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HOW CAN PHENOMENOLOGY BE PRESERVED
IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION? A PROPOSAL

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Abstract: This paper provides a foundation for a form of phenomenology, namely phenomenological, that rejects the traditional phenomenology of religion in order to provide a cognitive and non-theological discipline in the study of religion. Proposed amendments to phenomenology are based on the ideas of E. Husserl. The simultaneous strict distinction and necessary cooperation between facts and phenomena provided by the impurity of pure consciousness in admitting the outside world might enable the extension of scientific criteria to this reimagined phenomenology. Pure consciousness is considered irreducible to thought and cognitivity (feeling and accordingly, faith, might thus be viewed as a non-cognitive, purely emotional stream). This new comprehension of the phenomenology of religion could represent religion in all its contexts (God, supernatural forces as well as holy places, churches, utensils, texts etc) in the pure consciousness of the believer, as the effects of its structures, namely feeling and thought and their interactions and peculiarities.

Key words: phenomenology of religion, phenomenology, pure consciousness, study of religion, faith experience

1. Introduction. The Non-phenomenological Character of Phenomenology in the Study of Religion

The specificity of traditional phenomenology of religion, as carried out within the limits of the study of religion, has not been elaborated on that much in the current literature. As another term for the study of religion (Sharma 2001, 1-2, 13-14, 15, 20; comp.: Benavides 2001, 471-472; Pettersson and Akerberg 1981, 14-16; King 1984, 42; Cox 2006, 204; Bleeker 1974b, 199; Hultkranz 1970, 81-83), it has been preserved until the study of religion was made theoretically insufficient and a change was required, brought about by certain methodological apparatus (comp.: Dudley 1977, 5, 22-23, 31). Phenomenological discourse has mainly been used to denote facts and the conjugated rather than something special (Pummer 1975, 173; comp.: Widengren 1969, 1-2). In the absence of differentiation between phenomena and facts (Bleeker 1974a, 227, 234; comp.: Bianchi 1974, 221), researchers have considered epoché and reduction similarly, as a form of unprejudiced concentration (Bleeker 1974b, 198-199; comp.: Widengren 1974, 258, 270-271) (more precisely, restraining from truth statements, causal connections or additional unapt (non-religious) contexts), not as stages of preparation for pure consciousness. Reduction was not usually mentioned separately or was, simply, used to indicate the reduction of religion to the non-religious. In this form, as it was alien to epoché, reduction was acknowledged to be inadmissible for true researchers of religion. Eidetic vision was interpreted as no more than a procedure that intuitively grasped the conceptuality of facts, whereas the hermeneutic circle was generally regarded as a rotation from facts to their theoretical grounds. Both approaches seemed to construct knowledge differing from the ordinary based only on their respective notions, rather than content (when facts are naively interpreted as simply empirical data, the search for the “essence”, “meaning”, “logos” or “enthelecheia” deceptively resembles a new (phenomenological) understanding of the facts). One cannot but point out here G. van der Leeuw’s caricature-like depiction of the historian’s work as only capable of non-phenomenologically describing or cataloguing the found without genuine understanding (Leeuw 1956, 785). In view of facts as fragments of experience, it was admissible to discuss whether van der Leeuw’s notions and their periodical use in theological discourse are all that distinguish his work from the research of facts. In this sense, M. Eliade could also be discussed, as evident from D. Allen’s reasoning, although D. Allen depicted M. Eliade as the phenomenologist (Allen 1984, 28-29).

In so far as the study of religion has gained sufficient strength to be comprehended as a science, with its own theoretical background, phenomenology appears to be an invalid appendix that should be finally

rejected (Werblowsky 1984, 293, 296; but comp.: Werblowsky 1974, 185, esp. 187).

That variant of phenomenology that preserves its phenomenological quality – in theology and of course, in philosophy – only aggravates suspicions against phenomenology in the study of religion, as a form of study whose cognitive uncertainty disguises theology as a science and thus erodes the study of religion (Comp.: Berner 1974, 224-225, 251).

