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Toward an Existential and Transpersonal Understanding of Christianity: Commonalities Between Phenomenologies of Consciousness, Psychologies of Mysticism, and Early Gospel Accounts, and Their Significance for the Nature of Religion

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The existential–phenomenological approach of the early Heidegger and Max Scheler to religion as an amplified empirical phenomenology of the human condition, combined with Heidegger's specific derivation of his Daseins-analysis from the Christianity of Eckart, Paul, and Kierkegaard, is shown to be broadly congruent with the contemporary transpersonal psychology of higher states of consciousness, largely based on Eastern meditative traditions. This descriptive transpersonal psychology of a mystical core to all religions based on the direct experience of presence or Being, as developed by Rudolf Otto and elaborated by Laski, Almaas, and others, is then applied to selected gospel narratives as a further step, past its beginnings in the early Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann, toward a re-construction of specific numinous states in early Christianity. This derivation of facets of the numinous from their presumed doctrinal schematizations and/or amplifications places Christianity closer to the goals of the meditative traditions, and allows a more directly experiential understanding of doctrines of Christian redemption, loving compassion, and eternal life — as amplifications of the phenomenology of the inner forms of ordinary here and now consciousness, within which they are already foreshadowed.

Keywords: Dasein, presence, numinous, intentionality, ecological array

*My name is written on David's line
 I go to Heaven on the wheel of time*

Turtle Dove
 Traditional Song

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There have been two complementary strands of inquiry into the essence of the sacred considered in terms of a spontaneous and cross cultural felt core that would be differentially schematized into the world religions. One arises from the very core of existential philosophy and the other from the more recent transpersonal psychology of mystical or higher states of consciousness, and it will be relevant below that both emerge historically as aspects of a gradual naturalizing and secularizing of Christianity.

The first strand is existential–phenomenological: it begins with Schleiermacher (1799; Marina, 2004) and his spontaneous sense of “dependence” on an all-inclusive totality beneath and within the unfolding moment. It receives a major influence from Kierkegaard’s early phenomenology of Christianity in terms of dread, faith, and a felt sense of eternity in the ongoing moment (*The Concept of Dread; Fear and Trembling*). In his later works, however, based on his sense of an infinite distance between humanity and the absolute other-ness of God (Stan, 2009), Kierkegaard turns back from this necessarily “indirect” phenomenology of the transcendent to what he regards as the “direct communication” of a Christian dogmatics opposed to all first person mysticism (*Training in Christianity; For Self Examination and Judge for Yourselves*).

By contrast with Kierkegaard’s return to orthodoxy, the very early Heidegger of the 1920’s, in lectures only recently translated (*The Phenomenology of Religious Life; Towards the Definition of Philosophy*), continues an experiential re-inscription of Christianity, here as the source for a phenomenology of the underlying forms of all human existence, and based on “demythologized” readings of Meister Eckart, Augustine, Luther, Paul, and the early Kierkegaard. It is surprising to see how much the secular, naturalistic analysis of Dasein or existence in *Being and Time* (1927) depended on an initial phenomenology derived entirely from Christianity (Crowe, 2006; van Buren, 1994). Where Kierkegaard begins such a phenomenology and then turns back to orthodoxy, the later Heidegger proceeded on through Christianity and eventually through his Daseins-analysis in *Being and Time*, into a more abstract mysticism of the felt sense of Being (*On Time and Being; Country Path Conversations*), which many have compared to Buddhism and Taoism (Hunt, 1995a; May, 1996; Parkes, 1987).

The early Heidegger, similarly to the later Max Scheler (1923), had initially pursued their mentor Husserl’s project for a “transcendental” phenomenology of the everyday human life world. For Heidegger such a descriptive phenomenology of the “factual life” of Dasein can only be indirect and metaphorical, based on “formal indications” as his version of Kierkegaard’s “indirect communication,” since we already *are* that very being we seek to describe and there is no “outside” of our human existence from which to describe it. Both Heidegger and Scheler independently concluded that such a phenomenology already existed. It is religion, as the maximum of human self expression, one that “fills out” or “inflates” Dasein so as to allow the fullest possible view of our deepest, necessarily implicit, formal

dimensions. So the reinscription of religion *becomes* phenomenology, and especially so for Heidegger with the “incarnation” of a Christianity that links Eckart’s abstract all-inclusive godhead with the differentiated singularities of personal lives.

In the notes for his first lecture course, Heidegger (1919a) derives the inner dimensions of everyday human existence from the enhancement of that experience described in Meister Eckart’s medieval mysticism. Thus we find in Eckart (14th century) the direct precursor to this insight:

The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me. My eye and God’s eye are one and the same You haven’t got to borrow from God, for he is your own and therefore, whatever you get, you get from yourself God and I: we are one. (pp. 182, 206, 244)

Heidegger, after quoting Eckart, adds:

You can only know what you are Religion is transcendent life The point is to get down into the grasp of a living moment The stream of consciousness is already a religious one.¹ (pp. 239, 240, 243, 254)

While Heidegger will reverse Eckart’s direction, seeking to know man via God, this derivation of Daseins-analysis is certainly consistent with the emphasis in contemporary Christian theology (Cox, 2009) on the sacred as something immanent and *within* the secular.

The second strand of inquiry converging on the implications of a felt core for human spirituality culminates in the contemporary transpersonal psychology of “higher states of consciousness.” It is often linked to various forms of “New Age” spirituality and focuses especially on the Eastern meditative traditions, understood as the maximum developments of the mystical core of all religion and so often seen as least encrusted with a potentially obfuscating dogma and myth. We could say that this perspective has its beginning with Nietzsche’s naturalistic understanding of ecstasy (1888; see also Hunt, 2003). It comes into its own in William James (1902) on mysticism and Jung (1928) on a cross-cultural archetypal imagination that would confer a sense of meaning and purpose in human existence. It has its most recent developments in Wilber (2000) and Almaas (1988).

A major bridge between these two strands already exists in the form of Rudolf Otto’s (1917) phenomenology of a numinous felt core to all religious experience as set out in his influential *The Idea of the Holy*, itself a major influence on both Jung (1938) and Heidegger (1919a, 1938). Otto was a Protestant theologian

¹Heidegger also quotes Windelband here, who along with Dilthey, Natorp, and Bergson (van Buren, 1994) was part of the matrix out of which Heidegger’s early thought emerged.

and student of comparative religion. His multiple dimensions of a cross-cultural pattern of numinous feeling include (1) a sense of radical dependency and finitude (Otto's "creature feeling") in the face of something "wholly other," (2) a fascination, ineffable wonder, and sense of absolute newness and perfection ("mysterium"), and (3) a sense of awe, extraordinary energy and power, with a potential strangeness and uncanny dread ("tremendum"). These dimensions will vary both within and between cultures in their degrees of separate development and balance. A key point in Otto's analysis for what follows is that these felt dimensions will be variously amplified and "schematized" within the doctrines and dogma of the world religions. These latter are understood to have been inspired in the first place from such visionary states, while a fully absorbed contemplation in their doctrinal schematizations always retains the potential of re-evoking the original facets of numinous feeling.

