

KENŌSIS, ANAMNĒSIS, AND OUR PLACE IN HISTORY:  
A NEUROPHENOMENOLOGICAL ACCOUNT

by Roland Karo and Meelis Friedenthal

*Abstract.* We assess St. Paul's account of *kenōsis* in Philippians 2:5–8 from a neurophenomenological horizon. We argue that *kenōsis* is not primarily a unique event but belongs to a class of experiences that could be called kenotic and are, at least in principle, to some degree accessible to all human beings. These experiences can be well analyzed, making use of both a phenomenological approach and the cognitive neuroscience of altered states of consciousness. We argue that kenotic experiences are ecstatic, in that they involve—both phenomenologically and neurologically—one's "stepping out of" his/her self and history. This seemingly impossible task of stepping out has led to the understanding of *kenōsis* as a unique event. We conclude that kenotic experiences are continuous with common, everyday experiences of the self's intimate communion with everything that exists. This means that kenotic Christology does not necessarily have to rest solely on the scriptures but can also be arrived at by way of the worldly experiences of actual, living persons.

*Keywords:* altered states of consciousness; Christology; cognitive neuroscience of religion; *kenōsis*; mysticism; neurotheology; phenomenology; religion and science

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This essay consists of an interdisciplinary analysis of some of St. Paul's statements in Philippians 2:5–8, a passage that traditionally has served as the starting point to launch kenotic Christology. The passage is much written about, and the theological tendency is to conceptualize *kenōsis* as Christ's giving up his original divine attributes in order to be fully human. In our opinion, this is not a fruitful way to think about the subject. Because it

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presupposes a highly elaborate background metaphysic, it effectively slams the door in front of anyone interested in *kenōsis* but unsure about the accompanying speculative doctrine—which is to say that it slams the door in front of everyone, except for a few trained theologians.

The starting point, in our opinion, should be the fundamental humanness of Jesus, not his divinity. Jesus' divine properties should be explained exclusively vis-à-vis his humanness, for it is Jesus the human being we encounter in the Bible. Also, this way the door to access *kenōsis* is left ajar for interested parties from other disciplines.

The need to leave the door open is pressing. An undesirable side effect of airtight theological doctrines is that they tend to foster superstitious beliefs. The concept of *kenōsis* demands a lot of background knowledge, all of it theoretical and abstract, in order to be understood. Because Jesus is believed to originally have possessed a divine nature, there will be by definition no humanly graspable experiential context to *kenōsis*. This means that we are forced to take theologians at their word and cannot confirm the truth of their claims from our own experience.

If, however, *kenōsis* is approached from a human standpoint, it becomes analyzable both experientially (phenomenologically) and experimentally (neuroscientifically). In what follows, we demonstrate that a combination of phenomenological and neuroscientific perspectives can make a significant contribution to our understanding of *kenōsis*.

#### A CUP OF TEA, FOLLOWED BY SOME EXEGETICAL REMARKS

To mark the need to stay open to as many schools of thought as possible if we are to keep the traditional Christian concepts alive in today's world, and as a pointer of direction on where we are going in what follows, we begin with the famous Zen story "A Cup of Tea," which could very well have served as a motto for this paper.

Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868–1912), received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen. Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring.

The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. "It is overfull. No more will go in!"

"Like this cup," Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?" (Senzaki and Reys [1957] 1994, 7)

The story is instructive on several levels. It reflects the realization that in order to truly learn something, one must be prepared to give up something else (in this case, a couple of cherished beliefs about Zen). In other words, if one is to have a real insight into anything, it is imperative that he/she step out of the familiar "shoes." This is true for any creative enterprise, including religion-and-science.

Indeed, if one looks for “common currency” in the world’s major religious traditions, a curious unanimity vis-à-vis the importance of emptying one’s mind clearly stands out. The conceptual frameworks vary, but the metaphor of emptying the “vessel” (of self-centered intentions) to make room for the Divine keeps surfacing.

