On Immensity

MARCIA SÁ CAVALCANTE SCHUBACK

All things swept sole away
This — is immensity

Emily Dickinson

1. Introduction

The relation between phenomenology and religion can be discussed following different paths and in distinct manners. Considering the history of the “phenomenological movement” grounded by Edmund Husserl, one may refer to various attempts to develop a phenomenology of religion, in which the principal aim is to investigate in its transparency the phenomenon of religion or religion’s phenomenality, beyond pure subjective and objective views, beyond empirical and intellectualist positions, beyond psychological and logical prejudices. Such attempts aim to liberate religion from philosophical and theological views in order to recover the meaning of religiosity as lived experience. Another way of approaching this relation is to discuss phenomenology and religion by considering them as two realms of human experience where one can clarify and offer critical views towards the other. In this sense, the title “phenomenology and religion” would represent a renewed debate about the relation between reason and faith on the basis of the phenomenological critique of modern rationality and its naïve ontological basis. Both directions of investigation are important and necessary considering the historical conditions of our contemporary claim for such a questioning. However, it seems to me that whichever position we may take when discussing this relation, it is necessary to

clarify the “hermeneutical situation” and thereby clarify from which position in the cosmos contemporary man addresses such questions.

The “position of contemporary man in the cosmos”\(^2\) can be described as the position of an immeasurable human power over being and life. A main feature of the global technological era is the conviction that human power has immeasurable capabilities for “producing” being and life. I would like to qualify this position as “modern,” even if the term “modernity” can be considered surpassed in some aspects. If new attempts to describe contemporary society prefer to insist on it as “post-modern”\(^3\) or even “alter-modern”\(^4\) it is still in a decisive reference to “modernity” that these terms are described. The modernity of this position lies in a conviction about humans’ immeasurable power over being and life. But how can this immeasurable power be defined? In a lecture held in 1938, Heidegger described it as the conquest of the world as an image or a picture [\textit{Bild}] of a representational production.\(^5\) Heidegger centers his critique of modern rationality on the way modern man assumes this “position in the cosmos,” referring to Scheler’s well-known book. Modern man’s position in the cosmos is a \textit{position of power} through which the world becomes the image of representational production [\textit{vorstellenden Herrstellen}]. This position of power does not mean, however, that man transforms the whole of reality into an image of his own rationality and “worldview.” It is rather a paradoxical position in which man becomes the slave to his own power and freedom. This happens when the position of human

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2. The expression “man’s position in the cosmos” will be used here evoking Max Scheler’s book \textit{Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos}, Bern/München: Francke Verlag, 1983.
power reaches a gigantism of power that recovers the sum of all levels and realms of existence. That is why Heidegger affirms, in this same lecture, that “ein Zeichen für diesen Vorgang ist, daß überall und in den verschiedensten Gestalten und Verkleidungen das Riesenhafte zur Erscheinung kommt.” The fundamental event of modernity, the event of human power over being by which man becomes a slave to his own power and freedom — i.e., the conquest of the world as image — appears when hugeness, gigantism becomes manifest. Hugeness, gigantism becomes manifest in relation to both the infinitely big and the infinitely small, in the conquest of galaxies and of atoms. Heidegger insists that, as a sign of the fundamental event of modern man’s position in the cosmos, this hugeness and gigantism, this Riesenhaft shall not be understood as merely the empty quantitative nor as the striving towards producing anew and anew that which has never existed before. Gigantic hugeness is not simply a sign of the striving after infinite production and exploitation of all possible fields and realms of existence; it appears where quantity becomes quality and thereby an outstanding kind of greatness.

If every historical era has its concept of greatness [Größe], modernity, in the large sense of modern rationality that includes its “post-” and “alter-modern” features, defines greatness as gigantic hugeness, transforming quantity into the quality of every possible quality. This means, however, that the calculable becomes incalculable, control becomes uncontrollable, and every image of human power is followed by what can be called the shadow of the incalculable and uncontrollable. Heidegger refers to this shadow as an “invisible” shadow, indicating how difficult it is to see in the modern position of man in the cosmos, the uncontrollable and incalculable of his global control and calculation over the cosmos. Showing itself through the sign of gigantic hugeness, the “time of the world-image” [die Zeit des Weltbildes] describes more than ever our to-day. Our time is a time of worldwide hugeness. Gigantic hugeness can be assumed as sign of our “hermeneutical situation”: too much information, too much knowledge, too many images and signs. Our hermeneutical situation can be further described as the difficulty to see given the modern position of

7. Ibid.
man in the cosmos, the “invisible shadow” of the uncontrollable and incalculable of his global control and calculation over the cosmos. This “invisible shadow” refers to a “too big,” to a “beyond measures.” It indicates the “unmeasured power” and the paradox of being controlled by one’s own power. Too big, gigantic hugeness, and measures mean paradoxically beyond measures, beyond calculation and control. They refer to the paradox of human and worldly measures beyond worldly and human measures. They touch on questions about infinity and immensity. They further touch on the problem concerning what usually is called “mystery” and the question of a beyond this world. We encounter here a central issue concerning the relation between philosophy and religion, namely, the question of a “beyond” the world and man and of a world and God beyond.

