

PHENOMENOLOGY AS PHILOSOPHY OF REVELATION: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract. In this article I offer a programmatic interpretation of the fundamental problem of phenomenology in terms of a philosophy of revelation. As the subtitle expresses, this text is a research summary which shows the framework and the main conceptual structures of “phenomenology as philosophy of revelation”. I propose the outline of a renewal of one of the last important developments of Western philosophy both in terms of its metaphysical aspiration and scientific relevance. After the general introduction, I delineate the philosophical problem of revelation. I show how reflections on this problem influenced early phenomenology. I explain the underlying subject matter in the history of phenomenology, i.e., the notion of disclosure. I also outline what I term apocalyptic phenomenology in order to focus on the philosophical understanding of revelation. In this part I offer some details of the notion of newness and the appropriate method applied here. Finally, I summarize the scientific relevance of my approach in the context of logic, methodology, and disciplinarity with a special emphasis on the study of religion.

I. INTRODUCTION: REVELATION AND PHILOSOPHY

In what follows I offer a theoretical discussion of the problem of divine revelation. I base my approach on the phenomenological conception of revelation as has been worked out during the past decades of phenomenological philosophy. However, I also offer an overview of the rise of the problem of revelation throughout the centuries in such a way that the phenomenological concept of revelation is interpreted in the context of this evolution. In sections 2 and 3 below I outline the phenomenological notion of revelation; while in sections 1 I introduce this notion and in section 4 I offer an application of it in the study of religion. The central claim in this paper is that the phenomenological notion of revelation, which I term radical revelation, appears gradually in the history of the term and reaches its conceptual maturity during the last decades of phenomenological philosophy.¹

While term *revelatio* appeared in Latin Christianity, it is rooted in the Greek and Hebrew terminology of the Old and New Testaments. *Gala* in the Hebrew Bible and *apocalypsis* in the Septuagint expressed the idea of God’s overall disclosure of truth and reality linked to the end-of-the-world imagery. The Latin translation of *apocalypsis* as *revelatio* — possibly a creation of Jerome of Stridon — could have been better rendered with the word *develatio*, but the prefix *re-* had perhaps a stronger undertone for the translator. Emerging from Biblical sources, the Latin expression has become the general term of divine disclosure of secret contents in various religious settings. In this way, “revelation” offers itself today as a subject matter of comparative religion, comparative theology, and on this basis theoretical reflections of various sorts. The core meaning of the term, however, is still linked to the religious contexts of Judaism, Christianity,

¹ For the details of this development see René Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* (Alba House, 1967); Avery Dulles, *Models of revelation* (Orbis, 1992); Peter Koslowski, *Philosophien der Offenbarungen*. (Schöningh, 2001); Balázs M. Mezei, *Radical Revelation* (T&T Clark, 2017); and Adam J. Graves, *The Phenomenology of Revelation in Heidegger, Marion, and Ricoeur* (Lexington Books, 2021).

and Islam, i.e., the so-called Abrahamic religions where a certain notion of divine revelation has become centrally important.²

Judaism discusses divine revelation in terms of the Torah in accordance with Biblical descriptions. Christianity claims that what is written in the Tanah was fulfilled in a new kind of revelation, i.e., the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity. In Islam, revelation is the Quran itself that declares that the text is the written communication of God to human beings. These notions of revelation differ from one another in important points, while there is a common set of claims. This entails that there is one God, the absolute source of everything that expresses its messages in some form available for human beings in order to lead them to a transcendent fulfillment. The nature of this fulfillment is described differently beginning with pure faithfulness to God to some understanding of divine bliss. This latter is the aim of human beings; thus, revelation in its core is central to both human beings and to God striving to lead these beings to fulfillment. Based on these meanings, the concept of revelation today is widely used in various contexts often far-fetched from the original semantics of the term.

It may be surprising that well developed forms of a *philosophical reflection* on the notion of revelation emerged relatively late in our history. As an explanation of this fact we need to take into consideration the sophisticated structure of presuppositions that made such a development possible. Firstly, the notion of revelation needed to be presented in the form of a genuine incarnation into a human form creating the common platform of the divine and the human in the figure of Jesus. Secondly, the divine itself was thus manifested in a self-communicating way which strives for a higher unity of God and human beings. Thirdly, to be a human being is also transformed in this perspective not only as originating in, but also aiming at the divine so that the result of this development is something radically new, i.e., a new, divinized human being. To describe this structure, we needed a thoroughly revised Platonic terminology entailing not only the eternal ideal truth but also its concrete, incarnate presence in a human form. We also needed an anthropology in which the human mind is the free receptor of divine communication and, at the same time, a free agent. Nature must be freely researchable, truth freely attainable, and morality freely sustainable by the human mind. On a higher level, the human mind must be able to reach divine reality in some way and remain open to its communications in various forms, such as written texts, traditional teachings, and new insights.³

During the history of the interactions between theology proper and philosophy, these presuppositions were translated into a theoretical work on various aspects of human knowledge and divine communication. However, the problem of divine revelation was not put into the focus for a long time. Of course, the *notion* of revelation, i.e., the contents of what we term revelation were central to the Bible; it is also a focus of the Patristic literature and, in a more speculative sense, in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius. While the expression *revelatio* is only rarely used by St Augustine, the subject matter is just as well known to him as it was, many centuries later, for Thomas Aquinas. God as the highest truth communicating itself in the creation, the history of salvation, the person of Christ and the teachings of the church are about the infinite divine love disclosing itself in diverse forms. As the Letter to the Hebrews expresses: “God [...] at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets [...]”⁴ The expressions “at sundry times and in divers manners” point to an understanding of revelation in which the historical and formal diversity of divine disclosure culminates in the appearance of the Son. As the letter formulates it, God “in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds”⁵

2 Cf. Johannes Deninger, “Revelation”. Lindsay Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (vol. 11), (Thomason–Gale, 2005), 7773–9. See also Balázs M. Mezei *et al.*, *The Oxford Handbook of Divine Revelation* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2021), Part IV.

