

**CONTINGENCY AND INFINITY.
LÁSZLÓ TENGELYI'S FINAL REMARKS
ON THE POSSIBILITY OF
PHENOMENOLOGICAL METAPHYSICS**

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Abstract

In Tengelyi's interpretation the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl should be read as a categorical analysis of experience which is principally neutral concerning the metaphysical questions of world-views (Tengelyi, "Der methodologische Transzendentalismus der Phänomenologie", in: Carlo Iena – Hanne Jacobs – Filip Mattens (ed.), *Philosophy, Phenomenology, Science. Essays in Commemoration of Edmund Husserl*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2010, 135–153). In his opinion Husserl's phenomenology strove to distinguish itself from traditional metaphysics. In another text Tengelyi emphasizes the role of primordial facticity (Urfaktizität) in Husserl, which delineates the contours of a phenomenologically transformed metaphysics: a metaphysics of contingency ("La phénoménologie et les catégories de l'expérience", in: Karel Novotný, Alexander Schnell, László Tengelyi (Hrsg.), *La phénoménologie comme philosophie première*, Amiens – Prag, Filosofia Verlag 2011, 153–167).

Beside this metaphysics of contingency one also finds another conception of metaphysics in Husserl which was important to Tengelyi too: the metaphysics of Absolute and the problem of constructing the concept of this Absolute. This problem appeared in Husserl's works around 1907/08 at the latest (Ms. B II 2, partly in Husserliana 13, 42) and it remained a decisive problem for him until the end of his life. The problem of the Absolute appeared in Tengelyi's last book (*Welt und Unendlichkeit. Zum Problem der phänomenologischen Metaphysik*, München – Freiburg, Karl Alber Verlag, 2014) as the problem of the infinity of the world. Tengelyi interpreted infinity on the basis of openness, but he accepted the possibility of constructing an actual, absolute, all-encompassing infinity. In his interpretation the experience of openness is the basis of every religious experience of God, (Tengelyi, 2014: 556). I would like to show that beyond the differences there are also strong similarities between Husserl's and Tengelyi's understanding of phenomenological metaphysics.

Introduction

Starting with his first major work, *Der Zwitterbegriff Lebensgeschichte* (1998, in English: *Wild Regions of Life-History*),¹ through his second systematic major monograph, *Erfahrung und Ausdruck* (2007)² all the way to his last magnum opus – which was only published posthumously – *Welt und Unendlichkeit* (2014),³ László Tengelyi had in mind the idea of a phenomenologically founded and elaborated metaphysics of human experience. Throughout his entire lifetime and career, his ultimate goal was a metaphysics of experience. He considered the philosophy of Edmund Husserl the most important point of orientation in this project, though there were also other philosophers who were of fundamental importance for his philosophical efforts, most notably Kant, Heidegger, Lévinas, Merleau-Ponty, Ricœur and Richir. He also had an immense knowledge of history of philosophy in general, which he used extensively in his works. Nevertheless, his philosophy of experience could be regarded as Husserlian with good reason. His project of phenomenological metaphysics was bound to Husserl's transcendentalism; Tengelyi himself characterized his philosophical enterprise as a transcendental one, whose main elements were founded on Husserl's philosophy.

According to Tengelyi, the most important and ultimate aim of philosophy is to create an overall, systematic description of experience, which is open to every possible radical novelty that arises from the essentially contingent character of experience. In Tengelyi's opinion, philosophy has to construct categories of experience ("Experientialien") to describe the fundamental features of experience as such; and – in the sense of traditional metaphysics – it needs to do so in a metaphysically neutral manner. "Metaphysically neutral manner" means that this philosophy shall be a metaphysics in a radically new sense of the word: metaphysics of experience as such. He characterizes his method as "diacritical" ("diakritische"),⁴ whose task is "to separate elements which apparently fall together" and then to show "the necessary connection between those separated elements."⁵ He seeks to make distinctions everywhere where it is necessary, but in a second step he at-

¹ Tengelyi László, *Der Zwitterbegriff Lebensgeschichte*, München, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1998. English: *The Wild Region in Life-History*, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2003.

² Tengelyi László, *Erfahrung und Ausdruck*, Dordrecht, The Netherlands, Springer, 2007.

³ Tengelyi László, *Welt und Unendlichkeit. Zum Problem phänomenologischer Metaphysik*, Freiburg – München, Verlag Karl Alber, 2014.

⁴ A term he took from Merleau-Ponty. Cf. Merleau-Ponty Maurice, *Éloge de la philosophie et autres essais*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1960, p. 134.