From rational points of view, religion is considered an escape from the world, appearing as enchanted alienation. Philosophy appears, in its turn, as an escape from alienation, as a disenchanting enlightenment of the world. Although in opposite senses, both religion and philosophy are, usually, understood as a “moving beyond.” Religion is presented as a claim for moving beyond the world towards a world beyond, and philosophy as a demand of moving beyond the world towards a truer world. It is as a moving beyond that Husserl, at the end of his *Cartesian Meditations*, assumed phenomenology as the task of thinking beyond worldly appearances in order to win back, through “Selbstbesinnung,” (self meditation) the phenomenon of the world as appearing. ⁸ In this sense, we should admit that this simple particle, the “beyond” in the expressions “beyond the world” and “world beyond” shows itself as a common “source” for those, in several aspects, quite opposite experiences called “phenomenology” and “religion.” However, what is challenging is not merely to describe the phenomenological meaning of the particle “beyond” but its central issue, namely, the “world.” Thus, it is from the world that a beyond the world and a world beyond can be evoked. We re-encounter here the phenomenologically challenging question of how to grasp the world as world, that

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⁸ “Mas muß erst die Welt durch epokhé verlieren, um sie in universaler Selbstbesinnung wiederzugewinnen, Noli foras ire, sagt Augustin, in te redi, in interiore homine habitat veritas,” in Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Hua VI, 183.
is, in its worldliness. To address this question in very radical ways and to extend it to its most foundational problems can be considered one of the most important contributions of phenomenology to the history of modern Western philosophy. To this central question, phenomenology has showed that the world as world, the world in its worldliness, cannot be grasped as worldly things can be grasped, either as corporeal or mental things. The “world” means, further, a whole that neither can be grasped as a sum of existent things. The world appears as a whole that is more than and beyond the sum of its parts yet does not exist apart from the parts. Being beyond but not apart, the world appears as a strange beyond-within and not as a beyond outside. As beyond-within, the “world as such” brings to stake the experience of a “beyond” worldly things, beyond boundaries and measures being nevertheless within, not apart, not outside. This beyond boundaries and measures of things of the world reveals the world as experience of a worldly “too big.” If religion is to be assumed as a movement beyond the world it should then mean that it moves beyond the beyond-within of the world, being strangely a beyond the beyond measures, and in this sense a beyond the too big of the world. In this sense, a clarification of possible meanings of a “world beyond” as a common motive of different religious experiences should depart from the experience of the too-big of the world. I would therefore argue for a provisory suspension of the vocabulary of transcendence and immanence, comprehensibility and incomprehensibility, knowable and unknowable in order to bring to a focus the experience of the world as experience of the too big, that is, of a beyond-within measures, boundaries, limits, of the world’s immensity. My proposal here is to show that departing from the question about the “immensity of world” we may find a common ground to discuss the relation between phenomenology and religion. My central claim is, therefore, that through re-addressing the question about the phenomenality of the world in its immensity, possible or impossible that encounters between phenomenology and religion can find a new basis. Doing so, it becomes possible to bring phenomenology and religion to a previous state, to a before phenomenology and a before religion rather than to an after phenomenology and an after religion. This be-fore shall not be understood in chronological terms as inquiry about ages of history that precede the advent.
of philosophy and religion in different civilizations. This before shall be understood in *aspectual* terms such as inquiry about the dispositions, feelings, and attitudes that move human existence towards phenomenology (here understood as the *pathos* of philosophy itself) and towards religion. This be-fore is the point of view of the *awakening* of a certain feeling and attitude that precedes the distinction between phenomenology and religion. My claim is that we should depart from the experience of the awakening of such a previous feeling in order to develop the question proposed in this volume.

2. Phenomenology, Religion
   and the “Oceanic Feeling of the World”

How should we approach the experience of the too big of the world? It is not based on a previous knowledge nor on a simple awareness of the world. Rather, it is based on a *feeling* of the world, a *Weltgefühl*, to use an expression of Eugen Fink. The “feeling of the world” touches on the difficult question about the *cosmic experience of the world*. That is why, Fink wrote in some notes dated from 1931, that “in the threefold problematic of cosmology (Ontic, Eidetic, Cosmology), the interpretation of a world-feeling, *Weltgefühl*, plays a very central role.”

In another manuscript, Fink defines the expression *Weltgefühl* stressing that it has nothing to do with an affective relation to something that exists in *front of* a subject or is given to a subject. It is rather closed to what Heidegger discussed as “attunement.” In Fink’s own words, “The world-feeling is not a relation in the way of a distancing, an

9. Eugen Fink, *Phänomenologische Werkstatt*. Teilband 1: Die Doktorarbeit und erste Assistenzjahre bei Husserl, ed. Ronald Bruzina, Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2006, 416. Zu ”Weltgefühl ,” cf. Z-XIV II/2b, VI/1a, VIII/1a, 10a-b and XIV/2a in EFGA 3,2 and also Z-XIX II/4b amd Z- XXII 32 in EFGA 3.3. Fink criticizes the use of this concept in the Philosophy of Life (Z-XII 4c (EFGA 3.2).

