

## Phenomenology of Religious Experience IV: Religious Experience and Description

Michael David Barber\*

# Noetic and Noematic Dimensions of Religious Experience

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**Abstract:** Phenomenologies of religious experience have been developed by Max Scheler and via Alfred Schutz's frameworks of "multiple realities" and "finite provinces of meaning." For both, religious experience resists the pragmatic imperatives of the mechanistic worldview or world of working. Schutz's paradigm begins with a distinctive noetic religious *epoché* opening the religious province, in contrast with Scheler's start with spheres of being (especially the absolute sphere) furnishing the noematic context for religious acts. Scheler's religious act resembles the religious *epoché*, but his eidetic analysis highlights the act's distinctiveness, irreducibility to non-religious acts, and immunity to psychological reductionism. Correlating the religious act with his value theory (the absolute sphere), Scheler better withstands the subordination of religion to the pragmatic imperatives and the absolute to lesser values than does a Schutzian ranking of purposes in the province's form of spontaneity. Scheler's absolute personal being, whose revelation one must respectfully wait, supports the Schutzian relaxed tension of consciousness. Respectfulness of persons, the social/communal/critical dimensions of religious experience, religion's need for critique from theoretical provinces of meaning, and the wariness of idolatrously substituting one's own finite goods for the absolute can all mitigate the religious imperialism and violence to which absolute commitments can lead.

**Keywords:** phenomenology of religious experience, finite provinces of meaning, multiple realities, the religious act, value theory, religious violence, *epoché*, Max Scheler, Alfred Schutz, theism

Traditionally, phenomenology, as basic to its methodology, has sought to clarify both intentional acts and the objects given to them, with various phenomenologists emphasizing the noetic or noematic dimensions of experience or seeking some balance between them. This article will consider two descriptions of religious experience that depend on the work of two prominent phenomenologists: one in the tradition of Alfred Schutz that I have articulated elsewhere<sup>1</sup> and one developed by Max Scheler. I will show that the Schutzian view favors a more noetic approach while Scheler develops a noematic account that corresponds to a more clearly delineated noetic approach. Although both Schutz and Scheler conceive religious experience as a response that breaks free from forms of pragmatic reductionism and as an activity distinct from theoretical approaches to religion, Scheler's account of the religious act in relation to its object converges with Schutz's idea of an *epoché* separating religious experience from everyday experience, but Scheler more clearly distinguishes religious experience from other kinds of experience and renders it irreducible to them. In relation to Schutz's idea of the form of spontaneity that would concern the interrelationships of various purposes within religious experience, Scheler's correlational

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<sup>1</sup> Barber, *Religion and Humor as Emancipating Provinces of Meaning*.

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\* **Corresponding author: Michael David Barber**, Department of Philosophy, Saint Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri, United States of America, e-mail: michael.barber@slu.edu

account makes possible a better critical perspective for evaluating false forms of religious experience that subordinate the absolute to human wishes and needs. Finally, Scheler's correlational theory gives a fuller explanation of why the tension of consciousness that a Schutzian viewpoint would find typical of religious experience, namely, that is more passive and relaxed than that of pragmatic everyday life, is perfectly appropriate, given the personal character of the absolute in accord with which Scheler defines the religious act itself. Scheler can also provide an additional resource for the normative assessment of religious experience via his value theory, but his eidetically defined correlation between a more narrowly defined religious act and its absolute object may not be as accommodating to the diversity of religious experiences as Schutz's less well-defined noetic approach within the conception of a finite province of religious meaning. What this comparison of perspectives shows is that in taking eidetic account of the noematic object of religious experience and the noetic intentionality appropriate to it, it becomes possible to understand more clearly religious experience itself, in contrast to an account that considers religious experience principally from a noetic perspective, less articulated in relation to a noematic correlate.<sup>2</sup>

## 1 The dangers of pragmatic mastery

Both Scheler and Schutz present religious experience as a kind of resistance to pragmatic imperatives. For Scheler, the mechanistic worldview, which has for centuries been producing a revolution with wide-ranging, historical, sociological, epistemological, and ontological implications, has sought to reduce appearances and being to the blind processes of "ur-things" such as masses and electrons that, if managed, can facilitate efforts to dominate the natural world. This revolution further depended on a rising societal order that focused on a will to work and to power and that was slowly suppressing the earlier non-invidiously hierarchized feudal order with its provisions for the enjoyment of the world and the contemplative knowledge of nature (particularly by monkish and priestly groups). Scheler describes this mechanistic worldview:

That is the nominalism and conventionalism of the modern world, which is likewise its mechanistic basic belief about nature and history: there is in this world no realized objective value, form, or idea realm, no objective Logos which all mechanistic processes (natural and social processes, soul and life processes) ought to serve. There is thus no Logos in history or in the society (*Gesellschaft*) of human beings who are the highest and most complete of world-essences. And so after these objective forms and ideas about the world have been subjectivized and left to arbitrary choice, all that remains objectively is the mechanism of the world.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Recently, questions have been raised by Jonathan Tuckett about the danger of providing phenomenological descriptions of universal religious experience, but covertly or unconsciously relying on unexamined presuppositions from one's own religious tradition that should have been excluded by the phenomenological reduction. While caution about the universality of one's phenomenological descriptions is integral to phenomenological methodology, the authors whom Tuckett criticizes, such as Michael Staudigl and Keiji Hoshikawa and Anthony Steinbock, clearly recognize that they are describing religious experience from within specific religious traditions and demonstrate a wariness about making claims about all religious traditions. They exemplify Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic view that all understandings and interpretations depend on a prior lived understanding that makes possible (theoretical) interrogation and interpretation. Scheler offers goes even further in justifying his conception of the deity through a theoretical-metaphysical-value theory discourse (that differs from a phenomenology of non-theoretical, lived religious experience itself). It is also conceivable that one might, like Steinbock, seek to discover a limited *eidos* of religious experience, such as that pertaining to the Abrahamic religions. Or one might see a phenomenological description of religious as reflecting one's religious traditions but as advancing as a first step a project of clarifying the *eidos* of religious experience whose comprehensive "eidetic variation" would require serious engagement with other versions of religious experience (although the very framing of this discussion would seem to presuppose some *eidos* yet to be discovered and fully articulated). See Tuckett, "The a Priori Critique," 647, 649, 653, 654, 658, 659; Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 15, 24, 38–41, 208; Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 19, 348, 351; Wertz, "The Method of Eidetic Analysis," 293–94, 295, 296; Hoshikawa and Staudigl, "Schutzian Analysis of Prayer with Perspectives from Linguistic Philosophy," 8, 13n9.

<sup>3</sup> Scheler, "Christliche Demokratie," 683–4; Barber, *Guardian*, 47; Scheler, "Erkenntnis und Arbeit," 196–200.

