Limits of Phenomenology of Religion: Deliberations on the book *Phenomenology and Mysticism* by Anthony J. Steinbock¹

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Phenomenology and Mysticism: The Verticality of Religious Experience by Anthony J. Steinbock is an interesting contribution to the phenomenology of religious experience, one which has prompted Sylvain Camilleri to speculate about whether or not it constitutes a new era in the phenomenology of religion (Camilleri 166), one which would surpass both the classical phenomenological works of Heidegger, Scheler, and Reinach, as well as authors who, according to Dominique Janicaud, represent a theological shift in phenomenology, such as Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and Jean-Yves Lacoste.

In *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, Steinbock addresses three areas in particular: 1) he presents a broader concept of experience and evidence, thereby giving phenomenology access to religious phenomena; 2) he examines the nature of religious experience and the corresponding evidence as exemplified by three mystics of three monotheistic traditions—Teresa of Ávila, Rabbi Dov Baer, and Rūzbihān Baqlī; and 3) he does not limit himself solely to analysing religious experience, but expands his analyses to posit conclusions regarding such philosophical topics as idolatry and individuation.

My initial task is to ascertain whether or not Steinbock manages to overcome the issues and criticisms that phenomenology of religion often faces, e.g. in the aforementioned critique by Janicaud, and to explore certain aspects of his concepts of experience and evidence which require further elucidation. I will then introduce Steinbock's phenomenological description of religious experience and evaluate its adequacy and whether the philosophical conclusions which Steinbock deduces from his analyses are sufficiently justified.

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I. Various Manners of Givenness

The Theological Shift in French Philosophy

A key moment for contemporary French phenomenology, according to Janicaud, is 1961, when *Totality and Infinity* by Emmanuel Levinas was published, followed by the 1964 release of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's unfinished book, *The Visible and the Invisible*. Janicaud finds hints of this movement already in Ricœur's foreword to the French edition of Edmund Husserl's *Ideas*, in which Ricœur asks if the transcendental subject par excellence is not, in fact, God (Janicaud 13). While Ricœur does not take this further, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, each in their own way, strive to overcome Husserl's concept of intentionality. Janicaud adopts key terms from Merleau-Ponty and Levinas in order to illustrate the conflict between the "new and old phenomenologists". Key new directions included, most prominently, both "intertwining" (*entrelacs*) rather than the older "protrusion" and "exiting" (*suraplomb*), so shifting away from the older vertical term of transcendence, and the newer opening to the invisible, to the Other, to a pure givenness, or to "archi-revelation," shifting away from the older "aplomb" (*aplomb*) (13-15).

Janicaud critically scrutinizes Levinas, Marion, Henry, and Chrétien for exceeding immanence. He argues that staying within the limits of immanence is intrinsic to phenomenology as established by Husserl. Thus, their methods fail to meet the requirements of "science"; their phenomenology is ideologically contaminated with theological-metaphysical elements. Janicaud is not critical of theology; rather he argues for its clear separation from phenomenology, which should be neither theological nor atheistic. However, he argues that the theological shift beyond immanence is less of a conscious deviation from Husserl, and more of a result of the ambivalent and unspecific nature of phenomenology itself. On the one hand, the openness of the *epoché* is beneficial for any philosophical line of questioning; on the other hand, the openness risks ceasing to be philosophy.

Steinbock's Recourse

In his analysis of religious experience, Steinbock tries to show how phenomenology of religion can be conceived without exceeding immanence. Religious experience, the exemplary form of which is mystical experience, is not something unusual or rare according to Steinbock; indeed such experience may be a distinctive attribute of humans. Thus, religious experience would be accessible to philosophy. But since Kant, it has been a long-standing, influential view that the domain of religion does not belong to philosophy:

All matters, especially those that concern the Holy, have to conform to *one* type of givenness in order to be given and hence to be experienced. If they do not conform, they are said to remain essentially on the limit of experience and are subject only to theory, speculation, or mere personal belief. (Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism* 6)

In order to expand the field of possible experience and meaningful evidence, Steinbock chooses the phenomenological approach, which bears the advantage of not resting on speculation, and instead maintains a direct focus on the nature of experience (27). For

Steinbock, “experience” means the manner in which things are given to us. The givenness of experience exceeds the dichotomy between subject and object (2), and is employed instead of e.g. states of consciousness when speaking about mysticism (24-25).

