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Introduction: Transcending Selves

Religion is inherently relational. Talking of religion or religiosity means talking of a relationship people think to have to something else, something beyond, or something felt inside, but in every case something that is not immediately available. At the same time, no religious individual can neglect his or her relationship to other people, and there are various religious positions that equally give this relationship prominence. Finally, the concern of an individual for him- or herself is often conceived in relational terms, as 'self-relation'. In cases considered spiritual or religious, this may overlap with the inner experience of a larger force. Preoccupation with oneself, or with one's self, occurs in various shades and to varying degrees. There also is the suggestion to regard the object of self-relation as itself a relation (Schlette, this publication; cf. below in this Introduction).

These three types of relationality are not independent of each other, but condition, if not actually co-constitute each other. How the relations among these relationships are being conceived nonetheless varies immensely. Not all three are in focus to an equal degree in each case. What differs in particular is the degree to which human individuals or human selves are being assigned an active, shaping (*gestaltende*) role in this relational web, or are seen as merely recipients of the acts of others or the Other, or even as being engulfed by, and thus disappearing into the position or role that is being assigned to him or her. Relations in all three respects allow the individual – and actually constitute the conduits that enable this – to express him- or herself, to expand, to explore things, to widen his or her scope, to connect, but also to experience 'an other' and the import and significations of an other. The question is, in which way the individual develops and builds, and actually can develop and contribute to building, these relationships. Individuals contributing to a process of individualisation each represent an exemplar of a particular modality of individualisation. In reverse, and this points to instances of de-individualisation, one's others (or the Other), and the relationships to or with them, may constrain and even overwhelm the individual.

What then matters is how 'the' Other, how the social others, how the 'self' and 'selves', and how the form and dynamics of their interrelations and interactions are being conceived. The view on these relationships moreover differs depending on the angle one claims to take: that of an Ego who puts him/herself at the centre; that of the Divine (God) and the expectations humans ascribe to the Divine; or that of one's social others, if not of the 'generalized other' in G. H. Mead's sense of the term (Mead 1934).

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1 Relationality and 'transcendence'

Part 1 of our publication puts aspects of religious relationality in the centre, circulating around selfhood and interactional dynamics. Reflections gathered in this Part focus on how individual selves are seen to 'transcend' the confines of their (assumed or inferred) 'identities' and in this way either confirm the individuality of religious seekers or are an expression of individualised search. Keeping the framework of the three relational axes in view, the way the different aspects and dimensions are being explored however differs across the contributions to this Part (as well as to the other Parts) of the publication. Some foreground the relationship of an individual with the Divine or the Absolute and thus position the individual and the divine as two poles, differing with regard to the dynamics between the poles. Others approach this relationship from how it is embedded or even grounded in social relationships and in this way makes the rapport with the divine appear as a social relationship of a particular kind. Schematically speaking, this second perspective conceives of the religious-spiritual terrain as a triadic instead of a dyadic relationship. The dyadic image fits to ideas of a bounded being, discriminated from fellow beings, and tends to concentrate on elaborating the conception of self-hood. The relations to other humans as well as the non-human world – being pushed into the background in favour of concentrating on the self-divine relationship – tend to be seen as accidents or ancillary to what seems central, or are considered derivative of the core relation. This perspective one can find in an ideal-typical, but at the same time extreme form represented by Louis Dumont's individual-outside-the-world, in the case of India (Dumont 1980, 185, 267–86), as well as by modern ideas that take individuals as singles. The triadic or triangular model leaves the notion of self-hood more open and allows for a broader exploration of relationalities and a stronger consideration of the social dimension of this array of relationships.[1] The distinction between these two kinds of approaches or emphases, which represent different (disciplinary) lines of thought, is reflected in the way Part 1 of our publication has been partitioned.

