



## Review

# Edmund Husserl: to think God, believing in God

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Ales Bello, A. (2005). *Edmund Husserl: pensare Dio, credere in Dio*. Padova: Edizioni Messaggero (Col. Tracce del sacro nella cultura contemporanea; 32).

"Husserl's phenomenology presents itself as a theoretical research, which poses itself in and out of the western philosophy" (p.11) (1), as Angela Ales Bello affirms, and where he introduces his philosophy into the western philosophy there he criticizes it because it has not be faithful to the first Greek philosophers, because it is, according to the author, the radical point of view in reflection over the theoretical significance of the reality.

Ales Bello in the present book, as also its title shows it, indicates two ways of comprehending what God is; i.e. by "reasoning" and by "faith" and not only the shift from the natural attitude is delineated but she also explains how to change one's attitude in order to reach profound significance of the "things in themselves" by going through all the theoretical, practical and cultural stratifications which characterize human beings in their attempt to orient themselves in the world. In this manner the present book is divided into two parts: in the first part the author explains the phenomenological method which helps us to reach the sphere of *Erlebnisse* (living-experiences) through the phenomenological reduction delineating the eidetic and transcendental spheres and how through phenomenology we reach also a new way of understanding anthropology. Ales Bello's reading of phenomenology helps us to see the "five ways of reaching God" as does St. Thomas Aquinas as well, even though they are not the same.

Firstly it is necessary to explain Husserl's so called "atheistic" philosophical approach: in the phenomenological reduction we apply the suspension of any judgment, even that one regarding God. Parenthesizing, however, is not elimination of the content of the parenthesis and the intention to this process of suspension of any judgment is, first of all, to clarify the pure consciousness with its living-experiences in order to reach the things in themselves. In this particular case, our attempt is to consider the consciousness objectively. If it is examined in itself, even if it is related to the "reduced-consciousness", and not in connection with the living-experiences, it is transcendent, at the same time the second transcendence manifests itself evidently in the form of the surrounding world but still there is a third transcendence which one can know in a completely different manner and that is the transcendence of God. Reading through the living-experiences, in a phenomenological reflection, we realize that some of them correspond to the articulations of the "factual connections which have an order conformed to the characteristic rules" and in this manner we realize that it is possible to delineate the exact natural laws because the world has a rational structure and this rationality is teleological, as St. Thomas of Aquin said, even if Husserl does not quote him. The absolute point of view for the human beings is that of the stream of *Erlebnisse* because it regards our knowledge of the reality, interior and exterior, and its absoluteness. In this manner we understand that consciousness is the registration of the living-experiences of what manifests itself and moves us to search for its meaning. All what is registered, immanently moves us towards a transcendence of living being, which is different from the rest of the types of transcendences, and on its turn it is on an existential profile and not only cognitive from the rest of the reality. In this way the "atheistic" way of Husserl's phenomenologico-philosophical method is



not to negate the existence of God but to take into consideration as main field of research pure consciousness, in itself, which is also open towards God who is a crucial point of reflection and cannot be left aside.

Secondly the subjective way towards God is well connected with St. Anselm and St. Augustine's thought and as Augustine affirms that human subjectivity intuitions the presence of God in its soul Husserl also, through reduction, just like Anselm, who eliminates all what can disturb or distract to come back to oneself, makes a regressive move towards the subjectivity because on the transparent sheet of consciousness it is registered all what is contained in the human subjectivity.