3 David Adams Leemin, “Quests”. *Encyclopedia of Religion* (vol. 11), 7551–6.

4 Hebrews 1:1–2.

5 Ibid.

This passage, as a few others in the New Testament, points to the possibility of handling the problem of divine revelation in a theoretical fashion. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews considers revelation as a historical trajectory culminating in the incarnation of Christ *through which* the author recognizes the significance of the entire problematic of revelation beginning with the creation of the world to its fulfilment in Christ. In other words, the author of the text already possesses the grasp of the overall theoretical problem of divine revelation. However, it took a long time until the notion of revelation reached a conceptual unity capable of instigating deeper reflections on the question what revelation is. Inasmuch as it presupposes the entire realm of revelation as its logical axiom, theology proper is not fit to address this question. We need a philosophical approach to reach this goal, but this latter developed for a long time before it could begin its proper work.⁶

In this development, Francesco Suárez played a crucial role.⁷ Suárez introduced an important distinction between God's revelation *ad extra* and God being the revealer itself.⁸ By this step he distinguished the contents of revelation on the one hand and the source of revelation on the other. The importance of this distinction is given in that we gain thereby a notion of revelation in the sense of the source of revelation, i.e., revelation as such, which is the formal principle of all contents of revelation. Suárez was in this way indicative of the emerging discussions concerning revelation itself, i.e., not only some revealed propositions, but the problem of revelation *sui generis*. The debates in and around deism during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries used this distinction as their starting point to evaluate the relationship between "reason" and "revelation" on a principal level.⁹

Schelling stands in the center of a number of modern and contemporary reflections on the problem of revelation. His path had been prepared not only by the above mentioned developments, but also by the pietistic mysticism elaborating various forms of a direct communication between human beings and God, a communication leading up to works, such as those of Jakob Böhme or Emmanuel Swedenborg, focusing on the spiritual problems of divine revelation.¹⁰ Schelling gathered these influences and concentrated them in his "philosophy of revelation", the "positive philosophy" transcending the formal and conceptual philosophies of his precursors, Kant and Hegel included. Schelling proposed thereby to open an entirely new realm of reality, "positive" reality, as he suggested.¹¹

The roots of early phenomenology reach back to Austrian Philosophy, especially to the work of Bernard Bolzano and Anton Günther.¹² The latter's efforts to develop a philosophy of revelation can be felt in many ways in subsequent developments, including some aspects of the thought of Franz Brentano. Brentano strived to create a rigorously scientific philosophy based on the rapidly advancing empirical psychology of his age. The young Husserl, with the background of a mathematician, followed the path of developing the new science along the lines of a logical pattern. It is interesting to see the complicated way which led the phenomenological movement from these beginnings first to the rediscovery of the dimension of metaphysics and then, especially in the works of Max Scheler, to the inclusion of some aspects of Schelling's philosophy. A similar pattern can be observed in the philosophical career of other phenomenologists, such as Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, or Maurice Merleau-Ponty: starting with a specified understanding of phenomenology they gradually shaped their thought into an existential metaphysics and then, even though in a fragmentary fashion, into a theologically colored understanding. The

6 See again Latourelle, 1967; Dulles, 1992); Koslowski, 2001); Mezei, 2017.

7 Cf. Latourelle, 1967, 183–185.

8 Francesco Suárez, "De fide Catholica". *Opera Omnia*, Vol. XII. (Vivès, 1863), 38.

9 Cf. Gay, Peter (ed.), *Deism: An Anthology* (Vannostrand, 1968), 21–29.

10 Koslowski, *op. cit.*, 207–244; Douglas Shantz, "Charismatic Revelations". Mezei *et al.*, *The Oxford Handbook of Divine Revelation*. (Oxford, 2021), Chapter 13.

11 Schelling, "Einleitung in die Philosophie der Offenbarung oder Begründung der positiven Philosophie". *Sämtliche Werke*. Abt. II., Bd. 3., 1858; Koslowski, *op. cit.*, 565–643; Cyril O'Regan, "Revelation in German Idealism". Mezei *et al.*, *The Oxford Handbook of Divine Revelation* (Oxford, 2021), 258–75.

12 Bernard Bolzano, *Lehrbuch der Religionswissenschaft*, Bände I–IV (Frommann–Holzbog, 1994). Cf. Balázs M. Mezei, "Two Models of Radical Revelation in Austrian Philosophy". *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*: 1 1, 99–120, 2009; Balázs M. Mezei, "Anton Günther's Critique of Pantheism", forthcoming in *Intellectual History Review*.

notion of revelation, in pair with the notion of a phenomenon, played the crucial role in this “theological turn”, as Dominique Janicaud termed it. Beyond Scheler, especially Heidegger and Lévinas helped phenomenology understand itself in terms of a phenomenology of revelation in the works of Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, or William Desmond.¹³

In what follows I offer an approach to revelation as the central problem of phenomenology. While I use a seemingly theological material, I claim that the problem of revelation belongs primarily to philosophy of the kind I term “apocalyptic phenomenology.”¹⁴ This phenomenology focuses on the core problem not only of phenomenology as a movement, but also the central subject matter of philosophy in an overarching sense. Viewed from a rigorously theological perspective, apocalyptic phenomenology is presupposed in theological thinking, because it is the axiom of theology properly so-called. Viewed from the philosophical perspective, apocalyptic phenomenology aims at the investigation of the source of reality and knowledge. As such an investigation, apocalyptic phenomenology is relevant to the problematic and methodology of scientific thinking, because seen both historically and logically this problematic and methodology need to be based on ultimate grounds secured by this sort of phenomenology. At the same time, the phenomenological notion of revelation is relevant to the study of religion, as authors like Rudolf Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Friedrich Heiler or Paul Ricoeur recognized it in the last century (Mezei, 2021a; Mezei, 2021b).