2. Advantages of Phenomenology in Solving the Problem of the Study of Religion

Nevertheless, the decay of this non-phenomenological form of phenomenology clarifies, to my mind, a possibility of phenomenology of religion as a specific phenomenological discipline in the structure of the study of religion. When other routes are excluded, this becomes the only evident way... This possibility is supported by the problem of researching religion while preserving its uniqueness as something supernatural for the believer. In other words, the very mechanism of the inner content of religion in the context of natural events remains unclear: *how does the believer, under the influence of the natural, understand it as supernatural, and how are such events transformed into religious data of consciousness, with their specific details and mutual transmissions?* With respect to religious content, the researcher is limited to delineating its inner peculiarities or causal connections and is incapable of showing how the content or connections are formed, maintained and combined. Efforts by the researcher to show what events give rise to ideas about a specific deity or how the deity is experienced by the believer do not probe the very appearance of the deity in the believer's consciousness. How is the deity recognized and preserved in the believer's consciousness as something beyond the world? What properties of this consciousness are responsible for the changes, multiplication, and interaction of the divine? Why do the same events give rise to different notions of deity (with independent lives in the believer's consciousness)? How are the necessary connections between natural events and ideas about the deity formed? Thus, the study of religion is cognitively uncertain and uses a religious foundation as a substitute for models of religion, blending study with theology. This problem originates in the general distinction between consciousness and the world as a necessary conceptual framework of every science; this distinction presupposes this natural arrangement as empiric. This distinction cannot be corrected even via psychology of religion, which represents religion in consciousness only partly – via its psychical life. By contrast, the social religious life, with its holy places, churches, church utensils, etc., remains outside consciousness in the world, and the mechanism by which the psychical and social religious spheres can be combined remains unclear. In

the absence of such a mechanism, the psychologist must admit (frequently even involuntarily) something mysterious is at play here. When considering the religious character of the believer's motives, decisions, and activities, the psychologist fails to understand the nature of the religious (for example, the nature of its motives) but simply ascribes this quality as originating from the outside world rather than the believer's consciousness, thereby involuntarily substituting his understanding of the believer's motives for faith.

Researchers have recognized the potential of phenomenology to solve this problem, as reflected in the continuous attempts to renew the understanding of phenomenology. However, since phenomenology itself provides neither cognitivity nor science, they return to traditional (non-phenomenological) work, preserving at best only its name – "phenomenology".

3. My Proposal

Due to its ability to concentrate on the consciousness, phenomenology would allow, to my mind, the full preservation of the religious world as an appearance of the believer's consciousness and the clarification of this world through peculiarities of consciousness, i.e., God and everything sacred, as effects of interactions of consciousness structures. The whole religious psychic sphere would be combined with the religious social life in one entity as the stream of thought, feeling and will (with their respective characteristics), which are preserved despite their variations in empiric experience. Holy places, churches, etc. can be considered in this manner – through the mechanism of consciousness structures rather than as objects of the outside world – because they are subjects of experience, i.e., in consciousness, and even their identity as objects can also be considered to be provided by the relative peculiarities of consciousness. The same is true of God; he is discovered in nothing but consciousness, and therefore there is ground for searching for those peculiarities that enable him as their effect. All appearances of the religious world are reduced to effects of the believer's consciousness, and this consciousness itself is represented in its pure form – as if there is nothing but the religious consciousness – because consciousness in its entirety is the only mediator between men and the world. In its pure form, the believer's consciousness preserves its transcendental quality as the primordial ground for any religious experience (not only for the empiric through which the religious is given the researcher), and the effects of this consciousness represent data of this consciousness that demonstrate its framework rather than empiric experience appearing as phenomena. Consequently, phenomenology would be preserved in the sense of E. Husserl as constructing pure transcendental consciousness (even if this

construction is limited within religion and intended for combination with scientific criteria). Such phenomenology would thus succeed in constructing a model of religion as the successively natural without losing any of its inner content. Involuntary deviations from modeling to a religious substantiation would also cease because the mechanism of religion would be evident from its performance in the consciousness, and the causality for religion in the outside world would be clearly represented as a separate entity and not merged with religion itself. Although such research on religion only as consciousness (i.e., the reduction of religion to phenomena of pure consciousness) does not permit the elucidation of the mechanism of causal world-religion connections, it could provide a foundation for a more distinct understanding, by successively differentiating causality and its consequences as the outside world and religion. By contrast, causality and its consequences are merged when religion is considered in the world and in consciousness (because its boundaries in such a mixture are uncertain, any approach to its understanding is even more dubious). In other words, the proposed phenomenology (within the study of religion) would preserve the consciousness-world distinction as the distinction between religion and the whole empiric world (including empiric consciousness) outside it. This distinction would also stress the distinctness of religious representation, thereby better permitting an explanation of religion through the outside world within non-phenomenological branches of the study of religion, and prepare an understanding of the limits in terms of constructing pure consciousness of adapting phenomenology to the study of religion.

