

“Take it up again and again!” Interview with Anthony Steinbock

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Abstract

Anthony Steinbock is one of the leading figures in the American phenomenology. In this conversation he talks about topics like generative phenomenology, heresy and orthodoxy of Husserl's exegesis, a non-foundational transcendental phenomenology (which is for him a co-relational social ontology), the crisis of Europe and the limit-phenomena, but also about moral emotions, heart-phenomena, mysticism and religious experience.

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In order to introduce the abundant and plurality of themes of your work, we would like to start by asking your definition of phenomenology and in particular, generative phenomenology. How do you define phenomenology in general and what makes generative phenomenology particular among other ways of phenomenology?

A.S.: Most generally phenomenology is concerned with two kinds of inquiries or questions. It concerns (1) what something is and (2) how that what is given. Thus, phenomenology enquires into manners of givenness or how something is given, and it asks after the essential structures of what is given in experience. Perhaps this characterization is too broad for the meaning of phenomenology, but very generally, it

can be defined as a critical shift in perspective that allows us not to take things for granted, to perceive the powers and limits of meaning-emergence, to sketch meaningful and responsible engagement in the co-constitution of meaning, and to discern the structures of our world.

Where generative phenomenology is concerned, I can give two responses. When I first began to articulate a “generative phenomenology,” I was describing it in two ways simultaneously that are not very clear, ways that I would now like to distinguish. In one sense, generative phenomenology is another method of description. It occurs alongside static method and genetic method.

So, to begin with Husserl’s style of description and implicit methodology of phenomenological procedure, we can say that he would go from what he calls the “simple” to the “complex,” from the “lower” to the “higher,” and in some but not all cases, going from the “founding” to the “founded” layers of sense and meaning. Things changed discursively for him, however, when he reached those more “complex,” “higher,” “founded” phenomena. At this point he noticed that he was “already” describing phenomena that went beyond what he presupposed his method could allow. It was not a matter of discounting his conclusions, but it became a task for him of methodologically giving an account of these richer and more complex phenomena. It was at this time, at least by the early 1920s, that he formulated a distinction between static phenomena and genetic phenomena, and importantly, between static method and genetic method. These genetic phenomena included matters like kinaesthesia, normality and abnormality, self-temporalization, instinct, facticity, concordance and discordance, sleep as a constitutive problem, optimality, affectivity, passive genesis, association, motivation, etc.

I mentioned that things tended to change for Husserl *discursively* at this point. I mean by this not only that he explicitly formulated the distinction between static and genetic methods, but that he recast his evaluation of genetic and static phenomena. Having reached these so-called “higher” or “complex” or “founded” phenomena, he requalified them; what

was formerly termed the lower, the simple, or founding, are now designated as “abstract” and “founded”; what was higher or complex is now most “concrete” and in some cases even founding! That is, he now describes the “whole” from the perspective of the genetic insights, in which case the “static,” which was formerly “simple” and independent, is revealed as “dependent,” abstract, and in some cases, formal.

In my reading of the then relatively recently published material, and especially the unpublished manuscripts (unpublished at that time), I noticed a new problem-field circumscribed by the terminology of “generative phenomena.” This occurred clearly in places where fundamentally new phenomena were being described, phenomena that were *irreducible* to genetic phenomena. These included phenomena like homeworld and alienworld, home-companions, birth and death as constitutive features of experience, appropriation and transgression as kinds of constitution, familiarity and non-familiarity as modes of normality and abnormality, the occurrence of the prefix “*stamm*” in places where we might expect “primordial,” etc. These generative phenomena were also articulated around the term, “generativity.”

I noticed the emergence of a similar pattern here between genetic and generative phenomena that had occurred between static and genetic phenomena. Again, we have to remind ourselves that Husserl is always already working—at least implicitly—within the whole of the articulated unity of being—or as I will put it differently, within the movement of generativity. He is already there, at generativity, even if it does not become an explicit theme. Hence, when he does arrive there, he can write, as he has in fact done, that the most *concrete* phenomenon is generativity. When we abstract the dimension of historicity from generativity, we arrive at self-temporalization; when we abstract temporality from this genetic phenomenon, we have static conscious intending.

Of course, there was never any mention by Husserl of a “generative phenomenology.” In this specific sense, it did not exist as method. But it struck me that the next movement had to be taken—for Husserl, but more significantly for phenomenology as a whole. “All this” demanded a generative

phenomenology of “generativity” as the most concrete (but not exclusive) dimension of phenomenology. Thus, in some sense all phenomenology is/was “already” generative phenomenology, prompting Husserl to suggest that even the phenomenologists find themselves within generativity. Phenomenology is generative phenomenology, or alternately generative phenomenology is phenomenology as such. Accordingly, doing static phenomenology is already doing generative phenomenology from the position of the static, and describing static phenomena is already describing generativity from the angle of the static. It was with this understanding that I advanced generative phenomenology.

So, for me, generative phenomenology is phenomenology carried out in its multifarious ways. Generative phenomenology is what phenomenology is doing in its openness, and phenomenology is that practice that is open to all kinds of givenness no matter how they are given.

No matter how they are given?

A.S.: Yes, so it can't rule out what counts as givenness in advance, or just because it does not correspond to what we think the given should be according to our usual habits of mind. In fact, there are different kinds of intentionalities that are not simply from a subject to an object or of the type, noesis-noema. They are not even restricted to a dynamic constitutive duet of noesis-noema (as Husserl calls it), which is already very rich.

Your understanding and the way of doing phenomenology originates from the Husserlian point of view. However, more than a scholarship on Husserl, it establishes an unfolding of phenomenological thought after Husserl. In this regard, how can the methodological transformation of phenomenology be thought of between the heresy and orthodoxy of Husserl among a variety of phenomenologies?

A.S.: This probably relates to the earlier question as well. Husserl himself originated and approached the phenomenological method in a certain way. We do a disservice to Husserl if we only remain with either the contradictions or

the impasses that he himself encountered without going beyond them or developing their consequences. In certain ways, we are being truer to Husserl in taking the next steps. This might be a matter of saying what Husserl could, should, or could not say. Of course, we have to let Husserl remain “Husserl,” and this pertains as well to phenomenological method. But this is precisely the question and issue at stake: What “is” phenomenological method in the dynamic sense? This problem is reflected in the title of *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology After Husserl*. “After Husserl” is both according to Husserl and but also after Husserl.