Alfred Schutz in his phenomenological psychological essay “On Multiple Realities” begins by describing the reality of the world of everyday life whose “form of spontaneity”<sup>4</sup> consists in “working,” that is, action in the outer world based on a project that one aims at bringing about by bodily movements, and whose predominate motive is pragmatic. For Schutz, the world of everyday life constitutes a finite province of meaning with six basic features that constitute its “cognitive style”<sup>5</sup> (a specific tension of consciousness, *epoché*, form of spontaneity, self-experience, sociality, and time perspective). Schutz delineates other “provinces of meaning” that are “modifications”<sup>6</sup> of the world of everyday life but that lack the emphasis on mastering one’s world pragmatically. For instance, in the province of phantasying, one has no interest in mastering the outer world, does not decide to implement the projects one imagines, and entertains passively associated trains of images that ordinarily one would lack the leisure to enjoy as long as one was facing the need to implement bodily a project in everyday life. Similarly, the province of meaning of dreaming exhibits an even more relaxed tension of consciousness in which the sidelined inner censor permits unconscious processes to come to the surface, albeit disguisedly, in images that one cannot control. In addition, scientific theory is guided by an overarching non-pragmatic goal: “not to master the world but to observe and possibly understand it.”<sup>7</sup> In the finite province of religious experience, one adopts an *epoché* to break with pragmatic everyday life; embarks upon a more relaxed tension of consciousness in which one at least partly depends on the transcendent’s interventions in one’s life; allows symbols, series of symbols, and symbolically functioning events and natural events or objects to appresent the transcendent; and lets go of pragmatically inspired efforts to master and consequently finds oneself increasingly liberated.<sup>8</sup>

On the one hand, Scheler discerns the quest for pragmatic mastery in the modern mechanistic worldview that overthrows traditional social relationships, epistemology, values, and ontology by reducing them to the most basic, controllable components and arbitrary subjective choices. On the other hand, for Schutz, the press for pragmatic mastery dominates the paramount reality, the finite province of meaning of the world of everyday life, but alternative provinces of meaning, modifications of that paramount reality, ignore its pragmatic imperatives. Instead, in these alternative provinces, one pursues different purposes that are buttressed by encompassing cognitive styles whose six cognitive features cooperate in maintaining a more relaxed tension of consciousness than that of pragmatic everyday life.

## 2 Provinces of meaning versus spheres of being

To escape the pragmatic pressures of everyday life, Schutz believes that in the provinces of meaning alternative to everyday life (which still, though, pertain to the broader lifeworld), the mind turns away from everyday life working and suspends belief in its layers, thereby implementing distinctive forms of *epoché*. At that point (“in its turn,” that is, after the *epoché*),<sup>9</sup> according to Schutz, the corresponding province of meaning obtains “another accent of reality.”<sup>10</sup> Schutz goes to pains to distinguish his standpoint from that of William James’s idea of sub-universes of reality, which can be investigated in terms of a psychology of belief and disbelief:

In order to free this important insight from its psychologistic setting we prefer to speak instead of many sub-universes of reality of finite provinces of meaning upon each of which we may bestow the accent of reality. We speak of provinces of

<sup>4</sup> Schutz, “On Multiple Realities,” 212, see also 208–11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 230, see also 231.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 245. See also 234–59.

<sup>8</sup> Barber, *Religion and Humor*, 82–104, 107–28.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

meaning and not of sub-universes because it is the meaning of our experiences and not the ontological structure of the objects which constitutes reality.<sup>11</sup>

William James's psychologism consists in the belief that whatever is (and this would include objects given ontological status) depends for its existence upon our psychological acts, and hence James asserts, "The fons et origo of all reality, whether from the absolute or the practical point of view, is thus subjective, is ourselves."<sup>12</sup> Instead of holding that our believing makes things so, as this statement suggests, Schutz proceeds within the theoretical perspective of "On Multiple Realities," whose various versions of the *epoché* resemble that of the phenomenological reduction. As a result, Schutz argues that provinces of meaning consist in meanings relative bestowed the accent of reality on the world of his imageries, which are "as 'real' as anything."<sup>13</sup> Schutz acknowledges, however, that from the perspective of the world of everyday life, the archetype of all realities, the realities corresponding to these other provinces of meaning are only "quasi-realities."<sup>14</sup> Though one within a finite province of meaning implements an *epoché* and confers the accent of reality on what is given within that province, it is only when one oscillates between the world of everyday life and the world of phantasms that one is able to recognize that phantasy realities are only quasi-realities. In fact, following Husserl, within the natural attitude, the idea of "reality" did not exist and only came to be recognized after one entered another province of meaning and then reflectively marked out the distinction between it and everyday life. Only at that point, one would have been able to recognize that there are multiple realities at all. While occupying the province of phantasy, one confers reality on whatever presents itself there. Further concurring with Husserl, Schutz argues that within a particular province of meaning, certain inconsistencies and incompatibilities may appear that may lead one to invalidate a particular experience within that province, but that does not entail that one has to withdraw the accent of reality from that province of meaning. Hence, for example, certain objects appearing in the world of everyday life could turn out to be mirages, but that would not prompt one to withdraw the accent of reality from everyday life.<sup>15</sup>

While Schutz's account of multiple realities avoids the psychologism and perhaps subjectivism characterizing James's view, the notion that within a finite province of meaning one adopts an *epoché* and confers the accent of reality on what is presented within that sphere still seems to suggest that the meanings correlative to intentional acts possess a kind of relativity to the subjectivity of one inhabiting a particular province. Aron Gurwitsch highlights just this partiality of Schutz's perspective when he contrasts Schutz's provinces of meaning with his own notion of "orders of existence."<sup>16</sup> Gurwitsch points out that Schutz is pursuing, as he himself admits, a "phenomenological psychology in the natural attitude"<sup>17</sup> in which:

Objects, events, and items of every description and pertaining to any province of meaning must be considered, when studied from the psychological point of view, as what they appear to be to the experiencing self, or what they mean to the self. Such an orientation towards experiences of objects and objects as experienced rather than objects in themselves regarded as what they are in truth and reality, is characteristic of and essential to, the psychological point of view.<sup>18</sup>

By contrast, Gurwitsch undertakes a transcendental constitutive phenomenology within the confines of the phenomenological reduction, through which he discovers that objective time is the constitutive

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 229–30.

<sup>12</sup> James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 296–7. The italics are James's. See also 290, 293, 295, 297–8, 318–9 for similar psychologistic claims.

<sup>13</sup> Schutz, "On Multiple Realities," 237.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 230, 238; Husserl, *Ideas*, 260–2.

<sup>16</sup> Gurwitsch, *The Collected Works* 3, 392. The italics here are Gurwitsch's.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 390; Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, 43–4; Husserl, "Nachwort," 140–5.

<sup>18</sup> Gurwitsch, *The Collected Papers*, 3, 393.

relevancy principle of the fundamental stratum of reality in general. Any object or any event must be situated in such a time order to have existence, and by being localized that way it belongs to the “*one real, objective, spatio-temporal world*, the lifeworld of all human beings communicating with each other either directly or indirectly.”<sup>19</sup> While Gurwitsch acknowledges that this order of existence has little theoretical or practical significance, he still argues that he has uncovered a presupposition that Schutz does not thematize; that his work on the structure and constitution of the world itself contrasts with Schutz's narrower focus on the structure of behavior of lifeworld persons; and that, as a result, he is able to provide Schutz with a more encompassing foundation.<sup>20</sup> In fact, Scheler engages in an undertaking similar to Gurwitsch's, though with a different philosophical methodology, disclosing, beyond the experience of a psychological subjectivity within a religious province of meaning, encompassing spheres of reality. Among those spheres, there is an absolute sphere that Schutz does not thematize and that constitutes a wider framework within which Schutz's religious province of meaning can be situated and with which it can be correlated.