The main difficulty in applying phenomenology in the study of religion is correlating phenomena and facts, that is, pure consciousness and scientific experience, particularly as phenomenology, with its pretensions to “mathesis universalis” and criticism of “scientific dogmatism”, cannot, at first glance, be established as an ordinary (factual) science. The phenomenological apparatus is aimed mainly at cognitive structures and reduces whole consciousness to them (for details: Kirsberg 2014, 181-184; comp.: Kirsberg 2016a, 22-30), thus losing the specificity of faith (and the religious altogether) as feeling and further encouraging skepticism towards phenomenology. Researchers prefer to dissolve and lose phenomenology in the study of religion than to find themselves outside science or even knowledge at all. As a result, phenomena and facts appear to be one and the same sphere, especially as facts cannot be separated from consciousness and might therefore, be taken for phenomena. Such reasoning usually misses the failure by researchers to interpret facts as pure consciousness data because facts are constituted by the consciousness-world distinction in empiric experience.

To overcome this difficulty, I propose to present pure consciousness as a complex of data, comparable to facts in terms of mutual “intertests”

from which phenomena and facts can be specified and corrected in a type of hermeneutic circle (transforming gradually facts into phenomena). Phenomenology provides some premises for such as adaptation. Epoché and reduction are never fully realized; as non-stopping procedures, they always suppose the irreducible sphere that must be transformed into pure consciousness. The special, fixed status of epoché and reduction as unfulfilled also grounds the phenomena-facts circle as necessary. Pure consciousness itself even provides hints of the world outside consciousness: the phenomenologist who performs phenomenology separates it from himself and thus appears, at least methodologically, outside it. Furthermore, sensuality as a non-intentional “tissue” of acts (we see a thing in color, not a color as such (Husserl 1922, 374)) could be discovered only in view of the world considering pure consciousness as an object. Through pure consciousness, everything appears intentional, and the denoted peculiarity of sensuality or the difference between the intentional and non-intentional could be missed. Similarly, there is a certain independence of “materie” from its acts; such a division is incompatible with act-content unity, and without the outside world this assumption might appear dubious. Another hint is the living body, which, despite E. Husserl, is more evident as a ground for forming, than for indicating, intentionality (Husserl 1950, 128). The body with all its kinetics is too variable and immediate-concrete and thus cannot be interpreted through intentionality, whereas within space-time unity, the body to ground intentionality seems more persuasive. Finally, no peculiarities of pure consciousness (e.g., neither intentionality nor the difference between partialness and wholeness) could allow what appears in consciousness as its own to be discerned from what is outside and unbelonging to it, unless admitting that the world is independent of it (Kirsberg 2014, 188-190; comp.: Kirsberg 2016a, 39-47).

These indications that pure consciousness is unrealizable exhaustively can also be used to ground the facts-phenomena circle and are not shortcomings of phenomenology. Instead, the impurity of pure consciousness provides a possibility for a new understanding of phenomenology as a science, that reveals the outside world as the necessary background of pure consciousness and thus, inevitability of the circle. By means of this circle, scientific criteria are extended to this phenomenology, which is tested not through eidetic vision and intuition (i.e., through its own highly specific methods) but as rigorously as any ordinary science. These methods, which aim directly at contemplating consciousness independently of empiric experience, remain valid for providing a general reasoning for the specificity of pure consciousness but must be declined when the aim is to delineate and test the creation of concrete religious details within the structures and peculiarities of consciousness (in this form). As an object strictly separated from the researcher and thus included by this relation in his cognitive experience,