⁵ Tengelyi László, *Welt und Unendlichkeit. Zum Problem phänomenologischer Metaphysik*, p. 300f.

tempts to unfold and ascertain what necessary relations prevail between the elements he distinguished.

A *metaphysics in the new sense*, Tengelyi thinks, *must be a metaphysics of contingency*. It is a necessary transformation of traditional metaphysics, which sought to rule and control the entire being, the totality of entities. A phenomenological metaphysics must begin with the insight that this is impossible; nothing could limit and confine the contingent character of experience. Every new moment could bring a new insight, a new experience that could change everything we previously thought we knew about the world. A new metaphysics should be a metaphysics of radical openness and novelty. Tengelyi argues that several authors in the phenomenological movement, such as Husserl, Heidegger and Sartre, were aware of this fact of radical contingency.⁶ But Tengelyi's first and most important ally in the articulation of his own idea of this concept of metaphysics of contingency was Husserl and his "metaphysics of primordial facts" ("Metaphysik der Urtatsachen").⁷

In the first half of the lecture I would like to show that Husserl had another metaphysics, too – a metaphysics quite similar to the traditional sense of the word, that is a metaphysical vision of God, the fate of souls after the death of the body, the *telos* of history of the human world and of the Universe in general. Tengelyi was quite determined in his rejection of such strands of thought in Husserl. He sought to exclude this apparently traditional metaphysical vision from Husserlian philosophy, claiming that these remarks of Husserl were very sporadic and not integral parts of his most important philosophical efforts. I would like to show that in reality the opposite applies: these metaphysical attempts were indeed integral parts of Husserl's overall philosophical project. In the second part, I would like to reconstruct Tengelyi's own conception of phenomenological metaphysics, and I will try to show how these two apparently very different metaphysical views can be connected with each other, despite all the essential differences between them.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14ff.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 171–227.

1. Husserl. Metaphysics of primordial facts and metaphysics of the Absolute

We already noted that for Husserl there were basically two different conceptions of phenomenological metaphysics, which were, however, in an essential mutual connection with one another. One of these was also guiding for Tengelyi: It was Husserl's abovementioned metaphysics of primordial or absolute facts. In fact since 1922 at the latest Husserl had thought that there were some facts, which – as facts – were contingent but also possessed the character of absolute necessity, because we cannot imagine any concrete experience without them. Thus they were essentially constitutive elements of any experience whatsoever.⁸ As Husserl puts it, during the analysis of experience “we arrive at ultimate ‘facts’ – primordial facts, at ultimate necessities, primordial necessities”⁹. According to Husserl, in some sense these facts make experience as such possible. In Tengelyi's opinion, there are four main groups of primordial or absolute facts in Husserl: 1) the ego as an absolute fact. There is no flow of experience without an experiencing ego. 2) The absolute fact of world-possession (Welthabe). The ego has a world, in which it is an incarnated being. 3) The absolute fact of being-for-each-other (Füreinandersein) as intentional being-in-each-other (Ineinandersein). The ego is an intersubjective being. 4) The absolute fact of historical teleology, which is directed at the idea of God.¹⁰ The last group is in need of some explanation. According to Tengelyi, Husserl's idea of historical teleology, which points towards the idea of God, is not a metaphysically substantial conception of a divine reality but a heuristic principle based on human experience. In Tengelyi's interpretation, in Husserl the fourth metaphysical fact refers to the essentially historical nature of human beings and experience in general. Tengelyi argues that the concrete content of this fourth absolute fact is nothing else than historicity (Geschichtlichkeit) as such.¹¹

On the one hand, there was Husserl's metaphysics of primordial facts, which one might with good reason refer to as the metaphysics of contingency. But on the other hand he also proffered some other metaphysical efforts, which differed fundamentally from the previously mentioned approach and were very much akin to traditional metaphysics; this was the metaphysics of the Absolute, which appeared

⁸ Husserl Edmund, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Zweiter Teil. 1921–28*, The Hague, Netherlands, Martinus Nijhoff, pp. 151–160. Tengelyi László, *Welt und Unendlichkeit. Zum Problem phänomenologischer Metaphysik*, p. 182f.

⁹ Husserl Edmund, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Dritter Teil. 1929–35*, The Hague, Netherlands, Martinus Nijhoff, p. 385. Note from 5 November 1931.

