



# Phenomenology in Dialogue: Religious Experience and the Lifeworld

Second Regional Conference of  
the Society for the Phenomenology of Religious Experience  
Jan 26-27-5, 2018, Berkeley

## Conference Abstracts

**January 26, Friday, Morning Session, 9:15 am -1:15 pm**

***Religious Spirituality, an Emancipative Province of Meaning***  
**Michael BARBER**, Saint Louis University

Religious spirituality involves entering into what Alfred Schutz characterized as a province of meaning. Provinces of meaning, usually undertaken with reference to the paramount reality of everyday life (itself a province of meaning), include provinces that Schutz himself developed, such as phantasy, dreaming, scientific theorizing, and others such as attending a play or humor. These provinces involve six features constituting their cognitive style: a specific epoché, a tension of consciousness, a form of spontaneity, a way of experiencing oneself, and forms of sociality and temporality. Moving beyond Schutz, this paper develops religious spirituality as a province of meaning exhibiting these features. The religious/spiritual province plays an emancipative role with reference to everyday life (in particular, what Schutz calls the “world of working”) and fosters a creative, appresentative mindset. Critical questions concern whether such an approach adequately captures the fullness of religious spirituality and whether such spirituality poses dangers in need of constraint.

***Phenomenology and Local Theory of Mind***  
**Tanya LUHRMANN**, Stanford University

This talk makes the argument that the way we think about our minds matters, and may shape the phenomenology of our mental events. It makes the case that different practices of attending to mental events have identifiable phenomenological consequences; and that different cultures and different theologies emphasize mind and mental process in distinctive ways. The data to support this claim come from research on the way charismatic Christians experience God and the way persons who meet criteria for schizophrenia experience psychosis in the US, Accra and Chennai. These are different populations: but both hear “voices.” We can see that the way that people map the territory of the mind works as a kind of practice of attention: with practiced attention and cultural invitation, Christians report that some kinds of events come to feel more “external”—they develop more confidence that God has spoken,



and they report a more sensory quality to the voice. Meanwhile, those with psychosis report different content to voice-hearing when they do not immediately infer from the experience that they are “crazy” (as Americans do). They speak as if their negative voices are (on average) less caustic. The data suggest that one consequence of the different ways of representing mind and mental experience is that Americans have a harsher experience of psychosis, and less spiritual experience.

***Transformative Impact: How Do Religious Conversions Change our Life-world?***  
**Martin NITSCHÉ, Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences**

The presentation concentrates mainly on the transformative impact of religious conversions. I understand here religious conversions as all individual spiritual transformations that either create an essentially new religious experience, or substantially intensify an existing religiosity. The transformative impact of these transformations consists not only in modifying life perspectives or values, but also (and more substantially) in altering the very structure of personal experience. It can bring even significant changes in phenomenal character of individual life-world, which is then experienced as perceived “differently”. The presentation wants to reflect the possibilities that the phenomenological method possesses to describe (and understand) these changes. I will introduce the notion of phenomenal field (Husserl, Gurwitsch, Merleau-Ponty) and consequently focus my attention to its conversion to a phenomenological field (also in Fink and his “phenomenology of phenomenology”). This methodical conversion then forms a possible basis to explain religious conversions and their transformative impact.

***What Counts as a ‘Religious Experience?: A Phenomenological Exploration of Religious Expression***  
**Neal DEROO, The King’s University**

In this paper, I will argue that the term ‘religious’ in the phrase “religious experience” does not name particular distinct experiences, but rather names a facet of all experience. To do this, I will begin by arguing that all experiences are expressive of a deeper spirituality (Section I). Then, I will examine why this deeper spirituality ought to be considered ‘religious’ (Section II). Next, I will briefly explain how this ‘religious’ spirituality leads to the development of religion in a way that can expand our understanding of the religious (Section III). I will end by suggesting that “religious experience” is best conceived, not in the sense of particular experiences described as ‘religious’, but rather as a particular facet of all experience which is ‘religious.’ Therefore, my conclusion that all experiences are ‘religious,’ will not lead to the secondary conclusion that there is nothing gained by adding the adjective ‘religious’ to the noun ‘experiences.’ There remains good reason to talk about “religious experience” even if we say (as I will) that all experiences are ‘religious experiences’ (Section IV).



**January 26, Friday, Afternoon Sessions, 2:30 pm – 5:45 pm**

## **Session 1. Religious Lifeworlds**

***Why We Need the Demonic: A Phenomenological Analysis of Negative Religious Experience***  
**Jim NELSON and Jonah KOETKE, Valparaiso University**

An enduring feature of Christian religious life has been the experience of the demonic. This experience can be found in the New Testament, most obviously in reported encounters with demons, but more centrally in the language of spiritual warfare that pervades much of the Pauline literature. In the Patristic period, these ideas were cemented in the Christian tradition in the writings of the Desert Fathers and the Evagrian analysis of spiritual life. A phenomenological understanding of experience holds that percepts have qualities that are inherently given as part of the experience, and that these qualities can be observed through phenomenological reduction. An examination of the writings of the Desert Fathers and Evagrius suggests that one inherent quality of some religious experiences is their externality. Thoughts or feelings within the person are perceived as having an external source, and external threats can take on an embodied quality in perception as in visions of demonic beings. While the cultural milieu of Egyptian and Neoplatonic thought provided acceptability for demonic experience, Christian accounts suggest that the phenomenal quality of externality also had an important role.

