Immediacy: Steinbock and Lacoste between Emotions and Religious Experience

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I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophical and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue. (James, "Religious Experience" 43)

*[T]o seek and to find this infinite and eternal factor in all that lives and moves, all growth and change, in all action and passion, and to have and to know life itself only in immediate feeling—that is religion. (Schleiermacher, *On Religion* 79)*

Religion is life in *immediate* feeling. At least for Schleiermacher, immediacy is one essential aspect of feeling that makes feeling congenial as the means by which we tend to express the source of religious experience. Yet far too often, the association between religion and feeling leads to banal and ultimately shallow dichotomizations between reason and religion, which then get reduced to distinctions between caricatures of the intellect and the emotions. Reason, the guide and gatekeeper of a life well-lived in reality through suspicion of self-deception, tends to become the overlord of life's affective dimensions that, without checks and balances, careen the lives of individuals or groups all too quickly off the rails into irrational self-seeking or irruptive violence. Since religion is more associated with the affective and emotional sphere of life, it suffers, perhaps inadvertently, from becoming either *a*) something deemed of social value only once it has gone through the filter of reason's checks and balances (thus potentially disgracing its revelatory potential), or *b*) an experience founded upon an immediacy it ultimately cannot purchase *in good faith* because it claims to short-circuit and bypass precisely such a hermeneutics of potential self-deception.

This depiction of course is much more complicated than it at first may appear, and if one traces phenomenologically the thread of even "pure" reason's intelligibility down to its supposed zero point of origination, one arrives at something not unlike a fundamentally "emotional" experience. Following Descartes' novel separation between subject (*ego cogito*) and world (*res extensa*) and his demonstration that all real things in that world

come about through an originary relation one has with oneself, Kant furnished a new confidence in describing neutrally (read “non-emotionally”) that which presents itself. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* a description of the meaningful constitution of the world was risked via the combination of a priori intuitions (ways of showing) of space and time, with the categories of understanding. These intuitions and forms are *Vorstellungen* (representations) or “placed in front” of the experiencer like slides dropped into a view finder, with new affective images sliding in and out for experience to grasp and process. Not unlike Aristotle’s (in *On the Soul*) depiction of *sensus communis* (sense in common), which characterizes various imprints upon us that furnish the mind with its needed evidences, Kant’s analysis is that the transcendental access to the content of the world does *not* first come through a decidedly cognitive and conscious apprehension, but rather through *sensation*, a more affective relation as *sensum* (perception). Although the immediacy these originary imprints or sensations promise is attractive, perceptions without content are blind, and the distance and time between them begins to widen.

Perhaps it was Hume’s reference to these imprints as impressions (which inexplicably arise from the senses of perception) that contributed to Husserl’s once admitting that even “the consciousness judging a mathematical state of affairs is an impression,”¹ the after-affects things uniquely have on us. Yet contrary to Hume’s neo-skepticism, Husserl took these impressions to have cognitive potential for describing realities that shape the fundamentals of the *Lebenswelt*. Although Husserl is often claimed to reflect a traditional cognitivist understanding of emotional and affective life, (e.g. in *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas*), he refers to how our *Erfahrungswelt* also can be understood as “taken-for-granted,” immediate, obvious (*selbstverständlich*), pre-given (*vorgegeben*), and always already there in its “enigmatic” and “prescientific objectivity.” In a more critical tone, this taken-for-grantedness of the world is in part a product of modern life, which claims truths to be “situational.” Thus, in the 1937 “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man” (the 1935 Vienna Lectures), the privileging of what is visible is depicted as a result of having succumbed to “a mistaken rationalism” that presumes the “pre-given” is the only form of manifestation.² Phenomenology can help address this problem because the

¹ Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* 95/10. For a much more extensive development of Husserl’s notion of impression, see especially Henry, *Material Phenomenology* 20-27.

² For Husserl, “We must see that objectivism” is strictly and naively “based on a naturalistic focusing on the environing world.” He claims further that “For the transcendental philosopher, however, the totality of real objectivity—not only the scientific objectivity of all actual and possible sciences but also the prescientific objectivity of the life-world, with its ‘situational truths’ and the relativity of its existing objects—has become a problem, the enigma of all enigmas. The enigma is precisely the taken-for-grantedness in virtue of which the ‘world’ constantly and pre-scientifically exists for us, ‘world’ being a title for an infinity of what is taken for granted, what is indispensable for all objective sciences.” Later

epoché is intended to suspend those *worldly* presumptions of “ordinary” consciousness.

Heidegger refers to the manifestation potential of these affective strands as “moods,” which act as symptoms of our construed relations with the world. By “tuning in” (*Befindlichkeit*) to the world through various forms of comportment primordial to a conceptual grasping, knowing, or conceiving, the world is disclosed or construed for us: “ontologically mood is a primordial kind of Being for Dasein, in which Dasein is disclosed to itself *prior to* all cognition and volition, and *beyond* their range of disclosure.” (*Being and Time* 136). And while both following, and yet drastically departing from Heidegger’s project, Michel Henry conceives that all of “life” itself is experienced foremost through the *pathos* or affective dimension of experience that provides the very key “internal” to accessing the appearing of any “outside.”³ In one of his last works, Henry puts it quite clearly: “The human essence is the heart” and “affectivity is the essence of life.” (*Words of Christ* 12)

I provide this somewhat breezy and broad sketch of the role of the affections (gliding over non-synonymous terms such as emotion, feeling, mood, affect, sensation, impression) only to demonstrate the richness of what is at stake in the association between feeling and religion, and hopefully to gain a bit more specificity through addressing one essential, yet often overlooked element generally pre-understood to drive their relations—immediacy. When philosophers hear the word “immediacy” they likely are reminded of how the distinctions between datum/intelligibility, content/form, perception/thing, signifier/signified, appearance/reality all teach us that there is no purely un-mediated relation; that is, that the two of each of these pairs do not run in conjunction with one another in any automatic or instantaneous way. Yet if the analysis stops there, we then are presented with the risk of new presumptions or “givens” of immediacy: the intelligibility is presumed to originate in the datum; the content cannot exist without its form; the possibility of a thing is predicated upon a possible, prior reality; the perception operates with a thing to be perceived (Bode, *The Concept of Immediacy*). Thus, despite knowing that there is no such immediate relation (that there is no reflexive gap in being impressed by something or someone), we still end up with a new kind of immediacy in the aforementioned form.

This highlights the difficulty of defining immediacy as a concept, thus leading to a number of perplexing questions: Is immediacy simply the fact that we lack “conscious knowledge” of how we have operated with a belief or aspect of consciousness (Kriegel)? Or is immediacy a matter of

he suggests that “the life-world—the ‘world for us all’—is identical with the world that can be commonly talked about.” (*The Crisis* § 58 & § 59).

³ In the *Essence of Manifestation* (xii) Henry began the process of reducing the basis of phenomenology to affectivity.

perceptual faith whereby we seek “to be delivered from contingency” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*) despite knowing that in “hyper-reflection” we always are *situated*? Is a kind of immediacy demonstrated when things’ qualities are *given at one stroke*, to follow Sartre’s example, in how the marmalade’s qualities of stickiness, coldness, sourness, sweetness, tepidity or fluidity prove a “total interpenetration”?⁴ Are “immediacy and mediation” always inseparable, thus leaving any “opposition between them to be a nullity” (Hegel)?⁵ Is immediacy the absolutizing of the relative with an “unchecked vitality” of finite life, and thus a threat to true faith (Kierkegaard)?⁶ And finally, might not the ultimate insistence upon mediation morph it into a new form of immediacy, despite presenting itself to the contrary?