Furthermore, Steinbock sees in traditional philosophy a problem in its excessively narrow concept of experience, where *presentation* (7), characterised in terms of empirical or intellectual subjects, is the exclusive manner of givenness, meaning that the sacred cannot serve as a meaningful subject. Steinbock discerns five alternate manners of givenness, each characteristic, not of presentation, but rather of the sphere of “verticality”: 1) *epiphany* of the Holy, 2) *revelation* of a human person, 3) *manifestation* of cultural subjects, 4) *disclosure* of the Land, and 5) *display of elemental beings* (5). 1) Epiphany is a manner of givenness that corresponds to the religious sphere. Narrowed down to the Abrahamic religions, it forms the focus of his work. 2) Revelation pertains to the manners of givenness of the Other, or inter-personality, and the ethical sphere. 3) Manifestation is a manner of appearance of artworks that may also become the manifestation of the Holy, and, in addition to the most common forms of presentation, can be observed in e.g. icons. 4) Disclosure pertains to the Land, which for perception is never present as an object but is rather disclosed as the absolute foundation. 5) Display belongs to elemental beings, possibly nature; e.g. it is possible to speak of the sacredness of water (15-16). How exactly Steinbock arrived at this catalogue of manners of givenness is not apparent from his work. What is more, he provides only brief descriptions of each manner, and he focuses on their subject. It is important to note that he only discusses the epiphany manner of vertical givenness in *Phenomenology and Mysticism*. His discussion is differentiated completely from presentation—the manner of givenness characteristic of horizontality, and he aims both not to exceed immanence (but rather to expand its scope), and to respect Husserl’s bracketing of God’s transcendence in Section 58 of *Ideas I* and the exclusion of religious experience.

Presentation and Verticality

Presentation is a manner of givenness characteristic of sensory and intellectual subjects and as such represents a type of givenness to which, as mentioned above, philosophy has traditionally tried to reduce all phenomena:

Presentation is a type of givenness that is more or less dependent upon my power to usher things into appearance, either through the power of my “I can” or my “I think”. When I intend an object, an object gives itself (whether or not it is the object I intended) in such a way that it points further on to new themes and new horizons. (Steinbock, “Evidence in the phenomenology of religious experience” 587)

The appearance of the object is therefore dependent on the subject. In terms of perception, the subject, by use of movement, views the object from new angles and modifies its position, etc., to make it appear clearer. In terms of thinking, appearance is dependent on the capability of the subject to grasp and understand the thing. What is not given via presentation is either not given at all or represents a borderline phenomenon (such as sleeping, for instance 587). Presentation, unlike verticality, relies on the noetic-noematic

structure of intention and fulfilment; the appearance of the object depends on corresponding acts, as well as their meaning:

All this—the dynamic interplay or “constitutive duet” of my “I can” and the affective pull of the object, the intersubjective orientation to the world, the passive association of sense, the constitution of both simple and categorial objects, the foreground/background structure of the phenomenal field—all this belongs to the province of *presentation* and is governed by its systematic laws and interconnections. (*Phenomenology and Mysticism* 8)

However, there is a domain of givenness that exceeds the givenness of empirical or intellectual subjects. It is what Steinbock calls verticality, or vertical givenness, and it represents a distinctive form of experience:

Sensitivity to vertical givenness is not accomplished by constructing a metaphysics or by applying either theological convictions or ethical belief systems to the experiences, but by taking a phenomenological approach to these different kinds of givenness, that is by evaluating what is actually *given in human experience*, thereby expanding our notion of evidence. (*Phenomenology and Mysticism* 1)

Steinbock might just as well have used the term “transcendence” (rather than “verticality”). However, he wanted to avoid this term due to its excessive semantic burden in philosophy and religion, which implies “immanence” as its opposite. Steinbock is especially interested in overcoming this dichotomy and endeavours to examine, based on immanence, how transcendence is given. The term “verticality” also suggests an interesting existential sense and motion:

Verticality expresses a lived directedness—religiously, morally, and bodily—like when we aspire to reach new heights, when we look up to someone, when we value the life of another above our own, when someone honoured or esteemed is held in “high” regard, when we are “upright” both morally and physically, when we are in an elated mood or “uplifted” because of an event or at the sight of a friend. And it also implies the antithetical movement of falling. (12-13)

Verticality in Steinbock’s text implies a vertical-horizontal duality, where horizontality is something that is essentially seize-able and control-able, and thus within the sphere of presentation, while verticality, in contrast, is determined by elements of mystery and reverence. However, this does not mean that horizontality is a degraded form of experience. Instead, verticality and horizontality belong to each other and are essential aspects of human life:

The modes of givenness are “vertical” in the sense that they take us *beyond* ourselves. These modes of vertical givenness are testimony to the radical presence of “absolutes” *within* the field of human experience. By “absolute” I mean a presence that is so unique that it can be predicated neither of singularity nor plurality (14-15).

The antithesis of verticality is “idolatry,” so that, in a way, Steinbock’s his work is on verticality and idolatry as the phenomenology of religious experience. Idolatry represents

a countermovement to verticality, a closing off of oneself to the vertical dimension and rejection of vertical relationships (16). While the verticality of experience leads a person beyond himself, idolatry, on the other hand, closes him within himself. In a sense, exposing idolatry and revealing verticality frame Steinbock's work.

He is not merely interested in conducting phenomenological analyses of the mystical experience, but rather deduces key philosophical conclusions from his analyses. In doing so, Steinbock calls for a reworking of many generally accepted philosophical concepts, drawing attention to the fact that our common perspective is problematic due to excessive idolatry. This applies in particular where Steinbock focuses on the concept of individuation—though rooted in the vertical dimension, human identity is taken to be rooted in the human, which is idolatry (Chapter 7).

Steinbock's discussion of idolatry distinguishes three types: 1) I and pride, 2) being tied to the world in the form of secularism or fundamentalism, and finally 3) delimitation, which represents a unidimensional nature of experience that is no longer opened to the vertical dimension (212, and Chapter 8 in general). If life is limited to horizontality alone, then horizontality becomes something negative. If the vertical dimension remains open, human experience is polyvalent. Buber's illustration in *I and Thou* can serve as an example of such polyvalence:

I consider a tree. I can look on it as a picture: stiff column in a shock of light, or splash of green shot with the delicate blue and silver of the background. ... I can classify it in a species and study it as a type in its structure and mode of life. ... In all this the tree remains my object, occupies space and time, and has its nature and constitution. It can, however, also come about, if I have both will and grace, that in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is now no longer *It*. (Buber, *I and Thou*)

A single phenomenon may be given in many ways. To approach it beyond idolatry means to allow it to give itself in its different ways and to leave open the possibility that the phenomenon may become a form of address. Steinbock refers to Buber's differentiation between the two relationships, I-You and I-It, in numerous instances. Indeed, much of Steinbock's thinking borrows from Buber's idea of religious experience as a meeting of I and You, though there are complications. Although we may relate Buber's I-It and I-You with Steinbock's presentation and verticality, respectively, what is the relationship between I-It/presentation and I-You/verticality? It is unclear how these two manners of givenness remain linked or how one becomes subsumed by the other. What would be the appropriate phenomenological reading of, for example, the mystical experience of Teresa of Ávila, who felt God's proximity among pots and pans (St. Teresa of Ávila, *The Book of Foundations* 5.8), as recounted by Steinbock? In such a case, verticality is closely intertwined with presentation, thereby fundamentally transforming it. Presentation may gradually turn into verticality and vice versa. Steinbock's terms *delimitation* and *de-limitation* offer a glimmer of insight into this issue, with delimitation representing one form of idolatry:

Delimitation as a mode of idolatry can be summarised as an exclusive orientation to a particular thing, dimension of existence, or sphere of being such that it no longer is able to point beyond itself. Delimitation "limits" the

experience so that it remains “horizontal” and does not point vertically.
(*Phenomenology and Mysticism* 237)

Delimitation means the reduction of experience to only some of its components, even though that which is given is infinitely richer (239). That which is given is originally rich and polyvalent. De-limitation, on the other hand, is not closed to that which is given, but rather allows for crossing over into the vertical dimension. It represents the infinitisation of the finite (207). The use of the term is illustrated in Steinbock’s reading of the exodus story, in which the Hebrew word for Egypt—מצרים transliterated and pronounced as *Mizraim*—also means “borders”, *mezarim*. In a manner of speaking, the concept of phenomenology has a saving dimension, whereby it leads reality out of (Egyptian) captivity and opens it up to transcendence.