II. THE PROBLEM OF REVELATION

It is convenient to start the outline of the problem of revelation with a work closely connected to the period of deism when the problem moved to the center of philosophical reflections. The French *Encyclopédie* offered two articles on “revelation” in 1765: one on the theological, and another on the juridical problem. The theological meaning is summarized as “an act of revealing, i.e., to make publicly accessible a certain thing that was secret or unknown previously.” The juridical meaning is defined as “a declaration which is made before a parish priest or vicar as a consequence of a monitory which has been published on facts ...”¹⁵ While the two meanings are seemingly different, in fact they belong together. Revelation in the theological sense was derived from the Latin *revelare*, to make known, confess; this meaning led to the juridical understanding of “revelation” as an act of confessing. However, the *Encyclopédie* seems to be ignorant about the connection between the two definitions. It considers divine revelation merely in terms of “revealing certain things”, i.e., in a particular sense. It is not aware of the distinction Suárez outlined between the individual things revealed and the act of revealing as the source of revelation. On the other hand, the *Encyclopédie* had no glimpse into the meaning of revelation already emerging especially in the Protestant pietism in the form of direct divine communication with human persons. This uninformed dealing with the term of revelation in the *Encyclopédie* signals an important split in the development of the term which offers us the opportunity to consider the most important dimensions of this evolution: a) The history of the term; b) The development of the meaning in theology, mysticism, and philosophy; and c) the rise of contemporary reflections.

(a) As John Montag notes,¹⁶ the German translation of the Latin *revelare* as *offenbaren* was more than a simple rendering. A simple rendering occurred when the Hebrew *gala* was translated into Greek as *apocalypsis* or when the latter was interpreted in Latin as *revelatio*. In contrast, the German rendering

13 Dominique Janicaud et al., *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate* (Fordham, 2002); William Desmond, “Godsends”. *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* (Vol. 92; 1, 2016); 7–28. Janicaud was strongly critical of what he termed “the theological turn of French phenomenology”, a criticism due especially to his one-sided view of phenomenology as methodological rationality.

14 It must be clear that the expression of “apocalyptic” is used here merely in the etymological, philosophical and theological senses and not in a supposed colloquial sense of non-scholarly discussions.

15 Diderot et D’Alembert, *Encyclopédie*, vol. XIV, 1765, 224b, 226 (my translation).

16 John Montag, “Revelation”. John Milbank et al., *Radical Orthodoxy* (Routledge, 1999), 38–64; for more details, see also Mezei, *Radical Revelation*, 111–2.

was creative: it changed the meaning in such a way that instead of the mere negativity of “the removal of the veil” it directed the attention to the positive feature of what is “made manifest” as the fundamental act of *Offenbarung*.

(b) With that semantic change the problem of revelation became highlighted. The problem was not any longer about the “removal” but rather about what is disclosed the removal. The negativity of *revelare* was changed to the positivity of *Offenbarung*. Of course, such an approach had been implied even earlier in the problem of revelation as God’s communication. Yet in earlier forms of this approach revelation was seen rather in terms of prophecy, as can be seen in the writings of Thomas Aquinas.¹⁷ The problematic of prophecy may lead to the underlying problem of God’s election, human vocation, the relationship between sinful structures and God’s salvific message, ultimately to the problem of God’s original self-revelation, i.e., his “immediate” revelatory actions.¹⁸ In other words, even at the level of revelation as prophecy the theological problematic opens up *if and only if* the necessary sensitivity is also given. This sensitivity emerged however only gradually, especially with the mystical overtones of Protestant spirituality.¹⁹

Here we need to recall Avery Dulles’s classification of the “models of revelation.”²⁰ His widely used five types—revelation as doctrine, history, experience, dialectics and new awareness—offer not only a typological but also a historical approach. In spite of various criticisms,²¹ we can maintain that his is a useful description to characterize the evolution of the meaning of revelation throughout the centuries.²² This evolution begins with the undeveloped notion of revelation made possible by the emerging discussion between theology and science, faith and reason during the post-Renaissance period with the accumulation of new scientific and geographical discoveries. The rise of scientific rationalism run parallel with the development of mathematics, engineering and the ever better organized church and state administrations leading to the question addressed especially by Enlightenment scholars: If Reason is so reliable, why do we need Revelation? Revelation as the body of doctrines was to be harmonized with the body of human knowledge; and the principle of revelation was to be explained in its relationship to the principle of reason.

With the rise of Protestantism, a kind of direct mysticism contributed to the emergence of a new understanding of revelation counterbalancing rationalism.²³ Schelling’s way from the logical system of transcendental idealism—as an overall structure of rational-metaphysical philosophy—to positive philosophy, i.e., “the philosophy of revelation”, as he termed it, shows that the powers of a new thinking had been in work even during the rapid development of a rationalism.²⁴ Just as for Böhme, also for Schelling the problem of evil proved to be the real trigger. If nature is mathematically reasonable, if human affairs can be organized along rational patterns, if the world can be conceived in this way as among others Isaac Newton demonstrated, what is the origin and significance of evil? Kant’s answer to this question by the application of *radical evil*,²⁵ i.e., a rational version of the doctrine of the corruption of created nature was already an important concession *by* rationalism (a concession thoroughly misunderstood by authors like Hannah Arendt.)²⁶ However, Kant’s notion of “the root of evil” remained in the framework of an aprioristic rationalism. Hegel’s understanding of negativity as a moment in the development of the Spirit went far beyond that rationalism yet remained at the logical level. Schelling, nevertheless, sought to explore

17 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation*, 159–81.

18 Thomas Aquinas, “Summa theologiae”, I^a q. 1–49. *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita* (Roma, 1888), quaestio 1, articulus 5.

19 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions* (Oxford, 2008), 87–107.