10. As Ronald Bruzina, the editor of the above-mentioned volume of Fink’s *Gesamtausgabe* remarked, we can find a related expression in Georg Misch, *Lebensphilosophie und Phänomenologie* (Berlin: 1938), 308, based on his readings of Wilhelm Dilthey: “So enthält das Pathos der Diesseitigkeit [. . .] seine Ergänzung in einem stimmungsmäßigen, Gemütsverhalten’ zur Welt, wo dann schließlich die Religiön eine Stelle haben kann [. . .],” 417.
Abständigkeit, but in the way of a sich Hinaushalten über alles Seiende, a suspending beyond all beings in the unlimited wideness of the world, being a relation to indeterminacy, a diverging intentionality, an ‘oce-anic feeling.’”¹¹ The feeling of the world is an oceanic feeling, says Fink, using the well-known expression of Romain Rolland that Freud discussed in the introductory paragraphs of “das Unbehagen in der Kultur.”¹² “Oceanic feeling” defines for Romain Rolland the source of religious conviction and consists of a “sensation of eternity, as of something limitless, unbounded, as it were ‘oceanic.’ This feeling [. . .] is a pure subjective fact, not an article of faith.”¹³ “Oceanic feeling” describes for Rolland on the one hand the feeling of the limitless, unbounded, immensity of the world as source of religion and what precedes religion as an article of faith and, on the other hand, the feeling of an indissolvable bond, of “oneness with the universe.”¹⁴ This feeling is oceanic


¹². Cf. Sigmund Freud, Das Unbehagen in der Kultur, und andere kulturtheoretische Schriften, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer-Tasch-Verlag, 1994; Civilisation and its Discontents, trans. J. Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1975. Freud discusses critically Romain Rolland’s expression. Responding to the letter of Romain Rolland from 5 December 1927, Freud writes: “My dear Friend,Your letter of December 5, 1927, containing your remarks about a feeling you describe as ‘oceanic’ has left me no peace. It happens that in a new work which lies before me still uncompleted I am making a starting point of this remark; I mention this ‘oceanic’ feeling and am trying to interpret it from the point of view of our psychology. The essay moves on to other subjects, deals with happiness, civilization and the sense of guilt; I don’t mention your name but nevertheless drop a hint that points toward you. And now I am beset with doubts whether I am justified in using your private remark for publication in this way. I would not be surprised if this were to be contrary to your wishes, and if it is, even in the slightest degree, I should certainly refrain from using it. My essay could be given another introduction without any loss; perhaps it is altogether not indispensable.”

¹³. This is the way Freud understood Rolland’s definition of this expression. Freud, Civilisation and its Discontents, op. cit., 64–65.

¹⁴. Freud criticizes Rolland saying that this feeling is rather an intellectual percep-
because in articulating limitlessness and oneness with the universe it encounters what we can call the immensity of the world. It is this encounter with the articulation of limitlessness and oneness with the universe which we are calling “immensity” that Eugen Fink defines as the before, as the “source,” of philosophical inquiry. This encounter is, as he insists, the very “Ergriffenheit des Philosophen,” the being grasped and seized of the philosopher by the immensity of the world. This encounter brings the philosopher to face the all of Being and to confer to his philosophical question the wideness of the cosmological question about the world.\textsuperscript{15}

Describing the feeling of the world as an “oceanic feeling,” a “diverging intentionality,” and further as “Ergriffenheit des Philosophen,” Fink refers to a certain way of experiencing the worldliness of the world. This way corresponds to the experience of the world as being “beyond” — mental and corporeal things not being apart from them — and being a whole “beyond” the sum of the parts. As an oceanic feeling, the feeling of the world reveals the beyond-within of the world and contains the distinct sense of the idea of universal horizon that orients Husserl’s phenomenology of the world. According to Fink, the possibility to grasp the meaning of the oceanic feeling of the immensity of the world as the “source” of phenomenology is based on a critique of Husserl’s phenomenological description of the world. The core of this critique is the attempt made by Fink, to develop a cosmological perspective to the phenomenological description of the world.

3. The Immensity of the World under the Light of Fink’s Cosmological Critique of Husserl’s Concept of World

Husserl’s idea of phenomenology is essentially connected to the huge and difficult task of a systematic analysis and description of the world.
in its way of givenness. The starting point is a “destruction,” as Heidegger would call it, of the natural attitude in which the world appears as external world to a worldless consciousness. The belief of the being in itself of things and of consciousness is radically questioned in the phenomenological admission that “Gegenstände sind für mich und sind für mich was sie sind, nur als Gegenstände wirklichen und möglichen Bewusstseins.” This means that the world gives itself with worldly things not giving itself as a worldly thing. The non-givenness of the world as a thing gives itself in the various ways things in the world are given to us. This means that in each intentional experience several other possibilities of presentation are being co-given. The co-giveness of the world as world in the givenness of things as things was described by Husserl as an experience of horizon. According to Husserl, the world appears as world in three fundamental senses and can be characterized correspondently in three decisive features: the world appears as a substantial encompassing unity, constituting a universal field or horizon. “Welt is das Universalfeld, in das alle unsere Akte, erfahrende, erkenende, handelnde, hineingerichtet sind.” As universal horizon, the world is not given as an object may it be corporeal or mental and neither apart from worldly objects, being a beyond things not apart from things. “Der Welthorizont ist nur als Horizont für Seiende Objekt bewusst und kann ohne Sonderbewusst Objekte nicht aktuell sein.” Not being an object but not being actual without objects, the world gives itself apperceptively and non thematically, as correlated and co-given


19. Ibid.
in the natural and practical attitude, appearing lifeworldly. World appears therefore as an idea, figure, or correlate to a transcendental analysis. From this threefold characterization—world as horizon, as apperceived and co-given world-with, and as phenomenological, regulative idea—the world appears fundamentally as a correlate to a consciousness. It is this “metaphysical” co-relatedness that constitutes for Fink the most critical point of Husserl’s description of world’s phenomenon. The challenge of the phenomenological “discovery” of the world as universal and total horizon lies in the task of understanding the being of the world as a beyond things that is not apart or separated from things. There is an asymmetry in this co-relatedness, a presence of “negativity” at stake in the world’s “beyond” that, according to Fink, Husserl’s phenomenology was not able to grasp. For Fink, it is a misunderstanding of the non-objectivity of the world and its relation to innerwordly objects that does not allow Husserl to grasp what Fink will conceptualize as the cosmic dimension of the world.