'Transcending selves' then has a threefold meaning. The phrase refers first of all, and rather conventionally, to the experience of something beyond direct human grasp, something often substantialised as 'the' transcendent, but something with which individual actors want to connect or feel connected. The beyond (which

1 Versions of the triadic or triangular model are further explicated in the article of Fuchs in this publication and in the Afterword of Section 1.2.

may be a 'within'[2]) can be experienced as deepening or widening the (everyday) self, or even as contributing to its actual and authentic formation. The metaphor of self-transcendence secondly, and in a wider and at the same time more profane sense, refers to a self, or the image of a self, that reaches out to the world beyond him- or herself and experiences some powerful connectivity to something larger or broader in which it feels included, but which, on the face of it, can equally denote non-religious contexts – as in cases of 'collective effervescence', to employ Émile Durkheim's much quoted term (Durkheim 1964; cf. Joas 2000, 58–61). (Some, of course, turn this around and regard the profane transcendent as sequel to or extension of the religious transcendent.) And finally (and still broader), the phrase as used here refers to those social relations of a self that impact and connect him or her directly and inwardly with others, and become in this way adjuncts of a self. Under the last auspices, 'transcending selves' then relates in an emphatic sense of the term to what a person or self shares with significant others.[3] In religious contexts, as discussed in Part 1, the last and the first forms of transcending are sometimes closely entwined, and may involve the second form too. The last form is being mulled over particularly in Section 2 of this Part of our publication, but it also points towards cases of internalised interdependence conceptualised in Part 2 in discussions around the term 'dividuality'. As the introduction to Part 2 indicates (p. 323 of this publication), the concept of dividuality 'emphasises the existential moment of relationality and porousness between human beings, things, and the transcendent, and acknowledges the capacity of relevant actors to co-create the human being and her/his perception of the Self'. The relation to the transcendent in the common, narrower and more spiritual sense of the term stands in the foreground of Section 1. Concerning all three forms, 'transcending' relates to the self as subject as well as object of the process. But while from a theological point of view, as in the case of Meister Eckhart (Dietmar Mieth, Section 1.1), it is God who is seen as active and as initiating the process (in the case of Eckhart to be understood as a process of continuous movement and becoming), others, like Magnus Schlette (in an earlier work), consider the human self as the instance

2 The image applied here is that of 'beyond direct human grasp'. This is not necessarily meant in the sense of the spatial metaphor of 'beyond', as when one says 'beyond this world' or 'beyond this life', or 'life beyond'.

3 It is with respect to the second meaning in particular that Hans Joas and after him Magnus Schlette have recently brought self-transcendence into closer focus. Joas makes self-transcendence a core term of his sociology of sacralisation and of the formation of ideals and values (2000; 2017, esp. 431–5). In his eyes, experiences of self-transcendence 'have to be experiences of decentering' (Joas 2008, 14). Building on Joas, Schlette (2013, ch. 13) emphasises the aspect of receptiveness, openness or even disposition for the experience of the unexpected, incommensurable or incongruous.

that is active in a process of self-transcendence. For Schlette the process and activity of self-transcendence, however, occurs on the border between transitivity and intransivity and has to be seen as a process or activity that demands 'neither effort nor willfulness' ('weder Anstrengung noch Vorsätzlichkeit') (Schlette 2013, 351f.).

2 Struggling with selves and selfhood

Discussions and reflections on the notion of the 'self' abound. The 'self', or notions translated by the word 'self', have been central to philosophical and theological-doctrinal debates in the West in Christian and secular contexts, in India in various philosophical schools as well as in Brahmanical, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh and other religious contexts, and in the Islamic milieus, which includes South Asia, especially within Sufi traditions (and there will most probably be further instances of such reflections in other cultural contexts). What complicates things even more is not only that we have no consensus on what the term 'self' is to mean and include, or how to translate terms from other languages with comparable, but not identical meanings, themselves again often polyvalent, accruing additional meanings over time (like *ātman*, *ahaṃkāra*, *jīva*, *chitta*, *buddhi*, *manas*, etc. in Indian languages; also the Buddhist *anattā* – 'not-self'; or *nafs*, *qalb* and *rūḥ* among Sufis),[4] but also that in European language use the term 'self' is being intermixed with other terms like 'person', 'identity', 'soul', 'Ego' and even 'subject'.[5] Speakers and scholars may employ one of these terms referring to connotations for which others would employ another of the mentioned terms. For a long while the epistemic dimension stood in the foreground in discussions about the self. In recent times attempts are increasing to overcome limiting terminological conventions, especially now including bodily dimensions, self-other relationships, and more generally, inter-subjectivity. In this publication, 'self' stands as a placeholder for the practices, experiences and representations of humans circumscribed in different ways as person, even persona, identity, individual, in part also subject and actor or agent, respectively as 'patient' of someone else's actions.[6] In some contexts, notions of soul as well as of mind, but also of the body and of embodiment

