

# Max Scheler and Edith Stein as Precursors to the “Turn to Religion” Within Phenomenology

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Das Gegebene ist unendlich reicher als der Teil des Gegebenen,  
der im strengen Sinne der sogenannten Sinneserfahrung entspricht.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between phenomenology and religion, which today is often polemically phrased in terms of the “theological turn” described by Dominique Janicaud, in fact constitutes one of the basic tenets of the first phase of phenomenology, as can be seen in the pioneering work of Max Scheler and Edith Stein. Born Jews, just as Husserl, they both converted to Catholicism, whereas Husserl became a Protestant. Their religious background should not be seen as mere biographical facts — Scheler was indeed portrayed as the new hope for his Church during the early 1920s, and Stein became a nun a decade later — but enters into the very substance of their respective philosophies: the idea that givenness exceeds what is given in the ordinary mode is not only an epistemological problem, but already contains the seeds for a “theological turn” within phenomenology.

The contemporary problems of givenness and radical alterity are constantly present in these early discussions, as well as the topic of non-cognitive intentionality. A re-reading of the writings of Scheler and Stein will show that the question of the *limit* of phenomenology — a limit that conventionally has been understood as the border between philosophy and its other — was present from the very beginning, even that the reflection on this limit was not something that phenomenology

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1. Max Scheler, *Vom Ewigen im Menschen*, Gesammelte Werke. Bd 5, Bern: Francke Verlag, 1954, 250. Henceforth referred to as VEM.

would eventually *encounter*, but was part of its very idea. In this questioning of its own limits phenomenology necessarily opens towards similar themes in religion, and the contributions of Scheler and Stein remain decisive not only for an understanding of the early phase of phenomenology, but also for the future prospect of a dialogue between philosophy and religion.

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Since the beginning of the 1990s the idea of a turn to religion within phenomenology has become widespread. A key writer in establishing this concept is Dominique Janicaud, even though his aim was to criticize this tendency within French phenomenology. Similarly to phenomenologists and theologians that take their point of departure from such a “turn”, Janicaud states that this turn originates in Heidegger. It was Heidegger who turned to a phenomenology of the non-apparent and abandoned the phenomenology of originary givenness. Such a phenomenology of the non-apparent exceeds the intentional horizon, and would thus, according to Janicaud, be something totally different from Husserl’s investigation of constitution.<sup>2</sup>

What I would like to suggest is that Janicaud overemphasizes the importance of Heidegger and has too narrow an understanding of Husserl’s phenomenology. The necessary pre-conditions for a “turn to the non-apparent” are implicitly already present in Husserl, not least in his analysis of inner time-consciousness, passive synthesis, and intersubjectivity. Husserl scholars, such as Rudolf Bernet and Dan Zahavi, have (following in the footsteps of Aron Gurwitsch) shown the richness of the concept of horizon in Husserl’s philosophy, and others, such as Klaus Held and Eugen Fink, have discussed the anonymity and opacity of the self. Bernet suggests that Husserl’s analysis aims at a “metaphysical” and transparent result, whereas that which he describes “often runs counter to his metaphysical understanding of himself.”<sup>3</sup>

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2. Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”*: *The French Debate*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2000, 29ff and 94.

3. Rudolf Bernet, “Is the Present Ever Present? Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence,” *Research in Phenomenology*, 12, 85–112, 1982, 101f.

An important case of this is Husserl’s analysis of inner-time consciousness, which Husserl himself considers to be the deepest foundational analysis, and thus should offer the self-evident base of immanent consciousness. Instead this analysis leads to an increasingly apparent “transcendence” and a givenness that exceeds Husserl’s own understanding of intentionality. (This transcendence also becomes more and more explicit: it is more present in *Bernauer Manuskripte* from 1917/18 than in the lectures on inner time-consciousness from 1905, and more explicit in the C-manuscripts from 1929–1934 than in *Bernauer Manuskripte*).<sup>4</sup>

The analysis of inner-time consciousness is developed further by, for example, Held and Fink. Held’s expanded version of Husserl’s phenomenology has also been the starting-point for a Husserlian theology, developed mainly by James Hart, who just as Held, begins from Husserl’s analysis of inner-time consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

I have cited these examples in order to point to readings of Husserl that portray him as a philosopher of overflowing intentionalities. In the following I will not pursue these investigations, but instead turn to Scheler and Stein as two critical readers of Husserl, who by criticizing as well as continuing Husserl’s thoughts come close to many themes that have become important in the so-called turn to religion today. But in order to do this, we first need to take a brief look at how some central aspects of the turn to religion have been formulated.

Jayne Svenungsson has for example stated that Heidegger provides thought structures and a set of concepts in which the concept of God can return: One key thought in the later Heidegger is that being neither can nor should be made into an object, but always escapes human thought. Being is thus something that exists and is given “before” our thinking. Svenungsson also points to Heidegger’s concept of a “divine

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4. Edmund Husserl, *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein, (1917/18)*, Hua XXXIII, ed. Rudolf Bernet and Dieter Lohmar, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001. *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929–1934). Die C-manuskripte*, Hua, Materialien Bd VII, ed. Dieter Lohmar, Dordrecht: Springer, 2006. *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, Hua X, ed. Rudolf Boehm, Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966.

