



Toward a Proper Phenomenology of Religious Experience

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The purpose of this article is to highlight the difference between two “phenomenological” accounts of what it means to discuss “religious experience” in terms of how they understand “altered states of consciousness”. It aims to move away from “the phenomenology of religion” of Ninian Smart which would categorise religious experience as something “special”, promoting an ecumenical theological agenda, toward a “deflated” account of philosophical phenomenology. While not popular among academics, the basic structure of Smart’s position can still be identified in more recent scholarship. By mundanising what it means to talk of “altered states” in the phenomenologically reduced sense—i.e. as a scholarly, analytic concept—this article proposes grounds upon which we should re-evaluate what it means to describe particular experiences as “religious”.

Keywords: Ninian Smart; Religious Experience; Altered States of Consciousness; Alfred Schutz; Phenomenology

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to explicate what it is to use “altered states of consciousness” in the properly phenomenologically reduced sense. By the use of “proper” here I mean the phenomenology of Husserl’s Phenomenological Movement, rather than the (invented) monolithic tradition “the phenomenology of religion”. Speaking of a phenomenologically reduced sense of “altered states of conscious”, then, is more than a simple matter of bracketing out the question of the (non-)existence of the object of experience, it is to analyse the viability of the term as a scholarly, analytic category. How “believers” use the phrase will only be touched upon in a secondary manner. I am concerned here to uncover the potentially unrealised consequences of the term as used by scholars. Brutely put, in the phenomenologically reduced account of philosophical phenomenology, to speak of “altered states” is to say nothing very distinctive or “special” about a particular experience. In explicating this, philosophical phenomenology provides the grounds for calling into question what it is to talk about “religious experience”.

For the purposes of this article I will focus on “religious experience” as it is discussed by Ninian Smart who describes it in terms of “altered” or “higher states of consciousness”. Smart is a “typical” representative of “phenomenology of religion”

primarily because his own phenomenology involves the synthesis of several older inventions. As I will argue, Smart's discussion of religious experience is predicated on the metaphysical commitment to religion as *sui generis*. Moreover, the position that Smart presents is propaedeutic to "post-phenomenological" scholarship. More exactly, the claim to the *sui generis* status of religion is founded upon the Cartesian dualism of Nature (as a mathematical manifold) and Spirit (as an autonomous realm). While this *sui generis* claim, and the associated "essentialism", may be rejected nowadays, scholarship still tends to be predicated on this Dualism. Even naturalistic scholars of religion "resolve" the dualism (by denying the existence of Spirit), rather than question it. But this means framing the debate in the same way: "reductionism" is "essentialism" by another name. That is, what it means to use "altered states of consciousness" is not put into question, rather the definition (in terms of causes) is merely altered. Thus, while I may be taking Smart as my main target, the underlying emphasis here is a greater reflexivity on how *scholars* use their terminology. My concern is an assumption, found readily in Smart, that it is possible to speak of "altered states of consciousness" without value implication—an assumption which carries forth to this day—and is just that—an assumption, and therefore in need of philosophical analysis.¹

With this article, then, I intend to distance from the "phenomenology of religion" and instead associate with philosophical phenomenology and Husserl's Phenomenological Movement in section 2. This process will also highlight how philosophical phenomenology has historically shown little interest in the topic of "religion". I will conclude this paper in section 3 with some comments as to why this is the case and, as such, why philosophical phenomenology commends itself to the current critical trends in the study of "religion". Initially, though, the reason for this lack of interest can be seen in how the understanding of "altered states of consciousness" does not involve a commitment to the "specialness" of religion characteristic of "the phenomenology of religion".

1. Religious Experience as "special"

In this section I will provide a variation of Timothy Fitzgerald's (1997, 2000: 54-71) critique of Ninian Smart's work as a form of ecumenical theology. For Fitzgerald, the main point of this critique stems from Smart's failure to adequately formulate "religion" as a cross-cultural category; the emphasis for which has been Smart's "Dimensions of Religion" (1968, 1969, 1973a, 1973b, 1989, 1996). Smart, of course, would not see himself as promoting a theological agenda (particularly in these works). But the point of Fitzgerald's argument is that the very language of Smart is loaded with "theological" connotations which cannot simply be got rid of by claiming not be theological. In a similar vein, Tim Murphy (2010) has also pointed out how "the phenomenology of religion" is ironically Hegelian by extensive rejection of Hegel, taking up the same terminology and not critically reflecting enough to instantiate a new meaning other than the Hegelian one.

For my purposes here I shift emphasis more specifically onto Smart's understanding of "religious experience", drawing on material to be found in the two volumes of Smart's

¹ Following Alfred Schutz, I take it to be the task of philosophy (particularly philosophy of social science) to uncover and clarify certain foundational concepts which may have been overlooked by other scholars (Schutz 2011: 75).

papers edited by John Shepherd (2009a, 2009b). What I wish to show here is that Smart's ecumenical theology stems from a metaphysical commitment to the distinction between Nature and Spirit and the presumed superiority of the latter. This can be identified through Smart's assumption of the possibility of a "pure experience" accessible through "higher" or "altered states" of consciousness. If nothing else, scholars should also be aware that the terminology they use may assume, without prior reflection, this same Nature/Spirit dichotomy (though not necessarily with the same consequences).

1.1 Experience then interpretation

In "Understanding Religious Experience" (1978/2009a) Smart is concerned with the possibility of having an adequate theoretical understanding without existential understanding. As he defines these terms (2009a: 39), theoretical understanding provides an explanation—Y happened because X—and existential understanding is concerned with what it is like to feel that experience. In turning to the phrase "religious experience", Smart goes on to note that it is useful to distinguish between 'religion and religions, or ... between religion and a religion' (2009a: 40). Such a distinction is maintained because there are certain experiences which can strike "out of the blue" which though religious are not necessarily tied to a specific tradition. This becomes a distinction, then, between *dramatic experiences* and *interpreted experiences*. Of the latter Smart further explains that 'there are experiences which may have religious significance, but which are not necessarily religious in character' (2009a: 41). This involves what Smart calls "superimposition". Smart is primarily concerned with the dramatic kind: 'when writers' and here he means scholars of religion 'speak of religious experience they use it in a special sense, meaning something like a vision or an intuition' (2009a: 42). Contained here is the germ of his entire position: there is a class of experience which may be labelled "religious" (*Religion*) based on the content of that experience. What are commonly called "religions" then superimpose further content onto this base experience.