On reflection, it is not surprising that we would find a quality of externality in religious experience. Religion and spirituality deal with our relationship to the broader world around us, so it would be remarkable if religious experiences did not have a component of externality. Modern neuroscience research also suggests that the brain is hardwired to detect and attend to external perceptions as external to us. The idea that perception has a totally internal character is entirely incompatible with modern neuroscientific theory and research. While much of Western phenomenology has focused on internalism, perhaps because of Cartesian influences, recent phenomenological writings have begun to recover the importance of externality. In the mid-20th century, Emmanuel Levinas wrote about the experience of the Other, and more recently Jean-Luc Marion has developed the theme of giftedness in perception. However, they have focused on experiences with a more positive valence, leaving the powerful negative externality of spiritual warfare relatively unexplored. Critics of the demonic have tried hard to expel the idea from Western consciousness, pointing to tragic experiences in early modern Western history, and a supposed confusion between the demonic and mental illness. However, a careful historical analysis suggests that Christians generally had a clear separation between mental illness and the demonic, and that problems in the early modern period had much more to do with historical events and fears of witchcraft than ideas about the demonic itself.

Critics have also ridiculed the demonic as it typically posits the existence of entities that are rational and sentient but immaterial, a belief ruled out a priori by much of Western thought. However, a careful phenomenological analysis casts serious doubt on the modernist picture. Here it is useful to consider the concept of meme, developed by Richard Dawkins. In his thought, memes are powerful “unit of cultural transmission” such as ideas that replicate. According to some suggestions, these memes would qualify as “living” as they can reproduce and maintain their existence across time. In addition, many meme-ideas would pass the Turing



Test, a modern standard for whether something is thought to be "intelligent." Thus, Patristic authors would be justified in treating phenomenal experiences of the demonic as encounters with entities that are living and intelligent. The abandonment of the demonic in much of Christian religious thought and practice carries negative consequences, as it invalidates the external quality of many difficult religious experiences. A recovery of the concept of the demonic would help us better understand the phenomenology of religious life.

***The Forgotten Rituals of Order: Remembering the First Aesthetic Technologies of Politics***  
**James GARRISON**, Scripps College

Bernard Stiegler's influential work in phenomenology calls for a reconsideration of the tekhnē underlying "the politics of memory." This concerns the constitutive technology that draws together Sein and Schein, being and appearance, in the constitution of public, political life. Furthermore, Bernard Stiegler and contemporary Confucian/Marxian philosopher Lǐ Zéhòu converge in their understanding of how finer techniques with a ritual basis lie at the root of human life and how such techniques become covered over and lost with the passage of time. Though the idioms differ and perfect translation remains elusive, they both present novel insight into something being lost and foreclosed in becoming a normative subject and the possibility of recovery through artful ritual technique. The question then emerges: How can this forgetfulness be understood not just as a mere memory lapse, but rather as a major constitutive feature of human culture(s) in the singular and plural?

***The Phenomenology of Awe: Core to a Cross-Cultural Religiosity, Key to our Humanity***  
**Kirk SCHNEIDER**, Columbia University and Saybrook University

This talk proposes that the sense of "awe," or the humility and wonder, sense of adventure toward living, is core to a cross-cultural religiosity and key to the survival and optimization of human vitality. Drawing from classic phenomenological texts, such as Rudolf Otto's *Idea of the Holy*, Abraham Heschel's *Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* as well as my own recent writings, I propose that the sense of awe is a critical and needed link among the major world religions that are perhaps moving toward a kind of pan-religiosity that Huston Smith calls "post-secular" humanism. This post-secular humanism respects the depth and breadth of human experience and the resacralization of every day life. I also propose that the adoption of the sense of awe has had major salutary affects on individual lives, and draw on my own phenomenological reflections to flesh this point out. Specifically, I consider the role of awe in the personal experiences of interviewees in my 2009 book *Awakening to Awe: Personal Stories of Profound Transformation* as well as my own reflections on the role of awe in an increasingly technocratic world. These latter reflections draw from my recent book *The Spirituality of Awe: Challenges to the Robotic Revolution* in which I propose an "awe-based" consciousness of daily life to both counter and complement the encroachment of mechanization on our most intimate human engagements (including the religious and spiritual settings). I conclude with a plea for the need to deepen--and perhaps even institutionalize-- a sense of awe, both in our religious outlooks and individual lives.



***The Inexhaustible Self and Other: The Person, the Community, and the Potential of Ethics***  
Stephan QUARLES, Graduate Theological Union

What happens when one subject encounters another? What happens within the inner life of each person? The phenomenological approach of Edith Stein, specifically in *On the Problem of Empathy* and *The Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, approaches the question of the interaction of the two subjects through the lens of the inexhaustibility of each person's interior life. For Stein, the inexhaustibility of the other enables the subject to live radically and vulnerably in relationship with the other. This inexhaustibility also grants the potential for communal living that is fortified by the relational give and take of the community's life power. The investment and divestment of life power makes space for the approach of the other and a continual living into their subjectivity because the subject sees the other as they are in their singularity and inexhaustibility allowing for an encounter that is not exhausted through singular designations of identity. The inexhaustibility grants to the subject the space to participate in the other's life without considering that this one encounter names the totality of the other. It grants to the subject freedom to interact because I know that I, too, am not exhausted by this interaction.

**Session 2. Experience and Tradition, 2:30-5:45 pm**

***What Do the Angels Say? Scripture, Identity, and the Ascents of Emanuel Swedenborg and Baal Shem Tov***

Rebecca ESTERSON, Center for Swedenborgian Studies, Graduate Theological Union

The eighteenth century was a time of contradictions and counter-movements in Jewish-Christian relations. It was an era when Jewish and Christian philosophers could investigate together the mysteries of the universe owing to the purported victory of reason and enlightenment, while blood libels, forced conversions and Talmud burnings persisted, like gruesome echoes from a past age.

