

Is Transcendental Psychology Metaphysics?

About the Continuation of the Enlightenment by Other Means

(*Translation of: Ist Transzendente Psychologie Metaphysik*)

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Abstract

Within the scope of a transcendental psychology (Harnack 2011a) the question arises whether introducing an axiom of transcendence for social-scientific reflection and research would not be a step back behind the Enlightenment and its postulate of metaphysical freedom of science. The article in contrast opines that freedom from metaphysics is often implicitly equated with the ideology of a (naïve) materialism, while a non-materialist world view, nevertheless, can very well renounce metaphysics and make at the same time transcendence the axiom of a research program. The thesis is expatiated by the differential meanings of the concepts "religion" and "transcendence" within „religious experience“. Through transcendental experience, so we conclude, transcendence can be embedded in a research program free of metaphysics without loss of specific (spiritual) content.

Keywords: Transcendental psychology, metaphysics, Enlightenment, religious experience, spiritual experience, transcendence

Enlightenment against metaphysics

The medieval and late medieval metaphysics attempted to put on a rational and comprehensible foundation the irrational and incomprehensible, in order to justify and elucidate the one out of the other. Even because the system of metaphysical justification, coming to them from pagan Greeks and Arabs, was exterior to Christian theology, it had such a great importance for the latter (cf. Honnefelder 1988). It allowed transferring theology from a secluded into a referential system. In this it could examine and confirm the cosmic whole, at which it is targeted, in an independent system of thinking. But thereby metaphysics became – as *ancilla theologiae* – again part of the complete whole in which world and thinking knew to be in the good hands of God. The Renaissance with the birth of natural sciences, formulating its own laws, carried out the first rupture with this com-

plete *unus mundus* of the Middle Ages. In this way, a separation was initiated between an intelligible and a transrational universe, but had not yet cut the rope between both. Still the great scientists of this epoch commemorated the effects of the numinous on nature, and even in their works not only as individuals, not only to observe the rules of convention, but out of conviction; even if it is not accidental that just in this epoch the later esotericism blossoms in hermetism for the first time and considers to be necessary newly positioning the neglected side of the inexplicable (cf. Faivre 1996).

Not with Copernicus, Galilee, Kepler (and not even with Newton), but only in the subsequent Enlightenment occurred the radical “disenchantment of the world” (Max Weber) which finally made the numinous background dispensable for scientific research. With the disentanglement of metaphysics from the store of reasonable thinking the world really broke in two. However, this did not lead to the desired destruction of the inconceivable in the light of reason, but to its continued existence only as the unavoidable underbelly of reason, thus opposing its abolition stubbornly, now not being embedded in ratio by metaphysics anymore, but having to submerge into the depth of *genuine* esotericism or into the shallows of pure belief (in the sense of supposing; ecclesiastical-dogmatic like hermetic-occult) as opposed to scientific reason. In intellectual considerations of the “inexplicable” (what, accordingly, should not exist anymore) it is presupposed since then, Enlightenment had “cleared up” with the “superstition” of an otherworldly realm and its inhabitants, like ghosts, angels, and demons. Thus, it had detached the ado of human unreasonableness. But actually this never happened. The otherworldly could never have been abolished. What was abolished was the scientific preoccupation with it under the premise that it was methodically not accessible, not investigatable, and not usable for the rationality, objectivity and technology of modern sciences. However, this premise might have led merely to a methodical exclusion of the other world as a research subject, not to an ontic one. Since the fact that the otherworldly does not disclose itself to the mentioned scientific criteria can for purely logical reasons never prove that it does not exist. But nevertheless, the modern scientists claim that they had reduced it to absurdity, such placing an ontological predicate at the place of a methodical one. Hence, when Juri Gagarin could not discover God in the space (and one could ask, why this statement should be more spectacular than the same by the entomologist, she had not discovered God in the ant-hill), it could simply mean that he has had a wrong perspective.

Today we find ourselves in a situation where Enlightenment led to its dialectic opposite, i.e., to the thoughtless enmeshment in new ideological premises, and thus placed a new mythology (the one of academic nature and rationality) instead of the old one (cf. Horkheimer/Adorno 1988). It seems that the ensnarement of this new myth is already so entrenched in our convictions that we would need a new movement of enlightened verve to escape the implicitness of today’s mental bans. On the position of the old religion the credo to this form of rationality makes sure that the seemingly completely explained world of science became as sacrosanct as before, i.e., when the world was explained by myth. Thus the post-enlightened rationality again lays claim to explain the totality which always was the characteristic of metaphysics. The reduction of all real to the visible, the exclusion of the incomprehensible, absconding from pure natural sciences had to lead to

ideological materialism in all its variations which have their common cause in the Enlightenment's campaign against the invisible and irrational, in the "decrowning" of the Paracelsian tree man whose roots may be firmly in the earth now, however, increasingly dry up, while its branches, once tending to heaven, have been loped more and more.