4 Regarding processes of differentiation and accretion of meanings of the term *ātman* cf. Malinar 2015, 391–3.

5 Terminologically, discussions in this publication are dominated by Western philosophical language. Non-Western terminologies and conceptualisations are taken up in particular chapters.

6 The aspect of 'patiency' or the receptive or 'passive' dimension of agency is increasingly being included in theories of 'action'; see Dewey 1987 [1934]; cf. Fuchs 1999, 359f., 374–7; Pettenkofer 2010, 134f.; and others.

fill in for aspects of selfhood. 'Self' here is not meant to demarcate a specific idea of selfhood that all contributors would share. Self or person in the articles that follow can be geared to spirituality, but can also comprise embodiment and the whole gamut of sensoria, can refer to concrete human beings or to imagined-constructed-conceptualised beings, can see them as contained or as connected.

Of particular importance is that in no case the self can be understood as something that we can fully grasp. The self cannot be addressed as an 'object' of observation and scholarly discourse: 'We are not selves in the way that we are organisms, or we don't have selves in the way we have hearts or livers' (Taylor 1989, 34).[7] The self, in significant respects, is constituted through self-interpretation and, one should add, the interpretation of someone's self or person by others. What is more, the self's interpretations 'can never be fully explicit', nor can a self's articulations ever be completed (ibid.). Self is not a substance: self – like religion – is inherently relational. There are concepts that try to take self as an entity or substance, but these usually lean towards notions of 'soul', or substantialised notions of *ātman* or *jīva*, or, going in the opposite direction, towards an objectifying depiction of a 'person'.[8]

Significantly, the notion of self tends to show up in composites (*Komposita*). This includes composites denoting the attempt of *understanding* selves, or one's self: self-interpretation (in German both *Selbstdeutung* and *Selbstauslegung*), self-articulation, self-recognition (*Selbsterkenntnis*), self-awareness or self-perception (*Selbstwahrnehmung*), and self-definition (and in this sense then trying to determine one's self); composites denoting the activity of *developing* or *enhancing* one's self: self-becoming (*Selbstwerdung*), self-discovery (*Selbstfindung*), self-formation (*Selbstbildung*), and self-realization (*Selbstverwirklichung*); composites denoting the effort of *establishing*/*corroborating*/*proving* one's self or oneself: self-ascertainment (*Selbstvergewisserung*), self-assertion (*Selbstbehauptung*) or self-determination; and composites denoting *occupation with* one's self which more explicitly than the other denotations emphasise the *reflexive* character of thematising and imagining one's self, like with the terms self-image (*Selbstbild*) and – the most discussed term – self-consciousness (*Selbstbewußtsein*). 'Self', it seems, stands for something that has to be accessed. Therefore, the access-points matter.

At the same time, and against this background, a self has to be conceived as itself accessing the world and other selves or persons. One way to further proceed

7 Jonardon Ganeri confirms this from a different philosophical background. From a liberal naturalist standpoint, a first-person stance, which the self occupies, 'is compatible with the claim that no entity exists that might be visible from the perspective of a scientific naturalism'; Ganeri confirms that 'Buddhists are right to deny the existence of any such thing' (Ganeri 2012, 327).
8 Regarding *jīva* see the article by Rahul Parson in Part 3 of this publication.

