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PHENOMENOLOGY OF SECULAR SOCIETY AND ITS
SCIENTISM

Since its inception, phenomenology has been a forceful power against scientism and positivism. For this reason, among others, it has the capacity to give us tools to develop nuanced understandings of religion and to see beyond what Heidegger called onto-theology, i.e., the understanding of the divine as a highest being and as an object of thought on the one hand, and on the other hand, being as a generality. But it has not given us the same nuanced understanding of the secular society. Perhaps this is due to the strong criticisms and skepticisms railed against technology and the modern society, most present, for example, in Heidegger's philosophy, and later even more explicit in the phenomenology of Klaus Held and Michel Henry.¹ But these criticisms tend to only be conservative and when posed to political questions, lose their radical force and dynamic capacity. There is also a risk for phenomenology, just as for any philosophy, to lock itself and its criticisms against modern society into an ivory tower. Its reasoning is complex and many phenomenologists are afraid of trivializing phenomenology. This fear is not groundless, but nevertheless, it is important for phenomenologists to be involved in political and social discussions, due to the radical potential that it harbors for those discussions.

In this article I attempt to offer a phenomenological analysis of secular societies in contrast to religious societies. I will argue that the central feature of a secular society is its tendency to only acknowledge as real what can be measured – a standpoint that is founded in an ontological presupposition. In considering this presupposition, I will start with Husserl and his analysis of inner time consciousness and his concept of the life-world, especially found in his *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie* (*The Crisis of European Philosophy and Transcendental Phenomenology*).² I start here because I consider

¹ I am thinking especially of Heidegger's work beginning in the 30's, and culminating in his essays on technology, building, and dwelling in the early 50's. See for example "Die Zeit des Weltbildes" from 1935 in *Holzwege* and *Die Frage nach der Technik* in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Heidegger has of course been read in many different ways and not only as conservative. Klaus Held's article "Physis und Geburt: Naturerfahrung in phänomenologischer Sicht" (in *Phänomenologie der natürlichen Lebenswelt*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2012) provides another example of a technology sceptic phenomenology as well as Michel Henry's *C'est moi la vérité: pour une philosophie du christianisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1996, Engl. transl. *I am the truth: Toward a philosophy of Christianity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

² Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, *Husserliana* Vol. 6 (The Hague, Nijhoff 1954), English

the analysis of inner time consciousness to be the deepest foundation of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, and concepts such as "lifeworld" also fall back upon this foundation. Along these lines, I want to point toward a deeper ground that can help us understand the different ontological presuppositions that lie behind secular society on one side and religious societies on the other side. In my earlier essay "Religion at the Center of Phenomenology" I tried to show how the so-called turn to religion within phenomenology has its root in the Husserlian analyses of inner time consciousness, and I want to further develop here this line of thinking into an analysis of the secular society.³ I also want to suggest that phenomenology could meet a certain problematic in the secular society through connecting the analyses of inner time consciousness to concepts such as "life" and "phronesis."

I. A Phenomenological Starting-Point

What takes place in Husserl's analysis of inner time consciousness is an important—and maybe even fundamental—phenomenological insight, one that we are yet to fully understand. This analysis is also the ontological core of Husserlian phenomenology. Jacques Derrida claims, for example, that the analysis of inner time consciousness is the place where everything is settled,⁴ and as Husserl himself points out in *Ideas II*, this is the place where the deepest foundation of his phenomenology should be found.⁵

As Bernet and others have pointed out, Husserl believed that phenomenology could provide us with a steady ground for all knowledge, and that the structure of experience, which is what should be investigated through the phenomenological method, could be separated from its content and become an object of its own. At least initially, he believed in the possibility of putting the transcendental structure in front of us in order to investigate it, understand it, and describe it. But in the analysis of inner time-consciousness he found a limit for this task.⁶

In this analysis, experience shows itself as a continual flowing stream and thus as "time." It is in and through this stream of experience that we live our lives. Experience is structured as "intentionality," which means that this continual stream is

translation by David Carr, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1970).

³ See Jonna Bornemark, "Religion at the Center of Phenomenology: Husserl's Analysis of Inner Time-consciousness," *Impossible Time. Past and Future in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Marius Timmann Mjaaland and Ulrik Houliind Rasmussen, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 59-72.