So the misunderstanding seems to be that this materialism is a coherent result of Enlightenment and not only its dialectic underbelly. Enlightenment, then, is reduced to anti-metaphysics. The other ideal of Enlightenment, i.e., the freedom "to use ones own reason publicly in all its parts" (Kant 1784/1974, 11) and the fight against social suppression by suppression of free thinking, is relinquished to an ideology propagating materialism (according to the theses by Horkheimer/Adorno 1988) on the economic, as well as academic platform: economically by leading the mental faculties of the masses to consumption, and academically as the pretended impossibility to talk rationally beyond materialism. The Berlin philosopher and protagonist of a Jewish Enlightenment, Moses Mendelssohn, has already warned about the abuse of Enlightenment with an aphorism: "The more nobly a thing in its perfection, the more horrible it is in its decay" From which in case of Enlightenment „hard sense, egoism, irreligion and anarchy" (Mendelssohn in 1783, in 1974, 7) would arise; terms which today already have become to us adequate virtues (self-assertiveness, self-interest, agnosticism, unconditional liberty). It is just this dialectic feature of Enlightenment, having led to a new rule above the masses (by the materialist imperative of consumption), to a rule about thought (by the claim of a general explanation model in theoretical materialism), that reveals itself in its reaction to religion qua metaphysics.

Kant asks in the 2nd edition of his Critique of Pure Reason the prefatory question "How is metaphysics possible as a science?" (B 22). And he continues: "The critique of reason finally leads inevitably to science; the dogmatic use of the same, however, without critique to unfunded assertions, to which one can oppose feigned ones as well, consequently to scepticism" (B22 / 23). Here, in a nutshell, emerges the complete subject of the Enlightenment criticism against metaphysics. At the end of his investigation he proposes to dedicate the term "metaphysics" into an enterprise corresponding totally to his own transcendental philosophy. So, however, it becomes clear that the Kantian transcendental philosophy is in this respect completely metaphysics insofar as it is completely based on purely mental processes in which the connection to empiricism demanded by Kant for non-metaphysical thinking has no place. He concedes this privilege solely to a reflection of the mental conditions of thinking itself, while other metaphysics in the sense of a speculative discussion through mental concepts (noumena), turned out impracticable. Noumena are, according to the Platonic tradition and with Kant, those pure ideas which exist beyond the experience (Platon) or uncertainly exist and are empty (according to his well known phrase that concepts are empty without contents; B KRV 75). According to Kant, these pure concepts include the categories (since Aristotle the dimensions of the existing) as well as ideas (in the sense of Plato and beyond), and the ideals, which also include the concept of a God as a mere regulative idea deriving its justification out of a

constitution of moral. On this basis, in his critique of the arguments for God's existence he rejects any attempt to substantiate God objectively.

Thus Kant's thinking fits into the Enlightenment's refusal of (politically abusable) arbitrariness in those metaphysical thoughts, which individual philosophers produce without firm reason. While the metaphysical pretension of a world explanation out of an individual's mind produces invincible difficulties, its abolition leaves an open desideratum, according to Jürgen Habermas (1992). This desideratum is a perspective at the totality of the existing and existence (which Horkheimer/Adorno have already understood as the specific task of metaphysics) in which philosophical thinking could assert itself as an authentic perspective compared with the sciences and fulfils, as a unifying discipline, the longing for a cohesive world view and the union of all insular knowledge. Hence, Habermas' course goes beyond his own answer – the interactional constitution of verity in a reasonable discourse – conceding the last word in his article to religion: just religion (as the only intellectual force remaining from pre-enlightened times) is able to facilitate a normalising handling of the exceptional in everyday life, as long as its inspiring language opposes any translation into reasonable discourses and hence into philosophy.

In spite of this appreciative characterisation of theology as metaphysics with the function of giving meaning, the criticism of Enlightenment, according to which theological metaphysics were untenable, left its mark on the theologians. The realization that theological metaphysics would produce empty thoughts without clear contents, nullified the whole construction of a reflexive explanation of religion and led to a gradual retreat of theoretical theology from reality, to a reduction on the church (“extra ecclesiam nulla salus” in Catholicism) or the Bible (“sola scriptura” in Protestantism) as a refuge ungroundable and undestroyable by ratio. Thus theology renounced the claim to be the mistress of sciences, on the position, not even to be such because it positioned itself in the offside, lacking any explanatory basis. Accordingly the character of theology as a real science is questioned by Heinrich Scholz (cf. Scholz 1971) because it does not even conform to the basic demands of a science including the following postulates: the *sentence postulate* according to which science expresses premises which refer to something (i.e., are referential). The *coherence postulate* assumes that these premises must establish a system free of contradiction in itself; as well as the *testability postulate* according to which it must be at least possible in principle to test the statements. According to Scholz these postulates are not complied with Christian theology and thus refer theology back to the area of metaphysics as pure speculation. To escape from this conclusion by considering theology not as a system of referential propositions but as the task of mere interpretation of once revealed (biblical) knowledge, thus immunising it in the tradition of Karl Barth, seems on the one hand dishonest, contradicts to a large extent the essence of the Christian message (cf. Hick 1973) and disentangles theology from life-worldly relevance.