From this base, Smart divides dramatic experience into two, potentially three, varieties: first, there are mystical experiences which are inner visions or practices that are effectively contemplative; second, there is the thunderous numinous experience as described by Otto; third, there is a possible panenhenic experience involving an identification with nature. What is made clear is that in the case of a "dramatic experience", as opposed to "interpreted experience", there is a "special" occurrence different from normal experience. What it means to say that such experiences are "special" is made slightly clearer in Smart's discussion of the ritual dimension in *Dimensions of the Sacred* (1996). Seemingly building off his typology of religious experience he explicates two types of ritual: focused and harnessing. In the case of harnessing rituals he has the following to say: 'patterns of behaviour are used as part of a process of self-control that seeks attainment of higher states of consciousness' (1996: 72). To these harnessing rituals are later applied the terms "*dhyana*" or "contemplation" which 'essentially involves a purification of consciousness' (1996: 97). Other references in this context include the claims: that a contemplative life is a 'sort of pure consciousness in which recognisable attributes are absent' (1996: 43); that contemplation involves the quelling of the discursive mode (1996: 97); that meditation 'is an activity intended to produce ultimately advanced states of consciousness' (1996: 104); and, *dhyana* 'causes the individual to rise higher in the hierarchy of inner

consciousness in order to achieve a purification' (1996: 123). To these ideas of "higher states" and "pure states" we can also add "altered states" and "transcendent states" (2009b: 41).

In the context of "Understanding Religious Experience", however, Smart comes upon a challenge to what will later be referred to as "higher" or "pure states" in the distinction between 'actual experience and doctrinal interpretation'. The problem here is that 'experiences are always in some degree interpreted: they as it were contain the interpretation within them. No perception can be quite neutral' (2009a: 43). That is, how can we be sure that a dramatic experience is not always an interpreted experience? The issue, however, is summarily brushed aside: 'To this I would reply that there are differing degrees of interpretation, and the distinction being made is heuristically useful in providing a directive to be as phenomenological as possible about the experiences being reported' (2009a: 430). The remainder of the article consequently becomes concerned with the issue of existential understanding, dealing with statements regarding the ineffability of mystical experience and the transcendence of numinous ones. While problematic also, I want here to focus on what Smart means by "being phenomenological as possible", as implicit in the current account is the presumed possibility of a "pure" description devoid of doctrinal interpretation.

In particular, what needs to be highlighted is that Smart's position is Kantian-cum-Hegelian. Specifically, what I mean by this is that Smart is committed to a metaphysical distinction between the "natural" and "supernatural" as two distinct, non-overlapping, realms of reality. This would be the Kantian aspect of his thinking and can also be found in the more recent *phenomenology-of-religion* of James Cox's (2010: 16) postulated non-falsifiable alternate realities: 'When communities speak about their alternate realities, they refer to something like a spirit, a god, a power, or force that, although clearly occurring in this world and within consciousness, denotes something quite identifiably different from ordinary experience and consciousness'. Meanwhile, the Hegelian aspect of Smart's thinking comes from the distinction between a "pure" dramatic experience and "doctrinal" interpreted experience. This relates to Tim Murphy's (2010) criticisms of "the phenomenology of religion"; though presenting a monolithic tradition, what Murphy is really targeting is *phenomenological history-of-religion* (see Tuckett 2016).² Smart draws from this tradition of phenomenology through a Hegelian commitment to an "essence" in the form of *Religion* which "manifests" itself as various *religions*. Implicit in such an account, as highlighted by Murphy in the case of others, is a form of evaluative comparison in which the various religions can be judged according to how much of this "essence" they have then manifested.

Smart displays his connection to phenomenological history-of-religion most clearly in his discussions of religious experience. As already noted, Smart's typology of religious experience includes the numinous as one of its constitutive parts. And, as Otto (a member of this tradition) describes the numinous experience: 'It is through this positive feeling-content that the concepts of the "transcendent" and "supernatural" become forthwith designations for a unique "wholly other" reality and quality, something of whose special character we can *feel*, without being able to give it clear conceptual

² And erroneously attributing certain names to that tradition.

expression' (1923: 30)—i.e. an “essence” (the transcendent”) which as “wholly other” is only partly manifested in conceptual expression. Note here, of course, the claim that the numinous may never be fully described, though in fact Smart notes Otto does by use of analogies (Smart 2009a: 45). However, although highlighting the “special character” of such experience, Otto does not necessarily indicate here the superiority of such an experience which is the distinctive marker of phenomenological history-of-religion. This point is more forcefully expressed by Mircea Eliade (1987: 17) and his concept of hierophanies: ‘When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse’. In conferring the status of the “real” (“essence”) onto religious experience and “unreal” (“manifestation”) onto ordinary experience, Eliade makes quite clear the superiority of the former over the latter. A point which also finds expression in Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s (1963: x) distinction between faith (“essence”) and cumulative tradition (“manifestation”): ‘Faith in this sense includes religious experience, the sense of the numinous, religious emotions of love and awe, hope and fear, the disposition to worship, and the commitment of the will to service of the higher reality and value’. Although Smart does not make any explicit claims to this effect—in places he tries to distance himself from Eliade (Smart 1978)—he nonetheless adopts the same position by his distinction between “pure” (real, superior, higher, essence) dramatic experience and “doctrinal” (unreal, inferior, lower, manifestation) interpreted experience.

In the case of all these “phenomenologies of religion” there is a dichotomous relationship between the ordinary world and the *Religious world*, and that access into the latter requires some form of altered or higher states of consciousness. The problem of such a dualism is made rather apparent in Smart’s own attempts to conceptualise it, here he flounders over the “phenomenological” aim of getting at the “pure” or “actual” experience and those experiences being confounded by “doctrinal interpretation”. This is played out in another of his essays, “Interpretation and Mystical Experience” (1965/2009a: 56) where he overtly states ‘that some distinction must be made between experience and interpretation’. This is so, he explains, because ‘it is recognised that a mystic of one religion and some mystic of another faith can have what is substantially a similar experience’ (2009a: 56). Difference occurs when interpretations are applied to experiences of the same type.

In order to understand this point Smart discusses the notion of “ramifications” (i.e. superimposition). By ramification Smart means a part of the description of the experience that is not proved by the experience itself. Interpretation “ramifies” experience by adding propositions to that experience. To understand this he provides two examples: first, from Henry Suso: ‘In this merging of itself in God the spirit passes away’ (2009a: 57); second, from an unidentified author: ‘When the spirit by the loss of its self-consciousness has in very truth established its abode in this glorious and dazzling obscurity’ (2009a: 57). In the case of Suso there is a high degree of ramifications involved, the experience is described by a recourse to a notion of God which is “presupposed” in the description. Specifically, this is to say ramifications involve propositions whose truth is not dependent upon the experience in question (2009a: 58). By contrast, the other experience has less ramifications because it has less presupposed notions in the description. Importantly, Smart indicates that “spirit” has a different sense in each case.