5. See *Essays in Phenomenological Theology*, eds. Steven W. Laycock and James G. Hart, New York: State University of New York, 1986.

God” prior to any conceptualized God, which leads to the conclusion that theologians in conceptualizing God make him into a graspable object, and thus no longer God.<sup>6</sup> As we will see, all of these themes are present in both Stein’s and Scheler’s phenomenology. I thus agree with Svenungsson in her description of these themes of the turn, but I would like to broaden the perspective in order to include other early phenomenologists.

Another important trait in Stein and Scheler as well as in Heidegger is their criticism of Husserl’s epistemological foundationalism — a theme that has been pursued by Levinas and Derrida, as well as by Jean-Luc Marion, who criticizes Husserl for having a concept of givenness that focuses exclusively on presence. It could be argued that givenness and visibility have received a much broader treatment in later phenomenology, for instance in Derrida, who has pointed to the necessity of blindness for vision,<sup>7</sup> and whose work has continually explored various facets of radical alterity and otherness.

Even though Husserl discusses the non-given as given through horizons, intersubjectivity, and inner time-consciousness, he focused on the ideal positive given. This is obvious also on those few occasions when he explicitly discusses the concept of “God.” In the *Bernauer Manuskripte* the idea of God arises from the potentiality of all knowing, i.e., the possibility to turn the not-yet-given and no-longer-given into something originally given.<sup>8</sup> But what has been highlighted by later phenomenology in this analysis is instead a dimension of loss, the impossibility for intentionality to fully grasp the past as exactly the same, as well as the impossibility to fully grasp the self. The self always slips away from the grasp of reflection and intentionality. In emphasizing the non-given of every givenness, this type of analysis allows a radical alterity to appear. The “God” that appears in later phenomenology is thus closer to negative theology.

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6. Jayne Svenungsson, *Guds återkomst: en studie av gudsbegreppet inom postmodern filosofi*, Göteborg: Glänta, 2004, 71, 77f.

7. See Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-portrait and Other Ruins*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

8. See for example Husserl, *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewußtsein*, §8, 45ff.

Janicaud claims that this is exactly the point where phenomenology goes wrong. He proposes that where Levinas, Marion, Henry, etc., went astray, Merleau-Ponty remained on the right track. He formulates a shibboleth that bears on the difference between an invisible *of this world*, and an *absolutely invisible*.<sup>9</sup> This way of putting it is, however, misleading since what he calls “absolutely invisible,” and what I propose to call the non-giveness of the given, is by no means an invisible of *some other world*, but rather implies a broader understanding of visibility.

These questions lead us to the core of Scheler’s as well as Stein’s phenomenologies of religion. They both strike a balance between on the one hand an objectified and (in Heidegger’s vocabulary) theological God, and on the other hand analyses that connect their philosophies to the tradition of negative theology. In the following I will explore some fruitful aspects in Scheler and Stein that point in the later direction and that can be understood as precursors of later phenomenological discussions.

*An Alternative Concept of Intentionality:  
Scheler and Ordo Amoris*

Towards the end of Scheler’s life he and Heidegger became allies in their critique against Husserl’s claim for the primacy of an intentionality based on knowledge, which in their view had led Husserl to preserve a Cartesian and solipsistic immanence.<sup>10</sup> Heidegger points towards Scheler’s richer concept of intentionality, which gives primacy to the

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9. Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn,”* 34.

10. Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffes*, GA 20, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1979, § 10, 124ff, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik*, GA 26, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978, 164–8. In Scheler we can find an explicit criticism of Husserl’s epistemological understanding of the problem of intersubjectivity already in the preface to the second edition of *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, XII, Halle: Verlag von Max Niemeyer, For a discussion on the relation between Scheler and Heidegger during Scheler’s last years, see Mark Michalski, *Fremdwahrnehmung und Mitsein: Zur Grundlegung der Sozialphilosophie im Denken Max Schelers und Martin Heideggers*, Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1997, 24ff.

lover over the knower, as an alternative to Husserlian phenomenology. In *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffes* Heidegger states that the cognitive grasping of the given object is only one specific kind of act, and that it can be contrasted with the act of love in which the lover lives *in* the beloved.<sup>11</sup> In this kind of intentionality the loved one is not objectified and put at a distance, as is the case in cognitive intentionality. This also gives an opportunity to understand one's own self in a different, non-objectifying, way. Heidegger continues, stating that even if Husserl's phenomenology constitutes a first step away from an objectification of the self, Scheler reinforces and develops this movement further.<sup>12</sup>

Scheler thus claims that the world is not opened through rationality, but through love.<sup>13</sup> Love is the primordial giving act in which an object can be given to us. Love is not blind, but the premise for all seeing; it is the interest that guides every gaze and creates the possibility of perception and judgment, as well as of memory.<sup>14</sup> Love should not be understood as some emotional chaos, but nor can it be understood through the logic of reason: it is an order through which we live with our whole being in the other, and not only with our mental capacities. Thought must inversely be understood as the result of our love and hate, our striving and sensing, and not the other way around. This

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11. Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffes* §10, 135.

