

The Emergence of Transcendence in Self-Consciousness: Towards a Rehabilitation of a Transcendental Position of Philosophy of Religion

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I

At the beginning of the 19th century, the idea that self-consciousness and transcendence were inextricably related to each other was a central concept in the philosophy of religion: the knowledge of transcendence, the 'consciousness of God', was related to self-consciousness. This entailed an identification of transcendence with the idea of the infinite or the absolute, which in turn would be identified with the idea of God. Friedrich Schleiermacher famously considered this relation between self-consciousness and transcendence in his definition of religion as a 'feeling of ultimate dependence' and as a 'susceptibility and taste for the infinite'. Religious feeling emerges in self-consciousness as a feeling of ultimate dependence (*Gefühl schlechthinniger Abhängigkeit*) in so far as in self-consciousness one realises that one is entirely dependent upon another (Schleiermacher 1991a, 99ff.). According to Schleiermacher, this feeling of ultimate dependence represents the transcendent ground of the dependent self-consciousness in self-consciousness (cf. Schleiermacher 1991b, 120f.). It is with this feeling that humanity comprehends this transcendent ground of its self, which Schleiermacher identifies with God. The feeling of ultimate dependence can therefore be identified with a consciousness of God which emerges in self-consciousness (cf. Schleiermacher 1991c, 85ff.).

The idea of the absolute mediating itself in self-consciousness (and of a consciousness of the absolute being related to self-consciousness) was also a central notion of German Idealism. To Johann Gottlieb Fichte, for example, the absolute, which he identifies with God, mediates itself in self-consciousness, which can be regarded as an image of the absolute (cf. Fichte 1971, vol. V, 447-475, 507-523, 538-551; 1971, vol. II, 693-709). Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel determined self-consciousness as the instance in which the absolute determines and mediates itself. This mediation of the absolute as consciousness of the self in the self-consciousness of the other of the self is where the essential process of coming to itself of the absolute takes place (cf. Hegel 1970, Vol. 3, 82-155, 495-574; 1970, Vol. 16, 89-202; Vol. 17, 187-298).

However, soon after Hegel's death, the idea of self-consciousness as the instance of the consciousness of God was challenged. This also meant questioning the idea of self-consciousness as an expression of the coming into being of transcendence. These doubts led to a radical criticism of the idea that self-consciousness and transcendence are related. Ludwig Feuerbach tried to prove that the idea of the absolute mediating itself in self-consciousness was wrong: instead of consciousness of the infinite, it is the fundamental infinity of consciousness that is known and becomes known in self-consciousness. It would be wrong to hypostasise this infinity to an infinite being, thus projecting God as the reason or ground of consciousness. In its consciousness, the self has no knowledge of the absolute, only of itself and of the power of its consciousness. The feeling of dependence which arises in consciousness is therefore not a dependence upon the absolute, but merely the dependence upon nature (cf. Feuerbach 1983, 86-116, 124-128, 229-256).

Friedrich Nietzsche takes Feuerbach's criticism one step further: consciousness of God or some transcendence is nothing but an illusion which manifests itself in consciousness. Not only consciousness of God is an illusion, but also consciousness in general. Reason is nothing but a great means of deception, producing illusions like the illusion of truth, the illusion of the subject or the indisputable certainty that consciousness has of itself, and finally the illusion of God or an absolute. Belief in God resulted from the belief in grammar, which in turn was the illusory product of false concepts clouding reason because reason necessarily operates in language. God too is such a false concept forced upon us by reason and the structure of language (cf. Nietzsche 1988, Vol. 6, 77f.; Vol. 11, 505; Vol. 13, 54). According to Nietzsche, this means that not only the concept of God, but also that of (self-)consciousness are nothing but projections and illusions of reason.

