

Text 9. Phenomenology concerning the sacred (13 p.).

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The phenomenon 1.

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

The "phenomenon" is the given insofar as it is given, i.e. directly known. This involves three aspects: **1.** there is something; **2.** that something shows itself; **3.** precisely because that something shows itself, it is the 'phenomenon.'

Meeting

That showing itself - according to the proposer - includes both that which shows itself and the one to whom it shows itself. It is the object insofar as it is met by someone - called 'subject' - AND it is the subject insofar as it meets the object. In other words: a person lets the object penetrate him and in such a way that it penetrates his consciousness. In other words, the subject does not "do something to" the object because it "lets the object be what it is" (e.g., it does not make it exist or something). And the object does not "do anything to the subject" because it lets the subject be what it is. - That is "encounter.

"As soon as someone speaks of phenomenon, there is phenomenology" (o.c, 772).

The phenomenon, the whole phenomenon, nothing but the whole phenomenon.- That means that very definitely all that is related to the phenomenon is not discussed except to delineate it from the phenomenon. It also implies that everything that resembles the phenomenon but is not the phenomenon is not discussed except, at the most, for comparison.

Since E. Husserl (1859/1938), that exclusion of what is merely related to or similar to the given is called "Einklammerung," put in parentheses.

Remark. - If one can summarize a number of phenomena on the basis of mutual similarity, that summary is called "the general being" (the common property) of those phenomena. In that case, Husserl uses the term "eidos": limiting oneself to the eidos, all the eidos and only all the eidos he calls "eidetic reduction. One "reduces" (reduces) the phenomenon to its general characteristics.

Application

The sociological school (E. Durkheim (1858/1917); M. Mauss (1872/1950)) defines all that is called "sacred" as the origin of society. That is to define the sacred as a phenomenon in terms of what is related to it, namely, the community that denotes something sacred as the basis of coexistence. Thus the being itself comes to consciousness only indirectly!

Anders goes the way of the founder of the phenomenology of the sacred, N. Söderblom (1866/1931): he allows the sacred as "power," e.g., to come into its own directly. But that is no longer sociology but phenomenology of the sacred.

In summary.- As soon as one develops some science or philosophy about a phenomenon, one should proceed logically, i.e. starting from what is directly given, and first of all delineate the given phenomenologically.

Application.

The "esoteric" was in ancient times the object of "initiation" and initiation knowledge, a type of knowledge that somewhere exceeds the average knowledge. The esoteric is not the sacred and yet it is related to it and, yes, runs with it to some extent. To the extent that the sacred and the esoteric intermingle, they are objects of common phenomenology: e.g., one is part of the other.

The "occult" as a term dates from *C. Agrippa* (1486/1535) and his *De occulta philosophia*, where "all that is knowable only by virtue of initiation is called occult. Occultism continues as an interpretation of the esoteric and this since the XIXth century (with A.-L. Constant (1810/1875) who vulgarized the term).

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

The sacred is always somewhat esoteric and occult, and to that extent the sacred is called "mystery. Those who beforehand banish the mystery from the sacred mutilate the very essence of that sacred in such a way that in so doing they do not allow the sacred as a given to become fully conscious.

2. Consciousness without brain activity.

Bibl. st.: *Science* (revue), Paris, 2003 : juillet (*Dossier: Au-delà de la mort*), 69/71 (*Ou se situe la conscience?*).

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

During that short time, no blood is allowed to flow through the brain and it is in need of oxygen. Therefore one applies hypothermia (15.5° C.) and deprives the brain of all blood.- Everything is recorded. So among other things, the brain activity (EEG) and what the brain stem is going through.

Comparison

What P.R. saw and heard was easily testable. For example, she saw some kind of toothbrush. Which was in fact the trepanneur saw. The conversation between the surgeon and the cardiologist had been recorded: what P.R. had heard was consistent with it.

Comparison.

The comparison of the operative's story and the recordings especially allows one to accurately situate her NDE-"Well, the recordings show that at that time the body and brain were without blood" (a.c., 70).

Dr. Sabom.

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

The question arises:

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

3. Hylic pluralism.

'Hylic' means "concerning matter" and 'pluralism' means "view that assumes a multiplicity." So our theme is the fact that reality apparently exhibits a plurality of types of matter.

Joined is *J.J. Poortman, Ochèma (History of Hylic Pluralism)*, Asse, 1954, a work that is relatively surveyable.

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

1. the tenuous substance on and within;
- 2.1. the rarefied body;
- 2.2. the rarefied sphere in which the rarefied body is situated.

By way of introduction.

