

God or Self? The Re-Emergence of God in the Unconscious

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Abstract: Toward the end of the Age of Enlightenment, rationalism's demise gradually entailed the transcendent God's demise. In this article, I will draw on the resurfacing of God in the ensuing tradition of the unconscious. Whereas philosophers such as Schopenhauer or Eduard von Hartmann, undermining the alleged rational consciousness, assumed the existence of an impersonal, unconscious, yet collective will, others took one step back and maintained a higher yet individual "consciousness" beyond the threshold of sense perception. I am referring to the philosopher-spiritualist Carl du Prel (1833–1899), whose notion of a personal unconscious inaugurated both Freud's and Jung's "psychologies" of the unconscious. In many respects, Du Prel's "personal unconscious" ("transcendental consciousness") interestingly corresponds to the traditional conception of God; it is morally binding and has a cosmological impact. I will explore to what extent Carl du Prel, in his philosophy of the unconscious, allows for a re-emergence of God in the form of a personal unconscious. I will also try to specify the conditions of possibility for equating these unruly notions ("God" and "unconscious"). My question will be as follows: can we consider the personal unconscious (or transcendental consciousness), as developed in Carl du Prel's work, as a re-emergence of a more traditional conception of a transcendent God in terms of reason and intelligibility?

Keywords: transcendental consciousness; unconscious; Carl du Prel; subjectivity; transcendent God



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1. Introduction

"[T]here is only a difference in the mode of conceiving one and the same thought, whether we refer the hidden impulse of our actions to a transcendental Ego, or to Schopenhauer's Will, or to Hartmann's Unconscious, or to the Christian God. We may be of this opinion or that, yet since the impulse to action does not always lie in our sense and brain consciousness, we may agree with [Georg Christoph] Lichtenberg, that 'On this globe we serve an end, the attainment of which cannot be hindered, though all mankind conspired against it.'" (Du Prel 1889, p. 98; 1885, p. 362)

"a transcendental philosophy is the more genuine, and better fulfills its vocation as philosophy, the more radical it is" (Husserl 1970, p. 18; 1962, p. 102)

A discussion of "theism" in light of "humanism" and "secularism" might quickly lose itself in using unwarranted concepts and implicit assumptions. Already, the notion of "God" itself might lead the academic author astray: *mentioning* this notion all too often passes into *using* it, thereby taking a complete mastery of conceptual language for granted. What if "God" were a notion that neither designates nor means anything? What if the *intended* referent (*God*) were ultimately intractable and a limit case of language? What if *God* could not be intended, properly speaking, at all? Unless (pace Husserl) pre- or even post-intentionality were considered, it would be a challenge for any academic author who pretends to shed some light on resurfacing theism in the secular subject to not succumb to illicit reifications that make hitherto achieved philosophical insights undone.¹ Such inferences would occur in naïve conclusions in the form of $S = P$ (e.g., "the transcendent

God of pre-Modernity *equals* the modern subject's conscience, rationality, unconscious, etc.").

Not only the notion of "God" but also the concept of "secularity" is difficult to use unreflectively. How one defines these concepts somewhat already implies one's attitude towards them. For example, if one defines secularisation—as Hans Blumenberg does²—as the Modern movement of dissociating oneself from Judaeo-Christian affinities or as the emancipatory quest for moral self-legitimation, one cannot avoid presupposing, in one way or another, that (a) this movement and the quest are a concrete possibility, (b) a self-contained morality exists, and (c) Judaeo-Christian conceptuality is particularistic and nonuniversal. On the contrary, if one takes secularisation—as Hegel does³—to be the necessary outcome of a historical process leading from a contingent, locally determined ("religious") conceptuality towards its obtaining universal validity and commonness, one presupposes that (a) this conceptuality is universally, though first secretly, valid, (b) the radical opposition between a transcendent and a purely mundane ("secular") sphere makes sense, and (c) actual global developments related to human rights and cosmopolitan ideals of worldwide justice have some final significance.

In this article, I will not only defend the claim that the notion of the unconscious can be a legitimate inheritor of a more traditional discourse on God's transcendence. I will also argue that Carl du Prel's discussion of the unconscious ("transcendental consciousness") is sufficiently self-reflective to embrace the methodological difficulties mentioned above. It can encompass the requirements of *ultimacy* and *normativity*—traditionally attributed to the transcendent God—without, for that matter, necessarily infringing transcendence. Also, it refrains enough from reifying so as to prevent including *God* in a simplistic referential scheme.