Steinbock’s concept of de-limitation can also be elucidated using his reading of Marion’s concept of a saturated phenomenon, which Steinbock summarises as follows:

the saturated phenomenon is the paradigm of givenness, whereby revelation becomes exemplary for the meaning of saturation. The essence of givenness is revelation received as the call whose transformative impact constitutes me now as the gifted one. (“The Poor Phenomenon” 4)

A saturated phenomenon is one that “disrupts, floods, exceeds, and precedes the intentional granting of sense on the part of the subject.” (1) Marion discerns four modes of saturated giving: an event, an idol, a live body and an icon—revelation as such encapsulates all four. He divides other phenomena into “poor” and “regular.” A poor phenomenon is purely formal, versatile, and does not need the support of experience; examples include metaphysics, mathematics and logic. Regular phenomena refer to everyday phenomena, which may be given adequately but are usually given inadequately.

Steinbock asks whether the unsaturation of phenomena is given by the nature of the phenomena itself or by our incapability to accept them as saturated. He differentiates four types of unsaturated phenomena which do not give themselves in a revealing manner and which he designates as “poor”: the *poor* phenomenon itself, a *humble* phenomenon, a *denigrated* phenomenon, and *pride as the poverty of the gifted* (7-8). Within the context of Steinbock’s analysis of religious experience, the differentiation between a denigrated and humble phenomenon is substantial. A denigrated phenomenon arises through a unilateral focus of our perspective, which delimits it, thereby not allowing it to give itself in a de-limiting way. This is characteristic of the technological view of the world. With a humble phenomenon, on the other hand, the possibility of de-limiting remains open. A humble phenomenon gives itself in its own integrity but also serves as a revelation. Steinbock cites the example of Teresa and her pots and pans:

... in their everydayness, there is more, not a quantitative more, but a qualitative surplus. In the everyday common experience, in the context of use, in the technology of cooking, God is present in the activities involving pots and pans. The pots and pans give themselves in “the epiphany of the everyday”, to borrow a phrase from Kearney. (10)

A humble phenomenon is thus something of a paradox in which, on one hand, the phenomenon remains poor (“ordinary” in Marion’s sense), but at the same time, both in

its pooriness and through it, a revelation opens up (11). This duplicity of the humble phenomenon is lacking in Marion's conceptualization, according to Steinbock. Nevertheless, the humble phenomenon can, to a certain extent, remedy the tenuous connection between presentation and verticality, as in the case of the humble phenomenon, presentation opens up to verticality:

the humble phenomenon "de-limits", it opens to the infinite. Where for example pots and pans or cooking are concerned, we have in the humble phenomenon the possibility of the redemption (the de-limitation) of the product, of the utensil, of the technical. (10)

Although the humble phenomenon in connection with the above-mentioned problem of presentation and verticality is explicitly addressed by Steinbock in *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, it is not entirely clear how such a phenomenon is even possible, due to the strict separation of verticality and presentation, and Steinbock's description of a humble phenomenon appears somewhat vague in several aspects. Firstly, Steinbock fails to outwardly specify what exactly humble nature is based upon. It appears that a humble phenomenon may be brought about by the humbleness of the subject (i.e. by not trying to limit it), provided that the subject is open to its polyvalence and heeds the address. Alternatively, it may arise as the result of a blessing, an initiative of the Holy. However, what is far more problematic here is the dichotomous nature of the humble phenomenon itself, as Steinbock does not provide a more detailed phenomenological analysis. He only insists on the fact that the humble phenomenon remains itself while providing a revelation through itself. However, what remains unclear is how this is possible—how the phenomenon can continue to be itself when our experience with it has transformed fundamentally. Steinbock does not offer answers to these questions, only citing Teresa's example of the pots and pans: "When obedience makes you busy with external things, understand that if it is *for example* in the kitchen, the Lord passes *even* among pots and helps us with the internal also in the external." (*The Book of Foundations* 5.8) This example, on the one hand, calls for an openness to God's presence always and everywhere and, on the other hand, details an experience in which God is truly present in every situation. However, does it clearly elucidate the different manner in which pots appear when God's presence is felt versus when it is not? Or when a person approaches them with openness versus when the focus is merely on cooking? This is precisely where phenomenology of religion, including Steinbock's, falters—in the lack of sufficient evidence and thus in the impossibility of an honest description of individual modalities of religious experience. Such a description may not be possible due to the exceptionality of religious experience. Furthermore, the phenomenologist has to rely either on his or her own limited experience—experience which it might not be possible to replicate—or on the mediated descriptions of mystics, who lived within the context of certain traditions infused with languages and ideas we no longer experience. The second problem of the phenomenology of religion is the overly severe and conventional distinction between presentation and verticality, between the profane and the sacred, between It and You, which is reflected in the ubiquitous ambiguity concerning the separation or convergence of both spheres.