The Husserl heretics, as Ricoeur called them, are part of doing Husserlian phenomenology. This applies to Stein, Conrad-Martius, Heidegger, Scheler, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Marion, Derrida, et. al. I think they found themselves taking up this heritage and developing it.

So can we say that there are no heresies of Husserl in a way phenomenology includes all “heresies” of Husserl under the title of phenomenology?

A.S.: This is a difficult point, and it is related to the remark I made previously about what phenomenological method “is” in a dynamic sense. There are certainly modifications of phenomenology, and phenomenologists themselves of course disagree about the extent of those modifications. We certainly do not want to equate, for example, hermeneutics and phenomenology. But I would not rule out the possibility and even necessity of, say, a “hermeneutical phenomenology.” My main point is that a literalism imposed on Husserlian phenomenology actually does this very phenomenology a disservice. This is in part due to the fact that Husserl himself goes beyond what he could do in some ways. We find this when he goes from a static to a genetic phenomenology. We also find this when he takes up limit-phenomena that go beyond his present understanding of method, but describes them anyway. (His description of “Fremderfahrung” as accessibility in the mode of inaccessibility and incomprehensibility is an example of this.)

This is also due in part to the fact that there are many strands of Husserl, as it were. This makes it all the more challenging because you eventually will have to take a stand on the matters and methods as well as and their implications, because in some cases, they go in different directions. In some cases, his own reflections on what he is doing might be misunderstandings of his own descriptions. One reason we get these “strands” of Husserl is because he was a very honest scientist and tried to describe things themselves faithfully. I think that Husserl had that sense of genuine discovery and he was willing to “take it up again and again.”

In the same vein, we have one more question about transcendental phenomenology. You use transcendental not in the sense of foundational. Could you please explain your understanding of the transcendental role of subjectivity and its place in the phenomenological method? Must phenomenology be transcendental? Is it helpful to think of the lifeworld in a transcendental manner?

A.S.: I will try to be brief on this matter, but there is a lot to say here. First, I began with the assumption that for most if not all readers of Husserl, transcendental meant foundational, and this implied in various ways a subjective foundation of meaning. What I meant by “non-foundational” and more specifically a non-foundational transcendental phenomenology was a co-relational social ontology. I was not simply trying to be provocative with this seemingly paradoxical expression, but to suggest a phenomenology of intersubjectivity that was actually being broached in Husserl’s descriptions of generative phenomena. There is nothing wrong with the phenomenon of foundation, by the way, it was just that it had become too rigidly identified with a subject-centered origin of meaning to the exclusion of other manners of constitution. In this respect, non-foundational is to be understood in *Home and Beyond* as co-foundational.

Since that time, I have come to recognize many different senses of “foundation.” Where relations of founding are concerned, we can describe (1) relations of dependence, (2) relations of hierarchical ordering, (3) relations of

embeddedness, and (4) when the founding is given through the founded experience. And as a cross-section for all of these, there are positive and negative relations of foundation (see *Knowing by Heart*, ch. 8).

When I speak of transcendental phenomenology, I am understanding the eidetic or the structural dimension of phenomenology together with a description of manners of givenness. Accordingly, there are two sorts of questions: questions involving structures that give us the field of possibility and the how of givenness. But those dimensions or field of questions are not reducible to a subject; they also yield intersubjective formations of meaning; they have emotional dimensions of meaning that have a different structure of givenness than presentational givenness (perceptive or judicative givenness). So, I think that the question “must phenomenology be transcendental?” must be answered in the positive, but it does not exclude a hermeneutical phenomenology. This is the case because phenomenology (understood in a broad sense) cannot rest simply with being a description of feeling-states or a phenomenological autobiography, so to speak, but also investigates structures of those experiences, where these structures are more or less material, more or less formal. It describes in relation to modes of givenness, a priori structures. For Husserl, as for Scheler, “a priori” is not an epistemological concept (as it is for Kant or even Kripke), i.e., modifying a way of knowing, but is ontological.

Where the relation between transcendental and lifeworld is concerned, I can say yes, the lifeworld *can* be understood in a transcendental manner, but this has a very peculiar context and implications. I understand it in the way in which Husserl suggests that we must distinguish between that great task of a lifeworld ontology and a transcendental description of the lifeworld (section 37, *Crisis*). A transcendental description of the lifeworld is of course not the same as the lifeworld being a transcendental source. However, such a description for Husserl did point to the lifeworld as transcendental. For example, one only need to consult his investigations into the earth as earth-ground (*Erdboden*) and

the world as world-horizon. For me, those earlier descriptions of the lifeworld in the *Crisis* belong to an ontology of the lifeworld—for the most part. In some places, it belongs to a naïve, natural attitude understanding of the lifeworld as when we look for the certain eidetic structures of the lifeworld. When he points to the transcendental concepts of the lifeworld, he is looking at sense-conditions and conditions of possibility that found the very experience of the lived-body. The earth-ground “founds” the lived-body as a constitutive source in relation to which the lived-body “founds” the sense of objects and the here and there of things. Ultimately, the sense in which the world-horizon and the earth-ground become the transcendental concepts of the lifeworld require “completion,” becoming more concrete. This leads us to a generative phenomenology involving the interrelation of homeworlds and alienworlds—but I have passed over many steps getting to this point in such a short summary.

Phenomenology for Husserl was also an elaborate description of the crisis of Europe. Today the advancement of phenomenology exceeds the borders of Europe, even that of the West: in South America or in countries such as Japan, Iran, or Turkey, phenomenology means more than that which Husserl could have imagined.

