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Kenneth Jason Wardley

**Praying to a French God: Liturgy, anthropology and
phenomenology**



University of Edinburgh

A thesis submitted for the degree of doctor of philosophy

Abstract

This thesis aims to bring to wider attention the work of the Parisian theologian and philosopher Jean-Yves Lacoste (part of the so-called ‘theological turn’ in French phenomenology).

Lacoste (whose most recent work, *Etre en Danger* (2011), articulates what he describes as a ‘phenomenology of the spiritual life’), has previously published monographs in the phenomenology of liturgy (*Expérience et l’absolu: Questions disputées sur l’humanité de l’homme*, 1994; ET: *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, 2004); hope and eschatology (*Note sur le temps: essai sur les raisons de la mémoire et de l’espérance*, 1990); philosophy and aesthetics (*Le monde et l’absence d’œuvre*, 2000); and phenomenology and theology (*Présence et parousie*, 2006; *Phénoménalité de Dieu*, 2008). As a phenomenologist Lacoste is concerned with investigating the human aptitude for experience; as theologian Lacoste is interested in humanity’s potential for a relationship with the divine, what he terms the ‘liturgical relationship’ (where ‘liturgical’ implies more than simply worship *writ large* but refers instead to a specific anthropology, that of an existence lived and conducted ‘before God’, *coram Deo*).

Beginning from the proposition that prayer is a theme that occurs throughout Lacoste’s writing, the dissertation employs that as a heuristic through which to view, interpret and critique his thought by offering a thematic study of prayer as it appears in his published works. It will look at issues that impact upon the ‘spiritual life’ such as boredom and fatigue, and include the following topics: ambiguity, rumour and the absurd; utopia and fantasy; body, flesh and spirit; silence; time, anarchy and flux. The dissertation is, in part, also an answer to the question as to what kind of theology

might be written in response to and in dialogue with Lacoste, by examining some previously overlooked themes in and influences upon his work.

Thesis Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Parts of the dissertation have previously been published as or in the following:

Wardley, Kenneth Jason, 'Jean-Yves Lacoste: The Experience of Transcendence', in W. Stoker and W.L. van der Merwe (eds) *Looking Beyond? Shifting Views of Transcendence in Philosophy, Theology, Art, and Politics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 193–207.

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Signed:

KJ Wardley

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Abbreviations

Works by Jean-Yves Lacoste

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- EM *La Mémoire et l'espérance: Notes théologiques sur le temps* (Toulouse: Unpublished PhD dissertation, 1983).
- NP 'Nature et personne de l'homme: D'un paradoxe christologique', *La Politique de la mystique: hommage à Mgr Maxime Charles* (Limoges: Editions Criterion, 1984): pp. 129-138.
- AM 'Les Anges Musiciens : Considérations sur l'éternité, a partir de thèmes iconographiques et musicologiques', *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 68 (1984): pp. 549-575.
- BHP 'Bâtir, habiter, prier', *Revue Thomiste* 87:3 (1987), pp. 357-390.
- AH 'Anges et hobbits: le sens des mondes possibles', *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 36: 3(1989): pp. 341-373.
- NT *Note sur le temps: Essai sur les raisons de la mémoire et de l'espérance* (Paris: PUF, 1990).
- EeA *Expérience et absolu: Questions disputées sur l'humanité de l'homme* (Paris: PUF, 1994).
- MAO *Le monde et l'absence de l'œuvre et autres études* (Paris: PUF, 2000).

- WCA 'The Work and the Complement of Appearing', in Jeffrey Bloechl, ed., *Religious Experience and the End of Metaphysics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003): pp. 68–93.
- EA *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).
- ECT *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology* (3 vol., London/New York: Routledge, 2005).
- NMT *Narnia, monde théologique?* (Genève: Ad Solem, 2005); ET : 'Anonymous Theology and Pseudonymous Christology', trans. Judith Topping, *Chronicle of the Oxford University C.S. Lewis Society* 4:1 (2007): pp. 4-17.
- LC 'Liturgy and Coaffection', in Kevin Hart and Barbara Wall, eds., *The Experience of God: A Postmodern Response* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005): pp. 93-103.
- PP *Présence et parousie* (Genève: Ad Solem, 2006).
- TP 'Perception, Transcendence and the Experience of God', trans. Aaron Patrick Riches, in Conor Cunningham and Peter Candler, eds., *Transcendence and Phenomenology* (London: SCM Press, 2007): pp. 1–20.
- MH 'More Haste, Less Speed in Theology', trans. Oliver O'Donovan, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9:3 (2007): pp. 263-282.
- DCTh *Dictionnaire critique de théologie* (3rd éd., Paris: PUF, 2007).

- CP 'Continental Philosophy', in Chad Meister and Paul Copan, eds., *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010 [2007]): pp. 651–58.
- PD *La phénoménalité de Dieu: Neuf études* (Paris: Cerf, 2008).
- PA 'The Phenomenology of Anticipation', trans. Ronald Mendoza-De Jesús and Neal DeRoo, in Neal DeRoo and John Panteleimon Manoussakis, eds., *Phenomenology and Eschatology: Not Yet In The Now* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009): pp. 15-33.
- HQD 'Preface', Richard Kearney and Joseph Stephen O'Leary, eds., *Heidegger et la question de Dieu* (Paris: PUF, 2009): pp. 7-27.
- HT *Histoire de la théologie* (Paris: Seuil, 2009).
- HH 'Homoousios et homoousios: La substance entre théologie et philosophie', *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 98 (2010): pp. 85–100.
- AI 'The Appearing and the Irreducible', trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner, in Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, eds., *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010): pp. 42-67.
- TT 'Theology and the task of thinking', in Pierre Gibert and Christoph Theobald, eds., *Theologies and Truth: The Challenges of History* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010): pp. 217-230.
- IS 'L'intuition Sacramentelle', *Revue théologique de Louvain* 42: 4 (2011): pp. 496-525.

- ED *Être en danger* (Paris: Cerf, 2011).
- QD ‘Quand je parle de Dieu...’, in Philippe Capelle-Dumont, ed., *Dieu en tant que Dieu: La question philosophique* (Paris : Cerf, 2012): pp. 213-238.
- KG ‘Knowing God through Loving Him: Beyond “Faith and Reason”’, in Jeffrey Bloechl, ed., *Christianity and Secular Reason: Classical Themes and Modern Developments* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012): pp. 137-151.
- INT ‘Interview with Jean-Yves Lacoste’, trans. Kenneth Jason Wardley, in Christopher Hackett and Tarek Dika, eds., *The Quiet Power of the Possible: Interviews in Contemporary French Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

Works by Jean-Louis Chrétien

- AS *The Ark of Speech*, trans. Andrew Brown (London: Routledge, 2004).
- HtH *Hand To Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).
- DLF *De La Fatigue* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1996).
- SA *Saint Augustin et les actes de parole* (Paris: PUF, 2002).

Works by Søren Kierkegaard

- EUD *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- PF *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

PIC *Practice in Christianity*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

SUD *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological
Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. Howard V.
Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University
Press, 1980).

UDVS *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard V.
and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
1993).

Works by Jean-Luc Marion

GWB *God Without Being: hors texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

ID *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson
(New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

BG *Being Given*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford
University Press, 2002).

Works by Maurice Merleau-Ponty

PoP *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith,
(London: Routledge, 2002).

Works by Martin Heidegger

BT *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson
(Oxford: Blackwell, 1962).

PT *The Piety of Thinking: Essays*, trans., notes and commentary
James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (Bloomington: Indiana
University Press, 1976).

Works by Edmund Husserl – Husserliana edition

- Hua III. Husserliana III, 1-2. *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch. Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie.* Ed. Karl Schuhmann. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976; *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book. General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology.* Trans. Fred Kersten. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982.
- Hua. IV Husserliana IV. *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch. Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution.* Ed. Marly Biemel. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952; *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book. Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution.* Trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989.
- Hua. VI Husserliana VI. *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie.* Ed. Walter Biemel. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954, rpt. 1962; *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy.* Trans. David Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970 (6/1-348, 357-386, 459-462, 473-475, 508-516).

- Hua. X Husserliana X. *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893—1911)*. Ed. Rudolf Boehm. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966; *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*. Trans. John Barnett Brough. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991.
- Hua. XI Husserliana XI. *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis. Aus Vorlesungs – und Forschungsmanuskripten 1918-1926*. Ed. Margot Fleischer. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966.
- Hua. XV Husserliana XV. *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Dritter Teil: 1929-1935*. Ed. Iso Kern. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973.
- Hua. XVII Husserliana XVII. *Formale und transzendente Logik. Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft*. Ed. Paul Janssen. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974; *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. Trans. Dorion Cairns. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969 (17/5-335).
- Hua. XIX Husserliana XIX, 1-2. *Logische Untersuchungen. Zweiter Band. Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*. Ed. Ursula Panzer. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984; *Logical Investigations*. 2 vols. Trans. J. N. Findlay. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, 248-869.

1. God in France

Introduction

At the heart of phenomenology there lies a paradox: ‘the real is always already there for those who have ‘eyes’ to ‘see,’ and yet ‘thought is always defined as a quest for the real’ (WCA 68). What are human beings doing when they pray? Who – or perhaps even *what* – are they? This anthropological question has inspired a variety of theological and philosophical responses, and has proven to be of particular interest to French thought and to a certain generation of thinkers.¹ The aim of this dissertation is to examine the work of one of those figures, Jean-Yves Lacoste, a philosopher and theologian currently living and working in Paris. In his introduction to Lacoste’s thought the philosopher Joeri Schrijvers posits exactly that question: ‘*Who* are we when we pray? What does the encounter with the *eschaton* do with the human being at prayer?’ In prayer, he suggests, the religious human being lives out a fragile experience, that of their vocation: here, the *eschaton* ‘overwhelms the praying human being.’² From its inception, writes Lacoste, ‘philosophical anthropology had voluntarily studied the theme of man’s paradoxical eternal vocation – a vocation addressed, more precisely, to the human in man: to his soul, to his spirit’ (AM 549). One of the aims of this dissertation will be to try and offer some kind of an answer to Schrijvers’ own question as to ‘whether a theology (and if so, what kind?) might be written in response to and in dialogue with’ Lacoste’s work.³ According to Lacoste Christological and Trinitarian arguments do not specify a pre-existent concept, but indicate ‘what kind of God remains thinkable’ (ECT 111). The notion that there is a

¹ Enda McCaffrey, *The Return of Religion in France: From Democratization to Postmetaphysics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 8.

² Joeri Schrijvers, *An Introduction to Jean-Yves Lacoste* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 73. The impossible is not a presence – according to Marion it is given to our experience not conceptually, but as saturating and overflowing our intentions, exceeding them in its incomprehensibility.

³ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 190.

particular understanding of ‘God in France’ is a consequence of not only its own particular intellectual history but the influence upon it of German thought, notably that of Heidegger.⁴ There also remains the question of ‘whether men and women are at ease’⁵ with this peculiarly ‘French God’?

1.2 Biography

Born in 1953, Lacoste enrolled in 1972 at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris at around the same time that Althusser and Derrida were teaching there, although they seem to have left little impression on the young Lacoste. He passed his *agrégation* in 1976 and was ordained as a priest in 1981. In 1983 he completed his PhD research in Toulouse, which was later revised and published in 1990 as *Note Sur le Temps*, his first monograph. This was followed in 1994 by *Expérience et l’absolu* which sketched out a phenomenology of liturgy, and to date remains the only work of his to have been translated into English (*Experience and the Absolute*, 2004).⁶ Works on aesthetics (*Le monde et l’absence de l’œuvre*, 2000), eschatology (*Présence et parousie*, 2006) and phenomenology and theology (*La phénoménalité de Dieu*, 2008) followed. He is also the editor of *Histoire de la théologie* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2009) and has, in the years since 1997, edited three editions of the *Dictionnaire critique de théologie* (which was published in English as the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Theology*, 2005). A former chaplain of Notre-Dame de Lourdes and professor at L’Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem, and member of the editorial committees for the journals *Résurrection* and the French edition of *Communio*, he is currently one of the

⁴ Peter Jonkers, ‘God in France: Heidegger’s Legacy’ in Peter Jonkers and Rudi Welten, eds., *God in France: Eight Contemporary French Thinkers on God* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005): pp. 1-42.

⁵ Joeri Schrijvers, ‘Phenomenology, liturgy, and metaphysics: The thought of Jean-Yves Lacoste’, in Jonkers and Welten, *God in France*, pp. 207-225; p. 225.

⁶ This lacuna has produced some occasionally unfair and one-sided commentaries and dissertations, such as that of Andrew C. Rawnsley, ‘From roots to rites: practice logics and the ‘heir’ to metaphysics’ (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, St Andrews, 2006).

parish priests in the Parish of St Pierre de Chaillot in Paris, for which he contributes a regular column [*billets*] on the spiritual life.⁷

Although Lacoste has received a warm reception in Romania, Italy⁸, and Spain,⁹ most of his work has yet to receive an English translation, despite being a life member of Clare Hall, Cambridge since 1991 and a visiting professor at the University of Chicago from 2001-2005; in 2004 he was appointed Lady Constance Professor of Theology at the College of Blandings.¹⁰ In 2007 Lacoste ran a series of seminars at the Academia Sambata de Sus in Romania, and in 2010 he delivered the James W. Richards lectures at the University of Virginia, where he was Visiting Professor of Religious Studies.

These 2007 seminars, I suggest, help to reveal something of Lacoste's interests. The first is entitled '*Heidegger and the Love of God*' in reference to a now

⁷ <http://www.eglise-chaillot.com/> [accessed 1st March 2012]. One of the more recent is entitled 'Along the way, God's call': 'We all know what it a path is. We all know what it is to look for our way. And we all know what it is like (not always) to find your way. All our spiritual life is perhaps like that. We are not static animals, destined to be here or there and stay to here or there: we are dynamic animals, on our way, and, as long as we put our faith in God, on the way and knowing the journey's end. But is it enough to be "stretched" towards our goal, as Paul says, to know which route to take? Not in the slightest. God calls us to him - and whoever says "call" means "calling" - the path that will lead us to him, however, is our path, the path is paved for us, and we do not discern without asking what, exactly, it is God calls us to. Our circumstances and our state of life certainly tell us a lot about the way forward. No question of becoming a Benedictine if I have an elderly mother to support. No way to enter the Order of Preachers if I have a stutter. No question of married life if I prefer solitude. And many other possible examples, which all boil down to the precept that I stated: finding your way. Ways of finding it, let us reassure ourselves, are not wanting. To those who pray, God always provides effective leadership, albeit discreetly. For those who want to find his way, God will let them find it – what this means is that we are just as able to lose interest in any map that discerns our path for us to let it go at the whim of fate. And to put it bluntly: he who wants to find his way will find it, whether he knows it or not. Because it is good to want to find your way. And good that God hears noble wishes - which, of course, still show up after the fact, as an afterthought: for example, like that of young religious who understands the meaning and usefulness of the meanders, delays, etc. which led him to ordination.'

⁸ Giovanni Costantino, *Paradosso e gloria: una lettura topologico-liturgica dell'esistenza cristiana : analisi e confronto con il pensiero di Jean-Yves Lacoste* (Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 2008).

⁹ Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experiencia y absoluto: Cuestiones que se encuentran en discusión sobre la humanidad del hombre*, trans. Tania Checchi González (Salamanca: Sígueme/Universidad De Oviedo Servicio De Publicaciones, 2010).

¹⁰ Lacoste, an Anglophile without a full-time academic position, has been a member of the college since 1998; in fact both titles are an allusion to the novels of P.G. Wodehouse (Lacoste does, on occasion, use the pseudonym 'Galahad Threepwood'); by the time of its third edition in 2007 the entire editorial team of the *Dictionnaire* found themselves members of the college's staff. It has nonetheless been struck from Lacoste's Wikipedia entry by an over-zealous and under-read editor.

famous footnote in §29 of *Being and Time* in which Heidegger quotes Pascal and Augustine with reference to the notion of *Befindlichkeit* – as Lacoste acknowledges these are ‘strange quotations which are the only mention of a love of “ things divine” in the whole book’¹¹. Nonetheless both Heidegger’s *Promotion* and *Habilitationsschrift* theses, writes Lacoste, ‘bear the hallmark of his brief theological studies’ (HQD 8).

Some early reviews of *Being and Time* saw in it ‘the proper conceptualization of man’s situation in the world according to Luther’. This, says Lacoste, indicates ‘a basic truth: man is born without God’ (HQD 11). Aware as we are that Heidegger elsewhere defined philosophy as ‘a “godless” discipline even before the publication of *Being and Time*, a thorough reading of these quotations and their context’, Lacoste suggests, would ‘be fruitful’: ‘to take stock of what man is before God, one must have taken the measure of what he is without God’ (HQD 12). The second seminar, ‘*A theological subversion of the “fact” of existence*’ suggests that if ‘we admit that the description of “facticity” – the fact of existence – in *Being and Time* may be accepted as a standard description, we must nonetheless concede that non-standard phenomena are fairly common’.¹² The seminar focuses upon a few examples, with ‘a view (a) to showing how they are merely marginal on the map of existence (the Heideggerian tactic), and (b) to suggesting that man may be defined as a “being which does more than exist” – and therefore that there may be room for a “spiritual life”.’ The final seminar, entitled ‘*The theological neutrality of phenomenology*’ is oriented around Husserl’s definition of phenomenology as the ‘science of pure consciousness’. Consciousness, Lacoste suggests, ‘however “pure” it is, is always a consciousness-of, and directed toward whatever appears to us’. This “whatever”, he suggests, is what

¹¹ <http://www.theology.phenomenology.ro/courses.html> (accessed 23 April 2011).

¹² See François Raffoul and Eric Sean Nelson, eds., *Rethinking Facticity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

needs to be elucidated. The elucidation will allow us to spell out the theological “neutrality” of phenomenology: that is, the fact that all reality, insofar as it appears, is by right the object of a phenomenological description – which means that Husserlian phenomenology knows of no boundary between philosophy and theology’.¹³

A self-described ‘hybrid’, comfortable slipping between patristic, philosophical and theological studies, Lacoste (alluding to Heidegger’s remark¹⁴ that the only possible biography of a philosopher was that ‘He was born, he worked, and he died’) offers us this brief self-portrait:

Having not yet honoured the third point, I have let myself be overwhelmed by the second. This has indeed been quite a circuitous route. I went to the rue d’Ulm with the intention of learning some Greek, and along the way discovered the Greek Fathers, then stumbled from the pre-scholastic theology of the Fathers into the post-scholastic thought of Kierkegaard (without ever losing what phenomenology I had); I guess that I’m a classico-philosophical-theological hybrid. The chance to live in several countries (Israel, Belgium, England, and Germany) opened up some interesting perspectives: be it the analytic philosophy, for example, that I learned (or rather didn’t learn at all) at Oxbridge to the phenomenology that I learned in France (and unlearned in Germany).¹⁵

¹³ <http://www.theology.phenomenology.ro/courses.html> (accessed 23 April 2011).

¹⁴ Heidegger apparently made this remark at the beginning of a lecture on Aristotle. On this incident see Sean. J. McGrath, *Heidegger: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 8 and Thomas Sheehan, ‘Heidegger’s Early Year’s: Fragments for a Philosophical Biography’, in Thomas Sheehan, ed., *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010): pp. 3-20; p. 3.

¹⁵ http://www.puf.com/wiki/Auteur:Jean-Yves_Lacoste [accessed 23 April 2011].

The result he says is ‘a certain non-belonging perhaps’ on his part but from the start, he reveals, ‘all my work was designed to explore the border area¹⁶ that divides – but doesn’t actually separate – philosophy and theology. So instead of postulating the existence of a limit (such that x is on one side and y the other), I have defended – and still do – the existence of a borderland (PP 194) where no one knows exactly if x belongs to theology or philosophy, and where most often x belongs to both. To do this, my tools have been those of phenomenology, as much Husserlian as they are Heideggerian.’¹⁷ Lacoste has recently reiterated this point (INT 25-26), in which he makes even more explicit what he regards as the inseparability of and existence of a borderland between the two disciplines.

1.3 A secular drama

During the twentieth century French philosophy had a strongly secular and often anti-religious slant: Henri Bergson’s defence of religion had a deleterious effect upon his reputation while Gabriel Marcel’s religiously oriented existentialism was eclipsed by that of Sartre; Paul Ricoeur’s own religious commitment meant that his phenomenology and hermeneutics often received scant attention. Despite important Catholic philosophers such as Marcel, Emmanuel Mounier and Thomists such as Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson, as the generation of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida came of age in the 1960s, ‘religious philosophy was barely a blip on the horizon’; some thinkers, like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Louis Althusser, had been believers in their youth, ‘but sloughed off religion as they came to intellectual political maturity’.¹⁸ Says Lacoste, as Kant has shown, there is ‘no rational

¹⁶ Christopher Hackett elsewhere renders this phrase as ‘wilderness’ – see ‘Anthropomorphism and the meaning of life’, *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics* 1:1&2 (2012): pp. 201-224; p. 216.

¹⁷ http://www.puf.com/wiki/Auteur:Jean-Yves_Lacoste [accessed 23 April 2011].

¹⁸ Gary Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible: French philosophy since 1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 149.

antinomy concerning the existence of God'. It is 'not possible to demonstrate that God does not exist. The metaphysical definition of God, as supreme Being, is such that atheism is not the simple antithesis of theism. In other words, atheism is not primarily an opposition to a rational thesis concerning the existence of God' (ECT 107).

Lacoste's position can be seen as part of a wider return of religion (and religious truth) within France, one which is 'accompanied by a profound anti-philosophy in the way it relies quite simply on what Badiou calls the subjective and *declarative* power of faith'.¹⁹ One thinker identifies in Lacoste's essay, 'Towards a Kenotic Treatment of the Question of Man', just such a rejection of the modern transcendental subject:

The fool is inferior to the philosopher, inferior to the scholar, inferior to the politician. He effaces himself behind them, and it comes as no surprise that he receives no mention when we try to think the insuperably human person. But he does not efface himself without burdening us with a problem; what if, liturgically reduced to the essential or even to almost less than the essential, the minimal man's (fool's) experience of himself and of the Absolute is an experience richer than the philosopher's or the scholar's? What if he has arrived at the truth of his being and has taken his (pre-eschatological) capacity for experience to the limit? (EA 187)

McCaffrey traces here 'a shared narrative' common to both the democratisation of the individual (as self-sufficient and politically pragmatic) and its philosophical counterpart in a new post-subjectivity, one fostered by political crises in 'historical French republican universalism' and a philosophical crisis in metaphysical ontology. He argues that the process of democratisation within France post-1980

¹⁹ McCaffrey, *Return of Religion in France*, p. 8.

‘elevated the identity of the individual believer to a positive and credible place in France’s socio-political infrastructure’ while at the same time phenomenology ‘‘demoted’ the religious subject’ restoring him ‘to what Lacoste calls his appropriate dwelling place of ‘naïveté’’.²⁰ Specifically, the unconditional givenness articulated by phenomenology calls this proto-subject into being and ‘in turn bestows upon him name and logos in the form of ‘gifts’’.²¹ Phenomenologically speaking ‘‘givenness’ (and being) is founded on a call ... to which there is a delayed response’. Theologically a subject responds to a call of love from God ‘whom the subject can never identify or define in a name, but whom for this very reason the subject will name over and again’.²²

Within this context, and with reference to Schrijvers’ pioneering work in Lacoste studies, McCaffrey²³ concludes that ‘the common denominator’ among new philosophers of theology like Jean-Luc Marion, Lacoste and Emmanuel Levinas is their attempt to redo theology by refiguring ‘the subject’s adherence to being as a decentring that is ‘not contaminated’ or as a transcendence supposedly, as Marion would say, without ‘residue or perturbation’ by being or immanence’.²⁴ For Schrijvers, however, this is open to question, since it involves transcendence signalling itself ‘purely, iconically and univocally’.

In fact, as Schrijvers contends, the best explanation which can be inferred from the ‘residues and contaminations’ found in the works of Levinas, Marion, and Lacoste is that ‘ontotheology cannot be overcome’ and that these ‘metaphysical

²⁰ Ibid. p. 9.

²¹ Ibid. p. 137.

²² *Op. cit.* citing Thomas A. Carlson, ‘Converting the Given into the Seen: Introductory Remarks on Theological and Phenomenological Vision’ (ID xxv).

²³ McCaffrey, *Return of Religion in France*, p. 118.

²⁴ Joeri Schrijvers, ‘On Doing Theology ‘after’ Ontotheology: Notes on a French Debate’, *New Blackfriars* 87 (2006): pp. 302-314; p. 312. [Quotation corrected].

residues' orientate us in a different direction from that taken by many authors on the theme of 'overcoming ontotheology'.²⁵

The theological deployment of phenomenology attempts to respect the phenomenality of God and resists the objectification or reduction of the Divine to the 'supreme Being' of ontotheology, to an object of philosophical preconception. Scientism, for its part, risks reducing humanity merely to objects in the world, objects that might be explained by objectifying theories (such as those of biology, or psychology); writes Lacoste, 'Confidence in the powers of reason and mathematical science is indeed atheism, for it implicitly excludes any transcendence' (ECT 107). Preeminent among the phenomenological tradition was Merleau-Ponty who has pointed out that humanity should remember that its knowledge of the world, including scientific knowledge, arises from a first-person perspective, and that science would be meaningless without this experiential dimension (PoP 502). Modern civilization, contends Lacoste, based on the rationality of the natural sciences, even makes a kind of common sense out of atheism: 'It is belief that has become absurd and dangerous' (ECT 107). Atheism is thus interpreted 'as a tragic gesture of self-mutilation brought about by denial of the most precious realm of human experience' (ECT 108).²⁶

In 2007 Lacoste offered a series of courses at the Academia Sambata de Sus in the town of Sibiu in Brasov, Romania. These three seminars help to reveal something of Lacoste's interests. The first, entitled '*Heidegger and the Love of God*', refers to that now famous footnote in §29 of *Being and Time* in which Heidegger quotes Pascal and Augustine with reference to the notion of *Befindlichkeit* (variously translated as

²⁵ Joeri Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings? The Decentering of the Subject in Recent French Phenomenology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), p. 2.

²⁶ See Henri de Lubac, trans. Edith M. Riley, Anne Englund Nash, and Mark Sebanc, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995). Lubac points out that not only did Heidegger refuse to even allow the question of God to be raised, Max Scheler 'went so far as to speak of "postulatory atheism" as the essential characteristic of modern man.', p. 59.

“finedness”, “disclosure”, “state of mind”, and, “attunement”) – as Lacoste acknowledges these are ‘strange quotations which are the only mention of a love of “divine things” in the whole book’.²⁷ Since Heidegger defined philosophy as ‘a “godless” discipline before the publication of *Being and Time*, a thorough reading of these quotations and their context’, Lacoste suggests, will prove ‘fruitful’. The second seminar – ‘*A theological subversion of the “fact” of existence*’ – suggests that if ‘we accept the description of “facticity” (the fact of existence) in *Being and Time* as standard, ‘we must nonetheless concede that non-standard phenomena are fairly common’. The seminar focuses upon a select few of those phenomena, with the intent of showing how they are only marginal to the Heideggerian map of existence, hinting that mankind might be defined as a ‘more than existing being’ and therefore that there may be room for a “spiritual life”.’ The final course ‘*The theological neutrality of phenomenology*’ is oriented around Husserl’s definition of phenomenology as the ‘science of pure consciousness’. Consciousness, Lacoste suggests, ‘however “pure” it is, is always conscious-of, and directed toward whatever appears to us. It is this “whatever” which needs to be elucidated, an elucidation which will allow Lacoste to spell out the theological “neutrality” of phenomenology: that is, ‘the fact that all reality, insofar as it appears, is by right the object of a phenomenological description – which means that Husserlian phenomenology knows of no boundary between philosophy and theology’.²⁸

Lacoste has published widely over the last thirty years, producing a diverse body of reviews, essays and monographs addressing various questions in philosophy, phenomenology and theology, and the relationship between them. This dissertation will look at these relationships as they appear in Lacoste’s writings, which are situated

²⁷ <http://www.theology.phenomenology.ro/courses.html#3> (accessed 1st March 2012).

²⁸ <http://www.theology.phenomenology.ro/courses.html#3> (accessed 1st March 2012).

within what is known as ‘continental philosophy’. This particular style of philosophy is ‘less a seamless fabric than a patchwork of diverse strands.’²⁹ It is found in the non-English speaking countries of continental Europe and is predominantly influenced by German philosophy – notably the likes of Hegel, Friederich Schleiermacher, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger – as well as French thinkers such as Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, and Derrida.³⁰ Lacoste’s thinking also bears the influence of thinkers more usually associated with a philosophical tradition considered antithetical to continental thinking, the school of thought referred to as ‘Anglo-American philosophy’ – figures such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Willard van Quine and Bertrand Russell.

It has been suggested that the history of post-war French philosophy might be nothing more than a series of ‘footnotes to Heidegger’.³¹ Heidegger’s role has been likened to that of ‘a massive, yet rarely visible dark star’ which determines the nature and course of French philosophical debate.³² Neither can the influence of the French higher education be underestimated. As Gary Gutting observes ‘almost all prominent philosophers [in France] are *normaliens*’³³ – that is, like Lacoste, graduates of the Ecole Normale Supérieure.³⁴ The French system, which gives priority to success in competitive examinations, also allows charismatic teachers to gather around themselves a “chapel” of disciples to propagate their ideas and their agenda. Marion recalls that one of his teachers, Jean Beaufret, while a passionate Heideggerian, rarely mentioned him, and yet his course was based upon a Heideggerian reading of history

²⁹ Richard Kearney, ‘Introduction’, in Kearney, ed., *Routledge History of Philosophy – Volume VIII: Twentieth Century Continental Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 1.

³⁰ Indeed, Alain Badiou goes so far as to claim that French philosophy has been defined by what he calls the ‘German move’, effectively ‘a French appropriation of German philosophy’ in the ‘search for new ways of handling the relation of concept to existence by recourse to German philosophical traditions’ through which ‘German philosophy was transformed into something completely new’. Badiou, ‘The Adventure of French Philosophy’, *New Left Review* 35 (2005): pp. 67-77; p. 70.

³¹ Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible*, p. 50.

³² ‘*Being and Time* could be plausibly read as a critique of the metaphysics that had dominated modern Western thought at least since Descartes’. Ibid. p. 55.

³³ Ibid. p. 10.

³⁴ Those few exceptions are instead graduates of the Sorbonne.

and ‘without knowing it. I had imbibed ... a Heideggerian vision of the history of metaphysics’.³⁵ This would, in turn, inspire thinkers such as Marion and Jean-Francois Courtine to develop their own quite independent Heideggerianism.³⁶ As we shall see, Lacoste’s own work turns upon a rethinking of the Heideggerian analytic in the interest of ‘developing a constructive liturgical theology’³⁷, but also bears the influence of figures as diverse as Kierkegaard and Maximus the Confessor.

1.4 The French Hegel

Between 1933 and 1939 the Russian émigré philosopher Alexandre Kojève gave a series of seminars on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris. Whilst at the time this idiosyncratic reading of Hegel had more of an impact on novelists and poets than philosophers, this short-lived Hegel renaissance had a tremendous influence on post-war French thinkers. A great deal of post-war French philosophers sought to articulate a secular philosophical vision of history that made sense of human existence – and thereby offered support for political activism – without making that existent the centre of the world; as Gutting puts it, they discovered that their ‘commitment to leftist political goals of individual liberation’ was incompatible with absolutist Hegelianism and its reading of history – thus, their philosophical projects required them to come to terms with Hegel.³⁸

The likes of Merleau-Ponty, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Lacan, Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida would all struggle with the seemingly all-encompassing Hegelian system expounded by Kojève. By the late 1950s and early

³⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, ‘Entretien du 3 décembre 1999’, in Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger en France* (2 vols., Paris : Aubin Michel, 2001): ii. p. 210. Translated and cited in Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible*, p. 10 n. 7.

³⁶ Jean-François Courtine, ‘Phénoménologie et herméneutique de la religion’, in Jean-Louis Chrétien, Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Luc Marion et al, *Phénoménologie et théologie : Présentation de Jean-François Courtine* (Paris : Criterion, 1992).

³⁷ Kevin Hart, ‘The Liturgical Reduction’, *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 15:1 (2008): pp. 43-66; p. 61.

³⁸ Gutting, p. 23.

1960s, Hegelianism had become an object of scorn among French philosophers, emblematic of everything contemporary philosophy needed to overcome – subjectivism (a theoretical emphasis on subjective experience), metaphysics, and reason. The approach offered by Jean Wahl in particular ‘had the advantage of allowing French philosophers to assimilate Hegel’s phenomenology – construed as the careful description of concrete experience – to that practiced by Husserl and Heidegger in *Being and Time*’.³⁹ Indeed, according to one commentator if one adds the vocabulary of Hegelian unhappy consciousness to a Heideggerized Husserlian phenomenology ‘you have the means to carry out Sartre’s ontology of freedom.’⁴⁰ Whereas Wahl took Hegel’s unhappy consciousness as the key to understanding his system, Kojève’s reading was based on the section of the *Phenomenology* on the master-slave dialectic. Both, however, toned down Hegel’s absolutism, instead reading the dialectic in terms of a purely human struggle.

It was Kojève’s interpretation which was to exert a profound influence. In Hegel’s phenomenology human experience becomes ‘the privileged model’ for the life of the spirit, Hegel having ‘honed a language well suited’ to describing the ‘complex ‘torsions of consciousness’’.⁴¹ Indeed, it is arguable that ‘their most significant effect lies in the widespread belief that tragically violent experience – sometimes meaningful, but more frequently gratuitous and aimless, and thus supposedly incapable of being recuperated into an alienating project – characterizes the living of an authentic human life’ (HtH ix). The extent to which the tragic impacts upon theology is examined in chapter three.

Kojève’s philosophical heir Jean Hyppolite published the first French translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1939 and like that of Kojève before him,

³⁹ Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible*, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 26.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 25.

Hyppolite's Hegel was to prove attractive to French philosophers (Deleuze for example). On this account Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is seen as an attempt to refute anthropology (that is, any epistemology or account of knowledge that separates the known object from its knowing subject) by showing that any distinction between being as an object and a subject's reflection on being can only end in contradiction. Eliminating those contradictions requires the unification of distinct subjects and objects into a single self-knowing subject; Hegel's phenomenology thus becomes a matter of eliminating the hypothesis of an alien knowledge.

[T]he *Phenomenology* starts from human reflection [anthropology] in order to show that human reflection and what follows from it to lead to the absolute knowledge that they presuppose.⁴²

Thus, the difference between reflection and being becomes the difference of being itself – knowledge is thus always Absolute knowledge; that is, the self-knowledge of the Absolute, whose life includes all reality (including subjects and objects). Hyppolite ultimately abandoned Hegel's claim that philosophy could culminate in a "totality" that synthesized and reconciled all oppositions; philosophy was, as Foucault claimed of Husserl, 'an endless task, against the background of an infinite horizon'. The finality of absolute knowledge was replaced by the idea of "continuous recommencement", and the end of self-consciousness by repeated interrogation (reminiscent of Kierkegaard's category of repetition). Like Bergson before him, Hyppolite sought to re-establish contact with the non-philosophical, the irreducibility of which led him back to the question of how philosophy might find its beginning in the non-philosophical – an idea which would assume various forms over

⁴² Gilles Deleuze, 'Appendix: Review of Jean Hyppolite, *Logique et existence* in Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, trans. Leonard Lawlor and Amit Sen, pp. 191-5 ; p. 192. cited in Gutting, p. 39.

the twentieth century: for instance, the ethical (in the thought of Levinas) or the religious (as in the case of Marion).

According to the influential work of Jean-Francois Lyotard postmodernity was characterized by such an acceptance of the plural, and the concomitant rejection of grand narratives of progress and explanation. It was also characterized by a non-foundationalism, hybridity, an appeal to a certain excess⁴³, the employment of masks, irony, anti-realism, and self-conscious forms of representation. As such postmodernism represented both an aesthetic and a critical moment within the ideology of the modern – that is, a specific cultural movement in late capitalism. Even at its most basic, postmodernism cannot be reduced to one viewpoint or even a small collection of viewpoints (it thus resists the ‘eidetic reduction’ practised by classical phenomenology) – it is, however, usually characterised by anti-essentialism, anti-realism and anti-foundationalism. Of course, arguments against firm foundations of knowledge can be found among ancient Greek philosopher; although, as Kevin Hart notes, postmodernists normally take their specific bearings from the declaration of Friedrich Nietzsche’s madman, Zarathustra, that ‘God is dead’.⁴⁴ Indeed, Lacoste himself makes a similar observation, during his discussion of Henri de Lubac and the idea of a pure nature:

Is what is at stake in Nietzsche one possible consequence of Hegelianism and a radical alternative to Hegel? The question is worth asking. Nietzsche indeed needs to be listened to here for having linked two events, the “death of God” and what we will allow ourselves to name the “death of history”. It seems appropriate that the link does not seem to impose itself in a binding fashion

⁴³ This is a different but related conception of excess from that articulated in the phenomenology and concomitant theology of Jean-Luc Marion. See *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ Kevin Hart, *Postmodernism: A Beginner’s Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004), p. vi.

and that atheism, starting with that of the Hegelian Left, adapts very well (in practice) an idea of history, such that it even managed to acquire an eschatology. (MAO 39)⁴⁵

What Lacoste is here doing is drawing attention to what he regards as the consequences to the Hegelian thinking of the absolute, its concomitant phenomenology (one which is, one should note, not sensitive to the demands of Husserlian method) in relation to what Henri de Lubac identified as the ‘internal causes of the weakening and disappearance of the sense of the sacred’.⁴⁶ Jean Greisch acknowledged that to read Nietzsche is also to learn to defend oneself against him: ‘The best critical attitude to Nietzsche is to take [him] seriously’.⁴⁷ Religion, as the work of René Girard has shown, can meet Nietzsche’s challenge by confronting its darker side, and by embracing critical lucidity and intellectual honesty; as Greisch notes: ‘No one passes unscathed through a reading of Nietzsche, for he obliges us to face truths which wound and hurt, instead of holding on only to those that console’.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Nietzsche ‘invites us to resist the blackmail that equates every doubt to a sin and would have us jump into faith as into a lake, to pass our lives swimming there’.⁴⁹ In his review of Greisch’s *opus*, Joseph O’Leary (one of the leading commentators upon ‘Heidegger et la question de Dieu’) observes that an honest

⁴⁵ Wayne Hankey also identifies the following considerations of Lubac’s understanding of Hegel, which were included alongside the original publication of Lacoste’s essay: Olivier Boulnois, ‘Les deux fins de l’homme: L’impossible anthropologie et le repli de la théologie,’ Lacoste, ‘Le désir et l’inexigible. Préambules à une lecture,’ and Bruno Pinchard, ‘Sujet théologique, sujet initiatique. L’interprétation du joachimisme par Henri de Lubac et la figure de Dante,’ all in *Les Études Philosophiques* (Avril-Juin 1995) [« Henri de Lubac et la philosophie »], pp. 205-222 (esp. p. 208): pp. 223-246 (esp. pp. 232-38) and pp. 247-257 (esp. pp. 248-49).

⁴⁶ Henri de Lubac, ‘Internal Causes of the Weakening and Disappearance of the Sense of the Sacred’ *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 18:1 (Winter/Spring 2011): pp. 37-50; originally published in *Bulletin des aumôniers catholiques. Chantiers de la jeunesse* 31 (August 1942). Cf. *Résistance chrétienne à l’antisémitisme*, p. 116 [ET: *Christian Resistance to Anti-Semitism*].

⁴⁷ Jean Greisch, *Le Buisson ardent et les lumières de la raison: L’invention de la philosophie de la religion – Volume 1: Héritages et héritiers du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, Collection ‘Philosophie & Théologie’, 2002) p. 566.

⁴⁸ Greisch, *Le Buisson ardent*, p. 567.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 570.

religious reading of Nietzsche should concede the ‘truth of [his] insights into the flimsy, contingent, all-too-human texture of religious traditions, yet would rescue a function for these traditions as skilful means, which in their very emptiness can operate as conventional vehicles of ultimacy’. that such an approach would mean that ‘the idealizing extraction of essential religious choices from history, practiced by Schleiermacher and Troeltsch’ (and whose impact upon the philosophy of religion Lacoste is so scathing of) might then ‘yield to a full recognition of the brokenness of humankind’s religious constructions, which at their best can aspire only after a provisional, contextual adequacy’. This ‘brokenness’, as we have seen, is manifest for Lacoste in his description of theology as a *theologia peccatorum* or *theologia viatorum* subject to the ‘law of fragmentation’. O’Leary concludes that ‘this would clear the horizon for the phenomenological recognition of the quality of ultimacy attaching to classical moments in religious history, especially the founding events and scriptures, and for their retrieval in contemporary perspective’.⁵⁰

Philosophy for Deleuze cannot be anything except ontology; for Lacoste the Christian God counters ‘an ontology of the will to power with a dialectic of crucified and conquering love’ and who ‘confronts humanity as the giver of a future (in an age of the “eternal return of the same”)’ through an ‘economy of forgiveness’ that forces the dismissal of *ressentiment*. Hence theology’s response to the a-theological intentions of modern atheism was to purify its speech of any non-theological element (ECT 111). Heidegger, like Husserl before him, thinks in terms of specific regional ontologies which interpret and clarify their distinctive regions under the guidance of an implicit ontology. The task of phenomenology therefore is to both critique and make explicit that ontological dimension, and ask whether our (pre)understanding of

⁵⁰ Joseph S. O’Leary, ‘Review of Greisch, *Le Buisson ardent*’ *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29:1–2 (2002): pp. 175–180; p. 179.

the being of a certain kind of beings corresponds to the way they are actually given to us. Theological concepts have as their ontological determinants meanings which are pre-Christian and which ‘can thus be grasped purely rationally’ and ‘necessarily contain *that* understanding of being which is constitutive of human Dasein, insofar as it exists at all’.⁵¹

However, Heidegger states that the demand that philosophy serve as a corrective to theology ‘is not made by philosophy as such but rather by theology’⁵²; in other words, it is for *theological* reasons that theology turns to philosophy and we shall see how the potential of a philosophical corrective to theology will be important for Lacoste. So what might these reasons be? Ontology, Heidegger tells us, functions only as a corrective ‘to the ontic, and in particular pre-Christian, meanings of basic theological concepts’.⁵³ According to Heidegger’s hermeneutics, every interpretation is guided by pre-understanding and the Christian theologian has the task of interpreting the presuppositions of the Christian faith from “pre-Christian” sources, some of which may be pagan or secular (such as the impact of Greek philosophy, scientific rationalism or materialistic consumerism upon the culture of the theologian). Since these pre-Christian ideas have already found their way into theological thinking, Heidegger suggests that theologians might need assistance in weeding out the ways secular presuppositions may have distorted their interpretations. Thus, Heideggerian ontology offers theologians a potential tool.

Nonetheless, the theologian remains in the service of the faith which is their inspiration and ‘the mortal enemy of the form of existence which is an essential part of philosophy’; a fundamental opposition remains ‘between faithfulness and a

⁵¹ Martin Heidegger, ‘Phenomenology and theology’, trans. James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo in William McNeill, ed., *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): pp. 39-62; p. 51.

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 53.

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 52.

human's free appropriation of his whole Dasein'.⁵⁴ Moreover, in an era which has seen the end of master-narratives, the "death of God"⁵⁵ provides 'the master event of an age and the presupposition of an experience of the world'. The characteristic of this age of "nihilism") is not that 'the existence of God is denied but that it is forgotten' (ECT 111).

1.5 Between phenomenology and theology

Some thinkers – like Christopher Watkin and Robert Cumming – have debated the merits phenomenology over deconstruction; Watkin even dares to suggest that phenomenology might 'have had its day'.⁵⁶ Its founder Edmund Husserl recast the term from its earlier Hegelian and Kantian usage in his 1901 *Logical Investigations* and as early as 1926 theologian Paul Tillich claimed that phenomenology was 'of decisive importance for the philosophy of the twentieth century.' Phenomenology, he wrote, avoids 'dissolving objects' through critical analysis, exploring instead 'the essence of the things themselves quite apart from the question of their existence'.⁵⁷ Its basic premise is that it is difficult to capture the essence of everyday lived experience completely and accurately. This perspectivism (the experience of an object – such as a cube – from a certain perspective) is natural for embodied human beings, who are restricted to a spatiotemporal view of the world. Objects are presented in experience as transcending our experience of them. But how can experience be essentially perspectival and at the same time present objects to us as transcending our perspective of them? Phenomenology attempts to account for this possibility. For Husserl

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 53.

⁵⁵ See Frederiek Depoortere, *The Death of God: An investigation into the history of the Western concept of God* (London: T & T Clark, 2008).

⁵⁶ Christopher Watkin, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction? The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Luc Nancy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 1.

⁵⁷ Paul Tillich, *The Religious Situation*, trans. H. Richard Niebuhr, (New York: Meridian Books Inc., 1956), p. 75.

phenomenology was the study of consciousness, and the intentionality of consciousness and its structures independent of questions about the reality of the objects of consciousness, investigations which culminated in the so-called ‘transcendental ego’.

As what constitutes the world of objects for us from our experience these structures are characterised by a certain transcendence although, at its simplest, phenomenology (later redefined as the ‘science of being’ by Husserl’s pupil Heidegger, for whom philosophy was as fundamental for ‘being’ as religion) is the study of human aptitude for experience, rather than what transcends it.

Accounts of *immanent* and *radical* transcendence rightly draw attention to their corresponding philosophies of religion (what Tillich called ‘the two types of philosophy of religion’⁵⁸): *metaphysical identity thinking* (an identity between logos and reality or between thinking and being, such as that found in Schleiermacher) and its critique *difference thinking* (being coincides neither with beings or thinking, as found in Heidegger). The “new phenomenology” exemplified in recent years by Marion and Lacoste has been accused of being corrupted by the introduction of a ‘God’ usually excluded from phenomenological inquiry.⁵⁹ This so-called “theological turn” in French phenomenology exposes tensions between philosophy and theology, notably over the question of metaphysical theology or ontotheology, where divine transcendence is compromised by philosophical and metaphysical notions of being that claim conceptual equivalence with the God of biblical revelation – ‘a concept may be said to function in an idolatrous way by restricting God to the services he

⁵⁸ Paul Tillich, ‘The Two Types in of Philosophy of Religion’ in R. C. Kimball, ed., *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959): pp. 10-29.

⁵⁹ Dominique Janicaud, ‘The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology’, trans. Bernard G. Prusak in Dominique Janicaud, Jean-Francois Courtine, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, and Paul Ricœur, *Phenomenology and the ‘Theological Turn’: The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000): pp. 16-103.

performs for a particular metaphysics' (ECT 110). Ontotheology, Heidegger suggested, silences this God in favour of the ontotheological "God of the philosophers". Phenomenology offers ways with which to address the manner of God's appearing in the world without resorting to the often banal "metaphysics of presence" which denotes ontotheology and which, according to Heidegger, characterised the history of Western philosophy. As the Belgian theologian Lieven Boeve summarises these thinkers start with 'the Heideggerian critique of Western rationality, but in a second move go beyond Heidegger and present, as the starting point for a religious thinking, a concept of religious experience at odds with modern thought patterns'.⁶⁰ Indeed, says Lacoste, Christianity is not really made for these times.⁶¹

1.6 Between two Gods

The renewed emphasis on the pre-conceptual by the likes of Merleau-Ponty has been of considerable interest to theology. Here it has been adopted as a strategy in the 'overcoming of metaphysics' [*dépasser la métaphysique*] and recent theological resistance to an 'ontotheology' that attempts to capture the divine within pre-existing philosophical categories such as Being, reducing God to the *causa sui* or 'supreme Being'; as Lacoste notes, the 'overcoming of metaphysics is a theological – as well as philosophical – task (HQD 15). However, the "new phenomenology" represented by Marion and Levinas has been accused of being corrupted by the introduction of a 'God' that has traditionally been excluded from phenomenological inquiry; indeed, Lacoste exemplifies what Sylvain Camilleri has called this 'paradigme théologico-

⁶⁰ Lieven Boeve, 'Theology and the interruption of experience', in Lieven Boeve, Yves de Maeseneer, Stijn van den Bossche, eds., *Religious experience and Contemporary Theological Epistemology* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005): pp. 11-40; p. 30.

⁶¹ 'Interview with Jean-Yves Lacoste', *Dilema Veche* no. 267 (March 27) 2009 [accessed 11th January 2012].

religieux des nouvelles phénoménologies de la religion'.⁶² The so-called “theological turn” in French phenomenology has exposed some of the tensions that persist between philosophy and theology, notably over this question of ontotheology, where divine transcendence is seen as compromised by philosophical and metaphysical notions of ‘being’ that claim conceptual equivalence with the God of biblical revelation. As we shall see, Lacoste rejects any rigid distinction between the disciplines – investigating the phenomenality of God, he argues, implies investigating *all* phenomenality, a strategy which in fact throws into question Pascal’s distinction between the God of Abraham and the God of the philosophers.⁶³

The practitioners of the “turn” were rebuked by the late Dominique Janicaud for seemingly conflating phenomenology and theology contrary to the demands of Husserlian method; indeed, one of Lacoste’s earliest commentators expressed their reluctance about this new phenomenology.⁶⁴ By contrast, Lacoste suggests that it was Janicaud who actually made ‘a major phenomenological blunder’ when he assumed that phenomenology deals only with the visible (or the audible), and ‘that the play of sensory ‘matter’ and intentional ‘form’ gives access to the visible and the visible only’. In fact there is no perception of the visible without a co-perception of the invisible: ‘perception grasps – *Auffassung* – simultaneously the visible and the invisible’ (TP 5).

One of the best-known theological explorations of the idea of a post-metaphysical God has been Marion’s *God Without Being*. As John Milbank notes, this

⁶² Sylvain Camilleri, *Phénoménologie de la religion et herméneutique théologique dans la pensée du jeune Heidegger: commentaire analytique des Fondements philosophiques de la mystique médiévale (1916-1919)* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), p. 344.

⁶³ Lacoste, ‘Kierkegaard’, in L. Jaffro and M. Labrune, eds., *Gradus Philosophique: Un répertoire d’introductions méthodiques à la lecture des œuvres* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996): pp. 382-397; p.384.

⁶⁴ Jean Greisch, *Le buisson ardent et les lumières de la raison: L’invention de la philosophie de la religion – Tome 2: Les approches phénoménologiques et analytiques* (Paris: Cerf, 2002) pp. 283-284.

places Marion in ‘a curious final shift in the course of twentieth-century theology’.⁶⁵ Thinking from out of the resources of revelation alone is ‘specifically seen by Marion and many others as according precisely with the demand of modern philosophy in its ‘phenomenological’ variant that we should accept nothing as true except according to the conditions in which a phenomenon presents itself to us in excess of any preceding categorical assumptions’.⁶⁶

Milbank argues that one might even go further: ‘not only does the God known from himself alone fall within the phenomenological understanding of ‘donation’ as the one transcendental condition for simultaneous existing and knowing; this God *most of all fulfils* the demand for pure phenomenality, for reduction to ‘the thing itself’, since in this instance solely it is impossible for anything in my experience, including my own subjectivity, to persist outside of the donating gift as the independent site of my reception of it’.⁶⁷

The God of phenomenology, ‘whether announced through an ultimate ‘natural’ appearance, or else revealed through historical events, retains, against all conceptual idolatry, his absolute initiative, and yet operates as the phenomenon of all phenomena, the absolutely preceding call which ‘interlocutes’⁶⁸ us as subjects and provides transcendental permission for all other awareness’.⁶⁹ For Lacoste the holy fool refuses to settle for the peaceful totality offered in and through the promises of Easter, instead hiding himself away to pray.

⁶⁵ John Milbank, ‘Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,’ *New Blackfriars* 76: 895 (1995) pp. 325-343; p. 325.

⁶⁶ Op. cit.

⁶⁷ Op. cit.

⁶⁸ ‘Before ever knowing by what or by whom, the *I* surprises itself, as *interloqué*, and has always done so.’ Jean-Luc Marion, ‘*L’Interloqué*,’ in *Who Comes After the Subject?* Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy, eds., (London: Routledge, 1991): pp. 236-245; p. 245.

⁶⁹ Milbank, ‘Only Theology’, p. 325.

Levinas' project was grounded in his conviction that the 'philosophical discourse of the West claims the amplitude of an all-encompassing structure or of an ultimate comprehension. It compels every other discourse to justify itself before philosophy.' Theology, he felt, 'accepts this vassalage'.⁷⁰ The work of Marion has been closely associated with the issue of ontotheology, particularly his argument for a 'God *without* being'. Levinas' own attempt to escape a Western philosophical tradition that he felt that had entailed "a destruction of transcendence" was guided by Plato's phrase "beyond being" (*epekeina tes ousias*) and sought both an ethical transcendence and to refute the suggestion of Derrida (the *bête noire* of postmodernity, undertaking a demolition of 'everything ... that seems tied to metaphysics' [ECT 111]) that the Greek *logos* had the power 'to encompass whatever stood outside it'.⁷¹ Yet as Schrijvers has noted 'both Levinas and Marion insist that the problem of ontotheology has not yet been overcome'.⁷² Both thinkers are indebted to Heidegger's view that ontotheology permeates the entirety of Western philosophy: for instance, in *The Idol and Distance* Marion identifies in Plato's idea of the Good, Aristotle's divine self-thinking, the One of Plotinus and Aquinas' five ways a 'concept that makes a claim to equivalence with God' (ID 9; 13; 10). The problem of ontotheology, as Schrijvers has suggested, is not 'that God is used all too easily in philosophical discourse nor is it a "bad theological response to a good philosophical question."' ⁷³ On the contrary, 'the emphasis of the [onto-theological] constitution is not at all on the *theos* but on the *logos*.'⁷⁴ Marion alludes to this dominance of logic

⁷⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, 'God and Philosophy,' *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996): pp. 129-148; p. 129.

⁷¹ Levinas, 'God and Philosophy', p. 129.

⁷² Joeri Schrijvers, 'Marion, Levinas, and Heidegger on the question concerning ontotheology' *Continental Philosophy Review* 43 (2010): pp. 207–239; p. 208.

⁷³ *Ibid.* pp.211-12.

⁷⁴ Bernard Mabile, *Hegel, Heidegger et la métaphysique* (Paris: Vrin, 2004) pp. 122, 144 cited in Schrijvers, p. 212.

and theoretical discourse throughout the history of philosophy when he states that ‘the theological character of ontology does not have to do to with the fact that Greek metaphysics was later taken up and transformed by the ecclesial theology of Christianity’ (ID 16), nor with the fact that the God of the Christian revelation has passed into Greek thought, since ‘this passage itself became possible only inasmuch as, first and foremost, [...] Greek thought [is] constituted [ontotheologically]’ (GWB 64). God has thus not entered philosophy because of ‘an inappropriate Hellenization of the Christian God’ – it was because Greek thought was ‘*already* predisposed towards *to theion* that the God of revelation could be caught into philosophy’s web.’⁷⁵

The most important philosophical fact, says Lacoste, is that ‘Plotinus intends *energeiai*, more precisely *energeiai tès ousias*, to be creative’ and ‘can do little more than recast Aristotle’s solution in his own language’.⁷⁶ Lacoste writes elsewhere that ‘In any case, [philosophy’s modern preoccupation with theology] dispenses with the God of Christian *theology*’ (HQD 14).

Some postmodern theology ‘gazes with fascination’ at patristic theology because they seem to share similar concerns: the ‘Fathers were drawn to a hidden God who is beyond our naming’.⁷⁷ Here Maximus the Confessor is revealed as the faithful heir of the Cappadocians who follows ‘Basil and the Gregories in stating that the faithful, on the last day, will share by deification in [God’s] *energeia*’. This participation in the divine energies ‘transcends all conceptual knowledge’ – ‘the locus of man’s communion with God is the heart.’ In a conception of human becoming as ‘*La charité avenir divin de l’homme*’ therefore, Maximus’ theory implies, for Lacoste, mankind’s cooperation: Maximus’ theology of deification is a combination of divine

⁷⁵ Schrijvers, p. 212 (emphasis in the original).

⁷⁶ Lacoste, ‘From « *energeia* » to divine « *energies* »’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* (Winter 2007): pp. 437-442; p. 437.

⁷⁷ Hart, ‘Liturgical Reduction’, p. 51.

and human activity – ‘a much-needed precision...defines the divine *energeiai* as the activity and energy of God that can be shared by creatures, unlike God’s eternal attributes’.⁷⁸

Hellenism, writes Lacoste, felt that the interest in God was part of the *bios theoretikos*, the way of life most fitting for the philosopher. In late modernity what part of life can it be? For Lacoste such queries indicate ‘that the question of God is inseparable from a question about humanity, and that the affirmation of God cannot be isolated from affirmations about humanity’ (ECT 112). To ‘take stock of what man is before God, one must have taken the measure of what he is without God’ (HQD 12). The philosophical tradition ‘speaks of objects said to be located beyond being’ writes Lacoste (ECT 179). Here the term ontological describes any ‘ordered inventory of those things to which a reality is attributed’ while theology concerns objects which it names objects in ‘an order that corresponds to their reality’. As a result, says Lacoste, theology is impossible without ontology and must ‘situate itself in relation to ontological decisions that are made within nontheological frames of reference’ (ECT 179).

Perhaps unsurprisingly Lacoste wishes to ‘get rid of’ Pascal’s distinction.⁷⁹ However this is extremely difficult for the French, who have a soft spot for Pascal, who they regard as one of the great thinkers of the West but whose repudiation of philosophy now proves troublesome. Lacoste agrees ‘wholeheartedly that the biblical tradition knows many things about God that Greece did not know’. We learn that one of Lacoste’s mentors, Maxime Charles, ‘liked to relegate the God of Aristotle to what one might call the “outdated gods”, or what others would call “idols”’ (INT 16).

⁷⁸ Lacoste, ‘Energies’, p. 440.

⁷⁹ At the conference ‘Faith and the search for certitude: Religious, phenomenological and existential perspectives’ held in Glasgow on 16th March 2012 Marion responded to this suggestion to the effect that Lacoste was not the historian of philosophy that he [Marion] was and that Pascal’s distinction was still useful because it addressed contextual nuances to which, perhaps, Lacoste was not aware.

However philosophers can be readers of the Bible and its commentaries too. If concepts have a history there exists a possibility of dead concepts and their corresponding dead gods. But, asks Lacoste, ‘does it follow that the philosopher has nothing to say about God that respects his divinity?’ Heidegger’s near classic polemic against the *causa sui*, says Lacoste, is ‘inscribed on our memory’; ‘according to the published text, the philosopher would have no more interest in the work of the theologian than he would in the work of the mathematician’ (HQD 12). In spite of Heidegger, the God of the philosophers is not merely *causa sui*: ‘Descartes, who bears some of the responsibility, did not himself worship the *causa sui*, but neither must we forget that he concluded his third *Meditation* with a prayer of adoration’ (INT 17). Its most vociferous critic, Janicaud, to a certain extent held Heidegger responsible for the “religious turn” in phenomenology, even while he himself drew upon Heidegger’s thought because of his wish to keep philosophy pure and safe from theological contamination.

Heidegger’s critique of onto-theology argues that it is bad theology since we ‘can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god’. Before ‘the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance’⁸⁰. This onto-theological God enters ‘only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines how the deity enters into it’⁸¹ and yet the ‘Pascalian character’ of Heidegger’s own critique is often overlooked.⁸² While Husserl had little to say about God or religion, Heidegger was not as reticent, offering not only an hermeneutical critique of his former teacher but, in keeping with his personal journey, made religious texts crucial to his early philosophical formation, offering lecture courses on

⁸⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 17.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 56.

⁸² Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-theology: Towards a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), p. 4.

Saint Paul, Luther and Augustine of Hippo. Rudolf Otto's book on the holy, says Lacoste, inspired both Heidegger and Husserl – who 'read it badly enough to get excited about the 'phenomenology of religion' that he believed it contained' (HQD 8). The terms of the French debate have though, been – and continue to be – set by Heidegger – as Lacoste notes, Heidegger's lectures on 'The thing' and 'Building, dwelling, thinking' 'radically freed the space in which God can come to experience' (HQD 16).⁸³

In 1927, when his most influential work *Being and Time* was published, Heidegger gave a lecture at Tübingen entitled 'Phenomenology and Theology' in which he distinguishes between them as two radically different sciences: phenomenology is an ontological science (that is, concerned with being); theology an ontic, positive science (that is, a science of what is given and thus more like chemistry and mathematics than philosophy).

As a positive science, Christian theology (which is the only theology that Heidegger ever discusses) has its own distinctive content – its 'ontic *positum*, Christian preaching' (HQD12). This *positum* is firstly 'a mode of human existence'; secondly, given by revelation to faith; and, thirdly, centred upon Christ, the crucified God. Since theology arises from faith and gives rise to faith, and because faith is 'not some more or less modified type of knowing' but, as Luther said, is 'permitting ourselves to be seized by the things we do not see', it follows that theology 'is not speculative knowledge of God' but 'a fully autonomous ontic science'.⁸⁴ That is to say, that it concerns specific things – such as rituals and practices – which can be the object of consciousness; whether this might also include things whose manifestation

⁸³ Cf. Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and John Van Buren, *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

⁸⁴ Heidegger, 'Phenomenology and theology', pp. 44, 48, 50.

does not lend itself so readily to sensible perception (such as narratives or sacraments) remains to be seen – the question of a ‘phenomenology of the unapparent’ has sharply contested, not least by Heidegger himself.

1.7 A phenomenology of liturgy

Lacoste’s *Experience and the Absolute* contrasts a liturgical ‘being-before-God’ [*coram Deo*] to Heidegger’s ‘being-in-the-world’ which allows for an examination of human being before the Absolute not disclosed by Heidegger, but that reveal ‘important aspects of human Dasein to which Heidegger had no access, precisely because he excluded this aspect of human experience’ (although the extent to which that comment holds true will be examined later).⁸⁵ This Absolute pushes human beings to limit experiences such as those of vigil (in which we deprive ourselves of sleep and invert our ordinary relation to time) or the pilgrim, whose peregrinations suspend his usual topological relations. Although Christina Gschwandtner does not mention him by name, this clearly represents an inversion of the Kantian categories: ‘Liturgy thus subverts our normal relations to time and space by placing us in a non-place and an outside-of-time. We experience ourselves as foreign and as, in some sense, removed from the world’.⁸⁶

While the vision of God is usually an eschatological event, ‘we cannot forbid the Absolute from appearing and doing so in the realm of affectivity’ (PD 47); Lacoste is, though, suspicious of the term ‘religious experience’ which he associates with Schleiermacher, whose phenomenology of religion tries to seize and control the Absolute: religion cannot be reduced to affectivity in which God is reduced to an object of feeling. While human beings can indeed know God, from a phenomenological perspective this is neither an abstract nor a purely rational

⁸⁵ Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics*, p. 163.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 164.

knowledge but one of experience – here, one might draw a parallel with Bertrand Russell whose distinction between ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ and ‘knowledge by description’ Lacoste draws upon explicitly (PP 117; PD 41).

Rather than the “God” of ontotheology, the God (or Absolute) which phenomenology seeks to reserve “a place or non-place of possibility” is a fully personal God who speaks and whose speech can be said to be a promise. Bound by the logic of inherence, by our being-in-the-world, our inescapable dwelling in Heidegger’s world and earth, liturgy does indeed represent ‘a deliberate directing of our attention beyond their limits’.⁸⁷ Thus, the time of liturgy is properly eschatological time (and hence akin to an eschatology of perception): our liturgical existence does not signify the end of the dialectical tension between world and earth, but their being set against a wider horizon, akin to Kierkegaard’s notion of teleological suspension. Here that which was formerly assumed to be complete and self-sufficient is ‘recontextualized into a larger whole of which it is not the ground or organizing principle.’ Westphal summarizes it thus: ‘the Transcendent and Absolute is not a rival of the immanent and relative but their ground and telos. But the Transcendent/Absolute and the immanent/relative become rivals to each other when the latter takes itself to be absolute’.⁸⁸ Westphal does not though address the question as to whether Lacoste has abandoned phenomenology for metaphysics. Is what happens in the church and in the liturgical experience, as Jean Greisch argues, simply ‘the projection of a different light on the phenomena of the world, an invitation to envisage them differently’?⁸⁹ Indeed, is Heidegger correct that ‘*an interruption of our*

⁸⁷ Merold Westphal, ‘Phenomenology of Religion’, in Chad Meister, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2010): pp. 661-671; p. 668.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 669.

⁸⁹ Greisch, *Le buisson ardent*, p. 269.

being-in-the-world is impossible'⁹⁰; Lacoste himself acknowledges that the faithful leave the church apparently unchanged.⁹¹

1.8 Liturgy and homelessness

In bracketing out the world liturgy exacerbates our sense of homelessness. With regard to Lacoste, writes Schrijvers, 'the question is not whether God is at home in France' but whether this French God is nothing more than the Sartrean other who reduces me to an object?⁹² Here the question of home is important. What Anthony Steinbock calls the 'constitutive duet' of appropriation and transgression unfolds as 'the co-constitution of the alien through appropriative experience of the home' and of the home 'through the transgressive experience'.⁹³ In our life, temporality and historicity humanity is 'always already in a liminal encounter with the alienworld' which is constituted by 'reconstituting the home'.⁹⁴

Understood in its broadest sense, writes Lacoste, liturgy 'is the most human mode in which we can exist in the world or on the earth. And it is in the world or on the earth that it responds, once and for all, to the question of the place proper to man: beyond the historial play between world and earth, man has for his true *dwelling place* the *relation* he seals with God or that God seals with him' (EA 98). Dwelling and being at home is a peculiarly human desire: animals inhabit the world but do not have a home.⁹⁵ Moreover, human beings are the only animal that can promise and

⁹⁰ Schrijvers, 'The thought of Jean-Yves Lacoste', p. 220.

⁹¹ Lacoste, '*Sacrements, éthique et eucharistie*', *Revue Thomiste* 84 (1984): pp. 212-242 ; pp. 227-8 cited in Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 10.

⁹² Schrijvers, 'The thought of Jean-Yves Lacoste', p. 225.

⁹³ Anthony J. Steinbock, *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995), p. 179.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 181.

⁹⁵ Holger Zaborowski, 'Towards a phenomenology of dwelling', *Communio* 32:3 (2005): pp. 492-516.

forgive.⁹⁶ Martin Heidegger emphasized the connections between thinking and dwelling:

Building and thinking are, each in their own way, inescapable for dwelling.

The two, however, are also insufficient for dwelling so long as each busies itself with its own affairs in separation, instead of listening to the other. They are able to listen if both – building and thinking – belong to dwelling, if they remain within their limits and realize that the one as much as the other comes from the workshop of long experience and incessant practice.⁹⁷

But Heidegger was merely one of several continental thinkers who tend to treat being human and philosophical engagement as interlinked. Writing in the wake of Kant's Copernican revolution, Novalis described the unavoidable philosophy of human beings as "homesickness", the expression of the 'urge to be everywhere at home'⁹⁸ an issue which is still recognizable in Adorno's contention that 'Today, it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home'.⁹⁹

Continental philosophy has been driven by two questions: first of all *what* it is for human beings to be 'at home' in the world'; secondly, *how* human beings might be 'at home' in that world. Thus, in contrast to the analytic tradition, Continental philosophers attach some significance to the fact that human beings are embodied beings; 'being a corporeal object' prepares conditions and enables human beings to relate to the world. Concerned with humanity's "aptitude for experience" phenomenology's starting point is the fact that 'human beings are privileged beings in

⁹⁶ Robert Spaemann and Holger Zaborowski, 'An animal that can promise and forgive', *Communio* 34:4 (2007): pp. 511-521.

⁹⁷ Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1993): pp. 347-363; p. 362.

⁹⁸ Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997): pp. 131; 135.

⁹⁹ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. Edmund F. N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974): § 18, p. 39.

a disclosed world'. Humanity is here characterized both by an ability to acquire powers and its tendency to become accustomed or used to things; that is, to become familiar with them, and thus to be 'in control, skilled, knowledgeable, proficient, secure, composed, confident, sure – in other words 'at home' in the world'.¹⁰⁰

In the face of the modern preoccupation which has, for Lacoste, witnessed the epistemic disqualification of affection Lacoste has sought to expound an 'ontology of affectivity' (which reinstates taste, emotion, and feeling – anything that is considered unable to perform cognitive tasks once objective knowledge is prioritised). Whilst outwardly coherent it does not take into account any potential 'phenomenality of God' where limits are bracketed out (PP 11) and presence has the possibility of being felt. 'Presence,' writes Lacoste, 'is not perceived, it is sensed and welcomed' (PP 13). Affection is crucial to the discernment of truth.¹⁰¹ Its importance was recognised early on in phenomenology: Husserl's understanding of the 'adequacy' of the experience of an intentional object included the possibility that one also *felt* that object, while Scheler established the concept of the 'emotional *a priori*', a "faculty of the soul" that adds depth to and makes sense of the world; Edith Stein's *Lebensgefühl* [life-feeling] offered grounds for how to read the world. Finally, Sartre (following Heidegger's emphasis upon the ability of our 'moods' to affect the way that the realities of self, other and world appear to us) was convinced that the experience of nausea led us to an awareness of the contingency of the self; Lacoste thus stands in what has been called a 'rich tradition of phenomenological reflection upon affect'.¹⁰² However the dividing

¹⁰⁰ Maximilian de Gaynesford, 'Being at Home', in Michael Rosen and Brian Leiter, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): pp. 523-550; p. 524.

¹⁰¹ See Janet Martin Soskice, 'Love and attention', in Michael McGhee, ed., *Philosophy, Religion and the Spiritual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): pp. 59-72 and Gareth Matthews, 'Ritual and religious feeling', in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, ed., *Explaining Emotions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980): pp. 339-353.

¹⁰² John McCurry, 'Review of *Transcendence and Phenomenology*', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12:1 (2010): pp. 83-87; p. 84.

line between intentional feeling and emotion, between *fühlen von etwas* and *Gefühl*, does not leave any obvious traces but can be traced, without much theoretical risk ‘ if one assigns a task to feeling – that it can be integrated into a learning’ (QD 224).

Liturgy hints at a potential leaving of the world and the earth, a new use for a theological term, one, says Lacoste ‘that can be used to indicate the schematic in play’ (MAO 21). Lacoste attempts to articulate ‘a non-’religious’ (i.e., anti-Schleiermacherian and anti-Jamesian) logic of ‘liturgy’ (not worship!) – that is, of what man does *coram Deo*...as subverting the Heideggerian logic of being-in-the-world’ (CP 657) but is not troubled by the lack of a transcendental status for liturgy: what is important is ‘the existentiell or ontic basis this experience gets from prayer and concrete ascetic practices’.¹⁰³ The logic of inherence explored in these early investigations ‘is sufficiently rich for it both to confer on us the status of the not-at-home as well as to provide us with a mother earth’ (EA 21). In exploiting Heideggerian language Lacoste makes it clear that neither the world, nor the difference between earth and world, nor the marriage of earth and sky are transcendental conditions of humanity, although its has to take its place into consideration if it is to know who it is and that location has its roots in our flesh.

Liturgy is expressed in this ‘language of the flesh’ – it is the body which symbolically ‘allows worldly or earthly logic to take leave of its inscription in place’ (EA 38). Thus, mankind’s liturgical being is in contrast to its topological identity (EA 26) – here mankind dwells at the limit. For Lacoste the typology of the recluse and or hermit indicates a disposal of place, ‘an ironic subversion of his location’ (Lacoste will also use ‘dispossession’, a term which he shares with Marcel Gauchet¹⁰⁴). The humanity of the pilgrim is not determined by any ‘regional particularism, national or

¹⁰³ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁴ Marcel Gauchet, trans. Oscar Burge, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 33.

otherwise' (EA 29); 'no immanent logic of place is implied in liturgical experience' (EA 32). Moreover, liturgy 'exacerbates our not-being-at-home in the world and is a critique of our relation to the earth' (EA 74). Phenomena such as liturgy or hope which place human finitude and existence into question cannot appear for to Heideggerian facticity, but space and time can be experienced liturgically 'The human who prays (or who wants to) only wishes to be there for the act of being present to the Absolute' (PP 156).¹⁰⁵

Contemplation has the structure of what Jean Wahl calls 'transascendance' – that is of an upwards movement, that in some sense recaptures the transcendence that Levinas felt was lost. Part of Lacoste's response to the obsession of the current nihilistic age with objects and power relationships is to reverse the terms of the subject-object relationship. The ascetic passivity of the believer is itself described in terms of object-ness or objectivity, an objectivity which is akin to that of the thing. In other words, human beings no longer see God in quasi-Feuerbachian terms as the object of their own representation; instead it is God who turns human beings into objects like clay in the hands of the potter (EA 156).

It is important here to note that 'intellect' [*nous*] is not necessarily the same as reason; it merely involves the intellectual perception of something, and may be guided by faith. So one might add prayer to the contemplative life and attitude: 'the contemplation that allowed Plotinus to achieve mystical union with 'the God who is over all things' is transformed into an experience in faith that facilitates mystical union with the Trinity'.¹⁰⁶ This French God may yet be encountered in prayer.

With regard to prayer Derrida distinguishes two traits: firstly, it is always an address to the other *as* other, and secondly prayer is a celebration of the One to whom

¹⁰⁵ See Paul W. Pruyser, 'Phenomenology and Dynamics of Hoping', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 3:1 (1963): pp. 86-96.

¹⁰⁶ Kevin Hart, 'Contemplation: Beyond and Behind', *Sophia* 48: 4 (2009): pp. 435–45; p. 440.

it is addressed. Derrida stakes rather a lot on the claim that those two features are inseparable. As an address, prayer, he says, is not constative: it is not “about” God. It is instead an address, a movement that speaks to God and not of God – prayer is the human side of the Word of God. Prayer in this account traverses and marks the landscape of a persons’ response to God.

The idol is, according to Marion, an *image* of God, having been reduced to that which human beings might know, represent, or experience of God and tied to finite conditions of appearing. Here one recalls that Lacoste wonders if the idea of God “as” God, *Deus qua Deus*, is just wishful thinking?’ (QD 227) This will be – since what philosophy and theology ‘have in common that they ‘think’’ (HQD 15) – the joint task of the philosopher and the theologian.

2. Prayer

Introduction

In the post-Heideggerian landscape Lacoste notes that ‘the relationship between language and the event of being led to the suggestion that theology, if it must be true to its mission of ‘original and critical thought’ must include the experience of prayer and elucidate it’ (HQD 16). Prayer provides a useful way of examining Lacoste’s theological and philosophical thought, which takes place in what has been described as a ‘postmodern context’¹⁰⁷ (one usually characterised by the “end” or the “overcoming of metaphysics” as pronounced by Heidegger). Lacoste himself eschews the term ‘postmodern theologian’¹⁰⁸ and is concerned with articulating what is, by his own account, an alternative account of religious experience, one in which ‘phenomenology, eventually, is also omnipresent’ (CP 657). ‘Theology,’ writes Lacoste, ‘may encourage us to read biblical texts but is not the final word on them – theology is an act of listening to the biblical text, a silence that also enables prayer: ‘To read this text is to read before God; hence it is to make one’s reading a liturgy, a work of prayer’ (PP 187).

Is prayer one of the fundamental activities of human beings? Confronted by religious and sociological criticism over the question as to whether prayer belongs merely to an earlier period of human development or particular social or biographical situations, Christian systematic theology has attempted to reconsider and re-establish prayer from within the context of Christian thought and practice. Etymologically the English word “prayer” (unlike, say, the German *Gebet*) is related to the Old French

¹⁰⁷ Lacoste, ‘Présence et affection’, in Lieven Boeve and L Leijssen, eds., *Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001): pp. 212-231.

¹⁰⁸ Acknowledging that some ‘postmodern scholars are of the same opinion as me’ Lacoste ‘agreed to be an “active sympathizer” for a short while.’ See “‘Christianity is not really made for modernity’: Interview with Jean-Yves Lacoste’ *Dilema Veche* no. 267 (March 27) 2009 [accessed 11th January 2012].

preiere, which describes an “act of asking” or “demand” (itself descended from the Latin *precaria* “a request”); these may, in turn, be related to the Old English *frignan*, “inquire” which described one’s ritual initiation into church. Older anthropological theories suggesting that prayer developed out of magical formulae or sayings have been abandoned. The evidence from surviving religious texts is that a practice of prayer anchored in cultic practice was intended to keep alive and to express *teleologically* contact between religious subjects and objects. In prayer the *orant* is moved to address and venerate – and thereby bear witness to their contact with – a “Thou”; it is usually this human manifestation which is perceivable, rather than any theophany; Chrétien notes, ‘prayer...is first and foremost an anthropophany, a manifestation of man’ (AS 19).

