in order to save it, something drastic has to be done. We have to redirect the project away from determining how the object of religious experiences is constituted in consciousness to examining how a certain kind of experience counts as a religious experience. Again drawing on Levinas, I shall show that the religious object cannot be found in the consciousness of it, but rather in the consciousness of something else entirely. If I am right, what Levinas has to say may be regarded as the fourth “voice” in the phenomenology of religion. It may not blend harmoniously with the other voices, but that only proves that the phenomenology of religion is not so much

a harmony as a Husserl-inspired conversation. After a few brief remarks on the arguments of Dupré and Smith in Section I, I shall turn to Levinas in Section II.

I.

While the “ontological problems” may have escaped the attention of those phenomenologists who speak in what Twiss and Conser call the “first voice,” the voice of “essential phenomenology,” they are recognized by many who speak in “second voice,” that of “historical-typological phenomenology.” As Dupré has pointed out, one of the latter, Van der Leeuw, “raises the difficult question: How can there be an *experience* of the transcendent” if experience is “immanent by nature?” (p. 176). Differently put, the question is: “How could a phenomenological analysis ever result in an ‘essential intuition’ (*Wesensschau*) of an object that lies beyond experience?” (p. 177). Van der Leeuw’s own solution to the problem is to turn his phenomenology into one that deals with “religion-as-experience,” thus abstaining from “religion-as-transcendent.” In this way, Van der Leeuw speaks with a voice different from that of “essential phenomenology.” However, Dupré quite rightly points out that this is not so much solving the problem as sidestepping it. Van der Leeuw’s approach subtracts “the entire domain of *concrete* religion from its analysis” (p. 179), rendering his phenomenology not much more than “an anthropological typology” (p. 175). Siding with Max Scheler against Van der Leeuw, Dupré clearly prefers what Twiss and Conser call the “essential” voice, which speaks of the religious experience essentially as that of a transcendent object. This means that he has to find a solution to the “ontological problem.”

To solve the “ontological problem,” a phenomenology has to account for the “irreducible transcendence *within the noema as well as within the noesis* of the religious act” (p. 181), or what Dupré calls the “givenness.” It is true that in a religious experience, as in any other experience, what is experienced is the subject’s own projection. But what makes it religious is the fact that the subject somehow encounters the givenness in the act of projection. For Dupré, it is Henry Duméry who is the “phenomenological philosopher who has given the most careful attention to the dialectic of *givenness* and *projection* in the religious act” (*ibid.*). What the subject projects is in fact its representation in consciousness of an impulse coming from the givenness, which is for Duméry the “thing itself.” Furthermore, the givenness, or the thing itself, plays an active role in the way the subject projects, or represents in consciousness, the impulse that it gives to the subject. In Duméry’s own words, “the ‘thing itself’ orders, directs, rules the course of these representations . . . ,”⁵ and

does so according to a transcendent law. But how does the subject know that its projection has a source in something truly transcendent? Duméry's answer is that the subject can know this by effecting an ultimate reduction after all the Husserlian ones, "the *henological* (toward 'the One' – *to hen*) reduction" (Dupré, p. 182). The henological reduction "isolates within the subject itself the Absolute from which th(e) subject draws its projective impulse" (p. 183).