From Nietzsche there is a direct connection to current naturalistic explanations of religion and with it of ideas of transcendence, such as those of Eugene G. D'Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg (cf. D'Aquili/Newberg 1999): Religious experiences of an absolute or the Divine are the result of neurological processes in the brain and are therefore biological occurrences, particularly cerebral processes that take place in certain regions of the brain, which in turn are stimulated by particular exercises and movements (cf. D'Aquili/Newberg 1999, 16). Here too, the idea of transcendence becomes a fiction and an illusion without any claim to real knowledge. It is not a product of reason and language, but of neural processes which in turn produce a particular structure of language and particular concepts. The naturalistic proposition presents a challenge, because, like certain philosophical traditions, it relates religion or ideas of transcendence

to consciousness or self-consciousness. The difference is that it offers a naturalistic explanation for the emergence of consciousness and with it the emergence of religion and the idea of transcendence in that consciousness is considered to be an epiphenomenon of neural processes. In doing so, it takes the philosophical attempt at a rational justification for the emergence of the idea of transcendence through its relation to self-consciousness to an absurd extreme. After all, this idea would be a mere projection of consciousness, but consciousness itself is suspect as it is an epiphenomenon of neural processes. Consequently, naturalistic concepts are merely trying to provide an empirical substantiation for Nietzsche's proposition.

However, there were others who criticised the relation between transcendence and self-consciousness. Their criticism was based on a critical approach to the idea of the subject and the idea of a metaphysics of presence. The main exponents of this criticism are Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas and post-structuralist writers such as Jacques Derrida. They criticise the relation between transcendence and self-consciousness first of all because it is based on the idea of subjectivity, which in itself is open to criticism for several reasons. According to the critics of the concept of subjectivity, it is a modern version of the ideas of identity and origin, and it is determined by the search for an absolute principle, the search for an original cause, an absolute first, which would both provide an ontological foundation of diversity and be an epistemological condition for the possibility of knowledge. This absolute first could then be regarded as the origin of being and of knowledge. This identity logic inherently means an idea of power, a 'forced identity' that subjects the specificity, diversity and difference to oneness and which therefore extinguishes difference and otherness. The power of oneness means the death of otherness (cf. Adorno 1980). Second, the idea of the subject as a *fundamentum absolutum inconcussum veritatis* is the result of a signifying-calculating philosophy (cf. Heidegger 1989, 31-256); it serves as a *fundamentum inconcussum* within an idea of truth which equates truth with certainty and unshakeable certitude. Only the self that devises itself as the subject would be able to supply this absolute certainty. Such an idea of truth would be part of a calculating and planning philosophy which regards truth as certainty and furnishes itself with a foundation as the condition for the possibility of knowledge. Thirdly and finally, the idea of subjectivity results in an ideal of total (self-) presence (cf. Heidegger 1977b; Derrida 1972; Levinas 1974; Lyotard 1985), as it follows from making the idea of presence absolute. This idea is a product of the signifying-calculating philosophy that takes representation (*repraesentatio*) as the model. The implication is that the signifying self wants to avail itself of the signified, because if something is fully present, it is also fully available. The self aims to gain control of itself through the

transparency achieved in self-reflection, only to be able subsequently to gain control of the other. After all, the presence of the self in self-reflection is a mere condition for the presentation of the object.