12. In *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993, §10, 47–49, Heidegger argues for the similarity between Scheler and Husserl on this point, whereas in *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffes*, 175ff, he turns Scheler against Husserl.

13. Love is a central theme throughout Scheler's writings. His first phenomenological work from 1913 is *Zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Sympathiegefühl und von Liebe und Haß*. Halle: Verlag von Max Niemeyer, 1913. A second edition of this book was published 1923 as *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, 1927 (and this is the version I will use in the following hereafter referred to as WES). In 1916/17 he wrote the famous article "Ordo Amoris" (hereafter referred to as OA), that was published first in *Schriften aus dem Nachlass, Bd III, Philosophische Anthropologie*, Bern: Francke Verlag, 1987. The highly Catholic essay "Liebe und Erkenntnis" was published for the first time in 1916, and is also published with other essays in *Liebe und Erkenntnis*, Bern: Francke Verlag, 1955. In his last, and post-Catholic, period he wrote on the concept of love as eros, texts that have been published in *Schriften aus dem Nachlass, Bd III, Philosophische Anthropologie*.

14. "Liebe und Erkenntnis," 18, 26

does not, however, imply that the order of love would amount to something subjective, for in fact it constantly transcends the subject (OA 244 ff). It is through her being as *ens amans* that the human being also can be *ens cogitans* and *ens volens*. As *ens amans* she is transcending, because love is an original act through which a being, without stopping to be this being, leaves itself in order to intentionally take part in another being. The human being is thus always “out of herself” (OA 238).

Scheler refers to Brentano when he talks about love as an act and a movement, but unlike Brentano he claims that love, instead of being act of knowledge, is the very presupposition of knowledge. Knowledge is not love since it demands a distance that is alien to love (as well as to its opposite, hate) (WES 170f). Love is, thus, a more primordial givenness upon which the givenness of object-knowledge can be built.

In this understanding Scheler claims that love is not a social relationship (WES 173), it is not a feeling directed towards something or someone that I know, but must instead be related to the transcendence of the beloved. It is not primarily a response, but a spontaneous and creative act (WES 164 ff).

Love is directed towards something other, not however the other as a finalized object that the lover can grasp, but “in the direction of its specific perfection of value” (OA 237).<sup>15</sup> Love is bound to and directed towards values. But values are not some Platonic ideas, no fixed categories or regulative ideas, instead they are something that can be characterized as a “more.” With Karl Jaspers, Scheler suggests that values are not discovered through love, but that everything *becomes valuable* in love (WES 178, footnote 1). The value is what draws us towards it, that of which we want more, and what constantly shows itself as transcending us. Love lives in its direction towards the value (the valuable), and a fulfilled love would be a dead love: “love would never be fulfilled. For the transcending of given positive values towards a ‘higher’ belongs to their phenomenological essence” (WES 225).<sup>16</sup>

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15. “die Richtung der ihm eigentümlichen Wertvollkommenheit”. All translations from the German are mine.

16. “die Liebe wäre nie erfüllt. Denn das Transzendieren der gegebenen positiven Werte in die Richtung ‘höher’ gehört zu ihrem phänomenologischen Wesen”

Values continually show a higher co-given side as their center. But this center is always partly transcendent and the values can thus not be reduced to how they are given to human beings — they always exceed their givenness: “Thus, it belongs to the essence of love, that that, which it loves, which is phenomenologically ‘given’ in the act, is always more than what the loving one immediately feels in relation to values” (WES 221).<sup>17</sup>

To be in love means that the loving person

always lets the gaze of the movement of love extend a bit beyond the given. Precisely through this, the movement unfolds — especially in the case of personal love — the person, in her specific dimension of ideality and perfection, principally into infinity. (OA 241)<sup>18</sup>

Love and values belong together; love is directed toward values and values are visible only through love as a “more” of the beloved (WES 182ff). But he also tends to separate the given from its co-given values. He thus suggests a reduction in which we can look away from the given being that carries the values and reach a pure sphere of values. Such a sphere would be the divine (WES 179). The transcending movement in Scheler’s thought can therefore be understood in two ways: 1) As if we turned away from the human being as a given being and turned to the co-given value as something separated or even cut off from the given. 2) The values as an intensification of the human being who, as a person, is always transcending, which thus allows the person to appear in a different light.

Both of these interpretations are present in Scheler’s text, and even if he does not explicate this distinction, it is one of importance in our understanding of the similarities to the contemporary turn to religion in phenomenology.