A further illustration of the incipient overlap of the existential and transpersonal traditions comes with the surprisingly similar preoccupation with Meister Eckart by both Heidegger (1919a) and Jung (1921, 2009) in the early 1920s. Both independently derive from Eckart the identity of God with Being—as-such, the experience of Being as the core of the numinous, and, in marked contrast to Kierkegaard's absolute other-ness, the inner identity of God and humanity. Jung's (1921, pp. 248, 251) own paraphrase of Eckart directly echoes Heidegger above: "God is dependent on the soul The soul is the birthplace of God . . . giving rise to a feeling of intense vitality God [is] life at its most intense." Here we see why Jung (1959) could name his maximally integrative archetype of the sacred as the "Self," with the historical figures of Jesus and Buddha as exemplars of its most complete personal realization. What Jung called this "relativity" of God to man also meant that both Jung and Heidegger risked and at key points succumbed in their personal lives to a grandiose God-like inflation often associated with a Gnostic mystical element (see Hunt, 2003), and which Kierkegaard's more traditional Christian humility rejected as ontologically impossible.

A final example of early and striking overlap between these two strands of analysis comes with the Russian spiritual teacher Gurdjieff (1973; Ouspensky, 1949), a major precursor to the later transpersonal movement. As early as 1912 he is teaching an extraverted meditation to be practised in the midst of everyday social life, which he terms "self remembering." In an intriguing anticipation of Heidegger, Gurdjieff pictures modern humanity as asleep and mechanical, having lost our natural access to essence or Being. Self remembering is the cultivation of a here and now sense of Being, which, similar to Heidegger on authenticity, will gradually enable us to develop "permanent I" and "objective conscience." This contrasts with our usual everyday involvements in which we lose ourselves and forget our Being:

To remember one's self means the same thing as to be aware of oneself, I am. Sometimes it comes by itself. It is a very strange feeling . . . a different state of consciousness. By itself it only comes for very short moments, . . . and one says to oneself "how strange, I am actually here." This is self remembering. (Ouspensky, 1959, p. 8)

The resulting experience of presence carries a sense of joy, clarity, and freedom reminiscent of Maslow (1962) on peak experiences, as "I am" states in which one experiences one's very identity as Being.

Significantly for what follows, in various places Gurdjieff refers to his "fourth way" movement as "esoteric Christianity." He argues that it is impossible to sustain the Christian mandate for loving kindness and compassion toward others in the absence of our lost capacity for the experience of Being, still present/inferable in early Christianity:

Such as we are we cannot be Christians . . . Christ says "love your enemies," but . . . we cannot even love our friends . . . In order to be a good Christian one must *be* . . . If a man is not his own master . . . he is simply a machine, an automaton. A machine cannot be a Christian (quoted in Ouspensky, 1949, p. 102)

First one must be able [to be], only then can one love. Unfortunately, with time, modern Christians have adopted the second half, to love, and lost view of the first, the religion which should have preceded it. (Gurdjieff, 1973, p. 153).

Gurdjieff's analysis here is congruent with Kierkegaard's rejection of modern Christendom, as well as with the latter's own painful personal isolation, angry hypersensitivity to all social "humiliation," and death-bed regrets (see Kirmmse, 1996). If Gurdjieff is right, we can then ask how early Christianity and its later "reformations" may have actually evoked this sustaining, but so easily lost, sense of Being.

Existential and Transpersonal Approaches to the Experience of Being in Early Christianity

What light can Heidegger on the experience of Being and the transpersonal psychology of higher states of consciousness throw on the sense of presence in Christianity — turning them back on the Christianity that both traditions, along with so many, left behind? In contrast to Kierkegaard's own reversion from just such a phenomenology back to Lutheran orthodoxy, how would Heidegger — from within — and the transpersonal perspective — from without — *reinscribe* the inner life-world of Christianity?

Reinscribing Christianity From Within: Heidegger and Bultmann

For a time in the early 1920s Heidegger and the Protestant theologian Rudolf Bultmann worked in tandem, but to very different effect, on a reconstitution

of Being as the felt core of a “primitive Christianity” lived by the first Apostles. Heidegger’s early lectures (1919a, 1919b, 1920, 1921, 1923) show him “naturalizing” the Christianity of Eckart, Paul, Luther, and Kierkegaard as a means towards his later analyses of Dasein (Heidegger, 1924, 1927), whereas Bultmann (1956, 1961) would continue to use that existential analysis to re-interpret and de-mythologize the lived essence of Christianity. For Bultmann (1957), Heidegger’s openness of time ahead towards the mystery of death, which Heidegger adapts directly from Kierkegaard’s phenomenology of dread, illuminates the core existential insight of Christianity as the freedom for a future within which all encounters are potential tokens of God’s grace. Later a more mystical Heidegger (1944–1945, 1956, 1962) will revive and extend his initial fascination with Eckart’s continual “releasement” of the moment by moment gift of Being and time.²

This earlier Heidegger (1919a) had begun by analogizing the structure of our ordinary ongoing experience to a joining of Eckart’s bottomless sense of Being as Godhead with its expression as the differentiated personal soul of Paul and Luther. Thus everyday experience is seen as springing forth in the immediate moment from an ineffable background “something” (Schleiermacher’s *Etwa*, already anticipating Heidegger’s Being) and then “temporalizing” into specific life events. Both source and personal emanation are equally unknowable in any final or certain sense, and so are existentially “transcendent” — each human life its own double infinity. Christian love is re-inscribed into the existential structure of care, and faith in eternal life into the authenticity of being ahead of oneself towards the unknown of death. Heidegger (1919b, 1921) transforms “original sin” into the “formal indication” of a sense of inherent flaw or “fallenness” in human existence, such that ordinary living “inclines away,” “eludes,” or “disperses” from its “as such.” It is a “ruinance” that is yet pervaded by the sense of the indeterminate “something” behind it — the God of Christianity reinscribed as a primordial experience of Being.

