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Between Positing Existence and Absence of the Object: Interpreting Faith Experience from the Phenomenological Point of View

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Abstract

The paper attempts to clarify the structure of the experience of faith by making use of some fundamental elements of the phenomenological theory of knowledge. The dynamic between intention directed towards the object and intuitive fulfilment provides a key to understanding the peculiar form of intentionality proper to faith, in which there is the necessity of the intention directed toward the position of existence, without, however, this being accompanied by the givenness of the object posited as existing. What we find is a kind of anomaly in the relationship between the mode of belief and the fulfilment that is supposed to motivate it. In the case of the position of the object of faith, this fulfilment is not given in any intuitive form. Religious consciousness is thus characterised by the absence of any epistemic basis for justification, but on the other hand also by the necessary permanence of the existential mode of belief. The result is an interplay between presence and absence, fullness and emptiness, certainty and non-determinacy, which will provide the key to revisiting Anselm's ontological proof of God's existence from a particular perspective.

Keywords: experience of faith; phenomenology; theory of Knowledge; philosophy of religion; religious Belief; existence of God; ontological argument; intention and fulfilment; Husserl; Anselm of Canterbury

Introduction

How can religious experience[1] be understood from a philosophical-phenomenological perspective? What is the meaning and what are the intentional structures of religious life that are accessible to a philosophical-conceptual consideration? Of course, many approaches and different lines of research on the subject are available (Van der Leeuw 1956 and 1963;

Kristensen 1971; Eliade 1987; James 1995, for example). What we will try to do in this paper is to refer to certain invariants highlighted by the phenomenological theory of knowledge, which may be of great utility in explaining the epistemological reasons for the peculiarity of an experience such as that of faith, without, of course, having the ambition to give an exhaustive picture of religious life.

In the light of those invariants, we will be able to reject from the very beginning options that, while immediately presenting themselves as intuitively the most plausible, could lead us in the wrong direction. This concerns in particular the unilateral emphasis on the specific belief-character of doubt or the opposite character of certainty. Instead, we will see that the understanding of religious life requires both (section 1). We will then articulate more explicitly the relationship (which we will always keep in mind) between the position of existence in belief and that structural invariant of intentional acts expressed in the relation between empty and filled intuitions, showing in this regard the peculiarities of the phenomenon in question (section 2). In a further step, we will deepen these peculiarities through the reference to the conceptual pair essence-existence (section 3). Finally, we will conclude by trying a particular interpretation of Anselm of Canterbury's ontological argument in favour of the existence of God, showing the autonomy of faith from any instance of rational epistemic justification; autonomy, which, however, does not mean irrationality, but maintains a component of 'moderate rationality' (section 4).

1. Certainty and doubt. None of them or both of them?

The structure we want to focus on is related to the character of faith as such, to the intentional structure that supports its peculiar character of belief. What is the mode of consciousness that corresponds to faith? How can it be described as being directed towards something that is not given, nor can it be given 'in the flesh'?[2] Here, a phenomenological analysis should provide the tools to clear the field of misunderstandings, in order to indicate a plausible direction of research aimed at

investigating the essence of the characteristic intentionality of religious life.

The understanding of the very nature of what is at issue here should start from a consideration of the modalities of belief in relation to the dynamics of fulfilment of intentional directness, as far as the religious attitude is concerned. This consideration, at first fairly general, will be investigated more deeply later.

Firstly, it is clear that the mode of belief proper to faith, which leads to the position of existence of its object, does not include a straightforward certainty and therefore has not as its 'noematic' correlate the being of the object to which the noetic moment of certainty refers. Such a structure is in fact characteristic of the evidence of scientific statements, of judgements that posit objects, properties and states of affairs on the basis of an epistemic foundation sufficiently solid to motivate this 'doxic' mode, i.e. the position (in German: *Setzung*) that is inherent to the mode of being, in this case, that of existence.[3] However, this is not the doxic mode proper to religious experience, since in it the intention directed towards its object and the existence of the latter is destined to remain unfilled and the evidence of an epistemic foundation for the position of its object is therefore necessarily lacking, as we shall see more clearly.