in this direction is the renewal of a focus on attention, as recently exemplarily articulated by Jonardon Ganeri (2017). He takes attention as 'key' to an 'account of the nature of persons and their identity' that 'precedes self'. Ganeri discriminates between two distinct roles that conscious attention performs in experience, that of placing and focusing – 'placing' signifying 'opening a window for consciousness'; 'focusing' 'accessing the properties of whatever the window opens onto' – and distinguishes varieties of conscious attention that include intending, introspection, empathy[9] and past-directed or autonoetic attention (Ganeri 2017, 1–4).[10]

What the explorations and imaginaries encapsulated by the composites mentioned show is that the self becomes available, accessible, through deliberations. But is there a self before these deliberations and what would this be? Some assume a pre-discursive familiarity with one-self or a pre-reflexive state or sense of self-ness, which as such is underdetermined, implicit. Manfred Frank (2002) employs the conception of a pre-reflexive *Selbstgefühl*, which one might translate as sense of self. Dan Zahavi identifies the pre-reflexive sense of 'mineness' or 'ipseity' with a 'minimal' or 'core' sense of self (Zahavi 2005, 125).[11] Magnus Schlette proposes the phenomenological notion of pre-intentional awareness, which to a certain extent seems in line with Ganeri's term 'attention'. Schlette conceives the object of this relation, the pre-reflexive self, as itself relational, 'but neither in terms of a reflexive nor in terms of an egological relation': 'We have to conceptualize it as a pre-intentional co-consciousness in any state of mind that this particular state of mind belongs to *me*' (Schlette, Part 1 of this publication; cf. Schlette 2013, 197–207).[12] Even if attention, pre-intentional awareness or the minimal self would have to be presupposed systematically, these can be accessed indirectly only, once the self is being discursively (re-)constructed from within its both conceptual and pragmatic contexts.

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9 On empathy see Antje Linkenbach's article in Part 2.

10 'Attention is the selective placing and focal accessing that brings a world to view and provides orientation within it' (Ganeri 2017, 28). In his new book, Ganeri engages in particular with what he calls the 'meticulous Buddhist introspective observation of the human mind's structure and functioning' (ibid., 5), especially the Theravāda philosopher Buddhaghosa, with contemporary cognitive psychology, and with contemporary philosophy of mind.

11 '[...] the idea is to link an experiential sense of self to the particular first-personal givenness that characterizes our experiential life; it is this first-personal givenness that constitutes the *mineness* or *ipseity* of experience. Thus, the self is not something that stands opposed to the stream of consciousness, but is, rather, immersed in conscious life' (Zahavi 2005, 125; author's emphasis). Regarding ipseity, see also Paul Ricœur (e.g. 1999).

12 'Inner-directed self-relation [...] therefore means the relation to inner-directed mental states (states evoked by inner stimulation) that I am pre-intentionally and co-consciously aware of as *my* mental states' (Schlette, Part I of this publication; author's emphasis).

The environs of 'self', both understood as a concept and as something that is implicated in the world, are being articulated from different angles. Here Charles Taylor (1989) might be used as a guide. In the first instance, a self is placed in social as well as cultural spaces, with a cultural repertoire, shared social imaginaries and publicly available conceptual and moral languages, which a person might share, but also may dissociate him/herself from (Taylor 1989, 35): something not only, but particularly relevant with respect to people driven by religious intents.[13] Starting from the other end of naturalist first-personal accounts of subjective consciousness, there too the focus is now on how the self is open to and connects with the world.[14] More particularly, a self inescapably relates to other selves in conceptualising and constructing its identity, and one would have to add, taking others as both fellow beings and as opponents: '[o]ne is a self only among other selves' (ibid., 35). And, finally, what for Charles Taylor is of particular importance, humans cannot do without 'some orientation to the good' and define themselves by where they 'stand on this' (ibid., 33). For Taylor it is 'the space of moral and spiritual orientation' within which one's 'most important defining relations are lived out' (ibid., 35). A human being feels the 'need to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see as good [...] or of fundamental value' (ibid., 42).[15]