It should therefore come as no surprise that St. Paul’s Christology reflects the same sort of concept, when he states:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5–8 NRSV)

The Greek verb *kenōō* Paul is using in verse 7—the central and problematic passage for our discussion—translates as “to empty, make empty; to make void; deprive of force.” Hence the English translation “but he emptied himself” for *heauton ekenōsen*.

Exegetically, the first important thing to note here is that in Paul’s day the verb *kenōō* in itself had no technical meaning and was thus used by Paul in his letters several times meaning simply “to empty” (Romans 4:14; 1 Corinthians 1:17, 9:15; 2 Corinthians 9:3—see Berkhof 1996, 328). During the Antiquity, the concept of *kenōn* habitually was used to denote emptiness (mostly of things) and void. Pythagoreans picked it up to describe the separating element between essences. Their idea was disputed and rejected by Aristotle. The concept was also known to and used by hedonists at the time of Socrates and Plato. So, a tradition of philosophical usage of the term was present but deeply ambivalent.

The other exegetically significant aspect in relation to the phrase *heauton ekenōsen* is that *ekenōsen*, within this context, does not necessarily have to have a genitive qualifier—that Jesus must have emptied himself of something (Fee 1995, 210). In that case, “emptied himself” would be pretty much equal to expressions such as “made himself of no reputation” or “came with bare hands.” This would mean that the debates over what exactly it was that he emptied himself of are irrelevant.

The latter insight is important because it makes the traditional interpretation of *kenōsis* dubious. What if Paul, instead of referring to Jesus’ giving up some supernatural divine nature, is simply pointing at Jesus’ fundamental humanness in the twofold sense that humanness has in the Old Testament? To be human, according to the Old Testament, is on the one hand to be created in the image of God but also, on the other hand—ever since the Fall—inevitably to be mortal, finite. What if Paul simply wants to emphasize that Jesus took no egocentric, narcissistic pride in being made in the image of God (as most of us Christians traditionally have), preferring to face squarely the fundamental temporality and being-in-the-history of human existence?

## KENŌSIS AS AN EXPERIENTIAL CONCEPT

The foregoing is admittedly cryptic and lofty. But it serves a rather straightforward purpose: to gain enough theological ground to claim that *kenōsis* might be not a unique, divine *event* but an *experience* that is, at least in principle, achievable to anyone. This idea is not alien to Paul. In verse 5 he encourages the Philippians to have the same mind that Jesus had, and no reference is made to any supernatural attributes. The question, then, is what meaning “he emptied himself” could possibly have for us modern humans.

Our idea is to view the word *himself* as consisting of two parts. Expressions such as “he deflated his self,” “deprived his ego of force” or “made his self of no reputation” should not sound strange to anyone even vaguely familiar with the jargon of twentieth-century psychology. Moreover, they ring a bell for those interested in the neuroscientific study of so-called altered states of consciousness, including religious and mystical experiences. Radical and less radical changes in one’s sense of self can be and have been studied both neuroscientifically and phenomenologically. *Kenōsis*, in this analysis, would be a brain state or mind state in which a subject’s sense of self is significantly altered.

In thinking along these lines, we are not alone. Trevor Greenfield writes:

The continuing justification of Jesus as a seminal figure in history has tended to be derived from what has been understood as the uniqueness of his person . . . through his relationship to God. . . . Jesus is seen to be a man who, more than any other, lived for God, a man who, through his total god-centeredness, became the God-man. His life is understood in terms of a kenotic denial of self . . . to the point that when one observes Jesus one sees through him and beyond to God. (Greenfield 2001, 5)

Greenfield goes on, introducing a differentiation between *kenōsis* as a theological concept and as a way of life, explaining that as a way of life, *kenōsis* can be and is practiced by many seeking a spiritual path through life, whereby for Christianity the uniqueness of Jesus’ kenotic experience lies in its degree, not in kind. He cites Paul Tillich’s notion of Jesus as a man “united with the ground of his being,” a man who through such unity becomes “completely transparent to the mystery he reveals” (2001, 5f.).