As universal horizon, the world is understood by Husserl as what cannot be objectified, thematized, appearing *ad marginem* in relation to the objects of the world in the ways of being co-apprehended and co-meant. As universal horizon, the world is conceived as an intentional modification of the consciousness about things and objects. Horizon is understood as a non-thing in the sense of something unfinished, that we can approach again and again insofar as it distances itself again and again when we come closer. The image that orients Husserl’s descriptions is that of a navigator coming further and further towards a horizon that becomes farther away again as soon the navigator gets closer. What Husserl calls “universal” and “total” corresponds in fact to an idea of infinity. Fink will demonstrate that this idea of infinity relates however not really to the infinity of the horizon but to consciousness itself. What appears as infinite is consciousness’s approaching and accessibility, is consciousness’s conviction that “I can grasp the ungraspable.”

20. “In the ‘I can’ what is constituted is the extension of accessibility but never the world, that is, the inaccessible, of the Uneinlösbare,” manuscript quoted by Ronald Bruzina in “Redoing the Phenomenology of the World in the Freiburg Workshop, 1930–1934,” *Alter*, nr 6, 1998, 66, and commented by Robert Walton
a being able to be grasped through variations of experiences, further and further. In this sense, horizon becomes a metaphor of consciousness’s infinity. As universal horizon, the ungraspable of the world qua thing appears rather as consciousness’s infinite striving for grasping, and the beyond is rather understood as the infinite “further and further.” The non-graspable of the world appears as what cannot be grasped completely and finitely but only incompletely and infinitely, and therefore again and again, from one limit to another, further and further, more and more. The “non”-graspable of the world-horizon orresponds to the more and more of the “I can” access, inherent to consciousness. Husserl’s phenomenological model of variations and modifications of a primary perception is a result of consciousness’s infinite striving for further and further, for more and more. According to Fink, defined as universal horizon for all appearing, Husserl’s concept of the world masks rather than reveals the world as appearing. Thus, the infinity of the world, its non-thinghood, is in fact understood as the infinite becoming object for a subjective consciousness. It is therefore consciousness’s conviction of an “I can grasp the ungraspable, grasping it ‘more and more’” that appears as the “stage” of the universal appearing of beings. In this sense, the transcendental consciousness to which the universal horizon of the world is given is still assumed as worldless, that is, as itself beyond the world. Fink’s critique of Husserl follows Heidegger’s in its general traits. The problem lies in the way Husserl understands “appearing” as co-relatedness between subjectivity and being. For Fink, it is not consciousness that is beyond the world, but the world that is beyond consciousness. The task will be for him to describe this beyond of the world in the sense of a think-

21. Fink criticizes Husserl’s model of eidetic variations for assuming sense-perception as the prototype of all awareness and therefore for claiming a universal use of it. According to Fink, the prototypical role of sense-perception is due to the fact that Husserl assumes material to be non-transparent and the solid body to be the prototype of all kinds of appearances, neglecting the cosmic sudden character of the character. As Fink asks: Is it possible to see the flash of lightening through eidetic variations, that is, in a further and further, greater and greater succession of apprehensions? See Fink, “Bewußtseinsanalytik und Weltproblem,” in Nähe und Distanz, Freiburg /München: Alber, 2004, 293.
ing experience of the world that is not dependant on an analytics of consciousness. This means, moreover, to ground the cosmological perspective of the world as an *asubjective* perspective. The central question of Fink’s cosmology will be then to ground a knowing from and of the world rather than a knowledge about the world and thereby a knowing beyond an ontology of things and an analytics of consciousness, however relating me-ontologically to both. Studying Fink’s cosmological phenomenology and relating it to Heidegger’s phenomenology of the unapparent, it may become clear that, in regarding the knowing from and of the world, the philosophical task of the “destruction” of the modern concept of infinity becomes necessary. The immensity of the world is not the same as the infinite wanting of a consciousness about the world.

The critique developed by Fink in regard to Husserl’s description of the worldliness of the world as universal and as infinite horizon has some parallels to the critique Paul Valéry addresses to the famous phrase of Pascal: “the eternal silence of these infinite spaces fill me with dread,” [*le silence éternel des ces espaces infinis m’effraye*]. Valéry called this phrase a “poem” rather than a “thought” or rather even than “poetry.” It is a poem in the sense of a piece of eloquence, a pirouette of oratory, compared by him to a dog barking at the moon. Who barks, in this phrase, is the modern isolated subject for whom the too big of the universe appears as infinite spaces, as the empty infinity of a more and more, a further and further. Because Pascal treats the too big of the world as the empty infinity of spaces, it barks at the moon as a scientist of the moon and the universe, leaving out of circuit “the emotional system of his being,” to quote Valéry. The emptiness of this modern concept of infinity — by which the too big of the world is being defined — becomes clearer when compared with ancient views of the world as a cosmic space. For the ancient Greeks, universe is not infinite but eternal, forever living. It is never silent but sounding, sounding beauty. For Jews and their profound experience of the universe as the might of the night, universe is also never silent. The universe sings and praises the glory of the Lord. Valéry observes