The situatedness of selves in this triple way makes the selves appear dynamic. Selves are nothing fixed, but constantly change, shift, move, develop. Selves are evolving. The self, one's identity, the idea of personhood shifts from context to context of interaction and inter-subjectively established meaning; it never is complete, concluded, rounded off. It never is entire. This further complicates deliberations on the self. Ways to handle this condition differ. One way of dealing with

13 The concept 'social imaginaries' refers to implicit meanings and underlying or background assumptions about social existence, the ends of individual and social life, and also regarding fundamental values and norms (cf. Fuchs 2015, 333, with reference to Cornelius Castoriadis and Charles Taylor). This does not mean that anyone would be socially predetermined. – The use of the term of cultural repertoires here is mine.

14 Jonardon Ganeri's attempt of reconstructing human subjectivity from the angle of a liberal naturalist conception of the self sees the self as 'a unity of coordination, immersion, and participation': 'Fully first-personal subjective consciousness is at once *grounded* (in "friction" with the world and subject to its constraint), *lived* (in experiential openness and presence to the world), and *engaged* (with the pulls and demands of emotion and intention on the world)' (Ganeri 2012, 329; author's emphasis). Ganeri develops his conception in dialogue with Indian naturalistic philosophies of mind, especially those of Cārvāka, the Buddhist Yogācāra school, and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, incorporating recent discussions in phenomenology, analytical philosophy and Western philosophy of mind as well as Greek and Islamic philosophy.

15 Hans Joas (2000, 142f.) criticizes that Taylor leaves the relationship between the concepts of 'self' and 'identity' somewhat unclear and that he sometimes speaks of 'the good' in 'essentialist terms'.

this is a narrative approach – the reconstruction of the genealogy, the sequence of instantiations, of a self from the viewpoint of the present. Different versions of a narrative account of self have been proposed (Schapp 1953 [2004]; Ricœur 1999; Krueger 2011; and others). More radically, Buddhists reject the idea, encapsulated in the famous concept of *anattā*, not-self, 'that a detached witness watches from the centre of a space of experience' or 'that a detached agent acts in the centre of a space of action' (Ganeri 2017, 9f.). In a different direction go those conceptualisations that assume the possibility of identifying or establishing a core sense of continuity of the inner self even under conditions of constantly changing circumstances and in the vicissitudes of life. This may, as in several cases discussed in our publication (like those of Eckhart, Arndt, Kierkegaard), be backed by trust in the co-presence of the Divine, and thus by a foundational relationality, and may sometimes be even conceived as a processual, moving, interactional relationship. Other conceptualisations, in contrast (like many found in *bhakti* and among certain Sufis), think in terms of impermanence interrupted by transient experiential moments in which unity and the fulfilment of the relationship with someone else, or with the Divine, is being fleetingly, but never continuously, attained – just a hunch of permanence. It is the two last positions that are represented in Part 1 of this publication: the third one primarily in Section 1.1, the last one primarily in Section 1.2.

3 Religious language of self-transcendence

Religious discourses give the situatedness of selves a specific perspective. On a metaphysical-doctrinal level, religious authors tend to articulate the situatedness of humans in generalising, existentialist terms, be it suffering, be it meaninglessness, be it moral damnation of this world (the *Diesseits*), or be it longing for the beyond, for 'liberation'. On the level of lived religion, discourses tend to target moments, situations, experiences (in the sense of *Erlebnis*) and explorations in which a person, a 'self', senses or discovers something non-transient and liberating. Magnus Schlette makes the point that William James regarded religious experiences as *eo ipso* experiences of self-transcendence, that is a surrender to 'transcendent powers'; in this he sees a line going back to Friedrich Schleiermacher (Schlette 2013, 366; James 2008 [1902]).[16] This again, however, reduces the view on self-transcendence to a substantialised expression of 'transcendence'.

16 Hans Joas in a recent book (2017, 70, 73) comes to the conclusion that James did not receive his inspiration from Schleiermacher, but he sees an indirect connection to Schleiermacher via American Transcendentalism.