¹⁰ Tengelyi László, *Welt und Unendlichkeit. Zum Problem phänomenologischer Metaphysik*, p. 184f.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 186f.

relatively early in his work (around 1907/08), and which recurred throughout his writings until the end of his life. This was closely intertwined with his other metaphysical conception of primordial facts, from the very first moment since the latter appeared.

The first systematic discussion of Husserl's other metaphysical conception, the metaphysics of the Absolute, can be found in manuscript BII2 (from 1907/08).¹² In his late period, in the 1930s, the most systematic and most coherent trains of thought concerning the problem of the Absolute were primarily laid out in his E-manuscripts.¹³ Though there were important changes and developments in Husserl's thinking concerning the Absolute during his career, the main features, the basic lines of this conception remained the same throughout his last writings addressing this problem. For this reason I focus exclusively on folder BII2 to present a brief summary of Husserl's concept of the Absolute.

In manuscript BII2 we encounter a fascinating, speculative vision that is very similar to certain accounts of the Absolute in the tradition of German Idealism (e.g. in Fichte, Schelling and Hegel), and which has its roots in Neo-platonic philosophy. According to this account, Nature is the crystallization of a universal spiritual reality, the latter of which is ultimately represented by God. The souls in the universe have a substantive existence, too, which is different from their otherwise essentially incarnated nature. Death is only a form of sleep from which the soul awakens on a higher level of development. The universe of souls – of “monads” – is in a permanent and infinite state of evolution, whose ideal goal – dwelling in the infinity – is God himself. God is the essence of spiritual reality, with both personal and hyper-personal character. He is an infinite subject, and as such the ideal pole of every development and evolution. He has an immediate access to every finite subject; in a peculiar manner, he has a first person access to their experiences, feelings and thoughts, without constraining or limiting their freedom in any manner. Due to this access, God has compassion – in a very literal sense of the word – for every finite subjective being, all their sorrows and happiness.¹⁴

One might ask what the difference is between this latter metaphysical vision and traditional metaphysics? The most important difference is that in Husserl one finds from the very beginning the claim that he based this metaphysics of the Absolute on immediate sensuous experiences. Even the metaphysics of the Absolute

¹² Partly published in *Husserliana* volume 13 (pp. 5–9) and 42 (pp. 132–161).

¹³ Partly published in *Husserliana* volume 15 and 42.

¹⁴ For a systematic monography on Husserl's conception of God and the Absolute, see e.g. Lee Chun Lo, *Die Gottesauffassung in Husserls Phänomenologie*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang Verlag, 2008.

is bound by “the principle of all principles” of phenomenology,¹⁵ which posits that every hypothesis must have an immediately identifiable foundation in immediate sensuous intuition. In my opinion, the perhaps most exciting feature of Husserl’s speculative metaphysics is his effort to secure a basis in immediate experience for this metaphysical vision. But such a metaphysics exceeds all boundaries of possible intuitive experience. How did he manage to find a connection between what lies within the limits of possible experience and what is beyond it? He tries to create such a connection between the two realms through the method of *phenomenological construction*.

Husserl argues that when the answer to an otherwise meaningful question lies beyond the limits of experience, the philosopher must not give up the attempt to find this answer. In such a situation the philosopher must engage in constructions, but his constructions must be phenomenologically *motivated* by immediate experience. In the immediate experience one can find, localize and clearly identify certain signs that point beyond the limits of possible experience, which refer to facts that, as a matter of principle, intuition is now longer capable of providing. For the phenomenologist, these signs offer the possibility of a meaningful, phenomenologically legitimate *construction*. The basis of phenomenological construction is the realm of such apodictically identifiable and explicable signs, a realm that connects the intuitive and non-intuitive aspects of reality or the Absolute. In Husserl, “mere” („bloße“) and non-phenomenological constructions are juxtaposed with necessary and phenomenologically motivated constructions.¹⁶

In Alexander Schnell’s opinion, it was only in the 1930s that the method of phenomenological construction first appeared in Husserl in a clear formulation. This was in the context of his study of *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* by Eugen Fink,¹⁷ who elaborated the method of constructive phenomenology in said work. According to Schnell, Fink in turn took this idea from Heidegger,¹⁸ who presented the method of phenomenological construction in his 1928 summer semester lecture

¹⁵ Husserl Edmund, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie 1. Halbband: Text der 1.–3. Auflage – Nachdruck*, The Hague, Netherlands, Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, §24.