But is it justifiable to claim that the religious has to be seen as metaphysics and thereby resists any scientific approach? Kant as well as theology presupposes that the concept of God naturally belongs exclusively to the world of thinking, thus being a pure noumenon. On account of this premise Kant's conclusion would be justified to exclude transcendence (or “God”) as a metaphysical concept from the consideration of a pur-

poseful philosophy. However, a concept is metaphysical not by itself, but by its use. If we do not want to fall back behind Kant, we should see whether there are really just these two ways for using the concept of God: to constitute a mere belief in expressive phrases (called „regulative idea“ with Kant) or erroneously pretend to use it rationally and propositionally by the failed “objectification” in the traditional “proofs” of God’s existence.

Besides, it applies to every mental concept, not only to the concept of God, that it does not own empirical reality, just because we can use it consistently. This was already firmly pointed out by Wittgenstein. Though every concept is more than an individual invention and more than a mere name, because it executes its own effects in the social realm (e.g., as a regulative idea), and so it becomes independent and creates its own reality. However, this does not mean that the concept possesses a reality beyond the social space – like in the way of Anselm of Canterbury’s argument for the existence of God out of the necessary existence of a perfect concept. The concept of a God is for us primarily nothing else than a mental formation which is in correspondence with an object of the empirical world. And this fabricated character persists as long as we consider “God” as an object of our communication and not as an immediate impression of our experience (see below).

According to the minimal requirements of Scholz for scientific systems, we would have to use the concept of God (or its more confessionally neutral counterparts like “transcendence”) in a way which would enable us to formulate phrases with reference to the real world being consistent among each other and being accessible to external test criteria. Finally, there would be no other possibility but to understand “God / transcendence” not as noumenal, but as empirically founded concept. Or in other words: The bridging between the concept of God and the postmetaphysical science is only possible if this concept is not founded in old metaphysics, but becomes part of “meta-physics” based on the constitution of the physical but aiming at the exceeding in a way which connects both in a coherent structure.

Transcendence as referential (inferential) concept

Kant has confirmed the ancient and persisting doubts about the directness or even direct correctness of perception because all perception is impregnated by the basic categories of the mind. In addition, modern psychology of perception could confirm that all sensation proceeds on the background and by the filter of cognition, by patterns according to the laws of *Gestalt* and after reshaping by other biological and psychological mechanisms and thus does not at all deliver a direct simulacrum of the environment (cf. Gregory 2004). Accordingly, to speak of a pure perception we can reject as obsolete. Because this principle owns validity for every perceptual process it can be taken as an anthropological premise and does not differentiate between noumenal concepts and phenomenal circumstances, but proves merely their basic entanglement.

On the other side, concepts are not the same as the facts to which they refer but their fabricated cognitive counterparts. Concepts differ in the magnitude in which they refer to

phenomenal facts. A concept like “dog” owns a different relation of correspondence with a phenomenon of the external or internal perception as the concept “intelligence” or the concept “hermeneutics”. While the reported object of “dog” can be experienced with all external senses, no object can be assigned to the concept “intelligence”, but only the abstraction of an observation – namely the supposed potential of an individual to solve problems. For Frege (1893) the first is named a predicate of the first, the latter of the second order. Predicates of the second order have only predicates of the first order as their subject (which Frege calls “argument”). This means, it is impossible to say: “This object there is an intelligence”, but merely „This solution of the problem [a concept of the first order] indicates intelligence“. Therefore, the concepts “intelligence” and “hermeneutics” would be on the same logical level. However, a considerable difference exists between them if one considers their levels of abstraction. While “intelligence” can be concluded from indications in a sensual observation, this does not apply to “hermeneutics”. The concept “hermeneutics” can be understood only through other concepts which themselves form predicates of the second order, because it can not even be traced back to any sensory perception (unless in improper uses like „This person is studying hermeneutics“, in which, however, nothing is stated about the concept itself). In this respect “hermeneutics” already belongs to a third conceptual abstraction order. We could also say that the concept “hermeneutics” is not derived at all from sensory perception, but is constructed by the mind to signify circumstances which are formed by the constellation of other mental concepts. Kant calls such a concept to whose „idea no sensation is added” (KRV B74) a “pure concept” or noumenon. On the other hand, we want to call the concept “intelligence” an *inferential* concept which is settled on the intermediate stage between perception and pure abstraction.¹

Because of the certainty, deriving from perceptual psychology, that all perception is subjected to certain parameters in the mind of the perceiving person, we must ask ourselves whether there is at all a perception in normal life (differently than perhaps in meditation) without concepts of the first or even second abstraction order. According to the Gestalt laws we even *invent* from a certain distribution of lines or points certain primary perceptive experiences (like the depth of an object, its size compared to other objects or even the whole shape, although no lines can be seen between points) because this corresponds to the equipment of our mind. We seem not only to recognise a simple concept like “dog” in a few lines, but to perceive also quasi-sensually such inferential concepts like “rage” in a downwards crooked line with two points below it. That is because of the permanent conceptual admixture of our sensations.