I will return to some of these concerns in a final reflection, namely as they relate to religion. Yet my initial—still general—deliberation is that although immediacy seems to be a temporal expression of what is unconditioned, its being qualified is less a matter of pitting immediacy as purely dichotomous to mediation (for reasons just mentioned), and more so about demonstrating their constitutive interplay. For example: on the one hand, it is possible to observe today especially a social mourning of the loss of a certain immediacy. This is in part a loss due to the anxiety-creating complexities of the insistences upon solipsistic reflection and the obsessions with the never-ending investigations into one’s own personal identity, social conditions, and cultural situatedness. It is in this sense that the “mediation” entails the accrual of a debt, namely, to the mediator. Having a third party

⁴ For Sartre, “the lemon is extended throughout its qualities, and each of its qualities throughout each of the others.” Or “conversely if I poke my finger into a jar of jam, the sticky coldness of that jam is the revelation to my fingers of its sugary taste. The fluidity, the tepidity, the bluish color, the undulating restlessness of the water in a pool are given at one stroke, each quality through the others; and it is this total interpenetration which we call the *this*.” (*Being and Nothingness* “Quality and Quantity Potentiality, Instrumentality” § 3).

⁵ For Hegel, “there is nothing, nothing in heaven, or in nature or in mind or anywhere else which does not equally contain both immediacy and mediation, so that these two determinations reveal themselves to be unseparated and inseparable and the opposition between them to be a nullity. But as regards the philosophical discussion of this, it is to be found in every logical proposition in which occur the determinations of immediacy and mediation and consequently also the discussion of their opposition and their truth.” (Hegel, *Science of Logic*).

⁶ Westphal, interpreting Kierkegaard’s engagement with Hegel’s *Science*, summarizes immediately nicely: “What does define immediacy is this notion of unrelatedness or self-sufficiency. Anything that relates only to itself and lacks all outward reference because for it there is as yet no other is immediate. The absolutizing of relative ends can be described as immediacy, not because that is where we find ourselves most of the time, however true that may be, but because what we find when we find ourselves there is the ‘unchecked vitality’ of some finite moment of our life”. In this rich essay, Westphal points to four ways immediacy can be understood in Kierkegaard’s work. He refers to four types of immediacy—that of the ethical, aesthetic, religiousness A and religiousness B. (Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Phenomenology* 56).

as a mediator (even if I am my own mediator, reflector, and gatekeeper of what I claim as my own with fervor or passion), however, may not solve all of the problems from which insistences upon immediacy often are thought to suffer. *That is, absolute and unconditional insistence upon mediation is an attempt to assert an unquestionable authority upon the experience of what/who gets mediated.* Yet on the other hand, insistence upon something as immediate, as “a given” often threatens the responsibility that comes along with claims to its givenness. The positive relinquishing of control and calculation of the narrative of one’s life simultaneously is paired with the potential negation of self in an abyss of sensationalism. Immediacy can set the agent towards and around its own or *Eigen* of authenticity and authority, yet it also can encase an agent in a temporal bubble of self-affection.

Such questions and problems are precisely what motivate my interest in juxtaposing the work of Jean-Yves Lacoste and Anthony Steinbock. Despite working from the bases of very similar phenomenological resources, these two thinkers at first seem diametrically opposed in the aforementioned regards: Lacoste bemoans the association between religion and emotions, and Steinbock offers a strong defense of the emotional life. Lacoste attempts to conceive religion beyond “feeling” because the latter limits the impact of the Absolute, and Steinbock develops moral emotions especially as they relate with religious Experience and epiphany. Broadly conceived, in Steinbock’s *Moral Emotions*, today’s crisis is depicted not to be one of reason, but rather one of emotion (274). Modernity has taught that emotions provide no evidential import or intelligibility; are mere irrational “ruptures” in objectivity (4) and blind processes of nature (5). Countering this view, Steinbock claims emotions to be revelatory of human persons (11), situated on the level of “feeling,” and enacted in the realm of “spirit.” “Moral emotions” are a particular kind of emotion that points to the interpersonal nexus (finite to finite persons) and constitutes and regulates norms (13).

Religious experience gets implicated in this process, and intertwined within the immediacy of emotions. Unlike Lacoste, Steinbock does not appear to express concern over emotions, but instead seeks to retrieve their lost intelligibility from being inaccurately portrayed as overly solipsistic. Although not all emotions exhibit an interpersonal relation (14), they do underwrite those relations by revealing to a person that they are in need of both “interpersonal” (the finite to finite) and “inter-Personal” (the human-finite to Absolute-infinite-holy) engagements of relation (282 n. 33). Religious experience is dynamic, marks the sphere of the holy, and is integral to inter-Personal experience, which is underwritten by emotions.

The extent to which immediacy plays roles in forming a basis of religious experience is one primary concern this paper seeks to address. By sifting through the layers of differences between Steinbock and Lacoste, this paper will employ the notion of *immediacy* both to understand their conceptualizations of the matrix of emotions vis-à-vis religion and, in

general, to give it more specificity. After setting another short backdrop on the context of religious experience, then briefly engaging the work of Lacoste so as to provide a few pressure points by which Steinbock's work can be considered more closely—especially via the notion of immediacy—the paper concludes with closer reflection upon the role immediacy can play in regard to understanding religion.

I. Lacoste, Emotion, and Religious (Non)Experience

It is Schleiermacher's association between feelings and religion that Lacoste essentially seeks to counteract. At the risk of oversimplification, two short quotations from Schleiermacher—both of which give prominence to immediacy—sum up his position: first, the truest essence of religion is in “the immediate consciousness of the universal being of all finite things in and through the infinite, of all temporal things in and through the eternal.” And second, “to seek and to find this infinite and eternal factor in all that lives and moves, all growth and change, in all action and passion, and to have and to know life itself only in immediate feeling—that is religion.” (*On Religion* 79). That is, there is an immediacy by which the infinite/eternal relates with the religious experiencer *despite* the experiencer being finite, non-infinite, and temporally situated. This immediacy removes temporarily the cognitive filter from the experience so as to make a powerful and instantaneous impression within consciousness. Of course, the religious experiencer later will reflect upon the experience, draw it into a self-criticism, and question its veracity. Yet religion itself is qualified uniquely as employing emotions as the first or primary medium for its encounter and expression. The “eternal factor” or “God” operates according to the immediacy of emotion.

It is no wonder then that Lacoste, who has a distaste for feeling as the basis of religion, also will rail against this particular depiction of the “experience of God.” For Lacoste “God must not be assimilated too quickly to the sacred or to the numinous.” (*The Appearing and the Irreducible* 63). The numinous precisely is a combination of vagueness and the supposed immediate, filterless unconditioned that enters into the heart of the individual without going “through the front door”, so to speak, of a perception apparatus that presumes both temporal and spatial distance between the thing and its being taken-as-such-and-such. Lacoste not only critiques the idea of “feeling” as the *basis* of religious experience, but also that this reduction has served to limit precisely that which feelings are claimed to underwrite, support, and give expression—encounters with the Absolute.

