Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward a Micro-Eschatology

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That is God . . .
What?
A shout in the street
James Joyce, Ulysses

What if we were to return to epiphanies of the everyday? What if we could come back to the end (eucheton) in the here and now? Back to that end after the end of time that addresses us in each instant? What if we could rediscover ourselves again face-to-face with the infinite in the infinitesimal? Touch the sacred enfolded in the seeds of ordinary things?

Such a return would invite us to experience the ultimate in the mundane. The first in the last. The most in the least. It would bring us into dialogue with those who seek the divine in the pause between two breaths. Transcendence in a thornbush. The Eucharist in a morsel of madeleine. The Kingdom in a cup of cold water. San Marco in a cobblestone. God in a street cry.1

In our rush to the altars of Omnipotence we often neglected theophanies of the simple and familiar. We forgot to attend to the germs of the kingdom manifest in what Gerard Manley Hopkins calls “speckled, dappled things.” So doing, we tended to overlook the semaphore of the insignificant. For it is often in the most quotidian, broken, inconsequential, and minute of events that the divine signals
to us—"to the Father through the features of men's faces." This insight into the sacred "thinness" of things is what Duns Scotus, the Celtic thinker, called *haecceitas*. The idea is that Creation is synonymous and synchronous with incarnation, that each moment is a new occasion for the eternal to traverse the flesh and blood of time. Eros or enfleshment: the infinite embodied in every instant of existence, waiting to be activated, acknowledged, attended to. The one ablaze in the many. The timeless flaring in the transitory. The holiness of happenstance. And our calling, in the wake of such encounters, is nothing less than this: to give "beauty back to God" (Gerard Manley Hopkins). So that each of our responses serves, potentially, as an opportunity to transubstantiate flesh back into word. And by extension, word into action.

Our highest human vocation, as Hopkins puts it, is to revisit the "inscape" of the sacred in every passing particular. This activity he calls variously "aftering," "seconding," "over-and-overing," or "abiding again" by the "bidding" of the singular. This is what we might term *ana*-esthetics, heeding the semantic resonances of the Greek prefix *ana*: "up, in place or time, back, again, anew" (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). We are speaking of a refuging of first creation in second creation. Re-creation of the sacral in the carnal. Against the Grand Metaphysical Systems that construed God in terms of formal universals and abstract essences, the Scotist poet invites us back (*ana*) to the first genesis—and at the same time toward to the final kingdom: to that *eschaton* dwelling in each unique, material instant, no matter how lowly or profane. Here and now the sacred "selves" and "instresses" through the most transient forms of flesh. "Each mortal thing does one thing and the same: / Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; / Selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells, / Crying what I do is me: for that I came" ("As Kingfishers Catch Fire"). From such instantaneous and recurring incarnation no one and no thing, no single *this* or *that*, is excluded. All are invited to the table. And the table is laden. For "This Jack, poor potsherder, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond, / Is immortal diamond." Here the descent into the banal (*katabasis*) takes the form of a re-ascent to the precious (*anabasis*). And in the process the binary opposition between up and down dissolves.

What, then, if we could return to the *eschaton*? What if we could embrace a philosophical gesture inspired by successive radicalizations of the phenomenological method, culminating in what we might call a *fourth reduction*? Suppose we were to envisage an after-the-event return to the event. A move back to the everyday moment where philosophy first begins in wonder or pain. Would this not be the simplest of redirections? A recapture of those accidental events that escape the nets of essentialist inspection? This questioning is intended as a modest proposal fashioned in the guise of an epilogue, echo, repetition, recall (*ana-mnesis*)? Like a postscript of some "supplementary clerk" appended to the grand reductions of Husserl, Heidegger, and Marion?

Our wager is that such a fourth reduction—this last and least of returns—might eventually lead us back (re-dicere) to the *eschaton* curled at the heart of quotidian existence. Such a revisiting of the least of things, in order to retrieve the voice and visage of the highest in the lowest, is what we call an *eschatological reduction*. What follows is a brief sketch of what this might entail.

The phenomenological method, according to Jean-Luc Marion, has been subject to three main reductions since its inception in the early twentieth century. First came the *transcendental reduction* initiated by the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl. This involved a bracketing of our "natural attitude" of habit and opinion so as to return to the "essences" of meaning. According to Husserl, the redirecting of our attention from accidental contingencies of existence to the invariant, essentiel structures underlying them would lead us eventually to an inner realm of transcendental consciousness—a place where we might experience an "eidetic intuition" of timeless truths.

Husserl’s transcendental reduction was followed by Heidegger's *ontological reduction* (though Heidegger never used this term). This second reduction involved a further reorientation of our awareness; this time from the essences of beings to "being as being" (*Sein als Sein*). This also entailed a "turning" of our attention toward the so-called *ontological difference*, namely, the long neglected difference between being (*Sein*) and beings (*Seinende*).