While Dupré has some reservations about Duméry's phenomenology, he clearly believes that it meets the criteria of a philosophy of religion insofar as it has a plausible solution to the ontological problem. The henological reduction does not yield knowledge of the Absolute but merely "isolates" it in consciousness. There is no question of containing the transcendent within the immanent, hence no ontological problem. However, it is clear that the henological reduction is unlike any Husserlian reduction in that it yields no information whatsoever about the object of experience. Unlike, say, the eidetic reduction which yields the essence of the "thing itself," the henological reduction confirms the unknowability of that which makes the experience religious in the first place. In reply, Dupré might say that in isolating the Absolute, the henological reduction reveals that the noema of the religious experience is in fact the impulse coming from the Absolute, and as long as phenomenology can yield an understanding of this impulse, it can yield an understanding of the religious experience itself. Unfortunately, it seems that the ontological problem is still there, except that it has been shifted from the true religious object to the transcendent impulse. Van der Leeuw's question can now be asked about the latter: "how can there be an experience of the transcendent impulse if experience is immanent by nature?" Dupré himself admits that "Duméry remains exceedingly vague" about "the nature of the transcendent impulse" (p. 185). Without some specification of this transcendent impulse, we are entitled to remain skeptical about its connection with the transcendent object, or the Absolute, or God. Yet, any specification of it will take away its transcendent status. On the other hand, without some specification, how are we to distinguish in consciousness the transcendent impulse from just any impulse coming from a source outside the subject?

I turn now to Smith's attempt at "liberating religion from theology" by means of phenomenology. Smith too acknowledges in effect that any phenomenology of religion has to overcome what Dupré calls "the ontological problem." Indeed, he raises the stake by admitting that the religious phenomenon is "an impossible phenomenon" (p. 17). Smith chooses to state the problem in Jean-Luc Marion's words: the phenomenology of religion is "confronted with a disastrous alternative: either it would be a question of phenomena that are objectively definable but lose their religious specificity,

or it would be a question of phenomena that are specifically religious but cannot be described objectively.”⁶ Smith then considers and rejects Marion’s own solution. Marion solves the ontological problem with the idea that the religious phenomenon is a special kind of phenomenon that does not obey the Husserlian rules of representation, but rather sets its own rules. As it turns out, there are aspects of Marion’s solution that are indistinguishable from Duméry’s. To begin with, in Marion’s claim that the religious phenomenon sets its own rules by which it appears in consciousness, one is reminded of Duméry’s suggestion that the “‘thing self’ orders, directs, rules the course of . . . representations.” And his claim that the religious phenomenon overwhelms, or saturates, the horizon of consciousness, and appears in consciousness, according to its own rules, as a “donation,” is the same as Dupré’s characterisation of Duméry’s “thing itself” as “the givenness.” Indeed, Marion calls the object of the religious experience, God, “the given par excellence.”⁷ Unlike Duméry, however, Marion speaks of the saturated phenomenon as a direct experience of God rather than an experience of some “impulse” which mediates between God and the subject.

Quite rightly, Smith rejects Marion’s solution. The aspects of it that are the same as Duméry’s suffer from the same problems as pointed out above. Where it differs from Duméry’s, it suffers from problems of its own. For Smith, the main problems are that it reduces religion to theology and it particularizes religion to the “Catholic or at least Christian” variety (p. 18). The first problem arises because Marion conceives of the task of phenomenology as merely “clearing a space for . . . ‘revealed theology’ which is able to *recognize* and *name* the saturated phenomenon” (p. 22). The second problem becomes obvious when we discover that once recognized and named, the God of phenomenology turns out to be the “God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus of Nazareth” (p. 23). As such, Marion’s approach fails to do justice “to the other, to the other’s religion and the religion of the Other” (p. 24).

Having rejected Marion, Smith turns to Heidegger. What Smith finds attractive in Heidegger is the latter’s suggestion that the religious phenomenon should be treated as part of our “facticity.” The phenomenological field, then, should not be God Himself but facticity itself. The fact is that human beings have religious faiths and that their faiths are parts of the structure of their existence. Thus, it is the faith of a community that should be the object of phenomenological research, not God, whether the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or that of “Pope John Paul II” (p. 27). To be sure, traditional theology is concerned with faith, but it is faith *within* a particular community. What Heidegger has in mind for a phenomenology of religion is faith as the “believing comportment” of *any* community. For Smith, a Heideggerian phenomenology of religion “is able to range across religious

communities" (ibid.), thus avoiding the problem of particularization (and injustice) inherent in Marion's approach. Also, by following Heidegger, we can reclaim from theology the territory that rightfully belongs to phenomenology. It is not unreasonable to suggest that in singing the Heideggerian tune, Smith is contributing to what Twiss and Conser call the third "voice" in the phenomenology of religion, namely the "existential-hermeneutic" voice.