¹⁶ Cf. Marosán Bence Péter, „Husserls Gedanke einer phänomenologisch neubegründeten Metaphysik am Leitfaden der Idee der indirekten Apodiktizität“, in: Ates Murat – Bruns Oliver – Han Choong-Su – Sören Schulz Ole (Hrsg.), *Phänomenologie und Metaphysik. Beiträge zur Konstellation von Phänomenologie und Metaphysikkritik*, Freiburg – München, Verlag Karl Alber, 2016, pp. 59–70.

¹⁷ Fink Eugen, *Cartesianische Meditation. Teil I: Die Idee einer transzendentalen Methodelehre*, The Hague, Netherlands, Kluwer Academic Publishers.

¹⁸ Heidegger Martin, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1975, §5.

“Basic Problems of Phenomenology”).¹⁹ I think the clear conception of phenomenological construction, distinguished from non-phenomenological construction and juxtaposed with the same, appeared much earlier than the aforementioned Fink-influence and, moreover, it did so completely independently both of Fink and Heidegger. Among other texts, one can find it in the winter semester lecture of 1922/23, entitled “Introduction to Philosophy”²⁰, and in a supplementary text to the winter semester lecture 1923/24, entitled “First Philosophy”²¹. The idea of phenomenological construction appeared as early as 1907/08 in manuscript BII2,²² as well as in the 1910/11 winter semester lecture “Basic Problems of Phenomenology”²³. In my opinion, this idea of phenomenological constructions a necessary corollary of Husserl’s phenomenological metaphysics of the Absolute, and can be found in its very first appearance.

The ultimate task of phenomenological metaphysics – according to Husserl – is to render the Absolute in its actual infinity accessible to phenomenological reflection. Ultimately, the concrete reality is God conceived as the Absolute, in which transcendental intersubjectivity – that is to say the infinitely open community of monadic subjects – is a dependent layer. The metaphysics of primordial facts is in an inseparable and intimate interlacement with this metaphysics of the Absolute. These facts are the constitutive moments or elements of our personal, finite perspective. They are the main structural elements of the channel linking finite and infinite subjectivity, between particular monadic consciousness and God. From a certain angle, the metaphysics of primordial facts serves as a basis for the metaphysics of the Absolute.

These two dimensions of metaphysics are accessible to us in different ways. Ultimately, primordial facts are subject to immediate phenomenological reflection, which is – with the fortuitous and accurate term proposed by Klaus Held –

¹⁹ Schnell Alexander, „Phänomenbegriff und phänomenologische Konstruktion bei Husserl und Heidegger“, in: Van der Haiden Gert-Jan – Novotný Karel – Tengelyi László – Römer Inga (Hrsg.), *Investigating Subjectivity. Classical and New Perspectives*, Netherlands, Leiden, Brill Publishers, 2012, p. 49 f.

²⁰ Husserl Edmund, *Einleitung in die Philosophie. Vorlesungen 1922/23*, Dordrecht, Netherlands, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002, p. 190f.

²¹ Husserl Edmund, *Erste Philosophie (1923/4). Zweiter Teil: Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion*, The Hague, Netherlands, Martinus Nijhoff, 1959, p. 228.

²² Husserl Edmund, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie. Analysen des Unbewusstseins und der Instinkte. Me-taphysik. Späte Ethik*, New York, Springer, 2014, pp. 139, 150f.

²³ Husserl Edmund, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Erster Teil. 1905–1920*, The Hague, Netherlands, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973, p. 186.

“thoughtful perception” (“denkende Wahrnehmung”).²⁴ As we pointed out previously, the Absolute in its actual infinity – is a subject of phenomenological construction, and can never be fully grasped in its infinity by finite subjective beings.

2. Tengelyi. Metaphysics of contingency and metaphysics of openness

Tengelyi categorically resisted the idea that this metaphysics of the Absolute, with God as the core of the Absolute and immortal souls in perpetual metempsychosis acting as parts of the actually infinite divine life, had an important place in the thought and work of the life of Edmund Husserl; Tengelyi regarded these as nothing more than some less organized, poorly thought-out, merely playful speculative fancies, to which even Husserl himself did not attribute great philosophical importance in his main philosophical efforts and projects. In brief: according to Tengelyi, Husserl’s speculative considerations concerning God and the immortality of the soul were marginal in the overall context of his oeuvre. In my interpretation, this assessment of the role of Husserl’s metaphysics of the Absolute within the entire framework of Husserlian philosophy is at least debatable. There are hundreds of pages of manuscripts in Husserl with the clear and definite intention of elaborating such a metaphysics of the Absolute as an ultimate accomplishment of phenomenological metaphysics. Husserl very clearly and unambiguously thought that the philosopher cannot disregard the so-called first and final questions of metaphysics, that is questions concerning the existence of God, immortality (or mortality) of the soul and the ultimate meaning and end of history. Husserl argued that it is the ultimate responsibility of the philosopher to answer these questions in a strictly scientific manner; and so long as he is a true philosopher in the strict sense of the word, he cannot but invest every possible effort to fulfill this duty. Tengelyi, on the other hand, thought that such questions belonged into the field of worldviews (*Weltanschauungen*) rather than philosophy in the true sense of the word. Correspondingly, he assessed that the philosopher should abandon the engagement with such non-philosophical questions.²⁵