*In your work, generous references to non-European traditions of thought are followed and sometimes encounters with them can be found to understand these other philosophies in a phenomenological manner. We would like to ask how phenomenology can be more opened to non-European thoughts and how its exclusionist history (from *Krisis of Husserl* to contemporary works) can be critically discussed in order to give more place to the openness of phenomenological tradition. How does phenomenology methodologically and historically allow us to conduct such a dialogue and encounter on a non-hierarchical level? How can the historicity of phenomenology regarding Eurocentric roots be overcome?*

A.S.: If phenomenology remains open (as I said before) to all manners of givenness no matter how they give themselves, and not presupposing how they are to be given, that's already a

beginning of openness to other experiences that might be alien to our own. In terms of the structure of the homeworld and alienworld within Husserl, the particular insight that Husserl had in phenomenology was historically rooted. The eidetic structures were accessed through these particular modes of experience or historical “springboards” (an insight Scheler develops in his early work). Accordingly, these insights are born from a particular homeworld in the larger or smaller sense. We cannot ask Husserl, or anyone else, to be *completely* beyond where they are. If this were the case, there could be no “alien,” phenomenologically speaking. On the other hand, because these structures take us beyond ourselves, Husserl cannot be completely “home” when describing these kinds of experiences, either; none of us can. So, the question is then, how do we remain open to what is radically different without being able to anticipate it from the home perspective.

The alien only has the sense of the alien as from the home and in that sense precisely, in its birth in Europe, it is already exposed to what is non-European. Not all phenomenologists have taken it like this, but I think that is part of the very structure of the experience; the home is already constituted in the way it is in relationship to what is other, or to what is alien. That is the very co-foundational, irreducible structure of home and alien. Now, this can still remain naïve. What is needed is a critical reflection on this very co-foundational structure so as not to take our presuppositions and prejudices for granted. In those encounters with the alien, we can be called back ourselves for critical re-evaluation and possible transformation.

Concerning the last part of the question on the historicity of phenomenology with respect to its Eurocentric roots, I can say in one respect it cannot be overcome because it has emerged from them. If we mean Eurocentric in an exclusive manner, then the response is “yes.” Does it mean that we can undo the history of phenomenology? No, because that is what gave it a voice. Still, if it can be modified, if it can be transformed in our encounters in openness, then “yes.” Much depends upon how we understand “teleology,” and whether or not it is identified with a functional notion of progress. For

reasons that I examine in *Knowing by Heart* (mainly as it concerns interpersonal revelation) I do not think that phenomenology need be identified with a functional notion of progress.

Phenomenology is in principle open to non-European thoughts. It has to be. If it is taken in an exclusive way, then there is a misunderstanding of the nature of phenomenology. I tried to give examples of this in *Home and Beyond* and *Phenomenology and Mysticism*. There is an insight into radical emptiness emergent from a particular Zen Buddhist tradition, which is non-personal, non-Abrahamic, and that is expressed in a non-generative coming into being and passing away. That is a radically different insight to which Husserl could not have (had) access in an original manner, I suspect. It is misleading to say that we are all integrated into the same structure of experience or ultimate reality. People are well-intentioned by wanting to emphasize similarities and unity; but that would also be a misunderstanding, and not do justice to any. Much more interesting and “essential” are irreconcilable and perhaps incommensurable differences. It is not the one or the other, but the spark that flashes forth “in between.” That’s where the richness can be found and where we have to learn to be comfortable (or uncomfortable). In that sense, a priori structures are not universal. Yes, we can describe the a priori structure of generativity of which the Abrahamic or “western,” or that in which the personalist tradition partakes. But generativity itself has to be open to what is radically non-generative while remaining itself generative. Otherwise, we take (perhaps inadvertently) the position of a neutral “third,” which hides a presumptive force of domination. It is only through the touching that there is the touched; such a relation as relation is not given by observing it from a putative objective perspective that now counts as “universal.”

Moreover, do you think “the crisis” that is idiosyncratic to Europe is adopted by outside Europe? Or, alternatively, was this relatively local crisis already pointing out more worldwide problems?

A.S.: The crisis idiosyncratic or unique to Europe has its roots in a kind of thinking that grasps an experiential meaning or meanings with an orientation, simultaneously sees a deviation of and from that meaning sufficient enough to threaten that orientation (i.e., not a mere infraction), all within a context. The particular crisis that Husserl identifies comes from detecting a diremption of thinking that understands being as what is to be quantifiable: to be means to be mathematizable. It is not that being mathematizable, the quest for exactitude, measurement, quantification, etc. is a problem. The “crisis” emerges when it becomes the substrate for all kinds of experiences such that these other kinds of experience literally do not “measure up” to this “new” superimposed standard. Husserl identifies this crisis as a reversal. To say that the crisis is itself a reversal is to say that quantification is not the core experience to which the everyday “lifeworld” must measure up; that is, lifeworld experience is not a deficient mode of scientific exactitude.

To challenge the crisis is to reverse the reversal (something we continue to face in most university environments today!). How does reversing the reversal take place? Beginning from the naïve assumption of the scientific attitude as the basis, Husserl first identifies a distinctive realm of experience, the lifeworld of experience that is different from the scientific exactitude and its goals. Second, he attempts to show in what ways such reasoning is actually founded in lifeworld experience. Yes, we can attempt to clarify experience through quantification, but not only is such a method not the only way, but it itself is founded in a different way clarified phenomenologically. Insofar as others outside of Europe have succumbed to the clarification of reality through quantification in this way, for example, they are subject to the same kind of crises.

More broadly, it is also possible to say that insofar as any culture identifying itself as a particular orientation (that does not have to have a fixed teleology) and that then experiences a decisive movement from this orientation—insofar as this is the case, it would yield an experience of crisis. Hippocrates understood that a crisis could be good in the sense

that the body identifies a problem to be addressed through critique (crisis and critique having the same root). If we were never to experience ourselves with a particular orientation of meaning, there could never be a sense of crisis or critique.

Regarding the different types of evidences and limit-phenomena you draw, we come to embrace a new phenomenological rationality in which so-called “non-phenomena” find meaning in experience. We would like to hear about the nature of the enlargement of phenomenological rationality. Does this enlargement come from dealing with the description of these limit-phenomena and other kinds of “non-phenomena”? How could such a transformation happen? How can the phenomenological method offer us more than a narrow understanding of rationality in which there is no place for the other person, the Holy, emotions, and heart?

A.S.: You are going to get tired of hearing this, but it has to do with this openness of phenomenology that takes seriously being open to kinds of givenness that are non-traditional in a certain aspect – non-traditional within the understanding of what phenomenology is, and in some respects, has been doing.

