

DRAGAN PROLE

University Novi Sad

THE THEOLOGICAL TURN OF PHENOMENOLOGY AS  
RETURN:  
HEDWIG CONRAD-MARTIUS AND MAX SCHELER VERSUS  
THE HUSSERLIAN SECULAR BREAKTHROUGH

The intent of this paper is to show that the “theological turn”, which caused Janicaud to fiercely criticize the contemporary French phenomenologists, did not come from the accidental delusions of individual thinkers, but is related to a certain tendency in phenomenology to integrate theology into itself in spite of its strict scientific requirements. The ideas of several members of the Göttingen circle, above all Hedwig Conrad-Martius and Max Scheler, will be presented in order to illuminate the immanent tendency of transcendent thought to seek for the eternal as an instance of the foundation of all of its final insights.

One of the main features of the *theological turn* made by phenomenology in France, according to Janicaud, is the self-rejection of philosophy and the turn towards theology: “phenomenology was taken hostage by a theology which does not want to say its name”.<sup>1</sup> This time, the term “theology” is not connected with particular cultural or religious traditions but is taken literally, in the traditional sense in which Hegel talked about a discourse emphasizing belief, thus directly opposing the philosophical accent on thinking and knowledge. In that sense, Janicaud suggested that contemporary phenomenological discourse within its own framework recoiled from the challenge of thinking about the unthinkable. The great tradition that was essentially founded on understanding and knowing in phenomenology was set aside in order to affirm the stance of suspending knowledge.

Reestablishing Kant’s term *transcendental illusion*, contemporary French phenomenology became a hostage of theology, not through relying on its corrective function but through achieving its key philosophical mission. Janicaud pointed out that phenomenology was not demolished by theology, but rather surrendered willingly, giving up on all prerogatives that made it philosophical thought. This was not a testimony of a failed and impossible kinship between the philosophical and the theological, but an outcome that suggested that the trust given to theology did not allow phenomenology to continue on its own course, but rather completely turned it into theological discourse. From that,

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<sup>1</sup> D. Janicaud, *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française*, in: *La phénoménologie dans tous ses états* (Paris: Folio, 2009), 74.

we can understand that the phenomenological rhetoric which seriously talks of "salvation", "entering", "exiting", "escape", and "authenticity" is *most present where the structures of finiteness were most radically reflected*. Whenever a fragile and unestablishable subjectivity is diagnosed, we will always find indications or implications that point in quite the opposite direction. However, the contemporary situation differs, it seems, from the already seen situations, since the hope in some sort of future stabilization and the permanent establishment of philosophical knowledge has in the meantime dissolved as a futile illusion. If we no longer trust in the absolute and the apodictic, that means we are placed between two unappealing alternatives. On the one hand, it means we are wandering through an unstable and hostile field of the finite in which it is very hard to expect any kind of long-term stabilization, while on the other hand we see the forbidden fruit of the reliable and promising, but historically fatal Absolute. That is, it seems, a very suitable environment for the breach of theological motifs. Ultimately, based on this premise, can we establish a diagnosis which states that the recall of the philosophical eternal is slowly but surely retreating before the theological eternal?

In this context, a question that draws our attention is the extent to which the first interpretative tones of the young followers of phenomenology inspired the later theological chorus. That question becomes even more relevant if we remember that the young Jean Hering, though a theologian by vocation, warned against the possibility of the burgeoning of pseudo-phenomenological literature, but also against that which is theologically inspired!

In plain sight of the growing popularity of phenomenology, Hering foresaw that it was only a matter of time before it became a matter of intellectual fashion. The fashionableness of phenomenology would not be reflected, according to Hering, only in the increase of its representation in scientific and public discourse. On the contrary, he pointed out that we should expect that the negative sides of this trend phenomenology inspired by fashionableness would become prominent with "the use of the tools and the terms of the phenomenological method for theological and political ends".<sup>2</sup> As the living witness of the rising interest in phenomenology, Hering knew well what he was talking about.