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17. “Es gehört so zum Wesen der Liebe, daß das, was sie liebt, was im Akte phänomenologisch ‘gegeben’ ist, immer mehr ist, als was der Liebende an Werten gerade jetzt fühlt”

18. “läßt den Blickstrahl der Liebesbewegung immer ein wenig weiter über das Gegebene hinausspähen. Die Bewegung entfaltet — im höchsten Falle der Personliebe — eben hierdurch die Person in der ihr eigentümlichen Idealitäts- und Vollkommenheitsrichtung prinzipiell ins Unbegrenzte.”

One argument for the latter interpretation can be found in relation to art. In *Ordo Amoris* Scheler claims that love means a “listening going along” [*ein Horchende Entlanggehen*] (OA 247). This going-along returns as a loving-going-along in relation to God: As an anti-Platonist he states that the transcendent holy, infinite, and good should never be understood as an idea of the Good, since such an idea needs to be objectified, whereas values can never be fully objectified since they are constantly transcending (WES 176). He thus claims that since something like the Good or God can never stand in front of us, it cannot be loved on its own. The highest form of love is consequently not a love to God as an object, but a co-enactment [*Mitvollzug*] of God’s love to the world. To love the world, *amare mundum*, would in fact mean what St. Augustine called *amar in deo*, to love the world in God (WES 187ff). There is, thus, no love for God “beyond,” or “without” the world. But that does not make the concept of God superfluous, since the world is constantly transcending its givenness. To love the world *in* God would then mean to love the world in its transcending.

But can such love be the task of philosophy, or is it exclusively the task of faith? Would Scheler and Stein claim that philosophy is restricted to an objectifying and cognitive intentionality?

### *Faith and Phenomenology as Parallel Paths*

In her later phase Stein proposes that philosophy has strict limits: it is characterized by proofs of God, sharp concepts, and the power of deduction. The clarity of philosophy is therefore also the limit of philosophy. In Stein’s view, philosophy can never investigate the non-apparent, since it needs to objectify and give full visibility to every concept (EES 60). Philosophy can, thus, never get out of the paradigm of a differentiating visibility. Faith, on the other hand, Stein says, is where God shows himself as the creator and preserver. Her argument shows that her understanding of faith can lead to an objectification of the non-givenness, and as such take us into theology. This theological position has, as we noted earlier, been thoroughly criticized by Heidegger. He claims that this type of objectification goes beyond the phenomenological findings. In his discussion of the call of conscience,

he suggests that the scientific fallacy lies in the conclusion that what cannot be brought forward as an object cannot be at all, whereas the religious fallacy resides in the conclusion that what *is* also needs to be present-at-hand.<sup>19</sup>

The inability to admit non-objectifying intentionality is thus located differently by Heidegger and Stein. When Stein has the need to formulate an intentionality different from the cognitive, she takes a step away from philosophy and enters into faith. As spiritual, faith is always a movement and “doesn’t allow its knowledge be caught in rigid definitions, but must itself be a continual movement and find a fluid expression” (KSJ 99).<sup>20</sup>

She also claims that faith is that which shows being as dependent and as pointing beyond itself. It is through faith that she can relate to the non-given. But this non-given is not a radical alterity, but a beyond *in which we move*: “This obscure intuition gives us the incomprehensible as the inescapably close, in which we ‘live, move, and exist,’ but as the Incomprehensible” (EES 61; Stein’s footnote reference to the quote is to *Acts*, 17, 28).<sup>21</sup>

It is only through faith that we can relate to this ungraspable closeness: faith as a non-cognitive relation to a necessary, but ungraspable, transcendence in the world. In Scheler we find a related concept of faith. In order to make this concept clear we could compare his discussion of faith with his analysis of the phenomenon of shivering and anxiety.<sup>22</sup> To begin with, shivering with cold is both a symptom of a person being cold, and at the same time a response to, for example, cold air. In making the body move, shivering tries to regain some warmth. In a similar manner, anxiety is also a symptom or spontaneous reaction to a situation; it is a consequence of something that has already happened. But in Scheler’s analysis, it is at the same time a response that makes another future possible, a response that counter-

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19. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §57, 275.

20. “läßt sich seine Erkenntnis nicht in starre Definitionen einfangen, sondern muß selbst fortschreitende Bewegung sein und sich einen fließenden Ausdruck suchen”

21. “Dies dunkle Spüren gibt uns den Unfaßlichen als den unentrinnbar Nahen, in dem wir ‘leben, uns bewegen und sind’, aber als den Unfaßlichen”

22. Analyzed in the article “Reue und Wiedergeburt” in VEM.

acts the negative experience and releases the person from its preservation as a bad conscience. In this way anxiety ties the past and the future together through a transcending movement in which we can supersede our past and create a different future (VEM 54). Faith follows a similar pattern: the original event in faith can be compared to the experience of one’s own non-knowing. The non-knowing of faith is the consequence or symptom of the limitation of all knowledge. Just as the shivering reveals the cold to us, faith reveals our not-knowing, the not-given of the co-given. But the other side, and the response to this not-knowing, is a positive faith: we always believe in *something*. Just as shivering immediately counteracts the cold, faith is immediately filled with a content. Scheler calls this the sphere of the absolute, which the capitalist fills with money, the nationalist with the nation, and the religious person with God. But he also claims that God is the most proper way to fill this sphere, since God, in contrast to other values, is always transcending and can never be completely grasped (VEM 262 ff). In this case, God is neither a complete absence nor something fully given – God is instead the touching of that which cannot be grasped. God is not something that can be seen, nor something to which we are totally blind – but that which can only be touched, as Descartes already noted. This is the touching of a limit, which at the same time separates and connects.

