

## Article

# Phenomenology of Immanence. Doxography on the “Idea of God” (Descartes, Kant, Schelling, Levinas)

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**Abstract:** This article describes the history of modern metaphysics as the history of the immanentization of transcendence. We show this from the concept of the “idea of god”, which is the phenomenon that violently separates subjectivity from transcendence and opens up a tear in it that we call “psycho-theological”: the divine violently leaves a trace in us by its very distance. We describe this phenomenon by means of a study of four archives: Descartes’ third *Metaphysical Meditations* (1641), the refutation of the cosmological proof of the existence of God in Kant’s *Transcendental Dialectic* in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781–87), Schelling’s commentary on this Kant’s text in his Introduction to the lectures on *Philosophy of Revelation* (1841), and the traces of Descartes’ third *Meditation* in the work of Levinas.

**Keywords:** metaphysics; phenomenology; philosophy of religion; Schelling; Kant; Descartes; Levinas

This article examines the conceptual and historical fate in philosophy from Descartes to Levinas on the concept of the “idea of god”, understanding it as the philosophical expression of the most radical phenomenological subjectivity. The paper starts from the following Levinas remark on Descartes’ idea of god:

The one affected by the other—anarchic trauma or inspiration of the one by the other and not causality striking, in the mechanical mode, a matter subjected to its energy (*l’un affecté par l’autre—traumatisme an-archique ou inspiration de l’un par l’autre et non pas causalité frappant, sur le mode mécanique, une matière soumise à son énergie*)<sup>1</sup>.

From this Levinasian intuition, this article wishes to describe a moment in the history of metaphysics from a hypothesis that we call “psycho-theological” and through the study of the concept of “idea of god” in modern and contemporary philosophy: modern thought takes note of the remoteness of the divine in transcendence in such a way that what remains of him is no more than a trace, an idea that marks such a remoteness even more. On the one hand, the idea of god violently impacts the interiority of a subject since it is the irruption of radical transcendence into immanence; but on the other hand, such violence, which has psychological effects that we will describe, is also that of the refusal of transcendence, which thus gives itself by refusing itself, to produce a modern form of subjectivity abandoned to itself and striving to the point of madness to reconstitute transcendence. The methodology of this article is doxographic, with the aim to isolate, very arbitrarily, doctrines that each mark a metamorphosis of such a *psycho-theology*; the aim is ultimately to give a figure (or an ideal type) to modern philosophy as a whole, marked by the agony of god, of which only a very fragile immanent idea remains. The ambition of this article, therefore, is twofold. First, it gives a phenomenological history of the concept of “idea of god” in Descartes, Kant, Schelling and Levinas; but at the same time, it claims to inscribe such a history in the history of the immanentization of the divine that modern philosophy has described and against which it has opposed itself, not without a very radical speculative violence. Lastly, this paper is not theological but comes from a radical atheistic perspective where “god” is the name of a historical and cultural figure, where it is radically immersed in history—until the most extreme immanence.



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## 1. The Violence of Causality of the Idea of God in Descartes

### 1.1. The Idea «Mise en Moi»

In the third *Meditatio*, Descartes discovers that he is no longer alone in the world by examining, in the immanence of his *cogito*, all the kinds of ideas he has, and he observes that some ideas have more intensity of reality than others, based on the principle of causality maintained here in immanence. In addition, he discovers only one idea—the idea of god—that it is impossible for it to have been caused by his mind because an effect necessarily has as much or less intensity of reality as its cause, so my finite mind cannot be the cause of an idea of the infinite. Therefore, it is a necessity that there is a “formal reality” that causes the “objective reality” of the idea of god from outside. Jean-Luc Marion, moreover, had deeply insisted on the empire of efficient causality, up to the “*causa efficiens et totalis*”, in this meditation<sup>2</sup>. Here is how Descartes describes the action of such an efficient causality by which I have in me the idea of God:

... non tamen idcirco esset idea substantiae infinitae, cum sim finitus, nisi ab aliqua substantia, quae revera esset infinita, procederet (je n’aurais pas néanmoins l’idée d’une substance infinie, moi qui suis fini, si elle n’avait été mise en moi par quelque substance qui fût véritablement infinie—I, who am finite, would not have the idea of an infinite substance if it had not been put into me by some substance which is truly infinite). (AT VII, p. 45/AT IX, p. 36)

The curious expression: “mise en moi par quelque substance (put into me by some substance)” translates “*ab aliqua substantia . . . procederet*”, and perhaps calls for the following reading. In the *Meditationes* but also in the *Responsiones*, “*procedere*” always qualifies the external/internal causal relationship, for example (one example among others) in the sixth *Meditatio*: “*nempe corpora a quibus ideae istae procederent*” (AT VII, p. 75). In this text, the idea of infinite substance in me proceeds causally from the external god. However, the Duc de Luynes will find the expression “*mise en moi*” (put in me) in the *Discours de la méthode*, where we can read, in the fourth part, about the idea of god:

And because there is no less repugnance that the more perfect is a continuation and dependence of the less perfect, than there is that from nothing something proceeds, I could not hold it from myself either; So that it remained that it was put into me by a nature which was truly more perfect than I was, and even which had in itself all the perfections of which I could have some idea, that is, to explain myself in one word, which was God<sup>3</sup>.

We see here that “*procéder*” is first used in a general way to deny the causality of nothingness and that “*mise en moi*” then expressly qualifies the causality proper to the “nature that was truly more perfect”, “in a word”, “God”. “*Mise*” (put) is synonymous with “*causée*” (caused), but the expression “*mise en moi*” is almost exclusively used by Descartes to qualify divine causality; it is then a more direct action of god on me, in me—“*mise en moi*” insisting not only on the passivity of “me” who receives but also and above all on the imperial activity of the infinite substance on me through the idea. It is not myself who can cause by myself such an idea (“*itaque sola restat idea Dei, in qua considerandum est an aliquid sit quod a me ipso non potuerit proficisci*”); it is god itself which has the power to introduce in myself, who is radically other than god, its own idea. At the moment when subjectivity is plunged into the most radical doubt, when external reality and mathematical truths are suspended through doubt, the most radical of exteriority manifests its full positive power through the most radical *efficient causality*: the “*mise en moi* (putting into me)” of its idea.

This efficient causality operates an original dynamiting of subjectivity because the expression “put into me” already manifests the radical desubjectivation that deprives the *cogito* of what it believed to be its very originality:

... priorem quodammodo in me esse perceptionem infiniti quam finiti, hoc est Dei quam mei ipsius (in some way the perception of the infinite is prior in me to the perception of the finite, that is, the perception of God is prior to my perception of myself). (AT VII, p. 45)

The violence of the idea of god through efficient causality is the violence of the insertion in the mind of a content that it cannot contain, the insertion of an impossible idea for the mind; then, it is the violence of the radical positivity of such an idea in a being (me) that cannot contain such positive intensity. Or, in other words, the violence of the substitution of the *cogito* by the cause of the idea of god within the subjectivity itself. It is an idea so positive that it appears in retrospect as preceding in principle the *cogito* itself, insofar as the *cogito* is itself only possible from such a positivity<sup>4</sup>.

### 1.2. The Causal Distance of God

Now this explosion of the *ego* by efficient causality is singularly disrupted by the relationship that god itself has to efficient causality. Indeed, we find such a text in the *Quartae Responsiones*:

Where these words, the cause of itself (*causa sui*), cannot in any way be understood of the efficient cause, but only that God's inexhaustable power is the cause or reason why he needs no cause (*inexhausta Dei potentia sit causa sive ratio propter quam causa non indiget*). (AT VII, p. 236)

The thesis that there is a radical continuity between God and the idea he puts into me through the *efficient causality* that unites them is here radically complicated, even prevented. Vincent Carraud proposed to read not "*causa sive ratio/propter quam . . .*" but "*causa/sive ratio propter quam . . .*" by making "*ratio*" the unique antecedent of the subordinate, and understood that god occupied a quite eminent and indeed ambiguous position concerning efficient causality. Indeed, according to Carraud, the principle of causality (thus of efficient causality) "produces intelligibility" for all finite beings; but for god, it is not the same because it is the principle of reason which replaces the principle of efficient causality, the "*sive*" in the expression "*causa sive ratio*" in fact marking a disjunction—even if Carraud relativizes such a disjunction by emphasizing that it establishes causality in principle from the principle of sufficient reason<sup>5</sup>. The ambiguity is maintained, but made more complex by Descartes, in these answers to Arnauld, because he wants to preserve the positivity of the essence of god, insofar as it is said by itself in an entirely positive way. Moreover, it is precisely that Descartes gives another name to qualify that by which god does not need a cause to exist nor to be preserved—in a passage that rewrites the one we quoted just now: the "formal cause"<sup>6</sup>. If therefore god does not need a cause to exist because of its "immensity of power"<sup>7</sup>, the Cartesian vocabulary does not however completely exclude causality in order to think of such a divine essence as certainly non-efficient. Indeed, the Cartesian insistence on maintaining the vocabulary of causality is undeniable: "God is *per se* positively and as by a cause", a "very useful" and even "necessary" vocabulary<sup>8</sup>—but it should be noted that God is not *per se* "by a cause", but "as by a cause (*tanquam a causa*)", comparison which gives its tonality to this whole passage. Descartes thus makes an *analogical* use not only of the concept of cause, but more specifically of the concept of efficient causality to apply it to god itself—and this is not surprising, insofar as the proof of god's existence in the third *Meditatio* is not only a proof by causality, but more specifically a proof by efficient causality. It is therefore necessary that something be analogously thought of in god as efficient causality, without however reducing divine transcendence to the kind of causality proper to its creation, which is the heart of Arnauld's objection, who in this is entirely faithful to the scholastics' exclusion of efficient causality concerning god itself. The challenge for Descartes is not to fall into univocity, while maintaining the complete positivity of the idea of god which contains its essence: it is the *analogy*, a tool that could not be more traditional, which thus makes it possible to maintain this full positivity in spite of the impossibility of making god enter (so to speak) into causality. It is necessary to reconcile the hyper-transcendent immensity of god with its intelligibility in and through the *proof* by the idea, that is by the causality.

Now, formal causality is defined by Descartes in its opposition to efficient causality, the former being by itself, the latter by other<sup>9</sup>. However, Descartes goes so far as to qualify

the former precisely from the latter, insofar as the formal causality that constitutes divine self-causality can be approached from a radical extension of efficient causality—by *analogy* with the relation of a straight line to the “greatest circular line imaginable”<sup>10</sup>. Analogy allows a “passage to the limit”, to use an expression of Henri Gouhier (1999, p. 217), where efficient causality is radicalized to the point of its very disappearance in formal causality, or even to the point of the disappearance of all causality. In fact, Descartes pushes the concept of causality to its climax, not to reduce the divine essence to efficient causality or even to causality as such, but to meditate the extreme dialectical relationship which unites while separating the divine substance from its effects, especially the idea. The idea may well be fully positive, it may even very positively represent the divine essence, it is at the same time the expression of the tear that runs through Cartesian conceptuality itself between immanence and transcendence, between what god gives and what it does not give. It does give something, because of the idea we have of it is positivity; but it cannot give everything, there is a tear that the clearly analogical vocabulary of Descartes, even its very ambiguity, reflects: god is definable by causality, including in a certain way by efficient causality, and yet it is except for efficient causality, indeed for all causality<sup>11</sup>. In an almost Plotinian way, the Cartesian god gives what it does not have (which is actually a profoundly Aristotelian hesitation where the prime mover moves without itself moving)<sup>12</sup>. It is indeed the analogy between efficient causality for the existence of finite beings on the one hand, and *causa sui* on the other, that manifests the core of Cartesian ambiguity. The very concept of “*causa sui*” is problematic because it is not certain for Descartes, as we have seen, that the concept of “cause” can be ontologically appropriate to the divine essence: the Heideggerian interpretation of Descartes, which holds that the latter reduced the divine to the metaphysical principle of causality, therefore appears untenable<sup>13</sup>. In sum, by rehabilitating the scholastic concepts of “*causa formalis*” and “*analogia*” (Dan Arbib 2021, *op. cit.*, p. 268), Descartes, far from reducing god to its intelligibility according to the principle of causality, places it in a situation of profound imbalance, since it excepts *in fine* itself from such a principle. Descartes defends the intelligibility (up to a certain point) and especially the full positivity of the idea of god, but still marks the unbridgeable gap between the creature and the creator. Thus, we can understand that this Cartesian hesitation, obviously voluntary, between a god subject to the principle of causality and a god radically heterogeneous to such a principle, reflects the tension between the incommensurability between god and the human mind and the full positivity of the idea of god within me.