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that Pascal’s night and universe are, on the contrary, eternally silent, neither sound nor song, neither offering nor praise. That is why the feeling experienced by the isolated barking modern observer of the too big of the world can only be dread, tremendous anxiety, *effrayement*. It is the dread towards the empty infinity of a further and further, of a more and more, towards the gigantic hugeness of countable and controlling infinity. More important than to judge Pascal with Valéry’s poetical rigour, putting on him the label of modern insensible scientism, is to envisage the problematic of the modern concept of infinity as a “further and further,” a “more and more” of consciousness’s accessibility and the consequent concealment of the phenomenological meaning of the beyond or transcendence of the world. This is the core of Heidegger’s and Fink’s critiques of Husserl’s concept of the world. The great phenomenological “discovery” of the world as the “stage” of the appearing of all beings and the All of Being lies, according to both Heidegger and Fink, in its description of the world as horizon and thereby as the imaging of the beyond or transcendence of the world as a horizon. Husserl losses, however, the world when concealing the beyond of the horizon with the modern and empty concept of infinity. Thus, the beyond of the horizon appears more radically as a sliding away, as a play of concealment and unconcealment, as the aletheiological play *Spiel* of truth. This is indeed the phenomenological “illumination” that both Heidegger and Fink will each follow and develop in a proper manner.

Coming closer to the line of horizon, the line of the horizon slides away. Horizon implies, thus, not only and firstly a consciousness of the how to access but also and even more so a consciousness of its own sliding away, retraction, inaccessibility. The sliding away of the horizon does not appear in terms of infinity, of an again and again, further and further, more and more, that is, in terms of a beyond that is still within boundaries of vision. The sliding away indicates, on the contrary, beyond boundaries, what cannot be seized through the measure of accessibility, of an “I can” but only, in a sense, as an “I cannot,” as a beyond all measures and limits. In this sense, Fink will insist that the world cannot be seized from an idea of horizon qua an “and so on, and so on” but only through an idea of horizon qua Übersprung of a prec-
The meaning of “precedent” is, however, the one of sliding away, of unconcealing in concealing and not of something pre-existent that, in the impossibility of being seen frontally, would be grasped through variations and modifications of a frontal vision of things. The totality of the world is vertiginously foregoing insofar as it can never be given successively but only suddenly, in the way of a flash of lightning. The sliding away of a horizon is vertiginous not only because it slides away but insofar as it appears precisely in its disappearing, according to a flash of lightning that time and space measure. It indicates a beyond all measures and limits, insofar as it indicates a flash of lightning of immensity, an appearing while sliding away. Indeed, horizon is not firstly the seduction of infinity, of accessing more and more or further and further, but the meeting of heaven and earthly ocean, the meeting of two faces of immensity. If we admit, in a sense still to be grounded, that the “oceanic” feeling of the world is precedent—in Fink’s meaning of “Übersprung”—it would be possible to affirm that the “oceanic feeling” of immensity is precedent to the consciousness of infinity. Or in more “concrete” terms: things do not appear to a consciousness if they would not appear in the in-between heaven and earthly ocean, in-between light and night, an in-between that indicates the pre-philosophical meaning of cosmos. It is from this cosmic appearing of the world that things in the world can appear for a consciousness as if they only existed to and from a consciousness. For Fink, the experience of the meeting of heaven and earthly ocean, of light and night, is foregoing to a consciousness of horizon and it is on the basis of the feeling of these immensities, of such a cosmological feeling, that it is possible to be aware of something like a “universal and infinite horizon.” Following Fink in this cosmological feeling of the world, we could say that, more primordial than the distinction between infinite and finite is, therefore, the distinction between infinity and immensity, the distinction between an oceanic feeling of the world’s immensity (cosmological feeling) and the consciousness of its infinity. Heidegger wrote once that the “being-covered-up is the counterconcept to phenomenon, and such concealments are really the

24. Fink, op. cit, 30.
immediate theme of phenomenological reflection.” In this sense, we could say that the idea of infinity covers up and conceals rather than un conceals the phenomenon of the world. In order to understand the beyond-within the world it then becomes necessary to distinguish infinity and immensity. This distinction seems decisive in order to describe the cosmic feeling of the world and its consequent asubjective perspective. For the sake of distinguishing infinity and immensity, it is, however, important to ask how they are confused.

4. The Confusion Between Immensity and Infinity

In order to clear up the confusion between immensity and infinity that occurs in Husserl’s description of the world’s phenomenality as a universal and infinite horizon, we should step back and discuss a moment in modern philosophy when the theme of immensity is thematized in connection with infinity. This moment finds its paradigmatic philosophical expression in Kant’s Analytic of the Sublime. Kant called sublime “what is absolutely great.” He distinguishes greatness from magnitude, separating what is beyond all comparison (great) and what can only be apprehended through comparison (magnitude). The sublime refers to a non comparative magnum, a greatness that is incomparable because it is “comparable to itself alone,” and “in comparison to which all else is small.” The sublime expresses for Kant immensity. This cannot be given in nature, that is, as an object of the senses, neither as a telescopic hugeness nor as a microscopic smallness. No thing can be called sublime, absolutely great, that is, immense, because the sublime refers to a feeling found exclusively in the subject. This feeling is understood by Kant as a “striving in our imagination towards progress ad infinitum,” a striving that awakens while reason demands absolute totality, that is, absolute fulfilment. Kant adds further: “the same inability on the part of our