More recently, we have witnessed what Marion calls a third reduction. This we might call the *eschatological reduction*. It is largely identified with Jean-Luc Marion’s return to the "gift" in *Being Given* and other works. As such it aims to go beyond both Husserl’s epistemology and Heidegger’s ontology to a tertiary intimation of what Marion calls "the saturated phenomenon." But it finds several significant prefigurations, it seems to me, in the famous "religious turn" of a third generation of phenomenologists inspired by philosophers such
as Levinas, Ricoeur, and Michel Henry. Here we might also count such postmetaphysical thinkers as Derrida, Caputo, and Chrétién, not to mention Marion himself, who has made the reduction to the “givenness of the gift” a hallmark of his pioneering investigations.°

What we are suggesting here, then, is the possibility of a fourth reduction—one that does not aim to supplant the first three but merely to supplement them. We might call this reduction microeschatological insofar as it leads us through the horizons of (1) “essence,” (2) “being,” and (3) “gift”—back to the everyday: that is, back to the natural world of simple embodied life where we may confront again the other “face-to-face.” Here we recover the stranger as vis-à-vis or visage, as what the Greeks called prosopon.° The other who appears to us through the accidental and the anecdotal. This fourth reduction, in short, would reverse the first three reversals (while fully acknowledging their invaluable findings) and bring us right back to the beginning: the face-to-face encounters of our ordinary universe.

While this may appear, at first blush, to be like a return to Heidegger’s being-in-the-world, we recall that Heideggerian Dasein has no body, no sex, no unconscious, no unique answerability to the other. Dasein remains a universal, transcendental structure. In its most authentic expression, it is always and in each case alone before death. Inauthenticity, by contrast, is signaled by Dasein’s immersion in the common society of being-with-others in the mode of the “They.” Our everyday social, moral, and political relations with our fellow human beings are basically, for Heidegger, a distraction from the essential questioning of Being. Everydayness poses the threat of dasein to the rarefied insights of the Augenblick, understood in terms of Dasein’s own self-disclosure. For, we are told, “Dasein exists for the sake of itself,” and only secondarily for others. With the fourth reduction we are proposing to move in an alternative direction: from the ontological back to the ontical, from speculative solipsism back to the sensus communis of our being-for-one-another.

While our proposal may seem, at second blush, like a reiteration of the Levinasian move from ontology to ethics, it also departs from it in several crucial respects. For example, the eschatological encounter with the prosopon differs from Levinas’s account of the face in that for us the eyes of the other do have color (they are embodied as particular, living, sensible flesh). We also depart from Levinas in seeking to move back to being from beyond being. There is something quintessentially incarnate about the prosopon as a way of facing an Other whose very transcendence traverses and invests its immanence here and now. Every concrete person—understood as prospop/persona—is charged with the thonness of a specific narrative identity, of a contingent history that is both conscious and unconscious. Prosopon is not a mask (prosopon). It is not a mere pretext for God, some faint trace of transcendence. It is the divine self-manifest in the “least of these”: in the color of their eyes, in the lines of their hands and fingers, in the cracked tone of voice, in all the tiny epiphanies of flesh and blood.

So while Levinas’s notion of the face leads us beyond ontology and aesthetics to a religious ethics of asymmetry between self and other, the eschatological reduction we propose here aims to (a) reconcile ethics with aesthetics and (b) bring the Good back into liaison with being. For the prosopon is precisely that: liaison, dialogue, chiasmus, oneself-as-another and the other-as-one-self. This epitomizes a face-to-face symmetry that Levinas and certain deconstructionists decry. For us, the being of prosopon is a being-good. A recipe for what we have called elsewhere an ono-œcatholicity. It signals a retrieval of God not so much beyond being as beneath being. God in and through and for being. Deus sicut transitus ad esse.

Moreover, the fourth reduction is characteristically “prosopic” in that it embraces the possibility of hermeneutic mediation and detour. This profoundly modifies the tendency of both the ontological and the dononological reductions to ultimately sacrifice interpretation to some ineffable sublime. The fourth reduction proposes to return us to the hermeneutic resources of speech beyond the excesses of apathetic silence. And regarding religion, we would suggest that the eschatological reduction might lead us back to a God of the last and least of these (elachistous)—divinity encountered as incarnate prosopon in what may be described, with Ricoeur, as a “second naïveté” or “second faith.” So that after God we find ourselves returning to God. We discover ourselves before God in a new way, recovering, by way of creative repetition, what was always there in the first place, but remained unseen. The fourth reduction might thus be said to move from meta-physics to ana-physics: that is, back to the most concretely enfleshed phenomenon of the prosopon in its infinite capacity to be. In other words, there is nothing at all new about the prosopon in itself. All that is new is our way of seeing and hearing it. But it was always already there, summoning us, from the start.