Phenomenology did indeed become an intellectually fashionable trend, but it first got its start among students. If the most prominent factor of the fashionableness is that it makes things average and mediocre, then Hering, as a member of the Göttingen circle had sufficient opportunities to see how students, being independent from their teacher, affirmed their own style of

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<sup>2</sup> J. Hering, *Phénoménologie et philosophie religieuse. Étude sur la théorie de la connaissance religieuse* (Strasbourg: Imprimerie Alsacienne, 1925), 74-75.

philosophy at the expense of covering up and ignoring their teacher's crucial insights. From there, the noted fashionableness could be described as borrowing without obligation to the lender. Without this fashionable "trend", in which the most valued thing was the affirmation of its intentionality, even if its origins were forced and imagined, the early affiliation of phenomenology and theology cannot be perceived. It is beyond doubt that the assumptions of the *theological turn* imply the systematic flattening of all bumps in the road, the first and foremost of which can be seen in the subjective origin of all conscious accomplishments. As the unavoidable source of all that is constituted, subjectivity is branded as the obstacle which bars one from accessing true reality. To summarize, the desired correctness of phenomenological philosophy quickly interpreted the call to bypass conscious content as an appeal to abandon consciousness itself, a commitment to transcendence with a passion that evoked the *unio mystica* of the past.

Not all Husserl's followers waited patiently for the maturation of transcendental phenomenology. More to the point, the gradual rapprochement of the former teacher to the transcendental reassessment seemed like an abandonment of the core phenomenological motifs to the members of the Göttingen circle. What Husserl saw as a reliable path to the definite establishment of phenomenology, his students saw as a fatal obliquity. Under those conditions, the casual meetings of the Göttingen students with Husserl after his move to Freiburg took place. Hedwig Conrad-Martius testified that a sense of disappointment and helplessness was felt, as the "more profound constructions and clearer formation of Husserl's transcendentalism" became evident.<sup>3</sup>

With this we come to a paradox, where the theological turn amongst the phenomenologists is profiled first as an expression of the *anti-idealistic, and not an idealistic point of view*. The strong anti-idealistic impulse in the Göttingen group was responsible for the repulsion towards the exploration of subjectivity. The real foundation of philosophical work for them must not have been subjective, which was skillfully portrayed by Spiegelberg as the crucial feature of the Göttingen wing of the phenomenological movement: "For this lively group and to its varying membership and fringe, phenomenology meant something rather different from what it did to Husserl at this stage, i.e., not the turn toward subjectivity as the basic phenomenological stratum, but toward the 'Sachen', understood in the sense of the whole range of phenomena, and mostly toward the objective, not the subjective ones."<sup>4</sup> If we go back to Hering, we have to ask, why would a

<sup>3</sup> H. Conrad-Martius, "Die transzendentale und die ontologische Phänomenologie", in: *Edmund Husserl 1859-1959. Recueil commémoratif publié à l'occasion du centenaire de la naissance du philosophe* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1959), 178.

<sup>4</sup> H. Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement. A Historical Introduction* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1960), 170.

theologian by vocation express concern over the theological affinity towards phenomenology? Why did he, and not some secular critic, feel the need to present his fears about possible "theological manipulations"?

To get the answer, we must assume that, in the eyes of a theologian, the phenomenological ventures towards transcendence seemed arbitrary and therefore dangerous. With good cause, we can assume that according to Hering, as well as the early Heidegger,<sup>5</sup> phenomenology was welcomed as a method of analysis and not the initiation of a religious experience. So, an interesting outcome unfolds: the theological turn of phenomenology was, from the standpoint of a theologian, met with caution and restraint. Where does this theologian's doubtful position come from, a theologian who wanted to apply the phenomenological method in the exploration of the believing subjectivity? Instead of gloating over the correctness of his own rapprochement to phenomenology, he rather warns about the possible difficulties, about the manipulative pressure of the fashionable interplay between phenomenology and theology.

Warned by the experience of the break between Husserl and the Göttingen circle of students, we can guess that the abandonment of the "stream of consciousness", that is, the stepping out of the sphere in which the subjective experiences happen, did not bother only Husserl, but also some of the theologically inclined doctoral students. Indeed, if we observe this from the phenomenological recourse, only a religious man can have access to the phenomenon of believing, since without it he is relieved of any data he could descriptively accept. Because of that, even the ultimate success of the "realontology," which was advocated by Conrad-Martius, can be accepted as a philosophical affirmation of the already present religiosity, and not as support on the path towards religiosity. In brief, such an ontology affirms and justifies believing but does not inspire it. However, in order to confirm if there was a more profound basis for the abstention, the distancing of a theologian, it is necessary to more concretely consider the specifications of phenomenology's intertwinement with religion. Why should the phenomenological approach to religion be marked as more imaginative than any other philosophical approach?