faculty for the estimation of the magnitude of things of the world of sense to attain this idea [of absolute totality] is the awakening of a feeling of a supersensible faculty within us.” Kant’s discussions are concerned with a feeling that strives or desires beyond the senses and, in this meaning, includes a striving beyond nature. Nature is assumed by Kant both in theoretical as well as in practical and aesthetical concerns as that which is viewed from an intentionality of objects, whether as object for perception, for concepts, for pleasure or displeasure, and in contrast to morality. Nature in Kant is a large title for the intentionality of objects, of what a “thing” is. The discussion about the sublime is therefore a discussion about the beyond nature as an intentionality of objects, of forms. Kant distinguishes the sublime from beauty insofar the sublime is a feeling related to reason and beauty a feeling related to understanding [Verständnifs]. Understanding is faculty of conceptual representation, which is related to sensibility and in this sense to conditions of possibility for intending things as objects. Reason, on the contrary, is a demand for absolute totality, dealing with ideas, that is, with what cannot be represented by concepts insofar as it cannot be intended as an object. It is therefore not astonishing that Kant connects both religion and war to the feeling of the sublime. The sublime refers to ideas of reasons that cannot represent through concepts and neither can be expressed by language but that give a lot to think about. The sublime is related to different levels of a beyond—beyond conceptual

27. Ibid., § 25, 97.
28. Ibid., §49, “by an aesthetic idea I mean that representation of the imagination which unduces much thought [viel zu denken veranlasst], yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e., concept, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with or render completely intelligible,” 175–76.
representation, beyond language, even beyond imagination because beyond all measures. Nature shares the sublime “only in its chaos, or in its wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation,” where it gives “signs of magnitude and power” that “excites the ideas of the sublime.” Kant recognizes as sublime the feeling of absolute greatness which, transcending and going beyond the senses, confronts us with our own limitation to conceive and even to imagine things. He discusses not only the mathematically sublime as that which has the capacity of thinking and imagining the beyond-every-comparative measure but also the dynamically sublime found in nature, where we encounter our own limits in nature’s immeasurableness. But here, that is, precisely in the encounter with our own limitation for “adopting a standard proportionate to the aesthetic estimation of the magnitude of its realm,” “we also find [...] another non-sensuous standard, one which has that infinity itself under it as unit, and in comparison with which everything in nature is small, and so found in our minds a pre-eminence over nature even in its immeasurability.”

Encountering the feeling of immeasurability, our mind [Gemüt] encounters the limits of conceptual representation and conceptualization. But it is, however, in this very limit of conceptual representation that our mind [Gemüt] discovers the power of infinity as “pre-eminence over nature.” The immeasurability of nature’s might, the sublime that nevertheless can also be found in nature, faces us with the helplessness of our own nature discovering, though, at the same time, human pre-eminence above nature. Kant will therefore admit to call nature sublime “merely because it raises the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can make itself sensible of the appropriate sublimity of the sphere of its own being, even above nature.” The feeling of immensity discovers negatively the infinite power of consciousness, the infinite power of an “I can grasp” further and further, more and more, by which infinity becomes the measure of thought.

For Kant, immensity can only be thought of from the standard of infinity. That is why he also affirms that “a feeling for the sublime in

29. Ibid., §23, 92.
30. Ibid., §28, 111.
31. Ibid., §28, 112.
nature is hardly thinkable unless in association with an attitude of mind resembling the moral.”\textsuperscript{32} In this sense, it seems quite natural for Kant to affirm that there are two things that fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and respect the more that reflection is concerned with them, namely, the starry heaven above and the moral law within.\textsuperscript{33} The confusion between immensity and infinity that orients Kant’s \textit{Analytic of the Sublime} turns around the feeling of pre-eminence above nature that strangely awakens from within the limitation of perceptual presentation (not being able to perceive but still feeling) and from within the limitation of conceptual representation (not being able to conceive but still ideating and imagining). The not being able to grasp does not deny accessibility according to Kant but reveals another sense of the graspmable, a sense that enables the mind to grasp beyond limits, beyond forms. We find here a very strange moment in Kant’s \textit{Analytic of the Sublime} because he touches a strange point where the radical limit of accessibility touches infinite accessibility. It is here that the confusion between immensity and infinity occurs. This touching point or con-fusion, where opposites coincide, was seen by Kant. It is this Kantian sight of the confusion between opposites that can help us in grasping the proper meaning of immensity. Kant touches this con-fusion or touching point when he says, in §29 of the \textit{Critique of Judgement}, that the sight of the starry heaven can be called sublime only by putting into (Kantian) brackets all conceptual representations of stars and heavens. This sight is sublime in its way of “striking the eye: as a broad and all-embracing canopy.”\textsuperscript{34} The same occurs in the sight of the ocean. Only by putting into (Kantian) brackets conceptual representations of the ocean we may be able to see sublimity in the ocean “as the poets do,” as Kant himself claims. This poetical sight of the sublimity of heaven and ocean emerges when conceptual representations are suspended and “the impression upon the eyes,” in Kant’s own terms, reveals “in its calm, a clear mirror of water bounded only by the heavens, or, be it

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\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., §29, 120.
\textsuperscript{33} Kant, \textit{The Critique of Practical Reason}, conclusion.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., §29, 122.
disturbed, as threatening to overwhelm and engulf everything.”35 Here too we find an “oceanic feeling” of the world in Kant, related to a sight of the sublime immensity of the world rather than to the infinity of a universal horizon. Kant does not speak about horizon but about the “clear mirror of water” in which heaven and earthly ocean appear not as opposites but, we could say, as the non-other of each other.