On the other hand, the consciousness of the believer is not a variant of the consciousness of doubt, of that intentional mode of belief that is suspended between the options of full affirmation and full negation, remaining, so to speak, in this suspension. Nor does it have anything to do with the modes of supposing, of considering probable, of admitting or presuming, with the respective intentional correlates of the supposed as such, the probable as such, etc.[4] For it is the position of the existence of its object that belongs to the essence of religious life, and hence a certain kind of determination on the noetic side that excludes all these modes, which instead express an oscillation and uncertainty alien to the essence of faith. There must be some kind of conviction if faith is to be determined by this character; however, as we have seen, it cannot be the specific sort of certainty typical of science, based on an epistemic justification given in evidence.

In short, it seems that the noetic complex that must support the intentionality of religious life does not fall into any of the above modes of belief. Neither the mode of pure certainty nor the modes of non-certainty are able to account for it on their own if taken in isolation.

This is because both of these noetic forms are in some way co-present in the intentionality of faith, in a sense limiting each other. If the mode of doubt prevailed, there would be no faith, since it would lack the character of conviction that is proper to it (which, of course, can take different forms). If the mode of certainty prevailed, there would still be no faith, which would be replaced by the evidence of the occurrence of a givenness in an intuitive fulfilment; even this kind of evidence is not something that can belong to the consciousness of faith by essence.

The reason why both mere doubt and pure certainty in themselves cannot condition the noematic structure of the intentionality of religious life is that none of them, taken alone, would account for an essential character proper to that intentionality, namely that of finite freedom, which is always motivated freedom. This character would be incompatible with the evidence of a certainty that would be the correlate of an evident givenness. Here there would be nothing to believe, but only to ascertain, in the presence of scientific or everyday truth, at least as long as it is not threatened by contrary reasons that could lead to revoking this certainty. In such a framework there is no place for faith as an attitude that includes in its essence non-constraint, the possibility of being confirmed or revoked at any time, which means, the possibility of a free choice if faith has to be a free act of decision, as its essence seems to require.

On the other hand, it should not be assumed that such freedom could consist in the mere presence of an alternative, which would create the condition of doubt as the simple oscillation between the two possibilities of believing and not believing something. In this case, the choice between one or the other would not be the result of a free choice at all, but of a blind arbitrariness, since the choice would have no foothold, no motivation that could incline it to one side or the other, and the subject of the choice would be forced to make the inglorious end of the Buridan's donkey, i.e., to experience the paralysis of

choice. Should he decide to choose, in the absence of any motive for the decision, this act would be nothing more than an arbitrary act governed by fate, which is exactly the opposite of freedom. Behind the appearance of a free choice would thus hide an accidental arbitrariness (Schelling 2011).

Neither doubt nor certainty alone accounts for the core of freedom that resides in the essence of religious life, and this for opposite reasons. In one case, freedom is forced and therefore is not even called into question. On the other, it is so completely detached from every possible motivation and foothold that alone could motivate it and thus becomes a blind case, not rational and, after all, not free. Indeed, in faith as well as in every sphere of the existence of a finite being, freedom cannot be absolute arbitrariness, which would rather be a contradiction. It should be motivated freedom, a freedom that has in front of itself reasons that can (but they must not) guide and orient it, without these reasons being so strong as to constrict and suppress it. In other words, it must be the freedom of a rational being, which goes hand in hand with the rationality of a free being.

It should be now clear that the essence of such freedom excludes simple doubt and simple certainty only because it requires a composition of both in its constitution. There is an element of certainty in it, which makes it possible for it to assume a conviction (in our case, that particular conviction of faith), avoiding the doubtful paralysis of equivalent possibilities, thus allowing it to be finite freedom. And there is also an element of doubt in it, which in concert with the element of conviction prevents it from becoming sclerotic in its certainty, thus allowing it to remain freedom.

