

Jean-Yves Lacoste

The Experience of Transcendence¹

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Introduction

As early as 1926 Paul Tillich claimed that phenomenology was “of decisive importance for the philosophy of the twentieth century.” Phenomenology, he wrote, avoids “dissolving objects” through critical analysis, exploring instead “the essence of the things themselves quite apart from the question of their existence” (Tillich 1956: 75). Its basic premise is that it is difficult to capture the essence of everyday lived experience completely and accurately. This perspectivism (the experience of an object—such as a cube—from a certain perspective) is natural for embodied human beings, who are restricted to a spatiotemporal view of the world. Objects are presented in experience as transcending our experience of them. But how can experience be essentially perspectival and at the same time present objects to us as transcending our perspective of them? Phenomenology attempts to account for this possibility. For its founder, Edmund Husserl, phenomenology was the study of consciousness, and the intentionality of consciousness and its structures independent of questions about the reality of the objects of consciousness, investigations ~~which that~~ culminated—as Wessel Stoker suggests in his introduction—in the so-called “transcendental ego.”

As what constitutes the world of objects for us from our experience, these structures are characterised by a certain transcendence, although, at its simplest, phenomenology (later redefined as the “science of being” by Husserl’s pupil, Martin

¹ [My thanks to Joeri Schrijvers for his comments on an earlier version of this text.](#)

Heidegger, for whom philosophy was as fundamental for “being” as religion was is the study of the human aptitude for experience, rather than what transcends it. But by examining contemporary accounts of silence in phenomenology and theology, we can actually discover something of the human experience of transcendence and the constitution of that “transcendental ego.”

In distinguishing between *immanent* and *radical* transcendence in his opening typology of transcendence, Stoker rightly draws attention to their corresponding philosophies of religion (what Tillich called “the two types of philosophy of religion”; Tillich 1959): *metaphysical identity thinking* (an identity between logos and reality or between thinking and being, such as that found in Friedrich Schleiermacher) and its critique *difference thinking* (being coincides neither with beings or thinking, as found in Heidegger). The “new phenomenology” exemplified in recent years by Jean-Luc Marion has been accused of being corrupted by the introduction of a “God” usually excluded from phenomenological inquiry (Janicaud 2000: 16-103). This so-called “theological turn” in French phenomenology exposes tensions between philosophy and theology—notably over the question of metaphysical theology or ontotheology, where divine transcendence is compromised by philosophical and metaphysical notions of being that claim conceptual equivalence with the God of biblical revelation. Ontotheology, Heidegger suggested, silences this God in favour of the ontotheological “God of the philosophers” (Stoker reminds us of this following his engagement with Tillich, specifically the death of “the God of ontotheology” at the hands of Derrida). Phenomenology offers ways with which to address the manner of God’s appearing in the world without resorting to the often banal “metaphysics of presence” which that denotes ontotheology and that which, according to Heidegger, characterised the history of Western philosophy.

Jean-Yves Lacoste is a contemporary phenomenologist and philosophical theologian whose work blends Husserlian and post-Husserlian phenomenology (particularly that of Heidegger) and the *nouvelle théologie* of Catholic theologians such as Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar, as well as re-

Comment [HJ1]: As religion was for him or for others, e.g.?

flecting the influence of Wittgenstein and the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. Like Marion, Lacoste is interested in a post-metaphysical theology (Lacoste 2005b: 396) and employs phenomenology to push beyond Christian theology in order to respect that phenomenality, now freed from the “spectre of an ontotheology” that traps God inside propositional language. Drawing explicitly on Bertrand Russell’s distinction between “knowledge by acquaintance” and “knowledge by description” (Lacoste 2006: 117) Lacoste suggests that silence is instructive for theological epistemology, making available to us what he calls the transcendent “pre-discursive gift of the world.”

~~This essay~~ ~~This paper~~ will examine Lacoste’s treatment of ethics, transcendence and theology, beginning first of all with the relationship between phenomenology and transcendence in Lacoste’s work, specifically the issue of perception. As we shall see, for Lacoste, every phenomenon has the same right to be welcomed and described as any other: God does not differ from things in the world—both *Deus* and *res* can be *semper maior*. It will then discuss how, with reference to liturgy, the phenomenology of silence ~~could-might~~ relate to divine transcendence, ethics, and intersubjectivity.