In attempting to describe this peculiarly human activity we have already broached important phenomenological and anthropological questions. For instance, might it thus be legitimate to suggest that the proper phenomenality of God (that is, one that is perceivable according to the strictures of classical phenomenology) is to be found in the assemblies of the faithful rather than in any miraculous or spectacular theophany that perhaps exceeds the usual categories of Husserlian phenomenology? Moreover, phenomenology’s interest in what has reasonably been termed ‘humanity’s aptitude for experience’¹⁰⁹ here serves to emphasise its significance for theology: the questions of phenomenology almost invariably revolve around questions of intentionality and the subject/object distinction. Prayer offers a paradigmatic study in intentionality, whether it is that of the one who is doing the praying (the praying

¹⁰⁹ Joeri Schrijvers, ‘Phenomenology, Liturgy, and Metaphysics: The work of Jean-Yves Lacoste’, in Peter Jonkers and Ruud Welten, eds., *God in France: Eight Contemporary French Thinkers on God* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005): pp. 207-225; p. 208.

subject, or “pray-er”¹¹⁰) or the divinity (or object) to which those prayers are ostensibly addressed. Implicit in those prayers is a certain understanding of divinity, one which understands “God” as being capable not only of hearing but acting (or indeed, otherwise) upon those prayers, and one which, rooted as they are in a form of address, presupposes at least some form of personal relationship, however it may be construed. To put it another way, prayer – particularly in the Jewish and Christian traditions – is quite a different cultic activity and involves quite a different dynamic from, say, ritual sacrifice. This interest in the intentionality of the human subject inevitably leads into discussion of anthropology: whatever Francis of Assisi or Kierkegaard might have to say on the topic we are primarily concerned here with the prayers of human beings and not those of the birds of the air or the lilies of the field (although as we shall see, these may well have important lessons for humanity). While prayer is primarily an expression of an ongoing relationship between the twin poles of God (or the Absolute) and man, one should note that *Experience and the Absolute* was subtitled ‘Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man’ and devoted several pages to the discussion of both an *anthropologia Crucis* and an *anthropologia gloriae*, both of which attempted to set these wider anthropological and phenomenological debates within a theological register. Moreover, the discussion of the revelation of the divine in and through our affective (*pace* Schelling) is rooted in humanity’s prediscursive co-affective life in which prayer is the possibility of the overcoming not just of metaphysics but also the Hegelian master/slave dialectic (EA 51).

Amongst some postmodern theologians – the so-called “apostles of the impossible” – prayer represents a form of speech that is neither negation, affirmation,

¹¹⁰ I take this phrase from John C. McDowell, “‘Openness to the World’: Karl Barth’s Evangelical Theology of Christ as the Pray-Er’, *Modern Theology* 25:2 (April 2009): pp. 253-283.

or the apophantic, but what Marion terms ‘de-nomination’.¹¹¹ This non-predicative and ‘purely pragmatic’¹¹² discourse is, according to Claudia Welz, ‘no longer a matter of attributing something to something, but of relating to’ in which it becomes adequate to speak of ‘the invisible and incomprehensible God becoming recognizable in our responses to his call’.¹¹³ Encouraged by such notions of responsivity and passivity, Marion’s ‘de-nomination’ proposes a non-predicative discourse that is neither apophatic or kataphatic (what Martin Laird terms “logophatic”¹¹⁴) and which reveals the divine Word behind human deeds and discourse; for the believer it is ‘a matter of being exposed’.¹¹⁵ It is this tension that underlies Marion’s infamous argument with Derrida at Villanova University: as Welz summarises ‘if God’s self-presentation is phenomenal, then it is given to human experience. At the same time, his givenness must exceed human experience.’ Her question is whether this tension might be resolved by saying that God’s presence is given only as a gift, ‘a gift that no-one can receive ... without having been made into its recipient?’¹¹⁶ Marion maintains that God’s presence is a possible gift, yet if ‘God’s presence is temporal and appears, it inevitably appears in the time constituted by human time-consciousness and thereby becomes objectified’.¹¹⁷ What solution, then, does Marion propose?

Although Marion is at pains to refute each of Derrida’s charges against him, we shall content ourselves with only one here. In the course of an exegesis of the

¹¹¹ Jean-Luc Marion, ‘In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of ‘Negative Theology’, in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999): pp. 20-53, p. 37.

¹¹² Marion, ‘In the Name’, p. 30.

¹¹³ Claudia Welz, ‘God – A phenomenon? Theology as semiotic phenomenology of the invisible’, *Studia Theologica* 62 (2008): pp. 4-24, p. 9.

¹¹⁴ Martin Laird, ‘Whereof we speak’: Gregory of Nyssa, Jean-Luc Marion and the Current Apophatic Rage’, *Heythrop Journal* 42 (2001): pp. 1-12, p. 9.

¹¹⁵ Marion, ‘In the Name’, p. 32.

¹¹⁶ Welz, ‘God – A phenomenon?’, p. 9.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 10.

Gospel Marion draws our attention to what he calls the “Trinitarian play”¹¹⁸ of presence: the persons of the Trinity ‘play the role of Christ by loving each other mutually to the point of making Christ recognizable in them’.¹¹⁹ Thus, for Marion, God’s presence is primarily an *event* rather than an intentional object, an event of His self-presentation whereby God makes Himself into a present that can be received by its recipient in becoming transformed, or as Wittgenstein put it, by shaping his life in such and such a way. And this reshaping has a theological name: conversion.

For Lacoste, ‘sacrament and Christ-oriented prayer lead to the conversion of the human being.’¹²⁰ This phenomenology of conversion (what Schrijvers calls ‘the adventure of authentic existential conversion’) has been shown to be of concern to Lacoste; conversion is ‘a permanent struggle between the worldly and the theological self’.¹²¹ In an atheist world bracketed out in liturgy the sacrament of penance is thus a reformulation of that of baptism; the resurrection has “radicalized” the pre-paschal appeal¹²² to conversion and inaugurated a ‘new relation’ in which being forgiven by Christ is to receive a vocation to exist according to the ‘true measure of the excess of humanity that is attested in the coming of the Son in the flesh’.¹²³

While keen not to mistake it for theophany, the notion of event is clearly important to Lacoste. In an early essay Lacoste noted that one ‘linguistic event’, namely the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, ‘claims an absolutely unique status and an unparalleled hermeneutic dignity’ which demanded ‘a new model of linguistic communication, or ... a new use of language in the preaching of the Kingdom’ (AM

¹¹⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, ‘The Gift of a Presence’, trans. Stephen E. Lewis, in *Prolegomena to Charity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000): pp. 124-52; p. 143.

¹¹⁹ Marion, ‘The Gift of a Presence’, p. 144.

¹²⁰ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 77.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p. 20.

¹²² Lacoste, ‘Du droit de l’histoire au droit de Dieu: sur la résurrection de Jésus’, *Nouvelle revue théologique*, 104 (1982): pp. 495–531 cited in Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 21.

¹²³ Lacoste, ‘Vers le sacrement du pardon’, *Communio* 8 (1983): 5–24 ; pp. 14–15 cited in Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 21.

566). With the end of Jesus' preaching mission and the closure of the canon of Scripture, it fell to the emergent Christian community to make this "new voice" 'resonate'; there is, in the biblical story of God and man, 'something like a master word, and in the teaching of Jesus, a "last word"'. While this knowledge 'needs to be founded and interpreted [...] it also needs to be promoted', and here, for Lacoste, singing is significant. While he concedes that not every text (however venerable) can be sung – 'One does not sing the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Actually, we do not even sing the *Summa Theologica*, even though it was written by the Angelic Doctor' (AM 567) – we can sing Scripture. One can certainly sing other, non-religious texts but the decision to sing the biblical text is 'an entirely theological decision' which does not mean that 'one or another pericope is of a good hymnal quality and demands to be sung' (AM 567). This performance is not an aspect of the transcendental subject's creativity: singing does not represent anything – not in liturgy, anyway.

In liturgy, human performance – in this case, singing – is asked to do more than recall that "another" word has been spoken, and to remember that human beings are here under 'the authority, not of our words or our art, but that of *the Word*' (AM 567). The decision to sing – notwithstanding any pastoral or liturgical concerns – is theological: here and now, in the midst of all the words and gossip, it attests (or at least attempts so to do) that 'the acoustic thickness of sounds can have a sacramental value, and words can even be the place where the Word speaks God's Word' (AM 568).

The decentring of subjectivity which is characteristic of much contemporary Continental philosophy represents 'a confrontation with transcendental and idealist philosophy' which is why, explains Schrijvers, so much of the debate 'has turned

upon the critique of ‘representation.’¹²⁴ The Cartesian *ego cogito* represents itself as a thinking substance, while the Kantian ‘I think’ accompanied every representation [‘*Ich Denke muss alle Vorstellungen begleiten*’]; consequently whenever that subject represents an object, that object is acquiescent to the subject’s power to know and to represent.

2.2 Prayer and intentionality

Prayer and phenomenology are activities that are both concerned with issues of intentionality; it is, as Edith Wyschogrod suggests, something of a truism of transcendental phenomenology that consciousness is intentional, and that an act of conscious intending (*noesis*) is directed towards an intended “something” (*noema*). Thus, as the object of an intention, an entity – either physical or conceptual – ‘cannot be posited apart from the act that intends it as the correlate of that act’.¹²⁵ A phenomenological description of intentional acts, such as this, should not though to be confused with a psychological description of states of mind (which are for Husserl part of ‘a naive faith in the givenness of the world in its plenary presence’, the “so-called natural attitude”). Like Marion, Lacoste is attempting ‘to think phenomenologically about the possibility of a genuine divine transcendence’.¹²⁶

Bound by an embodied logic of inherence the liturgical relationship necessitates a transgression, which Lacoste acknowledges (EA 21) might well come from outside human being (for instance, in a moment of immanent transcendence represented by, say, the incarnation, or equally possible, unbeknownst to any human subject). But rather than the “God” of ontotheology, the God (or Absolute) for which phenomenology seeks to preserve ‘a place or non-place of possibility’ is a fully

¹²⁴ Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings?*, p. 6.

¹²⁵ Edith Wyschogrod, ‘Intending Transcendence: Desiring God’, in Graham Ward, ed., *Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005): pp. 349-365; p. 352.

¹²⁶ Merold Westphal, ‘Phenomenology of Religion’, in Chad Meister, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2010) pp. 661-671; p. 668.

personal, biblical God who speaks and whose speech is promise. Confronted by the ‘simultaneous possibility and impossibility of God talk’¹²⁷, Augustine’s question, ‘What, then, do I love when I love God?’ defines the theologian’s task, a question which motivates praise and prayer; it is, in Westphal’s words, ‘an inadequacy sufficient to motivate asking the question anew’.¹²⁸

Indeed, prayer leads inevitably to questions over the viability of “God talk”: the act of presence that constitutes prayer is accomplished after Easter in the element of a knowledge [*connaissance*] that perhaps leaves room for nonknowledge [*inconnaissance*], but which is not endangered by this non knowledge. To know [*connaitre*] is not to understand, and it also belongs to what we should know of God [*savoir sur Dieu*], for our knowledge [*notre savoir*] to be consistent, that God give rise to thought without it ever being possible for its reflections on him to come to an end: he must continue to elude our grasp. (EA 141)

Liturgy – conceived as transgression – does not escape either world or earth; it remains an ontic activity, practiced by a faith community and conducted in chiaroscuro, as Lacoste observes:

We pray, of course, in order to praise – it is in praise that the prayer manifests its essence in its purity – and praise can pass for the historical image or inchoation of an eschatological practice. (EA 43)

True prayer, according to Lacoste, is ‘the sole prerogative of’ the theologian’ (EA 141) yet, suggests Westphal (extending the notion of theologian to encompass all believers), the negative theology that has become popular amongst the ‘apostles of the impossible’ has its home in the same religious community, ‘in the practical disciplines

¹²⁷ Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 98.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 98.

that make up the purification that precedes illumination and union or perfection’ including ‘the cultivation of the virtues, prayer and meditation, reading and study, ascetic practices such as fasting, monastic vows, and participation in the liturgical life of the community.’¹²⁹

Westphal disagrees with Marion that praise replaces predication, arguing instead that it *presupposes* predication¹³⁰; the extent to which Lacoste agrees with either can be seen from his later comments on *lectio divina*. Westphal turns to Chrétien for support for the claim that, citing Aristotle’s claim that prayer is neither true nor false, what is said about prayer is equally true of praise:

A demand, a supplication, a lament are not, in effect, open to truth in the same manner as a predicative proposition. But prayer always has norms that determine its rectitude, and these norms put truth into play, including the truth of the *logos apophantikos*. [...] The mere linguistic form of the demanding prayer is not enough to put out of play the question of truth.¹³¹

As Westphal emphasises, theology ‘does not lose contact with the life of worship, but is tightly linked to prayer and praise (and love of neighbor, about which Heidegger expresses no concern)’¹³² and distinguished from the God of ontotheology, the God who resists its projects is ‘one who refuses to enter human discourse on philosophy’s terms (at least the terms of a major strand of Western philosophy), but who *ipso facto* gives Godself to human prayer and worship, singing and (perhaps even) dancing.’¹³³ Indeed, avers Lacoste, ‘every schema that more or less assimilates

¹²⁹ Westphal, *Transcendence*, p. 102.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 120 n. 15.

¹³¹ Jean-Louis Chrétien, ‘The Wounded Word: The Phenomenology of Prayer,’ in Dominique Janicaud et al., *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate*, trans. Bernard Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000): pp. 154–55.

¹³² Westphal, *Transcendence*, p. 130.

¹³³ *Ibid.* p. 161.

the contemplative prayer to the Hegelian enjoyment of absolute knowledge must be rejected' (EA 141).

Clearly then, in representing 'a certain practice of knowledge' (EA 142) the ontic practice of prayer has consequences for human understanding of the transcendence of God, but what about our understanding of ourselves? While Lacoste may not share the peculiar concerns of postmodernity, he is troubled by what he sees as the nihilism of the present age, what Michel Henry called our world of 'European nihilism in which all values are undone and self-destruct'.¹³⁴

Here the, 'the question of human being – namely, what is it for a human being to be – is one of the most pressing.' One may know, Lacoste suggests, *what* the human being is from the perspectives of the life sciences, social sciences or political sciences, but 'one no longer knows *who* man is, not simply insofar as he is (the flower "is" too), but insofar as he singularly *exists*'.¹³⁵

For Lacoste the first, and not least, theoretical difficulty that both believers and theologians encounter 'is that man who prays, to a degree the author of his presence before God and/or his expectation of God, does not undergo prayer as an event but in its possibility – because nothing may happen, prayer can only be a non-event (BHP 384). Now, Lacoste certainly concedes that the man who prays performs, phenomenologically, 'lots of different things'. But however those things – whether spoken words or sung phrases; an attentiveness (which is always at risk from distraction); liturgies – might satisfy religious anthropology, they are neither the preliminaries nor the prejudgement of how prayer leads to God. If prayer is based on the exclusive 'theoretical assumption of the omnipresence and providence of the Absolute', one could indeed argue, with Lacoste, 'that the only things to be found are

¹³⁴ Michel Henry, *Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky*, trans. Scott Davidson (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 2.

¹³⁵ Lacoste, 'Vers le sacrement du pardon', p. 6 cited in Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 22.

the actions of man': Husserl himself excluded 'The Transcendency, God' from his phenomenology (Hua. III, 1: 133) and Lacoste finds that there is no shortage of evidence for an 'undeniable anthropological given', namely the humanity of mankind.

Thus, the 'phenomenology of prayerful consciousness' (BHP 385) would be the last word on the issue, reducing it to the presence of mankind before God. However, one cannot pray 'without presupposing the divine omnipresence and providence', and confronted by 'the condescending freedom of God, the man who prays learns first of all that no exposition to which he consents, or any dispensation he acquires, can transmute his expectation of God into the proven certainty of the coming of God' (BHP 385). Yet, for Lacoste, man does not pray merely 'to prove his own existence: he prays by making the evidence of his own existence/presence subordinate to the obscurity of God'; he reemphasized this with the publication of *Experience and the Absolute*:

But the man who prays does not do so in order to prove his existence or the possibility of a mode of existence: he prays, on the one hand, to subordinate what he and world and earth are unveiled as to God's veiled presence, while hoping, on the other hand, that the veiled and omnipresent God will provide proof of his presence. Despite the undeniable importance of a phenomenology of the expectation of God, liturgy must thus appear to us, first of all, as a human power to liberate a space where perhaps nothing can come to pass that, in the sphere of immanence of consciousness, would bear unequivocal witness to God's condescension (EA 47).

Thus, despite the 'undeniable importance' of a phenomenology of waiting for God, the activity of prayer is evidence that the "pray-er" freely gives up his being to create a space for God, a space where perhaps nothing happens. Insofar as the

expectation of God takes the form of liturgy and that mankind is responsible for their speech (where those words more commonly used to describe its world are also those it uses to talk to God). The act of praying, whether a collision between man and God or an aporetic unravelling of his idea of God, assumes the character of an “event”.

Alternating between a phenomenological register and a theological one, it is quite possible that even if the act of praying is more faithful to the underlying purpose that animates mankind despite being given ‘a time and a place where he can exist in the expectation of God, or the presence of a God to come’, then nothing happens (or more precisely that God does not obviously pass by); in any case, concludes Lacoste, the ‘coming of God to man is not in proportion to our expectations or our attentiveness’ (BHP 385). The least mankind can expect is also the most that it can expect: namely that the attentiveness given to God, by definition, opens the space of prayer.

There is though, says Lacoste, more than one reason to pray (EA 142). Mankind prays ‘in order to engage in contemplation or praise, to ask for forgiveness for our sins or to ask for something else’. Whatever the particular reason, ‘we do not pray without presupposing that the experience of thought is not the only way to found a relation with the Absolute’ – put another way, without stating that ‘prayer is not an anachronism for whoever makes use of theology’: and thus that ‘the God who can be thought can also bear witness to himself in the immanent sphere of consciousness’. This conception of God becomes for man a God “sensible to the heart” one ‘whose presence is guaranteed in the element of affectivity’ (EA 142).

Even so, as Christina Gschwandtner rightly points out, ‘both Chrétien and Lacoste are also at times critical of an exclusive emphasis on emotion or self-affectivity’. Lacoste also gives considerable reflection to questions about the language and truth of theology, suggesting, like Marion, that it is more ‘a truth to be known

through love instead of pure reason. The postmodern project of speaking for God is indeed concerned with questions of truth, even if this truth is not measured in terms of certainty or factual evidence'.¹³⁶ Liturgy remains a "liminal experience" because 'God is veiled and never fully comes into presence.' Here, any "authentic experience of prayer" realizes that the divine always far transcends the person at prayer.¹³⁷

Gschwandtner finds that Lacoste's language is 'much more careful' than that of Marion; religious experience is experience pushed to the extreme, and, in disclosing something fundamental about who humanity is, is 'at the very limit or at the very core of human experience'. Lacoste thus describes religious or liturgical experience in terms of liminality, radical abnegation and kenosis, employing hyperbolic characters such as the saint, the ascetic, the pilgrim, or the holy fool (who wishes to spend his entire life living "liturgically" (EA 181).

Inevitably, this caution impacts upon the understanding of God. In a "liturgical critique of the concept" liturgy impresses itself upon us 'as a matter of urgency' since, 'unlike Hegel', it recognises 'that not everything needs to be thought or known in order for us to be able to praise or to present ourselves to God'.¹³⁸ Liturgical experience, with its praise and the prayers, does not accept the delay proper to conceptual thought which, in coinciding with Anselm's laudation of God which 'recognized in the *Summum Cogitabile* the Person par excellence, who is not enough to speak of, but to whom one must speak, or before whom one must remain silent to hear his silence or his word' (EA 182–3).

One must be able 'to encounter God without possessing speculative mastery' (EA 183); God, after all, demands to be thought, but, as Schrijvers indicates, 'the first

¹³⁶ Christina Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 211.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 175.

¹³⁸ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 103.

thing to be thought here is that any intellection of the divine is incomplete if it does not allow one to be-before-God in praise and in prayer'.¹³⁹ While the reconciliation of God and humanity 'in-and-through Christ' does indeed need to be 'thought through and 'conceptualised'' it is only 'when the human being thanks God for this reconciliation that one incarnates what it is to exist authentically: thought is only ever completed if it acts itself as a means to the end that is praise'.¹⁴⁰

The overriding sin of ontotheology is the attempt to grasp God in conceptual language and in refuting Plantinga's interpretation of Anselm, John Findlay has attempted to offer a modern critique of the Anselmic proof for God's existence. However, Lacoste suggests that this God – whom Findlay himself defines as a "speculative monster" – is 'not the God of whom we are speaking, who solicits free consent while performing his own unveiling' (EA 204). We are thus thrown back into the traditional divide between the God of philosophy and the biblical God.

Lacoste employs prayer here to deconstruct the traditional view that Anselm assumed God's existence as 'a matter of fact' and tried to prove it through reason (PP 223). In fact, this notorious example of ontotheology was originally inserted into a prayer (PD 79) and Lacoste turns to the interpretation of Anselm offered by Barth (who is 'often right', PD 80) in order to argue that God's phenomenality is essentially irreducible – the 'existence of God is not "an" existence' (PD 84; AI 65). There is no 'real distinction' (AI 65) between essence and existence and, in fact, Lacoste reveals in a footnote that his definition – 'knowing God by loving Him' [*Dieu connaissable comme aimable*] – actually comes from Anselm (PD 110). Lacoste agrees with Ricoeur's interpretation that Anselm is someone turned to God in prayer and love; the God praised by Anselm in prayer gives theological language its coherence. Anselm is

¹³⁹ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 103.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 103, citing EA 183–4.

ultimately exonerated and reinterpreted and the ‘very idea of a rational proof for God’s existence is consistently rejected as futile, unhelpful, or even blasphemous.’¹⁴¹

In his essay, ‘Prayer as the Posture of the Decentered Self’, Merold Westphal suggest that while the soul at prayer seeks to be fully present to God, it remains the unfulfilled task of a lifetime. Moreover, conceived as the study of humanity’s aptitude for experience, phenomenology harbours no expectations that the divine will become fully present, since as long as God is the speaker whom we do not see, God’s presence will be inseparable from God’s absence.¹⁴² Even Janicaud, commenting upon the often radical work of Richard Kearney, avers that ‘phenomenology and hermeneutics are intimately united and can work together in this way, provided that their “object” is revealed, or inscribed within our experience, through texts, traces, words, poems’. Ultimately, ‘hermeneutical phenomenology might pave the way for some kind of genuine faith and true theology’¹⁴³ (although Janicaud question as to whether these hermeneutic retrievals represent ‘nothing more than reinstitutions of metaphysics under the pretext of its transfiguration’¹⁴⁴ will remain an open one, at least for the time being.

For Lacoste a “phenomenology of the holy fool” – in particular its criticism of any realized eschatology – critiques those attempts to grasp or comprehend God which are proper to rationality. As John Webster usefully reminds us, eschatological speech is never far from the language of prayer, with the result that ‘an eschatological spirituality is therefore ascetical, eschatology in the desert’. This involves the ‘rupturing of ties and attachments, separation’ from ‘a comprehensible historical

¹⁴¹ Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics*, p. 219.

¹⁴² Westphal, ‘Prayer as the Posture of the Decentered Self’, in Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, eds., *The Phenomenology of Prayer* (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2005): pp. 13-31; p. 20.

¹⁴³ Dominique Janicaud, ‘Is The Possible Doing Justice To God?’, *Research in Phenomenology* 34 (2004): pp. 239-245; p. 242.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 244.

order, on the basis of which we can assign roles ... in which we can be safe'.¹⁴⁵ This does not, however, mean that Christian eschatology does not indicate some kind of security, even safety: Webster finds in Lacoste a proposed link 'between the ascetic's refusal of possession and location and the way in which 'the fool' (unlike the person of learning) is dissatisfied with that which is provisional. In an extended quote from Lacoste, Webster argues that the sage:

is satisfied with a happiness which bears every sign of being provisional (since speculative knowledge suggests that God is present other than through the Second Coming, since the promises made at Easter – which the sage is either unaware of or misunderstands – remain unfulfilled, etc.), and on the other hand he does not really try to situate in the present all the eschatological meanings that he may perceive. The fool, because he desires the final state ... more deeply than anyone, but can accede only to a fragile degree of anticipation ... is thus able to smile at those who hold that the *eschaton* is already here in the present.¹⁴⁶

Nonetheless, Webster advises 'vigilance': while 'a spirituality of reticence ought properly to dispossess us of false objects of desire and [their] satisfactions ... it ought not to direct itself against those hopes which are indeed, given to the saints.' Webster finds in the work of Lacoste an overdue reminder of the need to 'build into the fabric of Christian dogmatics the disavowal of those uses of eschatology' that lead to idolatry.¹⁴⁷

Lacoste argues that liturgical experience – such as the activity of prayer – is one that actually understands (unlike Hegelian eschatology) that for mankind to be

¹⁴⁵ John Webster, 'Eschatology, Anthropology and Postmodernity', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2:1 (2000): pp. 13-28; p. 22.

¹⁴⁶ Lacoste, 'Liturgy and Kenosis', in Graham Ward, ed., *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 252.

¹⁴⁷ Webster, 'Eschatology, Anthropology and Postmodernity', p. 23.

able to praise or to present itself to God, not everything needs to be either thought or known (EA 182). Unlike philosophical or theological thinking, the praise and the prayers of liturgical experience are not constrained by delays, but are, instead, driven by kerygmatic concerns and concur with Anselm's own laudation of God.

The proof occurs in the context of a discussion of prayer (PD 79) – Lacoste employs Barth's interpretation of Anselm in order to argue that God's phenomenality is irreducible (PD 80, 84); in fact, his definition – 'knowing God by loving God' – comes from Anselm: 'Anselm speaks to God of God' (PD 110). It is the God praised by Anselm in prayer which gives theological language its coherence, and for Lacoste Anselm provides an example of someone turned to God in prayer and love; the idea of a rational proof is dismissed as futile, unhelpful, and blasphemous.

2.3 An ontology of prayer

All prayer is worded, writes Laurence Hemming, which means that 'prayer is my being inscribed into the Word of prayer, which through the Spirit returns to the Father'. This prayer is of the body, and so takes for granted the ecclesia, the assembled body of Christ. Is there though, asks Hemming, such a thing as 'an ontology of prayer'? The ontological basis of this prayer is language, the human, speaking being and grounded in 'a place where I talk to God without you': this place, we learn, is 'boundaried'.¹⁴⁸ Mankind can share this outer space (it can even pray together), but these words may have no force – someone can undertake a prayer that they do not really mean or intend, or that means one thing to them and something different to someone else. Interiority alone is the place where man is with God. For Hemming it is a particular understanding of human being which underlies our

¹⁴⁸ Laurence P. Hemming, 'The Subject of Prayer: Unwilling Words in the Postmodern Access to God', in Graham Ward, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005): pp. 444-457; p. 445.

practices of prayer and assumes that we know what “praying” means so that it becomes merely a kind of thinking: a devoted thinking that needs no piety, ‘for piety is, if anything at all, practice.’¹⁴⁹ Divorced from practice, prayer and liturgy have become an adjunct of the indubitable Cartesian self (itself influenced by Leibniz): ‘We are no longer constituted liturgically in prayer: we constitute for ourselves the liturgy that best expresses our interior psychic life.’¹⁵⁰ Here, God who is now ‘a pure interior postulation of the intellect’ part of ‘an invocation, a prayer, an act of will, which itself discloses the subject it performs’; this subjectivity provides the condition under which ‘God might appear and become known *at all*.’¹⁵¹ The “subject of Modernity” is itself a construct of postmodernity – for Hemming, Heidegger’s reference to *causa sui* as metaphysics’ name for God makes clear that what is at issue is the inability of metaphysics to think the being of beings in favour of substance and subjectivity. This God cannot ‘be invoked or prayed to *as God*, for every invocation of this God would be a self-invocation.’¹⁵² Even intersubjectivity (which arises as a moral and ethical problem) is still ‘a claim to sovereignty and so an instrumentalization of a self’.¹⁵³ Heidegger’s critique of intersubjectivity is intended to show how Descartes’ separation of world and self, is in fact a construction: ‘Self and world belong together in the single being, *Dasein*. Self and world are not two beings, like subject and object, or like I and thou, but self and world are the basic determination of *Dasein* itself in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world.’¹⁵⁴ Human existence presupposes relatedness, even before any particular self comes to

¹⁴⁹ Op. cit.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 446.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 447; p. 449.

¹⁵² Ibid. p. 450.

¹⁵³ Ibid. p. 451.

¹⁵⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 24 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1996), p. 142; trans. Albert Hofstadter as *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) cited in Hemming p. 452.

itself as particular and individual – similar ideas can be found in Marion’s discussion of *l’interloqué* and, as we shall see, in Lacoste’s treatment of the prediscursive gift of the world to the self.

For Hemming, taking Heidegger seriously means that interiority and subjectivity is a modern fiction: instead the ‘language of prayer, rendered as singing, breaks the structures of mirroring and representation that constitute the human person subjectively, so that what is produced to be heard and understood is *not* the product of the human will, but the resonance of the human through invocation of the divine.’¹⁵⁵ The experience of prayer is such that it should be impossible to conceive God as absent – otherwise one would simply not pray – and impossible not to see the world as linked to creation ‘such that world and God are, in this experience, jointly given.’¹⁵⁶ Regarding the religious dimension of our humanity Lacoste considers his position to be neither intrinsicist or extrinsicist.¹⁵⁷ Liturgy proposes an ontology in the margins of being-in-the-world, one that is able to combine both extrinsicism and intrinsicism: ‘while God approaches the world extrinsically, it is only in and through liturgy that God relates intrinsically to being-in-the-world. Whereas God, from the perspective of Dasein, is extrinsically related to the world, for the believer, God and being are intrinsically related to the point that it becomes unconceivable that the world holds no relation whatsoever with being-in-the-world.’¹⁵⁸ This distance is what liturgy enables us to traverse: ‘The man who prays provides himself with access to the originary: carefully bracketing world or earth, he is granted or has returned to him the grounding sense of his ipseity’ (EA 95). The parousiacal moment of prayer stresses its

¹⁵⁵ Hemming, ‘Subject of Prayer’, p. 454.

¹⁵⁶ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 76.

¹⁵⁷ Jeffrey Bloechl, ‘A Response to Jean-Yves Lacoste’, in Kevin Hart and Barbara Wall, eds., *The Experience of God. A Postmodern Response* (New York, 2005): pp. 104–12.

¹⁵⁸ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 76.

discontinuity with the world, but liturgical experience cannot ultimately escape its constraints:

[W]e always pray in the knowledge of the inescapable reality of the world and in the knowledge that it interposes itself between us and a God. (EA 43)

2.4 Existence coram Deo

Even if one preserves the secular Heideggerian hermeneutic of facticity (MAO 5), for Lacoste, prayer ‘is not alien to the ontological constitution of the human being’.¹⁵⁹ Prayer represents a desire for God, and that God’s presence will displace the subject’s own. For Lacoste the experience of prayer is such that ‘it is first and foremost a confrontation with a non-experience. It is possible that nothing happens.’¹⁶⁰ ‘No one enters into liturgy without wishing for God to visit him’, writes Lacoste, but there is no requirement upon God to either appear to the one praying or to answer their prayers – ‘no one experiences liturgy without comprehending that God is never there present to consciousness in an entirely obvious way’ (EA 63). This desire will by no means guarantee an experience of God: the phenomenological intentional consciousness ‘will never be fulfilled by the intuition of a ‘divine’ object’.¹⁶¹ Even ‘[i]n the existence sustained by hope, death remains the naked truth of life’ (EM 68). Even our public prayer, says Lacoste, contains a ‘reminder of our mortality’ in the phrases of the Hail Mary: ‘Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.’ However prayer ‘is not only an eschatological vocation, but also its anticipated realization wherever man is before God and which brackets out being-in-the-world’ (NT 104). And thus, even though the divine condescension is not objectively given to prayer, it remains an object of hope:

¹⁵⁹ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 71.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 71.

¹⁶¹ *Op. cit.*

I stand by the claim that in the act wherein I hope there is no compelling reason to deny death in the name of life, but there is no conceptual constraint to refute the call that the (ethical, interpersonal, religious) content of my experience of temporality is otherwise (than the) time of the naked truth of life. (EM 68-9)

Lacoste adds that: ‘no sane theology has ever said that God isn’t nearby each time a man speaks to or cries out to Him’ (PP 27). The saint ‘is *homo beatus*, the “pilgrim” is *homo viator*’ – and ‘although there is continuity between *homo viator* and the blessed’ (QD 214), God appears differently ‘to *homo comprehensor* than to *homo viator*’ (QD 234).

One of the peculiarities of prayer is, says Lacoste, that Hegel’s master and slave can pray together – which seems ‘outlandish in the eyes of whoever confines himself to viewing [matters] exclusively in Hegelian terms’ (EA 51). This particular dialectic is suspended during liturgical (non)experience, which, like poetry, transgresses the violence of the world – as Lacoste writes ‘what the poet asks of God escapes the sense of worldly logic. These words can be none other than those of prayer’ (NT 59).

Liturgy still ‘unfolds within the limits of our historicity’ – mankind prays within history and within the world, and even if mankind ‘symbolically subvert[s] its relation’ to it (EA 49) its historicity is neither negated nor annulled in the attempt:

However, in contrast to what happens day to day, but which is still – however modestly – caught up in the dialectic which comprises history, those who pray seem to escape in an orderly fashion the reasons of history. My historicity is not denied or cancelled because I try to pay more attention to God than to the meaning of history (and to more than a philosophy or theology of history,

reminding us (or deciding to teach us) that here God is not absent from history, and that under certain conditions man exists even better “before God” than he is definitely an agent of a history). (BHP 388)

And yet this liturgical experience is outside space and time – liturgy is symbolically constituted as a “nontime” (EA 83). This is a time in which we no longer wish to be ‘governed only by the eschatological vigil but nullify the self’s preoccupation with itself’ in favour of an expectation and attentiveness which ‘divests us of our concern with ourselves’ and every future which is purely *our* possibility; the man who prays ‘never ceases to be all alone’ or ‘to see the worldly logic of temporalization exert its power over the time he would wish to extricate from the play of the world’ (EA 83). Prayer ‘puts the world out of play; it breaks with the (certainly authentic, but certainly pre-theological modes)’ of being (NT 105).

Here *kairos* supplants *chronos*: in defiance of Kantian categorization the liturgical “nonplace” where master and slave can pray together is also a “nontime” of peace, of joy and of communion – Schrijvers summarises it thus: ‘The one who prays thus opens a space in which that which keeps the human being at a distance from God – the world and history – is put out of play.’¹⁶² Nonetheless, this temporary experience of God’s presence in prayer is not to be confused with the Parousia (even though Schrijvers refers to its ‘Parousiacal Moment’): the ‘misinterpretation confusing the presence of the Absolute with its Parousia would then arise and be imposed on liturgy, which would be misinterpreted as the worldly place of the greatest happiness’ (EA 61–2). While this confusion is perhaps understandable, ‘God’s presence is not his Parousia’, – liturgical experience is merely the ‘where the

¹⁶² Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 72.

chiaroscuro of the world is dissipated and where man can enjoy the presence of the Absolute as if he were enjoying his Parousia' (EA 85).

2.5 *Ontic prayer*

For Lacoste, prayer is the 'interaction between remembrance and hope'¹⁶³: the memory that 'God once pitched his tent' amongst those of men (NMT 14) and the hope of God's return – 'theology is to do with memory and hope' (EA 136). To pray is to relate to the past – what in theology is called anamnesis, and what in Christian liturgies represents a rehearsal of the sacrifice of Christ, as commanded in Luke 22:19. In the liturgical nonplace, the divine presence is a work of memory and of vigilance: 'between memory and vigilance consciousness demonstrates that it holds being in the mode of vocation' (NT117). As Schrijvers neatly summarises, this is why the prayerful encounter instigates hope: 'Prayer encounters the promise of a (better) future: a land of liberation and an Easter, of a joy untainted by death.'¹⁶⁴ Structurally, prayer has the shape of a *project*: prayer merely anticipates an absolute future in the Parousia in the midst of a 'theological and philosophical aporia of temporality' (NT 100).

The remembrance of God is an eternal vigilance; a difficult eschatological attitude which man tries to overcome, on whose conditions do not originate in a time measured by the presence to oneself – each prayer is a recommencement of the spiritual life, and the attentive consciousness (EM 368). It is 'impossible for man to live a pure present, it is equally impossible to put aside his link to the diachrony of his body and his death' (NT 100-101). This philosophical aporia 'resides in the excess of what time puts into play relative to its conditions', to which is added 'a second,

¹⁶³ Op. cit. On the issue of hope see Gabriel Marcel, 'Sketch of a phenomenology and metaphysics of hope' in *Homo Viator: Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope*, trans. Emma Craufurd and Paul Seaton (South Bend: St Augustine's Press, 2010): pp. 23-61.

¹⁶⁴ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 72.

strictly theological, aporia which lies in the dialectic between worry and anxiety, that is to say, the theoretical and practical ban placed upon anxiety in order to establish insouciance' (NT 101). A covenant, says Lacoste, 'does not abolish time – rather it comes as a form of time, as the most human temporality, but is seamless compared to its native form of the everyday' (NT 101). It does not abolish the transcendental terms upon which all time relies: thus, for Lacoste, theological temporalization includes both a contradiction and confirmation. A contradiction, 'insofar as anxiety meets the requirements of a going concern, albeit without empirical evidence of their rights'. But there is also confirmation of the covenant in that 'it marks – in strict terms – a regression from the world towards creation' (NT 101), not as an escape from time, but as access to its original meaning. The interlacing of concern and anxiety reproduces in its own way the intertwining of creation and the world, and requires, according to Lacoste, a similar hermeneutics: 'the created essence of time is not an obvious gift of experience, no more than creation is available to us' (NT 101). Its thinking is based on rather oblique gifts of experience, although anxiety seems real enough to the consciousness experiencing it thus the theological aporia of temporality is not a pseudo-problem. Covenant is a form of time in which the Absolute, God (not death) is the final horizon, and where concern places the consciousness in relation to this horizon. It also breaks the cycle through which anxiety determines the present; consciousness is left in its own company, its projects, its expectations or its fears. But it does so within the fundamental ambiguity which characterizes the world from creation in which, however, creation has a "place". The possibility of prayer is evidence that it is possible to exist in a covenant: and '[i]n doing so, the man truly exists in an eschatological mode: prayer is not the measure of his being-in-the-world' (NT 101). But the time of prayer is also a time in which concern still worries us –

even when we believe we have excluded it. It does not testify to the covenant between God and man (man who also proves the existence of the world and is de facto subjected to its constraints).

Prayer encounters both the self-imposed limits that the human places upon themselves and the limits of the world; Lacoste distinguishes between the empirical self of consciousness [*le moi empirique*] and an eschatological self of soul or spirit [*un moi eschatologique*], the latter being that part of humanity which is oriented toward and determined by the Absolute – in which this relation ‘is his lifeblood and suffices to define man’, even though, compared to the empirical I, ‘it is merely a sketch or a nascent reality’ whose relation to the Absolute is ‘caught up in the worldly network of local and temporal relations that determine it’ (EA 58).

The self is both caught up in time (because it is a self-and-body), and ‘a temporal object insofar as it is a living self whose present is *ipso facto* a living present. Secondly, ‘the idea of a consciousness that is a timeless spectator of what it considers temporally is banally false. Time is not out with the life of consciousness. All that appears to me appears to *me* and appears to a self that appears to *itself* in time’ (PD 181). Temporality is undeniably dramatic, but amid the drama¹⁶⁵ of a temporal flux, of a ‘discontinuity of experiences’, there is the continued presence of the self ‘which now says “I”, which said “I” yesterday, and which understands perfectly well that it is [...] one and the same “I”.’ There is drama too, ‘if one here follows Heidegger, because we care about things more radically than we perceive them’ (PD 182). It is through prayer that the human being inhabits the eschatological mode of their being and it is through prayer that the human being is able to open a space in which the Word and eschatological promise of the Absolute can descend and

¹⁶⁵ See Hilda Lazon, *Gabriel Marcel – The Dramatist* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1978).

have a place within the world.¹⁶⁶ And yet, while ‘no one enters into liturgy without wishing for God to visit him’, in the immanent sphere of consciousness ‘we can demonstrate our attentiveness [...] but cannot give apodictic proof of a visitation’ (EA 63). Phenomenology can only describe mankind’s attempts to present itself *coram Deo*. It cannot provide proof that God answers its prayers.

But someone who prays does not do so in order to prove their existence or the possibility of a mode of existence: he or she prays, on the one hand, to subordinate what they and world and earth are unveiled as to God’s veiled presence, while hoping, on the other, that the veiled and omnipresent God will provide proof of his presence. Despite the undeniable importance of a phenomenology of the expectation of God, liturgy must first of all appear (to us at least) as a human power to liberate a space where perhaps nothing can come to pass, that, ‘in the sphere of immanence of consciousness, would bear unequivocal witness to God’s condescension’ (EA 47).

However, one seeks to avoid here what Gschwandtner terms two potential misinterpretations of phenomenology: first of all, that it deals only with the real, that is, things that can become objects of consciousness. Secondly, that there is only one mode of appearing, when there are in fact ‘many phenomena and many ways of appearing.’¹⁶⁷ In appearing through revelation ‘God is neither completely hidden nor utterly obvious’ (PP 324). The phenomenality particular to this chiaroscuro is a condition of faith (a condition that we posit in our conceptuality, but which is only a theological banality)’ (PP 338). It is, says Lacoste, ‘high time to admit that, in the debate between philosophy and theology, phenomenology is neutral’ (PD 9) and ‘without limits’ (PD 11). By allowing phenomena to appear in whatever way they give themselves to intuition and through the phenomenological work of making them

¹⁶⁶ See Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 73.

¹⁶⁷ Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?*, p. 165.

appear more clearly and fully, ideas such as presence, anticipation, and promise can be spoken of both theologically and philosophically. The boundary is especially porous in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*, where Kierkegaard shows us the importance of love (PD 28) and that we can 'think God' in the margins of philosophy through affectivity (PD 32-33). Theology thus becomes what Gschwandtner calls 'a rigorous discourse of love'.¹⁶⁸ Lacoste doubts whether the only adequate response to the revelation of a Loving Sovereign can be anything but returning love with love. And yet for Lacoste 'theology may well be speaking of God by loving him. It can say how to deploy the logic of divine love, such as its self-manifestation and in its transmission from human to human' (PP 191). Many objects may be visible only once they are loved; usually something has to be known beforehand but in the case of God love comes before knowledge. Theology is thus also a 'theory of love' (PD 93) although phenomenologically 'it would be wise not to imagine the life of the believer as a perpetual act of love' (PD 94).

Prayer exceeds the normal time of the world and puts it into question (PP 157) – the person who prays 'exists from the future onward' (EA 57) and the parousiacal moment of prayer can 'nullify' the distance between man and God, between the historical and the eschatological (EA 59). Liturgy is, moreover, a communal work that renders existence as coexistence: 'Those who pray together undertake an act of communion' (PP 99). Here, where this desire for communion 'is not merely a figment of the imagination' (PP 55; 100), things become sacraments; liturgy disqualifies the everyday and exceeds Heideggerian "being-with-others".

¹⁶⁸ Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?*, p. 182.

2.6 *Kenotic prayer*

In ‘Prayer as kenosis’, James Mensch argues that we should think of prayer as an attempt to “make room” for the sacred, which necessitates the one praying to undergo a self-emptying, so that the sacred can incarnate itself in our bodily being and behaviour.¹⁶⁹ Jesus Christ is here paradigmatic, the ‘most striking example of incarnation’ which in its specifically Christian sense involves the notion of *kenosis* (that is, of God emptying himself and taking on the form of a slave [Phil. 2:7]). In this work of kenosis one sees the full adoption of mankind’s responsibility for the other person – the model of prayer, writes Lacoste, ‘is the passionate interest in the other, the secret of prayer is to let God speak, its project that of attention and contemplation (EM 472). The most common prayer, says Lacoste, in the Christian ascetic tradition of the “remembrance of God” is Christological prayer (EM 377) – prayer ‘based on the icon of the son made man is the first excursion into Christian prayer... the Christ of history opens for us the space for prayer’ (EM 459).

A strictly phenomenological account of kenosis and incarnation can be expressed in terms of empathy, which comes from the Greek *pathein*, “to suffer or undergo,” and *en*, signifying “in.” According to this etymological meaning, ‘empathy is a *feeling* (a suffering or undergoing) of the world *in* and through another person. At its most basic level, empathy is bodily.’¹⁷⁰ Moreover, this self-emptying can be seen as ‘a response to the problem raised by the biblical concept of the alterity of God’ who, as creator, is prior to the world and independent of it, unrestrained and unconditioned it. God thus ‘cannot be made manifest by a worldly process’ which poses the problem of the presence of God and how this being manifests itself ‘*as it*

¹⁶⁹ James R. Mensch, ‘Prayer as Kenosis’, in Benson and Wirzba, eds., *Phenomenology of Prayer*, pp. 63-72; p. 64; see also James Richard Mensch, *Hiddenness and Alterity: Philosophical and Literary Sightings of the Unseen* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), chapter twelve.

¹⁷⁰ Mensch, ‘Prayer as Kenosis’, p. 68.

is'.¹⁷¹ Kierkegaard, writes Mensch, 'puts this problem in terms of the love that the Incarnation is supposed to make manifest.'¹⁷² Faith relies upon certain types of evidence: truth is experienced through love, just like one "knows" or "recognises" a work of art as such. Writes Lacoste, concerning divine phenomenality:

The name of God has a theological history and nothing can place itself at the end of this history – there where God appears only as love and to be loved – without knowing that this history (and only this history) allows him to recognise the Absolute as present in the form of a servant. (PD 100)

While mankind never leaves the world and still performs its prayer within it, liturgy opens mankind beyond the limit of this experience: the experience of prayer is an experience that 'dwells at the limit' (EA 42). The essence of prayer is praise – liturgy is a nonevent where the person praying awaits presence (and tries to experience the proximity) of God but does nothing but prepare the space of a possibility' (EA 46). The person who prays accomplishes this through an emptying out of themselves in anticipation: the liturgical self is a kenotic self.

Thus the paradoxical joy that is born of humiliation may be the *fundamental mood* of preeschatological experience. The reconciled man, despite what Hegel might say, is still at a distance from his absolute future. And, despite what Nietzsche might say, the disappropriated and humiliated man is not reduced to nothing, and does not reduce himself to nothing, but lives now in the fulfilment of God's promises to come. Man takes hold of what is most proper to him when he chooses to encounter God. This argument can now be made more specific: we can now assert that man says who he is most precisely when he accepts an existence in the image of a God who has taken humiliation upon himself – when he accepts a *kenotic* existence. (EA 194)

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p. 65

¹⁷² Op. cit.

Liturgy and prayer push us to the very limits of human experience. They thus enable us to displace our everyday experience of space and time in aid of a greater peace and love by suspending those ordinary worldly relations. This ‘kenotic existence of abnegation liberates us from false attachments to places, time, and things and frees us for a more authentic existence’.¹⁷³ Even doctors of philosophy have no monopoly over abnegation, but ‘because this gesture is thinkable’, writes Lacoste, ‘doctors of philosophy should not fail to recognize its importance. Abnegation therefore accepts that the Absolute, once man is liturgically turned toward it, takes away its right to embody the figure of humanity afforded him in modernity’ (EA 162).

Ultimately (the) prayer understands that it does not know how to pray, but it only learns this by praying. This agonistic dimension is the ordeal of transcendence: transcendence gives itself as such only when its distance is approachable without ceasing to be distant, and is encountered in the ordeal of speech. Chrétien claims that ‘the manifestation of self to other through speech, an agonistic struggling for its truth, is an ordeal, an undergoing of God, a suffering of God, a theopathy’ (AS 27).

This sense of the suffering speech of the incarnation echoes that of Marion in his own discussion of the passion; the God that Marion attests is crossed out by the sign of the crucified and uses the sign of the trace [vestige] to answer ‘a question of saturation pertaining to the flesh’. The death of Christ offers the apex of his visibility, such that we are able to claim that, truly, this was the son of God (Matthew 27:54). ‘Only the flesh suffers, dies and therefore can live’ (BG 239). Chrétien offers us his own reading:

Prayer is a prey to its addressee. By measuring itself with God, prayer is a speech that has always already lost all measure, the power of measuring itself

¹⁷³ Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?*, p. 183.

and knowing itself completely; it bears, even as it collapses under it – like all speech dictated by love – the weight of giving itself, that is, of losing itself, it suffers the other in its own self-detachment (AS 27).

Chrétien then presents us with the question, ‘How is the speech of prayer wounded by its addressee?’ and answers it thus:

The person praying addresses his speech to the divine capacity to listen. [...] To have God listening to you is an ordeal [which] appears in the attentive light of silence, the voice is really naked. [...] The theological paradox which says that all true prayer is, in one way or another, granted is based in the phenomenon itself. The praying person speaks for a listening that always already forestalls his speech. (AS 27)

The wounded word of prayer speaks of mankind’s ontological poverty before the Absolute. This freely made choice to, at the very least, partially dispossess, proves, says Lacoste, ‘that there is no equivocation between the ontological and the economic senses of poverty, that fundamental ontology can be translated into ways of being, into an ethos, and into concrete gestures that break with every kind of *divertissement*.’ For Lacoste, it demonstrates that dispossession defines mankind more so than its participation in the ‘play of appropriation’. In particular it demonstrates that this determination can ‘govern the experience we have of ourselves and the world’ (EA 175).

3. Ambiguity

Introduction

All theologians are hypocrites. This is the inescapable conclusion of Lacoste's reading of Søren Kierkegaard, whose own protest in *Practice in Christianity* that the object of theology – the “God-man” – is a sign of contradiction which can never be theologically exact. According to Kierkegaard, truth – and its telling – hinged upon the question of the appearance of the ‘God-man’, namely upon his *phenomenality*. The question is how that peculiar *phénoménalité* how might in turn inspire “liturgical knowing” which exposes something of the tension between Kierkegaard's own direct and indirect communication (particularly between the *Upbuilding Discourses* and the *Philosophical Fragments*) and its influence upon Lacoste and his inversion of the conservative paganism of Heidegger's *Geviert* in favour of the radical Christianity of Kierkegaard.

It is the question as to whether human knowledge can itself ‘capture God’ which is hypocritical. Theology is the sole discipline which ‘grasps God inside a supposedly cognitive propositional language: on one hand, expert, on the other, truthful’ (PD 205). However, Lacoste suggests, perhaps by following the lead set by the *Upbuilding Discourses*¹⁷⁴ we might have some confidence in theology's capacity to address its subject, when it foregoes ‘its didactic ambition’ and speaks ‘less about God and more about teaching us how get to know him’ (PD 214). While it cannot avoid talking about God, theological speech is not an end in itself; it has no eschatological vocation and occupies merely ‘a subordinate function’ in the world (PD 214). Theology is, then, ‘the work of sinners, whose first sin is to treat God as an

¹⁷⁴ It is perhaps worth noting that each of the *Upbuilding Discourses* from 1843-44 begins, in fact, with a preface explaining that they are neither sermons (since their ‘author does not have the authority to preach’) nor ‘discourses for upbuilding, because the speaker by no means claims to be a *teacher*’ [EUD 53; 179; 231]). In fact it is the modesty of their claims which recommends them to Lacoste.

object, that is, to speak of him as the Supreme Being' (PD 206). As we have seen contemporary theology has been concerned with the shape of a post-metaphysical – and therefore predominantly post-Heideggerian – theology, freed from the spectre of onto-theology; this has, in the hands of the likes of Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank, seen the border between theology and philosophy redrawn.¹⁷⁵

This indictment of the theologian's task animates the discussion of the difficulties of theological epistemology amid the perils of ontotheology. Lacoste, however, prefers to inhabit a border area that is 'defined either by a co-belonging or by an uncertain belonging' (PP 194), his work has tried to move 'above and beyond the division between the philosophical and the theological' (PD 9). Indeed, that border disappears completely in his discussion of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* (PD 15-32), where Lacoste advises us:

to read the *Fragments* as they are meant to be: as "a bit of philosophy." The text provides no clear information as to what "philosophy" means.

Kierkegaard no more defines the philosophical anymore than he does the theological. (PD 21)

At the frontiers of philosophy and theology therefore, 'we have no sure and certain knowledge' (PD 22). It is, of course, no secret what the *Fragments* are about: salvation, a concept, Lacoste reminds us, with no philosophical history, and a question usually asked by religious, or rather, theological texts (PD 15-16). Philosophy knows about mankind's absolute future, courtesy of Socrates; the *Fragments*, however, are intelligible only when read in parallel with another text, that of the Christian

¹⁷⁵ Cyril O'Regan, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Unwelcoming of Heidegger', in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler, eds., *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2010): pp. 264-298; p. 267. According to O'Regan, 'Marion refuses to accept the terms of relation between (phenomenological-ontological) philosophy and theology intimated in *Being and Time* (1927): declared in the essay 'Phenomenology and Theology' (1928), reiterated in the Zurich lecture of 1951, and performed in the 25-year interim.'

tradition.¹⁷⁶ Whereas Lacoste’s engagement with Heidegger¹⁷⁷ aimed at producing a constructive liturgical theology there has been an explicit rejection of the conservative paganism of the *Geviert* and the hierogamies of earth and sky¹⁷⁸ in favour of the radical Christianity of Kierkegaard: ‘Kierkegaard’s assertion, on this point, is the most radical that Christianity – in its Protestant version – has produced: before God, man is untruth’ (PD 23). Within this exploration of the tension – in which, according to Lacoste the ‘contradictory relationship that unites Kierkegaard and Heidegger thus becomes obvious’ (PD 24) – between untruth and inauthenticity¹⁷⁹ it is possible to see in those Heideggerian notions of “fourfold”, “festival” and “dwelling” quasi-liturgical forms that echo certain Hegelian simulacra:

And if we understand salvation as the gift of “truth” (of course, one need only take one step further to talk about a gift of “authenticity”), then the link between salvation and the philosophical life becomes easily thinkable. Indeed, one need read only a little of the *Fragments* to notice an absence, and a significant one at that, of any eschatology. As the “god in time” takes the form of a servant, but knows neither the cross nor the resurrection, similarly the disciple receives nothing other than the promise of life now really worth living. Understood as a loving relationship between divine master and human

¹⁷⁶ One should still take seriously George Pattison’s injunction not ‘to leap too readily to a mystical reading’ of either Kierkegaard or the *Discourses* and their ‘displacement of conventional subject-object structures’ and to instead read them ‘philosophically’, ‘within the general horizons of human understanding and experience, without appeal to any special dogmatic beliefs.’ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Theology, Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 65. Of course, this does not mean, as we shall see below, that such a reading is impossible (or invalid).

¹⁷⁷ Heidegger, of course, famously observed of Kierkegaard that ‘the existential problematic was so alien to him that, as regards his ontology, he remained completely dominated by Hegel and by ancient philosophy as he saw it. Thus there is more to be learned philosophically from his “edifying” writings than from his theoretical ones – with the exception of his treatise on the concept of anxiety.’ (BT 494) .

¹⁷⁸ However, the question remains as to whether, in Cyril O’Regan’s words, Heidegger’s ‘chthonic insistence on ‘dwelling’ and ‘rootedness’ actually elaborates a type of piety ‘that is in direct competition with Christianity.’ O’Regan, ‘Unwelcoming of Heidegger’, p. 274.

¹⁷⁹ This can be fruitfully compared to the *Upbuilding Discourses* which makes a distinction between “love” and “desire”, in that the latter ‘defrauds a person out of himself and lets him keep only a superficial passing intimation of authentic being’ (EUD 76).

disciple the event of salvation exhausts its reality in the living present of this relationship that tends toward no absolute future at all. Those who have recognized the god in the form of a servant have nothing else to hope for except to love and be loved. (PD 25)

Lacoste has offered a Christian critique of Heidegger's liturgical and doxological forms (liturgical architecture is, we learn, 'in tune with another destiny and another rhythm than Heidegger's temple' [EA 36]) while agreeing that that liturgical form must not yield to modern amnesia or what has been called 'a metaphysical tailspin that instantiates the dreaded metaphysics of presence.'¹⁸⁰ Lacoste's phenomenological analysis therefore distinguishes Heideggerian from Christian forms of liturgy and follows Balthasar's own refusal to separate 'love' and 'being' amid a genuine concern that 'any scheme in which the self or community finds the satisfaction of its desire in what bedazzles' is idolatrous.¹⁸¹ We are, instead, in search of *recognition*, both of God and humanity.¹⁸²

For Lacoste one of the problems of the present nihilistic age is that one no longer knows *who* man is, simply *that he exists*.¹⁸³ Within the topology of the human condition described by Lacoste, the crucial activity of confession begins from 'the

¹⁸⁰ O'Regan, 'Unwelcoming of Heidegger', p. 298.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. p. 273.

¹⁸² The *leitmotif* of Balthasar can perhaps be felt at this point: 'If God wishes to reveal the love that he harbors for the world, this love has to be something that the world can recognize, in spite of, or in fact in, its being wholly other. The inner reality of love can be recognized only by love. In order for a selfish beloved to understand the selfless love of a lover (not only as something he can use, which happens to serve better than other things, but rather as what it truly is), he must already have some glimmer of love, some initial sense of what it is. [...] Knowledge (with its whole complex of intuition and concept) comes into play, because the play of love has already begun beforehand, initiated by the mother, the transcendent. God interprets himself to man as love in the same way: he radiates love, which kindles the light of love in the heart of man, and it is precisely this light that allows man to perceive this, the absolute Love: "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).' Hans Urs von Balthasar, trans. D.C. Schindler, *Love Alone is Credible* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004): pp. 75-76.

¹⁸³ Lacoste, 'Vers le sacrement du pardon', *Communio*, 8 (1983) : pp. 5-24 ; p. 6 cited in Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 22.

intimate examination of one's conscience'¹⁸⁴ resulting in its penance and its refinement. Moreover, what Schrijvers describes as Lacoste's 'phenomenology of confession'¹⁸⁵ is rooted in an experience of failure: mankind cannot forgive its own sins while there are outstanding ethical questions. Questions of peace and reconciliation presuppose 'the failure of the human being to be human';¹⁸⁶ only liturgical experience shows mankind how to be human and allows it to escape the predicament of being and, for Lacoste, as one of the most radical of responses Kierkegaard's assertion of this point is especially helpful:

[C]onfronted by God, man is untruth. By this one understands that he *is* untruth; and highlighting this "is" allows us to add that as such the "sinner" is "in" untruth. (PD 24)

Sin, like salvation, 'appears on every page of the mixture of literary genres that is Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*' (PD 16). In sharing the common human condition theologian and philosopher alike are 'sinners'.

Lacoste, like Marion, is interested in the shape of a post-metaphysical and post-Heideggerian theology; unlike Marion, who in his own riposte to Heidegger redrew the border between theology and philosophy, Lacoste is not interested in any such distinction. Whereas his early work was located in what Donald Mackinnon¹⁸⁷ called the 'borderlands of theology' – a border area that, 'insofar as we understand it, is defined either by a co-belonging or by an uncertain belonging' (PP 194) – by Lacoste's own admission his later work tries to move 'above and beyond the division between the philosophical and the theological' (PD 9). But it is obvious, says

¹⁸⁴ Lacoste, 'Quatre thèses théologiques sur la confession', *Revue Thomiste* 82 (1982) : pp. 392-413 ; p. 402 cited in Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 17.

¹⁸⁵ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, pp. 15-36.

¹⁸⁶ Lacoste, 'Quatre thèses', p. 410 cited in Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 18.

¹⁸⁷ Donald M. MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968).

MacKinnon, 'that you cannot believe in the forgiveness of sins if there are no sins to forgive.' Theologians may be the biggest sinners of all.

The church has from its beginning called upon mankind to seek God's forgiveness through the confession of sin. But our understanding of sin and guilt has, says MacKinnon, 'been led astray by the judicial analogy', which has confused the religious fact of sin with the legal definition. We are all sinners because 'we have fallen short of the glory of God' and thus 'are all in the human predicament together'; our denial of 'our common humanity to thank God that we are not as other men are – whether that be unjust and extortionate even as this publican, or priggish and respectable even as this Pharisee.'¹⁸⁸

3.2 Philosophical Christology

Philosophy does not experience the existence of sacred texts or sacred histories as such – that is, as sacred. The role that philosophy has given to itself was to translate the meaning of revealed representations into the language of reason. Donald MacKinnon (from whom Fergus Kerr borrows the phrase) even coined the expression 'philosophy of theology' which, says Lacoste, describes 'a metatheology'.¹⁸⁹

Although 'liturgical in essence' this aspect of theology, suggests Lacoste, was attenuated under Neo-Scholasticism. So its recent rediscovery as a site of speech and meaning concerns every theory of Christian discourse, and raises the notion of liturgy beyond 'the limited framework of the theory of Christian worship' (ECT 1560). This is not a denial of reflection and critical thought, but if theology deals with the mystery of God then, in a manner reminiscent of that of Henri de Lubac, 'it deals with it in a Church for which this mystery offers itself to thought in an economy of presence and

¹⁸⁸ Donald M. Mackinnon, *God, Sex, and War* (London: 1963), pp. 124-5.

¹⁸⁹ Lacoste, 'Review of Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*', *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 85: 68 (1987): pp. 565-568; p. 566.

event – in a Church, therefore, whose religious practices provide the first matrix for speaking *about* God by offering a language in which to speak *to* him’ (ECT 1560).

This idea is repeated in *La phénoménalité de Dieu*: a ‘well-formed theological language speaks *to* God before speaking *about* God, and only speaks about God by being prepared beforehand to speak to God’ (PD 215).

This economy of presence (of the Absolute to mankind’s entreaties) and event (of ecclesial assembly) reappears in Lacoste’s discussion of Kierkegaard’s *Upbuilding Discourses* and helps to reinforce the location of the theologian and their work within a hermeneutic and liturgical community (or even a liturgical hermeneutic community, with the liturgy broadly conceived as the work of the community *coram Deo*).

Moreover, it helps to reinforce the often held association between theology and prayer: Lacoste notes that each of the *Upbuilding Discourses* is prefaced by a prayer which inaugurates it, by establishing the phenomenality of the God *about* which it is speaking as one *to* whom it can speak (PD 215). Hermeneutics, concludes Lacoste elsewhere, is ‘a genuinely liturgical theology – a theology of words that become Word’, more so in the act of preaching (ECT 1560). Describing Balthasar’s 1948 article ‘Theology and sanctity’ as the ‘manifesto’ for an existential theology, Lacoste reminds us that the question of the theologian is inseparable from that of their person: ‘[t]heological language is a believing language, self-implicating, which cannot be understood separately from those who speak it’ (ECT 1560).

Theology cannot therefore be entirely defined without discerning in it a search for charity which is reciprocal since it itself is prompted by charity (TP 15) – here Lacoste echoes remarks he made in *Présence et Parousie* about theology as an exercise of compassion, conducted in and in response to the co-affective and pre-discursive gift of the world that inaugurated that charity (PP 171). Theology is,

therefore, the experience of the saints as much as it is academic work (perhaps more so), which makes the theologian more than merely a professor (PP 170). It is in that context, then, that one should understand Lacoste's preference for the ascetic, the pilgrim and the holy fool. In his articulation of their varied stances before the Absolute (that is, *coram Deo*), what is important is the distance that they open up with their liturgical transgression of the world: onto-theology is the unintended consequence of the separation of the disciplines, and the creation of unfettered philosophical and theological speculations. In order not to be contaminated by these pernicious ideas they must therefore stand outside the usual community of received opinion. The question though remains as to the standing of these ascetics and holy fools with regard to the mainstream, orthodox community; moreover, in the potential confusion between 'ecstatic and enstatic conditions' there is the danger of life being reduced to existence even when those experiences are rarely purely enstatic or ecstatic (ED 252-253).

If theology, reasons Lacoste, 'is an experience, it is simultaneously a discourse' among all of those discourses that 'aspire to be true' (ECT 1561) – theological arguments are merely displacements: a speech 'that speaks the truth about essential things comes to meet us from its housing in particular languages and times' (MH 263). Theology has had to prove that its experience is indeed the experience of the *logos* (Patristic teaching contended that the divine *logos* is inseparable from the *logos* present in human beings – for his part, Lacoste says that the *logos* of theology is essentially a communication [MH 266]). Theology 'is not really the (thematic) subject matter of this book', writes Jérôme de Gramont in his review of Lacoste's *Etre en danger*, 'yet its sole purpose is to show how someone who practices phenomenology and begins to describe the objects that populate the world of everyday experience is

entitled to one day say something about God'. Phenomenology, says de Garamont, is the 'logos at the service of phenomena, that is, at the service of what shows itself'. Theology is 'human speech about God which finds its authority in the revelation of God himself'. So far so good – theology is a discipline (*logos*) that respects its phenomenon (God or θεός [*theos*]) but as Gramont notes, 'Anyone who has read a bit of phenomenology knows that things are a bit more complicated than that' (he adds parenthetically that 'this phrase could serve as a conclusion to all books of philosophy').¹⁹⁰

When the term 'science' was redefined in modernity, theology was therefore obliged to justify its own epistemic confidence – and here the concept of "theological science"¹⁹¹ reappeared as an attempt to reintegrate theology into the rigorous and pluralist Enlightenment-derived community of knowledge (ECT 1561).

Since it was sat the table of the sciences, theology wanted to be like them: that is, it therefore wanted merely to be a work of know-how. The most cursory glance at pre-university (or pre-scholastic) theology, however, convinces us that its discourse is not really that of know-how, or that it is know-how only by being an introduction to knowing. The first (but certainly not the only) goal of scholastic theology is to speak of God through know-how. However, theology can also give itself the more important task of letting us get to know.
(PD 213-4)

¹⁹⁰ Jérôme de Gramont, 'Review of *Etre en danger*', *Revue Nunc: littérature, poésie, création artistique* <http://www.corlevour.fr/spip.php?article719> [accessed February 2013]

¹⁹¹ Lacoste refers to Thomas F. Torrance, whose 1969 book *Theological Science* (Oxford: Blackwell) Lacoste translated into French. He describes it as a 'philosophy of theology' or 'theological epistemology' in which theology is a science insofar as it accedes to the constraints set by its object, God. despite his reservations and the lessons of history (theology's increasing marginalisation), Lacoste is impressed by its search for a meta-language and its combined critical and kerygmatic concerns. Lacoste, 'Thomas F. Torrance', *Les œuvres philosophiques : Dictionnaire – pensée contemporaine*, François Mattéi, ed., (Paris : PUF, 1992) : p. 3851.

This paradoxical attempt to restore theology to her position as the “queen of the sciences” by once more redefining her as a science represents for us the risk of *savoir* overtaking *connaissance* and the reduction of theological language to the status of an object by confining her to a single understanding of knowing; the phenomenologist has the modest but significant task of being the guardian of the plurality of modes of being (ED 358). Does theology still have its say? Yes, because it tells us that this transient world will come to pass in favour of another that will not: that of the Kingdom (ED 358). Perhaps the theologian, says Lacoste, will talk about how ‘the being of an eschatological point of view authorises a recapitulation of meaning’ (ED 38) – after all, its eschatological language ‘would be drained of content if we could not read in it the certainty of an imminent end to historical time’ (MH 264). However, both the theologian’s discourse and historical-temporal existence are merely provisional – an element ‘whose manifestation is always fragmentary, and in which meaning is anticipated rather than given, and never at our disposal’ (ED 38-9); eschatological awareness is ‘a permanent feature of theological experience’ (MH 265)

Lacoste has stated that knowing [*connaissance*] does not disqualify know-how [*savoir*]. On the other hand, knowing ‘may very well not “know” what it “learns” about and need the help of knowledge: the case of “religious” experience is here exemplary’ (PD 215). And, says Lacoste, as much as we claim to know how to criticize any pretention to “objective” language, the patient approach to know-how will be inextricably bound up in the play of knowing and not simply intervene in some incidental manner (PD 215).

While theology may attempt to fashion ‘an ideal image’ for itself (for instance, that of monarch), its recurrent image is in fact that of the word proclaimed and commented upon liturgically by the ministers of the Church. However, this

mystagogical motif (which is beloved of Eucharistic ecclesiology) is complemented by theology's 'perpetual quest for the most accurate language' as part of that 'debate in which *all* languages that aspire to be true participate'. Mystagogical and doxological demands are not, however, contradicted by critical necessities: theology – as Lacoste has been at pains to point out via analogy to phenomenology – 'is plural by nature' (ECT 1561). This 'plurality of discourses leads to a tenuous equilibrium': a merely liturgical theology would not meet its missionary demands; if it were merely scientific (read: scholastic) then it would not meet the needs of the spiritual lives of its community of believers. This 'kerygmatic' constraint upon the structure of theological language is due to its status as an evangelical discourse which is 'committed to the transmission of 'good news''. It is meant to arouse joy, and was born with 'reasons for hope' about which it cannot be silent 'without ceasing to be itself' (MH 266). However, its haste in 'showing the world a way out of the evils of atheism, idolatry and sin – in short, of existence lived within the limits of the 'world' (MH 266-7) did mean that 'the words which went to form the kerygma were picked up in a hurry' (MH 266). The purpose of Lacoste's genealogical excursion is then to demonstrate how the history of theology exposes the very aporia that threaten it and 'the conditions of theology's loyalty to its own logos and its own functions'. Thus, plural by nature and caught up in a variety of ways of being, clearly no 'ecclesiastical function could exhaust the practice of theology', while 'no simple definition could exhaust its meaning'. Put simply, concludes Lacoste, the status of the theologian is 'multifaceted' neither 'the bishop'¹⁹², nor the professor, nor the mystic could suffice as such to realise the whole essence of the theological' – just as theology is the historical

¹⁹² Lacoste is here critiquing Jean-Luc Marion's contentious claim that the bishop is 'the theologian par excellence' (GWB 152).

94discourse of a Church never entirely absorbed in a single task, it does not entrust one person 'with the exclusive responsibility of issuing commentary' (ECT 1561).

Western philosophy has, for centuries, concerned itself with the person of Christ and Hegel is only the most obvious figure in a list that includes Spinoza, Leibniz, Fichte, Hölderlin and Schelling, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, whilst in France it includes, amongst others, Pascal and Maine de Biran. This philosophical Christology represents an investigation of the 'Idea Christi', namely, the manifestation of the Absolute in the contingency and tragedy of history.

3.3 Tragedy and metaphysics

For MacKinnon it is 'where people live, think, and pray together that they rely on the transcendent, and where the work of God is present. MacKinnon understands the "placing" of issues in human life in the world, and the acute dilemmas of modern history.¹⁹³ For MacKinnon the 'problem of metaphysics', says Lacoste, is how 'to relate ontology, tragedy, poetry and religion, serving the same access to transcendence, or even hermeneutics of transcendence.'¹⁹⁴

The deep moral insight which can be found in the difficulties and tragedies of life (often expressed as or in literature) is beyond what can be explained in terms of any form of ethical naturalism; MacKinnon insists on the human "receptivity" of faith 'elicited, though not compelled by external occurrence, and always orientated upon that which lies outside the interior life of the believing subject'.¹⁹⁵ MacKinnon also believed that philosophers such as Kant were 'deeply in bondage' to generalized

¹⁹³ Only 'when we see morality as a coming to terms with our actual nature will we esteem it for what it is, something at once quite simple and authoritative, and yet as rich and diverse in content as human life itself.' Donald M. MacKinnon, *A Study in Ethical Theory* (London: A. & C. Black, 1957), p. 178.

¹⁹⁴ Lacoste, 'Donald M. MacKinnon', *Les œuvres philosophiques : Dictionnaire – pensée contemporaine*, François Mattéi, ed., (Paris : PUF, 1992), p. 3509.

¹⁹⁵ MacKinnon, *Ethical Theory*, p. 44.

forms of expression; Kant's work 'is suffused by a hostility to the particular'.¹⁹⁶ Even if the particularity of Jesus Christ presents 'awkward material' to the philosopher, however, that is no excuse not to do justice to Jesus' historical particularity. If Christology represents a 'human intellectual response to the overwhelming fact of the ministry, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus', then some form of Christology is inevitable, even for a philosopher.¹⁹⁷ As MacKinnon concedes, 'It was certainly the claim of the young Hegel that his dialectic owed much to his meditation on the fundamental Christian rhythm of crucifixion and resurrection.'¹⁹⁸

Both Hegel and Schelling, Lacoste reminds us, produced Christologies; thus Christ, according to this logic, 'does not belong to theology and a Christology outside theology is possible' (PD 18). Besides, 'we quickly run into an obstacle. It is true that Christ was crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem and exposed to everyone – and thus everyone can talk about him, including philosophers' (PD 18). The answer, Lacoste feels, may rely upon other texts from the Kierkegaardian corpus, through their mixture of genres, and 'primarily through their introduction of a literary genre previously unknown to philosophy, that of the parable' (PD 15). There are 'genuine discoveries to be made', writes MacKinnon, 'if we can overcome the paradoxes that quickly emerge'.¹⁹⁹

After Kant, transcendence is, by definition, what lies beyond the frontiers of intelligible discourse and a theology which avoids the question of the transcendent is 'doomed in the end to evacuate Christian faith of any serious intellectual content'.²⁰⁰

Donald M. MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), p. 25.

¹⁹⁷ MacKinnon, *Borderlands*, p. 64.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 153.

¹⁹⁹ Donald MacKinnon, 'Substance in Christology: A cross-bench view', in *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty: A Donald MacKinnon Reader*, John McDowell, ed., (London: T&T Clark, 2011): pp. 237-254; p. 241.

²⁰⁰ MacKinnon, *Borderlands*, p. 30.

In taking the concrete history of Jesus seriously theology necessarily encountered metaphysics, by which MacKinnon meant ontology and the metaphysical implications of particulars, the most stubborn of which was the cross of Jesus Christ, which defied easy ontological categorization – ‘there is no escape from contingency’.²⁰¹

There are different sorts of facts but a genuine difference between what is and what is not factual; the truth of Christianity rests on the factual, and the philosopher’s task, says MacKinnon, is to disentangle ‘confusions and illusions’ which come from ‘the imposition of a restricted inflexible paradigm of what it is to be a fact’.²⁰² Jesus Christ represents the ‘factual occurrence’ of loving self-giving by all three persons of the Trinity upon which all human relation to God depends.

Christianity presents mankind with the paradox that certain events which might have been otherwise are ‘of ultimate, transcendent import’ but without losing their contingent character. *Crucifixus est sub Pontio Pilato* and *passus et sepultus est* are, says MacKinnon, ‘contingent propositions’ their subject-matter free of miraculous undertones. And yet ‘this judicial murder, its pain and its end, form the substance of the confession of faith’. We thus cannot permit Christianity’s claim to truth ‘unless we can also claim factual truth in a simple ordinary sense, for propositions concerning the way the subject of that suffering approached his end.’²⁰³

The question of the factuality of the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is one in which history and faith condition each other, and meet their limits in a mystery which ‘involves and encompasses them’; human understanding reaches its limits in an ontological mystery, the mystery of the ‘kenosis of the Incarnation, the self-emptying of the Son, his conformity to the limitations of human particularity’ which reveals ‘concretely, decisively and effectually the manner of the presence of

²⁰¹ Ibid. p. 81.

²⁰² Ibid. p.76.

²⁰³ Ibid. p. 87.

God, in his changeless love and all-powerful humility'.²⁰⁴ There is an approach besides cognition 'which sees the metaphysical as something lying beyond the frontiers of intelligible descriptive discourse, yet as something which *presses* on us with a directness and immediacy which requires no argument to convince us of its reality.'²⁰⁵

As MacKinnon stresses, theological truth lies at the limits of philosophy, in 'the abyss of the unknown, never precisely to be measured but discernibly not altogether fathomless, an infinite resistant to, yet not ultimately alien to, the reach of understanding'.²⁰⁶ Once one has cleared away all the images improperly applied to him, God is inexpressible, to be thought 'only within the context of the most rigorous discipline of silence'.²⁰⁷ It was in that silence the possibility of speech – a fragmented, broken, and unsystematic discourse – became a reality'.²⁰⁸

If we are to speak of God, asks Rowan Williams, can we do so 'in a way that does not amount to another evasion of the world'? Is there is a way of talking about God that manages 'what we cannot achieve - a systematic vision of the world as a necessarily inter-related whole.'²⁰⁹ The unity of theology, Lacoste tells us, is discovered only through 'the articulated plurality of theological discourses' and ensuring that they are articulated well is not only a good division of theological labour but 'perhaps the essential task of the church' (ECT 1561-2). MacKinnon spoke of 'a continuing impoverishment of fundamental theological thought springing from excess

²⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 79.

²⁰⁵ Donald M. MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 55.

²⁰⁶ Donald M. Mackinnon, *Themes in Theology: The Three-fold Cord* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), p. 1.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 19.

²⁰⁸ Peter Sedgwick, 'Anglican Theology', in David Ford and Rachel Muers, eds., *The Modern Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005): pp. 178-193; p. 185.