Religious experience is our potential for a more direct awareness of this expansiveness, outflow, or “effulgence” of life itself — the “relucance” or “reflectence” of our self aware existence. God is the abstract form of all sensitive life, and our capacity to sense that means in Christian terms that the “kingdom” has already arrived as a “left over” echo of and within each life event. The early Heidegger thus comes very close to an incipient version of the transpersonal psychology of mystical states as natural human phenomena begun by

²While Sajda (2008) stresses Kierkegaard’s more obvious rejection of all mysticism as merely “aesthetic” and separated from revealed religion, Kangas (2007) shows an indirect influence of Eckart (through Tauler, Boehme, and Schelling) on Kierkegaard’s own understanding of the fullness of the moment and its eternally outward movement as the openness of time ahead in *The Concept of Dread*. Thus Heidegger’s reading of the early Kierkegaard could have helped to support his own joining of Eckart’s godhead and its “releasement” as the existential anxiety of personal being in time.

Maslow (1962) on “peak experience.” Numinous experience for Heidegger (1919b) is latent within all human experience as the intensification into our self awareness of its underlying form — a bringing forward of its pre-worldly “something” and its “not yet” of time-ahead directly into experience as “moments of especially intensive life.” These show the “essence of life in and for itself” (p. 88).

Now if Otto, Jung, and Heidegger are right about the numinous, and its core in the experience of Being, as an inherent human response, then it will not simply disappear in a predominantly secular era. Indeed Otto’s original phenomenology shows it to be broader than our modern, perhaps already secularized, understanding of “spirituality” or “religion.” Facets of the numinous may arise as a sense of wonder, fascination, and mystery in the face of the immensities of the modern universe of physics. Meanwhile its more uncanny, grotesque, and dreadful aspects appear in our subjective response to the atrocities of war and torture, or to the imagery of monstrous beings, blood, and dismemberment in the myths of tribal religions, contemporary video games, and psychedelic drug accounts (Grof, 1980).

So what has happened more generally to this inherent category of experience in what may well be our historically unique era of secularization and materialization — aside that is from the obvious exceptions of renewed fundamentalism, “new age” spiritualities, and the finite and more “polytheistic” sources of awe and fascination in nature, sports, and celebrities recently discussed by Dreyfus and Kelly (2011)? Pierre Hadot (2011), and Martin Buber (1947), both citing Heidegger, have suggested that for the general population in our radically secularized civilization the sense of the numinous tends to manifest in its most primitive form — as the sense of the uncanny. Buber (1947) finds a nightmarish “dread of the universe and dread of life” (p. 237), while Hadot (2011) suggests that as a culture we increasingly find existence itself to be uncanny, strange, and unreal, as somehow grotesque and bizarre, and in marked contrast to the fuller sense of wonder, mystery, and gratitude in the great axial religions. Hadot is struck by the influence here of Sartre’s novel *Nausea* (1938), as attesting to the widespread sense of a raw facticity and increasing strangeness in Being. Indeed for both Freud (1919) and Angyal (1941) disgust and nausea are common accompaniments of the sense of the uncanny.

For the early Heidegger modern culture has lost the sense of Being, so that in everyday life we flee from the “threat of existence itself” (1924, p. 221), and certainly from anything to do with death as its final outcome, into a self-concealing denial and “tranquilization.” No longer “at home” in the world, Being itself becomes “uncanny” (*unheimlich*, un-homelike). No wonder Kierkegaard begins his attempt at the re-newal of Christianity with a phenomenology of anxiety in *The Concept of Dread*. The “flight” from Being as something uncanny and full of incipient dread would thus become an unwitting and self reinforcing avoid-

ance conditioning away from the latent core of all spirituality and its sense of meaning in human existence. As Gurdjieff points out, spiritual practice thereby becomes relatively unsustainable, and doctrines of traditional Christian belief and ethic of loving compassion will lack crucial support in an ongoing sense of presence.

Yet Heidegger's early analysis of Dasein and its "fallenness" was directly derived from a Christian spirituality that by definition then remains implicit within his understanding of ordinary experience, and itself implies the underlying sense of Being and ongoing presence which would be its core. The possibility thereby emerges of some degree of reciprocal illumination and dialogue between the existentials of gospel narratives and their hypothetical numinous core and/or realization.

Reinscribing From Without: A Transpersonal Psychology of Early Christianity

Some preliminary concerns. The phenomenologist Max Scheler (1923) suggested some important limitations in Otto's analysis of a numinous core for all spirituality, which will in turn suggest some corresponding concerns for any attempted transpersonal psychology of Christianity. In regard to the relation between the immediacy of the numinous and its selective schematization as religious doctrine, the usual view has been that of James, Jung, and contemporary transpersonalists that the former is primary, as reflected in overlapping mystical traditions. Thereby the conceptual and theological schematization of the numinous is seen as secondary, even potentially static and stultifying in the face of social-economic change, and so in need of periodic charismatic renewal (see Hunt, 2003). Otto, as a Lutheran theologian, saw a more complex and reciprocal relation, even in the second half of *The Idea of the Holy* viewing Protestantism as the fullest historical development and schematization of all facets of the numinous. Separate critiques by Scheler (1923), and later by Martin Buber (1957), while agreeing on a cross cultural numinous core, actually prioritize doctrinal and ethical schematizations over their numinous mediations. Extreme constructivist critics, such as Katz (1978), who reject any universal core on the grounds that there can be no such thing as a culturally unmediated experience, seem to miss the more plausible empirically based conclusions of Moore (1978) and indeed Otto (1932) himself that picture a varying continuum of pre-experiential, simultaneous, and retrospective schematizations interacting with common inner structures that themselves can vary both within and between cultures. All mystical experiences, perhaps excepting only some nature inspired and psychedelic states, will themselves reflect shifting degrees of fusion between numinous facets and cultural meaning. Clearly "schematization" is not only or merely the outer "expression" of the numinous, but also potentially its further developmental articulation and broader contextualization.

For Scheler (1923) numinous experience is *always* at least incipiently denominational, and religion is its channeling and semantic completion. Religious

acts are more than their mediating states, however central these must also be. Numinous experiences are not ends, but means. The numinous is the inner process, in Husserl's (1913) terms the hyletic vehicle or sensory-affective by-product of its noetic meaning — which like all intentionality points beyond itself, here as the intuition of an encompassing “world transcending” (p. 250) meaning. For Scheler and Heidegger (1919b, 1944–1945) it is this “outward” look, away from specific life events and toward an intuited sense of totality, that allows religion to be the maximum expressive phenomenology of the human condition. Scheler actually says that such transcendental intuitions cast the numinous back “like a shadow” (p. 286). Both Scheler and Buber (1957) agree with the transpersonal psychologist Almaas (1988) that valuing numinous states over their intentional significance in meaning and ethical action risks an unwitting “self worship” or narcissism. Thus their potential for psychiatric-like “metapathologies” (Hunt, 2003). Indeed, recent empirical research by Hood, Ghorbani, Watson, and Williamson (2001) found that while the experiential dissolution-of-self dimension of Hood's mysticism questionnaire could be associated with measures of emotional disturbance, that effect was mitigated by higher scores on the “interpretation” dimension, as centered more on the broadly theological significance of such experiences.