### *I. The Göttingen Circle: The Roots of the Theological Turn of Phenomenology*

We should once more note that the tendencies mentioned by Janicuad are not specific to French phenomenology alone. It is well known that a theological turn happened in the biography of Husserl's first assistant, Edith Stein. Her case is not isolated. Religious motifs and choices played a significant role in the phenomenological self-understanding of Husserl's Göttingen

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<sup>5</sup> M. Heidegger, *Phänomenologie und Theologie* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1970), 21.

students and associates such as Hedwig Conrad-Martius, Adolf Reinach, Gerda Walther, and Arnold Metzger. However, we should not forget Max Scheler who, after being fired in Munich, came to Göttingen in 1910 and held lectures until 1911.

Conrad-Martius, who after WWII became the first female professor of a philosophy department in Germany, directly affirmed the tangent on which the phenomenological and the religious meet. We should also state that she never used the singular form to express herself, but favored the plural. When she talked of the relationship between phenomenology and religion, she confidently said "We", referring at the same time to her fellow students from the Göttingen classrooms. The value of her statements lies in the fact that they indicate that the popularity of phenomenology among Göttingen students was not limited to eminently philosophical motifs and interests. On the contrary, phenomenology appealed to them because it provided them with an *organon* for the abandonment of conventional philosophical frameworks. The suspension of validity, which we gained on the grounds of the natural state of this world, for them signalized the beginning of the exploration of essential values, which are entirely established in the beyond. The phenomenological focus of attention on the truth thus made a drastic approach toward the path to God.

In that sense, Conrad-Martius emphasized that the generational identity of the Göttingen followers of phenomenology was not shaped in the realistically inclined disambiguation of the visible world we deal with in everyday experience, but rather that it brought the unseen and unusual world to light. Briefly stated, the direction of their thought overstepped the empirical given so it could favor the region of invisible but conceivable spiritual forms. Because of that, it displayed the power of phenomenology to reach those spiritual regions which had been considered unreachable in philosophical thinking "the basis of our interconnecting with several Göttingen generations ... was the open mind for the spiritual attainability of all thinkable spiritual forms."<sup>6</sup> Even though a lot of exaggeration is encountered from later reconstructions of mutual generational features, and since personal stands can be generalized to include the entire generation, the reflections of Hedwig Conrad-Martius deserve proper attention. This is mostly because they convincingly announce their interest in the invisible, which was seminal in the great themes of French phenomenology presented by Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Michel Henry. On the other hand, they also open up the problem of surging theological ideas at departments of philosophy at a time when the institutionalized practice of faith was not looked upon favorably.

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<sup>6</sup> H. Conrad-Martius, "Meine Freundin Edith Stein," in: *Denken im Dialog. Zur Philosophie Edith Steins*, ed. W. Herbstrith (Tübingen: Attempto, 1991), 177

If we recall that in the first decades of the twentieth century all over Europe, and especially in Germany, the largest mass abandonment of church was observed, both Catholic and Protestant, then the turn of phenomenology towards theology seems, at the very least, strange. Such a turn could have been expected almost anywhere, but not in the frameworks of philosophy, which had been strongly scientifically oriented from the very beginning. While in everyday life the gap between believers and the church was widening, on the philosophical scene the strong influx of religious ideas into "pure" philosophical discourse became more and more prominent. Can this phenomenological episode give us better insight into the fact that the intensification of religious ideas in philosophical frameworks always marks a long-term crisis in institutionalized belief? Is this impressive effort of thinkers who work diligently on inciting the theological turn in philosophy always equal to a testimony of the need for a personal supplement to the content of religious consciousness, a supplement that never appeared or was originally present on the horizon of a certain belief, but vanished in the meantime from the frameworks of the conventional practices of faith? Whatever the answer is, after the experiences of the early twentieth century it became clear that the contemporary approach towards theology testifies to a certain "disorder", an internal imbalance in philosophical and religious discourse.

The epilogue of the phenomenological project on which Conrad-Martius insisted was that the philosophical *per se*, profound and free of idealistic delusions, should lead to the religious. At the very least, the philosophical should not exclude the religious or confront it as a competitor in the spiritual search for the Absolute. Even though this stance was consistent with the spiritual trends of her time, we can safely say that the ideas promoted by Conrad-Martius are non-historical. If we read her texts around that time<sup>7</sup>, not knowing the period in which they were written, we would get the impression that they owe their existence to the general societal flourishing of religious consciousness. How else can we explain the confidence and certainty without which religious ideas would never have entered the philosophical adventure? The dynamics of the theological turn in phenomenology give us a rich testimony about the contemporary tremors in secularization. One thing is certain: even though in the beginning, this idea was left unexplored, the theological turn is inherent in the idea of a new, religiously instigated means of socialization.