But what is about concepts like God or transcendence: Can we derive them from our perception? If we ask this question, we see that our answer very much depends on the use of these concepts. A theologian like Wolfhart Pannenberg (and likely Karl Rahner) describes the human being with the following words: “The issue of his determination does not let him come to rest at preliminary answers and propels him further. This

¹ Other characteristics of inferential concepts are treated in the here added next essay under the term “construct” (see. Harnack 2011b).

infinite drive aims beyond everything what occurs to him in the world, and at God. This is why openness towards immanence in the core means openness towards God" (Pannenberg, 1985, 40). If we understand God here as the cipher of an abstract anthropological consideration, which is the presumable meaning of this passage, the concept "God" loses the direct relation to phenomenal reality. It is simply impossible to observe any arbitrary person and would have to find in her after application of sufficiently profound methods a natural orientation towards God. The assertion in its generality would not be valid. Hence, it can only be expressed validly if it refrains from regarding the concrete person and grounds on an abstracted *ideal type* of human being. However, we could hardly say that this concept is based on phenomena.

In contrast, let us take a look at the following statement of an anonymous woman who is seeking in quiet prayer for re-orientation after the loss of her job: "I was able to stand back from it and clearly place the whole situation before God committing the future entirely to Him. Plans took shape and seemed entirely right and appropriate and with them was given the confidence that I should be helped through any difficulties that might arise. This peace and strength and support from this encounter has never left me..." (Hardy 1979, 52). In this case a person seems to speak of God in a quite different way than Pannenberg does. Here the report is in first person, the incident is phenomenal inasmuch as it corresponds to the immediate experience of the person, even if the phenomenal content is internal, not external. The person *experiences* that her search for a new task in life can be answered, while she focuses on God, thus finding rest and fulfillment. In her statement God is not meant as a noumenal concept, but as an object of the internal action of „placing the situation before him" and as a cause of the subsequent experience of internal certainty and rest. For this person the statement: "God has provided me with rest" is a phrase in which God stands for the circumstances which represent prayer and its result, thus one could also say: „God here is synonymous with the connection between prayer and rest“.

This is obviously still not an observational fact, but rather a concept which is used in a direct phenomenal reference. Though we can call into question whether a concept really represents what it seems to represent, but the irreconcilable gap between the contents assigned to a concept by the speaker, and any form of reality to a different extent concerns all concepts. Thus it is also not sure, whether two people have the same understanding of a "dog", whether they are mistaken by the classification of "dog" to a barking being or whether the mental idea or even perception of a "dog" at all corresponds to any external object. The same applies to "intelligence" and "God", in the sense explained above, to a major degree. But they own an abstraction order quite comparable to each other: They are derived from the phenomenal perception, thus inferential abstractions, while the God in Pannenberg's phrase demonstrates an *indirect* abstraction derived *from abstractions* of phenomena and thus is a noumenon. For being clear, while using the word "God" in the first sense we will apply the term "transcendence". But before we can rely on a thereby located concept of transcendence, we must understand the epistemic

status of what surrounds it and on what it is founded, i.e. the spiritual experience of an individual.

Religious experience as perception of the religious object?

All religions, including Christianity, are based on religious experiences of individuals and on continuations of these individual experiences in the experiences and reflections of other individuals and collectives. All interpretative statements about the divine are secondary and later than the experiences. Now let us take a look at the Bible in order to gain a better understanding of this. Here we see that the individual experience of the great leaders and the collective experience of the forefathers of the people establish the antecedent sources, while the analysis which creates a concept, a defined image of the divine out of experience comes later. While Abraham and Moses experience God directly and cast the experienced into moulds, the institutions created by them survive and become the object of reflection of later Pentateuchian authors, of priests and Talmud commentators. While Jesus of Nazareth experiences God directly, the apostles at least directly experience the divine in him, the Holy Spirit and the miraculous, and lay the groundwork for later constructors of the new religion. In this sense the experience of transcendence stands at the beginning of all religion. And in this sense we leave by no means the ground of occidental religious theory and theology if we consider God as a concept which can become a part of a referential premise including the attributability of logical values. The assertion of supernatural truth in this one religion, immunising against every criticism and appearing rightly suspicious to post-Enlightened thinking, originates from purporting that some of such experiences and some of their reflections (for example, those in the Bible or the Koran) are distinguished by greater holiness from all the others. Nevertheless, regarding the epistemic content of religious experience interesting here, a difference between canonised and contemporary mysticism does not exist.