Scheler begins to develop this structure, in which religious experience (understood by Schutz as a finite province of meaning) would need to be located, by disputing forms of both idealism and critical realism. Although both views distinguish the *Sosein* of objects from their *Dasein*, idealism thinks both are immanent to consciousness and critical realism recognizes the independence of *Dasein* and yet posits that the *Sosein* (existing as independent of consciousness) cannot be known by consciousness or be contained within it. In critical realism, one is conscious only of images or symbols that refer to the object, as the representational theory of knowledge prominent in modern philosophy held. Scheler, however, believes that *Sosein* can be in the thing and in the mind (versus critical realism) and that *Dasein*, or existence, can never be taken into the mind (versus idealism).<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, Scheler is concerned about how we grasp that something exists. To address this issue, he opposes efforts to see knowledge as beginning from consciousness (a starting point that makes it impossible ever to reach the real-world), and, instead, he posits that there is a kind of prior reaching out toward reality, an ecstatic knowledge, in which one lives unreflectively, as even children and animals do. This distinctive ecstatic “having”<sup>22</sup> things without knowing that having, develops into conscious knowing when one encounters resistance, clashes, or opposition and one is thrown back on oneself, becomes reflective, and acquires a knowledge of things and knows that knowing. Furthermore, Scheler argues that the objects that resist and provoke knowledge pertain to spheres of being that are themselves given prior to the objects found within them and capable of resisting our ecstatic having.

He distinguishes four irreducible spheres, whose essential features have to be articulated through phenomenological–eidetic analyses (presumably at work in Scheler's own descriptions<sup>23</sup>): (1) absolute being, (2) the external and internal worlds, (3) the sphere of the creature and its environment, and (4) the sphere of the I, Thou, and society. While one might be able to establish the existence or non-existence of any object within a sphere of being (e.g., in the external world through empirical evidence), it is not appropriate to ask whether the spheres of beings themselves are susceptible of being proven or not. These spheres, in fact, indicate what kinds of evidence are appropriate to proving the reality of any of the objects to be found within them, and one cannot establish the existence of an object within one sphere by relying on evidence appropriate to another sphere. Hence, we cannot infer or prove the existence of a living being from knowledge of the dead world or the existence of the absolute being on the basis of empirical causality. Likewise, one cannot derive one of these irreducible spheres from the other. Though philosophers have often attempted to derive the external world from the internal world, such an effort bypasses the diversity of spheres and subjects to the distinctive standards of “proof” characteristic of one

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 376–7, 372–4, 382, 391–5, 399; see also, Schutz/Gurwitsch, *Philosophers in Exile*, 135.

<sup>20</sup> Max Scheler, “Idealism and Realism,” 290–1, 294–5.

<sup>21</sup> Scheler, “Idealism and Realism,” 324. The term for having is “Haben von Realität,” see Scheler, “Idealismus-Realismus,” 214.

<sup>22</sup> Scheler, *Man's Place in Nature*, 52.

<sup>23</sup> Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, 235. The italics are Scheler's.

sphere over all spheres instead of recognizing that all these distinctive spheres on a meta-plane establish the conditions for proof regarding the (resistant) and distinctive kinds of realities found within them. Scheler advances all sorts of arguments to defend these spheres as kinds of ultimate presuppositions and irreducible to each other. For instance, he suggests that it is counter to common sense that we acquire our first idea of the external world by reflecting on what is given within the internal world and making inferences. Likewise, one cannot prove the existence of the sphere of the Thou since even a Robinson Crusoe who might have no inductive experience at all of another Thou would have a sense of the absence of others and experience intellectual and emotional acts directed toward others and so have “the idea of something *present to him as the sphere of the Thou, of which he is merely unacquainted with any particular instance*.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, one cannot avoid an absolute sphere whose contents bear the hallmark whatever is supremely valuable for him or her, even though it may not be clear what object ought to be found in that sphere and whether such an object is adequate to the absolute sphere or not, that is, whether it is God or an idol.<sup>25</sup>

Having specified the independent and irreducible spheres of being, among which would be counted the sphere of absolute being, Scheler proceeds to argue for the correlation between the religious act and this absolute sphere. He states in *On the Eternal in Man*:

Furthermore, just as “the” (individual) consciousness, with its essentially finite constitution, invariably and necessarily has as it correlates *ab origine* the spheres of the external world, of the “I” and of the “We” – without the possibility of reducing any one of these given spheres to any other – so in the religious act it also looks into the sphere of the divine, supersensual facts and phenomena, a sphere which is just as much *ab origine* its correlate. Evidently it may fall into any number of errors in deciding which things are real in any of these spheres, but that does not in itself cast doubt upon the original existence of the *sphere*.<sup>26</sup>

Scheler insists that the human spirit is “adjusted and directed toward a supernatural reality,”<sup>27</sup> which differs essentially from empirical or natural reality, and that, correlatively, one can only understand the existence and distinctiveness (in comparison with other kinds of intentionality aimed at empirical or ideal objects) of religious acts only if one accepts the reality of the kind of object that these acts intend.

The Schutzian finite province of religious meaning involves a conscious *epoché*, cordoning off the religious province from others and opening the way for the participant in the religious province to “confer the accent of reality” on the objects presented within that province – and there is little, if any, attention to the intentional object to which that participant is directed or how it plays a role in shaping the acts within the religious province of meaning. For Schutz, the *object* of the religious intentionality emerging from within the religious province of meaning does not seem to matter that much. Scheler, however, seems to proceed in an opposite manner, first discussing spheres of being, particularly the sphere of absolute being, with both the sphere and its contents being experienced as resisting one’s ecstatic knowing and consequently not being derived from any idealism of consciousness. Having that absolute sphere in place before consciousness (though it takes conscious phenomenological theorizing to articulate its eidetic features), Scheler then turns to the religious acts correlative with that sphere and affirms that the correlation between these acts and absolute being is necessary for understanding the acts themselves. At this point, it is important to consider Scheler’s distinctive understanding of the religious act and to see how it, in correlation with the absolute sphere and the absolute being, is determined by and plays a different role in having religious experience than the acts emerging from the religious subjectivity within the finite province of religious meaning.

<sup>24</sup> Scheler, *On the Eternal*, 267, 269, see also 248, 259; see Scheler, “Idealism and Realism,” 300–3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 258. The italics are Scheler’s.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 253.



### 3 The *Epoché*: religious acts and religious experience à la Max Scheler versus the religious act of the finite province of meaning

Scheler provides a more refined, thorough depiction of the religious act than that found in the account I have provided for a Schutzian finite province of religious meaning. In considering the religious act, which is distinctive from all other acts, Scheler argues that it is unable from its own resources or thought to construct what is presented to it. Instead the religious believer

must somehow *receive* the truth he “intends,” the salvation and felicity he “seeks” – and receive it via the very being he seeks. To that extent he is in his primary intention already disposed for and concerned with a *possible* reception, however much a multifarious intentional and external spontaneous activity may be a prerequisite of his reaching the threshold where the reception begins.<sup>28</sup>

This unique act, aimed at a sphere of absolute being and the absolute being within that sphere, finds itself unable to control or coerce the object it is directed toward and, instead, must await upon that object giving itself to be received by the one waiting – and later we will see why this explanation of the religious act is demanded by the absolute being which it is ordered toward and which plays a role in shaping the very act that is its counterpart. Just as acts of external perception are directed toward objects within the external world as part of a system of correlation – and the actor engaged in perceptual acts operates with less passivity, with more of an active, appropriative orientation to its objects than does the religious actor – so also “Religious acts, with their objective domain of being and value, thus form a basically closed system.”<sup>29</sup> Scheler claims that religious object appears in reference to the religious act through which alone it can be given, and that that act “transports the subject directly into a sphere of existence and values to which it alone holds the key.”<sup>30</sup> Given the way Scheler presents the religious act, it appears that one might say that the very taking up of this act performs the same function as the *epoché* of the religious province of meaning (in Schutz’s sense) that precedes the conferral accent of reality on its object and ushers one into the religious sphere.

