

Text 9. Phenomenology concerning the sacred

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9.1. The phenomenon

G. van der Leeuw (1890/1950) in his *Phänomenologie der Religion*, Tübingen, 1956-2, 768/777, describes what phenomenon is, the object of phenomenology.

The 'phenomenon' is the given insofar as the given, which is directly known, is. This encompasses three aspects: 1. there is something; 2. that something reveals itself; 3. precisely because that something reveals itself, it is the 'phenomenon'.

Meeting

That showing itself—according to the author—encompasses both that which shows itself and the one to whom it shows itself.—The phenomenon is therefore not the pure given—called 'object'—on and within itself. It is the object insofar as it is encountered by someone—called 'subject'—and it is the subject insofar as it also encounters the object. Expressed differently: someone allows the given to penetrate into themselves, in such a way that it penetrates their consciousness. In other words: the subject does not “do anything with” the object because it “lets the object be what it is” (it does not, for example, make it exist or something like that). And the object does not “do anything with the subject” because it lets the subject be what it is.— That is 'encounter'.

“As soon as someone speaks about the phenomenon, there is phenomenology” (oc, 772).

The phenomenon, the whole phenomenon, nothing but the whole phenomenon. – This implies that most certainly everything connected with the phenomenon is not to be discussed unless to delineate it from the phenomenon itself. This also implies that everything resembling the

phenomenon but not that phenomenon is not to be discussed unless, at most, by way of comparison.

Since E. Husserl (1859/1938), this exclusion of what is merely connected with or resembles the given is called 'Einklammerung', in parentheses 'jeszetting'.

Note - If a number of phenomena can be summarized on the basis of mutual similarity, then that summary is called "the general essence" (the common property) of those phenomena. In that case, Husserl uses the term 'eidos': limiting oneself to the eidos, the entire eidos, and only the entire eidos, he calls "eidetic reduction". One 'reduces' the phenomenon to its general characteristics.

Application

The sociological school (E. Durkheim (1858/1917); M. Mauss (1872/1950)) defines everything called 'sacred' as the origin of society. That is defining the sacred as a phenomenon based on what is connected with it, namely the community that designates something sacred as the basis of living together. In this way, the essence itself comes to consciousness only indirectly!

The founder of the phenomenology of the sacred, N. Söderblom (1866/1931), proceeds differently: he allows the sacred, for example as a 'power', to come into its own directly. But that is no longer sociology, but phenomenology of the sacred.

In summary : As soon as one develops some science or philosophy regarding a phenomenon, one must proceed logically, that is, starting from what is directly given, and first of all define the given phenomenon phenomenologically.

Application .

In antiquity, the 'esoteric' was the object of 'initiation' and initiatory knowledge, a type of knowledge that somehow transcends ordinary knowledge. The esoteric is not the sacred, and yet it is connected with it and, indeed, merges with it to a certain extent. To the degree that the sacred and the esoteric merge, they are objects of a common phenomenology: the one is, for example, a part of the other.

The term 'occult' dates from C. Agrippa (1486/1535) and his * *De*

*occulta philosophia**, in which “anything that is knowable solely by means of initiation is called occult”. Occultism has continued to be regarded as an indication of the esoteric since the 19th century (with A.-L. Constant (1810/1875) who popularized the term).

To the extent that the occult merges with the sacred, the object of phenomenology is of the sacred, naturally.

The sacred is always somewhat esoteric and occult, and to that extent the sacred is called 'mystery'. Whoever banishes the mystery from the sacred beforehand mutilates the very essence of that sacred in such a way that one does not allow the sacred as a given to come into consciousness in its entirety.

9.2. Consciousness without brain activity.

Library st. : *Science* (revue), Paris, 2003 : juillet (*File: Au-delà de la mort*), 69/71 (*Ou se si tue la conscience ?*).

American heart specialist Michael Sabom —initially very skeptical regarding NDE experiences—testifies about the removal of a very large aneurysm in the brain of a certain Pam Reynolds. Although the patient spends about six hours on the operating table, the removal itself takes half an hour.

During that short time, no blood is allowed to flow through the brain, and it is deprived of oxygen. Therefore, hypothermia is applied (15.5°C), and the brain is deprived of all blood. Everything is recorded, including brain activity (EEG) and what the brainstem is experiencing.

Comparison

What Pam.R. saw and heard was easily verifiable. She saw, for example, a kind of toothbrush , which was in fact the trepanation saw. The conversation between the surgeon and the cardiologist had been recorded: what Pam.R. had heard matched it.