Indeed, this irreducible distance which, itself outside of efficiency, nevertheless achieves through the efficiency of “putting its idea within me”, only achieves it precisely because it is this irreducible distance. It is because it puts its idea in me through efficient causality that such an idea dynamites the *ego*, thus constituted because it can then pronounce the *cogito*. Transcendence is henceforth *hypertranscendence*, since god seems (as we have just seen) to be excepted from the principle of efficient causality (however maintained analogically), which allows it to appear as an idea to subjectivity. The original fact of subjectivity only occurs from the radicalization of transcendence into *hypertranscendence*, at the frontier of causality. Let us summarize the process: god causes its idea in the immanence of the subject insofar as it transcends itself beyond efficient causality, where it is an efficient cause beyond the efficient cause. It is thus necessary to think that by the very movement of its transcendence, it projects by an efficient causality from which it is excluded in its infinity as an idea in each *cogito*, thus producing a kind of “*transimmanence*”, of transcendence plunged into immanence which however comes from a transcendence infinitely distant from immanence. Efficient causality is thus destroyed at the moment when it produces the most extreme idea. From then on, the violence of the idea of god is twofold: on the one hand, it is the violence of an idea that dynamites the *ego* by imposing itself within me when I cannot contain it: it marks subjectivity with a trace that goes beyond the limits of my finitude; on the other hand, it is “put into me” from a god that I certainly “know” insofar as it is constituted as an idea in immanence, but that I cannot “understand”, i.e., embrace by the mind<sup>14</sup>. This is at least how we understand the Cartesian tearing

of causality from causality itself, a divine proximity up to intimacy that is only possible through its infinite distance (which is, after all, a perfectly Augustinian *topos*). We call this violence “psycho–theological”, where the extreme divine transcendence, to the point of *abandonment*, nevertheless produces a psychological deflagration and thus constitutes modern subjectivity.

## 2. The Violence of the Idea of God in Kant’s Transcendental Dialectic

### 2.1. The Transcendental Experience of the Idea of God

We call the violence of putting the idea of god within me “psycho–theological violence”: a violence that violates the psychology of subjectivity by what it contains without being able to contain it, the idea of god. Now, such psycho–theological violence underwent a capital historical metamorphosis with Kant, where hypertranscendence radically vanishes from any relationship with subjectivity. The flight from transcendence into hypertranscendence is metamorphosed, historically, into abandonment by the transcendence of immanence now left to itself under the figure of the transcendental. The transcendental is the figure of such an abandonment from transcendence. In any case, the transcendental in its most extreme configuration, as it is described in a famous text that is rarely commented on in the Transcendental Dialectics of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which Kant exposes more than he refutes the proof *a contingentia mundi*, the cosmological proof by causality, which starts from the most general experience of the objectivity:

The proof, therefore, begins properly with experience (*Erfahrung*), and consequently, it is not quite established a priori. (Ak. III, p. 405 (A605/B633))

Such an experience implies both the generality of a world and the self that experiences its existence, since Kant reconstructs the proof in the following hypothetical syllogism: “(a) If something exists, there must also exist an absolutely necessary being; (b) yet I exist at least myself; (c) therefore an absolutely necessary being exists<sup>15</sup>”. As Kant immediately indicates, the major rests on “experience in general” (*aus einer Erfahrung überhaupt*), and the minor “contains an experience” (*enthält eine Erfahrung*). It is indeed through the experience of something that exists, generally in the major, and of a singular being in the minor, that absolutely necessary being is attained. One could say (and this will be crucial in Schelling’s interpretation) that such a proof is quasi-empirical, in the sense that it begins with a (non-objective) form of empiricity. Thus, Kant can go so far as to speak of the

empirical foundation of the proof (*empirische Beweisgrund*). (Ak. III, p. 406 (A606/B634))

an empiricity that nevertheless does not constitute an object of experience (and thus of knowledge) at all, including the singularized experience of my own existence. In each case (the experience of the world, i.e., of the object in general, and the experience of my own existence), it is a question of indeterminate, non-objectifying experiences, which are therefore both empirical and indeterminate. Thus, such an experience is not only not stable, but also cannot lead to the proof of a being that goes beyond all possible objectivity. This is why Kant emphasizes that such a proof ultimately falls back into the ontological proof from which it derives all its strength. If we try to phenomenologically reconstruct the mechanism of such a proof, we will say that subjectivity makes the indeterminate experience of objectivity by which he becomes aware of the contingency of objects as a contingency which then calls up the non-contingent foundation and cause of all contingent effects and causes: the *prima causa* which springs from all contingencies as contingency. The first Kantian determination of the kind of experience at work in the cosmological proof is thus the indeterminate experience of objectivity and of myself, experience which experiences itself in its contingency, which reflects itself (naturally uncritically) as contingent. However, there is a second Kantian determination of the type of experience at work in the cosmological proof, at a deeper level. Indeed, the reason is

forced, since this necessity must be unconditioned and certain a priori, to look for a concept which, as far as possible, satisfies such a requirement ( . . . *und wäre*

*nicht die Vernunft, da diese Nothwendigkeit unbedingt und a priori gewiß sein muß, gezwungen worden, einen Begriff zu suchen), and makes an existence known as quite a priori. (Ak. III, p. 404 (A603/B631))*

The word “*gezwungen*”, often used by Kant in his practical philosophy, does imply a *coercion*, external or internal, a quasi-physical force exerted on subjectivity in such a way that it is under such a force. We shall see in more detail what force we are talking about here, but it is indeed this word that allows us to qualify the mode of being of the transcendental appearance of the idea of god: at the heart of such a transcendental appearance is a *constraint*, the constraint that reason experiences from the unconditioned and the concept that must be adequate to it. The unconditioned imposes itself, by force, at the heart of the transcendental phenomenon, on reason. The mode of appearance of the transcendental appearance is thus profoundly normative, and the essence of its phenomenality is to be constraining. More precisely, and at this point in the Transcendental Dialectic the reader knows this, such phenomenality stems from a profoundly *pathological* dimension of reason, since the constraint exerted in it is the constraint to go beyond the transcendental limits of knowledge, as the following famous passage indicates: “But a principle that pushes these limits (*ein Grundsatz aber, der diese Schranken wegnimmt*), and even enjoins us to go beyond them, is called a transcendent principle (*ibid.*, p. 236 (A296/B352))”. Thus, the constituted principle is what we call “*transcendentalo–transcendent*”: it claims to be transcendental, i.e., constituted objectivity in the very immanence of the transcendental conditions of possibility of objectivity, and yet is used in a transcendent way, i.e., beyond the limits of such transcendental immanence. It seems, therefore, that transcendental appearance opens reason to transcendence which the transcendental alone could not reach because of its confinement within the transcendental frames of phenomenality.

It is a form of transcendentization of objectivity to the point of total and necessary objectivity that imposes itself as a constraint within the transcendental appearance, a constraint in fact, at the heart of phenomenality since it is so inevitable:

the subjective necessity of a certain connection of our concepts, in favour of the understanding, passes for an objective necessity of the determination of things in themselves (*für eine objective Nothwendigkeit der Bestimmung der Dinge an sich*). This is an illusion that cannot be avoided, any more than we could avoid the sea appearing to us to be higher in the open sea than it is near the shore (*ibid.*) . . .

The transcendental appearance is a transcendental illusion because it is an illusion of the (healthy) immanent–transcendental constitution of an object of knowledge, god appearing in some way as an object of knowledge. Is it a question, against such a “healthy” *immanence*, of a sick *transcendence*? No, but of another, sick type of *immanence*, which Kant describes here in the vocabulary of theatre and therefore of illusion: reason “changes costume and voice” and makes an “empirical deposition” (*ibid.*, p. 405 (A606/B634)), i.e., it plays at the same time the role of reason and the role of the intuitive given, the god-object then appearing as perfectly constituted by the duality necessary to all objectivity—intuition plus concepts. Reason, so to speak, strikes out the empirical foundation of proof (*empirische Beweisgrund!*) and replaces it with a factitious empiricity that it produces of its own strength. Reason thus imitates the normal transcendental functioning by itself and imposes on itself the *transcendent* principle, which is the final, definitive and total object—“god”. Here, it is *causality* that is affected by such a *transcendentalo–transcendent* pathology, insofar as reason draws from the understanding the concept of cause to make it an object by itself in a way, the cause-object (Theis 2012), in other words, the total cause (*causa efficiens et totalis* . . . ) which appears as an object of knowledge of common right. If we understand correctly, reason fraudulently hypostasizes, by transcendentalizing, the concept of causality and turns it into a total object, a total cause, *causa totalis*. Reason introduces the metastases of transcendence into the concept of cause and supports the development of these metastases by playing all the roles normally played by the transcendental dimensions of objectivity (including empiricity). The transcendental appearance is an illusion of transcendence as radical as it is objective, even though such transcendence is, in fact, constituted in and by

the immanence of distraught reason. Kant thus describes the phenomenality of the idea of god at the deepest transcendental level, where reason itself (as we shall see) can no longer sustain itself. It is an intrinsically binding, inevitable, natural phenomenality that manifests radical transcendence in its transcendence but, in fact, as an illusion produced by *immanence* alone. The *transcendentalo–transcendent* figure is a figure of *immanence*, or *transimmanence* insofar as *transcendence is now immersed in immanence*, produced by immanence, as an illusion that nevertheless deploys profound and *violent* psycho–theological effects.

## 2.2. The Psycho–Theological Vanishing of God in Its Idea

Indeed, the *transcendentalo–transcendent* figure of the idea of god in the Transcendental Dialectic contains a strong *psycho–theological* dimension. It is first of all the “self-satisfaction” of reason that Kant describes, evoking “*die falsche Selbstbefriedigung der Vernunft in Ansehung der Vollendung dieser Reihe*”. The term “*Selbstbefriedigung*”, which has a very strong sexual connotation, describes the immanent process of reason which, while locking itself into immanence (i.e., cutting itself off from the intuitive input), constructs a transcendental pseudo-world where it simultaneously plays all transcendental and empirical roles. Reason multiplies and thus masturbates, gives itself by this multiplication of pleasure, the pleasure of the illusion of transcendence. Pleasure of illusion, in illusion, and therefore (very paradoxically, *because* a pleasure as such cannot be either true or false) a false pleasure, as such a pleasure, very constrained, produces false syntheses (because cut off from intuitiveness and not content with analytical syntheses); the structure is thus originally and naturally faulty, subsequently inducing necessarily false judgments which will be those of metaphysics and theology. Such self-satisfaction has its repercussion in the fundamental inappetement of psycho–theological anxiety—thus, Kant writes, taking up the root “*befriedigen*”: the cosmological proof is

above all the efforts that we can attempt to satisfy ( . . . ) our understanding, and of all the attempts also that we can make to calm it on this impotence which is its own (*alle äußerste Bestrebungen, unseren Verstand über diesen: Punkt zu befriedigen, aber auch alle Versuche, ihn wegen dieses seines Unvermögens zu beruhigen*). (Ak. III, p. 409 (A613/B641))

Let us seriously consider the return of the root “*befriedigen*” here: “*Selbstbefriedigung*” designated the satisfaction of reason which was transported to the false transcendence promised in the idea of god; now, this implies that the understanding, for its part, is entirely deprived of all satisfaction because it experiences with the greatest violence its “powerlessness” (*Unvermögen*) in the face of such a promise. What impotence is this, that which reason did not experience when it stole the category of causality from the understanding to hypostasize it into a total object? The understanding, for its part, feels to be the lack of intuitiveness that would be needed for there to really be objectivity; he worries about the abnormal use of the concept of causality by reason, or even about the totalitarian empire of reason over all the other transcendental faculties. The understanding feels annihilated by the metastases of maddened reason; it experiences the most radical finitude before its total powerlessness to contain the idea of god that only reason could dare to produce. As a consequence of this madness of reason, the understanding experiences its finitude in its inability to produce objects by the sole force of its concepts. This text is very radical because it gives the impression that the understanding, in such use by reason of its concepts, has a life of its own, is autonomous and has a life of anxiety, of the experience of finitude when it is cut off from all intuitiveness, from all normal use of the transcendental faculties. The unreason of reason produces, in a way, the gap needed for the understanding to experience its own life, life anxiety. Subjectivity is thus split into a transcendental double life: the life of reason, the test of the contentment of *transcendentalo–transcendent* fraud; the life of the understanding, the challenge of the *immanent anxiety of finitude*. Double experience of a double transcendental subjectivity, which each time takes place in the (*hyper-*)*immanence* of the transcendental sphere cut off from all intuitiveness and therefore from all possible objectivity. Here, the transcendental creates a self-experience.