This paper will examine this history of boundary crossing and boundary preservation between Jews and Christians via an unorthodox path. Two men, a Swedish Lutheran natural philosopher and a charismatic Polish Rabbi, give their accounts of ascents to the heavens, both in the 1740s. Their lives did not intersect, but their other-worldly experiences tell related stories of strife between Jews and Christians while betraying something of a shared horizon concerning the future of their religious communities, and concerning sacred texts and their interpretation. Their conversations with angels and departed souls are revealing, not for their descriptions of transcendent realities, but because they betray the contours of the religious landscape of their contexts. Within these accounts we find articulations of the role of private and communal religious activity, intrareligious and interreligious conflict, the bestowal of authority to interpret, and shifting messianic expectations. Both men witnessed the opening of gates once closed, signaling a new access to divine truth, which is imparted, in turn, to those in their respective



communities. And yet their differences are as significant as their similarities. In Swedenborg's case, celestial dialogues with and concerning Jews in the other world bring to sharp focus the "phantom Jews" that populated the European imagination from ancient times. As David Nirenberg articulates in his history of anti-Judaism in the West, the figurative Jew has been conjured time and again as a constitutive idea in Christian thought, regardless of the presence or absence of actual Jews. As was the case in the past, Swedenborg's phantom Jews serve to distinguish Christian interpretive abilities and Christian self-identity. The Baal Shem Tov, conversely, goes to heaven to witness and repair the suffering of the Jewish people on earth and to renew the connection to Oral Torah, manifesting the anxieties of a people and a tradition at risk of endangerment.

With the methodological guidance of Martin Jay and Steven Katz, this paper will explore what we have come to call "mystical experiences," for the sake of their relevance to our understanding of particular historical locations. It does not deny the interior realities of the experiencing subject, but probes the symbolic potential of the visions for their relevance to external circumstances. These two sets of experiences, in particular, though they span Europe east to west, help us understand Jewish-Christian relations and biblical interpretation in an age of historical import for both Jews and Christians. It is a moment shaped by the European Enlightenment and Haskalah, Deism, pietism, Hermetic undercurrents, the fall of Sabbatai Zevi, and other social, religious and political forces. But it also illustrates a chapter in a much bigger story: the fraught history of two ancient and interconnected traditions whose depths of pain and heights of ecstasy seem only to be pronounceable in the words of angels.

### ***Zoroaster's Poetic Shaping of His Experience of Revelation***

**Martin SCHWARTZ**, University of California at Berkeley

Zoroaster (properly Zarathushtra, with nothing to do with Nietzsche's fictive persona) was a poet-priest flourishing in Central Asia ca. 1200-1000 BCE, who composed 17 religious poems, collectively called the Gathas in an ancient Iranian language (Old Avestan). This poetry was composed orally, and transmitting orally for many centuries before being put in writing. They are, in my opinion, the most intricate, intellectually packed poetry in all of literature. Apart from their giving us a window into the astounding realm of thought of preliterate genius, the Gathas constitute a unique foundation document at the origins of historically important and influential religion, Zoroastrianism. I will focus on the analysis, with schematically graphic illustrations, of a series of poems which set forth what Zoroaster reports, as revelations from his divinity, which he presents, via a variety of remarkable poetic-performative techniques meant, *inter alia*, to produce an experience of revelation in his core audience of adherents. I will retrieve from the relevant poems a template of the revelations which Z. reports, and show their projection of theological and eschatological doctrines. I shall indicate how this material illuminates the personal experience of a remarkable poet and religio-philosophical thinker.



## **Giving Shinran Away: *The Benefit, Risk, and Challenge of a Phenomenological Turn by Shin Scholars***

**Gordon BERMANT**, University of Pennsylvania

This paper focuses on characteristics of some recent scholarship that compares, contrasts, and interprets the religious teachings of Shinran Shonin (1163-1263) with concepts of modern Continental philosophy. It evaluates this scholarship from the perspective of Anglophone Shin Buddhists who seek an expression of Shin teachings that resonates authentically in modern American life.

The paper begins with a brief history of efforts, in English and English translation, to interpret Buddhist teaching in Western philosophical frameworks. The example of Nāgārjuna scholarship, as elaborated by Andrew Tuck, is spotlighted. The paper then focuses more specifically on some admirable analyses by Dennis Hirota, who sets two of Shinran's most important themes, the apprehension of shinjin and jinen, into the light provided by Heidegger's elaborations of "truth," "dwelling," "joy," "freedom," "nature," "belief," "faith," and other terms with similarly thick nets of semantic connections. Of primary importance to Hirota is that both Shinran and Heidegger, though separated by centuries and radically different cultural histories, eschewed the strict subject-object dualism typically associated with western philosophy as under the influence of Descartes. Hirota also emphasizes that both men moved away from simple correspondence or coherence accounts of "truth," "belief," and "faith" to more complex, nuanced accounts that include aesthetic, somatic, and performative components.

There is much to appreciate in Hirota's efforts and their results, and in the production of other scholars who work on parallel tracks. This paper describes some of these benefits as genuine advances in comprehension and expression. Emphasizing the significance of embodiment, in all its forms, is an important example that will be expanded in the paper.