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

In other words: a portion of subtle substance, the soul's own, can be detached and transferred to another biological body,- subtle substance which is a carrier of information, in this case "Devour that waxing woman."-We have herewith a set of basic concepts: biological body, immaterial soul, portion of subtle substance associated with the immaterial soul, information in that subtle substance.

The 'soul multiple'

This expression is misleading.- *W. Davis, The Snake and the Rainbow*, Amsterdam, 1986, 204vv, expounds the soul multiplicity in the vodu religion.

- 1.1. The "corps cadavre" (biological body);
- 1.2. the 'n'ame,' the soul substance that makes the biological body live;-.
- 2.1. the "z'étoile," the soul substance that is the lucky or unlucky star;
- 2.2.a. the "gros bon ange," the soul substance inherent in all who have consciousness;
- 2.2.b. the "ti bon ange," the individual soul with its individualizing soul matter.-.

The little good angel is in the grip of a "loa" (lwa) when someone is possessed; - is on a soul journey during sleep (in the dream) or during an out-of-body experience,- is momentarily out of the body following a violent shock of the mind;,- is partially withdrawn from the body by zombification.

In other words : when - especially in primitives - there is more than one soul, at least in one case there is soul matter.

Materialism.

Poortman reproaches *F.A. Lange, Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart* (1866), for neglecting, with the exception of a few details, certain forms of materialism which have nevertheless been evident for many centuries. Poortman calls this type of materialism "monistic materialism" (it knows only one type of matter, namely, the ordinary matter known to us and studied in natural science). Lange misses a "dualistic materialism" that Poortman identifies with his hylic pluralism". One finds the latter e.g. with Democritus (-460/-370) who states that the soul is composed of "fine, smooth, round atoms."

The religious materialisms

Stoa (-400/+200) and Epicureanism (-400/+400) see the soul as a fine material body, distinct from the gross material body. However, especially Neoplatonism (+250/600), e.g., in the person of Proclus (410/485), even has a plurality of soul substances of subtle nature: the immaterial soul possesses a plurality of "vehicles" or "vessels" (ochèmata) of subtle or "fluidic" (smoldering, sailing through things) nature. In other words, Lange has neglected a large piece of 'materialism.'

Portman's probing.

He distinguishes physiological rarefied matter (in an expression such as "The spirits of life had already departed") which mediates between the soul and the biological body at lower levels; - psychological rarefied matter which is more rarefied, and an even more rarefied matter. - With this he attempts to bring some order to the almost boundlessly confused terminology on the subject.

Opm ... - Quite common - at least in esoteric and occult circles among us - is:

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

4. A word on Islam.

To expound on Islam in the context of this work is impractical. However, it is possible to dwell on a current aspect - "the shock of cultures" (S. Huntington) - briefly situated in Islam.

Islam.

This religion dates back to the Arab Mahommed (circa 570/632), "the Prophet," and very specifically to the beginning of the "hegira," the era of Islam, i.e. 622, in which he left Mecca as an exile and founded the Muslim state,-a state in which religion and politics are inseparable.

Religion.

The Islamic religion is a religion of "*the Book*," *the Quran*, whose text is 114 chapters - the uncreated Word of God, Allah, "the God," himself. Fits thus opposite the Qur'an "Islam," i.e., submission to Allah.

Remark.

Sharia is the legislation inspired by the Qur'an. According to the interpretation of Islamic Sunnis - one streak among others - it is the only legislation.

Immediately, in this perspective, sharia is the basis of Islamic fundamentalism, i.e., adherence to the "fundamentals" as the Prophet received them from Allah at the time.

Note .: The words of the Prophet and his thinkers (outside the Qur'an) are fixed in the hadith. They are the essence of the Sunnah, the tradition, dating back to the IXth century.

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

The Ishmaelians (ishmailians).

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

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

Steller says that Islam amounts to a plurality of strains: "There are as many Islames as there are cultures in the Islamic countries" (o.c., 13). Sunnis are nearly the four-fifths and Shiites nearly one-fifth.

The latter themselves in turn fell into a multitude of tendencies.- At the Prophet's death, a group in Medina felt - against the majority - that Ali, married to Muhammad's daughter, Fatima, was the most suitable successor. They formed the Shiat Ali, Ali's party. The position of imam becomes decisive. Ali is assassinated in 661. Beginning in 765, ismailism gradually emerges within Shiism. This forms a framework for what follows.

Alamoet.

Daftary, o.c., 179/229 (*La période d' Alamut dans l'histoire des ismaéliens nizaristes*) talks about the fatimid dawa (versta: mission, mission) that dates back to Hassan Sabbah (circa 1050/1124) and his infamous fortress, high in the Elbroez Mountains. Indeed, Hassan developed his own method of eliminating political-religious opponents. Several groups, the Seljukid Turks (whom he fought), the Christian Crusaders committed assassinations. But Hassan put "selective killing" - usually in public places - at the center. The performers were the fidaiis or fidawis, i.e. young religious volunteers whom he subjected to an initiation with degrees such that they very willingly became suicide bombers.