II. Religious and Mystical Experience

Religious and Mystical Experience

Steinbock defines the religious and mystical experience, with reference to the work of Rudolf Otto, as a meeting with an overwhelming power, with what Otto calls “the numinous” and what is felt as the *mysterium tremendum*. It is an event which is unpredictable, dangerous, spontaneous, unclaimable, and exhibits a certain mood where *awe* precedes *wonder* (*Phenomenology and Mysticism* 14). Delimited as such, the religious experience remains fundamentally unspecified in terms of its content. Not only can a human have a religious experience outside of any traditional religious framework, but even its subject remains unspecified:

the numinous is not *necessarily* qualified in any personal way in all religious experiences, since in any religious experience this “who or what” may still remain undetermined, latent, unexplored in an individual life, or unexpressed in cult. The “Sacred”, the “Holy”, moreover, might well be experienced in all things in a unique set of experiences, but without any Personal quality. (21)

When considering religious experience within the scope of religion, Steinbock adds two more traditional determinants, i.e. the experience of dependency and creation, which, however, do not only refer to the person as an individual but to the very substance of humans (22). Steinbock moves from religious experience to mystical experience, stating that:

While religious experience may be given in many different ways, there are certain religious experiences that focus on what I consider to be the most profound character of this givenness. These are called “mystical experiences”. My attempt at further qualifying religious experience depends upon clarifying it inter-Personally. (23)

Therefore, mystical experience is an exemplary religious experience, in which a crucial element of religious experience is clearly manifested. This section of Steinbock’s work does not provide sufficient clarification for what he means by the *indeterminacy* of religious experience. He may be alluding to the fact that there are various types of religious experience, as indicated by the following passage:

religious experience can be understood as an indistinct extra-ordinary experience of “sacredness” that can range from the experience of nature as divine, to the daemonic, to, in monotheism, the living, Personal God. (21)

Another possible interpretation is that the inter-personal relationship remains latently hidden and undeveloped in other religious experiences, which would thus indicate a certain subordination of experiences to those of the Abrahamic religions, where the sacred is not of a strictly personal nature. This could lead to the conclusion that the inter-personal religious experience remains undeveloped if it does not understand God himself as a relationship or as the Trinity. Steinbock does explicitly state that his description focuses solely on the experiences of the mystics of the three monotheistic religions and that other religions, such as Buddhism, are not included in his analysis:

I focus here on a core of experience revealed and developed within the Abrahamic tradition that concerns “person” and lived in terms of verticality and

idolatry. These are not neutral or universal, but absolute experiences. It is not that there are no other religious traditions that have the notion of person generally speaking, or even spiritual traditions that do not unfold on the basis of person at all—Zen Buddhism in the latter case. But it is peculiar to the Abrahamic religious traditions that the *experience* of the absoluteness of the Holy (sometimes expressed as the “Oneness” of God) is expressly cultivated. (38)