However, these psycho–theological dimensions are only the symptoms of the “vertiginous impression” produced by reason understood at these depths, an original psycho–theological dimension which marks the most violent split in subjectivity in Kant’s work because it is not overcome by any *sublimation*. Indeed:

The unconditioned necessity which we so indispensably need as the ultimate support of all things is the true abyss (*der wahre Abgrund*) of human reason. Eternity itself, so terribly sublime (*schauderhaft erhaben*) that a Haller could have painted it, does not nearly make such a vertiginous impression (*schwindelichten Eindruck*) on the mind (*Gemüth*) ( . . . ) We can neither remove from ourselves nor support this thought that a being, that we represent as the highest among all possible beings, says to himself in a way: I am from eternity to eternity ( . . . ); but where am I from then (*aber woher bin ich denn?*)? everything is collapsing below us (*hier sinkt alles unter uns*).

Haller’s eternity is “terribly sublime” (*schauderhaft erhaben*), and here we can identify what will become the analytic of the sublime in the third *Critique*. However, reason faced with the idea of god is precisely not sublime; Kant is almost explicit here. It is, therefore, not a question of an experience of the sublime but of a much older, insurmountable experience of reason transcendently experiencing itself in the sickly mechanism that Kant describes here from the phenomenon of the question: “*aber woher bin ich denn?*” Question not posed by subjectivity, be it transcendental, but question asked by the unconditioned posed by reason as its radical other insofar as it is the total and totalizing object-cause, in other words, the question that god, as an idea (that is to say the transcendence irremediably plunged into immanence), poses deep within me. Such a question is not only unanswerable, it is not only an unanswerable question for someone other than me, but it is an unanswerable question for the god of tradition insofar as it is the god of reason who digs reason into its abyss (*Abgrund*). Subjectivity, as with Descartes, is absolutely dynamited, but (unlike Descartes) it is dynamited from immanence alone: god is infinite in abyss and weak in questions and immanence. Kant denies Descartes *hypertranscendence*. The flight from god into *hypertranscendence* (Descartes) becomes in Kant an idea of god that is cut off from its transcendence, without “formal reality” (in the language of Descartes), a purely immanent causality which, no longer able to refer to the infinite distance of transcendence, hollows out immanence from an infinite distance. *Hypertranscendence* (god’s flight into hypertranscendence) necessarily had to metamorphose into hyperimmanence (god’s flight into the *Abgrund* of reason). The causal tear is no longer between immanence and hypertranscendence as in Descartes (between the idea of god and what it comes from), but it is between immanence (the idea of god in reason) and hyperimmanence (the abyss produced by the idea of god in reason). Kant describes here, at the heart of the Transcendental Dialectic, the most original depths of transcendental subjectivity in its psycho–theological figure; he reaches the foundation of all transcendental subjectivity in the otherness that she carries deep within herself, which implies that transcendental subjectivity only truly has a possibility from the moment when *god begins to die historically*. Therefore, what the Transcendental Dialectic makes it possible to describe is the harrowing historical situation of subjectivity abandoned by a divine whose flight does not take place in the transcendent spheres but in the most immanent and oldest foundations of subjectivity. It is indeed here, with the idea of god, of the *violence of the death of god* that it is a question.

### 3. Schelling’s Transcendental Dialectic: The Impossible Reconquest of Transcendence

#### 3.1. The Empirical Experience of God

Schelling, in a crucial text from his Berlin introduction (1941) to the lectures on the philosophy of Revelation, interpreted this text from Kant’s Transcendental Dialectic. The fundamental issue at stake in such an interpretation is indeed the immanence/transcendence relationship, and more precisely the possibility for philosophical speculation to find a way out of the historical process of immanentization of god by the idea. Indeed, Schelling sees

clearly that it is such an immanentization that is in question in our text of the Transcendental Dialectic:

From the beginning to the end, this philosophy was immanent (*immanente*), i.e., progressing in pure thought (*im blossen Denken*), it was in no way a transcendent philosophy (*transzendente*). If, therefore, in the end it claimed to have knowledge of God (*Erkenntnis Gottes*), then it had demonstrated God only as a necessary idea of reason (*notwendige Vernunftidee*), (. . . ) the necessary consequence of this was that God was stripped of all transcendence (*dass Gott aller Transzendenz beraubt*), that He was inserted (*hereingezo-gen*) into this logical thought, as a purely logical concept, as the Idea itself (*Idee selbst*)<sup>16</sup>.

It is first interesting to note that Kant's transcendental philosophy is a philosophy that moves in immanence for Schelling, i.e., that sees the mind confronting itself, including when it comes to thinking the thing-in-itself. What Schelling calls "negative philosophy" is precisely such a thought immersed in immanence, which does not make the turn of positive philosophy which confronts transcendence as transcendence, which must start from it. Not only does transcendental philosophy start from the immanent faculties of the mind, but it also remains that there in the sense that it actually abolishes exteriority as exteriority, reducing it to phenomenal, i.e., immanent, exteriority. Transcendental philosophy is the investigation of immanence and transcendence from immanence, without ever leaving it. Critical philosophy is doubly negative, on the one hand, because it is transcendental philosophy, on the other hand, because god is thought of in its radicality only as "*Idee selbst*", that is to say, that he is "stripped of all transcendence": it is an idea, but an idea of reason, not of god itself. Schelling's expression is, moreover, striking: god is "stripped" of all transcendence; it is "*inserted*" (*hereingezo-gen*) into logical thought (the idea). Schelling, probably unintentionally, reverses the Cartesian use of the expression "*mise en moi*" (put into me—cf. *supra*): in Descartes, it is the divine hyperimmanence that puts into me the idea that I cannot contain; in Kant, according to Schelling, it is myself (my immanence) that "puts" god (that "*inserts*" him—"hereingezo-gen") into the immanent idea. The process is completely reversed from Descartes to Kant if we follow Schelling's reading here. Reason puts god into the idea. Moreover, unlike Descartes, the Kantian idea of god, at least in the Transcendental Dialectic, is the idea cut off from its god, from transcendence, without an object and abandoned to its ideality. As if such an idea, abandoned from its object, *digs* the abyss of reason to find in hyperimmanence the lost transcendence. The observation must, moreover, extend to the whole of the theological and metaphysical tradition, insofar as it believed that it was dealing with the exteriority of god when it actually was only struggling with a usurped transcendence.

Schelling's entire effort in the transition from negative to positive philosophy lies in the speculative decision to pose the pure transcendent, i.e., the pure being before the concept, in a spectacular reversal of the ontological argument: one no longer starts from the concept (that is to say "god"), but from the pure and simple being that exists, and in doing so one reverses the fundamental concepts of Aristotelianism (as Jean-François Courtine has forcefully shown): if what Schelling calls the prius (and not "god", the concept) is power, it will then be power without power, "power which is no longer power (*Potenz, die nicht mehr Potenz*)", beyond the possibility which was the object of negative philosophy, or even "power which is (*die Seyende Potenz*)", "power which is not power but itself an act (*Potenz, welche nicht Potenz, sondern selbst Actus ist*)"<sup>17</sup>: what Schelling is trying to think here is the very phenomenon of revelation in its most radical origin, or rather it is a question of his methodology concerning the phenomenon of revelation: a power which is not power but act, pure being as pure existing (which is all things considered completely Aristotelian, if it is true that for Aristotle potency is a mode of being invested by the act). Schelling, therefore, finds the following formula essential to qualify such a power:

this is why we could even call it the inverted power-to-be (*das umgekehrte Seynkönnende*), this power-to-be where the power is the *posterius*, and the act the *prius*. (SW. XIII, p. 156)

These concepts (which are precisely not concepts, but names) have the task of approaching the origin of revelation by projecting thought outside of itself. Here, Jean-François Courtine's comment is irreplaceable: "Mais si la puissance, prise en ce sens, est 'le seul fondement de tout doute', l'existant indubitable est aussi et surtout celui devant lequel 'la pensée est sans force', celui qui se trouve 'en sécurité contre tous les doutes', c'est-à-dire en sécurité 'contre la pensée'. La dimension du penser, au moins depuis F. Suarez, c'est en effet *l'essentia realis*, c'est-à-dire le '*cogitabile*', le 'possible'. L'indubitablement existant ne se lève pas à l'horizon d'un tel régime de penser; il le défait bien plutôt<sup>18</sup>". We must understand that it is against such a reduction in being to the thinkable, that is to say to the possible, that Schelling forges a new grammar of being capable of confronting the very great tension which inhabits the concept of god, between its deployment in the power of revelation on the one hand, and on the other hand, its holding in the absolute transcendence and the infinite exteriority which precedes any possible thought. Nevertheless, however necessary the *prius* is (necessity itself necessary), the fact remains that no rational a priori can open up to it; at the same time, it is indeed a very specific kind of *empiricality* which is at work here, insofar as access to the *prius* is made by its consequences but in such a way that these consequences open immediately to the *prius*, and do not hide it:

It is, therefore here, in positive philosophy, that empiricism, properly speaking (*eigentlicher Empirismus*), is found, insofar as that which presents itself in experience (*als das in der Erfahrung Vorkommende selbst*) becomes the element which contributes to philosophy. (. . .) positive philosophy is an empirical apriorism (*empirischer Apriorismus*), or the empiricism of the *apriorical* (*der Empirismus des Apriorischen*), insofar as it demonstrates *per posterium* the *prius* as being God. (SW XIII, p. 130)

It is well known that we must distinguish between two empiricisms (which Schelling has distinguished since 1830), the first specific to negative philosophy, which Schelling calls "regressive empiricism", and which consists of starting from all the knowledge about god as well as from nature to go back to god itself, and "progressive empiricism" which is proper to positive philosophy.<sup>19</sup> The latter one is fully empirical insofar as it makes a kind of experience of the *prius*, which is neither mystical nor liturgical. Schelling first specifies, in a note to this passage, what he means by this type of empirical experience: in positive philosophy, "one does not go from the effect to the cause, but inversely from the cause to the effect"; the *prius* is thus proven a posteriori inasmuch as some experience of the cause, better still of the *prima causa*, is made by positive philosophy (the proof of the existence of god must therefore be, like in Descartes' third *Meditatio*, a posteriori). Progressive empiricism (*progressive Empirismus*) is triggered by an experience—and here, the proximity to Kant begins to appear in depth:

Experience, to which positive philosophy goes (*die Erfahrung, welcher die positive Philosophie zugeht*), is not only a certain (*gewisse*) experience, but the whole of the experience (*die gesammte Erfahrung*) from the beginning to the end. What contributes to the proof is not a part of the experience (*ein Theil der Erfahrung*), it is the whole experience (*die ganze Erfahrung*). (. . .) because the realm of actuality in which it moves is not a completed and closed realm (*weil das Reich der Wirklichkeit, in welchem er sich bewegt, kein vollendetes und abgeschlossenes ist*)—for even if nature for the moment is at its end and remains at rest, there is nevertheless still in history (*Geschichte*) a movement (*Bewegung*) and a ceaseless progress—because, I say, the realm of effectiveness (*Reich der Wirklichkeit*) is not a closed realm, but a realm which goes unceasingly towards the meeting of its accomplishment (*sondern ein seiner Vollendung fortwährend entgegengehendes ist*), the proof also is never closed. (*ibid.*, pp. 130–31)

What is taken into view with such an experience is the *totality of the experience*, that is to say, the experience of the very process of the unfolding of the world from the prius, which thus appears in full light beyond the transcendently constituted Kantian experience. For it is not an experience of object by concept, but rather the experience of the movement (*Bewegung*) of the fulfilment (*Vollendung*) of the prius in the world, a total and totalizing view, post-rational (because after negative philosophy), of what Schelling described as early as his *Naturphilosophie* on the ontological level: a presentiment in the present of the phenomenon of all that it contains of the absolute in it, which, according to Schelling, makes every phenomenon both similar to a self-sufficient proposition by Euclid, and rich in the future of the phenomena it implies, since the phenomenon is experienced from the perspective of totality up to the prius, totality which is never closed, but which is the progression taking place within the phenomenon up to the prius itself. How not to see, here, a proximity with the type of experience that Kant described in the Transcendental Dialectic—let us recall the text: “The proof, therefore, begins properly with experience (*Erfahrung*), and consequently it is not quite established a priori (Ak. III, p. 405 (A605/B633))”, an experience of an “object of all possible experience (*der Gegenstand aller möglichen Erfahrung*)”. Additionally, this is our hypothesis: it is indeed in the text of the Transcendental Dialectic that we interpreted in the previous part that we must identify, in Berlin’s introduction of 1841, the precise description of the type of empiricity at work with positive philosophy when it is about experiencing god.

### 3.2. The Inverted Idea of God

Indeed, in refuting the cosmological proof by causality, Kant thus asserted that it starts from an *experience*, not of a particular object, but a general experience of the world and of myself, which opens to the existence of a necessary being that would be the cause of what is thus experienced—Kant speaks here of the “empirical foundation of the proof” (*empirische Beweisgrund*) (Ak. III, p. 406 (A 606/B634)), and he adds that the proof thinks it can attribute qualities to the *causa prima* on the basis of this foundation even though it actually falls back into the a priori attribution of concepts to the necessary being; reason no longer relies on the empirical foundation, but cuts itself off from it to fall back into the ontological proof. However, Schelling’s interpretation of Kant seems to confirm the possibility of making the “empirical foundation” the continuous basis of the switch between negative and positive philosophy. However, it is then a particular, non-representational mode of relation to necessary being that will pass through a certain type of *idea* that will not be a concept. We have pointed out that Schelling (unintentionally) inverted Descartes’ expression “*mise en moi* (put into me)” by the word “*hereingezogen*” to designate the way in which Kant put god into the idea of reason. However, it is more fundamentally a radical inversion of the concept of the idea of god that Schelling engages in this Berlin Introduction. This is, moreover, explicit since the crucial concept for understanding his conception of the idea of god is the concept of “inverted idea” (*umgekehrte Idee*)—which is the psycho-theological answer to the first (non-conceptual) definition of the prius as the “inverted power-to-be” (*das umgekehrte Seynkönnende*—see *supra*).

According to Schelling, the text of the Transcendental Dialectic is not only entangled in immanence, but it also opens a window, admittedly still negative, on transcendence as transcendence. However, he does so by deliberately committing a misinterpretation. He describes the Kantian *Abgrund* as the

unconditioned necessity of being, preceding all thought (*unbedingte, allem Denken vorausgehende Notwendigkeit des Seyns*);

or again:

deep feeling (*tiefes Gefühl*) of Kant for the sublimity of this being preceding all thought (*für die Erhabenheit dieses allem Denken zuvorkommenden Seyns*) ( . . . ), thought sunk in the depths of human nature ( . . . ) of the being who is before all thought (*welches vor allem Denken ist*). (*ibid.*, p. 163)

Let us start from Schelling's philological misinterpretation which evokes Kant's feeling for the "Erhabenheit", the sublimity, of god. Now, let us remember, Kant quasi explicitly refused that the sublime serve to qualify the idea of god in reason:

Selbst die Ewigkeit, so schauderhaft erhaben sie auch ein Haller schildern mag, macht lange den schwindelichten Eindruck nicht auf das Gemüth. (Ak. III, p. 409 (A 613/B 651)—see *supra*)

The sublime here describes the eternity sung by Haller, but precisely the idea of god provokes an impression that lies beyond such sublimity. The Kantian idea of god is, so to speak, beyond the sublime. However, Schelling twists the text to make it say precisely that the idea of god is found in the horizon of sublimity because he wants to convert the fundamental negativity of such an idea, immersed in the immanence, into positivity, that which marks the possible beginning of positive philosophy and the possible empirical experience of the prius by way of the sublime: the *Seyn* has always preceded the activity of reason, it is «*vor allem Denken*». However, such positivity, in turn, pushes the sublime into its most radical entrenchments because the idea of god in fact, projects thought into the outside of thought. What Schelling does, then, by leaving thought in this way, is to recapture the gesture of Descartes after Kant, to regain the transcendence (the *Seyn*!) which alone explains the presence of the idea of god in me. For Schelling affirms it: the idea of god of the Transcendental Dialectic takes thought out of itself because the idea of god, contrary to what Kant says, cannot be in my thought a priori: the idea of god is the limit representation without concept, a non-conceptual representation of a "pure and simple existing", of a "bottomless existing" (*das Grundlos Existierende*), which reason could in fact never produce by itself. We will have to determine how, but we see that at the heart of reason a radical a posteriori, which can never be presupposed by thought because it is "before all thought", manifests itself in a very paradoxical way because it must in some way come from such thought that it exceeds. Let us retain for the moment that Schelling, betraying the Kantian text, makes the *Seyn* appear radically a posteriori at the heart of a reason that is, in fact, affected by its other. One could believe in a return to Descartes, beyond Kant, or in a forced association between Descartes and Kant by Schelling. It is the most radical, the most absolute transcendence, which collapses reason into the abyss.

In the same lecture, Schelling gives the idea of god a very powerful configuration:

it is therefore pure idea and yet it is not idea in the sense that this word has in negative philosophy. Being pure and simple (*das bloss Seyende*) is the being (*Seyn*) in which rather all idea, that is to say all power (*Potenz*) is excluded. We can therefore name it only the inverted idea (*umgekehrte Idee*), the idea in which the reason is posited outside of itself (*die Idee, in welcher die Vernunft ausser sich gesetzt ist*). Reason cannot posit beings in which there is still nothing of a concept (*Begriff*), of a *quid*, as an absolute outside of itself (*als ein absolutes Ausser-sich*) (. . . ); reason, in this act of posing, is therefore posed outside of itself, in an absolutely ecstatic way (*absolut ekstatisch*). (SW XIII, pp. 162–63)

This idea that hollows out the immanence of absolute transcendence, is an "inverted idea" (*umgekehrte Idee*). We remember, earlier in Berlin's introduction, the expression "*umgekehrte Seynkönnende*" that constituted the first anti-conceptual, or counter-conceptual attempt to grasp something of the prius. With the "*umgekehrte Idee*", we encounter the attempt to describe the kind of experience that is subjectively done of the "*umgekehrte Seynkönnende*". It is a *destructive* idea, which hollows out reason from its very other at the moment when negative philosophy has exhausted all its resources when there is nothing left for it to deduce. It is not quite, as in Descartes, the immanence that finds itself projected into transcendence that dynamites the immanence of subjectivity in its very immanence; it is rather the opening of transcendence which bursts into the most intimate and secret background of subjectivity, where the idea is no longer really representation but "inverted idea": then, immanence is entirely projected into transcendence, it is forcibly *disimmanentized* so to speak, it has come out of itself—ecstasy. What is destroyed by this

inversion is indeed *causality*. It is almost incomprehensible; it cannot be thought of solely in the Cartesian mode of a causality torn between god and consciousness; causality is doubly torn in Schelling: on the one hand between god and consciousness, but on the other hand, between immanence and immanence, so to speak, the representation cancelling itself out in consciousness, producing the irrepresentable of the *prima causa* which can cause nothing other than the tearing of causality itself. Xavier Tilliette spoke, in an interpretation of this text, of a “collapse of causality” (Tilliette 1997). Perhaps, with such a destruction of the Cartesian efficient causality that went from god to the idea, we must understand that Schelling constructs an *inverted causality*, a causality that would start from immanence digging in itself the exit towards the transcendence of the *Seyn*, or even a *counter-causality* that would be understood in the opposite direction of the causal linearity that goes from the effect to the cause: the inverted idea explodes immanence to take it out of itself. The disease of reason is no longer that of transcendental appearance, but it is that of ecstasy, that is to say, the tearing away from causality in the depths of immanence, the opening in this immanence of the most radical transcendence. Such violence jeopardizes reason itself, which does not disappear, but which staggers, and which functions through this imbalance induced by the inverted idea. This would then be the way to think about the possible access to the empirical experience of the *prius*, that is to say to the radical experience of the divine exteriority, which would ultimately indeed start from such an exteriority, thanks to the inverted, rebounding causality, which projects reason outside of itself. It is certainly a complex process, which cannot be fully explained within the limits of this article; however, in any case, the radical Schellingian attempt is seen as work to conquer transcendence once again in spite of Kant, even by means of Kant.

### 3.3. *Stupefacta Quasi et Attonita*

We need to go deeper into Kant’s Schellingian commentary in the Berlin introduction, in order to understand the kind of violence at work in the thought experiencing this inverted idea. Immediately after Schelling’s quotation and rapid commentary of Kant’s refutation of the cosmological proof in the Transcendental Dialectic, he reminds us of what is at stake in the shift to positive philosophy: to start from what is “outside of thought” (*etwas außer dem Denken Seyendes*), “from a being (*Seyn*) that is absolutely independent of all thought, that prevents all thought (*das absolut unabhängig von allem Denken, das allem Denken zuvorkommend ist*)” (SW XIII, p. 164). Additionally it seems, after reading Kant, that this is precisely what the idea of god is not in the cosmological proof, fabricated by reason that digs the abyss in its foundation. It is certain that this radical exteriority is intended to be and even declares itself to be anti-Hegelian (“*von diesem Seyn weiß die Hegelsche Philosophie nichts, für diesen Begriff hat sie keine Stelle*”); and this anti-Hegelianism (i.e., the opposition with the overcoming of transcendence by thought) rests on the Kantian text but without the possibility of naming god, since (as we have seen) the being before all thought must be before all concept. Now, this is precisely what Kant calls (according to Schelling) “*Abgrund*”, which implies the following non-conceptual type of experience of reason (the one we try to describe in this part):

Is it anything other than that in front of which reason is silent, that which engulfs it and in front of which immediately it is nothing and can nothing anymore (*was ist dieß anders als das, wovor die Vernunft stille steht, von dem sie verschlungen wird, dem gegenüber sie zunächst nichts mehr ist, nichts vermag*)? (ibid.)

