The Future of Paradosis: Jean-Luc Nancy’s Dis-Enclosure: Deconstruction of Christianity

Bettina Bergo (Université de Montréal)

This essay discusses Jean-Luc Nancy’s Dis-Enclosure: Deconstruction of Christianity (2008). Nancy’s engagement with Christianity in this work contrasts with the so-called theological turn in phenomenology. This raises probing questions regarding the name of God and the sense of the “divine” in a demythified world, as well as the question of the exhaustion of Christianity and its self-deconstruction. I address Nancy’s exploration of the overcoming of nihilism and the possibility, and “look,” of a faith that is not tied to a god or a master signifier, thereby moving beyond certain ‘orthodox’ oppositions between atheism and Christianity. I use Gérard Granel’s deORMALIZATION of phenomenology and the Gospel of James’s “Epistle of straw” to adumbrate a minimalist faith in the world, and I also investigate Jean Pouillon’s study of the senses of “croire” and Émile Benveniste’s archeology of credere in light of Nancy’s approach to faith. I close with reflections on Nietzsche’s psychology of “the redeemer.”

1. An Insubstantial Faith

To examine Jean-Luc Nancy’s conception of faith, which is the central concept in his Dis-Enclosure: Deconstruction of Christianity, we should begin from the exemplary illustrations he provides, rather than from the concepts he adapts from Heidegger and Derrida. Operative throughout this collection of essays is the pursuit of an ontology that would have the lightness, or openness, of Heidegger’s Lichtung or clearing, but without making the ontological commitment to a difference between beings and Being, the ontic and the ontological. In Nancy, we find a resolute identification of faith with action, which is certainly not original, though it takes a strong position against the “gospel” of Paul, the thirteenth Apostle. Following Nancy’s initiative, then, I will turn to his most striking example. This is the deORMALIZATION of the “world” that Gérard Granel (1930–2000) sketched—keeping in mind that this approach to being highlights the
aesthetic rather than the moral or fideistic dimensions of it. Thereafter, I will turn to the claim that faith is not belief, but action. This is clearly a polemical claim that reduces the wealth of connotations in the concept of belief itself. Moreover, it draws on the opposition of the Judaism of James versus the early “Christianity” of Paul—a more complex opposition than Nancy indicates, and one that may imperil his conception of the source of the “Judeo-Christian tradition.”

The following lyrical description comes then from Gérard Granel:

Sub-stan ce...is, in effect, nothing other than the thetic profanation of the most banal of evidences, that of the presence of the real. That upon which I open my shutters each morning, that in which I attend to the affairs of life, that in which I fall asleep without concerning myself with what holds Hypnos and Thanatos together...and, despite all that, that of which I am never aware.

Save perhaps in the mode of a sort of mise en arrêt, a tiny and silent recoil before the nothing of that primitive All—let us say, a sentiment of the World, or of existing (which is not an alternative...). It is always a detail, nothing but a detail in the immense population of things that provokes this infinitesimal suspension: the cry of a harrier streaking across the gray sky; a sudden chill that sends me back inside my skin.... A red sun that sinks vertically down the far side of things...

One will probably say that all this concerns the poetry of the World, and that philosophy is not poetry. For my part, I would say that there reigns here...nothing less than a logic of phenomenality, a fabric of a priori that readily put to shame the formula we used earlier (“the presence of the real”), just as much as the one metaphysics uses.¹

A student of Husserl’s phenomenology after Heidegger, Granel was working out modalizations of existence that recall the work of the later Heidegger, but also that of Merleau-Ponty. It is noteworthy that Granel’s final thought experiment deformed the work of the later Heidegger, but also that of Merleau-Ponty. It is noteworthy that Granel’s final thought experiment deformed existence past even presencing and absencing. Painterly, he worked with and through a critique of formalist space and totalizing logics. We may say “all” about “things,” but not “the all”—what stands before “me”

(he writes præ-ens) “disappears the moment I distribute it into matter and form.” (D, 165) Moreover, spaces and objects given or lived through the senses “oblige us to conceive all form as an arrangement of sensations in space.” But arranged how, asks Granel, “brought about in what way?” (D, 165) If space were a formal a priori, then the thinking of these forms would “break up” the validity of the pair, form and matter. Following Kant, Granel agrees that space cannot serve as the universal concept for things and their relations. In experience, if the evidence of material things clearly precedes the evidence of form, then effectively space would be an a priori—where a priori cannot mean temporally first—but it would be an a priori form of nothing. Or again, when we think about things, we agree that a manifold and its spatial relations (as it were) “rest...on limits.” (D, 165) But limits, Granel adds, “[are] frontally opposed to [the concept] of the ‘part’, in other words, of ‘matter’....” (D, 165) If the evidence of matter precedes that of form, and form is understood as arrangements of parts, then we are thinking things in two types of space—the one, relative to things; the other, to absolute space. It then becomes impossible to “think space itself” formally, as deriving from what deploys areas or spaces around itself. Kant introduces “limits” to explain how we distinguish matter in the manifold, from form. By contrast, parts belong to matter in a way that does not deploy space as exteriority. So Kant’s “limit” would be superimposed on interpenetrating fields, circumscribing relations between them, delimiting transitions, and permitting a kind of calculus of spaces. All this, within a greater space that is metaphysically presupposed. We may thus speak of “all,” but if we speak of “the all,” then we place matter and space, limitation and relations, in an encompassing, abstract spatiality. “That this concept of limitation is opposed to that of...‘matter’,” Granel writes, “and that, consequently, the notion of ‘form’ used to qualify space itself (e.g., as an “a priori form of sensibility”) would thus become totally enigmatic—this is what Kant seems to want to smooth over by merely ‘exposing’ this novelty (i.e., his “transcendental exposition of space and time”)...as though [Kant] feared having to expose himself...to a novelty for which ‘words are lacking us.’” (D, 165) Space cannot be a universal concept for things, and as pure form, space becomes the form of the unthinkable. What can this possibly mean?

Attempting to think back, as it were, from parts and wholes, form and matter, Gérard Granel argues in the phenomenological-hermeneutic way that he no doubt learned from Heidegger (though he was familiar principally with the Heidegger of Being and Time), that the a priori forms, space and time, may well be forms of “the
world." Yet, our world itself has no form. The painterly examples he gives provide instances, sorts of still lifes for the indeterminacy about which we say: "everything" or "it is x-ing; it is y-ing." Worlds unfold in modalities that escape even acute phenomenological sensitivities—atmospheric modalities, adverbial modes show kinds of "how": "it is so fresh today," "oppressed by the heaviness around me...," "weakened by the stormy blast." Also evinced are boundaries, limits—all the unnoticed perceptions that deploy "space" so called. It is familiar to the point of proving uncanny: the shape of a university building, says Granel, which rises in reds, is underscored by a "trail of vegetative green," and then ascends to a height in "a kind of notching that thrusts forward." (D, 168) If Granel were to paint the building, it would lose its function as a pedagogical structure. When and if we speak of it, it grows banal—and its function is restored, or it becomes a geographical marker. Before conceptualizing it, however, we treat it as a whole. Yet, "what are we aiming at when we designate, as a perceptual 'whole', something that owes nothing to the pragmatic notion of a 'building', or to a transcendent concept of an 'object', but which unfailingly distinguishes itself from the other 'wholes' represented by the trees around it, the cars...the sky?,” Granel asks. (D, 168) What are we aiming at? Space? Or, how is it we are aiming at all?—No doubt, we aim through Merleau-Ponty's conception of perceptual faith; no doubt, we aim thanks to the power of synecdoche to polarize things into wholes, or the silent work of grammar in all our perceptions. Recall Merleau-Ponty's discussion in 1964:

It is indeed true that, in order to disentangle myself from the complexities in which the perceptual faith casts me, I can address myself only to my experience of the world, to that blending with the world that recommences for me each morning as soon as I open my eyes, to that flux of perceptual life between it and myself which beats unceasingly...and makes my own secret thoughts change the aspect of faces and landscapes for me....