Phenomenology and Transcendence

Theology and Philosophy

Unlike Marion, who in his own riposte to Heidegger “redraws the border between theology and philosophy” (O’Regan 2010: 267), Lacoste is unconcerned with any strict distinction. Whilst ~~his~~ earlier work inhabited a border area that, “insofar as we understand it, is defined either by a co-belonging or by an uncertain belonging” (Lacoste 2006: 194), his recent work tries to move “above and beyond the division between the philosophical and the theological” (Lacoste 2008: 9). Theology is “the work of sinners,” whose “first sin is to treat God as an object, one whom we call the highest being” (Lacoste 2008: 206). Lacoste recalls Calvin’s question, “~~W~~who is God?” (Lacoste 2010a: 60); divine phenomenality is, in fact, paradoxical, in that God is both *res* (an object of our discourse) and yet *res semper maior* (an object ~~thatwhich~~ transcends that discourse). With no recourse to an often facile metaphysics of presence,

investigating the phenomenality of God necessarily implies investigating all phenomenality, a strategy ~~which~~~~that~~ throws into question Pascal's distinction between the God of Abraham and the God of the philosophers (Lacoste 1996: 384). Lacoste also questions ~~whether-if~~ knowledge can "capture God? As soon as it is asked, one has to admit that that question is a hypocritical one." Only theology "seizes God inside a propositional language that is intended to be cognitive: proficient on one hand, true on the other" (Lacoste 2008: 205).

Is therefore the problem "with theology nothing more than that of its language?" (Lacoste 2006: 169)? If so, then perhaps silence offers us "a healthy lesson in theological epistemology" (Lacoste 2006: 172). Silence is typically understood negatively—representing discomfiture, anger, dejection, concession or even "being at a loss for words"; while the quiet vastness of the universe terrified Pascal. Even when and where silence is valued, it is still within a negative register—as the *absence* of noise, for instance.

Reflecting on silence allows Lacoste to rethink both Husserlian thought and its relation to God. For Lacoste, the conjunction between philosophy and theology can be explored through the analogy between the transcendence of a phenomenon and the transcendence of God, while liturgical religious experience provides the basis for an alternative phenomenology, uninhibited by artificial disciplinary boundaries.

Perception and Transcendence

But is this "new phenomenology" practised by Marion and Lacoste no longer phenomenological, having instead been corrupted by the introduction of "a god—the biblical God—who does not belong there" (Janicaud 2000: 3-4)? This God does not "belong" in phenomenology because Husserlian phenomenology is concerned only with that which *appears*, and since a transcendent God does not appear as an *object* for intentional consciousness, then God—and all God-talk—is excluded from phenomenological inquiry. Indeed, Heidegger himself argued that such a "phenomenology of the inapparent" would be non-phenomenological.

For Merleau-Ponty, however, phenomenology offered a means of "relearning" to look at the world, one which provided

its own foundation. It is characterised by an attentiveness and openness to the world ~~which~~that Heidegger (1962: 58) summarised as the means “to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself.” Intentionality is the central idea of Husserlian phenomenology: all consciousness is consciousness *of something*. There is an important correlation between the intentional act (*noesis*) and the intentional object (*noema*): in other words, nothing can be *given* to me apart from the way in which I *receive* it. Phenomenological description thus focuses upon the intentional act, or the horizon, life-world (*Lebenswelt*) or language-game (Lacoste 2006: 104) of the subject; phenomenology itself is predicated on the so-called “phenomenological reduction” or the “bracketing out”; ~~that~~which restricts noematic analysis to the contents of consciousness, regardless of whether or not anything corresponds to these representations in the visible—or audible—world.

The “paradoxical revelation of Transcendence... at the heart of phenomenality” has provoked apprehension (Janicaud 2000: 23). Lacoste, whose phenomenology seeks to re-examine the distinction between subject and object, offers a modest concept of divine transcendence, one grounded, ~~firstly~~, in the observation that “sense perception, in the Husserlian account, deals organically with transcendence”; ~~and, s~~Second, ~~in the positionly~~ that “the realm of phenomena is larger than the realm of perceived entities”—which leads Lacoste to ask what it is that appears to us in our *affective* experiences—thereby suggesting “one or two things about the way God appears while transcending his present apparition” (Lacoste 2007b: 1).