So, I repeat, the fourth reduction does not dispense with the three reductions that precede it. Rather it supplements them—to say “completes” would be pretentious—by retrieving the eschatological space.
that makes each reduction possible: the *exchaton* which holds and upholds “essence,” “being,” and “gift.” It salvages what isremaindered from the three reductions. Residual seeds of possibility that have been there, unremarked, from the beginning. In other words, the eschatological reduction retrieves the *possibilizing* of essence, being, and gift, which seemed impossible before the return to the gracious gap underlying and sustaining them. Is the fourth reduction religious, then? Yes; but only if we understand here a religion *beyond* religion, *before* religion, and *after* religion. This is a form of *ana-theism*, if you will. Leaving open options of both theism and atheism. It is a repetition forward to a God of the most ordinary things of our most ordinary existence.

By extension, we might suggest that the *ana-theistic* retrieval performed by the fourth reduction is accompanied by a series of related retrievals:

1. *ana-theistic* (retrieval of radiance after abjection);
2. *ana-dynamic* (retrieval of the possible after the impossible);
3. *ana-phatic* (retrieval of speech after silence);
4. *ana-physical* (retrieval of the natural after the supernatural);
5. *ana-ethical* (retrieval of the good after normativity);
6. *ana-choral* (retrieval of divine chora after the abyss);
7. *ana-erotic* (retrieval of desire after desirelessness).

Each of these retrievals would, of course, require extended hermeneutic explication, which is beyond the limits of this summary sketch.

For now, let me simply say this: like all philosophical enterprises, especially those of a spiritual character, this proposal of a fourth reduction is a hermeneutic wager. A matter of faith, then? Yes, but a faith sustained by as much understanding, interpretation, and wisdom as possible. A belief which never ceases to wrestle with its twin of unbelief. A hope in a light seen through the dark. Jacob’s faith as he struggles with the angel in the night.

It is crucial, I believe, to emphasize this hermeneutic character of the fourth reduction. Why so? Because such acknowledgment of the *interpretative* status of our approach guarantees a pluralist reading of the *exchaton*. It keeps us humble. Whether we call it simply “God,” or the “God beyond God” (with Eckhart and the mystics)—or, indeed, the not-yet-God of atheistic messianism (Bloch, Derrida)—all this is actually a matter of interpretation. A question of listening, of reading, of belief. The *exchaton* is not the prerogative of any one particular religion, monotheistic or otherwise. It is more generous than that. It is the assurance that every “I am” (and especially the divine) is inextricably linked to an “I am no one.” The *ego sum* is inseparable from the *nemo*: the last and least of beings. This double movement is felicitously captured in the French word *personne*: I am someone and no one at the same time. For the *exchaton* is a creative and loving emptying (*kenosis*) which gives space to beings. It is the gap in God incarnate in the littlest of things. The infinitesimal infinite.

Perhaps this is what Plato was alluding to in the *Timaeus* when he spoke of *chora* as an empty womb that precedes and engenders all intelligible and sensible things. Or what the Upanishads were gesturing toward when they spoke of *akasa*—that infinite empty space within *both* the universe *and* the inner heart, from which all divine energy (*sakti*) flows into the world. A sacredness, at first, smaller than a seed (*bijā*). And perhaps it was also what Paul had in mind when he spoke of a capacious “unknown God” who anticipates Christ—and, one might add, Krishna, the Buddha, and the other sacred figures of wisdom and compassion?

The *exchaton* may be construed, accordingly, as the least exclusive of functions. As the very opposite of Hegel’s *telos* and theodicy. And if we wish to read it as One, it would be as an absolute that refuses to be reduced to any one of its manifestations. An absolute that absolves itself. As such, this irreducibility of *L’Un à l’Unique* (to borrow the formula of Stanislas Breton) is the best guarantee of interreligious pluralism. Because the eschatological One cannot be named absolutely in any one way, it can be named only in multiple ways. The One in the midst of the many is not at the expense of the many. It is, rather, the path that leads to other paths. A refusal of both absolutism (one without many) and relativism (many without one). So that if Christ, for example, famously announces that it is “only” through him that one can get to the Father, we might interpret this “only” as excluding nothing but exclusiveness itself. The *exchaton* is open to everyone. It is, as it were, the germinal space that engenders numerous different religions. Thus, every attempt to define the *exchaton* is already and necessarily an interpretation. In the beginning was the Word, which is already already a multiplicity of words. From the start is hermeneutics! The first and last of methods. And the simplest. Which is why, in this free space of eschatology, we may say that Jesus and the Buddha, for example, converse without seeking to convert one another. The Scriptures and Sutras find themselves in dialogue. Theists and atheists commune.
If some of the preceding terms draw from monotheism, it is not only because this reflects my own hermeneutic wager as someone who hails from a Judeo-Christian heritage; it is also because I believe that this same tradition harbors within itself seed spaces which foster a coloquy of different voices. I am thinking here of several signal events in my own biblical narrative tradition. First, the aboriginal act of withdrawal (zimzum), which allows the Creator of Genesis to give space and freedom to its creatures. Second, the eschatological gap at the heart of the deity revealed in Exodus 3:15, which allows the one who “was” and “is” also to be the one who “may be”—a deity, in the guise of a common thornbush, which promises to be with its creatures forever, the God of possibility to come. Third, a Word self-emptying into the flesh of the last and least, an emptying that proceeds from incarnation right up to death on the cross and descent into the dark: kenotic acts inviting all beings to live again more fully. And, fourth, the *germen nibili* returning from the abyss of the empty tomb in the form of what Paul called the germinal or spiritual body.