Thus, when describing mystical experiences Smart warns that we need to be on the lookout for ramifications. Further to this we must be aware of where these ramifications have come from:

There is the description given by the man himself, in terms of his own tradition. There is the description which others of his own tradition may give. Also, men of another tradition may describe his experience in terms of *their* tradition or standpoint ... We crucially, then, should distinguish between a mystic's interpretation of his own experience and the interpretation which may be placed upon it from a different point of view. (2009a: 58)

These are formally divided into *auto*-interpretation and *hetero*-interpretation. The difference between the two, we are told, will depend on the degree of ramifications involved and the presupposed truths of those ramifications. For instance:

the Christian evaluation of the Buddha's Enlightenment-experience posited above uses the concept of *God* in the Christian sense. The Buddhist description on the other hand does not. Thus the Christian hetero-interpretation presupposes such propositions as that God created the world, God was in Christ, etc., and these propositions are not accepted in the Buddhist auto-interpretation. (2009a: 58-59)

Smart then distinguishes between interpretations which involve low degrees of ramifications and those with high degrees of ramifications. As such, a high hetero-interpretation of a particular experience (*e*) will entail the falsity of that experience's high auto-interpretation. As in the case above, the Christian makes appeal to various propositions, not to be found in the experience itself, which contradict the Buddhist's own propositions. Conversely, Smart suggests that if we seek both low hetero-interpretations and low auto-interpretations then 'an agreed phenomenological account of (*e*) will be arrived at, and this will facilitate the attempt to distinguish experience from interpretation' (2009a: 59). On this basis he goes on to reject Zaehner's distinction between monistic and theistic mystical experience on the grounds that the distinction is dependent on a high hetero-interpretation—Zaehner incorporates several Christian doctrines that are not part of the experiences themselves.

Smart concludes by providing three theses:

- (1) Phenomenologically, mysticism is everywhere the same.
- (2) Different flavours, however, accrue to the experience of mystics because of their ways of life and modes of auto-interpretation.
- (3) The truth of interpretation depends in large measure on factors extrinsic to the mystical experience itself. (2009a: 65)

Laid out in such a fashion Smart makes clear his commitment to the notion of a "pure" experience (essence) which is then "flavoured" by doctrinal content (manifestation) through the subsequent process of interpretation. In principle though, it should be possible to supply a description of this pure experience in a way that does not add ramifications. This, seemingly, is the purpose of "phenomenology" as Smart deploys it here: *to offer as low an hetero-interpretation as possible to supply a pure description of the mystical experience*—i.e. a phenomenologically reduced account of "altered states of consciousness".

The obvious question is what does a low hetero-interpretation look like? The answer to this is found in Smart's commitment to typological phenomenology's notion of "neutrality". Specifically, this is borne out in instances like *Beyond Ideology* (1981: 47) where he claims that 'Brede Kristensen said that the believer is always right'. Following this misquotation of Kristensen,³ one would presume that this phenomenologically reduced description is one that all believers could assent to as correct. Based on his explication, a low auto-interpretation and a low hetero-interpretation have a better chance of not contradicting one another than their high counterparts. This can also be found in the more recent case of Cox (2010: 57-58): 'the student of religion can follow Kristensen's ideal of endeavouring to make descriptions consistent with the perspective of believers and then devise ways to test the descriptions among believing communities'. It is this commitment to the "neutrality" of typological phenomenology which means that Smart's "phenomenology" is ostensibly not the phenomenological history-of-religion of Otto and Eliade, but rather *phenomenology-of-religion*. Although speaking of "the phenomenology of religion", Penner's definition summarises this tradition well:

1. Religion is a sui generis reality, and, therefore, the study of religion requires its own unique methodology. But, the essence of religion never manifests itself in a naked and unaccommodated form. 2. Because of the unique nature of religion all "reductions" must be avoided. 3. The ultimate aim of a phenomenology of religion is the formulation of the essence of religion. 4. Phenomenology of religion is free from value judgements; it is an objective account of religion. It can teach us to recognise what is genuine and what is spurious in religion. 5. By using Husserl's notion of the "epoche," phenomenologists are able to suspend the question of the truth of religion. 6. Guided by the principle of "epoche" the phenomenologist of religion does not use the term "revelation" but substitutes the concept of "hierophany" in its place. (Penner 1987: 43)

1-3 and 6 can be seen to come from phenomenological history-of-religion and 4-5 from typological phenomenology. However, it is worth noting that how the "epoche" is understood in this context actually differs from its understanding in philosophical phenomenology. Aside from the stalled attempts by van der leeuw (see Tuckett 2015b), the actual connection to Husserl's understanding of the "epoche" (and the connection to wider philosophical phenomenology) were stymied by Juoco Bleeker who set in motion the transition of this typological phenomenology into phenomenology-of-religion. Meanwhile, through Eliade, phenomenological history-of-religion would incorporate an ostensive rejection of philosophical phenomenology. As a result, the phenomenology-of-religion has, in the eyes of Capps (1995: 109), had little association and little in common with the philosophical movement. More significant for phenomenology-of-religion has been the task of reconciling the methodological commitment of typological phenomenology with the metaphysical commitment of phenomenological history-of-religion.

1.2 Smart's metaphysical commitments

That the metaphysical commitment and methodological commitment cannot be, or at least are not, reconciled in the case of Smart can be seen if we press the original

³ Kristensen actually claimed that 'the believers were completely right' (1960: 14). The plural and past tense actually leads to different connotations. Nevertheless, later "phenomenologists" such as Cox (2010: 70) have taken up the more individualistic version: 'believers are always right'.

question: what does a low hetero-/auto-interpretation of “mystical experience” look like? There are three potential answers to this: first, in his opening comments in “Interpretation and Mystical Experience” he suggests mystical experience to be ‘an interior or introvertive quest, culminating in certain interior experiences which are not described in terms of sense-experience or of mental images, etc.’ (2009a: 53); second, in *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (1969: 28) he defines “religious experience”—of which mystical experience is one of two types—as: ‘A religious experience involves some kind of “perception” of the *invisible* world, or involves a perception that some visible person or thing is a manifestation of the invisible world’ (1969: 28); third, in *Dimensions of the Sacred* (1996: 72) he describes as mystical experience as: ‘patterns of behaviour are used as part of a process of self-control that seeks attainment of higher states of consciousness’.