We have been accustomed to understand that an object of experience is correlative to perception or judgement – and (just for the sake of discussion), this is taken to be the traditional noesis-noema correlation, which is not, by the way, a one-sided correlation. It is dynamic, as Husserl calls it, a “constitutive duet.” In any case, this becomes the baseline of what phenomenology can handle, whether it pertain to perceptual objects or judicative propositions and intellectual ideas.

This is the presupposition when Husserl enquires into the experience of the alien. As phenomenologist, he has to ask initially not “what is the other or alien,” but “how is the alien given to me,” “What is its mode of givenness?” “What is my mode of access to it?” He responds that the other or the alien is given as not being able to be given; its “givenness” is such that it is not being able to be given; it is accessible in the mode of inaccessibility; and if we mean by comprehensibility, the ability to grasp something like an object, then, it is given in

the mode of incomprehensibility. While such an articulation is sensitive to a peculiar way of being given and is non-reductive, it nonetheless presupposes that givenness or accessibility is based on how an object or objectlike structure presents itself. Husserl recognizes that the other person or the other lived-body is not given like an object. Therefore, our experience of “it” is not being able “to experience” it (i.e., as if it were an object and where experience is identified with the presentation of an object). This is as far as he goes in some of his texts, and it is the reason we can identify them (and I have tried to identify them) as “limit-phenomena.” Just what are limit-phenomena is a complex question because this can shift within the context of static, genetic, and generative methods (see *Limit-Phenomena and Phenomenology in Husserl*.) This is an initial recognition of how the phenomenological method can be open to more than a narrow understanding of “phenomena.” It is an openness to different kinds of evidence. It also requires being ready to describe not just different kinds of experience or evidence, but different kinds of deception and self-deception, modalizations of experience, etc. that are not the same as dealing with something given illusory or mistaken in terms of perceptual experience. This leads to the other question you posed. I want to suggest that the expansion of rationality can only go as far as “limit-phenomena” if we are to do justice to the phenomena, and even to reason.

Can we call it “the enlargement of rationality” then?

A.S.: For me, no, in the sense that there cannot be an expansion of reason to account for all phenomena (which presupposes that all phenomena must have a rational structure or be given in a single basic style of intentionality). Claude Romano does seem to want to enlarge reason this in his magisterial work, *At the Heart of Reason*. At least, I would say that he wants to move in this direction. I also think that there are also others who want to expand the sphere of rationality in similar ways. For my part, it is not a matter of expanding rationality, but of not identifying all kinds of cognition with rationality, and in addition, to describe modes of cognition that are not necessarily “rational”—for example, a “knowing by

heart.” This is simultaneously not to remain committed to a dualism of reason/rationality and sensibility.

*Before coming to the issue of “the cognition of the heart”, let’s discuss the heart. In your recent works, especially in *Moral Emotions: Reclaiming the Evidence of the Heart* (2014) and *Knowing by Heart: Loving as Participation and Critique* (2021), you acknowledge various perspectives on the heart, employing the cross-cultural references, e.g., from Eastern traditions to the Abrahamic religions of the West. We can briefly put it this way: What is the heart? What can phenomenology say about this fleshy thing inside us — an intimate thing that is close enough, but still somehow distant?*

A.S.: That is a good question! The heart is a particular order of evidence and order of givenness – that I call “schema.” I don’t want to call it “sphere” or “dimension” because it is extremely articulated in terms of feeling and different kinds of feeling. Feeling is an intentional structure and is different from perceiving; still, it is fundamentally relational. Within “feelings,” we can identify different kinds of emotions (personal, non-personal, metaphysical), attunements (or what Heidegger might call “moods”), and also psycho-physical feelings like enjoyment or sympathy. Further, there is a main distinction between feelings and feeling-states (among which we find passions, sentiments, affects, conditions, etc.). That “schema” or those different kinds of evidences or experiences are what make up such a heart-cognition.

Is the heart a “fleshy thing”? I don’t know. I am not reducing it to the physical heart, although there is an interesting relation there between the physical and the spiritual. That is, it is interesting to observe a correlation between the heart, the heart-beat, excitement, “sympathetic” systems, and at least a change in feeling-states. Natalie Depraz works more in that direction of the “fleshy side,” advancing a “cardio-phenomenology” to describe an integrative heart-system (and not a brain-system).

Regarding the relation between feeling and feeling-states, we can say that we live through a dynamic movement of

loving, hating, or trusting without at the same time feeling a particular feeling-state. I can live in a hating movement but not feel hatred, but feel joy. Or I might not just be “in love” while loving, I might be suffering. There is always a link between feeling and feeling-states but they don’t necessarily have one-to-one correspondence. And that’s why I say that I might have a particular feeling-state and be excited about the experience of a feeling-state, which is related to the heart in a way we do not have in the brain or in a thought. In fact, I might also be excited about a thought and so live through a particular emotional experience that is founding in relation to thinking.

Let’s come to the issue of the heart. The heart in philosophy has been mostly clouded with the opposite of reason, something non-rational which is related to sensibility. Moreover, in the cultural imagination, it is associated with “inferior” qualities such as women, eastern, and black, in short, what is opposite to rational. However, your book presents a new reception of the heart that makes it possible to consider its own way of cognition. Could you please explain to us your project about the heart and its place in the human person as a way of critique?

A.S.: I partly addressed some of these questions previously, and this has to do with overcoming the dualism of reason and sensibility, and describing the distinctive roles of the emotions in our socio-political imaginary. But I would like to say a little more about the place of the human person as a way of critique. There is a distinction to be made between (1) naivety, which is called into question through a rational critique and (2) vulnerability peculiar to loving (or trusting, for example). We are most familiar with the former in the phenomenological tradition. This entails bracketing the natural attitude, and overcoming that kind of naivety as much as possible.

Because this model tends to dominate, we often reduce vulnerability to the problem of naivety, and then work “to reduce” vulnerability as if it were a matter of being naïve. The attempt then to be critical would be to generate a risk analysis or at the very least, to remove the feature of vulnerability.