The epistemological problem now assigned to us contains two components, namely the issue of the concept of the transcendent *in the experience* and secondly that of the status of the experience. We could also say that the first academic point of discussion concerns the question whether in the statement „Person A has a religious experience“ two premises are included („A has an experience (E)“ and „The experience (E) is religious (R)“), or if („A has a [religious experience] (Re)) is valid, in which „religious experience“ forms either an independent category of experience in comparison to other experiences or on the contrary is a perception like any in which the object and the perception are not naturally separated. Thus Friedrich Schleiermacher (1799/2002) or William James (1902/1997) argue, religious experience was an incident in which the religious would be given in the experience. Friedrich Schleiermacher speaks of the emotion of absolute („schlechthiniger“) dependence towards God as a direct emotional impression of God, thus as an identifiable special emotion. William James with the expression “no-etic quality” underlines the immediate certainty of the spiritual source of mystic experience. In both conceptions “no stamp can be slipped” between the spiritual part of the

experience and the experience itself. However, critics like Wayne Proudfoot (1985) insist on the fact that these may possibly be experiences, however, the religious quality of the experience was an attribute added by the experiencing subject.

Religious philosopher William Alston (1991) has contradicted this position decidedly. According to him religious experience is a phenomenal perception in a not basically distinguished manner compared with other perceptions. Thus he declares himself in favour of phenomenalism which accentuates the experience directly given to the subject compared with a cognitive construction of the experience. However, to be able to prove that the object of this experience is really the theistic God on whom Alston refers primarily, he can only declare as *a religious* experience what *is interpreted* by the experienter in a manner which corresponds to a theistic confession's concept of God. With this he gets tangled in contradictions which he tries to save rhetorically by a complex mental construction. It simply does not seem to be the case that the Christian God can be perceived directly in any sense: He – as an actually not object-like being – is identifiable just by subsequent interpretations of a primary (perceptual) experience. Hence, for a convinced atheist, experiencing one night an overwhelming feeling of being accepted, of unconditional love and being in the good hands of the cosmos, it is also a transcendental experience whose noetic quality (James) cannot be captured completely by a materialist interpretation, in the same way as for a Christian or Muslim. What he experiences, however, is above all the emotion of something different (not inherent in him), but not a concept like “God” which he (the atheist) rejects.

Besides, somebody who reports the immediate impression of the presence of God seems to refer to two propositions: Firstly the descriptive statement “I feel *something*” and secondly the attribution “I hold this sensation for God”. This would mean that “God” apparently is a conceptual, not a sensory date. “God” is a complicated concept, which fills whole libraries and which *explains* the primary experience. Therefore, Alston's attempt seems to be foredoomed, because he tries to find a *certain* concept in a perception, i.e., that of the Christian God. Nevertheless, the concept of God is a concept on – as we have called it – the third order of abstraction, thus a pure concept which can be captured as such only by means of other abstractions. While the perception of a pure concept is, however, a contradiction in terms, a concept at the second abstraction level can be experienced *indirectly*, in so far as we *can deduce* it *directly* from sensory data. That is what the transcendental experience is like, as we have seen. Accordingly, perception can occur in such a way that its most obvious and spontaneous interpretation contains the characteristics of a *transcendental experience*.

Because perception is never free from the admixture of “experiencing *as*” something, the theologian John Hick (1973) has suggested to understand all religious experience as real perception in which, however, the interpretation is already included (like everywhere else; as opposed to Alston's immediate perception, Hick proposes an indirect perception – and not a construction, too – in the religious experience). Because of the decisive psychological findings we now should join this proposal and distinguish between experiences on the level of a perception always charged with primary interpreta-

tion (the *experiencing as* of Hick) on the one hand and such experiences on a higher abstraction order which's interpretations follow secondarily by the attribution of a concept. Because only these correspond to sensory perception, the primary interpretation given to a perception can refer only to concepts of the first and second abstraction order. Inferential concepts (such of a second order, like intelligence) can be contained in the primary interpretation because they are also part of the primary perceptive Gestalt, as mentioned above. With the concept "transcendence" we mean accordingly, as opposed to the theological "God", only just this feeling of not-being-immanent of the experience which does not affirm at the same time any concept of a higher abstraction order.² Consequently transcendence seems suitable (although being part of an *indirect perception*) to be a *direct experience*.

Not only in case of the formless God, even in cases where an object-like vis-à-vis is given, a *religious* interpretation inevitably grounds in a process subsequent to the immediate perception (because religion is always on the third abstraction order), as the good example of apparitions of Saint Mary shows. For example, Bernadette Soubirous saw a lady dressed in white in the grotto of Lourdes so clearly as if it were another person, but she did not "see" the Virgin Mary. The lady being identified as such (according to the spirit of the times: the dogma of the Immaculate Conception had been announced only four years before) by priests and other locals (Carroll in 1985). Though Alston was right when he marked Soubirous' description as a reproduction of immediate perception, however, the *religious* content of her experience was a later added interpretation. Nevertheless, the *transcendental* content (pointing above the worldly), was already given in the perception when Bernadette Soubirous could be subjectively sure of having experienced something unusual *to her*. Its retroactive psychological interpretation (e.g., as an imaginative satisfaction of unconscious wishes, Carroll 1985) is – without evaluating the respective arguments here – also just one of many possible ex post explanations. The interpretation as a religious revelation is not less well possible per se.