Where the relation between transcendence and self-consciousness is concerned, this criticism of the idea of the subject is combined with the criticism of an idea of transcendence which is the result of a mistaken idea of the infinite, interpreted in line with a metaphysics of presence. Levinas for example characterizes this idea of transcendence as a philosophy of totality, a philosophy of sameness or an onto-theology that searches for a ground and origin of being. In doing so, it identifies this origin with oneness and wholeness, with the totality of being, with that which is, and with its history. That is, in keeping with an idea of the totality of truth. Here, transcendence is not the same as otherness, but as oneness and wholeness which reduces otherness to sameness (Levinas 1971). This philosophy of totality which extinguishes the otherness of transcendence also stands for the negation of the radical absence of transcendence and its mysterious, unspeakable and unrepresentable disposition. It follows that this infinity, which is regarded as oneness and wholeness, is in its universality, totality or uniqueness also presented, expressed or determined in the finite, and therefore also in philosophy and in language. According to this criticism, the relation between transcendence and self-consciousness is no longer relevant because the metaphysics of presence can avail itself of self-consciousness and a consciousness of God: God is present in self-consciousness and can therefore also be determined. He is not the radically other of sameness, he is the self which, in the otherness of self, comes to itself as the other of itself. As an alternative to the relation between transcendence and subjectivity or self-consciousness, the critics proposed a concept of transcendence which takes its bearings from the idea of alterity, viz. a relation between transcendence and radical otherness. In doing so, they abandoned the traditional relation between transcendence and self-consciousness and also tried to circumvent the criticism of Feuerbach and Nietzsche regarding an idea of transcendence emerging in self-consciousness.

II

The idea of transcendence in the theory of alterity emphasises the radical difference between transcendence and immanence. This strict division between transcendence and immanence implies a number of characteristics of the absoluteness of transcendence: it is radically and absolutely distanced from the immanent and at the same time it is radically absent. Ac-

cordingly, it is an absolute mystery and as such it cannot be expressed or known. However, as transcendence and immanence are radically different, transcendence is 'beyond' being, beyond man's thinking, feeling and willing. It is 'beyond' the immanence of being-in-the-world. It can even be regarded as a 'beyond being' in so far as being is still bound to immanence. As the radical opposite of immanence, transcendence can be equated with alterity, such that it is neither a being similar to objects that can be hypostasised to a supreme being, nor is it being. Distinct from Heidegger's thesis of the ontological difference of being and beings, the other, in this case, is regarded rather as the other of being, and as such as transcendence, as Levinas explains: "If transcendence has a meaning, then for the event of Being – for the *esse* – for *being* (*essence*) – this can only mean going over to the Other of Being" (Levinas 1974, 3). This radical transcendence of the absolute other is from time immemorial and is a non-presentable absence; it defies any possibility of (re-)presentation (cf. *ibid.* 11, 14). This is why it remains a mystery: unspeakable, unthinkable and unimaginable (cf. Levinas 1971, 50ff.). For Levinas, radical alterity is identical to the Cartesian idea of the infinite:

"The alterity of the other is not cancelled out, it does not just melt away in thoughts of whoever thinks it. In thinking the infinite, the self a priori thinks of more than it thinks of. The infinite is not lost in the idea of the infinite, it is not comprehended. This idea is not a concept. The infinite is the radically and absolute other. The transcendence of the infinite I am faced with, from which I am separated and which I think of, is the first sign of its infinity" (Levinas 1983, 197).

Like Levinas, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard define alterity as a radical and absolute otherness, but they do not identify it with the idea of the infinite. Derrida relates it to the unspeakable contingency or to the gift and the *différance* (cf. Derrida 1991) like *chora* (cf. Derrida 1996). Lyotard identifies this alterity with an unrepresentable absolute obligation which is at the same time contingency and gift (cf. Lyotard/Thébaud 1979, 102). The radical alterity can at best be presented negatively as trace, a sign – not as a sign of the signified, but as the expression of an eternal distancing. For example, for Levinas, transcendence breaks into immanence as a trace of the infinite, as a trace of absence in the face of the other as the expression, the epiphany of the other. However, transcendence is never absorbed into immanence, nor does it ever appear in it: "The God that has passed is not the archetype of which the face is the image" (Levinas 1983, 235). Likewise, Lyotard emphasises the unrepresentability of the law or the contingency, which can however be presented negatively as the presentation of its unrepresentability (cf. Lyotard 1985, 98). Lyotard proposes that there are several of these traces or negative presentations of that which can never be presented. One of these traces is the 'silent vowel' of

the *tora*, of the Scripture, *miqra* (Lyotard 1995, 27). Another example is the tetragram, the unspeakable name that is not the name of a divine being, but in its unspeakability, it is the expression of the unspeakable self (cf. Lyotard 1995, 102f.).