However, vulnerability is an essential feature of loving, and when we attempt to eradicate the former, we are no longer participate in the movement of loving (or trusting). But critique does not have to be only a matter of overcoming naivety—which is of course necessary. It can be a matter of discernment (κρίνειν/krinein) of the heart. Rather than a critique of loving, it is a critique *from* loving as participating being. This implies that loving has a peculiar normative status. Such a discernment has to do with all other kinds of clues to what is going on emotionally that can be seen in terms of particular emotions like shame.

There is for example a genuine shame, which is not reducible to a manipulative kind or abusive kind of shame. The genuine structure of shame is such that a certain experience before the other throws us back on ourselves. It opens the possibility of returning to our “true-selves” or “genuine selves” or becoming or re-aligning ourselves to who we are most deeply. If we have an abusive relationship in which those senses of ourselves are already distorted, then that shame becomes distorted and that would demand a particular way of critique as well. Experiences like shame or guilt—experiences that throw us back on ourselves—can be deceptive. This is why a distinctive kind of discernment is necessary, a mindful discernment of the heart that is rooted in genuine loving. This presupposes that there is a genuine self-love which means becoming who I am, but also in relationship to the love of another or love from another. Such a discernment of the heart has an intersubjective dimension (as in the case of mentors, exemplars, or partners) as well as a dimension of historical efficacy. There is much more to be said here, but in short, there is a different kind of critique—a discernment of the heart—that is to be distinguished from (and I suggest founding for) the epistemic critique of naivety.

I am happy to see such a project which puts the heart into the heart of the philosophy that before associated the heart with mostly inferior qualities.

The other question is about religious experience. In what sense does phenomenology offer an account of religious

experience? Philosophers have regard for speaking “generally” about the religious, diminishing the disparities. But your 2007 book, *Phenomenology and Mysticism: The Verticality of Religious Experience*, particularly scrutinizes three unorthodox mystics from three different traditions: St. Teresa of Avila, Rabbi Dov Baer, and Ruzbihan Baqli. What they have in common, as you remarkably argue, is their “vertical” relations to the other. Besides their everyday practices, to what extent are these various (Abrahamic) religious perspectives divergent from one another? How does this dissimilarity have an effect on the verticality of religious experience?

A.S.: Let me take these two questions in the order in which they are posed.

(1) In *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, the question “in what sense can and perhaps does phenomenology offer an account of religious experience?” was a leading question for me. I did not begin with a pre-set answer; it was a genuine question. To broach this question, I wanted to look at the first-person accounts of so-called “religious” experiences to see first all how they deal with the problem of evidence as well as deception, etc.

So the first question with which we have to grapple is whether all kinds of experiences are essentially the same, if they succumb to the same kind of “givenness,” or have the same kind of evidence, etc.

Allow me to appeal to an issue that was developed in a slightly different context in a latter book, *Moral Emotions*. One of the main leading questions there (which applies *mutatis mutandis* to religious experience) concerned whether or not an experience has to follow the relation of founding that Husserl understood initially between an objectivating act and non-objectivating acts. Does it have to be founded in this an epistemic act (i.e., a presentational act or function) in order to have its relationship to an object through sense? That is to say, is there an ultimate dependency of these other experiences (interpersonal, religions, and so forth) on the presentational experiences (i.e., the experience of judgement or the experience of perception)?

For example, I see a painting and it is a particular object that gives a certain way of evidence. “That is an ugly painting,” or “I see a beautiful painting.” For Husserl, the ugly or beautiful painting would be related to non-objectivating dimension that borrows from the objectivating one. Ultimately, this is one unified act for him. Nevertheless, what is going on in it can be distinguished in terms of two identifiable moments: one, the founded, which borrows its intentional structure from another, the founding, in order to have that experience. Accordingly, we can discern this founding/founded structure because we can strip off the founded (here, valuing level) and still leave the founding layer (the epistemic objectivating layer) intact as the basic structure.

But when I examined certain moral or interpersonal emotions in terms of their structures (for example, their relations to otherness, to modalizations, to temporality, etc.), I found that this was not the case. This was especially evident in emotions like shame, guilt, pride, repentance, trust, hope and despair, humility, loving, and hating.

Likewise, religious experiences are not perceptual or judicative experiences, so they cannot be reduced to the intentionality of presentation. But we also have to be careful and not assume that they have the structures as or are reducible to moral experience. They require their own analyses.

(2) The second question you posed concerns the effect of the dissimilarities within the verticality of religious experience. This is both an important and interesting question. For me, “verticality” evokes and signifies those dynamic vectors of experience that have a unique structure of their own, harbor their own kinds of evidence and manners of givenness, and as such are irreducible to the field of experience characterized by presentation. Religious experience is one kind of verticality.

My field of description in *Phenomenology and Mysticism* was circumscribed by inter-Personal relations (religious relations). And these were limited to the “Abrahamic” tradition. That is, while most phenomenologists deal only with the Christian tradition, and with some exceptions and qualifications, the Jewish experience—both broadly understood—this was too limiting where religious experience as

inter-Personal was concerned—and for the problem of religious evidence. On the other hand, I did not make a universal claim for all spirituality. So, for my phenomenological investigations, I took as examples St. Teresa of Avila, who is a woman of particular time in Christianity, Rabbi Dov Baer, of a different era and who belonged to a specific Hasidic tradition in Judaism, and the earlier mystic, Ruzbihan Baqli from the Islamic Sufi tradition. So, I began with a sort of “natural attitude” unifying position of the Abrahamic tradition as a starting point, but not as a presupposed result of phenomenological investigation.

Taking each on their own, and in and through these extremely interesting and complex differences, I found structural similarities that did unite them across these differences of cultural, history, worship, gender. In fact, the mystics of different traditions had more in common with each other (by virtue of their experiences and kind of evidences in play) than did the particular mystic and their own respective faith-tradition. These revealed above and beyond everyday similarities and differences, essential similarities by virtue of the structure of their “religious” experiences—nuanced by their historical and cultural position, gender, worship, etc.