But now it becomes clear that a double differentiation is necessary: Even if we admit that every spiritual experience must be conveyed conceptually, we may not take all (transcendental) experience for *products* of the interpretation of the experiencing subject, what they not necessarily are. On the other hand, Schleiermacher's emotion of absolute dependence and the Jamesian independent noetic quality of religious experiences really tend to the opposite generalisation and state that *all* spiritual experiences are of immediate impressiveness. Hence, the divine will be given directly in them. It is important, however, to recognise that the interpretative element in an immediate impression can retreat so much to the background that a pure primary interpretation, a pure "experiencing as" can result, without that being the case necessarily in every spiritual experience. Where

² We use the concept "transcendence" here according to the definition as it was given elsewhere (cf., e.g., Harnack 2011a). Besides, the *concept* is vital, not the *word*. Thus a statement like the one cited in the previous segment, in which a person speaks of her experience of *God*, can also refer to *transcendence* as we mean it here, while a theologian may speak of *transcendence* and explicate with this the Christian concept of *God* alone.

(like in some forms of deep meditation) even the intentional character (Husserl) of every phenomenon, i.e., the consciousness *of* some-thing, is annihilated, where the mystic experience becomes ineffable (disrupting the usual psychological processes), then even the *perception-as*, the primary interpretation, may be omitted and the experience falls in its own category as a psychological and epistemic singularity.

Transcendental experience in the competition of explanations

Proudfoot (1985) rightly attacks immunisation strategies with which proreligiously oriented authors try, according to him, to avoid the access of other fields of knowledge: Mircea Eliade's (1966) demand to search the meaning of religious phenomena only within the religious context; Cantwell Smith's (1976) view, statements about religions should be written in such a way that a member of the respective religion can approve them; and D. Z. Phillips' (1976) Wittgensteinian thesis, that religious language was not referential (i.e., referring to something), but purely expressive (with the purpose in itself), that it establishes its own "linguistic game" which carries its meaning in itself and is deprived of its intrinsic value by the reduction to nonreligious explanative patterns. The difficulty, indicated by Proudfoot here, nevertheless, lies only in the *categorical* exclusion of nonreligious hypotheses for religious objects. It is certainly essential for science that hypotheses for explaining a phenomenon need to correspond neither with the explanation of the experiencing subject nor with the explanation of that cultural field to which the subject assigns the phenomenon (e.g., religion). However, while an enjoyment of art can be studied legitimately in view of the neural reactions of probands, it can be called into question whether the explanation of a foreign field explains as many aspects of the phenomenon as the explanations which come from the respective field (e.g., art theory) itself.

Even if a field of knowledge is not necessarily able to state more about an object falling by convention into its terrain than a foreign one, it seems extremely problematic if a foreign field of knowledge raises the claim to explain the phenomenon *completely* and in the *only correct manner*. Here the concept of reductionism is correctly applicable, while Proudfoot rejects it for defending the application of nonreligious explanations on religiously connoted experiences. This defence is justified if enrichment by multiple perspectives on an object can be achieved. Nevertheless, many such alternative explanations for transcendental phenomena are presented not as alternatives, but as exclusive truths. (This was absolutely the case with Sigmund Freud and his school and, in our time, for example, with Richard Dawkins, 2006). In this case it really is a *reduction* of spiritual experience exclusively to non-spiritual issues and not an amplification of explanative perspectives. If psychoanalysis explains artistic creating by libidinous sublimation, it does not destroy automatically the whole concept of "art". However, by totally tracing back an experience connoted by the subject as a spiritual one to a non-spiritual reality, the elimination of transcendence and thus spirituality is often included. Hence, the total reduction

becomes a totalitarian one aiming at the destruction of the complete foreign semantic field.

Now taking into account all discussed difficulties the spiritual in the spiritual experience seems to differ in no way from the aesthetic in the aesthetic experience or from love in the experience of love. A specific difference arises merely if we ask whether such a spiritual experience can be called “religious” or rather whether it must be called “transcendental”. The “religious experience” according to our definition seems to be nothing but nonsense because it refers to an object which belongs to the third abstraction order and can impossibly be given in an direct experience, while transcendence as the relation of a person to something exceeding her can be given in an experience in exactly the same way like the feeling of love or aesthetic pleasure. Schleiermacher and James also seem to have had just this directness of an experience very clearly in mind, both explicitly differentiating their concepts from the concept of a God being predefined in religious concepts.