Nevertheless, this excerpt does not shed much light on what the *expressly cultivated* means, i.e. whether Steinbock means that mystical experiences which are not of an inter-personal nature are not given in sufficient clarity or that they are not sufficiently theoretically clarified and grasped. It appears that his analysis on the matter draws significantly on Buber’s *I and Thou*. Buber also understands the relationship to be a determinant of religious experience. This results in a critique of Buddhism, which seeks extrication from suffering and not wanting to return, and thus essentially prevents the relationship of I to You. Buber finds some respite in Mahayana Buddhism, stating that it majestically negated Buddha in that the “‘great vehicle’ ... has contradicted him magnificently. It has addressed the eternal human *Thou* under the name of Buddha himself.” (*I and Thou* 93) Furthermore, Buber’s notes on Buddhism in *Eclipse of God* are worth mentioning here: “In the reality of a religious relationship, the absolute is mostly (and sometimes only) personalised in the process of religious development gradually and almost somewhat unwillingly—such as in Buddhism” (Buber, *Eclipse of God* 96). However, Buber makes sure to “relativize” this personal nature of the absolute, something which is lacking in Steinbock’s work:

Within the scope of a religious relationship and its language, it is possible to legitimately speak of the God’s person; which, however, does not say about the substance of the absolute that it would be reduced to a mere personality but it is said here that the absolute enters into the relationship as an absolute person that we call God. (60)

This leads me to an objection against Steinbock’s phenomenological analysis, namely that he strives for an analysis of religious experience via immanence, though he is too quick to characterise this experience as inter-personal or inter-Personal. Is it even phenomenologically possible to describe the religious experience as an inter-Personal relationship, and if so, what exactly does that mean? Furthermore, defining the substance of mystical experience as an inter-Personal relationship grossly overgeneralises the experiences of the mystics of three monotheist religions to extend to the entire sphere of religion. Steinbock does not present a fundamental analysis of the modalities through which the sacred is felt, one which would better illuminate the differences between various religious experiences such as inter-Personal and non-inter-Personal experiences. At the same time, if we were to understand his work as an analysis of just one manner of vertical givenness, the philosophical conclusions concerning the identity established in the inter-Personal relationship would not be widely applicable and thus would problematize the general validity of his conclusions.

Steinbock’s work reveals an exclusive focus on epiphany as a religious experience, which is of an inter-Personal nature and which he designates as mystical experience. This

mystical experience is based on the immediate inter-Personal relationship and is expressed by a certain intimacy in the presence of the Holy:

It is characterised by *special intimacies* of the presence of the Holy. These special intimacies are not restricted to, but can include intimacies more commonly associated with, experiences like “union”. (*Phenomenology and Mysticism* 24)

Thus, while a mystical experience is always religious, religious experience is not always mystical, but all religious experiences involve an inter-Personal relationship (24). Steinbock repeatedly insists that religious experience, and possibly mystical experience, is essentially a regular part of human experience:

Epiphany is not rare, unusual, or exceptional in the sense that it is sometimes added on to mundane affairs. For the mystics, the Holy runs through everything and everyone; in its everydayness, epiphany is nonetheless optimal, and not average. This is why there can be a sense of the “religious” in the more general indeterminate sense. It is the mystic who lives this optimal character in the everyday experience of the Holy as an inter-Personal gift. This is how the lives of the mystics become exemplary and how mystical experience becomes exemplary of religious experience. (“The Poor Phenomenon” 25)

But can mystical experience be deemed exemplary of all religious experience? Isn’t it rather that the mystical is an exceptional kind of religious experience? Steinbock himself acknowledges that proximity or unity is not the true goal of religious life, which instead “consists in the service to God, redemption of the world, and participation in the establishment of love and justice” (26). Steinbock’s insistence on the stark contrast between vertical givenness and presentation becomes problematized by his excessive insistence on the exemplarity of mystical experience, as its connection to “regular” religious experience (or even everyday life) becomes unclear. If Steinbock understands openness to verticality as an inter-Personal relationship, then mystical experiences represent but a mere fragment of this relationship, one which is entrenched in its history, where mystical experiences take the form of an answer, challenge, invitation, that is inconceivable without what precedes or succeeds them.