Here we are aiming with neither intentional nor ideational exclusivity, and the circuit of our so-called perceptual wholes is shot through with memory and associations. At work here are Husserl's passive syntheses of association, which he explored along with instincts in the 1920s when, late in his career, he thrust intentional

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analysis into the dark horizon of “empty retentions.” There, in what promised to be “a phenomenology of what we call the unconscious,” a sedimented past shapes the presence of a plethora of wholes thanks above all to the force of affect.³ Recall his example of the string of lights perceived “in the flesh,” in the Rhine Valley near Freiburg, as a train passed along the river’s edge. Alongside of these, yet ex nihilo, arose the mnemonic association of another string of lights carrying or propelled by an affective charge, resembling yet detached from the first string: “That in one stroke the string of lights is affective as a whole is obviously die to the pre-affective lawful regularities of the formation of unity.” (PAS, 202; emphasis added) For these “pre-affective laws” we can only suggest comparisons, and the comparisons concern their effects—effects corresponding to geometries or painterly structures, but in no way explaining the rise of these affects. Thus, Husserl was led to the uncanny fabric of association, recollection, and affectivity. He muses, “How [is] the pure ego able to become conscious of the fact that it has behind itself an endless field of past lived-experiences as its own, a unity of past life in the form of time, as a life that is in principle everywhere accessible to it through rememberings, or, what amounts to the same thing, is capable of being reawakened in the core of its being...”? (PAS, 169) The answer is enigmatically clear: every present is also a past reception, unity is firstly affective and only subsequently formal or architectonic; the energy of the overlapping geometries from which we too quickly deduce objective space derives its energy from a continuum uniting sensibility and affectivity. Here, the addition of association stabilizes yet complicates the phenomenological awareness Granel discussed as his present perception beneath awareness. Granel’s prae(s)ens thereby proves complex beyond discursive presentation, and the presence of the real proves simultaneously to

³ In Division 3: Association of his Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis, Husserl argues: “Each living present brings an ever new original constitution of the object, ever new perceptual data in extensive articulations, as ordered particular data, as a kind of ordered world; that is, an ever new source of a new affective force that can spread over the nexuses in an awakening manner, spread over the unities constituted in retention, and that can make possible syntheses of fusion, of connection, of contrast in every coexistence. An actual connection, an actual formation of unity always and necessarily presupposes affective force or affective differentiation.” Edmund Husserl, Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis, (tr.) A. J. Steinbock (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), §36, 221; my emphasis. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as PAS. Originally published as Analysen zur Passiven Synthesis. Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten 1918-1926, (ed.) M. Fleischer (The Hague: Martinus Niijhoff, 1966).
be one of the imagination. As Merleau-Ponty put it, “any theory of painting is a metaphysics.” The same is true of the worlds I inhabit in the perceptual faith.⁴ Again we find the logics of wholes and parts, lined or doubled in Husserl by affective modes that condition these in a way that thickens, as it were, the so-called presence of the real.⁵

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⁵ In his discussion of the thematic “position and the delimitation of themes concerning a phenomenological doctrine of association” (Division 3: Association, Chapter 1, §26), Husserl marvels at the curious “law” whereby associations are simultaneously mediate and immediate: if “an a recalls a b, and then this again recalls c,” “we are not immediately reminded of c, but rather, precisely, on the way through b.” (PAS, 167) He adds that the final member of the associative chain “dawns on us like a sudden thought” or an eruption (Einfall) and may be unanticipated and, as an intuition, qualitatively different from much if not all of what was previously given. For example, a seaside image spontaneously “crosses our mind” while we are in the midst of a conversation. This allows Husserl to pose the above cited question whose analytical difficulty surpasses the conceptual wherewithal of phenomenological investigation (although it can be partly described). With regard to the possibility of having a past and being conscious of it, he adds: “We realize, then, [in asking this question] that it really concerns nothing else than clarifying the fundamental problem, the basic, essential conditions of the possibility of a subjectivity itself.” (PAS, 169)

After a considerable development of types of synthesis—through resemblance and covering over or through dissimilarity, etc.—Husserl mentions the curiously intertwined effectivity of association, recollection and affectivity: “It is evident that not every affection can have arisen through the awakening of another affection. Every instance of action through an isolated extreme contrast, like an explosion, illustrates this essential possibility. Certainly, we do not need such extremes. While taking an evening stroll on the Loretto Heights a string of lights in the Rhine valley suddenly flashes in our horizon; it immediately becomes prominent affectively and unitarily without, incidentally, the allure having therefore to lead to an attentive turning toward.” (PAS, 202) This affective eruption, accompanied by a partial detachment of the experience from its (utterly distinct) context, the Loretto Heights, poses genetic questions that the young Husserl (of, say, the time consciousness investigations) would not have posed. As he puts it, “I do not need to say that the entirety of these observations that we are undertaking can also be given the famed title of the ‘unconscious.’ Thus, our considerations concern a phenomenology of the so-called unconscious.” (PAS, 201; emphasis added) The unexpected Einfall, and significantly, its affective force, which can isolate it without necessarily occasioning a “conversion of attention,” corresponds to instances like Levinas’s “experience” of the other-in-the-same, although Husserl still insists that “with respect to its form, time is a mono-dimensional continual ‘straight’ series (‘homogeneous’); likewise, the visual field with respect to its form is a two-dimensional manifold that is to be grasped as a continuous double series (a series of series).” (PAS, 194; emphasis added) However, “space” is not equivalent to time in these considerations, and Husserl allows for a nearly infinite plurality of affective fields and a visual
Granel is working less from a concern with epistemological conundrums, however, than from one that opens precisely toward the affective sources of our reflex to reverence and our fundamental confidence in what-is.\(^6\) Foreshortening his remarks, he turns to the difference, the limitation he conceives to be the easiest to approach. Having argued that the approach to presence would be better thought as the basic reserve of the world, or as the way in which wholes variegate amongst each other—and not just kinaesthetically, as Husserl himself realized in the 1920s as he expanded his phenomenology of constitution. “[It] is true that the light of day, gradually erupting out of nocturnal chaos, ‘engenders’ the first duality of the visible, according to which it ‘divides itself’ into the non-thing that is the Sky, and an Earth-of-things.” (D, 169) Here, with the sky, is an open that needs no “way out,” no point of exit, an opening inaccessible and ungraspable—“for not being,” Granel adds. This open region and the clearing of beings, the sky, says Granel in deliberately Heideggerian language, self-differentiates as a whole, and as “justly original”; though we have to allow that it both is and is not. “For,

\(\text{plurality, in order to preserve his formal and unidimensional conception of time and the transcendental consciousness that temporalizes.}\)