While Smith's motive for turning to Heidegger, and away from Marion, is certainly commendable, it would appear that in following Heidegger, he has lost sight of the ontological problem. Just because the religious phenomenon is now a phenomenon of faith, or of the "believing comportment," it does not follow that we have escaped the problem of how to account for the appearance of the transcendent in the immanence of consciousness. Marion's "disastrous alternative" above applies equally to phenomena of faith: either they are "objectively definable" in which case they "lose their religious specificity," or they are "specifically religious but cannot be described objectively." Differently put, by taking God out of the "believing comportment," we take away what is religious about the comportment. But if we think of the comportment as specifically religious then the phenomenology that eschews the question of God will inevitably fail to capture its essence.

My review of the recent developments above indicates clearly enough that the phenomenology of religion must either solve the ontological problem or else find a way of getting around it. Both Duméry and Marion regard the problem as insoluble; both regard the religious phenomenon defined as the experience on the transcendent as impossible. Duméry tries to get around the problem by inserting an impulse between God and the experiencer; Marion attempts to do so by calling on theology to perform the task of accounting for the saturated phenomenon that is unaccountable by phenomenology. Both attempts are bogged down in severe difficulties, as we have seen, even though the basic premise, namely there is a need to get around the ontological problem, is right. Denying this premise, that is, turning our back to the problem, by following Heidegger for instance, is to go in the wrong direction. The transcendent is not to be found in facticity any more than in consciousness. Yet, there is something attractive in the Heideggerian way and it is understandable why Smith wants to follow it. If only we can combine Heidegger's existential approach with the religious fervor of Duméry and Marion, then perhaps we could turn the Heideggerian way around in the direction of the Infinite that transcends, overwhelms and saturates consciousness and facticity. In what follows, I suggest that Levinas may be said to have shown us a way by which we can do this.

II.

What we need is a way of forging a phenomenology of religion that combines the advantages of Heidegger's existential phenomenology with the religiousness of Duméry and Marion. Such a phenomenology would avoid the problem of what Smith calls "particularization," or the problem of "Christian imperialism." At the same time, it would do some justice to the ontological problem, something that Dupré is concerned to insist. Turning to Levinas for such a phenomenology is encouraged by the fact that, according to Dupré, Levinas "has recently . . . confirmed" that there are "philosophical alternatives to . . . absolute [religious] monism,"⁸ and that, according to Smith, Levinas's other (*l'autre*) "is another example of the saturated phenomenon."⁹ Ironically, Dupré's observation about Levinas is relevant to Smith's concern only, and conversely, Smith's observation is relevant to Dupré's concern, and so in the end neither Dupré nor Smith goes on to draw any insight from Levinas. Since it is clear that *both* concerns are legitimate, and since I believe that the observations by Dupré and Smith are sound, the prospect of locating a plausible phenomenology of religion in Levinas is more than good.

Given what Levinas has to say about the Infinite, or God, the ontological problem looms large for any Levinasian phenomenology of religion. Like Kant, Levinas believes that the Infinite is unknowable. In a move reminiscent of Kant, Levinas argues that all that is known, is known in terms of our thematization and characterization, which are finite. Nothing that is truly infinite and transcendent can be caught in the coarse net of finite understanding. Our understanding is all on the side of our finite being, conditioned by our own essence, which consists of not just the Kantian innate categories of knowledge, if there are any, but also of what we humans desire, hope for, wish to have, intend to do, form projects to attain, and so on. Facticity is finality and immanence par excellence. By contrast, the Infinite is on the hither side of our being, otherwise than the totality of our being and beyond our essence. We may, in our facticity, conceive of God as an infinite and transcendent being, but so conceived, this God is still a God of our own conception. The categories of infinity and transcendence that the mind ascribes to God are mere negations of other categories of the mind, namely finality and immanence. In *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, Levinas argues that once we conceive of God in terms of categories of the mind, even as an infinite and transcendent being, "this God is immediately situated within the 'gesture of being'."¹⁰ Indeed, the God thus conceived is just a term in a relation of opposites, such as infinite as opposed to finite, or transcendent as opposed to immanent. This God that anyone has in mind, let alone experience, cannot be a true God because "He is a term in no relation, . . . , because He is precisely not a term but the Infinite" (OG, p. 166). The Infinite is "other than the other" of the finite, "other otherwise,"