Thus, Lacoste begins with the cube, the classic phenomenological example of the limitations of our perception: the paradox of its phenomenality is that we immediately recognise it even though we are unable to see all of its faces simultaneously. As Lacoste notes,

In the Husserlian treatment of perception there is no need to “describe” a cube in order to know it. We see the cube, though sensation “presents” only part of it to us... The cube

is here “in the flesh”, *leibhaft da*. And yet what is presented here and now is not the whole thing” (Lacoste 2007b: 2).

Our “perception” therefore is not a singular, punctual experience—instead we perceive, silently, in and over time; time, indeed, “is given to us...to enable what Husserl calls ‘synthetic’ perception.” This synthetic perception is a synthesis of “adequate” and “inadequate” perception: as Lacoste suggests, a “wholly adequate perception” (that is, a comprehensive perception of the *whole* of the thing, or the *whole* of its perceivable reality) is “an ideal and only an ideal.” The comprehensive experience of an object, in fact, has only the possibility of an infinite experience” (Lacoste 2007b: 3). Time allows us to correct our mistaken interpretations of *res semper maior*.

Transcendence, therefore, is a possibility of our daily, quotidian perception: our senses present us with only “fragments of reality” that our perception synthesizes. Its temporal limits are clear: the “over-dimensional” transcendental ego “endowed with the power of perceiving comprehensively” is not a human ego; no eschatology of perception is conceivable—at least, no “human eschatology of perception” (Lacoste 2007b: 3). The possibility of transcendence is not only a part of our everyday possibility, but it is the condition of the very possibility of philosophy:

Things exist in as much as they invite themselves to us. Were we but able to render account of this invitation, were we only to perceive that it is not in disguise that things appear to us, and were we, finally, to know the conditions under which consciousness is open, all the work of philosophy would be, by right, achievable. (Lacoste 2003: 68)

Philosophy after Heidegger understands no eschatology except death and invites us only “to a long drawn-out labour, an *investigation*... When work is done, a philosopher may have no ‘findings’ to show” (Lacoste 2007a: 264). Lacoste distinguishes this from the kerygmatic urgency imposed upon theology by its eschatological expectation and its commission to communicate the “good news.” The product of the languages of the Greek *logos* and Jewish hope, Christianity represents a third language, one that tries to ensure the intelligibility of that kerygma in a

plurality of languages. In the particular language of biblical texts, theology discovers a God (whose speech it only partially comprehends) not by virtue of a *universal* transcendental aptitude but through the *particular* language of the biblical text. This hermeneutical detour does not remove the kerygmatic urgency but qualifies the labour of theology as an ongoing work of love or charity [*caritas*]. In other words, if the analogy between the transcendence of a phenomenon and the transcendence of God is to be maintained, then what is true of the cube in philosophy must be proclaimed in the grammar of theology. It is on such a basis that Lacoste argues for a profound continuity between philosophy and theology.

The appearance of something to consciousness is more than simply "being presented by our senses." At some passive level we synthesise the different sides or aspects of an object (such as a cube) and can perceive it as unified. Synthetic perception deals simultaneously with what appear (what are presented by our senses) and what do not appear (what are *not* presented by our senses). To return to our earlier example: we perceive it as a cube rather than the particular "side" of the cube ~~that which~~ is currently visible to us. Once we acknowledge that we perceive the cube, albeit "inadequately," Lacoste reasons, we must also acknowledge that the invisible is part of what we perceive. While we do not *see* the invisible, we can *perceive* the invisible: the visible refers ("symbolically") to the invisible (although what is presented by sensation and what is presented symbolically should not be confused). Crucially, this same passive level includes our disappointments and affections ~~that which~~ also enable us to perceive things.

These things can always transcend their actual phenomenality: as Lacoste notes, "most of the furniture of the universe" is absent from "the field of my consciousness" (Lacoste 2007b: 4). This matters little in daily life. But what does appear to me is "partially absent as well, and this does matter... because it discloses a major law in the logic of experience" namely that "perceptive experience deals simultaneously with the phenomenal and the nonphenomenal." In other words, "perceptive experience deals also with the non-perceived" (Lacoste

2007b: 4); phenomena “do give us the thing itself—but they give it to us obscurely” (Lacoste 2003: 71).