Religious thinkers conceive of 'the transcendent' and what we here call processes and moments of self-transcendence in very different ways. Much of what goes on in religious contexts is about ways of understanding and conceiving, as well as preparing for experiences of self-transcendence. Across the different religious contexts, Abrahamic as well as Indic ones, one encounters images of enlightenment through, or togetherness (communion) and even of union with the Divine, of love for the Divine and love of humans by the Divine, sometimes of fusion with the Divine, of sensory and bodily experience of the Divine, or even extinction in the Divine, aside from the more intellectualist conceptualisations of becoming a witness or voice of the Divine and a mediator between the Divine and other humans, of directedness towards the Divine, of devotion to and participation in the Divine (*bhaj* in the word *bhakti*). As mentioned before, some see the self-transcending relation to the Divine in the wider context of reaching out to and sharing with other humans, and thus as part and parcel of a form of social self-transcendence.

A particular experiential notion, also taken up by William James, and already referred to by Schleiermacher before him,[17] and again by Kierkegaard, is that of self-surrender (*Selbstaufgabe*, *Hingabe*), or, in the Indian *Śrīvaiṣṇava bhakti* context starting with Ramanuja (traditionally, 1017–1137 CE), the comparable Sanskrit term *prapatti*, which Srilata Raman and others take as synonymous with 'self-surrender'.[18] It is with regard to notions of self-surrender also that the paradox of self-transcendence becomes most tangible: the idea of confirmation of a self in the very act or attempt of relinquishing it, of its extinction. This may mark the extreme of constitutive relationality. But this is significant in other ways too. One often encounters statements that exhibit a lack of sociological sense and understanding of relationality and insinuate that Indic religions, particularly the Upanishadic and Buddhist variants, would represent positions of denial of individuality and individualisation, and thus the very opposite of Christianity as the exemplary field for religious individualisation. It rather seems that self-surrender – and this is only one option in the Indian, as in the Christian contexts –, be it viewed as an experience or as a desire, marks the extreme of religious individualisation.

17 In his *Über Religion* Schleiermacher asks to give up one's life out of love for the universe (*aus Liebe zum Universum Euer Leben aufzugeben*), to aim to become more than one is oneself (*strebt danach mehr zu sein als Ihr selbst*), to lose oneself, and in this context to eradicate (*vernichten*) one's individuality (Schleiermacher 1799, 132).

18 *Prapatti* from *pra+pad*, which can be translated as 'to take refuge with/in' (van Buiten, according to Raman 2007, 11). Discussions within Śrīvaiṣṇavism concerned the various dimensions of *prapatti*, the idea of God's grace and compassion, and in this context, the balance between God's doing and what the individual human should do or not do for his/her own salvation – *prapatti* either signifying just one of several paths in search of God, or requiring 'to do nothing, for any effort was an impediment to the working of God's grace' (Raman 2007, 11).

4 Transcending and embedding selfhood

The focus on relationality underlying the idea of 'transcending selves' guides the arrangement of the papers. The papers assembled under this title have been divided into two sections. A gross differentiation is the one already mentioned between a dyadic and a triadic focus. One may further distinguish between two analytical modalities of accessing the question of self, one focusing on the exegesis of systematic statements contending with questions of self, the other on reconstructing the practical and semantical articulations of self-hood. This is also being reflected, although not to the full extent, in the way the papers were divided up. The first approach predominates in the first section of Part 1 of this publication, the second in the second section, with the (partial) exception of the paper of Andrés Quero-Sánchez. Magnus Schlette's article may be considered an in-between case. He focuses on the practical attitudes and dispositions underlying the texts (in this case poems) he analyses.[19] In any case, especially the systematic reconstructions of notions of self, identity and person would require additionally to be historicized, with respect to the intellectual and social contexts in which the systematic positions were developed. This, however, is not part of the discussions here.