“other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other,” and “transcendent to the point of absence” (OG, p. 69).

Given the argument above, Levinas seems justified to go on to claim that the truly infinite and transcendent God is like the “*One* of the first hypothesis of Plato’s *Parmenides*, which should ‘neither be named, nor designated, nor opined, nor known’” (OG, p. 178). This gives rise most acutely to the ontological problem. Indeed, Levinas may be said to have such problem in mind when he asks how it is possible for “a thought [to] think(s) more than it thinks” (OG, p. xv). Yet, we find that Levinas does talk about God, or the Infinite. However, he does not talk about the Infinite as a God *in* mind but as a God that *comes to* mind (*vient à l’idée*). It is also true that in talking about God, Levinas must have some kind of thought about God, but he is careful to qualify it, describing it, in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, as a thought “behind thoughts, . . . too lofty to push itself up front”¹¹ and as a thought “that is not a thought *of* . . . , but from the outset a thought *for* . . .” (OG, p. 161). To have a thought *of* something is to contain it in thought, but to have a thought *for* something is to acknowledge that it can overflow thought and exceed all that a thought is capable of. This is of course not a solution to the ontological problem. To solution lies in specifying what it is for a thought to be a thought for the Infinite.

If it is the task of a phenomenology to account for the God *in* mind, or the God experienced in consciousness, then phenomenology of religion as such is impossible. The religious phenomenon as such is impossible. There cannot be an experience of that which overflows, or saturates, all the categories of experience. The ontological problem, as a problem of accounting for the transcendent in immanent experience, or for the Infinite in finite consciousness, is insoluble. However, just because the problem cannot be solved, it does not mean that we cannot get around it. We have seen that Dupré thinks that we can get around the problem by making it the task of phenomenology to account not for God directly but for something else that can appear immanently in consciousness, namely an “impulse” from God. While the suggestion itself has difficulties, again as we have seen, the underlying strategy is sound enough. What we need is something that serves, strategically, as Dupré’s (and Duméry’s) impulse without the attendant difficulties. What we find in Levinas is the idea of *l’autre*, conventionally translated as “the other,” and the idea of *l’autrui*, conventionally rendered as “the Other.” The other, *l’autre*, is radically transcendent and infinite, wholly otherwise than being and beyond essence. God, or the Infinite, is the other *par excellence*. If the other speaks to us at all, it does so in a “saying” (*le dire*) that overwhelms and saturates all our capabilities. There cannot be any experience of the other. However, in our daily existence, in our facticity, we do have experience of the Other,

l'autrui. The sayings of the Other are transmitted to us as “the said” (*le dit*). Now, if it is possible somehow to gain access to the other through the Other, to the saying through the said, then we can get around the ontological problem by constructing a phenomenology of religion as a phenomenology of the Other. As it turns out, the dialectic between the other and the Other in Levinas’s writings points directly to this possibility. More specifically, while the experience of the truly transcendent and infinite other is an impossible phenomenon, there is no reason to think that the other cannot be experienced in any form whatsoever. Many philosophers of mind take the position that the experience of the purely mental is an impossible phenomenon in view of the fact that experiences are bodily. However, many of them accept the reality of the mental as *epi-phenomena*. In the same way, the reality of the infinite can be experienced, not as a phenomenon, which is impossible, but as an *epi-phenomenon*, as a reality that we “bear witness to,” to borrow Levinas’s words, when we experience the Other in our commerce with our fellow human beings. Thus, the phenomenology of the Other is the way around the ontological problem.