If we begin by focusing on the use of “higher state of consciousness” in *Dimensions of the Sacred* as a low hetero-interpretation, this could be read into the two main examples from “Interpretation and Mystical Experience”: Henry Suso: ‘In this merging of itself in God the spirit passes away’ (2009a: 57); and the unidentified author: ‘When the spirit by the loss of its self-consciousness has in very truth established its abode in this glorious and dazzling obscurity’ (2009a: 57). As mentioned, Smart perceives the former to be a high auto-interpretation and the latter a low one. But the question that must be now raised of this is whether Suso could reduce his high auto-interpretation to a low variant equivocal to Smart’s without losing the sense of his own position? I suspect not, because to adopt Smart’s low hetero-interpretation would be to accept the claim that mysticism is everywhere the same, including non-Christian mysticism. As such the low hetero-interpretation of the “phenomenologist” would in fact fail to be “neutral” to Suso.

Smart, of course, could not raise such an issue himself because to do so would undermine the implicit ecumenical theological agenda of his account; an agenda which is rendered more explicit in “The Analogy of Meaning and the Task of Comparative Philosophy” (1988/2009b: 49): ‘the central issue of a transcendent-oriented world view is whether we are justified in claiming at all that some experiences can give insight into what lies beyond’. His considerations in this essay are:

mere hints about ways in which a religious philosophy may be excogitated combining both Indian and western resources. In an important sense this type of speculation is not comparative philosophy but cross-cultural [transcendent-oriented] world-view construction. Unless of course that is what comparative philosophy really is. (2009b: 49)

In Smart’s terminology “comparative philosophy” would become “phenomenology” and the task of cross-cultural comparison is underwrit with the attempt to develop a transcendent-oriented world-view. And in a conclusion reminiscent of Eliade’s opening to *The Quest* (1984: 3), Smart goes on to say:

In the global context we can practice a new kind of *pramānavidyā* [science of the sources of knowledge], that is, examining the consequences of alternative world views and the way they regard each other. It may prove irresistible beyond this stage to indulge in more than analytical global *darśanavidyā*: in a word, *sarvadarśanavidyā*. There may be the call to begin to fashion world views that arise from the situation of today and the suggestive resources from the various cultures now at our disposal. And now who would we be? No longer adherents of one tradition, but human

intellectuals in a pregnant sense: belonging to the new para-tribe, Humanity. (2009b: 50)

With Smart's agenda rendered explicit (in his own words) we can turn back to his consideration of mysticism and, turning Smart against himself, recognise that both "pure description" and "higher states" are ramifications. That is, the appeal to the possibility of pure description as something not tainted by "doctrine" is itself a doctrinal commitment. A "pure experience" is a ramification belonging to "Religion" (as the name for this transcendent-oriented world-view). In fact, we can literally catch him in the act of this ramifying. Going back to the quotation by the unidentified author above, it turns out that the author is in fact Suso and the quote is from an earlier passage in the same source. In full it actually reads as follows:

When the spirit by the loss of its self-consciousness has in very truth established its abode in this glorious and dazzling obscurity, it is set free from every obstacle to union and from all its individual properties, as St. Bernard says; and this takes place less or more according as the spirit remains in the body or goes out of it when it passes away out of itself into God. (Suso 2015)

Thus, despite Smart's imposition, the "spirit" of both experiences is in fact identical. What is telling about this rather blatant abstraction is that Smart clearly struggled to find a description of a mystical experience that was without "ramification" that would justify his own ramification of the possibility of a "pure experience".

And although scholars today may avoid talk of "pure experiences" and the associated terminology of "essences", this does not prevent another essentialising of a different sort. For instance, Thomas Metzinger's (2009: 97-98) observations into out-of-body experiences may be seen to find the neurological or biological essence behind a variety of experiences (manifestations). To say that there is no metaphysical commitment behind these studies is to grossly ignore how such analyses regularly deny the interpretations of the experiencer themselves. One of Metzinger's out-of-body examples describes the experience in terms of a "soul" (quoted in Metzinger 2009: 91), yet the entire premise of Metzinger's argument is that there is not such thing as the soul.⁴ Or—rather ironically—there is Michael Winkelman (2010) who has recently proposed to justify Eliade's claims that shamanism is a cross-cultural phenomenon (and basis of religions) using a biogenetic framework. Indeed, Winkelman claims to be validating that there is 'a cross-culturally valid pattern of religious practices [essence] corresponding to the subjective concepts [manifestation] of the shaman' (2010: 163-164). But this is to make a claim no different from Smart's that mysticism is everywhere the same. Where there is any difference is in the source (essence) of this "pure experience". The Cartesian Dualism is presumed still, but now supremacy has been changed: Nature (in the form of neurophysiological characteristics) is superior to (non-existent) Spirit.

As it happens, Smart argues himself into the impossibility of speaking about mystical experience without ramification in the following passage:

⁴ I should add that Metzinger's "phenomenology" bears little to no resemblance to the phenomenology being advocated here. In his usage, rather than an exploration of the structure of consciousness, "phenomenology" refers to a description of the feeling of an experience.

It is to be noted that ramifications may enter into the descriptions either because of the intentional nature of the experience or through reflection upon it. Thus a person brought up in a Christian environment and strenuously practising the Christian life may have a contemplative experience which see as a union with God. The whole spirit of his interior quest will affect the way he sees his experience; or, put it another way, the whole spirit of his quest will enter into the experience. On the other hand, a person might only come to see the experience in this way after the event, as it were: upon reflection he interprets his experience in theological categories. (2009a: 57)

What *should* be taken from this is the following: if there is a “pure experience”, getting at it is impossible: either the experience is pre-interpreted by the person who tries to induce such an experience; or, if it is not induced, the person can only interpret the experience after the fact by their already available “ramifications”. This would be the properly Kantian position on the matter. The logical conclusion in this case can only be that experiences are necessarily interpreted and the very idea of a “pure experience” is itself an empty one.

This, in fact, is the position of Kristensen (1960: 18): ‘Following [the phenomenological] approach, we shall become acquainted with more and more different expressions of the holy, but we shall never arrive at the definition of the holy’. For Kristensen there is no such thing as an experience which is not interpreted and so a metaphysical commitment is subordinated to the methodological commitment.⁵ Smart shies away from this conclusion because his methodological commitment to the distinction between “experience” and “interpretation” is predicated on the deeper metaphysical commitment to a distinction between Nature and Spirit with the assumed superiority of the latter. We can see this twisting of Kant in the following passage:

if we maintain the Kantian distinction between the noumenal reality and the phenomenal world presented by it, how does this distinction relate to the parallel but quite different distinction between the nondual and duality-drenched realms of experience and truth? There is the strange but persuasive, thought that there is something noumenal behind the nondual experience, which suggests a tripartite God: the noumenal X, the nondual Brahman, the duality-drenched Creator. (2009b: 49)

By a “phenomenological” “de-ramification” Smart commits to the idea that all these different systems are really just manifestations (interpretations) of some transcendent reality (experience).