Accordingly, in seeking the numinous facets of the experience of Being inspiring and inspired by early Christianity, it is important not to see these as something merely frozen and lost within gospel accounts considered as static dogma. Instead, these accounts can also be the maximum expressive articulation and realization of mediating numinous states fully implied, evoked, and embedded as the narratives of Jesus and the Apostles. Thus transpersonal psychology can be used as a contemporary means of re-inscribing and de-embedding lived realizations of numinous experience that mediated many gospel accounts and remain latent within them.³

Cartographies of transpersonal experience and their relation to Christianity and its early competitors. Laski (1961) outlines multiple dimensions of ecstatic experience. Like Otto's “creature feeling,” there is the initiating sense of an existential lack or loss, as a stage of purgation, suffering, and desolation — also reflected in its schematization as a sense of “original sin” or inherent flaw. This is followed by

³By not so distant analogy, since the uncanny is a primitive and less articulated form of the numinous, we can model this reciprocity between numinous state and interpretive schematization by contrasting two imaginary situations, within which each phase will predominate and in turn bring forth the other as a developing reciprocal dialogue. In the first, sitting alone, late at night, one starts to feel a sense of eeriness and invisible presence, one that soon elaborates into a specific ghost narrative further directing and intensifying those feelings. In the second, one is reading a well written ghost story by M.R. James and finds oneself increasingly suffused with specific facets of uncanniness and eeriness not actually mentioned at all in the story, but which express its very essence. By analogy then, new age mysticism does the former with the fuller numinous, while a transpersonal psychology of the gospels would do the latter.

experiences of “gain” and felt rebirth — in pentecostal Christianity the sense of being “born again” and “saved.” The path taken by this sense of “existential gain” can move toward mysticisms of love, as in Christianity; knowledge, as in Plotinus; or will, strength, and power, as in early Stoicism. Experiences of gain, as the equivalent of Otto’s *mysterium-tremendum*, are mediated and evoked by what Laski terms the “quasi physical sensations” of ecstasy. These are metaphoric and/or directly imagistic expressive meanings based variously on experiences of height and depth, light, darkness, insiderness, enlargement, and liquidity/flow. These facets of what she calls “intensity ecstasy” tend to develop in either of two directions in terms of fundamental shifts in one’s sense of personal identity — either toward a dissolution of self, as in Eastern mysticism and Eckart’s godhead, or toward a felt transformation/enhancement of self, which she also describes as “Adamic ecstasy,” as in a sensed return to the condition of Adam and Eve before the Fall.

Almaas (1988) has more recently divided this category of self transformation between “personal essence” or realization of the “pearl,” as the spontaneous synthesis of genuine autonomy and empathic contactfulness, and “essential identity” or realization of the “point,” in which one senses the identity of one’s true self as Being itself. Maslow’s (1962) earlier discussion of self actualization variously emphasized both components, but the former has more the connotations of personal “soul” and the latter of “spirit.” Almaas (1988) suggests that Jesus considered as “son of man” emphasizes more the loving humanity of “personal essence,” while Jesus as “son of God” evokes more of the pure divinity of Christ as guiding Logos and power of all creation.

Almaas (1986), like Heidegger, sees the varieties of the numinous in terms of experiences of Being or presence that can manifest in different aspects, each with its own expressive physiognomy or quasi-physical sensory quality, also related to classical yogic chakras, and each evoking and being supported by a primary sense of Being. Presence, or in his terms, “essence”:

. . . is the direct experience of existence. Of course essence can be experienced as other things, such as love, trust, peace, and the like. But the sense of existence is its most basic characteristic . . . that sets it apart from other categories of experience. (Almaas, 1986, p. 11).

These aspects of Being can appear in genuinely ineffable and metaphoric expressions, or in more inauthentic forms as the mere intensification of ordinary emotions. They include the qualities joy or bliss, will, strength, power or peace, noetic brilliancy or knowledge, and two aspects of love — merging essence, as the felt union or oneness of Platonic Eros, and compassion, as the loving kindness of Christian Agape.

To begin to contextualize Christianity within these frameworks, we can compare it to some of its early competitors within the Hellenized Roman era. The

spiritual wisdom schools of the Stoics, Epicureans, and Neo-Platonists are understood by Hadot (2002, 2011) as distinct approaches to cultivating the experience of presence as originally inspired by the example of Socrates in his embodied personal autonomy and inwardness, and with each supported by different aspects of essence. Here using the framework of Almaas, the Epicureans were most explicit in cultivating a direct sense of existence, understood as the most subtle pleasure or joy open to the individual, while for the Stoics one's essential identity as Being was based on a radical autonomy of essential strength and will. Where early Christianity cultivated compassion/Agape as its essential aspect, the Stoics sought not to be "saved," but to subordinate personal will to the universal will of God as revealed by ongoing events (Epictetus, first century). Despite their similar emphasis on a this-worldly spiritual realization, the personal and humanizing love of Christianity seems totally absent from the Stoics and Epicureans. Meanwhile, a more abstract love in the sense of Platonic Eros was central to the dissolving of Self in the mystical school of Plotinus, although it in turn lacked all interest in the singularities of personal life and intimate contact with others central to Christianity. The gradual predominance of Christian love over systems based exclusively on joy, strength, and will, and transcendent knowledge may have been inevitable as a deeply needed compensation for the harsh and competitive conditions of life suffered by the average person under Roman rule. The closest parallel to the Christian ethics of personal essence would have been a thoroughly secularized Aristotelian ethics of friendship and emotional balance, which, however, by definition would lack the numinous inspiration necessary for a charismatic movement.