Each in their own way, they described kinds of experiences of the holy that, on the one hand, corresponded more or less to my efforts to provoke them, and significantly, those on the other hand that could not be so provoked. For example, in St. Teresa, they were called acquired and infused prayer, in Dov Baer, natural and divine souls, and in Baqli, they were states and stations. In her earlier writings, St. Teresa described four such levels, in later writings, seven. Dov Baer described five divine souls, and amazingly Baqli alludes to over a thousand stations. (One of my favorites is from Baqli: the station of the laughter. I would have expected something like “calm,” “quiet,” “mercy,” but the special relation to God – a station – as laughter? – that’s just beautiful.) In any case, all of these people we call “mystics” undertook the effort of description, not because they wanted to understand themselves, but because they are trying to help others: people with whom they were working, friends, or those in a mentoring relation. These were very intimate descriptions of inter-Personal and

interpersonal experiences; they have all similar kind of relationship of discerning these experiences with another. I cannot go into all of this here, but they all described a fundamentally unique structure of intentionality (that did not have a noesis:noema structure), distinctive structure of evidence, modalizations of evidence, problems of deception, verifying and corroborating experiences, the interpersonal and inter-Personal nature of the experiences, and so on.

To respond to your second question, there is a peculiar relation of the starting points for each of the mystics I examined (in their distinctive faith, style of prayer, gender-positions, historical era, practices, cultures, etc.), and the religious insights garnered through their experiences that revealed religious a priori structures. To be sure, their own traditions nurtured and nuanced their respective experiences, and they are not nothing; nevertheless, in and through these significant differences, their experiences and descriptions revealed a core of verticality—if we want to call it that.

And also, you offer a new way to understand the relation between the secular and the religious from a phenomenological perspective. Could you mention a little from your stand-point of discussing the secular and the religious, and their relationship in regard to your project?

A.S.: First, when I am describing the “religious,” I don’t mean belonging to a religion, belief in “God,” participating in cult or rituals. In some ways, “religion” can be secular in the sense the adherents to a religion are not necessarily animated by the religious experience. What I mean by the religious relation, then, it is not a subscription to an idea of God, but rather an experience or experiences of an absolute (holiness) received [holiness constituted as absolute, absolute constituted as holiness] and that guides implicitly or explicit our practices. This seems to be a basic structure of personal generative experience in the sense that even if we do not have an explicit “absolute experience,” we still live in ways such that some finite relative thing at least implicitly occupies the place of an absolute. And because finite or relative things cannot take the

place of absolute experience, we witness a constant pursuit of relative, finite things to fill that place (which they cannot), attempting unwittingly to elevate the finite-relative matter to the status of an infinite-absolute. In political-economic terms, this is manifest as fetishism or reification dominant in capitalism (broadly understood); in religious terms, this is generally understood as idolatry.

If phenomenology is open to all matters and modes of givenness, no matter how they are given, then phenomenology has to open to absolute experience as well as relative experience. I sought to trace this out in the radically personal accounts given by those exemplary individuals we call “mystics.” Phenomenologically, however, the way was paved by thinkers like Husserl, Scheler, Stein, Reinach, Walther, Levinas, Marion, Henry, just to name some main figures.

The second issue concerns our Modern prejudices. I’ve dealt with this in *Moral Emotions* and *Knowing by Heart*, so I do not want to belabour the point here, but the problem is two-fold. The first concerns the exclusive categories of reason and sensibility; the second, secularism as a Modern starting-point.

The important recognition of the role of reason in our lives has produced for the Western Modern tradition a dualism between rationality and sensibility that we spoke about previously. This has tended to shove the heart (and the entire “emotional” sphere”) to the side of sensibility, to maintain that the heart is devoid of spirit, and to oversee the operations of the heart by making sure it is under the correct tutelage of reason. In this way, reason has been allowed to colonize the heart where evidence and the spiritual becoming of person and social relations are concerned.—This is why, for me, it is ultimately not helpful to expand rationality even further to account for different phenomena. With such an expansion, for example, trust is no longer a kind of freedom as being bound to others in their transcendence as essentially vulnerable, but becomes a product of rational belief sorted by risk analysis (where vulnerability is reducible to naivety, as noted previously.)

This same dualism has promoted the presupposition that rationality is neutral, and our new (Modern) starting point is secularism. If this were the case, then emotions, religious

experience, etc., would have to be seen as “add-ons,” and unjustifiable ones at that. But I have tried to show through *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, *Moral Emotions*, and *Knowing by Heart*, that the reverse is true. Secularism is an abstraction from the “heart,” and sets itself up as self-grounding. To undo this reversal is not to return to a kind of pre-ideological social imaginary or so-called religious orthodoxy. This would be to presuppose the same assumptions as Modernity under a different rubric. Rather, it is to recognize the distinctive dimension of the “heart” that has been present in Modernity (but as relegated to the side-lines in Modernity), and to understand secularism as not-self-grounding, which is ultimately to say, as “religious.”

Camus is instructive here. In his, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, He not only poses suicide as a philosophical problem, but he posits it as the “one truly serious philosophical problem.” He does this because suicide concerns the problem of absolutes in human experience, and this has implications all the way down, from metaphysics to existentialism. Camus’s point is that if there is no transcendent ground for hope, there is also no transcendent ground for despair. Even suicide, taking one’s life out of despair, asserts some ground of meaning—maybe one that is not accessible to me, now, but it is there, was there, or should be there, for me: suicide tries to settle the problem of the absurd. Absurdity is the admission that the world is inherently neither meaningful nor meaningless; it is neither rational nor irrational. Absurdity is the sheer randomness of these qualities’ emergence and my place in the world—to which the absurd person responds accordingly with sheer arbitrary indifference. Is there anything that can function as the ground of human meaning? Are absolutes of any kind experienced in human existence? If we have no evidence for God, there can be no automatic default now to honor Reason, individuality, community, humanity, and so on as our new absolutes. And if we assert not only that we cannot know God, but that there is no God (i.e., no transcendent absolute), then we cannot somehow still say that we should be true to something (the other, meaning, freedom, capital, etc.). Again,

what would be the basis for these assertions by existentialists who are true to their name? So, for Camus, there is either a radical “secularism”—absurdity—all the way for *every* experience, or there is “verticality.” Trying to settle the absurd in any way is itself a clue to verticality.