Four divine descents, then, into the empty space of the ordinary—creation, exodus, incarnation, death—resurrection—each one of which solicits the return of old life in epiphanies of new life. Four revelations of the divine potentiality to plumb the depths of *khora* in order to bring forth the more from the less. An extraordinary paradox, this, no? And one that is ingeniously captured, I believe, in the Patristic metaphor of the Trinity as *peri-choreia*. Three persons dancing around (*peri*) a fourth dimension, an empty space (*chora*)—that sacred milieu of mutual withdrawal, letting be, love. Three persons who would collapse into indirection and differentiation were it not for that free feminine spacing opening up between them: an Open that holds them at once together and apart. For *khora* has always been a she. The matrix of all things. As invoked by the anonymous artist of the mother-and-child mural in the monastery of Chora in Istanbul. *Chora Acheraton*. "Container of the Uncontainable."16

This is, of course, an interpretation. A "religious" interpretation, granted. A particular reading of the *eschaton* that acknowledges itself as such and does not exclude other interpretations (theistic or atheistic), but rather invites them to the chorus of philosophical exchange. For where our Western tradition speaks of *khora*, *eschaton*, and *germen nibili*, our Eastern counterparts might invoke such terms as *bija*, *guba*, or *tāo*. This decisive and long-overdue conversation between the world’s different wisdom traditions has hardly begun, though hap-

pily figures such as Pannikar, Abhishiktananda, Griffiths, and Thich Nhat Hanh are pointing the way. For if religion has, alas, been one of the major sources of war and hatred, it may also be a crucial ingredient of healing.

The fourth reduction, in sum, radicalizes the three phenomenological reductions to the point where they join hermeneutics. And here we adhere to Paul Ricoeur’s counsel that we “renounce the idea of creating a phenomenology o: the religious phenomenon taken in its indivisible universality” in favor of an “interconfessional hospitality” that permits us to trace the “broad hermeneutic strands” of specific religions in dialogue with others. At this critical juncture, we find intuition recovering interpretation. We see the *eschaton* settling itself in various ways, featuring itself in multiple faces, singing itself in many voices. A polyphony of call and response. A banquet of translation.

Let me offer, at this point, a few remarks on the eschatological reduction as “repetition.” The fourth reduction leads us back—by leading us forward—to a sacred space at the heart of things. For too long theology and metaphysics have identified the divine with the most all-powerful of Beings. Sovereign, Self-sufficient substances. Transcendental Forms. First and Final Causes. Immutable essences. But in the process, we tended to turn our backs on the “God of little things,” the holiness of this and that. Too often we forgot the fact that God is manifest in the least ones calling for a cup of cold water, asking to be fed, clothed, cared for, heard, loved. We ignored the face of the desert stranger who comes in the middle of the night and wrestles with us until we open our eyes and see face-to-face: *Prosopon*. We stepped hearing God in “a shout in the street.”

The fourth reduction solicits a retrieval of the lower case at the other side of the uppercase: after Metaphysics, after Theology, after Being, after God. So we call it a micro-eschatology. Why? To remind ourselves that we are seeking to signpost a path that brings us back to the “end” (*eschaton*) that is after the End (*telos*) and before the Beginning (*archē*). An eschatology, we repeat, that restores us to the simplicity of the face-to-face prior to all First and Final Causes. We are talking, to borrow Ricoeur’s formula, about an “eschatology of the sacred” beyond both archaeology and teleology. In other words, our eschatology of the everyday defies the perverse reading of eschatology as some triumphant End of History where the divine trumps the human. It scuppers the fantasy of a Supreme Being disparaging
finite creatures in some Final Settlement. Such a triumphal sense of Last Judgment travesties the enigma of the last-as-first; it betrays the logic of the “least of these.” And, so doing, it remains deaf to the miracle of discernment, which may intervene in the most profane moments of our lived experience.