The verb “*verschlungen*” is particularly striking here. Pascal David notices furtively that it is the verb that Schelling used in the text “Über die Bedeutung eines der neu entdeckten Wandgemälde von Pompeji” (1933), to speak of Kronos swallowing his children<sup>20</sup>. It is indeed ecstasy here but precisely defined positively as what happens from experience to reason. Such *violence of engulfment* is indeed the deployment of the most radical a posteriori, the reason which posits (or rather on whom is imposed) what it cannot engulf (as any object of experience); it is, therefore, in a certain way a counter-experience, an experience which is not made in the immanence of thought but which on the contrary is engulfed in

the abyssal necessity—or, better, the “absolute eternity”, Schelling remarking that Kant, in the text on the *Abgrund* of human reason, distinguishes between “unconditioned necessity” and “eternity”. For eternity is manifestation, the deep experience that is at stake before the pure and simple existing:

For eternal is ( . . . ) that in front of what thought has no freedom (*gegen welches das Denken keine Freiheit hat*). (SW XIII, p. 164)

It is indeed in the constitution of thought as radical finitude that the experience of necessarily existing being is expressed; in other words, the subject experiences the necessary a posteriori by being projected before her radical finitude where, because it is radical finitude, she experiences the necessary being which is expressed here as eternity. It is precisely the full empiricity of such an experience, coming to such an extent from the outside that it projects the subject outwards, which delimits the experience of the finite subject as finite, but at the same time capable of such an experience of infinity. Nevertheless, Kantian reason has the faculty of the infinite at the heart of finitude: it is “infinite power to know” (*unendlicher Potenz des Erkennens*), “nature” pure and simple “to which only the infinite act can fit with (*nur der unendliche Actus entsprechen*)”, but which can only be expressed as “immobile and fixed, *quasi attonita (wie erstarrt, quasi attonita)*” (SW XIII, p. 165). This is again a quote from the *Philosophy of Mythology* lectures, where Schelling described a kind of pre-humanity dispossessed of its freedom, possessed (even stricken) by the fate of the relentless theogonic process<sup>21</sup>. What is crucial here is the way in which finitude is seized with dread because it realizes that the infinity it carries within is experiencing infinite being. In fact, Schelling makes the Kantian transcendental appearance a positive dimension, a positive access to the necessary being before any conceptualization. The use Schelling makes of such a passage from the Transcendental Dialectic is particularly telling:

Was ist die Ursache der Unvermeidlichkeit, etwas als an sich nothwendig unter den existirenden Dingen anzunehmen und doch zugleich vor dem Dasein eines solchen Wesens als einem Abgrunde zurückzubeben; und wie fängt man es an, daß sich die Vernunft hierüber selbst verstehe und aus dem schwankenden Zustande eines schüchternen und immer wiederum zurückgenommenen Beifalls zur ruhigen Einsicht gelange?

Es ist etwas überaus Merkwürdiges, daß, wenn man voraussetzt, etwas existire, man der Folgerung nicht Umgang haben kann, daß auch irgend etwas nothwendigerweise existire<sup>22</sup>.

This text is perhaps the one (along with the one that opens the refutation<sup>23</sup>) in which Kant most shows his sympathy for the cosmological proof, since there is an irrepressible necessity to experience the transcendental appearance of the necessary being in itself, “among existing things (*unter den existirenden Dingen*)”, in the midst of the experience of the world. Moreover, it is in the midst of such an experience that reason “understands itself” (*selbst verstehe*), but at the same time, is frightened by the abyss that has opened up with such self-understanding. Additionally, in a surprisingly pre-Schellingian vocabulary, reason is “retracted” (*zurückgenommen*); it finds itself compelled to posit its absolutely other deep within itself and thus withdraws into the dread of the *Abgrund*. Such a withdrawal of reason before the *Abgrund* is “natural”—Schelling moreover immediately mentions the expression “*natürlichen Schlusse*” that Kant uses just after this extract. Reason finds its nature here, in withdrawal before violence of the pure existent, before any essence or concept. A pure being, a pure act, frightens the reason because it is experienced in the heart of the world as a radical exteriority. From this point of view, the pure existent is beyond god, because beyond any attempt at conceptualization; it is experienced gradually, beginning with an inverted idea which shakes reason with dread, fills it with stupor (“*quasi attonita*”) because it is the presence in its depths of this exteriority, it is the impossible a priori of the absolute a posteriori, the impossible empirical experience of such an a posteriori.

What is striking is the way Schelling, in the Berlin Introduction, completes his interpretation of the Transcendental Dialectic in terms of immanence and transcendence. He first writes:

Kant puts together as concepts of reason the absolutely immanent concept, that of supreme being (for everything else is only relatively immanent, insofar as it can pass into being) and the absolutely transcendent concept (that of the necessary existent), without connecting them or being able to explain their juxtaposition—*hat Kant den absolut immanenten Begriff, den des höchsten Wesens (denn alles andere ist nur relativ immanent, inwiefern es in das Seyn übergehen kann) und den absolut transscendenten Begriff (den des nothwendig Existirenden) nur als unverbunden nebeneinander, beide als Vernunftbegriffe, ohne daß er dieß Nebeneinanderseyn erklären kann.* (SW XIII, p. 168)

Schelling reaffirms in the vocabulary of transcendence his positive interpretation of the god of the Kantian Transcendental Dialectic. God as an idea of reason is certainly the pure and simple immanence or hyperimmanence (Schelling says “absolute immanence”) that hollows out reason from itself, more immanent than the object of knowledge insofar as such an object always needs an intuitive donation to constitute itself. However, the idea of god is also the spontaneous manifestation, at the bottom of immanence, of the absolute necessity of a transcendence that transpires in the concept and that, in fact, exceeds the concept just as radically—in order to deconceptualize such a necessity, Schelling doubles it, making it the necessity of the necessity of the existent, the pure fact of such an existent. At the bottom of the idea of god there is, next to the a priori, the vacillation of reason in front of the absolute a posteriori, which cannot be the object of a thought because it is before any thought. It is, therefore, no longer transcendence in immanence, but immanence *and* transcendence, one next to the other, as Schelling says, in their impossible communication. It is a very singular metaphysical figure that Schelling describes here, which can be explained by the fact that Kant failed to think of the positive empirical experience of the prius as a posteriori. The separation between immanence and transcendence is total, the two cohabit without ever touching.

However, Schelling believes that he can switch to positive philosophy by moving away from the transcendence/immanence pair. His argument is as follows: the “transcendent” concept depends on immanence, of which it is the transcendent, and vice versa. Transcendence, therefore, always implies immanence and vice versa. Ontological proof, which starts from the concept and ends in existence, is a “way of transcending” (“... so ist dieß ein Transscendiren”):

But if I start from what precedes any concept, I have not gone beyond anything, or rather, if one calls this being transcendent, and if in it I go further towards the concept, then I have gone beyond the transcendent and have become immanent again (*wenn ich aber von dem allem Begriff Zuorkommenden ausgehe, so habe ich hier nichts überschritten, und vielmehr, wenn man dieses Seyn das transscendente nennt, und ich gehe in ihm fort zum Begriff, so habe ich das Transscendente überschritten und bin so wieder immanent geworden*). (SW XIII, p. 169)

As we have seen, Schelling starts from the absolute transcendent, beyond transcendence itself (*hypertranscendent*) insofar as this transcendent is not related to anything immanent. It is the first transcendence, isolated in a way, to which reason is forced to consent with fear—in a way the origin of origins which must *exist*. Reason thus has this capacity, in dread, to experience what is radically heterogeneous, external to it—and more: it must be able to bring such heterogeneity (*hypertranscendence*) back to its *immanence*, it must think of it as “god”, as “a posteriori god”,

it posits the transcendent in order to transform it into the absolutely immanent, and to have this absolute immanent at the same time as existing (*sie setzt das Transscendente, um es in das absolut Immanente zu verwandeln, und um dieses absolut Immanente zugleich als ein Existirendes zu haben*). (SW XIII, p. 170)

It is then that the fundamental distinction appears in the whole of Berlin's introduction between the prius and "god", "god" being the immanentization of the prius in and through reason. As Schelling says a little later, the pure representation of the prius is metamorphosed into the conceptual *representation* of "god". There is thus a radical separation between the prius, which reason experiences only within an empiricity entirely separated from thought, and "god", which is the absolute immanentization of what was first posited as separate. Schelling's will is that of a victory of reason, in a certain way, which "recovers its rights" (SW XIII, p. 171) by the absolute immanentization (*hyperimmanentization*) of "god", but it is at the cost of a radical separation between this "god" and the prius which remains to him forever *unvoordenklich*, the absolute empiricity which seizes reason with terror. One has the impression, and such an interpretation must be deepened, that the transcendence of the prius is so transcendent, beyond the immanent/transcendent couple, that it forces reason to recover its health by playing its role (the Hegelian role!) of immanentization. The difference with Hegel is that the prius remains the *unvoordenklich*, always in the background of all immanence, frightening in its very radicality. Schelling describes the core of what we call "*psycho-theology*": the violence of *hypertranscendence*, which seizes subjectivity with dread, produces at the same time a whole *hyperimmanent* life where the divine immanentizes itself radically.

#### 4. On a So-Called Violence of the Idea of God in Levinas

Let us summarize the preceding sections. The violence of the idea of god is due, in Descartes, to the idea of infinity which explodes the finitude of my thought; in Kant, it digs into reason through a hyperimmanence which reveals at the bottom of subjectivity a radical otherness which nevertheless comes from this subjectivity; in Schelling, the idea of god is an inverted idea which reconquers, beyond Kant, the transcendence of what it is the idea of, but at the price of a radical separation between the hypertranscendent prius and the immanent rationalized god. Levinas explicitly inherits this metaphysical path from modernity. In a certain way, he deepens the description of the violence of the idea of god through a radicalized *psycho-theology* where otherness is shown in and through pathology, the disease of transcendence. It is such a pathology that we describe in the last part of this article.

##### 4.1. *Similitudo Dei*

First of all, we want to show how the phenomenological concept of the idea of god imposed itself on Levinas. We will not engage in a review of all the uses in the young Levinas, but we will explore its function in the 1949 book, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, whose fundamental thesis can be summarized in a few words: phenomenology accomplishes the immanentization of the world—and Descartes' third *Meditatio* already plays a significant role:

the reconstitution of the world after the *epokhè* which suspends our judgements on it, [is] something else than the deduction of the reality of the outside world in Descartes. The world to be reconquered after the phenomenological reduction will be a world constituted by a thought: a synthesis of noemes of the *noesis*, revealing the evidence from which it originates and of which it is the synthetic product<sup>24</sup>.

Let us emphasize a few points:

- (i) There is nothing that would be outside the field of appearance as in Kant, namely a thing in itself, but the phenomenon is constituted insofar as it is the whole of being, entirely in the immanence of consciousness—and Levinas goes as far as Husserl almost never ventured: "a world constituted by a thought", because—Levinas continues—the "world" finds its origin in the syntheses of consciousness, in the *noesis*.

- (ii) There is an opposition of this phenomenological immanentism with Descartes' conquest of outside reality—conquest which is possible by the proof by idea (i.e., by causality) of the existence of god in the third *Meditatio*.
- (iii) Levinas has a very Fichtean interpretation of Husserl: consciousness overcomes exteriority by *immanentizing it*, that is, by bringing it into the realm of freedom. Descartes, here again, plays a crucial role (we come back to it just after): what sustains the analysis here is less the certainty of the objective world in the sense that Descartes gives to this term, than the return to the freedom of evidence where the resistant and foreign object appears as springing from the mind because it is understood by it<sup>25</sup>.
- (iv) Intentionality softens the object, constitutes the real which is without secret, without any thing in itself. According to Levinas, on the one hand, there is an idealist freedom of phenomenological consciousness that constitutes meaning, and, on the other hand, the natural attitude which undergoes meaning, where objects are “resistant and foreign” in their resistant otherness; we struggle to understand them, to handle them, to perceive them. The natural attitude is normative throughout; the transcendental attitude is itself normative, prescriptive for the foundation of meaning. Phenomenological reduction, for Levinas, is an idealization of the world, the projection from a transcendental centre of a universal meaning, and Descartes is used by Levinas as the anti-thesis of this phenomenological immanentization of the world—which includes the other, and god.