The “religious act” is also a matter of a “*unity of operation of the mind trained upon the object*,”<sup>31</sup> and it can inform the feelings, volitions, thoughts, imaginings, expressive behaviors, and adoption of bodily postures (such as kneeling or standing) composing it, just as in any perceptual act there are sensational elements, forms, value qualities, factors of meaning, interest, attention, and judgment that function within the intentional unity, an act of perceptual experience.<sup>32</sup>

It should come as no surprise then that Scheler insists that “everything hinges on the proper characterization of the nature of religious acts,”<sup>33</sup> which “differ from all possible syntheses of finite mundane experience”<sup>34</sup> and which illustrate that the soul is able to partake “in a supersensual realm of being and value whose contents and objects cannot stem from the experience of finite things.”<sup>35</sup> Having delineated the distinctiveness of the religious act in the way that Schutzian paradigm does not, Scheler is better able to reject accounts that misinterpret the religious act as merely some kind of extraction or abstraction from non-religious experience, as only a construction built up from non-religious experiences by manipulation and syntheses, or as nothing more than the product of our own spontaneous cognition. As long as one’s religious act basically consists in an intentional orientation toward the reception of a

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 254. See also 253 where Scheler insists on the distinctiveness of the religious act from all other acts.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 155–156, 249, 288, 289.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 264.

response from the divine, one is at least implicitly acknowledging that whatever response or experience of God occurs, it is not one's own doing or construction and depends on God's intervening revelation. Hence, Scheler is able to reiterate over and over again that all knowledge of God is ultimately from God.<sup>36</sup> The religious act, then, in Scheler's outlook, functions very much like the *epoché* by conveying us into a unique sphere of being and values with which the act is correlated, and this separation of the object of the act from everyday day life is accentuated insofar as the act itself is not reducible to non-religious acts.

The "irreducibility and essential independence" of the religious act and its correlation with the sphere of absolute being both explain Scheler's critical stances to other approaches to absolute being and the acts leading to it. Thus, metaphysical approaches, among which Scheler includes even the profound, reformatory work of Rudolph Otto on "the holy," share the basic error of modern philosophy: namely, epistemological subjectivism. Such approaches hold that the ontic realm of objects are determined and even created by the acts through which such objects are accessible to humanity, as if there were no objective religious good. Scheler's phenomenology, accentuating that the mutual correlativity of and interaction between the religious act and its object, blocks any subjectivism. In addition, the very character of the religious act, namely, that it can only await a response from the divinity, from which it cannot extort a response, rules out any subjectivism that credits the act with a productive power over the divine object to which it is directed.

Similarly, Scheler undertakes an extensive critique of the psychology of religion. He argues that such psychology grew out of Protestantism's lack of an essential ontology of religious objects and its emphasis on subjectivity and, in particular, individual acts. Furthermore, the inquiry of psychology of religion has tended to question whether the religious act is a feeling, a volition, or a thought, or whether it is mediated by the subconscious processes – all in place of seeing the act as a unity of operation, organizing underlying acts, directed toward its object. In addition, the positivistic origins of modern psychology of religion have led it to consider religious acts as mere psychic phenomena, able to be causally explained or shown to function as part of an evolutionary biological adaptation to one's environment. Moreover, psychology's point of view is to investigate the acts of another person from the perspective of an observer, and, even if one examines oneself psychologically, one examines oneself "*as if one were a stranger or 'someone else.'*"<sup>37</sup> Since there is no empirical evidence for the object of the religious act, the psychology of religion, insofar as it endorses positivist premises, can easily proceed on the supposition that religious experience is simply a matter of error or delusion. The observer stance and the presumption of delusion result in observers cutting themselves off from the experience itself undergone from a first-person perspective directed toward an object whose response one receives rather than concocts in any way:

Religion simply is not, as that argument would have it, "in any case" a psychic phenomenon[...] So anyone investigating religion as an object of psychology has already emptied it of meaning and intention – even if only in a feigned and tentative manner, for the purposes of research. But if anyone deprives religions of all possible truth, he should not claim that he can still practice the psychology of religion.<sup>38</sup>

Scheler contends further that one who does not possess particular beliefs, such as that of Catholics in the Real Presence of Christ, cannot even describe the psychic experiences of what a Catholic experiences in the Mass. "He is as little able to do so as a person totally blind is able to describe the sensation and mood produced by colours vivid to unimpaired perception."<sup>39</sup> Scheler also reiterates that his approach is akin to other types of investigations that seek an "essential phenomenology of religion, such as envisage the 'essence' of the act or object,"<sup>40</sup> in contrast to psychology of religion's focus on individual, empirical examples. The eidetic distinctiveness of the religious act and its object, in a "closed system",<sup>41</sup> prevents it

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 133, 160, 250, 261, 282–3, 303.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 173.



from being subsumed into metaphysics, natural theology, epistemology, explanatory, or descriptive psychology, and, instead, Scheler – in good phenomenological style – claims to have provided the philosophical foundation for all these other kinds of study of religion.<sup>42</sup>

## 4 Form of spontaneity: the absolute character of the divinity and ultimate purposes

When Schutz discusses the form of spontaneity as one of the cognitive features of any finite province of meaning, he refers to the pragmatic world of everyday life whose form of spontaneity, working, consists in “a meaningful spontaneity based upon a project and characterized by the intention of bringing about the projected state of affairs by bodily movements gearing into the outer world.”<sup>43</sup> The goal toward which an act of working aims in the material world does not stand alone but is often more or less integrated into a system of goals that for Schutz is ultimately determined by one’s fundamental anxiety, namely, one’s knowledge that one will die, and so one decides, again with more or less exactness and precision, what purposes one hopes to realize and their relationships and rankings with reference to each other. In asking about what the form of spontaneity might mean in the religious sphere, one would have to ask about what projects and goals one ultimately pursues there. Indeed, in my own treatment of the form of spontaneity within the finite province of religious meaning, I observed that it is possible to subordinate the religious sphere to pragmatic goals as when one undertakes magical practices that often involve appeasing the divinity so that, for instance, one’s crops will successfully come to harvest. By doing so, however, one would end up betraying the final purpose of the religious province of meaning insofar as one commences pursuing religious experience in the first place as a way of breaking the hold of pragmatic imperatives. In addition, just as the placing a priority of the religious province relativizes and de-absolutizes the purposes of everyday working, so the transcendent itself seems to hold a place of ultimacy within the religious sphere. Following William James, though, I at times suggested that upholding the ultimacy of the transcendent guarantees a kind of peace and freedom from the pressures of working, but such a view risks subordinating the transcendent as a means to the production of peace, however liberating such peace might be in comparison with the burdens of working.<sup>44</sup> Scheler’s treatment of the religious act and the sphere of being converges with my concerns about the possibility of undermining the form of spontaneity of the religious province of meaning or the transcendent toward which the province is directed, insofar as he coordinates the religious sphere with his value theory and, especially, the absolute sphere of being and value.