Instead of “feeling” the presence of divinity, for Lacoste there is a *relational* opening or “Liturgical Reduction” as a being-before-the-Absolute that communicates in a way (and with content) that *disorients* and interrupts precisely the sense of feeling. *Sentir* still has a place in

phenomenological constitution of course. However both an *intuitional Gefühl* and an intentional *Fühlen von etwas* (feeling of/about something in particular, the way we “find ourselves” oriented, Heideggerian *Befindlichkeit*) are not the basis of the experience (or non-experience) of the Absolute.⁷ Another figure whose work figures prominently in the background of Lacoste’s critique here is William James, who sought to furnish some meaningful description of the essentially “mystical elements” in religious experiences despite some of the growing demands of his particular philosophical age to give epistemological legitimization of them. For James, religious experiences maintain four interlocking aspects as ineffable and negative, as presenting a noetic knowledge that reshapes thought, as being temporally transient, and as being passively encountered through intuition. James follows Schleiermacher’s qualification of the “religious” as founded upon *subjective* feeling, which James often considered to offer greater potential to impact one’s life, for even though “feeling is private and dumb, and unable to give an account of itself” (James, *Religious Experience* 44), “feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophical and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue.” (43)

In a major way, Lacoste wishes to get beyond the highly individualized—and we may also cue here Steinbock’s critique of the solipsism of modernity—privatization of religious experience of James, for whom “Mystical truth exists for the individual.” (*Religious Experience*, 40). Lacoste also will not like the tidy separation between philosophy and theology. Yet in another sense, there is one area in which Lacoste might agree with James, not only because religious experiences are not in need of warrant, but more importantly, because religious experience (Lacoste’s being-before-the-Absolute) is indeed at times the supreme origin of deliberation. James draws attention to how religious experience and a philosophical qualification of experience are entirely differing *kinds of experiencing*, with religion championing the paradox, and philosophy cherishing the objectively verifiable.⁸ This could be comparable to

⁷ Schrijvers interprets Lacoste to offer a critique of Heidegger’s “world”: “Lacoste asks whether *Dasein*, and the hermeneutic of its facticity is not merely a hermeneutics of secularization. Can and must we assume that this ‘being-in-the-world’ and its corresponding anxiety is the most original and fundamental characteristic of human existence?” (*Jean-Yves Lacoste: A Phenomenology of Liturgy* 314). On this point, especially regarding Heidegger’s influence on Lacoste, see also Schrijvers, *An Introduction to Jean-Yves Lacoste*.

⁸ Although studies of religious experience in more Anglo-American philosophy of religion contexts have taken on different challenges since the work of William James, they subsequently have been critiqued over the last century on similar grounds, namely in regards to the warrant or illegitimacy of such experiences in part because they are affective, improvable, and immediate. For James, religion’s “results are mysteries and enigmas, [it] declines to justify them rationally, and on occasion is willing that they should even pass for paradoxical and absurd. Philosophy takes just the opposite attitude. Her aspiration is to reclaim from mystery and paradox whatever territory she touches. To find an escape from obscure and wayward personal persuasion to truth objectively valid for all thinking men

Lacoste's Absolute-as-non-experience. Yet it must be reiterated that feeling is not the means of understanding this non-experience: "Our theology is never founded on the limited basis of our experience of God. We can feel his presence, or what we take as such, but we can just as much feel the presence of the 'divine' of which Heidegger speaks, or worse, we can confuse one with the other." (Lacoste, *The Appearing and the Irreducible* 63)

Overlooking for the moment this slighting of Heidegger, to which I will return, a key term here is "experience." Although understandable that this theological claim is expressive of the worries of over-emotionalizing religion, phenomenology—and the broader philosophical tradition leading up to it—has understood in different ways how *affectivity* is the essential basis of immediate, fundamental human experience. On the one hand, phenomenology (as first philosophy) has the tendency to prefer the pre-cognitive, pre-epistemological, and pre-judicial forms of knowledge; yet on the other hand, it presumes that consciousness operates with perceptive filters of "taking something as", and therefore all perceptions (even inner perceptions that do not employ the sensory faculties) never tell the entire story of an event. Lacoste turns experience on its head, and seeks to describe the relation with the Absolute as a "non-experience," as he is suspicious of the overwrought preunderstandings we tend to take up in regards to experience. Indeed, "the God with which liturgy confronts us does not necessarily belong to the field of experience." (*Experience and the Absolute* 22)

How then can one give expression to the belief or claim to having undergone an encounter with "God?" To what "field" or domain might such a confrontation belong? And finally, why avoid the concept of "experience?" I agree with Gschwandtner's assessment that Lacoste "hesitates to call this 'experience' because he tries to stay away from a reduction of religious experience to feeling or affectivity."⁹ Although our "being-before-God" can be understood to give various impressions, they are only one aspect of what constitutes Lacoste's understanding of liturgy, which is not reducible to feeling(s). This opens up a host of other questions and problems, and it also becomes necessary to negotiate the passage (at the end of which is a kind of knowledge that is not under the ultimate jurisdiction and oversight of subjective consciousness) threatened by falling off on the left towards ontotheology, and on the right towards losing oneself in the transcendental horizon of a kenotic going-out-of-oneself. He claims

has ever been the intellect's most cherished ideal. To redeem religion from unwholesome privacy, and to give public status and universal right of way to its deliverances, has been reason's task." (*Religious Experience* 44).

⁹ Gschwandtner continues, "Instead [of feeling-based experience language] he engages our 'being-before-God' in language deeply influenced by but also quite critical of Heidegger's phenomenological approach." ("The Vigil as Exemplary Liturgical Experience: On Jean-Yves Lacoste's Phenomenology of Liturgy" 653).

his concept of “liturgy” (not to be confused with liturgical ecclesial disciplines) can reframe the discussion of experience:

Liturgy does not annul the a priori laws governing existence. But it does prove that transcendental forms of experience do not constitute the entirety of our capacity for existence, and that the humanity of man does not let itself be determined exclusively by what comes to experience always, everywhere, and to everyone. (*Experience and the Absolute* 109)

Put simply, I am not what I experience. One’s very existence is not governed by the experience of the world in a universal fashion. By subverting one’s simple acceptance of being-in-the-world, and replacing it with a being-before-the-non-experienceable, one is afforded a means of piercing through the screen of the world as the only theatre of encounter. This is not unlike what Steinbock will refer to as a kind of epiphanic verticality.

God as Non-experience

In *attempting* to bracket the world, the aim is the non-experiential, the possibility of impossibility, a kind of nothingness-horizon that effectively alters one’s “present.” Whatever rules are in place concerning what it means to exist (ek-sist, to be simultaneously in and out-of) notwithstanding, being-before-God (the active bringing of oneself before the non-experiential) helps “prove” and provide for an evidence that is not reducible to what can come about via transcendental consciousness or “going out of oneself.” The transcendental finding of something other than oneself is not necessary in order for one to be-before the non-experience of God (or “The Absolute,” the distinction seems to matter little for Lacoste).