\(^6\) In the 1970s, Granel was engaged in wresting faith from a stagnant, doctrinaire Catholicism, and also from philosophy. He ventures a point that I sense Jean-Luc Nancy overlooks in his own deconstruction of Christianity, which remains a philosophical deconstruction, ending up at the “Open” of sense and at faithfulness to "sense." Granel argues in 1971: “Theology itself finds itself—particularly vulnerable to philosophy. The very heart of our enterprise...requires above all, despite their obscurity, knowledge of the reasons for this vulnerability, because the latter is at the heart of the Western deviation of the Christian Tradition [sic]. A "deviation" ["dévoiement"] in truth as old as the entirety of that Tradition and which affects all its theoretical and practical compartments—which in no way means that there is nothing that has not been...more or less seriously 'falsified', sometimes completely occulted by the penetration of what is metaphysical into what is Christian.” What is the penetration of philosophy into Christianity (before it is penetration into “theology” at all)? It is a discourse that approaches the “positivity” of Christianity in a philosophical way. The positivity in question is the structural “weakness” of Christianity, namely that something deemed a revelation could set someone into question. And again, “that man might be legitimately said capax Dei and this, in his very being.” This strange claim, deserted by faith and deviated into Platonism or Aristotelianism, writes Granel, should be “cleaned up and left free for the dual...patience of thought and faith.” While it is clear that Nancy follows such an inspiration, he often pulls even the thinnest faith—that of Saint James—toward philosophy, as part of his deconstructive strategy. See Granel, “La lutte dans l’Église” in Traditionis Traditio: Essais (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 288–89; my translation.
ultimately, the difference between this whole [of the university building] and the sky...[is] the easiest to grasp. The sky, precisely, never presents itself as a ‘thing’, in whose regard forms and qualities would stand in some relation of belonging. The sky is the paradigmatic non-thing. And in this way it is emblematic of the World as such." (D, 168; emphasis added) Note that here space and non-things are deployed in relations of reciprocity. So much for the deformatization of space as relations between things, or as an overarching "here." As originary, and as the evidence of evidences, the sky acquires—perhaps always already has, a divine quality—in multiple traditions. Dius and divus: the association of light, the bright non-place of sky, and the divine. Granel also writes, “sub divo,” under the light and beneath the divine; this informs theogonies and creation narratives. If these were to “belong” to philosophy as well, then it would be as informal a prioris, as non-things—as styles eliciting modalities and non-synthesizable regions of what-is. (D, 169) “The unity of appearing, from which arises invariably the dispensation of the sensible, has rarely the style of what is ‘thing-like’ [chosique]: for example, a tree that gleams as the daylight breaks over it confirms under our eyes the unity of a profusion in which it is obvious that the light does not pile, one upon the other, some ‘thing’ that would be the trunk, other ‘things’ that would be the branches, and then the twigs, all the way to a moving...multiplicity of those little-leafy-things. The tree is a unity of appearing of a non-thing-like type. There are many others, totally different from the vegetal profusion....” (D, 169) Merleau-Ponty meant nothing else when he argued that each theory of painting also opens a metaphysics. Of course, metaphysics need not stand radically separated from narrative, or even from a certain mythology.

The beauty of Granel’s other examples obscures the moment of concentration in light, which unfolds as and through phenomenological deformatization. This same beauty obscures the transition from presence-absence dynamics to their multiple hows, familiar to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, as well. Insisting on the reticence of perception leads Granel to argue that his adverbial profiles—“rising, notching, running”—all point to the “ungraspability of Being,” whose other pole is the body. Now, to the perceiver, the body is a blind site that deploys positions or “space” around its own obscure core, like Malevich’s black rectangle on a background of white.
2. Faith in Nancy’s Dis-Enclosure

Before we conclude too quickly that Granel, the one-time Marxist then Catholic Heideggerian, is guiding his teacher Heidegger in the all-too-French direction of aesthetics and sensibility, we should know that the godless, subjectless occurrences that Granel describes, like touches of colour or light on a body, represent a fundamental faith for Jean-Luc Nancy. The latter’s recent Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity (2008) is not unearthing the formal conditions of possibility of Christian faith, much less deconstructing them. It is exploring the simplest constituents of a faith without objects or purposes. To that end Nancy follows Gérard Granel. Curiously, having abandoned Christianity as corrupted by the “domination of a ‘Christendom’ carefully disguised as modernity” (D, 63), Granel never explicitly discussed the “destiny of his [own lost] faith.” (D, 63) Pursuing what he deems Kant’s “transcendental emptying out” of Being, Granel follows this kenosis or “red-thread of modern thought from Kant to Heidegger.” He understands it as parallel with the “finitization of being,” or the recognition of “the pure and simple finitude of being itself.” (D, 64) In this way, Granel works around Heidegger, evincing “a primitive mode of being that is different from the one described by [Heidegger’s] existential analytic, that is, the perceptual mode in which [things] are...‘given.’” (D, 66) The destiny of Granel’s own faith thus persists in his “perception créatrice,” without mystery or sublimity, but not without the beautiful, and not without the paradox of non-objective giving, which repeats through ongoing variations. (D, 67) We have here something like “aesthetic idea” in Kant, conjoined with imagination—and called “spirit” when it lent itself to communication.

7 We can see the agony of his disenchantment with the Catholic Church in his Traditionis Traditio: Essais, 233–302. Also see note 6, above.

8 Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment, (tr.) W. S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), § 49. In the section “On the Powers of the Mind which Consti- tute Genius” Kant observes: “an aesthetic idea is a presentation of the imagination which is conjoined with a given concept and is connected, when we use imagination in its freedom, with such a multiplicity of partial presentations that no expression that stands for a determinate concept can be found for it... [When the aim of such judgment is simply aesthetic and not cognitive] then the imagination is free, so that...it may supply, in an unstudied way, a wealth of undeveloped material for the understanding which the latter disregarded in its concept.” (185) The difference at which Granel, and in their way Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, respectively, is aiming is a radicalization of this understanding to a spontaneity and implicitness that does not rule out eventual communication,
In addition to Granel’s late work, Nancy’s *Dis-Enclosure* also works with the nearly apocryphal Epistle of James. This is the famous “Epistle of straw” by James the minor, which was derided by Luther. (D, 48) Together with the deormalization of presence in Granel, Nancy’s own project frames faith as a poetics of finitude—as so many ways of moving and being in a “world” emptied of things, wherein transcendence belongs to immanence and is neither precisely temporal (“now”), nor “spatial” (here versus there; above versus below). Nancy uses Granel’s chiasm of sky and body to imagine the eventuality of a faith without belief. In Granel, the self-giving of light rests on a there, or a Da, that is corporeal, that is our body, even as it is blind to itself. “There results ‘this utterly surprising consequence...that the very thing that constitutes the purest field of thought [the sky] is, as it were, laid [posé] upon our body’”; as such, body-perception or perception créatrice replaces a pure subject of consciousness, and even “the idea of an ‘incarnate spirit’” in Granel. (D, 68) *Perception créatrice* expresses the multiplicity of how in which “the principle of the world is...laid upon this [bodily] void: nothing else organizes [that principle].” (D, 68) What we thus call the “world” is the groundless Open, without transcendence, surrounding an active, self-modifying blind spot—the body. And all this is an aesthetic venture, the attempt to think through, or into Heidegger’s ontological “Er-eignis,” the active event(ing) and it appropriation.

To supplement Granel, then, Nancy reads faith through James’s Epistle, devoid of the Pauline Christology, in which God is conceived as an engenderer of humans, themselves creators and creative. James’s creator would be one that likewise gives light, emptying itself in its gift. Nancy writes—and this sums up what he has in mind for a philosophical approach to faith: “to give and to withhold...are not contradictories here and...to be and to appear would be identical: a phenomenology that is theological but not theophanic.” (D, 49; emphasis added) In short, where faith is confidence or trust, but “is” without representation. Faith here becomes a way of perceiving, which seeks a ground different from Merleau-Ponty’s “perceptual faith” even as it would be the deepest stratum of precisely that faith.