## *II. Against Husserl's Secular Breakthrough*

However, if we leave aside the general atmosphere of the times in which the Göttingen circle arose and turn to the philosophical reasons, we can with some certainty claim that one of the leading roles in the theological turn was played by Husserl's concept of

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<sup>7</sup> H. Conrad-Martius, *Die Zeit* (Munich: Kösel, 1954).

the horizon as a defined field of potentiality. Husserl's students did not need too much interpretative bravery to understand the philosophical imperative, based on which every succeeding generation must give its contribution to the unstoppable expansion of the achieved horizons, as a means of taking a confident step out of the possible.

From that perspective, it becomes clear that even the Göttingen circle in general accepted the phenomenological impulse of an unwavering, ever new beginning, no matter what subject was in question. Starting there, the Göttingen students took special interest in the key ontological category of philosophy of the twentieth century, the concept of possibility. The field of possibility thereby lost its recognizable boundaries. It was no longer tied to possibilities which were "pre-specified". On the contrary, the search for the possible had no connections to research but rather turned to what was not seen as possible and what should now be indicated as such. They did not pay much attention to the fact that by doing so they were breaking all ties with the transcendental prerogatives of phenomenology. They were equally less concerned about the fact that through their theological desire for the spiritual formations of the beyond, they were diligently working on weakening the motifs of strict science, which their teacher again and again placed above all other stimuli of philosophical thought. "The open spiritual view" of which Conrad-Martius speaks in fact cuts the transcendental guiding thread, starting with Descartes' *Regulae* and the idea that in philosophy we should deal with objects that are knowable through our own spiritual powers. With that, he disproved Kant's critical project, whose analyses are mostly concerned with setting the boundaries between the Knowable and the Unknowable.

Simply put, if we had to name the spiritual plain for which the Göttingen phenomenologists (especially Conrad-Martius) expressed a special kind of openness, then we would not look at arts, law, economics or politics, but in fact religion. Thus, we are in agreement with the interpretation that the "noted intellectual openness was historically not left without an existential effect on the religious searching of Husserl's students."<sup>8</sup> There is no doubt that the distancing of phenomenology from its transcendental foundations in Conrad-Martius's work is tied to the rapprochement with theology. More to the point, she explicitly indicates such a rapprochement: "In the surroundings of phenomenology, fertile soil has been created for the knowing of transcendence and revelation, the divine and God himself, for the final religious decisions, conversions and proselytizing."<sup>9</sup> Can this affinity towards theology be enough to illustrate the bankruptcy of Husserl's phenomenological reduction as a non-assumptive action? Furthermore, can it even serve as foundation

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<sup>8</sup> B. Beckmann, *Phänomenologie des religiösen Erlebnisses. Religionsphilosophische Überlegungen im Anschluß an Adolf Reinach und Edith Stein* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 52.

<sup>9</sup> H. Conrad-Martius, "Meine Freundin Edith Stein," 179.

for a hypothesis about the *a priori* religiousness of pure consciousness? Does it now come from the former emptiness of the noetic side of consciousness which is attained after the suspension of all validity of everyday experience? Is it not an understandable need, after the “successful purge” of intimate content from consciousness, to have it filled with spiritual formations which are untouchable in the everyday mindset? Lastly, did not the Göttingen example give foolproof evidence that “pure” consciousness cannot stand on its own? Is not then the radicalization of the transcendental stances confronted by its own unsustainability, after which the only thing left is to search for the Absolute outside of itself and not within?

There is no doubt that Conrad-Martius presented herself as a consistent follower of Reinach’s idea that phenomenology should firstly be the exploration of essence. She also accepted Reinach’s idea that the struggle for phenomenology should first deal with two equally controversial tendencies in the understanding of the *a priori*. Indicating that the *a priori* is never an exclusive matter of consciousness, Reinach confronted the *tendency toward subjectivizing*, while he identified the narrowing of the *a priori* region with the *tendency toward reduction*: “There are few philosophers who have not in some way acknowledged the fact of the *a priori*; but there also are none who would not in some way reduce it to a small province of its actual domain”.<sup>10</sup> If there were no philosophers who did not provincialize, that is, drastically reduce the field called the *a priori*, then even Husserl’s phenomenology cannot be saved from the flaws of those two tendencies. Starting there, Conrad-Martius has chosen a purely eidetic ontological phenomenology. For her, the characteristic is that: “the quiddity in a real world contains its true homeland, in which the facts that suit it most are immediately reflected”.<sup>11</sup> However, all of her readers will inevitably become disappointed if they try to find in her works a consistent development of the vaguely explicit qualities of the phenomenology of quiddity. The crucial assumptions of Husserl’s eidetic are turned upside down, since Conrad-Martius strongly opposed the idealistic prerogatives of transcendental phenomenology. Not even her late summaries of her own self-criticism would spare her former teacher.