Therefore, it seems that the structure of the experience of faith rests in a noetic complex in which doxic components of different (even opposite) types coexist in a peculiar compound of experiences of belief. The resulting overall experience is that of a convinced, determined, motivated, but free choice, free because made in the absence of the evident givenness of the object for which one decides and because there is nevertheless a motivation to follow. These elements: conviction, determination, motivation, on the one hand, freedom and lack of evidence, on the other, are all to be taken into account to the same extent, because they

make up, in their mutual opposition, the very delicate balance of the experience of religious life. The latter, so to speak, always walks on the edge that separates absolute certainty (which can also take on a negative connotation, in the form of pure and simple negation) from absolute doubt. The presence of all these elements is essential in order not to fall on one side or the other. The incarnation of these two extreme sides is represented, on the one hand, by that obtuse affirmation that does not want to hear reasons or by claiming the possibility of a supposed 'scientific' evidence of the content of faith and, of the other hand, by that attitude of weakness of conviction that sooner or later flows into agnosticism or ultimately atheism (which is curiously the negative side of faith, characterized by an act of belief no less strong, although of the opposite sign). Both these phenomena, for what we have seen so far, for opposite reasons are not at all extreme cases of an experience of faith taken to the extreme but constitute rather its negation and the two opposite radical alternatives.

This hybrid structure, so to speak, of religious attitude, in which doubt and certainty coexist in a delicate balance, brings to mind Pascal's intuition that there is not only light or only darkness in the world but both enough darkness and enough light, both for those who want to believe and those who do not (Pascal 1897, No. 454). Indeed, it is also clear from what has been said that faith is not and cannot be a blind act of abandonment that takes place on the unstable ground of pure and simple doubt, a position motivated by nothing, a positional act without the presence of motivation. Rather, it is always an intention that carries a position that, however, has behind it reasons which are accessible to examination and intersubjective communicability, although they can never be rational reasons whose evidence could aspire to universal recognition.

On the other hand, in fact, the intentionality of religious consciousness does not take as a model that of science, it will not place in front of itself the ideal of certainty that can be expressed in judgments clearly founded, as if faith should aspire to compete with scientific rationality, for example by showing or demonstrating the reality of its object, even as a possibility in principle. If this were also possible, if the content of the truths of

faith were to be reconstructed through evident and well-founded judgments, so as not to leave any gap of non-evidence, this would certainly not be a good gain for the faith, it would instead be its end. If faith is such, it is because the form of the intentional consciousness that supports it is peculiar to it and cannot be reduced to the one that governs scientific cognition. In other words, if faith lacks that evidence proper to science, this is not to be reproached as a defect, but is something to be recognized as belonging to its own essence, it belongs to what makes faith a faith, to that without which faith would not be such. To claim that the consciousness of faith could clearly exhibit its object, therefore, would be no less absurd, from the phenomenological point of view, than to claim that a physical, three-dimensional object could be given otherwise than in a perspective way, in a temporal development, in a dialectic between filled and unfilled intentions, in which both of them enter to constitute the concrete givenness of the object.

2. Position of existence and intention without fulfilment

Now, if we ask how this interplay between presence and absence, between certainty and non-certainty, is more precisely articulated, we see that it points to a complexity that is peculiar to the structure of faith, and which distinguishes it from any other kind of intentional experience, making it impossible to reduce it to any other form. For here we have a case that would seem to call into question the general case of the relationship between the intention directed towards the object and the fulfilment of the intention itself. The strange nature of this relationship as it appears in the phenomenon under discussion is such that, from the point of view of a standard phenomenological analysis of the more universal structures of experience, it may even appear as an incongruity, if not a contradiction. This brings us back to this aspect that we have already encountered, to clarify it further.