Evidence and Religious Experience

Steinbock’s analyses of the three mystics are in no way radical; they generally draw on the typology of religious experience expressed in their own works—the levels of prayer by Teresa of Ávila, the degrees of ecstasy by Rabbi Dov Baer, and the procedure of disclosure by Rūzbihān Baqlī. Steinbock does not make explicit use of a phenomenological procedure in his work. Generally speaking, his analyses bolster his initial statement that mystical experience represents a certain kind of intimacy in the presence of the Holy. He does not try to collapse the various stages into one common denominator for all three authors, though he does emphasize two stages of spiritual life: the first, in which the activity depends on the human, and the second, during which the activity comes from the Holy. However, Steinbock’s analyses differ from most analyses of mystical experiences in his emphasis on evidence.

From the outset of his book, Steinbock emphasises that religious experience has its own givenness and also its own evidence, which can only be obtained from itself. However, Husserl defined evidence as a givenness of phenomena which are given originally and in an apparent manner:

In the widest sense, evidence designates ... a completely prominent manner of consciousness, revealing the very matter in the original, self-giving, self-submission of a matter, an objective relationship, a universal, a value, etc. in the final mode "*the matter is here alone, immediately clear, given originally*". For I this means: not to aim at something with an intentionally confused, empty, anticipating meaning, but to be with itself, to view, to see, to behold itself. (Husserl, *Cartesians Meditations* § 24)

Steinbock, on the other hand, understands evidence within the context of religious experience, as a matter of ascertaining whether or not the revelation is a delusion, or possibly an experience that does not come from God but from an evil spirit. The problem of evidence thus extends to the methods of discerning and understanding within the scope of spiritual life. The relevant experience includes unexpected manifestations and a person's clear confidence that it does not come from himself. Furthermore, examination is required to determine whether the mystical experience is somehow positively reflected from the life of the believer; an interview with a priest, a confessor, or a teacher (simply someone who is further along on the path) is needed, and finally it calls for confrontation with Scripture, where personal revelation should not go against tradition. While such criteria may in some way aid the believer in discerning true experience from delusion, these methods appear to present a phenomenological problem: the nature of the elusive religious experience is quickly subordinated to interpretation and classification within a specific religious tradition. Therefore, to a certain extent, the phenomenon in its original givenness disappears and we are confronted with a certain interpretation of religious experience, which may be articulated very differently due to its ambivalence. This issue is elucidated by Evelyn Underhill in *Mysticism* in which mystics are categorized as those who tend to interpret the sacred experience as immanent or, on the contrary, as transcendent.

However, there is another problem with Steinbock's treatment of evidence. If evidence can be based on tradition and community, a significant connection can be made between mystical experiences and their corresponding religion. According to Steinbock, the substance of religious experience lies in the inter-Personal understanding of the mystical experience, though this is more symptomatic of the similarity of each religion's literary corpus (the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Quran). This would retroactively undermine, in Husserl's words, the originality of the revelation.

Steinbock selects sources which exhibit the highest degree of descriptiveness and critical distance, which takes us to one final point, regarding Steinbock's concept of phenomenology and its relationship to hermeneutics.

Static, Genetic, and Generative Phenomenology

Steinbock differentiates three forms of phenomenology: static, genetic, and generative. While the differentiation between static and genetic phenomenology was demonstrated by Husserl himself, generative phenomenology was introduced by Steinbock in his *Home and Beyond*. Steinbock deems generative phenomenology to be a natural progression from the terms employed by Husserl.

Static phenomenology examines an essentially non-temporal aspect of experience. Steinbock differentiates two methodological approaches: static phenomenology in the ontological sense and static phenomenology in the constitutional sense. The ontological perspective involves structures of experience such as formal and material substances, regions of being, morphological types, intentionality, the establishment of relationships, etc. The constitutional perspective relates to the manners in which the sense is given, such as the role of intention and fulfilment, etc. (Steinbock, “Generativity and the Scope of Generative Phenomenology” 290). While temporality plays no role in static phenomenology, retention and protention apply, albeit only to the present moment. Genetic phenomenology, on the other hand, examines the temporal becoming of sense. Genetic phenomenology can thus examine the past, together with the experience it contains, for example in the form of projection or expectation. Experience, in genetic phenomenology, consists of passive and active synthesis, with passive synthesis relating to habits (291-292). However, even genetic phenomenology has its limitations:

... concerning the constitution of normality and abnormality, human beings’ relation to animality, birth and death, and the I—Other relation of intersubjectivity; ultimately, however, genetic analyses rest within the confines of egological constitution, *self*-temporalization, and individual facticity... (292)

According to Steinbock, such limitations are overcome by generative phenomenology, though this is not expressly mentioned by Husserl. Nevertheless, the fact that many of his texts speak about “generative problems” and describe phenomena as “generative” not only justifies generative phenomenology, but even requires it (292).