The understanding of *kenōsis* as a way of life seems fruitful. It allows us to bring an otherwise airtight theological concept down to the experiential world of us modern humans, compare it to other types of spiritual behavior, and see whether we can model it against a scientific background.

## KENOTIC EXPERIENCE AND NEUROSCIENCE

*Kenōsis* can be interpreted as a way of life—that is, something experiential rather than theoretical. If we assume that this way of life is characterized by the subject’s significantly altered perception of the self, it becomes reason-

able to try to map kenotic experiences as a subclass of mystical states as defined, for example, by Andrew Newberg and Eugene d'Aquili (1999). Such mapping seems to make sense, for Newberg and d'Aquili's neuropsychological model explains the numinous impact of mystical insights largely via the neurologically conditioned transformations in one's concept of the self. This is christologically relevant, because once we agree that Jesus was fully human, we also must agree that he had a brain that worked very much like our own.

Newberg and d'Aquili propose that mystical states are characterized by a distinct pattern of interaction between the limbic structures of the temporal lobe, the Orientation Association Area (OAA), and parts of the frontal lobe, plus by the phenomena of functional deafferentation (the "cutting off" of a certain structure of the nervous system from neural input) and hypothalamic "spillover" (a state in which the two branches of the autonomic nervous system become highly activated simultaneously). They assert that the so-called mystical quality of an experience stems from the brain's ability to enter states in which the OAA—a brain structure Newberg and d'Aquili show to be responsible for maintaining a continuous perception of the self—is deprived of neural input to a significant degree.

The deafferentation of the OAA would have dramatic effects, because the brain would have no "landmarks" to sort the "self" out from the "world." Newberg and d'Aquili propose that such a state would result in an absolute subjective sensation that one is either everything or a no-thing—a sensation of the intimate interwovenness of the individual self with everything in existence. This experience would feel just as real as any sensory perception, for it would be made real for the brain in exactly the same way that ordinary perceptions are (Newberg and d'Aquili 1999, 109–14).

Their proposed phenomenology of mystical states is in good accordance with Paul's understanding of *kenōsis*. It also is harmonious with St. John's account on Jesus' view of himself, for example "the Father and I are one" (John 10:30 NRSV). Considering himself, Paul writes to the Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (2:19–20 NRSV).

#### HUMAN ENTANGLEMENT IN HISTORY

If we think of *kenōsis* as a mystical state that is in principle achievable to anyone, a puzzling question arises: Why is it so rare and atypical that Jesus' self-emptying has served as a means to argue for his essentially divine nature? Or is it, after all, so rare?

Our answer to this is threefold. We first explain why a full-blown kenotic experience (or any experience involving radical changes in one's concept of the self) is rare. Second, we evaluate the notion that the concept of

*kenōsis* can serve as a means to argue for Jesus' original divinity. Third, we contemplate whether kenotic experiences are as rare as they seem to be.

*The Historicity of the Human Brain.* In cognitive neuroscience one finds a well-known and commonly acknowledged saying that brain cells that fire together wire together. It means that once a neuronal association is formed, the more often it is used the stronger it gets. There is a counterpart to this saying: Use it or lose it—meaning that rarely used associations are likely to be lost altogether. (Anyone who has ever tried to learn a foreign language will be able to testify to the truth of these sayings.)

One of the most frequently used neuronal associations in the brain is the ego-circuitry, the neural basis for one's representation of the self. Whenever I see a beautiful sunset, it is (supposedly) *I* who see it. Whenever I am uncomfortable or ashamed, it is (again, supposedly) *I* who am uncomfortable or ashamed. Whenever I want to have a drink, it is *I* who want to have a drink—and so on. Now, in order to relativize or deflate one's ego, what needs to be done is to physically reorganize the synaptic associations, or rewire the brain, so that one realizes that it is completely possible to temporarily bypass the *I* yet still be a fully functional human being.