You delineate “surprise” as “an emotion while being neither an affect, like a startle-reflex, nor a moral emotion, like shame, guilt, or humility.” Is there a complete surprise? Were we really surprised at the outbreak of Covid and its tremendous effects on our lives? With all “warnings” by scientists as well as scholars, do we still have a right to be surprised at the refugee crises, the problems of climate change, or natural catastrophes?

A.S.: Is there a complete surprise? It is an interesting question because it asks if there is something that radically disrupts the flow of expectation. I think that it is possible, but it is always rooted in the mode of expectation. If I am surprised, in some sense I am accepting what I cannot accept. This already takes place in the process of basic doxic attitude. If you mean a complete surprise that I cannot accept, that wouldn't be a surprise: If a complete surprise is a complete rupture, that would not mean what I understand as surprise; it can be a trauma of some kind, perhaps. But I understand by surprise an overarching acceptance of what I cannot accept that keeps going; it is an existential posture. If the complete surprise means that I am overwhelmed and cannot be integrated into the experience, that would be shock.

In your question you are also asking about “the right to be surprised.” This is a different question, to my mind. I think that this would be better expressed as “we should have (or not have) *expected* such and such.” The question is interesting because it points to how with all the indications, all the hints and all the motivations for an expectation, how is it that we could continue not to observe the outcomes, and then claim to be surprised. That goes to a certain natural attitude, maybe blindness, or even better refusal. Ultimately, it goes to our moral make-up.

Let's come to speak about more concrete problems of our planet. Is phenomenology able to speak with the contemporary problems of us (living beings), the planet? How could we respond to such problems "phenomenologically"?

A.S.: One way of responding to these questions is to ask after norms of care or loving where nonhuman animals and the environment are concerned. Or put in a more drastic manner, why should care (aside from pure self-interest) that we are headed toward an uninhabitable earth—as David Wallace-Wells put it? Am I obligated to do anything or change my way of life? Ought I do something at least to mitigate dramatic climate change?

In *Knowing by Heart*, I suggested that all reality, all creation, is fundamentally and most radically participated as "beloveds." I realize that this is a curious formulation, and can sound sentimental (maudlin, gushy), new age (everything is love), or amorphous and vague. Despite these possible misunderstandings, I am led to this expression, "beloved," by virtue of the metaphysical-phenomenological insight into givenness: what is given at this level is revealed in the opening or partaking that lets be; loving incites the other to become in the way of its own value-magnitude. In terminology from that work, loving is participating being, and what is participated is as beloved. It is the beloved in and of itself and as such that incites the loving and compels the loving responsivity. It is this responsivity that founds responsibility. Thus, the value of life and living beings, for example, flashes forth in the living being, and calls forth responsivity to it as life-value (as care, tending to, intervention, and so forth). This is not dependent upon my giving it that value. The value of life is intrinsic to the living being and is there to behold and to nourish as such, and this is what founds the possibility of sympathy. But beholding it as such is also not neutral; it is calling forth a to-love (to foster it in its own way toward its own depth, vertically). Again, any beloved who loves is person—not just the human being. Primordial Loving, if we want to call it that, is personal in this sense, and as such is a vigilant invitation or solicitation, or the compelling incitement of all beloveds to be (love). This is where we find the peculiar

normativity in loving. Obviously, I do not love with the intention that a beloved becomes person. I don't love something in order for it to show itself, to become something else, or even in order for it to be itself. This would not be letting others be who they are of their own accord. It would be manipulative, controlling, prideful, and ultimately a form of hating.

Husserl identified a certain crisis of his time, and certainly phenomenology is not just able to but needs to intervene. For Husserl it was a matter of being a functionary of humanity. This brings us to your earlier question concerning crises. I think that we would be identifying different crises today as failures of as interpersonal (e.g., the refugee crises) related to climate crises and interspecies crises. And getting back to the problem of the "secular": the questions that pertain to human persons are not simply human questions and their responses cannot be merely "human" or "secular" ones, either. They are answered from the perspective of sacredness in the everyday. I do *not* mean that somehow "God" magically intervenes; rather, the ecological, for example, is not ultimately a secular issue, but is already founded in loving.

Reading and understanding Husserl is quite demanding. But what is more difficult is to specialize in Husserl's philosophy, regarding not only his monumental project but also the never-ending collection of his works, manuscripts, and lecture notes. As a scholar who has dedicated a great deal of time and effort to Husserl, what do you recommend for the young researchers of phenomenology? Is there a "method" for reading Husserl?

A.S.: It's a good question, a question that many a beginner has confronted one way or another. I don't know if there is a method of reading Husserl, let alone one method of reading Husserl.

What I can suggest is that young researchers in phenomenology read Husserl before reading any commentaries on Husserl. It is going to be difficult; that's ok. Of course, certain works can be a guide to Husserl. But as a beginner—and this may seem non-intuitive—it is important to confront

the thinker, and not determine your reading by interpretations that others have discovered. This means that you will have to do a lot of reading and re-reading; but it is necessary in order to get a sense of the whole and then to retrace particular themes that emerge or become particularly prominent. This might apply to reading any major philosopher, but it is especially important for Husserl because of his attempts at doing phenomenology (or “ways” into phenomenology), his various “introductions” to phenomenology, and the experimental and experiential nature of his writing, which is sometimes at odds with his own self-understanding regarding what he accomplished. Not just a clear-sighted knowledge of what Husserl is saying, but problems, confusions, questions are equally revelatory and perhaps generative of insights. It is only after such an initial encounter that I would suggest combing through the secondary literature. Finally, I would recommend not just trying to understand what Husserl is saying, but as a way of doing this, trying to see what Husserl himself is attempting to elucidate in and through his descriptions (to see what he is seeing and how he is seeing).

In the last semesters, you gave a doctoral seminar on Max Scheler at Stony Brook. He is one of the most ignored figures in the history of phenomenology. You, on the other hand, appreciate his work against the stream. Can you describe your intellectual relationship with Max Scheler? What makes him so crucial in the phenomenological way of doing philosophy?

A.S.: When I started doing philosophy and reading phenomenology in a concerted way, it was actually from Merleau-Ponty, then Heidegger, and then back to Husserl. The person who introduced me to phenomenology was Arthur R. Luther, and his major inspiration, though not by any means exclusively, was Scheler. So, in some ways, learning phenomenology was in fact informed by Scheler without me necessarily knowing it. But that’s more autobiographical.