However, the concept of transcendence as formulated by the theory of alterity proves to be rather weak, both from a philosophical and from a theological point of view. From a philosophical point of view, critical remarks can be made about the radical division between transcendence and immanence. Transcendence is without any substance, any historicity and cannot or even should not ever appear in history. It can never have any substance. It cannot mediate itself in and through the immanent, as transcendence and immanence are not mediated to each other. This perspective implies a residual dualism because transcendence can never materialise, never take bodily form or become history. Without the mutual mediation between transcendence and immanence, there would be no epiphany, no breaking in of the other. The other, transcendence, would merely neutralize itself if it were not related to that of which it is the 'more', the other. In which respects is radical alterity as a 'beyond being' different from the radical nothing of Nietzsche? In what way is it different from the idea of a radical 'outside' which, as Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault have pointed out, could only be the result of repressing mechanisms within a discursive practice? Would not that mean that radical alterity was after all an innerworldly 'more' which is hypostasised to an 'always greater' transcendence in the yearning for such a transcendence, as a kind of 'transcending without transcendence'? Moreover, the claim of the radical absence of transcendence implies an equivocal view of its knowability, which in turn leads to the arbitrariness of the definition of the concept of transcendence and to its total voiding.

These philosophical problems of the concept of alterity are even more acute from a theological point of view, as the faith in one God like that of the Judeo-Christian tradition based on Scripture, would be shaky within a concept of radical alterity: the faith in one God who has been free to create the world and who turns to humanity in love and loyalty, who promises it unconditional salvation and mediates himself to it. Furthermore, any idea of God becomes arbitrary when the knowledge of God and talking of God are considered to be equivocal. This would mean that God could, contrary to what the Scripture holds, also be a *genius malignus*, who may be almighty but also a malignant deceiver who enjoys misleading humanity, a kind of arbitrary God who enjoys humanity's suffering and continually tries to prolong it.

Faced with these problems of the concept of alterity, we need to consider returning to a relation between transcendence and self-consciousness.

In doing so, we must avoid the risk of projection and illusion pointed out by Feuerbach and Nietzsche, and the risk of naturalistic reformulations of the concept of transcendence.

III

In order to reflect on the possibility of a relation between transcendence and self-consciousness, a definition of both the concept of 'transcendence' and the concept of 'self-consciousness' is necessary. Let us first determine the concept of transcendence: As is well-known, the concepts of 'transcendence' or 'to transcend' are derived from the Latin verb *transcendere*, which initially meant nothing more than going beyond, being greater than something or ascending towards a 'more' or a 'beyond' (cf. Halfwassen 1998). Both 'transcending' as the act of going beyond and 'transcendence' as that 'beyond' and the thing to which transcending is aimed, can be interpreted in various ways. One could initially regard the 'more' as a quasi-innerworldly 'more' or 'beyond', a 'more' as part and moment of being-in-the-world. For example, another person could be regarded as this 'more' towards which the self transcends, as could a historical situation which transcends the social *status quo*. It is this last meaning of transcendence that Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno and Ernst Bloch use. For Adorno, the concept of 'transcendence' is a 'more' to that which is, something that exceeds mere factuality, but is part of the immanence and contingency of being-in-the-world, and is expressed in a work of art (cf. Adorno 1993, 200). According to Adorno, this 'more' does not allow for the formulation of a utopia as it is by no means an idea of the 'entirely other' of facticity, but merely an idea of what it could be, but what is not. Likewise, Ernst Bloch discusses the possibility of "transcending without transcendence" (Bloch 1973, 1522). Contrary to Adorno, he does hold onto the idea of a 'more' as a utopian condition of completion, although he does regard it as part of the world or history.