Further, this being-before-the-Absolute paradoxically makes the individual person more human than ever before. It provides a means of being-human in a fundamental way that demonstrates that intuition and awareness need not succumb to a supposedly “neutral” theatre of the world made “public” via universal (and at times therefore also *hegemonic*) presumptions of how experience is understood (which perhaps inadvertently quarantine religion to a sphere of non-verifiable feeling). In part, this is because the dynamics of being-before-God are built upon the *non-experience*, which God *is*.¹⁰ The Liturgical reduction displaces one’s ego, and leaves one emptied and impoverished (via *kenosis*) because the Absolute is precisely such a non-experience. This is one reason Lacoste eventually will claim that faith is not “phenomenologically identifiable.” If

¹⁰ For Gschwandtner, “it is less an experience than an openness to experience.” And “Liturgy functions as a challenge to ordinary experience. It shows something deeper and more fundamental than Dasein’s experience of being-in-the-world.” (“The Vigil as Exemplary Liturgical Experience: On Jean-Yves Lacoste’s Phenomenology of Liturgy” 655).

faith is unbracketable, as Schrijvers also interprets it, then how, in the more particular aspects, can this remain consistent with Lacoste's depiction of religious experience as going beyond a subjective, ego-oriented "feeling?"¹¹

This again points towards Lacoste's contention with experience itself. What is meaningfully present about such a non-experience for Lacoste is that there is a noticeable "'liturgical disorientation of consciousness' ... of the 'soul' putting consciousness in question" (*Experience and the Absolute* 152). The soul and consciousness (perhaps here following the Heideggerian ontological distinction between ontic and ontological) check and balance one another. One reflects on one's own conscious grasping, and challenges its preunderstandings and preferred modes of seeing, and it is Liturgy—which introduces another party, the Absolute—that furnishes a unique and active means that allows for this reflection. A testimony can be offered of such a liturgical disorientation of consciousness, for in being-before-God as the absolute non-experience, not only is the individual soul being put into question, but also along with it, the entirety of the world horizon. This again marks the excess¹² and profusion of inexperience over experience:

We can describe every experience, even inexperience, as the "experience of consciousness," and therefore in terms of intentionality. But ... this enables us to do no more than verify the presence of whoever is praying or is attempting to pray, and to verify the disappointment occasioned when knowledge coincides with inexperience. (*Experience and the Absolute* 149)

Although it is possible to give descriptions of intentional, conscious grasping or "experience," Lacoste is pessimistic that anything new can be achieved through this description; or even worse, that one is confronted with great disappointment in the fact that description of the intentional experience, no matter how detailed, lacks the power to furnish any fecund potential to enrich the experience further.

However, it must be clarified—although non-experience may still seem vague and non-verifiable, it is not to be reduced to what he deems to be a failed version of a Heideggerian sacred or numinous. In fact he pits his liturgical reduction against this. First, this is because, under his assessment, *Being and Time* limits the horizon of experience to what can be described according to the neutrally public, open, universalizable space for all: "The central (but not exclusive) intention of *Being and Time* is to unveil the fundamental structures of experience such as they are everywhere, always and for everyone." (*Experience and the Absolute* 104). For experience to be

¹¹ Faith cannot be phenomenologically identifiable. See Lacoste, *La phénoménalité de Dieu*. See also Schrijvers, "God and/in Phenomenology: Jean-Yves Lacoste's Phenomenality of God" 88.

¹² "We must always begin by referring to the excess of inexperience over experience, to the point of the pure and simple negation of experience." (Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute* 192).

“universal” in this sense is to limit the potential and possibilities of appearances that extend beyond the world’s horizon, and thus to allow little room for events of revelation. And second, this is because Heidegger’s later turn to the sacred and the divinities of the fourfold is a vague spirituality that only prologues the false equations of religious experience with “religious feeling” or a variation of a non-knowledge-based “sense of the infinite” (“Response” 677) once championed by Protestant Theologians (e.g. Schleiermacher) seeking legitimizations of religion in the face of modern critique and thought. In succumbing to a sentimental, “vague encounter with the sacred” we are left with but “divine entities without a face.” (677)

This critique of a faceless, non-identifiable, and general Absolute runs contrary to the depths and power of religious experiences, which tend to be expressed beyond sentimental vagueness and ambiguity. This has import with respect to his concerns for the association between religion and feeling, which I will clarify in a moment. In *Experience and the Absolute* Lacoste had already critiqued those four terms of location (earth, sky, mortals and deities), and how Heidegger’s *Geviert* or *Fourfold* “mark out the space in which Being is meted out, and over which sovereignly reigns, even over the gods themselves, the sacred—*das Heilige*.” (*Experience and the Absolute* 16). Reliance upon this “vague” spiritual notion leads us to the fact that “God” or the sacred now belongs to the “sphere of immanence”, which in turn exercises a greater power than what the Divine ever could produce.¹³ The form or mold of the sacred oversees and commands any “content” any divinity could fill it with. Thus, under the *Geviert* one can only become “acquainted with an immanent sacred [*deviennent familiers d’un sacré immanent*],” and therefore not with a transcendent God (*Experience and the Absolute* 18). And consequentially (and for the sake of time here withholding judgment as to whether his critique of Heidegger is founded), instead of feelings of the numinous/sacred providing a transcendental passageway, they chain the individual to an immanence that holds power over any potential being-before-God.

The attempt to “feel the presence of the ‘divine’ of which Heidegger speaks” should not be confused with what the liturgical reduction seeks to accomplish—the connection of a *relational* opening in being-before the Absolute. (*Experience and the Absolute* 63). The Absolute, before whom/what one trembles in its making-bear of oneself *and* one’s running thesis regarding the universality of being-in-the-world calls into question any *evident* “atheism of life.” (*Experience and the Absolute* 105). This is one reason why the liturgical reduction is first aid to the ultimately vacuous conceptions of religious experiences coming in the form of numinous, ambiguous, or “spiritual” feelings. Lacoste seeks to get beyond both a God

¹³ This is because for Lacoste “The sovereignty that the sacred (or that of Being) exercises [over the fourfold] ... substantially enlarges the sphere of immanence.” (*Experience and the Absolute* 16).

that only seeks to elicit emotional responses without cognitive content, as well as a God that is claimed according to theologically cognitive commitments and consciousness-oriented forms bereft of affectivity.

II. Steinbock and Emotions

Although Steinbock likely would be sympathetic to the majority of Lacoste's concerns, his approach to emotion and religious experience is quite different. His development of religious experience via epiphany in *Phenomenology and Mysticism* gets extended in the more recent *Moral Emotions*, in which his call for their development seems to take a cue from Merleau-Ponty:

If I try to study love or hate purely from inner observation, I will find very little to describe: a few pangs, a few heart throbs—in short, trite agitations which do not reveal the essence of love or hate... We must reject the prejudice which makes “inner realities” out of love, hate or anger, leaving them accessible to one single witness: the person who feels them. Anger, shame, hate and love are not psychic facts hidden at the bottom of another's consciousness: they are types of behavior or styles of conduct which are visible from the outside. They exist *on* this face or *in* those gestures, not hidden behind them. (*Sense and Non-Sense* 52-3)

The unique achievement of the *Moral Emotions* beyond Merleau-Ponty's observation is a more concrete articulation of how emotions can be freed from the trappings of a private, solipsistic consciousness by revealing their “outside,” as always open to the inter-personal. Emotions are capable of manifesting something new and otherwise “unknown” to the one undergoing them.¹⁴ These emotions get packaged into three categories. As Kelly interprets, those schemas are “emotions of self-givenness (pride, shame, guilt), of possibility (repentance, hope and despair) and of otherness (trust, loving and humility).” (“A Journey through the Emotions” 533)

Of course, emotions are an essential means by which the majority of contemporary academic discourse investigates the human condition. Nevertheless, emotions have been emptied of their social and political relevance, jettisoned from the sphere of inter-personal life (*Moral Emotions* 273), and thought to be less provocative/proactive, and more reactionary to internal states. This all too solipsistic conception of emotions reveals itself as putatively false when we consider, with even just a bit of investigative