pure consciousness (with its phenomena) succumbs to comparison with fact. Pure consciousness can be differentiated from fact by the irreducibility of its inner content to empiric experience (otherwise its structures creating phenomena would be missed) and by its phenomena that are not data of the (empiric) outside world or consciousness, which have already been transformatively included in pure consciousness as one entity. Therefore, phenomena are inseparable from pure consciousness structures (or cannot be concealed in it); the less the structures are shown, the less the phenomenon is evident and the more easily it can be confused with fact. The noesis-noema synthesis does not suppose the same difference as in the case of methodology-facts. Phenomena appear as the result of this synthesis in the same sphere of pure consciousness, whereas methodology is separable from facts as presupposing otherness – the outside world. To be compared with facts, phenomena, further, cannot be borrowed from non-factual data (i.e., perceptions as such); otherwise, they would remain untested by their sources. Re-understood as interdependent with facts, phenomena preserve their specificity and are thus comparable with facts only if there is mutual ground – in the form of data of the cognitive experience of the researcher. Because of this necessary connection to the outside world, pure consciousness is thus included in the scientific experience in an impure form that simultaneously preserves its nature within the limits of this experience (therefore its phenomena can be falsified or reinterpreted and verified anew in the course of comparisons with facts and the conceptuality of facts). However, even in this cognitive form – as object – pure consciousness refers not only to cognitive but also to non-cognitive structures (feeling, will).

Thus, phenomenology, which has been intended mainly for presenting pure consciousness as thought-knowledge, must be re-understood to include the non-cognitive as well. Peculiarities of thought can be used to clarify the non-cognitive as something opposite that does not have (in the case of feeling) intentional structures with correlations of acts and their contents. Instead, the non-cognitive moves as a temporal stream of unaimed sensuality that does not create appearances of imagination or the world but experiences and is spontaneously inspired by them (the arguments against any confusion of feeling with thought are formulated in: Kirsberg 2018, 262-265; comp.: Kirsberg 2016a, 22-38, 66-68, 118-124, 128-150 etc). Accordingly, it is possible to clarify the differences among intentional, correlative and causal connections in pure consciousness. As a stream, feeling does not reveal anything and is not aimed at something but only moves through things, without making any necessary connections. Feeling can be excited by other structures or vice versa; causality would be totally excluded from pure consciousness if its structures subsisted similarly – as intentional acts-contents unity. Whether combined in complex acts or singled out by their own movement, the influence of structures (feeling, thought and will) on each

other would appear the same, and any special delineating of causality would seem needless. The image that excites the feeling appears as its correlative datum rather than its cause – instead of one dependence it would be seen the other (or instead of the two – causal and correlative – only the one, i.e., correlative). Previously, a possibility of correlative connection in feeling could not even be discussed, because the feeling, as observed after the pattern of thought and intertwined simply with the image, would not be seen as such. All correlative connections seem simultaneously intentional – any act could be judged by its content (and vice versa). It is now clear that there are no such coincidental connections in pure consciousness. Consequently, causality should not be limited to the outside world but be admitted in pure consciousness, without any damage to phenomenology. Embracing causality for only some local phenomena would not distract the researcher from pure consciousness by the outside world, due to superfluous questions on the origin of religion, its background, etc., and causality would not be confused with the above-mentioned connections.

E. Husserl prescribes causality as belonging only to the outside (empiric) sphere (Husserl 1922, 391) either because he interprets thought too widely, extending its properties to the whole pure consciousness (as outlined above), or because he does not understand causality only as a necessary connection independent of a specific quality (and probably also mixes it with logical deduction). If the cause is what gives rise to the appearance, then the cause is defined only by the order of connections; its reference to something special or its unity by nature with the appearance as its consequence represent only arbitrarily extended interpretations. One should seek additional arguments for excluding causality from pure consciousness.

These preparations would preserve the religious fully, as it is experienced in the believer's consciousness, without its pervasive presentations as supernatural, unintelligible, etc. Like all feelings, faith is non-cognitive by nature, but its specificity differentiates it from unreligious feelings and may even differentiate it from other religious feelings (religious hope, love, etc.). Its direction could be viewed as an effect of its temporality and interweaving with thought, as aimed at the religious (i.e., undirected). God is experienced in faith as already comprehended by thought and thus, in no way is viewed in, but only shrouded by, faith. Any content of thought, as fallen in faith, appears to be an object shown by faith as a kind of cognitive-thought act, especially as thought remains invisible as an act. Therefore, any faith experience is purely an expression of faith that can be presented as a datum for attention drawn to faith, not in its own stream. *However, the very effect of the religious or miraculous (God, supernatural forces) originates in the interactions of the peculiarities of faith – irrespective of thought data, that may only strengthen rather than create this effect. Thought may excite faith or*