This interpretation of 'transcending' as an activity of a going-beyond itself and of 'transcendence' in the sense of an innerworldly 'more' is contrasted by an interpretation of transcending and transcendence as a crossing into a 'beyond something' which is no longer just part of being-in-the-world, which, in other words, can no longer be understood as an exclusively innerworldly transcendence. 'Transcendence' is instead defined here as an infinite or unconditional which goes beyond finitude and determinacy. The act of transcending is already part of this fundamental exceeding of the world. This idea of transcendence could be the idea of an unconditional which does not necessarily have to correspond with the existence of

this unconditional, or the idea of the other, the determinacy of a reality which transcends being-in-the-world. This transcendence towards a 'to which' (*Woraufhin*), which at the same time is determined by world and man as a 'from which' (*Wovonher*), that transcends the finitude and determinacy of the world, is characteristic of the religious idea of transcendence. This latter idea is different from other ideas of transcendence as innerworldly exceeding and accordingly forms the basis of the biblical idea of transcendence.

It seems natural that we should identify this idea of transcendence with that of infinity: that to which the self exceeds in its being-in-the-world is the infinite which is ground, origin and aim, specifically the 'from which' (*Wovonher*) and 'to which' (*Woraufhin*) of the finite and contingent being-in-the-world. The infinite is already part of our reason as the idea of the infinite, something which Descartes has pointed out in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Yet the idea of the infinite proves to be too unspecific to be able to determine the idea of transcendence as it is used in a religious context. This is because infinity in itself does not necessarily make this 'beyond' into a 'more' which transcends being-in-the-world as a whole, nor does it compel us to identify infinity with a 'beyond' in the sense of a 'more'; for example, matter too can be seen as infinite, as can the 'endless expanses' of the universe. We cannot identify nothingness with the infinite to which human existence transcends. Nothingness as the 'to which' of transcendence would not be a 'more', it would not be a 'beyond' this existence, but on the contrary, it would be the extinction, the negation of it. Considering these naturalistic or nihilistic interpretations of the idea of the infinite from a religious point of view, the idea of transcendence should rather be identified with the idea of the unconditional (*das Unbedingte*). Otherwise the definition would be inaccurate and self-contradictory. The idea of the unconditional describes an unconditional groundless ground of everything determinate as its condition and perfection. In this case, perfection does not only mean the totality of all possibilities, of all possible predicates like in the *omnitudo realitatis*, it also means the perfection of these predicates which in turn have their roots in the utter indeterminacy and groundlessness of the unconditional. Indeterminacy and perfection are therefore mutually referential. This is also how we should interpret Descartes' idea of the infinite: not as a 'bad infinity' of endless expansion or eternal recurrence of the same, but as an idea of the unconditional and the perfect. It is what makes the determinate determinate and the imperfect imperfect. Religious beliefs rely upon this idea of the unconditional. However, they do not merely postulate the idea of the unconditional but actually confirm their belief in its existence. This belief implies the ontological obligation to not merely postulate the unconditional as an epistemologi-

cally and/or ethically necessary idea (for example in a transcendental-logical approach as an unconditional self, unconditional knowledge, unconditional freedom or as unconditional obligation), but it also implies awarding the unconditional a real existence as well – as an unconditional being. So much for the definition of the concept of transcendence. Let us now turn to the definition of the concept of ‘self-consciousness’.