¹⁴ Debates in academic discourse over the role of emotions continue. Emotions are still a contested topic, even in practical and moral philosophy. For example, Elijah Millgram in “Pleasure in Practical Reasoning” draws the distinction between sensation and emotion. Emotion can (in a somewhat Kantian inspired way) reveal something new about our world, our “desirability,” as he puts it.

muscle, how emotions are sutured to our social dimension beyond subjective agency—e.g., I feel pride in part because I seek pleasure from social recognition. Not only are emotions no longer thought to play a socially relevant role, but they also are subjected to being untrustworthy for depicting reality. Thus, our crisis today is “not in reason, but in the fact that the emotions have been excluded from the meaning of person, and made the subset of reason, or sensibility, which amounts to the same thing.” (*Moral Emotions* 274)

This wholly inter-social element of human experience has largely been eclipsed by “old beginnings” (such as reflection, theory, or reason) and modern (4) social imaginaries that—in a way Lacoste would agree—have left us in a solipsistic state (12). Emotions no longer are thought to provide evidential import or disclosure of the intelligibility of what it means to be a person in a given circumstance, thus leaving our sensibilities dull, blunt, and deprived from introducing poetically anything new into our lives and the lives of others. Emotions have been given over to either reason or sensibility, leaving them but irrational “ruptures” in objectivity (4). Instead, following Scheler’s view that affects are the announcers of our foremost values and true natures (51), emotions no longer should be seen as “blind processes running from the course of nature” (5). This is not, of course, a blind praise of emotions, for they also (pending upon the specific emotion, and how one takes the emotion to express such and such) can be as equally damning in their lending to one’s retreating to the private and solipsistic. What helps keep emotions inter-social without barring personal agency and responsibility? How can we prevent emotions from falling back under the jurisdiction of those “old beginnings”?

Steinbock, Emotions and Immediacy

One task then becomes to provide a positive depiction of emotions, and how they are otherwise. Emotions (as experiences) “reveal the person as *interpersonal*; we discover in our self-relations that we are inherently relation and not self-grounding, the ‘self’ given most deeply relationally as myself.” (*Moral Emotions* 274). Yet what are emotions and what do they reveal? Emotions are on the level of “feeling” that is enacted in the realm of “spirit.” Emotions are revelatory of human persons (11), and open the sphere of personhood and one’s being manifested as a person, *in toto*. “Moral” emotions are a distinct kind that conclusively point to the interpersonal nexus (finite to finite persons), evince norm constitution, and play a revelatory/presentative role in the regulations of those norms (13). In these regards, one again is reminded of Merleau-Ponty, who construes this relation in the example of the seer and the seen, both of whom/which (also as “capacities”) condition one another in our “inter-individual” constitution. For Steinbock, although not all emotions exhibit an immediate “interpersonal relation” (14), all still are revelatory of one’s personhood (as relevantly intersocial) in that they manifest some content about that person.

This implicates immediacy. On the one hand, it is possible to interpret Steinbock's analysis of emotions as having a direct, *unmediated* manifestation to the individual, and as a consequence of his work, also an unmediated, instantaneity according to which the other person(s) relevance is auto-presented in the moral emotions. By seeking to reveal phenomenologically the universal essences of emotions, there is a sense in which this universality also supposes that the individual feels certain things *independent from*, i.e. a priori to, a "real" other (and not simply a virtual, imaginary, inter-personal/inter-Personal). This universality itself reveals something—namely, that the individual does not need a transcendental experience in order for the experience of the emotion to take place. Yet this universal structure of emotions also leads us to recognize that, barring the presence of a "real" other (whether a human in the flesh, or the Absolute), the emotion seems to operate with a kind of phantom or virtual other/Other. Indeed, Steinbock's approach is universal in scope, seeking to "clarify the *essential structures* of these experiences [so that] an emotion will have such and such a structure no matter when, where, or who experiences it." (267)

Yet on the other hand, it starts to become clearer that Steinbock is more in favor of a universal, essential description of emotion that presumes the (absolute?) necessity of mediation. The major and enduring questions with which everyone must grapple at some point, such as "what is my path in life?" (*Moral Emotions* 53) have an emotional import and communicate a kind of affective intelligibility that is universal, yet also individual. These enduring questions are universal in the sense that they are asked by everyone, yet they are individual because the answers posed vary drastically. The *way* one arrives at the answers to these enduring questions is hardly a matter of pure introspection. Indeed, it is a matter of induction of the transcendental sort, of going out of oneself and retrieving an experience and bringing it back into oneself. One cannot develop an intelligible answer to these questions on one's own because then "these questions would be so transparent that they would be answered in the very instant they were posed." (54). Yet, necessary is a transcendental experience that mediates or *intervenes* into my private world, some "one" breaking through the screen of my world from the outside. To reiterate, persons are "inherently interpersonal ... intrinsically relational and not self-grounding." (12)

Despite the inter-relation with the other and her interventions, these emotions appear, however, still to operate with a certain form of instantaneity. For Steinbock if emotions merely were an individual, solipsistic matter, barring the individual from inter-personal and inter-Personal relations, then the questions that bear the weight of these emotions would be both irrelevant (due to their transparency to the self) and perhaps even to some degree, empty of significance. Necessary, then, is an auto-immediate mediation or intervention of the other. It cannot be stressed enough that what makes these emotions "moral" is their automatic, interpersonal relation that bears their "own style of givenness, cognition,

and evidence and that is irreducible to both epistemic acts ... and to instinct or private feelings.” (11) Emotions thus slip through our explanations of them as either private, or as merely socially predetermined.

The question of instantaneity of course is a temporal one. What is the temporal dimension of these moral emotions, as inter-personal and inter-Personal? These experiences cut across the grain of the very fixed and familiar structures of everyday time-consciousness. Since the moral emotions exhibit their own unique sorts of givenness and evidence, this allows us to presume that the “temporal modes of givenness” must also be presented differently (15). For example, in the emotion of self-givenness of pride there is a kind of “bad” immediacy that gets presupposed by the one given over to pride. Pride presents a temporalization whereby “I am the ultimate source of meaning” (42). It is an emotion whereby a mediation (or perhaps rather, an intervention) of the other is presumed absent. It concerns a temporal construal of the present, as Kelly recently has interpreted, precisely in “my immediate self-awareness, that self-givenness that simulates the ‘eternal’ through the now’s retentional and protentional structure...” (“A Journey through the Emotions” 533). This self-temporalization is one in which I presume a present of my own making. Like the seemingly infinite presentation of my self-image in a hall of mirrors, I become trapped in my own eternal reflection, and thus become my own absolute. Not only am I the absolute “source” of time, but also the giver of time, thus again reinforcing a self-given immediacy. As Steinbock puts it, “I experience myself as always was and always will be... I am the origin of time. Thus, we have the givenness of an *eternal* being... The self-givenness in self-temporalization can be understood as a basic experience and lure for pride insofar as I am given to myself as self-grounding, as the absolute source of time, as ‘eternal.’” (*Moral Emotions* 43)¹⁵

Whereas love (categorized in the schema of an emotion of “the other”) demonstrates a more positive dimension of immediacy, namely in the form of the unconditional as an immediacy that does not originate in me, but in the other. Love is “given without temporal limitations” and it is senseless to suggest “I will love you for five years” precisely because that would betray the idea of loving—“loving in its very directedness is moving toward infinity (toward eternity, Omni-temporality... unconditionality.)” (230). This moving-toward infinity with a directedness towards a temporal unconditional not of my own making, runs in contradistinction to pride, which operates with a presupposition of eternity in the form of immediacy. Finally, another emotion of self-givenness mentioned by Steinbock bears directly upon a reflection upon immediacy—shame. As depicted in the Biblical narrative, after the fall of Adam and Eve shame became a possible emotional disposition, as they both sought to hide from God—“the ‘where

¹⁵ This does not entail, however, that pride is anti-interpersonal. It still is “interpersonal because it presupposes an implicit movement toward others and includes others only by resisting them.” (Steinbock, *Moral Emotions* 32).

are you?’ posed by God ... is a question not of location, but disposition; as sinners, their *immediate* [*my emphasis*] disposition to God was removed.” (76) What this narrative reveals about shame is that it is a direct product of a loss of immediacy. Adam and Eve no longer were oriented towards God, and as a consequence suffered from eternal mediation in the form of disorientation. Shame thus is the experience of having lost immediate orientation to the Absolute, which has the consequence of negating oneself by focusing entirely solipsistically, namely, on one’s shortcomings. This *lack* of immediacy is depicted more negatively.