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène: introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: PUF, 1976), 70.

⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy, second book: studies in the phenomenology of constitution*, translated by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer, ed. Rudolph Bernet (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1989), 109 (§ 23).

⁶ Rudolf Bernet, "Is the Present Ever Present?" *Research in Phenomenology*, 12(1982), 91 ff.

directed, and continually orders the world. This ordering also entails that the flowing experience is not only what continually disappears, but also what stays. But it stays in a different mode; in what he calls “retention.”⁷ This is analogous to a melody, which is not simply a succession of notes that we hear one after the other, but rather a structure wherein the notes are dependent upon each other, getting their meaning not only through the notes that came before, but also the notes that are expected afterwards. Retention therefore has its counter-side in protention: which means that the melody is dependent not only on an indirect presence of past notes, but also upon an indirect presence of the notes to come. “The now” can only appear as a constant moving into a futural horizon.⁷

That intentionality is always directed means that it is focused upon objects (in a wide sense, i.e. not only material objects but also for example a melody or a philosophical analysis). Through intentionality, objects get their continuity in the timely stream and can be experienced. But this way of being directed toward objects is only a part of intentionality. Therefore, Husserl speaks about two kinds of intentionality in relation to the floating stream:

- Husserl calls the first one *Querintentionalität*, translated as “transverse” or “vertical intentionality.” It is through this kind of intentionality that objects are constituted as they go through protention, presence and retention, it could therefore also be called an object intentionality. This means that consciousness constitutes the object as other than itself. The object is identified as one and the same as it moves through protention, primordial experience and retention, and gets a positive character through this over-lapping (*Deckung*), giving it an essence of its own. It also gets a negative character since its movement can be prolonged in both directions and can be understood as existent “before” it came into protention and “after” it left, or having sunk deep into retention. Through this process a stable world – one possible to live in – is constituted.
- The other kind of intentionality that shows itself in this analysis is what he calls *Längsintentionalität* translated as longitudinal or horizontal intentionality. This intentionality does not constitute objects, but is rather the consciousness of the continuity of the movement itself. Through this intentionality, consciousness or intentionality itself is aware of its own unit. This unit is not thematized, and thus objectified and put at distance from itself; rather it is an immediate consciousness that is always present in the background. As such it is pre-reflective and merely a horizontal consciousness. As the unit of time, it cannot be *in* time and Husserl therefore formulates it as a quasi-object.⁸

⁷ *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, Husserliana Vol. X (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), English trans. by John B. Brough, *On the phenomenology of the consciousness of internal time* (Dordrecht et al.: Kluwer 1990), §§ 8 and 24, and *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein (1917/18)*, Husserliana Vol. XXXIII (Dordrecht, Kluwer, 2001), texts 1 and 4.

⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, §39, 80 (Engl. trans., 84-5), appendix VIII, 116ff (Engl. trans., 120-2) and text 54, 379f. (Engl. trans., 390-1).

In recognizing the foundational character of time, consciousness or subjectivity is understood as a stream in constant movement. This is centrally important, for phenomenology is a transcendental investigation of the structure of life, and here life shows itself as something that cannot only be studied as an object. But nevertheless, in order to study subjectivity we must first turn it into an object, and once we have done this, it is no longer the living stream but one object *within* the stream. We no longer examine subjectivity as “perceiving,” but as something “perceived.” We have turned the longitudinal intentionality into transverse intentionality. When we start to reflect on the experiencing of subjectivity, it becomes one experience among many within time, and it is thus not the subjectivity as experiencing anymore. In order to grasp experiencing, we move to another level, but when we have done that we have once again turned the experience of the experience into another object, and we find ourselves in the same situation once again. Husserl describes this problem as an infinite regress: each transcendental analysis demands another analysis.⁹

The question then becomes this: do we really lose something in the transformation of subjectivity from the activity of perceiving into something perceived? Husserl sometimes argues that nothing is changed in the transformation from experiencing subjectivity into experienced object. In *Ideas II* he says that the pure Ego can conceive itself as an object without changing the Ego. He develops the position in the following way:

[...] everywhere the distinction must certainly be made between the objectified and the “originally” not objectified pure Ego, e.g., between the perceived and the perceiving pure Ego. [...] Yet it is evident, in virtue of further reflections at a higher level, *that this and the other pure Ego are in truth one and the same.* It is just that at one time it is given, at other times it is not given; or, in a higher reflection, in the one case it is straightforwardly given, in the other it is given through a further mediating stage.¹⁰

Here Husserl argues for the continuity and transparency of consciousness and the second kind of givenness given through “a further mediating stage,” i.e. through reason. But later (especially French) phenomenologists have showed him wrong. The problem of this argument is that it is not possible to compare subjectivity as experienced and thematized, with experiencing and thematizing subjectivity, since we need to thematize it in order to make such a comparison. There is no place from where we can compare, and any attempt would be outside of the phenomenological range. The limit of knowledge is thus reached in this central analysis. This does not mean that there is “some

⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, appendix VI, 111-115. (Engl. trans., 116-19).

¹⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy, second book*, §23, 108. Husserl provides similar arguments in *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, §39, 82-3 (English trans., 86-7) and in text 54, 382 (Engl. trans., 393-4).

thing” that cannot be thematized, but rather that the core of life, the movement and temporality of life, cannot fully be thematized by an object-intentionality. In some—especially later—texts Husserl also acknowledges this.¹¹

I would say that this is one of the most important phenomenological discussions for the kinship between phenomenology and (perhaps mostly mystical) religion. Concepts such as “radical alterity” and “the non-apparent” have become increasingly important; concepts that open up for a philosophy of religion. They are developed when one accepts that it is not possible, and thus not a goal, to find a place where subjectivity has itself as an object in its fullness. It also means that the foundation of phenomenology can never be transparent to the phenomenologist. Each analysis will lead to a new level to be analyzed, etc.—a movement Anthony Steinbock has worked out as a generative phenomenology—and each generation must necessarily develop a slightly different phenomenology.¹²

Already in Edith Stein and Max Scheler’s works, this analysis provides material for their flirtation (and in Stein’s case marriage) with religion.¹³ This limit for objective reasoning, found by objective reasoning, shows the transcendental ground as constantly slipping away from philosophy. It is no coincidence that phenomenologists since then have shown an interest in religious thinkers from (mainly Christian) mystic traditions: Meister Eckhart, Dionysius the Areopagite, Angelus Silesius, John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, etc. But even from the start, there has been one important, and particular problem connected to this move, a problem we will now turn to.

II. A Phenomenological Problem

Husserl considers this primordial streaming (*das Urströmende*), which longitudinal intentionality presents, as a standing-streaming and claims that it has two characteristics: it shows a radical alterity, as it continually slips away, but it is also a continual unity. For this second character he uses the Scholastic term *nunc stans*. With this concept he wants to point toward the static and continual form of the standing-streaming, in short: that the continual changing doesn’t change. As such it is not part of time, but over-, above- or pre- temporal.¹⁴

¹¹ See for example Edmund Husserl, *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein*, text 10, 201f

¹² Anthony J. Steinbock, *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1995), “Generativity and Generative Phenomenology,” *Husserl Studies* 12(1995), 55-79.

¹³ Edith Stein develops an explicitly Christian philosophy in *Endliches und ewiges Sein. Versuch eines Aufstiegs zum Sinn des Seins* (Freiburg, Basel, & Vienna: Herder, 2006([1950])), and in *Kreuzeswissenschaft, Studie über Johannes a Cruce*, Edith Steins Werke Vol. 1, (Louvain: E. Nauwelaerts, 1954), both written during her period as a nun. Max Scheler’s flirtation is most obvious in *Vom Ewigen im Menschen*, *Gesammelte Werke* Vol. 5 (Bern: Francke, 1954).

¹⁴ See for example Edmund Husserl, *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929-1934). Die C-Manuskripte*. Hua, Materialien band VII, ed. Dieter Lohmar, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006).