20 Dulles, *op. cit.*

21 Montag, *op. cit.*

22 Mezei, *Radical Revelation*, 97–102.

23 Versluis, *op. cit.*

24 See e.g. Fénelon, *Traité de l'existence et des attributs de Dieu* (Hachette, 2018).

25 Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (Cambridge 1999), Part I.

26 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt, 1951), 459. It seems that Arendt was responsible for the consistent misreading of Kant’s “radical evil” in terms of horrendous evil, while Kant’s expression of *Radikalböse* referred to the root and not the intensity of evil.

the origin and significance of evil as the unprethinkable (*das Unvordenkliche*) for reason.²⁷ This led to the rise of a new kind of philosophy, the philosophy of revelation, i.e., a radical rethinking of God's reality.

It would be misleading to understand Schelling's philosophy of revelation merely in terms of theosophy (in the sense of Böhme or Swedenborg). Despite such influences, Schelling makes it clear that *Theosophismus*, as he terms it, lacks the empirical content of his positive philosophy of revelation, i.e., what he calls metaphysical empiricism.²⁸ Here we find the connecting point between Schellingian positive philosophy and the phenomenological empiricism of the late nineteenth century. To understand the "empirical psychology" of Franz Brentano in terms of a narrow-minded sensualism is to misunderstand the intellectual situation of this thinker, especially the influence of Schelling's idea of "intellectual insight."²⁹ The emphasis on the development of the empirical sciences, the drive to experiment was greatly inspired by the idea of a new kind of experience so persuasively formulated by Schelling. Brentano's way from empirical psychology to the discovery of the "intentional inexistence" of insights, the "inner perception" as the source of objective truth concerning reality carries the mark of the metaphysical empiricism of Schelling in such a way that without it none of the subsequent developments of phenomenology could be properly understood. The rise of phenomenology as the description of a new kind of experience, its turn to an empirical idealism and then to a philosophy of revelation needs to be seen in this context.

(c) It seems that the history of phenomenology can be comfortably overviewed by applying the notion of revelation. Of course, at the end of the nineteenth century the concept was heavily used by a kind of scholastic theology that represented the doctrinal understanding. Yet there were clear signs of change. For instance, Bernard Bolzano already developed a sophisticated and universal pattern to understand revelation as the central phenomenon of metaphysical forms.³⁰ Moreover, the philosophical notion of revelation of the Hegelian and Schellingian type bears the title of "self-revelation" (*Selbstoffenbarung*) in which it is not particular things that are revealed but the essence of the godhead itself.³¹ This essence proves to be historically evolving for Hegel and dynamically active for Schelling. *Revelation as history*—Dulles's second type—is closely bound up with the dynamic understanding of self-revelation, itself based on the notion of salvation history.³² While this latter notion served as the basis of official church theologies, the notion of self-revelation was not embraced—until the end of the nineteenth century. In the dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* of the First Vatican Council the Biblical expression "[God] has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will..." (Eph 1:9) was understood as "[i]t has pleased His wisdom and goodness to reveal Himself and the eternal decrees of His will ..." "To reveal Himself" (*revelare seipsum*) is not foreign from the traditional doctrine; however, its surfacing in such an important text could not be understood otherwise than as an allusion to the notion of "self-revelation" in then recent philosophy, or rather a correction of theosophical notions of self-revelation by a doctrinal interpretation.³³

Husserl's phenomenology maintained the strong criticism of mystical philosophies offered by Brentano.³⁴ So it appeared to be another corrective of theosophical philosophies. His logical focus and rigorous analysis in his breakthrough work³⁵ seemed to follow a scholastically inspired logical minimalism with the clear result of demonstrating the self-contained existence of the logical realm and its irreducibility to historicism, relativism, or psychologism—approaches undermining objective truth, so the truth

27 Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy* (SUNY, 2007), 86: "that before which nothing can be thought".

28 Schelling, 1858, *op. cit.*

29 This emphasis on intellectual insight is also shared by Anton Günther. See Cf. Balázs M. Mezei, "Two Models of Radical Revelation in Austrian Philosophy". *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*: 1 1, 99–120, 2009; for the broader view cf. Wilhelm Weischedel, *Der Gott der Philosophen* (Darmstadt, 1983), 259–70.

30 Bolzano, *op. cit.* Cf. Mezei, "Two Models...", 2009.

31 Mezei, *Radical Revelation*, 109–151.

32 Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History* (Sheed and Ward, 1979).

33 Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *De revelatione per Ecclesiam Catholicam proposita* (Libreria Editrice Religiosa), vol. 1, 1951, 153–4.

34 Balázs M. Mezei–Barry Smith, *The Four Phases of Philosophy* (Rodopi, 1998).

35 Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vols 1–2. (Routledge, 1982). The work was originally published in 1900–1.

of the doctrines of the church as well.³⁶ Yet Husserl's entire business was of a different kind. Its scientific character was based on Brentano's understanding of intentionality reflecting the unique kind of experience, together with its certainty, as the object of a particular insight. The very name of phenomenology put Husserl's endeavor into the context of a notion closely bound up with the sources of the notion of revelation. Phenomenology as an expression—used by Kant and before him a few authors—was understood as the science of self-disclosing reality either in the empirical, the logical or the intellectual senses. *Phaino*, to appear, was the verb for revelation in the New Testament: angels, stars, “the Lord”, “the sign of the Son” etc. “appear”; and the derivative *phaneron*, “manifestation”, “revelation” is used by Paul as the basic mode of the being of God.³⁷