The Phenomenology and Psychology of Numinous Experience in Early Christianity

Numinous qualities in the *New Testament* must be derived and evoked from the more "top-down" schematization of narrative and belief in gospel accounts, in contrast to the more "bottom-up" mystical emanationism of Eckart and Plotinus. What was it like in transpersonal terms for the earliest followers of Christianity? By way of initial summary, we could say that the deeply felt acceptance of forgiveness of one's sins and assurance of eternal life would have the conjoined effect of removing guilt over the past and anxiety about the future, thus leaving the believers released into the state of ongoing presence and endlessly renewed "now" that Gurdjieff, Almaas, and Heidegger describe as the experience of Being. In turn, and in keeping with Gurdjieff's view of presence as the necessary support for Christian compassion, the gift and grace of that assurance of one's eternal Being will inspire a gratitude and grace in God's love that will spontaneously overflow towards all others. If Crossan (1994), Weiss (1959), and others preoccupied with the historical Jesus are correct that his nature miracles, tomb,

and resurrection are later additions, then the earliest Christians following Jesus during his lifetime were most likely to have been charismatically inspired by these more direct experiences of presence and compassion.

Experiences of Implied Presence

If we ask what stops the felt experience of presence for Almaas it is self image. Self image is based on fixed memories, more or less frozen in place by past anxiety, guilt, and shame. So if you fully believe that all sins are already forgiven (“your sins are forgiven . . . your faith has saved you; go in peace,” Luke 7:49–50), then the resulting release of self image from the past lands you in the present here and now. This is different from the later Kierkegaard’s retreat to Lutheran orthodoxy in *Training in Christianity* where as part of God’s infinite distance, forgiveness is postponed into eternity. By contrast, as Weiss (1959) points out, the early Apostles experience themselves as already saved, with the immediate effect of a joyous release.

In terms of our orientation to the future, while Heidegger’s existential anxiety of being-towards-death can open towards the experience of Being, more often it buffers and “tranquillizes” that awareness. However, if for the early believers death has been annihilated and eternal life already begun within that futural openness, then once again one is released into the on-flow of here and now Being:

Anyone who . . . puts his trust in him who sent me has hold of eternal life, and does not come up for judgement, but has already passed from death to life He shall never know what it is to die No one who is alive and has faith shall ever die. (John 5:24, 8:51, 11:26)

This can be taken as a top–down schematization of the spontaneous sense of timelessness and eternity within spontaneous experiences of numinous ecstasy potentially occurring outside of any traditional religious context, as in the following account from James (1902), where it is part of the noetic amplification of the quasi-physical metaphor of a fiery energy:

I found myself wrapped in a flame-colored cloud. For an instant I thought of fire . . . the next, I knew the fire was in myself. Directly afterward there came upon me a sense of exultation . . . immediately followed by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe I saw that the universe is a living Presence; I became conscious in myself of eternal life. It was not a conviction that I would have eternal life, but a consciousness that I possessed eternal life then; I saw that all men are immortal; . . . that the foundation principle of the world is what we call love, and that the happiness of each and all is in the long run absolutely certain. (pp. 360–361)

To fully sense Jesus’ statement on “eternal life” as already present in the here and now would be to evoke this more immediate felt state of timelessness.

Indeed, in several places Jesus announces, in contrast to possibly later doctrines of apocolypse (Weiss, 1959), that the eternal kingdom of God is already here — “on earth as it is in heaven.” Jesus says: “You cannot tell by observation when the kingdom of God comes . . . for in fact the kingdom of God is among you” (Luke 17:20–21). Even the more frequent statements that believers are to await a future second coming (“at the time you least expect him,” Matthew 24:44), encourages a “permanent wakefulness,” and so Paul’s perpetual sense of “newness,” which creates a top–down schematization for Gurdjieff’s “self remembering” of ongoing presence.

In the gospel of John, the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman drawing water at the well makes use of a metaphor central to the phenomenology of presence in Almaas and Gurdjieff. After asking this woman, both alien as a Samaritan and also isolated from her own community, for water, Jesus says:

If only you knew what God gives . . . you would have asked him and he would have given you *living water* The water I shall give . . . will be an inner spring always welling up for eternal life (John 4:10, 14). [and later at a public festival] If any man is thirsty let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me . . . a stream of *living water* shall flow out from within him. (John 7:38)

More than just a metaphor, flowing water is one of Laski’s (1961) quasi-physical sensations of ecstasy. Almaas (1986) stresses that its felt embodiment is a major form of the experience of numinous presence:

Essence when experienced directly is seen to be some kind of substance, like water or gold . . . but it is not a physical substance Imagine that the water is self aware . . . of its own energy and excitation. Imagine now that you are this aware substance, this water. This is close to an experience of essential substance. (pp. 54, 80)

Along these lines a Gurdjieff student describes her own experience of awakening to presence:

A fleeting sensation of no longer being alone, separate, but reconnected to an immense presence . . . like a rain of gold showering down over my head, shoulders, and back, I was completely aglow, inundated by a grace, both luminous and solid, which I received with surprise and wonder. (De Vilaine–Cambessedes, 1997, p. 395)

Such experiences can be understood as the self aware embodiment of William James’ (1890) metaphor for ongoing consciousness as flowing stream. In terms of the early Heidegger (1919a) on the experience of Being as enhancing and revealing the inner dimensions of all experience, this may help to make some sense of his cryptic “the stream of consciousness is already a religious one” (p. 254).

Experiences of Compassion/Agape

Loving compassion or Agape is the central aspect of the numinous supporting and supported by the experience of presence in Christianity. Indeed, for Rudolf Otto, the original element in Christianity is the experience of God as loving Father. The gift of God's love, in the form of forgiveness and eternal life, confers an assurance and loving gratitude that can spontaneously overflow towards others. This sense of spontaneous welling forth may be illustrated in the recent newscast of the audio recording of the utterly authentic voice of a young man hiding with several others in the dark and frightened silence of a restaurant food refrigeration room during a recent Mississippi tornado: "I love everyone." This image of the felt sense of God's absolute love spontaneously overflowing toward others was central to Luther's emphasis on grace over works, and therein may reflect the influence of Eckart and the German mystics on his theology (Hoffman, 1976). The spontaneous experience of one's love for neighbor as "overplus" of what has been received fits well with the incident where Jesus says of the woman sobbing while cleaning his feet: "Her great love proves her many sins have been forgiven; when little has been forgiven, little love is shown" (Luke 7:47).

This experiential interpretation is also consistent with Bultmann's (1956) view that those who become loving towards others show that they have really experienced God's love. It differs from the more conditional ethical interpretation, also supported by other gospel passages, where the love one will receive from God depends first on the effort made to love others. This works-predominant approach is reflected in Matthew 6:14 ". . . if you forgive others the wrong they have done, your heavenly father will forgive you," and in the later Kierkegaard's "like for like" in the appropriately titled *Works of Love*, where what one does to others God "repeats" back to the doer "with the intensification of infinity" (p. 252).