According to this value theory, there is an a priori ranking of values, extending from the lowest modality of the agreeable/disagreeable (e.g., pleasure, pain) values to vital values (e.g., feelings of strength or illness), to spiritual values (e.g., experiences of beauty, morality, truth), and to the value of the holy (e.g., what the religious act is oriented toward).<sup>45</sup> Scheler reaffirms in *On the Eternal in Man* the theory he developed in the *Formalism*, namely, that the nearer objects are to the sphere of absolute reality, the less we are able to control and produce the feelings pertinent to the sphere (e.g., one can exercise physically to experience vital feelings but cannot control the bliss given in the sphere of the holy) and “the more passively receptive (rather than ‘dictatorial’) [are] our minds to win knowledge of the object in question.”<sup>46</sup> This value theory converges with Scheler’s conception of the religious act in which one is oriented toward the absolute sphere and the holy within it insofar as one subordinates oneself to it,

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 154–160.

<sup>43</sup> Schutz, “On Multiple Realities,” 230.

<sup>44</sup> Barber, *Religion and Humor*, 107–14, 124–8.

<sup>45</sup> Scheler, *Formalism and Ethics*, 104–10.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 336–7; Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, 339.

oriented toward a response from the divinity that one can only wait upon and that one is unable to extort forcibly from the divinity. Scheler's value theory reinforces his conception of religious experience by pointing toward a ranking of goals that is part of what defines a form of spontaneity in any finite province of meaning.

Scheler's notion of the religious act as oriented toward the absolute, which holds the ultimate place within his value theory, also provides him a critical standpoint in relation to the form of spontaneity, the arrangement of purposes, as portrayed by other interpretations of religious experience. For example, Scheler rejects Simmel's view that religious acts are "merely a subjective and enthusiastic manner of envisaging any general object (be it God, humanity, one's country, or oneself, etc.),"<sup>47</sup> since Simmel's perspective implies that the only purpose of God is to intensify religious life itself and since the diversity of this perspective's possible ultimate objects runs contrary to the idea of God as the absolute reality. Furthermore, Luther's prioritizing the certainty of faith and the assurance of salvation tend to make the having of faith itself the object of faith, with the result that one remains ensconced within the religious act instead of understanding its directedness beyond itself. Likewise, there are those who see religion as useful for human culture, educating humanity; cementing or creating communities; serving as a weapon in conflicts; or fostering the economy, science, and art. Scheler objects, though, that in the religious act one's heart is set on the eternal and supreme good and so one cannot conceive any of these purposes as ultimate since one

inhabits a sphere, a culminating plane, from which human civilization appears more and more vain, vacuous, and fragmentary. How then shall the heart affirm the existence of that highest good not for its own sake, but for the sake of that which is so vain and empty.<sup>48</sup>

For Scheler, "The absolute must be absolutely prized,"<sup>49</sup> and in this "all or nothing,"<sup>50</sup> the essence of the religious outlook is to be found. Similarly, religious acts cannot be reduced to the cravings, needs, desires, or projections of unfulfilled extra-religious wishes that masquerade as religious orientations, even though once one has encountered the divinity through religious acts, religious needs can be subsequently generated. The unique place of the absolute in the form of spontaneity of the sphere of religious experience, according to Scheler, is consistent with the distinctiveness of the religious act that gives pride of place to God's revealing action for which the one experiencing God makes room, instead of insisting on having his or her own needs met. Moreover, insofar as psychological wishes and needs of all sorts are drawn from empirical objects and the religious act pertains to a different sphere, any effort to give explanations of religious experience through psychic causality (often operating behind the back of the experiencer) ignores the distinctive noetic intentionality of the act aiming at or waiting upon God – and this sharpened attention to the distinctiveness of intentional acts fully accords with phenomenological methodology.<sup>51</sup>

After praising William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* for its descriptions of religious states of consciousness, Scheler proceeds to criticize it because of its incorrectly ordered form of spontaneity. James focuses on the chaotic and random character of religious acts instead of eliciting their essential structure, and he lacks any treatment of divine ontology "which is the necessary preparation of all religious theory."<sup>52</sup> In addition, he fails to establish any criteria by which one might assess whether religious experiences are authentic or not, and, instead of working out such criteria, he relies on "an utterly worm-eaten pragmatism,"<sup>53</sup> which assesses the value of religious experience in terms of quasi-

<sup>47</sup> Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, 246.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 246, 248, 262; Simmel's idea resembles Paul Tillich's view that "God" is equivalent to whatever is one's ultimate concern.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

biological or utilitarian grounds, namely, whether there is a “happy issue of convictions in practical life.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed, in my own discussion of religious acts from within the finite province of religious meaning in the Schutzian framework, I argued that religious experience proves its value by freeing one from neurotic, society-destructive, anxiety-generating attempts at pragmatic hyper-mastery. However, in so doing, I may have been more or less converging with James’s portrayal of religious experience, as if the whole point of surrendering to the transcendent was ultimately to produce the experiencer’s peace of mind. Nevertheless, I also suggested that the ultimacy of the transcendent did call for worship or service of it for its own sake, as Scheler recommends.<sup>55</sup> If such service and worship is undertaken for the sake of the transcendent and if peace and contentment follow on that prioritizing as a consequence rather than as being its ultimate goal, perhaps my discussion would not succumb to the challenge Scheler raises to James’s pragmatic interpretation of religious experience whose forms of spontaneity would be at odds with absolute being and its correlation with the religious act.

## 5 Tension of consciousness: religious act and divine correlate and the divine as personal

For Schutz, the pragmatic world of everyday life exhibits the highest tension of consciousness, which Schutz calls “wide-awakeness,”<sup>56</sup> insofar as one’s attention is concentrated on executing its project in the physical world through bodily movement, and, as such, it consigns to the borders of one’s consciousness what Leibniz called the “surf of indiscernible small perceptions.”<sup>57</sup> In wide-awakeness, there is little room for passive associations to stir up images or thoughts loosely related to the experiences one is having in executing the project at hand especially since they might distract from realizing the project. Schutz borrows this idea of tensions of consciousness from Henri Bergson who, for instance, in his *Matter and Memory*, stresses the predominance of imageless motor memories when it comes to one’s perception insofar as perception is actively directed and engaged with the physical world (designated “matter”) – as opposed to “pure memory.”<sup>58</sup> In pure memory one gives up any effort at mastering the physical world and unleashes the free flow of memory images, in which one image passively connects with and elicits the appearance of another memory-stored image, though the linkages between such images might appear arbitrary, without necessarily serving any rational or pragmatic purposes. Bergson claims that there are thousands of different tensions of consciousness extending from the plane of action to the state of pure memory. Dreaming, located at the pure memory pole, takes place when one falls asleep and permits consciousness to “disport itself,”<sup>59</sup> and in dreaming one can discover “a distraught self, a self which has let itself go.”<sup>60</sup> For Schutz, a reduced tension of consciousness is one of the constitutive features of the finite provinces of meaning such as phantasy and dreaming, and I have explored how the religious province of meaning manifests increased relaxedness in comparison with pragmatic everyday life. For example, in the religious province, one experiences the transcendent as supporting and supplementing the implementation of one’s projects or as intervening in one’s life, beneficially and unpredictably, offering underserved benefits or forgiving gratuitously, as James’s examples illustrate. Furthermore, religious experience relies heavily and regularly on symbols that through passive association appresent

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Barber, *Religion and Humor*, 107–28, see also in particular, 109.