Thirdly the inter-subjective way of reaching God in Husserl's analysis is based on the rethinking the anthropological theme where the phenomenologist after having delineated the physical, psychical and spiritual dimensions of the human subjectivity does not remain ensnared in solipsism but through *Einfühlung* (Empathy/Empathy), which is becoming conscious of the living experiences of the other, explains how the human being is in relationship with other human beings and can know what the others are living and feeling. Through a reflection over this same act of empathy Husserl requires about the knowledge of God who neither does need empathy to know nor knows as much as a human being can know of the others but has directly, without any mediation, an absolute knowledge of all and this way in Leibniz's terminology it is *Monad Somma*. Husserl reconsiders Leibniz's reflections and affirms that the monads have "windows". This phenomenological reflection over the general structure of human subjectivity, when Husserl affirms that " the monad in its general structure is not easy to be known", shows the interior dissatisfaction of the father of phenomenology which is result of the reality that human soul (psychic & spiritual) is i.e., profound of the profundity. So we become conscious of an "I" as a monad which has its individuality and the way in which Husserl is entering into the passive sphere of the human subjectivity introduces us to further developments of what an "I" is.

Fourthly the way to reach God is the hyletic moment which is result of the evidence posed by the duplicity between the noetic intentional and the hyletic (material) moments. It is all a question of knowledge obtained hyletically and noetically and as Husserl affirms, all knowledge of a human being in a certain sense is attached with his body through a hyletic base. It is very important to delineate a distinction between the autonomy of the spiritual moment in respect to the material through an example of perception i.e., neither the affective perception of the form of touching a thing is not place in the finger nor the thought is intuitively placed in someone's head and, in Ales Bello's words, one can say that the attractive force of the hyletic replacement makes one concentrate on one's own body where the term hyletic is not to indicate the material in the traditional sense but a new form of materiality which has been already proposed by Husserl in *Ideen I* in § 85 (Husserl, 1913/2002). The hyletic sphere involves in itself the affective and impulsive levels which are at the base of the noetic reconsideration. Through the analysis of the stratification of the human acts Husserl finds in them a "blind" and "organic" entelechy which acts at impulsive level, it becomes explicit at a voluntary level, becoming, in this manner, conscious intentionality. In this way, according to Ales Bello, which takes us to God is quite original and is mainly based on the theme of "finality" which perceived as the main and profound structure of all the reality. It is same like the fifth way of St. Thomas Aquinas with a specific context because one does not say that all the things have an end but one analyzes singularly the parts of the stratification of the reality through an analyses of the stratification of the human beings so that one can reach the sense of all what is included in them. So one discovers the sense and end, the formal and the final cause of the things i.e., their teleology which is "form of all the forms" which have a sense so one cannot avoid attributing the origin of this sense to God who is "principal of all the things".

Fifthly the way to reach God is ethics because the teleological developments of Husserl's thought include in itself together with natural and cultural reality also the moral one where he introduces a logic of real values which find their reference in



human beings and in fact in this way one can question about those persons for whom the ethical values mean something. In the years 1918-1919 Husserl's writings particularly are dedicated to the community in its several forms of aggregation and for him in *Erste Philosophie* (Husserl, 1959, p.285)

...there is not a blind destiny – a God 'holds' the world. The world aspires towards absolute horizons, values and prepares the ways for such destinies in the hearts of men; the human beings can realize a divine world in freedom which one finds in it.

In the second part of the book Ales Bello approaches God through "faith" in a philosophical reading of what acting religiously means in Husserl's philosophical analyses. The *Maestro*, as Edith Stein likes to call Husserl, in *Ideen I* § 58 (Husserl, 1913/2002) refers to God's transcendence and affirms that the religious consciousness is based on a "rationally" founded motivation because here one deals with an evidence which does not require any mediation. The consciousness knows and is religious in the sense that such a knowledge is the knowledge of God's presence and simultaneously its irreducibility to knowledge as such, and for this reason its presentation itself as the "Other" is based on its recognition of its presence and absence. In this way with Husserl we can say that the religious consciousness is a particular specification of consciousness itself, its not optional but is constitutive.