Certainly in the context of "new age" spiritual groups (Almaas, 1988), loving compassion can have this more spontaneous first person mystical element, central also to Eckart's identification of godhead and person that so fascinated the early Heidegger. It is sometimes described as the sense of an infinite and absolute love experienced as a light shining from "above" and "behind" and through the individual's heart, directed through one's own self as vehicle or medium, toward others who have evoked in one a sense of loving compassion. Such experiences may also be implied where Jesus states that he heals by the power of God, as later the Apostles will heal through Jesus. Paul similarly states: "The life I live now is not my life, but the life Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:26). As phenomenological states these accounts make sense if we recall that numinous aspects feel transcendent and "wholly other," and that they carry the felt sense that they "have you," i.e., happen to the person as if from an outside source, rather than the more everyday sense of you "having" experience. So a

spontaneous response to the fully embodied experience of Christian Agape, in which the person feels transparent to something passing through them, can be a stunned “whose love is this?”

There is a similar first person mystical element of “it has you” in Luther’s own experience of faith, not as belief in a set of doctrines, but in terms of a state of “assurance” and “nearness” of God in the midst of everyday events that Otto (1917, 1932) and Hoffman (1976) suggest show the influence of the school of Eckart, where godhead permeates even the most painful and challenging experiences. Here faith is not effortful but a gift of grace that allows one to look through and beyond each event for the grace hidden within it.

Everything takes its flavour from God and becomes divine; everything that happens betrays God when a man’s mind works that way; things all have this one taste. (Eckart, 14th century, p. 17)

This is very far from the infinite alterity between God and humanity in Kierkegaard’s later retreat to a more effortful orthodoxy of doctrine and belief, perhaps sadly by-passing his earlier capacity for its felt inward animation.

Some Implications for a Transpersonal Phenomenology of Christianity

Mysticism, Dogma, and Faith

To the extent that the Christian believer comes to fully embody and live from the assurance of forgiveness of sins and an eternal life already begun, we would have a kind of top-down generation of Gurdjieff’s self-remembering of ongoing Being within the everyday social and personal world. This, if fully realized, would constitute a version of the inner- or this-worldly mysticism (Hunt, 2003) that is also the ultimate fruition of some Eastern meditative traditions, as in the ox-herding pictures of Zen Buddhism, where the realized meditator returns to a daily life now inwardly animated by enlightenment but outwardly indistinguishable from everyone else (Kapleau, 1967), or realized Taoist and Sufi sages ending up living anonymously in their communities as ordinary householders (Izutsu, 1984). Almaas (2011) similarly suggests that the Christian doctrine of a resurrection as already begun and continuously renewed moment by moment constitutes a potential integration of spiritual realization and the here and now secular order that is very different from the more preliminary radical rejection of world in most Gnostic and Eastern teachings. To the extent that certain gospel narrative schematizations are fully realized in terms of their numinous significance there is a potential sanctification of life in this world — a phenomenologically realized “kingdom of heaven on earth” reminiscent of these not often attained “return” phases of some Eastern meditative paths. In terms of comparative religion, it is as if the access levels of Eastern meditative

practice were skipped in favour of a direct schematization of their fullest possible realization within everyday life.

However, this setting out in narrative schematization of the ideal image of a spiritual enlightenment fully integrating sacred and secular will create a comparative dilemma for practising Christians largely absent for those engaged in the more gradual step by step practices of the meditative traditions. Christians from the beginning of their adult lives are thus asked to act in terms of an image of full spiritual realization for which they cannot possibly be ready. They are implicitly invited to an outward aspirational imitation of a level of integral realization that few human beings will ever attain in any spiritual tradition, and without the difficult but step by step techniques of meditation, often helpfully separated from daily social life, that would gradually create the states of consciousness that could foreshadow this fuller realization.

The effect for those most seriously inspired by gospel teachings can be a deep frustration, impossibly harsh self condemnation, and a decades long in-the-world equivalent of Laski's purgation/suffering stage of mystical development, with little or no sign of transcending experiences of "gain" or existential fulfillment. While Starbuck (1899) located potential experiences of mid and later life "sanctification" that do sound very much like Christian equivalents of Maslow's Being values of self-actualization, the serious Christian seems especially prone to two forms of a more fixating counter-reaction.

The first danger is what Cox (2009) has termed a clinging to "mandatory belief systems [that] nearly eclipse faith and hope" (p. 74). This is the subtle violence of conceptual exclusivity and premature certainty. The early Kierkegaard was right that "indirect communication" is necessary if we are to evoke an authentic human inwardness. His later retreat to "dogmatics" as somehow the "direct communication" of a biblical God of absolute other-ness came at the price of his earlier subtlety, poetry, and paradox needed to evoke the sense of the numinous. Whatever their faults, the later Heidegger and Jung understood there could be no "direct communication" of the sacred in an era of cultural secularization, and so went forward with the search for a more radical renewal.

The second danger is that these frustrations of reaching for the highest ideals of Christian compassion or love, without its potential sustenance through realizations of a supporting sense of presence, have sometimes led to an unconscious and reactive inversion of value. There we find a fascination with imageries of violence, hatred, and destruction. This can be reflected in a kind of exclusive reveling in the agonies of the crucifixion, the *Book of Revelation* with its violent and near psychotic imagery (Boisen, 1936), the endless elaborations of the tortures of eternal damnation, and the outwardly enacted barbarities and murderous cruelties of the inquisition and the early Puritans. It may be no accident that Gnosticism, as the major competition of a newly emerged Christianity, offered an elitist arrogance in contrast to a more difficult humility, and often pictured

creation itself as a malign and evil mistake (King, 2003), a view of an “infinite distance” between God and humanity more recently reflected in some fundamentalist dismissals of the social world as entirely under the rule of Satan (Bloom, 1992).

Gurdjieff saw that his in-the-world practice of self-remembering could constitute a kind of esoteric Christianity in the sense of offering the sense of presence in here and now social reality needed to support and sustain Agape as an authentic ethic of relationship. It is like digging a tunnel simultaneously from both ends, between the meditative practices so developed in Eastern traditions, here already in their most extraverted form in Gurdjieff and Almaas, and the narrative schematizations in the *New Testament* of a way of being-in-the-world that fully embodied would be indistinguishable from traditional notions of enlightenment in Buddhism, Taoism, and Sufism, and the closely related stories of the Hasidic Jewish tradition (Buber, 1948). Here we can see the value of “New Age” transpersonalism in both its focus on the empirical processes of meditation and in providing a phenomenology of the core facets of the numinous de-embedded from their gospel schematizations, themselves articulations of an ethic of enlightenment that goes far beyond what most could obtain from meditation alone.

