"A part of me remained there, with her . . . "
Being a Loving Community In and Out of Our Dreams

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Introduction

In Western contemporary culture, narratives referring to the presence of others in dreams can be approached from different perspectives:

1. Psychological approaches that conform to different schools of thought. For instance, following psychodynamic views, in which others showing up in one's dreams are to be considered as metaphors of parts of one's self; or when using relational approaches instead, the way others show themselves in a dream can metaphorically represent the state of the relationship between the dreamer and the person represented in that dream.

2. Transpersonal approaches, which do not necessarily have metaphysical implications, supported by studies led mainly by quantum physicists on the nature of consciousness. Following these views, others are at least in part "other than the dreamer," but this "otherness" represents aspects of both others' and dreamer's personalities that can be shared because of their peculiar features (e.g. non locality). These aspects can be studied in terms of theories deriving from quantum physics.

3. A community approach, which comprehends the two levels sketched above but also implies that metaphysical aspects of otherness – others can manifest their pure and original "I" in relationship with the dreamer's pure and original "I."

Perspective #1 is generally accepted in the professional community of psychologists, while perspectives #2 and #3 can meet hostile rejections based on depicting such perspectives as hodgepodges of imprecise psychology, misunderstood quantum physics and trivial spirituality. Undoubtedly in some cases this can be true. Nevertheless, objections of this kind could be applied to practically everything.

To provide my discourse with sound foundations, I'll start by drawing from the works of Edith Stein and Gerda Walther on philosophy and mystics. Afterwards I will hint at Manousakis' views about consciousness. Finally I'll present an example, and then will conclude with reflections and questions.

Edith Stein and Gerda Walther

Both Edith Stein and Gerda Walther were students of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), renowned as the father of phenomenology. In the field of philosophy, Husserl was one of the protagonists of that unique and tragical time, the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, in which the basic assumptions of Western Culture went through a radical crisis and needed a new foundation.

Edith Stein

Edith Stein was born in 1891, the last of eleven children, into a Jewish family in Breslau, Prussia. She was a gifted child, the favourite of her mother. Edith's father passed away when she was young and her mother made consideral efforts to let Edith continue her studies. After working with Martin Heidegger she became the assistant of Edmund Husserl. Edith was very sensitive to social issues, focusing in particular on women's conditions. Being very independent, she decided to split from her mentor Husserl and dedicate her energies to her own line of thought. In 1922, after a long period of atheism, she converted to Catholicism. Though Edith repeatedly stated that after her conversion she felt more deeply Jewish than before, her mother was never able to accept this choice. Being a Jew, in 1933 Edith was forced to leave the teaching profession. She wrote an impassioned letter to Pope Pius XI, asking him to openly denounce the Nazi regime.

In 1934 Edith was admitted to the Discalced Carmelite monastery in Cologne. She took the new name of Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. To preserve her safety she was sent to the Netherlands, but on 2 August 1942 she was arrested, and was slain in Auschwitz on 9 August 1942. In 1988 Pope St. John Paul II canonized her as a Saint, one of the six venerated by the Catholic Church as Patrons of Europe.

Gerda Walther

Gerda Walther was born in Gerdrach, Germany, in 1897. Niece of Federik Bajer, a Danish politician who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1908, she was raised in a Marxist environment. In her teens she became an active member of the German Social Democratic Party. At University she studied philosophy under Alexander Pfänder, who introduced her to psychology. It was only later that she became a student of Edmund Husserl and also of Edith Stein. Gerda felt more and more unsettled with worldviews deprived of trascendent roots, and became attracted to what she called "the other side" of existence. She delved into psychopathology, parapsychology and the mystics. The peculiar personality of the Jesuit Father Eric Przywara (a philosopher and passionate violinist), deeply affected her, and in 1944 she was converted to Catholicism. Though arrested by the Nazis several times because of her political ideas and interests in parapsychology, she survived. She died in Munich in 1977.

Some of Stein's and Walther's Basic Concepts.