²⁰⁹ Rowan Williams, 'Trinity and Ontology', in Kenneth Surin, ed., *Christ, Ethics and Tragedy: Essays in Honour of Donald MacKinnon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): pp. 71-92; p. 78.

reverence for powers that be as ordained of God²¹⁰ and cherished philosophy for its ability to sharpen critical reason:

There is a sense in which anyone who is a philosopher must regret the intrusive preoccupation of the question of faith, regret it lest such preoccupation deflect the energies of his thinking from its proper concerns and infect his disinterestedness with the *parti pris* attitudes of apologetics. Yet it is the case that while increasingly both this self-knowledge and a deepening distrust of the ecclesiastical *Apparat* lead me to be mistrustful of a very great deal I have enjoyed, yes enjoyed, in the world of the Christian religion and be aware that I must surely come equally to mistrust a great deal more, the domination of the *mysterium Christi* deepens its almost obsessive sovereignty over my mind.²¹¹

And it is by their witness to the *mysterium Christi*, ‘through word and teaching, through worship and sacrament, that those very structures must be judged, and if found wanting, swiftly rejected.’²¹² Nonetheless, there is some dissent: the “job” of a theologian, avers Lacoste, is ‘defined canonically, albeit with nuances, as a “task of the church”. Theology is not defined (primarily or exclusively) as free speech. It is authorised speech. And however that the authorization is drawn, theological work is both working within a community and serving this community’ (PD 19). For Lacoste, one consequence of Protestantism has been that philosophizing and theologizing have both become professional activities – ‘Husserl says that the reduction is a professional (that of the philosopher), and once we have stopped working – our job does not makes constant demands upon us – we find ourselves returned to the world of the “natural attitude”’ (PD 18).

²¹⁰ Mackinnon, *Themes*, p. 4.

²¹¹ Mackinnon, *Borderlands*, p. 31.

²¹² Mackinnon, *Themes*, p. 6.

For MacKinnon Christian theology was the loser in a victory won of Plato and the philosophers ‘over the poets, and in particular the tragedians’.²¹³ Tragedy, and not theory, is the genre that most closely corresponds to the subject matter of theology, its truth ‘constituted by the correspondence of its credenda with harsh, human reality, and with the divine reality that met that human reality and was broken by it’.²¹⁴

On the one hand, says Lacoste, ‘we cannot dispense with thinking of being and substance – but we cannot think of being by being indifferent to the ethical and political’. On the other hand, ‘one cannot conceive the call that morality makes to transcendence without recognizing the tragic ambiguity of existence. One can no longer speak of transcendence without agreeing to enter into disturbing language games that offer us discourse through parables. And we cannot, in the end, uphold the language of religion without confessing that it does so not only for the sake of ways of seeing the world, but the world as it is and as God is – or is not. A willingly circular questioning also tries to maintain all the requirements of rationality, and it is not surprising that most responses belong to the order of suggestion rather than that of a settled thesis.’²¹⁵

3.4 Ambiguity

The extent to which theological claims are intrinsically ‘sinful’ (PD 206) is a question to which Lacoste has returned in the years following its publication. In an essay published two years afterwards, Lacoste observed that ‘[t]he least that we might expect from a dogmatic statement, it seems, is that its words should be precise – but the most one can say is that this is not always the case’ (HH 85). In that essay Lacoste undertakes a detailed examination of the Chalcedonian confession of faith, arguing

²¹³ Mackinnon, *Borderlands*, p. 100.

²¹⁴ Mackinnon, *Explorations*, p. 21.

²¹⁵ Lacoste, ‘Donald M. MacKinnon’, p. 3509.

that it should be treated with an appropriate hermeneutic compassion, according to the ‘principle of charity’, conceding that while its ‘authors’ enthusiasm’ may have led to ‘ambiguity’ separating ‘the double *homoousios*’ of the confession from ‘its kerygmatic context in order to assign a univocal meaning to *ousia*’ is itself ‘a sin against every sane hermeneutic (and therefore against charity)’ (HH 87).

This principle, which Lacoste draws from Anglo-American philosophy of language, particularly that of Willard van Quine and Donald Davidson, ‘enjoins us to attribute to others’ propositions the maximum coherence and rationality’ (HH 87).

Adopting the approaches of Quine (‘radical translation’) or Davidson (‘radical interpretation’)²¹⁶ provides an example of ‘the principle of charity which requires that we attribute to what others have said the quality of spoken language and not simply that of noise’. While this may not ‘deny the fact that someone can also make nothing empty sounds’ it does require ‘that we ascribe sense to what might otherwise be seen as not having it’ (HH 87). That being said, as Maurice Wiles points out there is evidence from the historical situation at the time of Nicaea to indicate support for a certain deliberate imprecision that suited Constantine’s interests: ‘it is clear from the letter of Eusebius of Caesarea ... that the Emperor was ready to allow the greatest latitude in its interpretation’.²¹⁷ When examined on the basis of Greek theories of substance, and bearing in mind the ensuing theological struggles, the *homoousios* of Nicaea appears ‘as the product of a desire for meaning surpassing any philosophical

²¹⁶ Davidson also referred to it as the principle of ‘rational accommodation’, a version of which is also to be found in Quine’s work. Intended to optimise agreement between speakers it combines two notions: an assumption of rationality or “coherence” and an assumption of causal relatedness (or “correspondence”) between beliefs – especially perceptual beliefs – and their objects. Interpretation depends upon both: beliefs must be consistent with one another and with the speaker’s overall behaviour and our knowledge of their environment since it is the worldly causes of beliefs that must, in the ‘most basic cases’, be taken to be the objects of belief. Charity is both a constraint upon and a presupposition of interpretative activity: for instance, if the speaker’s beliefs agree with our own, then we can use our own beliefs as a guide to theirs. More on this can be found in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <http://plato.stanford.edu> [accessed 3 October 2012].

²¹⁷ Maurice Wiles, ‘*Omooyzioe hmin [Homoousios emin]*,’ *Journal of Theological Studies* 16 (1965): pp. 454-461, p. 454.

conditioning’; nonetheless its use, and the creed that accompanies it, ‘remain possible regardless of the fate of Greek concepts of *ousia*’ (ECT 181). The choice of the God of the philosophers, of *logos* over *muthos* and the conception of Christianity as “true philosophy” (with pagan philosophy re-conceived as a “preparation for the gospel”) saw the development of a Christology that combined the Johannine and the Hellenistic *logos*. These were all factors in how Christianity developed its doctrines (‘its canonical interpretation of the foundational texts’) using the conceptual resources offered by Greece. However, this Christian use of Greek words and ideas ‘took the form of isolated borrowings’ whose theological appropriateness sometimes ‘concealed spectacular philosophical blunders and imprecisions’ (ECT 179).

So while the principle of charity (see TP 15) ought to compel us to exercise proper hermeneutic sensitivity equally Lacoste does not wish to ‘suggest that that rhetorical and kerygmatic intentions ... can entitle a dogmatic text to get away [*impunément*] with ambiguous doctrine’, although ‘both must be linked, because kerygma necessarily involves an art of expression’ (HH 88). Lacoste’s point is this: ‘not only is no dogmatic statement perfect and incapable of improvement ... we cannot separate a dogmatic text from its catechetical and homiletic intentions’ (HH 88). As Wiles reminds us the ‘locus of salvation is the sphere of ordinary personal existence in which God establishes fellowship with man’²¹⁸; but, Lacoste wonders, ‘ought a dogmatic text offer us nothing but the most correct conceptual language?’ (HH 88)

Lacoste argues that while theology ‘has an idea or two what an escape from metaphysics might be like’ (HH 94) it should ‘accept that the philosopher can correct this or that conceptual mistake for it’ (HH 99). While it is ‘less obvious’ that the

²¹⁸ Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 111.

philosopher ‘*should* work with the theologian in the composition or the reading of theological texts’ this “working relationship” should be ‘maintained at all costs’ (HH 99).²¹⁹ The notion of solidarity which the Chalcedonian formula presupposes is, in fact, well expressed by the word ‘*homoousios*’ which in turn is not merely a ‘metaphysical’ category but also a moral and eschatological one.

Criticizing scholasticism requires ‘knowing how to criticize metaphysics’. Lacoste is clear that ‘[b]y teaching the theologian how (best) to say what he means, the philosopher stands at the margins of theology ... as an interested spectator’ (HH 99). These services may be rendered in a ‘completely unintentional way’: Lacoste notes that Wittgenstein’s influence upon theology might be that of a philosopher who could not help “seeing every problem from a religious point of view”,²²⁰ but ‘to whom it never occurred to talk to a theologian’ (HH 99).²²¹ Lacoste is clear that, above all, one point should be maintained: ‘if there must be rigour in theology and philosophy, the philosophical hermeneutics of theological texts and the critical interpretation of philosophical texts by the theologian are not an option but an imperative’ (HH 99).²²² Lacoste is here unpicking an all too easily assumed association of theology with philosophy, usually expressed in the binary ‘faith and reason’ or ‘*fides et ratio*’.

According to Lacoste philosophy ‘is entitled to deal rationally with divinity’ (INT 10) and the broader task of ‘thinking’ (whose proper task ‘is not to be taken for a geometric work and which collapses on itself when it takes itself for such’) is a

²¹⁹ Lacoste offers the Cistercian theologians as an example of thinkers whose texts are, paradoxically, read as post-scholastic; Cistercian theology never compromised with metaphysics.

²²⁰ As Lacoste notes, the meaning of this assertion has been the subject of much debate. On this see: Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, edited with a response by Peter Winch (London: Routledge, 1993).

²²¹ In fact, Lacoste observes, ‘no Cambridge theologian ever came into contact with him, either as a colleague or as a student’.

²²² Lacoste concludes, wryly, ‘short of mindlessly forbidding the philosopher from reading theology, and the theologian from reading philosophy!’

“personal” before it is a rational work’ (PD 104).²²³ While Lacoste raises ‘no objection’ to the ‘existence’ of the discipline of “philosophy of religion”, he is nevertheless embarrassed in the form that it has taken and that ‘modern philosophy of religion, from Schleiermacher through to William James, relies heavily upon a concept of experience ... as religious sentiment’ (INT 4). While he concedes that this has the advantage of ‘providing an easy entry into the subject’ it ‘restricts and limits the relationship between man and God’. In order to illustrate this problem, Lacoste offers the following question: ‘What is the believer “doing” when their experience of God is not a “religious experience” (for example, while reading and agreeing with a theological text nevertheless without experiencing the presence of God)?’ In response Lacoste reminds us that ‘[e]xisting “before God”, *coram Deo*, is not the same as living in a perpetual “religious experience”. And [the concept of] “liturgy,”... is nothing more than what Gerhard Ebeling called the “*coram* relationship” a concept which arises from the philosophical question that is Lacoste’s discomfort with traditional philosophy of religion.

Liturgy, as portrayed by Lacoste in *Experience and the Absolute*, provides a critique of religious experience, particularly as found in the philosophy of religion. Liturgical experience thus asks the human being where it is in relation to God, inaugurating a topology of human existence rather than the ontological stance offered by Heidegger.²²⁴

²²³ See Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958). On the advantages of Polanyi’s work for any theory of the relationship between “faith” and “reason” Lacoste directs us to Thomas F. Torrance, ed., *Belief in Science and in Christian Life: The Relevance of Michael Polanyi’s Thought for Christian Faith and Life* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1980).

²²⁴ One of Lacoste’s earliest commentators, Jean Greisch, noted this topological question, ‘Adam, where are you?’ *Le buisson ardent et les lumières de la raison : Tome II* (Paris : Editions du Cerf, 2002): pp. 266–7. The consequence of being the only creature not named by Adam himself has been addressed by Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

In Lacoste's analysis the human being is defined by two places: the world "in" which it exists as *Dasein* the world and the earth "on" which it dwells as a mortal. While the latter might accommodate the pagan divinities that intrigued the later Heidegger, for Lacoste the Heideggerian fourfold only allows humanity to pronounce the name of God ambiguously (EA 18); only the pilgrim can suggest that liturgy might hold the secrets of topology (EA 22).

However no religious experience can provide us with clear and distinct evidence that it is God we are experiencing, neither can it function as a proof of the existence of such religious realities (PP 19). Religious experience inevitably tells us more about ourselves than anything else: 'religious feeling proves more clearly man's relation to "earth" [...] than it proves [...] his relation to God' (EA 198 n. 17). Such religious experience tells us more about the subject of experience – the human being – than about its object – 'God'.

MacKinnon was willing to explore "living discourses" – parables and drama, those forms which inform but are open in texture and by their indirection not only 'point to unnoticed possibilities of well-doing, but to hint, or more than hint, at ways in which things fundamentally are.'²²⁵ In doing so, they illuminate human life by 'inducing deeper self-criticism, by puncturing make-believe, by renewing simplicity, etc.'²²⁶ Moreover, says Lacoste, the God who appears in the *Fragments* only offers a hint or two to his identity (PD 91). For MacKinnon the transcendent is where people live, think, and pray together; he, like Lacoste, understands the ethical topology of human life in the world, and its historical dilemmas.²²⁷

²²⁵ MacKinnon, *Metaphysics*, p.79.

²²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 94.

²²⁷ "Theory unrelated to personal conduct was for [MacKinnon] an impossibility.' David Brown, *Divine Humanity: Kenosis Explored and Defended* (London: SCM Press, 2010), p. 122.

On Golgotha God gives himself without limit but in a manner that neither Jesus nor humanity can process in our consciousness; this understanding of humanity offers a criticism of experience and phenomenology. Lacoste's Christology is rooted in the fact of the Cross as being what offers us the phenomenality of God as 'the presumptive ground of reality' not simply 'an eidetic possibility'²²⁸. But this is a stark Christology characterised primarily by eschatological dispossession - the phenomenality of God is given to us 'in a scene of torture and criminal execution, disgrace and abandonment, without any experience of consolation, triumph or decency'²²⁹.

For MacKinnon a 'radicalized and transformed' notion of the contingent is required by any properly 'high' Christology²³⁰ – in becoming incarnate God breaks down standard definitions of human historicity and gives it a new definition in the historicity of Jesus, rooted in an 'acceptance that Jesus' mission had ended for him in disaster: in a real sense of abandonment'²³¹; the resurrection does not mean that the cross becomes wholly positive – 'its unresolved side must be allowed to stand'.²³²

Hart, though, is too pessimistic – there is, for Lacoste, the possibility of hope. While the liturgical present is one that anticipates its absolute future from the past, there is also the hope that the promises of God in Christ – redemption, reconciliation and resurrection – will be the fate of humanity. As an imitation of Christ, humanity hopes that through liturgical experience it might participate in the being of Christ: specifically in those times 'where it has become difficult to discern my proper human

²²⁸ Kevin Hart, 'Religious Experience and the Phenomenality of God', in Lieven Boeve and Christoph Brabant, eds., *Between Philosophy and Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010): pp. 127-146; p. 143.

²²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 143.

²³⁰ MacKinnon, *Borderlands*, p. 81.

²³¹ Brown, *Divine Humanity*, p. 123.

²³² Brown, *Divine Humanity*, p. 123; Christopher Devanny, 'Truth, Tragedy and Compassion: some reflections on the theology of Donald MacKinnon', *New Blackfriars* 78 (1997): pp. 33-42.

face,' Lacoste writes, 'I can always let the God who became a face give me a face' (TH 25).

For Lacoste the concrete and ontic act of prayer is above all a dialectic of remembrance and hope, an interaction between the memory of the historical incarnation of God and the hope of that God's return. Prayer is – through a relating to the past – a remembrance of the Absolute, which will either bring to mind creation or recall the life and ministry of Jesus. It is from such 'remembrance that vigil (NT 117) and hope will befall the human being.'²³³

3.5 Radical Christianity

In 2008 Lacoste offered nine studies in the phenomenality of God, that is, the different ways in which the divine manifests itself phenomenologically. Many of these – themes such as anticipation, silence and love – are discussed elsewhere. This present section will examine the relationship between liturgy, theology and philosophy, centred on the particular phenomenality of Christ, and with specific reference to Lacoste's discussion of Kierkegaard, who has been such an important influence upon Lacoste.

The bold claim at the start of this chapter that 'all theologians are hypocrites', was the inescapable conclusion of Lacoste's reading of Kierkegaard: theology traps God inside a propositional language, in defiance of its kerygmatic and doxological imperatives (PD 205). Although this language is intended to be cognitive it has the effect of imperilling certain key tenets of the Christian confession of faith. Lacoste's discussion of Chalcedon furnishes us with an example, that of substance:

What do we mean, either in philosophy or theology, when we talk about substance? We may mean that Peter as he was twenty years ago and Peter he

²³³ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 72.

as today are “substantially” the same. We may mean that the one God is indivisibly Father, Son and Spirit. But if we do not want to say more than that, then two objections seem unstoppable. The first is that Peter is a living thing that exists in the dual mode of being and becoming. The second is that God is himself, too a living thing whose life cannot be fixed for all eternity in such a way that he would have no choice but to respect unvaryingly the relations that constitute his life. (HH 99)

According to Kierkegaard, then, theology’s object (the incarnate God) can never be theologically “exact” so long as theology is construed as *scientia* – that is, as *savoir* rather than *connaissance*. Truth is therefore tied to the phenomenality of God. Indeed, the theological reduction in the *Fragments* appears as a reduction to essentials but this theological reduction ‘does not destroy what it puts in parentheses’. It is merely content to follow the logic of one single relationship, ‘that of man and God’. This reduction therefore proposes that ‘the most important thing is to be found at play in the fragment, and such that the fragment can be abstract from all’ (PD 29). What, then, are the *Fragments* about? They do not make any secret of it, says Lacoste, they are about salvation. However, that concept has no philosophical history, merely a tragic one. Philosophy can speak of happiness but salvation, however, is usually a question asked by religious, or rather, theological texts (PD 15-16) and the *Fragments* therefore can only make sense when read alongside the Christian tradition.

3.6 Upbuilding discourse

It is in the *Upbuilding Discourses* that Lacoste finds grounds for at least some confidence in theology’s capacity to address its subject:

Theology, in these texts, loses all didactic ambition. It is designed as an introduction to the knowledge of God. Organized as a homily or rather, as a

lectio divina made text, the speeches speak less about God and more about teaching us how get to know him. They certainly start to ... and cannot avoid talking to or about God. But this speech is not an end in itself. It obviously has no eschatological vocation. It also does not fulfil, in the time of the world, anything more than a subordinate function. (PD 214)

It is, says MacKinnon, vital to remember what Kierkegaard never forgot: 'namely the difference between the role of Socrates in respect of the formulations of the metaphysical doctrines of Plato's middle period, and the sense in which Jesus Christ is the subject'.²³⁴ Theology is a sinful activity which can objectify God (PD 206); the theme of the *Fragments* is an opposition between the teacher, Socrates, who cannot save, and "god" (the Kierkegaardian pseudonym for the Christian God) who alone can save.

'Things,' Lacoste notes, 'exist inasmuch as they invite themselves to us'. If humanity were able to offer an 'account of this invitation' understanding that things do not appear to us in disguise, and to 'know the conditions under which consciousness is open', then 'all the work of philosophy would be achievable' (WCA 68). Lacoste draws our attention to an example from the *Fragments*, where amid the many emphatic declarations by Kierkegaard that the god is completely unknown he confesses that: 'his aim, therefore, cannot be to walk through the world in such a way that not one single person would come to know it. Presumably, he will allow something about himself to be understood' (PF 56). In phenomenological terms the question therefore becomes one of *intentionality* (EUD 59).²³⁵ It does not depend, as

²³⁴ MacKinnon, 'Subjective and Objective Conceptions of Atonement', in *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*, pp. 289-299; p. 292.

²³⁵ George Pattison points out Kierkegaard's recognition that what matters 'is not merely what one sees, but what one sees depends on how one sees; for observation is never merely receptive, but is also productive, and insofar as it is this, then what is decisive is how the observer himself is.' EUD 59 cited in Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, p. 198.

Kierkegaard himself notes in the *Upbuilding Discourses*, ‘merely upon what one sees, but what one sees depends upon how one sees; all observation is not just a receiving, a discovering, but also a bringing forth, and insofar as it is that, how the observer himself is constituted is indeed decisive’ (EUD 59).

The question of Kierkegaard and phenomenology²³⁶ (understood here as the study of the human aptitude for experience) rests upon the crucial importance of the ‘phenomenality of Christ’.²³⁷ The opening question of *Fragments*, ‘Can the truth be learned?’ is asked ‘not in order to solve some abstract or pedantic epistemological issue’ but because the truth that is sought is one that is appropriate to human beings and their salvation.’²³⁸ As George Pattison has observed, the *Discourses* ask the question as to ‘whether we bring to the phenomena the right conceptual understanding for deciphering its presence, a presence that, of itself, because of its transcendent nature, is always ambiguous, indirect, concealed.’²³⁹

3.7 *An ordo amoris*

Lacoste has examined the question of affections as they arose in the work of phenomenologist Max Scheler (MAO 107-27) mentioning the latter’s *ordo amoris* specifically (PD 92). On this account, values appear to the affections such that these same affections, then, should be understood as ‘affective recognitions of value.

²³⁶ On this see Arne Grøn, *Subjektivitet og Negativitet: Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1997), p. 37: The phenomenon ‘shows itself through the individual’s manner of presenting himself. It is not available for direct observation, but requires a particular mode of attention...a sign that is to be interpreted phenomenologically reveals itself to us in and as an expression of what is to be interpreted.’ Cited in Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses*, p. 74.

²³⁷ Jeffrey Hanson, ‘Michel Henry and Søren Kierkegaard on Paradox and the Phenomenality of Christ’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 17: 3 (2009): pp. 435-454; Hanson points out that for Henry the question ‘Can the truth be learned?’ was ‘as much an aporia as it was for Kierkegaard’ (p. 436) and borrows the term from p. 93 of Henry’s book, *I Am the Truth*, where Henry refers to the phenomenological aporia that Christ cannot show himself in the world as Christ. Michel Henry, *I Am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. Susan Emmanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Originally published as *C’est moi la vérité: pour une philosophie du christianisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1996). Hanson is referring specifically to the opening question of *Philosophical Fragments*.

²³⁸ Hanson, p. 436.

²³⁹ Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses*, p. 80. For Pattison it is this question of intentionality that separates Kierkegaard from more ‘classical’ forms of phenomenology’.

Lacoste critiques Scheler's view that sentiment [*Fühlen*] is 'epistemologically monarchical',²⁴⁰ in the recognition of value: sentiment is a moral intuition with as strong cognitive power as perception; after all, 'each fundamental mode of objectivity has its own distinct manner of appearing' (MAO 114, citing Hua. XVII: 169). Lacoste later summarises it as 'We perceive things, we also perceive values' (PD 92) – and yet the 'intersubjective understanding' which comes easily enough for those things we can see and hear, is more difficult to find with those things we feel. In order to address the question of quite how God might appear Lacoste refers to Heidegger's concept of *Befindlichkeit* which established that the affective life – notably love – is itself still possessed of some cognitive content:

In an all-important passage of *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes affection, *Befindlichkeit*, as endowed with cognitive abilities. He then praises Scheler for having rediscovered these abilities, following impulses by Augustine and Blaise Pascal. And there [...] he quotes both Augustine and Pascal. According to Augustine, *non intratur in veritatem nisi per caritatem*: one does not reach truth except through love. And according to Pascal, who develops Augustine's maxim, 'in the case we are speaking of human things, it is said to be necessary to know them before we can love... But the saints, on the contrary, when they speak of divine things, say we must love them before we know them, and that we enter into truth only through charity.' We can prove *ab absurdo* the rightness of the argument. Could God appear to us and not be loved? Can we figure an experience of a non-lovable God? Otto's *mysterium tremendum et fascinatum*, admittedly, is no lovable object. The primal experience in

²⁴⁰ I borrow this formulation from Joshua Hordern whose unpublished PhD thesis (Edinburgh, 2010) on political affections included a discussion of Lacoste's work.

Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith* (that is, the feeling of absolute dependence) makes no room for love.²⁴¹

It is this “logic of love” that is both crucial for Lacoste and also invites a criticism of Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard there is nothing more to hope for than to love and be loved: the relationship between God and human being occurs almost exclusively through love to the point of absolute knowledge:

Love is both the fact of God before it is the fact of man, and it requires little attention to notice that love comes into play in the text to describe the relationship of God and the man, and it alone. The relationship between man and man is absent, as is absent any relationship of knowledge in which the divine does not intervene. (PD 28)

Love, according to Kierkegaard, ‘will hide a multitude of sins’; it is what ‘witnesses when prophecy is silent’, what ‘does not cease when the vision ends’ (EUD 55). It remains constant ‘even though everything is changed’ (EUD 56) ‘that which gives away *everything* and *for that reason* demands nothing and therefore has nothing to lose’ (EUD 56-7).

Although sympathetic to such an *ordo amoris* (pace Scheler) or doctrine of love²⁴² Lacoste recognises the complexity, the partiality and the plurality of our affective lives:

God may appear to us, not according to the laws of theophanies, but in the modest way of his presence being felt. Peter's presence does not provide me

²⁴¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 178 and note on p. 492; Lacoste continues, ‘And I am ready to admit that in such experiences, if we stick to interpreting them from a theological point of view, God hides himself more than he discloses himself. What I have just said, nonetheless, was no slip of the tongue, and I intend to suggest that God can appear, paradoxically, as a hidden God – or more precisely, that it belongs to God's disclosure that his hiddenness is ever greater.’ See TP 15-16; PD 48-49.

²⁴² George Pattison (another writer who like Lacoste has emphasised the priority of ‘thinking about God’ over abstract theological work) writes of the ‘need to develop an ethical and religious transubstantiation of erotic love’ that may act as an ‘interpretative bridge’ that ‘does not require us to presuppose the prior acceptance of dogmatic principles or ecclesiastical authority.’ *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, p. 193.

with a ‘comprehensive’ affective knowledge of Peter: I just know that this one is Peter; I am acquainted with him though I keep discovering new aspects of his personality, etc. Peter is visible and God is invisible. But in both cases, we are not dealing with an apocalyptic disclosure of any sort. It will take years to become ‘perfectly acquainted’ with Peter, if it is possible at all. And can we say it is possible to become ‘perfectly acquainted’ with God? (TP 17-18)

Lacoste is quite clear: even though humanity cannot refuse God the right to reveal himself as love, this does ‘not imply that such an appearance would reveal any more than it might conceal’. If God can indeed be present in phenomenality then, Lacoste is at pains to suggest, it should be understood that such presence is not only mere presence (as opposed to the divine *parousia*) but also ‘essentially frustrating’²⁴³. Moreover, the *Fragments*, he observes, are characterised by their lack of attention to eschatology:

One actually need only read the *Fragments* a little to notice an absence – and a major one at that – that of any eschatology. Even though “the god in time” took the form of a servant, but knows neither the cross nor the Resurrection, so does his disciple receive nothing more than the promise here and now of a life truly worthy to be lived. Understood as the loving relationship between a divine master and a human disciple, the event of salvation exhausts its reality in the lifetime of this relationship which does not hint toward any absolute future. Those who have recognized the god in the form of a servant have nothing to hope for except to love and be loved. And if the moment when the man reaches discipleship deserves the name of the “fullness of time”, this is

²⁴³ ‘God’s presence, in so far as ‘presence’ is understood as present to the ‘heart’, is essentially frustrating. Anticipations may be enjoyed, but the God whose presence we enjoy is more to be desired than to be enjoyed.’ (TP 18-19).

not to read the text incorrectly than to see there also a specific end to time.’

(PD 25)

Small wonder, says Lacoste, since the ‘conceptual prose of our theologies can not claim any eschatological destiny. We must never believe that “theology” is predicated univocally upon both a “theology of the blessed” and *theologia viatorum*’ (PD 213).

Even according to Anti-Climacus, God is ‘a friend of order’ (SUD 121); the birds’ and the lilies’ being in this world is their obedience to God.²⁴⁴ Furthermore, nature in ‘its ingenious formation’ that humiliates human being honours God its creator as ‘the artist who weaves the carpet of the field and produces the beauty of the lilies’ of whom ‘it holds true that the wonder increases the closer one comes’ and ‘that the distance and worship increases the closer one comes to him’ (UDVS 164). Thus we learn from the birds and the lilies the reasonable and loving will behind them: ‘all nature is like the great staff of servants who remind the human being...about worshipping God’; if humanity wants to resemble God ‘by ruling, they have forgotten God’ (UDVS 193).

The ‘most grievous thing’ about paganism, according to Kierkegaard, ‘is that it could not worship’; man ‘could be silent in wonder, but he could not worship’ (UDVS 193). However, ‘the ability to worship is no visible glory, it cannot be seen’; ‘nature’s visible glory sighs’ and ‘incessantly reminds the human being that whatever he does he absolutely must not forget – to worship’ (UDVS 194). The world is reasonably ordered to direct human beings toward God as our own good and fulfilment: ‘the power that governs human life is love and God’s governance of the world is a ‘Loving Governance’ (PIC 194). God’s *logos* is both evident from the

²⁴⁴ Christopher Ben Simpson, ‘The Subjectivity of Truth and the Grandeur of Reason’ in Conor Cunningham & Peter Candler, eds., *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism* (London: SCM/Veritas, 2010): pp. 218-232; p. 220.

things created and beneficent – a logic of love.²⁴⁵ Liturgical knowledge is not necessarily knowledge gained in and through the explicit celebration of liturgy or the retreat of the communicant into ‘the sacred sphere of the church’²⁴⁶, but an understanding gained through a liturgical disposition, *coram Deo*. It is worship in its broadest sense. ‘All knowledge involves feeling. And when the words of the liturgy are vocalised in song, then we stumble upon a paradoxical and fruitful phenomenon: truth can be *felt*’ (PD 223). Humanity commonly defines the truth – or rather it is defined for it – in propositional terms: Lacoste concedes that while a semantic theory of truth can seem meagre, it does have the advantage of not being deceitful. Taking his cue from the radical Christianity of Kierkegaard Lacoste is prepared to ask that our knowledge performs – perhaps even to risk – a little more than that.

3.8 Incarnation and rumour

Joseph Moingt describes the memory of Christ as ‘dangerous’ and ‘subversive’, with the untamed character of a rumour.²⁴⁷ Lacoste’s discussion of the Chalcedonian definition hints that it might be possible to rehabilitate rumour, and to develop a positive theological account of ambiguity.

‘Apostolic speech,’ observed Kierkegaard, ‘is essentially different in content from all human speech...it is also...different in form’ and although ‘always as impatient as that of a woman in labour’ (EUD 69) it is not ‘deceitful’ or ‘poetic’ but ‘faithful’ and a ‘valid witness’ (EUD 59) and possessed of a proper eschatology that is tempered by love (EUD 69-70). Not every truth, avers Lacoste, ‘reaches us through the mediation of a witness who places himself at the service of his words; a rumour can also tell you the truth; it is, after all, in the same language as our everyday

²⁴⁵ As the *Upbuilding Discourses* of 1843-44 recall, it is therefore ‘incumbent upon us to explain both the what and the whence’ (EUD 129).

²⁴⁶ Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses*, p. 210.

²⁴⁷ Joseph Moingt, ‘Christologie et moderne’ in *Christianisme Et Modernité* (Paris: Editions du Cerf): pp.169-187; p. 186

speech'. Now, this is not to encourage anonymous discourse (that which no one claims as their own – at least at first glance anyway) that implies something without also declaring its intentions (again at first glance), or that of a crowd of interchangeable “selves”. It simply accedes to ‘the *a priori* of a common language that is content merely to be common – intelligible to all – and useful’. ‘The love of commitment is not a sin, and there are many things about which we can only make sense [speak well] if they engage us: by admitting that, when we talk about them, we make their cause our own.’ The ‘benefit of “they say...” is often to make something nameable, whether one is speaking about pipes, physical laws or about a certain Jesus, called “ of Nazareth”...’ (PP 107); Jesus does not appear in history by virtue of either having been born or of having lived, but because he has been spoken about by human beings. And whether or not MacKinnon approves, this ‘living story’ [*récit vivant*] is the ‘tale of the church’ [*discours de l’Église*]²⁴⁸

This is not some reference to ‘the faceless being of a substance or divine essence, but to the “mystery” [*mustèrion*] par excellence’ in which the Christ event ‘yields itself in order to initiate [*muein*] reason’ (ECT 625). On Moingt’s reading says Lacoste, the resurrection ‘is only the first word in Christology’ because it is ‘the first word’ in a Trinitarian theology of communion (ECT 625). But, cautions Lacoste, we cannot be certain that Moingt’s treatise has succeeded in its ambitious mission: to consistently attach some simple ‘rumours’ about Jesus to the paschal faith of the disciples, to a pre-Easter Christology, and finally, to the re-emergent Nicaean idea of the consubstantial, ‘all of which use the fluid and historical categories largely borrowed from Hegel’ although it is important that the author attempted it (ECT 766). For his part MacKinnon distrusted what he saw as the displacement of ‘an apologia

²⁴⁸ Lacoste here acknowledges his debt for the idea of a beneficial role for “rumour” to Moingt, *L’homme qui venait de Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1993): pp. 21-69; p. 23.

for trust in providence’ in favour of ‘confidence in an Hegelian “cunning of the idea” (*ruse de l’histoire*)’²⁴⁹ MacKinnon, notes Lacoste, also ‘expressed some doubts about the supposedly “metaphysical” character of christological statements’ (ECT 766).

But even pseudonymous works have an author, and perhaps all that phenomenology offers theology is – rather than a fundamental ontology²⁵⁰ – ‘a cipher for greater openness to and experience of what is given.’²⁵¹

The Christ of the *Fragments* is indeed a Christ who does not bear the name (and he is not even really a Christ, since there is no trace of any Trinitarian theology in the text, and the incarnation and salvation are the work of a god who did not anoint anyone as the messiah and who only assigns the task to himself). (PD 16)

History records that ‘men can and have talked about God, and spoken of him with sufficient accuracy before he showed himself definitively.’ Lacoste echoes the post-war strategy of *ressourcement* by his late friend Henri de Lubac in its interest in patristic authors rather than the theological Aristotelianism which had up to then dominated modern Catholic theology and thus finds it useful to recall that ‘Clement of Alexandria, who of all theologians was the one most convinced that there is no last word without an initial and a penultimate word, admitted the existence of three Testaments – the Old, the philosophical and the New – and placed on a roughly equal footing religious preparation and rational preparation for the (re)cognition of God as present in Jesus Christ’ (PD 100).

²⁴⁹ MacKinnon, *Borderlands*, p. 114/

²⁵⁰ This is George Pattison’s criticism of phenomenological readings of Kierkegaard.

²⁵¹ Cyril O’Regan, ‘Unwelcoming of Heidegger’, p. 273.

3.9 Theology and liturgical thinking

Lacoste has made explicit a phenomenological interest in salvation, with respect to the fragility of theological language on the subject.²⁵² Acutely aware of the frailty and thus the necessary humility and patience of theological language:

It takes time to find the right words, whether minting our own vocabulary and terminology, or taking over others' coinage. We should be in no hurry to speak, for hurry is more likely to produce a babble than coherent speech. If a philosopher lacks words to say just how things are, it is no disgrace to say nothing. Speech is most true to itself when it goes carefully; thought is most true to itself when it takes time. (MH 264)

Lacoste warns us not to 'expect a God's-eye view which would enable us to do away with discourses that have always taken place in the history of words and concepts, even with discourses that have always occurred in the history of our relationship with the world. However, we can expect that theological language represents our *needs*²⁵³:

insofar as they themselves speak in all our questions, insofar as they perceive that our whole being is a question, insofar as they also allow us to give or discern answers. To recognize these needs is not a trivial matter. The theologian will doubtless add that their appearance and their bearing upon the concept lead into the realms of a theory of salvation. (PP 116)

Put otherwise, mankind's yearning (or at the very least our *curiosity*) about its salvation is phenomenised as concern about the validity (or otherwise) of its theological statements and the capacity of theology, as a minimal discipline, for truth-

²⁵² The question 'can the truth be learned?' has its correlate in that of Hans Urs von Balthasar in *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"? With A Short Discourse on Hell*, trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

²⁵³ Cf. EUD 425 where Kierkegaard refers to our 'needs of the moment'.

saying, speaking responsibly and truthfully about God [the Absolute]. The claim made by Jesus “of Nazareth to be “the truth” [« *C’est moi la vérité* »] raises questions about both truth and transcendence, and their relation to the aesthetic. Kierkegaard’s own aesthetic attitude is, of course, crucial to both his work and its proper understanding – his literary activity often described as a form of seduction, commensurate with the phenomenological relationship between love, faith and reason proposed by Lacoste, who himself reminds us that ‘it remains true that the manifestation of God in the history of Israel, and in the history of Jesus of Nazareth, holds a deep manifestation for all artistic creation’ (NMT 14), and thereby echoing the theme of the theological aesthetic offered by Balthasar (someone else, writes Lacoste, who was deeply influenced by Kierkegaard):

Only love, if one is to believe Kierkegaard, pierces the disguise of this god present in the form of a servant. But if that is the case, love does not succeed faith, as if we first recognize god in the flesh and then find him to be lovable, instead it is purely and simply simultaneous. We possess no immemorial knowledge [*connaissance*] of God. We have probably forgotten those occasions where we heard his name, and spoke it ourselves, for the first time. “They” may have talked to us about God as if transmitting information²⁵⁴ without using those words which have allowed that God is revealed to us. But how is it that we can speak about God, or what the texts tell us about him, such that God can be allowed to appear us unedited, in flesh and bone and as large as life? (PD 93)

The answer which Lacoste advances is clear enough: it is only due to the perception of affections such as kindness or love that one can perceive at all. Common

²⁵⁴ Scholastically trained theologians and priests perhaps? Lacoste notes elsewhere that when he was a student at ENS, ‘I was myself fascinated by the God of the philosophers at a time when the God of the Christian faith was poorly promoted in churches’ (INT 20).

sense, he tells us, says that we perceive first of all and then love (which, he observes, is not completely wrong – after all, if there was nothing to perceive, then there would be nothing to love. What is there, however, to perceive? On this point, Kierkegaard is right says Lacoste, and ‘Balthasar borrowed from him more than he admitted: only love is to be perceived’ (PD 93).

As Lacoste notes, ‘It is not clear, however, that the visible must owe its being to an invisible first cause. And even when we have done our best to prove it, that proof (unlike a logical-mathematical proof) is not binding upon us. [...] No “proof” has however been able to command as clear an intersubjective agreement as that of a mathematical proof’; this may be merely a “fact”, adds Lacoste, but it is a significant one (PD 105). The history of Christianity, especially that of Christian theology and its debates offers more than enough evidence of this difficult trajectory: ‘one can, in the first analysis, call upon Christian experience and its language’ (PP 93). Its salient points are obvious, says Lacoste, and not necessarily those of either this single experience or of this single language.

They are the facts ‘of an experience lived in the plural, of which the subject is an “us”, a community or people...a common language of which we ask that it be fair – *orthos*...[and] common behaviours on which weigh the same requirement of righteousness.’ And these three ‘weave into a fourth, that of a premise of universality. And all in all, it must be said, are organized around an axiom: such experience is controlled by a primordial act of speech which was initiated by God’ (PP 94). Lacoste thus finds in Kierkegaard’s *Upbuilding Discourses* and their implicit phenomenology of religious language a hermeneutical clue to ethical theological language:

Each discourse will speak of God (it generally takes the form of a scriptural commentary), but it will do so only after having spoken to God. The rules are

immediately established: we cannot say how it is that the author speaks about God and (thus) forget in which horizon [register] it is that he speaks about him, and so forget that a well-trained theological language speaks to God before talking about God, and is only able to speak well about God by being capable of speaking to God beforehand. (PD 214-5)

Crucially, each of the *Discourses* has a preface²⁵⁵ that enables Lacoste to answer his own question, ‘What words, therefore, avoid treating God as the supreme object? We have already said that this will be words that *flirt*. Each edifying discourse, according to Kierkegaard, opens with a simple prayer’ (PD 214). If one accepts that the modern subject is caught between what it wants, wills and desires or what it anticipates intentionally (in the case of liturgical experience, the absolute eschatological future of God’s Kingdom) all of which does not present itself *an sich* then this compounds the sense of angst that has defined the human condition. By themselves, human intentionality and consciousness cannot make sense of this experience; the believer will finally have to renounce the autonomy of modern subjectivity (*Sinngebung*) in order to deliver their being into God’s hands.²⁵⁶ Lacoste conceives of the religious person as someone who exists in a liturgical (non)place where they can only receive – or must wait *patiently* to receive – a gift, and thereby promotes the passivity and powerlessness of the believer during the liturgical experience²⁵⁷ into an active refusal of the active and powerful modern subject and their replacement by a much more passive individual, akin to clay on the potter’s

²⁵⁵ A similar understanding can be found in the work of Arne Grøn who observes that ‘the forewords point to the role of the reader’ (*Subjektivitet og Negativitet*, p. 48); Kierkegaard himself acknowledges that they inaugurate a ‘conversation’.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 156.

²⁵⁷ Kierkegaard is also fascinated by the antithesis of indirect communication: the possibility of a direct, wordless encounter with God, freed from the babble of language – therefore the discussion of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* might be linked with the idea of being ‘transparent’ to God in texts such as *The Sickness Unto Death*.

wheel awaiting the arrival of the craftsman to give it form and purpose.²⁵⁸ Such passivity may be manifested in the bodily movements of prayer (anticipating here our later discussion of the body).²⁵⁹ It is not some disembodied soul, some Cartesian subject or intellect who prays: it is human beings who approach the Absolute as men and women of flesh and blood. As flesh and blood, it is their every liturgical gesture – that is, a body, its hands crossed in prayer, kneeling, its palms open wide to receive the *sancta* – that phenomenally realises the *coram* relation (PP 134). It is, moreover, as men of flesh and blood that we *flirt* with the Absolute in our speech, in a relationship established by the originary appearance of God in love,²⁶⁰ to be loved, a relationship conducted liturgically. Doubtless, God provides food for thought, and allows himself to be thought. For Lacoste, liturgy is what follows the necessary ‘cognitive delay’ (without which mankind would not understand what the name of God means). One might, of course, concede to Hegel that know-how [*savoir*] has certain privileges. But once the fundamental theses of Hegelian eschatology are denied in favour of a logic of ‘next to last’, which includes a logic of ‘inexperience’, it is a question of mankind knowing how to live this inexperience calmly by deciphering it as a specific mode of experience, by receiving the proper training or getting the relevant practice: ‘In its liturgical reality the *mustèrion* is not a refuge of ignorance but a school of experience – whoever participates in liturgical activity is, higgledy-piggledy, at the school of a speech, of a language of the body, of the recognition of a divine proximity (“presence”), of a shared experience of God’ (PP 130).

²⁵⁸ For a critique of this position see Joeri Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings?* pp. 25-49.

²⁵⁹ Pattison notes, ‘The work of praising love is a labour that any human being may undertake... [...] Praising love is at one and the same time a willing of the eschatological restitution of broken relationships, an affirmation that for God all things are possible, *and* in and through testifying in writing to all hopeful willing, building up the contemporary community of love.’ Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses*, p. 213.

²⁶⁰ George Pattison makes a similar point when he observes that for Kierkegaard at least divine love underwrites human love. *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses*, p. 204.

Merold Westphal writes that Kierkegaard's phenomenology of faith 'tells the existing individual that it is always too soon to rest'.²⁶¹ Lacoste – whose pilgrim ultimately has a place to go²⁶² – is a self-proclaimed follower of John of the Cross²⁶³, a theologian with whom Kierkegaard shared what has been called 'a mutual taste for the analogy of maternal withdrawal as descriptive of the God-relationship'.²⁶⁴ It is worth, at this point, noting that this recurrent use of maternal metaphor is not unproblematic. Although Balthasar writes about the ontological connection between human – particularly maternal – and divine love²⁶⁵ (something which Pattison also notes²⁶⁶) Kierkegaard's 'love takes everything' (EUD 74) an exertion akin to that of the woman in labour, which evokes 'tears of repentance' before it evokes 'tears of adoration' (EUD 75; 76).

But while the *maieutic* method might be analogous to midwifery, in the end, says Lacoste, Socrates cannot save us²⁶⁷, as illustrated by the example of the *Fragments* (note how Lacoste is particularly interested the possibility of an

²⁶¹ Merold Westphal, 'Kierkegaard's Phenomenology of Faith as Suffering', in Hugh J. Silverman, ed., *Writing the Politics of Difference* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), p. 70.

²⁶² See: Joeri Schrijvers, 'Le destin de la non-expérience de Dieu : Espoir et eschatologie selon Jean-Yves Lacoste' *Lumière et Vie* 279 (2008): pp. 43-53; p. 53.

²⁶³ 'To John of the Cross and his followers (myself included), though, we may nonetheless object that we have no right to forbid the Absolute from appearing to us, and from doing so in the realm of affection' (TP 14).

²⁶⁴ Simon D. Podmore, 'The Dark Night of Suffering and the Darkness of God: God-Forsakenness or Forsaking God in "The Gospel of Sufferings"', in Robert L. Perkins, ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Volume 15 – Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005): pp. 229-256; p. 231.

²⁶⁵ Consider the following passage: 'After a mother has smiled at her child for many days and weeks, she finally receives her child's smile in response. She has awakened love in the heart of her child, and as the child awakens to love, it also awakens to knowledge: the initially empty-sense impressions gather meaningfully around the core of the Thou. [...] the primal foundation of being smiles at us as a mother and as a father.' Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, p. 76.

²⁶⁶ 'Kierkegaard could, perhaps, not state more clearly that the love with which Christ beholds her [the woman at the house of the Pharisee] is of essentially the same kind as the love that is at work in her. If human love ultimately needs to be underwritten by divine love, both that need and the divine love that corresponds to it are understandable on the basis of our human experience. Nothing that is said here, of course, suggests that we can somehow compel that divine love and, certainly there remains for Kierkegaard (as for Christian doctrine generally) an indissoluble mystery of grace.

²⁶⁷ Lacoste's assessment of Kierkegaard's conclusion is similar to that of George Pattison, 'Socrates' dialectic does not lead to illumination, but...brings the whole edifice of thought crashing down.' There is instead a 'religious resolution of the crisis of the divided self.' Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, p. 69.

unsystematic, fragmentary theology – PP 169-191). Kierkegaard scholar Simon Podmore has suggested the mystical reading remains unavoidable, since for Kierkegaard, ‘the only authentic decision is to be in the wrong. God is love, but emphatically, ‘if God is love, then he is also love in everything, love in what you can understand and love in what you cannot understand’ (UDVS 268). So, this God of love, ‘understood by that belief which surrenders its doubts in the face of the incomprehensible’ thus represents Kierkegaard’s answer to the typical questions posed in theodicy. Kierkegaard’s inscrutable God of love brings those questions to an abrupt end.²⁶⁸ Even if a “Kierkegaardian phenomenology” might not, in the end, be understood as either an ‘existential and theological ontology’²⁶⁹ then it is certainly a demanding one which opens possibilities for human activity which “orders” the world by reference to moral principles.²⁷⁰

MacKinnon described kenosis as ‘the principle that bids us measure the Logos-Christ by the *Christus-patiens*’²⁷¹ – that is, a discernment of God through reflection on his historical embodiment rather than formal analysis.²⁷² From this springs his defence of realism in metaphysics – only the recognition of a reality over against ourselves that ‘can prevent the building of an alternative universe to suit our own fantasies’.²⁷³ This means that there can be no Christian account of history that ‘ignores the awkward brute facts: the surd and the inexplicable’ – the ‘mysterious and the tragic will always remain without adequate explanation ... it is into just such a world that Christ enters, and his identification with us becomes a matter of enabling

²⁶⁸ Podmore, p. 235.

²⁶⁹ Pattison, *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses*, p. 76.

²⁷⁰ ‘Morality is not a matter of arbitrary choice; it is in some sense expressive, at the level of human action, of the order of the world.’ MacKinnon, *Metaphysics*, p. 38.

²⁷¹ MacKinnon, *Borderlands*, p. 114.

²⁷² MacKinnon, ‘Miracle, irony, tragedy’, *Metaphysics*, pp. 114-21.

²⁷³ Brown, *Divine Humanity*, p. 123.

us both to face the tragic ... and our own self-deceptions'.²⁷⁴ For Moingt this meant reconciling how life could spring from death, how death could make history²⁷⁵ and be 'a work of life' by being both the source of a new future and a reliving of the past.²⁷⁶

For both MacKinnon and Lacoste it is eschatology (the missing part of Kierkegaard's reflections) which shows us 'the true historical and cosmic proportions' of the resurrection.²⁷⁷ Knowledge [*savoir*] has no eschatological vocation (PD 217). For Lacoste, as Schrijvers rightly points out, the eschaton appears as the end of theological know-how.²⁷⁸ It is displaced in favour of 'a knowledge [*connaissance*] of God richer than any know-how [*savoir*], and that cannot be criticised by know-how' (PD 213). Here, the focus is upon the corporeality and the affectivity of the human being – the truth can be felt, as the example of the sung liturgical word illustrates (here, says Lacoste, music – the most sensual of the arts – is placed at the service of liturgy [PD 223]). All knowing involves feeling and affectivity, and Absolute knowledge or know-how is here greeted by genuine scepticism; instead, liturgical knowing manifests both the true and the beautiful²⁷⁹ in the happy recognition of God in and through love (PD 218).

And yet, as Lacoste concedes, the 'theological reduction' offered by Kierkegaard rests on the fact that this love is 'both the fact of God before the act of man, and it requires little attention to notice that love comes into play in the text solely to describe the relationship of God and man. The relationship between human beings is absent as is any relationship of knowledge in which the divine does not intervene (PD 28).

²⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 123.

²⁷⁵ Moingt, *L'homme qui venait de Dieu*, p. 66.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 65.

²⁷⁷ MacKinnon, *Borderlands*, p. 114 citing R. Mehl.

²⁷⁸ Schrijvers, 'Destin de la non-expérience de Dieu', p. 53.

²⁷⁹ Lacoste picks out Cranmer's liturgy (PD 223).

Liturgical knowing is not necessarily knowledge gained in and through the explicit celebration of liturgy, but an understanding gained through a liturgical disposition, *coram Deo* which eludes definition and can be expressed in a variety of ways.

4. Phantasy

Introduction

‘Are there’, asks Gerard Loughlin, ‘no better stories we can tell, stories less complacent about contemporary society, less pessimistic about the human condition’?²⁸⁰ Lacoste notes wryly that ‘mythological accents’ appear in Heidegger’s later philosophy (HQD 15). Lacoste’s engagement with C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien on how myth is not foreign to thinking but might critique “pure reason” has been well received.²⁸¹ Interpreting the history of philosophy and writing detective stories have much in common: both the historian and the novelist need to find culprits – there can be no hero without a villain. Depending upon one’s own stance the figure in mind – Hegel – in fact deserves both of these titles.

Michael J. MacDonald has offered a reading of Hegel in which the journey of Spirit is less a series of chronological moments in history than the logical moments [*momenta*] of an Absolute Idea that transcends the chronic time of historical narrative. This is a kenotic story, that of a “pure” Idea that “empties itself out” into the worlds of substance and spirit.

Thus, drawing comparisons with the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine, in which ‘the *narratio* of a fallen life inscribed in the space and time of the written word opens onto the timeless present of Divine Scripture [*ennaratio*]’, MacDonald argues that Hegel’s *Phenomenology*:

marks the passage from phenomenology, the science of the “spiritual shapes”

[*Geistern*] assumed by Spirit [*Geist*] in history, to logic, the science of the pure

²⁸⁰ Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.17.

²⁸¹ Irène Fernandez, *Au commencement était la raison: Pour une intelligence de la foi* (Paris : Editions Philippe Rey, 2008), pp. 208-209 and *Mythe, raison ardente : Imagination et réalité selon C.S. Lewis* (Genève : Ad Solem., 2005), p. 323 n. 131.

Idea in the eternal element of Spirit (the “pure ether of science”). It is precisely by transcending the linear temporality of narrative that Hegel can define God as the “Absolute Idea” and proclaim the good news of speculative philosophy.²⁸²

Defying Lacoue-Labarthe’s warning that interpreting *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as a ‘narrative tragedy’, ‘novelistic *epos*’, or even an ‘Odyssey of Consciousness’ would be a terrible case of misreading²⁸³ MacDonald argues that while the Hegelian account of the ‘laborious journey’ of the Spirit toward Absolute Knowledge does indeed transcend the linear time of narrative chronology (which, for Lacoue-Labarthe at least, marks the “*dénouement* of narrative”) there is in it ‘a subtle interweaving of narrative and argument in the text of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, a complicity between *mythos* and *logos* that in turn reveals a more intimate rapport between narrative and knowledge in the Hegelian system of Absolute Idealism’.²⁸⁴

Levinas in particular, says MacDonald, developed a radical critique of Hegelian Idealism as ‘an Odyssean narrative of reason that consummates the whole “spiritual adventure” of Western philosophy’ and provides the allegorical key to Hegelian philosophy.²⁸⁵ For Levinas the circular narrative structure of the *Odyssey* provided the primal form of representation in Western philosophy, and Odysseus (master of ruse, cunning to the point of “malice” [*polytropous*]) an almost allegorical figure for the sovereign *ego* that has dominated Western philosophy: the Hegelian voyage retraces that of Odysseus, whose adventure in the world was merely the ‘adventure of a return to his native island – a complacency in the Same, an

²⁸² Michael J. MacDonald, ‘Losing Spirit: Hegel, Lévinas, and the Limits of Narrative’ *Narrative* 13: 2 (May 2005): pp. 182-194; p. 183.

²⁸³ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Subject of Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 132.

²⁸⁴ MacDonald, ‘Losing Spirit’, p. 183.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 184.

unrecognition of the other'.²⁸⁶ This enterprise is oriented toward the rational rather than ethical meaning and defined by its logic of circularity and its refusal of the gift.

Oliver O'Donovan has pointed out with reference to Levinas some of the issues involved with regard to the epistemic gap (not *historical* distance) between the reader and the text that contemplation and prayer attempt to traverse. O'Donovan sees no reason why the gap should be any wider when reading Plato than when reading Levinas; texts from unfamiliar cultural backgrounds simply present special tasks, 'but if we are ready to take up those tasks and familiarize ourselves with their backgrounds, they need not be any more alien to us'.²⁸⁷ The limits of narrative theology of course coincide with the genius of narrative discourse – namely, their ability to offer what has been described as 'detailed acquaintance with the phenomenal properties of lived human experience'. Those same limits, however, may enable us to point to how it may provide us with an acquaintance with the content of lived inexperience and nonexperience – that is, with the contents of liturgical experience as understood by Lacoste. Its entry to our discussion may indeed lie first of all in the suggestion that 'the kind of rich systematic discourse we call phenomenological analysis may go a good way toward producing such acquaintance.'²⁸⁸

4.2 Beyond metanarrative

The 'etymological filiations' between narrative [*narrare*] and knowing [*gnoscere*] suggest that knowledge is formed 'by gathering the dispersed events of

²⁸⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', trans. Alphonso Lingis, in *Deconstruction in Context*, Mark C. Taylor, ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986): pp. 345-359; p. 346 cited in MacDonald p. 184.

²⁸⁷ Oliver O'Donovan, *Church in Crisis* (Cascade Books, 2008), p. 78.

²⁸⁸ Paul Griffiths, 'The Limits of Narrative Theology' in Keith E. Yandell, *Faith and Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): pp. 217-236; p. 225.

experience into the coherent order of a tale, story, or narrative.’²⁸⁹ Lyotard’s own criticism of metanarratives was not that they were some ‘grand story’ but that their claims to legitimacy were by recourse to a hegemonic, universal reason. It is here that the work of Reiner Schürmann in its eloquent articulation of so-called ‘broken hegemonies’ becomes so important – Schürmann refers to the ‘metaphysical naïveté’ of those who try to dismiss the narratable condition and proclaim the end of grand narratives, which is merely an additional chapter to an intrigue declared to be finished.²⁹⁰

‘Is there’, asks Schürmann, ‘anything more narratable than a drama’s outcome?’ A so-called “happy ending” is not the end – who knows that the characters lived happily ever after or that ‘the blinded hero, having been chased from the usurped throne, chose to settle the tragedy rather than conclude it, thus doing nothing but constituting it – before he too carried on through fields and deserts to shine at last in the apotheosis at Colonus? Be the narratives grand or small, the story told never comes to an end.’²⁹¹ To what are we to listen, asks Schürmann, a ‘spherical, unmoving system, setting out universal law – or the narrative of a voyage in the first person singular, praising the ephemeral’?²⁹² It may, he adds, be that narrative structure does not cancel out its argumentative structure. It may be that a narrative’s argument reveals a differend rather than ‘some fault in reasoning’, the undertow of a dispersive strategy within being.

Among theologians of postmodernity, Kevin Vanhoozer has pointed out how several different thinkers across many disciplines ‘have come to see narrative, like

²⁸⁹ MacDonald, ‘Losing Spirit’, p. 184.

²⁹⁰ Reiner Schürmann, trans. Reginald Lilly, *Broken Hegemonies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 5.

²⁹¹ *Op. cit.*

²⁹² *Ibid.* p. 54.

language, as the medium in which humans live and move and have their being'²⁹³: Stephen Crites has spoken of the 'narrative quality of experience'²⁹⁴, Alasdair MacIntyre 'the narrative shape of human action'²⁹⁵, and Paul Ricoeur of narrative as the best form of language to articulate human temporality and identity.²⁹⁶ It is narratives such as these, suggests Vanhoozer, that 'sustain the particular identity over time not only of individuals but of communities', from which comes their association with 'historical tradition' in which 'personal identity is largely constituted by one's place in an ongoing story'.²⁹⁷ On this reading human beings are not merely *in* history but exist *as* history: a 'life' must therefore be narrated 'if it is to be grasped as a meaningful whole'.

In a French register then, such as that of Badiou, narrative provides a space in which 'there is no longer a formal differentiation between concept and life'²⁹⁸ and whose cognitive significance has been recognized by many in different disciplines.²⁹⁹ MacIntyre's contention³⁰⁰ is that epistemological progress in epistemology is a merely matter of constructing and reconstructing ever more adequate narratives in which

²⁹³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Once More into the Borderlands: The Way of Wisdom in Philosophy and Theology after the "Turn to Drama"' in Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Martin Warner, eds., *Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology: Reason, Meaning, and Experience* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007): pp. 31-54; p. 39.

²⁹⁴ Stephen Crites, 'The narrative quality of experience' in Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, eds., *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989): pp. 65–8.

²⁹⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre 'Epistemological crises, dramatic narrative, and the philosophy of science', in *Why Narrative?* pp. 138–57.

²⁹⁶ See *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, K. Blamey and Dan Pellauer, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) and *Oneself as Another*, trans. K. Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

²⁹⁷ Vanhoozer, 'Once More into the Borderlands', p. 39.

²⁹⁸ Badiou, 'The Adventure of French philosophy', p.73.

²⁹⁹ Vanhoozer reminds us that Ricoeur in particular views narrative as 'a unique and irreducible cognitive instrument that is able to 'configure' – that is, to synthesize in the form of a unified plot – a heterogeneity of otherwise unrelated persons, places and events. It is therefore 'the distinct form of historical understanding' (Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and Dan Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). See Vanhoozer, 'Once More Into the Borderlands', p. 39.

³⁰⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988).

‘historical traditions thus become the bearers of a properly narrative reason because all rationality is tradition-based’.³⁰¹

So, with regard to narrative, Vanhoozer suggests that it may be better to speak not of a ‘turn’ as we are accustomed with the “theological turn” (in phenomenology) or the turn to language, ‘but of the ‘return’ of literary form’ here borrowing from the work of Martha Nussbaum regarding the significance of literature for ethical understanding: ‘Literary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content – an integral part, then, of the search for and the statement of truth’.³⁰² David Tracy³⁰³ sees this return of literary form from a theological perspective as a reaction to modernity’s bondage to a single form (the propositional) and to its attempts to name God in terms of a particular ‘ism’ (which one may consider here to be the sin of ontotheology in another name). Narrative, on the contrary, writes Vanhoozer (drawing upon the work of Hans Frei and Robert Jenson) ‘is a pre-eminent biblical form for identifying both Jesus Christ and the triune God’³⁰⁴ while from a certain point of view theology is precisely a matter, to borrow a phrase from Francis Watson³⁰⁵, of ‘using the texts to think with’.

The linguistic turn was the first movement away from Descartes’s autonomous knowing subject and Kant’s transcendental knowing subject: thinkers from a variety of disciplines now see language as the medium in which both thought and existence live and move and have their being. Philosophy, avers Paul Ricoeur, begins from ‘the

³⁰¹ Vanhoozer, ‘Once More Into the Borderlands’, p. 40.

³⁰² Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 3.

³⁰³ David Tracy, ‘Theology and the many faces of postmodernity’, *Theology Today* 51 (1994): pp. 104–114.

³⁰⁴ Vanhoozer, ‘Once More Into the Borderlands’, p. 40.

³⁰⁵ Francis Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender: Towards a Pauline Sexual Ethic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. xiii.

fullness of language’.³⁰⁶ The linguistic turn represents an attempt to acknowledge something prior to and deeper than the subject, something – a structure, a system of differences – that serves as a framework for human reason and experience, for concepts and existence alike.

According to Vanhoozer, Badiou understands these various turns as complementary moves in an attempt to rearticulate the relation of concept to life through new forms and a new political engagement whose novelty is one of the innovations of twentieth-century French philosophy. And if one rephrases Badiou’s sentiment in different terms, it is perhaps fair to say that the relation of concept and life that he traces through the twentieth century is a thoroughly *hermeneutical* adventure, one which concurs with Lacoste’s assessment that, in its account of life, phenomenology returns us to hermeneutics wherein the sentences of Ricoeur ‘ought to be inscribed in golden letters on the front page of our texts. When it comes to eschatology the phenomena that we are talking about are phenomena given to us within the horizon of a history – that is, from the experience of mystics or from texts’ (INT 26).

Conceived thus and set, appropriately, in context the ‘ancient quarrel’ between poets and philosophers entered a new phase with Heidegger’s employment of the poetry of Hölderlin or the notion of the *Geviert* in his later philosophy (AH 369) Lacoste concedes that one might ‘understand the theme of *Geviert* as a failure in reason resulting in a falling back upon mythology. And here one may recall MacKinnon’s suggestion that theology may be ‘the victim of the victory won in the person of Plato by the philosophers over the poets, and in particular the tragedians’.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. D. Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 288.

³⁰⁷ MacKinnon, *Borderlands*, p. 100.

Returning to our earlier lexicon, for Heidegger this represented a saga, or epic narrative: the tale, as Michael Zimmermann describes it, of the eruption of the West ‘through the ancient Greek encounter with Being’ and its subsequent decline into ‘technological nihilism, characterized by the darkening of the earth and the flight of the gods’.³⁰⁸ This decline, we are told, was the result of the gradual self-concealment of Being, which began with Plato and Aristotle, hastened by the translation of crucial Greek philosophical terms into Latin, for instance the replacement of the Latin *natura* for the Greek *physis*. As Zimmermann notes, ‘Because [for Heidegger] language lets things be, this decay of language enables things to reveal themselves only one-dimensionally, not in their depth, complexity, and rank’.³⁰⁹ Western history was thus governed by the “metaphysics of presence”, a conceptual system ‘whose combination of anthropocentrism, foundationalism, and representational concepts of truth led to the contemporary view that for something “to be” it must be present as raw material for enhancing the power of the technological system’.³¹⁰

Heidegger saw *poiesis* (creativity, specifically the language of poetry, especially as it was manifested in a certain German poets) as providing an antidote to this modern spiritual malaise, rather than – in its recourse to myth – representing a “failure of thinking”. Both Heidegger and Wittgenstein represent the “linguistic turn” in philosophy. In the analytical tradition to which Wittgenstein belonged, this linguistic turn contended that the limits of philosophy (and thereby of what was understood to be “reality”) could only be manifest within language. It was this turn from ideas to words, from a focus upon idealist philosophy to one centered upon language (which as Lacoste reminds us is one of the great irreducibles of

³⁰⁸ Michael E. Zimmerman, ‘The Ontological Decline of the West,’ in Richard Polt and Gregory Fried, eds, *A Companion to Heidegger's 'Introduction to Metaphysics'* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001): pp. 185-204; p. 185.

³⁰⁹ Op cit.

³¹⁰ Op cit.

phenomenological inquiry [AI 42-67]) – a reversal thus of what Descartes inaugurated with his own turn towards ideas and the contents of the mind; for the analytical philosophers that influence Lacoste, the ultimate facts were those of language and they concentrated upon the kinds of human practices that grow from language and make it possible in the first place.³¹¹

For continental philosophy and the postmodernist theory that grew out of it the linguistic turn is based on the belief that, because language is riven with figuration – in Nietzsche’s phrase, nothing more than a ‘mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms’ – it cannot represent the world with any particular degree of accuracy, let alone in an immediate, undistorted way. One might simplify this down to the conclusion that words depend on *other* words for their meaning, rather than on reference to some extra-linguistic or metaphysical reality. In that case a phenomenology of language (and its silences) perhaps becomes essential.

The imagination is related to prayer through a question of *representation*. Husserlian phenomenology distinguishes between two basic types of imaginal consciousness: the first, image-consciousness [*Bildbewusstsein*], in which a perceived object is intended as an image of something else (for instance, as with a photograph of a person); and the second, *Phantasie*, in which one imagines an object directly, without anything perceptual serving as support for the imaginal intention.³¹² This image-consciousness has the three-fold structure whereas the structure of *Phantasie* is perceptual involving only two elements: first of all, a mental image; and secondly, that which is imagined by (intended through) it.

³¹¹ Prayer, like philosophy is a fundamentally human activity – Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference between “Someone” and “Something”*, trans. Oliver O’Donovan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 248.

³¹² John Sallis, *Force of Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 9.

Lacoste pushes us further, towards ‘the dialectic of *poēsis* and *hermēneia*’; this is the fruitful dialectic of the image. Poetics and hermeneutics are at work in all art to ensure that the image is no more than a twofold optical illusion, cancelling out the border between the world of life and the world of representation. There is no risk of such confusion, says Lacoste, when faerie intervenes, but seems to propose nothing less than the begetting of other worlds. ‘Nevertheless these other worlds do not establish a kingdom of possibility which is indifferent to the human totality of reality. As reading Tolkien and Lewis showed: they are either the world of men eschatologically returned to itself, or the world faced by the crucial sense of its history’ (AH 373).

4.3 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics, Lacoste tells us, is a product of the cultural or chronological distances that interfere with the understanding of texts – epistemic gap to which O’Donovan referred. This particular discipline enables mankind to discern the meaning to which it may no longer have access or to which it never had access, but it nonetheless regards as meaningful (ECT 688). Notwithstanding his antipathy towards the influence of Schleiermacher in the field of the philosophy of religion (INT 5) Lacoste recognises his importance in the development of a general hermeneutics. As theologian and philologist, Schleiermacher understood the value of criticism: his hermeneutics was first of all ‘grammatical’ which meant that only someone who knew a writer’s culture and their language could then perceive that writers’ original contribution to meaning’. And yet Schleiermacher was also a Romantic, and the second task of his hermeneutics (what Lacoste suggests one might term ‘technical,’ or ‘psychological’) consisted of understanding that writer as well as or even better than themselves, an idea rooted in what Lacoste (citing Ricoeur) calls the ‘deepest

conviction' of that same Romanticism – namely its conviction that there was a creative unconscious (or spirit) at work; the possibility of interpretation thus resides in an idea, that of 'connaturalism' where, through the mediation of the work, 'spirit spoke to spirit' (ECT 690).

While Dilthey's hermeneutics were concerned with interpreting 'life', Lacoste points out that it was Heidegger who gave hermeneutics new meaning, which touches upon the question of representation and the possibility of an ontology of prayer. Lacoste identifies a reversal at the core of *Being and Time*: hermeneutics traditionally presupposed that one interpreted with the aim of understanding. Lacoste suggests according to Heidegger, 'it is in fact the understanding that provides the object of interpretation' (ECT 690). Understanding is simply what *Dasein* has always already done. Different scenarios are possible within literature of course, and Lacoste counter-proposes that, 'Hobbits and eldils, and other paper creatures, can then perhaps truly perceive the humanity of mankind, and glimpse what it is of the world that has been obscured by our worldviews' (AH 373). Once mankind raises the question of the meaning of being, it may have already answered in advance, by virtue of the fact that mankind exists.

Hermeneutics post-Heidegger is thus an interpretation of 'facticity', of an existence located in a world, a finitude that is experienced as both *Befindlichkeit* and *Verstehen*. It is Heidegger who promotes the so-called 'hermeneutic circle' and who substitutes an ontological problem for the epistemological one that had occupied Schleiermacher and Dilthey. The abandonment of any pretence to an introspective theory of understanding emphasises the relationship between the self and the world – in fact, the very world whose limits and borders Lacoste wishes to transgress through the experience of liturgy. After Heidegger then hermeneutic concerns bear upon

everything knowable and not merely human artefacts. What appears in Lacoste's essay 'The Work and the Complement of Appearing' is his indebtedness to Gadamer's notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte* [the history of a work's effects], which affects every consciousness that confronts the work [*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*] – is this concern with the history of reception that determines his attitude to the biblical text and which in turn determines Lacoste's concern with divine phenomenality.

Lacoste suggests that the "fusion of perspectives" [*Horizontverschmelzung*] that Gadamer identifies thus makes it possible for the relationship between the reader and the work to bear fruit in dialogue. Now, this dialogue 'will never produce the last word in interpretation, nor indeed a better interpretation. It will produce *another* interpretation, in which the text will speak directly to the reader and to the world he inhabits' (ECT 690). There is, as one can see from this phrase, a certain eschatological tone to his discussion of hermeneutics; Lacoste fully concedes 'that we can practise phenomenology against an eschatological horizon' that is, after all, what Hegel did. Here though, says Lacoste, phenomenology returns us to hermeneutics:

"We must choose between absolute knowledge and the hermeneutics of testimony".³¹³ This sentence of Ricoeur ought to be inscribed in golden letters on the front page of our texts. When it comes to eschatology the phenomena that we are talking about are phenomena given to us within the horizon of a history – that is, from the experience of mystics or from texts (INT 26).

Lacoste acknowledges the importance of Ricoeur, whose hermeneutics coincided with the growth of the "science of the text" derived from linguistic structuralism and structural semantics, and 'whose ambition was to do away with

³¹³ See Paul Ricoeur, 'The Hermeneutics of Testimony' in Lewis S. Mudge, ed., *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980): pp. 119-154.

Dilthey's distinction between "explaining" and "understanding" 'in order to make explanation the necessary basis for understanding' (ECT 691). Here distance is no longer an obstacle to interpretation, and Lacoste here discerns that the fascination exercised by 'critique and method' coincides with the influence of Husserl's phenomenology in order that we may establish that the principle of hermeneutics is to 'allow the text to be itself, so that it must be *read* before it can be interpreted. Thereafter, phenomenology also provides material for understanding and a concept capable of articulating it' (ECT 691).

According to Ricoeur a "world" unfolds around a text, which is there for the reader to inhabit. Lacoste argues that this transformation of the 'world of the text' into 'my world' legitimates both the text and its interpretation; thus 'when I understand a classic text, I am in fact invited to understand myself through its mediation' (ECT, 691) noting that in Ricoeur's hermeneutics the author of the work disappears; the aim of interpretation is thus not what Lacoste identifies as the 'pathetic search for buried subjectivities' but the search for a work's meaning in the work.

Lacoste is explicit that in developing the concept of the "world of a text," Ricoeur's hermeneutics has given us 'the means to link reading and existence, text and world, in a manner that has as much resonance in theology as in philosophy. Biblical theology thus has resources through which to draw attention to the "habitability" of biblical texts. Lacoste suggests that a new discipline has emerged, what he terms "literary theology" a discipline which seeks "to demonstrate the possible opportunity for a renewal of the language of faith, not by using writers but by listening to them' (ECT 936).

4.4 Imagining utopia

This search, of course, relies upon empathy and imagination. For Kierkegaard the imagination provided ‘a first enabling step’, an almost transcendental condition for the possibility of our thinking and living and the basis for what we see as possible and thinkable.

In order for a person to become aware of his self and of God, imagination must raise him higher than the miasma of probability, it must tear him out of this and teach him to hope and to fear – or to fear and to hope – by rendering possible that which surpasses the *quantum satis* of any experience (SUD 41).

As Climacus states, ‘if actuality is to be understood by a third party, it must be understood as possibility’ – ‘ethically understood, if anything, is able to stir up a person, it is possibility’ (CUP 358; 360). As Christopher Simpson explains: ‘If one wants to ‘communicate’ the fuller truth of an actual state of existence to another...one must go about presenting the truth ‘in the form of possibility’ as a possibility, which they can choose to enter into, to become’. This is part of what distinguishes indirect ‘existence-communication’ from more direct communication. The imagination ‘helps us to see, to envision, what may be, how we can dwell in the world’.³¹⁴

There is an inevitable tension between Heidegger and Kierkegaard regarding myth and indirect communication. As Lacoste notes in an early essay, myth (as C. S. Lewis once said) is ‘not the other of the real.’³¹⁵ It can become fact’. And, continues Lacoste, in doing so ‘it does not lose its mythological isomorphism: it is simply realizing its meaning’. Moreover, the language of myth, in Tolkien as in Lewis:

³¹⁴ Christopher Ben Simpson, *The Truth is the Way: Kierkegaard's Theologia Viatorum* (London: SCM Press/Veritas, 2010), p. 66.

³¹⁵ C.S. Lewis, ‘Myth Became Fact’ in *Undeceptions: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1971): pp. 39-43 (first published in 1944).

can allow us to speak about what it seems we are no longer willing or able to say – indirect communication outlasts a direct communication of which modernity seems incapable. A seemingly brutal comparison can illuminate this thesis: the late Heidegger’s doctrine of the *Geviert*, the “Fourfold” consists of the earth and sky, gods and mortals. With every courtesy with which we try to interpret the lectures on *Building, Thinking and Living* and *The Thing*, it is difficult to avoid one conclusion: myth here reappears in philosophy, perhaps in order to say what philosophy had excluded from its scope (taking an irenic reading, it would also be possible to understand the theme of *Geviert* as a failure in reason resulting in a falling back upon a mythology). (AH 369)

So is a recourse to myth nothing more than a failure of thinking, or an inability to live at peace, that is, a homelessness born of an Augustinian *distentio animi*? If so, how wonders Lacoste, might the aesthetic relate to our dwelling upon the earth?

Living means being at home, being at rest, having a place which crystallizes everything that bears the meaning of our being in the world. The aesthetic experience does not relieve us of hunger, thirst and sleep, or from encountering care and anxiety. The work of art however imposes itself on us with an attribute that cannot be ignored without reducing it to a mere thing in the midst of all things: not only is it autonomous, but it gives us enough of itself; not only is it interpreted from itself, but it can still interpret what we are; so it is therefore paradoxical, but not foolish, that its contemplation temporarily revokes our being-there. The world of life is the only world in which man is born and dies. But meanwhile, we can also make art our dwelling place. (AH 352)

Lacoste issues an important caveat, wondering in fact if: ‘the one who prays is not in fact an example of alienation? Is what he calls the kingdom come, or whose premises he contemplates, nothing but a dream, which indicates no more than a disability or awkwardness to live this world (which alone is obviously real) which reveals no more than the panic of whoever renounces his essence for a misconception of himself?’ (BHP 358) ‘We live “inside” the dream, says Lacoste, ‘at least as quasi-consciousness, but what we experienced frays as soon as we wake up, so that we all can describe are confused and evanescent memories’ (IS 497-8).

Nonetheless, confronted by this alienation within the world, the imaginative description³¹⁶ enables one ‘to see what it would be like if such and such was the case and I lived as if this was so. We imagine ourselves as participating in a given reality as a possibility before we do so’³¹⁷. Thus, Johannes de Silentio’s use of story to make the movements of faith imaginable in *Fear and Trembling*; this is the way that a ‘developed imagination (as a potential value of the aesthetic) is a ‘presupposition’ for an ethical existence, as the ethical is a presupposition for the religious’.³¹⁸ The imagination – which enables one to think and to live in reality – is different from the fantastic, a mere escape from reality.

Conceived thus, the fantastic – as opposed to the imagination – is a distortion of the latter, imagination that provides only an escape from reality rather than enabling one to exist (ethically) in the real world. It is in that sort of register that the Christmas presents which the Pevensie children receive in *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* should be understood. These children are not given magic wands, magic swords, talismans or any of the other assorted paraphernalia that might make

³¹⁶ ‘The world *imagined* by literature is not the one where we live, even if it can be its image: that is to say, that the most attentive, captive or more readings always takes place *intermezzo*, away from the work and worries that necessarily plot our relationship to the world’ (AH 362).

³¹⁷ Simpson, *The Truth is the Way*, p. 66. See: FT 32.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 66.

their quest easier but tools of war. And if anything this makes it more difficult, since – as the martial themes identified by Michael Ward in the second novel, *Prince Caspian* make clear – they have to *fight* and *continue* to fight for Narnia and her values, rather than let them be subject to the charms of the White Witch (as Edmund does in the first novel), the Telmarine conquest, or the lure of wealth (as Eustace does with the dragon’s hoard in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*). , the Pevensies are thrown (a good Heideggerian term) into an alien – and alienating world – in which they have to, more or less, find their own way and make their own choices, notwithstanding the counsel they receive from Aslan.