The superiority of this transcendent reality is emphasised in his treatment of Maoism. Following his own “phenomenological dimensional” approach, Smart (2009b: 84-87) observes that Maoism fits all the dimensions he prescribes as the formal characteristics of “religion”. Yet ultimately Maoism is an “ideology” rather than “religion” and the justification, though never stated as such, rests upon on a brand of definition—the existential—which Smart denied as useful for defining “religion” (2009b: 84). On the one hand he effectively admits that Mao qualifies for a content-style definition on the grounds that he ‘is looking for his own kind of *spiritual* transformation of the Middle Kingdom’ (emphasis added, 2009b: 87). But in doing so ‘Maoism can never unlock the enigmas of death and human suffering, some of which cannot get away, even in an approach to an earthly paradise’ (2009b: 88). Similarly with Marxism: ‘it is unrealistic to treat Marxism as a religion: though it possesses doctrines, symbols, a moral code,

⁵ That Kristensen continued to maintain certain metaphysical commitments nonetheless meant that in certain places he too tripped over his own position.

and even sometimes rituals, it denies the possibility of an experience of the invisible world' (1969: 22). A "this-worldly" metaphysics (2009b: 95) cannot provide the resolution for such enigmas; for this we would need a "proper" religion such as Christianity, presumably because it can better handle such enigmas through an appeal to a transcendent (spiritual) reality (see Fitzgerald 2000: 58-59).

Thus, Smart's proper "low hetero interpretation" of "religious experience"—of which mystical experience is one of two types—is: 'A religious experience involves some kind of "perception" of the *invisible* world, or involves a perception that some visible person or thing is a manifestation of the invisible world' (1969: 28). This "perception" is then achieved through "altered" and "higher states of consciousness". To speak of altered states of consciousness in this sense—as a phenomenologically reduced sense—is to demonstrate a commitment to a particular form of metaphysics. But this is clearly the metaphysics of an ecumenical theology because as Smart's attempts above indicate, not all traditions auto-interpret themselves as having a similar metaphysics. Thus, he engages in the cognitive colonialism of "de-ramification" to fit their metaphysics into his own.⁶

2. The proper phenomenological approach

Does this mean we, as scholars, should abandon "altered" and "higher" states entirely as formal analytic terms for categories of describing experiences? Of the latter I will say yes, of the former no. However, although we can use "altered states of consciousness" in a phenomenologically reduced sense when referring to "religious experience" there is very little benefit in doing so. That is, within the context of philosophical phenomenology, speaking about "altered states of consciousness" makes sense and does not indicate an ecumenical theological project as in Smart's phenomenology. However, the reason it does this is because "altered states" operates in a *deflated* sense, by which I mean that to refer to an experience as involving an "altered state" is to say nothing distinctive about that experience as that experience. In the proper phenomenological sense, there is no necessary or specific connection between "altered states" and "religious experiences". In point of fact, by drawing on the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz and his notion of provinces of meaning, "altered states" in the phenomenologically reduced sense are in fact positively mundane, regular occurrences.

2.1 *The intentionality of consciousness*

In order to understand how it is that philosophical phenomenology can speak of altered states of consciousness in a deflationary sense, we need to first understand the core principle of Husserl's Phenomenological Movement—consciousness is *intentional*. As Husserl explains in *Crisis of European Science* (1936/1970: 109):

[consciousness] is in constant motion; we are conscious of the world always in terms of some object-content or other, in the alteration of the different ways of being conscious (intuitive, nonintuitive, determined, undetermined, etc.) and also in the

⁶ The naturalistic scholars above are no different in this regard. In the case of naturalism this cognitive colonialism can be seen especially in the way such scholars treat "non-ordinary beings" (See Tuckett 2015a).

alteration of affection and action, in such a way that there is always a total sphere of affection and such that the affecting objects are now thematic, now unthematic.

To speak of the intentionality of consciousness is to suggest that in order for consciousness to be consciousness it must be consciousness-of. I am conscious-of this particular (thematic) object to which other (unthematic) objects are oriented in their relation to it.

In Sartre's (2003: 18) understanding this is to say that consciousness is always positional, it always sits in relation to some object. Consciousness is not only conscious-of, it is conscious-of something which it is *not*. Of course, more is meant by this than simply saying that I am at co-ordinates XY and the object of which I am conscious of is at MN. Positionality entails that consciousness takes up a stance towards the objects it is conscious-of. Lester Embree (2001: 7) has introduced the helpful term "encountering" in this regard: objects never and nowhere just sit there, they are encountered—they are engaged with in some way. Take the example of the chair upon which you sit to read this article. The chair is not simply there, it is related to you in terms of what Heidegger (2010: 72-73) referred to its "being-useful-for". When you perceive (i.e. direct consciousness toward) the chair, you perceive it in terms of its ready-to-handness, its usefulness as a tool for your current activities (reading this article). To perceive the chair as a collection of wood and cushions you must take a "step back" to perceive the chair in its present-to-handness.

The full significance of this Intentional Theory of Mind is the realisation of an "I am"/"I am not" dualism which is *prior* to the Cartesian Nature/Spirit dualism. Indeed, rather than formulating a response to this dualism in which one of the pair is taken as primary, from which interpretation then proceeds (as Smart's phenomenology does), philosophical phenomenology undercuts it entirely. That is, both "Nature" and "Spirit" are interpretations (or ramifications on Smart's terminology). Or, in the framework of Sartre, to categorise something as Nature or Spirit is take up a certain positionality toward that thing.

The positionality of consciousness entails that by definition experiences are interpreted. In this first very basic point we can see a stark difference between the Movement and "the phenomenology of religion". The notion of a "pure experience"—i.e. an experience that is not interpreted—is something that makes no sense. It would require an experience in which consciousness does not take a position. To remove positionality from the discussion requires an "abstraction" which itself is another form of interpretation; an abstraction of the sort which Smart perpetrates above.

2.2 *The horizons of consciousness*

So, how do "altered states" fit into this? Simply put, although "conscious" remains persistent throughout, its necessary link to an "-of" indicates that a change of this "-of" will alter "conscious". Each new thematic object changes consciousness. However, it is possible to refine this understanding further. In order to do this we need to draw on the following comment by Husserl: 'The world is pregiven to us, the waking, always somehow practically interested subjects, not occasionally but always and necessarily as the universal field of all actual and possible praxis, as horizon' (1970: 142). The two key terms in this passage are "waking" and "horizon". I will deal with the latter first

because it is here that “alteration” takes place. But more accurately I also need to introduce the notion of “ulteration” in order to properly understand what is meant by “horizon”.