Love as Fundamental Form of the Experience of Being

Something like Christian love or Agape would seem to tap into the deepest root of the numinous, considered as the fullest symbolic self expression of both humanity and, with the early Heidegger, life in general. With respect to the former, the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott (1971), now supported by copious research on mirror neurons and neonatal behavior (Meltzoff and Moore, 1992), sees the core of humanness as manifesting from birth in the “mirroring” relation between infant and “mothering one.” The infant’s fascination with facial (and vocal) expression involves the infant seeing itself reflected back in the interactive gaze and intonations of the parents. The parents’ expressions in response to spontaneous manifestations of the infant’s states are empathic and compassionate reflections back of these states, and this is the means by which young children begin to form a distinctly human sense of self. What the infant experiences in the responsive face of the mothering one is a loving response to *itself*. The internalization of these elaborate mirroring reflections sets up the human self as an inner dialogic process, increasingly with the capacity to do that back to others (Winnicott, 1971). Accordingly, Christianity’s understanding of the reciprocal love and forgiveness between believer and God amplifies the heart of the human development of self. This, if the infant is to survive both physically and psychically, is the first and deepest pattern of our relating. Of necessity it lies beneath all later more differentiated and even potentially contrary motives, as reflected in what he thought could be his last statement in this life by the young man facing the Mississippi tornado: “I love everyone.”

This core of compassionate love goes to a “living truth” still deeper than Winnicott. Gibson’s (1979) psychology of perception itself is based on an inseparable and primary attunement between any organism and its environmental surround, such that as a condition of its potential existence the organism is “held” by its environment in a way that “gives” or “affords” the potential behaviors unique to each species. Going further, Gibson shows how the sensitive feedback or “echo” created by organismic movement generates an “ambient ecological array” or “envelope of flow” back from its life-world that mirrors the exact size, shape, and speed of the specific creature thereby evoking it. If we amplify or anthropomorphize this relationship in human metaphoric terms, as part of what spirituality already does as human phenomenology, we have an “allowing,” “letting,” “holding,” and “giving” that is the existential core of all organismic life, again prior to all more specific behavior patterns, and perpetually foundational even if that creature is annihilated within seconds of its birth.

Amplified on the interpersonal level of human existence this “holding” and “affording” pattern is reflected in Winnicott’s empathic mirroring relation.⁴ Amplified or in some sense “sublimated” as human spirituality, it is the most fundamental form of mystical experience, in which love is felt to be the foundation of Being. Indeed just such an amplification of Gibson’s mirroring of organism and surround and its relation to here and now presence is reflected in this often cited statement of Jesus:

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow and reap and store in barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them . . . So do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself. (Matthew 6:26, 34)

The “living truths” of the numinous reflected in Christian Agape rest on an amplified and objective perception of the existential foundations of all life. The early Heidegger (1919a) was right: “Religion is transcendent life” (p. 239). Spirituality is the full self awareness of the basic facts of human life and all life in general, and as such these remain the perpetually elusive and easily forgotten deepest context and open ground of all that we do and feel.

Intentionality and Eternity

There may also be a more direct transpersonal psychology embedded in Jesus’ assurance that he who has faith “. . . shall never know what it is to die . . . No

⁴In contrast to Rizzuto (1979) and other recent attachment theorists of early childhood (Kirkpatrick and Shaver, 1990), this approach does not so much see God as an adult projection of the primal parents, all seeing and powerful from the infant’s perspective. Rather it would be that early mirroring and supportive relationship which is the most basic human form of the still more primordial “holding” of all life. It is *that* which is amplified as the core of spirituality. The role of the parents in early life is its closest “factual” approximation. It is the *form* that gets amplified, and only incidentally its multiple contents.

one who is alive and has faith shall ever die" (John: 8:51, 11:26). We already have a research literature on the near-death experiences of revived persons, often approaching but not reaching the classical "white light" experiences of mysticism (Hunt, 1995a; Sabom, 1982), and yet with more occasional reports of hellish and psychotic-like disorientations (Greyson and Bush, 1992). Both kinds of state, as we know from research on psychedelic drugs (Grof, 1980), suspend ordinary third person objective time and can feel timeless and eternal.

Meanwhile, since Brentano (1874) there has been speculation within the phenomenological movement that the principle of intentionality — that each moment of consciousness points beyond itself — might provide a felt basis for more specific religious doctrines of eternal life or immortality. The very essence of intentionality as the organizing principle of all consciousness is that it always unfolds ahead of itself, endlessly "carrying forward" (Gendlin, 2004) toward the next and the next. Alternatively with the early Heidegger, each moment of our humanly self aware consciousness contains both origin and goal in its perpetually felt sense of "not yet." As long as this not yet, carrying forward, is at all, it can have no directly felt termination. Even were such a termination actually pending, our experience of it would be this self-constituting eternity of always unfolding ahead into openness.

What this would mean is that from a first-person point of view, which is all we would have in this terminal situation, we indeed cannot die. In that sense the statements of Jesus to that effect constitute a phenomenology of consciousness. Here first and third person criteria have gone their separate ways, and "third person" issues of truth vs. illusion have become irrelevant phenomenologically. The doctor's hypothetical watch indicating brain death would be irrelevant to a consciousness as long as it is consciousness unfolding into and as its most basic pattern. Meanwhile, and extrapolating from the near death literature, as physiological arousal attenuates, experience would become more and more foundational in terms of Heidegger's dimensions of Dasein, with a concomitant phenomenal sense of timeless eternity, and the potential, after whatever else unfolds, to increasingly approximate some version of love, grace, and blessing, as above. If Heidegger and Scheler are right, the most basic principles of all religions, since based on consciousness itself, are latent within everyone, and will emerge in situations of extreme personal crisis, mystical experience — and dying (see also Hunt, 1995a).