Besides those ‘works with an edifying purpose and great literary value, such as the sermons of Bossuet or the religious discourses of Kierkegaard’, Lacoste singles out for praise ‘the apologetics of G. K. Chesterton and the theological writings of C. S. Lewis, two masters of the English language’ (ECT 934). Lacoste acknowledges that ‘there is a great deal of fiction that conveys theological themes’ but finds their ‘purest example’ in the fiction of Lewis or of his friend Tolkien. Here the literary form of the fairy tale or the science fiction story is used ‘either to rewrite biblical events or to “sub-create” [...] worlds with a history rich in spiritual teachings’ (ECT 934-5). And in some cases, a work is theological in an anonymous or pseudonymous way. Lacoste summarises it thus: in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, ‘the Christ figure is a lion named Aslan; in Tolkien, elves and goblins embody the traditional figures, angels, demons, and others, of Christian narratives’. However, these are ‘extreme examples’, and Lacoste offers further incidences of the widespread ‘literary appropriation’ (or at the very least their expression in literature) of Christian themes, such as Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* and Racine’s biblical tragedies (ECT 935).

Lacoste is clear that a great deal of Western literature was written with reference to the Bible and to the history of the church, some of which – Dante for instance – occupies an important place in theology. Further, Lacoste argues that the novel is often the best key to a theological hermeneutics of modernity, whether it is exploring the logic of spiritual experience with the likes of Dostoyevsky, Graham Greene or Flannery O’Connor, the logic of a wholly atheist world with novelists unconcerned with Christianity (Stendhal, Flaubert³¹⁹), or the logic of evil in Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* (ECT 936).

Brian Elliott has suggested that Heidegger removed historical truth from the sphere of human freedom and replaces it with myth; that is to say, that he substitutes the transcendental-aesthetic with a mythical-poetic figure of imagination. This move, at least as Elliott understands it marks ‘an abandonment of phenomenology in any meaningful sense, that is, it constitutes the ‘ab-sence’ of phenomenology within Heidegger’s thought’.³²⁰ But at the same time this ‘ab-sence’ inaugurates a new phenomenology that seeks to dialogue not with science but with art.

Indeed, Lacoste acknowledges that here poetry may assume ‘the appearance of a confession of faith [...] is important in any event, because as Heidegger says, it “makes being more present,” presents reality better than reality shows itself to us outside the mediation of language [...]’ Poetry can though, Lacoste notes, ‘express human distress in the face of horror, and attempt to do what Adorno said was unthinkable, to write poetry after Auschwitz’. Everything, Lacoste concludes, ‘can be

³¹⁹ Lacoste suggests that the ‘juxtaposition on the shelves of our libraries of the works of Stendhal and Balzac clearly proves that every reader can move from one fictional universe to another without ceasing to inhabit the “real” world; the *imagined* worlds, closed signifying systems, coexist in our memory because of a meeting of mimetic relations which are analogous (but certainly not identical) to the world in which we live. It remains that the logics of these worlds are mutually exclusive. And it remains that we do not pass from one *imagined* world to another as from one region of a single world of representation to another, as we move from one room to another in an art gallery, but as of a vision of another world envisaged according to the totality of its essential elements’ (AH 353).

³²⁰ Brian Elliott, *Phenomenology and Imagination in Husserl and Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 141.

made into poetry. Any poem, in a sense, can provoke a theological or philosophical commentary. And every poem can provide new words with which to speak of God' (ECT 935-6). More generally, Lacoste concedes, the persistence of 'a poetry interested in the "religious"' (here he lists the examples of Rilke, Eliot, and Kathleen Raine) has helped 'to make poetry a sui generis "theological locus"'.

In 2008's *Histoire de la théologie* Lacoste notes that the Tolkien and Lewis 'observed that the legendary or faerie, could be vector of truth rather an obstacle to its utterance. And whether in the *Chronicles of Narnia* by Lewis or *The Lord of the Rings* by Tolkien, the appearance of mythology is at the service of a rewriting of the Christian realities above the antagonism between the historic (or the historical) and the mythical'. Lewis's essay on the Incarnation, 'Myth became fact', states the issue precisely says Lacoste: 'the appearance of literary myth³²¹ may correspond to a historical reality to which only a text of mythological appearance may, paradoxically, do justice' (HT 438).

This distinction between 'cold prose' and imaginative fiction is important, and brings us to the significance of Ricoeur's deliberate turn to the nocturnal language of myth and fable in order to describe evil: Ricoeur is aware of the phenomenological inadequacy of conceptual language to adequately describe evil, especially since in the ethical register introduced following Levinas, description must necessarily be

³²¹ Myth, writes Lacoste, is 'not without reason, and there are even circumstances in which, according to the metaphoric order which is its, it can pass for the only tenable language. By its Greek name, myth is *speech*. And its function is perhaps to "talk" about what one cannot "speak". Anyone who agrees with Wittgenstein's thesis that there are realities (Wittgenstein called them "mystical") that can only be known in silence must therefore refuse to grant myth its cognitive function, whatever that may be. On the other hand, whoever is convinced that he can here and now think fully the beginning and the end, simply by reasoning through it, can only relegate myth to the level of allegory: it is then the educational instrument of thought, thought itself is available away from myth, it can in any case be stripped of its mythological illustrations? But what "pure" thought could ever abolish the right to representation, or disqualify the desire of representation? We certainly have good reasons for knowing a more sober thought – and as such better equipped to report the absolute beginning and the last ends – than representation. In the representation, however, that can certainly be a tool of thought, it is not, since it stands as a work of art, to be governed by the constraints that govern conceptual thinking' (AH 358).

prescriptive.³²² Moreover, in what Lacoste calls the *chiaroscuro* of everyday life, imagination plays an important role in providing us with the lexicon necessary to explain, to describe and, more importantly, to teach us how to conduct our being-in-the-world.

Reason was ‘the natural organ of truth’ but imagination was ‘the organ of meaning’. In ‘producing new metaphors or revivifying old’, imagination ‘is not the cause of truth, but its condition’.³²³ Reason and imagination are separate but complementary; the interplay between the two a means of attaining knowledge. This desire for knowledge is – like boredom – one of the distinctive traits of human beings. Unlike other animals the human being ‘simply wants to know things, wants to find out what reality is like, simply for the sake of knowing’.³²⁴ Human knowledge depends upon authority, reason and experience³²⁵; the proportions vary according to whether or not this knowledge *of* something by acquaintance or personal knowledge (*connaître*), or knowledge *about* something, either analytically or abstractly (*savoir*)³²⁶. The French lexicon here helps to make a distinction otherwise obscured by the English word “knowledge” which tends to commit the kind of metaphysical violence that so obsessed and disquieted Derrida and Levinas.

Abstract knowledge is that obtained through observation, reasoning (about what is being or has been observed) and authority (including reported observation, rumour and deductive reasoning). There is very little role for imagination. As Lewis

³²² This particular point is made by Lacoste in his forthcoming essay ‘On War and Peace: Heidegger, Levinas, O’Donovan’, trans. Kenneth Jason Wardley, in Robert Song and Brent Waters, eds., *The Authority of the Gospel: Explorations in Moral and Political Theology in Honour of Oliver O’Donovan* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

³²³ C.S. Lewis, ‘Bluspels and Falansferes: A Semantic Nightmare’, in Walter Hooper, ed., *C.S. Lewis: Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 265.

³²⁴ C.S. Lewis, ‘Man or Rabbit?’ in *Undeceptions: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1971): pp. 81-85; p. 81.

³²⁵ C.S. Lewis, ‘Religion: Reality or Substitute?’ in Walter Hooper, ed., *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 41.

³²⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1960), p. 143.

notes, the '[h]uman intellect is incurably abstract. Pure mathematics is the type of successful thought. Yet the only realities we experience are concrete – this pain, this pleasure, this dog, this man'.³²⁷ One commentator unexpectedly – and perhaps unconsciously – makes an important and covert phenomenological point when he notes that, 'The word tree is abstract; the tree outside my window is concrete'³²⁸. To which Husserl would add that it is not simply concrete, this tree also bears a wealth of associations and significations and appears to me through a variety of differing but related intentionalities: it is the tree in and around which my children played, the cherry tree whose blossom delights me every spring, the tree under which our beloved family pet was buried and so on. This manifold of intuitions, a smorgasbord of memories, affective experiences and different intentionalities – life, in effect – is what makes the phenomenological description possible and what it attempts to describe. But as Charlie W. Starr has noted, Lewis believed that the epistemological separations of this world (in Husserlian terms, *Lebenswelt* or "lifeworld") between the abstract and concrete or between reason and the imagination prevent us from knowing something completely. Although we can think about it or we can experience it³²⁹, we 'cannot do both simultaneously'; as Lacoste observes, our "perception" is neither singular or punctual – instead we perceive in and over time; time is given to us 'to enable what Husserl calls 'synthetic' perception.' This synthetic perception is a synthesis of 'adequate' and 'inadequate' perception: as Lacoste suggests, a 'wholly

³²⁷ C.S. Lewis, 'Myth Became Fact' in *Undeceptions: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1971): pp. 39-43; p. 41.

³²⁸ Peter J. Schakel, 'C.S. Lewis: Reason, imagination and knowledge', in David Hein and Edward Henderson, eds., *C.S. Lewis and Friends: Faith and the power of imagination* (London: SPCK, 2011): pp. 15-33; p. 24.

³²⁹ Lacoste makes a similar point in regard to the affective flux of everyday life; Lacoste's phenomenology is concerned with abolishing the traditional metaphysical distinction between subjects and objects; life is the primordial rhythm of affectivity (ED 51). This does not of course mean that we can draw a clear boundary here, any more than we can between philosophy and theology – see Boyd Blundell, *Paul Ricoeur between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

adequate perception’, (that is, a comprehensive perception of the *whole* of the thing, or the *whole* of its perceivable reality) is ‘an ideal and only an ideal. [...] The comprehensive experience of an object, in fact, has only the possibility of an infinite experience’ (TP 3). Transcendence, therefore, is a possibility of our daily, quotidian perception: our senses present us with only ‘fragments of reality’ which our perception synthesizes. The temporal limits of that perception are clear: the ‘overdimensioned’ transcendental ego ‘endowed with the power of perceiving comprehensively’ imagined by Fink in his sixth Cartesian Meditation is not a human ego; no eschatology of perception is conceivable – at least, no ‘*human* eschatology of perception’ (TP 3). Lewis shared this eschatological concern: only in heaven would experiencing a thing and thinking about it ‘be a single, simultaneous activity.’³³⁰ Imagination is necessary to enable us to experience abstractions and to compensate for the fact that ‘there are things which we cannot fully understand at all, but of which we can get a faint inkling by means of metaphor.’³³¹ Starr summarises it thus: truth in this world is ‘an abstract statement of correspondence with reality obtained by reason which operates in the abstract... Meaning, however, is a product of imaginative connection through metaphor... Whether or not a meaning corresponds to reality (whether or not it is true) is something that must be determined by reason.’³³² Abstract knowledge relies on the interplay between reason (to determine truth) and imagination (to provide access to the meaningfulness of such truth).

Knowledge by acquaintance, on the other hand, is rooted more in experience than in reason, with a more direct relationship to imagination. While we can gain such acquaintance through direct experience, ‘even reading or hearing about the

³³⁰ Charlie W. Starr, ‘Meaning, Meanings, and Epistemology in C.S. Lewis’, *Mythlore* 25:3-4 (2007): p. 165.

³³¹ Lewis, ‘Bluspels and Falansferes’, p. 254.

³³² Starr, ‘Meaning, Meanings, and Epistemology’, p. 177.

experiences of others can result in a kind of knowledge, if received with an active imagination³³³; as we shall see later in chapter six, this has profound theological implications, particularly for Christology.

Moreover there are significant ethical implications from awareness or understanding that springs not from *savoir* but from *connaître*, as Lewis explains in *An Experiment in Criticism* (which dealt specifically with the role of the imagination in reading literature): it is through the use of imaginative identification that ‘we become...other selves’ which enables us to ‘see what [they] see, to occupy, for a while, their seat in the great theatre.’³³⁴ By reading great literature ‘I become a thousand men and yet remain myself.’³³⁵ Here the role of the imagination in constructing the possibility and the content of co-affectivity becomes clear – it is through an act of the imagination that I am able to see myself as another. As Lacoste notes, the purpose of faerie (or fantastic literature) is ‘to “concretely” organize another world which is not that in which men live daily with men’ (AH 354).

Sympathetic imagination is not, however, something that occurs only in books – it is also at work in non-literary ways ‘when we have empathy with others and attempt to identify with their thoughts and feelings’³³⁶; phenomenological study, as Ricœur notes, ‘gambles on the possibility of thinking and naming...on that primordial discursivity of each subjective process’ as well as on reflection.³³⁷ As Lacoste notes, phenomenology is not to be reduced merely to a theory of sense perception. It deals with phenomena, and it is part of the definition of a phenomenon that it ‘appears’ (TP 7). Lacoste adds that numbers also appear, though they are devoid of any

³³³ Schakel, ‘Reason, imagination and knowledge’, p. 24.

³³⁴ C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 139.

³³⁵ Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, p. 141.

³³⁶ Schakel, ‘Reason, imagination and knowledge’, p. 25.

³³⁷ Paul Ricœur, *Husserl: An Analysis of his Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), p. 216

perceptibility; values also appear, which despite appearances, is something Scheler was not the only phenomenologist to have noticed.

Myth, Lewis suggests, takes us close to the eschatological unity of the abstract and concrete, one grasped simultaneously by the reason and the imagination, in a distinction between knowing and tasting ‘What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is)’.³³⁸ The deployment here of an embodied and sensual metaphor such as that of tasting (with obvious eucharistic³³⁹ connotations) is interesting, given the crucial part that the imagination played in the thought of Merleau-Ponty.³⁴⁰

As Starr summarises it, ‘Myth solves the problem of knowing by removing abstraction from the equation ... The myth is a real object of thought, a sub-created, concrete reality, intended not to represent reality out-side itself...but to be simply what it is, a pattern of the reality behind (not a pattern about that reality but an actual taste of the reality itself).’³⁴¹

Nonetheless, that mythic realm has a phenomenological reality – as we have suggested, intentionality is the central idea of Husserlian phenomenology: all consciousness is consciousness *of something*. As Merold Westphal explains, there is an important correlation between the intentional act [*noesis*] and the intentional object [*noema*]: in other words, nothing can be *given* to me apart from the way in which I *receive* it. Thus phenomenological description can focus upon the intentional act, or the horizon, life-world [*lebenswelt*] or language-game of what Westphal calls ‘the believing soul from which the intentional act emerges’. Furthermore, phenomenology

³³⁸ Lewis, ‘Myth Became Fact,’ p. 42.

³³⁹ See Michael P. Muth, ‘Beastly Metaphysics: The Beasts of Narnia and Lewis’s Reclamation of Medieval Sacramental Metaphysics’ in David Baggett, Gary R. Habermas & Jerry L. Walls, eds., *C. S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth, Goodness, Beauty* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008): pp. 228-244.

³⁴⁰ See James B. Steeves, *Imagining Bodies: Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Imagination* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004).

³⁴¹ Starr, ‘Meaning, Meanings, and Epistemology’, p. 176.

‘brackets or sets aside all questions about the actual existence of intended objects in order to focus on describing them as given to consciousness along with the acts’³⁴² by which they are received. This is the so-called “phenomenological reduction” which restricts noematic analysis to the contents of consciousness, regardless of whether or not anything corresponds to these representations in the visible world.

In spite of them never having read his work (HT 438) Lacoste finds that Lewis and Tolkien offer a riposte to Bultmann:³⁴³ ‘we find here a remarkable example of what, in another context, Kierkegaard called indirect communication: the sideways expression of what we cannot call by its name without it becoming unintelligible or inaccessible, or quite simply inaudible. The question of the meaning of human experience, anyway (and more so in the Christian perspective which Tolkien never denied was his own), arises at the crossroads of history and eschatology, of provisional reasons and definitive realities’ (AH 357). Donald MacKinnon rebuked idealists such as Bultmann for making ‘the mistake of supposing that one can translate propositions concerning actual historical transactions into propositions relating to the spiritual lives of individuals and of groups...a crowning illustration of the entrenched habits of the idealist of supposing that the inner life of the subject is alone truly significant, and that when we deal with its supposed, evident realities, we are on firm ground from which the onslaught of critical reflection, whether historical or philosophical, cannot dislodge us.’³⁴⁴

³⁴² Merold Westphal, ‘Phenomenology of Religion’ in Chad Meister, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2010): pp. 661-671; p. 661.

³⁴³ For Lacoste, ‘faerie literature allows us to suggest an alternative: either the agenda is set by Bultmann (in which case a disenchanted world – ours – must match an eschatology of which faerie can only be the grossest travesty), or the biblical world remains habitable beyond the disappointments of this one, and then the world of faerie has value as an imaginary imparting between the profane world that flowed from the Enlightenment and the eschatological meanings hidden therein’ (AH 360-61).

³⁴⁴ Mackinnon, *Borderlands of Theology*, p.88.

Already in the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl, (as Espen Dahl points out) was ‘highly aware of the fact that there is more to the perceived thing than what appears in perception, and that this corresponds to the inadequate self-givenness of the thing in outer perception. His solution to the surplus of meaning in perception at this stage is to distinguish between different acts, that is, between *intuitive acts*, such as perception, *signitive acts*, which are conceptual and regard meaning, and *imaginative acts*, which regard symbols and pictures – which all refer to different forms of givenness. Although Husserl notices that somehow the idea of an adequately given perception must be given along with ordinary thing perception, it is similarly clear that such ordinary perception is inadequate since the thing is not in any way given exhaustively. What Husserl thereby suggests is that any concrete perception is a mixed representation, consisting of the relatively empty signitive acts which are fulfilled by the presence in perception of intuitive acts and eventually supplemented by means of fantasy [*phantasy*] and pictures in the imaginative acts.’³⁴⁵

According to Richard Kearney, the phenomenological movement ‘elucidates potentialities of imagination’ which Husserl ‘believed were neglected in most previous philosophies’; phenomenology freed the imagination from its ‘inherited conceptual constraints’ by disclosing its function as ‘a dynamic and constitutive act of intentionality.’³⁴⁶ By revealing the image to be an intentional structure, Husserl perhaps demolished the immanent metaphysics of images, and removed the difficulties concerning the relationship of pure thought and the object to their simulacra. For phenomenology, any *genuine* account of imagination must account for the spontaneous discriminations made by the mind between its images and its perceptions and it must explain the role that images play in thought.

³⁴⁵ Dahl, *Phenomenology and the Holy*, p. 92.

³⁴⁶ Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-modern* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), p. 13.

Referring to the image of a centaur – a good Narnian motif – Husserl writes that ‘in the very essence of the experience lies determined not only *that* but also *whereof* it is a consciousness.’³⁴⁷ As Kearney summarises, this definition ‘rests upon his claim that there is an essential distinction between the act of imagining and the object – the centaur – which the subject is intentionally conscious of by means of this act’; Husserl tries to resolve the conundrum of whether the image is ‘a thing internal to consciousness (the fallacy of positivism) by arguing that it is not a *thing* at all’.³⁴⁸ Husserlian phenomenology ‘redefines the image as a *relation* – an act of consciousness directed to an object beyond consciousness. Imagination cannot reduce the world to a myriad of faded inner sensations or ideas, as Hume maintained’.³⁴⁹ The world remains transcendent of the consciousness which intends it and under no circumstances ‘can the object intended be translated into an image-copy within the mind... [t]he phenomenological method redresses this error by disclosing the essence of the image to be an intentional *actus*’.³⁵⁰ As phenomenology shows, ‘all modes of intentionality are conscious that they exist to the extent that they are purposive determinations of a conscious ego...[i]mages do not determine consciousness; they are determining acts of consciousness.’³⁵¹

Phenomenology – crucially for anyone interested in a post-metaphysical theology – dispenses, in Kearney’s words, ‘with the old metaphysical worry about the ‘reality’ or otherwise of images and accepts the mode of being of the image as its mode of appearing to consciousness’, although the act of presenting something to

³⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 13 n.8

³⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 15.

³⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 15.

³⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 15.

³⁵¹ Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 15.

consciousness should not be confused with the *something* thus presented.³⁵²

Returning to our centaur, Husserl writes:

The flute-playing centaur we freely imagine is...obviously a product of the mind. But [...] the centaur itself is nothing psychical; it exists neither in the soul nor in consciousness, nor does it exist somewhere else; the centaur is in fact “nothing” ... wholly “imagination;” stated more precisely, the mental process of imagination is the imagining *of* a centaur. To that extent the “supposed-centaur,” the centaur-phantasied, certainly belongs to the mental process itself. But one also should not confuse just this mental process of imagining with what is imagined by it as imagined. (Hua. III, 1: 43)

Although the centaur does not actually exist this does not entitle us to dismiss it as a mere psychic entity; it may be, as Kearney notes, an ‘irreality’ but *qua* irreality it can, Husserl would argue, achieve a transcendence *vis-à-vis* the mind.

As Lacoste makes clear in ‘The Phenomenality of Anticipation’ (and as Kearney rehearses here), *perceiving* Peter and *imagining* Peter are two different ways of intending the same transcendent object. The crucial difference is that one intends him – Peter – as *real*, while the latter is *unreal*. Phenomenology thus ‘rescues imagination from its ‘naturalistic’ confusion with perception, and restores it to its essential role as a power capable of intending the unreal *as if* it were real, the absent *as if* it were present, the possible *as if* it were actual’.³⁵³

The theological implications of this statement are clear: accepting Husserl’s account of its constitutive power, then it is the faculty of the imagination that makes it possible – specifically within the framework of liturgical non-experience and non-place described by Lacoste – for human beings-in-the-world to intend the God that is,

³⁵² Ibid. p. 16.

³⁵³ Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 16, emphasis in the original.

theologically at least, *Deus semper maior*. This potential understanding [*connaissance*] of God is freed from the shackles of conceptual language, specifically those of ontotheology, by constructing (rather in the manner of Narnia) an imaginative utopia in which our relation to that God may be thought and explored, one which is rooted in the phenomenality of God as love, and which thus “speaks” to our own pre-reflective affective awareness, and what might thus now be called the “affective imagination”.

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Moreover, in the affective imagination – that phenomenon in which the book captures our intentionality or “holds our attention” to the exclusion or detriment of all else (including our concern for the other person, such that I miss my stop and am late for our appointment etc) – this subject/object distinction is elided: in this case the object – a physical item of paper and ink – no longer appears to me *as such* since (if it is well enough written) I am “lost inside” the story conveyed through (or the utopia described in) that medium. While I may be dimly aware of the action of turning of its pages, and the rustle and crinkle of their paper, my intentionality is on that of the subjects of that book, and their affective resonance.³⁵⁵ It is probably no coincidence that elsewhere Lacoste refers to his books as his “friends”.

³⁵⁴ Lacoste seeks first of all to ‘distinguish the faerie world of poetry from that of utopia’. However, the poetics of enchantment harbour ‘no utopian ambition: it is not there to play any role in interpreting the world as it is, or in transforming it. It is true that faerie, like utopia, is nowhere: we now know that fairies and elves have no existence except on paper. But even though it has no place in the world as it is, faerie no longer fulfils a prescriptive function, only a marginal elucidatory function. Utopia depicts or thematizes the world as it should be, or as it should be portrayed. Faerie apparently depicts a world that never existed, and that will never exist’ (AH 359).

³⁵⁵ One is thinking primarily here, in relation to Narnia, of the literary genre of novel but the same could hold true for works of poetry, history and philosophy. The model becomes admittedly more difficult with regard to more strictly and narrowly informative works such as telephone directories or legal codes and juridical rulings – these things hold my attention only up until I obtain the information or *datum* for which I have been searching and the longer that it takes to find that information then the less my interest; almost no-one reads such things for amusement (although paradoxically, as these items date they acquire the appearance – and thus the interest – of the historical, as illustrated in the growth in genealogical research in the early twenty-first century).

Phenomenology, as Ricœur observed, gambles upon the possibility of thinking as well as upon reflection. In his own short book on Narnia Lacoste notes that it is from Ricœur that he learnt that ‘the symbol offers food for thought’.

Both Lacoste and Ricœur begin from a similar place – what Lacoste calls the inescapable chiaroscuro of human existence, and Ricœur calls ‘l’obscur reconnaissance’ of modern subjectivity in which hermeneutics has its origin as ‘the art of deciphering indirect meaning’ and where the hiddenness of the divine remains ever greater. As the philosopher Maréchal observed, the ‘ancient critique posits the ontological object, which includes the transcendental subject; whereas the modern critique relates to the transcendental subject, who posits the ontological object.’³⁵⁶ The problem in postmodernity has been the displacement of that stable subject³⁵⁷ by one characterised by disruption, and irruption. And yet narratability – even a narrative of fragmentation – presupposes a metaphysics of story; my life can only be experienced (and thus re-told in psychoanalysis, for example³⁵⁸) as fragmented within a horizon of ordered life stories and histories.³⁵⁹ Ricœur writes: ‘My deepest conviction is that poetic language alone restores to us that participation-in or belonging-to an order of things which precedes our capacity to oppose ourselves to things taken as objects opposed to a subject.’³⁶⁰ Ricœur notes in his 1959 essay ‘*Le symbole donne à penser*’ that as our language becomes more precise, unambiguous and more technical he

³⁵⁶ Joseph Maréchal, *Le point de départ de la métaphysique* (Brussels: Editions Universelles, 1947), p. 69.

³⁵⁷ One commentator describes the situation as one ‘no longer viewed simply as constituting and constructing but as itself constituted and constructed, and the concomitant return of the object whose exteriority disturbs and disrupts our subjective frameworks and horizons.’ Michael Purcell, ‘Rahner amid modernity and post-modernity,’ *Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, eds. Declan Marmion and Mary E Hines, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): pp. 195-210; p. 210.

³⁵⁸ Or the re-narration of trauma – Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 47-49.

³⁵⁹ It is thus no surprise that this theory has found its best expression amongst those French and German thinkers for whom the same word (*histoire* and *Geschichte*) renders both history and story.

³⁶⁰ Ricœur, ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,’ *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 101.

wishes to restore the fullness³⁶¹ of language, an opportunity which he considers one of ‘the gifts of modernity’.³⁶² Ricœur’s concern is ethical: thought cannot understand evil without ‘returning to the symbols that best display the problem of evil and make thought about evil a possibility in the first place.’³⁶³ Traditionally it has been in our stories that we have explored the themes of “good” and “evil”, recasting them as stories of vain princesses, witches’ tales, and heroic sagas of brave knights and dragons, and, these days at least, the growing pains of adolescent boy-wizards.

From a theological perspective, Lacoste asks whether it is legitimate – ‘The narrative that bears witness to God’s acts among us does not constitute the only possible theology’ (EA 183) – to transpose the Christian history of salvation into faerie; at issue is the capacity of fairy tales (like myths) to speak directly about God: ‘Myths speak of gods and heroes; they cannot pronounce the name of God within the framework of a topology of revelation. They dream the history of gods and men’ (NMT 5). It turns out that the nocturnal register³⁶⁴ to which Ricœur turned in 1959 has much in common with the pretend world of Narnia; indeed, asks Lacoste, what of this chiaroscuro? He replies that it is ‘the dwelling place of myth’ into which four children are thrown, where talking animals, dwarves, magicians, centaurs and unicorns, and at least one werewolf appear, according to the classic rules of the fairy tale (NMT 5).

While science is Husserl’s favoured example, it is simply a particular – perhaps more refined – version of the general historical structure of linguistic co-

³⁶¹ ‘...only the ensemble constitutes the metaphor.’ Paul Ricœur, trans. David Pellauer, ‘Metaphor and Symbol’, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 50

³⁶² ‘Or cela aussi est un cadeau de la « modernité »; car nous sommes, nous modernes, les hommes de la philologie, de l’exégèse, de la phénoménologie de la religion, de la psychanalyse du langage. Ainsi c’est la même époque qui développe la possibilité de vider le langage et celle de le remplir à nouveau.’ Paul Ricœur, ‘Le symbole donne à penser’, *Esprit* 27/7-8 (1959).

³⁶³ Stephen H. Webb, *Re-figuring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 29. It is significant that the 1959 essay was published after *Le Volontaire et l’Involontaire, Finitude et Culpabilité*.

³⁶⁴ Cf. the nocturnal events in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (London: Collins, 1981): pp. 132-141.

constitution. When writing of the constitution of a normal communal world, that is, of “our world,” Husserl introduces the general role of *Geschichte* that is “awakened” through the telling [*Erzählung*] of the *Geschichte*. Such a history, John Sallis notes, ‘belongs not to any tradition in general, but to a home tradition, a home history, a home story’. Accordingly, we participate ‘in the constitution of sense that stems from a tradition through narrative “reawakening” the sedimented historical sense of a tradition bequeathed through generations’.³⁶⁵ When Husserl writes of *Geschichte* and *Geschichtserzählung*, that is, ‘what the elders and the oldest recount [*erzählen*], as that which their elders recounted’ (Hua. XV: 145), he is trying to evoke a process of recounting history as narrative storytelling in the home-world and as constitutive of the home-world.

4.5 Narrative theology and a theology of narrative

Although Lewis’ pseudonymous Christ, ‘and his anonymous God, are not decipherable unless the names of God and of Christ have already been uttered’ Lacoste is not advocating some crude allegory. While it is banal to say that the manifestation of God does not leave art intact, it is equally banal that art does not always lend itself to a theological reading (even if theology can, for good or ill, speak about and interpret everything – NMT13). Neither Peter Rabbit nor Winnie-the-Pooh, for example, solicits a theological interpretation; neither Beatrix Potter nor A.A. Milne speaks of God,³⁶⁶ either anonymously or pseudonymously – even if the manifestation of God in the history of Israel, and in the history of Jesus of Nazareth, exerts a deep fascination over ‘artistic creation’. In communicating Himself, God

³⁶⁵ Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, p. 9.

³⁶⁶ Although it has been attempted: C. J. L Culpepper, ‘*O Felix Culpa!* The Sacramental Meaning of *Winnie-the-Pooh*’, Frederick C. Crews, ed., *The Pooh Perplex: A Student Casebook* (London: Arthur Baker Limited, 1976): pp. 53-64.

assumes something Lacoste terms ‘narrability’.³⁶⁷ But the *Chronicles* predate the theological discipline of “narrative theology”, and Lewis’s tales only lend themselves to a theological interpretation – according to Lacoste, the *Chronicles* only hint that ‘it is possible to develop a Christology – a narrative Christology – within a mythological setting’ (NMT 10). Although ‘sagas teach us that the native element of theological reason is not argumentation but narration’ (NMT 5), the narrability of God does provide the theological reason behind the *Chronicles*).³⁶⁸ The crux is the story and its transformative effect upon the imagination.³⁶⁹

4.6 Allegory and imagination

Imagination is the single philosophical problem that pervades Ricœur’s enquiries³⁷⁰; indeed, it is imagination that makes metaphor possible because it enables the construction of resemblance out of seemingly dissimilar elements. Equally, Richard Kearney describes imagination as his ‘abiding, if often inconspicuous, preoccupation’ concluding that ‘in most of his works Ricœur speaks less of imagination itself than of its multifarious expressions in symbol, metaphor, myth,

³⁶⁷ ‘After the long years during which the concept of History reigned unrivalled over theology, recent research has afforded key status to the concept of Story. The God who is unveiled in history is a narrable God, just as, having assumed a face, He is an imageable God. Because we have no other means than the reading of texts to access the history of God with men, historical and literary questions necessarily respond to each other. And because the God who is unveiled in history is also therein the teacher of a history, story houses the most ancient of theologies (Deut. 26:5 has been spoken of as ‘a small historical creed’).’ (NMT 15) .

³⁶⁸ ‘Only one book – only one story – is sacred, and only one history is holy. But just as the closure of revelation does not inaugurate an age of pure and simple repetition, the normative singularity of the biblical and evangelical arch-narrative does not prevent the Absolute, which will never be the secret of another history, from being the secret of other stories’ (NMT 15).

³⁶⁹ According to Lewis’s sermon ‘Transposition’, because human beings are not simply either body or soul or spirit, but ‘mixed’, they can only experience higher things such as emotions, thoughts or Spirit as ‘transposed’ or near-sacramentally ‘incarnated’ in the lower (such as bodily sensations and processes). Thus, on Lacoste’s account, faerie is a lower realm in which the Christian story can be embodied, or a lens through which it can be seen. See Judith Tønning, ‘Editorial’, *Chronicle of the Oxford University C.S. Lewis Society* 4:1 (2007), p. 3; ‘In the liturgical game of the sacramental memory, the Absolute and its holiness give themselves a space in the world of our techniques and our arts, and not only at its margin or in a theoretical ghetto’ (NMT 7).

³⁷⁰ George H. Taylor, ‘Ricœur’s Philosophy of Imagination,’ *Journal of French Philosophy* 16:1-2 (2006): pp. 93-104; p. 93. While we await the forthcoming publication of Ricœur’s unpublished lectures on imagination under Taylor’s editorship, I am grateful for the work that he has already done to make them available to those interested in Ricœur, myself included.

dream, narrative and the social imaginary'³⁷¹ Ricœur himself claims that 'the imagination can be considered as the power of giving form to human experience or...as the power of redescribing reality.' Fiction, which for Husserl constituted 'the vital element of phenomenology'³⁷² is Ricœur's name for the imagination considered as both rule-governed invention and a power of redescription.'³⁷³

For his part, Lewis admired the indirect approach in communication; success in writing came about by 'secretly evoking powerful associations'; expressions should 'not merely state but suggest'; the mechanism behind poetry should not be 'too visible'; and 'what the reader is made to do for himself has a particular importance'; since 'an influence which cannot evade our consciousness will not go very deep'.³⁷⁴ One should be careful of labelling Lewis³⁷⁵ merely as a crude allegorist.³⁷⁶ Lacoste notes that 'at most allusion is made to a nameless paternal figure for whom Aslan accomplishes his doings. No religion is practised in Narnia: This world of mythical characters and actions is a world from which all liturgy is absent (although one must interpret the relations of the children with Aslan as an introduction to the spiritual life)' (NMT 5). Lewis' own dependence upon imagination arises from his belief that it

³⁷¹ For Richard Kearney this is '...a scruple of hermeneutic detour inspired by the Kantian conviction that imagination is an 'art hidden in the depths of nature...a blind but indispensable faculty of the human soul'. Kearney, 'Narrative imagination: between ethics and poetics,' *Paul Ricœur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, (London: Sage, 1996): pp. 173-190; p. 173.

³⁷² '...as of all eidetic science, that fiction is the source from which the knowledge of 'eternal truths' draws its sustenance.' Hua. 3:1; 163.

³⁷³ Paul Ricœur, 'The Bible and the Imagination', *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and the Imagination* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995): pp. 144-166; p. 144. Reprinted from H. D. Betz, ed., *The Bible as a Document of the University* (Chicago: Scholars Press, 1981): pp. 49-75.

³⁷⁴ Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 21.

³⁷⁵ Lewis had two rules for exegetics: firstly, 'never take the images literally'; secondly, 'when the purport of the images [...] seems to conflict with the theological abstractions, trust the purport of the images every time.' C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (London: Fontana, 1966) p. 54.

³⁷⁶ Indeed, he actually delighted in receiving letters from young readers querying the christological themes in the Chronicles. See Peter J. Schakel, *The Way into Narnia: A Reader's Guide* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 37.

‘is rational not to reason, or not to limit oneself to reason, in the wrong place; and the more rational a man is the better he knows this.’³⁷⁷

4.7 Utopia, myth and the space of the imagination

If Christian liturgy ‘demythologizes all theurgy,’ and in its rites manifests (or at least should manifest) ‘its emancipation from all myths’, what is the value of ‘fairy tales, and their numinous worlds, in a world interpreted and demythologized’ (NMT 7) by monotheistic faith? For Lewis, to prefer abstractions is ‘not to be more rational; it is simply to be less fully human. De-mythologisers, like Bultmann³⁷⁸, are really only re-mythologisers; and the new mythology is poorer than the old one.’³⁷⁹ In the fantastical realm of Narnia, Lewis offers a rich mixture of mythical characters and tropes: the Chronicles abolish the old ritual antagonism between the “mythical” and the “rational”; and yet they remain works of literature rather than didactic texts or, even worse, “books with a message”.

If ‘[l]iterature writes the possible, which is the Other of the real’ (NMT 12), Ricœur’s typology of imagination³⁸⁰ opens up the possibility of the creation of a place of the ethically possible. ‘Are we, asks Ricœur, ‘not ready to recognize in the power of the imagination, no longer simply the faculty of deriving ‘images’ from our sensory experience, but the capacity for letting new worlds shape our understanding of ourselves?’³⁸¹ The literal translation of utopia³⁸² is ‘nowhere’, ‘the possibility of [the]

³⁷⁷ ‘Priestesses in the Church?’ *Undeceptions* pp. 191-196, p. 191.

³⁷⁸ ‘In Bultmann’s pure ‘*Daß*’ of the Cross, no myth is factualized. Bultmann’s Christ is a bloodless Christ’ (NMT 11).

³⁷⁹ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, p. 21.

³⁸⁰ In his unpublished 1975 Lectures on Imagination, Ricœur says that there are four types of productive imagination: 1) social and cultural; 2) epistemological; 3) poetic; and 4) religious.

³⁸¹ ‘This power would not be conveyed by images, but by the emergent meanings in our language.’ Paul Ricœur, ‘Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics’, *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 70 (1972): pp. 93-112; trans. and ed. J. B. Thompson in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 181.

³⁸² Paul Ricœur, ed. George H Taylor, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 16.

nowhere in relation to [our] social condition.’³⁸³ ‘At its best, the utopia is not only an escape from reality, but it points to a new kind of reality’,³⁸⁴ expanding both our sense of reality and reality’s possibilities. Understood thus, and following Ricœur’s reading of Gaston Bachelard in his 1959 essay, one could argue that the imaginary realm of Narnia offers space for ethics, and the construction of the ethical imagination; understood religiously, in the religious sense of the productive imagination, God is no longer some Santa Claus-figure – the Father Christmas in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* brings useful, practical gifts (quasi-Heideggerian) ‘tools not toys’³⁸⁵ for use in the impending battle against evil. ‘The fairy Christology of Lewis proves that the concrete logic of salvation is also capable of being reflected in the mirror of other worlds’ (NMT 12). Nonetheless, recognition of this “logic of salvation” resists lazy Christological and hasty allegorical readings and remains purely in the realm of the structural.

To return to the affective register of *Befindlichkeit*, one might therefore need to ask who has never found themselves “lost in a book”, to the extent that – perhaps heedless of time and regardless of their fellow travellers, and seemingly through no conscious decision – they have paradoxically “found themselves” somewhere else entirely, their imagination having led them to a different geographical location. Becoming thus absorbed in the atmosphere of the Narnian world – and being able to live imaginatively in that fictional world for as long as the book lasts – is one of the powerful appeals of Lewis’s stories. The line ‘Always winter but never Christmas’³⁸⁶ illustrates this quality. Allegorically speaking, the line should not be in the book.³⁸⁷

³⁸³ Ricœur, ‘Lectures,’ 14:12, cited in George H. Taylor, ‘Ricœur’s Philosophy of Imagination’, *Journal of French Philosophy* 16:1-2 (2006): pp. 93-104; p. 96.

³⁸⁴ Ricœur, ‘Lectures,’ 14:19 cited in Taylor, p. 96.

³⁸⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (London: Collins, 1981), p. 99.

³⁸⁶ Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, p. 57.

³⁸⁷ Tolkien nonetheless famously disliked the Narnia stories because of their “mixed-mythology”.

As one critic notes: ‘We find out later that the Narnia name for Christ is Aslan. If his birthday is celebrated in Narnia, it should be called Aslan-mass, not Christmass. (Of course, the reference to Mass is also unknown in Narnia, which has no formal religious services or liturgies.) Although the reference to “never Christmas” should not work, it does work. It takes us back to the Primary World and should break the imaginative spell, but for most readers it does the opposite and helps sustain the spell. [...] After being taken to a cold, bleak world, a place of bondage and without joy, readers may return to our world with a new appreciation of what Christmas is and how important it is...’³⁸⁸ Similarly the narratives of hope, suffering and ethical responsibility in which Dionysus and Father Christmas rub shoulders with werewolves and dragons are not undiminished by their rich mixture of characters. Narnia, notes Lacoste, asks:

What relation does the work of art bear to truth? Other worlds certainly tell us, in their oblique way, the truth of our world. Theology’s mission is to say that the truth of our world cannot be spoken unless it calls to memory the Absolute Who, at one time, pitched His tent in the midst of men.³⁸⁹

And Lacoste continues, ‘Art sets truth to work, according to Heidegger, because in its work all that makes up the world is knit together.’³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸ Schakel, *The Way into Narnia*, p. 116.

³⁸⁹ Lacoste states elsewhere that ‘it remains true that the manifestation of God in the history of Israel, and in the history of Jesus of Nazareth, holds a deep manifestation for all artistic creation’ (NMT 14).

³⁹⁰ ‘What relation does the work of art bear to truth? Other worlds certainly tell us, in their oblique way, the truth of our world. Theology’s mission is to say that the truth of our world cannot be spoken unless it calls to memory the Absolute who, at one time, pitched His tent in the midst of men. Art sets truth to work, according to Heidegger, because in its work all that makes up the world is knit together. Let us say here that faerie sets truth to work because it celebrates, in its way, the remembrance of the *verissimum*, of the eschatological visit of the Absolute to men – or because it makes work of truth in permitting Christ to reign also in worlds created by men, not by God’ (NMT16).

4.8 Eschatology and imagination

It is, by now, clear that for both Ricœur and Lacoste imagination ‘permeates all thought and conceptualisation’³⁹¹ According to Ricœur, both the psychology of perception and linguistic philosophy indicate that there is no such thing as a brute impression, direct and unadorned by human structuring³⁹²; as Bachelard’s account of the house in *The Poetics of Space* illustrates, perception is always structured by physiological and imaginative processes, a sentiment echoed by Lacoste:

‘appearing’ is more than ‘being presented by our senses’. Perception precisely deals simultaneously with what appears (what is presented by our senses) and what does not appear (what is not presented by our senses). ...We do not see the invisible. But we perceive the invisible: the visible refers (‘symbolically’) to the invisible. Perceiving what is presented by sensation and what is presented symbolically must not be confused. (TP 4)

The imagination [*der Phantasie*] played a significant role in Husserl’s phenomenological method. The everyday act of apperception is, in fact, a unity of both authentic (concrete) and inauthentic (imaginative) perception: ‘the authentic perception of the front of a house is only conceivable as a side if it simultaneously refers to the inauthentically perceived whole house of which it is [but] one side.’³⁹³

*Phantasie*³⁹⁴ is that process whereby one imagines an object directly, without anything perceptual serving as support for the imaginal intention.³⁹⁵

³⁹¹ Taylor, ‘Ricœur’s Philosophy of Imagination’, p. 93.

³⁹² Ricœur, ‘Lectures,’ 2:6, citing J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) in Taylor, ‘Ricœur’s Philosophy of Imagination’, p. 94.

³⁹³ Dahl, *Phenomenology and the Holy*, p. 93. Image-consciousness has a three-fold structure: (1) a perceived object intended (2) as image (3) of something; while *Phantasie* of a perceptual thing involves only (1) a mental image, and (2) that which is imagined by (intended through) it.

³⁹⁴ Husserl distinguishes between the imaginal consciousness of an image [*Bildbewusstsein*] from *Phantasie* in which there is no perceptual object functioning as an image or an analogue through which one intends something else and made a distinction between intuitive acts (such as perception), signitive acts (conceptual) and imaginative acts (which refer to symbols and pictures) although all referred to different forms of givenness. Hua. XIX, pp. 539, 588; Dahl, *Phenomenology and the Holy*, p. 92.

³⁹⁵ Sallis, *Force of Imagination*, p. 9.

Ricœur, for his part, argues that the “imagination is not at all an alternative to perception [but] an ingredient of perception . . . encapsulated within the framework of perception.”³⁹⁶ Ricœur³⁹⁷ draws upon Sartre’s psychology of the imagination, for whom ‘the imagination is the necessary condition for [human] freedom’³⁹⁸ located in a theory of the unreal [‘nothingness’] which escapes the boundaries of current empirical reality. Taylor suggests that Ricœur wants to build upon Sartre’s theory of the unreal to develop his own approach to the productive imagination, but encountered a problem: although Sartre illustrates the ability of human thought to have an image of the unreal based on an image of an absent friend, Peter in Berlin, this image is itself reproductive, because it is an analogue of an original (real) Peter.³⁹⁹ Absence maybe conceived as ‘paradigmatic for nothingness’⁴⁰⁰ but this reduces it simply to a theory of nothingness.⁴⁰¹ ‘Presence and absence are distinctions relative to [current empirical] reality.’⁴⁰² Taylor summarizes it thus: ‘Absence is a copy – a form of reproductive imagination – of someone present.’ Lacoste⁴⁰³ is even more scathing⁴⁰⁴:

Nothing is more banal, then, than the realization of an anticipation, and
 nothing is more banal than the distinction of their proper phenomenality. We

³⁹⁶ Ricœur, ‘Lectures,’ 5:10, cited in Taylor, ‘Ricœur’s Philosophy of Imagination’, p. 94. Elsewhere Ricœur argues that ‘[w]e can no longer oppose . . . imagining to seeing, if seeing is itself a way of imagining, interpreting, or thinking’ (Lectures 9:1).

³⁹⁷ Ricœur notes that, for Spinoza, the imagination is equivalent to inadequation: illusion, prejudice, something lacking. By contrast for the religious Pascal, imagination is sophistry or deception. Ricœur, ‘Lectures,’ 3:19, cited in Taylor, p. 95.

³⁹⁸ Ricœur, ‘Lectures,’ 14:13, quoting Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), p. 271, cited in Taylor, ‘Ricœur’s Philosophy of Imagination’, p. 96.

³⁹⁹ Ricœur, ‘Lectures,’ 13:14 in Taylor, p. 96.

⁴⁰⁰ Ricœur, ‘Lectures,’ 14:9 in Taylor, p. 96.

⁴⁰¹ Ricœur, ‘Lectures,’ 14:13 in Taylor, p. 96.

⁴⁰² Ricœur, ‘Lectures,’ 13:15 in Taylor, p. 96.

⁴⁰³ The ‘God manifested in Jesus Christ does not belong to the world... Thus the believer practices his faith in a disenchanted world. The ‘present’ of faith has as its place and horizon a secular universe, which is no longer inhabited by any numinous force. It is the ‘present’ of memory, or of memorial, that gives back to the believer the presence of God who no longer has a place in the world except in the past, and in the measure in which this past still invests the present’ (NMT 6).

⁴⁰⁴ ‘Only a totally eschatological viewpoint could dissipate the chiaroscuro of the world, and so allow us to dispense with theology, understood as the discursive practice of disclosure’ (NMT 5).

find ourselves in the element of imagination, inevitably free to construct a scenario, but the sound of the doorbell brings us back to the world of perception and what we perceive – the friend at the door – vividly realises what we had blurrily anticipated. (PA 16)

And, adapting Sartre’s example for a moment, Lacoste offers an important phenomenological qualification: ‘...anticipation appears as such when it knows its realization (I know that I anticipated Pierre’s visit when Pierre shows himself at the door’s threshold), or it appears as such when it stumbles into the essentially unrealized character of existence’ (PA 31).

This eschatological character of perception is made clear within the pages of the final Narnia book when the dwarves’ cunning and cynicism ultimately prevents them recognising paradise⁴⁰⁵ following the events of the Last Battle, Aslan concedes: ‘They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they can not be taken out.’⁴⁰⁶ A certain naivety is both essential and crucial to a proper interpretation, lest we become like Odysseus; Lacoste asserts that ‘naïveté can be right. And without it, we might remain unaware of precisely what we are doing when we decide to exist face-to-face with God’ (EA 178).

One of the tasks Ricœur sets himself in the 1959 essay is to cut across the ‘desert of criticism’⁴⁰⁷ and one should remember that the Chronicles were written to amuse children and not to elicit theological commentary. As Lacoste observes perhaps it is only the adult reader (although, he adds, ‘I was not brought up in an English nursery’) who is capable of ‘a theological decoding of the Chronicles. And only the

⁴⁰⁵ It ‘was clear that they couldn’t taste it properly’. C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (London: Collins, 1981), p. 140.

⁴⁰⁶ Lewis, *Last Battle*, p. 141.

⁴⁰⁷ ‘...par delà le désert de la critique...’ Ricœur, ‘Le symbole donne à penser’.

adult (and the worst sort of adult, the intellectual, at that) can discern theoretical problems in these small masterpieces' (NMT 8). Instead, it is children and those like them who read fairy tales and only their parents (or their uncles) who pose questions about them.

4.9 Plot and canonicity

One of the strongest themes in the *Chronicles* is that of temporal unity, that fusion of time and narrative which constitutes the 'emplotment' of its ethical actors.⁴⁰⁸

In Lewis' own words:

All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter one of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.⁴⁰⁹

Temporality, Ricœur⁴¹⁰ reminds us, is that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity is the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent.⁴¹¹ One should also note that it requires more than a little patience: 'It takes time to find the right words, whether minting our own vocabulary and terminology, or taking over others' coinage. We should be in no hurry to speak, for hurry is more likely to produce a babble than coherent speech.[...] thought is most true to itself when it takes time' (MH 264). As Lacoste notes elsewhere:

⁴⁰⁸ 'In Narnia they are witnesses to the creation and the redemption of a world. In Narnia, they meet the Christological figure of the lion Aslan, and are witnesses to his passion and resurrection. And it is in Narnia that, in the final tale, they live out an eschatology and enter, at the outcome of the 'last battle', into the truest secret of all stories' (NMT 7).

⁴⁰⁹ Lewis, *Last Battle*, p. 172.

⁴¹⁰ '...no action is a beginning except in a story that it inaugurates; that no action constitutes a middle unless it instigates a change of fortune in the story told, an 'intrigue' to be sorted out, a surprising 'turn of events', a series of 'pitiful' or 'terrifying' incidents; finally, no action, taken in itself, constitutes an end except insofar as it concludes a course of action in the story told, unravels an intrigue, explains the surprising turn of fortune or seals the hero's fate by a final event which clarifies the whole action and produces in the listener the catharsis of pity and terror.' Paul Ricœur, 'On Interpretation', *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. A. Montefiore, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁴¹¹ Paul Ricœur, 'Narrative Time,' *On Narrative*, ed. William JT McNeill, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 165.

Dialogue is always threatened by the opacity of words. The philosopher can become a sophist. And religion is home to its worrying double, which is idolatry. Biblical exegesis, one of the earliest perversions of speech and reason has, ever since there has been a Bible and exegesis, tirelessly read the story of the very first temptation addressed to man, as it is discussed in the third chapter of Genesis. It is indeed there, paradigmatically, that reason allies itself with evil; and it concludes that pact by being able to pose a suspicion about God – would it not be one whose existence prevents man from being in turn a God? Is the transgression of the law not the condition under which we can become human? (AH 367)

The Narniad – this sequence of seven novels, set in the same world, chronicling its creation, fall, redemption and, ultimately, its destruction – offer, argues Lacoste, their reader ‘the reflective capacity to place itself at a distance and to consider itself, as such and in its entirety, as related to the totality of what is’⁴¹² (what in literary and biblical studies is called canon) and to pose anew the question of our belonging-to an order of things. Plot ‘grasps together and integrates into one whole scattered and multiple events, just as the metaphor fuses together words not ordinarily associated with each other’.⁴¹³

4.10 A Phenomenology of Narnia

As Lacoste notes, ‘phenomenology is definitely not to be reduced to a theory of sense perception. Phenomenology deals with phenomena, and it belongs to the definition of the phenomenon’⁴¹⁴ that it ‘appears’. Part of Lacoste’s concern is to

⁴¹² Paul Ricœur, tr. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, *Rule of Metaphor* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 304.

⁴¹³ Stephen H. Webb, *Re-figuring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 35.

⁴¹⁴ As Lacoste reminds us, ‘The phenomenon is lord of its senses. It thus reveals a primacy of possibility over reality, of the original over the already-evident. The work of art is irreducible to the

articulate a phenomenology that is attentive to the irreducibility of certain phenomena that resist the phenomenological reduction, and which instead argues for their recognition as such, recognising that such recognition is part of the givenness of that phenomenon as it appears to us.⁴¹⁵

The use of the archaic, the nocturnal⁴¹⁶ and the dream, in allowing access to the origin of language, represented an attempt to escape the problem of a philosophical⁴¹⁷ starting point⁴¹⁸:

A dream is not nothing. A dream is nothing less than a dream, and does not stop carrying out a heuristic function, much like a utopia. It denounces primarily, the proper un-realization of all lived experience in the time of awakening. (PA 29)

world. It probably tells the truth about this world. But it always comes as a surplus: it over-comes' (AH 351).

⁴¹⁵ Love only gives itself to be recognised in and through love, a relationship of mutuality that relies upon our ability to recognise it. It is becoming increasingly common in the wake of the public and often traumatic scrutiny that follows a high profile judicial murder investigation – particularly when children are involved, either as victims or perpetrators – to speak of a ‘failure of moral imagination’ so it may be fruitful here to employ a quasi-religious register and speak here of a failure to recognise “love as love in or through love”. See Michael Mack, *How Literature Changes The Way We Think* (New York: Continuum, 2012).

⁴¹⁶ Note that the “christological” sacrifice of Aslan itself takes place at night: C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (London: Collins, 1981): pp. 132-141.

⁴¹⁷ ‘Unlike pre-philosophical classic myth, faerie survives the advent of philosophy, a myth produced in a supposedly demythologized world.’ One possible response, says Lacoste, ‘would be to strip faerie of all seriousness. [...] it would be in jeopardy. No longer having to say what is at the beginning and the end of the real world – the responsibility of philosophers and theologians – allows it the pure pleasure of narrating and creating worlds.’ Artistic cosmology possesses its own answers: ‘Lands where elves and hobbits live (and the stories that take place there) are interesting in themselves; it is not certain that they must report their existence to any literary theory; only bad literature is justified by its theoretical concerns.’ However, rather than an image of the world faerie ‘appears to be some re-mythologisation of the world, and its superficial exoticism conceals a properly hermeneutic function with respect to the world of life. Would literature have nothing better to do than contribute to a return of myth?’ For Lacoste the example of non-figurative art proves that ‘the mimetic function is not the secret of the work of art. Creating a work of art calls worlds into existence; production triumphs over reproduction. However, it remains that faerie subcreation promotes the existence of possible worlds that are not the one in which we live and do philosophy – but that these worlds show disturbing similarities with our own’ (AH 358-9).

⁴¹⁸ ‘...ce recours à l’archaïque, au nocturne et à l’onirique, qui est aussi, comme le dit M. Bachelard dans *la Poétique de l’espace*, un accès au point de naissance du langage, représente une tentative pour échapper aux difficultés du problème du point de départ en philosophie.’ Ricœur, ‘Le symbole donne à penser’. Ricœur of course translated Husserl’s *Ideas* in 1950.

This “un-realization” of lived experience includes, in a religious register, the problem of moral evil which formed the subject: the other [*l’autrui*] can appear both by appealing to my affection – for instance, through sympathy, empathy – and by refusing such an appeal; the absence of such affect does not exclude their ethical demand.

While Husserl endorsed the ‘rich use of fancy’⁴¹⁹ Lewis endorses the language of *epoché* (albeit indirectly):

To experience a work of art fully, we must lay aside preconceptions, self-absorbed experiences, and personal needs or cravings. We must make room for the work by, and as far as possible, emptying a space for the work to fill: ‘Get yourself out of the way’. Then we must engage with the work by surrendering to it.⁴²⁰

It is theology’s eschatological task⁴²¹ to surrender its ground⁴²² even while it continues to stand on it. Lewis’ stories, with their bold images of joy and heaven, are (as Lacoste recognises) radiant exponents of ‘transposed’ Spirit. But precisely in this role, they also require the reader, in some way, to let go of them. ‘[D]on’t go trying to use the same route twice. Indeed, don’t try to get [to Narnia] at all’, the Professor advises the Pevensie children.⁴²³ Lacoste ruefully observes, that ‘[t]he theologian or

⁴¹⁹ Phenomenology can draw ‘extraordinary profit’ from the gifts of art and poetry that ‘in the abundance of their singular features...tower high above the products of our own phantasy’ (Hua. 3:1; 160).

⁴²⁰ Peter J. Schakel, *Imagination and the Arts in C.S. Lewis: Journeying to Narnia and Other Worlds* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), p. 14. The quote is from *An Experiment in Criticism*.

⁴²¹ ‘In theological terms: there is only ever a good eschatological hermeneutics of protology’ (AH 368); the ‘conceptual prose of our theologies cannot claim any eschatological destiny. We must never believe that “theology” is predicated univocally upon both a “theology of the blessed” and a *theologia viatorum*’ (PD 213).

⁴²² ‘The flip side of ‘transposition’ is that it requires an ultimate (perhaps even a constant) letting go of the very lens through which we see. If we need time to see eternity, earthly love to taste the divine, ‘subcreation’ to respond to God’s creative power, these things inevitably become, to some extent, constitutive of our relation to God: they are, in a sense, the ground on which we stand before Him.’ Tønning, ‘Editorial’, p. 3.

⁴²³ Lewis, *Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, p. 170.

the philosopher no longer enjoys, alas, the naivety of children.⁴²⁴ We are incapable of not interpreting' (NMT 8-9). 'The words that man makes use of to speak of him are incapable of entertaining all God gives us to think. The image gets mixed up with the concept, and the narrative with argument' (EA 184). Our theological knowledge runs the risk of either hypocrisy (PD 205) or fideism.⁴²⁵

And yet if it is to achieve a constructive dialogue with a particular text⁴²⁶, Narnian phenomenology requires an initial aesthetic reflective judgement, the discernment of genre or form⁴²⁷: 'The book does not appear to its reader as it appears to the one who sees just a book among many, and, a fortiori, to the one who sees a mere object on the table' (PA 15). Similarly, a biography does not appear to its reader in the same way as, say, a work of magical literature. The recognition of a phenomenon, whether it is God or a book, requires that we recognise it as such

⁴²⁴ '...an aporia that culminates in Hegel, but which has haunted every philosophy of history, and which unbalances the Hegelian edifice – all the more so to the extent one perceives it as a theological structure powerless to let us think the experience of the child, or of the experience that resembles it, otherwise than as embryonic. Childhood could not have been defined otherwise than as a lack from within the terms that Hegel shares with the entire metaphysical tradition of the West. The full exercise of reason is refused the child. The wisdom (in the ordinary sense of the term) that the philosopher seeks is unattainable for the child – inasmuch as man is only truly human when he displays his "wisdom" and "reason," the child is thus nothing but the beginning of man: he is of no interest in himself but only in relation to what he will (perhaps) become. It takes no great capacity for inference to recognize that where (in Hegel) the possession of conceptually insuperable knowledge governs the advent of finally self-identical man, neither the experience of the child nor any experience resembling it can have any eschatological significance whatsoever. The prayers of the child and of those resembling him – "simple" people – falsify this theory however. For those who do not, nor could ever, possess "absolute knowledge," or more broadly, strictly conceptual knowledge, the practice of praise and the act of grace are nevertheless possible' (EA 184).

⁴²⁵ However, by further suggesting that the phenomenon of faith might only be understood by the faithful (i.e. from out of their response and their commitment) Lacoste is not articulating some crude fideism of the kind generally – and usually wrongly – attributed to Karl Barth. The other's speech can only be considered if both their existence and my response is presupposed in the imagination; faith (for the most part identified, with Kierkegaard, with an act of love) is the appropriate response to the phenomenality of God as recorded in the narrative that is human history. Both linguistic intersubjectivity and God represent irreducible phenomena that resist the limits of the phenomenological reduction: all human language games are – some extent at least – translatable (PP 97-116) and, as Schrijvers has pointed out, it is one thing to suggest that fideism is partially right and another to be a fideist oneself. 'Fideism then is partly right, because no conceptual constraint here suffices. Rationalism is also partly right' (PD 108).

⁴²⁶ Mara E. Donaldson, *Holy Places are Dark Places: C.S. Lewis and Paul Ricœur on Narrative Transformation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), p. 66. Donaldson is critical of Schakel's emphasis on the imagination *behind* rather than the content of the story. Ibid. p. 16.

⁴²⁷ Donaldson, *Holy Places are Dark Places*, p. 22.

imaginatively: the book that I am looking for does not appear to me in the same way as all the other books on that shelf in which I am, for the time being at least, not interested.

An event, such as reading, can ‘possess the character of repeatability’ (as Lacoste observes ‘I could always re-open the book to the same page, grab it in the same way...’) as well as that of ‘unrepeatability’: ‘Opening the book to this page right now, and re-opening it tomorrow to the same page, are not identical experiences. I shall not be the same tomorrow, and therefore I will open the book again – precisely again, already knowing what it says, and reading the page with the power of anticipating what the next page will say. I will open it again, on the other hand, because tomorrow I shall not be identical to what I am today: my humor, or my attention, or the purpose of my gesture (to re-read the book, or to try to prove that an event can be repeated) might not be the same’ (PA 16). Reading is a function of being-in-the-world, which reminds us that we are mortal – Heidegger’s later texts even ‘have a remarkably mythological tone’ (NMT 6). But to the extent to which it diverts us, it is that function of our ‘worldliness which permits us to play with our worldliness, to make something of a game out of our relationship with the world’.

This game can assume many forms, not least that of a diversion which draws us into fictional worlds, like those of Stendhal and Pullman, where God is dead. In Lewis’ christo-mythic⁴²⁸, however, the apparatus of diversion (other worlds, adventures, fantastic creatures, etc.) comes into play only as the background against which moral subjects enact the dramas which will eventually come to nullify that diversion’ (NMT 12). ‘A minor literary genre, the fairy tale is... [the] genre that offers the easiest survival to a world that is no more’ (NMT 15). Magical literature speaks to

⁴²⁸ Lacoste employs the term to denote ‘the paradox of a mythological word governed by the logic of Christ’ (NMT 9).

the imagination and might also have the power to structure that imagination. Thus fairy tales can give rise to thinking, and whilst, for the believer at least, literature is not a substitute for religion, both speak to the problems posed by our lives. In the adventures of the children thrown into the magical world of Narnia, we discover something that shapes our ethical imagination, thereby offering us a utopic space in which to rehearse our prayer. The child and the “simple” person’ do not, of course, know everything that they do when they pray. They are, says Lacoste, unaware that they thereby question their belonging to the world.

They do not realize the subversive power of their acts. But because they know enough to encounter a God whose benevolence they know [*connaissent*], it must be said that they have it within their power to make gestures of definitive value, and to implicate (doubtless without their knowledge) properly eschatological modes of being in the provisional. The child and the “simple” person (“the collier” [*le charbonnier*]) do not deny what God gives them and us to think. They will probably have the humility to believe the “sages” to be more learned than they in things divine. (EA 184-5)

5. Flesh

Introduction

The body has a long and significant place in the articulation of phenomenological enquiry, beginning with the observations of Edmund Husserl, but with traces also to be found in the work of his teacher Brentano. Equally, the centrality for Christian theology of the body in the Incarnation – that is, the assuming of flesh by the divine to become God incarnate – cannot be overestimated (notwithstanding attempts over the millennia to downplay its importance). It is also as an embodied self that the liturgical or praying subject [*orant*] prays *coram Deo*. Thus the body – whether that of the individual, the corporate body of the Church or the unique body of Jesus Christ, remembrance of whom is celebrated in the liturgy – is of central importance, representing the essence of our expressive capabilities and providing the ground of language and meaning. Truth is ‘articulated and shaped within a specific form of life’; language is ‘organic and linked to subjectivity’. Mankind cannot conceive of ‘a self without language’ nor ‘a completely subjective language’ which is not linked to the body.⁴²⁹ Kant’s identification of finitude and receptivity – in which the finite rational being does not *create* the objects of its representation but *receives* them – is expanded upon by Paul Ricoeur who sees the body primarily as the medium that mediates appearance, rather than simply giving rise to the experience of finitude.

Rather than merely a ‘bag of skin’ which seems like one more thing in the ‘midst of things’, the body ‘opens me onto the world, either allowing perceived things to appear or making me dependent on things I lack and of which I experience the need and desire because they are elsewhere or even nowhere in the world’.⁴³⁰ The body

⁴²⁹ Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?*, p. 179.

⁴³⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), p. 19.

‘opens me onto the world even when it isolates me in suffering; for the solitude of suffering is still haunted by the threats of the world’. This gives the body a sacramental character since it not only ‘opens me to others’ it ‘becomes a sign for others, decipherable and offered to the reciprocity of consciousness [...] my body opens me to the world by everything it is able to do’. In the words of one thinker,⁴³¹ ‘Ricoeur’s description underscores *the de-centred origin of the self’s reflection upon its own finitude*’: insofar as finitude is a constitutive part of the world/body relationship, we are introduced to a different type of reflexivity one in which the body-subject is receptive, its constitutional character not fully understood when we understand it merely as a body-object.

‘Throughout his work’, writes Christina Gschwandtner, ‘Lacoste emphasizes corporeality ... the body is essential to the liturgical experience.’⁴³² As Lacoste himself observes ‘the liturgical “dance” forces us to relate the question of God ... to the question of the body’ – in other words, the ways we think about God (or the Absolute) are inextricably linked to the ways in which we think the body; liturgy (the *coram Deo* relationship) is expressed in ‘the language of the flesh’ – the body symbolically ‘allows worldly or earthly logic to take leave of its inscription in place’ (EA 38).

So this ‘carnal dimension’ (which is doomed to ‘confinement within this world’) is what liturgy must transgress in its pursuit of the spiritual life. It achieves this by thinking through the very logic of place and inherence – or topology – which is only proper to the “I” (EA 10) ‘establishes itself as a logic of corporeal existence. And as such, it goes hand in hand with proximity, and thus ... with [the]

⁴³¹ Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Finitude and Theological Anthropology: An Interdisciplinary Exploration into Theological Dimensions of Finitude* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), p. 23. Italics in the original.

⁴³² Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?*, p. 176.

manipulability' of things (EA 9); liturgy employs 'the words, the bodies and things of the world'⁴³³ in order to speak of what is beyond it.

Liturgy is expressed in 'the language of the flesh' – the body symbolically 'allows worldly or earthly logic to take leave of its inscription in place' (EA 38). While Lacoste has been at pains to avoid his concept of "liturgy" being misunderstood as merely hyperbolized worship, Eucharist, self, church and bodily existence are linked. The "body of Christ" refers simultaneously to the Church, its members – whether young or old, sick or healthy, tired or rested – and the bread which is broken during the Eucharistic sacrifice. The Eucharist is an act of bodily proximity – that is, the 'human body of God given here and now' (PP 73). Participation in the Eucharist is a 'fact of mankind taken as they are, body and soul, intellect and affection, including their aptitude for language and their aptitude for silence' (PP 81), the significance of which will be examined later.

Maine de Biran (a near contemporary of Kant) was relatively unknown in France until the post-war period. Lacoste traces the emphasis by philosophy upon the embodied nature of human existence and objectivity back to Biran's rewriting of the *cogito* which recognized that 'the self – ipseity – does not come under the exclusive jurisdiction of the incorporeal'. The problem of the body is that 'it is an I [*un je*]: not some "thing" that we may or may not possess, but something we are: and, more rigorously, something that defines us as man: as someone' (EA 7).

This corporeality necessarily has a "corporate dimension" – since the other person, my neighbour is also 'an I', that is, a person rather than a thing:

I cannot treat him as an object without violating the meaning of our shared presence in the world. It follows, however, that he is also ready to hand, and

⁴³³ Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?*, p. 177.

thereby open to possible gestures of friendship or of tenderness, but also to possible acts of violence (EA 154).

5.2 Philosophical interpretations of the body

For philosophers and theologians alike, a violent, nihilistic modernity may be characterized by a progressive loss of confidence in the relevance of the formal and final causes. Blame for this is often laid at the feet of Aristotle, whose metaphysics had consequences for philosophical thinking about embodiment. In his account of the four causes of a thing, Aristotle held that it is explained and known firstly through its material cause (what it consists of); secondly, its efficient cause (what caused the changes that resulted in the thing); thirdly, its formal cause (whatever form or arrangement of matter makes the thing the sort of thing it is); and fourthly, its final cause (the purpose for which the thing exists).

For the human beings then, who find themselves living in this ‘age of nihilism’, their formal cause is what makes them the sort of being they are; their *telos* the final cause toward which they are directed. Often dismissing these as merely subjective or cultural attributions, modernity instead directs its attention to durable and material causes (for example, flesh), and efficient causes (that which brings about an effect or change). As causes that science can know and technology can control, these latter inform modern medicine, in particular its view of the body; Foucault’s specific claims is that in medicine ‘the dead body is the epistemologically normative body, and medicine’s metaphysics is one dominated by efficient causation’.⁴³⁴

Elsewhere Anthony Giddens suggested concerning the ‘body-project’, that the ontological insecurity of late modernity had fostered a growing concern with identity

⁴³⁴ Jeffrey P. Bishop, *The Anticipatory Corpse: Medicine, Power, and the Care of the Dying* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), p. 24. Of course, for many of the early Greek thinkers philosophy was bound up with medicine. See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) and Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *The Philosophers: Their Lives and the Nature of their Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

and body⁴³⁵; David Lyon has argued for a mutual interdependence between ‘new media’ and contemporary cultures of the body: the ‘excarnate’ (that is, disembodied or non-corporeal) nature of communication through new media has resulted in ‘hypercarnate’ cultural expressions such as body modification and tattooing.⁴³⁶ Inevitably, the body-culture of late (or post)modernity has religious and social consequences – the authors of one collection concluded that modernity’s continued ignorance of the sensual human body, other ‘than as a resource for commercial exploitation’ would exacerbate its ‘descent into banality’. If it is unable to do so, then ‘the volatility and passionate intensity which characterized medieval life may again impose itself upon large tracts of the Western world’.⁴³⁷ Although perhaps a rather over-stated and somewhat pessimistic prediction, it is true that the place of the body in theological and philosophical discourse is somewhat ambivalent. One distinctive voice in this debate has been provided by Samuel Todes, whom Piotr Hoffman describes as having ‘rescued phenomenology from the threat of idealism’.⁴³⁸

Yet despite his neo-Kantian tendencies Husserl himself distinguished between *Leib* (animated flesh, either animal or human being) and *Körper* (inanimate physical matter)⁴³⁹, although it is generally agreed that the clearest formulations are to be

⁴³⁵ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

⁴³⁶ David Lyon, ‘New Media, Niche Markets, and the Body: Excarnate and Hypercarnate Challenges for Theory and Theology’, in James A. Beckford and John Wallis (eds.), *Theorising Religion: Classical and Contemporary Debates* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006): pp. 196-210.

⁴³⁷ Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling, *Re-forming the Body: Religion, Community and Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 201.

⁴³⁸ Hoffman notes that ‘the phenomenologies of both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty were put forward as being, among other things, alternatives to the philosophical idealism that – from Descartes through Kant to Husserl – represented the main current of European philosophy. Both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty attempted each in his own way, to work out an account of human being-in-the-world through which the untenable idealistic conclusions would be overcome, and both of them failed at critical junctures.’ Piotr Hoffman, ‘Introduction II: How Todes Rescues Phenomenology from the Threat of Idealism’, in Samuel Todes, *Body and World*, with introductions by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Piotr Hoffman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001): pp. xxviii-xlvi; p. xxix.

⁴³⁹ Edmund Husserl, trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer, *Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution* (Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989). See Editors’ Introduction, p. xiv.

found in Merleau-Ponty – ‘the patron saint of the body’⁴⁴⁰ specifically his *Phenomenology of Perception*. Here the body is ‘a nexus of living meanings, not the law for a certain number of covariant forms’ (PoP 175) irreducible to a physical object, simply ‘one more among external objects’ (PoP 105). Alluding to earlier philosophical attempts to aestheticize the *self* (Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, for instance) Merleau-Ponty suggests that the body is comparable to a work of art.

Derrida took issue with what he referred to as the “phenomenological voice” in Husserl’s phenomenology: to him it represented the very objectivity – of the *phōnē* (or voice) and onto-theological transformation he was arguing against. For Derrida this presence (or objectivity, a relation to objects) requires a problematic intentionality, one that transforms the body of the word into flesh, the very flesh that is crucial to Michel Henry’s “material phenomenology”; as Derrida notes, in the voice as phenomenologically given, speech in its transcendental flesh, ‘in the breath, the intentional animation that transforms the body of the word into flesh’ turns *Körper* into *Leib*, a ‘*geistige Leiblichkeit*’. This phenomenological voice continues to speak and to hear itself in the absence of the world, possessed of an irreducible language or “phonic complex.”⁴⁴¹

Michel Henry regarded Maine de Biran as a ‘prince of thought, who merits being regarded by us in the same way as Descartes and Husserl’.⁴⁴² Henry’s own reinvention of Biran’s philosophy of the body and his own thinking on the body as flesh [*la chair*] amount to ‘an empowering theory of the body’ in which ‘[l]ife reveals flesh by engendering it, as that which is born in life, forming and edifying itself into,

⁴⁴⁰ Richard Shusterman, ‘The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy’, in Taylor Carman and M. Hansen (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): pp. 151-180; p. 151.

⁴⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, trans. David B. Allison, *Speech and Phenomena And Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 16.

⁴⁴² Michel Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, trans. Girard J. Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), p. 8.

extracting its substance, its pure phenomenological substance, from the very substance of life. This is an impressional and affective flesh, whose impressionality and affectivity is the result of nothing other than of the impressionality and affectivity of life itself.’⁴⁴³ For Henry, Western thought had reduced the body to a ‘physical quantity’ that merely validates and shores up the physical sciences. Deconstruction’s *sens du lointain* stands in marked contrast to Henry’s ‘impressional and affective reading of language’s corporeity understood not in terms of Derrida’s conception of the body of language or the ‘writing machine’,⁴⁴⁴ but in terms of the body taken as flesh’.⁴⁴⁵ Reading, for instance, is an interaction with the text, one in which the reader is induced to create the necessary conditions for its effectiveness; Henry opens up the question of ‘the radical phenomenological possibility’ of intentionality, that of auto-affectivity and affectivity, the possibility of that that which is felt without any intermediary sense.⁴⁴⁶ In his book *La Barbarie* Henry explains how the naïve confusion of phenomenological and biological life leads to a false conception the degeneration of culture in society as ‘natural’ and civilisations as ‘mortal’.

Similar concerns to Henry have also been apparent in cognitive theories of narrative and in the work of Giorgio Agamben, which has examined the dichotomy between human and animal life, and the dominant representation of mankind as master of ‘the anthropophorous animal’.⁴⁴⁷ Agamben is concerned with the ‘hiatus’ between man and animal in metaphysics and ontology and the ethical implications of

⁴⁴³ Michel Henry, *Incarnation: Une philosophie de la chair* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p. 174.

⁴⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, trans. Alan Bass, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 216.

⁴⁴⁵ Michael O’Sullivan, *Michel Henry: Incarnation, Barbarism and Belief – An Introduction to the Work of Michel Henry* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 107.

⁴⁴⁶ Michel Henry, trans. Girard Etzkorn, *The Essence of Manifestation* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 462.

⁴⁴⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

thinking of man as an ‘incongruity’ of both body and soul, and we shall examine later the role, for Agamben, of boredom in anthropogenesis.

Elsewhere within the sphere of phenomenological enquiry, it was Max Scheler who asserted that there can be ‘no doubt that the *lived body* [*Leib*] does *not* belong to the *sphere of the person* or the *sphere of acts*. It belongs to the *object sphere* of any “consciousness of something” and its kind and ways of being. The lived body’s phenomenal mode of givenness, with its foundations, is essentially different from that of the *ego*, with its states and experiences’.⁴⁴⁸ In other words, Scheler wishes to move beyond the Cartesian ego and its dominant position in the constitution of the world, arguing instead for an embodied epistemology which encompasses the pre-reflective and pre-discursive facets of human existence. Scheler contends that “*lived bodiliness*” [*Leiblichkeit*] ‘represents a special non-formal essential given (for pure phenomenological intuition) which ... functions as a form of perception’ and ‘implies that its *givenness* is not reducible to a form of outer or inner perception ... of an individual thing’.⁴⁴⁹ It is according to the contours of this embodied epistemology that the trajectory of the following chapter proceeds. It takes as its horizon this ‘lived bodiliness’ against which the possibilities of prayer and liturgy are played out, what Lacoste terms ‘the ultimate hermeneutic occasion’.

The human body is prior to the Heideggerian categories of ‘world’ and ‘earth’, which appear to it as possibilities: liturgy is another of those possibilities. What they all have in common is corporeality; embodiment provides the shared locus between the continuity and discontinuity of all present human experience. Liturgy thus begins from this corporeality, and takes the body as its starting point: ‘it is as men of flesh and blood that we approach the Absolute. As men of flesh and blood, it is our body,

⁴⁴⁸ Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. Manfred Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 398.

⁴⁴⁹ Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*, p. 398.

praying with hands crossed kneeling down or with the palms of the hand wide open to receive the *sancta*, that phenomenalises the *coram relation*' (PP 134).