For Husserl consciousness is kinaesthetic, consciousness is never static; even if standing still, the world about us is in constant flux so that new objects are constantly brought before consciousness—each one demanding a new conscious-of. And conversely, even if we allow ourselves the ability to move but focus on a single object we undergo various new conscious-of's. However, we find that in our everyday attitude 'our gaze passes through the appearances toward what continuously appears through to the continuous unification: the object, with the ontic validity of the mode “itself present”' (1970: 105). Take a cube for example. When I look at a cube I have an awareness of more than just the sides I currently see. This is so because there are phases of “seeing” which build up to complete the thing cube: ‘In the continuous alteration of seeing, the side just seen ceases being actually still seen, it is “retained” and “taken” together with those retained from before and thus I “get to know” the thing’ (1970: 158). Consciousness is constantly undergoing these phases of seeing and so is under constant alteration, each new phase entails a new conscious-of. But to know this involves stepping into the reflective attitude, different to the natural attitude of simply encountering the thing. In this natural attitude I am not aware of a series of successive phases, but the thing present through all these phases. Heidegger perhaps gives a more intuitive account of this through his example of tools. He explains, that the hammer, for example, is never brought to present-at-handness—i.e. perceived as a configuration of metal and wood—because we are too caught up in the use of the hammer.

For Husserl the reason we don't pay attention to the transition from one conscious-of to the next is due to the notion of *horizon*: within each perception is contained an anticipation of what will be in the next perception. An example of this would be, to borrow from Sartre (2003: 40-43), meeting Pierre at the café. Imagine an experiential sequence in which Pierre performs a number of discrete actions each one requiring an individual conscious-of. If I am with Pierre in a café each of these actions has a horizon into which other actions may or may not fall. So, Pierre may perform the following actions: order himself a latte but doesn't get me anything, stares at pretty girls rather than listen to me, takes a long time to drink his latte to avoid work, etc. Each action involves a new conscious-of and thus involves an alteration of my consciousness, but as each action occurs within the horizon of “Pierre” they do not as such “stand out”. We may suggest that so long as the successive actions occur within the horizon of the previous, the experiential series I am presented with is a single thing: meeting-Pierre-at-the-café.

Although my consciousness undergoes many alterations in this series, because the series does not break it would not necessarily be appropriate to speak of “altering consciousness”. To this end I recommend the term “ulter”.⁷ We may write this experiential series in the following manner:

Conscious-of *a* (then) conscious-of *b* (then) conscious-of *c*.

⁷ To my knowledge, no one in philosophical phenomenology speaks of the changes in consciousness in terms of “alter” or “ulter”.

A, *b*, and *c* are all actions of Pierre. Each “then” is placed in brackets because I am not really concerned about the shift from one conscious-of to another because *b* is within the horizon of *a* and *c* in the horizon of *b*. Uttering consciousness therefore refers to those alterations that occur within an individual series.

If, however, we choose to speak instead of altering consciousness we refer to a break in the experiential series. More specifically, the new object of consciousness is out of the *horizon* of the previous object. Say, Pierre does something unexpected such as put his feet up on the table; this example allows us to qualify a difference between inner and outer horizon. By the *inner horizon* is meant all those possibilities within the thematic object of consciousness—everything that this object can do. The *outer horizon* refers to the unthematic objects that surround the thematic object. Sartre calls the totality of these unthematic objects the “ground”: ‘the necessary condition for the appearance of the principal figure, which is here the person of Pierre’ (2003: 41). The ground determines the contextual constraints of our thematic object. In this example of Pierre, it may be that it is within his inner horizon to put his feet on the table, but the café as the ground presents an outer horizon which constrains such actions.

In our experiential sequence above we may insert *n* as this break so that:

Conscious-of *a* then conscious-of *n*.

This new “then” is not placed in brackets because *n* is out of the horizon of *a*; I am aware of the shift from one conscious-of to another. It is important to bear in mind on this point that the ascription of alter *only* applies with this move from *a* to *n*. If we extend this particular experiential series to include *m* we would then revert back to altered consciousness if *m* is within *n*’s horizon. But the shift from *m* to *b* would require another altered consciousness. Thus the experiential series in full would be:

Conscious-of *a* then conscious-of *n* (then) conscious-of *m* then
conscious-of *b* (then) conscious-of *c*.

What needs to be taken from this so far is that whether consciousness goes through alterations or alterations is dependent upon the constitution of the objects of which we are conscious-of and their associated horizons. Alterations and alterations refer more specifically to the transition from one conscious-of to another.

2.3 Provinces of meaning

Although we can now talk of altering and uttering consciousness, the question that hangs over this is what does it mean to say that consciousness has a “state”? In order to answer this we need to turn back to Husserl’s comments about the *wakefulness* of consciousness by drawing on the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz.

It is Husserl’s suggestion that when in the natural attitude—the day-to-day processes of simply living in the world—consciousness is “wide awake”. This idea is further developed by Schutz who prefers to speak of the tension of consciousness. In his essay “On Multiple Realities” (1945/1962), Schutz introduces the notion of *finite*

provinces of meaning to explain this. A province involves a particular “cognitive style” which entails:

a specific tension of consciousness in which the person has a specific attentional focus or interest; this is brought about by a specific *epoché* which brackets out other interests; a prevalent form of spontaneity – specific mode of acting based on this tension; a specific form of self-experience; a specific form of sociality; and a specific time perspective. (1962: 232)

Everything that is “discovered” by this particular cognitive style then forms a stock of knowledge that constitutes that province of meaning. The province thus contains not only a particular way of thinking, but also all that has been discovered by that way of thinking. Of interest here is the use of the *epoché* which is not necessarily used in the technical sense of Husserl—or for that matter its use by “the phenomenology of religion”.⁸ For Schutz, we can only successfully utilise a cognitive style one at a time, and this *epoché* involves placing other cognitive styles “out of play” so that they do not get in the way. Each *epoché*, therefore, involves the changing of the tension of consciousness to adopt a particular cognitive style (and reject others).