Because the neuronal networks that support our ego-awareness are incessantly reinforced by habitual everyday waking states, it seems almost impossible to most Western people to even conceptualize a consciousness that does not center itself around the *I*. After all, my consciousness is *my* consciousness. This, however, is not how the mystical schools of the world's religions see the subject. Although the concept of ego-less consciousness usually has been discussed within the context of Buddhism, it is not at all a stranger in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

There also exists a fairly lively scientific discussion on this topic within the research context of the Neural Correlates of Consciousness. The phenomenon of ego dissolution has been studied, for example, in the case of hallucinogen-induced altered states (Vollenweider, Gamma, and Vollenweider-Scherpenhuyzen 1999, 99–109) and meditation (Newberg, d'Aquili, and Rause 2002). The important thing to be learned from the religious as well as scientific pursuit of the altered states of consciousness is that with sufficient training these states are attainable by virtually anyone. But because "sufficient training" in this case means gradually rewiring one of the brain's best established cognitive structures, the ego-circuitry, it is to be expected that full-blown kenotic experiences would be extremely rare.

What is at stake here cannot be underestimated. Rewiring the neuronal basis of the ego presupposes nothing less than undoing elements of one's personal, experiential history that are deeply imprinted upon the brain in the form of an individual brain's synaptic configuration at any given moment. Still, it is not a mission impossible. We know from developmental psychology that all human beings begin their life in a "kenotic" state of no-

self. Endel Tulving has convincingly shown that in children under the age of four years, episodic memory (the ability to recall one's past experiences—a distinctly human feature that he describes via the concept of mental time-travel) is not yet fully functional. From this he infers that under a certain age human beings cannot possess a clear-cut sense of self (Tulving 2002, 1–7). However well established and hard to break the neuronal ego-circuits may be in later life, they develop only gradually via interactions with the environment and enculturation.

It could be said, therefore, that defeating the ego takes something like a mental time-travel back to our earliest reflexive memories to try to see the world anew from a child's perspective. We believe it is this imperative that Jesus has in mind when he says “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:15 NRSV).

*Kenōsis as ek-stasis.* How shall we evaluate the notion that the concept of *kenōsis* can serve as a means to argue for Jesus' original divinity?

We have seen that one of the few distinctly human features is the ability to mentally time-travel. For example, when one thinks about what one did yesterday, time's arrow is bent into a loop—the rememberer has traveled back into his/her past, albeit only mentally (Tulving 2002, 2). This spectacular human capability does not cancel out any laws of nature, however. Thinking ourselves back into childhood does not physically turn us into children. Neither does it automatically undo any neuronal connections responsible for maintaining the sense of self. So, even if we try to see the world anew from a child's perspective, we will still be looking at it through the lens of our later experiential history.

In a famous and often-cited sentence Otto Neurath likened us to sailors who have to rebuild their ship at sea while staying afloat in it (Neurath [1932] 1981, 577). The “ship,” within the present context, would be a particular human brain, along with its owner's experiential history, from “aboard” which he or she interacts with the world. There is no way to simply discard the ship. From this we can logically arrive at the conclusion that some type of supernatural intervention is needed if a truly kenotic experience is to be possible. The ego-circuits are simply too central for the structure of the ship to be broken by a sailor at sea.

It seems, then, that Jesus' emptying himself in Philippians 2:7 *can* function as a basis to proclaim his divinity, because it would have to have consisted of an *ek-stasis*, a stepping out of history—a task almost impossible for ordinary human beings who are always attached to the “ship” and engaged in history.

For someone aspiring to follow Christ in self-emptying this is a discouraging conclusion. Nevertheless, it seems to make sense, especially when we turn from the lofty topic of *kenōsis* to analyzing the inner logic of human relationships. Even if we try very hard, we cannot help judging another

person through the lens of our own enculturated value system. One of the main reasons the Jewish community of the time rejected the idea of Jesus' being the long-awaited Messiah was the obvious fact that he did not possess many of the culturally presumed attributes of trustworthiness.