The universal invariant structure underlying normally experience and knowledge is that provided by the intention-fulfilment pair, as we have already mentioned. Our view from the standpoint of a phenomenological theory of knowledge

reveals coordination between the intention directed at the object and the corresponding act of fulfilment, which, if fulfilment occurs, carries the character of intuitiveness (*Anschaulichkeit*), in which the intended object exhibits itself in the form of the givenness corresponding to the intention.[5] Now, generally speaking, the motivation of the particular mode of belief associated with intention, the bearer, on the noetic side, of the object's position as existing in reality, or probable, or doubtful, etc., depends on the mode of the givenness of the object itself given in the fulfilment. For example, a perceptual experience, which gives the object 'in the flesh', will motivate the particular mode of belief related to the position of the object's existence, with the being of the object acting as a noematic correlate of this position.

Naturally, at least in the case of the perception of physical objects, which develops according to a temporal dimension, it will be necessary to introduce a dynamic structure that articulates the interplay between intuition and fulfilment through the introduction of the concept of 'confirmation'. The fulfilment of intuition must find confirmation at each stage of the perceptual process, and it is this confirmation that, in the dynamic process of the course of the experiences that form perception, continually motivates, at each stage, the position of existence. If at a certain point in the process a discordance occurs, the intention does not find a fulfilment corresponding to the type it predefined, then we have the phenomenon of 'modalisation' (*Modalisierung*), in which the thesis that had hitherto remained constant undergoes a revision and is replaced by another mode of belief. What was previously posited as certain is now doubtful, uncertain, etc., and undergoes therefore modalisation (Husserl 1939, § 21). Correspondingly, from the noematic side we will no longer have being, but being-doubtful, being-uncertain, etc.

It is thus, so to speak, the mode of the fulfilment of the intention that grounds the particular mode of belief with regard to the mode of being of the intended object. If the object is posited as existing, this is because the mode of givenness exhibited in the filling intention motivates that position. This would seem to be, it is worth emphasising, an invariant structure of intentional experiences.

What is missing in religious experience is precisely the actualisation of this structure: in the intention directed towards the object of faith, we do not have an intuitive fulfilment of the intention, which remains a purely empty or 'signitive' intention. In the equation $i + s = 1$ that defines the hyperbola that describes the variation in the degree of fulfilment of the intention, where i corresponds to the component of intuitive fullness, while s refers to the purely signitive (empty) component, there are two extreme cases which correspond to the asymptotes of the hyperbola. On the one hand, we have the case where $i = 1$ and $s = 0$, whereby we have the full intuitive givenness of the object without the slightest trace of intentional components remaining unfilled. On the other hand, we have the case where, on the contrary, $i = 0$ and $s = 1$, i.e. where there is no intuitive component and the intention remains therefore completely unfilled.[6] Although we are dealing here precisely with asymptotic borderline cases, and in the normal scientific or everyday experience we normally always have to deal with a mixture of intuitive and signifying components (i.e. none of the asymptotes is ever reached), in the experience of faith we seem to be dealing precisely with a situation in which the intention is destined to remain completely unfilled, i.e. without the slightest component of intuitive givenness of the intended object (the second case indicated).

The peculiarity of the experience of faith, compared to any other form of experience or knowledge, thus becomes evident. In religious attitude we have an intentional component that must posit the existence of its object as certain, without, however, being able to exhibit an intuitive fulfilment, even to the smallest degree, for the givenness of this object. The object remains simply ungiven. This peculiar asymmetry between an intention that posits existence and the absolute non-givenness of the object of that intention confirms itself as the foundation of that hybrid character of the experience of faith that we have spoken about. We know, the essence of the intentionality underlying religious attitude must contain within itself a component of certainty (expressed in conviction) and a component of non-certainty, which compensate each other by preventing faith from imploding, on the one hand, into self-confident affirmation or the pure rational contemplation of an

evident truth, or, on the other, into scepticism regarding the existence of its object.