In distinction to genetic analysis, which is restricted to the becoming of individual subjectivity, a synchronic field of contemporary individuals, and intersubjectivity founded in an egology, generative phenomenology treats phenomena that are geo-historical, cultural, intersubjective, and normative. For Husserl, generativity suggests both the process of becoming, hence the process of generation and a process that occurs over the generations as socio-geo-historical movement. Generativity becomes Husserl’s new “Absolute”, and in this sense, ultimately, the matter of generative phenomenology (292).

Generative phenomena, therefore, apply to history, tradition, rituals, birth, death, the domestic and the foreign, etc. Steinbock uses a generative analysis of the domestic and the foreign to illustrate that they do not reflect a unilaterally established relationship but instead mutually co-constitute each other. Generative phenomenology also serves as a foundation for Steinbock’s approach in *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, where his approach is a combination of phenomenology and hermeneutics. Steinbock is interested in the description of experience and its structures from a first-person perspective. For this

purpose, however, he does not describe his own experience but instead opts for texts by three mystics whose works he selected due to the high degree of descriptiveness and fidelity to their own experience, as well as their tendency to constantly scrutinise the authenticity of their experience. Naturally, this approach leads to a point of contention, one raised by Steinbock himself:

Now one might object that phenomenology reigns over “pure internal experience”, while hermeneutics claims for itself the domain of language and texts. (*Phenomenology and Mysticism* 32)

However, according to Steinbock, this would be a very narrow understanding of phenomenology, undermining established phenomenological works, such as *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which Merleau-Ponty does not hesitate to use second-hand descriptions in his phenomenological analyses (such as the phantom limb). According to Steinbock, the interconnection between experience, tradition, and texts is ultimately made possible by generative phenomenology:

Given this understanding, I have no objection to regarding what I am doing as a “hermeneutic phenomenology” if the emphasis is on “phenomenology” as a mode of generative phenomenology. (33)

However, Steinbock does not present an elaborated development of generative phenomenology of religion. His analyses of religious experience are generative in that they are based on the texts of different mystics. It is through their descriptions that Steinbock attempts to grasp the essence of religious experience, the core of which is common, despite different theological expressions. However, he crucially omits the generative dimension of this experience, which is characteristic of religious traditions based on a shared literary corpus, and which stem from the revelations in their holy books, and that try to cultivate inter-Personal religious experience. This “hermeneutic” dimension fundamentally limits and maybe even contradicts the results of Steinbock’s analyses.

III. Conclusion

The results that Steinbock furnishes in *Phenomenology and Mysticism* are of a highly ambivalent nature. The problem of his analyses does not lie so much in exceeding immanence as it does in the insufficient description of religious experience, coupled with the author’s overly quick characterisation using traditional or theological terminology. Steinbock’s phenomenology of religion encounters three main issues. 1) First and foremost, it does not offer a clearer elaboration of the relationship and transition between presentation and epiphany. The problematic differentiation of various manners of givenness gives rise to the question of whether phenomenology of religion should not be more fundamentally rooted in a careful description of experience rather than in the differentiation of two spheres which will need to be subsequently interconnected. 2) The second problem is Steinbock’s assertion that the substance of religious experience is an inter-Personal relationship, as he does not conduct a sufficient analysis of religious experience to justify this conclusion, does not nuance his assertion by confronting it with different experiences, and does not clearly delimit what inter-personality means vis-à-vis

the experience of the Sacred nor what constitutes an inner experience as inter-Personal. In this regard, phenomenology of religion could be enriched by a confrontation with Zen Buddhism or the traditions in which the experience of the absolute is not of a personal nature. This means that grasping such an experience would require the creation of a terminological apparatus that is unmarked by the theology of monotheistic religions. 3) Last but not least, Steinbock's phenomenology does not sufficiently consider the historical nature of the experiences examined in his text and the inter-textuality of their traditions, both of which are pivotal in understanding the nature of these experiences and their conceptualization.

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