Comparison .

The comparison of the account of the operated patient and the recordings allows us, above all, to accurately situate her NDE. - “Well, the recordings show that at that moment the body and the brain were without blood” (ac , 70).

Dr. Sabom .

We have access to medical recordings of the course of the NDE. We can study the EEG activity. We are able to study everything that occurred in the biological body during that NDE. This allows us to answer questions such as: “Was the NDE triggered by a crisis in the temporal lobe or by specific electrical activity in the brain?” Well, the answer is: 'No'. For the brain waves were flat and the brainstem was not active precisely during the NDE.

The question arises :

How can consciousness be in a waking state without any brain activity?

9.3. *Hylic pluralism.*

' Hylic ' means 'concerning matter' and 'pluralism' means 'viewpoint that assumes a multiplicity'. So our theme is the fact that reality apparently exhibits a multiplicity of kinds of matter.

We refer to *JJ Poortman, Ochèma (History of hylistic pluralism)*, Asse, 1954, a work that is relatively clear.

The concept of the “ ethereal body” is “one of the oldest beliefs of mankind” (*G. Mead* (1863/1933), in his *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition* (1919)). The concept of “ethereal or fine or subtle substance” is our theme, in a threefold sense:

1. the thin substance upon and within itself;
- 2.1. the rarefied body;
- 2.2. the rarefied atmosphere in which the rarefied body is situated.

By way of introduction .

G. Welter , Les croyances primitives et leurs survivances (Précis de paleopsycho-logie), Paris, 1960,53, notes: “The magician can detach a part of the soul and introduce it into the body of a crocodile, which will then devour a woman who was washing linen”.

In other words: a portion of subtle substance, inherent to the soul, can be detached and transferred to another biological body—subtle substance that is the carrier of information, in this case “Devour that waxing woman”.—With this, we have a set of basic concepts: biological body, immaterial soul, part of the subtle substance connected with the immaterial soul , information in that subtle substance.

The 'plural of souls'

This expression is misleading. - W. Davis, *The Snake and the Rainbow* , Amsterdam, 1986, 204ff., explains the plural of souls in the Vodou religion.

- 1.1. The “corps cadavre ” (biological body);
- 1.2. the ' n'ame ', the soul substance that gives life to the biological body;
- 2.1. the “ z'étoile ', the soul substance that is the lucky or unlucky star;
- 2.2.a. the “gros bon ange ”, the substance of the soul that is inherent to all who have consciousness;
- 2.2.b. the "ti bon ange ", the individual soul with its individuating soul substance. -

The little good angel is in the grip of a ' loa ' (lwa) when someone is possessed; - is on a soul journey during sleep (in the dream) or during an out-of-body experience; - is briefly outside the body following a severe emotional shock; - is partially withdrawn from the body by zombification .

In other words: when—especially among primitives—there is more than one soul, then in at least one case there is a case of soul- dust.

Materialism

Poortman accuses FA Lange, *History of Materialism and Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart* (1866), notes that, with the exception of a few details, he neglects certain forms of materialism which nevertheless had clearly emerged for many centuries. Poortman calls this type of materialism “monistic materialism” (it recognizes only one type of matter, namely the ordinary substance known to us and studied in natural science). Lange disregards a “dualistic materialism” that Poortman identifies with his “ hylistic pluralism.” The latter is found, for example, in Democritus (-460/-370), who states that the soul consists of “fine, smooth, round atoms.”

The religious materialisms

Stoicism (-400/+200) and Epicureanism (-400/+400) view the soul as a subtle body, distinct from the gross physical body. However, Neoplatonism (+250/600) in particular recognizes, for example in the person of Proclus (410/485), even a multitude of soul substances of a subtle nature: the immaterial soul possesses a multitude of 'vehicles' or 'vessels' (ochèmata) of a subtle or ' fluidic ' (supple, navigating through things) nature. In other words: Lange has neglected a large part of 'materialism'.

Poortman's gauges.

He distinguishes physiological rarefied matter (in an expression like “The

life spirits had already departed”) which mediates between the soul and the biological body at a lower level; – psychological rarefied matter which is rarer, and an even rarer substance. – With this, he attempts to create some order in the almost limitlessly confused terminology on the subject .