Nancy seeks a faith that has nothing to do with a truth believed, he insists. “Faith resides in inadequation to itself as a content of meaning.... This is not sacri-fication but veri-fication. This is also the

which Kant associated with “genius.” In a sense, this loosens the distinction between the uses and ends of the aesthetic ideas.

contrary of a truth **believed**. This faith, above all, does not **believe**. It is neither credulous nor even believing in the current sense of the term.... *It is a non-belief whose faith guarantees it as un-believable,* writes Nancy. (D, 53–54)

At this level of experimental deformalization, it seems superfluous to ask, *What* does faith not believe? What is the content that is bracketed here, or undercut? For James, this faith is practical, an *ergon* (D, 53), and for Nancy, the epistemic challenge is to keep the *logoi* of persuasion out of the picture. “...[T]he work of faith, the *poiēsis-praxis of pistis*, presents itself...under three aspects: the love of the neighbour, the discrediting of wealth, and the truthful and decided word. In each of these three aspects of work, each time what is in question is exposure to what cannot be appropriated, to what has outside [or beyond] itself...the justice and truth of itself.” (D, 55)

Nancy's deformalization moves back toward a pre-Christian confidence, or to his conception of Judaism, albeit without or before the Law. The work he is attempting wants to pass behind Paul, just as Granel passed behind Heidegger’s ontology. Yet there is something not wholly convincing about the diremption of faith and belief. To demonstrate what I mean by this, let me take a step outside Nancy's deconstruction, to illustrate the complexity of the pair, faith and belief. Nancy sets *belief* on the side of Paul and of orthodoxy. He makes belief a matter of conviction, like something lying between dogmatic utterances and rational arguments. It may be that these two dimensions of dogmatism and rationality work like polarities in Paul. The point here, however, is that Nancy's distinction, faith and belief, freezes what are really more *paradoxical* senses of belief itself. He thereby creates the impression that there could be a faith that was more spontaneous and more profound (metaphorically) than belief itself. In fact, much of the argument in Nancy's book depends on that distinction. For instance, the hyphen between “Judeo” and “Christian” depends on Nancy's polarization of faith and belief; not to mention the way in which their separation restructures the symbolic and phenomenological fields, so that James opposes the doctrinaire, more “Christian” Paul, whilst Granel, the Catholic Marxist, is understood to be talking about faith, because he is talking about the “simplest” perception. Yet Granel never uses the concept of faith in his aesthetics of experience.

I am arguing firstly that these ambiguities, which have made possible the deployment of Nancy’s logic, are already present in the term “belief,” itself. However, to acknowledge this would undermine the possibility of Nancy’s elements of a proto-Christianity, in which a rarefied faith is supposed to precede theological debates about the
status of the Christ, or the justice promised by the resurrection of the dead. The complexity of “belief” is what I want now to bring out by following Nancy’s intuition, stated much earlier in the book, that “Christianity is by and in itself a deconstruction.” (D, 35) Let us look, then, at the concept of belief through the uses of the French verb croire, since Nancy writes and thinks in French. I will show the parallels with the English “to believe,” wherever possible.

3. The Senses of Belief and its Cultural “Situations”

Approaching the concept of belief from the perspective of cultural anthropology, Jean Pouillon of the Institut d’Anthropologie culturelle at the Collège de France, reminds us that the French verb, “to believe” breaks into three, basic constructions: “croire à...,” “croire en...,” and “croire que....” The first two constructions take an indirect object and belong grammatically to objective constructions. “Croire” by itself, or “croire que...,” is the subjective form that takes a direct object. This plurality of constructions is neither accidental nor irrelevant to English, which itself breaks “to believe” into “believe in” and “believe that.” We must be clear about the nature of the difference. Croire à implies a belief in the existence of something. It carries an ontological commitment. Croire en expresses firstly confidence, or trust. Croire que introduces acts of representation. “I believe that” means I represent something to myself. Now, I can croire en, or believe in a friend, or a god, but I cannot believe in “le démon,” in French. This is because, no matter what my belief may be in the existence of demons, or evil spirits, I do not place confidence in them. In contrast to the existential, ontological commitment of croire à, the expression croire en translates a confidence in which the existence factor is implicit. This is basically the case in English as well, where we say “I believe in evil forces” as a kind of ontological claim, without implying trust in evil forces. However, if we say “I believe in you,” we clearly imply that we are engaging in a moral or aesthetic relation, entailing trust. With that, there is little question about existence: I believe in you not because you exist, which is clear, but because of what you are capable of, because of what you have done. “I believe in God” is likewise not about existence, except when it becomes a

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A riposte in an argument. More important is the fact that the believer does not so much believe self-consciously, she just perceives, or sees things in a certain way. Therefore, “to believe in” (croire en) immediately entails two possible modes of perception and two implicit modes of existence: the perceived, trusted friend and the trusted god whose “appearing” may or may not require representation. In both cases, existence never functions as an attribute attached to a substance. Existence is implicit in the perception, conditions it and, for monotheisms, existence is situated at one of two possible levels, the immanent or the transcendent. Those levels are what Granel and Nancy both attempt to merge.

Into this linguistic ambiguity, which in English is greater because English possesses no form for the French croire à, comes the following, additional equivocation: belief as an utterance of conviction versus belief as an expression of doubt: “I believe that 2 plus 2 equals 4” as against “I believe it will rain.” Jean Pouillon points out that when belief involves conviction and affirmation, the content of the belief may well be a representation. Yet, representation and assertion of existence (or conviction about existence) are separable from each other. “The assertion [of existence] can be bracketed—as in Husserl’s epoché—and this is what allows us to study beliefs as such: one does not have to believe [the existence of, or content of] what one believes in order to analyse it. The ‘I believe’, which often precedes a host of utterances of diverse types, is precisely the mark of distancing and not that of adherence.”

When representation accompanies an assertion of existence; notably, when representation cannot be disentangled from the conviction about its existence, “we are often enough “on the side of ideology,” Pouillon argues. “There are no isolated beliefs, each representation is, more or less clearly, more or less consciously inserted into a global system, which can be religious but equally well philosophical, [or] political....” (RVC, 45) It is the representation that polarizes confidence, with its implicit assumption of existence, toward various aesthetics or even fetishes. Representations are especially valuable in mobilizing desire or willing toward a given end. Think of the florid representations of Gehenna in Tertullian, Thomas Aquinas, or the revelation of John, found recapitulated in Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals. Yet, ethnography shows that the confidence dimension expressed by croire en, “to believe in,” is actually the oldest form of belief. Confidence need not require representation, and it arises out of a horizontal dimension of exchange and reciprocity. Thus, the term “credit” in its relation to credo, Pouillon writes, “In his Vocabulary of Indo-European Institutions...,” Émile Benveniste treats belief in the
section devoted to ‘economic obligations’ and not in that devoted to ‘pouvoir, droit, religion.’ Moreover, [Benveniste] sees in this credit accorded, which must also return to the creditor, the original sense of belief. Should we then see belief-as-representation as a derivative sense? [Should we see, here,] a meaning added later on? [But that] would make the verb ‘croire’ into a conglomeration without [possible] unity.” (RVC, 45)^