III. Steinbock, Religious Experience, and Emotion

In addressing specific emotions such as pride, shame, or love, religious experience becomes central, and Steinbock relies upon his past work in these regards. He has referred to “the inter-Personal elsewhere as religious experience” (*Moral Emotions* 13) and indeed the moral emotions have a distinct “spiritual significance” (28). Religious experience is essential to the moral emotions, which reveal a person as in need of relations that are both interpersonal and inter-Personal (a distinction between which the lowercase “p” and capital “P” draw attention) (14). The former concerns the finite-to-finite relation of persons. The latter involves the human-finite to absolute-infinite-holy relation of persons (282 n. 33). This distinction corresponds nicely to how he writes of religious experience in *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, and to collate an essential conclusion of that work with those of the *Moral Emotions*, this inter-Personal experience *is* religious experience of epiphany or verticality, whereas revelation is a religious experience more so of/with the human other.

While the crisis of modern life is described in *The Moral Emotions* as being sourced by a flawed understanding of the relationship between reason and emotion, the crisis addressed in *Phenomenology and Mysticism* is a “despiritualization understood as idolatry” (*Phenomenology and Mysticism* 241). These two crises can be understood in conjunction with one another, with a turn to the Absolute/religion being a means of counter-privileging dominant elevations of conditioned things to the status of Absolutes (again echoing Scheler). Religious experience; is dynamic; is not given to full and total closure; concerns the sphere of the holy; is an experience named “the foundation of religion” (230); should be “determined on its own level and in its own terms” (241); provides for the articulation of the “many modes of vertical experience” that pertain to its own sphere (118). An overarching aim of this text is to retrieve a religious evidence that operates according to “verticality,” which must “*be taken on its own terms* and not subordinated to how objects are given to us in perception, or evaluated according to philosophical narrow-mindedness, or accepted or rejected according to presuppositions of religious belief” (115).

Additionally, religious experience can be characterized according to a particular and unique kind of givenness—verticality (211)—one that is counter-idolatrous. What should draw our attention here is that one essential way in which verticality is characterized is as *immediate*: Verticality is “‘absolute,’ immediate, spontaneous, beyond our calculation or control, creative, each time ‘full,’ not partial, not mixed with absence, not given as lacking. It is ‘vertical’ givenness” (146). The immediacy of verticality directly correlates with both *a*) our lack of control of its giver and givenness, and its coming from an elsewhere, and *b*) its having a *direct* (read here, immediate, with nothing interposed) impact upon us and not being overlooked. Steinbock’s vertical givenness can come in different ways and intensities (2) and is to be distinguished from the aforementioned notion of presentation championed by our modern social imaginaries (12).

It is his concept of “epiphany” that becomes an essential means by which “the given” of this vertical givenness as a “vertical experiencing” (115) is qualified, namely as the sort of “vertical givenness that opens the religious dimension of experience.” (241, cf. 25). *Epiphany* becomes the key to counteracting the aforementioned idolatry referred to as despiritualization. What gives epiphany the power to counteract idolatry is that it is—as the mystics bear witness—deeply personal in a rather paradoxical way. Instead of leading the experiencer to herself, she is directed outwards. Here one might take Steinbock’s aforementioned claim seriously, that the inter-Personal is the encounter of religious experience, with the *Moral Emotions* furthering this earlier development of epiphany as the “mode in which ‘Being,’ ‘Ereignis,’ and so forth, leaves the realm of *impersonal regioning*, and becomes radically *personal*” (*Phenomenology and Mysticism* 162) as well as inter-Personal (125). As a form of verticality, which is immediate, epiphany is not expressive simply of a protentional or retentive time-experience of God, but rather an instantaneous (or rather, perhaps, given the relationality of the two—a contemporaneous) “personal presence of the Holy” (25).

To follow one path where this conclusion may lead: when this personal presence is dis-acknowledged, when this immediacy is excused instead as being purely mediated, then one runs the risk of falling back into relativizing the Absolute, into despiritualization and idolatry, which is referred to as a force of human creation and technology. One need not invoke Heideggerian enframing here, for idolatry—which always fails to direct us vertically in our immediate experience (212)—occurs whenever one is to “elevate things to the status of an absolute.” (220). Yet we also cannot be too quick to refer to any case that lacks immediacy as idolatrous, for we then would forget what is demonstrated in *The Moral Emotions*, which can be summed up to present two different understandings of immediacy, namely in relation to fallenness. First, immediacy is, on the one hand, a presumption taken up in the “fallen” disposition of pride. Yet on the other hand, it is a loss of an ideal relation religious experience could entail; a dis-orientation from God that can resource shame, and now seems to

demand constant reflection and mediation, and reliance upon one's *own* interpretive instruments, thus leading back to the possibility of idolatry. Idolatry amounts to "accepting something with absolute weight" (*The Moral Emotions* 253) that is not worthy of unconditionality, or "non-self-grounding character" (119). Effectively, this critique of idolatry is that it is an act whereby a different kind of immediacy also is rejected, an immediacy that is part and parcel of epiphanic, vertical experiencing. This is much like Kierkegaard's depiction of what one rejects in the religious leap of faith, which, as Westphal interprets is precisely the polemical resignation of the "immediacy that is defined as absolute commitment to relative ends." (*Kierkegaard's Phenomenology of Faith* 55).