What I suggest is that what Schutz calls a cognitive style we may refer to as the state of consciousness. If we take the idea of a cognitive style to be a state of consciousness the question that presents itself is how we shift from one cognitive style to another. Speaking of the natural attitude as the primary cognitive style, Schutz suggests that we do not readily abandon it unless we experience ‘a specific *shock* which compels us to break through the limits of this “finite” province of meaning and to shift the accent of reality to another one’ (1962: 231). At this point we could suggest that a religious experience is such a “shock” bringing about an “altered state of consciousness”. And while this is perfectly legitimate, it does not thereby entail that such an experience is “special” *per se*. Schutz goes on to inform us that ‘experiences of shock befall me frequently amidst my daily life... there are as many innumerable kinds of different shock experiences as there are different finite provinces of meaning’ (1962: 231). And within “On Multiple Realities” alone Schutz discusses such provinces as Daydreaming, Phantasy, Work, and Science all of which then require this “shock” in order to be entered into. Indeed, Science and Religion are compared in this very regard: ‘religious experiences in all their varieties – for instance, Kierkegaard’s experience of the “instant” as the leap into the religious sphere – are examples of such a shock, as well as the decision of the scientist to replace all passionate participation in the affairs of “this world” by a disinterested contemplative attitude’ (1962: 231).

Now, Schutz does not suggest if there is a difference between “leap” and “shock”, but I would infer there is. Specifically, “leaps” refer to those instances where the person enters a province by their own volition whereas “shocks” occur when they are forced into a province. This differs from Berger and Luckmann’s (1966: 39) interpretation of provinces of meaning where they claim that: ‘While there are, of course, shifts in attention *within* everyday life, the shift to a finite province of meaning is of a much more radical kind’. In their conception, “everyday life” is surrounded by provinces of meaning which implies these leaps are “unnatural” or disturbing. Sebald (2011) has suggested something similar in claiming that moving through provinces is never easy. I regard it as more accurate to say that everyday life is constituted by the totality of various

⁸ Nor is Husserl’s use the same as “the phenomenology of religion’s”.

provinces of meaning all arranged around the primary province of the natural attitude as the “lodestone”. Thus, while the movement from province to province involves “leaps” and “shocks”, these are by no means disturbing as implied by Berger and Luckmann. In either case, each “leap” or “shock” entails an altered state of consciousness as it adopts a new cognitive style for engaging with its thematic objects. All conscious-of within a province of meaning, by contrast, involves altered states of consciousness.

From the perspective of philosophical phenomenology to deploy the phrase “altered states of consciousness” in the phenomenologically reduced sense means just this: *“altered states of consciousness” refer to those transitions from one province of meaning to another. Or: how I am engaging with an object now differs from how I was engaging with objects previously.* But this renders the phrase somewhat mundane.

DRAGONS

This seemingly random insertion has likely altered your consciousness, the word “dragons” is not something one would expect to be in the horizon of an article discussing the different phenomenologies’ interpretation of “religious experience”. In point of fact, the size of the font would likely have drawn the attention long before you had actually reached this part simply because the size is outside the horizon of a normally presented journal article. And as mundane and facetious as this may seem, in the phenomenologically reduced sense of philosophical phenomenology this counts as an altered state of consciousness. To emphasise, to say that religious experience involves an “altered state of consciousness” is to say nothing distinctive about that experience whatsoever.

3. What does “religious experience” mean?

There is, therefore, nothing special about altered or altered states of consciousness because the consciousness that goes through these alterations and alterations is the same throughout. What changes is not consciousness itself, but its “state”—“wakefulness” in the terminology of Husserl or “positionality” in the terminology of Sartre. All that “altered” indicates in the phenomenologically reduced sense is that the object which consciousness is now conscious-of requires a style of engagement different to the one previously being utilised. To ask questions of whether consciousness does indeed change in these situations is to fall down the Cartesian path of Nature vs Spirit that philosophical phenomenology steadfastly tried to avoid—that is, it is to start making certain metaphysical commitments. This raises two questions about “religious experience” more generally, however:

First, what are we to say when the phrase “higher state” or “altered state” is used by the everyday “believer” to describe a particular experience? Have we now denied their accounts on the basis of this phenomenologically reduced understanding of “altered states”? Indeed, many of the contributors to this journal will no doubt detail numerous people using this very language. Certainly the quick impression could be that philosophical phenomenology would declare the falsity of such positions—marking a very stark contrast from the proclaimed “neutrality” of “the phenomenology of religion” indeed.

This is not necessarily the case, however. From the perspective of philosophical phenomenology when people use such language this says less about the thing experienced and more about the experiencer. More specifically, in using such language as “higher state” and “altered state” the speaker is doing two things: First, by the very fact of talking about a particular experience they are indicating that there is something worth mentioning—it *stands out* from the norm. However, we must be clear that the experience does not stand out because it involves a “higher state” and “altered state” *per se*. That is, all sorts of experiences stand out and therefore are worth mentioning. Rather, in certain cases, in order to convey to an Other why the experience stands out, the experiencer resorts to the language of “higher state” and “altered state”. It is the fact that it stands out from the norm that makes it “dramatic”, to use Smart’s term. Take, for example two people who have identical visions of the god Lugus commanding them to lead the people to the Promised Land. The first person—a Lugite—will find this experience worth mentioning and may describe it as a “higher state of consciousness”: “I was able to see Lugus by entering a higher state”. The second person—a non-Lugite—however, may still mention this experience as it stands out, but offer a different perspective: “I got so drunk last night I thought saw Lugus” or “I think I may have had some sort of epileptic fit”. For both, the experience is dramatic. From the perspective of philosophical phenomenology though, which account is the “true” one isn’t at stake, nor are the metaphysical presuppositions behind either statement particularly important. Rather, the importance lies in how the experience is interpreted in the sense of the *meaning* it has for the experiencer.⁹ This means that, second, by using the language of “altered” or “higher states”, the experiencer is ascribing a particular *value* to that meaning. Specifically, it is an experience whose meaning is to be *valued*. This, in fact, would also lead to a far better use of Smart’s notion of “ramifications”: a “ramified” experience is one which is *valued* over others.

In this regard, the approach of philosophical phenomenology has some affinity with Ann Taves in that the focus is on ‘the processes whereby people sometimes ascribe the special characteristics to things that we (as scholars) associate with terms such as “religious,” “magical,” “mystical,” “spiritual”’ (Taves 2009: 8). This would give some more sense to Schutz’s own scant references to “religious experience” in his discussions of provinces of meaning. Except when it is merely listed alongside that of daydreaming, work, etc., the only other reference to “religious experience” is in another essay “Symbol, Reality, and Society” (1955/1962). Here Schutz’s concern is to discuss whether finite provinces of meaning can be socialised. That is, can they be intersubjectively shared? Of provinces such as daydreams, Schutz says they cannot, but in the case of religious experiences there is ‘on the one hand, the lonely vision of the mystic or of the prophet and, on the other hand, the community service – there are lonely prayers and prayers offered by the congregation’ (1962: 342). As such it can be shared, and by extension it would seem that “religion” refers to a type of province of meaning. Insofar as the phrase “religious experience” does occur in Schutz’s work it is clear that it means nothing “special” as Smart would have. Rather, in its phenomenologically reduced sense: *religious experience means that the person is encountering objects utilising a religious cognitive style*. And the use of such phrases

⁹ Knowing the metaphysical presuppositions of the person only helps us work out how this meaning was ascribed to the experience.

as “higher” or “altered state” are an indicator of this. But such encountering is no different than encountering another object utilising a political cognitive style.