In the course of a personal discussion with Tengelyi concerning this topic last year, he told me that in his opinion one should not highlight these aspects of

²⁴ Held Klaus, *Lebendige Gegenwart. Die Frage nach der Seinsweise des transzendentalen Ich bei Edmund Husserl entwickelt am Leitfaden der Zeitproblematik*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1966, p. 12.

²⁵ Tengelyi László, *Welt und Unendlichkeit. Zum Problem phänomenologischer Metaphysik*, p. 212.

Husserl's philosophy and one should not address what Tengelyi considers such non-philosophical issues, because that would eliminate the possibility of a dialogue with analytic philosophers, who have a deeply natural scientific outlook. Doing so would "push the philosopher into the arms of theologians who," Tengelyi says, "also have their own tasks and duties, which differs considerably from that of philosophers". In my view there is a philosophical possibility to transform these so-called questions of worldview into questions of philosophy in the strict sense. I think that Husserl's metaphysics of the Absolute had exactly this goal and intention; that is: it based metaphysical considerations of the speculative kind on immediate intuition. Husserl's project of indirect, constructive and apodictic metaphysics remained unfinished, and this might inspire us to try whether the avenue of thinking he proposed it might lead some positive, philosophically fruitful outcome. In the end, we will see that Tengelyi arrived at some philosophical consequences that might lead us in the direction of Husserl's metaphysics of the Absolute.

Tengelyi's last book is made up of three main parts: 1) *Metaphysics and onto-theology*, in which he – in a Heideggerian manner – presents traditional metaphysics as projects of onto-theology; as conceptions that conceived the totality of beings with an absolute, ultimate foundation, generally referred to as God. This first part serves as an historical introduction to Tengelyi's idea of a non-traditional, phenomenological metaphysics. 2) *Phenomenology and metaphysics*, in which Tengelyi provided an overview of phenomenological attempts to overcome traditional metaphysics, while devoting detailed analyses to the philosophies of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Lévinas, Richir and Marion. 3) The third and last part of the book, *Phenomenological metaphysics*, was meant to elaborate Tengelyi's own conception of the metaphysics of "contingent facticity" ("zufällige Faktizität").²⁶

The main features of Tengelyi's project of phenomenological metaphysics: 1) *Metaphysics without onto-theology*. This means that the metaphysics in question abandons the traditional attempt of finding an ultimate foundation for Being and particular existents, and of dealing with traditional metaphysical questions, which were revealed as non-philosophical questions of worldview. According to Tengelyi, metaphysics should be neutral in regard of worldview. 2) It must be a *metaphysics of contingency*. There is no ultimate metaphysical necessity except for the necessity of primordial or absolute facts. 3) The method of this metaphysics is *diacritical*: it separates all elements of experience that are separable and demonstrates the differ-

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

ences between them, while at the same time it also unfolds the mutual connection between them. 4) It is an *analysis of categories of experiences* (Experientialien). It defines the essential core of certain basic types of experiences, but it is always ready to redefine and reconsider the meaning of these once defined categories in the light of new experiences, which are related to these former categories in a certain way. The most important, most essential characteristic of experience is its radical openness (Offenheit), which could at any and every moment yield something new and completely unexpected. This characteristic of the radical openness of experience is precisely due to its ineliminable contingency. 5) *The ultimate topic of philosophy is the world*. This phenomenology of metaphysics is a phenomenology and metaphysics of the world; it is phenomenological and metaphysical *cosmology* (my expression – B.P.M.). The ultimate and implicit subject of human experience is the world itself; the latter is essentially open, just like experience that it corresponds to. The fundamental feature of world is that it is an openness without borders rather than a totality. The task of a phenomenology of the world is to grasp it in its openness and to preserve it through the phenomenological investigations of the world.