But if we want to accept that transcendental experiences own the same status as other experiences which contain concepts of the second abstraction order, the question arises again whether these are experiences at all, i.e., regarding its epistemic status. An experience of love is only a personal experience and not identical with the phenomenal content of an external perception like an embrace. Phenomena being that what appears to a person form generally (we say with the phenomenologists William James and Edmund Husserl) the only valid elements of reality, regardless of whether they find their origin outside or within the person. For the here challenged epistemology the origin of the experience is not as problematic as the question if there is something corresponding to it in the outer world (while it poses a problem for methodology having to start from observational propositions in which deceit or deliberately produced imaginations cannot be separated externally from a – in comparison – more *receiving* experience). However, this is something which regards the complete history of philosophy since Aristotle’s remark: “What concerns the asserted truth of all *phainomena*, it has to be answered that not all *phainomena* are true” (Aristotle *Metaphysics*, 1010b). The principal issue of the existence of external objects still remains unsolved by an empirically based philosophy. Therefore however, it belongs to metaphysics, which will be ignored here. But beyond fundamental epistemological debates, we can find a pragmatic (or in the Jamesian sense pragmatistic) criterion which facilitates the differentiation between an object of perception originating not in the (production of a) person qua personality – and therefore not even qualifiable as a real “experience” – and one from outside her being-as-it-is – and in so far as a correct one. That is not identical with the problem of external or internal origin of an experiential object or its truth.

Since we find this criterion in the fact that the term “person” is nothing else but the being of an individual given at one moment in contrast to the otherness of something not belonging to him/her. In the simplest case we see this in the temporary prophet who is able to correctly predict an event by virtue of a dream. Another example might be the woman cited above who finds to a completely changed perspective and a new coping for her life due to a deep prayer. Hence, the occasion (prayer) as well as the effect seems to

be psychologically incommensurable. Even taking into account all possible depth-psychological or autosuggestive explanations, it seems to be justifiable to talk *phenomenally* and impartially of an exceeding of the possibilities being inherent in that woman *before* the prayer compared to her *subsequent* mental state. In so far as no objective influence has worked on her, it is not clear whether that what caused this change of states was external to her *body*. Nevertheless, for her psyche, it was experientially external and at the same time “real” in terms of an effect not resulting from her previous state of being, but from an agent foreign to this.

We must admit that the question of the phenomenal quality of transcendental experiences seems answerable only in the singular case. But there it can be answered very well. But can we also answer in singular cases the correctness of the object in the sense whether the assertion “Anna sees Christ in her bedroom” *is true*? Therefore we must at first distinguish two cases (whose practical distinctiveness is given by the application of a phenomenological analysis following the phenomenological reduction of Husserl): (1) Anna owns an immediate, unsensuous evidence of the presence of Christ. In this case there is not an appearance of something which is interpreted by Anna as Christ, but an immediate evidential experience which is stated by her. Furthermore, the question of truth is pragmatically pointless as it is analogously in the sentence “I know that I love him”, where the request: “Can you prove this?” remains insignificant for the person’s real situation. (2) Anna *sees* a man’s shape and *recognises* Christ in this. In this case the concept “Christ” in the way of a predicate of first (or second) abstraction order is attributed to the appearance. Now it makes sense to ask whether the interpretation corresponds to the object. Its reply can be attempted (as elsewhere indicated; cf. Harnack 2011a, b) under one of both premises that transcendence is included as an explanative principle (“transcendence axiom”) or remains impossible (materialistic paradigm). Nevertheless, both ways stand open – in contrast to an “immunisation” of either transcendence or materialism (reductionist immunisation) –, but *both* need their own justification.

But if we are still not sure whether Anna really experiences transcendence in the transcendental experience or not, we get caught into a circular argument just by the question itself (what is further founded in Harnack 2011b). Because we cannot put into question the *external reality* of a concept of the second order, but only its *usefulness* for describing our perception. In other words: The differentiation of transcendence and transcendental experience is pointless. To us transcendence is comprehensible in the transcendental function only, being the subjective experience of the transcendent in us, because the human being to us is the only measure and medium for transcendence. Even if we could clean the person as an instrument from all personal – from his *persona* resulting – projections³ so far that s/he is able to perceive transcendence purely, the transcendental experience would still be filtered by the neural equipment of the person and would thus be limited. So we get to that radical empiricism, which William James takes

³ Concerning this, we want to remind, beside the phenomenological method, of the Christian *via purgativa* and its result in the *unio* or the Buddhist overcoming Ego-attachment.

as a basis for the transcendence concept for whom just the religious can be no field of metaphysical speculation because world does not take place beyond the externally or internally experienced.

Transcendence in the sense of experienceability of the other, i.e., the numinous, appears in ways which establish a continuum, reaching out hierarchically (or in several dimensions hierarchical in themselves) upwards for more transcendence: In every spiritual practise in which the individual connects to the transcendent, in prayer, but still more in internal, quiet attention, we transcend the material level. In *meditatio* (as opposed to the popular term “meditation” in the western tradition meaning the rather discursive consideration of a spiritual object) and *contemplatio* (according to the same, i.e., the wordless absorption) farther experience is collected which achieves by no means its hierarchical peak in the unusual experiences, where it particularly attracts attention. Therefore, for investigating spiritual experiences we need a broad spectrum from the real miraculous to the very gentle experience of the numinous in quiet prayer, and from simple prayers to the adventures of the far advanced saints and spiritual virtuosi. We must examine the latter to find out what transcendence itself is, to see what is possible for the transcendence dimension of the human beings. This constitutes the difference between the investigation of the transcendental dimension of mankind and conventional sociology or psychology of religion: Because the first is not about a description of the religious models of common behaviour, but looks at the core of spirituality, as it presents itself nowhere with greater clarity but within the spiritual virtuosi. That is the only reason why the statements and experiences of persons directly in connection with the divine in the Old as well as the New Testament have achieved special attention.