This background gained more and more momentum in the history of phenomenology. Beginning with the later Husserl through Max Scheler to Martin Heidegger the metaphysical problems of phenomenology became central in the framework just outlined. The transcendental ego (Husserl), the value (Scheler), the Encompassing (Jaspers), Being (Heidegger), or even Analogy (Przywara) or Ambiguity (Merleau-Ponty) can be understood as versions of the fundamental problem of phenomenology, i.e., the problem of reality as self-disclosure. Reality is essentially self-disclosing, self-manifesting or self-revealing even in its hiddenness and exactly in virtue of its hiding; and it is disclosed by the philosophers able to grasp the core of this manifestation by an act of metaphysical empiricism. Heidegger's famous etymology of *aletheia* as unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*) is repeatedly conceived as the discovery of being in terms of an original self-disclosure, i.e., revelation.³⁸ When Sartre criticizes Husserl and Heidegger for not comprehending properly the emptiness of being,³⁹ he proposes a similar kind of understanding in terms of the skeptical mind. And when Lévinas raises the point that infinity, as opposed to totality, expresses itself *in the face of the other*—because Infinity is the infinite other—he again follows the same path to a new phenomenological experience that serves as the ultimate foundation of a new metaphysics now termed “ethics.”⁴⁰

Whoever has some understanding of the authors I just mentioned will not doubt that the common core of their enterprises is indeed the problem of reality in terms of self-disclosure.⁴¹ And while the theological understanding of divine revelation may be both thematically and methodologically different from these endeavors, the overall relationship between the phenomenological conceptions of disclosure and the theological narratives of God's self-revelation is evident. This linkage is given in the context of the history of terms and ideas; but it is even more obvious in its thematic connection at the philosophical level. This latter was clearly seen by Michel Henry who attempted to cover the common core of Marxism, theology, and phenomenology by a reinterpretation of life as the most fundamental form of manifestation.⁴² This manifestation originates, for Henry, in the self-disclosing words of Christ in the Gospel of John, “I am...” This “I am...” so deeply Biblical, is the foremost expression of reality in an ultimately personal fashion.⁴³

This approach to the self-disclosing nature of revelation goes beyond even Marion's understanding of the saturated phenomenon.⁴⁴ Starting with various saturated phenomena, which transcend the grasp of the knower, we may *not* conclude validly to a metaphysical framework which by definition and in an absolute sense saturated. That would be a kind of induction leading to some probability, but not to the

36 Cf. the religious conversions among the early phenomenologists, Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*. Vol I. (Nijhoff, 1982), 172–3.

37 Rom. 1:19.

38 Martin Heidegger, *Logik. Die Frage nach der Wahrheit*. In: *Gesamtausgabe*. Band 21 (Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), 180.

39 Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (Pocket Books, 1978), 233–52.

40 Cf. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Duquesne, 1969).

41 Cf. Graves, 2021. The author offers a close reading of the works of the phenomenologists mentioned in the title of his stimulating work, also arguing for the important point of the inseparable connection between the topic of revelation and phenomenological thinking.

42 Michel Henry, *Incarnation* (Northwestern, 2015).

43 Michel Henry, *I am the Truth* (Stanford, 2003).

44 Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given* (Stanford, 2002).

immediate insight proper to that absolute dimension; indeed, probabilistic induction is not central to the phenomenological tradition. Central to this tradition is the intellectual insight, the experience of evidence, the hermeneutics of being, or the recognition of the other as other—forms of knowledge related to the traditional understanding of *nous* and *intuitio*, i.e., the direct, unmediated becoming aware of a fundamental fact as a moment of the fact itself. Just as the *phaneron* in the New Testament is the direct expression of reality that is immediately conceived of, so the notion of evidence in Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, and Husserl does not originate, properly speaking, in a procedure. It certainly needs contexts and acts, but the content of them is the direct becoming aware of *x*. This may be termed metaphysical empiricism, an empiricism central to Brentano's intentionality, and central to a number of various phenomenologies up to our days, such as William Desmond's notion of the irreducible surprise of the godsend.⁴⁵

III. APOCALYPTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

I use the expression “apocalyptic phenomenology” in two senses.⁴⁶ In the historical sense, the term refers to the origins of phenomenology in philosophical endeavors deeply rooted in the problematic of divine revelation. Secondly, the term expresses the central problem of phenomenology, i.e., the problem of reality as self-disclosure. As to the first point, the phenomenological movement was recognized—and partly also criticized—as the heir of earlier understandings of divine illumination going back to Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, or to ontologism.⁴⁷ Since illumination was primarily understood as a kind of divine communication or revelation, phenomenology could be comfortably seen as belonging to this tradition originating in the Platonic and New Testament conceptions of *epopteia*, i.e., enlightenment.⁴⁸ Even if we find several problems in this regard, especially with the phenomenological emphasis on essences as opposed to actual entities (i.e., phenomenological idealism vs. naturalistic realism), the genealogy appears to be correct. It is not accidental that Husserl concludes his *Cartesian Meditations* with the sentence of St Augustine: *Noli foras ire, in te redi, in interiore homine habitat veritas*.⁴⁹ Thereby Husserl wished to express the close connection of phenomenology to doctrine of illumination. Indeed, revelation — as illumination, but also as the fundamental disclosure, i.e., *the apocalypsis* of reality — was central to the Platonic-Augustinian tradition, and thus phenomenology, as a modern reformulation of some pivotal tenets of this tradition, represents a historical continuity in this regard. Given the original meaning of *apocalypsis* and its relation to revelation, phenomenology can be rightly termed apocalyptic in the historical sense.

In the second sense, phenomenology can be termed apocalyptic, because its central concern—beyond the historical context—is the disclosure of reality in the ultimate as well as regional or partial senses. At this point we need to address the problem of reality in phenomenology. It is a usual misunderstanding, present already at the time of Husserl's important publications, that intentionality and essence, the logical character of what is recognized in a phenomenological fashion are to be opposed to what is seen as physical, psychic, or everyday reality.⁵⁰ Of course, in everyday experience of the natural attitude we do have access to reality in some measure. Husserl's important point is that this naturally conceived reality is incomplete. It represents just one layer, dimension or aspect of the larger whole corresponding to the phenomenological attitude, as Husserl terms it. By changing our natural attitude to the phenomenological one (which is possible for us in virtue of our freedom⁵¹), we become able to conceive the whole in which natural reality is just one layer. The initial logical analyses and later the phenomenology of essences do not exclude this layer of reality but they put it into the larger set of what is essentially,

45 Desmond, “Godsends”, 7–28.

46 For a detailed discussion see Mezei, *Radical Revelation*, 151–189.

47 Joseph Geysler, *Max Schelers Phänomenologie der Religion* (Herder, 1924), 12–3; Johannes Hessen, *Religionsphilosophie*, vol. 1 (Reinhardt, 1955), 243–5; Erich Przywara, *Analogia entis* (Eerdmans, 2014), 409–30.