2. The Unconscious: From Schopenhauer to Carl du Prel

Carl du Prel (1833–1899) was a German philosopher and psychical researcher whose work links Freud's and Jung's oeuvre, on the one hand, and Schopenhauer's, on the other. Largely forgotten today, Carl du Prel was famous in his own time for integrating exceptional experiences, like telepathy, out-of-body experiences, clairvoyance, etc., into thinking.⁴ Toward the end of the 19th century, he was a leading spiritualist in Germany who conducted experiments with mediums, the most famous being Eusapia Palladino (1854–1918). Whereas philosophers tend to be suspicious regarding the excessive claims of psychical researchers, let alone the "evidence" they offer, Du Prel did nothing more than underpin Schopenhauer's famous claim about the *practical metaphysical* nature of psychic phenomena. After finishing his major work, *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer repeatedly insisted on exceptional experiences, disregarding our standard spatiotemporal framework as an empirical confirmation of his philosophy of Will.⁵ Space and time, Schopenhauer argued, belong to metaphysical Will and its representations, not to reality itself. Will is "located" beyond time and space. Will conditions time and space themselves; they have no independent being. Schopenhauer continued, stating that, being equivalent to the Kantian thing-in-itself, Will is not only supra-individual. It is also intrinsically blind: being insatiable, it only wills itself. Its blindness entails that it is unconscious. The conscious human person is the outward appearance of an unconscious inner reality. Therefore, Will represents and destroys the individuation principle, which makes us believe in separate entities.⁶

Carl du Prel was heir to the respectable 19th-century Schopenhauerian tradition of the unconscious.⁷ With the benefit of hindsight, we can say that this tradition could only emerge in light of the discomforts of any identification of the human mind with mere reason. This identification had always counted as the fundamental asset of the Enlightenment. One can only surmise that, just as the Enlightenment's rational subject generated a rational God, a generalised unconscious would reveal a corresponding trans-rational God associated with a human unconscious in the ensuing Romantic rationality critique. It would, however, be premature to assume that such a transformation of the notion of God unambiguously

applies to the Romantic period. Schopenhauer's Will, for example, is impersonal and, rather than a moral incentive, forms the main predicament for human existence; it should be overcome. Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906), Schopenhauer's "successor" and author of the *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, continued to argue for an impersonal will and to undermine any belief in ultimate individuality or individual consciousness—let alone an individual conscious God. Yet, in Carl du Prel, we meet an author who argued for the latter's individuality while drawing on Schopenhauer's generalised unconscious. We will see in a moment that this move brought him closer to a renewed conception of God, however abstrusely.⁸

3. Double Nature of the I and Psychophysical Threshold

The main ingredients of Schopenhauer's thinking return as the key elements of Du Prel's philosophy. In *Philosophy of Mysticism*, Du Prel critically elaborates on the implied *duality* of the subject: its conscious and its unconscious parts. He claims that research on stimulus transmission through the human nervous system confirms Schopenhauer's basic ideas. Such research was mainly conducted by the psychologist–philosopher Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887) in his *Elements of Psychophysics*. Its outcome showed that a time-lapse is implied for a nerve stimulus to arrive at the brain centre and be adequately processed. "The functions of the nervous system", Du Prel states, "are [. . .] associated with a definite measure of time". (Du Prel 1889, p. 89; 1885, p. 74f). And he continues by saying that "the phenomenal world would undergo a powerful transformation, were our measure of time in perception altered". (Du Prel 1889, p. 90; 1885, p. 75) Such transformations may occur during exceptional human experiences, for example, after using narcotics, during the dying process, in our deepest dreams, in a somnambulist state, or under hypnosis. It may become manifest, then, that our I is stratified. Whereas our *empirical* I conforms to a physiological time frame, our ("unconscious") *transcendental* I obeys a wholly idiosyncratic time. Any confusion must result from an erroneous application of physiological temporal units to the time frame that governs exceptional experiences. "Thus we carry over into dream", Du Prel writes, "the waking habit of estimating duration according to the number of perceptions upon the physiological scale of time, while our consciousness is, in fact, then subject to the transcendental scale". (Du Prel 1889, p. 94; 1885, p. 79) And, "the physiological scale of time is not essential to the human mind"; "its connection with the organic body is *no necessary relation*" (Du Prel 1889, p. 112; 1885, p. 94).