4.1 Section 1.1: Relationships between transcendence and selfhood

The inner dynamics of relationships of (self-)transcendence have usually not been analysed sociologically and comparatively in Western scholarship. They rather still are the preserve of theologians and philosophers. Many of the current conventions of talking of the transcendent and of transcendence with respect to the self originate here. The discussions of recent years in Erfurt, with their focus on religious individualisation, at least allowed starting a process of reconsideration that prepares cases taken from Christian contexts for comparisons and perhaps even sociological analyses in the future. De-centring one's lens and the assumptions of the debate will take a long time.

The pieces in Section 1.1 provide snapshots of processes of religious individualisation in the European context. They offer exemplars, important instances or moments, of processes that show the unfolding of particular ideas and formats of selfhood in relation specifically to ideas and experiences of the divine. While

19 In this context see also his reflections on the reconstruction of the 'grammar' of the uses of notions of self(-realisation); Schlette, 2013, 45–9.

Section 1.1 presents cases from different epochs, starting with the 13th century, and while all these cases are taken only from West European traditions this selection is not meant to confirm the belief in the idea of a singular and linear process that developed in the Western and Christian context independently of processes elsewhere. One paper, that of Julie Casteigt, gives an inkling at least of exchanges with the Arabic scholarly world. What this selection then illustrates is the fact that European developments have been studied much more intensively than the philosophical and conceptual developments elsewhere.

The article by *Julie Casteigt* on the work of Albert the Great (c. 1200–1280) that opens our publication presents an exemplary and at the same time unique case of religious individualisation. The article shows how Albert not only takes the figure of John the Baptist as the model witness of God, mediating between the Divine and the human world. But further, using the metaphor of 'vases of light' and universalising the model of John, Albert argues for the possibility that everyone, in an absolutely singular manner, can become a manifestation of the divine principle and act as metaphysical mediator between God and other human addressees, constituting thereby a community of individuals.

In Albert's case the individual appears as the recipient, or 'vase', of the light that transcends the self. In the case of Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–1328), presented by *Dietmar Mieth*, the individual is meant to prepare him/herself to receive and recognise the presence of God in his/her heart. The transcendence of the empirical self, experienced as a sudden breakthrough, is being understood by Eckhart not only as a constant process of flow and movement, but also as a mode that does not allow distinction between God and human on the categorial level: *distinctio per indistinctionem*, or 'distinction by non-distinction'.

With the article of *Magnus Schlette* we jump to a much later stage, the early 17th up to the turn to the 19th century, but stay in central Europe. Discussing the philosophical transformation by Immanuel Kant of the inward-oriented Protestant worldview exemplified by intellectual figures of the Protestant tradition as diverse as Johann Arndt (1555–1621), Paul Gerhardt, Gerhard Tersteegen and Barthold Hinrich Brocke, with respect to the idea of natural beauty and the sublime, Schlette elaborates on the two-level concept of self-relation that is entailed in these Protestant positions, based on an inner sense of relationality with God, experienced (comparable to Eckhart) as togetherness, and the progress from an inner-directed to an other- or outer-directed self-relation.

In a move beyond Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1786–1834) raised the question of the relationship of human rationality to the transcendent. *Elisabeth Gräb-Schmidt*, in her article, thus shifts the focus from the process of self-transcendence to the position of the individual vis-à-vis 'the' transcendent, or transcendence as 'religion' and thus as a sphere of its own, a notion that prevails in modern

contexts. While the transcendent appears here as the unalienable precondition of rationality, Schleiermacher insists on the limits of rationality for the individual. He sees the individual as grounded in an overarching transcendent, which confirms his/her individuality.

Matthias Engmann in his discussion of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) returns to practices of self-transcendence. Kierkegaard regards God as ground of, and presence in, every human being that each human is being asked to actively actualise, the goal being self-surrender. The article points to an understanding of religious individualisation as 'becoming oneself before God' and thus a process of re-positioning and increased self-awareness in acknowledging one's unconditional dependency. Here, the immanent aspects of authenticity and (self-)transcendence are systematically correlated to the individual's inward relation to God.