Now, we can briefly sketch at this point the following result. The component of certainty is founded on the subjective intention that in the experience of faith posits the existence of its object, while the total lack of intuitive fulfilment on the side of the object establishes the compensation that balances that certainty by preventing its degeneration. Correlatively, this same certainty of the position of existence balances the component of uncertainty (which is given by the lack of the object), so that the result is that admirable equilibrium that constitutes the typical character of faith.

On the other hand (to repeat this) certainty, if it should not be based on an arbitrary unmotivated choice, must rest on motives that direct the intention corresponding to the position of the object. These motives can be of various kinds, and here a coloured 'phenomenology' of the 'reasons' of faith can be established, ranging from miracles to sacred scriptures, from credible and authoritative testimonies to rational reasons in the narrower sense and, in certain cases, to genuine logical arguments. The truly religious attitude will then be able to live as long as none of these motives acquires such a force as to overcome the contrary, negative weight, represented by the absence of the object, and as long as this absence is never a sufficient reason to abandon all grounds for that existential position.

3. About essence and existence

If we consider this result from the point of view of the conceptual pair existence-essence, we can perhaps go so far as to say that in religious experience the relationship between the component of existence and that of essence is somewhat opposite to that of the everyday experience of objects we encounter in our surrounding world. In ordinary perceptual experience, objects are so to say given in their essence, which is accessible to a phenomenological description that highlights its characteristics. This essence is articulated in complexes of essential structures that determine the content of our experience of objects and allow for their linguistic expression. The experience of objects is shifted

from potentiality to actuality through the *ego*, which, as a functional pole, activates those essential structures. These, for their part, are regulated by the laws of formal and material *a priori* (Husserl 1976, §§ 9-10). In the actualisation of the predelineated potentiality of experience, the object, therefore, comes to be given, and it is given (and can only be given) in those essential complexes. Existence, on the other hand, is always 'presumptive' (Husserl 1968, 125), it is a 'claim to existence' never given *a priori*, but always to be confirmed *a posteriori*.

As is well known to those accustomed to phenomenological analysis, the temporal structure of the perceptual process means that the object is always given in perspective, one side at a time, without experience (however much it may deepen knowledge of the object) ever arriving at a complete determination of the object itself. What guarantees the very transcendence of the object is the inexhaustibility of its aspects and determinations, which means that to speak of a complete acquaintance of it only makes sense if by this is meant an ideal limit of experience in which the object is given in all its aspects. This 'determinable indeterminacy' (Husserl 1966, 6), which, far from being a limit, is part of the very essential structure of the experience of objects in the 'lifeworld', means, however, that no conclusive word can ever be put on the existence of the object. Since experiences can go on potentially indefinitely, it cannot be ruled out *a priori* that sooner or later there will be a break in the concordant synthesis of experiences, which forces me to revise my belief in the object's existence. Through modalisation,[7] this existence could be then replaced by doubt or belief in non-existence. In this sphere, of course, this is always a possibility guaranteed in principle *a priori*.

If the normal experience of the lifeworld is such that the content of the essence is given, but the certainty of the existence is never assured, in religious attitude we have that of the object it is the existence that is given with certainty, while the essence, and therefore the content of the object itself, is never given at all. No intuitive content can correspond to the intention directed towards the essential content. This fact, which decisively distinguishes religious experience from the other dimensions of the life-world, echoes the essential necessity underlying the fact

that the certainty proper to faith has no relation with a kind of certainty such as that of scientific evidence. In faith, the position of existence can never rest on and find a motivation, let alone a justification, from an essential content given in intuitive evidence. However, it was precisely this that prevented faith, in its finite freedom, from imploding in the non-freedom of the ascertainment of evidence in its giving itself in some intuitive form.