Du Prel not only distinguishes multiple simultaneous time frames (physiological and transcendental). He further claims that our physiological time cannot originate in transcendental consciousness itself and must therefore be relative; our nervous system only *retards* the cognitive content of consciousness. As everyone can see who has ever woken up from a dream because of an outward stimulus that produced the complete dream content *retrospectively* (the sudden ringing of a bell), this dream content must be located in the (infinitely short) time-lapse needed for the stimulus to reach consciousness and be processed by it, as if consciousness were already aware of what remains to be transmitted to it through the nervous system, and as if "its connection with the organic body is *no necessary relation*". We can hardly avoid assuming the existence of a transcendental consciousness beyond the physiology of the nervous system. This transcendental consciousness might be unconscious for the waking mind; it will be conscious for itself. Let us see how this should be understood and how it can be connected—if at all—to the transcendent God's resurfacing in the human unconscious.

Beyond the coincidental retro-causality of dream production, Du Prel suggests, dreams—let alone somnambulist states—provide evidence for the simultaneity of two forms of consciousness (of two I's) more directly. They *split* the dreaming (or hallucinating) I. What is eventually a monologue is *distributed* over a *scene* and an *audience*. This splitting takes place on the fault line of a *psychophysical threshold*. "In dream, somnambulism, and all ecstatic conditions, an interior waking takes the place of the external sense-consciousness, but, being itself limited, likewise borders on the Unconscious". (Du Prel 1889, p. 115; 1885,

p. 96) External and internal stimuli are *dramatised* in our dream lives. The latter consists of a “projection of interior states” or a “symbolical representation of the internal condition”. (Du Prel 1889, p. 117; 1885, p. 98) “[H]e conceives as non-Ego all that oversteps the threshold from the unconscious. Consequently, the dualism of the Conscious and the unconscious, the psychophysical partition, is the common cause, as well of the dramatic sundering, as of deception which makes dreams seem real” (Du Prel 1889, p. 120f; 1885, p. 101).

Consciousness seems to be divided over two I’s, which are separated by a psychophysical threshold. This threshold does not separate a waking from a dreaming state; it is instead displaced *when* dreaming. Insofar as displacement (or another altered state of consciousness) occurs within the dream itself, it testifies to an increased susceptibility to content thus far concealed. Dreams exteriorise such unconscious content by immediately converting each flash of insight into an image and putting each word into another person’s mouth. They poignantly enhance the dramatic splitting.

Suppose that a psychophysical threshold is at work in our minds. In that case, Du Prel concludes, it is psychologically possible that the subject consists of two persons *ignorant* of their mutual unity and connection with the subject. This doubleness may be permanent, although it will only manifest in dreams and other exceptional states of mind. Our second I, then, can contact us without us realising its identity with ourselves.⁹

4. The Unconscious and God

The question becomes urgent as to whether such a more profound, “transcendental” I may be rightfully identified with a transcendent God and under which conditions. These two questions cannot be isolated.

It is already noteworthy that Du Prel appropriates Kant’s term “transcendental consciousness” to designate an unconscious level in the human mind beyond waking consciousness. In Kant, this term refers to an unalterable structure of thinking and perceiving (i.e., the two forms of perception, space and time, and the twelve categories of thinking). While Hegel and the neo-Kantians in his wake historicise transcendental consciousness by letting it unfold over time, they nevertheless capitalise, as a point of no return, the transcendental gain that history procures. In contrast, one could remark that Husserl’s phenomenology resists any form of reification while maintaining the concept of the transcendental consciousness itself.