To some extent, we could affirm that the confusion between immensity and infinity lies in the con-fusion that is intrinsic to immensity. Immensity means the immeasurable of a co-fusion. In immensity — such as of heaven and of an earthly ocean — what frightens and seduces is con-fusion, is the feeling that all is one, hen kai pan, and that the one is itself differentiated, hen diaferon heauton, to remember the oldest philosophical expressions of immensity in Western philosophy. This feeling of the sublime immensity in which all appears as one at the same time that the one appears as in itself differentiated, is the feeling that Fink called the “oceanic feeling” of the world; it shows itself to be a cosmological feeling and was understood by the Ancients as enthusiasm and admiration. It is also in these terms that Kant describes the “negative pleasure” that accompanies the feeling of sublime immensity. To the negative pleasures of admiration and enthusiasm, Kant adds another, namely, respect [Achtung]. What respect, admiration, and enthusiasm reveal as negative is their difference from any feeling of well-being and harmony. This indicates the shaking experience at stake in the feeling of sublime immensity which draws the mind [Gemüt] beyond a life in harmony and towards a life that could be called, with the words of Jan Patočka, a “life in amplitude.” This explains why Kant speaks so frequently in his Analytic of the Sublime about the awakening [Erweckung] and shaking [Erschütterung] of the mind [Gemüt].

5. The Cosmological Feeling of Immensity as a Knowing of Non-otherness

The sublime image of the “clear mirror of water” showing heaven as the openness of the ocean and the ocean as the abyss of heaven,
showing heaven and ocean as the non-other of each other, brings to our reflective memory the role the sight of the immensity of heaven and ocean play in the awakening and shaking of both philosophical inquiry and religious experience. What awakens here is the cosmological feeling of immensity that enables a shaking from which a moving towards phenomenology and religion can be described. In the Kantian confusion between immensity and infinity, sublime immensity expresses a moment where opposites coincide, when the awareness of human extreme limits touch the awareness of consciousness’s striving for infinite and unlimited knowledge beyond limits. What sublime immensity reveals is this particular coincidence of opposites in which differences appear not as sameness but as the non-other of the other. The cosmological feeling of sublime immensity is an awareness of sameness as non-otherness, where heaven touches ocean as a non-other, human limits touch non-human boundless as a non-other, where smallness touches hugeness, where the all of Being touches the nothingness of beings. It shows a knowing from and of the world rather than knowledge about the world, a knowing where “all things swept sole away.”

This cosmological feeling of sublime immensity was pronounced as a birth of a way of life guided by a sight of immensity which defines the philosophical life in ancient Greece. The sight of the immensity of heaven is a sight of the above, an inclining of the head and the eyes towards the above. The sight of the starry heaven is a philosophical sight not only in the sense of a parallel source for the philosopher but as a primary source for thinking, when we remember Thales of Mileto, the first philosopher, the one to whom we attribute the first philosophical sentence — hen kai pan — “all is one.” Looking above, looking to the immensity of the starry heaven, Thales fell on the ground, becoming for “common people” the Quixotesque figure of a philosopher alienated from the world, searching for measures beyond the world. But the sight of the heaven above us is not only a source for philosophical thinking. It seems also to be a source for religious feelings. Most religions place the divine in the above of the heavens. Metaphysical religions are religions of heaven we could say, mirroring themselves in the abyssal hells of oceans and deserts. “Hands touch each other in prayer towards heaven; in heaven, the eyes find either a
refugee or perdition; it is heaven that shows the finger of a prophet or of the one who consoles, certain words fall from heaven and it is from heaven that trumpets can be heard,” recalling again some words of Valéry.36 Furthermore, it was while regarding the heaven above that reason discovered the science of nature, numerals, and the reasoning of eternal beings, $\text{ta aei onta}$, geometrical and axiomatic principles. But the sight of a starry heaven cannot be disconnected from the sight of a pure night. It is the sight of the night and the might of immensity. The sight of heaven, of the starry heaven above us, is the sight of very distant objects that appear to be completely disconnected from our own bodies. Directing our eyes toward heaven, we direct our eyes above but in a different manner than simply directing our eyes towards the ceiling. Directing our eyes to heaven we accomplish the defocusing or “depresencing” proper to every sight of an above, in which things close to us become “invisible,” sensible things become “intangible.”