influence its movement, but thought is neither its necessary ground nor the sample for its understanding. As a non-structural stream, faith is not combined with thought in one complex act but only borrows and changes thought in accordance with its own emotional nature. Faith is experienced in its stream as non-individual, unbelonging to a single person, and *thus appears non-psychical and miraculous*, embracing a community of believers and religious things that, as bearers of faith, are specially designed for encouraging and joining in faith rather than for everyday needs. Mutual activities (celebrations, rituals, prayers) generalize this stream as more or less identically experienced, so that even the level of its intensity remains relatively the same, independent of this or that believer. Things enshrouded by faith as different to everyday needs also fix this stream as quite special and, some might say, objective – although the stream is in consciousness it appears to the believer as flowing in the outside world. So, *as independent by its approximately identical – general – experience in people and by its “objectivity” in things, faith appears as something the beyond, i.e., even without any images as God.* Common elements of this mutual activity can be discovered and tested as facts by historical, sociological or psychological methods, but the very mechanism of their combination in the general stream is reconstructed in pure consciousness, so far as such facts are transformed into phenomena of pure consciousness, moving in one emotion in concert, with respective acts of thought more or less disappearing in the stream. The specificity of things as religious is considered in the same way – clarifying their ‘penetrativeness’ with faith and its influence on their variable appearance with relevant changes of thought acts and the reverse influence of this appearance on the whole movement of the believer’s consciousness – all this on the basis of facts of worship. The unevenness of the religious presence in even the same religious things (when churches of the same confession and architecture differ in spirituality to the believer) cannot be comprehended through intentional correlative connections of thought but is clarified in the variations of the intensity of faith moving and absorbing things as data in interactions and interdependence with other structures of pure consciousness (e.g., observing the degradation of thought accompanying faith to perceptions of faith content – down to the confluence of thought with faith). This facts-phenomena circle is compatible with epoché and reduction in that it first fixes the facts of religion irrespective of consciousness or the world as such (thus distracting from the natural arrangement of facts) and then reduces them to pure consciousness. In addition, the difference between epoché and reduction prevents the pure consciousness-outside world mixture in the circle’s general movement. In Husserl’s understanding, epoché and reduction coincide as different shades of the same work in revealing pure consciousness and were never simply synonyms (Husserl distinguishes epoché from reduction as a general attitude toward pure consciousness versus a concrete

performance in reaching pure consciousness (Husserl 1976, 68-69)). Traces of this circle can also be observed in his works when he compares empiric consciousness and the world with pure consciousness or the natural “I” with the transcendental (Husserl 1976, *e.g.* 60-65, 67), even if such comparisons do not have methodological meaning but stipulate only the obviousness in depicting phenomenology. In contrast to Husserl’s understanding that pure consciousness reveals itself, I aspire to construct the pure consciousness of the believer, for pure consciousness comes to light nowhere but through the believer’s experience as restored by the researcher. I propose that this approach will provide the necessary connection between pure consciousness and the outside world or at least the general methodological limits in representing pure consciousness as transcendental. The causality for religion as such (or for its factual details) should be considered separately, outside phenomenology and in other spheres of the study of religion (researching the world as an outside religion) – stimulating a closer examination of the character of interconnections between pure consciousness and the world altogether (and likely reconsidering the possibility of showing the world only as the empiric and approaching to the world thereby as the real cause of pure consciousness).