Lacoste's phenomenology of boredom illustrates the conversion that is at the heart of the embodied liturgical nonexperience (EA 148-49). The person at prayer may anticipate the coming of God, but, as Schrijvers suggests, once they realize that 'this liturgical project does not oblige God to respond either visibly or experientially, the liturgical person might become bored with prayer'.⁴⁵⁰ This boredom, for Lacoste, constitutes the "experience" of the gift: one learns what giving means when there is hardly anything given back; true giving, as Derrida reminded us, does not demand reciprocation. The person who prays patiently gives – or "wastes" (EA 148-9) – their time. This abandonment of self teaches mankind 'about the essence of giving. In liturgical experience, human beings turn over their lives to God in order to receive God's Word'. And over and against modern subjectivity, here 'prayer and the liturgical celebration *incarnate* a passivity that precedes every conscious act, *creation*.'⁴⁵¹ In a play on the German *es gibt* [there is] – and at the risk of 'a naive anthropomorphism' – Lacoste speculates as to whether the gift is truly 'an anthropological reality' (PD 159). In fact, it can be separated from its 'anthropological roots' (PD 169); the liturgical possibility is 'an "anthropological" possibility' (INT 15) but in order to affirm human being as the gift of creation one must undertake an 'ascetic exodus' from the Heideggerian world. The gift confirms that liturgical exodus – in boredom, human being experiences the bankruptcy of every attempt to 'no longer have to receive any gift' (GWB 97).

⁴⁵⁰ Joeri Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings? The Decentring of the Modern Subject in Recent French Phenomenology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), p. 34.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 34.

5.3 *Fatigue and boredom*

‘We can,’ writes Lacoste, ‘identify the marks of fatigue on the body in many ways’ (ED 225). Boredom and fatigue are undoubtedly part of our everyday lives: fatigue, as the phenomenologist Jean-Louis Chrétien has suggested is one of the fundamental phenomena of existence, implicating not only a person’s work and body, but its temporality, death, meaning and being. While English-speaking commentators may contend that the word *boredom* is an invention of the nineteenth century (a product of either the Enlightenment or Romanticism), they also acknowledge that French *ennui* ‘in all its metaphysical dignity’ originated in the twelfth century.⁴⁵² French studies of boredom are certainly more elegiac, perhaps because they associate boredom with depression⁴⁵³ – what the poet Baudelaire called ‘the planes of *Ennui*, vacant and profound’. At the start of the twentieth century French philosophy exhibited a divided and dialectical character: a philosophy of life on the one hand, a philosophy of the concept on the other. At stake, Alain Badiou suggests, was the human subject as a ‘living organism’ and ‘creator of concepts’ with both its ‘interior, animal, organic life,’ and ‘capacity for creativity and abstraction’ under scrutiny.⁴⁵⁴ As Badiou observes, this ‘relationship between body and idea, or life and concept, formulated around the question of the subject, thus structures the whole development’ of twentieth-century French philosophy.⁴⁵⁵

Indeed Jean-Luc Marion argues that the supernatural boredom which ‘turns the spiritual away from the good...away from charity’ (GWB 135) also ‘undoes being from its very beingness’ and ‘abolishes the very name of being’ (GWB 120).

⁴⁵² Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 9, 14.

⁴⁵³ Peter Toohey, *Boredom: A Lively History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 201. Cf. Bernard Granger and Georges Charbonneau (eds.), *Phénoménologie des sentiments corporels: II – Fatigue, lassitude, ennui* (Puteaux: Le cercle herméneutique, 2003). My thanks to Agnes Chalier for alerting me to this collection.

⁴⁵⁴ Alain Badiou, ‘The Adventure of French Philosophy’, *New Left Review* 35 (2005): pp. 69-79; p. 69.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 69.

Conversely, rather than this disengagement of ontological difference, Emmanuel Levinas observed that fatigue is ‘not a cancellation of one’s contract with being’,⁴⁵⁶ but the opportunity for an ‘interrogation of being’ (DLF 12). Instead, understood as ‘some lapse or diminishment in our capacity to go on’,⁴⁵⁷ fatigue is probably our most common form of experience, one which happens so often and so closely to us that it can often escape proper reflection and understanding.

Such familiarity (following the examples of both Chrétien and Lacoste) has though, until recently, bred philosophical neglect, while in theology the very idea that God might be something we are tired of – or even bored by – seems blasphemous. Indeed as Lacoste notes, in the history of ideas what was usually referred to as wisdom was in fact the ‘life of the mind’ or the ‘vitality of the spirit’. By contrast, Lacoste continues, fatigue is often defined as *failure*, a closing off of ourselves from the world (PP 311). Theological claims that the God to whom we pray is tirelessly⁴⁵⁸ concerned with the world come to naught if I am so bored that cannot pray well, or if I am so tired that I cannot pray at all.

As Tuija Hovi has observed the question of ‘how the body is understood, how it is experienced and how its spiritual functions are made explicit in words, is integral to all religious experience’.⁴⁵⁹ Hovi draws upon the work of Thomas Csordas in order to help elucidate her position: Csordas, arguing from a phenomenological perspective, proposes that embodiment is, in fact, the existential condition in which culture and the

⁴⁵⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), p. 25.

⁴⁵⁷ Jeffrey Bloechl, ‘The difficulty of being: A partial reading of E. Levinas, *De l’existence à l’existant*’, *European Journal of Psychotherapy, Counselling and Health* 7:1-2 (2005): pp. 77-87; p. 78.

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, ‘On unceasing prayer’, trans. William Morlock, *Communio* 4:2 (1977): pp. 99-113.

⁴⁵⁹ Tuija Hovi, ‘Praising as bodily practice: The neocharismatic culture of celebration’, in Tore Ahlbäck, ed., *Religion and the Body*, Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis; 23 (Åbo: Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History, 2011): pp. 129-140; p. 129.

self are grounded and the body is a locus of social practice.⁴⁶⁰ Similarly, the work of Meredith McGuire (which itself draws upon the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty) argues that lived religion is based more on practice than ideas or beliefs; spirituality thus involves the material body not just its mind or spirit, linked to it through ‘social senses’ and ‘ritual acts’ which restructure human experiences of space and time.⁴⁶¹ These embodied practices can produce both individual and communal spiritual experiences.

5.3.1 The theological status of fatigue and boredom

Lacoste mentions the tradition of the *logismoi* (PP 316) and both Thomas Aquinas⁴⁶² and the Desert Fathers understood the dangers of *accidia* as a lack of interest in spiritual matters, the so-called ‘noon day devil’ which could afflict even the best intentioned monastic communities. A key term in Byzantine ascetical theology and particularly influential amongst patristic theologians (notably Maximus the Confessor, himself an important influence upon Hans Urs von Balthasar, who in turn was to influence Lacoste [AM 555]) was Evagrius’ understanding that in prayer humanity might eventually attain a state of pure contemplation and his conviction that the goal of the ascetic struggle was a state he called *apatheia*; Once the soul has attained *apatheia*, it can begin to contemplate. This state – usually misunderstood in the Western theology – should not to be confused with contemporary ‘apathy’; as Andrew Louth makes clear, the aim of ascetic struggle for Evagrius is ‘to purify the mind and prepare it for prayer’.⁴⁶³ Literally, it means ‘passionlessness’ and is often translated ‘dispassion’, although Louth suggests that it is better understood as a state

⁴⁶⁰ Thomas Csordas, *Body/Meaning/Healing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 241-2.

⁴⁶¹ Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 118.

⁴⁶² *Summa Theologica* II/2, q.35, art.4, ‘Reply to objection 3.’ Cited in Michael L. Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 177.

⁴⁶³ Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 24.

of serenity. The ascetic struggle is here understood as a struggle with the passions, with the moods or desires that overcome, disturb or distract us. As Louth points out Evagrius uses another word to describe the passions: *logismos*, meaning ‘a thought’, or as Louth translates it ‘a train of thought’ set in motion by one or more of the passions. According to Evagrius, there were eight *logismoi*, corresponding to the passions of gluttony, fornication, avarice, grief, anger, accidie or listlessness, vainglory and pride.

Evagrius, like most of the Fathers, worked with a tripartite model of the soul: the rational part or mind [*nous*] (what Louth terms ‘the pilot of the soul’) and two irrational parts. The first, the incensive part, was considered the source of the soul’s energy; and the second the desiring part. This tripartition could be traced back to Plato and Evagrius employed it in his analysis of the ways in which the passions affected the soul: gluttony, fornication and avarice are passions that affect the desiring part of the soul (that is, they are disordered desires); grief and anger affect the incensive part; vainglory and pride affect the rational part of the soul; accidie [boredom or listlessness] is the only passion that affects all three parts. The point of this analysis, Louth suggests, is diagnostic: ‘if one understands what kind of passion one is suffering from, then one can begin to learn how to deal with it’.⁴⁶⁴

But while the author of Ecclesiastes offered a warning to every potentially prideful theologian that ‘of making books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh’⁴⁶⁵ the Biblical witness is for the most part silent on the topic of boredom,⁴⁶⁶ while the prophet Isaiah (Is. 40: 28-31) tends to typify scriptural attitudes to fatigue. The Gospels at least offer some solace for weary souls (and theologians a space for contemplation and investigation [DLF 13]) revealing that even the incarnate

⁴⁶⁴ Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 36.

⁴⁶⁵ Ecclesiastes 12:12.

⁴⁶⁶ Although Proverbs 31:27 describes an ideal wife as one who ‘avoids the bread of idleness’.

God was himself tired from his journey (John 4:6). One specific type of boredom is found elsewhere in the Gospels, arising from a jadedness born of excess and repetition (what Svendsen terms the ‘boredom of satiety’⁴⁶⁷), so is this what befalls the disciples in Mark 14: 32-42 as Christ prays in the Garden of Gethsemane?

Figure 1: Lo Spagna, ‘The Agony in the Garden’ (National Gallery, London)



As scriptural commentary, Lo Spagna’s painting of *The Agony in the Garden* (1500-1505) certainly gives that impression: it depicts three drowsy disciples, their heads resting on their forearms (a position which Toohey considers ‘a sign of boredom’⁴⁶⁸). Now, the disciples ought not to be bored and sleepy – they ought to be ‘full of attention and prayerful devotion. But they have had enough of their Easter service and this terrible garden. Their dereliction ... is expressed as boredom with the

⁴⁶⁷ Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, trans. John Irons (London: Reaktion, 2005), p. 41.

⁴⁶⁸ Toohey, *Boredom*, p. 13.

travails of their Saviour',⁴⁶⁹ and Toohey applauds Lo Spagna's genius in adding 'this boredom to the usual depiction' of the sleepy disciples in Gethsemane.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 13.

Figure 2: 'Paul raiseth Eutychus to life'



As evocative as this is, it probably represents an exegetical stretch. Rather more damning is an incident from the career of the Apostle Paul (who commands us to pray unceasingly in 1 Thessalonians) in which we learn that a young man, Eutychus, sank 'into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on' until, 'sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third storey ... dead'⁴⁷⁰. This, one might suggest, is the first recorded incident in the history of the Christian church in which a member of the congregation is bored to death by the preaching; a cautionary tale of a preacher who drones on until the service becomes an all-nighter and 'vespers has turned into a lock-in.'⁴⁷¹ No wonder then, that it is usually passed over by embarrassed Biblical commentators.⁴⁷²

Echoing the author of Ecclesiastes, in his commentary on Paul's *Letter to the Romans*, Karl Barth talked about the flourishing business of sin with 'the publication of books such as the one I am now writing'.⁴⁷³ For Barth, writing in the wake of the First World War, 'the signature of modern man' seemed to consist 'simply and unfortunately in his utter weariness and boredom...man is bored with himself.' Modern man, Barth avers, 'can no longer work up any interest in himself, or give himself to the stimuli and disillusionments of seeking and self-transcendence'. He thus reacts 'neither positively nor negatively to his experience, however intense' and

⁴⁷⁰ Acts 20:7-12.

⁴⁷¹ Anna Carter Florence, 'A Prodigal Preaching Story and Bored-to-Death Youth', *Theology Today* 64:2 (2007): pp. 233-243; p. 238.

⁴⁷² Those that do normally skip to Eutychus' resurrection, glossing over the fact that Paul was at least partly culpable. One of the few references to this incident notes, archly, that 'If this was not his first and his only sermon at Troas, it was certainly his last.' Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters: Stephen to Timothy* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1901), p. 43.

⁴⁷³ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 174.

is incapable 'of the joys of faith or of the fierceness of atheistic defiance. Everything has become a burden to him. He has attained only to the indifference which lets things take their course.' For Barth such lethargy was 'a pressing reality' in post-war Europe; the 'fateful question' was whether Europe would succeed 'in shaking [it] off.'⁴⁷⁴

His study of human phenomena in part leads Barth to the rejection of the existential thought that characterised his early theology:⁴⁷⁵ here 'the religious interpretation of human life obviously reaches its limit'. Boredom is immanence in 'its purest form'⁴⁷⁶. Yet the assertion that human life is related to transcendence:

presupposes that man is interested in himself, that he is not weary of himself but in search of his true self ... [I]s it fair to take account of the enthusiasm which is able either to affirm or to deny the mystery suggested but to ignore the lethargy which may also be a reaction in this situation, leaving out of account the tired and indifferent man, as though there could be no place for him too, and for him precisely, in a coherent anthropology?⁴⁷⁷

And not just existentialist philosophy; systematic theology itself, Barth suggested was 'the turning over of a sick man in his bed for the sake of change'.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁴ Karl Barth, trans. Harold Knight et al, *Church Dogmatics* III/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), p. 117.

⁴⁷⁵ 'In Barth's eyes, Protestant theology had become trivial and boring in comparison to the best of Roman Catholic thought. Protestant theology had become lost in existential thought (a relationship that Barth had helped initiate)'. Stephen H. Webb, *Re-figuring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 153. However, the French 'theology of work' which emerged in the 1950s amounted to little more than a 'theology of pious consciousness' that ignored pressing socio-ethical problems; the papal encyclical *Laborem exercens* recognised only that man rest in order to 'prepare himself, becoming more and more what in the will of God he ought to be'. *On Human Work* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1981), p. 25. See Lothar Roos, 'On a theology and ethics of work', trans. Albert K. Wimmer, *Communio* 11:2 (1984): pp. 100-119.

⁴⁷⁶ Svendsen, *Philosophy of Boredom*, p. 47.

⁴⁷⁷ Barth continues: 'Is not this unfairness a further indication that it is not quite correct to maintain that the frontier situation is laden with transcendence or that this is genuine transcendence? Is it not a further indication of the highly problematical nature of the main principle of this philosophy?' *Church Dogmatics* III/2, pp. 117-8.

⁴⁷⁸ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 184.

What one generation found interesting will likely bore the next;⁴⁷⁹ as Stephen Webb notes, theology, ‘because it must speak from the emptiness of human life, is always seeking something new to say, a newness that Barth suggests can only barely cover up its profound *ennui*.’⁴⁸⁰ Even the relatively mundane activity of weekly preaching falters: ‘The people do not need us to help them with the paraphernalia [appurtenances] of their daily life’, writes Barth,⁴⁸¹ thus exposing the embarrassing conceptual myopia behind Schleiermacher’s definition of religion as a ‘taste for the infinite’ or a ‘feeling of ultimate dependence [*Gefühl schlechthinniger Abhängigkeit*] which has plagued the philosophy of religion ever since.

5.3.2 The temporality of boredom

Similar sentiments were echoed by Husserl writing in 1936 that ‘the exclusiveness with which the total world-view of modern man, in the second half of the nineteenth century, let itself be determined by the positive sciences and be blinded by the ‘prosperity’ they produced mean an indifferent turning away from the questions which are decisive for a genuine humanity’ (Hua. VI: 6). Barth’s comments were though directed in part at Martin Heidegger. While the phenomenological analysis which Heidegger had offered in *Being and Time* had centred on anxiety, in his winter semester 1929-30 lecture course it was replaced by boredom as the basic mood of *Dasein*. Boredom here means literally a long while [*Langeweile*] and, Heidegger asks, ‘who is not acquainted with it in the most varied forms and disguises

⁴⁷⁹ Jacques Ellul identifies boredom – ‘gloomy, dull, and joyless’ – as one of the defining perversions of modern social life. *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, trans. Cecilia Gaul Kings (London: SCM Press, 1970), p. 121.

⁴⁸⁰ Webb, *Re-figuring Theology*, p. 134.

⁴⁸¹ Barth, *Word of God and the Word of Man*, p. 187.

in which it arises, in the way it often befalls us only for a moment, the way it torments and depresses us for longer periods too.’⁴⁸²

This German term better conveys the temporal aspect of the experience, one in which ‘the imagination is crucified’;⁴⁸³ if time does become intolerably ‘long’ for *Dasein*⁴⁸⁴ then it tries to drive that time and its boring character away with petty distractions. *Dasein* simply does not wish to experience a ‘long time’:

Such boredom is still distant when it is only this book or that play, that business or this idleness, which drags on and on. It irrupts when ‘one is bored.’ Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference. This boredom manifests beings as a whole.⁴⁸⁵

Heidegger asks how might ‘we escape this boredom, in which we find, as we ourselves say, that *time* becomes drawn out, becomes long?’ His response is simply ‘by at all times making an effort, whether consciously or unconsciously, to pass the time, by welcoming highly important and essential preoccupations for the sole reason that they take up our time.’⁴⁸⁶ Heidegger, like Kierkegaard and Pascal, considered boredom to be a fundamental human ‘attunement’⁴⁸⁷ with ‘profound metaphysical, if not explicitly religious, significance’.⁴⁸⁸ These attunements are not ‘merely subjectively coloured experiences or epiphenomenal manifestations of psychological

⁴⁸² Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 79.

⁴⁸³ Raposa, *Boredom*, p. 40.

⁴⁸⁴ As Agamben observes, Heidegger’s *locus classicus* is that of waiting on a railway platform. *The Open*, p. 63; Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 101.

⁴⁸⁵ ‘No matter how fragmented our everyday existence may appear to be, however, it always deals with beings in a unity of the “whole,” if only in a shadowy way. Even and precisely when we are not actually busy with things or ourselves, this “as a whole” comes over us – for example, in authentic boredom.’ Martin Heidegger, ‘What is Metaphysics?’ in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): pp. 82-96; p. 87.

⁴⁸⁶ Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 78.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 77-79.

⁴⁸⁸ Raposa, *Boredom*, p. 54.

life' but fundamental modes of being, 'ways of *Dasein* in which *Dasein* becomes manifest to itself'.⁴⁸⁹ Such powerful habits of feeling shape our perceptions of the world, and was concerned with finding a way to make our boredom 'resonate' rather than allowing it only to manifest itself 'wherever we create a diversion from boredom for ourselves'.⁴⁹⁰ This boredom is rooted in an experience of emptiness – what Raposa calls the 'emptiness of each passing moment, as well as that of the object that confronts us and of the situation that binds us'.⁴⁹¹ This overpowering feeling, that in boredom 'we are *bound* precisely by – nothing',⁴⁹² that is, 'not bound by time but by the emptiness of *this* time'⁴⁹³ becomes clearer in Heidegger's intensification of boredom as more than simply being 'bored by' a particular object or activity. Anxiety and boredom constitute a state of mind that is both a kind of calmness and an uneasiness that 'leaves us hanging, because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole'.⁴⁹⁴ 'Profound boredom' as a state of detachment and indifference provides a 'vehicle of transcendence'⁴⁹⁵ beyond specific circumstances and particular beings, one which 'manifests being as a whole'. This reading of boredom as a state in which we might be open to the demand of Being has been challenged by Jean-Luc Marion, who points out that it is more likely that it is state in which we are unable to say anything at all, in which every call or claim (including that of Being itself) is disqualified: 'boredom does not evaluate, does not affirm, does not love'.⁴⁹⁶ Indeed the only other

⁴⁸⁹ Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 238.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 90.

⁴⁹¹ Raposa, *Boredom*, p. 55.

⁴⁹² Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 97.

⁴⁹³ Raposa, *Boredom*, p. 55 (emphasis in the original).

⁴⁹⁴ Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?' p. 88.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 57.

⁴⁹⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 190. For an incisive critical discussion of Marion, see Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings?*, pp. 159-178.

possibility of such revelation, Heidegger concedes, is ‘the joy we feel in the presence of the Dasein ... of a human being whom we love’.⁴⁹⁷

5.4 The bored animal

One should then ask the question whether boredom is ‘affect’ or ‘affectlessness’? These preoccupations testify to ‘being-left-empty as the essential experience of boredom’⁴⁹⁸ and Giorgio Agamben’s own reading of Heidegger (developing the notion of ‘profound boredom’ [*tiefe Langeweile*]) assigns it the privileged role of ‘metaphysical operator’⁴⁹⁹ in the anthropological ‘machine’ which produces – and thereby separates – humanity from animality⁵⁰⁰. Boredom is the keynote of ‘anthropogenesis, the becoming Da-sein of living man’⁵⁰¹ suspending its animal captivation with its habitual stimuli (what Agamben calls the ‘carriers of significance which constitute its environment’⁵⁰²). ‘Dasein,’ concludes Agamben ‘is simply an animal that has learned to become bored’.⁵⁰³ What separates us from the animals is our awareness of tedium, both the tedium of having nothing particular to occupy us, and the tediousness of what does, and which might enable us, however briefly, to forget how much we are restrained by our habits. Boredom exposes ‘the unexpected proximity of Dasein and the animal: both are ‘open to a closedness ... totally delivered over to something that obstinately refuses itself’;⁵⁰⁴ nonetheless this

⁴⁹⁷ Heidegger, ‘What is Metaphysics?’ p. 87.

⁴⁹⁸ Agamben, *The Open*, p. 64.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 68.

⁵⁰⁰ In *Animal boredom: towards an empirical approach of animal subjectivity* (Leiden, 1993), François Wemelsfelder offers an account from the perspective of physical sciences (although one still drawing upon Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty), suggesting that animals and humans participate in a common pre-reflective *Umwelt*.

⁵⁰¹ Agamben, *The Open*, p. 68.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.* p. 41.

⁵⁰³ ‘... it has awakened *from* its own captivation *to* its own captivation. This awakening of the living being to its own being-captivated this anxious and resolute opening to a not-open, is the human.’ *Ibid.* p. 70.

⁵⁰⁴ ‘In boredom, Dasein can be riveted to beings that refuse themselves in their totality because it is constitutively “delivered up” [*überantwortet*] to its own proper being,” factually “thrown” and “lost” in the world of its concern ... *In becoming bored Dasein is delivered over* (ausgeliefert) *to something*

non-relation ultimately leads to an estrangement from our environment.⁵⁰⁵ And yet this anthropology remains incoherent: disaffection is not simply the absence of affection. It has an object: people are disaffected *with* something or *by* something; in this sense, as we shall note later on, it has the same structure as fatigue. And while Agamben's 'weak messianicity' articulates an 'ontology of potentiality' fatigue remains a neglected theme⁵⁰⁶ of Agamben's post human bio-politics, one to which we now turn.

5.5 The phenomenology of fatigue

Chrétien's thesis is simple: 'ever since we came into the world we have always found (or lost) ourselves in this familiar but immemorial ordeal' (DLF 9). We are tested by fatigue, in one or other of its many forms, every day. Fatigue is a constant part of the fabric of human lives and accompanies all of its activities: exhaustion represents an extreme form of fatigue, one that is intelligible only according to a tiredness of which one has prior experience. It is, therefore, a sign of solidarity, the condition of our living and our humanity; experienced [*donné*] as both indivisible and yet infinitely varied: 'even if philosophical analysis⁵⁰⁷ could distinguish (or even resist) the fatigue of the body and lassitude of the soul, that is not for us the beginning of the fatigue ... which weighs upon our actions, our feet and our faces, nor the sheer physical effort that plunges us into some stupor or bewilderment' (DLF 9).

Since fatigue thus lies in the background of every activity, it is there in idleness too (one can get tired of doing nothing – 'each act has its own fatigue'). Chrétien's genealogical investigation asks whether it always the *same* tiredness, or

that refuses itself, exactly as the animal, in its captivity, is exposed (hinausgesetzt) in something unrevealed.' Agamben, *The Open*, p. 65 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁰⁵ The 'jewel ... at the center of the human world ... is nothing but animal captivity'. Ibid. p. 68.

⁵⁰⁶ Neither *Homo Sacer*, *The Open* or *Means Without End* make any reference to fatigue.

⁵⁰⁷ Lacoste himself describes the task of the philosopher as 'that of an ascetic ... but this work has nothing to do with that of the manual worker or servant' (PP 310).

does it have a history, even a destiny? Is the history of fatigue, in fact, not the history of the body? It is one of the most humane, common and enduring experiences; intimate, unspectacular and unobjectifiable, present at the heart of each human life, affecting both body and soul. But, according to Lacoste, the marks of fatigue upon the body remind us that it is also a self. And with this in mind, one can understand the philosophical meaning of fatigue. Whenever someone says that they are tired they do not mean that their body is tired⁵⁰⁸ or that certain physical-chemical processes have tired them: they mean that, above all, fatigue has an egological reality. Now, this does not mean that animals are never tired nor does it suggest that they have an ego; it simply reminds us that once again consciousness and the body are inseparable (ED 243). Indeed for Lacoste, dreamless sleep reveals the irreducible animality of human life (ED 132) while a 'sleepy consciousness is not consciousness but, at best, semi-consciousness' (ED 243).

5.6 Boredom and life

Phenomenology maintains 'things are endowed with meaning and value only through the comportment adopted toward them and in accordance with how such things appear to the subject.'⁵⁰⁹ One should ask then what the significance of boredom and fatigue is.

Merleau-Ponty, who like Husserl understood the importance of embodiment,⁵¹⁰ contended that attentiveness was crucial to consciousness (PoP 30).

⁵⁰⁸ Of course one might 'challenge the impression that being must be either actively engaged in what Levinas calls 'effort' or else in some state of deceleration or decline. This division seems to overlook the humble experience of *leisure*, of being at one's ease.' Bloechl, 'The difficulty of being', p. 85; MAO 18-21.

⁵⁰⁹ Jean-Luc Petit, 'Constitution by movement: Husserl in light of recent neurobiological findings' in Jean Petitot, ed., *Naturalizing Phenomenology: Issues in contemporary phenomenology and cognitive science* (Stanford, 1999), p. 221.

⁵¹⁰ Our bodies are 'given as the constant bearer of the center of orientation'. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, (Collected Works Vol. 3) trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1989), p. 70.

On the other hand, in examining our affective lives Lacoste wishes to preserve the ‘formal plurality’ in which the world appears including inattentiveness, disappointment and boredom. Like Gethsemane there should be no time for boredom: the *desideratum* for God supersedes the sort of temporary ‘micro-eschatology’ of peace or the rest⁵¹¹ that Levinas found somewhat ridiculous.⁵¹² Nonetheless, this play between rest and restlessness is one of our most commonplace experiences.

At this mention of desire, it is worth reminding ourselves that “cherishing” the body involves caring for it *besides* its erotic capacity. It means, as one Anglican theologian has noted with reference to recent debates over human sexuality, caring for ‘its internal organs and their functions, for the extraordinary capacities of its hands and feet, for its processes of growth. It is to take care of its weight, its rhythms of sleeping and waking, its powers of hearing and seeing’. Even if one were to make a sharp distinction between our created and the fallen bodies, thereby ‘bracketing out illness and death, we can hardly attend to the body and cherish it if we fail to notice its temporality, its exposure to physical risk, or its processes of ageing’.⁵¹³

In his own analysis of the affective life, Lacoste states unequivocally that ‘the experience of fatigue...is not pathological: a tired person is not a sick person (even if the distinction is often not that clear)’ (PP 310). Often ‘[f]atigue is defined as failure’ when I cannot read or pay attention to whatever I am supposed to be listening to. Fatigue can be described in terms of opening and closing: openness, because it is ‘my exposure to certain things or events in the world which tires me’; closure, because it is ‘the refusal of that opening that is called fatigue’. One of the purest examples of

⁵¹¹ Lacoste, here borrowing a term from the Irish philosopher Richard Kearney: (ED 283).

⁵¹² ‘Mortality renders senseless any concern that the ego would have for its existence and its destiny ... nothing is more comical than the concern that a being has for an existence that it could not save from its destruction’. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Duchesne University Press, 2002), pp. 128-9.

⁵¹³ Oliver O'Donovan, *Church in Crisis: The Gay Controversy and the Anglican Communion* (Eugene, 2008), p. 92.

fatigue, offered by Lacoste, is the desire to sleep: ‘if not for fatigue I would be dead to the world ... In such a case, *I* would be tired. But the world would be only incidental for exhaustion ... [nevertheless] it is the same world which appears to me in my tired state as in ... my rested or relaxed state’ (PP 311). Fatigue and boredom thereby reveal the incipient structuralism of daily life; fatigue has directionality:

I am of course tired of this or that, of having read the *Critique of Pure Reason* or having had too long a hike,⁵¹⁴ but the tiring thing (or tiring action) has the remarkable phenomenological property of affecting every other occurrence. The *Critique of Pure Reason* tires me. But during the act when it tires me (and, of course, in that act alone— I will always be able to do something different and allow the world to appear to me differently), it is the whole world, in its totality – and this is the important point – which tires me.

(PP 311)

It is axiomatic that ‘[t]he experience of fatigue is the daily bread of prayer’: the spiritual life represents a costly break in our *being-in-the-world*. So is fatigue simply ‘a reclamation of man’ by the secular world? Lacoste admits that we might easily believe that – after all, it is not necessary for us to be tired to discover that prayer is difficult. The *topos* which defines us does not necessarily include any *ad esse Deum* but it does unfold as corporeality, as flesh and spirit, and this corporeality is characterized as a closure on itself as much as by its openness to the world. This closure might be the *adséité* of the transcendental ego or it may be the tension between the pray-er [*orant*] to cope with their “thoughts”, the *logismoi* of the ascetic

⁵¹⁴ Lacoste may be making an implicit reference here to Jean-Paul Sartre’s own discussion in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay On Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 475-6.

tradition.⁵¹⁵ Whichever it is, it is important that we can name this ‘heaviness’ or ‘embarrassment’ (PP 315-316) and the two experiences – of prayer and of fatigue – ‘should be linked ... in order to better illumine this relationship’ (PP 314). In other words, ‘[w]e must learn to pray in times of fatigue ... It is especially important – and this is where our emphasis should focus – to learn that it is in time of fatigue that we really pray’ (PP 316).

Fatigue characterizes the dispossession of the self when subjectivity is bracketed out in and by the world. And yet, fatigue presents obstacles: ‘The heavy gestures of he who is not master of his own body. The voice that stumbles over its words. And other mundane realities. But there is more. It follows that the body is too tired to pray “well” (PP 315).’

5.7 Nihilism and affection

In Nietzsche, writes Lacoste, ‘the attack on Christianity is carried out as an adjunct to the attack on Platonism’ (ECT 181). For Friedrich Nietzsche fatigue and exhaustion were the chief exports and essential characteristics of the Christian faith (DLF 137) so much so that the highest goal of Europeans was ‘wakefulness itself’.⁵¹⁶ The ‘will-to-power’ thus represented an epistemological principle whereby Nietzsche intended to ‘construct a philosophy consistent with the extraordinary openness he felt was available to man’⁵¹⁷ in opposition to the ‘transcendental nihilistic fatigue’ of which Christianity was merely the most radical form (DLF 136-8).⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁵ Maximus is aware of the danger of an *apatheia* that is merely disinterestedness: for him, *apatheia* must be a purified love: ‘the blessed passion of holy love, which binds the intellect to spiritual contemplation and persuades it to prefer what is immaterial to what is material, and what is intelligible and divine to what is apprehended by the senses’. Maximus the Confessor, *Centuries on Love*, III.67, cited in Louth, p. 40. The same interest can be seen in Diadochus of Photikê who employs the imagery of the ‘fire of *apatheia*’.

⁵¹⁶ Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. J. Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 4.

⁵¹⁷ Arthur C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 12.

⁵¹⁸ Dominique Janicaud, so critical of the “theological turn” in phenomenology, expressed his approval of ‘the poetic phenomenology of corporeality’ that Chrétien ‘paradoxically extracts best in the fine

But, contends Levinas, the subject cannot be described merely on the basis of intentionality, freedom and will; it has to be described on ‘the basis of the passivity of time’.⁵¹⁹ The patience of ageing is ‘not a position taken with regard to one’s death, but a lassitude, a passive exposure to being which is not assumed ... that peculiar “being too much” which is also a failing but in a deficiency in which the *conatus* is not relaxed’. Moreover, the non-repose or restlessness of the ethical concern implicit in ‘being for another’ is ‘better than rest’ and ‘bears witness to the Good’⁵²⁰.

However, Lacoste reminds us that since nothing is given to us without first being reduced to that which we can receive of that gift, then being is constantly in danger: ‘A human being is flesh and body, and this duality puts it in danger of being treated merely as a body: for instance, the surgeon is only concerned with a body, the flesh being somehow anesthetized – he would operate on an animal in the same way’ (ED 7). Thus, as well as letting things appear ‘we can also allow [them] to disappear. Reduced to an object by distractions, the work of art disappears. Reduced to a body, the anesthetized flesh disappears. Our being-at-rest disappears when we find ourselves without a place in the world’ (ED 316).

The simple thesis behind de Lubac’s *Surnaturel* was that Enlightenment modernity was the product of a neoscholastic theology which overlooked humanity’s natural desire for God leading to ‘a conception of grace as something so totally extraneous and alien to human nature that anything and everything natural and human was downgraded and demeaned’⁵²¹. That meant that human nature – including reason,

pages where he confronts Nietzsche’. See *Phenomenology “Wide Open”*: After the French Debate, trans. Charles N. Cabral (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 84 n. 8.

⁵¹⁹ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 53.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 54.

⁵²¹ Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-century Catholic Theologians: From neoscholasticism to nuptial mysticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 74.

feeling, and the body – became ‘temptingly easy to denigrate.’⁵²² Lacoste concedes that the concept of ‘pure nature’ probably ‘died from the rebuttal inflicted upon it by Lubac’ (MAO 26). But does that mean that it became merely a chapter in the history of theological nonsense with nothing to tell us?⁵²³ According to Lacoste, the history of modern philosophy will, in fact, turn out to be nothing more than the history of philosophers’ inability ‘to grasp an object (the humanity of mankind⁵²⁴) that “natural reason” is, in principle, sufficient to grasp’ (MAO 32). The idea of a pure nature – with all its attendant epistemological implications – is a modern hypothesis, a product of the division of theology and philosophy into ‘separate bodies’.

Indeed it is at this latter point which the Anglican theologian John Milbank has taken and made such an integral part of his own thought⁵²⁵, drawing from it the typically rather more radical conclusion that this separation ‘had well-nigh ludicrous consequences’ for theology and philosophy. Milbank argues that granted the autonomy to explore this concept of pure nature, rather than finding what they were supposed to find, philosophers began ‘announcing materialisms, scepticisms, determinisms, rationalisms, pantheisms, idealisms and so forth. A little later they were disconnecting natural beatitude from any contemplation of the divine whatsoever’.⁵²⁶

⁵²² Kerr, *Catholic Theologians*, pp. 74-5.

⁵²³ Lacoste cautiously suggests that rather than ‘acquiescing too quickly to de Lubac’s insinuations’ we will never really know what de Lubac – who was hardly ‘an impersonal witness’ to doctrine – himself had to say, so much so that the real issues wrought by the theory of “pure nature” have been neglected.’ (MAO 26).

⁵²⁴ It ‘is the strangest of beings’ one whose ‘strangeness is that of a pure enigma’ and yet sustains ‘a cognitive discourse ... about what we are here and now.’ (MAO 45).

⁵²⁵ ‘As both Lacoste and Boulnois argue, modern ‘philosophy’ does not simply emancipate itself from theology; rather it arises in a space that theology itself has carved out for it: the space of pure nature. To be sure, ‘natural beatitude’ was supposed to correspond roughly to the pagan *theoria* achieved by Plato and Aristotle. But this was a delusion: pagan *physis* was not Christian *natura*, since the latter exists only in paired contrast with the supernatural. It would be truer to say that the Platonic and Peripatetic philosophies contain some rough anticipation of the Christian supernatural, as much as they do of the Christian natural. For they both understand wisdom to be primarily the prerogative of the divine, and human wisdom as some degree of sharing in this replete wisdom.’ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 114.

⁵²⁶ Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, p. 116.

This meant that the only “true” philosophy was done by theologians ‘with their left hand’.

Moreover, drawing here explicitly upon Lacoste’s own analysis, Milbank proposes that the space of pure nature inevitably confines the human essence to ‘what the human being is itself on its own capable of, and must equally confine true human understanding to this capacity in its cognitive aspect’.⁵²⁷ Within such a confinement, Milbank adds:

our world will be defined by technological capacity, by an empty reach towards a sublime unknown and by systematic indeterminacy – since limits turn out to be themselves the perpetual anarchic transgression of limits (the inevitable postmodern turn of modernity), as well as by the horizon of death. As Lacoste points out, even the later Heidegger’s exceeding of these options in terms of a symbolic dwelling within the cosmos remains a resignation to the impersonal, without hope beyond death, and so in subordination of the desires and aspirations of the body.⁵²⁸

Lacoste’s own phenomenological analysis is interested in the margins of language, what he calls ‘the pre-discursive gift of the world to the self’ (PP 117). This priority of the affective-corporeal dimension involves a privileging of the corporeal and topological register of experience as offering possibilities of human freedom that precede and exceed the merely conceptual or discursive. This represents a freedom from ontotheological language, a freedom in which human subjectivity is revealed as much at the level of passive syntheses such as disappointment or frustration as the perceptive life of which they are a part. These affections may overwhelm our perceptive life: when something appears to us, it is given to be both seen and felt

⁵²⁷ Ibid. p. 117.

⁵²⁸ Ibid. p. 118.

(sensory *hulè* and intentional *morphé*) and the joy of seeing (or feeling) is all part of the composition of that experience. That something affects us, which means that it is *present* to us. Yet, while we are enjoying its presence, tiredness overcomes us – that something is still there and is still perceived but it is no longer *present*. And nothing is more common, Lacoste suggests, ‘than to allow oneself to invest in a presence, only to let that which was present to then absent itself’ (ED 51).

This affective flux is, in part, reminiscent of Lubac’s own claim that our minds rest on a certain ‘anticipation’, or *prolepsis*⁵²⁹ that there is a truth ‘which is lived before it is known, perceived with certainty before being subjected to the discipline of proofs and the control of concepts – because it is connatural to us’.⁵³⁰ And as Levinas observes, ‘human labor and effort presuppose a commitment in which we are already involved’.⁵³¹ But while the non-appearing divine may be perceptible through an affective act of mediation⁵³² the *orant* still risks boredom. Regardless of any theological proleptic, eschatology reminds us that God (or the Absolute) cannot easily be brought to mind in prayer, which may be destined only to be frustrated. Lacoste wishes simply to articulate ‘a possibility of a beyond-the-world in which nothing could be reduced to an object, in which flesh could be bracketed out to the benefit of the body, a world beyond, therefore, in which being would not be being-in-danger. Such eschatology is a possibility, and thus not necessarily wishful thinking’ (ED 8).

Boredom thus provides a measure of how liturgical experience is, above all, a non-experience (one that undermines conventional accounts of ‘religious experience’

⁵²⁹ ‘God must be present to the mind before any explicit reasoning or objective concept is possible [...] he must be secretly affirmed and thought’. Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, trans. Alexander Dru (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 54.

⁵³⁰ Lubac, *Discovery of God*, p. 55.

⁵³¹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 19.

⁵³² The idea of God ‘prior to our concepts, although beyond our grasp without their help, and prior to all our argumentation, in spite of being logically unjustifiable without them ... is the inspiration, the motive power and justification of them all.’ Lubac, *Discovery of God*, p. 39.

since Schleiermacher) that cannot be prescribed, rooted in something besides the intentionality of consciousness. Despite the claims made by certain theological texts (MAO 33), Lacoste maintains, it is impossible to apprehend God via an act of the will or the intellect, here recalling Schelling and Kierkegaard, philosophers who transgressed the border between philosophical and theological reason in favour of a rationality that bypassed the opposition of natural and the supernatural in the interest of a vision of human freedom (PP 18-19). But while philosophy can be concerned with human happiness it does not follow that it possesses the necessary conditions for beatitude; although most claim to understand ‘well-being’,⁵³³ Lacoste notes wryly that philosophies such as logical positivism do not present themselves as lifestyles.⁵³⁴ And it remains fascinated by happiness even when this ‘well-being’ no longer has a divine warrant once philosophy asserts – following Nietzsche – that God is dead. As an example of this ‘right to the philosophical life’ Lacoste suggests Heidegger’s notion of ‘serenity’⁵³⁵ in which human beings enjoy everything that is their due, untroubled by anything that might exceed their “ontological requirements”. This existential logic is thus one of satiety: humanity’s desire can be filled because it lives in an intelligible world. And because it wants to achieve those goals it has given itself the power to do so; the figure of the will which creates that power has its own name: the will-to-power, in reality a closed human experience.

⁵³³ Lacoste suggests elsewhere that the philosophy which was supposed to investigate the nature of man in its purity never existed outside of philosophical texts written by theologians for theologians.

⁵³⁴ Nor do they ‘claim for the philosopher the privilege of living life itself.’ (MAO 33).

⁵³⁵ ‘Serenity means simply the welfare of the mortal who does not dwell in any hope – the right to natural beatitude is nothing more than right to the philosophical life, understood on one hand as the highest human experience, on the other as a closed experience, in which human beings shall enjoy everything that is due to them, and in which everything that could exceed their “ontological requirements” does not worry them. by interpreting (tacitly or explicitly) its nature as the power to achieve its purposes, and thus refraining from “naturally” hoping anything that it cannot expect, anything whose absence would impose, purely and simply, a less than being. The logic of existence is thus defined as a logic of satiety. Man naturally desires to know, and this desire can be filled because he lives in an intelligible world. [...] Therefore it has a corollary: I have to satisfy myself to enforce it.’ (MAO 44).

This will-to-power was an ‘all inclusive principle for Nietzsche’⁵³⁶ encompassing ontology, axiology, anthropology and epistemology. So, does the split between philosophy and theology (with its concomitant theory of ‘pure nature’) leave humanity ‘helpless before the disturbing reality of nihilism’ (MAO 34)? Although he never discussed human nature Heidegger outlined the conditions for a possible happiness on a godforsaken earth. And, Lacoste continues, it was a quote from Nietzsche’s Zarathustra which provided the inspiration for his essay ‘*What is thinking?*’.⁵³⁷ Thinking should oppose the growth of that Nietzschean desert. But what is thinking? For Heidegger it involved tracing the links between thinking, building and living, between thinking and our physical contact with the country lanes along which we (if not Sartre) walk. But these things do not engender hope (MAO 42). And for Lacoste, the Hegelian ‘God’ died because it deprived humanity of hope.

As we saw what is at stake in Nietzsche is, Lacoste suggests, a direct consequence of Hegelian eschatology. As Milbank summarises it, what has passed for reason is, as Lacoste has suggested:

a mere decision to see that which is Prometheanly within our capacity as the key to our nature and the key to unlock the secrets of the world, or else as the key to a knowable world limited to the truth that arises for our purposes. This of course has often been seen as a pious gesture: confine reason and nature within their limits, thereby let the gratuity of grace in its glory all the more shine out upon us.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁶ Ammar Zeifa, ‘Le Nihilisme et l’Épuisement: Heidegger ou Nietzsche’ in *Phénoménologie des sentiments corporels*, pp. 123-137; p. 128.

⁵³⁷ ‘The desert grows: woe him who harbours deserts!’ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, eds. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 252.

⁵³⁸ Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, p. 120.

While Nietzsche cared little for either Hegel or his ‘Swabian piety’,⁵³⁹ the affirmation of the ‘eternal return of the same’ is his response to Hegelian idealism.

Following the death of God:

life wants to survive, and survive through the work of a will to power to create new values. But ... the work of the will to power is an endless task: at a time without end and without purpose, eternal and folded in on itself. The will to power can never pronounce its last word. It can never lead itself to a final experience. It must assert itself with joy. (MAO 41)

Although it offers us a future, the truth of its being resides in the present – the will-to-power is founded on neither promise nor hope. Moreover, eschatologies which survive the death of God cannot resist the endless claims of the will-to-power (MAO 43). This absolute future has its own name: the advent of the *Übermensch*, an early attempt to overcome metaphysics, that is to *dépasser l’homme*⁵⁴⁰ as a metaphysical animal. And the lessons of twentieth history have made humanity understandably cautious about that so-called ‘eschatology’.

Christian theology is defined by its refusal of any quantifiable eschatology as Lacoste well understands. Every other end, however enviable and respectable it might be, cannot claim anything more than the status of a ‘penultimate end’: ‘Nothing that the world is home to is eschatologically *simpliciter*’.⁵⁴¹ And because de Lubac never pretended to describe ‘the current conditions of this existence’, the theologoumenon he rehabilitated leaves the Heideggerian hermeneutics of facticity intact. Is, Lacoste

⁵³⁹ Lacoste reminds us of Nietzsche’s disdain for Hegel’s ‘*gothische Himmelstürmerei*’. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente: Frühjahr bis Herbst 1884* (Nietzsche Werke VII/2), eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974), p. 251.

⁵⁴⁰ On this and the relationship between the so-called ‘new atheism’ and natural beatitude see Rémi Brague, *Les ancres dans le Ciel: L’infrastructure métaphysique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2011), pp. 77; 110.

⁵⁴¹ ‘Only those realities of which the kingdom of God provides the conceptual figure, and for which the resurrection of the flesh (with its corollary in the “beatific vision”) provides the hermeneutic principle’ (MAO 35).

asks, the longing for the eschaton – understood as consciousness-of-desire – really an eschatological event? Is the fate of the *desideratum* to pass incognito among the conditions – such as boredom and fatigue – that being-in-the-world dictates to experience?

As someone associated with the post-metaphysical ‘theological turn’ in phenomenology Lacoste is unlikely to assign, as Agamben does, any one thing the status of a metaphysical operator; he wishes simply to preserve the ‘formal plurality’⁵⁴² in which the world appears. In this sense phenomenology may play a reparative role: the danger that phenomena (particularly ‘irregular’ ones such as religious phenomena) could be either dissolved or subsumed under metaphysical categories is, of course, the charge raised against the Kantian legacy by Horkheimer and Adorno.⁵⁴³ Here, humanity becomes a victim of Kant’s logic: the doctrine of pure reason, in its level of abstraction and iterability, ultimately reduces humanity to the level of the herd, susceptible to domination by the will-to-power. Irregular phenomena such as fatigue and boredom resist this reduction. In the experience of fatigue, in fact, ‘one must trace a link from myself to the world or abandon any attempt at explanation’ (PP 311) and we ‘must therefore speak of the world and about fatigue, just as we talk about a world of anguish or joy’ (PP 312). Christianity, which negotiated the apparent scandal posed by the non-realization of its *eschaton*, ‘has precisely the ability to teach humanity how to exist without drama ... in an accomplished history, devoid of ontophanic and onto poetic promises’.⁵⁴⁴ This existence is typically characterised as vigil.

⁵⁴² ‘... The world always appears to us in the formal plurality of worlds, among them the world of fatigue’ (PP 312).

⁵⁴³ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 2000).

⁵⁴⁴ And can ‘cope without investing new messianic hopes in the future’ (MAO 38).

5.7.1 *Vigil and sleep*

Although Nietzsche counselled ‘wakefulness’⁵⁴⁵, vigil usually has a specific religious significance. A self-declared follower of John of the Cross (TP 14), Lacoste draws upon an important liturgical register of ‘night and vigil’.⁵⁴⁶ Human beings live by day and by night. Although sleep, ‘from which the freedom and the intentional acts of consciousness are absent, is not a part of life where we manifest who we are’ this ‘lesser mode of existence during the hours we devote to purely physiological operations is nevertheless essential to what we are’ (EA 78). Only angels ignore sleep – Lacoste reminds us that the Aramaic name for angel is “‘one who keeps vigil” [“*veilleur*”].⁵⁴⁷ But vigil is not our perpetual mode of consciousness: keeping vigil; and sleep, as being-less and as indicative of being-less in general reminds us that we are not masters of ourselves: “‘life”, in this case, has power over “existence.”” What, then, asks Lacoste makes someone forego sleep so as to gain time for the vigil? It is a question of the victorious protest of ‘existence’ against ‘life’. Life precedes our existence in the world (PP 163).

The animal can suffer sleepless nights or stay awake simply because it is hungry or afraid (and human beings can certainly remain awake for the same reasons). But, notes Lacoste, there would no sense in saying that an animal is capable of keeping vigil: ‘keeping vigil cannot be the object of an obligation; it is something that can only be the object of a *desideratum*. The philosophical importance of the question should not make us forget that we do not necessarily invest ourselves in the vigil for

⁵⁴⁵ William Desmond notes the paradoxical ‘hypnotizing effect ... marvellous to behold’ that Nietzsche has had on ‘some of the better minds of the last century’, charming us ‘with the belief that at last we are waking up and no longer asleep in the nightmares of the millennia’. William Desmond, *Is There A Sabbath For Thought? Between Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 204.

⁵⁴⁶ Cf. The ‘saved night’ in Agamben, *The Open*, p. 82.

⁵⁴⁷ Lacoste wishes to determine the ‘affirmative practice represented by the liturgy’ by specifying ‘a new register’ in which its symbolic place lies: ‘in the night and the vigil’ (EA 78). ‘[O]ne might be justified in affirming that the attention that he devotes to and his expectation of God symbolically assume the nocturnal character of the vigil in which, every ethical duty having been honored man gives to the Absolute the time (and thus the being) which he might otherwise have given to sleep.’

the most laudable reasons: though we see nothing but futility in his actions, the reveler [*fêtard*] also keeps vigil' (EA 79).

In struggling to 'exist' a little longer 'the time of vigil is truly our time ... time which we gain at the expense of ... pure biological necessities'; that is, beyond the ontological satisfaction of serenity. And although we are not accountable to any authority for this time, even our rest has a political dimension:

To deliberately deprive me of sleep, or of the sleep necessary to my good health, would be tantamount to abuse; I have the right to expect that the State or the company, except in cases of emergency, leave me sufficient time to sleep. The act of keeping vigil appears to us then as the purest form of the self positing itself, as the epitome of an affirmation of our freedom. (EA 79)

In this decentring of human subjectivity,⁵⁴⁸ liturgical time is diverted time (a time of inoperativity, time 'given over'). Boredom, *pace* Heidegger, reveals that this time can also be experienced as wasted time: impatience reappears, wishing to put an end to this dead time [*temps mort*] (to devote it, Lacoste notes sardonically, to 'an indisputably more "interesting" activity, such as theological work'). The bored consciousness wastes its time. It might compensate for this wasted time and transform the dialogue it would like to establish with God into a soliloquy and thereby retake possession of this time (EA 148-9). This phenomenology of the liturgy suggests that *boredom* might be a principal mood of nocturnal experience. Can man become bored with facing God? As provocative as that may seem, the answer must be yes. It would 'be contradictory for man to be completely eschatologically satisfied with the Absolute. The nocturnal nonexperience is, however, eschatological and by

⁵⁴⁸ 'Once our inevitable allocation of work, whose distribution is necessary, foreseeable and commonplace, has been completed and proves that we remain in possession of a fundamental right: that of proving, by the content we give to our vigil (which we can spend doing philosophy, writing poetry, or praying – and many other things besides), the surplus of meaning we give to our humanity' (EA 79).

‘precariously distancing himself from history, the man who prays signifies and anticipates the accomplishment of this history’ (EA 78).

Since *Deus semper maior* resists conceptualisation, the act of ‘making oneself present’ that inaugurates liturgy cannot help being affected by the distance which remains between God (or the Absolute) and whoever prays. Liturgical experience is by no means ecstatic (EA 26). As Lacoste argues, ‘Inexperience has no hold over knowledge’ and actually permits its own particular rationality – that of Schelling and Kierkegaard – to unfold ‘while contradistinguishing itself as clearly as possible from religious emotionalism’ (EA 148). Nonetheless, it does exert a hold over the present, which is therefore not structured primarily by the impatient expectation of some promised *parousia*, or an earthly satisfaction which it has promised itself. Instead, as a work of an *ascesis* (of making oneself present and waiting), one might well understand that this time can be one of *theologically* profound boredom.

In his review of Fergus Kerr’s book *Theology after Wittgenstein* Lacoste observes that ‘[c]ulture, rituals and routine semantic transactions are not only the original place of [our] experience ... but remain the ultimate hermeneutic occasion. Suddenly, all access to the world of life (in the Husserlian sense) is prohibited by the undivided rule of *Lebensformen*’. Lacoste concludes that Kerr ‘would probably suggest that the Husserlian *Lebenswelt* is both a myth and a philosophical construct’.

Lacoste thinks otherwise and asks ‘whether the deconstruction of the Cartesian ego, or the transcendental ego, is an unfinished task?’ Lacoste concludes that ultimately that particular deconstruction is a *fait accompli*; however, that ‘does not for a moment abolish phenomenological questions of subjectivity. The egological problem is subsumed in Wittgenstein as a praxeological problem, a silencing that perhaps has its benefits’. For Lacoste, this is all the more reason to ask again how the

ego manifests itself: 'A philosophy which disqualifies this problem is most convenient. Unfortunately this problem is a universal datum of experience'. Are, Lacoste asks, *Lebensformen* and *Sprachspiele* 'the ultimate transcendentals, beyond which nothing is identifiable? No, because there are ways of life and language games, and whoever is participating in one does not participate simultaneously in the others'. Is it clear, Lacoste asks, 'that what I am is merely due to my participation in successful semantic transactions, or in games whose rules are known and respected?' Lacoste remains doubtful and formulates his objection thus: 'even in Oxford, and with Wittgenstein's help, we cannot think everything at once'. Although Wittgenstein may be 'the philosopher who formulated our objections before we did, and who answered them beforehand (Kerr quite rightly points this out) ... it must be possible to think after Wittgenstein, both philosophically and / or theologically, without thinking only according to Wittgenstein. One should try, and despite Kerr's comments, it is likely that the philosophy of the body here provide plenty of points of departure for a critique'.⁵⁴⁹

5.8 The eschatological consummation of fatigue

Theological reflection upon boredom and fatigue represents a call to impurity: an end, perhaps, to the distinctions between faith and reason, mind and body, and the debate over an elusive 'pure nature'. It is also recognition of a certain porosity between theology and philosophy, at least in the continental tradition.

Impurity though? There is certainly no guarantee that, although engaged in liturgy, someone will feel close to God: '[w]hoever prays may have a toothache' or be concerned about something (PD 221). They may, of course, still feel the joy of speaking or singing the truth.

⁵⁴⁹ Review of Fergus Kerr, 'Theology after Wittgenstein', *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* (1987): pp. 565-568; p. 568.

Since the man who prays ‘is bored because he does not perform an act of knowledge; he must remember a basic lesson: he is there first of all to speak (praise, offer thanksgiving, make confession) and listen and only then to feel’ (PD 221). Thus the flesh is already involved in the liturgy: the songs, gestures and ceremonies which surround those words inaugurate ‘a quasi-eminence’. For Lacoste, the prescription in the Rule of St. Benedict that ‘*mens concordet voci*’ identifies a particular hazard, that of a liturgy that is no longer concerned with the body. There are precursors to this kind of thinking in French critiques of Neoplatonism, ‘in which the object is completely absorbed in the subject’ in ‘perfect peaceful contemplation’ that is, a ‘pure pensée qui est en soi [*bei sich*]’.⁵⁵⁰ Bréhier’s following of Hegel, though, is limited, refusing to consider Plotinian thought as a reality in itself. For Bréhier the history of philosophy is not that of extant ideas but only men who thought; as a result its method is, historically, nominalist. In contrast, Graham Ward contends that ‘patristic theologies understood bodies more fluidly than we who have inherited notions of ‘body’ following the nominalist (and atomistic) debates of the late Middle Ages, the Cartesian definition of bodies as extended things (*res extensae*), the seventeenth-century move towards unequivocation, and Leibniz’s understanding of the individuation of matter’.⁵⁵¹

‘When will Radical Orthodoxy discover Maine de Biran?’⁵⁵² asks Wayne Hankey, who has offered what Schrijvers has described as ‘an accurate and at times critical account’⁵⁵³ of the recent Anglican theological renewal movement of which

⁵⁵⁰ Émile Bréhier, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, trans. Joseph Thomas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 190 cited by Hankey, p.123 .

⁵⁵¹ Graham Ward, ‘Bodies’, in John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 178 n. 3.

⁵⁵² Wayne J. Hankey, *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France: A Brief Philosophical Enquiry* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), p. 188.

⁵⁵³ Joeri Schrijvers, ‘Review of Levinas and the Greek Heritage & One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France’, *Ars Disputandi* 9 (2009), pp. 51-3; p. 52.

Ward was one of the founding members. There is, writes Hankey, 'almost nothing in the Radical Orthodox constructions which is not picked up in one way or another from French thinkers'.⁵⁵⁴ According to Hankey, for Milbank interiority and privatization is the real heresy, so it may seem odd that peculiar standards of purity have been set into its neo-Platonic thinking, which represents a turn to the pre-modern as a necessary response to the failed project of modernity, founded in a strong ontological claim in which nothing can be regarded as 'a territory independent of God'.⁵⁵⁵ For Catherine Pickstock the Platonic dialogue represents a theological – rather than doxological – prayer⁵⁵⁶ while the *Lebenswelt* is itself liturgical owing to its patterns and rhythms.⁵⁵⁷

To its proponents, Radical Orthodoxy's retrieval of Neoplatonism serves to uphold the Christian legacy in a way that what they allege to be the hyper-Cartesianism of Henry denies⁵⁵⁸ and 'to reduce the modern subject, which will be overcome by *praxis* and *poiêsis*'⁵⁵⁹; thus, for Pickstock (reading EaA 7-49) the question 'where am I?' precedes that of 'who am I?' underlining the embodied nature of the worshipper, and the importance of place and physicality.⁵⁶⁰ Pickstock derives from Lacoste confirmation that 'our bodiedness is a sign of our fundamental objectivity in relation to God, more important than any notion of subjective desire, which implies that *undergoing* a relationship with God is more fundamental than desiring it'. The extent to which Pickstock is correct that Lacoste overemphasizes 'the

⁵⁵⁴ Hankey, *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism*, p. 187.

⁵⁵⁵ John Milbank, Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock, 'Introduction - Suspending the material: the turn of radical orthodoxy', in *Radical Orthodoxy*, p. 3.

⁵⁵⁶ Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 43.

⁵⁵⁷ Catherine Pickstock, 'Liturgy, Art and Politics', *Modern Theology* 16:1 (2000), pp. 159-79; p. 160.

⁵⁵⁸ John Milbank, 'The Soul of Reciprocity – Part One: Reciprocity Refused', *Modern Theology* 17:3 (2001): pp. 335-391; p. 360.

⁵⁵⁹ Hankey, *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism*, p. 187.

⁵⁶⁰ Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p.184.

liturgical journey as solitary and unicursal'⁵⁶¹ is, however, questionable and as Espen Dahl has pointed out, this questionable sacralisation of the everyday also ignores the threats –toothache for instance– in which any traces of the holy ‘tend to get lost in the internal dynamics of the everyday’.⁵⁶²

Reflecting upon boredom is, conversely, also an affirmation of life: in contradistinction to Agamben these are not the non-states prior to some unspecified captivation scheduled to be overcome in the post-human condition – they are basic and constant conditions of humanity. Subjected to proper philosophical and theological reflection, boredom and fatigue offer a reparative to the reduction of humanity to animality; that is, their reduction to nothing more than a herd mentality at risk of being dominated by the will-to-power. For phenomenology, the human form is the foundation of the world’s meaning; for theology, the embodiment of God (in the Incarnation) is the basis of the moral and physical integrity of those bodies, whose meaning resides in their being in the image of Christ.⁵⁶³ Lacoste’s own post-Heideggerian analysis suggests that – as Barth suggested – boredom is theologically constitutive of any coherent anthropology.

In his recent enquiry into ‘God and Being’ George Pattison makes the suggestion that possibility represents ‘a kind of trace of non-being within Being, the index of a given entity’s mutability and corruptibility and, since possibility is a feature of the sublunary world in general, a marker of the world’s falling-short of true Being’.⁵⁶⁴ Thus conceived, the phenomenological attention that boredom and nihilism receive is due to their capacity to reveal the negative potential of possibility. Unlike

⁵⁶¹ Pickstock, *After Writing*, p. 233.

⁵⁶² Espen Dahl. *Phenomenology and the Holy: Religious Experience After Husserl* (London: SCM Press, 2010), p. 268.

⁵⁶³ Cf. Stephen H. Webb, *Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵⁶⁴ George Pattison, *God and Being: An Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 295.

Marion – who remains a philosopher of experience, and therefore closer to Maurice Blanchot (who, like Marion, writes about an *excess* of experience) – Lacoste treats religious phenomena as (potentially) *inexperienced*: just as the angels could be bored by the presence of God, ‘it can happen that anyone or anything that delighted us yesterday bores us today’ (PA 26).

This not only remains truer to the day-to-day experiences of so many believers (phenomenologically speaking there is no difference between a congregation after a church service than before; indeed, as Lacoste has shown, the most profound mood of liturgy is probably boredom) but it allows (liturgical) revelation more room than what has already been specified by phenomenology. Henry and Lacoste both agree that the humanity is not fully explicable in terms of worldliness, and wish to construe the human being as one that exceeds the strictures of Being-in-the-world. However, unlike Henry, Lacoste insists that as flesh and blood, humanity never is completely free from the strictures of Being-in-the-world. Rest and sleep are more than physical necessities; however provisional, they represent micro-eschatologies of the kingdom or a fleeting ‘taste’ (quite different from Schleiermacher’s ‘taste for the infinite’) of happiness to come, brief pauses in a life of vigil. As Lacoste himself states, ‘Liturgy anticipates the Kingdom, so it should also be said that rest returns to creation’ (MAO 22).

Sleep and rest are not just desirable but essential, necessary, and testimony to the passivity of humanity. Sleep therefore represents profound dispossession: as Jean-Luc Nancy suggests in his phenomenology of sleep, ‘Sleep is proclaimed and symbolized by the sign of the fall, the more or less swift descent or sagging,

faintness.⁵⁶⁵ In other words, the fall into sleep represents nothing less than the fall of subjectivity itself.

But to what extent therefore, does anything – as Rahner wondered⁵⁶⁶ – persist through sleep, into our waking life? Moreover, there is for mankind no “empty present” beyond that of a dreamless sleep or similar phenomena in which it is uncertain that we perform any act of existence (PP 180). Lacoste has hinted at the logic of the trace elsewhere besides his treatment of boredom: ‘It is not necessary for a presence to be total for it to delight us...it can happen that anyone or anything that delighted us yesterday bores us today (as the angels themselves, according to Origen, were capable of being bored by the presence of God)...’ (PA 26). The liturgical presence is never more than temporary or partial – liable to interruption – and non-experience includes within it not simply pure negation but degree. However, our sense of anticipation allows us to look ahead to a time of Parousia beyond the temporal flux of the present.

Writing under the pseudonym of “Galahad Threepwood”, Lacoste observes that although a Christian theology of time is ‘commonly organized by the temporal horizons of the eucharistic celebration’ – that is, in the memorial, anticipation, and sacramental presence of the eschaton – the thematic of the Sabbath appears ‘indispensable for the appearance of other temporal horizons – such as that of life created and blessed by God, which man can enjoy peacefully in praising the gift that gave him to himself’ (ECT 1407). Thus the Sabbath is no longer ‘a Jewish reality replaced by the Christian reality of Sunday’ or a vetero-testamentary prototype of the

⁵⁶⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 1.

⁵⁶⁶ When someone is unable to sleep ‘it is the whole man and not merely his body which is ill’. Karl Rahner, ‘A Spiritual Dialogue at Evening: On sleep, prayer, and other subjects’, *Theological Investigations III: The Theology of the Spiritual Life*, trans. Karl-H and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), pp. 220-236; p. 221.

Christian Sunday but ‘an ensemble of meaningful gestures that can be received by Christians with respect for its specific religious intention’ (ECT 1407). Maximus the Confessor even offers an interpretation of the stages of *apatheia* in terms of a sequence of Sabbaths: here the Sabbath signifies ‘the dispassion of the deiform soul that through practice of the virtues has utterly cast off the marks of sin’; ‘the freedom of the deiform soul that through the spiritual contemplation of created nature has quelled even the natural activity of sense-perception’; and ‘the spiritual calm of the deiform soul’.⁵⁶⁷

5.9 Fatigue and religiosity

Being human and engaging in philosophy are interdependent if not identical activities; this, avers Maximilian de Gaynesford, ‘is a central tenet of Continental thought’.⁵⁶⁸ Engaging in philosophy means thinking about what it is to be human – a view that was bequeathed to us by Kant in his claim that philosophy could be reduced to what he called anthropology. For Todes, however, Kant takes it too easily for granted that there are “pure” forms of our conceptual imagination: the *Critique of Pure Reason* is therefore ‘a critique of reason purified of all perceptual sense’.⁵⁶⁹ Yet as Nancy proposes in his “noumenology of sleep”, that dark, dreamy self is also the Kantian thing in itself: no reduction is capable of grasping this lethargic essence. Sleep represents an ambiguous experience, profoundly otherwise than that of our waking life, that both underscores and is an irreducible part of it.

Despite Nietzsche’s injunction, wakefulness gives way to sleep, and, as Nancy elaborates, ‘wakefulness preserved stems from sleep refused, sleepiness refused. The

⁵⁶⁷ Maximus the Confessor, *Centuries on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation of the Son of God*, I. 37–9 cited in Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 42.

⁵⁶⁸ Maximilian de Gaynesford, ‘Being at Home in the World’, in Brian Leiter and Michael Rosen (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 523–550; p. 523.

⁵⁶⁹ Todes, *Body and World*, p. 155.

sentinel must struggle against sleep, as does Aeschylus's watchman on the roof, as Christ's companions forget to do.⁵⁷⁰ Seemingly untroubled by Lo Spagna's composition, Nancy continues, 'Whoever relinquishes attention and intention, every kind of tension and anticipation...enters into the unraveling of plans and aims, of expectations and calculations...this loosening...gathers together – actually or symbolically – the fall into sleep.' So in other words, what we encounter in sleep is nothing less than the dissolution – the unravelling – of the Kantian subject; as we noted earlier, Lacoste notes ironically that reading the *Critique of Pure Reason* 'tires me' (PP 311).

The act of keeping vigil appears to us then as the purest form of the self-positing, and as the epitome of an affirmation of our freedom:

Once our inevitable allocation of work, whose distribution is necessary, foreseeable and commonplace, has been completed, and proves that we remain in possession of a fundamental right: that of proving, by the content we give to our vigil (which we can spend doing philosophy, writing poetry, or praying – and many other things besides), the surplus of meaning we give to our humanity. (EA 79)

And as Lacoste observes, this vigil need not necessarily be explicitly religious in nature (in keeping with his stated aims) – it could just as well be poetic as (explicitly) liturgical. And yet, contends Milbank, a reason orientated only to 'a beatitude supposedly within our grasp dispenses with hope' and if such a reason is taken as 'hermeneutically decisive, it must downgrade the promptings, urgings and longings of the body.'⁵⁷¹ He thus offers the following thought-experiment: suppose that 'the human aspiration to, or even openness to, that which lies beyond its capacity,

⁵⁷⁰ Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, p. 2.

⁵⁷¹ Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, p. 121.

were taken as the hermeneutic key instead?’ Milbank’s question – which is indebted to Lacoste’s analysis on the *natura pura* – serves as a reminder that ‘we are not postmodern nomads, but ecclesial pilgrims’⁵⁷²; liturgy gives hope that we can reach ‘beyond the world’ (PP 314).

Sylvain Camilleri is another thinker who has employed Chrétien and Lacoste’s analysis of fatigue and the body for theological effect.⁵⁷³ Camilleri treads warily, afraid of falling into a theological trap, namely that Christ’s fatigue is ‘metonymic of the fatigue of the human condition freely assumed by God’ (DLF 71). While admitting that Chrétien has a point, saying that which is metonymic ‘runs the risk of forgetting its existential dimension’.⁵⁷⁴ The historical Jesus who arrives at Jacob’s well is certainly tired, and, as saviour, thereby gains an unassailable insight into the human condition, providing humanity with an example to imitate. Fatigue is thus fruitful for our religiosity: only through liturgy can we ‘move beyond responsiveness and restore empathic fatigue its missing part, that is to say, its active part’.⁵⁷⁵ Here, remarks Chrétien, in their invocation ‘the believer grasps the fatigue that Jesus suffered for him as a reason for hope’; fatigue ‘refers to its abysmal condition of possibility, which is the divine decision to incarnate for our salvation’ where, in the assumption of fatigue by the holy, it is transfigured (DLF 72).

Lacoste, as Camilleri notes, adopts a “monist” view of fatigue as the fatigue of both mind and spirit. Moreover, he thinks that ‘there are good reasons’ to think that what Lacoste only entertains as a hypothesis, namely that fatigue concerns ‘the *physis* of the human being in its entirety’ (PP 309) is actually ‘the most generic perspective that we can adopt’ which enables an ‘adequate phenomenological analysis, in contrast

⁵⁷² Ibid. p. 210.

⁵⁷³ Sylvain Camilleri, ‘Fatigue et Religiosité : Une Analyse Phénoménologique’, *Questions Liturgiques* 89 (2008) : pp. 29-48.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 41.

⁵⁷⁵ Op. cit.

to a dualistic conception'.⁵⁷⁶ With the help of Lacoste and Chrétien we can affirm the 'unitary character of fatigue' and that 'the flesh of Christ does not divide body and mind but unites and transcends the moment of the Incarnation'.⁵⁷⁷

Thus accorded a place at the 'forefront of our religiosity' can fatigue determine the religious life as deeply as anxiety, for example? According to Lacoste, it is easy enough to concede that not all conditions are as fundamental as each other, the affective life certainly has its 'superficial layers', 'small joys' or 'petty annoyances' and as such 'unable to determine the appearance of the world' (PP 313). Yet what, Camilleri asks, are the criteria for the predominance of a *Stimmung*, a question which presses at the heart of the role of fatigue in the religious life? Hence, Lacoste's question: is a truth – or the truth – of the world manifested in fatigue? (PP 313)

Lacoste certainly thinks that we have much to gain by linking the experience of fatigue to that of prayer – understood here as a specific modality of existence (or beyond) that of *esse coram Deo* or being before God (PP 314). When liturgy is understood in the manner of contemplation or, conversely (as in Heidegger), anxiety, Camilleri notes, 'we understand how contemplative prayer or anxious prayer may carry us beyond the mundane conditions of experience and thus acquire an eschatological sense'.⁵⁷⁸ What connection is there between prayer and fatigue, when the first describes an activity and the second 'a weighty passivity'? In prayer 'I speak (supplications, invocations, greetings, songs, etc.), I think – 'the man who prays is a man of a *theôria*' (PP 315) – and my body itself can be set in motion by moving (kneeling, hand gestures, tilting the head etc.)'. While caught by fatigue, whether physical or spiritual, I still experience the world, enduring trials 'as if they wanted to

⁵⁷⁶ Camilleri, 'Fatigue et Religiosité', p. 43.

⁵⁷⁷ Op. cit.

⁵⁷⁸ Camilleri, 'Fatigue et Religiosité', p. 45.

deprive my conatus of expression'. In other words: everything suggests that fatigue is 'the antithesis of prayer', so that linking them takes a specific form of *Aufhebung*. In phenomenology, Camilleri suggests, the union of active constitution and passive constitution does not exclude anything: 'my consciousness as my body can consist of both an invited auto-affection and an imposed hetero-affection'. It is thus not necessary for fatigue to disappear in prayer or 'that prayer is sucked into the spiral of fatigue' although we still must find a way to combine them in such a way that integrates them both, in a moment that, in turn, asserts, denies eventually exceeds them.⁵⁷⁹

For Lacoste such a process is possible if we are willing to consider that 'the experience of fatigue is the daily bread of prayer' (PP 315) and that 'it is in time of fatigue that we truly pray. Prayer is a task – *opus*, in the Latin. Fatigue puts this task to us in its purest form' (PP 315). This identification of prayer and fatigue is, Camilleri suggests, crucial since it indicates a twofold transcendental dimension: 'fatigue is the condition of the possibility of authentic prayer and prayer is the condition of possibility of authentic fatigue' although this reciprocity does not solve everything, because 'it always still appears as a struggle for eventual departure from the world, and as that struggle it is never a foregone conclusion'.⁵⁸⁰ If one hopes to win this battle, one must make a last hermeneutic effort to understand reality, namely that in the experience of fatigue, "the world as it appears to us and not as it "should not" appear to us' (PP 318). The world does not, therefore, appear as it is. This does not mean that the experience of fatigue is worthless and meaningless. Instead, might it suggest that 'the truth of the world appears to us in its non-truth, that is, in its disappearance' (PP 318).

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 46.

⁵⁸⁰ Op. cit.

What Camilleri calls ‘this strange manifestation of the truth amid a flawed or partially erased⁵⁸¹ appearing [event]’ is what the fatigue of prayer permits; he concedes that, certainly, it is paradoxical, but it must be remembered ‘that it is nonetheless this kind of paradox that religiosity was traditionally built upon and which can still nourish and shape us today’.⁵⁸² It is because fatigue ‘slows down our otherwise frantic activity that it makes possible the appearance of higher realities which are otherwise invisible; it opens up a field of quite singular religious potentialities that do not involve man in either effort or comfort’. In short, ‘the tired man, despite his tiredness, and if he has some spiritual interests (of which there is no requirement...), may simply be content to be before God, a tenuous *esse*, which does not include any prowess or intelligence. And if he can be satisfied with this, that is a valuable work of fatigue’ (PP 321-22).

Thinking religiously or theologically about fatigue in a non-intentional manner effects a ‘radical immanence’ and a ‘radical phenomenology’: that is to say, not only how it relates to our selfhood but also – and more fundamentally – how it gives back to us. Through fatigue, humanity’s religious sentiment lets it understand and live authentically, as ‘our fatigue is finally only the reflection or refraction of the feeling of absolute dependence on God in his totality and indivisibility’⁵⁸³; in this it is, finally, of a sacramental character, uniting diverse traditions even as it overcomes them, being both a supremely free gift and revealing of God to man and veiling that same God, thus symbolizing the union of sign and secret. Finally, fatigue deconstructs the theological conception that whatever one prays one believes (*lex orandi, lex credendi*) and since our words and gestures are thus disrupted the content of faith can no longer

⁵⁸¹ The French *biffée* carries the sense of ‘crossing out’ inviting comparison with Jean-Luc Marion’s notion of crossed and erased phenomena in *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Press, 2007), where he articulates the transcending and affirming of finitude in desire.

⁵⁸² Camilleri, ‘Fatigue et Religiosité’, p. 46.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 50.

be considered a right. Theology is therefore ‘forced to rework its categories and make room for the inchoate and unstable, such as fatigue’. Camilleri hopes, through this, to achieve nothing less than the refashioning ‘of the whole of Christian dogma’ through a rediscovery of the origins of our feeling of absolute dependence on God and ‘to instil, finally, some absolute Life in the Church’.⁵⁸⁴ Of course, how far Lacoste would be prepared to accept this rehabilitation of the Schleiermacherian notion of absolute dependence, albeit tempered by the finite character of the flesh, is debatable.

But ‘within the limits of the world, is flesh destined to die regardless of the purity of faith’ that is evidence (assuming, of course, that ‘our senses do not deceive us?’ [PD 219]); the consequences of reflecting, theologically, upon flesh and embodiment are not insignificant: after all, says Lacoste, ‘liturgy can be experienced as the anticipated resurrection of the flesh’ (PD 227). An eschatological experience ‘thought as *resurrectio carnis* does not permit objective language for the good reason that it has never dealt with any object whatsoever: above all it prohibits the constitution a physics of the glorified body more radically than any theological knowledge’ (PD 213).

Lacoste suggests that we do not have to ask if boredom is the fundamental tone of the existence of man in the age of nihilism: having a body becomes being a body – the desire for eternity becomes the certainty of being to or for death; the exultation of Teresa of Avila faced with the eternal becomes the *Langeweile* of Heidegger (AM 573). Secular anthropology begins with time, world and bodies (AM 574) and yet, while one write a history of philosophical anthropology which is a history of conceptions of the eternal in man, modern man, avers Lacoste, thinks little of eternal life, because he no longer understands what living or eternity are (AM 549).

⁵⁸⁴Camilleri, ‘Fatigue et Religiosité’, p. 51.

We can speak of mankind without mentioning eternity; we can even name those paradigms of transcendence which comprise the eternal divine economy (AM 567). Mankind cannot be defined as a transient desire for eternity for the simple reason that he is spirit: having fallen through boredom (*choros*) man 'is a body not by origin but by consequence. Seeing God bores him' (AM 554). The immortality of the ego was, in fact, an anthropological introduction: the very idea of a salvation of the body an aphilosophical or pre-Hellenic notion (AM 552).

For Lacoste the *choros* in which the *nous* is bored of God, and prefers time to eternity, 'is an effective theme whereby to criticize every anthropology in which something like an "eternal life" with God seems to go without saying'. As spirit humanity is able to choose time over eternity, which leads then to the ontological question: 'As spirit, what is my vocation?' and a second, complementary question: 'What do we want to be human – time, or eternity?' (AM 554)

The solution is an unusual combination of angelology and anthropology: faced with the fear of eternity, in contrast to the anguish of modern man confronted by the absolute, faced with the fear of getting bored (even of God) the angel 'brings to mind older evidence, evidence that mankind was once known other than through knowing itself', and that, argues Lacoste, 'is something that we should relearn, perhaps by interesting us in something besides man' (AM 572). It is our lot to be embodied; man *is* spirit *and* flesh. The angel, however, compels us to think *what* spirit *is* and that the soul is immortal. Eternity is not the bad infinite of boring repetition and a lack of novelty that is the eternal return of the same, neither is it the gel which binds time and space: 'it is the act and vitality of being, and for man, if he is to be resuscitated for an eternal life, the call to his flesh to also be the spiritual event to which his spirit already witnesses' (AM 572).