The economic origins of belief as credere, meant as an act without representation, are the original ones. No doubt they could not long stand alone, as it were, without the sanction of authority, and eventually representation itself. Belief with representation, as in a representable God, authorizes and legitimates the horizontal economy of confidence, as if “from above.” Psychoanalytically speaking, it may be that the horizontal relation is too fragile (believing in the borrower or trusting in the movement of goods and words) to survive unsanctioned for long periods, without a vertical axis being superimposed on it. This is because the vertical plane fixes the horizontal one as it legitimates it, opening still other types of exchange—of a more dangerous kind, perhaps, where God or the gods are party to the exchange itself, pre-eminently as witnesses. Think of the Potlatch, largely without a vertical legitimation; compare this with contracts or litigation with divine sanction. This means simply that belief can be as thin as Nancy’s “faith,” or it can be as symbolically incrusted as

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11 See Émile Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, Vol. 1, Économie, parenté, société (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 171–79. tr. by E. Palmer as a single volume as *Indo-European Language and Society* (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1973), 138–44. Translations are nevertheless mine. Page references, separated by a slash, are first to the French, then to the English text. In analysing the roots of words like créance and credo, Benveniste proposes a lengthy discussion of *kred* (confidence), and possibly the root of heart, cor, cordis. He says, “we are thus moving back toward a distant prehistory whose principal trades at least can be sketched: rivalry of power between clans, divine or human champions wherein one must prove one’s vigour or generosity to be assured of victory or to win a game (the game is a properly religious act: the gods play). The champion needs others to believe in him, that others confer *kred* upon him and place it in his charge so that he can spread its benefits over those who have thus supported him: there is, in this way, between man and gods, a ‘do ut des’ [‘I give that you may give’].” (177/143) We thus see coming together three ostensibly autonomous currents of cultural-economic rivalry and violence, religiosity and ludism, and the dubious association between *kred*, confidence, and the heart. Whatever the validity of the *kred-cors* association, which Benveniste discusses, belief is indissociably woven together with an affective perception; one not so different from the affect that fuels associative memory and imagination in Husserl and Granel.
belief-with-representations and a *credo* that gradually comes to be taken as the object of the belief itself. Remarkable in Granel’s exercise is his struggle to set the high, the *divus*, of the sky upon the body, as though vertical and horizontal were interlaced in an intimate relationship. Inspired by Heidegger, yet criticizing him, the sky is Granel’s *Open*—an immanent transcendence. For his part, Nancy seems less concerned with the symbolic and political risks implicit in the vertical axis, though the political risks clearly pose questions of justice. He does not wonder whether its return would undermine his logic of faith as *poiēsis* and *praxis*; that faith which Nancy reads out of James, and which he understands to be action free of representations. After all, Pouillon makes it abundantly clear that belief as confidence already entails an ontological conviction with no apparent need to declare itself. It is the non-believer who says that believers *believe*, whereas believers appear dogmatically to believe when they invoke arguments of authority defensively or out of *resentment*. Thus, before others, before so-called non-believers, the believers invoke the vertical axis for purposes of legitimation. There too, or there *again*, begins the political gesture.

A great difficulty lies in that we believe that everyone believes in much the same way. However, the awkward combination of believing as confidence, believing as existential presupposition, and believing bonded to representation and a *credo*—this awkward combination is found mainly in monotheism. It is out of monotheism that a two-world vision arises. And I do not think that deconstruction can protect immanence from the kind of endless stretching or struggling it wages, in order to produce a perspective outside it (above it) from which to view, or to present, itself.

For Pouillon, that is an essentially Western problem. His ethnography of the Hadjeraï of Chad presents a belief in spirits, called the *margaï*, to whom the Hadjeraï devote a cult. The *margaï* elude representation because they are invisible and there is no need to materialize them. Why? Because their cohabitation with humans is already a natural thing, so that disorders and troubles caused by them are *never* supernatural, but rather part of the ordinary course of the natural world. (RVC, 49) Hadjeraï empiricism also recognizes that their *margaï* may not exist in other parts of the world. However, this does not cause them ontological dilemmas, any more so than the absence of palm trees in Québec causes difficulties. The this-worldly empiricism of the Hadjeraï proceeds from their cosmological monism. Polytheistic religions are frequently one-world religions, which means that they can dispense with revelation, witnesses, and the guarantees of doctrinal transmission by a church or by an explicitly
political institution. It is for that reason, too, that this people translates “faith” with the verb *abidè*, according to the *Dictionnaire Dan-galeat*. (RVC, 46–47) *Abidè* means “to serve,” “to devote a cult to.” It is sometimes supplemented by another verb, *amniyè*, meaning “to give one’s trust to something,” “to rely on.” (RVC, 47) The latter verb, *amniyè*, corresponds to our believing in, or *croire en*. It has a Semitic root from which the liturgical “amen” also comes. (RVC, 47) What is important here is that the philologically first sense of *religio*, meaning to perform faithfully one’s obligations to a cult or an ancestor, is effectively expressed in *abidè*.12 The confidence connotation of *amniyè* prolongs the dimension of believing-in something, but no representation of that something seems necessary.

12 Benveniste recapitulates the complex history of the uses of “*religio*” through Latinity, disputing among other things the sole etymology of a “tie” of piety, “which would ‘tie us in’ [relier] to the divinity, *uinculo pietatis obstricti et religati sumus*” [we are a bond of piety tight-knit and interconnected], as the Christian Lactantius put it. Despite the notion of a tie or connection to certain sites or things, *religio* “does not denote ‘religion’ in its entirety, that is certain.” See Émile Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, Vol. 2, *Pouvoir, droit, religion* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 268–69/519–22; my translation. More important is the sense of a kind of scruple, by which one observes one’s cult. At this level it means simultaneously an action whose affective component engenders regularity. From there it moves into a psychological sense of being concerned to act or observe. According to Benveniste, “*Religio* takes up *scrupulous*. From there comes the expression *religio est* ‘to have scruples’ and also *religioni est* or *religio tenet* with an infinitive proposition... ‘some people feel a scruple (in such and such circumstances) about going out by the Carmental gate.’” (269/520) This use of *religio* and its derivative *religiosus* (“scrupulous with regard to the cult, making it a case of conscience with regard to rites”) is profoundly psychological or subjective, and will come to be supplemented—as Cicero teaches—by a deformation of *legere*. *Legere*, and not *ligare*: *legere* is related to “to gather together, bring back to self, to recognize.” Prior to the spread of Christianity, “the Roman *religio* is, at its origin, essentially subjective.” Christianity will restructure the use of the term such that the tie in question is “remodelled on the idea that man made for himself about his relation to God, an idea that was totally different from that of the old Roman religio and prepared the way for the modern sense of the term.” (270–72/522) Remarkable here is that *abidè* is ostensibly closer to Roman *religio*, while *amniyè* suggests a potential opening to senses found in monotheism, notably Christianity—unless we are already reading the term through Christian lenses. Most important here—and this is what Nancy wants to deconstruct—is the displacement of the scruple and the connections, to the relationship itself with God; a relationship that had become tenuous in post-Exilic Judaism and which, in Christianity, required a mediator.
4. The Perplexities of Nancy’s Reduction of Faith