The fourth reduction also resists the tendency of certain sublime theologies—deconstructive or New Age—to leave us senseless before some utterly inaccessible Other. Departing from the secure syllogisms of metaphysics does not mean we have to embrace a transcendent so transcendent that it disappears off the radar screen, leaving behind not only flesh but word as well. We are not obliged to become sightless and speechless (apo-phasia) before the sublimity of God. No. What we seek, with the fourth reduction, is a “repetition” of speech (ana-phasia), a retrieval of saying beyond silence. Such saying would, in turn, be accompanied by a seeing beyond the invisible (ana-aesthesis) and a touching beyond the tangible (ana-pathos). In short, we are concerned with a way of saying, seeing, and feeling over again—of sensing otherwise, anew, for a second time. So that we may “see and touch the goodness of the Lord” in the wounds and wonders of the commonest beings. Disclose the sacramental in le dernier des derniers. For the eschaton reveals itself in the mundane as much as in the momentous, in the scarred as much as in the beautiful, in the lost as much as in the found. It elicits ways of rediscovering God in the ordinary universe which the gods—pace Heidegger and certain postmodern prophets of fatality—have never really abandoned.

This is why we claim that the eschatological reduction signals a return to poetics. A sort of ana-poetico after aporetico. Such a poetics, we repeat, bids us revisit the primordial sphere of everyday sayings, expressions, presuppositions, beliefs, speech acts, convictions, faiths, and commitments—namely, that realm of primary speech that the first three reductions sought, in their different ways, to bracket. Not that we want to dispense with the invaluable disclosures of essence, being, and gift brought about by the preceding suspensions. On the contrary, we wish rather to push these radical insights toward a recapitulation of the ordinary beyond the extraordinary. Such that one will, hopefully, never again take the given for granted nor remain deaf to the epiphany of a street cry. So that what might first appear as a presumptuous gesture—somehow to outdo such thinkers as Husserl, Heidegger, or Marion—is in fact the opposite. The fourth reduction is no more than a memo, an afterword, an epilogue after the event. It is intended, in all modesty, as a reminder posted to these great phenomenologists that there are a few small things left behind, unheard and unseen, discarded and neglected, in their seemingly exhaustive wake. In their plunge toward fundamental profundity, phenomenology often turns its sights from the treasures floating in the flotsam and jetsam of the forfeited. It overlooked the “foul rag and bone shop of the heart” (Yeats).

The return to poetics does not require the abandonment of philosophy. In fact, poetics might be said to occupy that in-between site where conceptual reflection finds its limits and poetry finds its illimitable nutrition. In this sense, the idiom of poetics promoted by the fourth reduction invites us to another kind of thinking, what we might call with Rilke an understanding of the heart, which observes a double fidelity to both philosophy and poetry. As such, it hopes to conjoin a certain rigor of mind with a special resonance of imagination. And to obviate dogmatism.

Against the Hegelian lure of a final synthesis, we insist that the four reductions be considered as a fluid interplay where each moves back and forth between the others, resisting the tendency to fix the interrelationship in some teleological hierarchy of progressive fulfillment. The cry of the fourth reduction, no less than that of the first (Husserl’s), is “back to the beginning,” over and over again. Indeed, our commitment to such a poetics of perpetual replay reminds us that the game of the four reductions is not confined to phenomenology per se, considered as some crowning achievement of Western metaphysics. It has been playing itself out, time after time, from the earliest instances of Western (and, no doubt, non-Western) thought. For example, Platonism might be said to mark the first reduction; Aristotelianism, the second; Neoplatonism, the third; and a certain return to the ordinary world (Augustine’s questing heart, Duns Scotus’s “thinness,” Teresa of Avila’s “pots and pans”), the fourth. The variations are multiple and recurring. There is nothing really new in what we are saying here. It has been said before, in numerous ways. The fourth reduction simply offers a poetic license to start all over. To say it again. To do it again.

As we have already indicated, the return to the eschaton triggers a renewed interest in the religious. But this return to the religious remains for us philosophers a hermeneutic exercise rather than a theological dogma. It is not apologetics. For the hermeneutic space opened up by the fourth reduction is necessarily a creative conflict.
zone of interpretations—a space where, for example, the theistic "messianisms" of monotheism can converse with the atheistic "messianicities" of postmodernism (Derrida, Bloch, Žižek, Badiou, Agamben), not to mention the wisdom interpretations of non-Western traditions. The philosophical hermeneutics we espouse acknowledges that every seeing is a seeing-as; every hearing, a hearing-as; every understanding, an understanding-as. True, the eschatological space disclosed by the fourth reduction is, arguably, the closest that the contemporary philosophy of phenomenological hermeneutics gets to theology. It certainly opens up the possibility of new theological interpretations. But it may not serve as a prelude to theology, it is not yet, strictly speaking, theology. As philosophy of religion it keeps a certain methodological distance, as philosophy must. (If I were writing as a theologian, I could waive such scruples.) At best, we might say that the eschatological reduction carves out an agora where philosophy and theology may confront one another anew in "loving combat."