Religious consciousness, therefore, lives on its inability to be nourished by the source of an intuitive fullness. This is why conviction must seek its motives elsewhere, motives which, since they never involve an exhibition of the object in the flesh, will never have a definitive objective force, and thus will motivate conviction without threatening its space of freedom.

4. Revisiting Anselm's ontological argument

It must have been the awareness that faith could not be founded on an epistemic justification on the side of the object and its givenness (this awareness may be obvious, but it is less obvious to focus on the reasons for this impossibility), that drove Anselm of Canterbury to not seek the foundation of faith in an *a posteriori* procedure that starts from what is given in experience and then proceeds deductively or inductively. Much has been written about his famous ontological argument in the *Proslogion* (Anselm of Canterbury 2000, 93 ff.), and here it is not a question of going head-to-head with this well-known place in the history of theology and philosophy. However, it seems legitimate and, in the context of our discussion, fruitful, to at least briefly refer to a possible interpretation of the ontological argument that, while going far beyond the intentions and the letter of the script of the monk of Canterbury, can help shed light on our subject.

One would first like to state that to appreciate his argument, it is not necessary to follow Anselm to the point of positing the actual existence of God from the concept of God. If one reflects on what is analytically contained in the concept of God, one is not forced to make an unjustified jump from concept (thought) to existence (reality), which would certainly require a synthesis that would presuppose some empirical intuition, which cannot be derived from any concept and which would justify the assertion of such a reality. However, an empirical intuition, as

we have seen, is precisely what is not and cannot be available in the case of the object in inquiry. Kant's famous critique of the ontological argument (Kant 1911, 620 ff.) is directed precisely at the unwarranted shift from concept to reality, but our claim here is that one can read Anselm's argument by staying within the realm of thought, thus circumventing Kant's critique.

Indeed, the position of existence is, in a determinate sense, motivated without leaving the analytical content of the concept of God (as understood by Anselm), without making that impossible synthetic spring. If we break down the concept of God analytically, e.g., using the Russellian method of definite descriptions, we find that this concept is nothing other than the concept of an *x*, such that *x* cannot be thought of as non-existent. The emphasis here is on the 'thought', and not on reality. Read in this sense, the argument does not conclude at all to the existence of God, but to the necessity of thinking God as existing, thus remaining in the analytical sphere of thought, this necessity being contained in the concept of God itself.

In this way, the proof would no longer be a stringent demonstration of the existence of something outside the thought, but the simple explication of the principle that if I have the concept of God (and that I have it is a fact), then I 'must' think of him as existing (Abbagnano 2005). Logical stringency here does not go out of the realm of thought to exhibit something in reality, but merely indicates the necessity of consistent adherence to the content of the concept in question. Indeed, this adherence requires that I must think of God as existing if I do not want to fall into contradiction with my thought.

In other words, *that procedure does not prove the objective reality of an object, but the subjective necessity of faith*. Faith is thus brought back to its genuine meaning, which has nothing to do with a belief that would be in principle capable of receiving confirmation through the immediate or mediated (through deductions, etc.) presentation or exhibition of its object, as if it were a kind of intentional consciousness within the broader genre of cognitive intentionality, with the specific difference constituted by the lack of intuitive evidence (which would reduce faith to a deficient form of cognitive act). As discussed earlier, if religious consciousness constitutes a type in itself of intentional

structure, this lack of intuitive content should not be regarded as a defect, but as necessarily belonging to the essence of this kind of consciousness. There is then no reason to evaluate faith through a criterion borrowed from scientific-cognitive intentionality, and Anselm's proof (in the limited use we are making of it) thus turns out to be a powerful affirmation of the autonomy of faith and its liberation from taking other, cognitively oriented types of intentionality as a model.[8]

In this way, the ontological proof, from a theoretical demonstration, is turned into the principle of a sort of practical postulate: if *x* designates what cannot be thought of as non-existent, the sentence expressing the attitude of faith is not '*x* exists', but 'I must think *x* as existing'. Clearly, then, it is no longer a question of actual objective existence, which, at least in principle and given certain phenomenological assumptions, should always be able to be exhibited to a possible subject (and if it is not exhibited to my consciousness, this is due to the contingent limits of my consciousness). It is rather a question of the necessity of a position of existence that takes place on the subjective side of the *a priori* of the intentional correlation and does not even claim the ideal possibility (not to mention the actuality) of being filled through a possible intuition coming from outside, not even as a borderline case.