A historical novel.

We turn now to a stirring writing, namely *Alamut*; by *Vladimir Bartol* (1903/1967), published in 1938 amid complete indifference, as *A. Clavel, Le tyran qui semait la terreur avec ses commandos suicides*, in: *Le Temps* (Geneva), 17.11.2001, 9, it writes.

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

Such personal details are necessary for the proper understanding of what might be labeled "a medieval epic."

"In reality - says Clavel, - *Alamut* conjures up before our eyes all the demons that haunt the Islamic world: obscurantism, state terrorism, religious hysteria, totalitarian excesses, pathological cult of persons." Not surprisingly, the novel has now been a blockbuster across Europe since al-Qaida and Ussama Ben Laden turned the Twin Towers in New York, the Pentagon and - only intended - the White House in Washington into war zones on 11.09.2001.

The fedayin.

The *fidai* *offidawi* - which Daftary talks about - is the central figure of *Alamut*: "Every believer is a soldier cast in steel, and every soldier is at the same time the most ardent of all believers." This is how Clavel describes the one who commits suicide. The *fedayin* is willing to sacrifice himself blindly. If he dies in the performance of his duty, then he becomes a martyr who enjoys the pleasures of paradise in the afterlife, - in an oath full of whores who never lose her virginity.

This basic element of the Prophet's writings defines the core course of the engagingly written novel: the suicide bomber in the service of the Islamic State is literally - as Clavel writes - "in love with death" as the ideal entrance to paradise.

"The Old One of the Mountain".

The novel describes Hassan Ibn Saba as the thinking head - there high up in the impregnable eagle's nest *Alamut* - who initiates the "assassins" in the skill of becoming "the terror of foreign rulers" in the course of an - for normal Islamism - esoteric initiation that, apart from a general and refined formation of mind and body, includes the use of hashish. The latter after acting as a war hero and before gaining access to the very earthly paradise of available hoeris. So that the *fedayin* - at least as Bartol describes him - is literally carried into the earthly paradise in a drugged state. As in an eastern fairy tale.

Note: The name "assassin" comes from hashish taker;

Daftary tarzake.- Steller nowhere mentions Bartol's novel. But in all events he vehemently emphasizes that the Sunnis and all dissenting Muslims and in their wake the Christian Crusaders have invented - if it must be said: invented - a black image of the fedayin. - Above all, a strong disbelief - even in the Prophet and his message - , a disbelief that goes up to and including atheism and libertinism. - The use of hash, according to Daftary who is a specialist in the matter, dates back to 1122, year in which the Shiite nizarites in Syria were first called "hashishjiyya," hashish users. In 1183 the Seljukids adopted the name.-What's more: the name was used metaphorically (metaphorically) in the sense of "scum," "unbelieving unscrupulous. Thus o.c., 361.

Remark. - If Daftary's contention is correct, then Bartol's novel is merely a conception of Hassan's true system supported on unrealism,-at least in part.-Something even Clavel appears not to have realized,-at least in his criticism or rather plea. - This implies that the great success of Alamut rests in part on an unhistorical fact, for it makes the novel much less "historical" and much more fictional.

This does not prevent Daftary from conceding that Hassan centered on the selective killing after faith and army inauguration in public places of political opponents. And that is clearly at the heart of Bartol's novel. In that sense, it is indeed "historical. And meaningful for our time.

Certain characteristics of Islam.

For lack of space, we limit ourselves to what follows:

Dialogue

As for the ecumenical dialogue with Islam (and not the mutual combat for centuries), it has barely begun and is proceeding with great difficulty that springs from the claims of absoluteness on both sides as well as sometimes from the claim that the Qur'an contains definitive statements regarding Judaism and Christianity that dismiss both religions as obsolete stages.

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

Opn. - *H. von Glasenapp, The Islam, The Hague, 1971, 21v.*, notes that the Prophet did receive stimuli from Judaism and Christianity but only gradually acquired a real knowledge of both religions: he could not possibly have studied the Bible itself thoroughly.

Consequence: "the numerous misconceptions on the subject." - Thus, anyone who dialogues on that basis inevitably encounters serious difficulties.

Three types.

D. Sourdél, L'Islam 1986-14 PUF, 34s., says what follows.-For the Islam believer, belief is decisive so much so that "the works" are second-rate: whoever sins becomes an outcast but not a damned one. The hypocrite, however, whose good works cover an absent conviction, is not a "believer. The term "unbeliever" includes all that is not Islamic. Although the Jew and Christian as believing in the Book are given a special status in practice.