‘There can be no Christology without anthropological relevance’ (NP 129). For Lacoste the opposite is also true: Christology is the first and ‘the last word of anthropology, a Christological hypothesis’ (NP 138). Behind all this lies the theological idea of *kenosis*: an “emptying out” of both man and God – in eternity and in the world. The kenotic figure of Christ, of God become man, is thus paradigmatic to thinking of both God and man and is inextricably linked to mankind’s liturgical understanding and the non-experience of God himself, and the joy and celebration of Easter, when (according to Emmanuel Falque) mankind’s ‘animality’ is transformed through Christ.⁵⁸⁵ As Schrijvers notes, ‘This joy, then, is the joy of giving oneself completely to God through a kenotic ‘being-there’. Only in this way, for Lacoste, does the human being arrive at what is most proper to him: an existence in the image of God; a God who humiliated Godself.’⁵⁸⁶ Lacoste, then, employs the notions of embodiment and boredom to think through some of the ‘disputed questions on the humanity of man’ but also with important theological, specifically Christological, consequences for the understanding of God. Schrijvers again: ‘Lacoste refuses to ascribe omniscience to Jesus. [...] The ignorance of Christ is most clear in his unawareness of the precise nature of God’s parousia. [...] The ignorance of Christ is, according to Lacoste, the kenotic ignorance of the one who refuses every anticipation and grasping of the absolute future.’⁵⁸⁷

Jérôme de Gramont contends that ‘the keystone of a theological doctrine of the person’⁵⁸⁸ for Lacoste was the Christological theory of anhypostasy, which describes the particular ontological status of Christ’s humanity. Traditionally this meant that the man Jesus of Nazareth is not a hypostasis or concrete individual who exists

⁵⁸⁵ Emmanuel Falque, *Les Nocces de l’Agneau: Essai philosophique sur le corps et l’eucharistie* (Paris : Editions du Cerf, 2011), p. 27.

⁵⁸⁶ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 113.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 109.

⁵⁸⁸ Jérôme de Gramont, ‘Anthropology: 20th Century’, ECT 56-8; 57.

separately, but that his humanity receives its concrete reality (or is “en-hypostasized”) within the personal being of the second Person of the Trinity. And this is certainly a view which has been reflected in Lacoste’s work:

The Father’s will and mystery overlook the science of the Son present among men. The messianic nescience of Jesus is certainly that of someone who knows a lot and who knows enough about himself that the claims of the Johannine Christ are not merely projections of the post-Easter consciousness of Jesus onto the days before Easter. Nevertheless, unknowing has a premium over knowledge. And it must be said that the messianic nescience of Jesus is not a denial – but is a fundamental mode – of his identity. Obedience, nescience and mission in fact define the humanity of the Son as much as they do his divinity. Ignoring his time, Jesus Nazareth corresponds to the Trinitarian play in which the Father has the knowledge and the Son availability. (NT 174).

Unfortunately, elsewhere in ECT we learn that this notion has not always been properly understood by modern writers, for whom *anhypostatos* meant the divine gift to generic or “impersonal” human nature of a personal existence in itself, a position not substantiated by patristic authors. Donald Baillie offers a critique of a variety of thinkers: while the humanity of Christ is not impersonal, it may not have an independent personality ‘[t]he human nature is personalized in the Divine Logos that assumes it, and is thus not impersonal (*anhypostatos*) but ‘in-personal’ (*enhypostatos*)’, this latter a term whose use he describes as ‘difficult’ and ‘a pity’.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁹ Donald M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (London: Faber & Faber, 1956), p. 90. Lacoste describes it as ‘an interesting Anglo Saxon point of view on “continental” theological debates’ which ‘proposes a new model whereby to think hypostatic union via the theology of grace’. Here the self belongs to fullness of being and government of the grace of God. This paradox is not realised in every fragmented human life but through a Christological paradigm – ‘in the life of He who lived His life in abandonment to the divine grace, with whom initiative rests’ and in an economy of anhypostsasis (Lacoste, ‘Donald

While Baillie concludes that it is a term that has “had its day”⁵⁹⁰ other twentieth-century Protestant theologians have considered the idea of an “anhypostatic” humanity of Christ significant since it credits the divine initiative for the work of salvation rather than awarding autonomy to the created order. Scottish theologian T.F. Torrance – whose book Lacoste translated into French – for instance saw them as describing the basic structure of the relationship between God and humanity, *anhypostasia* asserting the unconditional priority of grace (and that all theological knowledge derives from God’s grace) and *enhypostasia* asserting that God’s grace acts only as grace.⁵⁹¹

In the end, though, the point may be moot: the author of the *Dictionnaire* article on ‘Anhypostasy’ notes that one Catholic writer, ‘critical of Scholasticism, maintains on the other hand that a Christology that uses the concept of anhypostasy by that very fact denies the full humanity of Christ’.⁵⁹² Since that same anonymous writer apparently ‘proposes a reconsideration of all the Chalcedonian terminology’ not unlike that recently penned by Lacoste,⁵⁹³ it would seem fair to assume that he has seen fit to either revise or to clarify his position.

Baillie’, *Les œuvres philosophiques : Dictionnaire – pensée contemporaine*, François Mattéi, ed., (Paris : PUF, 1992) : p. 3509. Lacoste writes of Donald’s brother John that his *Sense of the Presence Of God* argues that knowing God means exploring a dimension of experience in its full reality in which the believer can offer an appropriate response for each circumstance of their life and a sketch of an anthropology of thankfulness that proved the porosity of two intellectual worlds.

⁵⁹⁰ Baillie, *God Was in Christ*, p. 93.

⁵⁹¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (London: T&T Clark, 1990), pp. 238-40.

⁵⁹² Brian E. Daley, ‘Anhypostasy’, ECT 41.

⁵⁹³ ‘Homoousios et homoousios: La substance entre théologie et philosophie’, *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 98 (2010) : pp. 85–100.

6. Silence

Introduction

Silence, we are told, ‘is a language shaped around liturgy that we are called as creatures to learn in order that we may speak’.⁵⁹⁴ In this essay ‘Cosmic Speech and the Liturgy of Silence’, Oliver Davies notes that Maximus the Confessor, writing on the liturgy, describes two distinct kinds of silence: the ‘much hymned ‘silence of ‘the unseen and unknown call of the deity’ and the human silence invested in liturgical speech which itself ‘rich in tone’ summons the former.’⁵⁹⁵ Liturgy, avers Davies, should make present to us, or allow us to discern and to hear the silences of God. In order to articulate something of what he sees as the specific contexts – the cosmic and the relational – of the silence of the cross, Davies refers to the Russian terms *tishina* (a state of rest, disturbed or interrupted by speech) and *molchanie* (a form of communication, ‘subtended by speech’⁵⁹⁶).

Conceived thus, in a twofold sense that is both cosmic and personal or ethical, it collides with the conventional understandings of silence and of deconstruction:

Silence ultimately is a contentless sign. It is a free-floating signifier which draws its meaning from the character of the other signs which provide its context and thus bring it into the semiotic realm. But within a world-system conceived as divine speech, silence has a resonance which is at once cosmic and relational, natural and redemptive.⁵⁹⁷

For Davies, the argument that the collocation (or “presence”) of these two types of silence on the cross achieves a transformation of Jesus’ own body is one that

⁵⁹⁴ Oliver Davies, ‘Cosmic Speech and the Liturgy of Silence’, in Randi Rashkover and C. C. Pecknold, eds., *Liturgy, Time and the Politics of Redemption* (London: SCM Press, 2006): pp. 215-226; p. 226.

⁵⁹⁵ Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy*, Chapter Four cited in Davies, ‘Cosmic Speech’, p. 215.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 219.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 226.

‘regenerates the relation of the divine to the world’. Moreover, it ‘opens up and challenges narrow conceptions’ of the “liturgical” in which respect the work of Lacoste on ‘liturgical phenomenology’ is ‘important’.⁵⁹⁸

For Lacoste himself, the *Summum Cogitabile* remains ‘the Person par excellence’, before whom ‘one must remain silent to hear his silence or his word’ (EA 183). So, asks Lacoste, if its biggest sins is to cast God as an object (PP 206) – namely, the “supreme being” – is the problem ‘with theology nothing more than that of its language?’ (PP 169). If so, then perhaps silence, he suggests, offers ‘a healthy lesson in theological epistemology’ (PP 172). In spite of the obvious religious and theological connotations (in particular discussion of compassion and the divine silence in the face of suffering) Lacoste’s treatment of silence remains rooted in explicitly phenomenological concerns: namely, the exposition of quite what it was that Husserl understood by ‘pre-predicative syntheses’, their relation to notions of subjectivity, personhood and tradition, and the relationship between (divine) transcendence and humanity’s (quotidian) perspective. For Lacoste the relevance of silence in these phenomenological examinations informs how they in turn might modify theological – specifically apophatic – language in order to respect what he regards as the proper phenomenality of God. Chrétien here provides a useful summary: ‘the elusive transcendence of God, manifested in silence in our own silence (in other words, being spoken by itself in our listening), is precisely what we are endlessly striving to say, although that it cannot be spoken in its entirety’ (SA 99).

Silence is, of course, often seen in a negative sense – as representing discomfiture, anger, dejection, concession or simply ‘being at a loss’.⁵⁹⁹ And even

⁵⁹⁸ Davies, ‘Cosmic Speech’, p. 225 n. 19.

⁵⁹⁹ Jean-Luc Egger, “Ganz und gar gegenwärtig”: Forma e silenzio nel pensiero di Max Picard,’ *Sapienza* 52:2 (1999), pp. 143-96; pp. 143-44 cited in William L. Brownsberger, ‘Silence,’ *Communio* 36 (2009) pp. 586-606; p. 587.

when and where silence is valued it is still within a negative register – for instance, as the *absence* of and respite *from* work and noise. Philosopher William Desmond identifies what he refers to as ‘malignant silence’ – a ‘negative otherness on which the self is broken’.⁶⁰⁰ Lacoste concedes that ‘the field of silent knowledge is vast’ but, he continues, ‘this does not preclude an interest in language, or languages’ (ED 34), and, like the silences I share ‘with those I love’ (NT 147), phenomenological silence is ‘a happy silence’. As Lacoste summarises:

It is first of all, an ample silence, which may appeal to language (and to thereby reduce the axiological perplexity of feeling), but is not defined negatively as an absence of language. It is in this silence, secondly, that the self is an actor and witness to the appearance-constitution of world.

Phenomenology, of course, is not a discourse that would be organized merely to articulate that what is the most interesting or the most serious happens ahead of speech. But it is this that philosophy has made the most of (and may continue to do much with) such that no one could believe that the frontier of knowledge and non-knowledge is that of speech and of silence.⁶⁰¹

Lacoste’s compatriot, Jean-Louis Chrétien, makes the point even more explicitly, in an essay entitled ‘The hospitality of silence’ in which he connects silence with the debate over post-metaphysical philosophy: ‘one completely misunderstands the phenomenon of silence and its meaning if one defines it as a mere absence of sound ... as a privation in the Aristotelian sense of the term’ (AS 39). For his part, Blaise Pascal (the thinker who coined what Lacoste regards as an infamous and unhelpful antimony between the ‘God of philosophers’ and the ‘God of

⁶⁰⁰ William Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others: Ways of Being and Mind* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), p. 241.

⁶⁰¹ Lacoste, ‘La connaissance silencieuse : Des évidences antéprédicatives à une critique de l’apophase’, *Laval théologique et philosophique* 58 : 1 (2002), pp. 137-153 ; p. 141. Curiously, this passage was not included when the essay was reprinted in *Présence et parousia*.

theologians’ – that is, the ‘God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’) was terrified by the vastness of the universe; yet it was not its size but its silence that terrified him: ‘*le silence éternel de ces espaces infinies m’effraie*’. As Nicholas Lash reflects, the ‘empty stillness of the sky speaks silently to human solitude’⁶⁰² producing a ‘solitude that is unnerving’⁶⁰³; what we find in Lacoste is a suggestion that this intersubjective ethical register – perhaps with a Heideggerian accent – can prove to be of particular interest for theology.

Indeed, reflecting on silence allows Lacoste to rethink both Husserlian thought and its relation to God. For Lacoste the conjunction between philosophy and theology can be explored through the analogy between the transcendence of a phenomenon and the transcendence of God, while liturgical religious experience provides the basis for an alternative phenomenology, uninhibited by artificial disciplinary boundaries, as we saw earlier with regard to the influence of Kierkegaard upon how Lacoste conceives the relation between philosophy and theology. As a phenomenologist Lacoste is interested in the human aptitude for experience; and as a theologian, in the possibilities of human religious experience.

This chapter proposes to examine, with reference to that Husserlian phenomenology, some of the philosophical and religious aspects of silence, notably its specifically ontological aspects as well as its theological, liturgical and ethical dimensions (specifically in prayer), and to suggest how here the rich polysemy of silence cuts across the disciplinary boundaries between philosophy and theology. It also allows us to examine the place of silence in liturgy for Heidegger (in the lectures published as the *Phenomenology of the Religious Life*) and, following Lacoste, to reflect on the philosophical and theological implications of “being silent”, the

⁶⁰² Nicholas Lash, ‘Attending to Silence,’ *Holiness, Speech and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 77.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 78.

relationship between silence and solitude, and the difficulty and even the necessity of keeping silent.

6.2 Silence and the phenomenology of the religious life

Scholar of religion Sylvain Camilleri has offered a salient critique of Lacoste, by profitably indicating ways which silence might have actually interested the early Heidegger and how it impacts upon the phenomenology of religion in general: mystical silence represents ‘an asceticism of speech’ that is, ‘*literally* the passage from the liturgical act to the mystical act’.⁶⁰⁴ As an inner state prayer enables the development, or rather the event of the gift of a new phenomenon (God); it is this second aspect of prayer, Camilleri suggests, that Heidegger seems to have preferred, having a ‘hidden side that, once discovered, is likely to lead to real communion or union with God’ and a ‘significantly enriched religious experience’. In the silence at the heart of prayer it reaches its peak in its internalization and its (irrational) fulmination.

Following Lacoste, Camilleri proposes to focus on the content of liturgical silence and its consequences, yet at the same time is critical of what he describes as Lacoste’s assertion that ‘liturgy is absent from the phenomenology of religion in the early Heidegger’.⁶⁰⁵ Noting that in his own comparative analysis between Lacoste and the early Heidegger, Jean Greisch does not involve himself in this dispute, Camilleri regrets the resulting lack of any mention of a liturgical dimension in the early Heidegger’s phenomenology of religion. Camilleri is forced to conclude that ‘neither Greisch nor Lacoste were concerned with the explicit presence of radically liturgical phenomena in our text’ and asks why they do not make any reference to the

⁶⁰⁴ Sylvain Camilleri, *Phénoménologie De La Religion Et Herméneutique Théologique Dans La Pensée Du Jeune Heidegger: Commentaire analytique des Fondements philosophiques de la mystique médiévale (1916–1919)* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), p. 259.

⁶⁰⁵ Camilleri, p. 261.

inclusion of silence, worship, admiration and astonishment in the sketch? For Camilleri, there ‘is no doubt that Heidegger was planning a phenomenology of these elements. Even if it will never lead this project to fruition, he did not ignore the liturgical dimension of religious life in general and the mystical life in particular’.⁶⁰⁶ Therefore, Camilleri can conclude that there is in the early Heidegger ‘the lineaments of a phenomenology of the liturgy, although it obviously does not share the same assumptions as Lacoste’.⁶⁰⁷ In a short comparison between the opposing two religious phenomenologies of liturgy Camilleri notes that for Lacoste, ‘liturgical logic’ is secondary with the liturgical *coram Deo* needing to overcome the world of life, whereas for Heidegger, the ‘liturgy may well be part of the initial immediacy of religious life and cannot be applied outside the limits of the world of religious life; moreover, extends everywhere and everything *for* a religious conscience’.⁶⁰⁸ This suggestion thus runs counter to Lacoste’s own that life and existence are, by default, atheistic.

Moreover, Camilleri suggests that Greisch’s surprise at the absence of the liturgy from Heidegger’s lecture course on Paul – despite mention of the *coram Deo* relation – is not some flaw or omission on the part of Heidegger that he suggests. This overly harsh judgment is mainly because Greisch continues to understand *coram Deo* in the sense defined by Lacoste, that is, in terms of topology, a topology itself ‘not free from philosophical presuppositions in that it understands the passage to the liturgical place as a transition from atheism to religion’. Lacoste (following Husserl) posits an ‘atheism of life’, and of facticity as being prior to liturgy. However, Camilleri argues, for the young Heidegger ‘life, the mystical consciousness is

⁶⁰⁶ Op. cit.

⁶⁰⁷ Camilleri, p. 262.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 262.

originally religious in its initial immediacy, and not its second (to use Lacoste's terminology).⁶⁰⁹

Heidegger's initial interest in theology during his time at Freiburg was, of course, textual, devoting courses to Luther and Augustine.⁶¹⁰ In his own study of Augustine, Jean-Louis Chrétien has identified various possibilities of being silent, which was for Augustine, states Chrétien, both a human and a divine act (SA 92). These possibilities are an 'eloquent silence, affirmative, listening attentively, silently humming the song or cry inside, or the desire to ascend to God as a flame tearing the darkness, silence and strictly negative mute gossip, the boasting and empty words of love' (SA 91). For Augustine this is very much a kenotic activity, expressive of the 'agonistic dimension' of human speech (SA 92), 'the silence of intellectual intuition, of inner contemplation. This silence is therefore an act, a living act that seems to weaken and erode the very word which it proceeds to translate for another' (SA 92-93). Thus, as 'a form of kenosis' in its passage from 'the silence of thought to the patience of expression' it sees in the Incarnation – and the suffering servant – a model for expressive activity (SA 93). For Chrétien reading Augustine reveals that whilst mankind is possessed of an 'interior word' which itself reveals that no human speech [*parole*] can properly or adequately utter the divinity of God, conversely, whenever Augustine discusses the ineffability of God, it is in order to authorize and demand human speech, not to ban it'; since the divine majesty 'does not exempt us from being his image, and having to manifest Him, and since the ineffable God is not the One of Plotinus, he is the Word, and the word that addresses us desires our response' (SA 95). The essence of human speech is thus praise, within a framework of critical consciousness and humble vigilance, where it is 'better to be silent than to speak

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 263.

⁶¹⁰ Published as *Phenomenology of the Religious Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

badly and say what you should not' and 'pusillanimity is more perilous than audacity' (SA 96). Why? Because 'every word is rooted in listening'.⁶¹¹ Having said all that, Lacoste rather undercuts this contemporary fascination with the bishop of Hippo by warning us that often Augustine tells us more about himself than about God (PD 208).

The Nativity and the Passion – tropes to which we will return – are identified by Chrétien as providing two major sites for a silent meditation by the divine silence itself: 'By embodying and entering the human condition, the eternal Word, which is the Word of God, comes first of all in love, in a silence that is truly human, properly human, the silence of childhood, the silence of those who do not yet speak' (SA 101). Mankind may glimpse in the childhood narratives of the *verbum infans*. Augustine, avers Chrétien, 'renews the Pauline parallelism of the first and second Adam, by comparing the silence of Jesus and Adam's invention of human language. Adam, whom he suggests 'each of us can and must recognize' rather than merely occupying 'a place of emotion or sentimentality, draws humanity towards Christmas and invites it to consider the abyssal Word that deprives itself of speech' – thus, central to Augustine's meditation is the kenosis of Christ (SA 102) and Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Suffering Servant (SA 103).

Hence one might find that there is some substance to Catherine Pickstock's own claim that the 'alternation of sound and silence' is, for Augustine, 'a manifestation of the alternation of the coming into being and the passing into non-being which must characterise a universe created out of nothing'. It is, then, a Christianisation of the Pythagorean view, which awards 'a serious ontological role to 'nothing''. This has obvious significance for the possible articulation of a non-

⁶¹¹ See Peter Szendy, *Listen: A History of Our Ears*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). A similar theme can be found in Jean-Luc Marion's own reading of Augustine. See his: *In Place of Self: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 75; 86; 346.

metaphysical God as ‘The hospitality of silence’ conceived as creator, standing in contrast to a Platonic scheme which would seek to impose ‘merely a *degree* of order upon chaos’.⁶¹² Lacoste sees in these interpretations of creation in a kenotic manner – ‘as a self-limitation of God’ – as characteristic of recent attempts to answer questions about theodicy and the origins of suffering by calling into question the omnipotence of God (PP 170), an example of theology being silenced through compassion, preserving the language of the cross (PP 171).

6.3 The ontological status of silence

6.3.1 The phenomenality of silence

Silence must exist, as a necessary condition for sound, and particularly music, itself to exist. Even if the noted musicologist John Cage is correct to affirm⁶¹³ – following his own experiences in an anechoic chamber – that there is always noise, and that our bodily existence is always accompanied by noise (even if it is only the sound of our own circulatory and nervous systems) then one also has to admit that, even if it is not absolute, there is silence as well. The indeterminate state of silence raises the question, alongside the ontological one, of how this silence phenomenally itself.

The very phenomenality of silence suggests that rather than a negative phenomenon – the mere absence of something – silence is in fact a complex and positive phenomenon. For Max Scheler, writing in 1913, the fact that persons, ‘can be silent and keep their thought to themselves ... is quite different from simply saying nothing. It is an active attitude.’⁶¹⁴ The phenomenologist Bernard Dauenhauer

⁶¹² Catherine Pickstock, ‘Music: Soul, city and cosmos after Augustine’ in *Radical Orthodoxy*, pp. 243-277; p. 247.

⁶¹³ John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p. 8.

⁶¹⁴ Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), p. 225.

summarises the thesis of Max Picard's *The World of Silence* thus⁶¹⁵: silence is an ontological principle; in belonging to almost every dimension of human activity and the world which it inhabits, it is one of the “forces” that constitute the human world, a constitutive principle distinct from (although associated with) other forces such as spirit and word. Dauenhauer's analysis is, of course, not explicitly theological, although he acknowledges that ‘Picard speaks of a type of discourse, the discourse of faith, which responds to the absolute word, to God. This discourse is prayer.’⁶¹⁶

Silence is, as we have seen from Chrétien's reading of Augustine, often connected with that type of discourse, and Dauenhauer's analysis argues that the complexity of discourse is crucial to the discovery of the complexity of silence, which he suggests ‘occurs and is encountered only as somehow linked to some, active, as opposed to spontaneous, human performances ... most obviously ... those performances which engender sounds [such as] cries, speech, and music.’⁶¹⁷ But silence ‘also occurs in conjunction with human performances in which no sounds are engendered...such as...private reading...painting and sculpture’⁶¹⁸; William Desmond notes that great art ‘calls for silence, for slowness’.⁶¹⁹ Indeed, Chrétien has written eloquently on “silence in painting”: ‘it is with *our* silence that we listen to the silence in painting: two antiphonic silences, two silences that respond to one another, give one another a fresh start, and in a certain sense embrace one another. [...] And silence in painting, when it is truly silent, *calls* forth our silence too: we can be speaking with a friend in a museum or gallery, when all of a sudden a picture imposes silence upon us’ (HtH 19). As Lacoste observes, ‘For temporal man, the work of art can be given in

⁶¹⁵ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. vii.

⁶¹⁶ Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p. 188.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 3.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 3-4.

⁶¹⁹ Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others*, p. 102.

a parousiacal manner' (QD 227). More often than not, however, it is not given in such a manner and one accepts the limits in which one is caught.

However, in those activities that Dauenhauer concentrates upon, 'just as in hearing sounds, one can be so distracted or so preoccupied that the work in question does not convey what it could convey. Silence in such cases is experienced as absent.' There is, however, a difference between the experience of absence and absence itself and silence is not merely linked to some active human performance – it is itself an active performance, 'neither muteness nor mere absence of audible sound.'⁶²⁰ Muteness, according to Dauenhauer, is 'simply the inarticulateness of that which is incapable of any sort of signifying performances...silence necessarily involves conscious activity' and as such 'the occurrence or nonoccurrence of passively encountered noise', can neither prevent silence nor produce it. In this thought, Dauenhauer probably underestimates the capacity of intrusive and unwanted noise to both distract and disturb us – in short, its interruptive capacity, which as Kraut acknowledges in his use of the term "assassination", can be as violent as the silencing of noise.⁶²¹

Silence – what Maurice Blanchot regarded as "the space of literature"⁶²² – reveals the social character of man's kind of being through its role in dialogue. Dialogue necessarily employs an established language and refers to a world which is recognized as antedating that dialogue; in short, it establishes a logic of inherence, or "being-in-the-world". This antecedent world is one in which we can also detect the

⁶²⁰ Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p. 4.

⁶²¹ Jael Kraut, 'Phénoménologie du silence,' in Yves Mayzaud and Gregori Jean, *Le langage et ses phénomènes* (Paris : Harmattan, 2007), pp. 137-151 ; p. 141. Cf. Picard's criticism of broadcasting.

⁶²² Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 48.

traces of previous human performances.⁶²³ In principle, ‘the phenomenon of silence and its appropriate ontological interpretation do not preclude as foolish any claims concerning origin, culmination, and definitive sense of the interplay between man and world.’ By its nature, silence is non-judgemental: it provides a space for dialogue and neither silence nor its interpretation can ‘provide a conclusive basis for adjudicating between competing claims of this sort. Man can make claims then, concerning which the evidence furnished by the phenomenon of silence and an appropriate ontological interpretation of silence permits one to say only that such claims are intelligible and not devoid of all plausibility.’⁶²⁴ Dialogue thus ‘requires a listening as its starting point. Only through first listening can a man join his own performances to those of others and thereby bring the world...to say what it means to say. This listening is accomplished through silence.’⁶²⁵

The point here has not been to affirm a theological warrant⁶²⁶ for silence, but simply to outline its ontological value: after all, *Dasein* is all ‘doors and windows’⁶²⁷ through which sound enters in⁶²⁸ amid conditions of mutual speech and hearing.

⁶²³ ‘Silence is rightly said to be unsurpassable because it holds sway over the occurrence of all strictly human performances...performances which are mediational or directly linked to mediations.’ Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p. 185.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 189.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 184.

⁶²⁶ The popularity of apophatic theology in postmodernity is merely one example; Dauenhauer concedes ‘...that a hierarchical arrangement of a multiplicity of types within each region has positive warrant’ but it is only if, like Picard, one makes the move to faith, that ‘such a hierarchy may have some basis.’ *Ibid.* pp. 192-3. Dauenhauer’s position, he maintains, ‘does not preclude such a supplementation which might justify a hierarchy.’ But without this supplementation his ‘interpretation offers no support to any sort of hierarchy.’

⁶²⁷ Kevin Hart calls this Lacoste’s ‘brilliant’ description of *Dasein*. In Kevin Hart, ed., *Clandestine Encounters: Philosophy in the Narratives of Maurice Blanchot* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), p. 31 n.57. The original can be found in EA 11.

⁶²⁸ If the question of ontotheology revolves around the dialogue between Greek and Christian epistemology, it is worth here recalling the experience Augustine in the garden at Ostia (recorded in *Confessions*) and the importance of “social epistemology”: the presence of his mother Monica (thereby making it a shared, social experience) undoes the Plotinian model – typically, Plotinian union required that the soul be no longer conscious of her body, no longer conscious of herself as distinct from the One, and thus could not be conscious of another person. By contrast, the Christian hope of resurrection holds out that ‘individuality will always be our condition.’ Janet Martin Soskice, ‘Monica’s Tears: Augustine on Words and Speech,’ *New Blackfriars* 83:980 (October 2002): pp. 448-458; p. 455

6.3.2 *The temporal phenomenality of silence*

For Lacoste living liturgically – that is, living *coram Deo* – is ‘an act of freedom’ (EA 22). This freedom arises out of the encounter between human beings and their world, including life and tradition; as such, this freedom is necessarily temporal.

Phenomenology presupposes an ego that continually witnesses to the experience of the continuity of time. Following Husserl, consciousness is no longer regarded as simply the present moment or a succession of “nows”. Husserl expressed this via the concepts of ‘retention’ (recalling the past) and ‘protention’ (anticipating the future). Without this equipoise between the present, past and future, signification is impossible; listening to a Bach partita (ED 35 *et passim*) would be impossible: without reference to the note before or anticipation of the note to come, instead of a melody we would merely hear a succession of notes.

This temporal consciousness unfolds against a background of silence. Dauenhauer⁶²⁹ (referring to Husserl’s own *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*⁶³⁰) has shown how the silence which punctuates our words and phrases relates to these constituent moments of “*Urimpression*” (“*Urempfindung*”), “*Retention*” and “*Protention*”. If one understands silence by reference to Bergson’s concept of the “*néant*”⁶³¹ then, as Jael Kraut has argued, there are two ontological possibilities. Firstly, silence provides a blank canvas upon which all the noises of the universe appear. This implies that there was an initial primordial silence followed by an explosion of noise which overwhelmed it; this silence eternally antedates noise and

⁶²⁹ This possesses its own temporal structure besides that of the concrete utterances of which it is a part. Dauenhauer further suggests that an intervening silence (which punctuates the words and phrases of an utterance), A¹, contains elements of both its preceding utterance, A, and its protended successor related to the three constituent moments of “*Urimpression*” (“*Urempfindung*”), “*Retention*” and “*Protention*”.

⁶³⁰ Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, Martin Heidegger, ed., trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), pp. 44-45 and pp. 50-52.

⁶³¹ Cf. Henri Bergson, « L’existence et le néant », *L’Evolution créatrice* (*Œuvres*, Edition du Centenaire, Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), pp. 728-746.

surrounds every object in the world. Second, if there has always been something like noise (which, as the example of Cage demonstrates, is, in our embodied existence, inescapable), then silence is not given, but forces aside that eternal noise, like a violent irruption or interruption in the ‘virgin noises of being’.⁶³² In short, silence is itself a form of “non-being” that contradicts the logic of ontotheology. Both of these possibilities have theological implications. For an embodied consciousness endowed with memory, hopes, and a body which can keep silent⁶³³, then silence signifies not simply an absence of words but the necessary temporality of life. As Lacoste observes, ‘there is a *time* to speak, a *time* to be silent and a *time* to heal’ (PP180).

6.3.3 Silence, ethics and aesthetics

Silence exists in a dialectic with utterance. Susan Sontag writes: “Silence” never ceases to imply its opposite and to depend on its presence: just as there can’t be “up” without “down”...so one must acknowledge a surrounding environment of sound or language in order to recognize silence.’ Silence then can be conceived as a necessary condition for utterance, ‘somehow coordinate with utterance.’⁶³⁴

For phenomenology, it is impossible to discuss silence without first listening to the consciousness which *thinks* that silence, a silence which is neither an abstraction nor a belief, but lived (PoP 143). This silence is linked to each and every sound that is produced, and thereby to time: silence has a ‘describable temporality of its own...not radically derived from the temporality of the utterance with which it is conjoined.’⁶³⁵ Theology is concerned with and speaks of “salvation” and, as Lacoste points out, the Greek for “to save” also means “to heal”. Theology employs the

⁶³² Kraut, ‘Phénoménologie du silence,’ p. 141.

⁶³³ As Merleau-Ponty observes ‘To have lost one’s voice is not to keep silence: one keeps silence only when one can speak.’ (PoP 187)

⁶³⁴ ‘The Aesthetics of Silence,’ in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), p. 11.

⁶³⁵ Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p. 5.

language of reconciliation and forgiveness, but also that of the resurrection of flesh, and these two accents, suggests Lacoste, are equally essential:

Saving, healing: this is the work attributed to God, in the form of a man who is both spirit and flesh. And theology cannot learn this (and any theology that cannot should be told to return to kindergarten urgently) without knowing how to care for the sick body – and without knowing that there is here a tension rather than polarity. We therefore advocate a “theology” which recognizes jointly the care of souls and the care of the body. Caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, visiting the prisoner, etc. –all of this would add nothing to a speech that on its own terms would be complete, but are an integral part of theological work. Theology is a practice of discourse, it is a practice of silence; it is, in the end, praxis. (PP 174)

In light of this, it is therefore questionable whether Schrijvers’ claim that, for Lacoste, ‘the demands of the Kingdom surpass the demands of worldly ethics and politics’.⁶³⁶ While Lacoste’s comments on Levinas display his aversion to any effort to grasp the entirety of the human being from a single perspective – ‘by granting to ethics the status of first philosophy and to its exigencies the status of immediate givens, Levinas is condemned to passing over in silence everything that does not constitute being-in-the-world as moral obligation’ (EA 71) – and although the believer may call others to ‘a more genuine experience of the world and of oneself’ (EA 175), this mission must (as Schrijvers correctly points out) also ‘incorporate an ethical element’⁶³⁷ lest the believer appear ‘incapable of existing in the world humanely’ (EA 68–9).

⁶³⁶ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 21.

⁶³⁷ Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings?*, p. 36.

Drawing upon the work of Michael Theunissen, Lacoste remarks that since Kant the idea of the Kingdom has become the final issue of philosophy: the definitive can only be reached through the provisional (NT 55) – ‘we live simultaneously in the field of ontology and that of ethics’ (NT 53). Whilst not hardening, this tension cannot be abolished, (and we thus encounter one of the secrets of our existence). So while the ‘pre-ethical consciousness is neither short of knowledge nor devoid of humanity’ (NT 53) since the ethical relation is caught up in the ambiguity of being (NT 52) the relation between ethical and liturgical experience is thus nuanced, tenuous and uncomfortable: the ‘ethical order of ends and means’ over-determines [*surdéterminer*] our native and immediate comportment towards being (NT 52) while ‘the (theoretical and existential) discomfort of such an experience is essential to us’ (NT 55).

In its ‘single-minded focus on a single appearance, that of the Other’, Lacoste argues, Levinas’ phenomenology explored an area badly explored by Husserl because his explorations in intersubjectivity failed to take note of the irruption of that other person into the field of consciousness. However, neither does Levinas’ phenomenology provide the means by which to ‘thematise the appearance of one who appears as loveable – because the Other, in Levinas, always appears as the one who directs me not to kill him. Each being has its own phenomenality; each phenomenality the welcome that it demands from us. Therefore, subjectivity needs to be conceived flexibly (INT 34). Silence therefore might help to re-conceive not only subjectivity but its understanding of the divine – which invites humanity to welcome it by loving it – as well.

Moreover, without this silent understanding of temporality our aesthetic life – particularly music – would also be impossible. The appeal for silence by an

orchestra⁶³⁸ at the beginning of their performance is nothing other than an appeal to our intentionality – that, through an act of *ascesis*, of self-denial and hospitality, we create an appropriate environment for that performance and the possibility of the appearance of that piece of music, not just on their behalf but on behalf of our neighbour; thus not keeping silent represents an offence against the dignity of the other person.

Liturgical experience is similarly ascetic – a voluntary choice for poverty that is authentic to humanity’s own ontological poverty. The work of art frees human beings from their involvement with world and earth because it brackets out every other phenomenon than itself – it demands our undivided attention (although there are, of course, no guarantees over one’s affective life – one may still wander through a gallery distracted and uninterested). Nonetheless, despite Heidegger’s criticism of aesthetics⁶³⁹ for its “subjectivist tendencies” (particularly its concentration upon the artist and onlooker) perceiving the work of art *as such* implies that one has *seen* it and been affected by it; indeed, our common empathy and affectivity are the conditions of the *possibility* of its production. Lacoste’s contemporary Jean-Louis Chrétien recalls Hegel’s own emphasis⁶⁴⁰ on “silence in painting”: ‘it is with *our* silence that we listen to the silence in painting: two antiphonic silences, two silences that respond to one another, give one another a fresh start, and in a certain sense embrace one another. [...] And silence in painting, when it is truly silent, *calls* forth our silence too: we can be speaking with a friend in a museum or gallery, when all of a sudden a picture imposes silence upon us’ (HtH 19). Language and painting depend upon silence in order to be

⁶³⁸ Kraut, ‘Phénoménologie du silence,’ p. 139.

⁶³⁹ Martin Heidegger, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 15-88; p. 36.

⁶⁴⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), pp. 33-34.

expressive: ‘language speaks, and the voices of painting are the voices of silence’.⁶⁴¹

Painting is silent not because it is inaudible, but because it is indirect and allusive, and dependent upon our engagement and interpretation; indeed for Merleau-Ponty ‘all language is indirect or allusive – that is...silence’.⁶⁴²

Affectivity, Lacoste advises us, is older or more ‘richer than the constitutions in which it takes its form’ (MAO 101); the demand upon us made by the work of art interrupts Heideggerian being-in-the-world offering an experience of its limits which forces us to admit that our aptitude for *experience* in fact exceeds our aptitude for experiencing the *world* (WCA 84). Thus in the aesthetic encounter human beings may ‘discover an affective freedom towards their transcendental make-up’⁶⁴³; here, experiences ‘such as friendship or love, which presuppose a joyful constitution of the present, become ontologically significant.’⁶⁴⁴ Nonetheless, art simply ‘renders a being more a being...it does not make the world less a world, and it does not make time lead elsewhere than death. Liturgy, in contrast, tells us that the world and earth can be placed in parentheses’ (WCA 92).

6.3.4 Mimesis, narrative and liturgy

The repeated, mimetic actions of liturgy and prayer (rooted in memory and reflection) seek to replace personal memory with that of tradition, to replace the events of personal narrative with ‘the great, transpersonal narrative of the tradition’.⁶⁴⁵

Yet Lacoste observes wryly that postmodernity supposedly saw the death of the

⁶⁴¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘Indirect language and the voices of silence’, in Galen A. Johnson, ed., *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), pp. 76-120; p. 117.

⁶⁴² Ibid. p. 80.

⁶⁴³ Joeri Schrijvers, ‘Phenomenology, liturgy, and metaphysics: The thought of Jean-Yves Lacoste’, in Peter Jonkers and Rudi Welten, eds., *God in France: Eight Contemporary French Thinkers on God* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005): pp. 207-225; p. 218.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 219.

⁶⁴⁵ Another ascetic practice, religious reading, forms part of the monastic *habitus*: in hearing the word of God the monk internalises it, ‘chews it over’ (*ruminatio*) and thus learns, through the internalisation of scripture, to conform to the structures of ecclesiastical authority. Gavin Flood, *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 194.

“grand narrative”; that is, of every totalizing discourse that sought to assign everything its origin, purpose and meaning, and although there were, among those who were part of this death, those who thought that it was also the death of theological reason, they were ‘few in number’ (PP 181). Furthermore, he asks, is the biblical text really a prototype of the “grand narrative”? It certainly teaches us about origins and conclusions, and ‘between alpha and omega, between protology and eschatology, nothing is foreign: life and death, sin and justice, war and peace, religion and irreligion’ (PP 181). However, the remarkable thing, which, for Lacoste, allows the biblical corpus to resist all “postmodern” criticism is that everything is given in a collection of fragments, and a multiplicity of languages which prohibits the (re)construction of a linear “grand narrative.” The Gospel is transmitted in four canonical texts whose harmonization is an impossible task, the failure of which dates back to the Diatessaron of Tatian. Mankind has no divine point of view on the ‘theological meaning of history,’ only human perspectives that often contradict each other (PP 182). Not only that, but the texts often obscure more than they say: the apocryphal gospels show us the frustration of readers wanting to know more than canonical texts disclose. Now, this may well be a silence about inessential matters, such as the missing years in the life of Jesus of Nazareth before his ministry, but often they silent on important points: for example, the Gospel of John is silent on the institution of the Eucharist while ‘the Church is almost absent from the discourse of Jesus as collected and transmitted by the Gospels’ (PP 182).

Nonetheless, whatever the status of narrative this simultaneous intensification of subjectivity and the erosion of the will through an act of will turn my story into that of the tradition and the text. Lacoste notes that a recurrent Kantian temptation in Husserl led him to favour spontaneity and the power of constitution. But elsewhere, in

the ‘phenomenology of passivity’ as well as in the ‘phenomenology of constitution’, Husserl speaks about an order of the world or of things which has already been silently established and guaranteed, one destined merely to be named and described. But although predicates and relations are named and defined, an experience of what these words *mean* has already been constructed in the experience of the consciousness which perceives and constitutes them.

As concerned as it is with the Heideggerian notion of “being-in-the-world” Lacoste’s analysis is rooted in this Husserlian understanding of the pre-discursive donation of the world to the self, where the order of the world and of the presence of subjectivity in the world is established in the silence of our perceptive lives prior to language. Husserl’s later philosophy might even be described as a theory of deferred or “bracketed” speech⁶⁴⁶ where nearly all conscious life is organized in the margin of words – to the extent that Husserl’s research on intersubjectivity devotes scant attention to the fact of interlocution. Lacoste suggests that this can be termed the “prediscursive gift” of the world.⁶⁴⁷

For Lacoste, liturgical experience is essentially a mimetic one which, in providing ‘*le lieu herméneutique de l’expérience chrétienne*’, anticipates God’s coming by confessing God’s non-parousiacal presence: ‘the Kingdom may be present in the world – it might even be represented – but it is essentially different’ (NT 210). This discloses the provisional character of the world against an eschatological future. As in silent contemplation, the world is both present and absent, neither completely

⁶⁴⁶ ‘Pages devoted to topics such as “passive syntheses”, “active syntheses”, and “pre-predicative evidences” amply demonstrate that things – which are given to consciousness as phenomena – both constitute and are formed within the sphere of the silent life of our consciousness’ (PP 117).

⁶⁴⁷ Although references to Merleau-Ponty are rare in Lacoste (who seems to prefer to cite Husserl wherever possible), the former does elsewhere offer a useful summary of this view which presages the importance of gesture: ‘Our view of man will remain superficial so long as we fail to go back to that origin, so long as we fail to find, beneath the chatter of words, the primordial silence, and as long as we do not describe the action which breaks this silence. The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world.’ (PoP 214)

present nor completely absent. This is the silence of intellectual intuition, of inner contemplation. This silence acts as a living act that seems to weaken and erode the very word that undertakes to translate it for others.

Rather than claiming theological warrant⁶⁴⁸ for silence, Lacoste wishes to outline its ontological value⁶⁴⁹. Phenomenological method demands that one ground both logic and the apophatic in a cognitive silent life: the familiar and affective life of things and the world. There philosophy, Lacoste suggests, has its ‘own silent moment’ (PP 118) where compassion is an extension of our co-affectivity; as Husserl pursued his phenomenological descriptions⁶⁵⁰ the pre-predicative sphere seemed to him to increasingly anticipate the work of *logos*, or predicative language. The affective life has the power to reveal clearly and distinctly the reality of the world: Husserl’s heirs in the phenomenological tradition were divided over the relative value of anxiety, boredom (Heidegger), and joy (Stein) to disclose the world.⁶⁵¹ Nonetheless, this coaffectivity – the primordial, peaceful equipoise between human beings, what Levinas termed the ‘subjectivity prior to the Ego, prior to its freedom

⁶⁴⁸ The popularity of apophatic theology in postmodernity is merely one example; Dauenhauer concedes ‘...that a hierarchical arrangement of a multiplicity of types within each region has positive warrant’ but it is only if, like Picard, one makes the move to faith, that ‘such a hierarchy may have some basis.’ Dauenhauer, *Silence*, pp. 192-3. Dauenhauer’s position, he maintains, ‘does not preclude such a supplementation which might justify a hierarchy.’ But without this supplementation his ‘interpretation offers no support to any sort of hierarchy.’

⁶⁴⁹ If the question of ontotheology revolves around the dialogue between Greek and Christian epistemology, it is worth here recalling the experience Augustine in the garden at Ostia (recorded in Confessions) and the importance of “social epistemology”: the presence of his mother Monica (thereby making it a shared, social experience) undoes the Plotinian model – typically, Plotinian union required that the soul be no longer conscious of her body, no longer conscious of herself as distinct from the One, and thus could not be conscious of another person. By contrast, the Christian hope of resurrection holds out that ‘individuality will always be our condition.’ Soskice, ‘Monica’s Tears,’ p. 455.

⁶⁵⁰ Later published as *Experience and Judgement: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, revised and edited by Ludwig Landgrebe; trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973)

⁶⁵¹ But there are ambiguous events as well; Scheler noted the distinction between *Gefühl* and *fühlen von etwas*, between the empty feeling of an object and our intentional feeling.

and non-freedom⁶⁵² – is, I would suggest, the basis of Lacoste’s proposed ‘*connaissance liturgique*’.

Lacoste is interested in articulating a “theological ontology”. In such an ontology, a tradition, for example, only becomes “mine” through my volitional act, thus preserving my subjectivity. Moreover, a tradition is born out *of* inter-subjectivity, exists *in* inter-subjectivity, *is* inter-subjective in nature and thus requires subjects in all their subjectivity: notably, the pure passivity which precedes freedom is marked by a responsibility⁶⁵³ for the world.

Yet a certain construal of phenomenology insists that we should not accept anything we might have learnt, any particular way of thinking we might have inherited from our culture and upbringing – we should verify everything for ourselves individually, with our own intuitions – the constitution of objectivity is always performed by an ego which *exists* in the world. For Husserl at his most Kantian, the pure ego of transcendental phenomenology is that kernel of *personhood* that would survive the hypothetical annihilation of the world, both the natural world and the social world of ready-made meanings and hard-won interpretations of reality (Hua. IV: 311).

The restlessness that for Lacoste defines the human condition encounters its theological status when trying to relate to the Absolute (NT 96-98): mankind’s desire for the eschaton is (and can only be) informed by theological tradition, as part of the created order. Nonetheless, this suspension of the provisional in favour of the definitive and the eschatological remains ambiguous: this restlessness may testify to creation but it can neither inspire a new ontology nor evade its own worldly condition, offering merely a temporary break from being-toward-death. At this point it is worth

⁶⁵² Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, trans. Nidra Poller (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 51.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 55.

considering some important phenomenological reflections upon ontology and silence, in order to take stock of how they might relate to our discussion of tradition, and in particular this pre-discursive sphere.

As Dauenhauer notes, ‘Silence is rightly said to be unsurpassable because it holds sway over the occurrence of all strictly human performances...performances which are mediational or directly linked to mediations.’⁶⁵⁴ Such “meditational performances” of course take us into the realm of the liturgical and those activities⁶⁵⁵ performed within the “language game” of a “way of life”.⁶⁵⁶ Does, Lacoste asks, one ‘*only* understand religious realities *within* the language game where they have their proper use?’ Lacoste makes clear that the arguments of D. Z. Phillips still deserve to be heard.⁶⁵⁷ Understanding a language game or a way of life (Lacoste notes that the two are synonymous, as they are for Wittgenstein) is possible only *within* this language game (PP 85-116). Moreover, the perceived world demands to be understood: ‘Every represented world is a perceived and interpreted world. This is not a surprise, because the world of life itself is always *already interpreted*, and the idea of a world prior to the interpretation serves less to account for common experience than to criticize it’ (AH 346). This pre-discursive sphere, or “unsaid” is both ‘the inexhaustible source’ and ‘permanent determinate’ of Saying and can only be acknowledged in silence as both the origin and the termination of any Saying and of

⁶⁵⁴ Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p. 185.

⁶⁵⁵ As Dauenhauer astutely observes, ‘Heidegger ... deals only with the discourse and silence of creative men’ and so is inclined to overlook the quotidian asceticism of the religious person, focussing instead on heroic and voluntary aphonia. Ibid. p. 186.

⁶⁵⁶ Religious communities are not without risk, as Lacoste concedes: ‘The monastic community (the community where one wants to live an “angelic” life) is intended to be a community of brothers in which no-one has to fear the threat of any other man. But who will deny that it also represents the most risky model of human community, one that will leave the widest scope for hostility if the community is not kept under close oversight’. Lacoste, ‘In war and peace: Heidegger, Levinas, O’Donovan’ in *The Authority of the Gospel: Explorations in Moral and Political Theology in Honour of Oliver O’Donovan*, eds. Robert Song and Brent Waters (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

⁶⁵⁷ Lacoste here refers us to *Faith After Foundationalism* (London: Routledge, 1988), and *Wittgenstein and Religion* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993).

any human words which might bring that Saying to speech and is not ‘simply indeterminate’.⁶⁵⁸ Humanity thus lives in a dialectical relationship between the unsaid and what is said, and between what it itself articulates and what has been (un)said before, so much so that while ‘...in principle, the phenomenon of silence and its appropriate ontological interpretation do not preclude as foolish any claims concerning origin, culmination, and definitive sense of the interplay between man and world ... neither do silence and its interpretation provide a conclusive basis for adjudicating between competing claims’; the evidence of the ‘phenomenon of silence’ and its ‘appropriate ontological interpretation’ permit mankind to say only that such claims ‘are intelligible and not devoid of all plausibility.’⁶⁵⁹ Thus humanity may live, speak and keep silent, all of which may be ontologically and theologically significant, but ultimately – and quite properly phenomenologically – inconclusive, an indication of the presence of irreducible phenomena in the world. Indeed, one might even go so far as to say that ‘...the irreducibility of the difference between tradition and new discourse is a function of the irreducible difference between world and man.’ Seen from this standpoint, humanity’s mediations are always performed against an already ‘established background’ which includes ‘the determinate residue of previous human mediations’ as part of the call to which humanity responds. On the other hand, since restless humanity is characterised by nondeterminancy, humanity’s response to the world’s call remains its own, even when it merely repeats a previous response.

6.3.5 Silence and asceticism

Lacoste usually employs two examples of liturgical asceticism, the hermit and the pilgrim, to which we add a third, the monk, for whom liturgy is an integral aspect of their own ascetic path. Like the hermit the monk not only performs austerities and

⁶⁵⁸ Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p. 187.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 189.

inner contemplation, but the pattern of their whole life becomes liturgical – in Wittgensteinian terms he inhabits this “language game” and thus understands it. Fasting, the performance of penance while reciting the Psalter or an inner prayer performed in silence,⁶⁶⁰ are all part of monastic liturgical life where the habit of the monastery is internalised, the intensification of subjectivity through the solitary life instead a subjectivity formed according to the established pattern of tradition. By observing the set times, festivals and the fast periods of the liturgical year, the monk’s individual rhythms are made to conform to the rhythms of tradition through an act of will which is, at the same time, a subversion of that will. The body of the Church, that is the body of tradition, is thus expressed in the body of the ascetic:

The ascetic body in its conformity to the liturgical pattern becomes an expression of the Church and also an expression of the text. The body becomes a text on which the text of tradition is inscribed: fasting, prayer and recitation of the Psalter while performing flagellation are entextualisations of the body. The ascetic body becomes a sign of the ascetic tradition.⁶⁶¹

As we noted with regard to Lacoste’s engagement with Kierkegaard, the practice of religious reading, (*lectio divina*) is crucial for the development of the spiritual life and is intimately related to prayer and contemplation; the internalisation of Scripture has a long history in Christian theological exposition, from Origen, Ambrose and Augustine through to Bede. The essential themes of monastic mysticism can characterised by three pairs: *solitudo/silentium*, *lectio/meditatio* and *oratio/contemplatio*. Founded in silence, reading and meditation (*lectio/meditatio*) are

⁶⁶⁰ ‘Picard speaks of a type of discourse, the discourse of faith, which responds to the absolute word, to God. This discourse is prayer. The experience of originary and terminal silence reveals a demonic element in silence, which Picard would exorcise through faith in God. Picard’s insight here is that the experience of silence is such that man can, by a leap, aim at resolving the experienced polyvalence of silence by deciding to take one of its dimensions as unequivocally primary.’ Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p. 188.

⁶⁶¹ Flood, *Ascetic Self*, p. 190.

an important part of the formation of the ascetic self: during this process the ascetic learns to inhabit the great edifice of collective memory, the memory of tradition shared – to varying degrees, depending upon their skill and application – by everyone in the community. While clearly a subjective one, it is not a merely private or individual activity, but part of the construction of a subjectivity and interiority that is simultaneously subjective and collective, ‘in harmony with the communal prayer of the whole church, the Body of Christ’.⁶⁶² This kind of ‘religious reading’ is consonant with the liturgical rhythms of the monk and differs from what Flood terms ‘the modern experience’ that is, a merely ‘consumerist reading’ where information is substituted for wisdom or understanding. Reading scripture or the lives of the saints is, along with prayer and liturgy, one way ‘in which the body is entextualised’.⁶⁶³

As Lacoste observes, ‘The insider, one who enjoys and is rooted in the event of a “hidden” God, never faces an all-known, but a known-and-unknown’ (QD 219). For the monk then, the insider *par excellence* it is through hearing the word of God that they can internalise this mystery and make its story part of their own, “chewing it over” (*ruminatio*) and so learn to conform their body to the Church.⁶⁶⁴ This internalisation of scripture becomes the internalisation of the body of the Church and conformity to the structures of ecclesiastical authority, although the question remains to what extent for Lacoste that the philosopher might upset the theologian’s authority, with awkward questions about the phenomenality of this mystery, preserved as it is in a historically contingent tradition.

Nonetheless, such religious reading represents an ascetic practice, integrated into a complete path of transformation, along with other practices as part of the

⁶⁶² Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great through the 12th Century* (New York: Crossroads, 1996), p. 132.

⁶⁶³ Flood, *Ascetic Self*, p. 193.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 194.

habitus of the monastery; as Lacoste notes, ‘Cultures, social and linguistic customs are just some of the numerous factors which may make us experts in the use of language games where “God” occurs. We can even participate in these games in (for us) an age-old or immemorial way. But where we only stop playing these games by the force of habit, then we discover that nothing really forced us to play them, and thus that we can either stop playing, or even decide to play it by affecting a seriousness that is not included in any definition of *Sprachspiele*’ (PP 100). There is, in the end, nothing that compels us to have participated in these games. Yet the repeated actions of the liturgy, prayer and religious reading (i.e. processes of memorisation and reflection) seek to replace personal memory with the memory of tradition, to repress the recollection of events in a personal narrative with the collective tropes of the great, transpersonal narrative of the tradition. The internalisation of this ‘machine’, as Gregory the Great called the mnemonic devices of the monastery, is simultaneously an intensification of subjectivity and the erosion of the will through the will. An individual’s story becomes the story of the tradition and the text.

Thus the relationship between phenomenology and theology (paradigmatic of a tradition shaped discourse or culture) has typically been characterised by a certain degree of distance⁶⁶⁵ (as Lacoste makes clear in his own article on ‘Phenomenology’ for his *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*), long before the reaction of the likes of Janicaud to the so-called “theological turn”.

⁶⁶⁵ In Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another*, ‘the absolute centrality of the theological motivation is guarded against the dangers of hubris by a hiddenness that at the same time ensures its deepest presence. This is apparent even in Ricoeur’s preface to his book, where he states “all my philosophical work, leads to a type of philosophy from which the actual mention of God is absent and in which the question of God, as a philosophical question, itself remains in a suspension that could be called ‘agnostic.’” David Jasper, *The Sacred Desert: Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 181.

6.3.6 *A silent aesthetic*

‘Where,’ wonders Lacoste, ‘does one find a conversation more infinite than in theology?’ (PP 189) In *The Infinite Conversation* Maurice Blanchot warns that ‘[w]e never speak without deciding whether the violence of reason that wants to give proof and be right or the violence of the possessive self that wants to extend itself and prevail will once again be the rule of discourse.’⁶⁶⁶ We will not be distracted here with the “Cartesian meditations” that have so occupied Husserl and Marion, other than to note, with Blanchot, that ‘Descartes did not venture to assert that everything is thought; he contented himself with the understanding that all thought is language.’ As Blanchot observes, ‘silence exists; “it is not death and it is not speech”; there is then, something that is neither indifference nor discourse’.⁶⁶⁷ Compassion, however, ‘knows no “reason” whatsoever’ (PP 178).

Lacoste’s own thought has been influenced by that of Kierkegaard. Confronted by the “chatter” of Danish daily life in a bourgeois-philistine age where ‘[o]nly the person who can remain essentially silent can speak essentially, can act essentially’⁶⁶⁸ – Kierkegaard proposed the foundation of what has been described as a ‘Trappist-like aesthetic order to shut up the chatter of the day’.⁶⁶⁹ Understood thus, in the hollow drama of a ‘public’ sphere created by the press⁶⁷⁰ where the only values are those of commodity and celebrity, human individuality becomes enslaved to the vagaries of fashion and the market. In such a context, where language is a debased currency of bankrupt words, then ‘the appeal to silence is a tactical ploy, to escape the fabrication

⁶⁶⁶ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 212.

⁶⁶⁷ Maurice Blanchot. ‘Studies on language,’ *Faux Pas*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 89.

⁶⁶⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review*, trans. Edward Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 97.

⁶⁶⁹ Steven Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard, Language and the Reality of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 111.

⁶⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, p. 90.

and evasions of language'. In this setting, silence '*signifies* – it alerts us to that in our experience which cannot be assimilated by the system, the order of knowledge.'⁶⁷¹ And yet, this same commentator detects in this attempt by Kierkegaard to go beyond the 'messy ambiguities' of language the same 'unattainable fantasy', a similar 'idealization of silence'⁶⁷² that underscores both the seducer's desire for immediacy and the believer's direct, silent relation to God. Despite the fact that in several of Kierkegaard's texts 'the cultivation of silence is given religious prominence'⁶⁷³, Shakespeare remains suspicious of the desire that words 'transcend their indirectness and learn to obey duty immediately, or meet God face to face' or that the 'wordless unknowing which mystics have evoked as the culmination of the spiritual path might encourage us to tread a linguistic *via negativa*'; for him, 'silence occurs as a motif in those of Kierkegaard's texts which either betray an unwelcome similarity to that of the seducer or place silence in a self-consciously ironic context.'⁶⁷⁴ Good student of Derrida that he is, Shakespeare holds that religious language remains open to 'this or that interpretation, and whilst the 'silent, direct encounter' might seem to satisfy humanity's spiritual quest, Shakespeare maintains that the 'art of cultivating silence' is as open to interpretation as its linguistic counterpart.

This openness reveals that listening is nothing less than the primal act of hospitality and the occasion of "the infinite conversation". Jean-Louis Chrétien describes it as 'that which we can give, body and soul, both in the street and at the side of the road, when we would otherwise offer neither roof, nor fire, nor cover.' It can be given at any time and anywhere and provides the ethical condition 'of all other hospitalities, since bitter is the bread that one eats without having shared conversation,

⁶⁷¹ Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard*, p. 111.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.* p. 113.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 110.

⁶⁷⁴ Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard*, p. 110.

hard and heavy with insomnia are beds where one may lay without our fatigue being welcomed and respected.⁶⁷⁵ As we shall suggest, this ethical aspect is crucial.

6.4 Silent knowledge

Dauenhauer's phenomenology of silence suggests that 'to accomplish anything...is to be involved with the world just as it is, with all of its residues from previous human performances. This involvement with the world is initiated in perception and is revealed, through the performance of silence, as an involvement in an interplay rather than as absorption into an identity.'⁶⁷⁶ This pre-eminence of the indeterminate is expressed most clearly in the performance of silence, both to its author and their audience. Silence and the world, in their 'primordial union, jointly constitute the unsurpassable foundation for specific human performances and their objects...where man as the interrogator who primordially listens to the world brings the things of the world to presence.'⁶⁷⁷ The world is both present and absent, neither completely present nor completely absent.

Lacoste's analysis is rooted in a similar understanding of the pre-discursive donation of the world to the self, prior to any well formed language: in the silence of the perceptive life, an order is established and deployed, an order whose richness continues to manifest itself, that of the world and of the presence of subjectivity in the world. The Husserlian examination of that silent life, suggests Lacoste, has inspired much of the best contemporary philosophical work. Husserl's later philosophy, following the *Logical Investigations*, may even be described as a theory of deferred or "bracketed" speech while the pages devoted to topics such as "passive syntheses", "active syntheses", and "ante-predicative patencies" 'amply demonstrate that things,

⁶⁷⁵ Chrétien adds a religious coda, 'And the ultimate hospitality, that of the Lord, will it not fall, dizzily, into the luminous listening of the Word, listening in order to speak, speaking in order to listen? Listening is pregnant with eternity.' Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Christus* 176 (October 1997).

⁶⁷⁶ Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p. 184.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 185.

which are given to consciousness as phenomena, both constitute and are formed within the sphere of the silent life of our consciousness' (PP 117). Words themselves are certainly phenomena, and things are, of course, certainly given to us through the mediation of words. But in the Husserlian descriptions nearly all conscious life is organized in the margin of those words that – to the extent that Husserl's research on intersubjectivity devotes only marginal attention to the fact of interlocution (and thereby the origins of Lacoste's critique of Levinas). So what, wonders Lacoste, is happening, where speech does not intervene, and which dispenses with its services? This complex fact he suggests can be grouped under a general title, that of a "pre-discursive gift" of the world to the self (PP 117).

For Lacoste though the demands of phenomenological method require that one take a step behind logic and the apophatic in order to ground them both in a cognitive silent life: the familiar and affective life of things and the world. It is here that philosophy has its own 'silent moment' (PP 118) – compassion is an extension of our co-affectivity; the more Husserl pursued the descriptions later published as *Experience and Judgement* the more that the sphere of the pre-predicative appears to him as anticipating – even in detail – the work of *logos*, or predicative language. The affective life has the power to reveal clearly and distinctly the reality of the world: anxiety reveals the non-being which perpetual threatens being, the death that forever threatens life. And in later Heideggerian texts, as we have seen, it is another affect, boredom, provides a revelation of the world. But there are also ambiguous events; Scheler noted the distinction between *Gefühl* and *fühlen von etwas*, between the empty feeling of an object and intentional feeling (PP 121).

Lacoste notes that a recurrent Kantian temptation in Husserl (which eventually triumphed in *Ideas II*) did lead him to favour spontaneity and the power of

constitution (PP 119). Elsewhere, in the phenomenology of passivity as well as in the phenomenology of constitution, ‘speech is nonetheless required to speak about an order of the world or an order of things whose essentials have already been guaranteed in silence’; this order is destined merely to be named and to be described. Although predicates and relations are named and defined, an experience of what these words *mean* has already been constructed – without speaking – in the experience of the consciousness which perceives and constitutes them (PP 119).

For his fellow phenomenologist Jean-Louis Chrétien silence is laden with meaning; the only meaningful word is born of silence. Speech necessarily takes risks ‘because it is always the *unheard-of* that it wants to say, when it really wants to say something. The silence within events is what we want to bring into speech. In this way, the voice blazes for itself a trail that was not marked out in advance, a trail that it can in no way follow. It can be strong only in its weakness. Its sole authority lies in being venturesome, and so its trembling must always bear the hallmark of the silence from which it emerges: sometimes it is a toneless voice that alone can express the unheard-of.’⁶⁷⁸

6.5 Theological aspects of silence

6.5.1 Religious Silence

Silence has enjoyed a long and distinguished religious history. ‘[L]anguage, observes Blanchot, is ‘devoted to a ‘frozen analysis’ but can be suddenly ‘tempted by song’⁶⁷⁹ a ‘frozen analysis’ can be suddenly ‘tempted by song’ in a manner

⁶⁷⁸ ‘The distress inherent to airport novels and hit songs lies precisely in the fact that, by providing simple-hearted people with formulae of pure convention and worn-out, devalued expressions with which to express their joys and their pains, they deprive them of access to speech, they forbid its stammerings, and they thus deprive men of their own existence. There is something really vampiric about this. An arrogant vulgarity flourishes at the expense of all who listen to it. Then there is nothing left between the nakedness of the unsayable and the off-the-peg formulae that are all ready to wear, in which nobody speaks and nothing is said’ (AS 13).

⁶⁷⁹ Maurice Blanchot, ‘Studies on language’, p. 213.

reminiscent of the ‘Silent music, Sounding solitude, The supper that refreshes, and deepens love’⁶⁸⁰ which is found in the spirituality of John of the Cross. For his part, John Cassian sought to explain:

that fiery and [...] wordless prayer which is known and experienced by very few. This transcends all human understanding and is distinguished not . . . by a sound of the voice or a movement of the tongue or a pronunciation of words. Rather, the mind is aware of it when it is illuminated by an infusion of heavenly light from it, and not by narrow human words, and once the understanding has been suspended it gushes forth as from a most abundant fountain and speaks ineffably to God, producing more in that very brief moment than the self-conscious mind is able to articulate easily or to reflect upon.⁶⁸¹

According to Mortley (to whom Lacoste refers – PP 136), Philo sees verbal expression ‘not only as a means of externalising the unspoken deliberations of the mind, but also as having the power to turn back to the mind, influencing its processes’. In fact, Philo has ‘a great deal to say on the uses and functions of language’ much of which is ‘quite positive’. Mortley discovers in Philo ‘little trace of the failure of confidence in language which is characteristic of the writers of late antiquity’⁶⁸². He notes that:

Speech, like the bird, is swift in its movements. It is quickly broadcast into the environment. For speech is naturally light and winged, moving swifter than an arrow, and shooting in every direction. Once spoken the word cannot return,

⁶⁸⁰ Saint John of the Cross, *John of the Cross: Selected Writings*, ed. Kieran Kavanaugh, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 245. Cf. Nelson Pike, *Mystic Union: An Essay in the Phenomenology of Mysticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 57.

⁶⁸¹ John Cassian, *John Cassian: The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey OP, The Works of the Fathers in Translation, 57 [New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1997], Ninth Conference, c. 25, 345–46).

⁶⁸² Raoul Mortley, *From Word to Silence: Volume 1 – The Rise and Fall of Logos* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1986), p. 40.

but when carried outwards courses away at high speed, strikes the ears and passing through the whole hearing process immediately issues in sound. But speech is twofold, true and false.⁶⁸³

Nonetheless, silence never enjoys a completely positive status.

For Kierkegaard the task was not merely to polemicize *contra* modernity but how to live and to communicate faith in, with and under the conditions of modernity⁶⁸⁴ (to which one could now add the conditions of Western postmodern and phonocentric culture). Postmodernity is often characterised by Derridean notions of “unsaying” and by a revival of interest in apophatic spirituality (Marion has writing extensively on the place of Pseudo-Denys in the articulation of post-metaphysical theology); as Dauenhauer notes: ‘The unsaid is the inexhaustible source of Saying and is a permanent determinate of it. Whereas man can bring Saying to human word, the unsaid can only be acknowledged in silence. The unsaid is at both the origin and the termination of any Saying. The silence in which the unsaid is acknowledged is at both the origin and the termination of any human words which bring Saying to speech. The Saying and its source to which man responds is not sheerly indeterminate.’⁶⁸⁵

Such apophatic spirituality is itself characterised by the “unsaying” (*apophasis*) of language for God, specifically a mode of discourse in which God is approached using a dialectical structure of affirmation and negation, with a particular temporal emphasis on the negative *moment*. There are echoes here – albeit discrete ones – of the notion of non-experience elaborated by Balthasar,⁶⁸⁶ where this moment represents the stripping away by the celebrant or worshipper of those attitudes, mental

⁶⁸³ *On Change of Names*, 248 cited in Mortley p. 40.

⁶⁸⁴ This is the essence of George Pattison’s criticism of Ronald L. Hall’s *Word and Spirit: A Kierkegaardian Critique of the Modern Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) in his review for *Literature and Theology* 8:3 (1994), p. 332-3.

⁶⁸⁵ Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p. 187.

⁶⁸⁶ See his influential essay ‘Experience God?’ in *New Elucidations* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986): pp. 20-45.

images and ideas which might inhibit their active pursuit of a relationship with God. In this regard it represents a path of training (*ascesis*) intended to make room for God by bracketing out the world in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the classical Husserlian phenomenological reduction. In particular, this reduction is one of silence, in which the pilgrim learns to keep silence. In this religious register, keeping or being silent offers an opportunity for the recollection of man's status as *coram deo*: 'the state of the person's being with the Other that is closer to him than he is to himself.'⁶⁸⁷ The experience of originary and terminal silence reveals the familiar demonic element in silence, which Picard sought to exorcise through faith. Dauenhauer remarks that 'Picard's insight here is that the experience of silence is such that man can, by a leap, aim at resolving the experienced polyvalence of silence by deciding to take one of its dimensions as unequivocally primary.'⁶⁸⁸ In short, it is a spiritual strategy, an open concept adopted in this world to describe another and to permit man to transgress the dialectic of world and earth, escaping the logic of inherence (EA 9-11) through liturgical silence.

Lacoste observed that Levinas' phenomenology overlooked the interruption of the Other into my field of consciousness. Theologian Rachel Muers describes silence as 'the interruption of the everyday and the delimitation of an alternative space – a characteristic of the liturgy as a whole – may be said to be "performed," and not only represented, most fully in the keeping of silence.'⁶⁸⁹ Muers, in dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer indicates that an interlocutor with God should in some way take an apophatic stance and, along with this, accept liability to the openness of a wordless, undetermined (at least from the human side) relationship. She writes: '[P]ractices of

⁶⁸⁷ Brownsberger, 'Silence,' p. 587.

⁶⁸⁸ Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p. 188.

⁶⁸⁹ Rachel Muers, *Keeping God's Silence: Towards a Theological Ethics of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 147.

silence in worship call further into question the idea that the ‘ultimate,’ God’s ‘givenness,’ and its realization in the world, can be described best or only in terms of a *word* spoken—and raise the question of whether both the being-in-relation of God and the being-in-relation of human persons may exceed what can be spoken or signified’.⁶⁹⁰

6.5.2 Ethics and the silencing of theology

Levinas sought, in place of the lost transcendence of Western philosophy, to remind us of ‘the impossibility of indifference...before the misfortunes and faults of a neighbour’.⁶⁹¹ In contrast to this Lacoste offers us the telling example of theology “being silenced”: that of its being silenced in the face of the suffering of others (PP 169). In these remarks on theodicy, Lacoste makes clear that we are not dealing here with a problem capable of one day receiving its solution, but something rather more like a mystery or a scandal: ‘a scandal because every faith can collapse in the face of the experience of evil, a mystery because no response is heard which does not include some reference to “the words from the cross”’. And this is truly where the most responsible theology is silent’ (PP 171).

To sympathise, then, is also to suffer-with, and our compassion demands that we do not discuss the suffering of others without also feeling it as our own. The major religious traditions have sought in personal knowledge (the knowledge that human beings acquire of themselves and of each other through networks of relationship) the least inappropriate analogy or metaphor for the character of the relations between

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 151

⁶⁹¹ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘God and Philosophy,’ in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996): pp. 129-148; p. 142.

human beings and God (and hence the centrality, in what we do say about God, of motifs such as “gift” and “utterance”).⁶⁹²

The experience of compassion forces us to admit that the relation of one man to another is beyond the limits of mere “co-being” or Heideggerian⁶⁹³ “care” [*Mitdasein Fürsorge*], although in pondering the question of how God might appear Lacoste refers to Heidegger’s concept of *Befindlichkeit* (BT 178; 492 n.) and how the affective life – notably love – possesses cognitive content. In an ‘all-important passage of *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes affection, *Befindlichkeit*, as endowed with cognitive abilities’ (TP 15); Heidegger then praises Scheler for having rediscovered these abilities, following impulses from Augustine and Pascal. And there, notes Lacoste, Heidegger quotes them both: firstly Augustine (*non intratur in veritatem nisi per caritatem*: ‘one does not reach truth except through love’), then Pascal, who develops Augustine’s maxim: ‘in the case we are speaking of human things, it is said to be necessary to know them before we can love... But the saints, on the contrary, when they speak of divine things, say we must love them before we know them, and that we enter into truth only through charity’ (TP 15).⁶⁹⁴

And to feel it as our own ‘is to learn that he who suffers is, above all, waiting for us to hold their hand, not because we are not able to speak intelligently, but because with him we have exceeded the limits expressible by means of argumentation’ (PP 171-2). There is, as we note later, a time to speak and a time to be

⁶⁹² Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence*, p. 86.

⁶⁹³ Heidegger notably ‘deals only with the discourse and silence of creative men.’ Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p. 186; as Lacoste observes, ‘Heidegger’s silences are not, however, meaningless’ (PD 194).

⁶⁹⁴ ‘We can prove *ab absurdo* the rightness of the argument. Could God appear to us and not be loved? Can we figure an experience of a non-lovable God? Otto’s *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, admittedly, is no lovable object. The primal experience in Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith* (that is, the feeling of absolute dependence) makes no room for love.’ Lacoste continues, ‘And I am ready to admit that in such experiences, if we stick to interpreting them from a theological point of view, God hides himself more than he discloses himself. What I have just said, nonetheless, was no slip of the tongue, and I intend to suggest that God can appear, paradoxically, as a hidden God – or more precisely, that it belongs to God’s disclosure that his hiddenness is ever greater’ (PD 48-49).

quiet.⁶⁹⁵ It is at this point that the “liturgical gesture”⁶⁹⁶ transcends the capacities of speech, reminding us once again that ‘[k]eeping silent does not mean the same as being absent’ (PP 171).

This compassionate silence serves as a reminder that theology is only able to speak of God by stating that he is a God to whom man can talk, a reminder that ‘it is a theologically fruitful experience to be quiet in order to pray and to sympathise’ (PP 173). A ‘regulative idea’, the existence of ‘a caring community in which the sick are visited and comforted’ offers us an ecclesiological response to the “problem” of evil; one in which everyone shares the same Paschal interpretation of suffering, where ‘common discipline ensures that the other is always treated as a brother’ (PP 180).

Lacoste’s phenomenological analysis therefore distinguishes Heideggerian from Christian forms of liturgy and follows Balthasar’s refusal to separate “love” and “being” (in the way that perhaps Marion does) amid genuine concern about an idolatrous relationship; mankind is instead in search of *recognition*, particularly the recognition of the fact that only love is to be perceived. To sympathize then is also to “pray-with” – the two cannot be differentiated for Lacoste. To someone who is suffering, theology cannot say “why” he is suffering, or what “meaning” his suffering has other than that the theologian should exhibit the ‘elementary tact or good sense to turn the gaze of the sufferer toward him in whom God has suffered’ (PP 172). Here, then, compassion quickly leads to ‘talk of a compassionate God, [and] to preserve the language of the cross’ (PP 171). Lacoste here hints at what has also been recognised as one of the principle concerns of Michel de Certeau: if the attempt to speak about God ‘is neither analogical nor heterological but *alogical*... what then of Jesus, who is,

⁶⁹⁵ ‘Theology is “authentic” when talking about time and the unforeseen’ (PP 180).

⁶⁹⁶ ‘To venerate an icon is to make a theological affirmation. A genuflection before a tabernacle is another, just like the refusal to bend your knees in the same circumstances. Gestures, words, songs, silence, structure time’ (PP 96).

in classical Christian confession, the logos of God?’⁶⁹⁷ Although Certeau certainly believed that a relationship to Jesus provided the ‘single criterion for Christianity, Jesus was for him an *anti*-logos or, perhaps better, a “crucified” logos.’⁶⁹⁸ As Nicholas Lash points out, Gethsemane provides the theological paradigm: ‘Jesus speaks and, when he has spoken, there is silence. There is no suggestion, in the structure of the narrative, that he expected a reply.’⁶⁹⁹ Certeau’s presentation of Jesus as a particular, historically situated person – ‘one of the “stubborn details” to which we cling’⁷⁰⁰ in ‘our desire to be faithful’ which both prevents – and protects – us from speaking a universal onto-theological discourse; the Christian practice of silence ‘must be rooted in some respect in the life of Christ himself if it is to be meaningful or even in some way normative’⁷⁰¹ and one here need only recall Christ’s silence before Pilate, Herod and the High Priest (recorded in Matthew 26:62-63, 27:12, 14; Mark 14:60-61, 15:5; John 19:9). Since the Gospel itself is transmitted in four canonical texts whose harmonization is impossible this has ecclesiological implications; Matthew 12:36 warns that we shall be held to account “for every careless word” [*πάν ῥήμα ἀργόν*].

Muers revisits Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s thought in order to suggest that even Christ himself experiences the temptation to distort and ignore that which exceeds and counters a purely human account of things: ‘Christ as the “weak” Word is exposed, not only to the possibility of mishearing, but to the possibility of being silenced by the word that claims universal validity – and condemns that “whereof it cannot speak” to

⁶⁹⁷ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, ‘The Otherness of God,’ in Ian Buchanan, ed., ‘Michel de Certeau – in the Plural’ *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100:2 (2001), pp. 349-364; p. 358.

⁶⁹⁸ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, ‘The Otherness of God,’ p. 358. Cf. Michel de Certeau, *La faiblesse de croire*, Luce Giard, ed., (Paris, 1987), p. 209 and Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, ‘The Wounds of Christ,’ *Journal of Literature and Theology* 5 (1991), pp. 83-100.

⁶⁹⁹ Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence*, p. 75.

⁷⁰⁰ Bauerschmidt, ‘The Otherness of God,’ p. 358.

⁷⁰¹ Brownsberger, ‘Silence,’ p. 595.

be passed over in silence. The stark alternatives put forward in the Christology introduction – “Either man must die or he kills Jesus” – draw attention to the violence of the human *logos* that reduces the person – here the person of Christ – a mute object of enquiry.⁷⁰² As we noted, the combination of plurality and silence in the Gospels, for Lacoste, testifies to ‘a law of fragmentation’ that resists the totalising claims of metanarrative and postmodern biblical criticism. Indeed, Jean-Louis Chrétien refers to Christ’s silence in his infancy: ‘The *Verbum infans* is Speech that does not speak, that cannot speak, Speech deprived of speech. In coming to reveal himself to us, the Word began by becoming silent’ (HtH 44). This is the crucial Christological difference between “being for others” and “being with others”⁷⁰³.