Does Levinas have a phenomenology of the Other? In one interview, Levinas made the following claim: “I remain to this day a phenomenologist.”¹² Most commentators would accept that what he does is indeed phenomenology, albeit not the classical Husserlian kind. It is more an existential phenomenology of the Sartrean or Heideggerian kind. But whether it is phenomenology of the Other remains to be shown. In his various writings, Levinas’s concern is with the phenomenon of subjectivity, or that of “the I” as he puts it. More specifically, he is concerned to show what it is like to be a subject in possession of full subjectivity. However, it is not difficult to show that the Other is just the other side of subjectivity. As we shall see, the Other is encountered in the subject’s discovery of his or her subjectivity, and is maintained by the subject as Other in the process of confirming and maintaining subjectivity. The experience of subjectivity is constituted, or structured, as the experience of the Other. The phenomenology of the I, then, just is the phenomenology of the Other.

In various works, Levinas argues that the phenomenology of subjectivity shows that one encounters the Other in the process of confirming one’s subjectivity. To be a subject, or to be an I with full subjectivity, is to be aware of one’s own ipseity, to be aware of oneself as a unique identity, or as a “unicity.” The I, then, must be completely separate from what is not itself, and furthermore, must have an awareness of this separation. To say the same thing differently, the I must be aware of the limits of its own being. As Hegel has shown us, the idea of the limit implies the idea of the beyond, of that which lies on the other side of the limit. Thus, the separation that

constitutes the I requires awareness of what lies on the hither side of one's own being. I am not a subject, an I, without this awareness. As Levinas puts it in *Totality and Infinity*, being "absolutely for myself" "assuredly does not render [me] the concrete man."¹³ It follows that subjectivity is confirmed only when there is an awareness of what is radically other than oneself, of radical alterity. As Levinas puts it in *Otherwise than Being*, the subjectivity of the I is constituted as a "node and a denouement" of being and the otherwise than being, "of essence and the essence's other" (OB, p. 10). Levinas goes on to argue that such awareness can come to me in my commerce with the Other (*l'autrui*), with my fellow human beings, provided that I maintain a certain comportment, to borrow a term from Heidegger, towards them.

The required comportment is that which allows me to see myself as a unique I, an I with full subjectivity. What I have to do is to treat the Other as if coming from the hither side of my being, beyond my essence, as possessing a radical alterity. I have to behave in a way such that my enjoyment is not "absolutely for myself." The alternative is to see the Other from my point of view, as fitting in with my aims and purposes, i.e. as a part of my own being. In this way, the Other is absorbed in the totality of my being, and to face this totalized Other is to retreat into one's own being, into one's essence, or the sameness in the total blackness of which subjectivity becomes indiscernible. When, in my commerce with them, my neighbors are not maintained in their radical alterity, I have no true conception of my own subjectivity. When I see them as serving my own ends and purposes, the boundaries that mark out my subjectivity disappear. Thus, to maintain the Other in its radical alterity, I must avoid making myself the standard of reference in my dealings with them, in particular, avoid calculating everything in terms of my interests, my enjoyment and my welfare.

In the process of confirming my own subjectivity, I am assisted by the fact that my commerce with my fellow human beings is conducted in language. In language, I realize that my fellow human beings possess an alterity that cannot be absorbed into the totality of my being. I realize that the meanings of my utterances depend not just on me but also on my interlocutors. As Levinas puts it, the "relationship of language implies transcendence [and] radical separation" (TI, p. 73). I am assisted furthermore by the fact that my experiences with others show me that they have their own intentions and purposes. When I bracket out all my presuppositions about the Other, I will find that the Other is "*not under a category*" and has "only a reference to himself" (TI, p. 69). Indeed, as long as the bracketing is resolutely maintained, I will discover that try as I may to conceptualize and thematize my fellow human beings, I will only succeed in realizing that they are "absolutely foreign to me – refractory to every typology, to every genus, to every