"O Muslims, believe in Allah, in the Book He sent, in the scriptures revealed before. All those who do not believe in Allah, in His angels, in His Books, in those He sent, and in the Last Day, are in a completely deviated state." Thus the *Qur'an IV: 135 (11:285)*.

Feminism

Sourdél, o.c., 61 : "The wife should be treated with justice and respect. As subject to a system of separation of property, she retains the dowry. Yet the Qur'an straightforwardly states her profound inferiority since in court her testimony is worth half that of the man. Given the absolute authority of the head of the family, it is difficult for the woman to enjoy the benefits granted to her by the Law unless she asserts herself by her personal attributes and is thus valued and listened to."

All those who get to know Muslim families up close here with us, at least occasionally, observe something of what Sourdél claims.

Remark. - There is the cultural diversity mentioned above: in Saudi Arabia the strict separation of the sexes according to the Qur'an is applied but e.g. in Tunisia equal rights has been in place since independence in 1956 and in Turkey, since Mustafa Kemal in 1924, the republic has been laicized and the emancipation of women plays an essential role in modernization.

In Iran, moderate modernization continues: the women on the outside e.g. win in terms of practical rights. In Indonesia, the constitution ensures equal rights: the president's daughter, Megawati Sukarnoputri, heads the laicized Democratic party and she became president with the consent of Muslim organizations.

Thus *C. Guigon, Moi, femme en pays musulman*, in: *L' Histoire*, No 270 bis (octobre 2002), SES, 16/17.

This suggests that planetary evolution, strongly controlled by the West with its increasingly laicized culture, is more powerful than strict "faith" in the Book and the Prophet.

Such is also noticeable within the Jewish and Christian religions to say nothing of the others.

It is a paradox of cultural development that religious freedom gradually increases as politics and religion are separated and take the practical form of a laicized society. The emancipation of women occurs in the same vein.

Up to there a few points.

5. The concept of God in the shock of cultures.

The Islamic concept of God.

Sourdel, o.c., 35s., summarizes.-- Allah is "transcendent" (transcendent) to such an extent that "any analogy (*op.*: partial identity) is excluded. "There is nothing like Him."

What resembles apophatic theology, i.e., a speaking about God that asserts the unspeakable of it.- Such degree of non-knowing is untenable. Also: Mohammed received the revelation through the angel Gabriel who then surely knew much about Allah.- Allah, of course, is eternal.- He is omnipotent in the sense that "Him no account is asked of what He does."

Remark. - This is very similar to the nominalist view which holds that all that is has no being or essence such that, within that axiomatics, God self-possessedly defines (creates) being. Also: Sourdel says that Allah's will is "une volonté arbitraire" (an arbitrary will) - Allah is single in the numerical sense: he is single.

Remark. - Christianity recognizes the singleness of God's nature but not of the three Persons, Father, Son, Spirit.-That's the essential about Allah. His meaning, by the way, is already evident from what was said above.

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

"In God we Trust" or "God Bless America" expresses a purely 'civil' or 'social' meaning. *J.-J. Rousseau* (1712/1778), in his *Contrat social*, says: "There is a purely bourgeois creed. Its articles must be laid down by the sovereign,-now not as religious dogmas but as sentiments of belonging."-All those who know what it is about see it as Rousseau said.

Mattu summarizes.

1. As a species name, "God" means the community bond that guarantees all differences regarding race, class, language, religion et al.

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

Mattu: THAT very thing is the deistic basis of "the axis of evil" in the language of Bush Jr ... One noted that no president will ever invoke Jesus or the Bible.

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

Evangelism.

Already President J. Carter went somewhat down this road, but Bush Jr. is clearly accomplishing it: he is coming out to live evangelistically,-in order to win over the religious right in the USA (some say).- As a result, the USA is both bathed in traditional bourgeois "religion" (which after all amounts to weaving an aura of sacredness around the American system) and a kind of peculiar Protestantism (B. Cottret).

Conclusion.

On both sides people talk about "God," - both in the USA and in Muslim countries. In both cases, 'God' defines the essence of culture. However, in America, something like postmodernist skepticism is encompassed by the bourgeois 'god' while that same postmodernism is causing a death scare in Muslim middens.

To wish to deny that there is a shock of cultures is to deny the fundamental place of civil religion in America AND at the same time to deny the at least equally fundamental place of Allah in Islam.

Unless one assumes that on both sides the bulk of people do not live consistently and put their axioms first as a non-meaningful basis. Which, given the ferocity of mutual feelings, is to be wished for.