Faith, here, is a way for the finite being to relate to its finitude and its horizons of co-givenness and non-givenness. From the perspective of a phenomenology that investigates the phenomenon of limits and the relation of co-givenness and non-givenness, testimonies to such a faith would be more interesting than most types of philosophy and theology. Both Scheler and Stein also relate phenomenology to different religious structures, and in the following I will look more closely at some of these strategies.

*The Transformation of Wesensschau  
to Visio Beatifica*

Stein wants to locate several similarities between phenomenology and various Christian techniques. She formulates two ways, one positive

and one negative. The positive way deals with foundational *forms*, that which is unchanging in our changing experience. These foundational forms emerge through eidetic variation or *Wesensschau*, and they are what are intended in the concept of *transcendentals*. This *Wesensschau* is made possible by the free movement of the human spirit through memory and fantasy — it is the movement of the inner eye across experience as a whole (EES 241).

We can understand this as a static analysis in Husserl's sense of the term, an analysis that aims to grasp the most general way in which being can be understood. The transcendentals are in this sense the emptiest forms of being as they stand in front of us. But, as Stein suggests, being is revelation to spirit, and the other necessary investigation would then aim to understand *revelation* or *appearance*. This type of investigation would come closer to a genetic analysis of how beings show themselves.

This is the project that Stein undertakes in “Was ist Philosophie? Ein Gespräch zwischen Edmund Husserl und Thomas von Aquino.”<sup>23</sup> Stein sets up a discussion between Husserl and Thomas on whether the means of knowledge themselves can be fully known. The difference between them would be that Husserl claims that such knowledge would be an immediate knowledge in pure immanence, whereas Thomas (and Stein) claim that being and knowledge always fall apart in human knowledge. To Stein and Thomas such an immediate knowledge can only be found in and through God (EuG 30).

If the human being follows such a religious path, she can reach what Stein calls immediate insight. The immediacy of these insights does not mean that they are the most obvious, i.e., they are not something that would not need any preparation. Instead, they are foundational and thus hidden truths. These insights are not deduced from something else, they are the origin of deduced truths. They are co-originarily given, or co-given with deduced truths. This means that deduced truths are what is given first, chronologically. Thomas as well as Husserl search for these immediate insights on which the empirical is built. And they both suggest that we need to investigate our own

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23. Published in *Erkenntnis und Glaube*, Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1993. Henceforth referred to as EuG.

existence in order to reach these insights. According to Stein they both agree on three possible means necessary to deduce knowledge:

1. The light of understanding [*Verstand*], by virtue of which we know.
2. Forms, shapes, or categories through which understanding knows a being.
3. Objects through which we can experience other objects, for example mirror images. (EuG 44)

The first one of these three is necessary for the other two. Thomas claims that this light of understanding is intimately connected to the soul. The soul is not one being among other beings but that being through which the others are given. Stein therefore understands Thomas’s concept of soul as a parallel to Husserl’s concept of the pure I. Like Husserl, Thomas claims that our intentional acts are originally directed to other or outer objects.<sup>24</sup> The knowledge of the “directedness” itself, i.e., intentionality, is thus, just as knowledge of our own existence, won through a self-reflection of intentionality. But knowledge of the soul also demands categories (the second means enumerated above), since the soul must also understand itself as one kind of being among many. But in knowing oneself in categories, something is also not grasped. That which slips away in the grasping of subjectivity when it is turned into an object of knowledge is what Stein calls the divine:

for the divine essence is not known through specific species, unlike created beings [...] God is the light and communicates this light to the blessed, and in this light, they behold the light, but in different degrees, corresponding to how much has been communicated to them. Only God himself is knowledge, in which knowledge and object thus fully coincide. (EuG 45f)<sup>25</sup>

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24. Intentionality is of course a central concept that binds the scholastic tradition and the Husserlian tradition together, but I will not develop this theme here.

25. “denn das göttliche Wesen wird nicht wie die Geschöpfe durch besondere Species erkannt [...] Gott *ist* das Licht und teilt *von* diesem Licht den Seligen mit und in seinem Licht schauen sie das Licht, aber in verschiedenem Maß und Grad, dem Maß des Mitgeteilten entsprechend. Nur Gott selbst *ist* die Erkenntnis, in der darum Erkenntnis und Gegenstand völlig zusammenfallen.”