It is interesting to note that the growing irrelevance and separation of the third person perspective from the inevitable primacy at that point of the first, need not entirely eliminate, for the intimate survivors of the (third person) deceased, a second person perspective — especially since all three perspectival tenses have developed and are normally defined in terms of each other. It would be worth remembering that if all of the dying, from their own point of view, are held within a pure unfolding present, which, again from their experience, lasts

forever, and at least has the potential of approximating, in conscious self-awareness, the deepest “holding” and indeed “loving” structure of all life, then that can hardly be irrelevant for all those who still survive in this life and had a genuine I–Thou relation with the deceased. The latter, in their own fullest experience, are “still” eternally present, here and now, and in their very essence. All of us already, from our first person view, commune empathically with our living intimates in the various states in which we have known or indeed can imagine them, whether they are present or not. So whatever the projections and overschematizations so often involved in doctrines of an after-life, our intuitive sense of a “final state” or “fulfilled essence” of the deceased will invite some sense of an inner continuing dialogue on the part of those surviving, and this at a deep and essential level. Certainly cross culturally, and especially interesting given all the intuitive religious schematizations of a first-person after-life, there seems to be the human inevitability of this felt second person relation as well, as also reflected upon by Jung (1961). Its imagined continuum has ranged from the primitive propitiation of “ghosts” and the ambiguities of the modern seance, to the further evolution of our memories in greater understanding, to the inner sense of receiving a guidance and blessing, often in dreams.

If in the above sense faith in eternal life is always justified, since it is implicit for everyone already in the onrushing flow-ahead of experience, does this make explicit “belief” and choice of a spiritual path irrelevant? Have we come out to a sort of “democratic gnosticism” in which there is a sort of secret knowledge, furnished here by existential–phenomenology and transpersonal psychology, that guarantees everyone immortal life, and not just some gnostic elite, and this regardless of ethical conduct or conscious concern. Is this a sort of phenomenological antinomianism? On the one hand this could be a logical and humane extension of that universality of message asserted by the *New Testament*, yet narrowed even there to “believers” and later to specific church and sect. On the other hand, what remains unknowable is that while compassion may be the humanly amplified deepest structure of all life, it is not so clear whether any one of us arrives at *that* eternity directly, with our personal self awareness — or only after quasi-eternal, psychotic-like hells, perhaps richly deserved, and finally stripped of all specifically human personhood. The empirical near-death literature implies both as open possibilities.

Accordingly “belief,” and corresponding ethical commitment to a chosen preparatory spiritual path, may be very important for the lives of many persons. They will want to live a life most fully appropriate to the highest potential of being human, and so consistent with our deepest and phenomenologically eternal structures. It would seem most likely that given the above phenomenology of mirroring and holding, and given that physiological death must at the end necessitate a profound relaxation of all physical tension, that the very final experience would be “positive,” whatever the route by which we arrive there.

If it should turn out, and none of us would potentially ever know this, that the “holy” arrive at this same place no quicker or better than the “lost,” then surely, in that state of deepest acceptance and love, no one at either extreme could possibly have anything or anyone of which to complain. If, with the Christian message, the God of all Being incarnates as human and then promises “forgiveness” and “eternal life” and announces an eternal “kingdom of heaven,” it is most difficult, and especially if this is itself an amplification of the phenomenology of the deepest patterns of all human existence, to see how any of it could really be “members only.”

Conclusions

Heidegger’s and Scheler’s insight into religion as the expanded self expression of the fundamentals of human existence is not in itself any reductive or “projective” *explanation* of spirituality, but rather its reinterpretation as the *descriptive* phenomenology of being human sought by Husserl (Zahavi, 2003). At the same time we can see the bases of the kind of self validation — fictive or not — that comes from projective explanations of religion in terms of early parental imagos (Freud, 1930; Rizzuto, 1979), a neo- or pre-natal oceanic experience (Freud, 1930; Laing, 1976), life energy (Bergson, 1907; Reich, 1949) or the collective bond of society itself (Durkheim, 1912). These all describe fundamental contexts of human experience that will also of necessity echo within the “expansions” of Dasein that are religion, and which can seem to approximate these successively inclusive totalities. These models “work” not necessarily in their own right, whether as explanations or metaphors, but because religion and mystical experience, whatever else they might be, are necessarily revelatory of *us*.

Heidegger, both early and late, ultimately leaves open whether mystical states would merely be projections of our being alive, as they certainly are phenomenologically, or veridical ontological perceptions of a transcendent source and intentionality. How we view such a question, aside from decisions of faith, may also depend on what science does or does not learn about the place and potential inevitability of life, and its self aware development, in the universe of modern physics (Hunt, 2006). The later Heidegger (1936) does caution that before we dismiss intuitions of Being as mere anthropomorphizing we should be more clear on whether we — inside our own being and without access to an outside — do or can finally know who and what we are. We may not be able to know in any final way what is metaphor of what — the universe of us or us of the universe.

To understand the core of religion as an anthropomorphizing of a given culture’s understanding of the physical universe (Guthrie, 1993) carries no logical necessity of making that “illusion,” especially given the necessity of metaphor in all human thought, artistic and scientific (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). Given the lawfulness of life in this universe and its incipient “anthropic” possibility within the

original physical constants after the “big bang” of cosmological creation, and given the lawfulness of our own human evolution based on the progressive interconnections of the separate senses, themselves attuned to the physical world (Hunt, 1995a, 2011), there seems to be no reason why we should not “put things in our own terms,” since we must anyway, even in mathematics (Lakoff and Nunez, 2000). If part of this be religion, then so be it. It may be that our “anthropomorphizing” of the universe that generated us will capture aspects of the system complexity principles that in fact did lead in our direction.

Whatever else it is, religion is also a manifestation and variant of our symbolic intelligence. As Otto was a neo-Kantian, interested in the numinous as its own apriori cognitive–affective capacity, we can place his phenomenology with more recent attempts to understand spirituality as one form of our multiple intelligences — logical, artistic, scientific–mechanical, economic, and political. Accordingly, Emmons (2000) and Hunt (1995b, 2012) have understood spirituality as an abstract development of a personal–social or emotional intelligence, as the maximal expressive synthesis of human self-understanding. Here, the abstract “expansion” and “inflation” from within of Heidegger’s Dasein, as his understanding of what happens in religious experience, intuits all-inclusive outer boundaries that can never be represented in full, since we are within them. These expressive, finally uncompletable, expansions from within thereby expose the gaps between transcendental intuitions, inclusive metaphors of numinous feeling, and the methods (prayer, meditation) seeking to evoke them that seem to be characteristic of a spiritual intelligence. Thus we find the perennial tensions between mystics and their respective “religions of the book.” These inevitable historical “distentions” between technique, doctrine, and numinous state, based on an intuitive inclusivity that can only be approximated in each cultural era, makes spirituality, as also attested by the very rigidities of dogma, our most fragile and easily disrupted form of symbolic intelligence, and this in ways sometimes destructive and distortive to both individual and group. The inherent pull towards an expressive understanding of all Being asks what is simultaneously open to and even demanded by our intuition, and yet closed to any final completion or consistency.

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