One could say that the discussions about longitudinal intentionality have oscillated between at least three positions: 1) emphasizing the character of radical alterity: that it is what cannot be reached (from an epistemological point of view); 2) that it is what is most stable in its character of being a *nunc stans* (from an ontological point of view); 3) that it is what is closest to us (from an experiential point of view). All these positions include problems: emphasizing the radical alterity risks missing its presence in every living experience. Using *nunc stans* in its ontological signification easily leads to the risk of overemphasizing its accessibility for transcendental reflection. Relating it to the experiential point of view shows a distance between experience, conceptualization and systematization, and it is exactly this position that throws us into either overemphasizing its accessibility or inaccessibility. This problem has evoked extensive phenomenological debates, which sometimes can be seen as following a similar pattern.

For example, in his work *Lebendige Gegenwart*, Klaus Held criticizes Thomas Seebohm and his *Die Bedingungen der Möglichkeit der Transzendental-Philosophie*¹⁵ for arguing that the infinite repeatability of transcendental self-reflection is a proof that living presence can be seen and that the temporality of the self can thereby be objectified and reflected. Held questions this coinciding between the standing and the streaming, but nevertheless claims that it is possible to join these concepts together under the one concept of *nunc stans*.¹⁶

The concept *nunc stans*, and thus indirectly Held, has also been criticized by Daniel Birnbaum (among others) in a way similar to Held's critique of Seebohm. Birnbaum claims that the concept *nunc stans* will always include a metaphysical objectivation, and a grasping and exclusion of all alterity, since it tries to name that which escapes all reflection. By focusing on the eternal continuity of the motion, this movement is frozen and becomes an omnitemporality that is both everywhere and nowhere.¹⁷

And this not only goes for the concept of *nunc stans*, but for other concepts as well. The concept of "givenness" has also been debated, especially when Dominique Janicaud criticized Jean-Luc Marion for translating Husserl's concept *Gegebenheit* into *donation*. (Janicaud suggests instead the usual translation *le donné* or *la donnée*, to be "the given.")¹⁸ Just as the English word "givenness," *donation* formulates the act rather than the fact that the given is given. The act then becomes something on its own beyond anything specifically is given. And there is a similar discussion concerning Michel Henry's attempt to transform the processuality of the God of Meister Eckhart into a category of its own, through

¹⁵ Thomas Seebohm, *Die Bedingungen der Möglichkeit der Transzendental-Philosophie: Edmund Husserls Transzendental-Phänomenologischer Ansatz, Dargestellt im Anschluss an seine Kant-Kritik* (Cologne: Bouvier, 1962).

¹⁶ Klaus Held, *Lebendige Gegenwart* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 143 and 172.

¹⁷ Daniel Birnbaum, *The Hospitality of Presence* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1998), 152, 149.

¹⁸ Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology "Wide Open": After the French Debate* (New York, Fordham University Press, 2000), 35.

which this processuality or movement is fixated and formulated as a stable category or even entity.¹⁹ In all these discussions, what is only creative motility tends to be understood as static and fixed (because of its continuity). This new category is no longer understood primarily in relation to that which is created, given or shown, but instead, understood according to its movement being “frozen” and valued separately. By separating the act from its “product,” an abstraction is made and a new noun is formulated. This process tends to be quite frequent in phenomenology of religion, but at the same time is pointed out to be a central problem. The process is fruitful to the extent that it makes something visible, but problematic because it includes a questionable objectivation of the movement.

There is a double problematic here: something becomes visible through the phenomenological analysis, but at the same time an isolation and essentialisation occurs when the conceptualisation takes place. This isolation and essentialisation negates the intimate connection between the giving movement and that which is given as givenness beyond anything given comes into focus. But there is also an awareness of this risk; the worst thing for most phenomenologists working on religion is to be accused of ontotheology, which could be understood exactly as the tendency to address the foundational movement as static and as an essence on its own.

Derrida, Janicaud and others have warned us against objectifying longitudinal intentionality. On the other hand, James Hart has emphasized that not only the temptation of objectifying longitudinal intentionality should be avoided, but also the temptation of reducing it to a nothing.²⁰

At least one religious tradition has often been understood as escaping ontotheology, namely the Christian apophatic mystic tradition. And it is also this tradition that is most present in phenomenological analysis. Negative theology includes a suspicion against metaphysical and rationalistic conceptuality, and it is here that phenomenologists have found a speaking partner in order to relate to what cannot be named. But this move has also been criticized, among others, by Derrida.