The concept of ‘self-consciousness’ can be defined with the help of Dieter Henrich’s theory of consciousness for now. Henrich convincingly criticizes the reflection theories of consciousness which regard consciousness as the result of a reflective act, or even identify it with this act. Henrich has pointed out that these theories fall into the trap of a *regressus ad infinitum* and end up in a circular argument (cf. Henrich 1967, 12f.). Instead, Henrich regards consciousness as pre-reflective familiarity with the self, which forms the ground of any self-reflection. In fact, it must necessarily be the ground of all self-reflection for the self to be able to relate to itself. After all, reflection on the self presupposes knowledge of the self: “The familiarity with consciousness can in no way be understood as the result of an act. It is already there when consciousness starts” (Henrich 1970, 271). If it is true however that the self is not conscious of itself because of a reflection, but rather because of a pre-reflective familiarity, we are dealing with a direct perception of the self, an intuitive comprehension of the self. This intuitive insight is not an experience in the sense of a concrete, interpreted and mediated insight, bound to the interplay of receptivity and spontaneity. It should rather be regarded as an experience that is the condition for the ability to experience anything at all. This experience can be compared to a form of knowledge which Johann Gottlieb Fichte and others have called ‘intellectual vision’: as a vision, it is like a perception, but it is also different from sensory perception in that it is not brought about by a ‘perceived’ object and is therefore intellectual. This vision is an act (*Thathandlung*) (Fichte 1971, Vol. I, 91) that can no longer be proven itself (*ibid.*, 463). This act combines activity and passivity, receptivity and spontaneity: it is active in its act of vision, passive in its surrendering to that vision.

However, Henrich is also an exponent of a non-egological theory of consciousness. Accordingly, he distinguishes between a self-less, pre-reflective consciousness and a full self-consciousness as a moment of consciousness (which is regarded as uniqueness). This non-egological definition of consciousness has its problems however. For example the unproven leap from a self-less consciousness to a full self-consciousness, the identity-logical structure of a self-less and therefore monistic concept of consciousness, the lack of a definition of the relation between consciousness and freedom, or the possibility of a naturalistic interpretation of a non-

egological, monistic concept of consciousness as an anonymous flow of energy or life.¹ That is why we need to present the concept of 'self-consciousness' by referring to an egological theory of consciousness. It is my opinion that Fichte's definition of the concept of 'self-consciousness' is well-suited for this purpose.

As I have mentioned before, Fichte identifies the intellectual vision which precedes any reflection with the self which has direct pre-reflective knowledge of itself. This self-conscious self is the basic condition for any further knowledge. As Fichte defines the self as an act (*Thatandlung*), he does not regard it as a thing nor as a substance, but as an actualization. Consequently, self-consciousness is identical to the intuitive comprehension of the self, or even with the self itself, which is the condition for any further knowledge of the self or the world as it becomes aware of itself. This means that self-consciousness is not a form of qualitative or material self-knowledge aimed at special characteristics or traits, but the formal acknowledgement of an "I am, rather than not" (*ich bin und nicht vielmehr nicht*). Although this acknowledgement is always open to reflection and to reflective knowledge of the self in the sense of self-knowledge as an "I know that I am and what I am" (*ich weiß, dass ich bin und was ich bin*), it is not formulated reflectively itself. This pre-reflective definition of self-consciousness precludes an exclusively reflective idea of self-consciousness as a 'conceiving thinking' and therefore also the power-characteristic of subjectivity of self-consciousness criticised by Heidegger and others.²

Given these definitions of transcendence and self-consciousness, we can now formulate the relation between the two without falling into the traps of projection, illusion, naturalism or the metaphysics of presence and the identity logic criticised in the concepts of the theory of alterity.

IV

Transcendence has been defined as unconditional in the sense of a 'from which' (*Wovonher*) and a 'to which' (*Woraufhin*) of contingent existence. This unconditional can now be concretised as an unconditional self and unconditional freedom, which serves to narrow down both the concept of the unconditional and, with it, that of transcendence (as unconditional self and freedom (*Ich und Freiheit*)), and that of self-consciousness (as an unconditional (*unbedingtes*) self and freedom). The fact of the matter is that self-consciousness as a form of knowledge of the self can be defined as an

¹ For an extensive critique of a non-egological consciousness theory, see Wendel 2002, 271-283.