So, we in fact perceive *more* than our *senses* present to us. Our description also implies knowledge of the invisible (or the inaudible); this knowledge is granted to us by the visible ~~which~~ that lets the invisible appear. Care ought to be taken not to expect too precise a knowledge of the invisible: as Lacoste observes, Husserl himself was at pains to point out that the logic of *belief* is never far from the logic of perception. Lacoste even suggests that Janicaud actually made “a major phenomenological blunder” when he assumed that phenomenology deals only with the visible (or the audible), and “that the play of sensory ‘matter’ and intentional ‘form’ gives access to the visible and the visible only.” In fact, there is no perception of the visible without a co-perception of the invisible: “perception grasps—*Auffassung*—simultaneously the visible and the invisible” (Lacoste 2007b: 5).

Affectivity and Silence

Phenomenology recognised early on that affection is crucial to the discernment of truth: Husserl’s understanding of the “adequacy” of the experience of an intentional object included the possibility that one also *felt* that object. The idea that self-consciousness and transcendence were inextricably linked also became a central concept in the philosophy of religion, particularly in Schleiermacher’s definition of religion as a “taste for the infinite” or a “feeling of ultimate dependence” (*{Gefühl schlechthiniger Abhängigkeit}*). This feeling (what Stoker ~~in his typology~~ labels “immanent transcendence”) represented the transcendent ground of the dependent self-consciousness in self-consciousness, through which humanity comprehends the transcendent ground of its self and ~~which that~~ Schleiermacher identified with God. This feeling is all too often mistaken for transcendence (Lacoste 2006: 97); our liturgical experience remains pre-eschatological and “promises us no ecstasy” (Lacoste 2004: 26). Lacoste’s conception of liturgy arises from his dissatisfaction with the traditional philosophy of religion: in his own words to articulate

a non-“religious” (i.e., anti-Schleiermacherian and anti-Jamesian) logic of “liturgy” (not worship!)—that is, of what man does *coram Deo* ... as subverting the Heideggerian logic of being-in-the-world. (Lacoste 2010b: 657)

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Tillich himself suggested that Schleiermacher “injured the understanding of religion” when he divorced “feeling” (as the religious function) from will and intellect, thereby “excluding religion from the totality of personal existence and delivering it to emotional subjectivity” (Tillich 1959: 23, 24). Theology “is never founded on the limited basis of our experience of God” (Lacoste 2010a: 63). While we can feel God’s presence—or, at least, what we construe as such—“we can just as much feel the presence of the ‘divine’ of which Heidegger speaks... God must not be assimilated too quickly to the sacred or to the numinous” (Lacoste 2010a: 63). Attempting to escape the interminable faith-reason dichotomy, Lacoste explores the paradoxical divine phenomenality in terms of “love”: God is “connaissable comme aimable” which thus raises the possibility of something, perhaps even an understanding, “in which humanity exceeds its definition of ‘rational animal’” (Lacoste 2008: 88).

But the believer does not necessarily love their neighbour as a consequence of their love for God or vice versa. They simply *feel*—the phenomenology of perception reminds us that our experience of the world is not limited merely to what we might describe but can include our affectivity (love, joy, frustration) as a fundamental possibility of that experience. Lacoste’s phenomenological analysis is rooted in an understanding of this “pre-discursive gift” of the world to the self, prior to conceptual language. Here then, in the silence of perceptive life, an order is established ~~that~~^{which} includes the presence of subjectivity in that world. Words are themselves phenomena and things are given to us through words. But in Husserl nearly all conscious life is organised in their silent margins—his later philosophy might even be described as a theory of deferred or “bracketed” speech in which “things, which are given to consciousness as phenomena, both constitute and are formed within the sphere of the silent life of our consciousness” (Lacoste 2006: 117). And if one takes seriously the question of the phenomenality of God—that is, “God as love” rather than “God as being”—then

within the order of that perceptive life one should also take seriously the question of our coaffectivity—that is, our shared perceptive life with others experienced at those margins.