How then, one might ask, does the fourth reduction relate to the "theological turn in phenomenology"? While my friend, the late Dominique Jancaud, coined this phrase with a specific polemic in mind, we would be prepared to offer a somewhat broader reading. It is not necessary, in our view, to see the encounter between phenomenology and theology as a takeover of one by the other. Rather, I would suggest that the hermeneutic space opened up by the fourth reduction allows philosophy and theology to face off against one another in a process of mutual exchange. This facing off is also a facing toward: prosopon. Distance in and through rapprochement. That is to say, the eschatological turn allows theology to surpass itself as theology just as it permits phenomenology to surpass itself as phenomenology. So that the theological turn in phenomenology might correspond to a phenomenological turn in theology. The fourth reduction could thus be said to emancipate both disciplines into a new reinterpretation of the rapport between Being and God. A rapport that, we recall, has preoccupied Western thinkers from its Greek and biblical origins and that, after a temporary eclipse, is now finding voice again.

The eschatological reduction, therefore, endeavors to amplify the horizons of "theology" and "philosophy" to include neglected possibilities of experiencing divinity and sacredness, alterity and transcendence, ultimacy and depth. That is why eschatology, as I understand it, can include in its range of reference both religious phenomenolo-
gists like Marion, Henry, Levinas, and Chrétien—targeted by Jancaud—and "postreligious" thinkers such as Bonhoeffer, Caputo, and Derrida. In sum, rather than excluding either theology or phenomenology, micro-eschatology explores new possibilities for both by exceeding their conventional limits.

Eschatological repetition calls lastly, for another notion of time. Here we encounter a temporality beyond both the linear chronology of history and the circular reiteration of myth (e.g., the eternal return of the same). We are speaking of a specific kind of ana-chronology that might repeat the moment forward. This process of repetitive return operates like a gyre or spiral that carries us through the same experience for a second time, or a number of times, but at different altitudes, as it were—sometimes higher and farther, sometimes lower and closer. To repeat forward is, as Kierkegaard rightly insists, to reignite the possible in the actual. Eschatological repetition undoes the inevitable and deactivates (kataargain) the actual by recovering the gracious seeds of possibility still lurking in our midst. It alerts us to the grace that can transmute each moment of linear time—past, present, future—into an instant (kairos) of eternity: timelessness in time, the not-yet in the now, the possible in the impossible, the word in the flesh. Thus while "recollection" may be said merely to reiterate the fixed actualities of the past, "repetition" retrieves the past in the present in such a way that it opens up possibilities for the future. Rather than simply remember what has been, qua fait accompli, repetition reorients time toward the problemizing eschaton still to come. Repetition, in other words, gets the world back, but as different—on another level in the spiral of eschatological time. Vita mutata non tollitur: life changed but not taken away. Life returned, turned around. As though life were experienced in reverse—ana-logically—so as to be lived forward! For the eschatological instant is the one (and it is potentially every moment) in which we receive the gift of the world anew. The same world, of course, but refigured. The inevitability of what-has-been suddenly transfigured into the possibility of what-may-be. Each instant, suddenly, a portal at which the possible knocks. And seeks to enter.

This recovery of the eschaton at the heart of things is nothing less, I suggest, than the rediscovery of posses in esse. I am speaking here of that posses which flows from the divine to the human and back again, like a river in endless flux. There is nothing new here, and yet it is an invitation to constant renewal. It is no secret; it has been recog-
nized again and again by poets and sages (and countless ordinary people) throughout the ages. It is the river that the Dublin poet Patrick Kavanagh invoked in his passionate theopoetics of the common and contingent: “Leafy-with-love banks and the green waters of the canal / Pouring redemption for me, that I do / The will of God, wallow in the habitual, the banal...” It is the river in the Taoist saying that “The best man is like water / Water is good; it benefits all things / and does not compete with them / It dwells in lowly places that all disdain / This is why it is so near to Tao.” And it is that same “river of compassion” which is celebrated by Bede Griffiths in his religious commentary on the Bhagavad Gita. For here in the confluence of diverse currents, possibilities crisscross and traverse, sounding an “infinite capacity for being.” In such times and places, the response “I am able” answers to the call “You are able.” Divinity capacitates humanity and, in return, humanity reactivates divinity.