<sup>56</sup> Schutz, “On Multiple Realities,” 213.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., see also 241.

<sup>58</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 180, see also 17, 20–1, 36, 217, 223, 303, 302–7, 315–6.

<sup>59</sup> Bergson, *Mind-Energy*, 155.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 132, see also 126.

the transcendent or on other chains of appresentations that in their turn appresent the transcendent – all often beneath the level of conscious control.<sup>61</sup>

My account of the relaxed religious consciousness develops semi-eidetic conclusions (much like those to be found in Schutz's account of "finite provinces of meaning" in "On Multiple Realities") on the basis of a survey of empirical or biographical accounts of religious experience, often excerpted from mystic writings, biographies, or William James's *Varieties*, and on the prominence of passive association in symbolic appresentations in religious experience. This lower tension of religious consciousness is comparable to and yet different from that to be found in parallel provinces of meaning, such as dreaming and phantasy. Scheler, however, provides an eidetic account of the religious act, which has built into it a patient reliance upon and waiting for a response that cannot be wrung from the divine and which could be said to explain the typical passivity of religious experiences that are described as regularly taking place, *de facto*, in biographical accounts of mystical experiences. In addition, there is no reason why the unpredictability and surprising nature of religious experiences in these mystical narratives could not be understood as in accordance with Scheler's depiction of the religious act since mystical experiences of the divine do not necessarily occur at the moment when one is praying and attentively awaiting a response but can often occur later, outside of one's deliberate praying, and be seen, nevertheless, as responses to one's earlier having disposed oneself for such a revelation. In addition, the relaxed tension of consciousness in religious experience can be traced back to Scheler's view of the correlate of the religious act, the absolute being, who, as an ultimate value, cannot be pressed into service for some pragmatic goal that one having a religious experience may hope to achieve (e.g., producing peace in her own heart). Furthermore, the religious consciousness is more relaxed insofar as, when one's religious act orients one toward this absolute, one removes oneself from pragmatic everyday life with its pressures to achieve pragmatically, and the pragmatic purposes one once had felt responsible for assume only a relative importance. Even the having of religious experience itself is not something one needs to anxiously pursue since one knows beforehand that one cannot produce the experience by one's own efforts. Moreover, Scheler's positing of ascending value rankings from the lowest physical pleasures that we can easily manipulate and control to the religious feeling of bliss that can only be divinely bestowed reinforces the sense of relief from pragmatic imperatives in the religious sphere directed toward the pinnacle of the value spheres, which is least susceptible to one's mastery. However, it should be pointed out that I have argued elsewhere that Schutz in his discussion of levels of transcendencies correlative to his theory of signs and symbols also grasps our declining ability to overcome completely transcendencies as we move from lower level indications and marks (e.g., my bookmark) to signs (which lead to an always incomplete understanding of another) to symbols that reach beyond everyday life.<sup>62</sup> Clearly, Scheler's eidetic account of the religious act and its absolute correlate serve to provide a philosophical foundation and explanation for the more restful religious-experiencing consciousness.

In discussing this relaxed tension of consciousness, one can find in Scheler a further example of how his understanding of the object of the religious act and the act itself mutually inform each other. In regard to this "object," Scheler argues on the basis of his value theory that the personal form of existence is essential to a concrete spirit and that personal value is superior to the values of impersonal things, states, and acts and – consequently, that the *ens a se* insofar as it is a spirit must be personal and insofar as it is the *summum bonum* it must be not an impersonal good but a personal value. This personal character of the object of the religious act explains why that act requires waiting for a revelation since only persons can reveal freely themselves just as persons can also choose to be "silent"<sup>63</sup> or "unforthcoming,"<sup>64</sup> or they can lie or dissemble. Human persons, insofar as they are bodily cannot conceal their existence when in

<sup>61</sup> Barber, *Religion and Humor*, 82–94. James's vision of a God who forgives indicates that he is presupposing a kind of theism in relationship to a personal God – and other religious approaches may not share this understanding of the transcendent.

<sup>62</sup> Barber, "Finitude Rediscovered."

<sup>63</sup> Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, 335.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

the presence of another bodily person, but they can conceal what they think or love. However, an incorporeal, invisible, perfect, infinite, absolutely free person could conceal even its existence. Consequently, we can only know persons, whether human (with regard to its inner thoughts) or divine (even with regard to its existence), if they freely choose, at their own discretion, to reveal themselves. On these grounds, Scheler affirms that knowledge of God (of God's existence or God's thoughts) will never be solely the result of us engaging in our "spontaneous cognitive acts"<sup>65</sup> because the knowledge of God as a person requires some act on God's part by which God discloses and imparts himself to us – in other words, we depend on revelation. From this dependence on revelation, it is clear that Scheler's definition of the religious act as intending the divinity but also awaiting a revelation must have from the start already presupposed that God is personal. Furthermore, since the absolute object of religious knowledge and experience is a person, free to reveal its self or not, such religious knowledge or experience will never be one's own doing alone and even the responsibility for coming to know and experience God can never be totally one's own. One's tension of consciousness within the religious sphere is correspondingly lowered since beyond any achievement that one might strive for, having the experience of God depends ultimately on God's "free and sovereign condescension to us."<sup>66</sup> One is responsible for making oneself ready for revelation – so one is not completely relaxed in the religious sphere (as one might be in dreaming) – but one's activity leads one only to the threshold of receiving a revelation.<sup>67</sup> For Scheler, the lowered tension of consciousness in the religious sphere is not solely or ultimately the outcome of some action or *epoché* that we put in place, as it is for Schutz in his account of finite provinces of meaning, when we decide to fall asleep (and enter the sphere of dreaming), to leap into a state of daydreaming (as in phantasy), or to enact some psychic technique to achieve peace of mind. Rather it results, in Scheler's view, from the fact that the correlate of the religious act, beyond the religious believer's activity, is an independent correlate, a divine being who is personal and free and capable of revealing himself or herself or not. Here again, the object/correlate of the religious act plays a key role in shaping the character of the act itself, which, in its turn, is configured in terms of the correlate it intends.