Precisely because it is claimed not the 'being' of something, but rather that something 'must be', we do not even have to deal with any form of dogmatism, since here is not affirmed an epistemic access to something without a preliminary assurance of the legitimacy of this affirmation. Indeed, the 'must be' never claims to grasp (or even to be able to grasp) a being, but it determines itself completely in the practical principle that renews the position only for a requirement of non-contradiction, and not for an assertion of unfounded knowledge.

This is why religious experience is not, again, some form of subject-object relation of an epistemic kind, not even of a wholly particular sort. It is not a relationship that is in any way intellectual or cognitive, in which a subject is faced with an object to which it relates precisely as an object, albeit of a particular kind, that could be in principle experienced (although it cannot be experienced factually). Here there is no possible

intuitive intention that is at least indirectly available as fulfilment, that could also include a deductive chain or that would be at the end of a very mediated chain of justifications, which in the end, however, would lead back to an immediate original givenness that legitimates such mediated knowledge. There is no sedimentation of past experiences of the subject, who would only have to return to these experiences in order to derive from them sufficient reasons to fill his position through the givenness, thus mediated, of the object in question.

In short, there is no object at all, which as such would be given in its essence. There is only a position of existence, but the position of existence of an object without the object itself is not a cognitive relationship at all, but rather a practical imperative principle that I must renew at every moment of my existence as a religious individual. At every moment, the imperative says: 'You must posit God as existing', and at every moment it is in the power of my freedom to give or withhold assent. Faith is thus a choice that is incessantly renewed and for this very reason continually at risk of being revoked, and this precisely because the position of existence is never 'corroborated' by the availability of the object in its essence (to which this position is addressed), so that then this experience, so achieved, could remain in my cognitive horizon as a stable possession capable of providing sure confirmation of my thesis as often as I like.

Nevertheless, the character of necessity of the existence-position is what separates religious faith from other types of belief, such as in magic, astrology and so on. This must be taken into consideration every time one is tempted to reduce these modalities of experience, which are different in essence, to a single genre. In faith, there is always a stringency that gives it a certain rational character. However, since in Anselm's argument necessity is a necessity of thought, we are dealing with a form of rationality, which is destined to remain in the limited sphere of analytic non-contradiction, without any cognitive addition. Seen from our point of view, Anselm's demonstration is not the discovery of the existence of something, but an exhibition of the reasonableness of the postulate that posits that something. With his proof, he does not tell us that the object of faith exists (could faith subsist at that?), but that, after all, that postulate is

required by reason itself. He does not show us that faith is true because what it posits also truly exists in reality but only indicates that the assumption on which faith is based is rational, not arbitrary and that therefore religious life is legitimate and has its own particular foundation, the reasons for which are not borrowed from the objectivist ideal of science, but are internal to the central concept of faith itself. The circularity that is thus established is not vicious, but virtuous, and faith lives within it: outside of it, it falls.

This means that we do not just have pure rational light, nor pure darkness, but rather a compensation of the two. It is therefore questionable that faith is a jump into the dark, and this is said, this time, against Pascal (1897). It seems rather to be a delicate tension between, on the one hand, the rationality of a position of existence dictated by a logical stringency and, on the other, the absence of rationality constituted by never being able to give an epistemic foundation to this position. (From this point of view, if in religious experience there is neither pure crystalline rationality, epistemically founded, nor a full irrationality, then one could perhaps say that what distinguishes it is a 'moderate rationality'.)