What makes Scheler crucial to phenomenology, and philosophy more generally, concerns his openness to the problem of givenness and evidence with respect to multiple dimensions of experience. Not only did he recognize more than

one kind of intentionality, he was immediately critical of the rationality/sensibility dualism (which I mentioned above), and the distinctive role that the emotions play as informing “spirit” (and not simply as a matter of psychology). In describing the role feeling, he saw its irreducible relation to value, where value is not a “thing” or “object,” but feature of givenness. As Husserl identified a reversal peculiar to the lifeworld and the sciences that marked a crisis in humanity, Scheler identified a reversal of value in the order of the heart, identifiable as resentment, that marked a “crisis” in interpersonal and even ecological being. Finally—in a way entirely creative way—he engaged the personal/interpersonal, historical, cultural, emotional dimensions of existence from the very start. Just to be clear, Husserl is himself already “there” at generativity from the start, but more in an implicit way. Scheler starts there, and it enables him to understand the emotional sphere, which is constitutive of the person, not only as distinct from rationality, as a cognition having its own style, but where loving in concerning, as founding for epistemic cognition.

We would like to hear your opinion about contemporary phenomenological studies. For example, how do you find its engagement with neuro-sciences? Are you pleased with neuro-phenomenology?

A.S.: I really have to remain more or less more silent on this issue because I don’t know enough about it. I would have to defer to other contemporary phenomenologists like Natalie Depraz, Dan Zahavi, or allied thinkers like Shaun Gallagher and Evan Thompson.

Apart from its relationship with neuroscience, how do you see the contemporary situation of phenomenology in the States? Is there such a school so-called “American phenomenology”, especially in regard to the Phenomenology Research Center at Stony Brook?

A.S.: That is a hard question, and it would be presumptive of me to say that there is an American school of

phenomenology, especially if we consider our Canadian colleagues to the north and Mexican colleagues to the south of the US. I am curious to learn if you see a particular style.

If it is possible to designate a style or styles of phenomenology in the US, such a designation would be gained by reflecting on the kind of questions that are being asked and the way the descriptions are being carried out. In any case, the response would itself have to be phenomenological; I mean, it would entail not only answering what phenomenology is, but doing this by how we undertake it.

What about the Phenomenology Research Center at Stony Brook? What do you do there?

A.S.: The style of phenomenology that we carry out at the Center began when I was in Carbondale, about 20-25 years ago. It started quite innocently when I was teaching a graduate seminar on Husserl's *Passive Synthesis*. This is a wonderful text, full of concrete analyses and intricate distinctions, and evocative descriptions. In the middle of the seminar, somebody asked me "how do you do phenomenology?" I thought to myself that I must really be doing a disservice to the students: "How can we be reading such a powerful work in which Husserl is carrying out phenomenology, and yet somehow they are not learning how to do phenomenology?" At that time, I held my seminars in cafés, so I suggested that we meet on another day in a different café, and "do" phenomenology. (It was at that time that I was starting to look into the matter of religious experience and at the same time, the emotions.)

One condition of the gathering was that we did not (initially) refer to texts or authors—even Husserl; we would have to give examples of everything we proposed or described, and we had to be willing to rework our "results" on the basis of new descriptions that were more evocative or more in evidence. I remember not wanting to talk about our perception of a cup on the table, or some such example. It thought it would be more helpful to take up an emotional experience, and of one that was not frequented in phenomenology, namely, hoping. Employing distinctions we learned from Husserl, but eventually extending these analyses in new directions, we considered the temporal

meaning and temporal orientation of this experience, how it was or was not related to expectation (and eventually its relation of founding vis-à-vis a thetic act like expectation), if it was related to the past or present, and if so how or how not. Eventually, in subsequent weeks and months, we examined its relation to belief-assertions like optimism, its bearing on otherness, its relation to other acts like imagination, wishing, desiring, willing, how it concerns modalizations and relations to possibility. These questions emerged quite spontaneously, in discussions, through examples, via revisions, without relying on “what Husserl said.” We did not begin with definitions, but with everyday linguistic clues—as it turns out—but then submitted them to more critical investigations. During each session, I took (and still take) notes; I then reworked them, reflected on them, write them up, and distribute them to all the participants. It was, and continues to be very difficult work. [One of my former students, Fabricio Pontin—who is now a professor in Brazil—organized and collated these notes—at least up until about 10 years ago, so that they could be accessible in the PRC Archives.]

The meetings today are no longer in a café, but in the Center. But we do keep the café atmosphere by beginning each meeting with coffee tasting, using different coffees from various processing methods and roasters, as well as various brewing methods.

It reminded us of Husserl's relation with tobacco, as he calls “tobaccology” in one of his letters.

A.S.: That’s great; I did not know that. Regarding the style of phenomenology that is carried out in the Center, I can say that it emerged in the way that it did in part by virtue of the phenomena that we were addressing. I don’t think that the orientation, distinctions, questions, or points of entry would have surfaced in the way they did, had we begun, for example, with cups and tables. Although we were informed by the meticulous work offered by Husserl, what developed was not from a pre-set method.

Lastly, may we ask about what you read these days? What is your next project?

A.S.: I continue to read (and reread) Husserl, of course, and Scheler. But I am also inspired by Latin American literature and the work in phenomenology that is coming out in Spanish speaking countries through an inspiring younger generation of phenomenologists in, e.g., Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Spain, Peru, Columbia, but also in the Portuguese language in Brazil and Portugal. Phenomenology seems to be alive there in distinctive ways. In addition to this, my new project is on vocational experience. In some ways, *Knowing by Heart* has been a preface to this work. The tentative title of this work is *Whispers of the Heart: Proper Names, Vocations, and Exemplars*. As you might surmise from the tentative title, this project has led me to investigate the proper name and to appreciate its development in the analytic tradition (which also had one of its early conversation-points in a dialogue between Husserl and Frege). There is much more to be said here, and there is a fruitful dialogue to be developed between a phenomenology of the proper name and the conversations that arose within the analytic tradition. But that's for another occasion.

Thank you so much.

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