God cannot be understood through any means since he *is* the most foundational mean, the light of reason. This light of reason is used in order to make distinctions. All positive knowledge about the world uses this discriminating power, which makes it possible to discriminate one thing from another. Immediacy can only be ascribed to what she calls divine knowledge, in which the interior is not separated from the exterior, means are not separated from content, the subject not from object, and so on. As the light of reason, this knowledge exists in human knowledge, but is only negatively known, it is only co-given. If *Wesensschau* or eidetic variation is what this immediate knowledge “does,” then Stein claims that there is another kind of vision that relates differently to immediate knowledge. With Thomas she calls this *visio beatifica*. Through this type of vision the human being can take part in the immediate knowledge of God. When a person sees an object in *visio beatifica*, she simultaneously beholds its origin and givenness in God, or light of reason. This *visio* at the same time includes human discriminative knowledge about the “what” [*res*] of the object, and its state of indivision from, and origin in God. The holy person beholds these at the same time. In the terminology I have used here, this could be expressed as a simultaneous vision of the given and its non-given origin. In the *visio beatifica* these two moments are seen at once, but as soon as they enter language they are immediately split up and one of them is brought forth at the expense of the other. The vision and its arrival to language is a process of falling apart, just as every piece of human knowledge necessarily includes such a falling apart.

Stein claims that Husserl as well as Thomas follows this process. But to Husserl the light of rationality needs to find its own immediate ground within immanence, which Stein understands as within the human mind itself. It is in this immanence that a ground must be located, where the object and the subject can be one and the same. Stein suggests that Husserl keeps believing that such a fusion takes place in the reflection on inner time-consciousness. And with Thomas she objects that such a oneness would be possible in human immanence (just as later phenomenologists have claimed that Husserl’s own analysis does not acknowledge the gap of inner time-consciousness). In Scholastic thinking this immediacy can only exist in God. And in

visio beatifica, the visionary person “borrows” such an immediacy from God and thus needs to go beyond herself (EuG 44 ff). Human knowledge could never be transparent and see its own origin:

In every finite and temporal act, the act of knowledge and the known fall apart, even when that which is known is an act of knowledge and is known in a reflection, which is the consciousness that accompanies it and temporally coincides with it. Therefore we must say that every final act of knowledge transcends itself. (EuG 50)<sup>26</sup>

But this transcendence is at the same time a touching upon what slips away, since it is its product. In Stein’s terminology this non-given origin is God, in Husserl’s terminology it is the living stream of subjectivity.

When Stein says that the holy person can “borrow” immediacy from God, it means that there is no transparency. We must instead understand “God” as including the opportunity of *receiving* a possibility to touch immediacy. “Borrow” would then point towards the passivity within the reception of such an immediacy. This touching can be understood as the possibility of being aware of Husserl’s “living stream” without objectifying it.<sup>27</sup>

Because of this non-transparency of knowledge, Stein argues for a necessary difference between Being and the understanding of Being. (And she criticizes Heidegger for not acknowledging this difference; see EES 499, footnote 146.) Like Scheler she wants to accept a givenness of the non-given that prevents the understanding of Being from including all of Being. And Stein claims, just as Scheler, that philosophy needs faith in order to be able to see the limits of its own

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26. “Bei jedem endlichen und zeitlichen Akt fallen Erkenntnisakt und Erkanntes auseinander, selbst wenn das Erkannte ein Erkenntnisakt ist und wenn es in einer Reflexion erkannt wird, die das ihn begleitende und zeitlich mit ihm zusammenfallende Bewußtsein ist. So muß man sagen, daß jeder endliche Erkenntnisakt sich selbst transzendiert.”

In her dissertation *Zum Problem der Einfühlung*, Halle: Buchdruckerei des Waisenhauses, 1917, she still has faith in a coincidence in vision and reflection on vision, for example, see 111.

27. On this point Stein comes close to Michel Henry’s discussion on immanent consciousness, as a non-objectifying intentionality.

knowledge. Faith shows being in a new light and shows that which cannot be seen in a paradigm of knowledge (EES 30 f). But faith is not another kind of knowledge:

faith gives us something to understand, but only to point toward something that remains incomprehensible to us. Since the ultimate ground of all beings can not be grasped, everything which is seen from out of this ground steps into the 'obscure light' of faith and secrecy, and everything comprehensible acquires an incomprehensible background. This is what P. Przywara has called "reductio ad mysterium". (EES 32)<sup>28</sup>

This obscure light does not produce any new knowledge, but makes all knowledge look different.

### *Reduction as Negative Theology*

Scheler similarly relates phenomenology to negative theology. In this way, the eidetic reduction does not mainly produce the givenness of essences as visible objects, but rather peels off every graspable character. The essences are not given "in an eternal life of spirit in the 'essentials' of all things, but in an eternal fading away" (VEM 68).<sup>29</sup>

Reduction is not a method for grasping a sphere of essences, but a method to continually lose such a grip. And through this the spirit that makes things visible comes to touch itself. But what is touched in this movement is not only the human spirit as active, but at the same instant that which goes beyond every constituted spirit, the spirit in its passivity. We could speak here of a mystic realism in Scheler as well as in Stein. They both objected to the transcendental idealism of Husserl and suggested that reality must be separated from what can

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28. "Er gibt uns etwas zu verstehen, aber nur, um uns auf etwas hinzuweisen, was für uns unfaßlich bleibt. Weil der letzte Grund alles Seienden ein unergründlicher ist, darum rückt alles, was von ihm her gesehen wird, in das 'dunkle Licht' des Glaubens und des Geheimnisses, und alles Begreifliches bekommt einen unbegreiflichen Hintergrund. Das ist was P. Przywara als "reductio ad mysterium" bezeichnet hat."