What Husserl called an act of “presentification” [*Vergegenwärtigung*] described an intentional act whose object, although intuitively given, is not immediately present. Empathy is thus an “appresentation” of the lived experience of another person: although only dimly perceived, the other person’s body gives me access to ~~his or her~~ lived experience while also making me realize that this lived experience remains inaccessible to me. The praying human community is, Lacoste contends, a pacified—or at least pacifiable—community; those who are liturgically occupied with God “must at least have it as their goal” while the identity of others is expressed in this imaginable affective communion. However, the “God to whom we pray is not necessarily a God felt in the heart.” Similarly, the other person with whom I pray “is there with me more than the sensibility can suffer him” (Lacoste 2005a: 100). Empathy is thus, phenomenologically, a presentification of what is absent as invisible; theologically, indicative of the non-phenomenal divine love. When we pray in communion, “we accept with an open heart the presence of all those with whom we pray, visible and invisible, near and far, known and unknown, nameable and anonymous.” Thus “to pray together is to have something to say and do together, to participate together in a drama” (Lacoste 2005a: 100); a common participation that is provisional and eschatological, sought in liturgical participation rather than simply discovered within our “shared sensibility” or any “affective communion.” Although located within the pre-discursive structures of the world, this communion is something one must strive for as “pilgrims” (Lacoste 2006: 134). Lacoste here pushes beyond the Heideggerian analytic into a realm “beyond being” through a horizontal move into human experience of the world, away from the solitary life of *Dasein*.

Kunneman, as Stoker observes in his discussion of the third type, suggests that today “the name of God [is] connected with caring, morally involved, loving relationships both between people mutually and on the level of person” (Kunneman 2005: 67). Lacoste examines the profound example of theology

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“being silenced” in the face of the suffering of others (Lacoste 2006: 169). In these remarks on theodicy, Lacoste makes clear that it is both “a scandal” and “mystery” where “no response is heard ~~which that~~ does not include some reference to “the words from the cross.” And this is truly where the most responsible theology is silent” (Lacoste 2006: 171).

Silence discloses the essence of perceptive life—the co-affectivity ~~that which~~ is the ground of our compassion. In the sphere of this silent, co-affective life, an order where such passive syntheses combine to form our experience of the world, “sympathy” is thus also “suffering -with-.” Compassion demands that we do not discuss the suffering of others without also feeling it *ourselves*. The experience of compassion forces us to admit that human relations transcend the limits of mere “co-being” or Heideggerian “care” (*Mitdasein Fürsorge*); it

is to learn that he who suffers is, above all, waiting for us to hold their hand, not because we are unable to speak intelligently, but because ... we have exceeded the limits of argumentation” (Lacoste 2006: 171-72)

It is also to learn-and-that “there is a time to speak, a time to be quiet and a time to heal” (Lacoste 2006: 180).

Theology and Transcendence

Love and Silence

Heidegger did not dismiss every account of presence, but sought a more originary—that is, phenomenological—account of the presence of beings in their coming into presence in being and in time. Concerning the question of how God might appear, Lacoste draws upon his concept of *Befindlichkeit* (Heidegger 1962: 178; 492 n.) and how the affective life—notably love—possesses cognitive content (Lacoste 2007b: 15-16). But while emotions can “act as consciousness,” they can “lack identifiable and describable objects” (Lacoste 2010a: 63). Compassionate silence—concern for the other person—reminds us that theology is only able to speak of God by stating that he is a (loving) God to whom humans can talk, thus “it is a theologically fruitful experience to be quiet in order to pray and to sympathise” (Lacoste 2006: 173). Lacoste’s phenomenological analysis therefore

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distinguishes Heideggerian and Christian forms of liturgy—and thus God from “the sacred”—and refuses to separate “love” and “being” (in the way that Marion does) amid genuine concern that “any scheme in which the self or community finds the satisfaction of its desire in what bedazzles” (O’Regan 2010: 273) is idolatrous. Humanity instead searches for *understanding*, particularly recognition of God as lovable and that that love is perceptible (Lacoste 2008: 87-110, echoing 1 John 4:19); ~~one-I~~ might even be correct in saying “that I have perceived a divine presence in a manner as convincing as I perceive human presences,” as “presences that require being known as putting pressure on me from outside myself” (Lacoste 2010a: 64). Human affectivity is that existential condition from which hope can anticipate its fulfillment, directed towards a transcendence ahead of and above it.