Aristotle is aware of the significance of such enculturated biases and discusses them in relation to rhetoric: "The orator persuades by moral character when his speech is delivered in such a manner as to render him worthy of confidence; for we feel confidence in a greater degree and more readily in persons of worth. . . . But this confidence must be due to the speech itself, not to any preconceived idea of the speaker's character" (*Rhetoric* 1. 2. 4). At play here is the Hellenistic understanding of a person's inheriting his/her ethos from his/her family or place of origin (Morris 2004, 1–3; Weintraub 1978, 1–17). *We are*, in a way, our history. Through the story of the speaker, through his/her character, we are given an understanding of his/her motives and, more important, background history.

The fact that we are our history means that all of our decisions will necessarily be colored by prejudice of one sort or another. Aristotle is arguing that before we judge someone we should get rid of enculturated or presupposed concepts and listen to what is actually being said. In other words, it is advisable to try to *empty* ourselves of prejudice. But because we cannot step out of our history, this task may seem humanly impossible.

Is the emptying of the self (the *ek-stasis*) then reserved to such divine individuals as Jesus is supposed to have been, or is it also achievable to mundane human beings such as ourselves? We think it is open to us, too.

*Everyday Self-emptying: Kenōsis and kenōsis.* For starters, we think it is possible to map kenotic states of self-emptying along a continuum in much the same way Newberg and d'Aquili map mystical states (Newberg, d'Aquili, and Rause 2002, 115–16). In fact, we are talking about the same continuum, for the Pauline concept of self-emptying and Newberg and d'Aquili's notion of self-transcendence are probably just two views of the same thing. *Kenōsis* does not necessarily have to be a full-blown stepping out of history. A complete emptying of the self may not be an option for history-bound humans such as ourselves, but insightful moments of temporarily transcending the limits of the ego are. Any parent, for example, knows that when it comes to the best interest of our children, we are generally quite ready to selflessly put up with personal discomfort. A lover may willingly go through great pains in order to please the beloved. The point is that Jesus' emptying himself and our own everyday victories over the hegemony of the ego are essentially continuous; their difference is not of kind but of degree. There is *kenōsis*, and then there is *Kenōsis*.

Perhaps the best way to think of the innermost core of *kenōsis* is to connect it with the concept of catharsis that is well known in the discus-



sion of drama and tragedy. At the moment of catharsis, what has been hidden from our sight, what we have expected but have not fully understood, is revealed to us. Catharsis as a technical term is derived from the medical term meaning purgation or purification. It, too, has inside it the idea of getting rid of something. The ancient Greek mystery-schools' use of the term corroborates this—before one can be admitted to the precincts of truth, one must first purge the mind of false and degrading thoughts. Plato uses it in the same sense in his dialogue “Phaedo”:

But truth is in fact a purification from all these things, and self-restraint and justice and courage and wisdom itself are a kind of purification. And I fancy that those men who established the mysteries were not unenlightened, but in reality had a hidden meaning when they said long ago that whoever goes uninitiated and unsanctified to the other world will lie in the mire, but he who arrives there initiated and purified will dwell with the gods. For as they say in the mysteries, “the thyrsus-bearers are many, but the mystics few.” (1966, 69)

“Getting rid of” was seen as central to the way of truth. Without it the truth might actually not be acquired at all and could remain in the state of *neutrum*, of something we do not really care about.

We see that even though Jesus' emptying of the ego is something that could be called a sign of divine touch, it cannot be interpreted to mean that *kenōsis* as such is a unique, one-time event. Many individuals have come to what is essentially the same realization; the state of ego-less awareness is systematically cultivated in many religious traditions. But even without training, our everyday experience provides us with everything we need in order to grasp the essence of *kenōsis*. That is, *kenōsis* is enough to understand *Kenōsis*.

*Kenōsis* is, definitely and emphatically, *not* a neat, perfectly airtight, ivory-tower theological concept. It can be evaluated experientially by anyone. The difference between our humble everyday doings-away-with-the-ego and a full-blown kenotic experience is simply a matter of degree.

Critics may point out that the difference in level of experience still makes it impossible for us to know *kenōsis* as Jesus experienced it. And in that case, how are we to know if it is of another order entirely?