To be sure, Pouillon is not Nancy; he is not deconstructing anything. His exploration of “belief” shows clearly that the ambiguity of the word is distributed between two terms among the Hadjeraı̈. And, even if we utilize other terms ourselves, like “credence” or “confidence,” it remains the case that they all stand in the signifying universe of the verb “to believe.” To this, Pouillon argues: “the ambiguity is not simply the [verb’s] polysemia; it is not the fact that the verb [“to believe”] takes one meaning then another, each of which would be [sequential and] univocal. It is that they are all intrinsically inter-related, even when they are contradictory....” (RVC, 48; emphasis added) This over-determination—along with the presence of representations and a credo or dogma—is what Nietzsche’s “death of God” destabilized. Nancy acknowledges clearly his debt, “Nietzsche tells me nothing without also communicating an experience to me. This contagion between the discourse and the ordeal thoroughly marks an oeuvre that...does not cease to exasperate...The experience is always that of the death of God. The death of God is always the fact of this immense destitution of the representation of the premise...of representation in general.” (D, 75) By leading belief back toward (his conception of) faith (independent of representation), Nancy would return us to something like the originary horizontal economy of confidence, and the practical exchanges which turn on trust, thereby supposedly dispensing with the need for vertical legitimation, representation, or ontological arguments. But it is not so sure that the two-world logic of monotheism vanishes along with its representations. Nancy argues that that deconstruction precedes him. “Nietzsche knew, first, the agitation that takes hold when presence comes to tremble as the premise[13] withdraws.... We should understand Nietzsche’s Umwerten in this sense. It is necessary to um-werten [“re-value”] the Werte [“values”].... That means: we must rethink value’s price, considering it as an absolute price and one no longer dependent on a principle that sets it fast, fixes it.” (D, 76)

Indeed, Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity implies that there is still something to deconstruct, still du chemin à faire in working toward an absolute value. As such, Nietzsche’s work would be unfin-

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13 “Premise” translates here ”le principe.” In order to avoid certain equivocities around “principe,” I have used “premise” in the English translation where underscoring its function in a larger structure or logic is the primordial sense of “principe.” Here, it clearly means a grounding postulate; here, the grounding postulate is the God whose death Nietzsche merely pointed out as an event.
ished (or interminable) and this monotheism, with its core value of a redeemer “within/without the world” (D, 79), remains a gnoseological object and a subject of history, before which other religions live and die with various consequences—or simply follow the defunct God of values into oblivion. Whatever we make of claims for a religion with a redeemer who raises value to the immeasurable (D, 79), it has been essential to Christianity to deploy a credo, with representation, in light of which other beliefs are delegitimated as sources of ultimate value. Does that mean that the content of Christian faith should be transvalued? It certainly argues that the polysemy of the verb croire, with its contradictory aspects held in tension in Christianity, translates an intrication in which horizontal economies of exchange and confidence flow around—sometimes into—vertical economies of sanction and authorization. This is not peculiar to monotheism, but Pouillon insists that animism gives more latitude to the horizontal, allowing what is vertical in monotheism to perfuse nature as a whole—invisibly and for the community of Hadjeraï. By contrast, a quest for absolute value, for an “outside [of] the valence of values in general” (D, 78) exerts a terrible pull on the Open that, in Nancy, is intended to translate an aesthetic transcendence-immanence. Nancy eludes this by concentrating the movement of his deconstruction on an “‘inner’ experience, which is not ...the fact of some interiority qua subjectivity...[but] the literal and simple text of the retreat of the homogeneity of equivalent values.” (D, 78) “Inner experience” here is momentary; a destabilization of the horizontal axis of exchange and reciprocal values, in favour of something nevertheless not vertical because it is other than height, beyond elevation. This too was Nietzsche’s project, and we hear it clearly when he speaks of distance, whether as pathos or as characteristic of the fidelity of friendship. In Nancy, such hyperbole nonetheless disappoints, because it always carries a significant immanentist weight: “This experience is an ‘experience at a heart’...an experience that forms itself right at a heart...as the interval between the within and the without.” (D, 80) And, lacking a fixed site [and time, since the moment returns], this beyond being “is everywhere, it is nowhere.” (D, 80)

Benveniste points out, following his discussion of the polyvalence of “religio,” that superstes, “the adjective of superstare” and often contrasted with religio, before it denotes something “above” or “superior,” translates as “a progression relative to that which is found below [au-dessous]”: “Similarly, superstare means ‘to stand beyond’, ‘to subsist past or beyond,’ in fact, beyond an event that has destroyed the rest. Death has come upon a family: the superstites
have subsisted *beyond* the event...thus having been a ‘witness’ to it.”

Between the survival of an event of annihilation—whether we associate the death of God or the Shoah with such an event—and the pursuit of non-relative value “everywhere and nowhere,” Nancy enlists James and Granel to a vision *formally* not unlike the symbolic *monism* of the Hadjeraïï. It would be simplistic to call “pagan” a post-modern religiosity without *credo* or phenomenization, which does not devalue the body of flesh, and bears witness...at least to semantic cohabitations like *dius divus*, light and height. It would be simplistic because Nancy’s deconstruction is seeking an *answer* to the crisis of civilization accompanying two world wars, the death of God, and the sapping of ethical visions. For this book is *also* Nancy’s response to Heidegger’s “nur ein Gott kann uns jetzt retten.” And it would be a rejoinder to Horkheimer’s observation that preserving unconditional meaning in the absence of a god is vain from the outset. This is how we should *begin to understand* Nancy’s justification. "I will call ‘deconstruction of monotheism’ that inquiry that consists in disassembling and analyzing the constitutive elements of monotheism, and more directly of Christianity...in order to go back to (or to advance toward) a resource, which could at once form the buried origin and the imperceptible *future* of the world that calls itself ‘modern.’” (D, 34)

Yet this buried origin and future is the “living God,” which holds two fundamental, residual elements together: the rarefied sense of faith as act—faith that comes back to its proximity, as Pouillon showed us, to belief: “*fides quae creditur,*” or the “faith that is believed.” (D, 153) Ultimately, Nancy has willed one thing in that regard, to keep intentionality out of belief: “the greatest spiritual and theological analyses of the Christian faith show that faith is rather...the adhesion to itself of an aim without other...without correlative object, or with no fulfilment of sense but that of the aim itself.” (D, 153) It is almost simpler to point to what is not-Christian here, than to argue for an essentially Christian character in this faith. Faith-in-belief, exposure of self, experience as *ex-peirazo*—proceeding as from a risk or trial. Nancy expresses this as *homoousia*, a charitative aligning of being that is all act and no essence. *Homoousia* but not *parousia*, he argues, thereby eliminating the *iustificatio* of Christianity as first defined by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians: “But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then *is* our preaching vain, and your faith *is also* vain.” (1 Cor 15:13–14, KJV) For Saint Paul,

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resurrection entails a pneumatic body, but as the heart of Christian justice, of *justification* of Christian existence, it must be a victory over death.\(^\text{15}\) This victory is simultaneously a victory over the flesh that sins—the moral flesh that was governed by the “Law” of the original covenant—and the spiritual body that belongs to Christ. This division, instituting the Christian conception of an equality of spiritual members of the body that is the Church, is Paul’s destruction, or radicalization—according to how one reads Paul, and who one takes him ultimately to be—of the Law. “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” (Rom 7:22–23)\(^\text{16}\)

5. The Ascetic *versus* the Faithful Subject: Two Approaches to the Letter of Saint James

In Nancy, the surpassing of Christianity goes together with its reduction to an original *élan*, for which faith is formally self-referential and without a specific content that would motivate a proclamation or promise—be it of *parousia*, the return of the risen Christ. He argues that his bracketing of Pauline Christianity leaves him with a “Jamesian” Christianity of the act. “The moment of the act as such is dominant, and the sense merges into it.” (D, 153) While this is “so inti-

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\(^\text{15}\) This appears to be the case, whether one reads Paul as a “radical Jew” with Daniel Boyarin, or as the forger of Christianity. The pneumatic body permits an understanding of resurrection and justifies Paul’s claims to superiority of knowledge of “Jesus-Messiah” (Jesus as the messiah; the hyphenated expression comes from Agamben’s reading of Romans), to James and Peter’s *paradosis*. The latter knew Jesus in the flesh; Paul knows him through a higher paradosis. As Boyarin paraphrases Paul (Gal 1:12 “For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ”), “Paul’s ‘negative’ statement is exactly the essence of his argument. Paul is emphasizing the superiority of his gospel precisely because it has no human, no fleshly, origin but only the content of the revelation of Christ in him.” This, Boyarin points out fairly, shows why Paul believes “his opponents [Peter and James] are found wanting.” See Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 110. By this argument, no deconstruction of Christianity could circumvent Paul; moreover, Paul’s “pneumatism”—as a radical Jew—is not somehow less Jewish or more distant from the hyphen Nancy emphasizes between “Judeo” and “Christian” than James and Peter’s fleshly paradosis or experience of the “presence” of Christ.