From her perspective, consciousness cannot be accepted as the source of the Absolute, since by emphasizing it we see the destruction of the real being of the world. She characterized the affirmation of the world of pure consciousness as Husserl’s “great secular breakthrough”,<sup>12</sup> to be able to point out the independence

<sup>10</sup> A. Reinach, “Über Phänomenologie,” in: ders., *Sämtliche Werke*, Band I (Munich, Hamden, Vienna: Philosophia, 1989), 546.

<sup>11</sup> H. Conrad-Martius, “Realontologie,” in: *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* vol. VI, ed. E. Husserl (Halle 1924), 179.

<sup>12</sup> H. Conrad-Martius, “Phänomenologie und Spekulation,” in: *Rencontre/Encounter/Begegnung. Contributions à une psychologie humaine*

of *ontos on*, that is, the transcendent character of the real world in which this independence belongs as an immanent, constituent phenomenon. Just in case, Conrad-Martius dissociated herself from the possibility that her approach to the quiddities could be understood as a secular one. The noted independence of being "does not contradict the most profound, all-encompassing creational dependence of being and the essence of that world from God".<sup>13</sup>

What she established as the fertile soil of knowing, Husserl would rather characterize as a sterile ground from which no knowledge can come. In the eyes of the founder of phenomenology, there was no mystery in the experiences of his associates as they converted to a belief system. In them, Husserl, without hesitation recognized the abandonment of the philosophical assertions of phenomenology. Having that in mind, it becomes clear that he could not benignly read the content of the eminent "philosophical" works that came from the Göttingen phenomenologists. Husserl could only react with dissatisfaction at the concept of speculations that no longer signified thought processes or the experienced, but rather aimed at a projected step into unknown territories. Even though at the very end of his *Cartesian Meditations*, for illustrative purposes, he quotes St. Augustine, Husserl would never approve of an essential definition of reality that is solely present in the beyond.

Unlike the tradition of the transcendental through the apparent, Conrad-Martius at all costs tried to shed light on the reality that does not appear. However, the things she could say about such a reality were long ago described by the Christian thinkers. In the spirit of Thomas Aquinas, Conrad Martius thinks that what is really existing can be extrapolated from its own foundation, and by that does not contradict the scholastic determination of *creatio continua*: "God contains the world in his 'reality', and that means grown being from its existential foundation."<sup>14</sup>

Knowing full well that Husserl's phenomenology ambitiously took over Kant's legacy of creative imagination, Conrad-Martius energetically disassociated herself from its transcendental version in the name of so called "real imagination". True, unlike the productive fantasy the results of which we have our subjectivity to thank, real imagination with Conrad Martius is compared to the parapsychological state of clairvoyance, for which it is characteristic that the subject is not the real performer of his own vision, since it comes to him in an inexplicable way. Generally speaking, instead of strict science, Husserl found on the pages of her early works the encouragement for the readers to "experiment intuitively".<sup>15</sup> Because of that we should not be surprised that in

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dédiées au F.J.J. Buitendijk (Utrecht and Antwerpen: Spectrum, 1957), 116.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>14</sup> H. Conrad-Martius, *Die Zeit*, 296.

<sup>15</sup> H. Conrad-Martius, "Realontologie," 161.

Husserl's correspondence with Hedwig Conrad-Martius we notice a tone of irreconcilable distance: "I cannot go with you along your lines of metaphysics. Your philosophy is separated by an abyss from what I call phenomenology."<sup>16</sup>

Conrad-Martius openly talked about the inconsistencies and the unexplained problem of intentionality, keeping in mind that by a mere break of the bond between the *ego cogito* and *cogitatum*, the problem of intentionality is at best half solved. The liberation from the former idealistic ballast contained in the privileged role of *intentio recta* by itself does not yet imply a new form of intentionality. If intentionality no longer figures as the core feature of conscious life, but as a structure that points to transcendence from beyond consciousness, then we are left with a great difficulty to mark the metareflexive structure of the content of consciousness to which we were not able to come via direct contact with the subject, nor with the help of a reflective processing of an immediate given. In principle, it is not disputed that all achieved thought forms can be transcendent, but it is not easy to plot the trajectory of the *intentio obliqua* in a convincing manner, which by itself confidently surpasses the limits of the perspective of the known subject. It is not by accident that the solution to that problem remained on Conrad-Martius' wish list: "I would very much like to talk about objective intentionality, which should be differentiated from the subjective intentionality of the spiritual persona. But we would have to do precise analysis to determine where that difference lies."<sup>17</sup> Even if this "precise analysis" never came about, the question of whether the voice of the Holy Spirit or a parapsychological experience could be counted as objective intentionality, Conrad-Martius would probably answer in the affirmative.