In light of Du Prel, however, one might highlight three different shortcomings concerning transcendental consciousness. Kant sets strict limits to it, paralysing experience and forcing it into a spatiotemporal and categorical framework.¹⁰ Hegel and neo-Kantianism historicise it, but that hardly improves anything: once developed, the transcendental creates an ontological *fait accompli*. Husserl—posterior to Du Prel—threw out the baby with the bathwater since he did not allow for the *inner* self-transcendence of transcendental consciousness. In Husserl, consciousness is intentional, and that excludes any form of stratification. In this respect, it is highly significant that Husserl could only interpret Descartes’ ontological argument for the existence of God as vicious instead of taking it as a *rupture* of intentionality: “Descartes had [...] had not noticed the circle in which he was involved when he presupposed, in his proof of the existence of God, the possibility of inferences transcending the ego, when this possibility, after all, was supposed to be established only through this proof” (Husserl 1962, p. 11; 1970, p. 92). And yet, Husserl acknowledged the necessity for the philosopher to “penetrate[...] to a clear *understanding of himself as the subjectivity functioning as primal source* [urquellend]”.¹¹ I claim in this article that Carl du Prel, even before Husserl’s call and doubtlessly overstating its immediate concern, tried to take this necessity seriously and reinterpret the self as a generating source of transcendence, thereby contributing to the alleged “secularisation” of the transcendent God. Let us take a closer look.

In the final chapter of his *Philosophy of Mysticism*, Du Prel addresses the question of transcendental consciousness and its relation to God. This question cannot be avoided in light of transcendental consciousness’ *ultimacy* and *normativity*—characteristics commonly

associated with God. Transcendental consciousness is first accessed at the “dusk” of waking consciousness. Du Prel does not hesitate to link the apostle Paul, the mythical seer Tiresias, Socrates/Plato, Philo, Christian mysticism, and Kant. To start with the latter: “[T]he greatest passivity of the sensible man”, Du Prel states, “brings the highest ecstasy, that is, the clearest inward awakening of the transcendental—or in Kant’s expression, the intelligible—man, while in the energetic abandonment of the personality to the phenomenal world, the inward man is reduced to silence” (Du Prel 1889, p. 170; 1885, p. 423f). Du Prel corroborates this Kantian insight by associating “intelligible man” (who experiences “respect” for the law) with essential notions from the authors just mentioned. In his *Second Letter to the Corinthians* (4, 16), Paul writes, “The more our outward man dies away, the more living is the inward”. Philo, in his turn, claims that “[w]hen the divine light shows itself, the light of man is hidden, not appearing again till the divine is hidden, as the prophets said: ‘Your spirit departs, as it were, when the spirit of God comes, and only returns when this withdraws’”. Plato writes in the *Phaedo* that “if we would have pure knowledge of anything, we must be quit of the body—the soul in herself must behold all things in themselves: and then we shall attain the wisdom which we desire, and of which we say that we are lovers; not while we live, but after death”. Du Prel concludes that Christian mysticism’s fundamental notion can be found in the adage *sensuum occasus veritatis exortus est* (“the decline of the senses constitutes the birth of truth”). “[A]ll are but different expressions of one and the same knowledge, confirmed also by somnambulism, that the inward sense of man is only manifested when the outward senses are suppressed; that the higher powers of the soul rise in proportion as the life of sense is depressed” (Du Prel 1889, p. 171; 1885, p. 424).

True, Du Prel’s literary “evidence” in support of his claim can be interpreted otherwise. One might, for example, be surprised about the implicit identification of Kant’s intelligible man with “the highest ecstasy” or about the association of Paul’s encouragements to the senescent with somnambulism. My intention here is neither to justify nor to refute this “evidence”. I am interested in how the transcendental self can be identified with the transcendent God. Du Prel claims that such identification is possible, or at least that a clear distinction makes no sense. “Now if between man and the thing-in-itself”, Du Prel contends, “call we that God, or Pan, or Nature, there must be interposed the transcendental Subject, then the problem of our existence appears in a completely new light” (Du Prel 1889, p. 202; 1885, p. 452).¹²

When, I would ask, would a distinction between the transcendental self and God make sense? It would make sense if both differed in their degree of ultimacy or normativity. Such is not the case in Du Prel’s account. The latter does not imply celestial hierarchies in the sense of either pseudo-Dionysius or Swedenborgian theosophy. It restricts its scope to a threshold of consciousness that can be displaced under certain conditions.