It is true that we have no direct access to Jesus' (or any other individual's) particular experiences. But we do have one very significant clue: the fact that Jesus was a human being. To claim that *kenōsis* as Jesus experienced it must somehow have been radically and fundamentally different from our own kenotic states of consciousness is to dehumanize Jesus. Human (brain) physiology sets limiting constraints as to what basic types of experiences are possible (hence the Jungian concept of archetypes). Having an experience that is in principle unattainable to anyone else automatically disqualifies the experienter as a human being.

THE EUCHARIST AS *ANAMNĒSIS*<sup>1</sup>

There exists a continuum of states from *kenōsis* (for our own moments of defeating the ego) to *Kenōsis* (Christ's full-blown ecstatic stepping out of history). The common denominator of these states is that they involve a heightened sense of the intimate *communion* of the individual self with everything in existence, ultimately to the point of total ego-dissolution. Among other connotations, this idea has implications for our understanding of the Eucharist.

Luke has Jesus saying during the course of the Last Supper: "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (22:19 NRSV). Anybody who is familiar with Christian history will remember the fierce debates over the meaning of these two sentences. The Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation maintains that the wine and bread shared during the Holy Communion literally are Jesus' blood and flesh. There is the Lutheran doctrine of Christ's "real presence" in the Eucharist. And there is the symbolic understanding. An intriguing option emerges if we view all of this in light of our discussion about *kenōsis*.

Our sense of being a self consists of embodied perceptions. For better or for worse, this means that the main "vessel" for ego-awareness is our neurally represented body image. This image has a history; the way I perceive my body (therefore, myself) right at this moment is the result of my brain's developmental history. For example, had I never been exposed to dualistic views of life, the neural associations that allow me to think of myself as somehow separable from what I consider to be my body might never have been established (see Brück 2001, 650–52 for related discussion). However, the neural representation of the body is the result of the history of my interactions with the environment: I know that this is *my* hand because it hurts if I happen to stick it into fire.

In some cases, however, the situation is not so clear-cut. Is a bursal prosthesis a part of me or not? Or, as to the logic of pain, it hurts more to see one's child get hurt than to get hurt oneself. This is suggestive of a more ecological view of the self. As one's body is undeniably a part of larger ecological and social systems, it is possible to conceive of an altered body-image that incorporates its ecosystem as a part of the self. Think, for example, of the popular saying "You are what you eat" and compare it to Jesus' statement "This is my body."

To establish such an altered sense of the self, one would have to unlearn (concerning *kenōsis*) certain habitual patterns of perception. One has to stop objectifying his/her environment in order to realize that a self can exist only in communion with everything that exists. Just as a living brain is a community of neurons—each of which has a "consciousness" of its own (Laughlin, McManus, and d'Aquili 1992, 34–52), in which the higher cognitive functions emerge as a result of mutual interactions between indi-

vidual neurons—an ecological self is established through interaction with everything that exists, starting from the community of cells that constitute our physical bodies and on to the outside world (which is no longer “outside” when an ecological perspective is realized; on one or another level we *are* one with nature).

Such “ego-deprived” ecological self-understanding is not easily learned, considering the degree to which Western culture is individualistic. Brain cells that fire together wire together. A cultural background that values personal achievement continually reinforces the neural circuitry that mediates ego-awareness. This is why the “tea cup” is so terribly difficult to empty. What the Zen master demands of the professor is not merely to lay his opinions aside for awhile; the deeper imperative of the story is to undo the customary pattern of perception and adopt a different mode of consciousness, something comparable to what Arthur Deikman calls a switch to the receptive consciousness (2002, 75–92).

We believe that this same imperative is traceable in the establishment of Eucharist, the primary example of communion for Christians. If we think of Jesus’ perception of himself as not limited by the boundaries of his physical body, the shared bread and wine *literally are* the flesh and blood of Christ. There is nothing merely symbolic about it. Neither is there any need for a doctrine of transubstantiation. It is just as Luke has it: “This is my body.”