### *III. Max Scheler: Belief as a Gift*

Unlike the Göttingen students, Max Scheler became familiar with phenomenology after he had already habilitated. A certain amount of mental maturity and the new philosophical insights he got from the early works of Husserl did not ensure a stable and permanent relationship towards phenomenology for him. On the contrary, in his case the appeal of phenomenological ideas was accompanied by fierce disagreement which did not only relate to the ideas and motifs of *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I*, but also to those in *Being and Time*. Keeping in mind that the reception of that work among the philosophical public was excellent, and the fact that even Husserl started a vast critical study only after an irritating introductory lecture by his Freiburg successor, Scheler at that point had a repulsion towards the entire style of phenomenological thought. From where does Scheler's disloyalty

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<sup>16</sup> Husserl's letter to Hedwig Conrad-Martius 28. 11. 1932. Quoted from: Edmund Husserl, *Briefwechsel*, vol. II, ed. K. Schulmann, E. Schuhmann (Dordrecht et al.: Springer, 1994), 19-20.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 300.

come? What are the roots of his dissonance with the most remarkable phenomenological literature?

Putting aside the enthusiastic reading of Nietzsche and the Russian writers, Scheler's ideas are very different from the position of leading phenomenological figures, not just through his emphasized affirmation and reliance on the philosophical authority of Christian writers, but also on their significance in the contemporary world. Even though he was the first amongst the phenomenologists to adopt some of Nietzsche's ideas and point out the great significance of that thinker for modern philosophy, and even though he tirelessly promulgated the significance of Russian literature, and also theologically motivated philosophical thought (mostly Sorelyev), Scheler's uniqueness is mostly reflected in the distinctive intertwining of contemporary philosophical problems with the apostolic heritage, along with his unusually frequent references to Christian philosophers.

Naturally, their affirmation with Scheler was not incited by the pure need for a religious retouching of the secular phenomenological stand. On the contrary, in the midst of the discontent over Husserl and Heidegger stood the faulty phenomenological response to the problems of inter-subjectivity. From there, in the foremost subjects of Scheler's thought (sympathy, resentment, pleasure, compassion, love) we should recognize his contribution to the shaping of the phenomenology of inter-subjectivity. In the same spirit, Helmuth Plessner, in an article written in 1937 for the Belgrade magazine *Philosophia*, pointed out that with Scheler, the emphasis is on the "sense for the fullness of the interhuman".<sup>18</sup> However, the mutual orientation towards the problems of philosophical anthropology did not prevent Plessner from reprimanding Scheler because of his unreadiness to step away from the post-romantic tradition. The affinity towards romanticization that Plessner had in mind was mostly recognizable by its affirmation of non-philosophical ways of solving philosophical problems. More to the point, it was aimed at Scheler's uncanny readiness to espouse the rebuilding of bridges long gone: the knowledge of the world should, by itself, secure a spontaneous transition to knowledge of God and vice versa. That tendency was noted by Edith Stein early on, and she talked about it with unhidden enthusiasm. Listening to Scheler's lectures she became familiar with the possibilities of the phenomenological leap beyond philosophy: "it was my first encounter with a world I never knew existed."<sup>19</sup>

The phenomenological concept of ideation, that is, the procedure of thinking that objectifies the non-objective, was not used by Scheler just for expressing the specificities of the human position

<sup>18</sup> H. Plessner, "Die Aufgabe der philosophischen Anthropologie," in: *Philosophia* Vol. 2, (Beograd 1937), 102.