There is also an attendant risk: given the realities of American academic professional life, these early efforts at linkage could become a progressively more insular and specialized form of doing philosophy, one that would create very high barriers against understanding by other intelligent, well-educated English speakers who have interests in deepening their religious understanding. We can note, for example, that Heidegger's German, either as German or when translated, can be just as incomprehensible as some of Shinran's prose in translation. Interpreting one vocabulary in the light of another, when neither is comprehensible to most people, is not an advance in religious understanding. Rather than aiding Shin temple clergy and lay leaders in the task of authentic Shin propagation in English, this philosophizing could become an academic sub-specialty in which the religious studies professors and theologians would be talking, after all, only to each other. And this unfortunate outcome would arise while everyone involved would have none but the most beneficent intentions.

The challenge, therefore, is to accept gratefully the genuine advances that these efforts produce and to work even harder to find means of expression that open the minds and hearts of non-specialized English speakers, particularly by reaching into the rich American vernacular of idioms and memes. This isn't easy, but it's not impossible either. An excellent example was published very recently in the New York Times, when the authors used the phrase "dirty hands" as a moral metaphor to introduce Shinran's teaching that spiritual awakening to wisdom and compassion, and commitment to engage in wholesome social action, does not require moral purification beforehand. And it's a good thing, too, because efforts at moral purification have seeds of defeat built right in.



### ***Understanding Sri Lalita Sahasranamam***

**Karen MATTERN**, independent scholar

In this paper, I will reflect on select verses of the Sri Lalitasahasranamam, or 'Thousand Names of the Goddess,' a portion of the 4th c.BCE Brahmanda Purana, viewed in relation to South Indian titular Goddess Sri Lalita Tripurasundari's themes, as distilled by Pundit David Frawley, focusing especially on Beauty, Perception and Love. Where appropriate, I will share personal mystical experiences, and also insights relevant to Phenomenology that evidence the consistent and coherent meanings of this hymn within the context of the rich home-world of Saktism, especially as embodied in Amma, the Hugging Saint of Kerala, its most iconic exemplar. Using Anthony Steinbock's distinctions of three forms of religious experience, defined as 'vertically given' in epiphany, revelation through exemplars, and manifestation in icons, I will go on to unfold aspects of Phenomenological themes, such as embodiment, intersubjectivity, and empathy, discoverable as centrally significant in religious experience within the Sakta homeworld, as reflected in both the Lalitasahasranamam and Lalita's icon, Amma, drawing on Dan Zahavi's nuanced interpretation of empathy in Husserl. I will also reflect on the age-old spiritual practice of icon/idol-gazing, with especial consideration of differences in viewpoints and practice around idols, East and West, drawing on Marion and Steinbock and my own experience. Finally, in sharing anecdotes of personal mystical experience around Amma and the Lalitasahasranamam, focusing particularly on the face and the eyes as loci of alterity, (following Levinas), I will conclude that the mystery of vertically-given religious experience exceeds all forms, texts and concepts, continually drawing us forward in our human exploration of Reality as 'I,' 'Thou,' 'We,' and 'She.'





**January 27, Saturday, Morning Session, 9:00 am - 10:30 pm**

***The Grammars of Experience in Christian Theology Dialogue***

**Marc JEAN-BERNARD**, University of Puerto Rico

The philosophical horizon of this essay is theoretically comparative and hermeneutically dialogical. Its main philosophical and theological tonality expresses, in first person and through three discursive moments, the differentiated fusion of horizons between phenomenological and grammatical understanding of experience. After a philosophical overture -drawing the *éthos* of the problematic and situating it in the contemporary openness of phenomenology, I will expose the consistent modalities of convergence between Husserlian phenomenology and Wittgensteinian grammar of the mystical shapes of experience. I consider the tense responsorial dialogue between Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas and Wittgenstein's styles of thinking, from the crossed categorial spaces of Austrian philosophy and German culture in general. In a second time, I will show how the comparative inquiring of the two styles of phenomenology enquires today a cautious micro-logical methodology. I will first consider some precise semantical clarifications of central concepts frequently misunderstood: Experience, the mystical, evidence and truth, *via negativa*; in a second time, the theoretic levels of grammar and phenomenology of mystical experience are heralded in the context of the Christian theological dialogue, where I emphasize the rebirth of the French theology and its dialogic transcendence, since Maritain or de Chardin to Marcel, de Lubac, Levinas, de Certeau and Marion. Finally, I consider the aesthetical experience of the mystical, from both visual and acoustic manifestations. I synthesize the grammatical and comparative approach of the experience by the opening of theological perspectives coming from musico-philosophical investigations, such as the awakening to the resonance of Being and the Divine through aesthetic experience and musical thinking. Within a theology of the acoustic *λόγος*, the grammar of mystical experience reveals the sacramentality of music and the mystery of silence. I conclude with the concrete possibilities offered by aesthetic dimensions of experience for the interreligious and diplomatic dialogues.