At such moments we share, with those people who are blind or who do not have sight, the traits of movements of touching and non-touching. Directing our sight to above “nous flottons loin de nous,” “we flight distant from ourselves”(Valéry). What distinguishes the sight of an above from the sight of the starry heaven above us is the vision that what binds us to heaven is precisely what separates us from it. We can count the stars, and in the night the stars are everything to us, but at least from our limited perspective to them we signify nothing. This unreciprocal and asymmetrical relation between a heaven signifying everything for us and we signifying nothing to it binds together, in a shaking and admiring way, what we see in heaven and what we find in the depths of ourselves. Still keeping Valéry in mind, we could say that here we experience the coincidence of “heaven lightning up beyond our representations and productions and the depth of ourselves living beyond our expressions.” In this unreciprocal and asymmetrical coincidence, we experience how and when the attention to what is most distant from each one of us and the attention to what is closest to each

36. Valéry, op.cit., “C’est vers le Ciel que les mains se tendent; en lui que les yeux se refugient ou se perdent; c’est lui que montre le doigt d’un prophète ou d’un consolateur; c’est du haut de lui que certaines paroles sont tombées, et que certains appels de trompettes se feront entendre,” 476.
one of us appears as non-other of each other. Immensity of heaven meets at once, as if in a flash of lightning, the community of “us” and the extreme solitude of each one as non-other, beyond oppositions. In the sight of immensity it becomes possible to say as poets do: “I am all and part,” Je suis tout et partie, (Valéry), “immensity enlightens me,” m’illummino d’immenso (G. Ungaretti). What appears here is another sense of difference beyond a dialectics of oppositions. This other sense of difference constitutes rather a me-ontological than an ontological difference, something that the neo-platonic tradition has tried to think of and that Nicolau of Cues has formulated in terms of non-otherness, non-aliud. The cosmological feeling of sublime immensity awakens human sensibility and thought for a non-oppositional view of differences. Starring at the immensity of the starry heaven above each one of us, the humanity of power which images the world according to the measure of gigantic hugeness touches as its non-other the smallness of human freedom in the cosmos. In Valéry’s words, “an immense opening of perspectives is confronted with the reduction of our own power. We lose for some time the familiar illusion that things correspond to us. Our image becomes the one of a fly that cannot trespass a glass.”37 The sight of the immensity of the starry heaven above appears as the sight of this con-fusion where the all meets the one, where the feeling of being all, the feeling of the world, meets the experience of being nothing, the experience that the immensity of the world cannot be measured by the units of things. The sight of the heaven above is at once the sight of the depth of oceans and of the solitude of human life. It situates the human knowing life in the in-between of both. Both Valéry and Kant allude to a certain physics of the human soul that, facing sublime immensity and the suspensive in-between-ness in which man is situated, tends to protect itself, searching for ways of resisting wholeness. It looks for ways not to escape from it but to resist it through religion and philosophy, through the order of the heart or the order of the spirit. In this experience of being at once all and part, dissolution in the all and solitude from the all, nothingness touching the all, non-being touching being, where extreme opposites coincide, it becomes possible to experience horizon as a sliding way, as uncon-

37. Ibid.
cealing in concealing, as the rhythm of non-otherness in each one. In intimate consonance to central views of Schelling, Fink understood the position of man in the cosmos in the position of a “medium” or “symbol,” in the sense of a mirror of the immensity of cosmos. Following those diffuse cosmic thoughts of both, we could then say that in immeasurable power over being and life, which characterize the position of contemporary man in the cosmos, the cosmos’s immensity is mirrored and appears as an inverted image of it. Gigantic hugeness is as an inverted image of the immensity of the cosmos, showing paradoxically in human gigantism its own smallness and solitude. If the gigantic hugeness of man’s power over being and life can be considered a resistance to the immensity of the cosmos and thereby as the most arrogant conviction on the pre-eminence of man over cosmos, we discover, paradoxically in this infinite hugeness, immensity beyond infinity. At this moment, it becomes possible to discover, as Fink proposed, the solitary fragility of human freedom touching the immensity of the cosmos as its non-other.

To resist means not only to resist against but also to resist in the sense of sustaining and keeping attuned to this Ergriffenheit, to this feeling of the immensity of the world. If philosophy and its phenomenological pathos may seem so charged by the hugeness of its knowledge by the industry of its academic products it is perhaps paradoxically in the hard experience of the charge of this gigantic hugeness that the cosmological feeling of immensity may break through. This can be understood as the moment where thinking meets poetry, as even Kant acknowledged when he said that the sublime feeling of immensity cannot be thought in concepts but gives much to think, much that should be thought as poets do. In terms of the question concerning the relationship between phenomenology and religion, departing from the cosmological feeling of the immensity of the world, we have still to address the question concerning creative imagination as the basis of poetical thinking. I think it was in this sense that Heidegger affirmed, in the already-quoted lecture, that the human soul perhaps can only experience the “invisible shadow” of the uncontrollable and incalculable in creation, which involves the double reflective movement of questioning our concepts of creation and searching for a creative questioning. It seems that it is here that the human soul can be
transposed to an in-between in which she belongs to being remaining a stranger to beings.\(^{38}\) Maybe the question is not really about a new meaning of both phenomenology and religion (and further of their relation) but rather is a question of “seeing” the invisible shadow of the uncontrollable and incalculable — the creative shadow of world’s immensity — in the human’s belief about his or her power over being and life.

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38. I am interpreting the following passage from *Die Zeit als Weltbildes*, op.cit, 94: “Wissen, d.h. in seine Wahrheit verwahren, wird der Mensch jenes Unberechenbare nur im schöpferischen Fragen und Gestalten aus der Kraft echter Besinnung. Sie versetzt den künftigen Menschen in jenes Zwischen, darin er dem Sein zugehört und doch im Seienden ein Fremdling bleibt.” In the posteriorly added remark to this passage, Heidegger writes “Dieses offene Zwischen ist das Da-sein, das Wort verstanden im Sinne des ekstatischen Bereiches der Entbergung und Verbergung des Seins,” 110.