For Derrida this question is not, as it was for Janicaud, mainly about pointing out the wrongs of others, as a watchdog for phenomenology. It is rather a question about how his own philosophy should be understood, as similar questions appear in relation to his concepts. In his “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” he claims to avoid the dangers since: “What *differance*, the *trace*, and so on ‘mean’ [...] is ‘before’ the concept, the name, the word.”²¹ Deconstruction “does not aim to reestablish a

¹⁹ Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973[1963]), 104.

²⁰ James G. Hart, “A Précis of an Husserlian Philosophical Theology,” in *Essays in Phenomenological Theology*, ed. S. Laycock and J. G. Hart (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 89-168, here 157.

²¹ Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” *Languages of the Unsayable*, eds. S. Budick and W. Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 15.

'hyperessentiality' since it aims at neither predication nor at Being."²² He has found a different way of relating to language, which in this text he claims to not be the case with the mystics. Here, he argues that the mystics of negative theology only tried to guard the nobility of God, and in their own way, only want to confirm the Being of God, and therefore never actually escape ontotheology. His (early) understanding of the mystics, however, has not gone without some criticism, too: if Derrida can formulate a concept before all concepts, why should others not have used the same strategy? Such a criticism is posed, for example, by Marion in their famous meeting at Villanova 1997.²³

There are many more examples, and on this theme we could have also discussed Levinas' criticism of Heidegger in his theory of "the said and saying,"²⁴ or Henry's development of the concept of immanence, and criticism of object intentionality (which I have also discussed elsewhere).²⁵ But what I want to emphasize is that all these discussions structurally relate to Husserl's analysis of inner time consciousness. They all, in their own way, relate to an inherent phenomenological problematic made explicit for the first time through Husserl's analysis of longitudinal intentionality.

So, has phenomenology found a solution or a way to handle this question? I'm not so sure. One could conclude that it is an area that still calls for thinking. But I will not take on that task here. I want instead to turn to a political analysis that can find its basis in the above discussion.

III. Societal Consequences

I would like to suggest that this question is not only important for phenomenological, ontological, or epistemological reasons; it also has clear political implications. How we as social and political communities relate to this question, affects the culture in which we live. The two tendencies within phenomenology – either to see no problem with thematizing longitudinal intentionality and use concepts such as *nunc stans*, or the other tendency of denying any access, thematization or naming of longitudinal intentionality – have their political consequences. The first tendency of fixating names where no names really could be given, can be understood as the ontology of religious societies, whereas denying such names is an important feature of the secular societies. Let me in short describe two extremes.

a) The religious fundamentalist society

By means of the above phenomenological analysis we can understand religious societies as built upon an acceptance of

²² Ibid., 9

²³ *God, the Gift and Postmodernism*, eds. J. Caputo and M. J. Scanlon (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999).

²⁴ This is developed in *Autrement qu'être ou au delà de l'essence* (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1974); English trans. by A. Lingis, *Otherwise than being or beyond essence* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

²⁵ See Jonna Bornemark, "Immanence and Transcendence in Michel Henry and Mechthild von Magdeburg," *L'Orient des dieux*, vol 8-9(2008-2009), 75-90.

giving fixated names to that which Husserl called “longitudinal intentionality.”²⁶ As several phenomenological analyses have shown, what has been called “the divine dimension” grows through an attunement and perceptiveness to what is given through longitudinal intentionality.²⁶ This intentionality points toward “that” which ontologically not is part of the world, but at the same time is foundational to the world. It is therefore a dimension that epistemologically exceeds our capacity of knowledge (which demands some degree of thematization) and brings us to faith and trust. Because of this lack of knowledge and over-view when before the divine, humility is always demanded.

The ontological acceptance of the longitudinal experience also means that it is drawn into language. A variety of names and words have been coined for this foundational area. And since longitudinal intentionality is existentially more foundational than transversal intentionality, these names and words are attributed with a power that give them a privileged place in language, and effectively change how reality is perceived. Their power comes from the presupposition that they relate to the innermost structure of being and as a result, they play a leading role in the ordering of life. These names are therefore also structurally above any naming of objects found through transversal intentionality. As these names of the divine are used to order life and the political structure, they are transformed. When this happens, these names easily lose their relation to their origination, and become objectivized and understood as one sort of objects among many. As such they are drawn into a logic of transversal intentionality and increasingly become understood as substances. Thus an ontotheology arises in which concepts, such as “God,” are understood as a highest being, present at a specific location (heaven), which becomes an extension of the world, and follow the logic of the world. The “standing” of “standing-streaming” is thus emphasized at the cost of the “streaming.”