It is at this point that the “liturgical gesture” transcends the capacities of speech, reminding us once again that keeping silent “does not mean the same as being absent” (Lacoste 2006: 171). Thus “to sympathize” is also to “pray-with”—Lacoste does not differentiate between the two actions. The theologian cannot tell someone “why” they are suffering, or what “meaning” their suffering has, except by exhibiting the “elementary tact or good sense to turn the sufferer’s gaze toward him in whom God has suffered” (Lacoste 2006: 172). Here, then, compassion means “talking about a compassionate God [and] preserving the language of the cross...” (Lacoste 2006: 171). In contrast to Kunneman’s suggestion of a shift to *horizontal* transcendence, the Christian practice of silence “must be rooted in some respect in the life of Christ himself if it is to be meaningful or even in some way normative” (Brownsberger 2009: 595). Stoker himself mentions the biblical experience of immanent transcendence, specifically Tillich’s claim that the biblical God is unique in combining both elements of transcendence and immanence in the incarnation. Here the phenomenon of Gethsemane provides a theological paradigm: “Jesus speaks and, when he has spoken, there is silence” with no suggestion “that he expected a reply” (Lash 2004: 75). One may also recall Christ’s silence before Pilate or Jesus’ silence in death—his tomb is empty, silent. Yet it is in this

disappearance—his absence—that Jesus becomes a sign of God *semper maior*.

Lacoste's proposal is that, in being silenced, theology is reduced to its essence: a *theologia viatorum* and not the theology of angels and saints; that it is not just a province of knowledge but "a way of existing and of existing in the plural" (Lacoste 2006: 172). Reminding theologians that they are something besides "an interpreter[s] of rationality is to say that theology is a form of existence before it is an intellectual work, and that compassionate silence is an integral part of theological experience." Keeping silent may concede that argument no longer holds, but that does not abrogate every theological project: it merely demonstrates that "theological experience would be incomplete if one reduced it solely to a work of conceptual construction" (Lacoste 2006: 172). In urging theology to be quiet, suffering forces it to remember that the theological experience is not solitary but one lived in the element of an original plurality. This plural existence is one that recognises the polysemy of both silence and the scriptural witness, and resists the reduction of "God-talk" to a univocal metaphysical—that is to say ontotheological—language. The God of the silent, perceptive life is not an object of intentional consciousness but the ground of our fundamental affectivity.

Conclusion

At the interstices between phenomenology and theology Lacoste has sought to reveal the ground and limit of human consciousness encountering an irreducible transcendence. That ground is the pre-discursive affective gift of the world, the common "vie spirituelle" shared by philosopher and mystic alike (Lacoste 2006: 218-9). Irreducible to human *logos*, God differs from things (perhaps, recalling both Derrida and Stoker's final typology, even to the point of non-alterity). However, that difference does not introduce a caesura in the field of knowledge but makes us attentive to the *multiplicity* of modes of appearance; phenomenality is not "uniform" (Lacoste 2010a: 49). As Lacoste observes, some phenomena—such as God, or the other person—are irreducible to language: "[t]he right description," in the case of God as well as that of the intersubjective "en-

counter,” requires “the transcendent reality of what it describes.” Neither the existence of the other nor the existence of God can be put aside: “not due to a personal decision...but because to call these existences phenomenologically indispensable to description is merely the right response to their proper mode of phenomenality” (Lacoste 2010a: 66). Here these two phenomenologies—that of the love of God and of the other person—are analogous.

Keeping silent, therefore, is an immanent activity, a *kenotic* activity ~~that~~^{which} exemplifies Stoker’s typology of the open concept. And, as Stoker suggests, once the concept of transcendence is differentiated, then its differences and overlaps can be perceived more easily. Amidst competing discourses about transcendence, silence is something that cuts across typologies; reflecting ~~up~~^{upon} silence helps to clarify their relationship and, confronted by kerygmatic haste, teaches theological patience. As Lacoste’s “silent reduction” makes clear, the “accuracy” of theological concepts is easily upset by the polysemy and polymorphism of scripture. Lacoste instead offers an “asystematic theology of the fragment” (Lacoste 2006: 189): as with perceptive life, a *fragmentary* understanding is nevertheless an *understanding*. A theology prepared to silence its arguments for the sake of compassion is able to speak non-conceptually, to be only a marginal note to the scriptural text, and one which understands its own *logos*—the coherent but fragmentary understanding of God in history. Despite Hegel’s ambitious claims regarding *immanent* transcendence, the transcendent God is not made manifest to us through some banal ontotheological metaphysics of presence. Lacoste’s rigorous eschatology reinforces this point—the once and for all character of the Christ-event, recounted in a plurality of narratives, defies the theologian’s hypocritical speculation; theology that takes its transcendence seriously is an unsystematic, fragmentary and, above all, *ethical* activity.

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