Let us take a step further and see which role the transcendental subject fulfils in Du Prel’s philosophy and how it assumes ultimacy and normativity. I take “ultimacy” and “normativity” as unalienable qualities of transcendence. The “act” of transcending already implies limits imposed on what is transcended. These limits make it relative as regards the transcending and are proportionate to the latter’s *binding* or *normative* nature—in whatever form. At the same time, they confront it with its *beyond*, with what is inexorably and irreducibly out of reach. Transcendence introduces normativity (it binds) and ultimacy (it cannot be superseded in turn).¹³

The role of the transcendental subject in Du Prel is at least threefold. It inaugurates birth (1), generates moral injunctions (2), and directs our lives (3). Especially the latter two are closely related, although, in the end, the first is involved in both. These three roles have traditionally been attributed to the transcendent God. God has always counted as the creator, issuing moral injunctions and governing our lives, albeit invisibly.

In Du Prel, however, these roles are attributed to the transcendental subject. Its first role (1) is to inaugurate birth, in other words, to become incarnate. Du Prel draws here on a longstanding spiritual tradition, which spanned at least from Plato (*Gorgias*) and Plotinus to Schelling and Schopenhauer. This tradition entails that we choose our

incarnation. A secularised version of this belief can be found in Fichte and Sartre. The latter two only differ from the former in that they have minimised, if not eliminated, the interstices between choosing the transcendental subject and its elective environment: I am my own act. In the Platonic tradition, however, the choice of our incarnation antedates it. “My transcendental Subject may be cause of my earthly personality;” Du Prel writes, “it is thus not the individuality that begins at birth, but only the sensuous, the earthly-conditional Ego”. (Du Prel 1889, p. 204; 1885, p. 453). The transcendental “causality” of my empirical existence is further enhanced by parental love. Rather than attribute birth to the (coincidental) intercourse of parents, Du Prel goes as far as interpreting the sexual desire in parents to the drive of the (pre-existent) child to become incarnate: “if between man and the world-substance there is the transcendental Subject, then obviously the metaphysical Will is to be placed in such a Subject, and the love of the parents coincides with the incarnation-impulse of a transcendental, pre-existing Subject”. (Du Prel 1889, p. 216; 1885, p. 463). (Note that Du Prel draws on Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of sexual love here, except for Schopenhauer’s conception of the Will to incarnate as *impersonal*.)

The second role (2) of the transcendental subject reminiscent of the transcendent God concerns the moral injunctions it issues. Morality is ultimately rooted in the incentives that the transcendental subject generates and reveals—in whichever way—to the empirical person. The latter may have hitherto identified morality with law or tradition. But the empirical person may be wrong on this. “For the monistic doctrine of the soul”, Du Prel argues, “the moral imperative comes ultimately from the transcendental subject. Thus the authority ceases to be foreign, but as authority remains; and even though proceeding from our own subject, it is still not to be presupposed as *petitio principii*”.

Consequently, a confrontation with one’s innermost being, e.g., in crisis experiences or other meaningful life events, may lead to reconsidering what is morally incumbent on us or even *supererogatory*. In light of ground-breaking, *supererogating* demands, common moral conceptions are likely to appear as mere tradition or convention without being *ultimately* decisive. “The whole content of Ethic may be comprehended therein”, Du Prel summarises, “that the person should be serviceable to the Subject; every revolt of the person, in its own favour, against the Subject is immoral”. (Du Prel 1889, p. 294; 1885, p. 530). What is more, such revolt cannot be made intelligible, for it runs contrary to our deepest *motivations*: “The motive force of a moral principle depends on how *near me* is the nature for whose redemption I am called to co-operate, and *from which* the moral authority proceeds—and *this proximity is the greatest possible*, if a transcendental Subject is supposed; it depends, further, on the *nearness* of the aim to be reached by moral action, and this *nearness* also is the greatest possible, when I already experience the transcendental results of my acts by discarding my earthly phenomenal form through death”. (Du Prel 1889, p. 300; 1885, p. 535; my italics, RS). The transcendent God—one might retort here—to the precise extent that he is transcendent, lacks motivational force; at best, he might *deter* the trespassing of his commandments, but such deterrence would immediately annul ethics *as* ethics (for my moral agency would be based on fear of divine punishment). Du Prel invites us to reconsider transcendence by *conflating* command and the commander.¹⁴

Du Prel is undoubtedly not the only one to associate ethics with self-encounter. Existentialism, for example, likewise based proper ethics on critical human experiences calling one back to one’s own-most self—without, for that matter, implying a particularly *transcendental* subject. Similarly, Henri Bergson argued that there are two sources of morality and religion: tradition and intuition. The latter, Bergson contended, tends to disrupt commonly held moral views and dynamise petrified ethical systems (Bergson 1934). In 20th-century psychological thinking, we find this radical morality of selfhood in C.G. Jung; in many respects, Jung was inspired by Du Prel, not in the least regarding his conceptions of morality.