***Bergoglio among the Phenomenologists?: Otherness, Encounter, and Church in Evangelii gaudium and Amoris Laetitia***

**Kristóf Zoltán OLTVAI**, The University of Chicago Divinity School

Although Jorge Bergoglio's (Pope Francis's) pastoral emphasis on encounter is well-known, almost no scholarship has noted his use of an explicitly phenomenological vocabulary in his theological work. Because the terms that populate his pontifical texts – “experience,” “the gaze,” “the other,” “the icon,” “the idol,” “technoscience” – diverge from his predecessors' Thomistic repertoire, observers claim Bergoglio writes his documents in an improvisational style. Here I argue that, on the contrary, Bergoglio's language is deeply rooted in the philosophical terminology of 20th-century French phenomenology. By focusing on how *Evangelii gaudium* and *Amoris laetitia* frame “the gaze,” “the face,” and “the other,” I show how Bergoglio's description of the interpersonal encounter as a theological site mirrors Emmanuel Lévinas's and Jean-Luc Marion's philosophical projects. Without ruling out a direct textual influence, I show how these



two apostolic exhortations foreground French phenomenology's implications for Catholic moral theology and ecclesiology

## **Parallel Sessions 10:45 am -1 pm**

### **Session 1. Phenomenological Theology**

#### ***God's presence within the phenomenology of life. A phenomenological critique of Alvin Plantinga's treatment of the ontological argument***

**Andreas Gonçalves LIND**, Université de Namur

The recent debate on the notorious Anselmian proof of God's existence, usually called the "ontological argument", is placed within an analytic approach, since Alvin Plantinga revisited this argument beginning in the sixties and especially during the nineties. In the same epoch, Michel Henry contested this proof, situating the debate in a completely different field. Henry's critique does not concern the question of logical validity or the matter of rational justification of religious belief. Rather, Henry focuses on the way existence is conceived. In so doing, his phenomenology of life shows the difference between affirming God's existence (in every "possible world") and accessing God's presence inside the ego's subjectivity. In this article, I will try to show how Henry's way of proceeding makes self-life-experience a legitimate foundation for a belief in God's presence (not only the simple intellectual affirmation of His existence).

#### ***Option for the Poor and the Phenomenology of Life***

**Vincent PASTRO**, Jesuit School of Theology

Recently, Catholic teaching and theology have given much attention to "the preferential option for the poor." Gustavo Gutiérrez, OP, who has popularized the phrase, also defines theology as a "reflection on praxis in the light of the word of God." The praxis of the option for the poor is therefore indispensable to the theological task, for theology must always be "enfleshed" and concrete in the life of the people. This is particularly the case of Latin American theology and strongly emphasized in the magisterium of Pope Francis. The option for the poor has its foundation in who God is and how God is for the people (cf Exod 3:8-15). The option for the poor is grounded in life. Michel Henry's phenomenology of life provides a logical approach to theological reflection on poverty, justice, and solidarity with the poor. The people of God, the Church community, live the option in concrete praxis. The God of life has a special love and concern for the poor. The poor, and those in solidarity with them, mysteriously experience the divine love and grace in their everyday lives and la lucha por la vida (the struggle for life). In the living, religious experience is intimately grounded.

The option for the poor is a fundamental "quality of God." St. Maximos the Confessor says that while God's essence cannot be known, the "qualities" of God are discerned in life



experience. They become the center of the theologian's contemplation. God is "experienced" through the divine qualities. A primary quality of the God of life is the option for the poor.

This essay is an exercise in "phenomenological theology." Its point of departure is the phenomenology of life articulated as theological reflection on the option for the poor and its praxis.

### ***Ethical Dimensions of Religious Experiencing: Phenomenological Ontology of Good Mind in Zarathushtra's Dream***

**Olga LOUCHAKOVA-SCHWARTZ**, UC Davis and Graduate Theological Union

Zarathushtra (Zoroaster) was a poet-priest who is credited with starting a new religion named, after him, Zoroastrianism. Schwartz (2000, 2015) shows that Zarathushtra's Godhead contains three (or more) unified aspects, Good Mind (Vohu Manah), Best Rightness (Asha Vahishta), and the chief representative of the deity, Wisdom (Mazda, called Ahura, "Lord"). In the Gathas, seventeen poems authored by Zarathushtra, the references to the triad are exceedingly numerous, yet left without definitions and placed amidst multiple syntactic, semantic, phonetic and lexical ambiguities. For the audience, this causes a Schutzian tension of consciousness, perhaps intended by Zarathushtra to induce an insight into the nature of the Godhead.

I explicate the Gathas with regard to phenomenological ontology of Vohu Manah, and to a lesser degree, Asha and Mazda. Using a situation of a dream, Zarathushtra reduces out the sphere of ownness (Eigenheitssphäre), and brings out of anonymity direct intuition of the manyu-s (impulses or impeti), which are primordial stirrings of consciousness at the origin of fully developed intentionalities. One of the manyu-s is Holy (spenta), and another is wicked or wrong (druj). Their choices produce two kinds of the mind, a good one which is in correlation with the givenness of the world, and its opposite; thereby, an ethical value of mental states is posited and linked to their cognitive value, and the ontological foundation of the mind is disclosed to be in the capacity of ethical choice. Out of this choice, the Deity becomes available to the subject in direct intuition.

All three principles constituting Ahura Mazda are conceived by Zarathushtra as simultaneously Divine and human, with a fluidity of their ontological modes. In this manner, in Vohu Manah Zarathushtra absolutizes ethical psychological intentionality. In a move distinctive of Zarathushtra's metaphysics, the human mind is viewed as partly sharing ontological status with the Deity and thereby having seeds of salvation in afterlife within itself.