² For an extensive discussion of this, cf. Wendel 2002, 246-313 and 2003.

unconditional in the determinate self which Fichte called the absolute or unconditional self. This does not signify a self separated from the individual self, but merely an appearance of the self or a perspective on the individual self, which is the determination of the possibility of the individual power of reason of the concrete self. The self that is to such an extent regarded as unconditional, is at the same time free because it knows of itself in the form of an act, or rather as an act. This knowledge accompanies all other knowledge, all acts of the self. This pure activity of the self is pure freedom, or, to put it differently, pure ability, pure competence – in the union of activity and passivity. As a consequence, the unconditional self also entails a formal freedom which is unconditional despite its formality and which distinguishes itself from the determinate freedom of the will that aims for materiality as a singular capacity of reason. As its condition, it even precedes it (cf. Fichte 1971, V, 513-523). Thus, freedom is not just a moment in consciousness, it is identified with consciousness. Likewise, self-consciousness is not a mere moment of consciousness, but identical to it. That is why in self-consciousness the feeling of freedom arises simultaneously with the intuitive comprehension of the self – as a comprehension of the ability, of competence in the sense of a condition for the determinate freedom of the will. However, this feeling coincides with the feeling of indebtedness, of dependence, for in its determinacy the self cannot guarantee the ground of the unconditional that is given in the consciousness of the self and its freedom. It is in its feeling of freedom and its self-knowledge that it experiences a feeling of gratitude, 'complete dependence' upon an unavailable unconditional as a 'from which' of its consciousness, of the completely unconditional which is no longer subject to any determinacy.

The complete unconditional as the 'from which' of the unconditional in determinacy, as the 'from which' of contingent consciousness, must be seen in this light, otherwise it could never be its 'from which' (cf. Fichte 1971, II, 697f.; V, 455 and 512f.). This means that it should be conceived as the unconditional self and unconditional freedom and consequently as self-consciousness. Yet, as self-consciousness, it is another self-consciousness to the self-consciousness of the contingent self. This relation between the completely unconditional and the determinate is therefore not one of participation of the determinate in a mere unconditional, but it is a relation of unity in permanent dissimilarity: unity in the unconditional and the pre-reflectivity of consciousness, permanent dissimilarity in self-consciousness. This precludes a naturalistic interpretation, as the completely unconditional is not a singular flow of life, but an unconditional self and unconditional freedom that relates to the other self and other freedom, for which it is the 'from which' and the 'to which'. This also helps, at least partly, to disprove the suspicion of projection. Although the existence of

the completely unconditional cannot be 'known' theoretically, it can be postulated practically. It can be believed in and hoped for, and it can be relied upon from a practical point of view. But why can it be relied upon? After all, could it not be said with Nietzsche that this move towards practical reason is a move towards the illusion of reason? This general suspicion of Nietzsche against reason cannot be completely overcome, but at least we can counter that there is one insight which even he cannot doubt without contradicting himself: self-consciousness. Self-consciousness can be the basis for trusting the possibility of knowledge, not merely the possibility of true knowledge with regard to theoretical reason, but also with regard to that practical aspect. This also means that trust in the existence of the completely unconditional is an attitude that cannot be described as inescapably illusory. As a postulate of practical reason, the belief in an existence of the completely unconditional as an attitude of trust from an epistemological point of view also offers a sufficient basis for a successful way of life and hence an 'orthopraxis'.

The definition of the unconditional as self and freedom furthermore guarantees the intuition of the idea of alterity that the otherness of transcendence should be acknowledged. The completely unconditional and the determinate should neither be neutralized into absolute unity, nor should the unconditional fully present itself in the determinate. It can however appear in the determinate, as image.