Nonetheless, like any historical figure Jesus is silenced by death – even his tomb is empty, silent. But it is in this disappearance – his absence, rather than his presence – that Jesus becomes a sign of God *semper maior*: the absence of the risen Jesus, at least for Certeau, is conceived as a letting be, a creative activity on the part of a God *plus grand* which ‘gives witness to the Father and gives way to the Christian community’⁷⁰⁴ in whose interstices God is to be found, even as it is subjected to the clash of interpretations that potentially shatters⁷⁰⁵ the ecclesial and Eucharistic body; Lacoste himself refers to the persistence of “intra-ecclesiological sin” in which theology is “the work of sinners”, whose first sin is to treat God as an object, to speak of him as the being that is more important than anything else’ (PD 206). What is at stake for Certeau, suggests Bauerschmidt, is our ability ‘to hear these organizing silences...to listen to the silence of the unnameable...[to] master the...marginalized

⁷⁰² Muers, *Keeping God’s Silence*, p. 117.

⁷⁰³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*: III/2 ‘The Doctrine of Creation’, eds. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), §45.

⁷⁰⁴ Bauerschmidt, ‘The Otherness of God,’ p. 358.

⁷⁰⁵ Bauerschmidt refers us to de Certeau’s book, *Le christianisme éclaté* (Paris, 1974).

vocabularies',⁷⁰⁶ because 'when we attempt to speak of God in a world of equivocity, the most we can say is that God is non aliud'.⁷⁰⁷ Marginalised, 'confined to the white eschatology of death, God falls silent, and we no longer lift our voices in prayer. We simply speak to others, hoping they will hear the silence that structures our speech'.⁷⁰⁸

Lacoste is not as melancholic as Certeau, although, like Certeau he understands the transformative value of turning nihilism into tragedy; he undertakes what one might term, after Husserl, a 'silent reduction' to match his earlier 'liturgical reduction',⁷⁰⁹:

Being silenced, or at any rate having its arguments reduced to silence, theology finds itself reduced to an essential; and this essential is that it is *theologia viatorum*, the theology of men in the world and not the theology of angels and the blessed; that it is not just a province of knowledge but a way of existing and of existing in the plural. (PP 172)

In saying that 'the theologian is capable of performing other functions than that of an interpreter of rationality is to say that theology is a form of existence before it is an intellectual work, and that compassionate silence is an integral part of theological experience. Keeping silent certainly concedes that argument no longer holds, but this is not to abdicate every theological project: it is merely to demonstrate that the theological experience would be incomplete if one reduced it solely to a work of conceptual construction' (PP 172). In forcing theology to be quiet, the task accomplished by suffering is in forcing it also to remember that theological experience is not a solitary one but one lived in the element of an original plurality. This plural existence is one that recognises the polysemy of both silence and the

⁷⁰⁶ Bauerschmidt, 'The Otherness of God,' p. 360.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid. pp. 360-361.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 361.

⁷⁰⁹ See Kevin Hart's essay, 'The Liturgical Reduction'.

scriptural witness. Theology is primarily an act of speaking; that is why it can also be an act of silence (PP 173) and Lacoste here interweaves the vertical and horizontal aspects of transcendence. As Chrétien notes, the elusive transcendence of God is manifested in our silence, in other words, ‘in being said by itself in our listening, it is precisely that which we endlessly strive to say, although that it can not be said as a whole’ (SA 99).

It is perhaps worth revisiting Kierkegaard at this point, and asking, in light of this, whether Shakespeare’s criticisms still hold. ‘All misapprehension,’ writes Kierkegaard, ‘stems from speech, more specifically from a comparison that is implicit in talking, especially in conversation.’⁷¹⁰ If one seeks to avoid misunderstanding [*misforstaaelse*] then one must either avoid language or create silence [*taushed*] in language by refusing to compare oneself to another, thereby avoiding its distractions. Kierkegaard’s discourse refers to the friends of Job: ‘But silence respects the worry and respects the worried one as Job’s friends did, who out of respect sat silent with the sufferer and held him in respect’⁷¹¹; indeed, sat there in silence, ‘their presence prompted Job to compare himself to himself’; this is quite different from when the Lord eventually answered Job ‘out of the whirlwind’ (Job 38:1). Elsewhere, of course, the polysemic scriptural witness records with almost perverse glee Job’s friends’ inability to keep silent, how the possessive selves of which Blanchot warned once again wished to extend themselves, reinforcing Shakespeare’s sceptical and Derridean view of phonocentrism – although, as Lacoste observes, despite accusations of phonocentrism, theology is practiced more through speaking than writing. A theologian is someone who always speaks in a context, without necessarily having the ambition to speak beyond that context, without necessarily having the ambition that

⁷¹⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, ‘To Be Contented with Being a Human Being’ (UDVS 160-61).

⁷¹¹ Ibid. p. 161.

their words survive those (PP 173). But as regards what one might term “the natural silence of compassion” explored by Lacoste, Jolita Pons comments further that ‘if silence is one of the conditions to avoid the misunderstanding of comparison, then the lily and the bird are indeed perfect examples since there is no language in the image... Indeed, in *The Lily in the Field and the Bird under the Sky* we are told that the first thing we can learn is silence, and ‘namely because a human being can speak, it is an art to keep silent’⁷¹²,⁷¹³ Here then the non-human world offers, for Kierkegaard at least, a necessary ethical and ecological lesson in silence, since learning to be silent is an aspect of our being-in-the world lost amid an economy of noise⁷¹⁴, one which takes on the liturgical character of interruption.⁷¹⁵

6.5.3 Affectivity and silence

Lacoste, as he makes clear has in his later work ‘attempted to examine the presence of affection at the heart of every liturgical situation’ (INT 4). Phenomenology recognised early on that affection is crucial to the discernment of truth: Husserl’s understanding of the ‘adequacy’ of the experience of an intentional object included the possibility that one also *felt* that object. The idea that self-consciousness and transcendence were inextricably linked became a central concept in the philosophy of religion, particularly Schleiermacher’s definition of religion as a ‘taste for the infinite’ or a ‘feeling of ultimate dependence’ [*Gefühl schlechthinniger Abhängigkeit*]. This feeling represented the transcendent ground of the dependent self-

⁷¹² Søren Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 10.

⁷¹³ Jolita Pons, ‘On Imitating the Inimitable: Example, Comparison, and Prototype,’ in Robert L. Perkins, ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Volume 15 - Uplifting Discourses in Various Spirits* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005): pp. 173-197; p. 177.

⁷¹⁴ ‘[T]he noise of radio destroys man. Man who should confront objects concretely is deprived of the power of present concrete experience. This is what makes the man who lives in this world of radio so bad-tempered, so ill at ease: everything is thrown at him by the radio, but nothing is really there at all. Everything slips away from him.’ Max Picard, *The World of Silence*, trans. Stanley Godman (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), p. 199. Cf. p. 62: ‘The man whose nature is still possessed by silence moves out from the silence into the outside world. The silence is central in the man’.

⁷¹⁵ See Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History* (London: Continuum, 2009).

consciousness in self-consciousness, through which humanity comprehends the transcendent ground of its self and which Schleiermacher identified with God. This feeling is all too often mistaken for transcendence (PP 97); our liturgical experience remains pre-eschatological and ‘promises us no ecstasy’ (EA 26). Lacoste’s conception of liturgy arises from his dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy of religion: in his own words to articulate ‘a non-’religious’ (i.e., anti-Schleiermacherian and anti-Jamesian) logic of ‘liturgy’ (not worship!) – that is, of what man does *coram Deo*...as subverting the Heideggerian logic of being-in-the-world’ (CP 657). Paul Tillich himself suggested that Schleiermacher ‘injured the understanding of religion’ when he divorced ‘feeling’ (as the religious function) from will and intellect, thereby ‘excluding religion from the totality of personal existence and delivering it to emotional subjectivity’.⁷¹⁶ Theology ‘is never founded on the limited basis of our experience of God’ (AI 63). While we can feel God’s presence – or, at least, what we construe as such – ‘we can just as much feel the presence of the “divine” of which Heidegger speaks...God must not be assimilated too quickly to the sacred or to the numinous’ (AI 63). Attempting to escape the often seemingly interminable faith-reason dichotomy Lacoste explores the paradoxical divine phenomenality in terms of ‘love’: God is ‘*connaissable comme aimable*’ which thus raises the possibility of something, perhaps even an understanding or a knowing, ‘in which humanity exceeds its definition of “rational animal”’ (PD 88). Nonetheless, Lacoste does not go to the extremes encountered in Marion’s eroticism.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁶ Paul Tillich, ‘The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion’, in R.C. Kimball, ed., *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959): pp. 10-29; p. 23, 24.

⁷¹⁷ See Christina M. Gschwandtner, ‘Love as a Declaration of War? On the Absolute Character of Love in Jean-Luc Marion’s Phenomenology of Eros’, in Norman Wirzba & Bruce Ellis Benson (eds.), *Transforming Philosophy and Religion: Love’s Wisdom* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp. 185-198.

As we noted earlier Lacoste's phenomenological analysis is rooted in an understanding of the 'pre-discursive gift' of the world to the self, prior to conceptual language. There, in the silence of perceptive life, an order is established: the rich order of the world and of the presence of subjectivity in that world. Words are themselves phenomena and things are given to us through words. But in Husserl nearly all conscious life is organised in their silent margins (as Chrétien notes, the 'silent white of the page is not the page itself, it is rather a passive listening, filled with dawning potential' [AS 41]); Husserl's later philosophy might even be described as a theory of deferred or "bracketed" speech in which 'things, which are given to consciousness as phenomena, both constitute and are formed within the sphere of the silent life of our consciousness' (PP 117). And if one takes seriously the question of the phenomenality of God – that is, "God as love" rather than "God as being" – then within the order of that perceptive life one needs also to take seriously the question of our coaffectivity – that is, our shared perceptive life with others experienced at those margins.

Silence discloses the essence of that perceptive life – the coaffectivity which is ground of our compassion. What Husserl called an act of 'presentification' [*Vergegenwärtigung*] described an intentional act whose object, though intuitively given, is not immediately present. Empathy is thus an 'appresentation' of the lived experience of another person: although only dimly perceived, the other person's body gives me access to their lived experience while also making me realize that this lived experience remains inaccessible to me. The praying human community is, Lacoste contends, a pacified – or at least pacifiable – community; those who are liturgically occupied with God 'must at least have it as their goal' while the identity of others is expressed in this imaginable affective communion. However, the 'God to whom we pray is not necessarily a God felt in the heart'. Similarly, the other person with whom

I pray 'is there with me more than the sensibility can suffer him' (LC 100). Empathy is thus, phenomenologically, a presentification of what is absent as invisible; theologically indicative of the non-phenomenal divine love. When we pray in communion, 'we accept with an open heart the presence of all those with whom we pray, visible and invisible, near and far, known and unknown, nameable and anonymous'. Thus 'to pray together is to have something to say and do together, to participate together in a drama' (LC 100); a common participation that is provisional and eschatological, sought in liturgical participation rather than simply discovered within our 'shared sensibility' or any 'affective communion'. Although located within the pre-discursive structures of the world, this communion is something one must strive for as 'pilgrims' (PP 134). Lacoste here pushes beyond the Heideggerian analytic into a realm "beyond being" through a horizontal move into human experience of the world, away from the solitary life of *Dasein*.

In contrast to some "post-Christian philosophers" who might suggest that today the name of God is increasingly connected (and restricted to) caring, moral, and loving interpersonal relationships, Lacoste examines the profound example of theology 'being silenced' in the face of the suffering of others (PP 169). In these remarks on theodicy, Lacoste makes clear that it is both 'a scandal' and 'mystery' where 'no response is heard which does not include some reference to 'the words from the cross'. And this is truly where the most responsible theology is silent' (PP 171).

In the sphere of the silent, co-affective life, an order where passive syntheses combine to form our experience of the world and we may sense the other person's presence, 'sympathy' is thus also '*suffering-with*'. Compassion demands that we do not discuss the suffering of others without also feeling it *ourselves*. The experience of

compassion forces us to admit that human relations transcend the limits of mere ‘co-being’ or Heideggerian ‘care’ [*Mitdasein Fürsorge*]; to feel it as our own ‘is to learn that he who suffers is, above all, waiting for us to hold their hand, not because we are not able to speak intelligently, but because with him we have exceeded the limits expressible by means of argumentation’ (PP 171-2); that ‘there is a time to speak, a time to be quiet and a time to heal’ (PP 180).

6.5.3 *Love and silence*

Concerning the question of the appearing of God, Lacoste draws upon the concept of *Befindlichkeit* and how the affective life – notably love – might possess cognitive content (TP 15-16). But while emotions can ‘act as consciousness’, they can ‘lack identifiable and describable objects’ (AI 63). Compassionate silence – concern for the other person – reminds us that theology is only able to speak of God by stating that he is a (loving) God to whom man can talk, that ‘it is a theologically fruitful experience to be quiet in order to pray and to sympathise’ (PP 173). As we have already noted, Lacoste’s phenomenological analysis distinguishes Heideggerian and Christian forms of liturgy – and thus God from “the sacred” – and refuses to separate ‘love’ and ‘being’, in the way that Marion’s occasionally injudicious reading of *agape* perhaps does:

The first area where nuance was needed was criticism of onto-theology. Is any thought attributing being to God *ipso facto* metaphysic? Marion so said in 1979, and reiterated it in *God Without Being*. More careful texts followed (HQD21)

There is, though, (as noted by O’Regan) genuine concern that ‘any scheme in which the self or community finds the satisfaction of its desire in what bedazzles’ is

idolatrous.⁷¹⁸ On this counter-reading humanity instead searches for *understanding*, particularly recognition of God as lovable and that that love is perceptible (PD 87-110, echoing 1 John 4:19); one might even be correct in saying ‘that I have perceived a divine presence in a manner as convincing as I perceive human presences,’ and thus, recalling our earlier discussion of transgression, as ‘presences that require being known as putting pressure on me from outside myself’ (AI 64).

It is at this point that the ‘liturgical gesture’ transcends the capacities of speech, reminding us once again that ‘[k]eeping silent does not mean the same as being absent’ (PP 171). Thus ‘to sympathize’ is also to ‘pray-with’ – Lacoste does not differentiate. The theologian cannot tell someone ‘why’ they are suffering, or what ‘meaning’ their suffering has, except by exhibiting the ‘elementary tact or good sense to turn the sufferer’s gaze toward him in whom God has suffered’ (PP 172). Here, then, compassion quickly leads to ‘talking about a compassionate God [and] preserving the language of the cross’ (PP 171). In contrast to suggestions of the ethics of (post)modernity being characterised by a shift to merely intersubjective or *horizontal* transcendence, the Christian practice of silence ‘must be rooted in some respect in the life of Christ himself if it is to be meaningful or even in some way normative’.⁷¹⁹ As regards the biblical experience of immanent transcendence, one may specifically refer to Tillich’s claim that the biblical God is unique in combining both elements of transcendence and immanence in the incarnation. Here then the phenomenon of Gethsemane provides a theological paradigm: ‘Jesus speaks and, when he has spoken, there is silence’ with no suggestion ‘that he expected a reply’.⁷²⁰ One may also recall Christ’s silence before Pilate or Jesus’ silence in death – his tomb

⁷¹⁸ O’Regan, ‘Balthasar and the Unwelcoming of Heidegger’, p. 273.

⁷¹⁹ Brownsberger, ‘Silence,’ p. 595.

⁷²⁰ Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence*, p. 75.

is empty, silent. Yet it is in this disappearance – his absence – that Jesus becomes a sign of God *semper maior*.⁷²¹

Lacoste proposes that in being silenced, having its arguments reduced to silence, theology finds itself reduced to its essential *theologia viatorum* (PP 172). Reminding theologians that they are something besides ‘an interpreter of rationality is to say that theology is a form of existence before it is an intellectual work, and that compassionate silence is an integral part of theological experience’. Keeping silent may concede that argument no longer holds, but this does not abrogate every theological project: it merely demonstrates that ‘theological experience would be incomplete if one reduced it solely to a work of conceptual construction’ (PP 172). In urging theology to be quiet, suffering forces it to remember that the theological experience is not solitary but one lived in the element of an original plurality. This plural existence is one that recognises the polysemy of both silence and the scriptural witness, and resists the reduction of ‘God-talk’ to a univocal metaphysical – that is to say ontotheological – language. God – the God of the silent, perceptive life – is the ground of our fundamental coaffectivity not an object of intentional consciousness.

Conclusion

The feminist philosopher Michèle le Doeuff felt that theology rests upon a prior silencing of philosophy; Lacoste – like Augustine and Kierkegaard – remains unconcerned with any strict distinction between the disciplines where theology is an unsystematic, fragmentary and, above all, *ethical* activity, that is in some ways reminiscent of aspects of Derrida’s thought, specifically a type of messianic

⁷²¹ As Lacoste notes, ‘If the teaching on the bread of life is received as hard, then if the man in whom other men have acknowledged the Word (even God’s Word) as human speech from a human flesh, must be reduced to silence and to death by other men, the idea of a cultivated chat, between well-bred men, and where everyone is supposed to arouse interest in its own words and traditions, by showing himself the same interest which other words and traditions have awakened in him, this idea, to be that of the hour, is nevertheless a desperate idea whose theological reception, here and there, has all the same looked a little comical’ (PP 95-96).

transcendence that remains always to come. While the issue of suffering can reduce theology to silence this does not mean that it reduces it to nothingness: in being silenced theology finds itself reduced to its essentials as *theologia viatorum*, as a way of life rather than simply a province of transcendent knowledge. And for Lacoste philosophy also has its own '*moment silencieux*' in which its theorizing collapses and *com*-passion is perhaps the only response.

At the interstices between phenomenology and theology Lacoste has sought to reveal the ground and limit of human consciousness before an irreducible transcendence. That ground is the pre-discursive affective gift of the world, the common '*vie spirituelle*' shared by philosopher and mystic alike (PP 218-9). Irreducible to human *logos*, God differs from things (even perhaps to the point of non-alterity). However, that difference does not introduce a caesura in the field of knowledge but makes us attentive to the *multiplicity* of modes of appearance; phenomenality⁷²² is not 'uniform' (AI 49). As Lacoste observes, some phenomena – such as God, or the other person – are irreducible to language: '[t]he right description,' in the case of God as well as that of the intersubjective "encounter," requires 'the transcendent reality of what it describes'. Neither the existence of the other nor the existence of God can be put aside: 'not due to a personal decision or by *petitio principii*, but because to call these existences phenomenologically indispensable to description is merely the right response to their proper mode of phenomenality' (AI 66). Here the two phenomenalitys – that of God and of the other person – are related.

⁷²² Lacoste asks that we 'recognise that in the story of humanity and its experiences – either religious or philosophical – we meet plenty of non-divine gods. A God who is merely wholly other would not be a divine god. A God whose transcendence precludes any condescension is, we repeat, not a divine god. And despite the word's dubious past, a god who is merely speech, *logos*, would then lack a silence, *sigè*, which is itself equally divine. As God, God is perpetually critical of all concepts, and all experiences that purport to offer an account of him or, more modestly, to take his right name' (QD 233).

Keeping silent, therefore, is an immanent activity; being-in-the-world and yet listening-in-community represents a *kenotic* activity. Once the concept of transcendence is differentiated, then its differences and overlaps can be perceived more easily. Amidst competing⁷²³ discourses about transcendence silence is something that cuts across them. Reflecting upon silence helps to clarify their relationship and, in the face of kerygmatic haste, teaches us theological patience (for the sake of the ethical demand – the urgency of both speech and silence is ‘bound to the urgency of doing’ [PP 176]). As Lacoste’s ‘silent reduction’ makes clear, conceptual rigor is costly and illusory. The ‘accuracy’ of our theological concepts is easily upset by the polysemy and polymorphism of the scriptural text, and the breadth of action (PP 177). Lacoste’s counter-proposal of a theology prepared to silence its arguments for the sake of compassion offers a theology capable of speaking other than through a succession of concepts. This ‘asystematic theology of the fragment’ (PP 189) offers a *fragmentary* understanding, but an *understanding* nonetheless. Theology which agrees to be silenced, to be only a marginal note to the scriptural text, is one which understands its own *logos*, which is a coherent but fragmentary understanding of God in history. Despite the ambitious claims of Hegel regarding *immanent* transcendence, God is not made manifest to us through some banal ontotheological metaphysics of presence. Lacoste’s rigorous eschatology reinforces this point – the

⁷²³ ‘...in principle, the phenomenon of silence and its appropriate ontological interpretation do not preclude as foolish any claims concerning origin, culmination, and definitive sense of the interplay between man and world. But neither do silence and its interpretation provide a conclusive basis for adjudicating between competing claims of this sort. Man can make claims then, concerning which the evidence furnished by the phenomenon of silence and an appropriate ontological interpretation of silence permits one to say only that such claims are intelligible and not devoid of all plausibility.’ Dauenhauer, *Silence*, p. 189. As Lacoste notes, ‘And within the few concepts that we think our relationships of native familiarity with things (including those remarkable things, words, that we use to name other things), “from substantive belief” in Husserl, “principle of credulity” in Reid and more recently in Plantinga, “openness to the world” in Heidegger and elsewhere, etc., this familiarity is always familiarity with the true, in a world that we can always welcome silence, but is also still a “spoken” world, or at least “speakable”. Words, things, the relationship from one to the other is something we can problematize in several ways’ (PP 89).

278once and for all character of the Christ-event, recorded in history and recounted in a plurality of narratives, defies the hypocritical chatter of the theologian; as a contextual discipline theology is an unsystematic, fragmentary and, above all, *ethical* activity rooted in our transcendent experience of love.

It argues that keeping silent is an immanent activity conducted in the ‘mundane reality’ of this world; an activity of *kenosis*. Silence indicates the concealment of self and the individual’s withdrawal from society and yet, in a religious or liturgical setting, one often – paradoxically – keeps silence in company, an act which aims to reinforce human solidarity. Contemplation is, in economic terms, a “waste of time” that confounds models of work and industry and represents the interruption of the everyday and the delimitation of an alternative (ethical) space and time, one given over to contemplation of oneself and one another.

For Blanchot silence provided “the space of literature”: language risked destroying the singularity of being, while preserving its being in general, which for Hegel revealed the “divine nature” of and the Cartesian contented understanding that all thought is language. And yet ‘silence exists; “it is not death and it is not speech”...something that is neither indifference nor discourse’, a ‘frozen analysis’ that can be suddenly ‘tempted by song’ reminiscent of the silent music and the supper that refreshes and deepens love which is found in Christian spirituality. Silence has as many different possibilities as speech; through his pseudonyms Kierkegaard explored particular forms of silence. Silence is the cessation of speech, not for the lack of anything to say, but deliberately and intentionally. Such muteness is not simply the negation of speech; it can be an occasion for a listening that respects the integrity (finitude) of matter, the individual, and the Other. Silence is rich and varied – and perhaps “being silent” speaks most of all about transcendence. Silence is also then an

act of *ascesis*, a stripping away of attitudes, mental images and ideas that cuts across notions of radical immanence and transcendence, of a purely textual reality and into non-linguistic forms of culture.

In a world of competing discourses about transcendence, silence helps to clarify the relation between them. As Lacoste makes clear, the price of conceptual rigor can be very high: perhaps too high – besides, the “accuracy” of our theological concepts is easily upset by the polysemy and polymorphism of the scriptural text. However, it might be achieved without paying such a price: Lacoste’s example of a theology prepared to put an end to its argument in order to make room for a practice of compassion), a theology that is also capable of speaking other than through a succession of concepts; such a theology is unsystematic. Lacoste therefore proposes ‘an asystematic theology of the fragment’ (PP 189) – a *fragmentary* understanding, but an *understanding* nonetheless (PP 190). A theology which agrees to be silenced; a theology that agrees to be only a marginal note to the scriptural text, this is a theology which understands its own *logos*, which is a coherent but fragmentary understanding of God in history. Despite the ambitious claims of Hegel regarding *immanent* transcendence, God is not made manifest to us. Lacoste’s rigorous eschatology reinforces this point – the once and for all character of the Christ-event, recorded in history and recounted in a plurality of narratives, defies the hypocritical chatter of the theologian, and as a contextual discipline theology is an unsystematic, fragmentary and, above all, *ethical* activity, one which, just as it calls to mind Derrida’s account of *messianic* transcendence, also moves *beyond* its textual slavery.

Silence is not itself transcendence: it is a condition of our temporality, the possibility of our being, and a strategy – as polysemic as the scriptural narrative, and one of the practices of everyday life analysed by Michel de Certeau. And as

Bauerschmidt has pointed out, for Certeau that which appears in the face of our idle questions ‘is *not* the God of ontotheology...precisely because it is not thought within the confines of “being” and thus cannot be thought as “first being” or, likewise, as “first other.”’ For Certeau, ‘God appears...as the blinding, obliterating glory of the white eschatology of death. And yet this glory appears in the white silences that structure “mystic speech” and those that organize the kind of tactical silences that Certeau analyzes so acutely.’⁷²⁴

Keeping silent, therefore, is an immanent activity, one conducted in the ‘mundane reality’ of this world; bound by a logic of inherence – being-in-the-world, listening in community – it is an activity of *kenosis*. Silence indicates the (voluntary) concealment of self and the individual’s withdraw from society and the crowd [*das Mann* in the Heideggerian register] and yet, in a compassionate, religious or liturgical setting, one often – perhaps paradoxically – keeps silence in company (something which is, in the end, not unlike the horizontal shift in transcendence identified in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas) an act which aims to reinforce human solidarity, and where theology is the practice of charity (*caritas*) in the midst of a community.⁷²⁵ Silence is also then an ascetic act, a stripping away of attitudes, mental images and ideas that cuts across notions of radical immanence and transcendence, of a purely textual reality and into non-linguistic forms of culture.

These non-linguistic forms are by their nature intersubjective and here permit a note on *Mitsein* and *Mitwelt*: originally describing theology as ‘the science of God’, Heidegger later described it⁷²⁶ as ‘the science of faith’. Thus understood as “trust”, the affective community of faith become phenomena or tokens of that trust. What, as we

⁷²⁴ Bauerschmidt, ‘The Otherness of God’, p. 360.

⁷²⁵ ‘Practices of responsible silence – such as the silence of a listener – can be signs for others of the silence of God as “more than speakable,” but they must also be understood as themselves open to transformations not anticipated in advance.’ Muers, *Keeping God’s Silence*, p. 215.

⁷²⁶ In the 1927 conference paper ‘Phenomenology and theology’.

noted above, Husserl called an act of ‘presentification’ [*Vergegenwärtigung*] described an intentional act whose object, though intuitively given, is not immediately present and irreducible. The praying human community is, according to Lacoste, one in which the identity of others is expressed in an imaginable affective communion.⁷²⁷ The praying community accepts the presence of those with whom it prays, both visible and invisible, known and unknown, nameable and anonymous as part of its participation in a drama (LC 100); a common participation that is provisional and eschatological, sought in liturgical participation rather than simply discovered within our ‘shared sensibility’ or any ‘affective communion’. Moreover, where, unable to escape the strictures of “being-in-the-world”, the phenomenality of God is represented in the memory and anticipation of the *communio sanctorum* one must, *pace* Kierkegaard, inevitably entertain both the ‘law of fragmentation’ and the ‘theology of rumour’ and the productive part that they might play in theology, especially in Christology.

⁷²⁷ However, as the ‘God to whom we pray is not necessarily a God felt in the heart’ the other person with whom I pray ‘is there with me more than the sensibility can suffer him’ (LC100).

7. Time

Introduction – A brief phenomenology of time

While *Experience and the Absolute* articulated a theology of place its predecessor, *Note sur le temps*, sought, by offering a theology of time, to invert another of the Kantian categories. Whilst possessed of rather an anarchic character – namely, conceived backwards from an eschatological referent (Parousia) that is always to come, and characterised by a phenomenology of anticipation – the act of prayer remains a temporal and ontic activity. Simply put, praying *takes* time; it may, if measured according to the economic criteria of the present nihilistic age be considered “a waste of time”: that is, it represents an activity of surplus outwith the usual daily pattern of work, an activity that points towards a desire and a satisfaction other than the material or economic and thus to a different account of human flourishing. It is though, according to the anarchic logic implicit in Lacoste’s work, nonetheless a worthwhile activity. Marion argues that when Kant asserts that ‘all appearances are in time’⁷²⁸, this depends upon presupposing time as a horizon against which all phenomena must appear – while Marion will contest this presupposition by arguing that saturated phenomena cannot be restricted to any particular horizon, Lacoste states that within a broad understanding of event-uality or event-ness [*événementialité*] ‘it is obvious that nothing appears to us outside of the horizon of time’ (ED 42).

Nonetheless, it was Husserl himself who argued that temporality must be regarded as the formal condition of possibility for the constitution of any objects (Hua. XI: 125, 128). Mankind can perceive temporal objects because consciousness is not caught in the now: we do not merely perceive the “now-phase” but its past and

⁷²⁸ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 300; A 182/B 224.

future phases; indeed, each and every memory posits a past perceptual consciousness illuminated by the “halo” of its temporal surrounding.

Fittingly, since Lacoste compares Husserl’s ‘living present’ and Augustine’s ‘*distentio animi*’ (PD 180; NT 17-18), Husserl himself opens the *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins* with a citation from book XI, chapter 14 of Augustine’s *Confessions*: ‘What then *is* time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to a questioner, I do not know.’⁷²⁹ And as Husserl elaborates, only an analysis of time-consciousness will disclose the truly absolute (Hua. III: 182). Husserl speaks of a phenomenological absolute, and of the analysis of temporality as constituting the bedrock of phenomenology because it is not merely the investigation of the temporal givenness of objects: it is an account of the temporal *self-givenness* of consciousness itself. Husserl performs an *epochē* regarding our naive beliefs regarding the existence and nature of objective time, and instead begins from the type of time we are directly acquainted with: *experienced* or *lived time*.

Thus in order to investigate the role and structure of time-consciousness, Husserl abandons his usual examples of trees and tables in favour of what he calls temporal objects (*Zeitobjekte*). These are objects that have a temporal extension and whose different aspects cannot exist simultaneously but only appear across time – for instance, musical melodies (Hua. X: 23). As with silence, the essential components of this phenomenon are retention (for instance, in listening to a musical piece – one of Lacoste’s favourite examples – the recollection of the previous note) and protention (the anticipation of the succeeding note). But for Husserl retention and protention have to be distinguished from their *recollection* and *expectation*. Retaining and protending musical tones that have just sounded (and are just about to sound) is

⁷²⁹ *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. F. J. Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward, 1951), p. 217.

different from the remembrance of an event, which is an independent intentional act which presupposes that passive work of retention and protention. Protention and retention are dependent moments of an ‘occurrent experience’⁷³⁰: they do not provide us with new intentional objects, but with a consciousness of the temporal horizon of the present object. Retention is an intuition, and recollection is an intuition of something absent, something that has just existed (Hua. X: 41, 118); that is a representing *{vergegenwärtigende}* intentional act directed toward a completed past occurrence (Hua. X: 333). Whereas retention is a *passive* process (which takes place without our active contribution) recollection is an act which we can initiate ourselves.

Lacoste is quite clear as to the *temporal* character of all appearances: in effect, “appearing” must be understood as an event. If ‘one can say that the phenomenon of the world co-appears with every appearance, that the ego co-appears to itself with every appearance — it must be the case, then, that we always deal, in the first place, with something that appears to us now, whose appearance lasts more or less time, and completes itself in a disappearance’ (PA 16). Lacoste asks that we think existence as ‘the deployment of a unique event in which the *existant*, the existing being, comes to itself within the event of its birth and death’ (PA 19). As Lacoste observes, ‘[r]are are the appearances that, between retention and protention, do not engage any future, as brief as that future may be. Consciousness is instinctively protentional’ (PA 25).

Thus conceived our relations of projection and mastery erase themselves before the absolute future, and although we might attempt to exist from an absolute future (Lacoste proposes Heidegger’s ‘anticipatory resoluteness’ as one such) this attempt is bound to fail for the following reason: the possible – and thus the future – is taken as higher than the real. Between the present of the decision and the realization

⁷³⁰ Dan Zahavi, *Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 83.

of our highest possibility, what is “not yet” proves to be an excess of experience in relation to nonexperience.

Our point of departure is a ‘link between experience and non-experience, between what happened, the happening, and the non-happening’; only absolute knowledge, suggests Lacoste, ‘if its concept resisted reality, would be an experience that could not be suspected of containing any non-experience’ (PA 19). Human consciousness, for Lacoste, is narrow since it can perceive, remember, or imagine, but cannot do these things simultaneously, so whoever talks of the “‘experience of consciousness’” but ‘refuses to give to these words the sense that Hegel gives them, must therefore say that all experience, the most rudimentary and the most rich, is intrinsically limited’ (PA 19). Human experience is, in fact, impossible ‘unless it possesses limits and obeys them (any other type of consciousness would certainly be an angelic consciousness)’ (PA 20).

Liturgy, however, is a non-experience: for Lacoste the nocturnal register of this non-experience indicates a refusal on the part of humanity to be defined by the usual constraints of time. Vigil indicates a time given over to an activity besides that of either labour or leisure, the Sabbath an occasion of rest; we shall see in the end how prayer is an anarchic activity that upsets such constraints.

7.2 Anticipating the Eschaton

During the Transfiguration, Lacoste tells us, the disciples experienced givenness, but since they did not perceive that the event was an investment of the present by an absolute future the event was reduced to its presence, and this presence became incomprehensible (PA 31). In short, their grasp of eschatology was lacking.

Is it true, as John Panteleimon Manoussakis suggests, that theology in the last century ‘witnessed a shift in emphasis’⁷³¹ in which a different understanding of eschatology emerged, one that recognises in the Parousia not only an event at the end of history but that event which, grounded in the Eucharist, flows through every moment of history from the *ἔσχατα*? For his part Lacoste avers that from the standpoint of theology the resurgence of the eschatological problem (which had been completely overlooked during most of the nineteenth century) began with the publication in 1892 of Johannes Weiss’ book *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (INT 20) and was furthered by the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Jacob Taubes.⁷³² This rediscovery of eschatology has coincided with the theological turn made in phenomenology, resulting in a curious meeting of ‘the theology of things-to-come’ and ‘the philosophy of things-themselves’.⁷³³ But as we have seen Lacoste – like Schelling and Kierkegaard – is not interested in any distinction between the disciplines – modern Western philosophy must tackle nihilism and eschatology.⁷³⁴ Manoussakis, for his part, believes that the insights afforded by the phenomenologists implicated in the “theological turn” ‘can be a very helpful instrument in the hands of eucharistic eschatology in its effort to rescue eschatology from the twin risks of either immanentizing it or relegating it to an end-of-times utopia.’⁷³⁵

Lacoste’s own thought is characterised by his rigorous eschatological instincts, and, as we might expect he has written widely on the subject since the publication of *Note sur le temps* in 1990: although Greek philosophy first considered time in terms

⁷³¹ John Panteleimon Manoussakis, ‘The Anarchic Principle of Christian Eschatology in the Eucharistic Tradition of the Eastern Church’, *Harvard Theological Review* 100:1 (2007): pp. 29-46; p. 29.

⁷³² Jacob Taubes, *Abendländische Eschatologie* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz Verlag, 2007) ; French translation : *Eschatologie Occidentale*, trans. Raphaël Lellouche and Michel Pennerier (Paris: Éditions de l’Éclat, 2009).

⁷³³ Manoussakis, ‘Anarchic Principle’, p. 29.

⁷³⁴ T. S. Eliot attributes his own dissatisfaction with the vagaries of philosophy to its divorce from theology – see his ‘Foreword’ to Joseph Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, trans. Alick Dru (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), p. 15.

⁷³⁵ Manoussakis, ‘Anarchic Principle’, p. 30.

of its cosmic and cyclical reality, Christian experience has been that ‘of a time organized into a history by divine initiative’ which was reflected as such in the experience of a consciousness “stretched” between present, past, and future (ECT 1585).

This work often hinges on a confrontation with Heidegger and Hegel: Lacoste writes that the Hegelian understanding of history as progress and progression towards the future ‘could only be right, finally, if the resurrection of the Crucified did not have to be interpreted as a promise, and was nothing but the meaning of the last fact – of the reconciling Cross’ (EA 138). So, the cause of the things that happen (and have happened) lies not in their beginning but in the end since they come from the kingdom of God, and which is their origin. ‘It is not at the beginning (in the morning of consciousness and at the dawn of history) that man is truly himself’ (EA 137).

As Heidegger would say, the beginning determines humanity and its history only insofar as it ‘remains an advent’⁷³⁶; ‘meaning comes at the end’ (EA 137). Lacoste offers one of his clearest expressions of theological anthropology his contribution to a *festschrift* in honour of one of his teachers:

Man is invited to exist, which means more than living: its precise definition is to be this utterly unique being of spirit, which refuses its identity and folds it into reflexivity, in a filial relationship with God, in a fraternal relationship to another man. The person is the self claiming its very nature, knowing it and fulfilling it. I am born man to become man. And I have become it by consenting to having the site of my highest humanity and personalization in the ethical relationship, intersubjective and religious. (NP 132)

⁷³⁶ Martin Heidegger, trans. Keith Hoeller, ‘Hölderlin’s Earth and Heaven’, in *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), p. 195.

Lacoste writes that ‘here and now man exists between remembrance of God and self, between *memoria Dei* and *memoria sui*’. This begs, says Lacoste, an initial Christologic question: ‘can the remembrance of God be the initial and constant horizon of human consciousness’ (NP 134). The conclusion he says is ‘inescapable: the humanity of the Son is the eschatological truth of the human, and one cannot relate that which Jesus of Nazareth tells us about man and what every man says about it, without naming the difference and continuity between history and eschatology’ (NP 135). In this Lacoste seeks to unite the eschatological and Christological themes of his theological anthropology with an eucharistic eschatology, one which hinges on a understanding of Christian eschatology as playing out between two eschatological nodal points: the already of the Incarnation and the not yet of the Parousia (PP 11-15). Lacoste writes of a twofold division of the *εσχάτων*: the eschaton of the present at the end time and the present of the eschaton in the everyday⁷³⁷ (EA 138):

Reconciled existence takes place therefore in an *interim between the eschatological blessings already granted and the eschatological blessings that still remain within an economy of promise* (EA 139).

In his analysis of time and work, Lacoste can, along the way, be quite self-deprecating: the work that is interrupted when he takes a break ‘is then perhaps not important, but it matters to me’. More importantly, it is routinely devoted to the treatment – albeit ‘probably quite poor’, he says – of problems that *do* matter. Lacoste has, he admits, ‘struggled to glimpse a little better the status of truth, in order to thematize precisely the link between temporality and historicity, to better read Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and at the same time to better know who I am and who we are’ (MAO 18).

⁷³⁷ See Richard Kearney, ‘Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward a Micro-Eschatology’, in John Panteleimon Manoussakis, ed., *After God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 3-20.

As Lacoste knows, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard shared an appreciation of time, and specifically the future: in *The Concept of Dread* Kierkegaard described a future that was intrinsically problematic, unfathomable and full of, well, dread. This future is beyond the capacity of philosophy and can only be appropriated through the Christian paradox of the incarnate God-man (a topic whose discussion in the *Upbuilding Discourses* phenomenalisises the soteriological concerns of the *Philosophical Fragments*). By contrast, Nietzsche's atheistic account not only represents a riposte to Kierkegaard's 'radical Christianity' but also – in the shape of the genealogy – offers an alternative methodology, a 'way of taking philosophical account of the past without ignoring the future as Hegel did'.⁷³⁸ For Nietzsche the future is radically open, an openness that is present at every stage of history, and the movement from one event to the next therefore random; there is then, at least for Nietzsche, no continuity in history, 'no ongoing processes that are worth being carried forwards'.⁷³⁹ Nietzsche's atheism thus represents one of the strongest expressions of this particular treatment of the future.

According to Lacoste mankind is caught between a sequence of founding events (what Lacoste describes as 'the *absolute past* of an inaccessible "sacred history"') and their eschatological fulfilment ('an absolute future') which has been promised and anticipated through the resurrection of Christ, the present of the believer is in the first place defined by an act of memory (which provides its historical coordinates, namely that it 'calls to memory the Absolute Who, at one time, pitched His tent in the midst of men' [NMT 14]⁷⁴⁰) and secondly by an act of hope, which refers to this absolute future. 'Thus,' writes Lacoste, 'the theological meaning of the

⁷³⁸ John McCumber, *Time and Philosophy: A History of Continental Thought* (Durham: Acumen, 2011) p. 9.

⁷³⁹ McCumber, *Time and Philosophy*, p. 9.

⁷⁴⁰ Lacoste claims later on that 'it remains true that the manifestation of God in the history of Israel, and in the history of Jesus of Nazareth, holds a deep manifestation for all artistic creation'.

present consists of its envelopment by an originating past and its yearning for the perfection of all things, represented in theology by the phrase “the kingdom of God” (ECT 1585).

The chief characteristics of this ‘envelopment’ are fixed and expressed by the liturgical experience – after all, theology, Lacoste suggests elsewhere, is liturgical in essence (ECT 1560). Here the believer’s memory is expressed as a commemoration, ‘beyond the mere order of remembrance’ in which ‘the original past is endlessly represented in a sacramental practice that feeds on presence’ (and here Lacoste is once again keen to emphasise presence rather than Parousia rather than defining an absence which considers the experience of salvation in the present [ECT 1585]). Lacoste’s choice of “liturgy” provides him with a way of naming humanity’s comportment before God, in order to avoid crippling distinctions such as “interior and exterior”, “soul and body” that seem to affect theologies of the subject. So, on the other hand, this ‘liturgical present presents itself as an anticipation of the eschaton [...] eternal rewards [*les biens définitifs*] are already at the Church’s disposal while it acts in hope [*fait œuvre d’espérance*]. Hence, ‘the relationship with the absolute future is experienced in the form of extreme proximity’ (ECT 1585), rather than absence.

Christ, says Lacoste, began his preaching with the announcement of the imminence of the Kingdom of God: this imminence is lived or played out in Christian experience as ‘the secret of its relationship to the *eschaton*’. Here, every present is ‘liturgically equidistant’ from the end, just as they are equidistant (or “contemporary” with, as in Kierkegaard’s description) from their origin. The present therefore earns the designation of *kairos*, which is here described as ‘the favorable time able to accommodate fully the relationship between man and God’ (ECT 1585). Since humanity is trapped in the ‘time of this world’ – that is, the present consciousness –

and never freed from ‘the pressures of anguish and boredom’ but caught in ‘the irrefutable logic of a *time leading toward death*’, the present of faith and hope, argues Lacoste, is nonetheless ‘experienced at the boundary between the world and eschatology’ (ECT 1586). This fact, according to Lacoste, may itself be reflected in the style of temporalization: ‘the proposition of original experiences’ corresponds to a time ‘bursting with eschatological meanings’ (ECT 1586).

In this time, where a philosophical concern such as Heidegger’s can discern the secret of time, the focus is upon ‘the proposition of a *nonchalance*, which entrusts the direction of the future to God alone and thus experiences the present in its own terms, in the fullness of its meaning’ (ECT 1586). The “hermeneutics of facticity” is thus left intact – liturgy merely brackets out the world rather than subsuming it (as it does in the thought of Catherine Pickstock). And by virtue of the ‘essential imminence of fulfilment’, the present can be lived out ‘as a *vigil* that refuses to speculate on the postponements of history’; here, in state of nonchalance and vigilance ‘a *filial* temporality is established’ (ECT 1586), and a Christology which contests the will to power (NT 203-5). Therefore, whilst such theological and eschatological meanings do not rule out the existential logic of a Christian time that is also a human time and therefore comparable to any other, they do give rise to a divergence: ‘*une contestation christologique*’ (NT 204). Owing to its kairological content, this time structures itself by subverting the logic of any purely worldly temporalization. Lacoste therefore seeks to qualify by means of a Christological conception of the question of time, in relation to God’s eternity and the Trinitarian *perichoresis*, what it is that eternity controls and judges. By reference to Balthasar’s conception of the Incarnation as the ‘concrete *analogia entis*’ as the basis for an assumption that human and divine time can assume a relationship of analogy, human

time is thus no longer defined in terms of being-on-the-world but instead in terms of an eternal relation before God, reminiscent of Gregory of Nyssa's notion of *epectasis*, the eternal movement of the spirit before God. Whilst speaking of the resurrection of the flesh theology necessarily also speaks of a resurrection of time, but the believer experiences an Augustinian 'time leading *toward* death' founded in a Christian social epistemology rather than a Heideggerian time 'intended *for* death' (ECT 1586) founded in a solitary Plotinian pursuit of the Absolute.

From this we learn that for Lacoste – at the porous boundary between the theological and philosophical – the co-affection that defines humanity, as a marker of the pre-discursive gift of the world to the (liturgical) self, is also eschatological, a co-affectivity with the saints as much as with my contemporaries (perhaps even more so), united in the joy of the Eucharistic celebration (NT 177). This joy combines both urgency and patience: the liturgical act is one that occurs primarily as '*la dépossession messianique*' (NT 177-80), a dispossession which Nathan Kerr describes as 'the experience not only of a kind of death to the historical and spatial territorialities according to which we might schematize in advance how 'Jesus' will present himself in a given context' but 'the experience of the church's 'non-possession' of itself, of its own 'identity''.⁷⁴¹

The logic of the *eschaton* outlined by Lacoste liturgically interferes with that of Heideggerian being-toward-death. Mankind no more possesses the future than it does its absolute future, which is 'all the more reason why it must be understood within the order of the promise and the gift'. It is, nonetheless, this future which governs liturgical experience. It is certainly possible, says Lacoste, to pray while ignoring it.

⁷⁴¹ Nathan Kerr, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 2008), p. 179.

But no intellocution of liturgy is possible if we do not recognize in it the clearing in which the Absolute's eschatological claims over us are substituted for the world's historical claims – not, of course, by abolishing the facticity of the world, but by taking possession of the liturgical nonplace and enabling a certain overshadowing of our facticity that does not amount to an act of *divertissement*. It is in this regard that the *eschaton* is, not the horizon in which the man who prays lives, but already the hidden *present* of our prayers.

(EA 61)

This 'our' is, says Lacoste, richly self-evident: that of a possible communion among believers (LC 93-103).

7.3 Sabbathic time

Lacoste (here writing under the pseudonym 'Galahad Threepwood') describes the Sabbath as 'a Jewish cultural institution' which figures in neither 'an obvious' nor 'necessary way among Christian theological objects'. Its Jewish origins, however, meant that while the first Christian communities respected the Sabbath despite Christian liturgies preserving hardly any memory of the sabbath as the last day of the Jewish week, and its theologians' criticism of the 'vetero-testamentary institution of the sabbath' [ECT 1406]. Through an extended gloss on a variety of patristic authors, Lacoste sets out to describe the content and possibility of "Christian time". This time is 'dominical' (in that it takes its meaning from the commemoration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which the church confesses as Lord) and is organized weekly around Sunday, 'which is both the "eighth day," the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection, and the day of Eucharistic *synaxis*' (ECT 1406). Given his concern with fatigue and about supercessionist readings of Scripture, it is significant then that Lacoste reminds us about a once popular patristic interpretation of John 5:17

wherein it is asserted that ‘the God of Jesus Christ worked without interruption’ alongside a tradition that the Sabbath – which had been unknown to the their patriarchs – ‘was given to the Jews because they are hard-hearted’ (ECT 1406). What Lacoste terms ‘the cultural content’ of the Sabbath is then, (citing Tertullian), either ‘extended to the totality of Christian time’ or described (here by reference to Colossians 2:16) as merely a “shadow” (or “type” or “image”) of the eschatological Sabbath (citing Origen). It was, avers Lacoste, only once the Christian Church was adopted as the imperial religion that it could make the eighth day one of rest on the Jewish model, a development which was not welcomed by everyone – especially those in monastic circles who had strong views on what they saw as sanctioned laziness; in fact, Lacoste points out, the Sabbath turned ‘from an “image” into a model for the Christian Sunday’. By the sixth century the Sabbath and Sunday were seen as equivalent, by now transformed into a compulsory day of rest enforced by both ecclesiastical and imperial law, and which preserved its liturgical meanings and requirements.

The everyday world presents itself as nothing more or less than a ‘profane kingdom’, and while Lacoste concedes that other analyses of secularity might be possible, he asks that we allow this argument, at least as a potentially forceful line of argument in the face of the ‘transcendental atheism’ of the existential (MAO 6). As a transcendental this cannot be overcome – at best it can be bracketed out or suspended. And as the suspension of humanity’s ‘profane and laborious relations’ (ECT 1407), Sunday represents the day when the Christian can and *must* “attend to God” – something which Lacoste dismisses as being rather a thin precept (ECT 1407).

Being required to abstain from what he calls ‘servile works’ and to participate in ‘the eucharistic assembly’ never amounted to more than a rudimentary legislation

which, according to Lacoste, explains ‘why Christianity never developed a casuistry of Sunday comparable to the Jewish casuistry’ of the Sabbath (ECT 1407). It is only recently, Lacoste suggests, that following liturgical renewal within Catholicism and a renewed theological interest in the Jewish experience that the Eucharistic meaning of Sunday has become significant⁷⁴², producing a distinction between Eucharistic and sabbatical meanings, and a rejuvenated theology of Sunday as the Eucharistic day, alongside a Christian appreciation of ‘the Jewish spirituality of the Sabbath’ (ECT 1407). The difference, suggests Lacoste, is that while medieval theology thought the Sabbath merely in terms of those elements of Jewish law – the so-called “ceremonial” precepts – that remained binding upon Christians. The contemporary theological rediscovery of Israel, which Lacoste regards as a product of the Second Vatican Council, is a discovery of the ‘mystery of Israel’ and the Sabbath ‘primarily a question of spirituality’; Lacoste suggests that is due to ‘the powerful influence’ of Abraham Heschel⁷⁴³: that the Sabbath now no longer appeared as ‘a tissue of legalistic constraints’ (ECT 1407).

This represents a reversal of what had been the prevalent view in antiquity: Roman authors had frequently mocked the Jewish people over one of their religion’s most distinctive features, the Sabbath, but which they saw as their ‘persistent ‘idleness’’ while by the fourth century the church reviled what it described as ‘a gross

⁷⁴² Lacoste also cites what he calls ‘a remarkable case of “sabbatization”’ from 16th century Britain: Nicholas Bound’s 1595 book, *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath*, argued in favour of a much stricter application of the vetero-testamentary precepts – what was known as “sabbatarianism” – an argument which was widely accepted among English and Scottish Puritans. In the course of the ensuing lengthy public controversy this Puritan Sabbath was imposed through legislation on three occasions (in 1644, 1650, and 1655), with regulations including the prohibition of entertainment on Sundays. Assuaged by Charles II at the Restoration, the Puritan Sunday was ‘practiced in extreme forms in Scotland, and did not really fade out until the end of the 19th century’ (ECT 1407).

⁷⁴³ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for The Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

misunderstanding' by the Jewish people: the Sabbath was not a day of joy⁷⁴⁴ or rest, but had been designed 'so they should make expiation for the murder of Christ by sorrow and mourning'.⁷⁴⁵ It was in this context, then, that although the early church had regarded Saturday as the Sabbath, its celebration was replaced by that of Sunday, "the day of the Lord", that is, by weekly celebration of the Jesus' death and resurrection. However, it should be noted that the Talmuds do link 'the coming of the Messiah with the keeping of the Sabbath',⁷⁴⁶ which may reflect debates with Jewish-Christians who were discarding the old observance in favour of this new one.

7.4 Rest as "micro-eschatology"

Distinct from the pagan notion of *otium* or *ataraxie*, a theological understanding of the day of rest has an eschatological referent: 'Liturgy anticipates the Kingdom, so it should also be said that rest returns to creation' (MAO 22). Although Lacoste concedes that a specifically Christian theology of time is usually organised within the temporal horizons of the Eucharistic celebration (specifically the memorial, anticipation, and sacramental presence of the eschaton), he suggests that the Sabbath might still be indispensable to the appearance of other 'temporal horizons', such as that of a life created and blessed by God, which mankind can enjoy peacefully in praising the gift that has given him to himself (MAO 8) in which case the Sabbath is seen neither as a Jewish reality replaced by the Christian reality of Sunday nor as a vetero-testamentary rough version of the Christian Sunday 'but as an ensemble of meaningful gestures that can be received by Christians with respect for

⁷⁴⁴ Lacoste notes however that some 'Christian communities, generally issuing from charismatic renewal, adopted a sabbath liturgy conceived as a vetero-testamentary preparation of the neotestamentary joy of Sunday' (ECT 1407).

⁷⁴⁵ Michael Hilton, *The Christian Effect on Jewish Life* (London: SCM Press, 1994), p. 179.

⁷⁴⁶ Hilton, *Christian Effect*, p. 75.

its specific religious intention'.⁷⁴⁷ Moreover, Lacoste notes that respect for the Sabbath is inscribed within a Decalogue which theology traditionally identifies as a “natural law” that obliges all humanity. The Sabbath thus gives food for thought [*donner à penser*] not only to liturgical theology but also philosophy of religion and the theology of religions.

In ritual food and drink are inextricably linked. In order to elucidate his idea of liturgy as a non-place outside of everyday time and place, and the possibility of micro-eschatologies to perhaps offer a glimpse of the Kingdom, Lacoste provides us with an account of how rest, and, in particular, a short ‘phenomenology of tea drinking’:

One could say then, on first reading, that the short rest that I grant myself to drink one or two cups of tea does not deserve philosophical attention, except to note that we cannot really live and work if we do not look after our place of rest and to note that we cannot banish “daily” experiences from our life such as it is, and that there is also an express right to leisure. However, it is better to take a closer look, and let one concept, that of comfort, direct our gaze. The time given to the small domestic ritual of teatime is given effect to the enjoyment of what might be called well-being. “There” – in my office surrounded by my friends the books, temporarily bracketing out my deepest concerns or worries – I can content myself with just a few minutes of well-being. I’m by no means satisfied. This is a break, an intermission, and of course I have better things to do. However, the lessons of this hiatus should not go unnoticed. We speak of “comfort” for lack of a better word. What is “feeling comfortable”, therefore? One answer would be the experience of

⁷⁴⁷ ECT 1407; elsewhere, Lacoste notes that ‘it is always within a way of life (or some ways of life) that one shall proceed intelligibly to such theological assertions’ (PP 97).

place as home, the experience of being there as a living, a *Wohnen*. My office, in a sense, is first of all nothing more to me than the place in which to gather the largest possible number of work instruments in the smallest space. But any instrumental relationship with things disappears when I let a few gestures and objects turn my office into, provisionally, nothing less than my home. I am certainly pressed for time – I have an article to write, I am expecting a visitor. I certainly have worries – the article throws up theoretical problems whose solution still does not seem very clear, my visitors is talking to me about even more pressing problems. But for a few minutes, I can take my time and enjoy a precarious but genuine carelessness. (MAO 19)

This notion of ‘well-being-there’ (albeit temporary and fleeting) contradicts the “fundamental tone” of being-in-the-world which, Lacoste reminds us, is, in *Being and Time*, anxiety. This notion also contradicts the phenomenon of homelessness. It offers us the joy of the present moment, and an especially grounded experience. The ritual – tea-making – to which one devotes oneself, is completely profane (or secular) – nothing here provides us with an opportunity to recall either our origins or our “roots”. For Lacoste, the symbolism of place ‘is probably quite clear: behind closed doors I can enjoy a few minutes of peace and quiet’ (MAO 20). However, they are closed not only to the secular city but also the country roads that – according to Heidegger – might give me a sense of belonging: ‘here I am at home, or rather *feel* at home and *find* myself at home. But by specifically excluding any “dis-comfort”, comfort promises me nothing beyond the few minutes respite from the time of work’ (MAO 20).

As in liturgical experience, during these fleeting moments of ‘well-being-there’ humanity finds itself pleasantly distanced from both world and earth, and their

cares and anxieties: wherever mankind can rest it can dwell – the homelessness of *Dasein* is not determinative. Again, as with liturgical experience, the human being experiences an excess over the transcendental figures (MAO 22) which produces a certain light heartedness (MAO 21).

As Schrijvers points out, Lacoste thus criticises the hierarchies Heidegger places between the ontic and the ontological: anxiety is not the only affect or mood that can reveal what is proper to the human being: the primitive logic of experience ‘is present in each experience’ (MAO 73). Experiences of joy and art inaugurate a plurality of worlds in which the (theological) truth of human being can be revealed – albeit partially. In answer to Lacoste’s question, what is original in human beings does indeed show itself in the plural (MAO 84) and Lacoste devotes an increasing amount of space in his later writings to discussion of the plurality of appearing: it is, after all, from out of this plurality that experiences (such as those belonging to the spiritual life) receive their ontological significance. But for now, there is only what Schrijvers terms ‘the mere possibility of being-in-the-world and its corresponding affects’.⁷⁴⁸

“Homelessness” (*Unheimlichkeit*) is more of ‘a given *possibility*’ than ‘a given *reality*’, and, says Lacoste, the same applies to ‘the ‘homecoming’ (*Heimkunft*)’ of the later Heidegger’ (EA 19). The perceived differences between the early and later Heidegger – the latter what William Richardson called “Heidegger II” – have been seized upon by French phenomenology; Lacoste, he tells us, ‘learned to decipher the continuities more than map the discontinuities’ (INT 14) and has been able to reconcile the two into what Schrijvers describes as ‘a broader account of human

⁷⁴⁸ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 69.

topology: the only actuality and reality about the human being that can be settled in a definitive manner is his placedness and his embodiment',⁷⁴⁹.

7.5 Habit

Proust contended that 'the heavy curtain of habit conceals from us almost the whole universe',⁷⁵⁰; and yet for others the law of habit is still to be found, 'even in the sphere of the pure understanding and of abstract reason'.⁷⁵¹ Space precludes an examination of Ravaisson's *De l'habitude* but for Husserl the pure ego of transcendental phenomenology is that kernel of *personhood* that would survive the hypothetical annihilation of the world, 'both the natural world and the social world of ready-made meanings and hard-won interpretations of reality' (Hua. IV: 311). Yet he was also clear that the person that we are is thematised through reflection upon ourselves as an ego which is the subject of experiences. It is possible for human beings to develop a sense of themselves *qua* subjects of experience – that is, it is possible for them to reflect upon their habits, opinions, tendencies and to thereby construct a sense of themselves as they consider the ways in which they have thought and acted in the past. As Schrijvers notes, habit also plays an important role for Lacoste for whom the human being is 'found between continuity and discontinuity, habits and novelty'; the reality of habits is 'to do with the fact that the world is always and already there'.⁷⁵² In liturgical play, as we shall see, the human attempts to escape or transgress worldly 'everydayness, prejudice, and habit' (EA 95) although, as

⁷⁴⁹ Op cit.

⁷⁵⁰ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (London: Vintage), Vol. 5, p. 478.

⁷⁵¹ Félix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, trans. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 71.

⁷⁵² Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 49.

Schrijvers points out, the possibility of liturgical experience ‘needs to be taught, to be thought and to be passed down.’⁷⁵³

This ‘spiritual self’ can, of course, change over the course of its life as it is shaped by its experience of this life, and as its circumstances change. Thus, this ‘I’ of self-observation, the spiritual self, is the ‘I’ of phenomenological reflection as it finds itself enmeshed in the contingencies and specificities of its own life-history and in the intersubjectively mediated ‘surrounding world’ (*Umwelt*) in and through which it develops as a self and develops a self-understanding of itself. The intentional life of the pure ego becomes the life of an individual person through the accretions of experience and the mediations of sociality (Hua. IV: 259-261).

For Heidegger labour and time coalesce around the theme of tradition and habituation, in which each and every labour ‘arises from a task and is bound to that which is handed down, determines itself from mandate and mission’.⁷⁵⁴ Here *Dasein* is ‘sent ahead of itself and delivered into the tradition’ [*ausgeliefert in die Oberlieferung*] – that is, caught between tradition and the future. Being thus exposed to mood [*Stimmung*] and cast into labour makes *Dasein* historical. In typically tortuous prose, Heidegger writes that the power of time ‘temporalizes originally and not complementarily the transporting of *Dasein* into the future and beenness’. This transportation is a play of interior and exterior forces:

The being-transported into the present of labor and the extending of *Dasein* into the future and beenness is not understood in the manner of the being-present-at-hand of individual subjects, which are endowed with an interior, around which something is also exterior.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵³ Ibid. p. 75.

⁷⁵⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language*, trans. Wanda Torres Gregory and Yvonne Unna (New York: SUNY Press, 2009), p. 128.

⁷⁵⁵ Heidegger, *Logic*, p. 128.

Lacoste recalls that for Aristotle the present moment is nothing more than ‘the boundary between two non-beings’ (NT 13). Time, conceived as a succession of “nows” has the ‘peculiarity’ of disappearing inside each of those same “nows”: this now, says Heidegger, ‘even now is no longer now’ – it simply ‘goes by’. This idea of time flowing from the now inspires ‘the fundamental impression of passing’ in which, quoting Aristotle, Heidegger says that it is itself to blame and, quoting Hegel, that ‘Time is that which consumes [itself]’. He sees time in its flow into the past, as captured in the phrase, ‘As time goes by’ (which, however, does not have the correlate ‘Time comes into being’). This is why, according to Heidegger, everything that stands in it, human things and human being itself, is transient and from this he deduces that the Western mind thinks, as it were, ‘in the coupling of the Christian and of the ancient world-conception. Today, we move just as if it were a matter of course in the representation of time that has emerged from this coupling.’⁷⁵⁶

7.6 Liturgical inoperativity

Dasein’s temporality is that which stretches between its birth and death – Heidegger tells us that this is not, what Macquarrie calls, ‘an empty slot of time into which a *Dasein* can be inserted’ but instead that *Dasein* somehow generates its time; thus Heidegger may here share – with Kant – the ‘belief that time is a form imposed by consciousness on our intuitions of the material world’.⁷⁵⁷ Kant certainly held, as Joseph Pieper points out, that knowledge was exclusively discursive – that is, ‘the opposite of receptive and contemplative’.⁷⁵⁸ However, vigil, says Lacoste, is one thing in which I do not have to reveal myself as I have to be, but as I would wish to be; it thus provides us with a conceptual code with which ‘to think the time that, removed

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 88.

⁷⁵⁷ John Macquarrie, *Heidegger and Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1994), p. 41.

⁷⁵⁸ Pieper, *Leisure*, p. 32.

from *bonum utilis*, we consecrate to liturgical “inoperativity” (EA 79).

Dasein's time is though determined primarily by practical considerations – whether it is time to get up, time to go to work etc – and since *Dasein* is a ‘being-with-others’ these individual times have to be correlated with (those of) other people; *Dasein* ‘finds itself already in a world in which there is something like an objective time, regulated by the sun and the seasons’. So, suggests Macquarrie, for Heidegger (as for Augustine) time began with the world and is, in some sense, generated by the world.⁷⁵⁹

Yet in not belonging to the world, vigil requires no work of us simply because (unlike the world of work, for instance) ‘no exigency’ bears upon it (EA 79).⁷⁶⁰ Whether impotent or inoperative, liturgy is still an absence of work [*œuvre*] – vigil is not the only time ‘that can command itself to no work’ (EA 79). The man who prays must accept that he belongs to the same class that includes the reveller – even so, his inoperativity ‘is in fact a critique of “doing” and of “work”’ (EA 80). The non-utility of praise here must be interpreted not as uselessness but as a ‘beyond-utility’: vigil, we are told, is neither ‘a time of salaried work (*negotium*) nor a time [of] leisure (*otium*)’ to which “‘free” days would be better suited than sleep-deprived nights’ (EA 80). If we wish to pray, vigil is the time most favourable to liturgy, its *kairos*: this does not mean, though, that ‘we only have the right (and the time) to pray at night ... liturgy [has] the right to critique historical reason ... from within the margins of history’. Liturgical time – a time of inoperativity, of time given over – thus critiques *Dasein*'s temporality by offering an alternative, a temporality neither imposed upon

⁷⁵⁹ Macquarrie, *Heidegger and Christianity*, p. 41.

⁷⁶⁰ Heidegger's comments on work and labour underscore its temporality and sociality: unemployment becomes not merely a privation of ‘a merit’, but a ‘mental shattering’ not because the lack of work ‘thrusts the human being back to the individualized isolated I’, but because a lack of work or labour leaves empty what he calls ‘the being-transported into things.’ Because work and labour ‘carry out the relation to beings, therefore unemployment is an emptying of this relation to being. ... unemployment is impotent being-exposed.’ Heidegger, *Logic*, p. 127.

the world through consciousness nor determined by practical considerations, a temporality that rather than being determined by mortality, merely stretched between birth and death, looks instead towards eternity and asks what is mankind's vocation (AM 554). The 'daytime work of ethics' and the 'nighttime inoperativity of prayer' are related as 'the *necessary* and the *surplus*' (EA 80), we pray between acts, but vigil – as a surplus of time over the exigency or demands of work – prolongs this “between”⁷⁶¹; daytime, which returns us to the care of secular things, is ‘still far off’ (EA 81).

Liturgy is, therefore, strictly unnecessary – surplus to requirements, just like the Absolute (EA 81); the emphasis here then is on preserving the sheer gratuity of divine grace and mankind's freedom to respond to the gift of that sanctifying grace. In this we find that Lacoste is in agreement with his friend Henri de Lubac, to whom *Experience and the Absolute* is dedicated, and who despite the strategy of *ressourcement* expressed severe reservations regarding the Platonic tradition:

Let us say it once more in conclusion: God could have refused to give himself to his creatures, just as he could have, and has, given himself. The gratuitousness of the supernatural order is true individually and totally. It is gratuitous in regard to what we see as preceding it, whether in time or in logic.⁷⁶²

As supreme intelligence the Platonic absolute is, says Lubac, ‘eternally unaware of us imperfect beings’.⁷⁶³ Theologian John Hughes, on the other hand, wishes to argue that human labour is able to participate in divine labour because there is an analogy between divine and human making. Hughes is ‘convinced that the

⁷⁶¹ On this notion of the “between” – the space between religion and philosophy – see William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

⁷⁶² Henri De Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad/Herder, 1998), p. 236.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 228.

dangers which Lacoste and others see in the Romantic and Idealist visions of human creation’ – and which are also visible in the Marxist tradition – (what Hughes describes as ‘ateleological’ and arbitrary self-expressions) are ‘not purely reducible to the Barthian charge of ignoring the ontological distinction’.

Drawing here upon Dorothy L. Sayer’s book *The Mind of the Maker* Hughes argues that it is no problem if ‘the highest forms of human labour are *almost ex nihilo*’. If the *analogia actionis* that he proposes is to make any sense, then, Hughes suggests, we should note that even in the case of God, ‘ex nihilo should not be understood in an arbitrary, voluntarist sense’ (this is what Hughes attributes the Idealists’ error to) but ‘grounded in the Sophic eternal ideas in the divine mind’.⁷⁶⁴

Hughes can therefore speak of the ‘transformation or redemption of work’ in which human work participates more fully in the divine work. Thus, ‘in the highest forms of human activity, perhaps especially in the lives of the saints and in the liturgy, we see ‘work’ that is also thoughtful, playful, restful and delightful’.⁷⁶⁵

In this register, Hughes argues, service of God is ‘a ‘slavery’ which is also ‘perfect freedom’ in which a ‘transvaluation of values’ or ‘transcendence of utility’ – here drawing explicitly upon Lacoste⁷⁶⁶ – means that ‘all our life’s work becomes a liturgical offering to God, and as such moves beyond utility’.⁷⁶⁷ Here, the Sabbath ‘is no longer a rest after creation, but is the day when the sick are healed’ in anticipation of the new creation; as Lacoste observes ‘Sunday suspends the rule of utility and control’; here ‘time is freed’ (TH 19).

⁷⁶⁴ John Hughes, *The End of Work: Theological Critiques of Capitalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 227 n. 19.

⁷⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 228.

⁷⁶⁶ Hughes, *End of Work*, p. 228 n. 20.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 228.

7.7 Prayer and play

All this talk of inoperativity and the ‘phenomenology of tea-making’ leads, oddly enough, to that of phenomenologies of worship and of rugby: both can be said to represent “play” (in the Gadamerian sense) – that is, a combination of praxis and the purposeless in which this purposelessness represents discontinuity from the world, its values and its concerns. Thus in its combination of ‘liturgical inoperativity’ and the transgression of the world, liturgy does indeed represent a form of play.⁷⁶⁸ In the ‘sacred play of liturgy’, words are freed from their usual communicative purpose and ‘can then give themselves to be perceived in another way’.⁷⁶⁹

On this reading, then, play is not devoid of meaning, but – like art – an ‘expression and celebration of life and meaning itself’.⁷⁷⁰ Liturgy can thus be conceived as *sacred play* which fulfils no external purpose, even if it has its own internal rules and purposes [*Selbstzweck*]. Pointing out that the attendance of believers at services such as the Eucharist is ‘*in order* to participate in a holy event’, and to sing psalms ‘*in order* to give praise’. Dahl argues that in art and religion this ‘in order to’ ‘is not a means to achieve external goals, but a way to *fulfil* its essence and bring it to expression’ it is teleological rather than instrumental.⁷⁷¹

This fulfilment, Dahl tells us, comes from the ability of worship to ‘let be’ (*Sein-lassen*) – namely, that it lets the holy be encountered for its own sake; such ‘praxis without practical purpose interrupts the dealings of the ‘they’ (*das Man*), and thereby welcomes experiences that are unavailable from the perspective of a fallen everyday’.⁷⁷² This “letting-be” in liturgy is of direct interest to the project of overcoming an onto-theology in which the highest perfection of mankind, according

⁷⁶⁸ For a lucid and rich non-philosophical account of this, see Duncan B. Forrester, *Living and Loving the Mystery* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2010), pp. 33-44.

⁷⁶⁹ Dahl, *Phenomenology and the Holy*, p. 295.

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 273.

⁷⁷¹ Dahl, *Phenomenology and the Holy*, p. 274.

⁷⁷² Dahl, *Phenomenology and the Holy*, p. 274.

to Plato, is merely to be παίγνιον θεοῦ – ‘a plaything of God’.⁷⁷³ It remains to be seen whether Balthasar’s apparent endorsement of the view of Maximus the Confessor that ‘controlled by the imperious program of our present nature ... we deserve to be called God’s playthings’⁷⁷⁴ can be reconciled to a positive account of play and human freedom.

And yet in the Heideggerian register, as John Caputo explains: ‘Being means presence’ and the distinction between “Being and beings” is thus the distinction between letting-presence (*Anwesenlassen*) and what is present (*Anwesendes*), letting-presence means bestowing or granting presence, which means ‘bringing something into the open, the realm of the unconcealed’.⁷⁷⁵ Thus, as freely given or granted – *Geben* – this idea of “Being given” or “given Being” is not a causal making-seen but a letting-be-seen, in which presence is freely granted and bestowed. This freedom is at odds with what Gadamer called the ‘world of aims’, that is, the everyday; as a free activity, liturgy (as human comportment *coram Deo*) is aimless according to the aims of the everyday.

In a liturgical context (re)conceived as play the everyday is thereby recontextualised within the limits set by play and worship – the discontinuity of play with the everyday is marked out with spatial and temporal limits: ‘one leaves the everyday for some time in order to be engaged in play’.⁷⁷⁶ Play and liturgy share a central feature: just as grammar makes up the meaningful structure of language games the boundaries of play are due to its autonomous rules – that is, ‘the

⁷⁷³ Hugo Rahner, *Man at Play*, trans. Brian Battershaw and Edward Quinner (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 11.

⁷⁷⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* Trans. Brian E. Daley, S. J., (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), p. 60. In a footnote Balthasar tell us that it is Dionysius the Areopagite’s ‘sense of the world – of existence as liturgical event’ that provides the background to Maximus’ mental picture of creation.

⁷⁷⁵ John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), p. 169.

⁷⁷⁶ Dahl, *Phenomenology and the Holy*, p. 274.

transcendental conditions that make play and sacred play meaningful in the first place'⁷⁷⁷ which, as such, are not imposed by everyday external objectives such as pedagogy or edification. By exercising these internal rules, liturgy (like art and play) can open up a world. The hermeneutic pioneer Gadamer, who more than most has argued for the autonomy of play and art, states that:

Human play requires a playing field. Setting off the playing field – just like setting off sacred precincts, as Huizinga⁷⁷⁸ rightly points out – sets off the sphere of play as a closed world, one without transition and mediation to the world of aims. That all play is playing something is true here, where the ordered to-and-fro movement of the game is determined as one kind of *comportment* (Verhalten) among others.⁷⁷⁹

Now, in their play players still comport themselves in a certain manner 'even if the proper essence of the game consists in his disburdening himself of the tension he feels in his purposive comportment'.⁷⁸⁰ The presence of such comportment (*coram Deo* especially) is consistent, even while the game is different; there is, as Lacoste points out, 'no essential feature common to every game' no "*air de famille*" (PP 103). But, continues Lacoste, 'we do not play all games in the same way' (for instance, someone who is good at rugby can be bad at chess), but (in order not to "mutilate" his analysis) he reminds us that we exhibit a talent for one game or another (PP 103). We will thus examine this possibility a little further by way of Lacoste's own engagement with Wittgenstein over language games and the "phenomenology of rugby".

⁷⁷⁷ Op. cit.

⁷⁷⁸ Gadamer refers to Johann Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study in the Play Element of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950) and in particular the linguistic peculiarities of the German *spiele* and Dutch *spelletje* in indicating that play is 'a particular and independent' action (p. 162 n. 6).

⁷⁷⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 107.

⁷⁸⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 107.

In their ‘public reality’ (although not mentioned here, an ecclesial setting represents a particular form of public reality) a game’s meaningful gestures, which can be ‘seen and interpreted by anyone with eyes to see’ involve an application of rules, their appropriate style, and some hint of ‘a distinction between the person playing and the game being played’ (PP 103) – in an ecclesial setting, a phenomenology of worship would identify different participants, since just as there is subjectivity prior to the language(s) that it practices, in any language game there are several ways to be involved (PP 103-4). There are “grammarians” (guardians of the entire language); commentators (literary critics and sports’ journalists); there are spectators; there are also the players. This plurality of participants, says Lacoste, creates complexity. To play consists of participating in the game by following its rules, but to play is also to put those rules to ‘use’: namely for one side to win by doing everything within the rules *in order to* win (that is, fulfil its essence).

But by exploiting the rules to form winning strategies, says Lacoste, players often lead the referee (whose job it is to check that the game is being played according to the rules) to suggest rule changes to the grammarians (the guardians of the game), changes intended to preserve the “spirit” of the game by transforming the letter of its rules. Of course, Lacoste notes, players can also indulge in heretical practices, and thereby create a new game – as happened ‘on the day when a student at Rugby School decided that a ball was made to be carried as well as to be kicked’ (PP 104).

And, last of all, there is the spectator (reader or listener, etc.) who in his way plays as well and understands that ‘we do not play without him, without thinking about his or her pleasure’. Now, continues Lacoste, if describing a game requires all this, then ‘the idea of a rule gains enough fluidity to serve our purposes’. The players on the field, referees, rule-makers, spectators – or poets, literary critics, poetry

theorists, readers – all participate in an public activity that is governed by ‘public criteria’. Even if they prefer their spirit to their letter, everyone accepts the rules and performs their assigned role even if they do not have the same relationship to the rules. Thus, concludes Lacoste, ‘for our purposes: the rules of a game also have a duty to allow for a plurality of participations’ (PP 104).

Art, like worship and liturgy, brackets out the everyday and illuminates aspects of the being of things in accordance with its own rules; worship enacts ‘a sacred play in which an everyday penetrated by holiness is made present’.⁷⁸¹ Lacoste is seemingly satisfied with the idea of a “free play” in which humanity can escape the strictures of the everyday and comport itself in a purposeless activity (which nonetheless fulfils its own internal rules). But an important caveat remains: proper respect for the phenomenality of the game reveals that there is a plurality of participations as much as there is a plurality of participants. Those caught up in ‘liturgical’ or ‘Sabbathic’ time may enjoy (or otherwise) quite different experiences.

In order to offer some clarification, warns Lacoste, two pitfalls need to be avoided: firstly, the idea of “a language without a self” (that is, the idea of a pre-existent self, prior to its participation in any language game, an existence that does not live within ways of life) and, secondly, that of a language game which is played by complying with ‘rules injurious to human subjectivity and freedom’. He points out that human beings distinguish ‘between the game played and the game that is watched, between the language spoken about and the language that we speak, in order to show that it – that of the rugby player and the commentator – is still the same game, albeit a different practice’ (PP 104). Here Lacoste reintroduces the phenomenological question of the body (both subjective and objective) to provide some precision: *firstly*,

⁷⁸¹ Dahl, *Phenomenology and the Holy*, p. 275.

that a game is meant to be played, by players; *secondly*, that its referees, rule-makers and spectators still participate in the game (there is no ambiguity between the rugby played by the fly-half, the referee and that watched from the stands); *thirdly*, watching the game is not a substitute for participation, but is a particular way of playing.