## **Session 2. Proto- Phenomenology and Interdisciplinarity 10:45 am -1 pm**

### ***Salpuri and Candomblé: from Suffering to Prospering***

**Hanna KANG**, Graduate Theological Union

This paper will demonstrate the close relationship of dance and religion by examining a Korean folkloric dance called Salpuri, which originally was derived from an impromptu dance of shamans during their rituals. By exploring this folkloric dance, the paper will also demonstrate



how when the internalized feeling of suffering of a person or a group of people is shared at the collective level within a religious setting, such emotion of frustration is ventilated and externalized as a vibrant and dynamic form of dance with high artistic and cultural values. Then we will examine if the same intrinsic relationship of dance and religion is found in other cultures as well. Therefore, we will analyze how this mechanism of externalization of suffering in the form of dance in a religious atmosphere is developed in the Brazilian Candomblé. However, this paper does not intend to make a direct comparison between Salpuri and Candomblé, for it will primarily focus on Salpuri and the ventilation of suffering by means of dance at a religious setting in the Korean context. On the other hand, it will underline some critical similarities in terms of the role of religion and dance in Salpuri and Candomblé. Truly, both Salpuri and Candomblé were born out of the acute pain of the most oppressed in their respective society. In spite of those circumstances, they prospered throughout history by means of the synergic interaction between religion and dance, until they eventually flourished into a priceless cultural treasure.

***“Should I Also Make a Garden Out of the Desert”*: Camus’ Story of Janine**

**Juliet ROHDE-BROWN**, Pacifica Graduate Institute

This paper explores Albert Camus' short story entitled *The Adulterous Woman* as a nature-based initiation into deeper complexity. Rich with archetypal and alchemical imagery, we are taken through a day in the life of Janine and we can see, reflected in her experience, those places that beckon to greater authenticity within ourselves. The image of the desert invites us to consider, for Janine, the same kind of question that Jung asked in *The Red Book*, with “Why is my self a desert? Have I lived too much outside of myself in men and events? Why did I avoid my self? Was I not dear to myself? But I have avoided the place of my soul.” (RE, Par. 72)

**The Conversion of Jarena Lee: A Ricoeurian Analysis of the Formation of Ethical Subjectivity**

**Aline GRAM**, Graduate Theological Union

This paper is a historical, literary, and phenomenological study of religious experience. It offers a reading of Jarena Lee's autobiography, *Religious Experiences and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee*, through the lens of Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*. Using Ricoeur's insights about the ethical implications of narrative, subjectivity, and the role of otherness in identity, it argues that the genre of the eighteenth-century conversion narrative contributed to Lee's ethical formation. Lee was an African-American domestic worker, whose autobiography is the first autobiography written and published by an African-American woman. In her autobiography, Lee documents her conversion and call to preach as well as a number of obstacles she faced and overcame. She contended with criticism from both blacks and whites for her preaching; she boldly preached in Maryland—a slave state; she criticized the institution of slavery; and she wrote against the church's prohibition of women's preaching. Although no analysis of her text nor any theoretical considerations can fully account for what made Lee so remarkable, Ricoeur's insights can elucidate aspects of Lee's conversion process and religious experience that contributed to her brave actions and willingness to take a stand on contested issues.



**January 27, Saturday, Afternoon Parallel Sessions, 2:15 pm – 5:00 pm**

## **Session 1. Phenomenological Theology**

### ***God, Arbitrary Decisions, and the Metaphysical Consequences***

**Leland HARPER**, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

I explore whether arbitrariness and making arbitrary decisions arise out of a possessing a lack of knowledge, possessing too much knowledge, indifference towards a particular outcome, or some other potential factor. Drawing from the work of Sharon M. Kaye (2004), I examine whether the ability to make arbitrary decisions ought to be seen as a marker of power or weakness, whether it is desirable or undesirable and, ultimately, whether or not it fits with the classical conception of God. This application is to determine whether or not the God of classical theism, with specific attention being paid to His omniscient nature, can make arbitrary decisions and explores the relevant epistemological and metaphysical consequences that follow since, we would suspect that, any of God's potential actions would be guided by some amount of knowledge of a particular state of affairs.

### ***Levinas and the Significance of Passivity in the Christian Religious Experience***

**James CYFKO**, Ryerson University

In the following essay, I will relate, from a Christian perspective, the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, specifically, his reflections on the experience of the face of the Other, to the face of the crucified Jesus Christ. Analyzing the tendency of Christian believers to rationalize the religious experience of the face of the Other, I reveal through Levinas, how, in doing so, they paradoxically neglect to perceive God, who is love. I will focus on the appropriate response shown by both Levinas and Christ in the inter-human drama, specifically, that of passive kenosis, as opposed to self-preserving activity. In undergoing the an-archic passion of the Other, I encounter a possibility of transformation from my self qua ego which disconnects me from reality, to my self qua responsibility which throws me back into my finitude. This becomes most powerful upon experiencing the Crucifixion of Christ, as 'I', as active agent, become traumatically substituted by 'me', as passive recipient. When I surrender to this accusative gaze of the face of Christ which pierces my egoistic shell, I encounter, according to Levinas, the infinite demands of the vulnerable Other haunting me before ontological qualification. In this, I experience the trace of the inescapable Infinite who calls me to holiness. This holiness can only be reached if I cease to manipulate God, instead allowing him the freedom to do with me as he wills through the self-emptying passivity which Levinas professes.



### ***A Conversation around Evil: A Case for a Narrative Understanding of Moral Scepticism and Man's Capability for Moral Action***

**Marius BAN**, Heythrop College, University of London

Drawing on the concept of narrative understanding, hermeneutical phenomenology and theology, I would like to challenge the canonical, methodological conventions grounded in Anglo-American philosophy of religion. Through an analysis of the Adamic myth and an associated quest for a total grasp of theism, I intend to explore fresh ways of establishing the compossibility of God, evil and moral praxis. In particular, I would like to claim that the concept of narrative understanding can help us reconfigure the dialectic between the incomprehensibility of God and moral action in a way that is true to our humanity and, perhaps, in a way that makes us act more against evil rather than less. By resituating the view of divine incomprehensibility within an ever-growing narrative of God, evil and moral praxis, I will show, contra both the proponents of sceptical theism (Bergmann and Rea) and its detractors (Almeida and Oppy), that when the incommensurability of God and evil and man's epistemological limitations are understood on their immediate plane of reference (at a more pre-reflective level of understanding) the charge of moral paralysis is ineffective. First, I will locate the analytic discussion about moral action within the framework of sceptical theism. I will then go on to question the 'observer's standpoint' which underlines much of the discussion about sceptical theism and moral scepticism. Next, the concept of 'narrative understanding' is introduced as a more humane model of speaking about the dialectic between God, evil and moral action. The last section identifies a series of 'anchor-points' that may help to interweave the dialectic between God, evil and moral action into a narrative of personal experience and human interaction.