Though Stein and Walther worked separatedly, their views are quite similar in many aspects – they both shared common phenomenological roots and both were deeply impressed by the writings of St. Teresa of Avila. Among their concepts, the following are of particular interest for this presentation.

a) The idea of "I," which is radically different from what we commonly call "Ego." The "I" is unique for every person, a transcendent and free perception maker and decision maker. The metaphor that best expresses the nature of the "I" is light, shining in all directions, including

b) The "ground" where the "I" has been "settled." The "settlement" concerns all the contents of consciousness and unconscious: memories, affections, family and cultural bonds, persons and realities of "this" and of the "other" side of existence, and finally with all that constitutes the "embodiment" of the "I." The metaphor of "settlement" implies the idea of a loving mastership that the "I" has to exert on all these elements so to be able to decide in a responsible way on how to act.

c) The "I" not only stretches its roots out in the "ground," but it is also rooted in God. Nevertheless, its territory is unviolable. Nothing can force the freedom of the "I" unless the latter agrees, not even God. God accepts the offer of a person's free will as a supreme act of sanctity but only when the offer is out of pure love. "Purification" is a lifelong strife where, from a certain point on, the inititiative has to be consigned into the hands of God. Purification is fundamental, because the "I's" awareness of freedom can be substantially weakened or strengthened in accord with the way one's "I" takes care of its settlement.

d) The peculiar relationship that every single "I" entertains with "the ground" and God gives account of the unreductable uniqueness of everyone. It is of vital importance for everyone who strives to "become what one is," that is, to purify the process of grounding and the relationship with God.

e) "Empathy" consists first in detecting and respecting differences, and only afterwards in allowing oneself to recognize similarities. Finally, the more one's "I" is enlightened from God's light, the more one can be empathic, free from egotism and self-projections. But to let God's light imbue the "I," it is also necessarily an active work aimed to self-awareness.

f) Community is not based on having the same goals to achieve, and using others as means, even though in a mutual or "ethical" way. This is more like a "society." Instead, community arises out of the recognition that we are all different but we share the same

ground and are enlightened by the same Light, so we understand that we can share the same values and aims. Communities have certain characteristics, including that they are saturated with freedoms and responsibilities. Their bonds and boundaries come from within: external rules are just set up as aids. Eventually, the boundaries of a community are not limited to a visible and local world in linear time.
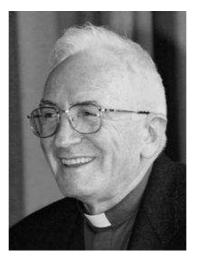

Efstratios Manousakis

Quantum perspectives: Manousakis' view

Efstratios Manousakis is a physicist at Florida State University who recently (2006) elaborated an original model of consciousness. While the most renowned models of consciousness have tried to explain the latter in terms of quantum physics, Manousakis turns the whole issue upside down: it is quantum physics that needs to be explained in terms of consciousness, which is the basic ontological unit characterized by oneness and universality. Within the "global stream of consciousness" many substreams can be detected, like those we experience as individuals, but ultimately they are not separate from the global stream. Consciousness is active, and through its activity arises what we usually perceive as the "external objective world." This is possible because, before a sub-stream of consciousness operates upon any part of itself, the various sub-streams are in a state of "potentiality." The ways in which consciousness operates are several, all led by attention. Manousakis' stand is neither idealistic nor solipsistic. He just claims that the "objectivation" of something is an operation of consciousness upon itself, and this happens continuously, not only thanks to human beings but to all living systems. So, in Manousakis's

view, as in Husserl's, what we know about the universe is manifested through the processes of consciousness.

Between physics and metaphysics

Manousakis's system seems to be driven by the idea of recursivity: processes of consciousness operating on processes of conciousness and so on. A question remains open. Since these processes are regulated by attention, what or who leads the attention? To answer properly we have to leave "the ground" of physics, even of quantum physics, and address metaphysics, like Stein and Walther do. In the meantime, the "stream of consciousness" as depicted by Manousakis is a good example of what Stein and Walther describe as "the ground" where the "I" settles itself.

Father Ghi

Father Pierino Ghi and his sister Rita

Pierino Ghi was born in 1920 in Canove di Govone, a small peasant village in Northern Italy. Poverty was very common, but Pierino's family was able to survive. Since his late childhood Pierino had wanted to become a Catholic priest. He left home and was admitted to the Seminary

at the age of 12. Pierino had a sister, Rita, one and a half years older than him. They were very close and shared many confidences. When Pierino was nearly 18, Rita fell severely ill, and in a few weeks passed away from pleuritis. This was a major trauma for him, and many years later in his autobiography, Pierino described the last moments of his sister's life with touching words. Before leaving, Rita promised to always pray for him. Pierino also wrote that, after the burial ceremony, he had the feeling that "a part of me remained there, with her."