The conceptual order of power is also intimately bound to power structures between human beings (as well as between human beings and animals etc.). Some men (and here “men” most often are males) have access and a special link to this inaccessible greatness. Sociological analysis often shows how this access is built upon relationships, money, tradition, weapons, or sometimes on the capacity for reflection or, we could add, even perceptiveness for longitudinal intentionality. In the political fight for worldly power, concepts derived from experience and reflection upon longitudinal intentionality are both useful tools. But this can also be seen the other way around: in order to understand power and its relation to destiny, luck, and other

²⁶ See for example Michel Henry, *Essence of Manifestation* and J. G. Hart, “A Précis of an Husserlian Philosophical Theology”. My suggestion is not that the arising of religion is only dependent upon the experience of longitudinal intentionality, excluding for example Levinas’ phenomenology of the radical alterity of the other person or Marion’s analysis of the saturated phenomena. My aim is rather to contrast the positioning of longitudinal experience in the religious versus the secular society. In this very sketchy way I therefore want to point toward the role of longitudinal intentionality in the arising and structuring of what we call a religious society.

phenomena beyond human control, the experience of longitudinal intentionality is a resource. When power reveals itself not as something that some human beings have, but as that which orders the world, then power itself could be understood in connection to the divine.

The analysis of religious society in terms of power is quite common outside the phenomenological tradition, but we can here in a very sketchy way see how it is related to the phenomenological question concerning a transcendental, transcending stream and the phenomenological criticism of ontotheology. But if phenomenology has constantly been guarding against ontotheology as the utmost consequence of naming the longitudinal experience, there is another problem connected to the forgetfulness of longitudinal intentionality in secular and scientific society.

b) Secular Scientific Society

Secular society is to a large extent built upon a rationalistic and scientific understanding of the world.²⁷ Science has the position of being the highest source of knowledge that should guide us and science means the study of objects: it is all done through transversal intentionality. Science is a specific kind of activity and often includes a self-reflection on its own limits. Building a society upon science therefore needs to exceed science itself and become a whole world-view, which can be formulated as scientism. In its popular version, the reflection on its own limits tends to be what is forgotten first. In such a world-view there is no room for thematization of longitudinal intentionality, and in fact, it could even be said that it is not known here. It is as if it wasn't invented yet, or rather, as if it was forgotten. That "all knowledge is knowledge about an object" becomes an axiom, and as a consequence, only what can be measured can be called "real."

There is, in poetry, humanities, the arts, etc. sensitivity for the limitation of transversal intentionality, and other kinds of intentionalities are performed. But in politics, these are most often seen as signs of human weakness, and of subjectivity. They are thus rarely considered to provide insights upon which a politics might be built. Ontologically, only what can be understood as an object is considered real, and objects should be possible to measure. As one consequence everything should be evidence-based: psychotherapy, elderly care, pre-school pedagogy, etc. Everything should be rationalized, performed from an evidence-based method, and quality should in the end be quantified. Take the university, for example: that which is measureable is put under an economic framework in which the university shall produce knowledge. Knowledge is facts rather than insights, which results in the belief in a transparency of knowledge: each student should, from the beginning of the course, know what information is to be gained by the end of the course, and the

²⁷ My examples come from Sweden, and Sweden is also the place I have in mind when I discuss the secular society, though much of this discussion may be relevant for all western secular societies.

student should also know in the beginning of the course in what way this information is useful.

I would say that, to a large extent, this is also what happens to politics when there is no room and no insight into “not-knowing” and the limitations of objective reasoning and object intentionality. It is acknowledged that in this environment reflection (to the extent that there is such a reflection) over a longitudinal intentionality does not gain any fixated names, in difference to a transversal intentionality. And therefore it is deemed useless. We are in need for knowledge upon which we might build our continual welfare, and this kind of existential and transcendental thought is relegated to the private sphere. Existentially we do not know, and the state shouldn’t be the one to provide answers. Instead, the state should only make it possible to fulfill individual life-projects, and its contributions should be performed as rational and economic as possible.