### ***The Way of Holiness: Deification as The Final Phase of Orthodox Spiritual Life***

**Andrew VERNON**, Saint Cyril and Athanasius of Alexandria Institute for Orthodox Studies

Deification ( $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$ /theosis in Greek) has been the subject of increasing interest among theologians East and West for the past several decades. However, it is most often treated theoretically, as a variation on the theme of the incarnation, "He became human that we might become divine," rather than practically, as a way of spiritual transformation. This paper discusses theosis from the latter point of view, in the context of the three-part schema of purification-illumination-perfection that has been used as a framework to describe spiritual experience since the early days of the Church. Deification is defined as both a process that includes all phases of spiritual life and also as referring specifically to the third or final phase of perfection or sanctification. The writings of the Fathers of the Church indicate that theosis was understood almost from the beginning of Christian spiritual practice as "participation in the divine nature." This possibility of participation in the divine is by no means restricted to Christians but is a gift bestowed on all humanity, past, present, and future. The paper concludes by describing deification as the healing of the soul that is required to return human beings to the natural or normal level of spiritual development intended from the beginning, and also as a further development beyond that point into the purely divine realm of the Kingdom of God.



## Session 2. Proto- Phenomenology and Interdisciplinarity 2:15 pm – 5:00 pm

### *Traversing the Terrain: An Eco-Phenomenological Religious Naturalism*

Sarah O'BRIEN, Drew University

Giving language to the sacred experience of the more-than-human world, phenomenology and its sub-discipline, eco-phenomenology, illuminate the value of religious naturalism as a viable form of religious experience, particularly in light of the present ecological crisis. An interdisciplinary and comprehensive discourse, religious naturalism has attracted the applicability from a diverse range of scholars, including biologists, philosophers, and theologians. While religious naturalists sometimes diverge on method, all religious naturalists assert first, that nature, or the natural world is all that exists; and second, there is no supernatural or otherworldly causes, gives meaning to, or creates the world. Yet, many religious naturalists, particularly Donald A. Crosby, contend that nature as such is sacred and is a generative canvas for religious experience.

Nature, in all of its' chaos, creation, destruction, and balance, is all that there is, as such, nature is everywhere and inter-relates, encompasses, sustains all things—both human and non-human. Outside of its' aesthetic qualities, nature, therefore, possesses profound religious significance—nature, through its sustaining processes, in creating order from chaos, gives meaning to our understanding of existence. Essential to Crosby's religion of nature is lived experience, including both pre-conceptual experiences, or those based largely on sensuous experience, and one's perceptions. The experience of the more-than-human world, particularly as it pertains to the religious naturalism of Donald A. Crosby, exemplifies the ways in which experiences with the animate earth embody religious experiences. As members within and beings dependent upon the more-than-human world, Crosby's religion of nature demonstrates the importance of human actions and decisions that uphold the inherent value of the more-than-human world.

Eco-phenomenology, through its' starting point in experience, particularly within the more-than-human world, seeks to bring about a powerful shift in both our current understandings of the human subject and our place within the more-than-human world. Drawing upon and extending the work of Husserl, Scheler, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas, foundational to eco-phenomenological method is the conviction that the more-than-human world has value outside of its' use for humanity. As such, eco-phenomenologists assert first, that in order to adequately address and describe our current ecological climate, or that of the Anthropocene, phenomenological method and insight must be used; and second, phenomenology, in its' ontological and axiological dimensions, is inherently a philosophical ecology in that it studies the interrelationships and interdependences between the perceiver and the perceived.

Vitally important for sustaining life and significant for the development of human meaning-making systems is the ecological lifeworld. Both Crosby's religion of nature and the eco-phenomenological work of David Abram demonstrate the necessity of the more-than-human world for the development of human civilization. In other words, we are human only because of and through our experiences with the more-than-human world. Bringing together the work of religious naturalist Donald A. Crosby and eco-phenomenologist David Abram through Merleau-Ponty's concept of the flesh, this paper seeks to demonstrate the ways that phenomenology is useful for conceptualizing the religious experience of the more-than-human world and the necessity of this perspective for alleviating the current ecological crisis.



### ***Conceptualizing A Phenomenological Hermeneutic Framework of Religious-Spiritual Healing In Chaplaincy Process: A Clinical Case-Study***

**Parameshwaran RAMAKRISHNAN**, Graduate Theological Union

Chaplains believe that it is the God/Divine that heals the patient in their spiritual care process. The phenomenon of Divine manifestation in a clinical spiritual-care process has never been studied and/or published. Phenomenological-hermeneutic framework of clinical chaplaincy process will ground religious-spiritual studies in evidence-based scientific paradigm. In this paper I aim (1) to study a clinical chaplain-patient interaction in verbatim to understand the framework of spiritual care process in which the God/Divine would manifest to heal the patient. (2) Then, using several of the currently existing scriptural studies methodologies and hermeneutical principles I will inductively study the clinical chaplaincy process to arrive at a hermeneutical tool which can be used to practical theology for clinical care, research and educational purposes.