The third role (3), which Du Prel attributes to the transcendental subject and which reminds us of the transcendent God, is closely linked to the former. It regards the steering of our empirical lives. Many things may happen in our lives that we would have preferred

not to happen: misfortune, suffering, or tragedy. Yet, rather than ascribe these to blind fate or sheer coincidence, Du Prel argues that they are connected to transcendental leadership: “the transcendental being considers the personality of sense in a purely objective relation, in an attitude of as much indifference to its fate as to that of a stranger—as it must be, since the two halves of the being lie this side and that side of a threshold of sensibility”. (Du Prel 1889, p. 178; 1885, p. 430f). And he continues, stating that “[s]ince, moreover, we now know that the fruits of this life are not lost for the comprehensive consciousness of the transcendental being, it looks as if this being itself had chosen this lot, not being moved by the sufferings of our earthly life, but yet enjoying the fruits of it. Should we in this way conceive the earthly life, notwithstanding its preponderant suffering, as a transcendental prescription, then—and only then—disappear at once the contradictions encountered by theistic and pantheistic systems between the miseries of existence and providence; and the complaints of man against nature, which no philosophical system can seriously contend to be groundless, are silenced”. (Du Prel 1889, p. 179; 1885, p. 431).

It would be easy to trace these ideas back to the ancient tradition of the Stoa. Prior to any philosophy of the transcendental subject, Seneca spoke of the indwelling God. We owe this God our gratefulness despite misfortunes.¹⁵ In modern days, a thinker like Simone Weil perpetuates the Stoic tradition of divine immanence. In her *Waiting for God*, she writes, “All that man vainly desires here below is perfectly realised in God. We have all those impossible desires within us as a *mark of our destination*, and they are good for us when we no longer hope to accomplish them”.¹⁶ In this quotation, Weil shows that suffering is limited to the perspective of our empirical existence and represents our challenge. It might be a gateway to a higher form of consciousness that merges with the divine.

5. Conclusions

In this article, I have tried to argue that the notion of the unconscious (“transcendental consciousness”) developed by Carl du Prel perpetuates the classical idea of a transcendent God. It does so by its ultimacy and its normativity. I have taken “ultimacy” and “normativity” as notions that irreducibly belong to “transcendence”. Transcendence, by virtue of transcending, limits and binds the transcended and confronts it with its beyond. Transcendence introduces normativity (it binds) and ultimacy (it cannot be superseded in turn).

To this, we can add the intractability of the unconscious regarding linguistic referentiality: as the unconscious is not an object, it cannot be “designated”; any form of reification of the unconscious will likely draw on the limitations proper to “waking” consciousness. The predicament of philosophy and language is that concepts tend to be conceived as signifiers that refer to univocal “meanings” susceptible to “definition”. The history of philosophy can partly be seen as a growing awareness of this predicament. Could it be that what is called “secularisation” or “Modernity”—at least to some extent—ties in with this growing awareness to the point of “reallocating” transcendence elsewhere, for example, in an unconscious issuing ultimately binding injunctions? Is it not highly telling and most significant, therefore, that Du Prel insists on the *proximity* of moral authority and transcendental subjectivity, a proximity that almost *conflates* the “distance” of a transcendent God and the “nearness” of my unconscious (“The motive force of a moral principle depends on how *near me* is the nature for whose redemption I am called to co-operate, and *from which* the moral authority proceeds—and *this proximity is the greatest possible*, if a transcendental Subject is supposed; it depends, further, on the *nearness* of the aim to be reached by moral action, and this *nearness* also is the greatest possible, when I already experience the transcendental results of my acts by discarding my earthly phenomenal form through death”) (Du Prel 1889, p. 300; 1885, p. 535. My italics, RS)? This proximity need not be conceived as identity, for that might unjustifiably divinise the unconscious and reify both God and the unconscious. What is gained by the notion of an unconscious lies precisely in its blurring of the boundaries between clear-cut entities (“God”, “consciousness”, “unconscious”).¹⁷