Following Taves further this also means that, described so, to speak of “religious experience” means only to ‘focus on things deemed religious’ (2009: 9). In this manner we could just as easily speak of “political experience”, “scientific experience”, all of which would involve an altered state of consciousness. Nothing “special” has been added to the discourse on religions by the phrase. But this leads to the second question: what does it mean to describe a particular experience as “religious”? Or, for that matter, what does it mean to describe an experience as “political” or “scientific”? For the last, at least, I do have an answer which involved identifying the constituents that constitute the province of meaning that we call “social science” (Tuckett 2014). What, then, would be the constituents of “religion”? On this score, philosophical phenomenology has been rather quiet. As noted above, “religion” was rather infrequently mentioned by Schutz, and Embree (2015: 8) has pointed out that it is not clear what Schutz’s “science of myth and religion” would look like.¹⁰

This stance happens to be indicative of many phenomenologists from the Movement. Perhaps the only phenomenologist to show a real interest in a phenomenology of religion was Max Scheler whose most consistent work on this matter was *On the Eternal in Man* (1921/2010), but even he lost interest in the topic almost immediately after this. There are several reasons for this but one that seems to stand out in the current context is that Scheler realised that his phenomenology of religion was more an apologetic for religion—a stance which he had since lost. In another instance, Husserl originally intended Heidegger to undertake a “phenomenology of religion” until he decided that Heidegger had more potential. This lack of interest I suggest—though it is only stipulation here—is because many of these early phenomenologists equated “religion” with “belief in God” which, with the Movement’s primary emphasis on intersubjectivity and how to resolve the problems of the Other’s existence, made it a topic of little use/interest. This point is well articulated in the case of Sartre. In rejecting Idealist (re. Spirit) and Realist (re. Nature) accounts for proof of the Other’s existence, Sartre sees the challenge of philosophical phenomenology to provide a positive theory of the Other’s existence that does not fall into solipsism or recourse to God (2003: 256).

The reader may object that I have summarily dismissed the works of other later phenomenologists such as Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Levinas who most certainly did express an interest in “religion”. The issue with these “phenomenologists” is that their status within the Movement is in some dispute. More properly they appear to belong to “the theological turn” in French phenomenology during the 1980s-1990s which was criticised by Dominique Janicaud (1991/2000) as perverting the principles of philosophical phenomenology by introducing a (biblical) God which does not belong. Now represented by the likes of Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Louis Chrétien and Michel Henry it may be more accurate to describe this as a new invention of “phenomenology”—*phenomenological theology*.

It would seem that there has not been a serious attempt at a philosophical phenomenology of religion of late. Indeed, it currently sits on the agenda of what

¹⁰ Though that he referred to a science of myth *and* religion might be telling in itself.

Embree (2001: 8; Moran and Embree 2004: 1-2) calls Cultural Phenomenology as a sub branch within the Movement. Thus, by way of conclusion, although there are significant grounds for taking issue with Smart's "phenomenological" account of "religious experience"—at brute an exercise in ecumenical theology—there is no full content to what an alternative philosophical phenomenological account of "religious experience" might provide, especially if speaking in terms of "altered states of consciousness" contributes nothing to it.

Initially, based on what has been discussed above regarding "altered states of consciousness" and provinces of meaning, the task of such a proper phenomenology of religion would be to determine the constituents of the "religious cognitive style". However, here a lesson should be learned from "the phenomenologies of religion" and Smart's phenomenology-of-religion. In his discussions of "higher states" and "altered states" of consciousness, Smart reveals his commitment to a metaphysical framework in which Nature and Spirit represent two separate realms, of which the latter is superior. This takes shape as the Hegelian "essence and manifestation" of "Religion and religions". The risk of speaking of a "religious cognitive style" is to fall into the same pitfall as Smart: the philosophical phenomenologist runs the risk of valorising this religious cognitive style as an essence which is manifested to varying degrees by the "concrete religions". A byproduct of such an approach is to then judge how well these religions have manifested this essence—something extraneous to aims of philosophical phenomenology. But, Taves (who happens to associate with naturalism) would be just as at risk in this regard. Indeed, precisely because she is a naturalist she happens to assume the superiority of Nature (like Metzinger)¹¹ and ends up just as prone to "essentialising" by the name of "reductionism".

In the light of the critical studies of Fitzgerald and Murphy, it is evident this would be the wrong approach and likely to validate the suspicions of all "phenomenologies" that I highlighted in my opening comments. As hinted at the end of section 1.2, the problem here is that if we assume the Nature/Spirit dualism, then metaphysical commitments will ensue. If, as I suggested, in the previous section that philosophical phenomenology undercuts this with the "I am"/"I am not" dualism, then a different approach is required. Building off what has been said above in regard to "higher state" or "altered states of consciousness", the principle emphasis should be on *meaning*. That is, in speaking of "things deemed religious", the emphasis on "things" by Taves makes "religion" a phenomenon: some content, some constituent of the object of experience (e.g. Lugus of the vision) makes it "religious". Remove that content/constituent and the object in question would, presumably, lose its "religious" character. In contrast to this, "Religion" in the properly phenomenologically reduced sense, I hazard, is not a phenomenon, but a *meaning* and it is the continuing task of philosophical phenomenology to analyse what that is. At the least, what this entails is that, as scholars, we should not be focusing on "things deemed religious" but on *people* deemed religious. That is, to describe an experience as a "religious experience" is to ramify it. And thus to say of someone that they had a religious experience is to ascribe that person a particular *value*—it is to ramify *them*. "Religiousness", then, is not about the Nature/Spirit dichotomy, but the "I am"/"I am not". The scholar if not careful of what this value might actually be, is at full risk of

¹¹ Both happen to draw on the work of Olaf Blanke (e.g. 2004; 2005) in their understanding of "altered states".

engaging the same cognitive colonialism as Ninian Smart (and Metzinger and Winkelman) when describing an experience as “religious”.

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