Furthermore, if God is personal and correlative to the religious act that depends on revelation, this correlation would rule out a whole series of alternative conceptions of religious activity and the divinity correlative to it. For instance, Scheler's viewpoint provides him a critical fulcrum from which to criticize gnosticism that reduces God to a substance to be known or pantheism that eliminates the human pole of the interpersonal relationship that becomes only a part or function of God, a mere locus where God becomes conscious of himself. Nor would it do to consider God as an impersonal cosmic spirit, a mere world order, an all-pervasive life, a thing or idea devoid of personality, or an entity dominated by a blind dynamic factor devoid of any awareness of love or goodness.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, many in the tradition of Hegelian pantheism, Scheler argues, denying or neglecting the divinity of Christ and the offer of a personal relationship with the divine that Christ affords, conceive Christ as a mere *teacher* who recognized an awareness of God "universally endemic in the human soul" and accessible to human cognitive ambition.<sup>69</sup>

A problem appears, though, in that many major religions throughout the world do not regard Christ as divine and, especially, do not relate to the absolute as personal, as do the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. One wonders whether Scheler might be inclined to regard other religions as less than perfect or absolute – and he specifically raises the question, without answering it, of whether Christianity might be the "utterly true or absolute religion."<sup>70</sup> On the one hand, Scheler resists the relativism of religious perspectives that appears when one considers them from outside of any commitment to any such perspective, in much the way that psychology of religion considers religious

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 160, 290, 334–5.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 111–8, 133, 195–6, 333.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 333.

perspectives from without, from an observer's point of view – and from such a detached perspective one will find any religious perspective as good as any other. But, on the other hand, when one inhabits a religious viewpoint and practice from within which one experiences the transcendent, the religious perspective within which one lives most likely will prove itself to be the true one. As a result, those religious traditions whose experience of transcendence does not involve a personal deity would find their own traditions true as opposed to, say, the Abrahamic traditions. Regardless of anyone's final decision about which religious tradition one wishes to embrace, it is clear that Scheler seems to favor a theism directed toward a personal God (akin to that of the Abrahamic religions) – even more so he seems to affirm the personal God of Christianity. However, he does not succumb to the criticisms of Tuckett since he is not uncritically, naively taking for granted Christianity as the truest religion and merely assuming that all religion is reducible to or the equivalent of his religion. Indeed, he argues on the basis of religious experience, metaphysics, and value theory for his conclusions at every step, subjecting his own religious suppositions to critical scrutiny and thereby inviting those of other religious outlooks who may not be persuaded by his arguments to intellectual dialogue.

## 6 Assessing religious experience normatively

In developing a Schutzian interpretation of the phenomenology of religious experience, I provided for the critique of religious experience by the fact that the province of religious meaning has as one of its cognitive features social relations that can include the possibility of mutual criticism from the members of one's religious community or those from other religious communities. I also argued that religious beliefs can be subjected to criticism from other provinces of meaning, such as the theoretical province of meaning, in which one might be exposed to questions from theoretical atheists or agnostics, or from enclaves, in which, for instance, religious belief and theoretical activity can confront each other in an area in which these two different provinces overlap, as when believers in the same or related religions undertake theology that can function critically in relation to their religious beliefs and practices. Scheler, who recognizes the differences between science, metaphysics, philosophy, and religious experience, and who repeatedly acknowledges the importance of social relations for the practice of religious faith could also easily acknowledge these two sources from which religious experience can be criticized. In addition, I made the case that religious experience insufficiently disengaged from everyday pragmatic life can revert to patterns of pragmatic mastery that could pervert the religious province of meaning, converting it into a means of pragmatic dominance (e.g., a mechanism to ensure a successful harvest). Such desire to assert pragmatic mastery can also extend to controlling or subjugating other religious groups, those with different convictions, or those who are not religious at all. Furthermore, these patterns of dominance can even conceal themselves beneath the veneer of a false religiosity, as Nietzsche saw so clearly.<sup>71</sup>

But Scheler, within the “closed system” of the religious act and its correlate, the sphere of absolute being and the absolute given within that sphere, can provide a further resource for critique that is not located as centrally in the subjective, noetic side of finite province of religious meaning, as it is for Schutz, but rather can be found in the absolute being and the absolute sphere. For Scheler, the absolute sphere and the absolute being transcend the religious act as any object transcends its act according to phenomenology, but in addition the absolute also transcends the world as a whole, including the person of the subject.<sup>72</sup> As a consequence, no finite object belonging to this finite world is capable of fulfilling the religious act that is directed toward the absolute sphere and absolute being upon which it waits – as Augustine observed in his *Inquietum cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te*. In religious acts, such as praise, thanks, hope, love, yearning, veneration, petition, and worship, one's spirit surpasses in its intentionality

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 128–60, 154, 267.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 250.



the whole realm of finite things. Nothing we produce by our own efforts can take the place of the object intended by the religious act.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Scheler argues that the sphere of being and value of the absolute contains contents to which one pledges oneself unconditionally, such that one might utter, “I shall exist and have worth, wish to exist and have worth, only insofar as thou, object of faith, art and hast worth”<sup>74</sup> and “we two stand or fall together.”<sup>75</sup> In Scheler’s perspective, everyone already and always has a sphere of absolute being and value, but they populate that sphere with different objects, often unreflectively. For some it can be the maximal acquisition of economic goods, for the nationalist it could be one’s nation, for Don Juan the repeated conquest of women, and for the Faustian unlimited knowledge. Even the atheist or agnostic can value above all nothingness or metaphysical nihilism over faith in the divine. Scheler describes how the dissonance between the absolute sphere of being and value and the possibly finite object that one elevates to absoluteness (a pseudo-absoluteness) constitutes a form of idolatry:

In principle any finite good may enter the absolute sphere of being and values in any concrete mind, and thereafter be striven for with “unending endeavor.” In such a case the good invariably becomes a false god. The finite good is torn from its harmonious context in the world of goods: it is loved and pursued with a total lack of compromise wholly out of proportion with its objective significance; the human being seems magically enchained to its idol, and behaves “as if” it were God himself.

You cannot choose between having and not having a good of this kind. You can only choose whether your absolute sphere will be inhabited by God, as the one good *commensurate* with the religious act, or by an idol.<sup>76</sup>

While Scheler at this point proceeds to describe how atheists and agnostics might worship absolute nothingness, it seems that those who are religious, too, can worship idols. One can think, for examples of such religious idolatry, in the subjugation of other persons through colonization for the sake of proselytizing them or in the forceful imposition of one’s own religious values upon them – all the more dangerous because undertaken supposedly in the name of the absolute good or in the name of a religious tradition that one takes to be more perfect than that of other traditions. Such examples of religious oppression and violence represent forms of idolatry, too tightly bound to the individual subject who is religious, too much a part of something that one or a group can achieve or produce by their own efforts, too much a conflation of the religious tradition by which one accesses the absolute with the absolute itself. In the end, though, they contradict the very character of the religious act itself that has such respect for the dignity of personhood (in the case of the divine) and that it is willing to pull itself back from the least hint of coercion or pressure in the presence of such a person and to wait patiently for that person’s own free, self-determined response. How can religious believers consistently hold the personhood of God in such reverence only to run roughshod over the personhood of their fellow human beings, especially those of alternative religious traditions or without any religious belief at all?

## 7 Conclusion

Both Alfred Schutz and Max Scheler recognize the dangers generated by the dominance of pragmatic imperatives, Schutz seeing those imperatives as originating in everyday life and Scheler as resulting from the prevailing of the mechanistic worldview that reduces ontology and values to manageable micro-

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<sup>73</sup> It should be pointed out that natural religion and positive religion refer to different ways in which the object of the religious act could be given, with the first taking place in nature or history and the second only with reference to holy persons and their doctrines and messages usually transmitted through religious practices and traditions, see Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, 254–5.