Clinical chaplaincy process is a "Comparative Theological (CT) study" applied to interpersonal empathetic interactions. The chaplain and his patient are studied as two scriptural texts (Living Human Scriptures, LHSs) drawn from different religious traditions empathizing with one another. Clooney's CT method is found to be most appropriate but, it is complicated as the chaplain and the patient are simultaneously studying each other's LHSs, i.e. mirroring each other's CT process. I have discussed how and why theological concepts on Soul, Spirit and Universal Spirit as God, drawn from scriptures across religious traditions need to be included into phenomenological hermeneutical study of chaplaincy. Mindfulness processes in LHSs studies of chaplaincy are understood through phenomenological hermeneutical methods applied in conjunction with Clooney's CT method. In conclusion: The non-corporeal Divine that manifests in chaplaincy can be best studied using a hermeneutic method that includes phenomenological hermeneutics and a "mirrored-CT method" seamlessly stitched together. Such a hermeneutical framework is described in this paper.

### ***Towards a Contemplative Science of Religions: A Methodological Inquiry***

**Rory MCNTEE**, Drew University

In this paper I develop the idea of a contemplative science of religions in a phenomenological key, utilizing methodological insights emerging from the dialogue of science and religion, philosophy of science, and classical pragmatism. These methodological insights will then be integrated and expanded to account for an intersubjective, phenomenological approach to religious experience. Unique to this development will be a phenomenological categorizing of different types of religious experience, in particular differences between "mystical" and "contemplative" experience as I define the terms here. With these developments in hand, I am able to articulate the possibility of a "contemplative science of religions," and point towards how it might proceed along the methodological lines developed.

I begin by reviewing a particular instance of Christian theological engagement with science; that of the work of Philip Clayton. My concentration is on Clayton's sophisticated underlying methodology. Clayton utilizes the work of Charles Pierce, Jürgen Habermas, and John Rawls to develop a basis for dialogue between science and religion. Next I turn to a series of Tibetan Buddhist interlocutors in their engagement with science. Buddhism's highly complex phenomenological methodologies both overlap with, and are at odds with, Clayton's methodological conclusions, which resist experiential descriptions of religious possibilities. Despite these differences, I find considerable resonance among the types of inquiry presented, working to open them up for more capacious modes of engagement along phenomenological lines.





## ***Mental Visualization, the Phenomenology of Birth, and a Philosophy of Mind***

**Anna HENNESSEY**, Center for Buddhist Studies, Graduate Theological Union

This paper examines an interesting issue that arises in the philosophy of mind when one considers the impact of mental imagery on the physiology of birth. When objects are used for visualization purposes during birth or in preparation for the event, the ontological status of the mental image is neither objective nor subjective but somewhere in between. Some philosophers contend that mental content can never in itself be an object. A clear case that mental content is not entirely subjective emerges when a specific type of mental phenomenon, the visualized birth object, is recognized as dissimilar from other mental phenomena (such as memories, dreams, hallucinations, passing thoughts, etc.). I propose that evidence of how this type of mental content is categorically different emerges in cases of birth where phenomenological transformation of the human body is connected to the visualization of a mental object. Similar cases showing the connection between mental imagery and phenomenological transformation are available in other contexts, such as contemplative practices, mental learning, and sports psychology. On a fundamental level, this paper reveals a crucial way that the phenomenology of birth, a deeply marginalized topic within the area of philosophy, can have an impact on the philosophy of mind.

The internal observation of a visualized object, as a concept, points to two ideas relevant to the philosophy of mind: First, that the mind can purposefully see an object within its own mental space, focus on it as an intentional object, albeit a mental one, without also seeing a real-world counterpart, an idea suggesting that mental content, which is subjective, has the capacity to be an object in itself. Second, that the mind's ability to create mental objects has the capacity to relate to phenomenological changes in the body. If there is evidence that the internally observed object is connected to phenomenological changes of the body, then this evidence in turn strengthens the view that some types of mental objects are categorically different both from other mental objects and from real objects existing in the external world.

Similarly, if visualized mental images do have the capacity to be intentional objects, then their ontological statuses are quite different when compared to the statuses of either objects seen in the real world or of those imagined by way of hallucination, dreaming, normal stream-of-consciousness thought, etc. In the case of the internally observed images, a concept that the visualization of objects for birth encapsulates so well, the mental object is neither purely objective nor entirely subjective but somewhere in between. It is in these cases that the creation of mental images in a concentrated, attentive manner has the capacity to change both the brain and other parts of the body, sometimes in profound ways, providing evidence that this aspect of consciousness is categorically different from other aspects of it.

To proceed with my study, I examine a specific object, and that is the *Sheela-na-gig*, a name that refers not to one object but to any of several types of carvings made of stone, depictive of the female form, and associated with the context of religion. There are many objects that could be used, but this one is a classic example within the study of birth. Presenting a series of diagrams, I look at four philosophical components of the object's ontology—two metaphysical and two epistemic. These components, commonly described in the philosophy of mind, are the object's ontological objectivity, ontological subjectivity, epistemic subjectivity, and epistemic objectivity. This paper's fundamental purpose is to map out four philosophical components of an object's ontology—two metaphysical and two epistemic—specifically within the context of birth, and to theorize a way in which mental objects conjured up during the phenomenological experience of birth have deep implications, as do other visualized objects, for the philosophy of mind.