Carl du Prel's philosophy of the unconscious (or "transcendental subjectivity") and its 20th- and 21st-century concomitants can help rethink transcendence precisely by (1) its embracing of experience (true, not the manipulated, randomised version often substituted for experience, i.e., the *sense data* or *evidence* of science) and (2) its more comprehensive conception of consciousness as a form endowed with a *mobile* inner threshold.

"If, therefore, the question of the prophet: 'Leavest thou men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler?' (*Habakkuk* 1, 14) must, as regards human history, be answered in the negative, it only remains to ask to whom this question is to be addressed: to the personal God, to the single Universal Will, or to the plurality of transcendental subjects, whose consciousness of their solidarity, however, must, with the continual development of the purpose of history on a large scale and in the whole, have grown into antagonism to the Will of the earthly individual".

And Du Prel meaningfully continues, saying that,

"[p]ractically, it is indifferent which address we suppose for this question of the prophet, and if only we do not, like the materialists, deny that it has any address, we should join hands over all other differences of opinion, with a common faith in human solidarity, instead of contending, as unhappily those do who have nevertheless still a belief in metaphysics generally—the religious and the philosophical. It is not really a question of the form of metaphysic, be it this or that religion or philosophy, at a time when a common danger has to be encountered in the total rejection of metaphysic, with the already alarming consequences of that rejection". (Du Prel 1889, p. 218f; 1885, p. 465f)

If, and only if, neither the unconscious nor the transcendent God is reified, it is indeed "practically indifferent which address we suppose for this question of the prophet". Transcendental consciousness (or just the unconscious) remains a limit case for "ordinary" consciousness. Ultimately, and at a more *profound* level of reflection, it would make no sense to ask if God "exists", or whether God's transcendence disappears in the (alleged) immanence of the unconscious. Such questions draw on tacit reifications that distort the basic intractability and fertility of the unconscious.

It cannot be my aim in this article to suggest that any *alleged* claim to unconscious contents is irrefutably valid. The unconscious is equally liable to be misunderstood, if not abused, as was the notion of God's transcendence throughout history. The secular age has not profoundly eliminated such possible abuse. I wonder, however, whether *no* forms of abuse (i.e., deceitful truth claims) ultimately draw on transcendence. Is it not finally the transcendent God who "permits"—in a highly ambiguous sense—truth abuse?¹⁸

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¹ I am referring here to insights from critical philosophy, philosophy of language, hermeneutics, etc.

² Cf. "Was in dem als Säkularisierung gedeuteten Vorgang überwiegend, jedenfalls bisher mit nur wenigen erkennbaren und spezifischen Ausnahmen, geschehen ist, lässt sich nicht als *Umsetzung* authentisch theologischer Gehalte in ihre säkulare Selbstentfremdung, sondern als *Umbesetzung* vakanter gewordenen Positionen von Antworten beschreiben, deren zugehörigen Fragen nicht eliminiert werden konnten" (Blumenberg [1966] 1999).

³ "[W]ir behaupten eine wesentliche Beziehung der Vernunftkenntnis und der Religion. Es ist ungegründet, dass der Glaube an den Inhalt der positiven Religion bestehen kann, wenn die Vernunft sich vom Gegenteil überzeugt hat. Die Vernunft ist ebenso

göttliche Offenbarung wie die Vorstellung in der Religion, und es ist falsch, dass Glaube und Vernunft, wenn sie entgegengesetzte Inhalt haben, gleichgültig nebeneinander zu bestehen vermöchten" (Hegel 1974, p. 54v).

4 Also see Sneller 2021 (Husserl 1970, p. 18; 1962, p. 102) and the introduction to the recent re-edition of *The Philosophy of Mysticism* I, 2022.