All this discussion around Anselm's proof brings us back to the central point that ran through this paper, confirming and reinforcing it. The hybrid dimension of faith, expressed in a certainty that is never satisfied, is the correlate of the balance between a subjective intention that must posit an object *a priori* and the absence of givenness of the object itself, an absence that is not only factual but also an *a priori* necessity belonging to the very essence of religious experience. Neither 'I don't know', nor 'I am sure', but 'It must be so even though I can never have the evidence'. This is what expresses the essence of the particular experience that we have so far tried to explain and thematise from a particular perspective, without having the slightest intention of making an exhaustive presentation.

Conclusion and reference to further topics of investigation

Summarising the course undertaken, it emerged that the nature of faith derives its specific character from an

interweaving of opposing components that have their basis in the coexistence, in religious experience, of both the necessity of the positing of the existence of its object and the absence of this very object. The result is a picture in which faith is removed both from an unfounded arbitrary approach and from a claim of quasi-epistemic justification that would make it merely a defective substitute for a hitherto impossible science.

What we have done is no more than an attempt to make a small contribution to the elucidation of the experience of faith using phenomenological instruments. Many other topics of phenomenological interest deserve to be addressed. It would be interesting, for example, to address the question of the relationship between the religious subject and the world, since the religious attitude, by moving 'outside' the world and accessing an 'absolute' view, attributes to the things of the world a particular index with which they are in a certain sense relativized. And in addition: how does the detachment proper to the attitude of faith lead to freeing things from the not-reflected belonging to the network of meanings and references in which they originally lie, and thus to seeing them in another light, so that the incrustations of meaning which are linked to their practical manoeuvrability (Heidegger 1967, §§ 17-18) are brought to the surface? This would certainly not lead to the loss of things but, as in the phenomenological reduction, it would establish for the first time a view capable of thematising the interweavings of meaning that make the givenness of things possible, and thus the profound meaning of their 'being in the world' and of the world itself as the pre-given horizon of the givenness of things. In order to gain such a thematic view of the world, it is in fact necessary to 'leave' the world by taking a step out of it: the step that the phenomenological reduction takes by suspending involvement in the world, and that the religious perspective takes by placing itself at a point beyond it. It would be interesting to see to what extent this constitutes an unparalleled way of 'modifying' the natural attitude and whether one can speak of a religious way (which could certainly not be more phenomenological in the strict sense) to reduction. But we have to leave all that for another time.

NOTES

[1] Here and in the following, 'faith' and 'religious experience' are used as almost equivalent terms. It should be kept in mind that when speaking of religious experience, it is meant specifically the act of believing in a pregnant sense, as expressed in the attitude of faith, with its implications. Other characteristic elements of religious experience, such as rituals etc., are in this way explicitly excluded.
[2] Here and in the following, we always refer to those forms of religious life in which the object of faith is transcendent in an absolute way.
[3] Regarding modes of belief and correlative modes of being see Husserl (1976), §§ 103-107.
[4] For these other modalities of belief see Husserl (1976), 239.
[5] Husserl in the sixth *Logical Investigation* (Husserl 1984) deals in detail with the dynamic between empty and intuitive intention as a central invariant structure of the theory of phenomenological knowledge, as well as with the issue of fulfilment.
[6] For these considerations see Husserl (1984), § 23.
[7] See section 2.
[8] This reading is quite consistent with Karl Barth's remarkable interpretation of the *Proslogion* (Barth 1981). In a context animated by the aspiration to affirm the terms of the difficult relationship between reason and faith and the role of theology, Barth sees in Anselm's attempt (against the usual line of interpretation that accentuates the rationalistic moment) not an effort to give a demonstration to the content of faith (as if it would need one), but a movement within faith itself that does not make it dependent on some rational demonstration, but assumes faith as the presupposition of any intellectual questioning of its content, thus guaranteeing at the same time its autonomy and legitimacy in the face of any rational treatment.

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