Play makes present (*Darstellung*) ‘according to its own limited rules’.⁷⁸² The presence of the holy – all but lost amid the everyday, is potentially made accessible through the discontinuity of play. The ‘sporting digression’ was justified, says Lacoste, since it provides us with the means by which to illuminate a question of “fairness” and “authenticity” in which our words never conform to rules without also being revelatory of who said them; this exposes those players who want to win at all costs, and who are not content to play by the rules (PP 104). Thus, Lacoste links participation in (liturgical) play to ‘a duty of respect’ between language games. Phenomenology practices reductions; that is its methodology. But, warns Lacoste, the twin reduction of our participation merely to what we are or our compliance with the rules of the game, but which do not describe the player, ‘would be disastrous’ (PP 105).

7.8 Time and anticipation

We have seen how, for Lacoste, liturgy and “micro-eschatologies” of rest or the Sabbath can, in some small way, anticipate the eschaton. As Lacoste makes clear ‘without the work of retention and protention, and more broadly, without the work of memory and anticipation’ the work of art ‘could not appear to us ... could not make itself present (PA 21). Prayer then, as an ontic activity similar to art in its economic purposelessness, takes place in the realm of the *existentiell* (that is, within the world); and yet properly conceived within an eschatological horizon, may anticipate the

⁷⁸² Dahl, *Phenomenology and the Holy*, p. 275.

Parousia by orienting the human being to God. As Lacoste concedes, the believer understands that no prayer is truly without God's presence and that joy is simply 'the first and the last word of' liturgical experience (EA 72).

Anticipation, Lacoste notes, 'is the gesture of a consciousness that ensures the coherence and sense of its present experience by relating this experience to a pre-experience of what is not yet here but will, in time, realize what is already here'; indeed, everything 'that is given to us inchoately, in the mode of a hint or promise, makes use of anticipation' (PA 15). Thus, while it may not necessarily be fulfilled in this present moment the logic of the event of prayer is that of anticipation *in* time and *over* time. For Lacoste the richest experiences 'are probably those unachieved, and perhaps unachievable, those where the thing is always given to us in the mode of renewal or in the mode of a putting-into-perspective, where no perspective can fully satisfy us because we know that there are other perspectives' (PA 20).

The point is made more explicitly in the essay that went on to form part of *Experience and the Absolute*: liturgy (that is, existence *coram Deo*) – and here prayer especially, as an ontic act – is an attentive waiting upon God:

As much as the expectation of God takes the form of liturgy, man is responsible for speech, words that are commonly used to describe his world for him are also used to talk to God, in the act of praying, whether it is a real confrontation of man with God or his aporetic dispute with his idea of God, anyway takes on the character of the event. But it is quite possible that the act of praying is even more faithful to the underlying purpose that moves the human being, being given a time and a place in which to exist in the expectation of God, or in the presence of the God who comes to see that nothing is happening there, or more precisely that God does not happen – at

least, that the coming of God to man is not in proportion to our expectations or our attention. The attention given to God by definition opens space for prayer. (BHP 385)

Between birth and death, our existence is shaped as an event. To such an event, it belongs to be partly expectable and controllable' (PA 23). And yet for Lacoste there is no expectation of any divine presence (he will instead employ the term *Parousia*, with a particular sacramental association). If one employs the lexicon of his most recent book *Etre en Danger*, prayer presents itself as an enterprise of risk, an activity which has no expectation of being fulfilled: as Lacoste notes the 'inaction' that we experience instead 'is a common experience', the familiar consciousness concerned about what *is* not yet; nothing, he suggests, '*is perhaps more common than the familiar phrase "dead time"*'. He also proposes that in its place one should unpack that 'surprising analogy between spiritual experience and everything where man does nothing but lose himself or his time' (BHP 387).

Here, he argues, it would 'be imprecise to use the lexicon of love, if for no other reason than that we can love while feeling only an absence, or because we can love without something being given to affection [*donner à sentir*]' (PA 24). Phenomena of fidelity, love, and enjoyment all share in humanity's desire for permanence (love 'has a temporality and a mode of appearance that contradict both the experience of Dasein and that of the mortal' [ED 150] while the act of loving 'unfolds in a dual time indebted to both enjoyment and desire, and that its insatiable temporality is incompatible with that of serenity' [ED 151]).

As a transgression of our being-in-the-world undetermined by angst or by the serenity of the earth (both strong Heideggerian themes), liturgy represents a desire to see and experience God and to anticipate our absolute future (that is, the future

already prepared for and promised to us). Liturgy can therefore be thought of as a project that tries to let God, (rather than the world or earth) signify our existence, motivated by the desire to live *coram Deo* and not in the world or on the earth, although it may confuse its anticipation of the future with the future *an sich*, heedless to any other signification(s) than those which it gives to itself autonomously.

Cautiously employing the ‘language of fidelity and hope’ says Lacoste, allows us to talk of at least the possibility of reappearance and the inclusion of ‘a relation with the future that is suddenly and absolutely imposed in the aftermath of enjoyment’ (PA 24). Disappearance can only guarantee re-appearance if it sacrifices the existential for what Lacoste calls ‘the mechanical’ – the potential loss of hope and humanity as ‘technologized, quantified, divided amongst various scientific realms, merely an object only and subject to control’ has been a concern of Lacoste from the beginning of his career (TH 19) .

But whenever an enjoyable and given presence ‘erases itself’ – that is, as Heidegger might say, disappears amid a succession of “nows” (Lacoste also mentions resignation and oblivion) – then it is ‘logical’ to hope for it to be repeated. This is the relation between fidelity and hope: fidelity is ‘proven’ in the pursuit of either a repetition or a fuller reappearance; for its part ‘fidelity refuses all satisfaction’ (PA 24). Anticipation gets its meaning from what it anticipates and can only be interpreted from the end (PA 27). Lacoste is here trying to be faithful to an intrinsic phenomenality: that of ‘what has not emptied its being in its being-present but which is given to us to anticipate a future presence’ this future presence might be even fuller, but is present to us merely as a hint (PA 26). This much-anticipated fuller experience – that is, an experience of Parousia – should be thought of as transcending any and all experience realized within the limits of the world. If nothing else, nihilism affirms the

impossibility of a final, definitive word: an eschatology resistant to the anti-historical onslaught of Nietzsche would involve a criticism of any realized eschatology. Phenomenology enjoys and patiently awaits whatever is given to it; while the ‘patience of God’ gives mankind time for conversion, ‘time is not something God can be thought to owe them. It is a time of ‘watchfulness’ – the eschatological posture *par excellence* – in which every possible future apart from the Absolute Future is bracketed off’ (MH 265). There cannot be any nihilist phenomenology since, according to Lacoste the life of consciousness prohibits the eternal return of the same. But phenomenology can welcome the eschaton: it is sufficient for it ‘to be given, which only comes here and now, of course, in the form of expectations or ... as a “micro-eschatology” (INT 22-23).⁷⁸³

Eschatological anticipation is, avers Lacoste, anticipation *par excellence* (PA 32). It therefore has nothing in common with the phenomenon of presence, that is, with those experiences which reveal that presence is merely presence – the Paschal appearances are merely provisional (PA 28).

Nonetheless, anticipation has an ‘experiential reality similar to anything else that is experienced in consciousness and the event of anticipatory signification is given to us with as much reality as everything else’ (PA 31). This anticipation relies upon an existing givenness and while ‘the gifts made to us are the anticipation of a gift that they promise to us’ (PA 32) such pre-givenness may be not much more than ‘a preamble’, givenness, Lacoste reassures us, can have the character of promise (PD 159-178) which he describes as ‘the perpetual stimulus of donation beyond the finitude and vulnerability of the given’ (PD 160).

⁷⁸³ See Kearney ‘Epiphanies of the Everyday’ as well as his ‘Sacramental Imagination and Eschatology’, in Neal DeRoo and John Panteleimon Manoussakis, eds., *Phenomenology And Eschatology: Not Yet In The Now* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 55-67.

This account of the promise coincides with his observation that within the limits of the world, waiting and ‘eschatological desire’ are pre-eschatological experiences, and as such, do not overflow those limits. The gift here loses ‘its anthropological roots’ although, perhaps paradoxically, Lacoste suggests that ‘it is clear that there is no donation if there is no consciousness to recollect it, and that nothing is given nor is nothing given if not to a consciousness and flesh’ (PD 169). This given manifests itself as ‘the ongoing possibility of a forgetting of the gift. The past of the donation can remain in memory and this memory then puts it back into presence. This past, however, may disappear in favour of a present possession which no longer has reference to’ it (PD 170). The gift is both event and appearance, and each of its appearances is unique: the crystallization of the gift into one form of the given therefore represents ‘a loss of experience’ (PD 171).

The idea of a final gift and a final given require a present ‘that is frozen in the perpetuation of the same’. But more broadly, says Lacoste, the phenomenological equivalence of appearance and givenness ‘only makes sense in a time frame where the future is uncontrollable; and the interpretation of this equivalence required that we use the lexicon of the promise, such that nothing appears to without promising to reappear again’ (PD 172).

“Promise” is understood by Lacoste in its broadest sense: promises can be made and promises can be broken and sometimes we even feel that the future will manifest itself (although, barring minor differences, he expects his office to look the same upon his return as when he left it). Givenness exceeds and subverts the given which promises nothing and is happy, finally, to be equal to itself. There is no given, however, ‘that is not open to a new donation which, by and by, will enrich its appearance or give us another “thing”’ (PD 172); even the past does not reappear as

identical. Promise therefore dominates the gift and may hover in the background while we enjoy ‘what we are given, as given, and hope for no more than the perpetuation of the present’. Here, Lacoste returns to his familiar example of listening to a musical work: ‘the few bars we have already heard promise us ... a surplus of experience and joy’ (PD 173).

Yet the logic of anticipation is, we are told, ‘antithetical of that of enjoyment’: even if we are completely absorbed in enjoyment, it seizes upon ‘a presence that is not parousia-like because it is a presence’ (PA 32). Within the time of the world, humanity’s relation to God is characterised by its waiting on a definitive relation – Parousia – that can only take place beyond the world and that mankind can only anticipate. Anything else is merely presence, and not Parousia – ‘presence appears to us as not-being eschatological omnipresence’ (PP 11). Such presence invites my own presence: it does not compel it, but it does have need of it (PP 13).

If mankind contents itself with enjoying merely the pre-appearance of something in the present, then the ‘proper phenomenality’ of anticipation eludes us. A consciousness that could not anticipate anything is unthinkable.

7.9 The time of sleep

‘Everyone,’ Jean-Luc Nancy asserts, ‘sleeps in the equality of the same sleep’.⁷⁸⁴ The humanism (that is, humanity) of the other person resides in their consciousness and desires⁷⁸⁵ and, as embodied, each night they need a “still life” – or ‘sufficient time to sleep’ (EA 79) – as an essential part of their health and well-being. Although expressed in the active language of “*désir*” – the insomniac’s cry of “I want to sleep!” – these concrete demands of health and well-being testify to an essential

⁷⁸⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 18.

⁷⁸⁵ ‘Desire, an aspiration that does not proceed from a lack – metaphysics – is the desire of a person.’ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), p. 299.

passivity on the part of the human person⁷⁸⁶; fatigue has directionality towards the human subject as object – as Lacoste observed, we are always tired by *something* (for example reading or walking) or bored of *something* (prayer or philosophy for instance). Although the sleeper wakes up and speaks, Lacoste tells us, her affectivity ‘performs no work of knowing in the dreamtime; it is done once she is awakened’. But for now, any trace of ‘a bond between knowing and affection’ has gone and with it nearly everything else: almost any shred of concern or being-with. And if I should happen to recognize in her another self we are together here only ‘in a minimal way’ (ED 124).

Husserl himself described the level of the Ego – ‘where subjectivity is most living its life’⁷⁸⁷ – in terms of sleep and waking; the *Cartesian Meditations* affirms the essential inadequacy of intuition: simply put, what is intended and what is perceived are not the same, more so if one is tired. Consciousness, as a correlation of the *nomotic* and *noetic*, is little consolation to an exhausted or bored *homo vivens*; self-consciousness, as an absolute knowledge, offers ‘an inadequate model for the “living present of the *cogito-sum*,” for presence to self is already disturbed by a rupture within immanence; and this is: awakening and life (*réveil et vie*)’.⁷⁸⁸ Nancy, who more than anyone could be called Derrida’s heir, described sleep as a fall, playing on the French *tomber de sommeil* (an idiomatic expression which means ‘to drop from exhaustion, to be falling asleep on one’s feet’).

Sleep represents an erasure between subjectivity and objectivity (‘of which we can only dream’ [ED 82]), between an understanding [*connaissance*] of the world and

⁷⁸⁶ As Donald Baillie notes ‘we suppose ourselves to be much more the masters of our spiritual development than we actually are...in sleep...the will then relaxes its too despotic control’, ‘The Theology of Sleep’, *Christian Devotion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962): pp. 71-77; p. 74.

⁷⁸⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* (Paris: Vrin, 1986), p. 47.

⁷⁸⁸ Michael Purcell, *Mystery and Method: The Other in Rahner and Levinas* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998), p. 14 citing Levinas, *Entre Nous: Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), p. 102.

knowledge of the world gained through the unity of transcendental apperception and Husserl, as we noted above, understood consciousness in terms of an awakening. In overcoming insomnia through sleep, the subject proves itself victorious over anonymous being; alternatively, by waking it asserts its own conscious relationship, or hypostasis, with being. The problem though, says Lacoste, is that “I sleep” is an impossible statement. Once said, in the strictest sense of the first person, then I am clearly not asleep. The problem appears even more clearly in the phrase “I dream” which is an impossible statement. No one doubts, he says, ‘that when I dream, an “I” is an actor in and witness to his dreams – if they are good dreams, during which he exercises no power upon them, but for which he bears some responsibility.’ No one doubts that there a dream-world exists, or more precisely that the ‘quasi-experience’ of the dreamer is still an experience of the world, similar to the ‘experience of waking consciousness’: that of ‘a world where into which we are projected, which has its temporality, where affect is ubiquitous’. However, while I am dreaming, ‘my experience or quasi-experience differs from the phenomena of waking time to the extent that it is almost impossible to confuse them’. Whoever pinches himself to check that he is not dreaming already knows that he is not, and only burdens himself with unnecessary extra proof. ‘The dream,’ says Lacoste ‘lacks freedom and decision’. And it is here that the dream-world ‘is radically different from that of the previous day’ (ED 124).

Emmanuel Levinas, of course, pursued a ‘second level of awakening’, one which verged on intersubjectivity, no longer the hypostasis of existent and existence but the hypostasis of the “Other-in-me”, although he conceded that this was ‘no longer Husserl’.⁷⁸⁹ Husserl’s understanding of consciousness in terms of

⁷⁸⁹ Purcell, *Mystery and Method*, pp. 203-4 citing Levinas, *Entre Nous*, p. 104.

representation is therefore challenged by Levinas who pushes Husserl's reduction further into this 'second level' which while Husserl might have hinted at he never pursued: 'the exposition of the other (Autre) in the Same... in which the subject loses the atomic consistency of transcendental apperception'⁷⁹⁰. Levinas suggests that 'despite its gnoseological expression – ontical and ontological – phenomenology calls attention to a sense of philosophy which does not lead to a reflexion on the relationship of thought to the world'.⁷⁹¹ Although Husserl may have sought an explanation of experience in terms of an adequate relationship between what is given and what is signified in the subjective unity of transcendental apperception 'this is not the sole, nor even the initial modality of the subjective in the Husserlian analyses'⁷⁹² which are always more surprising than his "system." Levinas continues, 'we think that the reduction reveals its true meaning, and the meaning of the subjective which it signifies, in its final phase which is the intersubjective reduction. The subjectivity of the subject shows itself in the traumatism of awakening, despite the gnoseological interpretation which, for Husserl, finally characterises the element of spirit'⁷⁹³. The characteristic of Levinas' conception is that consciousness is not simply disturbed by what is other [*autre*] rousing it from sleep, but also radically compromised by the personal other [*autrui*] who awakens the ego to a life other than that of presence and representation; Levinas once observed that 'it is not necessary to sleep, it is necessary to philosophise'.⁷⁹⁴

According to Karl Rahner modern medicine (unlike the materialism identified by Foucault and Bishop) recognises 'that it is the whole man and not merely his body

⁷⁹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* (Paris: Vrin, 1986), p. 55.

⁷⁹¹ Levinas, *Entre Nous*, p. 97.

⁷⁹² Ibid. p. 98.

⁷⁹³ Ibid. pp. 102-3.

⁷⁹⁴ Levinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, p. 35.

which is ill when he is unable to sleep'.⁷⁹⁵ However, in the face of this holistic approach, Rahner poses the question as to whether 'this land into which we move through sleep more than in our wakeful state...is so exclusively a kingdom of quiet peacefulness and of benevolent powers?'.⁷⁹⁶ Sleep, he maintains, contains an element of risk: 'when we sleep, our spirit, our responsible personality, does not simply put up the shutters and say 'closing-time', after which nothing further can happen which is of any interest to it. No, rather it sinks down into that in us which belongs to us and yet lies before or beneath that sphere of reality around us over which we exercise immediately and 'despotically' responsible control.'⁷⁹⁷ As Nancy observes, 'I fall asleep and at the same time I vanish as "I". I fall into myself and myself falls into self. It is no longer me, it is oneself, which does nothing but return to self.'⁷⁹⁸ In other words, sleep represents an unavoidable decline of human subjectivity into a strange non-place and offers a profound illustration of the notion of non-experience, and its potential affect upon the human person.

Rahner rather problematises the Heideggerian logic of *Beifindlichkeit* upon which Lacoste has placed such emphasis. Rahner is 'surprised that people so naturally assume that one always judges and acts better and more correctly if one has first 'slept on it'...often one sleeps away the highest inspirations.' Put simply, 'the wellspring of our personal waking thinking and acting, to which we can never penetrate completely, is altered during sleep...in an uncontrollable way...[which] is surely not something to be taken for granted and not quite without danger. We allow ourselves in sleep to be hypnotized to some extent by a 'something' which is wholly unknown to us, and to be

⁷⁹⁵ Karl Rahner, 'A Spiritual Dialogue at Evening: On sleep, prayer, and other subjects', *Theological Investigations III: The Theology of the Spiritual Life*, trans. Karl-H and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), pp. 220-236; p. 221.

⁷⁹⁶ Rahner, 'Spiritual Dialogue', p. 224.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 225.

⁷⁹⁸ Nancy, *Fall of Sleep*, p. 11.

given by it post-hypnotic commands for the day.’⁷⁹⁹

Now, says Lacoste, dreams can come from ‘a rich sense of existence’: our existential right (that is, one included in existence) to constitute objects is not abolished in the dream-time. And if this is true, he says, then ‘it must be said that the limits of existence are broader than those of freedom and the day before’ (ED 125). Since not only sleep ‘but often dreamless sleep’ happens to us all, Lacoste concludes that wherever existence withdraws into the dream-world, where mankind does nothing more than ‘quasi-exist’ it undergoes a withdrawal into a world-less existence – that is, existence in its pure possibility – whose withdrawal from biological life forces ‘us to say that there is no existence without life, and that life can be insulated from existence’ (ED 125).

The sleeping *self* does not appear: according to Nancy, ‘[t]here is no phenomenology of sleep, for it shows of itself only its disappearance, its burrowing and its concealment.’⁸⁰⁰ Moreover, the sleeping self ‘is the self of the thing in itself: a self that cannot even distinguish *itself* from what is not “self,” a self without self, in a way, but that finds or touches in this being-without-self its most genuine autonomous existence.’ Accordingly, there is ‘no representation, there is barely presentation, barely presence. The presence of the sleeper is the presence of an absence, the thing in itself is a thing of no-thing.’⁸⁰¹ Between this play of absence and presence, everything ‘is equal to itself and to the rest of the world. Everything reverts to the general equivalence in which one sleeper is worth as much as any other sleeper and every sleep is worth all the others, however it may appear.’ Lacoste indeed states that sleep ‘happens to us all’ (ED 125) and in a manner reminiscent of his insistence that the phenomenology of liturgy must acknowledge a time when even the master and slave

⁷⁹⁹ Rahner, ‘Spiritual Dialogue’, p. 225.

⁸⁰⁰ Nancy, *Fall of Sleep*, p. 13.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.* p. 15.

of Hegelian dialectic can pray together, Nancy concludes that sleep ‘knows only equality, the measure common to all, which allows no differences or disparities. All sleepers fall into the same, identical and uniform sleep. [...] That is why night suits it, along with darkness, and especially silence.’⁸⁰²

7.10 Anarchy and flux⁸⁰³

The ‘trouble with anarchy, warns Schrijvers in his introduction to Lacoste’s work, ‘is that anarchy means trouble’. And the problem with ontological anarchy is the same as that of every other anarchy: ‘it unsettles order in such a way that all order becomes impossible’.⁸⁰⁴ But rather than simply merely being the ‘possibility of being-in-the-world and its corresponding affects’, life exceeds *Dasein* (to which human being cannot be reduced), a surplus which can be expressed in two of those affects – what Schrijvers calls ‘pleasantly anarchic’⁸⁰⁵ – experiences of peace and joy, which cannot be accommodated within the horizon of the world.

Joy – which, cautions Lacoste, is not to be thought of as merely ‘negative work’ or ‘a work of nothing’ – enjoys an ‘extraterritoriality’ with regard to history and cannot, at least fruitfully, be contradicted (ED 200). And while anxiety is marred by violence ‘peace is a matter of (re)conciliation which introduces a certain fruitful disorder [*désordre fructueux*]’ into the Heideggerian logic of existence (ED 193).

According to the Psalmist, ‘Joy cometh in the morning’ (Psalm 30: 5) and even if one has to admit that joy can only be uttered in a fragile voice (perhaps,

⁸⁰² Ibid. p. 17.

⁸⁰³ On the possibility of religious anarchy see John D. Caputo, ‘In Search of a Sacred Anarchy: An Experiment in Danish Deconstruction’, in Martin Beck Matušík and William L. McBride, eds., *Calvin O. Schrag and the Task of Philosophy After Postmodernity* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002).

⁸⁰⁴ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 189.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 180.

suggests Jérôme de Gramont⁸⁰⁶, if not born with it, then mankind is born *to* joy), then, following Lacoste and Gramont, this joy is that of a life presented in the light of Easter morning, although not that of the first morning), in the middle of history and the midst of the world; even if it in any way leads towards humanity's absolute illumination, it cannot tear it away entirely from those conditions of its present existence which are also fatigue and heaviness: according to Lacoste, we know, of course, that the experience of ease or comfort cannot be coextensive with our lives. In other words, that 'well-being-there can not cancel out the "malaise" which threatens us' (MAO 21).

In his lucid summary of Lacoste's thought Gramont remarks that as a temporal being, subject to fatigue (and not just of the body) whose cares and worries even joy cannot abolish (MAO 50; PP 307) there is, for the human being, no experience of joy, even when it is complete, which is not also an experience of its own fragility (MAO 98); joy finds its 'legitimacy in having gone through anxiety's test beforehand and to have learned its lessons' (MAO, p. 96). Christian joy, is says Lacoste, 'a proleptic sharing in the eschatological goods'.⁸⁰⁷ Joy is perhaps then, speculates Gramont, a "wonder of wonders" for which mankind must do nothing else than raise its voice in song or Eucharistic thanksgiving: 'but should our joy come to be it is this body of mine that it raises and traverses, this history of mine that it splits into two, and its experience does not stop being fragile'.⁸⁰⁸

Joy is just one of our "affections", which have their own intentional quality (MAO 117) and Lacoste argues, in his engagement with Scheler's account of values (MAO 107-127) that moral intuition (which, after all, is nothing more than the moral

⁸⁰⁶ Jérôme de Gramont, 'Le monde muet et la patrie de la phénoménologie', *Transversalités* 110 (2009): pp. 177-95, p. 177-195 ; 193.

⁸⁰⁷ Lacoste, 'Review of *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* by David F. Ford', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 15 (2002): pp. 151-2; p. 151.

⁸⁰⁸ Gramont, 'Le monde muet et la patrie de la phénoménologie', p. 193.

use of affective intentionality) has as strong a ‘cognitive power’ as does perception (MAO 114). Joy, as with any other affection, may be presently experienced or the object of remembrance either in an action of commemoration or an action of witnessing and, crucially, by either an individual or a group – while joy is necessarily *my* joy, ‘this should not obscure a possibility which is not mine but ours, or which is mine only through being ours’ (ED 199-200). Either way, the potential relevance of an account of affectivity to a theological account of the Eucharist is clear, even if – or, especially if – the ‘transcendental and anonymous Christianization of values and feeling has not closed the debate’ (MAO 118). But what then of foundations? On Scheler’s account, says Lacoste, the welcome which we extend to the appearance of values ‘enjoys the privileges of a unique foundation’: the only way that values are present to us is by their appearance in the realm of the affects (MAO 117). Yet Scheler’s account precludes any real interaffectivity or intersubjectivity; Lacoste takes his orientation from Heidegger’s account of the affections as offering a pre-reflexive and pre-discursive understanding of the world which appears obscurely – in what Lacoste terms the ‘chiaroscuro’ [*clair-obscur*] (MAO 122).

Janet Soskice notes that ‘the admonitory thesis of metaphor-as-myth comes closely to resemble the anarchic view of Nietzsche’.⁸⁰⁹ For Lacoste spiritual experience takes place within an anarchy where the interplay between ‘thingness’ [*choséité*] and ‘beingness’ [*étantité*] means that a single entity can appear as both thing *and* being. Its truth lies in its plural appearance as this (thing) or that (being) and for this to be described phenomenologically, as Schrijvers points out, ‘one would need to describe a flux and a fluency of appearances’.⁸¹⁰ Phenomenology thus exposes a

⁸⁰⁹ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). p.80.

⁸¹⁰ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 168. For a discussion of anarchy in contemporary philosophy see his ‘Anarchistic Tendencies in Contemporary Philosophy: Reiner Schürmann and the Hybris of Philosophy’, *Research in Phenomenology* 37 (2007): pp. 417–39.

fundamental anarchic plurality (ED 162) which is tied to a ‘chaos of affectivity’ (ED 258).

To this chaos and anarchy one can add drama: temporality is, says Lacoste, ‘undeniably dramatic: changes, movements, actions are temporal events and are dramatic for the simple reason that this is life’ (PD 181). There is, however, nothing tragic about his drama: the play of appearance is temporal; the self basically participates there as the power of reception-and-constitution (which does not, Lacoste assures us, mean either modelling or conception). This power is granted to the self because it ‘lives in the stream of the temporal flux’, and Lacoste preserves ‘the language of continuity’ in order to describe ‘the sequence of presences which appear in the element of perception and disappear just as quickly, having no other being than in retention and then in the intuitional act of memory’ (PD 181).

Rather than being merely the playthings of some Platonic Absolute⁸¹¹, every project (NT 27-29) has its own freedom. If some other future comportment is possible, the human being can forget its finitude and no longer treat it as its sole concern.⁸¹² For the human being, whose being is revealed as time, its being appears in and as a becoming [*devenir*], or – in the case of *esse coram Deo* – even a ‘letting-be’; because, says Schrijvers, ‘the human being is, through its corporeality, thrown into the time of the world [which is] already a movement, the being of the human being also has to be conceived of as movement’.⁸¹³ For Lacoste the becoming of the world and ego are a single event, not merely an ever-changing flux: the difference between who I am and who I have been (PD 184). Indeed the self ‘first of all gives itself

⁸¹¹ I take plaything [*παίγνιον*] here to denote an essential passivity, like clay in hands of the potter (EA 156); it is this kind of decentring, in which mankind is reduced merely to the status of an object that Schrijvers takes issue with in Lacoste’s early work. See *Ontotheological Turnings?*, p. 14.

⁸¹² On this issue of finitude Ludwig Heyde’s book, *The Weight of Finitude: On the Philosophical Question of God*, trans. Alexander Harmsen and William Desmond (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999).

⁸¹³ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 43.

metaphysically to be conceived as perpetually and identically present in the flux of experiences' (PD 185). This opens up the question of 'the substantiality of the self' (which acts as 'a guarantor of a permanent and enduring presence' that is indifferent to any "absence" – I leave the world, says Lacoste, 'when I sleep and do not dream [PD 186]). He concedes that there is 'an empirical self and that it is partly governed by time – but one then resorts to a meta-empirical and phenomenologically inaccessible ego' a doomed strategy which falls prey to those critics 'who know only the empirical ego, his body, his memory lapses, his quirks of character' (PD 186). Phenomenology is unable to accept a metaphysical *Deus ex machina* or a transcendental ego which are based upon a conceptual knowledge that it is the product of a panic aroused by the future or 'becoming' (PD 185). Instead phenomenology thinks this movement through *my* experiences (plural) of this temporal flux.

Now, we can describe the appearance of the thing and the object, but not without taking into – and without offering an – account 'of the affective flux in which a thing becomes an object and an object a thing' (ED 80). A phenomenological description such as this forces us 'to quit the familiar terrain of Heideggerian interpretation' that otherwise obscures the play between thing and object (ED 80). Here, perception is inextricably part of a sometimes chaotic affective tonality. Equally inseparable are the flux of phenomena and the temporality of the self, which should both be thought together (ED 177); for Lacoste, we would be mistaken about the meaning of existence if we were to make *one* moment in the life of consciousness and the direct welcome of *one* particular phenomenon paradigmatic of lived experience. This would be, as Schrijvers points out, an example of privileging Husserl over Heidegger when in fact no single experience should be conceived as more fundamental than another. This does not imply that one experience is as valid for

phenomenology as any other, but instead that human being is comprised of often contradictory experiences (ED 163).

Manoussakis considers that ‘the structure of an “inverted intentionality,” as exemplified by certain liturgical forms such as hymnology and iconography’ provides the ‘precise point of phenomenology’s convergence with eucharistic eschatology’. He believes that eschatology is in essence a “liberation” theology, freeing humanity from ‘the moralistic and sociological constellations of this world’ which has important consequences for ecclesial organisation and relations, within both its tradition and its ecumenical efforts. With this come lessons in ethics and humility, and a critical re-assessment of the place of human judgement: ‘[t]he truth of the Other is not determined by the things-themselves but by the wonderfully unpredictable and surprising things-to-come.’⁸¹⁴ ‘Back to the things themselves’ was, of course, slogan of Edmund Husserl, father of the phenomenological movement by which he meant a return to the reality that Kant had denied to things following his bifurcation of the world into *phenomena* and *noumena*.

Theologically speaking, says Manoussakis, the cause of things does not lie in their beginning but in their end: since they come *from* the kingdom of God, ‘it is the kingdom that is, properly speaking, their origin’⁸¹⁵ – and, citing Lacoste, ‘It is not at the beginning (in the morning of consciousness and at the dawn of history) that man is truly himself... meaning comes at the end (EA 137). So, in this respect, eschatology is indeed thoroughly anarchic, for, writes Manoussakis, ‘it alone can effect such a radical subversion of the *ἀρχή*, of principles and beginnings.’⁸¹⁶

Eschatology, on this reading, ‘reverses naturalistic, essentialist, and historicist models by making the seemingly improbable claim that I am not who I am, let alone

⁸¹⁴ Manoussakis, ‘Anarchic Principle’, p. 46.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid. p. 32.

⁸¹⁶ Op cit.

who I was and have been, but rather, like the theophanic Name of Exodus (3:14), I am who I *will* be. Eschatological theology is deep down a liberation theology.⁸¹⁷

Manoussakis proffers the protological example of the shadow [*σκιά*] from the epistles to the Hebrews and Colossians, a metaphor which cannot but help invite comparisons with Lacoste's own notion of chiaroscuro. This shadow, we are told, 'precedes reality, so that, in Christian typology, the present condition of things as the things-themselves is merely an adumbration of the things-to-come', Manoussakis here referring to an unpublished work of the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas. The implication is, then, that 'the validity of the things-themselves depends upon the things-to-come, and that therefore, the former have no intrinsic value of their own.'⁸¹⁸

In a somewhat anarchic move, Lacoste criticizes worldly eschatology – that is, the practice of ethics – for the sake of eschatology, since no present-day experience could ever prove to be fundamental; thus it is 'necessary that the question of peace and reconciliation is posed while presupposing the failure of the human being to be human'.⁸¹⁹ The only substance that can be attributed to the event of the self is that event itself – 'substance is not some atemporal thing allegedly more real than the temporal history of the self' (PD 196); what remains identical in and for the subject is precisely that which is always in flux. Lacoste thus argues that the self can only be fully known in the eschaton, and is undetermined by present-day experience in which it has merely the character of an aporia (PD 196), a character of unknowability that it will only shed at the end of history.⁸²⁰

⁸¹⁷ Op cit.

⁸¹⁸ Op cit.

⁸¹⁹ Lacoste, 'Vers le sacrement du pardon', *Communio*, 8 (1983) : pp. 5–24, p. 11 cited in Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 18.

⁸²⁰ Moltmann, indicates at its seemingly paradoxical nature of this sort of comment with his observation that: 'The Christian expectation for the future has nothing at all to do with final solutions of this kind, for its focus is not the end of life, or history, or the world. It is rather the beginning.' See his "Is the World Coming to an End or Has Its Future Already Begun?" in David Fergusson and Marcel

But perhaps the self is instead determined not by the “now” but by a past event (such as that commemorated in the Eucharistic memorial) or by an event-to-come. This is the meaning of comportment. As a self, I am ‘in time’: either by projecting into the future or recalling the past (BHP 361). The eschatological mode of our being that is elucidated in and through prayer needs to be thought of as grace: the person who consents to pray exists within a “gracious” possibility, neither deduced nor determined by the present (BHP 551). The difference between ‘*exister dans l’horizon de son avenir*’ (existence within the horizon of the future) and that of ‘*exister à partir de son avenir*’ (an existence determined by the future) is, in Schrijvers words, ‘that the latter is not *our* possibility, although it remains a *possibility* for us after all, although it cannot be once and for all appropriated and assumed’.⁸²¹ Mankind’s comportment *coram Deo* is inaugurated and sustained both by a prior divine call (NT 127) and an anticipated eschaton.

So, in contrast to the concept of time as the passage of time or *chronos* [χρόνος] there is a different understanding of temporality as *kairos* [καιρός] – vertical and discontinuous, anarchic even. It is this contention of a backwards project (the inversion of the liturgical project in which man presents himself *coram Deo* in ontic activities such as prayer) in which meaning and significance are projected backwards through history⁸²² that can offer (and in no more definite a manner than that) some structure to the affective chaos of everyday life and provide a tentative answer to Schrijvers’ concern that liturgical experience might ‘evaporate’ and lose ‘its verticality’ in the anarchy of ordinary life.

Sarot, eds., *The Future as God’s Gift: Explorations in Christian Eschatology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000): pp.129-138; p. 130.

⁸²¹ Schrijvers, *Introduction*, p. 75.

⁸²² Or indeed forwards, hence Gramont’s remarks on the significance of the Easter memorial for Lacoste’s thinking

Moreover, a reading of the Eucharist like that of René Girard can show how it should undermine traditional notions of sacrifice and the often violently expressed anxiety that needs a scapegoat in order for it to be satisfied, replacing them instead with experiences of peace and joy that have the potential to overwhelm the *Daseinanalytik*; however, this being a phenomenologically grounded theology it is all too grounded in the plurality and diversity of our experiences, so the possible 'liturgical consummation' of philosophy remains a possibility rather than a given.

8. Concluding thoughts

Introduction

The relation between theology and phenomenology has been varied, and often (as in the case of Janicaud) one of mutual suspicion. Phenomenology as Spiegelberg has shown was less a philosophical school than a movement that accommodated a plurality of viewpoints.⁸²³ Husserl – a Jew who converted to liberal Protestantism – had, writes Lacoste, ‘little to say about God who only appeared in his thought as a “limit”’, although Christianity became increasingly important to him at the end of his life. Scheler’s interest in “the God to come” was, following his break from Catholicism, from within the confines of philosophy of religion rather than theology. Although Husserl’s assistant at Gottingen, Adolf Reinach, ‘displayed a distinct interest in philosophical theology’ his research was tragically cut short by the First World War. Edith Stein, Husserl’s research assistant at Freiburg, ultimately abandoned phenomenology, gradually slipping into neo-scholasticism and denying developments in Husserlian phenomenology (DCTh 1084). Heidegger’s own interest in theology during his initial period teaching at Freiburg manifested itself in the reading of texts: by Luther and Augustine; although while ‘the Christian experience interested Heidegger, it is not certain that he was really interested in Christianity’ (HQD 22).⁸²⁴

Lacoste notes that ‘the relationship between language and the event of being led to the suggestion that theology, if it is to ‘be true to its mission of ‘original and critical thought’ must include the experience of prayer and elucidate it’ (HQD 16). The task of these previous chapters has been to demonstrate to what extent phenomenology aids in that elucidation. We can, writes Lacoste, ‘refuse the proposal:

⁸²³ Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965).

⁸²⁴ See here the work of Craig De Paulo.

either to think God “without being” and as *agape*, such that no ontology can be caught in its net (cf. Jean-Luc Marion), or to move from a metaphysical thinking of God as *ens* to a post-metaphysical and eschatological thinking of God as *posse* (Richard Kearney)’ (HQD20).

8.2 Sacramental existence

One question remains – where to situate Lacoste in the constellation of contemporary theology? It is the contention of this chapter that Lacoste merits a place amongst *nouvelle théologie*. Without pretending to do more than ‘simply opening a door’, Lacoste tries to show two things. The first is that a sacrament, by the very complexity of its appearance, provides food for philosophical thought. The second is that phenomenology has the means to respect its phenomenality, which shows that, although complex, this appearing is no less intelligible to reason, let alone the intellect inherent in an act of faith (IS 524-5).

After Heidegger, writes Lacoste, ‘God is not a being, neither is He *Being*’ (HQD 16). So Tillich’s contention that since God is *beyond* essence and existence arguing that ‘God exists’ amounts to denying him is, writes David Brown, ‘just silly’. Not only does it contradict the traditional use of the terms, he says, it effectively puts God ‘beyond the possibility of anything significant at all being said about him, such has been the extravagant blossoming of metaphysical compliments’.⁸²⁵ Brown identifies two dangers to this metaphysical impulse: firstly, it may preclude us from taking seriously the independence of the world and humanity; secondly, it tends to equate unity or wholeness and simplicity. What Brown finds ‘more plausible’ is that ‘impulse that has its basis in experience is what we might call the sacramental impulse’ by which he understands the detection of signs of transcendence in our

⁸²⁵ David Brown, *Continental Philosophy and Modern Theology: An Engagement* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 3.

experience, which need not imply ‘any overall unity inhering all our experience.’⁸²⁶ For Brown the thesis of Peter Berger’s *A Rumour of Angels* ‘challenges the common view that it is only a fairly explicit religious experience that could raise for us the question of God. Instead, hints of the transcendent, ‘a rumour of angels’, are all about us in our everyday experience.’⁸²⁷

According to Balthasar, ‘the life of contemplation is an everyday life’.⁸²⁸ But is it possible, as Richard Kearney contends, to conceive of a sacramental imagination which celebrates the ‘holiness of the everyday’?⁸²⁹ Liturgy transforms everyday language and its time is not that of the world, while its silence indicates an attunement of the human being with a pre-discursive order of being.

Husserl’s phenomenology of the flesh and embodiment revitalised ‘a theme largely ignored by Western metaphysics since Plato.’⁸³⁰ Metaphysics ‘managed to take the flesh and blood out of Christian incarnation, leaving us with abstract conceptual and categorical equivalents’. Husserl and the phenomenological revolution brought Western philosophy ‘back to the flesh of pre-reflective lived experience’. Despite his existential analytic of “moods” and “facticity”, ‘Heideggerian *Dasein* has no real sense of a body’ and while Scheler and Stein ‘made sorties into a phenomenology of feeling’, it was suggests Kearney, ‘only with Merleau-Ponty that we witnessed a credible return of the flesh ‘in all its ontological depth’.⁸³¹ Merleau-Ponty even went so far as to describe his phenomenology of the sensible body in sacramental language:

⁸²⁶ Ibid. p. 4.

⁸²⁷ Ibid. p. 10

⁸²⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, trans. Graham Harrison, *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986): p. 137.

⁸²⁹ Richard Kearney, ‘Sacramental Imagination and Eschatology’ in Neal DeRoo and John Panteleimon Manoussakis, eds., *Phenomenology and Eschatology: Not Yet In The Now* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009): pp. 55-67. An earlier version of the essay bears the subtitle ‘Eucharists of the Ordinary Universe’.

⁸³⁰ Ibid. p. 56.

⁸³¹ Ibid. p. 58.

Just as the sacrament not only symbolizes, in sensible species, an operation of Grace, but is also the real presence of God, which it causes to occupy a fragment of space and communicates to those who eat of the consecrated bread, provided that they are inwardly prepared, in the same way the sensible has not only a motor and vital significance, but is nothing other than a certain way of being in the world suggested to us from some point in space, and seized and acted upon by our body, provided that it is capable of doing so, so that sensation is literally a form of communion. (PoP 256)

In this sacramental ‘form of existence’ suggests Merleau-Ponty, ‘I am brought into relation with an external being’ (whether I open myself to or shut myself off from it). This particular mode of existence has the power to cast a spell and a ‘sacramental value’ because ‘the sentient subject does not posit them as objects, but enters into a sympathetic relation with them’ (PoP 248).

Lacoste’s phenomenologically inflected theology is one that through its ‘liturgical reduction’ attempts to avoid turning ‘things’ into ‘objects’ – for instance, reducing the biblical God to the supreme being of ontotheology: ‘We feel the presence of God, though nothing more than presence, and no parousia, is given to us’ (TP 19). The precise meaning of “object”, says Lacoste, is ‘the conceptual correlate of the subject’ (PP 12). Conceived through a metaphysics organized as ontology the object appears merely to ‘perception and ideation, but not to affection’. And the ontology of this object – that is, says Lacoste, ‘the ontology of Being when constituted as an object’ can clearly be interrogated. Lacoste thus proposes that – if it is to be truly meaningful – the language of presence does not acquire that presence in ‘a general ontology of the object’. It is the lesson of Heidegger, he says, to have ‘taught us that we live in the environment of the world in the company of beings who are “within

easy reach” or “close at hand” (PP 12). This may be a good way of thinking of ‘existential objectivity’ but a stone or a pen placed upon a table offer no evidence of presence; a work of art, another person, the whole of reality ‘cannot appear without opening the realm of emotional experience within us’. Until it is useful the object is merely that. On the other hand, says Lacoste, a work of art or the other person ‘who confronts me, demands to be recognized’ and ‘appear to us whilst calling for a response’ (PP 13). Presence then is not discerned; it is felt and welcomed. According to Lacoste, this is where every theory of objective knowledge fails. Hegel and Bultmann knew of ‘no other love of God than an *amor Dei intellectualis* – or that they love theology more than God.’ And if ‘we think that God is *offenbar*, and/or when we have no room left for hope’ then, warns Lacoste, ‘idolatry is not far off’ (TP 20).⁸³²

8.3 A sacramental ontology

What is the subject-matter of theology, after Heidegger? Theology should be concerned with the exposition of Christian faith, and find appropriate ways of speaking and thinking (PT 22). This is something for theologians to decide themselves and not borrow their categories of thinking and the form of their speech from philosophy. ‘If this faith’, wrote Heidegger, ‘by the power of its own conviction concerns man as man in his very nature, then genuine theological thinking and speaking have no need of a special resource (*Zurüstung*) to reach people and find a hearing among them’ (PT 23). Mankind’s becoming cannot be adequately expressed in a language governed by concepts of substance or thinghood. As Lacoste observes in an early article ‘the man who prays could ... be the most truly human of all’ (BHP 357). The sacrament ‘is not itself the event of our salvation, but makes us present to –

⁸³² See Hans von Balthasar, *Présence et pensée: essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1942). Here the theologian is caught between history and contemplation of the Eternal.

represents us to – the event’.⁸³³

Contemplation, writes Balthasar, ‘is liturgical, if we understand liturgy in its fullest sense’.⁸³⁴ Balthasar undertook what could be described as his own ‘liturgical reduction’ one which relied upon what he termed ‘an important practical teaching with regard to contemplative prayer’. This prayer cannot and must not be self-contemplation. On the contrary, he says, ‘it must be a devotional attention to what is essentially the non-I’.⁸³⁵ Tellingly, his muse, Adrienne von Speyer, compared the man at prayer to ‘Adam, sought out by God’.⁸³⁶ This contemplative prayer – a unity of Greek *theôria* and the Christian faith – was, says Lacoste, once upon a time ‘one of the most human of activities.’

Baroque or medieval man was probably no better at praying than contemporary man, but it was agreed that the one who prays is a more paradigmatic of humanity than he who does not. And whatever worldly business he delivered himself up to, he had little doubt that the trade of the contemplative with God was not only more important, but simply more real. (BHP 357)

From Eberhard Jüngel, writes Lacoste, we have learned how to provide a strictly Christological version of God-talk, and that ‘theological anthropology is always theological ontology’, or – following Ingolf Dalferth – ‘eschatological ontology’.⁸³⁷ For Lacoste, prayer involves risk, and, as an academic discipline, theology is a risky and potentially hypocritical exercise (PD 205) that may reduce its

⁸³³ Laurence Paul Hemming, ‘Transubstantiating Our Selves’, *Heythrop Journal* XLIV (2003): pp. 418–439; p. 418.

⁸³⁴ Balthasar, *Prayer*, p. 116.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 115.

⁸³⁶ Adrienne von Speyer, trans. Graham Harrison, *The World of Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), p. 299.

⁸³⁷ Lacoste, ‘Review of *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* by David F. Ford’, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 15 (2002) p. 151.

content to that of a thing through conceptual language that obscures an evangelical imperative. The first constraint upon the structure of theological language is what we might 'call 'kerygmatic'. Theology, we must always remember, is an *evangelical* discourse committed to the transmission of 'good news'; it is meant to arouse joy' (MH 266).

Mankind is thus called to accept the witness of scripture to revelation within a necessarily religious framework – 'the theology of the Word of God always leads to or always leads back to a theology of preaching and sermon' (AM 565). Theology is an act of repentant humility, and, like all other functions of the Church, is based upon the fact that God has spoken to humanity and that humanity may hear his Word.

Lacoste observes that whoever takes the risk of praying does not ask God to put the finishing touches to an almost perfect world (EA 93-94). Prayer exposes mankind's moral and theological poverty: it may have a 'kairological character' but 'morality cannot live on illusions' (EA 94); mankind cannot 'think morality without recognising an ambiguity [that] does not exclude immorality' (EA 95). Theologians cannot aim for a comprehensive treatment of any topic; as Yves Congar once commented: 'It is permissible not to say all that can be said on a topic, but to deal with it from one particular standpoint.'⁸³⁸ 'A doubtful conclusion is though', says Lacoste, 'still a conclusion'. What is inaugurated here is nothing less than 'a new chapter in phenomenology devoted to the elucidation of an original situation of feeling.

We only feel the "thing" of the sacrament, perhaps we can be given it within the time of the world. How can such a thing affect us without it also falling under the dominance of the signs and symbols of its gift? We cannot answer in

⁸³⁸ Yves Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple, or, The Manner of God's Presence to His Creatures from Genesis to the Apocalypse*, trans. Reginald F. Trevett (London: Burns & Oates, 1962), p. xi.

the context of this research. But it's enough to be asking that question in a legitimate way. (ED 119)

What Lacoste is concerned with is, in the end, what Kevin Hart has called a 'thorough revision of phenomenology' that allows us to ascertain 'what is most proper to a human being.'⁸³⁹ Balthasar appealed for some sort of '*supernatural phenomenology*' one in which affection displaces experience⁸⁴⁰ and which 'dismantles the constitution of subjectivity' (EA 156). Lacoste teaches us that the "theological turn" in phenomenology 'does not and cannot give us a classical phenomenology of the Christian life.'⁸⁴¹ Instead, being able to address Christianity demands an expansion of phenomenology and an acknowledgement not only that phenomenality is not restricted to 'perceptible entities' but has different modes of appearing that need to be respected: God transcends his phenomenality and 'hides himself more than he discloses himself' (TP 16). Theology, writes Hart, needs to 'recognise that the love that embraces us *sine qua modo* is always a love greater than we can imagine'; as Lacoste puts it 'if I love God as he is present to me in the world, I can but know that he transcends every 'side' – every Husserlian *Seite* – of himself that is here disclosed to me now' (TP 20). Hart writes we need 'to see that there is a myriad of little phenomenologies of the non-apparent that must be practised in sacramental theology, including explorations of the Christian life in terms of anticipation and the non-event, patience and waiting, fatigue and prayer, love and faith.'⁸⁴² Sacramental existence involves a combination of passivity and intuition. Here, writes Lacoste, 'pain is my pain. Suffering is mine. Passivity is mine, and welcomed by a consciousness that is

⁸³⁹ Kevin Hart, 'The Liturgical Reduction', *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 15:1 (2008): pp. 43-66; p. 65.

⁸⁴⁰ See Balthasar's essay 'Experience God?', *New Elucidations*, trans. Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986): pp. 20-45.

⁸⁴¹ Hart, 'The Liturgical Reduction', p. 66.

⁸⁴² Op. cit.

intentionally conscious.’ Both phenomenology and the Eucharist are oriented around a central notion of hospitality,⁸⁴³ be it the welcome extended to phenomena or the invitation to “taste and see” an act which inaugurates a new mode of intuition: ‘both “reveal” and “to pay attention” are linked. Psychoanalysis reveals through the careful deciphering of language, phenomenology does so in the welcome extended to whatever appears’ (IS 499). Phenomenology is no empiricism but, in ‘the element of perception, memory, anticipation, and even in that of conceptual imagination (intellectual intuition and work of thought), nothing gives itself that is not given firstly to intuition, to be “seen” in the largest possible sense’ (IS 497). The world is the precondition of ‘a plural phenomenality’ (IS 503) and whoever says “sacrament” ‘does not, in fact, refer to an independent reality (and thus independent phenomenality), but a reality whose function is to refer to another reality which itself has no sensible intuition to appear’ (IS 505). The symbol provides food for thought, it also gives thanks (IS 507).

8.4 Sacramental ontology and la nouvelle théologie

Lacoste is not advocating the grounding of hermeneutics in the Eucharist, despite the close relation between theology and the Eucharist (PP 76). Nor is he using phenomenology to develop a “radical overturn of the classical approach” of scholastic theology of the sacraments’, as Hart rightly recognises⁸⁴⁴ (although Lacoste does admit that ‘I am personally too far from any sort of thomism’⁸⁴⁵). Sacramental theology has moved from the periphery to the centre of a theological discourse no longer constrained by the metaphysical structures of Catholic scholasticism.

⁸⁴³ ‘...the power of that presence that is not felt here and now but offers itself to be felt’. Lacoste, ‘La présence et la demeure : L’eucharistie par delà toute « métaphysique de la présence » (Unpublished essay).

⁸⁴⁴ Hart, ‘Liturgical Reduction’, p. 61.

⁸⁴⁵ Lacoste, ‘From « energeia » to divine « energies »’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* (Winter 2007): pp. 437-442; p. 441.

Undoubtedly, as Hans Boersma points out, there is an overlap between Modernism and *nouvelle théologie*.⁸⁴⁶ For the arch-modernist and Anglo-Irish Jesuit George Tyrrell Christian truth was founded upon religious experience and articulated in symbols and rituals. He argued that ‘scholasticism was inadequate since it identified revelation simply as a body of propositions to be absorbed; lived experience should be at the centre of theological reflection’.⁸⁴⁷

Theological reflection on rituals and sacraments cannot, as Boeve concedes, deny the importance of anthropological research, but it should ‘pay particular attention to the Christian specificity of the sacramental praxis. While the ‘anthropology of rite and ritual’ can support the understanding of Christian sacraments ‘it will never be quite able to fully grasp their particular meaning for Christians’.⁸⁴⁸ Life, says Lacoste, ‘is not a work of philosophy’ (IS 498).

In 1935 Yves Congar was invited to write a theological conclusion to an investigation into the causes of unbelief in France which Congar identified as a ‘hiatus between faith and life’, similar to the ‘rupture between theology and life’ later lamented by Daniélou. Both were concerned by a retreat of religion into the private domain, and a resulting secularization of society – Congar in particular warned against ‘the principle of immanence implying the sufficiency of reason and the possibility of an indefinite progress in the world’.⁸⁴⁹ It is in this context, therefore, that the ‘phenomenology of the spiritual life’ in *Etre en Danger* should be understood, amid Lacoste’s conviction that modernity witnessed ‘a tragedy’: the ‘fundamentally

⁸⁴⁶ Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 20.

⁸⁴⁷ David Torevell, *Losing the Sacred: Ritual, Modernity and Liturgical Reform* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), p. 133

⁸⁴⁸ Lieven Boeve, ‘The Sacramental Interruption of Rituals of Life’, *Heythrop Journal* 44:4 (2003): pp. 401–417; p. 401.

⁸⁴⁹ Cited in Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*.

modern divorce' between theology and spirituality which is 'at the root of most of our troubles'.⁸⁵⁰

The appointment in 1960 of de Lubac and Congar to the preparatory *Theological Commission* for the Second Vatican Council marked the rehabilitation of the *nouvelle* theologians, several of whom were elevated to cardinal. Ecclesiology was central for both de Lubac and Congar, an ecclesiology that was sacramental in character and which shaped the communion ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council.⁸⁵¹ Congar and de Lubac had a similar approach: they distinguished between the Church as a structure or an institution and as life or community, and posited a sacramental relationship between the two (Congar in particular saw the Church's structure as the sacrament [*sacramentum*] that served as the means to bring about life as the reality [*res*] of the Church.⁸⁵² De Lubac and Congar forged their 'communion ecclesiology' in opposition to the neo-scholastic overemphasis on the real presence in the Eucharist and accentuated the sacramental purpose of the Church's unity as the reality [*res*] of the Eucharistic celebration.⁸⁵³

It is not necessary though for the bread and wine to become the body and blood of Christ 'for their perception is devoid of banality for those whose eyes can see' says Lacoste (IS 506). It is not necessary that this or that has the theological status of *sacramentum* for its appearance to be symbolic. Bread, wine, water – all provide food for thought without having to be the index of a "thing", *res*. Symbolism has its own order and its own autonomy. But has this put aside the question of a possible sacramental intuition? Lacoste borrows from Tillich the example of the flag – it is nothing less than a symbol, and it takes surprisingly little knowledge not to

⁸⁵⁰ Interview: 'Christianity is not really made for modernity' [accessed 11th January 2012].

⁸⁵¹ See Henri de Lubac, trans. Michael Mason, *The Splendor of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986): pp. 15-49.

⁸⁵² Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, p. 34.

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 293.

perceive it simply as a rectangle of colourful fabric. The flag symbolically refers to what is not, and it represents the country of which it is the symbol. Burning it can be a serious offense. A country, in a sense, is “present” in its flag’ (IS 507). But does this mean that whoever mentions a symbolic presence can talk about a sacramental presence? Obviously not says Lacoste. The sacrament – and it is a sacrament (and not a thing in Heidegger’s sense of the term):

is a new dimension, one beyond our space and our present time, which is opened when it is celebrated. The country is of this world. Bread, water, wine, are all also of this world, and if all this attracts us, it does not lure us out of the world: their symbolism does nothing less than reveal to us the reality of the world in all its richness, reveal to us the nontrivial reality of bread, wine and water, and the importance of homeland. The power of symbolism is to disaccustom us. Bread, wine, water, are more often no more than bread, wine and water. We eat and drink – not always, of course – without paying attention to what our actions mean. But as soon as they acquire the force of symbols, then bread, wine and water become somewhat in their own way, what Heidegger calls things (IS 507).

The increased emphasis upon liturgy is inspired by the slogan of Henri de Lubac ‘the Eucharist makes the church, and the church makes the Eucharist’. This reciprocal relationship between Eucharist and Church means that on one hand, the Eucharistic body aims for the realization of the communion of the ecclesial body. On the other, that clergy were required to produce the Eucharist. De Lubac went on to argue that the Church herself was the sacrament of Christ’s presence and convinced that Christ was sacramentally present in the world through the Church, he believed that he had overcome the neo-scholastic separation between nature and the

supernatural. Lacoste sees in Marion's remarkable claim in *God Without Being* that the bishop represents the 'theologian *par excellence*' a challenge to any sound theological hermeneutics. One which is founded upon Gadamer's arguments that might elucidate 'a principle of continuity, and of the existence of a place – the church – in which the "fusion of perspectives" and the dwelling in the "world of the Scriptures" might come about'. Compared to this, the proposal by Marion represents an 'extremist theory', one that knows the 'ecclesiastical conditions of interpretive success so well that they can rely on a paradigm supplied by Eucharistic ecclesiology – that is, one in which the bishop assumes 'theological competence' during the liturgy in order 'to quickly resolve any hermeneutic question'. Fortunately the debate, observes Lacoste, is 'dominated by more prudent voices, united by the rejection of any theological discourse that claims to hold an absolute point of view, and united in the recognition of a fruitful tension between tradition and critique' (ECT 692). This does not, however, forbid them from embodying 'diverse emphases, according to whether they agree with Ricoeur that the "thing" of the biblical text, "the new being" that it unfolds, has the reality of an inhabitable "world" or whether 'they share with Bultmann the fear of past worlds believed to have been abolished by history' (ECT 692). This phenomenological approach to scripture – one that recognises both its unity and plurality (that is, its manifestation in a diversity of appearances) – is a longstanding characteristic of Lacoste's theology.⁸⁵⁴ Heidegger's Bible, Lacoste reminds us, 'does not contain an Old Testament' (HQD 9). He endorses Ricoeur's observation that 'What often surprised me, in Heidegger, is that he has, it seems, always avoided confrontation with the wealth of Hebrew thought'; this, he says, should be inscribed upon every memory (HQD 19).

⁸⁵⁴ See Lacoste, 'The Unfailing Witness : Notes on the Canon of Scripture.' *Communio* 10 (1983): pp. 167–184.

For Lacoste, liturgical words ‘are never singular but always already communal’.⁸⁵⁵ Moreover, gift and presence are inseparable from a speech event: ‘There is no Eucharist without the institution. There is no baptism without the performative speech acts that seal it.’ It was an excess of naivety that led the medievals to distinguish, in every sacrament, an “element” and a “word” (IS 511). Humanity exists ‘before God’ in its Eucharistic acts (PP 70) to which the Absolute is invited: ‘The Absolute who asks us to make place for it always proposes only its peace. The human being who prays is the human reconciled to God. “Saved”, if you prefer’ (PP 71-2). Thus, for Lacoste, Eucharist, self, church and bodily existence are all linked (PP 73). It is the church as a whole, its individual members, and the bread are all referred to as the body of Christ; and in the Eucharist we encounter what Gschwandtner terms ‘bodily proximity’ – that is, the ‘human body of God given here and now’ (PP 73). It is the exemplification of this proximity which turns it into ‘an event of speech’ – within the liturgy, it is chant or singing which accomplishes ‘the work of sanctification’ (PP 76); ‘the liturgical word’ in contrast to everyday chatter, ‘is a perpetual vocative’ (PP 77); this vocative is phenomenised in prayer.

For the *nouvelle* theologians such a strong sacramental ontology – namely, their conviction that ‘the historical realities of the created order served as divinely ordained, sacramental means leading to eternal divine mysteries’ rested upon an interpenetration of sign (*signum*) and reality (*res*) which meant that external, temporal appearances contained the spiritual, eternal realities that they represented. For *nouvelle théologie*, the task of theology was ‘the dynamic exploration of the reality of the divine mystery: theology as a return to mystery’⁸⁵⁶ as an important theological category. The sacramental ontology of *nouvelle théologie* represented ‘an attempt to

⁸⁵⁵ Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics*, p. 176.

⁸⁵⁶ Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, p. 288.

rework the relationship between nature and the supernatural'⁸⁵⁷ and maintained that the natural order was enveloped by a supernatural ground and purpose. De Lubac saw the *desiderium naturale* as sacramental presence and drew upon the Neo-Platonic tradition in order to recover a sense of mystery, emphasizing the 'upward' direction of the natural world as it pointed towards the supernatural.⁸⁵⁸ De Lubac's opposition to the notion of 'pure nature', sought to overcome neo-Thomism's dualism between nature and the supernatural and to recover a sense of the mystery at the core of each human being – for de Lubac the human spirit served as a sacramental mystery. Balthasar insisted upon the goodness of the created order; his sacramental approach centred on the Incarnation and emphasised the divine condescension. This emphasis upon the relative autonomy of the created order also emphasized 'the divine descent into the created realities of this-worldly time and space'⁸⁵⁹ and included his reading of figures such as Maximus the Confessor. Under the influence of their sacramental ontology, the *nouvelle* theologians – unlike the scholastics – recognised history as being of theological significance.⁸⁶⁰ Here the Christian narrative should be able to recognise productive patterns whereby it can unfold its own internal rationale'.⁸⁶¹

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 32.

⁸⁵⁸ In order to maintain the gratuity and freedom of grace and to avoid be labelled a 'closet Neoplatonist' de Lubac struck a note of caution about Neoplatonism, warning that one must 'be careful to correct – if not wholly to avoid – the neo-Platonist metaphors of flux' [...] God is not [...] a generosity pouring himself out, it is at best inadequate to see him simply as that 'fundamental generosity' which must mean, for the Absolute, simply the fact of being essentially communicable'. De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, pp. 234–5 cited in Boersma, p 89. De Lubac contrasted Christ with the Platonic absolute, supreme intelligence, 'eternally unaware of us imperfect beings' (Ibid. p. 228). De Lubac of course called for a reintegration of theology and philosophy whose separation, he felt, had cut 'the study of man... into two parts.' *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (New York: Crossroad/Herder, 2000), p. 215.

⁸⁵⁹ Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, p. 32.

⁸⁶⁰ See Henri de Lubac, 'Sacramental body and ecclesial body', trans. Gemma Simmonds with Richard Price; Laurence Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons, eds., *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages* (London: SCM Press, 2006); pp. 75-100.

⁸⁶¹ Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting tradition : an essay on Christian faith in a postmodern context* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2003), p. 143.

‘Contemplation is liturgical, if we understand liturgy in its fullest sense.’⁸⁶² Indeed, Balthasar undertook what could be described as his own ‘liturgical reduction’ which relied upon what he termed ‘an important practical teaching with regard to contemplative prayer’. This prayer cannot and must not be self-contemplation. On the contrary, he says, ‘it must be a devotional attention to what is essentially the non-I’.⁸⁶³ De Lubac wanted to restore the unity of Christian anthropology, and the contingency of the image of God meant it was potentially ‘the sacramental means of entering into deifying union with the triune God’.⁸⁶⁴

Unlike Louis-Marie Chauvet, Lacoste is not making an anthropological turn.⁸⁶⁵ His phenomenological description of what is given to see and feel during the Eucharistic liturgy aims at showing that both being-in-the-world and “being-in-the-Fourfold” can be bracketed out, and need to be for such an event to be understood. The sacrament does not realize the eschaton, but is “a pre-giveness”. Hegel, writes Lacoste, ‘was partially wrong, then: the sacramental economy is not an economy of enjoyment, because nothing realizes the experience of a sacramental presence without learning that this experience is not that of the parousia – and it is urgently necessary for the one who does not know this to learn it’ (PA 32). Lacoste combines the liturgical with the sacramental – the liturgical reduction (that is, man’s comportment *coram Deo*) – is what makes possible the recognition or acceptance of the *res* as *sacramentum* within the spiritual life and its phenomenology:

Conversely, the space where bread and wine are gifted is no more profane than it is pagan. It doesn’t matter that somewhere in man there is a “sense of the sacred”. It is, however, important that gestures and things are not located here

⁸⁶² Balthasar, *Prayer*, p.116.

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 115.

⁸⁶⁴ Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, p. 117.

⁸⁶⁵ Louis-Marie Chauvet, trans. Madeleine Beaumont, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Minnesota: Pueblo/Liturgical Press, 2001), p. 114.

outside *fanum* but in space-time, one of memorial, which is not bounded from what we are but by the Absolute itself. The sacred in Heidegger manifests itself from things and in the event where we let them serve as things.

However, in the case we are considering, the sacred manifests itself before things, in the form of a summons or invitation. Before the bread and wine have been displayed, the church bells have warned us that they soon would be.

Readings – taken from a so-called Holy Scripture – precede the words and actions of the memorial. And if an initial logic (of offering) is clear, that according to which bread and wine are our product, a second logic is also clear, according to which become – liturgically – more than they were (more than the things they were), and does so not through our initiative but through the divine initiative. (ED 109)

In the midst of flux, prayer – especially that of contemplation or silent prayer – represents a counter-cultural act of *ascesis*. Furthermore, this asceticism sees a voluntary sublation of the subject which places them at the disposal of previous generations (the *communio sanctorum*) of agents, adopting their words and their liturgical formulae for contemporary use, rather than risk indulging in novelty; here the subject assimilates itself with the object.⁸⁶⁶ But this recognition is at risk of being overwhelmed and that initiative lost as mankind finds itself reclaimed by the world:

Thus if we do not perceive that we are not masters of what happens, this initiative will be obliterated, and one way or another we will be left merely with things. (ED 109)

What, then, is of importance is a fidelity to small things – perhaps even what Balthasar called a ‘fidelity in small matters, small services rendered in the spirit and

⁸⁶⁶ On this see James G. Leachman, ed., *The Liturgical Subject: Subject, Subjectivity, and the Human Person in Contemporary Liturgical Discussion and Critique* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

warmth of love'.⁸⁶⁷ We are therefore in a position to offer an answer to our opening question as to what kind of theology might be written in response to Lacoste: it is a theology of 'small matters', a fragmentary theology of the plural.⁸⁶⁸ As Beáta Tóth notes, drawing upon Lacoste, 'theology can best be characterized as a plurality of interrelated disciplines and a complex variety of distinct discourses.'⁸⁶⁹

Like that of Jean-Luc Marion, Lacoste's thinking is marked by a refusal to admit that he is working within precisely determined theological parameters. Rather than find themselves excluded from either philosophical or theological discourse, and while both have been involved with the editorial boards of the international Catholic journal *Communio*, there is no real trace from them of their involvement in inner-theological polemics. This may then characterise them both as wishing not to be excluded from or restricted to either theological or philosophical debates. Not one to shy away from such polemics Anglican theologian John Milbank argues that some "romantics" involved in this controversy go as far as to trace the collapse of reason from a 'debasement of scholasticism' and then to secular modernity. Here there is something more of an insistence upon the role of desire or the "erotic" – the passions, the imagination, and art, than had been the case up till and including Aquinas.⁸⁷⁰ However, for the "classicist" thinkers it is only through confessing its inadequacy that such rationalism can fully embrace the completely supernatural content of the act of faith. Thus the arch-Thomist Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance has 'astoundingly risen', avers Milbank, 'from the most apparently terminal intellectual death of all time'. The

⁸⁶⁷ Balthasar, *Prayer*, p. 137.

⁸⁶⁸ See Jacques Pohier, *God – in Fragments*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1985).

⁸⁶⁹ Beáta Tóth, 'Critical' Theology? Notes on Theological Method', *Louvain Studies* 26 (2001): pp. 99-116; p. 99.

⁸⁷⁰ John Milbank, 'The New Divide: Romantic Versus Classical Orthodoxy', *Modern Theology* 26:1 (2010): pp. 26-38; pp. 28-29. See also Sarah Coakley, ed., *Faith, Rationality and the Passions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011).

conflict between these two is therefore one between opposed metanarratives, one within which one might locate the *Communio* grouping.

It is worth noting the differing role played by Marie-Dominique Chenu in fostering a breach with positivism in Catholic theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; Chenu in particular criticised the neo-Scholastics or neo-Thomists for having a metaphysical view of truth through which one sought to arrive at the essence of things, while ignoring the dynamic character of revelation, instead of extending a phenomenologically appropriate and sensitive welcome in which the phenomenon is to be welcomed, howsoever it appears.

Nonetheless, Dominique Janicaud's intentionally caustic label has stuck and the phrase "theological turn" has become a way of defining a specifically vibrant discourse in French philosophy (which has in its stead included deliberately unconventional thinkers of religion, such as Jacques Derrida or Jean-Luc Nancy).

How might phenomenology enable talk about God? Conceived as a "rigorous philosophy", phenomenology is a return to phenomena, that is to things as they appear to human consciousness. Through its exercise of a reduction, a bracketing out (*epochē*) an attention to the appearance of phenomena which enables humankind to discuss their essence and their appearance (*noema*) alongside their phenomenality (*noesis*).

Generations of phenomenologists since Husserl have examined ever more complex phenomena (in particular the embodied human form, in the case of Maurice Merleau-Ponty) including humanity's experiences of dreams, art and music. What cannot be excluded from all this are radical phenomena such as experiences of God or the divine (there is here an important distinction to be made, as regards the

philosopher Martin Heidegger's exposition of the "religious life" compared to the "radical Christianity" of Søren Kierkegaard which nonetheless influenced it).

Heidegger's notion of a "hermeneutic circle" refers to an existing and on-going movement back and forth between a reader and text, or between an individual and a larger context, such as the larger or cultural context of the time. For this task, the language and method of hermeneutics and phenomenology is required.

For Marion it is the notion of distance (as explored in his work *The Idol and the Distance*) which enables an attempt to do theology in the wake of Nietzsche and Heidegger, by employing philosophical theology to understand God's nearness and to avoid idolatry; for Lacoste it is the conviction that a philosophical and phenomenological approach to certain phenomena opens the possibility onto a fruitful theological interpretation. In both cases (and that of Marion especially where he discusses the Trinitarian relationship) distance or withdrawal seems to be a presupposition of the divine presence. As Lacoste himself writes:

Theology is pluralistic by nature. Maintaining a plurality of discourses necessarily creates an unstable balance. Were it merely liturgical, theology would cease to respond to the demands of missionary *apologia*. Were it merely a scientific discourse, it would not respond to the needs of believers' spiritual lives. (DCTh 1383)

So, in the end, how might this 'unstable balance' possibly be articulated? Clearly a quite distinct way of talking about faith and God has appeared within French philosophy.

Drawing from Maurice Blanchot's own reading of the Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, Kevin Hart finds within the French intellectual tradition the articulation of a 'counter spiritual life' – that is, a way of thinking that represents 'a

rupture with discourse, break with all that is possible, and an affirmation of the impossible⁸⁷¹ within which Kojève glosses Hegel's observation that conceptual comprehension [*Begreifen*] knows of natural existence only once it has been cancelled or annulled⁸⁷² (although one admits that one will struggle to find any explicit discussion of authors such as Yves Bonnefoy within Lacoste's published oeuvre). Hart's exploration of this so-called "counter spirituality" [*une expérience spirituelle*] is itself derived from Jewish and Christian spiritualities that are perhaps no longer as well-known as they once were and could 'be used to check the excessively philosophical, triumphalist or political forms that Judaism and Christianity have taken'.⁸⁷³

As Lacoste affirms in his preface to the translation of Michel Henry's *Words of Christ*: 'for Henry the meaning of "life" is not biological...[for] the most anti-Heideggerian of all the phenomenologists, life is primarily an anti-ecstasy...existence might be 'an essential being-outside-of-oneself...perpetually ahead of itself, on concern, in solicitude, in anticipatory resoluteness, and in other phenomena'. By contrast, writes Lacoste, pain is not pain-of; joy is not joy-of 'they are most fundamentally life's self-revelation...the now in which life embraces itself is "moving" [*pathétique*]'.⁸⁷⁴

It is within such a French exploration of "life" therefore that one should consider Milbank's own treatment of 'integralism' (inflected, naturally, by reference to *la nouvelle théologie*): that is to say a 'new philosophy which goes beyond both positivism and dialectics' so as to anticipate what Milbank (who has in many ways

⁸⁷¹ Kevin Hart, *The Dark Gaze: Maurice Blanchot and the Sacred* (London: Chicago University Press, 2004), p. 223.

⁸⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁸⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁸⁷⁴ Jean-Yves Lacoste, 'Preface', trans. Aaron Riches and Peter M. Candler, Michel Henry, *Words of Christ*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner, introduction Karl Hefty (Eerdmans: 2012), p. x.

fostered Anglophone interest in French thought) terms a ‘postmodern ‘discourse about difference’ which he considers to be crucial to his ‘treatment of secular nihilism’.⁸⁷⁵

Here one encounters a philosophical theology at work in the tradition itself. Such thinking requires an openness to that which is usually veiled or covered over. Thus it is my contention that Lacoste should instead be placed with a context of a so-called “meditative thinking” which displaces “speculative” (or metaphysical and ontotheological thinking)⁸⁷⁶ and which is intrinsically linked to central ideas of *la nouvelle théologie*, such as the eucharist, hospitality, thinking and thanking (of course connected with, but not simply equivalent to “thanksgiving”). It should perhaps be noted that one of Emmanuel Falque’s contentions is that the old distinctions between soul and body have been recreated where flesh designates a phenomenological experience devoid of a concrete and organic materiality going as far as actually accusing Lacoste of being part of an intellectual movement ignoring this dimension of our animality (which seems odd given the latter’s nuanced discussion of boredom and fatigue). The philosopher Brendan Crowe has argued that Heidegger’s search for the Gods does not simply equate with an expression of poetry or nature mysticism but refers to religious practices that search for meaning *before* something conceived as wholly other. Here an engagement with Heidegger represents a potential reinvigoration of tradition within a period of cultural crisis. If Heidegger is indeed interested in the meaning of religious belief rather than its justification then the notion of *aletheia* remains a valid function of history different from calculative thinking, where the fourfold refers to a primal oneness – its notion of divinities refers to notions of hospitality, thinking and thanking more in common with explicit theological

⁸⁷⁵ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 209.

⁸⁷⁶ See Lacoste’s ‘Theology and the task of thinking’, in Pierre Gibert and Christoph Theobald, eds., *Theologies and Truth: The Challenges of History* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010): pp. 217-230.

interests: ‘knowledge must never be separated from the attitude of prayer with which it begins... There is no such thing as a theological investigation that does not breathe the atmosphere of ‘seeking in prayer’’.⁸⁷⁷

So this is a philosophical concept that is not helpful to the life of faith, and indeed, is indifferent to its very line of questioning. Confronted by such “calculative thinking” the issue would be one of keeping meditative thinking alive. To think thus connects to the opening of the world and the human, which finds itself dwelling between the two in the chiaroscuro [*clair-obscur*] of the world, whereas a forgetting of *aletheia* as an unconcealment leads to the beginnings of metaphysics as onto-theology. Here Milbank finds the origins of ‘the questionable idea of an autonomous secular realm, completely transparent to rational understanding’.⁸⁷⁸

For Heidegger – and for those upon he exerted such a profound influence - the approaching tide of ‘technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle, and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted as the only way of thinking... then man would have denied and thrown away his own special nature that he is a meditative being’.⁸⁷⁹ Therefore, the issue for him is how one might keep meditative thinking alive. In *The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics* (Heidegger’s final seminar on Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, given in February 1957 and published along with another lecture under the title *Identity and Difference*) he argues that the history of ontology determines the being/beingness of beings or entities by founding them on a supreme or divine Being. Since this being is most often called God this metaphysics tends to be theological in

⁸⁷⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, ‘Theology in sanctity’ p. 207, quoted in Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: a (very) critical introduction* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2012) p. 155.

⁸⁷⁸ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 1.

⁸⁷⁹ Martin Heidegger, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, *Discourse on Thinking* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 54.

its character: 'If *Wissenschaft* must begin with God, then it is the thinking about God: theology'.⁸⁸⁰

The "god" so essential for the grounding of beings for most of the history of metaphysics is not a religious God, not the God of piety, not a God to be worshipped. The philosophical theology at work in metaphysics is very different from the life of faith, which is rightly characterised by hospitality, and the emergence of the *homo religiosus* which is so important to a thinker such as Richard Kearney.

In this 'life of faith' then created, being finds its highest point in the human person, and reason its own highest point in interpersonal knowledge. For Balthasar the revelation of existence is only meaningful if mankind grasps in the appearance the essence (*Ding an sich*) that manifests itself. Here the maieutic method offers some clue: a child attains knowledge, not through pure appearance but through the mother, a reminder of the importance of interpersonal dialogue, and of theology's necessarily pluralistic methodology of conversation.

Nonetheless, while a figure such as Balthasar would undoubtedly agree that there is no purely secular reason, unlike the often totalising discourse of Milbank (where 'some de Lubac is good, more must be better'⁸⁸¹) Balthasar would instead argue that the God of Christianity and thus of meditative thinking 'respects the proper autonomy of the created order within the supernatural order', or what Balthasar sometimes calls God's single order of creation and redemption. In other words, to radicalize de Lubac's thesis on nature and grace so that nature is supernaturalised, the secular is sacralised, or philosophy is theologized, would be precisely to jeopardize the knife-edge that must be walked.⁸⁸² Philosophy, similarly, will not be considered

⁸⁸⁰ Martin Heidegger, trans. Joan Stambaugh, *Identity and Difference* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 54.

⁸⁸¹ Rodney Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 159.

⁸⁸² Op cit.

intrinsically indifferent to or neutral towards theological matters, but as driven by its own inner impulses to seek and to point to, or somehow open itself up to, what lies beyond its boundaries.⁸⁸³ It is ultimately within these boundaries that the so-called 'French god' is at work.

⁸⁸³ Kilby, *Balthasar*, p. 20.

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