\(^\text{16}\) Also see Didier Franck’s remarkable discussion of Paul and Luther on the two bodies and the meaning of the will under Christianity, in *Nietzsche et l’ombre de dieu* (Paris: PUF, 1998), 55–67.
“mate” that “it is inaccessible to the subject” (D, 154), it is not otiosely subjective, he insists. However, a significant difficulty confronts Nancy’s reduction. “From the point of view of the Christian community, to interpret the act of faith as a subjective and existential adherence is, consequently, completely erroneous.” (D, 154) We may assume he means that either: 1) “the Christian community,” as social and ideological entity or entities, will find Nancy’s interpretation “erroneous,” because it offers nothing on which to construct community. Or Nancy may mean that: 2) the Christian community could only renew itself if, by deforming the source of Christianity, it could grasp how such an interpretation is necessary and primordial. Instead of elaborating the relationship between act-source and community-formation, Nancy pursues the aporetics of faith. “Yet it is true that faith...becomes progressively, as faithfulness, faithfulness to nothing.” (D, 154) Or again, faithfulness to belief and its irreconcilable meanings. Of course, that saps Christianity of its history and historicity. Above all, it supposes something extraordinary, something Nietzsche also sought to reach by reinterpreting the Christian iustificatio (the resurrection of the dead), although Nietzsche proceeded from the body of flesh, and its life as will to power, under the “Idea of ideas”—“Eternal recurrence.” For Nietzsche, only a radical Umwertung or transvaluation could carry us past the ruin of the God we can no longer believe in, but who hangs on like the shadow of Buddha in his cave. That one might accede to a Christianity that “preceded” Paul occurred to Nietzsche in the last years of his philosophical life. We find it in his psychological portrait of Christ as “this ‘bringer of glad tidings’ [who] died as he lived, as he taught...to demonstrate how one ought to live.” And this Christ will be contrasted with the “Crucified” or “the Son of God,” a figure who was virtually created by the disciples (i.e., by ressentiment) motivated to

17 Here, with the complex question of a community of difference—different peoples, different faiths and practices—is where the question of Paul’s significance to an original Christianity, or a messianic Judaism, stands in its starkest light. Unlike Franck, for whom the resurrection of the dead constitutes the core of the Christianity that Nietzsche overcame through his new gravitas, the idea of eternal recurrence and its emphasis of life and the transvaluating instant or now, Boyarin argues that his vision “enabled Paul to understand the allegorical structure of the entire cosmos as the solution to the problem of the Other...” (Boyarin, A Radical Jew, 111; emphasis added.)


determine the cause of the death of their teacher, according to Nietzsche disputing the portraits of Christ by his contemporaries, Strauss and Renan. We should pause briefly with Nietzsche to understand how his demythification inspires Nancy.

Whatever the lasting merits of the history of Judaism by Julius Wellhausen, which Nietzsche studied as he took notes for The Anti-christ, his Prolegomena to the History of Israel (1883) constituted for decades the authoritative work on the history of the Jews. This work provided Nietzsche material for his conception of Umwertung, since it occurred first within Judaism, only to culminate in the transvaluation proposed by Paul. For my purposes—and to the degree that Nancy’s work is influenced, subtly but decisively, by Nietzsche’s project—what is essential is that any trans- or re-valueation of Christianity must take into account the narrative history and political dimensions of that religion. This also means determining the relationship between violence in its content and the metaphysics by which that content endured. We find elements of that relationship in Wellhausen, whose decisive contribution was to offer Nietzsche two historic points onto which to attach transvaluation as a bona fide historical possibility. Without that possibility, whether in Judaism or Pauline Christianity, the eventuality of a third or ultimate transvaluation would only be fanciful. Moreover, without the Nietzschean possibility of transformation, Nancy’s deconstruction is demotivated. This also is why Nancy’s “faith” proves to be without any clear links to community, whatever the Christian doctrinal basis of the latter might be. I am saying that community and historical content are precisely what cannot be found in the “gospel” of James. Nancy’s alternative approach, to a Christianity not distorted by the Pauline reinterpretation of the Law and reframing of justice as resurrection, leaves us with faith as act—something thinner than even the teachings of Nietzsche’s otherworldly “symbolist,” viz., the Jesus he glimpsed by deconstructing the depictions of the messiah in his time.

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20 Ibid., § 40, 164–65. Nietzsche writes, “The fate of the Evangel was determined by the death—it hung on the Cross... It was only the death, this unexpected shameful death, only the Cross, which was in general reserved for the canaille alone...which brought the disciples face to face with the real enigma: ‘Who was that? What was that?...’ To which he adds, by way of his genealogy of a “religion” originating in reseitement: “Only now did the chasm open up: ‘Who killed him? Who was his natural enemy?... The popular expectation of a Messiah came once more into the foreground; an historic moment appeared in view: the ‘kingdom of God is coming to sit in judgement on its enemies... But with this everything is misunderstood.”
I touch on the problem of the \textit{psychology of the redeemer}.... True life, eternal life is found—it is not promised, it is here, it is \textit{within you}: as life lived in love, in love without deduction or exclusion.... To make a \textit{hero} of Jesus!... To speak with the precision of the physiologist: a quite different word would rather be in place here: the word \textit{idiot}.\textsuperscript{21} We recognize a condition of morbid susceptibility of the \textit{sense of touch} which makes it shrink back in horror from every contact, every grasping of a firm object. Translate such a physiological \textit{habitus} into its ultimate logic...as antipathy towards every form, every special and temporal concept, towards everything firm...institution, Church, as being at home in a world undisturbed by reality of any kind, a merely "inner" world, a "real" world, an "eternal" world... "The kingdom of God \textit{is within you}"...\textsuperscript{22}

Nietzsche’s deconstruction was historical and philological. He sought to establish a justice not rooted in Idealist metaphysics, which he identified explicitly as the inheritor of Christianity, so far as it perfused German philosophy from Leibniz onward. Nietzsche’s alternative justice had to be based upon the affirmation of life itself, and it found a new principle of valuation in the trial of Eternal Recurrence, intended to confer a new, atheological \textit{gravitas} on precisely that life. For Nietzsche, then, the deconstruction—better, the \textit{destruction}—of Christianity required historical criticism of Paul, but above all the conception of a new gospel, which we find in \textit{Zarathustra}. Nancy’s deconstruction is to my eyes less radical. Inspired by his discussion of the “Hyphen,” between “Judeo” and “Christian,” he has found in James the Minor his antipode to Paul. Now, James’s legitimacy rests on two points: firstly, his enduring proximity to Jewish law and observance; secondly, his ostensible relation to Jesus. Even the author of the Vulgate, Jerome, identifies him with the family of Jesus, as a cousin. In short, this figure would represent the ways and ideals of Nietzsche’s greatest “symbolist” in a way that Paul could not. Moreover, the absence of the Epistle of Saint James from the canonical letters of the Western Church in the second and third centuries when they were being assembled, suggests that James long stood outside the orthodoxy taking shape at least in the “Western Catalogue.” This increases his value to Nancy. For all that, numerous biblical commentators—starting with Luther—insist that James and