V

Hegel's metaphysics of presence, for example, assumed that the unconditional could present itself in immanence. It assumed that the absolute is directly and therefore fully present in self-consciousness as a form of self-realisation, even though the directness of the presence is at the same time always mediated because of the identity of being and comprehension or of self-consciousness and reflection. If however the absolute is regarded as an unconditional, which on the one hand is identical with the determinate in so far as it has founded determinacy from itself and remains related to it, while on the other hand it remains distinct from it as it has founded it as *an other outside* itself, we can no longer assume the possibility of complete presence of the unconditional in the determinate. This presence must be ruled out because of the difference between the unconditional and the determinate, because of the otherness of the unconditional vis-à-vis the determinate. Likewise, we need to ask how the unconditional and determinacy can be mediated to each other to prevent an unbridgeable gap from opening up, a *chorismos* between the unconditional and the determinate

which no longer allows us to imagine the mediation and relation between the two. The unconditional would thus be reduced to an a-historical and abstract, totally unconditional entity, without any relation to the concrete, to history or to immanence.

The mediation between the unconditional and the determinate should now be thought of as the idea of an image, different from that of the theory of representation of Plato. The unconditional now founds the determinate as the other of itself, and this otherness can be regarded as an image. On the one hand, this image fully and totally contains the unconditional, on the other hand, it does not show itself as itself but as its other, as something separate, viz. as its image. In this image, the unconditional shows itself without fully presenting itself. It is constantly torn, not just between identity and difference, but also between presence and absence. The image of the unconditional retains a mysterious rest which cannot be represented.³ This image of the unconditional in the determinate is first of all the self-consciousness of the determinate self. It refers to a 'more', a 'beyond' which is contained in it and yet at the same transcends it, it refers to its 'from which' (*Wovonher*) and its 'to which' (*Woraufhin*). To put it succinctly: to the unconditional to which it owes its existence – "*interior intimo meo, superior summo meo*" (Augustine: Conf. III 6, 11). However, not only the singular self-consciousness can be regarded as an image of the unconditional, as the emergence of transcendence, but also the encounter, the 'becoming each other's image' of self-consciousness and the self-consciousness of others, i.e. the relation between others and the mutual recognition of another. This mutual recognition ensures the success of this relation, as the reciprocity of the acknowledgment precludes the corruption of this relation to one of power with dominant and submissive sides and the use of force. In doing so, it again refers to a 'more'. This is not a 'more' that necessarily results from the relation and the acknowledgement, but a 'more' in the sense of a 'more than what is', a 'more' of the limited, the imperfect and the distorted, also the negligently imperfect.⁴ So this 'more' emerges in the determinate, in the concrete history of finite existence and

³ For this idea of the image of the unconditional in relation to Meister Eckhart and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, see Wendel 2002, 195-209, 268ff., 309-313.

⁴ We could discuss at length whether this emergence of transcendence in self-consciousness and the encounter of self-consciousness with other self-consciousnesses could also be regarded as an embodiment of the unconditional in the determinate when one relates the concept of self-consciousness with that of body and that of body with symbol, viz. as the form in which the unconditional appears. For the relation between self-consciousness or subjectivity and embodiment in relation to phenomenological theories of the body in Husserl, Stein and Merleau-Ponty, cf. for example Wendel 2002, 283-292 and 295ff. Cf. also Michel Henry's phenomenological Christology in Henry 1996 and 2000.

presents it in a different light: "Transcendence can no longer be thought of as a force of transience; eternity does not appear as such, it only appears through the most transient" (Adorno 1988, 353). Therefore, not only in the individual self-consciousness, but also in the relation between self-consciousness and another self-consciousness, in the entanglement of self-consciousness in concrete history, in relations with others, in a social context, does transcendence emerge. This emergence of the unconditional under the seal of the determinate, even in the 'smallest and most paltry', can serve as a sign and a form of hope for reconciliation in an unreconciled world that appears to be ruled by the 'will to power' and the 'the eternal recurrence of the same' – a hope that may not be known in self-consciousness in the sense of a consciousness of God, but one that justifies reasonable faith.⁵

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⁵ Cf. Wendel 2004 for an extensive discussion of this issue.

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