This can be taken even further. It can be argued that the kenotic state of selflessness or deflated ego-awareness is a more natural state than the traditional Western egocentrism. After all, we are all intimately intertwined with everything that exists. We need intimacy with other people to grow up to be normal human beings (remember the Mowgli story?<sup>2</sup>), we need air to breathe, water to drink. In fact, 90 percent of the human body consists of water, so it would be more justified to claim that we are water than to argue that we are separate individuals.

It could be said, then, that *kenōsis* is a “return to innocence,” a return to the original integrity of human existence with the whole of creation, a recollection (concerning the Greek concept of *anamnēsis*) or remembrance of the prelapsarian state. Putting this into a biblical context, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance (*anamnēsin*) of me” (Luke 22:19 NRSV).

It is well attested that the concept of *anamnēsis* is not about mechanical recalling of information from the past but rather a recollection of the past that enlivens and empowers the present, the true knowledge (Johnson 1999, 125–26). Plato comments on the idea of *anamnēsis* as follows:

Seeing then that the soul is immortal and has been born many times, and has beheld all things both in this world and in the nether realms, she has acquired knowledge of all and everything; so that it is no wonder that she should be able to recollect all that she knew before about virtue and other things. For as all nature is akin, and the soul has learned all things, there is no reason why we should not, by

remembering but one single thing—an act which men call learning—discover everything else, if we have courage and faint not in the search; since, it would seem, research and learning are wholly recollection. (1967, 81)

But, first, there is a definite and crucial prerequisite. In order to remember anew, recollect, there is a need to forget, to get rid of ego-centered delusions. In short, there is a need for a kenotic alteration in one's sense of self.

Think of the story of the Fall. From the state of original integrity with everything that exists—the state of *kenōsis*—one is led to a state in which his/her perceptions of the world are corrupt and he/she is not able to see clearly. The symbolic *anamnēsis* of Christ with his call to forget in order to see anew can then be interpreted as a call back to the original state of integrity, the openness of mind. Only then is true understanding possible. Paul puts it this way: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12 NRSV).

#### CONCLUSION: CHRISTOLOGY AND NEUROPHENOMENOLOGY

In this essay we have been trying to establish kenotic Christology in relation to the physiological aspect of humanness. A final question emerges: Why should theologians bother sifting through the mountains of data collected by neuroscientists? Do we not already have more revelation than we can handle in the scriptures and tradition?

The answer is that the innermost truth of Christianity is embodied not in scriptures but in a historical person, Jesus of Nazareth. Two thousand years of cultural evolution stand between us and Jesus, making it questionable whether we can ever adequately understand biblical heritage; yet on the physiological level Jesus is as close to us as our next-door neighbor. This means that what is neuropsychologically true of human beings today will also be true of Jesus. In our view, the greatest strength of the Christian narrative is precisely the fact that it is an embodied (bodily present) narrative, a narrative named Jesus. We hope that the foregoing makes it clear that cognitive neuroscience has its word to say in Christology. We believe that a neuroscientifically informed Christology has at least one clear advantage over traditional ones: Because it is founded on the fundamental humanness of Jesus, it validates the use of what is known about the brain physiology of actual, living people as a legitimate source of theological information beside scriptural material and tradition.

## NOTES

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1. We discuss the Greek concept of *anamnēsis* in some detail below. Most commonly it means recalling. In Antiquity, both Plato and Aristotle used it as a technical term in the sense of "calling to mind" or "reminiscence." In the Greek Old Testament it stands in connection with the concept of memorial sacrifice (as in Leviticus 24:7; Numbers 10:10).

2. There are romantic legends about children who, severed from human contact at a young age, have been brought up by animals such as wolves or bears. A well-known example is Rudyard Kipling's Mowgli story. Such legends tend to attribute their heroes moral and physical superiority over ordinary humans. Alas, in reality children who have no experience of human care, loving relationships, and language display none of these. Instead, they display symptoms of what is called the Mowgli syndrome, symptoms including fear of humans, inability to learn basic social skills and language, lack of interest in human activities, and mental impairment. Attempts to resocialize such children are usually unsuccessful and they die young.

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