48 Phaedrus 250c, cf. Plato, *The Complete Works* (Hackett, 1997), 528; cf. 2 Peter 1:16.

49 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* (Nijhoff, 1960), 157.

50 Roman Ingarden, *The Controversy over the Existence of the World* (Peter Lang, 2013).

51 Edmund Husserl, *Introduction to Transcendental Phenomenology* (Atcost, 2003), 5.

i.e., phenomenologically accessible for us in our enlarged view of reality. When we suspend or bracket our experience of everyday reality, including its psychological and anthropological dimensions, what we bracket is their arrogance to be the entirety of reality (or to be the fundamental part thereof). “The point is not to secure objectivity but to understand it”, as Husserl wrote in 1938.⁵² Phenomenology applies its reductive methodology not in order to ignore various aspects of reality but to understand them, i.e., to grasp their meaning. Thereby it shows that and how they are aspects of a larger whole, reality as such, accessible in the form of *Wesensschau*, intuition of what is apodictically evident. Scheler and Jaspers follow a similar path, but even Heidegger’s way to Being is based on the understanding running parallel with the fundamental phenomenological recognition as to the primacy of the whole over its parts, the essence over its instances, or again: the primacy of reality over its derivations in everyday life, the natural attitude, partial consciousness, or existential inauthenticity.

How is reality available for us? We do not simply presuppose reality in a logical fashion; we directly embody it in such a way that reality is fully open to us in a sense preceding and fulfilling all other senses. We *are* real and are therefore directly aware of our being real, i.e., reality as such. This direct awareness of reality is not to be confused with our self-perception, because through the latter we perceive what is directly given in us. The direct awareness of reality needs to be grasped, because we usually find ourselves closed in a partial attitude determined by a partial attention, task, physical or psychic condition etc. Phenomenology helps us undo these partial dimensions and reach the perception of reality. This latter is not partial but essential; and its becoming available for us, or our perception of it is rooted in the awareness of reality which is seen as the fundamental disclosure of reality itself, a revelation we are part of. We are moments of the self-disclosure of reality *a fortiori* in our awareness of this reality; as soon as we perceive this awareness, we are on the path of the phenomenological understanding of reality. The task of phenomenology is to show that we not only need *to breach* our partial attitudes but also *to reach* the fundamental one, the “phenomenological attitude”, as Husserl puts it, in which reality as self-disclosing, i.e., self-revelation as such becomes accessible. Breaching the old, the partial and aspectual, and reaching the whole, the encompassing and the real—this belongs to the core of phenomenology in its epistemological and ontological endeavor.

This is the way we understand phenomenology as “apocalyptic” also in the thematic sense. However, we cannot stop at this point; we need to elaborate the meaning of “apocalyptic” and show its broader context. Thus, I offer the notion of radical revelation as the systemic understanding of apocalyptic phenomenology; next, I highlight the importance of this phenomenology in terms of newness. Finally, I add a third point on methodology.

a) *Radical Revelation*. In what I term “the concentric model of revelation”⁵³, I not only consider Dulles’s models but offer an overall evaluation of his approach. My starting point is not the history of the term (which I also analyze separately in the work mentioned), not even the logical evolution as realized by a few theologians and philosophers, but the very content of revelation itself as given in its self-disclosing ultimacy. Revelation, in accordance with both the meaning of the prefix of the term and its conceptual matrix, contains a negative and a positive moment, i.e., the moment of closing and the moment of disclosing. These moments presuppose one another and build the dynamics of revelation. In the concentric model, revelation is presented as arranged in concentric circles the center of which is the twofold moment of original hiding and revealing; revelation is both “nothing” and “something” at the same time. Revelation, in a kenotic way, is nothing inasmuch as it withdraws itself; and it is something inasmuch as it reveals itself. Beyond this core, revelation reveals itself as part and whole, person and community, private and public, experience and reality, natural and supernatural, word and deed, incarnation and resurrection, creation and salvation, fact and cognition.⁵⁴

52 Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Northwestern, 1970), 189.

53 Mezei, *Radical Revelation*, 101–2.

54 *Ibid.*, 101 and 341.

This concentric model goes beyond Dulles's models and improves them by a systemic and systematic overview rooted in the notion of revelation. It discloses the underlying dynamics of revelation which always carries a duality and unity, a negative and a positive dimension, by which it appears as a perennial radiation of reality out of its own (to use Schelling's word) "unprethinkable" source. Behind the duality of "something and nothing" there is the necessarily presupposed source of revelation based on which it can be understood both as nothing and something. In other words, so that we can *deny* revelation, we need to have an elementary understanding of it in terms of its absolute possibility. The logical content of this possibility leads us to the "ontological argument of revelation" which I will briefly consider below. Here it may suffice to say that the dualistic structure of revelation is to be understood as a self-contained process of self-opening or self-disclosure, the content of the term "self-revelation" offered for the first time by German philosophers in the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ This self-revelation is radical revelation, i.e., the *radix* and essence of revelation, as described in what I term "the ramifications of revelation." These ramifications show in concrete terms the circular nature of revelation returning to itself through the special achievements of "apocalyptic personhood", i.e., human persons understanding and processing the dynamics of revelation in their most personal and unique ways.⁵⁶