Tengelyi attempts to outline his own conception of the infinity of the world – juxtaposed to its totality – through massive analyses of the mathematical concept of infinity, chiefly articulated by Georg Cantor.²⁷ According to Tengelyi, Cantor's theory of infinite cardinalities has both fundamental philosophical and mathematical importance: on the one hand, he introduces the concept of actual infinity into the mathematical sciences in an exact, scientifically well-founded and elaborated way. On the other hand, in the end he introduces different levels of infinity: a complex hierarchy of infinite cardinalities. In Tengelyi's interpretation, the most important discovery of Cantor may be the distinction between transfinite (infinity beyond the finite) and absolute infinity (infinity which is a result of the total summary of different infinite cardinalities, a fusion of every possible infinite quantity). By constructing a non-contradictory concept of actual, transfinite infinity, Cantor – thus Tengelyi – was able to overcome the Kantian antinomy of infinity. Nevertheless, Tengelyi argues, this antinomy returned to the level of absolute infinity when Cantor tried to unify the different forms of infinities into the concept of one absolutely infinite totality.²⁸ Cantor realized that his concept of absolute infinity implied several contradictions, such as “the paradox of the largest cardinal number”, known as the “Cantor-paradox”. For this very reason he situated

²⁷ I would like to thank László Szekely who helped me in the interpretation of these sections of Tengelyi's book.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 458–467.

the concept of absolute infinity outside mathematics, in the realm of theology, as the absolute infinity of God.²⁹

In Tengelyi's opinion, due to the contradictory and paradoxical nature of the Cantorian concept of the Absolute, it cannot serve as the ultimate and adequate notion of infinity. Cantor's concept of absolute infinity leads us beyond the field of philosophy and mathematics to the realm of theology. But Tengelyi tries to develop and articulate the adequate philosophical notion of infinity. In his opinion, the philosophically positive aspect of Cantor's notion of actual infinity is his conception of transfinite infinity, so that there is an excess, a surplus in the infinity. On the basis of experience, this notion could be interpreted as the openness of experience. The genuinely adequate interpretation of infinity within the field of philosophy proves to be Husserl's concept of openness: that the world is an infinitely open horizon of ever new experiences.³⁰ We can only reconstruct Cantor's idea of absolute infinity as a self-enclosed totality on the basis of this openness of experiences. In this way, openness has precedence over totality and absolute infinity. We are only capable of conceiving the latter as a means to the former.

There are certain points in Tengelyi's project which – in my opinion – lead us in the direction of Husserl's metaphysics of the Absolute. These points in Tengelyi are those places in his book, where he leaves room for the possibility that religious experiences could be analyzed by means of his phenomenological metaphysics, and he admits that one can attribute certain objectivity to those experiences. Thus for example on the last page of his book he writes that "Cantor was completely right to define absolute infinity as a topic of theology. But the infinity of the world is not the absolute infinity. It is rather an open infinity, which is probably at the foundation of every religious tradition, but which cannot be entirely included in any of them"³¹. This phrasing, however, makes it possible to claim that the transcendence of God can be conceived on the basis of the transcendence of the world. But we have seen that in Husserl the ultimate basis of his constructive metaphysics of the Absolute was his metaphysics of primordial facts. If we approach the problem from this angle, the two projects do not differ from one another as much as they seemed to differ at first glance.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 556.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 544ff.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 556.

3. Conclusion

As we saw, in addition to his metaphysics of primordial facts, Husserl also entertained a rather speculative vision of the Absolute or God, which was fairly similar to the metaphysics of onto-theological tradition. Tengelyi's view was that these remarks of Husserl concerning the existence of God, immortality of the soul and ultimate meaning of history were of marginal importance. In my opinion, Tengelyi was wrong in this respect, though I am empathic regarding the underlying reasons that led him to espouse this view: he wanted to sever Husserl from the onto-theological tradition.

Even though there were systematic efforts in Husserl to elaborate a metaphysics of the Absolute, what distinguishes this latter conception of metaphysics from the metaphysical constructions of onto-theology is that Husserl tried to base this metaphysics on his metaphysics of primordial facts; and he tried to elaborate an articulate, well-founded connection between these two fields of metaphysics. Tengelyi on the other hand left open the possibility of basing a phenomenological account of God on the phenomenology and experience of openness.³² With this final gesture, he allowed for the possibility of a phenomenology that might lead us in exactly the same direction as Husserl's metaphysics of the Absolute; this is an inspiring unfinished and tempting way of understanding phenomenology.

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³² *Ibid.*, p. 555f.