Note .. – Quite common – at least in esoteric and occult circles here – is:

1. biological or gross body;
2. etheric body (which falls apart into fragments at death),
3. astral body (which remains one with the immaterial soul after death and does not die).
4. the immaterial soul.

9.4. A word about Islam.

Expositing Islam within the framework of this work is impossible. However, we can consider a current aspect—“the shock of cultures” (S. Huntington)—briefly situated within Islam.

Islam.

This religion dates back to the Arab Muhammad (around 570/632), “the Prophet”, and very specifically to the beginning of the ' Hegirah ', the calendar of Islam, namely 622, in which he leaves Mecca as an exile and founds the Mohammedan state – a state in which religion and politics are inseparable.

Religion.

The Islamic religion is a religion of “ *the Book* ”, *the Quran* , the text of which consists of 114 chapters – the uncreated Word of God, Allah, “the God”, Himself. Thus, opposed to the Quran is 'Islam', which is submission to Allah.

Note

Sharia is the legislation inspired by the Quran. According to the interpretation of Sunni Muslims—one school of thought among others—it is the only legislation.

From this perspective, Sharia is immediately the basis of Islamic fundamentalism, i.e., adherence to the 'foundations' as the Prophet received them from Allah at the time.

Note : The words of the Prophet and his followers (outside the Quran) are recorded in the hadith . They are the essence of the Sunnah, the tradition , dating from the 9th century.

Note : The Ummah is the united Islamic people insofar as it accepts in faith Muhammad's message—in his eyes the culmination of Judaism and Christianity, the two other religions of the Book. So much for a set of basic concepts that make what follows more understandable.

The Ishmaelians (Ismailers).

understand the Islamic background of the current confrontation between the West and Islam, it is necessary to learn something about this tendency within Islam.

Library st. : *Farhad Daftary , Les ismaéliens (Histoire et tradition d'une community musulman)* Paris, 2003 (or.: *A Short History of the Ismailis* , Edinburgh, 1988).

The author states that Islam amounts to a plurality of tendencies: “There are as many Islams as there are cultures in Islamic countries” (oc, 13). The Sunnis make up almost four-fifths and the Shiites almost one-fifth.

The latter themselves, in turn, fragmented into a multitude of factions. Upon the death of the Prophet, a small group in Medina—against the majority—considered that Ali, married to Muhammad's daughter, Fatima, was the most suitable successor. They formed the Shiat Ali, Ali's party. The position of imam became decisive. Ali was assassinated in 661. From 765 onwards, Ismailism gradually emerged within Shiism . This forms a framework for what follows.

***Alamut* .**

Daftary , oc, 179/229 (*La période d' Alamut dans l'histoire des ismaéliens Nizaristes*) speaks of the Fatimid *dawa* (understand: evangelism, mission) dating back to Hassan Sabbah (circa 1050/1124) and his infamous fortress high in the Elbrus mountains. Hassan developed his own method of eliminating political and religious opponents. Various groups, the Seljuk Turks (whom he fought), and the Christian Crusaders committed murders. But Hassan placed “selective killing”—usually in public places—at the center of his work. The perpetrators were the *fidaiïs* or *fidawis* , young volunteer believers whom he subjected to an initiation with degrees so that they very willingly became suicide commandos.

***A historical novel* .**

We will now briefly consider a controversial writing, namely *Alamut* by Vladimir Bartol. (1903/1967), appeared in 1938 amidst complete

indifference , like A. Clavel , *Le tyran qui semait la terreur avec ses commands suicides* , in: *Le Temps* (Geneva), 17.11.2001, 9, it writes.

Bartol , a Slovenian, is primarily a novelist but a translator of Fr. Nietzsche (1844/1900), the cultural critic, and is interested in Freud's psychoanalysis. He is also an entomologist and a butterfly collector.

Such personal details are necessary for a proper understanding of what might be labeled as “a medieval epic”.

“In reality,” according to Clavel , “ Alamut summons before our eyes all the demons churning up the Islamic world: obscurantism, state terrorism, religious hysteria, totalitarian excesses, a morbid cult of personality.” It is not surprising that the novel is now a blockbuster throughout Europe since Al-Qaeda and Usama Ben Laden turned the Twin Towers in New York, the Pentagon, and—specifically—the White House in Washington into a battlefield on September 11, 2001 .

The fedayin .