b) *A Phenomenology of Newness*. The structure of the ramifications of revelation leads us to the other meaning of apocalyptic phenomenology, i.e., the phenomenology of newness. "Apocalyptic personhood" in the terminology I apply here refers to unique personalities that, relying on divine revelation, also conceived its importance in realizing novel achievements—in their personality, moral life, science, the arts, or even politics. This personhood is a certain interpretation of the traditional notion of a genius, a common legacy of the previous centuries. For instance, the musical genius is a person capable of producing genuine originality, i.e., newness beyond the level of "original nonsense", as Kant put it.⁵⁷ This originality goes hand in hand with a high level of technical knowledge as well as an exemplary form, capable of instigating followership. The modern notion of a genius goes back to the notion of apocalyptic personhood as described in the New Testament above all in and through the person of Jesus. The narratives describing this person are composed in such a way that they call for a certain imitation. They instigate this imitation, however, in a genuine way: the saints and holy persons following the examples given have never been mere imitators but rather genuine renovators beginning with the apostles through St Augustine to Martin Luther or Mother Theresa. As renovators they strove for genuine newness in the framework of a pre-given pattern the essence of which has always been the call to renew itself and others, the individual as well as the community.

This situation leads us to the ultimate horizon of apocalyptic phenomenology. Phenomenology is about newness. The essences of phenomenology are new inasmuch as they are conceived, intuited, or grasped—always in their irreducible novelty. They reveal themselves in terms of radical newness in which their derivations and ramifications, traditional meanings and interpretations can be thoroughly considered. We do not conceive newness in phenomenology on the basis of oldness; it is radical newness by which we conceive temporal modes other than this newness, i.e., past and future. The center is the novelty of the phenomenon and, by way of implication, the newness of the conceiver of the phenomenon.⁵⁸ Apocalyptic phenomenology is about the self-disclosing of reality in terms of absolute newness—in which other dimensions can be recognized. This shows that the theological understandings of revelation in terms of a closed tradition freeze the living core of revelation. Revelation is the revelation of newness both in absolute and relative terms, so in metaphysics as in anthropology, epistemology, or sociology. Apocalyptic phenomenology is the philosophical understanding of newness as the center of the self-disclosure of reality.

55 *Ibid.*, 110–33.

56 *Ibid.*, 342.

57 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Cambridge, 2000), 186–7.

58 See the analysis of „renewing newness” in Vetö Miklos, *The Expansion of Metaphysics* (Cascade Books, 2018), 32–38.

c) *The Refusive Method*. In which way do we arrive at such an understanding? The answer is given by the method applied in apocalyptic phenomenology. The *refusive method* is so-called because of its instantiation of the compound of a negative and a positive element, i.e., the element of “withdrawal” and the element of “restoration” in one and the same act. Both meanings are derived from the Latin *refundo*, and while they oppose to one another semantically, they also make possible to understand them as two aspects of the same whole.⁵⁹ “The principle of *refusivum sui*” (i.e., self-withdrawal and self-restoration) expresses that negation and affirmation are conceived in their unity. This unity is newness that makes possible to conceive the negative and positive moments, separate them and see their mutual presupposing each other in any concrete instance. This whole is always a new instance, a new thought, a new act, a new development in nature, history, culture, or society, depending on our focus. The refusive method is the method of conceiving newness as a whole in and through the duality of its components in such a way that we realize that it is only and exclusively in the context of newness that these moments can be grasped.

The refusive method is closely connected to the phenomenological method of the *epoche* and the reductions, inasmuch as we understand that these steps appear to be negative only initially.⁶⁰ In reality, they make possible to conceive the whole as newness. Some forms of skepticism have a similar function: while they seemingly instantiate a negative attitude, their proper aim is to reach certainty, such as in the methodological doubt of René Descartes. Heidegger’s notion of “the step back” (*der Schritt zurück*) has a similar character in that it expresses an initial negativity so that genuine wholeness may be disclosed.⁶¹ The refusive method in apocalyptic phenomenology goes beyond these conceptions inasmuch as it points out that any negativity and positivity (self-withdrawal and self-restoration) are conceived in the totality of newness expressed in the corresponding whole encompassing the elements of negativity and positivity. In more concrete terms, negativity is made possible by the kenotic withdrawal of positivity by which negativity instigates the emergence of newness.⁶²

To grasp the refusive method in a more concrete way, let me offer an example. Negativity is perceived as such in a variety of experiential forms beginning with physical pain to logical contradiction. In all these forms we are directly aware of some problem, pain, or negativity, to use a general term. However, the negative character of these experiences has an inner dynamics as we come to realize spontaneously that the perception of negativity is intrinsically and necessarily related to what is positive in the same context, i.e., the overcoming of physical pain, agony, ignorance, or logical insufficiency. We realize directly — already in the experience of negativity itself — that our pain is perceived in the context of the overcoming of suffering, our anguish is defined by satisfaction, our ignorance by knowledge, and the logical contradiction by logical solution. Satisfaction, knowledge, consistency etc. are concretely perceived in the moments of negativity as constituting the meaningful context of negativity. In other words, moments of negativity are necessarily defined by moments of positivity in such a way that their belonging together is conceived in the midst of the experience of negativity. The perception of negativity and positivity in one and the same act of experience contains a higher-level holistic insight into the novelty of the two moments belonging together and forming a common whole. This structure is triadic, yet it is not discursive but simultaneous. In the act of perceiving the negative moment, we become aware of the positive one and, at the same time, the overall structure of their whole. This whole is something new, i.e., through the inner dynamics of negativity and positivity we arrive at an understanding of a meaningful structure.

The three aspects of apocalyptic phenomenology—radical revelation, newness, and the refusive method—are intertwined in a whole which goes beyond traditional theologies of revelation, classical patterns of phenomenology, or corresponding developments in philosophy of religion. Apocalyptic phenomenology is hyper-theological, since it investigates the axiom of theology, namely revelation, not in

59 Mezei, *Radical Revelation*, 255–8.

60 Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, 135–42.

61 Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” *Pathmarks* (Cambridge 1998).