Descartes is the anti-thesis, precisely because of the third *Meditatio* where “he deviates [from the first two meditations] (. . .) when he identifies the cogito with the ‘soul’—that is, with an object in the world—and when he deduces from it God and the ‘formal’ existence of the world”<sup>26</sup>. The third *Meditatio* opens onto radical exteriority without remainder and thus contrasts (as whenever Descartes is mobilised) with phenomenological immanentism by its thought of a mind-independent exteriority. However, this opening to exteriority happens in Descartes (according to Levinas) in the very immanence of the *cogito*:

This overflowing of the evidence of the cogito by the infinite light on which Descartes' third Meditation ends, this “*valde credibile est . . . illam similitudinem, in qua Dei idea continetur, a me percipi per eandem facultatem, per quam ego ipse a me percipior*”—is absent from Husserlian philosophy<sup>27</sup>.

Let us quote more broadly the third *Meditatio* text: “but considering that God is my creator, it is highly probable that he in some way fashioned me after his own image and likeness (*ad imaginem et similitudinem*), and that I perceive this likeness, in which is contained the idea of God (*in qua Dei idea continetur*), by the same faculty by which I apprehend myself<sup>28</sup>” “Levinas' interpretation is subtle: the *cogito* does have the idea of god within it, in a similarity that makes it my idea that reveals me to myself; I resemble god, I am (what I am at this moment of the *Meditationes*, i.e., a *cogito*) in a certain way the idea of god, but insofar as god precedes who I am, insofar as in the adherence of the *cogito* to the idea of god there is a (still slight) gap, an “overflow” between the idea and what it is the idea of. It is interesting that Levinas, in 1949, uses the Cartesian text where the gap between the formal reality and the objective reality of the idea of god is the thinnest<sup>29</sup>. He finds a resource in a description of immanence (the idea of god adhering to the cogito and the cogitatio) to describe the awakening of transcendence against phenomenology.

It is the same text of the *Meditationes* that leads Levinas on this explicit confrontation with phenomenology:

L'abandon de la transcendance conditionnée par l'idée du parfait, ramène à la transcendance caractérisée par l'intentionnalité. Nous saisissons là un nouveau trait de la description phénoménologique qui annonce son évolution irrésistible vers une philosophie de l'existence. La possibilité pour l'idéalisme cartésien de concilier dans le sujet humain sa finitude avec l'infini auquel le sujet participe en sortant, ainsi, en quelque façon, de sa finitude, repose sur une distinction radicale entre l'être du sujet et ses idées. Bien que Descartes ait défini la substance

pensante exclusivement par la pensée et qu'en cessant de penser, le moi pour lui cesse d'être, le moi n'est pas purement et simplement une pensée. Comment, en effet, la substance pensante peut-elle avoir l'idée de l'infini sans être infinie elle-même si exister et penser coïncidaient? Par l'idée du parfait la pensée s'enracine dans l'absolu, mais l'existence d'une pensée enracinée dans l'absolu est moins que l'absolu, n'est qu'une pensée, pas plus qu'une pensée. (...) La condition de l'existence se distingue de l'existence elle-même. L'une est infinie, l'autre finie. L'important c'est que l'existence finie, n'est pas coupée chez Descartes de l'infini et que le lien est assuré par la pensée; que la pensée, qui constitue toute l'existence du cogito s'ajoute cependant à cette existence la rattachant à l'absolu<sup>30</sup>.

This text is a continuation of the commentary on the *similitudo Dei* passage. Levinas first asserts that the radical transcendence that illuminates the ego in the 3<sup>e</sup> meditation is transformed, with phenomenology, into *transcendence in immanence*, that is, intentional transcendence. All transcendence is reduced to the level of immanence by phenomenology—including god. This is the famous thesis of the young Levinas, according to which the immanent theory of intentionality already implied Heideggerian existentialism. The speculative key is as follows: in Descartes, there is a separation of the idea of god from the subject (since, as we know, the formal reality of such an idea cannot be myself, i.e., my thought), and this separation is “radical”. Thought thinks the absolute, but by doing so (by thinking it very positively), it delimits itself as finite, as only thought, “no more than a thought”. Because it thinks the idea of the infinite very positively, thought is not quite what it thinks, and there is a separation insofar as thought has not given to itself such an idea. Thus, in this quasi-adhesion of the infinite and thought emerges the gap (and this gap is all the more obvious as it appears at the heart of the quasi adequacy of the ego and god in the idea). The gap is between the finite and the infinite, but such a separation is not (yet!) a cut: thought does think the infinite, positively, allowing itself to be taken in some way by the gap within immanence.

However, Levinas does not deny to phenomenology the presence of the infinite within immanence, on the contrary, at least concerning two Husserlian problems:

- (i) First, the horizon, as a fundamental dimension of the *Sinnggebung*. Levinas calls it “the objective counterpart of thought (la contre-partie objective de la pensée)” (ibid., p. 18); Levinas argues that in the horizon, meaning has a life on its own, a non-intentional phenomenological life, a “revelation”, as Levinas says, where meaning reveals itself as meaning independently of the object, before or after the object. He describes the infinite flight of the Husserlian horizon there, whether it is this table, this room, this university, this city, this country, this continent, etc. The object appears against the background of a horizon that has its own pre-intentional life, or even hermeneutical life, without the object itself. We remain in immanence, but here is a trace of a counter-intentionality that flees towards the infinite and that is experienced.
- (ii) Second, evidence as an infinite teleological process: “the process of identification may be infinite. However, it ends in evidence. (...) Every intention is an evidence that seeks itself, a light that tends to be made”<sup>31</sup>. Levinas does not insist much on this teleology—he even tends to limit its scope. However, he does mention it: the process of evidence is infinite, it is never fully given, and always remains to be accomplished a little further, a little more precisely because there always is the possibility of further pursuing the process of intentional verification. So, in Husserl we can observe the presence from the beginning of any intentional act of the *infinite*, insofar as the infinite is the object definitively given in the evidence, that which will never happen and which nevertheless (as finality) determines the totality of the intentional act. In short: within immanence, and within strict immanence, there are the beginnings of the infinite; the infinite vanishing dimensions of horizon and evidence stays into the horizon of phenomenological immanence, it is an infinite strictly limited to immanence. Phenomenology is anti-cartesian, it is a monism, not

a dualism between the finite substance and the infinite one. Descartes is already, in Levinas, the thinker of separation, but from the immanence of the *similitudo Dei*.

#### 4.2. Peace of the Face

Levinas, from *Totalité et infini* (1961), evokes transcendence in far more radical terms. Let us read one of the first descriptions of the face in the book:

La position en face, l'opposition par excellence, ne se peut que comme mise en cause morale<sup>32</sup>.

The other speaks to me by implicating me; he accuses me, precisely because he overwhelms me:

L'idée de l'infini, l'infiniment plus contenu dans le moins, se produit concrètement sous les espèces d'une relation avec le visage. Et seule l'idée de l'infini maintient l'extériorité de l'Autre par rapport au Même, malgré ce rapport,

because such an idea “does not come from our a priori background, and therefore it is the experience par excellence (*ne vient pas de notre fond a priori, et, par là elle est l'expérience par excellence*)”<sup>33</sup>. It is through the idea of infinity that Levinas introduces the description of the face. The idea of infinity is what expresses the “*mise en cause morale*”. Here, we must fully understand the word “*cause*” in “*mise en cause*”, which means “accusation”: what is caused is an accusation, precisely. It requires a certain type of causality, where subjectivity must welcome the infinite like the all other, without reducing it to the same. Levinas takes up Kantian vocabulary to refuse the normal transcendental constitution of the face: the face precedes the transcendental, which means that it is (causally!) its own condition of possibility, its own condition of appearance. It is precisely Kant that Levinas then discusses. Indeed, he first summons the idea of infinity in Kant, which he interprets as an extension of the finite, as “the ideal of reason” which projects its “requirements into a beyond such as the completion ideal of what is given as unfinished”; then according to Levinas, the subject does not draw “from this confrontation the limits of its finitude” (ibid.). The Kantian idea of god is in fact the projection of the finite into the infinite, which is its goal, its horizon; in short, Levinas reduces the idea of god to the regulative idea which makes the finite a moment of the infinite. However, he clearly sees that at the bottom, the Kantian idea of god is an idea that reason produces in itself, that it is reason which by itself opens the gap of the abyss under its own feet. The idea of god does not go out immanence; moreover, it is immanence which creates it within itself. However, Levinas immediately recognizes the Kantian complexity when he points out that “this passage to the limit or this projection implies in an unacknowledged form the idea of the infinite with all the consequences that Descartes will draw from it” (ibid., p. 214). Levinas is close to Schelling's interpretation here: the Kantian idea of infinity may well be the creature of human reason, but it is such only because a true infinity, a positive infinity, has always already collided with the subjectivity. Reason then only reproduces what has always already happened without its knowledge—and it is Descartes who has adequately identified this happening of transcendence. What Levinas wants to describe is an idea of infinity caused by an absolutely separate, radically exterior infinity, that is to say, precisely the Cartesian idea of god, as he himself underlines in this famous passage:

En revenant à la notion cartésienne de l'infini à l' “idée de l'infini” mise dans l'être séparé par l'infini, on en retient la positivité, son antériorité à toute pensée finie et à toute pensée du fini, son extériorité à l'égard du fini. Ce fut la possibilité de l'être séparé. L'idée de l'infini, le débordement de la pensée finie par son contenu effectue la relation de la pensée, avec ce qui passe sa capacité, avec ce qu'à tout moment elle apprend sans être heurtée. Voilà la situation que nous appelons accueil du visage. L'idée de l'infini se produit dans l'opposition du discours, dans la socialité. Le rapport avec le visage avec l'autre absolument autre que je ne saurais contenir, avec l'autre, dans ce sens, infini, est cependant mon Idée, un commerce. Mais la relation se maintient sans violence dans la paix avec cette

altérité absolue. La “résistance” de l’Autre ne me fait pas violence, n’agit pas négativement; elle a une structure positive: éthique. La première révélation de l’autre, supposée dans toutes les autres relations avec lui, ne consiste pas à le saisir dans sa résistance négative, et à le circonvenir par la ruse. Je ne lutte pas avec un dieu sans visage, mais réponds à son expression, à sa révélation<sup>34</sup>.

Let us first quote the takeover by Levinas of the expression “*mise en moi*” in the sentence: ‘the idea of the infinite put into the being separated by the infinite (*l’idée de l’infini mise dans l’être séparé par l’infini*)’. Levinas starts from the radicality of the insertion of the idea of infinity by the infinite, radicality due to the full positivity of such an idea of infinity insofar as this positivity overflows from the thought which nevertheless think it. However, there is no *violence* in this text because it takes place without brutality, in a “commerce”, a “relation”, a “positive” “resistance”. Moreover, Levinas says it explicitly: “the relationship does not do violence to me”; “the resistance of the Other does not do violence to me”. There is no “struggle” with a “faceless god”, but there is indeed a response to its “expression, to its revelation”. However radical such a welcoming of the idea of infinity in me may be, there is nevertheless a welcome relationship, indeed a response—the response implying a link to what the answer is an answer to. The face enters me as there is indeed an appearing, or more exactly: it is what is heard from the face, the call of the face, beyond appearing, which enters me, that finds meaning in me. From this point of view, the idea of god is indeed “putted in the being separated by the infinite”, that is to say, in me, who is nevertheless separated from the face. So, the subject is something originally not just split, torn, cut up, but in a certain kind of non-violent relationship, with the impossibility of infinite itself. Later in *Totalité et infini*, Levinas deepens the role of the Cartesian idea of god: it is not an objectification of god, or even a mysticism that passes through feeling. It is a speech, that is to say, an ethics, without *violence*:

Descartes, mieux qu’un idéaliste ou qu’un réaliste, découvre une relation avec une altérité totale, irréductible à l’intériorité et qui, cependant, ne violente pas l’intériorité; une réceptivité sans passivité, un rapport entre libertés<sup>35</sup>.