IV. Preliminary Conclusions: Immediacy and Religion via Steinbock and Lacoste

But this leap is full, not only of promise, but also peril. As Jaspers understood, the mystical life concerns being caught up immediately in the Divine or Unconditioned, and this has the negative effect of absorption—of losing oneself in the Absolute or Abyss. As Ricœur later will interpret Jaspers' work on religion, "Between this religious immediacy and the human quality of freedom Jaspers sees no possibility of harmony. Mysticism is being charged with being suicidal."¹⁶ As the mystic flees, so does her freedom, and thus mysticism is a negative decision whereby even the world itself, as a medium of grounding oneself and organizing some understanding of self-affection, is negated (*Weltverneinung*). As a good existentialist insistent upon radical freedom, Jaspers cannot accept that all things simply "are given" in a way that our individual decisions are limited, otherwise I surrender myself over to the control of the given. Even in my inner emotional life, "I do not act without affecting myself," and thus, even in self-affection there is a split-second decision over which I have volition to intervene in my emotions. I either can affirm and encourage certain affects or negate and inhibit them. After "the very first rudiments of my feelings, of my modes of viewing" I intervene in my own "inner existence"

¹⁶ Ricœur continues: "Religion as seen by Karl Jaspers turns two faces toward man: the visage of mysticism and the visage of authority. Both 'petrify' freedom. On the one hand, religion presents itself mystically to man, that is to say, as vertical communication, direct and immediate, in which man absorbs himself and loses himself in the Supreme Thou. Between this religious immediacy and the human quality of freedom Jaspers sees no possibility of harmony. Mysticism is being charged with being suicidal. It is true that the suicide has its grandeur, a nocturnal grandeur—the grandeur of the 'unconditioned'—which reminds us that life is neither the supreme reality nor the supreme value." Ricœur continues: "the mystic, like the suicide, flees: the latter flees nowhere, the former flees beyond, to the other side (*Jenseits*) to a *Hinterwelt* which 'doubles' for this world. Mysticism is the 'negative decision', the 'negation of the world' (*Weltverneinung*)." ("Relation of Philosophy to Religion" 613).

either by developing and multiplying these affects, or responding to them with a kind of negating “violence.” (Jaspers, *Philosophy II* 281).¹⁷

Not unlike Jaspers’ insistence upon a “soft” reflection of my affective experience, yet void of some of his concerns of absorption in the Absolute, Steinbock points to how I can bracket certain presuppositions and inquire into how things are “given”, i.e. immediately present. Yet, this first person description of the experience is more than “autobiographical” and also extends into the description of the universal essence, reinforcing the essential role of another—the person or Person. Like Lacoste, Steinbock is interested in overcoming the indeterminate and ambiguous nature of the numinous (although Steinbock does not critique it in the way Lacoste might), referring instead to forms of religious experience that address the person to the inter-personal/Personal nexus. As Steinbock investigates the religious experiences of mystics, he concludes that despite the potential immediacy of such experiences, the mystics still bring themselves under a reflective, intentional structure. This concerns the veracity of the experience being subjected to investigation through questions of potential self-deception, or of the impact the experience has upon the emotional character of the person, as expressed in emotional dispositions. Thus, what expresses itself with immediacy in a given religious experience later gets processed through a mediatory, interpretive approach.

Overall, my interests in this paper have been less a matter of choosing sides between Lacoste and Steinbock and more a concern to highlight the role of immediacy in religion. Their work sketches two different solutions to similar problems, and their shared dispositions concern seeking means of counteracting *a*) an overall disenchantment associated with the loss of an understanding of how to relate with the Absolute; *b*) any elevation of immanent, relative life to the status of the Unconditioned; and *c*) the jettisoning of religion to a sentimentality that has no evidence or intelligibility of its own. These dispositions are all a matter of, on the one hand, retrieving something lost, and on the other, creating something new for contemporary religious reflection. Steinbock emphasizes the direct immediacy of verticality in epiphany in particular, and it is by merit of this immediacy that it is possible to remain in touch with something outside the control of relative, finite life. Yet, as Lacoste warns, as soon the term “experience” is relied upon to describe such an encounter, we easily retreat

¹⁷ For Jaspers, “I do not act without affecting myself. I not only draft possibilities of mundane action by inwardly planning them and trying them out, I watch and note my impulses and take affirmative and enhancing, or negative and inhibiting, positions on these impulses. Applying standards that show me what I really ought to be and do, I affect the very first rudiments of my feelings, of my modes of viewing, of my appraisals. I intervene in my inner existence and see myself continuously developing by my own means, or I intervene with instantaneous violence, upsetting my development and creating a hodgepodge of moods and ineffectual volitive impulses.” (*Philosophy II*, 218)

to the language of mediation and the privileging of an intentionality that seeks to shut the windows and doors of intuition.

Steinbock's strategy is to develop/retrieve a different kind of emotion, an inherently moral one beyond solipsism. Yet if the presumption of immediacy is retained, especially in descriptions of religious experience, then this potentially threatens the moral emotions, in part because the individual could remain trapped in a continuous feedback loop of self-self relation (not unlike some of the negative moral emotions to which Steinbock refers). This self-self relation (recalling Jaspers' depiction of self-affection) could be one without any other because of the kind of immediacy it claims. This would be a relation *sans* transcendental reach even if the Absolute is presupposed to be the giver of the religious experience.

One way to get out of this feedback loop of self-self relation is a way not unlike that proposed by Steinbock regarding the religious experiencer, who should do as the mystics—raise the emotional, affective experience up to the light of reason and let it mediate with a post-hoc explanation as to whether or not the religious experience passes some tests to determine its veracity. Steinbock is not alone in this assessment. William James, despite having a personalist account of religious experience, insisted that this “cosmic or mystic consciousness” ultimately still is connected to “persevering exercises” whereby the experience is questioned (*Religious Experience* 40). Not unlike the spiritual “disciplines” of Saint Ignatius, or the checks and balances of scripture and a virtuous life of St. Teresa of Avila, these exercises, which serve to “detach [one] from outer sensations,” (“Religious Experience” 40) help the subject test their religious experience.¹⁸ Westphal endorses a similar, yet perhaps starker approach, setting deontological work with the task to “isolate the affective moment of the religious life from the cognitive and volitional, and to identify religious experience with the former.” (*Phenomenological Account of Religious Experience* 80)

While not disagreeing entirely with this approach, it does lead to a number of further, rather tricky challenges. One challenge is that this seems to result in a two-stage and separated approach (emotion first, reason second). By merit of these two stages, one runs the possible risk of falling back into the trap of allowing reason to be the gatekeeper of religious experience. Instead, it seems that to be more consistent with Steinbock's overall approach (of casting suspicion upon that very reason-emotion distinction), it would be necessary to insist upon the *immediacy* of reason's engagement within the play of emotions of the religious experience. This is not a critique of Steinbock's project, but rather a hope for gaining more

¹⁸ James continues: “... as a matter of psychological fact, mystical states of a well-pronounced and emphatic sort *are* usually authoritative over those who have them. They have been ‘there,’ and know. It is vain for rationalism to grumble about this.” (“Religious Experience” 41)

specificity in regards to some general worries that arise when aligning religion too closely with feeling (following Lacoste's concerns). How, after all, if we reject the "immediate immediacy" of an experience with the Absolute, are we not still threatened, as Kierkegaard understood, by my self-sufficiency of inward reflection, which then would amount to a new kind of immediacy, a "mediated immediacy"?¹⁹ Is it thus possible ever to escape two equally flawed consequences wherein either the supposed immediacy itself becomes the God or tyrant of the experience, or the mediator becomes the one to whom we remain infinitely indebted (again even if it is ourselves and post-hoc)?