62 For the meaning of „kenotic” cf. Phil. 2:5–11.

the traditional senses of the term but in a new sense connecting various aspects of the old meanings. It also enlarges phenomenology by showing its central problem as the problem of revelation or the self-disclosure of reality in an elaborate manner. And it goes beyond theories of religion in that it considers revelation not only the central problem of religious forms but—as the problem of self-disclosure—the ultimate background of various philosophical endeavors. As such it constitutes a new problematic with a new methodology and a new interpretation of the history of ideas. For this reason, I introduced the term *apocalypitics* to denote this kind of investigation and offered a systemic overview of its central fields of research.⁶³

IV. SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The scientific relevance of apocalypitics is given in several ways: in its logical basis concerning the unavoidable character of revelation; its disciplinary buildup; its methodology; and its connections to philosophy and religious studies.

(a) The logical basis of apocalypitics is given in what I term the ontological argument for the fact of revelation. It is important to see that the notion of revelation is not arbitrary, nor is it a partial idea encapsulated in some historical vocabularies, not to mention an objectified understanding of revelation as a certain body of doctrines. Even if we may be able to show that a given body of doctrines is the linguistic expression of a logical structure, necessary in its form and content, the notion of such a logical understanding of revelation is not yet the original notion, nor is it *radical revelation* as I term it. Revelation in the radical sense is the ultimate origin of all kinds of revelation synopsized in Dullesian or other models. As soon as we face this radical notion of revelation, we also see that its reality is undeniable. As soon as we deny it, we recognize its possibility and we can even conceive that the very notion of the possibility of revelation entails both revelation as such and, at the same time, the concrete instantiation of revelation (at least in the fact of my conceiving of it). The fact of revelation connects both: it is an original fact and a fact necessarily instantiated. Thus, the ontological argument for the fact of revelation runs as follows:

Axiom (A): The notion of revelation is a moment of the fact of revelation.

Premise (P): We actually possess the notion of revelation.

Conclusion (C) on ((A) and (P)): Therefore, there is the fact of revelation.⁶⁴

The logic of this argument is strong. It contributes to the better understanding of revelation as a necessary logical concept which cannot be overridden. Reality is the expression of the fact of revelation, and revelation is the expression of reality itself. Reality is openness the opening of which is the fact of revelation. The denial of this reality equals the confirmation of this reality in a negative way; and the explanation of this reality in terms of its components or systemic evolution equals the implication of its original openness.

(b) The disciplinarity of the notion of revelation, i.e., the systematic form of apocalyptic phenomenology is *apocalypitics*. Apocalypitics, as it were, is the periodic table of knowledge in which various disciplines can be arranged as connected to one another. The systemacy of this table is given in its connection to the fact of revelation from which apocalyptic phenomenology evolves. The table covers the most important fields of knowledge in which several disciplines can be arranged and interpreted accordingly.⁶⁵

(c) The refusive method is an important aspect of the scientific relevance of apocalyptic phenomenology. As described above, in this holistic method the two moments of self-withdrawal and self-restoration are conceived in a new whole. We conceive this whole and realize its elements with their dynamic relationship between appearing and disappearing, generation and annihilation, birth and death. While we

63 Mezei, *Radical Revelation*, 344.

64 *Ibid.*, 30–1. For possible counterarguments see *ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*, 344.

realize the appearing or disappearing of something, we conceive it as belonging to the other element in such a way that the two aspects fit in with the larger whole. The refusive method, in this way, is the method of conceiving reality in its entirety, including various aspects, levels, dimensions and moments of reality, in such a way that we always conceive the relevant level of a meaningful whole. This leads us to the logic of parts and wholes, especially to the problem of the latter as *sui generis* entities transcending a simple addition of their parts. Revelation is always the ultimate source of wholes being itself the disclosure of reality in its fullness.

(d) The philosophical significance of this understanding can be seen if we consider that classical phenomenology already aspired to become an overall scientific system on the basis of transcendental phenomenology. However, Husserl never endeavored to develop a periodic table of the sciences in the form of an apocalypics, i.e., the essential disciplinary forms. He spoke about ontologies, regional ontologies, the application of phenomenology onto the study of psychology, logic, sociology, or religious studies. Yet he never outlined the framework in which such ontologies could be developed. Apocalypics offers such a framework, and it is to be elaborated in a detailed fashion.

What I want underline here is the relevance of apocalyptic phenomenology for religious studies. Since revelation is a term often applied in theology and the study of religion, it seems that an apocalyptic approach to religious studies needs the method outlined here. Concrete concepts of divine revelation, illumination, inspiration, prophecy, spiritual experience etc. abound in various religious forms, so an analysis of the precise meaning of such forms in the context of radical revelation appears to be a promising endeavor. We can even say that in most religious forms the notion of revelation, in a certain sense, is central; and we can evaluate these forms in the framework of apocalyptic phenomenology by virtue of the refusive method. As soon as we outline this endeavor, we recognize the larger theoretical significance of apocalyptic phenomenology. We even see its philosophical importance, given the centrality of the fact of self-disclosure and its corresponding methodology in philosophy. To understand and evaluate this fact and method we need an overall theoretical framework in which other relevant disciplines—such as history, art, psychology, anthropology, sociology, even cosmology and physics—can be contextualized. In other words, by starting with the most obvious subject matter, i.e., “revelation” in its fundamental sense, we arrive at the understanding of the importance of apocalyptic phenomenology capable of covering other fields of human knowledge as well.

Several branches of knowledge, such as specific technologies, cannot be directly handled by such a phenomenology. However, at the theoretical and methodological level we can approach even the most specialized fields of research in that we understand their connections with other fields of knowledge in the framework of apocalypics. In this sense, apocalyptic phenomenology appears to be the way to the understanding of religious forms and thus also to the exploration of the systemic context of other fields of scientific activity.⁶⁶

66 Cf. Balázs M. Mezei, “The Methodological Importance of the Notion of Divine Revelation in a Historical Perspective.” *Wisdom*, 2, 7, 63–76 (2017).

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