5 Even Husserl makes, *mutatis mutandis*, a case for connecting the transcendental with direct experience: "Wir selbst werden in eine innerliche Verwandlung hineingezogen; in der uns die längst erfüllte und doch stets verborgene Dimension des 'Transzendentalen' wirklich zu Gesicht, zu direkter Erfahrung kommt. Der in seiner Unendlichkeit eröffnete Erfahrungsboden wird alsbald zum Ackerfeld einer methodischen Arbeitsphilosophie" (Husserl 1962, p. 104). Also cf. (Adriaanse 1974).

6 While not being dependent on it, Schopenhauer's insights are largely reminiscent of the Hindu notion of *atman* (self). See, for example, the *Bhagavad Gita*, 7–8 and 14–15.

7 Cf. (Kiesewetter 1869), 1891–1895 (Von Hartmann 1869).

8 For more information on Carl du Prel, see (Kaiser 2006; Sommer 2013; Tenhaeff 1926; Treitel 2004; Weber 2007; Sneller 2021).

9 In a way, Du Prel's notion of a *threshold* at the heart of consciousness enables us to deal with the main paradox as regards the notion of the 'unconscious' as such, i.e., that it is unconsciously *aware* and, therefore, not unconscious all throughout. It could encompass insights from modern brain research (cf. Ramachandran, Damasio, Gazzaniga) indicating that the brain is never fully inactive.

10 Cf. (Duintjer 1966) and (Gerding 1993).

11 "wenn der Philosoph zu einem klaren Verständnis seiner selbst als der urquellend fungierenden Subjektivität sich durchgerungen hat" (Husserl 1962, p. 102; 1970, p. 18).

12 Also cf. Descartes' fourth meditation, "et que je suis comme un milieu entre Dieu et le néant, c'est-à-dire placé de telle sorte entre le souverain être et le non-être, qu'il ne se rencontre, de vrai, rien en moi qui me puisse conduire dans l'erreur, en tant qu'un souverain être m'a produit" (Descartes 1979, p. 133).

13 "Si la transcendance a un sens", Levinas writes at the beginning of *Autrement qu'être*, "elle ne peut signifier que le fait, pour l'événement d'être—pour l'esse—pour l'essence de passer à l'autre de l'être" (Levinas [1974] 1991, p. 3). And several pages further: "Gravité de l'autrement qu'être qui vient de montrer d'une façon encore confuse son affinité avec l'éthique". *Ibid.*, p. 8.

14 In a Talmud lecture, Levinas interestingly suggests that God, rather than address my rational faculties, *seduces* me: "Voilà que Dieu ne t'enseigne pas en s'adressant à ta raison, il t'enseigne et te mène vers cette 'table couverte de mets succulents' en te séduisant. [...] L'incitation divine, c'est la Thora" (Levinas 1982, p. 48).

15 Cf. "Non sunt ad caelum elevandae manus nec exorandus aedituus, ut nos ad aures simulacra, quasi magis exaudiri possimus, admittat; prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est". *Epistulae ad Lucilium* XLI.

16 (Weil 1973, p. 126; 1966, p. 109). My italics, RS. Relying on the kabbalistic notion of the *divine* self-withdrawal (*zimzum*), Weil imagines a morality of pure attention which equally rests upon self-withdrawal—as if human attention repeats God's. Cf. "Vouloir l'existence de cette faculté de libre consentement chez un autre homme qui en a été privé par le malheur, c'est se transporter dans l'autre, c'est consentir soi-même au malheur, c'est-à-dire à la destruction de soi-même. C'est se nier soi-même. En se niant soi-même, on devient capable après Dieu d'affirmer un autre par une affirmation créatrice. On se donne en rançon pour l'autre. C'est un acte rédempteur". *Ibid.*, p. 134.

17 Cf. "Le problème de la transcendance et de Dieu et le problème de la subjectivité irréductible à l'essence—irréductible à l'immanence essentielle—vont ensemble" (Levinas [1974] 1991, p. 20).

18 Cf. Jacques Derrida: "C'est ce qu'on appelle Dieu, non, ce qui s'appelle Dieu quand nécessairement il signe à ma place même quand je crois le nommer, lui. Dieu est le nom de cette métonymie absolue, ce qu'elle nomme en déplaçant les noms, la substitution et ce qui se substitute dans cette substitution" (Derrida 1994, p. 134).

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