This way of thinking about the thought of the idea of god as ethics is a very powerful decision: only ethics, thought in an originary way, can make us understand how there can be an *experience* through the finite of what is infinite because it is precisely the nature of ethics to make two beings confront each other in the very *separation*. And it is moreover this same ethics which justifies, in *Totalité et infini*, the *nonviolence* of the idea of god, because I myself, who receives the face of others, am not *passive*, I am a face for others, I am a freedom. There seems to be a kind of reciprocity of freedoms here. Otherness is total and irreducible to interiority, but it finds its ethical place in interiority, in peace. *However*, and this is crucial, the relationship *must* remain asymmetrical: I am brought to my freedom by that shining freedom which is “majesty”, the majesty of the face. This is the ethical relationship, the immeasurable greatness of god’s idea in myself, that is to say, his ethical overflow, his perpetual accusation which assigns me to freedom: “you shall not commit murder (*tu ne commettras pas de meurtre*)”, this is what the idea of infinity literally says, in its appearing. It is, therefore, the ethical accusation which is the mode of appearing of the idea of god, insofar as only the infinite asymmetry between the subject and the other can produce ethics. It is in this ethical appearing, which Levinas calls “epiphany”, that immanence is found from its deepest interiority projected towards transcendence, in such a way that we must then more precisely speak of immanence in transcendence, without however, really carrying it out because ethics maintains, more than ever, the *separation* between me and the infinite other.

#### 4.3. The Hostage

However, how violent is such a face-to-face relationship in *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* (1974)? Levinas hardens his tone there, and it is very palpable in the interpretation that he again gives of the third Meditatio. Let us quote the main text:

Du Bien à moi—assignation: relation qui “survit” à la “mort de Dieu”. Celle-ci ne signifie, peut-être, que la possibilité de réduire toute valeur suscitant une pulsion à une pulsion suscitant la valeur. Que, dans sa bonté, le Bien décline le désir qu’il suscite en l’inclinant vers la responsabilité pour le prochain, cela préserve la différence dans la non-indifférence du Bien qui m’élit avant que je ne l’accueille; cela préserve son illéité au point de la laisser exclure de l’analyse, sauf la trace qu’elle laisse dans les mots ou la “réalité objective” dans les pensées, selon le témoignage irrécusable de la troisième Méditation de Descartes. Que dans la responsabilité pour autrui, le moi—déjà soi, déjà obsédé par le prochain—soit unique et irremplaçable, cela confirme son élection. Car la condition ou l’incondition du Soi ne commence pas dans l’auto-affection d’un moi souverain “compatissant”, après coup, pour autrui. Tout au contraire: l’unicité du moi responsable ne se peut que dans l’obsession par autrui, dans le traumatisme subi en deçà de toute auto-identification, dans un auparavant irréprésentable. L’un affecté par l’autre, traumatisme an-archique ou inspiration de l’un par l’autre et non pas causalité frappant, sur le mode mécanique, une matière soumise à son énergie<sup>36</sup>.

Levinas is describing here what we have not, in fact, ceased to describe in this article: the death of god and its psycho–theological manifestations. Because in the death of god, the hypertranscendence of god is maintained insofar as the “good” is so high that it can no longer be reached by a desire. It maintains the “difference”, but at the same time, god as the whole other is the main instigator of such a difference, in accordance with the teaching of *Totalité et infini*, insofar as it “elects” me long before the face to face. However, from this election, there is a “trace”, a deposit of meaning: what Descartes calls “objective reality”, the representation of the idea of god which necessarily comes from its formal reality in exteriority. Objective reality is thus the trace of formal reality, the way for the infinite to become an idea, a positive representation. However, such a trace finds a more disturbing description than in *Totalité et infini*: it is an “obsession” for others, it inscribes the essence of the self in this obsession. As in *Totalité et infini*, the condition of possibility is not transcendental (“the self-affection of a sovereign self compassionate for others”), but it comes from elsewhere, from the other as she is the prescriber, the prescriber of obsession, by the “trauma” of the unrepresentable difference, and the crucial point is the following: “One affected by the other, anarchic trauma or inspiration of one by the other and not causality striking, in a mechanical mode, a matter subjected to its energy”. *Autrement qu’être* radicalizes *Totalité et infini*, which reversed causality from me to the other who “*me met en cause*”. This reversal becomes a traumatic questioning from a radically non-efficient causality: it is a principle beyond causation that affects the self, “inspiration”. Inspiration is a word that gives me an answer: “Here I am”; it is the action of others on my word. It is also the violence of the trauma before any subjective constitution, the trauma of the interpellation, of the accusation, of the taking hostage by others of what is constituted, by the taking of the hostage, in oneself. The relationship turned violent.

The idea of infinity, which projects me into transcendence through responsibility, “survived” (I owe this term to Dan Arbib) the death of god, but not insofar as this death never took place, on the contrary. The phenomenality of transcendence, which is counter-phenomenality, constitution by others of the ego, returns to Descartes by also assuming/surmounting, at the same time, the death of god. The value precedes me, but after the death of god, it implies (but it has, in fact, always implied in Western metaphysics) a *disease* of the soul because of the radical estrangement from the dead god. “Obsession by others”, “an-archic trauma”, beyond all foundation and all past, precisely because (but was not that what Descartes was already describing?) *efficient causality has disappeared*. The violence of these pages is commensurate with what was at stake in Kant, the metaphysical illness of the idea of god, and is close to the Cartesian metaphysical decision to describe the rupture of causality even though it is causality that puts the idea of god *within* me. From this point of view, “*illeity*” is also atheism, escape. There is an escape from god in this text, which in

a way clears its escape by substituting for its infinity the infinity of other and the responsibility that I owe her. Certainly, it is salvation for the self, its election, but the positivity of this election should not make us forget the cruelty of this god who is no more than a traumatic trace, inoculating man with an incurable disease, here described as “obsession with others”, an obsession from which even my subjectivity finds itself dispossessed even when it suffers from it, and which other passages of *Autrement qu’être* describe:

the psyche of the soul is the other in me; disease of accused identity—and self,  
the same for the other, even by the other

—and in note:

The Soul is the other in me. The psyche, one-for-the-other, can be possession and psychosis; the soul is already a grain of madness. (ibid., p. 122)

or again:

To this relentlessly tense command, I can only respond “Here I am” where the pronoun “I” is in the accusative, declined before any declension, possessed by the other, sick. (ibid.)

Is the situation less negative than in the Transcendental Dialectic? What Levinas allows us to see is that already in Descartes there is the death of god, in the *decausation* of god; the idea of infinity “put into me” plunges me into the contemplation of the epiphany of the face, it puts me in a gap with myself so wide that the idea of god becomes sour until sickness of separation. There is a (certainly salutary) form of *abandonment of man by god* evaporated in his height. Max Weber had identified this world as the world of contemporary Western capitalism; he had also called it a Calvinist, or post-Calvinist one.

Let us risk this hypothesis from Levinas, which can only be a suggestion in the context of this article: in *Autrement qu’être*, the face almost tends to fall back into immanence insofar as god has absent itself by declining the desire it arouses. Perhaps this even leads Levinasian meditation to the Kantian abyss of transcendental pathology since god abandons the face in order to leave only a trace of itself that will take place in the illness of immanence. God’s abandonment of the face of another produces in immanence the disruption of such abandonment, “the trace of objective reality”, that is, the immanent reality of transcendence; what Levinas calls before our extract the “Passion of the self”: the responsibility for others (up to the responsibility for the evil they do to me) is the situation of absolute separation that goes as far as the “suffering” of illness, that is to say, the immanence that does not manage to let itself out of itself in the face to face with the face. From then on, the subject is condemned to immanence because the separation is too radical. As if we had to analyze the modern philosophy of the idea of god as a constantly failed attempt to transcend immanence from itself, to the point of positing a posteriori, in empiricity, the transcendent itself (Schelling). From this point of view, while it radicalizes transcendence, the philosophy of the idea of god is, through and through, a philosophy of immanence—and, as a result, *entirely atheistic*.

## 5. Conclusions

The violence that we have studied in this article is plentiful. First, it is the psycho-theological violence of the idea of god insofar as such an idea dynamites subjectivity, this dynamiting being the *sine qua non*-condition of subjectivity. Violence is only the necessary phenomenality of the presence of such an idea in me, which Descartes had identified with precision by the expression “*mise en moi*” which designates the violence of the objective reality of the idea of god in me caused by formal reality. However, such violence is only possible because it belongs to a very precise historical configuration of metaphysics, that of the death of god (which Levinas identifies perfectly), and which is already present in Descartes as the Cartesian god already begins to separate definitively from the human being when the causality that unites them begins to tear. The violence of the idea of god is the violence of the causal separation of the human being and the divine, which places the human being in a situation of radical tearing since he is taken hostage by the divine via

the idea of god while no longer having any causal access to this divine. It is the Western metaphysical and historical situation described by Max Weber in his works on *Protestant ethics*, which showed how the Calvinist god was so transcendent that he ended up deserting his creation to leave human beings only a few traces, in their very activity, of their election in the hereafter. Business, sectarian community organization, the horizontality of power through the social control of each over each—this fundamental metaphysical situation of modernity was “caused” by the hypertranscendence of the divine until separation, until the abandonment. It is the same metaphysical situation that Heidegger described in the 1930s in these terms, which he never ceased to repeat: “The flight of the gods (*die Flucht die Götter*) must first be the object of an experience (*Erfahrung*); this experience must first strike (*stossen*) *Dasein* in that fundamental tone (*Grundstimmung*) according to which a historical people as a whole feels and endures the distress (*Not*) of its absence of gods and its tearing apart (*Zerrissenheit*) (GA 39, p. 80)”. Metaphysics exercises its historical power over the human being through violence. Its tool is the idea of god, the violence of which puts human beings in a situation of endurance, even of renunciation, which Max Weber described at the very end of *The Protestant Ethics*: “The restriction to a specialized work and, which goes hand in hand, the renunciation of the encyclopedic humanity of Faust is, in today’s world, the condition of all worthwhile activity, ‘action’ and ‘renunciation’ are at the presently inseparable”. In this article, we have given a conceptual and metaphysical history of such a contingent and historical situation. The concept of the idea of god is nothing other than the conceptual expression of such a historical contingency as it can be identified in the texts of the history of metaphysics. Such metaphysics is not sovereign, and must be accompanied by a historical analysis of the processes of anguish caused by the hypertranscendentalization of god, which a Pierre Chaunu for example has identified in modern history (Chaunu 1975, 1980).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Levinas (1991a). When I do not indicate the names of the translators, the translation is mine.

<sup>2</sup> As soon as in (Marion 1975, p. 201).

<sup>3</sup> AT VI, p. 34: “Et pourcequ’il n’y a pas moins de repugnance que le plus parfait soit vne suite et vne dependance du moins parfait, qu’il y en a que de rien procede quelque chose, ie ne la pouuois tenir non plus de moymesme; De façon qu’il restoit qu’elle eust esté mise en moy par vne nature qui fust veritablemēt plus parfaite que ie n’estois, et mesme qui eust en soy toutes les perfections dont ie pouuois auoir quelque idée, c’est à dire, pour m’expliquer en vn mot, qui fust Dieu”.

<sup>4</sup> See on this originarity of the idea of god over the *cogito* (Arbib 2021).

<sup>5</sup> See (Carraud 1997). See, for a broader inscription of Descartes’s «*causa sui*» in the history of metaphysics, Carraud (2002).

<sup>6</sup> AT VII, p. 236: “Atque eodem modo, in omnibus aliis locis, ita contuli causam formalem, sive rationem ab essentia Dei petitam, propter quam ipse causa non indiget ut existat . . . ” On Descartes’ use of the concept of “formal cause” and the influence of Suarez, see Olivo (1997).