characterology, to every classification” (TI, p. 73). Thus, when the I with full subjectivity examines its own experiences, it becomes aware of the Other as possessing a radical alterity, an absolute otherness. For, only in such experience can I confirm my subjectivity. Only in such experience can the desire for subjectivity be fulfilled. Now, the radical alterity, or the absolute otherness, of the Other, is precisely the mark of the other. Levinas concludes that the phenomenology of subjectivity reveal that in the face of the Other, there is “revelation of the other” (TI, p. 73).

Given the dialectic between the Other and the other as we have seen, there is a way to the other, and to God who is the other par excellence, and that is through the Other, or my fellow human beings. In particular, it is through a particular kind of comportment with them. It is not a believing comportment that Heidegger speaks of. It is rather an *ethical* comportment. We can follow Levinas a little further to see why this is so. We have seen that to maintain subjectivity, the I has to behave toward others in such a way that the enjoyment, the mark of separation that is the structure of the I, is not “absolutely for myself.” For Levinas, that means I have to behave in such a way that “the goods of this world break forth from the exclusive property of enjoyment,” or from the “egoist and solitary enjoyment” (TI, p. 76). Levinas characterizes this behavior as “without utility, in pure loss, gratuitously, without referring to anything else, in pure expenditure” (TI, p. 133). To do otherwise, that is, referring only to oneself, or egoistically, is to fail to accomplish the separation that is constitutive of subjectivity.

Levinas goes further, arguing that what the I in its full subjectivity needs is consciousness of something that is its *ownmost*, to borrow a phrase from Heidegger. To say I is to be able to hold on to something that is my very own, that no one else can identify with. For Levinas, that something is my responsibility for the Other: “To utter ‘I,’ to affirm the irreducible singularity . . . , means to possess a privileged place with regard to responsibilities for which no one can replace me and from which no one can release me” (TI, p. 245). To call oneself an “I” then is already to see oneself as responsible for the Other, already in possession of a “privileged place with regard to responsibilities.” To be an I, I have to see myself as having a responsibility that is my very own, one that I cannot shirk. As Levinas puts it: “To be unable to shirk: this is the I” (ibid.). Clearly then, one is a subject by acting altruistically. My own subjectivity “comes from the impossibility of escaping responsibility” (OB, p. 14).

Now, since the subjectivity of the subject is located at the “node and denouement” of being and the otherwise than being, “of essence and the essence’s other,” or the beyond essence, the confirmation of subjectivity is *ipso facto* the confirmation of the beyond, the infinity and transcendence

that lie on the hither side of being. It follows that to behave ethically is to turn outward from the finality of one's being and face the infinity and transcendence of what is beyond being. It follows, in other words, that to be ethical is to bear witness to the Infinite, to God. Thus it is that simply by ethically facing my neighbors, I come face to face with, without actually knowing or experiencing, the Infinite. For, it is in the faces of the stranger, the widow, the orphan, for whom I am responsible, is revealed what is truly infinite and transcendent. As we have seen, it is in the face of the Other that there is "revelation of the other." It is in the face of the Other that there is the trace of that which is wholly infinite and transcendent, the trace of "the un-containable, the Infinite or God" (OG, p. 50). The "glory of the Infinite is glorified in [the] responsibility" that is the command to substitute oneself for the Other (OB, p. 144). In being responsible for my neighbor, in saying "Here I am," "I bear witness to the Infinite," not an Infinite that is "in front of" me, but a "thought behind thoughts . . . too lofty to push itself up front" (OB, p. 149).