This is perhaps what Paul means by the “dunamis of the spirit” which outstrips all the powers of dominion (Ephesians 1). And it is surely what Nicholas of Cusa is intimating when he says that divine posse—his preferred name for God—is a “truth that shouts in the streets,” something so obvious that even a child can hear! Such posse speaks in many distinct voices: ebullitio, viriditas, sakti, lila, charas, gratia. It is what in a previous work we have described as the posse of no-power capable of overcoming all powers. This is why micro-eschatology begins, most simply, as a “poetics of the possible.”

Conclusion

So why recommend a fourth reduction if all it does is bring us back to where we began? All the way back to the everyday universe? Why? Because without sundering there is no recognition. Some breaking down or breaking away from our given lived experience is necessary, it seems, for a breakthrough to the meaning of that same experience, at another level, one where we may see and hear otherwise. I do not wish to claim, however, that such a new optics and acoustics are only available through philosophical reflection. Epiphanies are already there “in the pots and pans.” So what is it that triggers the shift of attention?

At its most basic it is, perhaps, the experience of death. The seed dying so that we may grow. Dying unto the world so that we may live again more abundantly. Being in the world still, more deeply than ever, but no longer of the world. No longer subject to the illu-

sions and attachments of Habit. This is, doubtless, what Heidegger meant by Angst: an existential mood that “de-worlds” us, throws us off kilter, shatters our cozy preconceptions, so as to open us to the authentic possibilities of our being-in-the-world. But, for Heidegger, this experience seems to be the elitist prerogative of exceptional individuals who renounce life in community with others to bravely face the solitary instant. As he says in Being and Time, the traumatic experience of death “individualizes” each one of us in an authentic moment (Augenblick) in which one finds oneself utterly alone.

Such “existential solipsism” is not what we are after with the eschatological reduction. As a first step, it is true, such moments—which I would claim are available to everyone—can elicit a certain disenchantment which may then issue in a reverse moment of epiphany. This is an experience that, arguably, resides at the root of most great philosophical beginnings. One thinks of the moment of Socratic ignorance that precedes wonderment (thaumazein); the moment of Augustinian disillusionment serving as prelude to radical questioning (quis ergo amo cum deum meum amo?); the moment of “learned not-knowing” (doxa ignorantia), which Cusanus and certain “negative” theologians saw as portal to a viae dei; the moment of Descartes’s doubt, which precedes his recovery of the “idea of the infinite”; the moment of Husserl’s suspension (epoché), which aims to return us, eventually, to a “categorial intuition” of the being of things. But my point is that epiphanies don’t have to be exclusive moments of philosophical insight-through-detachment. The above are exemplary cases, and ones from which we can greatly learn. But they are not primary. They are no more than “repetitions” of more primordial experiences—aesthetic, mystical, spiritual, existential. I think Merleau-Ponty acknowledges this when he admits, in his preface to the Phenomenology of Perception, that there is nothing that the phenomenological reduction discloses that was not already laid forth, for example, in our cultural life-world. “The unfinished nature of phenomenology and the inchoative atmosphere which has surrounded it are not to be taken as a sign of failure, they were inevitable because phenomenology’s task was to reveal the mystery of the world... If phenomenology was a movement before becoming a doctrine or a philosophical system, this was attributable neither to accident, nor to fraudulent intent. It is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valéry, or Cézanne—by reason of the same kind of attentiveness and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the
same will to seize the meaning of the world or of history as that meaning comes into being.”

In short, the philosophical reductions are doing no more than “repeating” at the level of reflective discourse what Cézanne, for one, was already doing in painting when he “exploded perspective” and solicited a more primordial way of seeing—enabling us to apprehend not just natura naturata but natura naturans. Or, by extension, what writers such as Proust and Joyce were doing when—in the pivotal “library scenes” of Remembrance and Ulysses—they showed their young authors (Marcel and Stephen) renouncing Grand Illusions in order to embrace epiphanies of the everyday. Moreover, it is precisely this homecoming that the poet Patrick Kavanagh calls the reaffirmation of a “second simplicity” after the experience of skeptical loss. Such a moment is movingly captured in his poem “Hospital,” which describes the poet’s reentry to ordinary life after his recovery from a near fatal illness. Suddenly, almost posthumously, he sees the world again as he had never experienced it before—all the broken, battered, throwaway objects suddenly redeemed. “Naming these things is the love-act and its pledge,” he concludes, “to snatch out of time the passionate transitory.”

Does this imply that one must be either a philosophical initiate or an aesthetic connoisseur to have access to epiphanies? Are such insights confined to readers of Heidegger and Proust? Not at all. My argument has been, all along, that they are already available to the most simple of beings in the most simple of experiences—namely, in sacred moments of the ordinary aside from any grand leaps into Art or Metaphysics. They are there in the detritus of a Dublin canal, in stray cries of the street, in the mere “mereness of things” (Wallace Stevens). They are always already there. But we do not heed them unless, at some level, we have an experience of sundering. This can be registered in the simplest prayer of letting-go or in the commonest exposure to pain or disappointment. For dying unto oneself can happen in the most indigent and banal instants. If one follows the call of these dark ruptures in our natural attitude, one reaches a no-place from which one is invited to return to the place of life. One becomes a no-one called back to oneself. Though the world to which one returns is never quite the same. Just as the self to which one returns after such estrangement is always oneself as another. The moi comes back to itself as soi.