Meta-physics of the transcendental experience

In response to the post-Enlightenment’s religious criticism the theologian, Heinz Zahrnt, writes: “Christians own no privileges of knowledge and can appeal to no authority out of the reach of human judgment. It is also not enough the assertion that religious statements are covered by own experiences, consequently by existence. Rather Christians are obliged to prove the general intersubjective validity of their religious experiences” (Zahrnt 1980, 115). Perhaps Zahrnt wants to refer to the same what William James characterised as the fruit of the religious experience for the Whole and for the interpersonal sphere, but it also includes another consideration. To be relevant, the evidence for the interpretation “transcendence” needs to be multiple: At the outset – as we have said –, there is the direct subjective experience of the experiencing person, but this can unfold more explanatory power, than foreign fields of knowledge can, in a shared intersubjective reconstruction of his/her perception of reality. Then, transcendence (like the regulative idea of Kant or as in the concepts of Pannenberg and Rahner) becomes an active factor in the recognition of a person of him/herself and his/her interaction with the world. But, finally, transcendence is also a concept which shows its importance by means of the intersubjective correspondence of different people’s experiences. Thus, McClenon (1994) indicates

by diachronous and synchronous cultural comparisons that the variety of transcendental experiences shows intersubjective patterns, which cannot be explained by cultural transmission, lines only. Rather, spiritual experience seems to be a part of the basic human equipment. Thus starting with transcendental experience, the possibility to formulate a research program in connection with the post-Enlightenment sciences opens up. Together with intersubjectivity in comparison to mere subjectivity, it can claim to possess a higher evaluated provability measure for observational sentences. This leads to the following answer of the question if it would be possible to think transcendence within the scope of a post-Enlightenment paradigm:

If post-Enlightenment science as well as today's society had really applied to themselves the principles of Enlightenment, to which it appeals, it would have to unmask its own restriction on the materialist ideology as a pre-Enlightened mental ban. However, the methodological exclusion of an otherworldly reality as an object of scientific research is untenable beyond this materialist paradigm. By using the right conditions, science can investigate what reaches beyond the sensually discernible part of the world by means of the consequences of this other reality. The numinous extends into the worldly by leaving signs and indications, and even more: it leaves inevitably remarkable mysteries. Consequently, every rational and at the same time mentally open viewer must get in the pious amazement caused by the real experience of transcendence. However, it is significant in this regard to avoid the cognitional top-down-process which makes us believe we knew already everything about the world, which surrounds us, and thus provides for the fact that every phenomenon is automatically classified in a mental category, and is coloured by secondary interpretative construction, before it could be captured at all. Therefore it will be helpful to use a phenomenology against it, which devotes itself to the extraction of the essence of experiential contents, as it was already taught by Husserl and was transferred by others into practicable psychological methodology. In pure phenomenological awareness (like in the Buddhist practise of mindfulness) first and foremost reveals the fact that we cannot explain every phenomenon in a life-worldly relevant way with today's rash declaration as superstition or fantasy.

As far as religion comprehends itself (like it often still does) as an advocate of metaphysical theory, it will be struck by the dictum of Enlightenment. On the other hand, spirituality and mysticism as transcendental experience avoid this, because transcendental experience does not rest on a metaphysical foundation, but on an empirical one. The methodology necessary in addition will be reported in the following contribution (Harnack 2011b). The (post-) Enlightenment criticism of metaphysics may have its justification, as long as it refers to certain institutional forms of religion. Religious experience, nevertheless, as long as it is only reflected and perpetuated in religion, would be nothing else than the free discourse about what people experience.

However, to apply the principles of Enlightenment to itself means that the person is not deprived of his own abilities, but is enabled to comprehend not only with his intellect but with the fullness of his human existence. This also includes comprehending his or her dimension of transcendence. Enlightenment, always having turned against irrational

dogmas of superstition residing in the fog of the inscrutable and against the power structures and mental bans of totalitarian institutions, must define its objects any times anew. If these in 18th century were the church and metaphysics, in the 20th century they were the excesses of totalitarian states, totalitarian capitalism and the stultification of the masses by consumption and pretended liberties (cf. Horkheimer/Adorno). And still at the beginning of 21st century it is the slavery of the person by the doctrinal intolerance of the philosophical and life-worldly materialism which moves him into a position of self-inflicted immaturity. In this century Enlightenment, being the movement which wants to promote the highest cognitive and developmental potentials of mankind, must allow the illumination by spiritual *enlightenment* denigrated by materialism as a pure chimera.

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⁴ Being simply a translation from the German text, some literature is indicated in German, even if it exists in English or is a translation from an English text.

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