These elaborations on self and self-transcendence in the European context are backed by *Anders Klostergaard Petersen* with a general evolutionist narrative of the making of the self, or what he calls 'suifaction'. Klostergaard Petersen considers the transition from what he calls complex urban to early cosmos types of religion, what others call axial age religions, as the point at which genuine forms of selfhood, i.e. the distinction of the individual self from not only other selves but also from the group, emerged, accompanied by ideologies of selfhood as well as modes of self-cultivation that made the self 'independent' of culture. Discussing the examples of the Book of Deuteronomy and of late Stoicism, Klostergaard Petersen understands the self at this developmental stage as being involved in a relationship to 'superhuman powers'. This he sees then superseded – with the coming of modernity, in the form of Western Enlightenment and Romanticism – by the idea of a detached autonomous self that now is conceived as existing 'all on its own'.

4.2 Section 1.2: The social life of religious individualisation

The relationships of religiously inclined individuals with other spiritual seekers correlate with and, in various and different ways, corroborate the relationship of selves with what is variously considered as the divine, the absolute or the ground. Speaking more generally, relationships with the Divine are embedded, or are even seen as co-grounded, in relationships with other people one is or feels attached to. Religious positions differ in how far they acknowledge and above all respect and include the relationships to others, or, conversely, are in denial of such social relationships, on which, however, they inescapably build, even while they try to break these.

The article of *Andrés Quero-Sánchez* presents such a case of denial. His paper, at the same time, represents a link to the papers in Section 1.1. Focussing on Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854), and on Schelling's engagement with ideas of

Plato, Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, Jakob Böhme, and Friedrich Jacobi, he discusses how this idealist thinker struggles with what he regards as the threat of one's particular engagements to an unmediated relationship to the Absolute.

The other three contributions to this Section take social relations as their starting point. *Rubina Raja*, who takes us to Palmyra in the three first centuries CE, discusses the relationship between priests and the (lay) people to whom they attended, but also the relationship between these priests and their deities. Raja focuses in particular on the banqueting *tesserae* (tiles or tokens) that served as entrance cards to religious banquets and that were found in large numbers in Palmyra. The religious banqueting events can be regarded as clear signs of a process of religious individualisation when seen against the background of the otherwise seemingly standardised Palmyran ritual practices. Individualising aspects show up in several ways, with respect to the choice of people invited, the individual personages of invitees, and the individualised iconography of the entrance cards. On top of this, and this seems a specific feature, judging by the way the *tesserae* were designed Raja can show that the priests were put on a level with the deities.

Dimensions of relationality and intersubjectivity are at the centre of discussion in the contribution of *Martin Fuchs*. Fuchs takes *bhakti*, a core strand of Indian – especially, but not only, Hinduistic – religiosity, as an exemplary case of relationally grounded religious individualisation. Covering a history of at least 2000 years till today, the term *bhakti* denotes forms of participatory devotion and self-transcendence and stands for direct access to and experience of the divine. Of core relevance are the dimension of universal recognition and the potential for, but also the limitations of, the critique of religious as well as social hierarchy and exclusion. Examining what he regards as the phenomenological core of *bhakti*, while keeping track of the diversity, malleability and innovative capacity of *bhakti*, Fuchs develops the concept of a triangular interactional structure of reciprocity and authority between saint-poets (exemplary *bhaktas*), 'lay' devotees and the divine, in which each side, transcending itself, reaches out to the others.

Discussing a context that combines *bhakti* elements with Sufi and Nath Yogi traditions – 18th century Punjab, today divided between the states of India and Pakistan – *Anne Murphy* takes the concept of religious individualisation as a key to develop a new understanding of the ways in which what later generations conceived of as separate religious traditions are being connected, blended and transcended contextually. Taking the case of the *qissa* (a poetic narrative) *Hir*, composed by Wazir Shah – centred around a love story, social (gender, family) relations and religious affiliations, and popular even beyond the region to this day – , Murphy puts particular focus on the ways deep normative conflicts are being fought, in which strict conventions and hierarchies of gender and caste

clash with an individualising ethos and the critique of authority. Bringing into play differing religious perspectives and alignments, she shows how the cross-religious, both as devotional experience and as a form of religio-social critique, was in vital respects tied to religious individualisation.

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