Lacoste's work opens up new possibilities for understanding the mediate/immediate relation, in part through his depiction of the reduction of intention/intuition to, in some instances, being a Liturgical twist or shift of attention from *extasis* to *enstasis*. He furnishes a—successful in my view—defense of the preference for non-experience, and of his deposing emotion from being the primary impetus and enactor of religious life. Yet one question still could be posed: could discarding "feeling" and "experience", and focusing instead on non-experience still possibly retain essential components that have attracted scholars to "feeling" for the description of religious experience in the first place? One such component of course is, in my view, immediacy. If a notion of non-experience is developed to articulate the *shock* of our dispositions and expectations of *esse Coram Deo* in an encounter that is unfilterable, immediate, and on the terms of the Absolute Unconditioned itself, then it starts to become unclear as to what the difference may be between such immediacy and emotion/feeling. Nevertheless, as Lacoste seems to argue, relation with God in non-experience is transcendently *ecstatic*, and this may lead to a different kind of immediacy altogether as distinguished from the emotions more traditionally understood as sentimental.²⁰

Such concerns (e.g. of the negating abyss of the immediate Absolute) may be one reason why Ricœur inserted, precisely within the qualification

¹⁹ Summarizing Kierkegaard, Westphal puts it succinctly: "If the journey to inwardness and subjectivity is absolutely necessary so that aesthetic and speculative immediacy may be overcome, it results in an immediacy of its own, the self-sufficiency of inwardness, which must in turn be overcome." ("Kierkegaard's Phenomenology" 67) This is why, as Westphal will note later, Kierkegaard rejects Hegel's call for a mediate immediacy ("Kierkegaard's Phenomenology" 69).

²⁰ Another figure whose work could be raised in this context is William Alston. Like Steinbock Alston makes a distinction between the sensory/nonsensory, referring "to nonsensory experience as 'mystical experience'." ("Religious Experience as Perception of God" 52.) But then like Lacoste, Alston is interested in countering the view that feelings are to be associated with religious experience. Interestingly, Alston still holds onto the idea that such experiences are/can be "immediate", although still subjective, "direct" experience of God, which "contrasts with the widespread view that 'experience of God' is to be construed as purely subjective feelings and sensations to which supernaturalistic causal hypothesis are added." ("Religious Experience as Perception of God" 53)

of religion, a counter-balancing of mediacy/immediacy of the Absolute encounter. Despite his well-known emphasis upon the hermeneutic enterprise, which is wholly mediatory, Ricœur insists upon how something immediate remains inextricable from religious experience and putatively beyond my intentional grasp. Despite my will, there is a certain “status of immediacy that could be claimed by the dispositions and feelings allied with the call-and response structure in a religious order.” (*Experience and Language in Religious Discourse* 129). Twenty years earlier he will refer to how an experience of faith by which one furnishes a “hermeneutics of testimony” is immediate—“The Absolute declares itself here and now. In testimony there is an immediacy of the Absolute without which there would be nothing to interpret. This immediacy functions as origin.” After this kind of omega point or *initium*, the experience of interpretation then takes over as the endless mediation of this immediacy, for “without it [this immediacy] interpretation will forever be only an interpretation of interpretation.” (*Essays on Biblical Interpretation* 144). Interpretation needs a fecund experience that breaks in from the outside and *makes* an impression in order to be motivated to ever engage in the interpretive enterprise in the first place. And conversely, the power of the immediate event can come alive again and again through the work of mediation and interpretation. Immediacy is *constitutive* of the religious experience, but—and as Staudigl accurately depicts—a hermeneutic character and mediation constitutes its essential “other half.”²¹

This helps thicken a final reflection on immediacy and religion via Steinbock and Lacoste. Despite contemporary insistentcies upon mediation that tend to censure any possibility of immediacy, this does not stop us from yearning for it. When I retreat, for example, into untouched nature to go for a hike on the weekend, not only am I looking for an experience of something uncultured, unconditioned, or purely beautiful; I also seek the unconditioned through a distance from the concerns of everyday temporality. On the hike, I try not to look at my watch, or to calculate or measure persistently how long each movement takes to achieve my surely immeasurable goal of enjoying the hike. This search for a form of timelessness or immediacy is one of being without time’s mediation, which commands my everyday work-life and from which I yearn for a repose and idleness. But this timelessness is not reducible to a mere “being in the present” or even being present before the Absolute. That is, this refrain from time is not one of “being in the moment,” to repeat the platitude. Despite some attempts at criticizing claims to religious experiences due to their immediacy, as “experience[s] in which one senses the immediate presence

²¹ As Staudigl concludes, “It is in this context that he [Ricœur] declares the inherently hermeneutic character that a ‘phenomenology of religion’ has to assume. With this decision he definitely parts ways with the radicalized phenomenologies which revolve around the idea of some originary, unconditioned, or absolute self-givenness. Yet the necessity of running a hermeneutic detour is not simply derived from the fact that the dispositions related to the ‘basic feelings’ are embodied linguistically.” (“On Seizing the Source” 759).

of some supernatural entity” (Martin, “Critique of Religious Experience” 65),²² it seems that it is precisely because of religion’s immediacy that it is able to teach us something new about, and disturb any preunderstanding of, *presence* itself.

Both Lacoste and Steinbock can help us see with greater detail that *presence* has an intelligibility that never straightforwardly is given. They recognize that the freedom of immediate, unconditioned, vertical givenness is not a mere openness to any and all vague, numinous, or sacred encounters as especially Lacoste and Jaspers worry. Such immediacy is sought due to its being radically *personal* and “here” (for Steinbock it is Inter-Personal and Epiphanic; for Lacoste it is *esse Coram Deo*, being-in/before God). This hereness of the Absolute disrupts my own, intentional “here” of *my* present moment. The Absolute brings a timelessness into *our* shared encounter, and this keeps me from being able both to call it my experience, and to refer to its immediacy as a “presence.” Understanding this “presence” of the Absolute here does not succumb to other critiques of a metaphysics of presence raised by Derrida, et al., in part because, as an introduction of Absolute presence, it becomes a presence that subverts the very idea of my temporally present (Derrida refers to the subversion of the present as *différance*). This immediacy of the Absolute or, involuted, this Absolute Immediacy, *is* an eternity and infinity that is reducible to neither diachronic nor synchronic time. The promise of the eternal is less of a temporal stretch of not-having-an-end, and more of a possibility of instantaneously and immediately compressing or folding the gaps between not only past and future, but also between a perception and its stimulus.

If we can trust Lacoste and Steinbock on one thing, it is that religion and the transcendental *extension* for which it hopes as direct and *immediate*, is tirelessly *inter-Personal*. And this may be what safeguards—or allows us any claim upon having—any experience that is immediate. It would be precisely the Absolute that both binds me to the experience (or non-experience, as one beyond my ipseity), and then gives the experience its intelligibility as one utterly beyond-me and uniquely fecund *without my total absorption or being utterly given over in the Absolute* (as Jasper warns). I thus can go unfiltered, raw, and open in religious experience because it is there that I may encounter an immediate affect that does not originate in me, and to which I may return, again and again (Ricoeur), to this shared, inter-experience by unfolding more and more of its layers over the course of time.

Finally, yet still on the level of preliminary reflection, if *a)* immediacy can be understood in part as the temporal expression of the unconditioned, and *b)* following the classic association between the

²² Martin also notes that mystics often rely upon (or more pejoratively, retreat to) paradoxes in describing such experiences, as their intelligibilities exceed normal vocabulary. (“Critique of Religious Experience” 66).

Unconditioned/Absolute/God, then *c*), could not immediacy, especially in the context of religion, be associable (and perhaps therefore only) with the Person of the Absolute, paradoxically bringing us back to reliance upon a mediator? Religion is unique in that its experiences concern a non-interposed and direct immediacy that supports and helps agency to flourish in a way that is simultaneously inside and outside, as well as always already in relation with the inter-Personal *in medias res*, the Absolute in the “middle of things” as *mediator*. Beyond *my* present, two persons/Persons sharing a present, with a sameness of time, exceed description as either immediate or mediate. It may be more accurate to qualify such immediacy of religious experience then not as *the instantaneous*, but—because of the simultaneous experiencing and involvement of another person/the Absolute—the *contemporaneous*.

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