<sup>19</sup> E. Stein, *Aus dem Leben einer jüdischen Familie und weitere autobiographische Beiträge*, in: *Gesamtausgabe* vol. I, (Freiburg: Herder, 2010), 211.

in the cosmos, but also for an approach to the religious point of view. He easily linked the anti-metaphysical tendencies of his time to an unfounded skepticism, whose pragmatic goal is to strive towards the stabilization of a permanent rift between knowledge and belief. The key move of the positivistic program unambiguously granted the attributes of rational knowledge to philosophy, trying to move it closer to science, while it left theology with the infamous attribute of irrational faith. From there philosophy is formatively set closer to the positivistic sciences than it is to theology. Scheler was convinced that, in such a constellation, we have a perverted state of things. Contrary to his time frame, Scheler pointed out that religiosity, like philosophy, should be seen as a necessary disposition of man's spiritual life. In that way, Scheler's unfashionableness is in the promotion of a concept of philosophy that will not exclude religion: "we need philosophy which does not resemble a clenched fist, like Kant's, but one that resembles an open hand; it must bind itself to the great tradition of the Christian thinking world, and its soul must be the strictest objectivism and the recognition of the last essential states of things and compositions in the world and in the human spirit."<sup>20</sup>

Joining the strict scientific and religious legacy of Christianity for Scheler did not seem like joining two opposing sides. Through their mutual work on a criticism of strong phenomenological subjectivity, Husserl's students and associates set in place a heavy emphasis on the metaphysical dimensions of spirituality.

The accentuation of the metaphysical did not in its essence strive towards an ambitious construction of a new ontology. On the contrary, the magnified value of metaphysics went hand in hand with the reduction of the competence of subjectivity. Unlike Hartmann and Heidegger, this group of phenomenologist's did not work on a project of "new paths" of ontology or on its fundamental shaping in the medium of authentic human existence. When the phenomenological tendency to overstep the given is joined with the idea of a weak subject, which is expressively sensitive to the Absolute of the beyond, then we are just one step away from the *emptying of the soul* that is the Christian *kenosis*. Scheler's example is illustrative enough. Considering that the education of a human with no metaphysics is also a "religious impossibility",<sup>21</sup> he leads us to the dilemma of what the true image of the *metaphysics* is, which acts as an incentive towards religiosity and enables its free and independent development. The answer to that question is given to us by his concept of faith, close to the neo-totemic personalism: "religious faith is a constant and always 'believing in', and never a mere 'believing that' – those are two fundamentally different things ... such believing in must be

<sup>20</sup> M. Scheler, "Vom kulturellen Wiederaufbau Europas," in: *Vom Ewigen in Menschen (Gesammelte Werke vol. V)*, (Bern, Munich: Francke, 1968), 434.

<sup>21</sup> M. Scheler, "Probleme der Religion," in idem, *Vom Ewigen in Menschen*, 294.

experienced as a gift, as mercy, as a present, and not as a subjective achievement of the personal.”<sup>22</sup>

Scheler’s search for the new man developed under the idea that weak subjectivity in the end gets rewarded with the *gift of faith*. To summarize, the metaphysics that Scheler had in mind may be strict, but it is not a rational science in the sense of Husserl’s foundation in the absolute responsibility of the philosophical mind. With a turn towards the supra-rational, phenomenology inevitably loses the individuality of the *philosophia prima*. By giving space to religiosity within the phenomenological arena does not result in the equality of the philosophical and religious, but in a step out of phenomenology into the area beyond philosophy. The paths of phenomenological ideation and the development of the metaphysical disposition of spirituality cross paths on the plane of the experience of belief, with a tendency to never leave that plane again.

Thereby, we can confirm the initial assumption that the theological turn of phenomenology did not come from the phenomenology of the French interpreters but from the writings of Husserl’s immediate students and associates. Their philosophical motif could be found in the need for a new constitution of the philosophical generality that will no longer exclude the eternal. Unlike the philosophical generality, the theological one will not rush to the front lines and speak on behalf of other disciplines. It is not in the nature of theology to deal with the assessment of the general achievements of arts, poetry, or ethnology, and even less to discuss the concepts of law, economy, or history. Instead, it will rather unobtrusively mediate in the step towards the other side of the finite.

Recommending a step away from incorrigibly unstable worldly phenomena, theology with all its might supports the noumenal openness for a foundation both in the worldly and the divine. *The strategy of promoting theological universality does not consist of a broad synthetic approach that enables theology to speak on behalf of the other disciplines; instead, it rather tries to negotiate a move of the counterpoint from the finite to the infinite in each of the disciplines separately.* In its favor is the fact that philosophers today talk about the infinite and the Absolute with great caution. From there, the step into the infinite, for which Hegel found the boldness for both philosophy and theology, is today most often performed as a leap of faith. What was once an expression of the mutual dissatisfaction about the possibility that the finite can become the expression of the one true reality man has at his disposal, has today become the alpha and omega of thinking for the philosopher. For philosophy, the finite, even if subjected to infinite variations, represents an inevitability we must face. In that way, the step into infinity became the exclusive privilege of theology.