29. "in einem ewigen Leben des Geistes im 'Wesenhaften' aller Dinge, sondern in ewigem Absterben zu sehen"

be known. Knowledge can never provide an object with a definite and finished definition, since this would imply that the object could be completely exhausted by the human spirit. If the object did not exceed its mode of givenness to a human being, it would not be something separate from this human. It would be completely given without any sides co-given as non-given. To be undefinable is thus the sign of every real essence, since it transcends the epistemological subject. Scheler also claims that the existence or reality of an essence increases with its undefinability (VEM 167ff). The more non-givenness that is co-given with the given, the more reality there is.

The divine, as the highest value or essence, is in Scheler's understanding the life of the human spirit, but as such it also exceeds this human spirit. As spirit, the divine is the living stream through which every thought and experience is given. The highest essence cannot be conceptualized and grasped since it is the movement of conceptualization and of grasping. To be conceptualized means to be brought back to other concepts, but there are no other concepts to which the divine could be brought back. Scheler thus claims that the search for graspable essences is a search that sooner or later will come upon an undefinable essence through which all other concepts come forth (VEM 167).

The divine is thus reached only through a "peeling off," only through a negative method. Scheler states that such a movement from a rationalistic point of view would be totally unfruitful since it does not "see" anything: no shape comes forth. Nevertheless, he claims that this negative movement directs the gaze in another direction; it is not purely negative but opens another kind of seeing. What is reached is the hyper-conceptually given, as a necessary ground for everything that is conceptually given. The negative movement tries to direct the gaze towards the non-given of the co-given. The movement beyond every image or concept does not imply a movement toward absolute emptiness; it is rather a reduction to the movement of a *giving*, not a reduction to something *given*. Is it at the same time the limit of knowledge and the origin of all knowledge.

Phenomenology and negative theology thus have a common method. Scheler therefore claims that the phenomenological method was first used in Christian neo-Platonism, as a method to make all

images dissolve. It is a negative method, but a negative method that at the same time provides the possibility for every affirmation. “Faith” is the name of the relation to this negativity, a relation that always takes the shape of affirmations (VEM 163 ff, 174).

Giving can here not be reduced to a giver and a receiver but is a loving movement. It does not include an objectification of the value that is loved, which as we have seen would be the end of love, but a taking part in it. Scheler claims that being is much richer than what is possible to objectify, and he suggests that we are able to take part of a “being of act.” This act-being is in Scheler the being of the person. A person is not what can be represented, but at its core that which is immediately lost in any representation; it is the *experiencing*, but not the *experienced*, the unity of every experience, but not a substance.<sup>30</sup> We can only take part of this being through co-enactment (VEM 71f).

What is real for Scheler is thus what is given but exceeds man and his knowledge. The real also goes beyond the given and is given as a co-originary non-givenness. This non-givenness is however not something that is totally unrelated to the human being, and the real is not something beyond human knowledge that would make the latter unreal. But real knowledge always *also* exceeds what is known. Negative theology and Scheler’s version of phenomenological reduction as a peeling off are loving movements that are more interested in the excess of the given than in cutting off the given from this excess. That is why I have called it a “mystical realism.” This excess is also the true nature of the human being; we are always in the midst of such a movement.

### *The Dark Night of Lived Reduction*

Let me, as a final analysis, discuss Stein’s reading of John of the Cross, which also has been compared with the phenomenological reduction.<sup>31</sup>

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30. The concept of person is one of Scheler’s most important concepts. It is developed most fully in *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, Halle: Verlag von Max Niemeyer, 1927, 385ff.

31. Both Herbert Hecker and Rolf Kühn have seen Stein’s interest in the mystic tradition in her late years as a fulfillment of her phenomenological intentions of

But here the mystical moment appears as a fuller embodiment of the phenomenological movement. Step by step John leaves the constituted world and turns to its constituting origin. The famous “night” of John’s journey thus conceptualizes the turn toward transcendental presuppositions that in the end always transcend their givenness; it is a change of direction of intentionality. The night is, in Stein’s words,

invisible and formless. And yet we perceive it, it is much closer to us, than all things and forms, it is much more intimately connected with our being. Just as the light allows things to appear with their visible properties, the night folds back on itself and also threatens to engulf us. That which founders in the night, is not simply nothing: it remains, although indeterminate, invisible, and formless as the night itself, or shadow-like and ghostly, and thus threatening. Here our own being is not just threatened from without, from the dangers hidden in the night, it is effected in its innermost self by the night. (KSJ 33)<sup>32</sup>