Pierino Ghi became a Jesuit father. He led an active life, but it was marked by both physical and psychological suffering. Falling into depression, he underwent a long psychoanalysis, which reinforced his instinct to keep an account of his dreams. After the Second Vatican Council, he devoted himself primarily to helping young people find their own pathways to "becoming what one is." However, he had a major spiritual experience while praying at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem – he felt a radical relief within, accompanied with words from Jesus: "I have forgiven all your sins, and I have healed you."

From this time on he spent all his energies in praying for the sick and consoling them. His concept of "healing" was very similar to that of the Ancient Fathers of the Church: illness, even when plainly physical, always has an inner dimension, and that illness is part of the pathway that leads to salvation. Thus "healing" is an "inner healing" first, not always coinciding with a full physical or psychological recovery, and is based on "acceptance" in the light of the infinite Mercy of the Lord. Father Ghi began to experience a new faculty arising within him, especially at the conclusion of a Mass. He clearly visualized health issues relating to some of the people attending the Mass, and would publically announce his visions. In the weeks following such a prayer service, he usually received feedback, which was sometimes very specific. Based on this feedback, Father Ghi was concerned about how best to use his gift of healing. On the one hand he didn't want to delude or manipulate people. On the other hand, he felt that he should not hide this gift. So he submitted the question of whether to continue to use his gift to the local bishop, and was ready to accept the bishop's decision. With the bishop's acceptance, Father Ghi continued his healing ministry for years, benefitting thousands, while a succession of three bishops openly supported him, never asking him to give up.

In 1993 Father Ghi and I became close friends. We shared a lot of work, dreams, disappointments, laughter, tears, and gigantic arguments as well – discovering painfully that, in friendship, the most difficult thing is to accept mutual differences and that the most beautiful gift is mercy.

A dream from Father Ghi's Mother *quotes from Fr. Ghi' s self-biography come directly from the manuscript diary that I have kept in custody for years and now is in the archives of Compagnia di Gesù, Rome, Italy*

Father Ghi was very cognizant of his own dreams, as well as the dreams of others. In a page of his autobiography, recalling the grievous times following her sister's death when he was 18, he writes:

> *"God speaks also in dreams. . . . My sister Rita had flown into Heaven. . . . A few Saturdays afterwards Dad came to see me [at the Seminary]: as usual, a meeting with a duration of only a few minutes, full of tenderness; he always brought me something, usually dry fig . . . his hands were calloused, but weakened because of work and also because of the disease that was already undermining him. Our poverty was extreme, because [my sister's] illness had been expensive, but he trusted the Providence and used to say: "God sees, God provides". . . . With sadness in his eyes he told me: "Mom does not resign herself." In the misery of grief we parted, without saying one more word.*

> *. . . When the school year finished, I went home for my vacation . . . At home I found Mom smiling, so I asked her: "What's up Mom? How is this?" She replied: "I dreamed of Rita," and then added: "I asked the Lord to let me see her just one more time and then I'd cry for her no more. And here is the dream:*

> *'I was in the Church praying, I saw Jesus with his Heart open and he asked me: "Would you like to see your daughter once more?" In the dream Jesus was standing up in front of the balustrade and the presbitery was closed with a big shroud, broken in two. 'Yes, I answered, I want to see her.' Jesus opened the curtain behind Him, and there was Rita, all dressed in white, smiling, walking down a big flight of steps. When she reached the ground I hugged her*

with great tenderness and peace in my heart. From that moment on I never cried for her anymore, I knew she was happy in Heaven.' "

Father Ghi never gave up affirming that he felt his sister was particularly close to him in his ministry of healing, protecting him with warm affection. He dreamed of her in the final part of his life.

Conclusions and questions

I consider the example above as quite consistent with the theoretical assumptions of this presentation. The reported dream can be read in accord with the three approaches listed in the introduction. Here are some questions to start the discussion:

a) Montague Ullman defined affections as "the stuff of reality," the fabric connecting individuals despite the limitations of locality and linear time. This overlaps very well with Manousakis' view and Stein's and Walther's "ground" where "I" settles in a circular relationship with the ground itself. How does this correspond with your opinions and experiences on the subject?

b) In Stein's and Walther's views there are domains pertaining to sciences, philosophy and arts, and others pertaining to metaphysics and to the "sciences of the spirit," such as religions, mysticism and theology. I claim that this distinction is of utmost importance. What are your opinions and experiences about this?

c) Can you report dreams and other personal experiences that are consistent with the contents of this presentation?