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<sup>22</sup> M. Scheler, *Über das Wesen und Form der Sympathie (Gesammelte Werke vol. VII)*, (Bern, Munich: Francke, 1973), 96-97.

#### *IV. From the Infinity Phenomenon to the Foundation in Infinity*

In his encyclical entitled *Fides et Ratio* from 1998, Pope John Paul II, in whose rich priestly carrier we also see a lot of attention given to phenomenology (he wrote especially about Max Scheler), recommends that philosophers deal with the foundation in the infinite and the finite: "We face a great challenge at the end of this millennium to move from *phenomenon* to *foundation*, a step as necessary as it is urgent."<sup>23</sup> For us here, of more concern is the interesting similarity of the transition from the phenomenon towards the foundation with crucial arguments like those Janicaud disputed concerning the French theological turn, in a book whose first edition was in 1991. What he characterized as a motion through which phenomenology irreversibly departed from philosophical discourse, the Pope, seven years later, found to be an epoch turn in thinking that should urgently be followed by philosophy as a whole. It is not necessary to especially point out that the result of such a turn cannot be seen as anything other than *the theological form of the unity of the human spirit*.

Summarizing the previous results of the philosophical orientation that took on a dominant role in France after WW II, Janicaud points out that: "The *phenomenon* is sacrificed in its transcendental or even transcendent conditions."<sup>24</sup> To sacrifice the phenomenon to its transcendent conditions means nothing other than to insist on the transcendent foundation of the immanent. The intuitive experiments suggested by Hedwig Conrad-Martius should now be conducted so that we leave the realm of experiential givens, and in that "undiscovered country" where ontologically independent infinity reigns, recognize and accept the foundations on which we will later establish all our insights. In doing so, the final word has been spoken on the internal Copernican revolution in phenomenology. Unlike Husserl, whose starting point in immanence of consciousness strived towards what is transcendent to it, now the counterpoint is seeking for transcendence only to use it in order to reach the immanent. In other words, the unity of spirit is no longer established through subjectivity, but is "opened up" through the denouncement of subjectivity in the name of the invisible, the absolute Other, pure giving, or archrevelation.

Commenting on Janicaud's objections, Benny Lévy called on the direct affiliations of the Göttingen students with Husserl's understanding of phenomenological methods: "it is all about the *exit*. It is about the turn, the necessity of a turn. In his book *The Theological Turn in Phenomenology*, Janicaud demands the

<sup>23</sup> Ioannes Paulus II, *Fides et Ratio*, § 83. Available in the internet: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html) (last access 14-02-2018).

<sup>24</sup> D. Janicaud, *La phénoménologie éclatée*, in: *La phénoménologie dans tous ses états*, 249.

extensive protection of phenomenology from every possible attempt at a theological exit. This is somewhat childish, since phenomenology with Husserl himself establishes the metaphysical problems of the explication of its own methods.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, for Husserl the method is a certain norm that can trace its origins to us and, as with Aristotle, can point to the general structures of a defined realm of being. However, concretizing the phenomenological terms of the method brings us closer to the concepts that were, for the Göttingen students, of great significance.

Husserl explicitly requested the exclusion of any kind of deductive theorizing, but the counterpart of his personal request for the concretization of the descriptive portrayal was also reflected in the abandonment of the usual alternative to deduction. Along with the deductive method, he likewise abandoned induction. His crucial methodological concern is based on the thinking of a mediatory transition from the immanent to the transcendent, so we should not be surprised by the fact that on the pages of *Ideas I*, in which he presents the concept of the phenomenological method, he places at the forefront the confrontation with false transitions from one sphere of being to the other. It is also no surprise that the term *metábasis* appears in this context.<sup>26</sup> Succinctly stated, the goal of the phenomenological method simply cannot be unraveled if we disregard Husserl’s stand on the correlation of the transcendent and the immanent, that is, the thesis that the path towards the transcendent, unlike Kant, is not set at the expense of the transcendent, but is set on behalf of its noetic envelopment. Keeping that in mind, we can conclude that the Göttingen circle focused on the question of transcendence as a question of the *passing from one into the other*.

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<sup>25</sup> B. Lévy, *Lévinas: Dieu et la philosophie* (Paris: Lagrasse, 2009), 247.

<sup>26</sup> E. Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie I (Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung)*, (Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1913), 115 (§ 61).