Stein discusses how John reaches this transcending presence. Step by step he leaves all natural knowledge to enter, or focus on, its co-given origin. He does not only take leave of the givenness of sense knowledge, but also of the givenness of every specific memory and image (KSJ 71ff). This is called “night,” since it makes the soul acquainted with something that cannot be seen, and the wonder of this night is exactly that it is *possible* to be acquainted with something that cannot be seen — that such non-seeing, which is also called *visio dei*, is possible as an experience of the limits of oneself. Also what she formulates as the

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her early years. See *Phänomenologie des Christlichen bei Edith Stein*, Herbert Hecker, Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1993, 379f, footnote 78, and Rolf Kühn, “Leben aus dem Sein,” in Waltraud Herbstrith, *Denken im Dialog. Zur Philosophie Edith Steins*, Tübingen: Attempto Verlag, 1991, 118–132.

32. “unsichtbar und Gestaltlos. Und doch nehmen wir sie wahr, ja sie ist uns viel näher als alle Dinge und Gestalten, ist mit unserem Sein viel enger verbunden. Wie das Licht die Dinge mit ihren sichtbaren Eigenschaften hervortreten läßt, so verschlingt sich die Nacht und droht auch uns zu verschlingen. Was in ihr versinkt, das ist nicht einfach nichts: es bleibt bestehen, aber unbestimmt, unsichtbar und gestaltlos wie die Nacht selbst oder schattenhaft und gespenstisch und darum bedrohlich. Dabei ist unser eigenes Sein nicht nur durch die in der Nacht verborgenen Gefahren von außen bedroht, sondern durch die Nacht selbst innerlich betroffen.”

goal of this *visio*, God, is himself a darkness since the eye is not adjusted to his extreme light. It is a dazzling light in which we cannot see, and it can be understood as darkness to the extent that we, within its luminosity, are blind, since it is the origin of all visibility (KSJ 38).

Love is what makes this movement possible; through the movement and directedness of love everything can be abandoned. This also implies that this love is a love without knowledge of its goal (KSJ 60). Finally, the last and darkest moment of John's journey differs from previous steps in that it is no longer a change of direction of intentionality. The last moment is instead a taking leave of intentionality, where not even God is understood as something to which we could be directed (KSJ 109f). In this condition of a total night, Stein with Johannes claims that darkness becomes a burning love (KSJ 114). This experience could be understood in relation to Heidegger's phenomenological description of anxiety as the place where every being loses its meaning and the possibility of an access to the totality of beings is opened up. Here what we could call a non-discriminating light comes forth. Beyond intentionality there is still being, and this experience hovers in the background of every other experience.

After this experience the burning love or wholeness is no longer understood through comparisons and images. The order is reversed and every image is instead understood through the experience of burning love, i.e., every image, concept, and specific being is known through its origin. (KSJ 214) The end of John's journey is however a return to the multiple world. But it is a return that entails a different way of seeing, where God no longer is understood through insufficient images, but John realizes that the beings of the world can only be seen through God.

### *Conclusion*

In all of these examples the investigation has, from different angles, explored the limits of knowledge. Scheler formulates love as a primary intentionality, necessary for the intentionality of knowledge. Faith appears in both Stein and Scheler as the intentionality through which the givenness of the non-given appears, beyond the clarity of philosophy. Phenomenology however turns out to be a parallel path

that leads us to the limits of knowledge. Stein develops *Wesensschau* into *visio beatifica* and Scheler connects reduction to negative theology. Finally Stein’s analysis of the dark night of the soul has been understood as the concrete experience of a reduction in which love turns out to be a parallel to anxiety in its possibility to give access to the totality of beings.

Phenomenology from its very beginning questioned its own instruments of knowledge and discovered its limits, and in this task stumbled on the transcending aspect of the given. Janicaud’s shibboleth, that I discussed earlier, was formulated as the difference between an invisible *of this world*, and an *absolutely invisible*. But what if an absolutely invisible is given in this world? Phenomenology needs to discuss the co-given of givenness, as well as its co-givenly non-given sides. The step between co-given and non-given should not be over-emphasized; every co-given has a non-given side to it, otherwise it would be pure givenness. In pursuing this task phenomenology can be related to other similar tasks within traditions labeled as religious. Stein and Scheler connect to the Christian scholastic, as well as mystic, tradition but the phenomenological tradition can, and has, also been connected to, for example, the Mahayana Buddhist or Sufic traditions. I would say that it is not phenomenology that turns to religious questions, but that some religious traditions are trying to come to grips with questions that we can formulate as strictly phenomenological.

Nevertheless I still would say that we can find a shibboleth *within* Stein’s and Scheler’s works. For them it was unproblematic to align themselves with the Catholic Church, whereas later phenomenologists have found this more complicated, or at least felt the need to strictly separate their philosophical and theological work. This difference can be related to a central phenomenological point that I would like to emphasize: phenomenology always needs to keep the connection between the non-given and the given through which it is given. Any attempt to cut off the non-given from the given immediately leads to an objectification of the non-given. This means that *the non-given can only appear as non-given through the given*.