<sup>74</sup> Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, 268.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 269.

elements. Schutz resists pragmatic pressures by his theory of non-pragmatic finite provinces of meaning, including the religious province, that depend on specific forms of *epoché* that open up spheres of meaning which a subject confers the accent of reality on and which is buttressed by the features of a particular cognitive style. To be sure, Aron Gurwitsch noted Schutz's emphasis on the role of subjectivity in his theory of finite provinces of meaning, and he contrasted it with his own stress on ontology. Scheler, by contrast, locates religious subjective activity within encompassing spheres of being and value, of which the absolute sphere is the ultimate, and he develops an eidetic account of the religious act correlative to that absolute sphere and the absolute being within it.

Scheler's eidetic account of the religious act and its absolute correlate makes it possible for the religious act to convey the one undertaking it into the absolute sphere of being and value, as if one had adopted equivalently the *epoché* important for entering the religious province of meaning within the Schutzian framework. However, by defining the religious act in eidetic terms and in relation to the absolute, Scheler more clearly separates the religious act from other acts and especially from various versions of subjectivism, projection, and delusion that completely misinterpret religious experience, as Scheler understands it. In addition, Scheler's demarcating the religious act off from other acts helps him avoid the misunderstandings of religious experience to which the psychology of religion is prone insofar as it considers religious experience to be merely a subjective act, reduces religious acts to other non-religious acts, and divorces itself from the first-person religious experience, that is, the dwelling in the religious act, to which alone the absolute being can be given. Scheler's eidetically defined religious act, which corresponds to a Schutzian *epoché*, separates religious experience more decisively from its counterfeit or reductionistic forms than does Schutz's account of the *epoché* of the finite province of religious meaning.

Scheler's eidetic analysis and the correlation of the religious act with the absolute sphere and absolute being enables him to reconstrue what a Schutzian account might call the religious form of spontaneity, which concerns principally the system of goals and purposes that guides one in the religious province of meaning (just as alternative forms of spontaneity govern other province of meaning). For Scheler, the absolute resists being subordinated to other purposes and, as pertaining to the highest value sphere, it is much less susceptible to the control and manipulation than one can exercise with reference to lower value spheres. Moreover, in the religious act, one sidelines one's own interest in order to be receptive to any communication from the divine. Consequently, Scheler's view of religious experience establishes more clearly than the Schutzian framework that the absolute deserves dedication to it for its own sake. Scheler is also able to demonstrate that those conceptions of religious experience that portray it as merely instrumental for satisfying human needs and wishes, as controlled by unconscious psychic processes in search of fulfillment, or as seeking only "the happy issue of convictions in practical life" (as William James did) – all simply fail to appreciate what religious experience essentially is, namely, the eidetic correspondence between the self-displacing religious act and the absolute to which it is oriented.

Furthermore, a Schutzian account would conceive religious experience as involving a reduced tension of consciousness, as one feature of the cognitive style of the finite province of religious meaning, and such a feature repeatedly appears in biographical accounts or psychological descriptions of mystical religious experience. Scheler's eidetical, correlational view, however, explains *why* in the first place the religious tension of consciousness is more relaxed. The absolute cannot be controlled by human efforts and, as personal, must be waited on patiently for a revelation that cannot be extorted from it. Consequently, one seeking to experience the absolute is relieved by the very character of the absolute from the pressure that can result if one feels that one is responsible by oneself for making religious experience happen. In addition, this relaxation also results from the religious act, which consists only in disposing oneself for a revelation and then in patiently hoping for a response that can only be given freely by the divine person.

Finally, while both a Schutzian framework and Scheler recognize the critical potential that can be brought to bear on religious experience from the social relationships and groups to which those having religious experience belong, from the resistance to pragmatic mastery out of which religious experience extricates itself in the first place, and from one's ability to engage in theoretical-critical analysis in relationship to other theorizers of every stripe, from within a distinctive theoretical province of meaning or an overlapping enclave, Scheler adds a further resource for such critique. For Scheler, the religious act is

oriented toward the absolute sphere of being and value, but it is possible to value an object projected into that sphere that is of less than absolute value and to engage in a form of idolatry that is at least susceptible to critique insofar as the object absolutized does not correspond to the absolute sphere in which it has been placed. In other words, Scheler locates a potential for criticism that can be found from within the taking up of the religious act itself and in its relationship to its (absolute) object.

A potential difficulty with Scheler's view is that his value theory argues that the absolute being must be personal, to which the religious act is coordinated in such a way that it must await a personal revelation. As a consequence, Scheler goes on to place a priority on the divinity of Christ because Christ, as the absolute being, is then able to offer a personal revelation of the absolute being correlative to the religious act, as opposed to considering Christ merely as a teacher alerting us to truths we might be able to discover by exercising our own cognitive capacities. For this reason, Scheler entertains the question of whether Christianity is the most perfect religion. The difficulty, though, is the other Abrahamic religions relate to the absolute as personal and given in religious acts, but they would not attribute divinity to Christ. In addition, many of the great world religions do not share the view that the experience of the transcendent is the experience of a person. As a result, it is conceivable that the Schutzian focus on religious experience as belonging to a noetic-leaning finite province of meaning might accommodate religious experiences that pertain to a broader range of religious traditions than the more clearly defined correlation between act and absolute that Scheler advances. Part of this problem, as we have suggested, depends on whether one participates from a first-person perspective in a religious experience shaped in part by the religious tradition to which one belongs – in which case, one is likely to find one's own religious tradition the "true one," as opposed to a detached, theoretical consideration of religious experiences from a third-person perspective that might simply catalogue the differences between such experiences and the contrasting traditions to which they belong without normatively evaluating them. Even though the Schelerian perspective, particularly because of his value theory, allows for a normative assessment and comparison of religious experiences, his wariness about arrogating absoluteness to oneself or one's beliefs might ward off any proclivity to demean or suppress religious experiences and traditions, not one's own. This is especially so since such a suppression would contradict the reverence before the personhood of those not of one's religious tradition and so be inconsistent with the reverence accorded to the personhood of God that is definitive of the religious act. In addition and in response to Tuckett's criticisms raised at the outset of this article, it could be said that Scheler's analyses of religious experience and the religious act seem to presuppose a theism directed toward a personal deity such as might be found in the Abrahamic religions (though he goes even further in favoring a Roman Catholic understanding). However, he goes beyond simply clarifying religious experience based on these suppositions, insofar as he supplements his account with metaphysical arguments and a value theory which enable him to undertake a critical, argued engagement with other approaches to religious experience.

In summary, it can be said, though, that Scheler develops a more comprehensive eidetic correlational account of the religious act and its absolute object in contrast to a Schutzian approach that would be predominately noetic in character and focused on religious acts as part of an encompassing finite province of meaning. Scheler is able to distinguish more decisively the acts and objects of religious experience from other acts and objects and so achieves a more thorough religious *epoché* than does Schutz. Scheler also establishes a more critical understanding of how purposes and goals are to be coordinated within religious experience than does the Schutzian analysis of the form of spontaneity in the religious province of meaning, although the Schutzian framework also has resources to resist the pragmatization of the religious province. Moreover, Scheler provides an eidetic, correlational explanation of why religious experience involves a more relaxed tension of consciousness that is called for by the personal character of the absolute and the religious act appropriate to it. Finally, Scheler adds a resource for the critique of religious experience insofar as idolatrous religious experience renders itself susceptible to critique insofar as it elevates into the absolute sphere an object one worships that it is not itself absolute and so incompatible with the sphere into which it has been placed.

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