IV. A task for phenomenology

So where does this take us? What is the task for phenomenology here? I do think that Husserl’s analysis of inner time-consciousness provides us with tools to understand different human approaches to what comes to be understood as the divine, and as foundational existential presuppositions. And I think that we need to see the internal phenomenological discussion on naming or not-naming from this political angle.

I am not necessarily arguing that secular society should be more religious. Maybe the distinction between religion and secular in the end is not the most important. In a secular society, only object-intentionality is acknowledged, but what it needs is to find new ways to relate to longitudinal intentionality and to give longitudinal reflection a new status. I will give one example of how this could work.

A nurse working in elderly care is today living under pressure from measurability and the paradigm of evidence-based methodologies. This means that as she visits the elderly person she is supposed to do certain things, for example, to cook, clean, and give the elderly person a shower. Her work is often structured by a piece of paper with one box for each task that she is supposed to check-off. If all boxes are checked, then in a short time, quality is fulfilled and she has done a good job. Her task, and the quality of her performance, can in this way be measured. But most nurses that are dedicated to their work feel a great dissatisfaction with this way of measuring quality. They consider their task to primarily be present for another human being. And maybe a certain elderly person, let’s call her Agda, really does not want to take a shower. If the nurse persuades her into the shower, then yes, measured quality is up-held, whereas sitting down to talk to Agda (which might be what Agda really needs that day) means to fail in her job. Here the nurse knows what is right from the human perspective – which in her occupation is the only one that really should count – but is often forced to go against it for “quality-reason”. The nurse needs concepts and thought structures that make it possible for her to explain to her employee, and the

politicians responsible for the creation of this system, as to why their way to measure quality is wrong. And seen from a larger perspective, these concepts need to be of ontological weight since it otherwise tends not to be taken as real.

A reflection upon the dimension of longitudinal intentionality would here mean to realize that the work with the elderly person should not transform her into a calculable object. What is often understood as the “human factors” or the soft factors need to be given time and space to develop. Empathy and the understanding that both the care-taker and elderly person are part of a living system and that the one receiving care also per definition redraws from the nurse’s knowledge, are important insights here that need to influence the work done. I would say that phenomenology has so much to contribute here because it grows out of an interest for longitudinal intentionality. The aforementioned “soft factors” are simply that which cannot be fully seen through transversal intentionality, but necessarily exceed it. Maybe phenomenology here also needs to be able to talk about life as something that constantly withdraws from knowledge, but as that with which we must nevertheless relate: life as that which tries to see itself, but never fully succeeds. In this way there is a mystery connected to life and to our own lives that needs to be taken into account. This mystery makes it impossible to name it, in a fixating way, to limit it to measurable knowledge, and also to ignore it. It is epistemologically distant, but experientially, that which is closest to us. The nurse knows about this, but since she lacks words it is too often not taken into account.

An interpretation of Husserl might be that what is most central for life is its streaming, subjective character. Longitudinal intentionality formulates this in terms of intentionality, but this intentionality also points toward an ontological structure of life; it not only has an epistemological content. Longitudinal intentionality could be understood as the awareness of a foundational structure of life. Just as Husserl noted, this concept shows that living subjectivity is not to be found *in* time, but rather *is* time itself. As such it also goes beyond individual subjectivity. The connection between longitudinal and transversal intentionality also shows that conscious life is directed, and focused upon that which is in front of it. The natural structure of directed consciousness tends to cover up the character of life itself. Nevertheless, life as streaming is something that we experience; it is a background or horizontal consciousness that we can bring forth and become conscious of, even if we can never grasp it as an object. We live in, by and through it, which also means that it overflows us. Our lives are what we receive.

Life is also what binds us together, and we can only differ within this streaming life. Here there is recognition of the other living creature exactly as living, just as I am. We can of course also relate to the other living creature through object intentionality, but this will never be enough. To transform the other creature into an object will not tell us all about it since its character of being alive, just as our own character of being alive, cannot be reduced to something given in time. We recognize the life of the other person exactly as an epistemological, radical alterity. Just as Levinas has

pointed out: to experience another living creature is to experience that it overflows me and that I can never know about it, in its entirety. This is something that the wise nurse already knows.