\textsuperscript{21} This is an indirect reference to Dostoevsky’s \textit{The Idiot}, which Nietzsche knew of (if he did not read it); the Idiot or other-worldly epileptic who stands as a figure without \textit{ressentiment} or guile.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{The Antichrist}, §§ 28–29, 152–53.
Paul were both criticizing orthodoxy, and that the difference between them was one of emphasis: “The general tenor of Saint James’ Epistle is that of an earnest practical morality, related to the teaching of Saint Paul much as the...maxims of the Book of Proverbs are related to the prophetic visions....”\(^2^3\) For that reason, this other, Jamesian Christianity, ostensibly closer to the “Hyphen” that Nancy expatiates, has something artificial to it. The difficulty becomes clearer still when, approaching the faith of the pure act as found in James, Nancy forges a Granelian-Heideggerian path through the “Open.” Despite an extreme sensitivity to the difficulty of his project, Nancy ignores the asceticism of James. Ironically, it was precisely his well-known ascetic existence, and observance of Jewish law, that made James less of a connector or hyphen between Judeo and Christian, and more like the “ascetic priest” in whom Nietzsche, this time, saw life striving against itself—\textit{even as it obeyed an incomprehensible, vital necessity in so doing.} “What does this mean?” asks Nietzsche.

So monstrous a mode of valuation stands inscribed in the history of mankind not as an exception but as one of the most widespread and enduring of all phenomena.... For consider how regularly and universally the ascetic priest appears in almost every age;... he prospers everywhere; he emerges from every class of society.... It must be a necessity of the first order that again and again promotes the growth...of this \textit{life-inimical} species—it must indeed be in the \textit{interest of life itself} that such a self-contradictory type does not die out.... “Triumph in the ultimate agony”: in this enigma of seduction...it recognized its brightest light, its salvation....\(^2^4\)

The “future” Nancy sketches thus appears naïve. \textit{Homoousia}, not promises, he urges, using James. “We are becoming a culture of pure faithfulness: the faithful assured not only to be obliged, but to want to be faithful. Faithful to what? To sense, and thus...to the very gesture of faithfulness.” (D, 154) Having rarefied historic content, Nancy looks past the ascetic \textit{tenor} of faithfulness, even to faithfulness itself. It is as though the life-denying discipline, in which Nietzsche perceived the sign of life opposing itself \textit{in order to overcome itself}, were no longer relevant to the minimalist faith that would be the future of

\(^2^3\) "The General Epistles: James" in \textit{The Bible: Authorized King James Version} (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Ltd./Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, no date), 382–84, esp. 383. No commentator’s name is listed for these commentaries.

Christianity. Indeed, the polarizing concept that permits the emergence of conscience, i.e., sin, were a secondary consideration to Nancy. “Sin” endures in his discussion, but without connection to discipline or to praxis. It understandably corresponds to a concept of a certain indebtedness, as it does in Heidegger. For my part, I am not arguing that the suffering Nietzsche exposed in the *Genealogy* need represent the future of Christianity. It is rather that the movement of willing, whatever we understand this to be, desire, resoluteness, or hope, requires a denser object, a thicker sense. That is the lesson Nietzsche gleans from the ascetic nihilism out of which a bridge to “beyond” a defunct Christianity might be glimpsed. For Nancy, however, it is only a “living God” that can hold together faithfulness-to-sense, and indebtedness-to-existence. But what does the “living” in this conception of God mean? This God “is properly self-affection,” writes Nancy, using an expression to which Michel Henry repeatedly recurred when he pondered a phenomenology of life. To be sure, asceticism may well be a form of self-affection. But asceticism engages desire in a very different way than would the self-affection to which Nancy refers here. Let us try to preserve a subtle reading of this claim; for, in its rudimentary sense it holds, simply, that sensuous self- or auto-affection is a movement whose positivity also requires a dimension of negativity—and that means a content. Nancy writes: “It [this auto-affection] presents the person to itself in the infinite dimension of itself to itself.” (D, 156) But his claim is underdetermined. Was this not also the upshot of *Angst* in Heidegger’s 1927 characterization of the fundamental, existential attunements of being-in-the-world—which by 1929 also included joy and boredom?

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25 The sense or meaning of “sense,” here, is specific to Nancy, or to a certain post-modern reading in search of an *Ur-Christentum*. Boyarin—who is not alone in this insight—suggests that Paul’s vision, which opens his eyes to “the allegorical structure of the cosmos,” would approach “sense” in a different, I would argue illuminating, way that does not turn on a devaluation of Paul’s teaching. In this, Boyarin joins the Christian, Hans-Dieter Betz’s commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians, to argue that the opposition “according to the flesh (sarka)” versus “according to the spirit (pneuma),” is designed to explain why “the physical observances that constitute the physical Israel as the People of God have been transmuted and fulfilled in the allegorical signification in the spirit, thereby constituting the faithful gentiles as Israel in the spirit.” (Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 113) This interpretation provides a significant response to Nietzsche’s invectives against Paul. Equally important, it implies that an originary radical Judaism, or “Christian-ity,” passes through the reinterpretation of meaning and messianisms as allegorical and universalizing. That notion of allegorical then rejoins Nietzsche’s psychological insights into Jesus as a “symbolist,” thereby closing the circle of interpretation.
I would argue that self-affection is too thin, too variously inconvertible to qualify a living God, whatever the site of its glimmering might be. How can self-affection—if it is to be “more,” somehow, than the sensuous self-apperception of being-alive—be the core intuition of the living God? Self-affection brings us, in Heidegger at least, before ourselves—as finite or, from the perspective of a “subject,” as the nothing that is an open site, a Da-. I sense, here, in Nancy’s purification, less the source of Christianity than an interpretation that might be its rarefied future—provided Christianity were reconcilable with Heidegger’s philosophy of the ontological difference. But that difference itself requires the ontic richness of world and implements to provide a path toward the ontological, like the polychrome world Granel adumbrated. But suddenly we find that Granel and James do not merge so clearly into a single proto- or para-Christianity. As such, Nancy’s future pulls religion, or Christianity, toward what philosophers lamented was its mere servant, precisely “Greek” philosophy. That should be contrary to Nancy’s wish; at least insofar as he follows Granel in urging the preservation (and revivification) of what is peculiar to Christianity. Perhaps this is the best mode of access to a horizontal future; say, one in which croire en were enduringly separated from croire à. But in that case, Nancy’s separation from his inspiration, Nietzsche, would also be definitive. I cannot but wonder whether such a future would not resemble something more like a European Buddhism—of which Nietzsche feared his fellow décadents were not yet capable.

bettina.bergo@umontreal.ca

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26 See note 6 above
27 See The Antichrist, §§ 20–23. For Nietzsche, Christianity and Buddhism are both “décadence” religions. However, “Buddhism…is a hundred times colder…more objective.” Europeans, that is “the barbarian,” cannot accept it, because to them “suffering in itself is not decent: [the European] first requires it to be interpreted before he will admit to himself that he suffers….“ (§ 23)