The Fidai Offidawi —of whom Daftary speaks—is the central figure of Alamut : “Every believer is a soldier cast in steel, and every soldier is at the same time the most fervent of all believers.” This is how Clavel describes the one who commits a suicide attack. The fedayin is prepared to sacrifice himself blindly. If he dies in the performance of his duty, then he becomes a martyr who enjoys the delights of paradise in the hereafter—in an oath full of houris who never lose their virginity.

This fundamental element of the Prophet's writings determines the core plot of the captivatingly written novel: the suicide in the service of the Islamic State is literally – as Clavel writes – “in love with death” as the ideal gateway to paradise.

The Old Man from the Mountain.

The novel describes Hassan Ibn Saba as the thinking head—up there in the impregnable eagle's nest of Alamut —who initiates the ' assassins ' into the skill of becoming “the terror of foreign oppressors” in the course of an initiation—esoteric for normal Islamism—which, besides a general and refined formation of mind and body, also includes the use of hashish. The latter after one has conducted oneself as a war hero and before one gains access to the very earthly paradise of the available hoe ris. So that the fedayin —as Bartol describes him, at least—is literally carried into the earthly paradise in a

drugged state. Like in an Oriental fairy tale.

Note: The name ' assassin ' comes from hash user .

Daftary regarding the matter . – The author nowhere mentions Bartol's novel. But in any case, he vehemently emphasizes that the Sunnis and all dissenting Muslims, and in their wake the Christian crusaders , have invented a black image – it must be said: invented – of the fedayin . – Especially a strong disbelief – even in the Prophet and his message – a disbelief that extends to atheism and libertinism. – According to Daftary , who is a specialist on the subject , the use of hashish dates back to 1122, the year in which the Shiite Nizarites in Syria were first called ' hashishjiyya ' , hashish users. In 1183, the Seljuks adopted the name. – What is more: the name was used metaphorically (figuratively) in the sense of 'scum', “unbelieving unscrupulous”. Zo oc, 361.

Note - If Daftary's thesis is correct, then Bartol's novel is merely based on an unreal understanding of Hassan's true system—at least partially.—Something that Clavel also appears not to have realized—at least in his critique, or rather plea.—This implies that the great success of *Alamut* rests partly on an ahistorical premise, for the novel thereby becomes much less 'historical' and much more fictional.

This does not prevent Daftary from admitting that Hassan centered on the selective killing of political opponents in public places following religious and military initiation. And that clearly forms the core of Bartol's novel. In that sense, he is indeed 'historical'. And meaningful for our time.

Certain characteristics of Islam .

Due to lack of space, we limit ourselves to the following:

Dialogue

As for the ecumenical dialogue with Islam (and not the mutual opposition that has existed for centuries): it has barely begun and is proceeding with major problems stemming from claims of absolute authority on both sides, and sometimes also from the assertion that the Quran contains definitive pronouncements regarding Judaism and Christianity that dismiss both religions as outdated stages.

Thus *J. Montenot , dir ., Encyclopédie de la philosophie ,* Librairie Générale Française, 2002, 823/825 (Islam). - We to lay on a pair points out .

Note - *H. von Glasenapp , *De Islam **, The Hague, 1971, 21ff., establishes

that the Prophet indeed received stimuli from Judaism and Christianity but only gradually acquired a true knowledge of both religions: it is impossible for him to have thoroughly studied the Bible itself.

The result: “the numerous misconceptions on the matter ”. – Anyone, therefore, engaging in dialogue on that basis inevitably encounters serious difficulties.

Three types .

D. Sourdél , *L'islam* 1986-14 PUF, 34s., states the following: For the Muslim believer, faith is decisive, so much so that “works” are of secondary importance: whoever sins becomes an outcast but not a damned one. The hypocrite, however, whose good works mask an absent conviction, is not a 'believer'. The term 'unbeliever' encompasses everything that is not Islamic. Although the Jew and the Christian are granted a special status in practice as believing in the Book.

“ O Muslims, believe in Allah, in the Book that He has sent, in the Scriptures that were revealed before. Whoever does not believe in Allah, in His angels, in His books, in those whom He sent, and in the Last Day, is in a completely deviated state.” Thus the *Quran IV* : 135 (11:285).

Feminism

Sourdél , oc, 61: “The woman ought to be treated with justice and respect. As she is subject to a system of separation of property, she retains the dowry. Yet the Quran unequivocally establishes her profound inferiority, since in court her testimony is worth half that of the man. Given the absolute authority of the head of the family, the woman can hardly enjoy the benefits granted to her by the Law unless she asserts herself through her personal qualities and is thus valued and listened to.”