But to talk about life in this way and to talk about this kind of (what might be called) longitudinal knowledge, is most often impossible for the nurse, as her knowledge is restricted to object-knowledge. To talk about longitudinal intentionality and knowledge is full of dangers, as we have seen above, so secular society has chosen to relegate it to the private arena and separate it from any knowledge production and societal power. Maybe phenomenology should take up the dialogue with the nurse and build new alliances. In such a move the phenomenologist would need to accept a certain leveling of her concepts. The high sophistication of the question should not stop it from being influential on a political or societal level. If it does, then phenomenology becomes part of the problem.

Another concept that could be useful here is an ontological reading of the Aristotelian concept *phronesis*, which Heidegger and Gadamer reintroduced in the phenomenological context.²⁸ *Phronesis* could—in relation to this discussion on longitudinal consciousness and life—be understood as a specific capacity to act in relation to the concept of streaming life. Life as streaming has a verbal character and as streaming we are always acting. Life is constantly different and each situation has a character of being unique. *Phronesis* is precisely the capacity to act in relation to the specificity of each situation, and in an ontology of flowing life, this capacity becomes more central than *sophia* with its capacity to grasp universalities. To act in relation to unique situations includes the capacity, not to reduce either oneself or the others to objects, but to relate to them exactly as living. *Phronesis* could in this sense be one way of formulating the capacity for ethical action that takes its starting-point in a “living together,” and not in an objective, distanced reasoning. In this way *phronesis* includes an acknowledgement of the continual newness of the stream and the living capacity of human beings. The practical side of philosophy can here show its intimate relation to a certain kind of ontological thinking: they meet in the verb.²⁹ “Life” and “phronesis” are here suggested as two concepts that merit more attention since they could contribute to the development of a secular society beyond scientism. Its relation to longitudinal intentionality is here only suggested as something that might merit closer attention. We could nevertheless already see the use of such concepts in the case of the nurse. The task of our nurse could be, as a starting-point in such a concept, to develop her phronetic sensibility in order to meet the needs and life of the elderly person. It would give room for those aspects of the human that cannot be measured. And words can in this way be empowering, our nurse can ask her boss

²⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Martin Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes*, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann, Gesamtausgabe vol.19 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1976); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik. 1, Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 317ff.

²⁹ A related attempt to do an ontological reading of phronesis has been made by Christopher P. Long in “The Ontological Reappropriation of Phronesis,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 35(2002), 35-60.

how she/he creates systems that give room for important phronetic skills, which she finds central to her professional role. Without such concepts and thought systems, she can only feel that something is wrong in the way things are organized, but she cannot give a productive contribution.

Our nurse is of course included in a complicated power structure, but this should not lead us to conclude that she is totally powerless—especially since she is not alone. The experience that something important is missing is a deeply personal one, but also a very common experience in many interpersonal professions. It is not subjective in the sense that it is relative to one individual, but says something about our societies. At the bottom of the nurse's situation there is a conflict of ontology: what is real, and what should thus be taken into account? And it is here that an alliance between academic philosophers (which still have a certain status in secular society) and groups of practitioners, such as nurses in elderly care, could prove to be equally beneficial. The nurses can contribute by providing life experiences that show that something is missing in the organization of their work and the philosophers can contribute with giving this question ontological weight through analysis (such as that of inner-time consciousness) and concepts (such as life and phronesis).

Just as religious societies are not by necessity fundamentalist, secular societies are not by necessity scientific. Within both there are possibilities for nuanced discussions, and perhaps a discussion between the secular and religious can also provide the possibilities of developing a greater sensitivity and attunement to longitudinal intentionality.

Throughout this paper I have employed the concept of longitudinal intentionality, and pushed it to its limits. I understand longitudinal intentionality as one name for a movement of life (which would of course be another name). The important thing is that we keep naming, and keep talking about this aspect of life. It can be discussed in religious or secular terminology; the different uses of words are not the separating line here. What is important is that the unknown does not scare us from constituting new concepts and applying these new concepts to discussions at many different levels, thus letting these concepts attract power. And at the same time, the unknown can render us humble in relation to the concepts that we create (or re-awake), as they at some point will need to be deconstructed.