<sup>7</sup> AT VII, p. 237: “Sed, ut spero, etiam ille non negabit immensitatem illam potentiae, propter quam Deus non indiget causa ut existat, esse in ipso rem positivam . . . ”

<sup>8</sup> AT VII, p. 237: “Sed, quia tam ferio hic monet Vir Clar., vix ullum Theologum reperiri posse, qui non ea propositione offendatur, quid Deus a se ipso sit positive, & tanquam a causa . . . ”

- 9 AT VII, p. 238: “ . . . ita scilicet ut quod est ab alio, sit ab ipso tanquam a causa efficiente; quod autem est a se, sit tanquam a causa formali, hoc est, quia talem habet essentiam, ut causa efficiente non egeat . . . ”
- 10 AT VII, p. 239: “Ut autem apposite ad ipsam respondeatur, existimo necesse esse ostendere inter causam efficientem proprie dictam & nullam causam esse quid intermedium, nempe positivam rei essentiam, ad quam causae efficientis conceptus eodem modo potest extendi, quo solemus in Geometricis conceptum lineae circularis quamaximae ad conceptum linea rectae, vel conceptum polygoni rectilinei, cujus indefinitus sit numerus laterum, ad conceptum circuli extendere”.
- 11 On this ambiguity, see Dan [Arbib \(2021\)](#), *op. cit.*, p. 267 sq.
- 12 On the Plotinian (and more broadly neo-Platonist) roots of Descartes’ god, see ([Gontier 2005](#); [Gress 2011](#)).
- 13 Here we agree with Thibaut Gress, in *Descartes et la précarité du monde*, *op.cit.*
- 14 On the distinction between “comprendre” et “connaître” god by its idea, see Dan [Arbib \(2021\)](#), *Descartes, la métaphysique et l’infini*, *op. cit.*, p. 102 sqq.
- 15 Ak. III, p. 404 (A605/B633): “Wenn etwas existirt, so muß auch ein schlechterdings nothwendiges Wesen existiren. Nun existire zum mindesten ich selbst: also existirt ein absolut nothwendiges Wesen”.
- 16 SW XIII, p. 73. My English translation was always based on the following French translation: [Schelling \(1989\)](#).
- 17 *ibid.*, p. 156. On this text, see the very important commentary by [Courtine \(1990\)](#), for example p. 306).
- 18 Jean-François Courtine, *Extase de la raison*, *op. cit.*, pp. 306–7.
- 19 On the question of empiricism in Schelling, see ([Fischbach 2015](#)).
- 20 SW XII, p. 681: “Denn ohne die Voraussetzung einer auf solche Weise abgeänderten Sage könnten wir uns dieß nicht denken, weil nach der uns bekannten Erzählung Zeus nicht mit seinen andern Brüdern verschlungen, d.h. in die Verborgenheit zurückgesetzt wird”, or, p. 678: “Demnach gelingt es ihr, den Kronos zu hintergehen, und ihm den jüngstgeborenen Sohn Zeus zu entziehen, der dann auf die bekannte Art den Vater wirklich bezwingt und zugleich auch die von eben diesem verschlungenen Söhne wieder befreit und ans Licht hervorbringt”. The word is constantly used by Schelling in the *Philosophy of Mythology* to describe what Kronos does to his sons.
- 21 SW XI, p. 193. “Also—freilich nicht im Sinn einer Philosophie, welche den Menschen von thierischer Stumpfheit und Sinnlosigkeit anfangen läßt, wohl aber in dem Sinn, ( . . . ) daß das Bewußtseyn mit dem einseitig-Einen behaftet und gleichsam geschlagen ist—befindet sich die älteste Menschheit allerdings in einem Zustand von Unfreiheit, von dem wir unter dem Gesetz einer ganz andern Zeit Lebenden uns keinen unmittelbaren Begriff machen können, mit einer Art von stupor geschlagen (stupefacta quasi et attonita) und von einer fremden Gewalt ergriffen, außer sich, d.h. aus ihrer eigenen Gewalt, gesetzt”. On this text, see [Frigo \(1994\)](#). Xavier Tilliette had noted this mythological dimension of the ecstatic reason, but in the way that Revelation is the reversal of mythology ([Tilliette 2002](#), p. 61).
- 22 Ak. III, p. 410 (A615/B643): “What causes it to be unavoidable to assume something among existing things to be in itself necessary, and yet at the same time to shrink back from the existence of such a being as an abyss? And how is one to bring reason to an understanding of itself over this matter, so that from a vacillating state of different approval it may achieve one of calm insight?/There is something exceedingly remarkable in the fact that when one presupposes something existing, one can find no way around the conclusion that something also exists necessarily” ([Kant 1998](#), p. 675).
- 23 Ak. III, p. 404 (A604/B632): “Der kosmologische Beweis, den wir jetzt untersuchen wollen, behält die Verknüpfung der absoluten Nothwendigkeit mit der höchsten Realität bei; aber anstatt wie der vorige von der höchsten Realität auf die Nothwendigkeit im Dasein zu schließen, schließt er vielmehr von der zum voraus gegebenen unbedingten Nothwendigkeit irgend eines Wesens auf dessen unbegrenzte Realität und bringt so fern alles wenigstens in das Geleis einer, ich weiß nicht ob vernünftigen oder vernünftelnden, wenigstens natürlichen Schlußart, welche nicht allein für den gemeinen, sondern auch den speculativen Verstand die meiste Überredung bei sich führt . . . —The cosmological proof, which we will now investigate, retains the connection of absolute necessity with the highest reality, but instead of inferring as in the previous argument from the highest reality to necessity of existence, it rather infers from the previously given unconditioned necessity of some being or other to the unbounded reality of this being, thus setting everything on the track of a species of inference that, whether reasonable or sophistical, is at least natural, and has been the most persuasive one not only for the common but also for the speculative understanding . . . (trans. P. Guyer & A. W. Wood, *op. cit.*, pp. 569–70).
- 24 [Levinas \(1974\)](#), pp. 37–38): “la reconstitution du monde après l’épokhè qui suspend nos jugements sur lui, [est] autre chose que la déduction de la réalité du monde extérieur à laquelle procède Descartes. Le monde qu’il s’agira de reconquérir après la réduction phénoménologique, sera un monde constitué par une pensée: une synthèse de noèmes de la noésis, laissant apparaître les évidences dont il tire son origine et dont il est le produit synthétique”.
- 25 *ibid.*, p. 38: “ce qui poursuit ici l’analyse, c’est moins la certitude du monde objectif dans le sens que Descartes donne à ce terme, que le retour à la liberté de l’évidence où l’objet résistant et étranger apparaît comme jaillissant de l’esprit parce que compris par lui. »
- 26 *ibid.*, p. 45: “il dévie [des deux premières méditations] ( . . . ) lorsqu’il identifie le *cogito* avec l’ “âme”—c’est-à-dire avec un objet se trouvant dans le monde—et lorsqu’il en déduit Dieu et l’existence “formelle” du monde”.

- 27 *ibid.*, p. 97: “Ce débordement de l’évidence du cogito par la lumière infinie sur lequel se termine la troisième Méditation de Descartes, ce “valde credibile est . . . illam similitudinem, in qua Dei idea continetur, a me percipi per eandem facultatem, per quam ego ipse a me percipior”—est absent de la philosophie husserlienne”.
- 28 AT. VII, p. 51—trans. John Veitch.
- 29 As Jean-Luc Marion emphasizes it, in [Marion \(1975\)](#).
- 30 Emmanuel Levinas, *En Découvrant l’existence . . .*, *op. cit.*, pp. 97–98: “The abandonment of transcendence conditioned by the idea of the perfect, leads back to transcendence characterised by intentionality. We grasp here a new feature of the phenomenological description that announces its irresistible evolution towards a philosophy of existence. The possibility for Cartesian idealism to reconcile in the human subject its finitude with the infinite in which the subject participates, thus, in some way, emerging from its finitude, rests on a radical distinction between the subject’s being and its ideas. Although Descartes defined the thinking substance exclusively through thought and although by ceasing to think, the self for him ceases to be, the self is not purely and simply a thought. How, indeed, can the thinking substance have the idea of the infinite without being infinite itself if existing and thinking coincide? Through the idea of the perfect, thought is rooted in the absolute, but the existence of a thought rooted in the absolute is less than the absolute, is only a thought, not more than a thought. (. . .) The condition of existence is distinguished from existence itself. One is infinite, the other finite. The important thing is that finite existence is not cut off in Descartes from the infinite and that the link is ensured by thought; that thought, which constitutes the whole existence of the cogito, is nevertheless added to this existence, linking it to the absolute”.
- 31 *ibid.*, p. 24: “le processus de l’identification peut être infini. Mais il s’achève dans l’évidence. (. . .) Toute intention est une évidence qui se cherche, une lumière qui tend à se faire”.
- 32 [Levinas \(1991b\)](#), p. 212: “The in-front position, the opposition par excellence, is only possible as a moral accusation”. In the French expression “mise en cause” we hear the “cause”, which resonates secretly in the word “accusation”.
- 33 *ibid.*, p. 213: “The idea of infinite, the infinitely more contained in the less, occurs concretely in the form of a relationship with the face. And only the idea of the infinite maintains the exteriority of the Other in relation to the Same, despite this relation”.
- 34 *ibid.*, p. 215: “In returning to the Cartesian notion of infinity, the “idea of infinity” put in the separated being by the infinite, we retain its positivity, its anteriority to every finite thought and every thought of the finite, its exteriority with regard to the finite; here there was the possibility of separated being. The idea of infinity, the overflowing of finite thought by its content, effectuates the relation of thought with what exceeds its capacity, with what at each moment it learns without suffering shock. This is the situation we call welcome of the face. The idea of infinity is produced in the opposition of conversation, in sociality. The relation with the face, with the other absolutely other which I can not contain, the other in this sense infinite, is nonetheless my Idea, a commerce. However, the relation is maintained without violence, in peace with this absolute alterity. The “resistance” of the other does not do violence to me, does not act negatively; it has a positive structure: ethical. The first revelation of the other, presupposed in all the other relations with him, does not consist in grasping him in his negative resistance and in circumventing him by ruse. I do not struggle with a faceless god, but I respond to his expression, to his revelation” ([Levinas 2007](#), p. 197).
- 35 *ibid.*, p. 233: “Descartes, better than an idealist or a realist, discovers a relation with a total alterity irreducible to interiority, which nevertheless does not do violence to interiority—a receptivity without passivity, a relation between freedoms”.
- 36 [Levinas \(1991a\)](#), p. 196: “From the Good to me, there is assignation: a relation that survives the “death of God”. The death of God perhaps signifies only the possibility to reduce every value arousing an impulse to an impulse arousing a value. The fact that in its goodness the Good declines the desire it arouses while inclining it toward responsibility for the neighbor, preserves difference in the non-indifference of the Good, which chooses me before I welcome it. It preserves its reality to the point of letting it be excluded from the analysis, save for the trace it leaves in words or the “objective reality” in thoughts, according to the unimpeachable witness of the Descartes’ Third Meditation. That in the responsibility for another, the ego, already a self, already obsessed by the neighbor, would be unique and irreplaceable is what confirms its election. For the condition for, or the unconditionality of, the self does not begin in the auto-affection of a sovereign ego that would be, after the event, “compassionate” for another. Quite the contrary: the uniqueness of the responsible ego is possible only in being obsessed by another, in the trauma suffered prior to any auto-identification, in an unrepresentable before. The one affected by the other is an anarchic trauma, or an inspiration of the one by the other, and not a causality striking mechanically a matter subject to its energy. In this trauma the Good reabsorbs, or redeems, the violence of non-freedom. Responsibility is what first enables one to catch sight of and conceive of value” ([Levinas 1998](#), p. 123).

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