So, we ask one last time, why bother with philosophical reflection at all if the end of our elaborate bracketings and retrievals is already accessible in the prephilosophical experiences of life and art? The reasons are, I think, twofold. First, philosophy is one of the most formative discourses of our culture. And even if the vast majority of people never actually read Plato or Aristotle, the Scholastics or Descartes our accredited ways of understanding ourselves are deeply marked by their thinking. This doesn’t require us to buy into the Heideggerian notion that the entire world picture, governing our technological age, is determined by a forgotten destiny of Being. Suffice it to note that the long history of metaphysics has left indelible watermarks on our most basic forms of thought. (Just as the great texts of the Vedic or Buddhist traditions have profoundly informed Eastern ways of thinking, even if many adherents have no direct familiarity with the original Sanskrit philosophies.) If this be so, then it is incumbent on us to find ways of repeating these decisive philosophical maneuvers forward, by letting the flies out of the metaphysical bottles so that we may come back again from perplexity and skepticism to the “habitual and the banal.” Though we acknowledge that after the Odyssean detour through the wandering rocks of reflective detachment, the same is never quite the same. One rediscovers oneself as “othered,” as never before, as never again. One’s life has changed.

But there is a second reason to embrace the philosophical journey of exodus and return. It is this philosophy sometimes gives us special pause to review things at a more considered remove than is afforded by our usual nights of the soul or exposures to estrangement. This has something to do with that intellectual conversion that Plato called periope (turning around) and that Aristotle described as anagnosia catharsis (recognition through purgation). It refers to that peculiar sense of mental inversion that is signaled, today, by such terms as epoke, Überwindung, or Kehre. It is, in short, that indispensable loop on the hill path that enables us to climb higher before doubling back to the valley below. The step forward as step back. And vice versa.

In Life’s Knowledge, Martha Nussbaum defends this philosophical countermove vis-à-vis our given experience. She makes the point that philosophical reflection on our primary lived experience, and even on our secondary literary experience, can help us “see” things that have gone unnoticed in our daily lives. At best, philosophical deliberation permits a second knowing, which returns us to experience for a second time as if for the first time. On occasion, writes Nussbaum, “I think the human heart needs reflection as an ally. Sometimes we need explicit philosophy to return us to the truths of the heart and to permit us to trust that multiplicity, that bewildering

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indefiniteness. To direct us to the ‘appearances’ rather than to somewhere ‘out there’ or beneath or behind them.” And she adds that in certain contexts it is the momentary detour through “sceptical uneasiness,” provoked by philosophy, which can “lead us back to and express a respect for the multiplicity of the everyday.”

I would say, in conclusion, that the eschatological reduction aims to bring a second sight to bear on the hidden and often neglected truths of first sight. It seeks to offer a form of recognition newer than cognition and older than perception. And, so doing, it hopes to serve as a modest guide to terrestrial wisdom: “I am the necessary angel of earth, / Since in my sight you see the world again” (Wallace Stevens).

These questions call for extensive detailed investigation well beyond the limits of this brief outline. We can, for now, but sketch a menu and offer a preliminary taste. The essay “Enabling God,” which follows in part 2, is a small offering in this direction.

Toward a Fourth Reduction?

JOHN PANTELEIMON MANOUSSAKIS

In this essay we attempt a redefining of the phenomenological method as this has been developed mainly through three “reductions” represented by three thinkers whose work advanced phenomenological research in novel ways: Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Luc Marion. Our rehearsal of the phenomenological tradition aims at formulating a set of controversial questions: Is it, perhaps, time for a fourth reduction that would better serve the sensibilities of the so-called phenomenology of the apparent? And if so, what might be its guiding principles, its ways of operating, its scope and aim? Such a fourth reduction, we believe, would not seek to overcome or discard the preceding movements of reduction; rather, it would strive to complete them by rehearsing, retrieving, and repeating them. In some sense, a fourth reduction could be a corrective recapitulation of the transcendent, ontological, and dosological reductions. In the following pages we will try to flesh out what the basic principles of a fourth reduction might be by clarifying further the definition of the prosopon and its pertinence for a phenomenology of the experience of God.

Husserl’s transcendental reduction called for a return “to the things themselves,” where consciousness refocuses on the phenomena as they appear in themselves and by themselves (eidetically), cutting through, as it were, the layers of preassigned signification that common usage has accumulated over them. Heidegger’s ontological