The fifth way to reach God, as explained in the present book by Ales Bello, is in a speculative relationship with the first chapter of the second part of it even if Husserl directly has never reflected over the theme of the relationship between theology and philosophy but his personal choice of conversion as a Christian in 1896 shows his profound interior religious attitude. Several disciples of Husserl accepted Christian faith and others remained highly fascinated by his path of interior life, proposed in his three dimensional anthropological vision which is further developed by Edith Stein but also his particular attention perhaps helped Gerda Walter to write *Phenomenology of Mysticism*. Gerda Walter studies the mystical experiences, which, for the Maestro are only "ideal possibilities". The reality which remains at the end is the experience of the mystic but at the same time it is not possible to define exactly the reality of the "object" experienced mystically. In Ms. trans. A VII 9 of 1933 Husserl specifies in his philosophical analysis the interior as a universal consciousness. Husserl is among those intellectuals who distinguish between faith and reason. These two ways of knowledge are inter-related in ethics because where it is possible to explain ethics rationally there the height of moral life is present in the profound moment of religious attitude which helps the human beings to reach God through the exercise of freedom.

The fourth way to reach God i.e. the hyletic way, as explained in this book, is related with the second chapter of the second part i.e., religion as the object of the phenomenological analyses. According to Ales Bello even if Husserl does not deal with religion as a main argument but still through his phenomenological analysis we can take into consideration what the religious experience is because the profundity and ampleness show the direction of this philosophical investigation: profundity because he, like an archeologist, discovers the interiority of the human being so that he can perceive the roots and the ultimate source of the aperture of human being towards the divine; and its ampleness because he analyses its expressions and the human configuration which are present, especially those which are known through the sense of religiosity which is present in the human beings and can be known through the registration of the living acts together with what is present in the historical and cultural anthropology on the religious phenomena, be it public or collective expression. In an analytical attempt to configure the phenomenon of religion Ales Bello affirms that the phenomenology of religion presents itself as a new science which is between two disciplines like the history of religions and phenomenological philosophy. Gerardus van der Leeuw's *Phenomenology of religion* is an important example. Philosophically it is possible to know what the phenomenon religion is but not completely and for this reason we can start an attempt to do so phenomenologically taking into consideration



all the religious experiences registered with the relative living experiences on the consciousness of the human beings. Van der Leeuw in his personal approach which is based on his study of the history of religions reflects on the fundamental nucleus of the human existence in its attempt to open itself religiously, in search of the horizon which consists in a desire and ability of human beings expansion, its production and its knowledge. He calls it search of "Power" where it fills the invocation and desire. In phenomenology of religion there is coincidence of noetics and hyletics because what transforms the material in the intentional living acts is the moment of consciousness which can be expressed with the term *noesis* which has "sense" as the most important meaning. Sensual *Hyle* and intentional *Noesis* dominate all the field of phenomenology because the sensible data provides material for the intentional formations and meanings but at the same time it is possible to separate them as two subjects which can be studied apart even if the richest analysis belong to the noetics. The term "Power" used by van der Leeuw explains the human beings tendency towards a complete fulfillment, towards a totality, an ultimate dynamism which is related with the dimensions of the religious and sacred where this sacred which we reach phenomenologically can be considered a "presence" that has a hyletic nucleus. In conclusion we have identified a new phenomenology of religion which is based on the archeological analysis of the phenomenon religion which delineates the detailed essential analyses of the sacred-religious expressions. Ales Bello had already examined the philosophical questions regarding God and cultures in her works entitled *Husserl. Sul problema di Dio*, 1985 and *Culture e religioni. Una lettura fenomenologica*, 1997. This new phenomenology of religion based on the archeological excavation of the human subjectivity, analysed through entropathy, introduces us to a rather profound respect for all the religions and to the search for the interior nucleus present in all types of cultural manifestations which take us to the absolutely transcendent "Presence".

### **Bibliographic references**

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### **Note**

(1) "*La fenomenologia di Husserl si presenta come una ricerca teoretica, che si pone dentro e fuori la filosofia occidentale...*" (my own translation).

### **Note on the author**

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