We have seen that Levinas rejects all metaphysical discourses in which the Infinite is thematized and conceptualized, all religious discourses in which God is named. He would therefore reject a phenomenology of religion that attempts to "isolate" God, or some transcendent impulse, in consciousness. While he does not seem to suspect his fellow phenomenologists of this, he does, in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, explicitly reject any theology that attempts to name God. Indeed, he argues that we must declare dead any god so named or isolated so that we could focus more effectively on the right kind of religious experience. As he puts it, in the closing remark of *Otherwise than Being*, "after the death of a certain god inhabiting the world behind the scenes, the substitution of the hostage discovers the trace, the unpronounceable inscription, of what, always already past, always 'he,' does not enter into any present, to which are suited not the nouns designating beings, or the verbs in which their essence resounds, but that which, as a pronoun, marks with its seal all that a noun can convey" (OB, p. 185). The Infinite that can be spoken of in human understanding is not what it is, and the God that can be named is not the true God. This rejection is at the same time an argument for a different way of bearing witness to the Infinite, of pronouncing the name of the unnameable. The Levinasian way to the Infinite, or to God is, as we have seen, to behave ethically toward others: "The very movement that leads to another leads to God" (OG, p. 148). The way to God, or the Infinite, is through my ethical dealings with my neighbors. In tending to the troubles of our neighbors rather than asking to know God, we are really seeking God, and in not determinately seeking God, we nevertheless manage to find Him. As Levinas puts it, the "word of the prophet (Isaiah 65:1) . . . expresses this

admirably. ‘I am sought of them that asked not for me, I am found of them that sought me not’ ” (OG, p. 51).

If Levinas is right, the religious experience is the ethical experience. It is the experience of being aware of a primordial responsibility for others, for their “outrage and wounding.” It is the experience of substituting oneself for another, as a hostage. It is the experience of suffering in the suffering of others. It is the experience of giving to the destitute widow and orphan, to the cold and hungry stranger, “the bread out of one’s mouth and the coat from one’s shoulders” (OB, p. 55). To have these experiences is to bear witness to God. The ontological problem is the problem of how “thought thinks more than it thinks.” Levinas’s answer to the problem is: “For-the-other-man and thereby unto God! This is how a thought thinks more than it thinks” (OG, p. xv). For-the-other-man is the phenomenon of which the Infinite is the epi-phenomenon. This is why the phenomenology of the for-the-other-man experience can serve as a phenomenology of religion. The former, in turn, is none other than the phenomenology of subjectivity. It is a phenomenology that is on the one hand without religious imperialism and on the other preserves what is essential in a phenomenology *of religion*. Yet, it is not essentialist, nor anthropological, nor factual. It is the fourth voice.

Notes

1. Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1950) and Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, trans. Bernard Noble (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960).
2. Sumner B. Twiss and Walter H. Conser, Jr. (eds.), *Experience of the Sacred* (Hanover, NH: Brown University Press, 1992).
3. Louis Dupré, “Phenomenology of Religion: Limits and Possibilities,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 66 (1992), pp. 175–188, at page 175.
4. James K.A. Smith, “Liberating Religion from Theology: Marion and Heidegger on the Possibility of a Phenomenology of Religion,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 46 (1999), pp. 17–33, at p. 17.
5. Henry Duméry, *La foi n’est pas un cri*, 2nd edn. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1959), p. 245n. Cited in Dupré, op. cit., p. 181.
6. Jean-Luc Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” trans. Thomas A. Carlson, *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 40 (1996), p. 103.
7. Jean-Luc Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” trans. Thomas A. Carlson, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 20 (1994), p. 588.
8. Dupré, op. cit., p. 185.
9. Smith, op. cit., p. 30n.
10. Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, IL: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 56. Other quotations from this work are indicated by ‘OG’ followed by page numbers.

11. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), p. 149. Other quotations from this work are indicated by 'OB' followed by page numbers.
12. Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in Richard A. Cohen (ed.), *Face to Face with Levinas* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 14.
13. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press (1969), p. 139. Other quotations from this work are indicated by 'TI' followed by page numbers.

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