Anyone who gets to know our Muslim families up close here observes, at least every now and then, something of what Sourdél claims.

Note - Cultural diversity has indeed been mentioned above: in Saudi Arabia, the strict separation of the sexes is applied in accordance with the Koran, but in Tunisia, for example, equal rights have been in effect since independence in 1956, and in Turkey, the republic has been secularized since Mustafa Kemal in 1924, with the emancipation of women playing a vital role in modernization.

In Iran, moderate modernization is taking hold: women in rural areas, for example, are gaining ground regarding practical rights . In Indonesia, the constitution guarantees equal rights: the president's daughter, Megawati Sukarnoputri heads the secularized Democratic Party and became president with the consent of the Muslim organizations.

Thus C. Guigon , *Moi, fem me en pays musulman* , in: *L' Historie* , No 270 bis (Octobre 2002), SES, 16/17.

This indicates that planetary evolution, strongly dominated by the West with its increasingly secularized culture, turns out to be stronger than the strict 'faith' in the Book and the Prophet.

This is also noticeable within the Jewish and Christian religions, not to mention the others.

It is a paradox of cultural development that freedom of religion gradually increases as politics and religion become separated and take on the practical form of a secularized society. The emancipation of women is occurring in the same waters.

That's all for a few points.

9.5. The concept of 'God' in the shock of cultures.

The Islamic concept of God.

Sourdel , oc, 35s., summarizes. -- Allah is 'transcendent' (transcending) to such an extent that "every analogy (*note* : partial identity) is excluded". "There is nothing that resembles Him".

Which resembles an apophatic theology, i.e., a discourse about God that asserts its ineffable. - Such a degree of not-knowing is untenable. Also: Muhammad received the revelation via the angel Gabriel, who nevertheless knew much about Allah. - Allah is, of course, eternal. - He is almighty in the sense that "He is not held accountable for what He does".

Note - That strongly resembles the nominalist view which states that all that exists has no being or essence, such that, within that axiomatics, God arbitrarily defines (creates) the being. Also: Sourdel says that Allah's will "une arbitrary will" is. - Allah is unique in the numerical sense: He is unique.

Note - Christianity acknowledges the unity of God's nature but not of the three Persons, Father, Son, Spirit. - So much for the essentials regarding

Allah. Moreover, His significance is already evident from what was said above.

The American Concept of God . - Bibl. st. : H. Mattu, La religion civile américaine est la légitimation fotografie de la liberté , in: Le Temps (Geneva) 13.05.2003, 11.

“In God we Trust” or “God Bless America” expresses a purely 'bourgeois' or 'social' meaning. J.-J. Rousseau (1712/1778), in his *Contrat social* , says: “There exists a purely civil creed. The prince must establish its articles—not as religious dogmas, but as feelings of solidarity.”—All who know what is at stake see it as Rousseau said.

Mattu summarizes .

1. As a generic term, 'God' means the community bond that safeguards all differences regarding race, class, language, religion, etc.

2. Modern rationalist deism is the background that believes in a vague 'deity' who creates, is provident, and distinguishes good from evil.

Mattu : that is precisely the deistic basis of “the axis of evil” in the language of Bush Jr .. Let us ensure that no president will ever invoke Jesus or the Bible.

3. Such a 'god' is the basis of typical American messianism: as a kind of “new Israel,” the 'god' of the USA appropriates the right to serve as a light and guide to all peoples to recommend his "way of life."

Evangelism

President J. Carter already went somewhat down that path, but Bush Jr. clearly carries it out: he openly admits to living an evangelical life—in order to win over the religious right in the USA (some claim). As a result, the USA bathed simultaneously in the traditional bourgeois 'religion' (which ultimately amounts to weaving an aura of sacrality around the American system) and a kind of peculiar Protestantism (B. Cottret).

Conclusion

On both sides, people talk at length about 'God'—both in the USA and in Muslim countries. In both cases, 'God' defines the essence of the culture. Yet in America, something like postmodernist skepticism is encompassed by the bourgeois 'god,' whereas that same postmodernism causes a deathly fear in Islamic circles.

To want to deny that there is a clash of cultures is to deny the fundamental place of civil religion in America and, at the same time, to deny the at least equally fundamental place of Allah in Islam.

Unless one assumes that the majority of people on both sides do not live consistently and prioritize their axioms as an insincere basis. Which, given the intensity of mutual feelings, is to be desired.