Reverting to pure consciousness, from this point of view, transmitters of Talmudic words would be considered together with words as expressions of faith flowing through people and surrounding things or words rather than as persons with their specific lives in the world. Their personal circumstances or something from their consciousness are equated with each other or disappear as nuances (shades) of the same stream, supporting and strengthening faith. This confluence occurs through the words pronounced by this or that person. As places in which words are present, people become almost indistinguishable, *i.e.*, everybody includes and replaces everything. How do R. Johanan, R. Jose, Abba Benjamin, R. Adda or R. Isaac differ if they differ only in the words they pronounce? They could be not mentioned at all in the movement of the same speech or preserved, instead of words; as concrete places they preserve words as well as each other. Thus, the stream is always unfinished, even in the fragments that, by their construction are more or less self-sufficient (visions, images) but mean nevertheless, something more intertwined with what in the immediate context, means relation, rather than presentation – short or enlarged prayer. The pronouncement of “hear me” twice or the repetition of God’s prayer appear in such descriptions as: “Lord of the Universe, ‘hear me’, that the fire may descend from heaven and consume everything that is upon the altar...” (Ber. 9 (b)), “I once entered into the innermost part of the Sanctuary to offer incense and saw... the Lord of Hosts seated upon a high and exalted throne. He said to me... And He nodded to me with His head” (Ber. (7a)). The details of the description of the altar vary in the application to God – “hear me” –

stressing the continuation of the application in different people and thus drawing by this openness more and more believers. Similar variation occurs in God's prayer, which is also repeated this way to be spread to many. When the nuances of the stream are so open to each other, the difference between the text and reader is overcome: what happens in the text can be continued outside it. As transmitted similarly by their content and even by their acts (reminiscences, representations or perceptions are indistinguishable, for their descriptions are constructed in an identical manner), visions, images, interpretations or other thought fragments appear as independent of a specific person, further stressing the sameness of the stream and their inclusion in it as non-cognitively transformed. In such a way, they are combined with the stream as the means for submersion in it rather than to demonstrate or understand it.

The stream moves in the same way also in the absence of thought, as evident in the case of prayer, which is transmitted in the same way as thought and in reminiscence is no less alive than in present movement and indistinguishable thus in its modes. This additionally proves the homogenous character of the stream as one and the same faith (non-cognitive, intensive and by its effect – independent). Applications to God in prayer also support faith in its temporality and in the effect of its independence, promoting the effects of God's presence in faith and its relation to Him. As the expression of faith, the whole text is thus totally included in consciousness and is considered through its mechanism (See with the use of the law as an example: Kirsberg 2016, 341-343; comp.: Kirsberg 2016a, 174-179).

Criticism may touch on the concrete details of this example of phenomenology (e.g., the possibility of expanding these interpretations of Berachoth extracts to the whole treatise or the Talmud) – especially as I pretend to make no more than a sketch – but such criticism will only be beneficial as this phenomenology expands possibilities for research, promoting its maturity through facts. Nothing interferes with the reduction of reconstructed biographies, details of the outside world as they are given in the text, or peculiarities of Talmudic school methods to the nuances of faith rather than simply intending them as facts. Moreover, it is not evident that such a representation would be cognitively worse than the traditional representation; what is usually seen from the modern point of view as figures of speech, whims of poetry, separated episodes with different tasks, that is, the unconsidered depiction of literary devices, can be conceptualized in pure consciousness, thereby avoiding modernizations. Instead of the religion depiction there will be *an understanding of its mechanism*.

What cannot be understood in religion through its psychical fragments or the outside world appears through pure consciousness in which religion is represented as a whole – fully preserving its mysterious character for the believer but non-mysterious by the mechanism of

consciousness for the researcher. In addition, this phenomenology narrows the deviation from science or simply knowledge by abridging the substantiation of religion – or theology (in the sphere of the study of religion). One may argue to what extent my proposal corresponds to E. Husserl, but the only test for it is whether it promotes the solution of the problem of the study of religion by opening a new perspective for research.

4. Conclusions

My proposal is briefly formulated as follows. To represent religion exclusively by the interactions and peculiarities of consciousness (as effects of consciousness), one should (1) re-understand the consciousness-world distinction as the distinction between religion and the world outside it; (2) clarify the irreducible differences among the intentional, correlative and causal connections of and among thought, feeling (and will) as well as their inner peculiarities, i.e., the distinction between the cognitive and non-cognitive spheres of consciousness and the properties of consciousness, independently of empiric experience; (3) specify that phenomena represent data on religion only within the structures of consciousness, while facts represent religious empirical data within the consciousness-world distinction, i.e., specify their differences and cooperation based on the cognitive experience of the researcher. These changes in phenomenology would allow the specificity of religion to be revealed and tested using the traditional criteria of the study of religion.

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