

# Phenomenology and Mysticism

*The Verticality of  
Religious Experience*

ANTHONY J. STEINBOCK

Indiana University Press  
*Bloomington and Indianapolis*

Acknowledgments ix

## INTRODUCTION

Vertical Givenness in Human Experience 1

## CHAPTER 1

The Religious and Mystical Shape of Experience 21

## CHAPTER 2

St. Teresa of Avila and Mysticism of Prayer 45

## CHAPTER 3

Rabbi Dov Baer and Mysticism of Ecstasy 67

## CHAPTER 4

Rūzbihān Baqlī and Mysticism of Unveiling 89

## CHAPTER 5

Matters of Evidence in Religious Experience 115

## CHAPTER 6

Epiphany and Withdrawal 149

## CHAPTER 7

On Individuation 167

## CHAPTER 8

Idolatry 211

## EPILOGUE

On the De-Limitation of the Religious and the Moral 241

Glossary of Main Hebrew and Arabic Terms 245

Notes 249

Bibliography 285

Index 303

# INTRODUCTION

## Vertical Givenness in Human Experience

*Phenomenology and Mysticism* gives an account of a specific dimension of human experience and its own evidence that is traditionally expunged from philosophical treatment. To give such an account, we have to operate with a substantially broader view of experience and evidence than we customarily admit into our inventory. For example, we usually think that what counts as evidence or what can be experienced are empirical or even intellectual objects. The spheres of experience and evidence that are more robust than just those of objects, I call vertical givenness, or “verticality.” Sensitivity to vertical givenness is not accomplished by constructing a metaphysics or by applying either theological convictions or ethical belief systems to the experiences, but by taking a phenomenological approach to these different kinds of givenness, that is, by evaluating what is actually given in human experience, thereby expanding our notion of evidence. This expansion, which is grounded in experience, opens us to the religious, moral, and ecological spheres of existence, even though the quality of these kinds of experiences is fundamentally different from the ways in which objects are presented in perception or in judgments. Because the religious, moral, and ecological dimensions are given (though given in their own unique ways), they are susceptible to critical, philosophical thinking.

In addition to describing phenomenologically the givenness of verticality, I explicate the philosophical implications of vertical givenness. I do this by articulating its evidential force and its modifications in the religious sphere, by contrasting vertical presence with the movement of “withdrawal” and forgetfulness, by suggesting what vertical evidence means for the individuation of the person, and finally, by critically examining the process of de-spiritualization that deforms or reverses verticality, a process I term, here, *idolatry*. This is the task of personal and cultural critique. Ultimately, if our society and ecosystems are in disarray and in turmoil, it is because our relations to the vertical dimensions of experience are in disarray and in turmoil.

In this Introduction, I show how phenomenology as a philosophical approach is appropriate to this task of *Phenomenology and Mysticism* and explain what I mean by vertical givenness as well as the kinds of vertical givenness.

Although there are several forms of verticality, this work concentrates on just one kind of vertical givenness, what I term *epiphany*, and its countervailing movements of idolatry. It is this mode of givenness, epiphany, that articulates the structure of this work, not the presupposition of a being called "God." *Phenomenology and Mysticism* treats the dimension of human experience that is opened up by this kind of givenness and is therefore devoted to a phenomenology of religious experience. While I name other modes of vertical givenness pertaining to the moral and ecological spheres, I reserve them for future work.

## Givenness and Experience

By taking experience as a touchstone for reflection, I am concerned not merely with *what* is there in experience, but with *how* this "what" appears to us. Phenomenologists, for example, have traditionally expressed this "how" of the appearance under the general title of "givenness" or "modes of givenness." Experience means the way or mode in which something is *given* to us.

Among all philosophical attitudes, it has been the virtue of phenomenological philosophy to call into question the naïveté that structures our everyday life, our "taking it for granted," by carrying out a shift in perspective. It accomplishes this by holding in abeyance or "bracketing" the assumptions pertaining to life as we live it and by suspending the prejudices concerning the being of things; it does this in an effort to expose how their meanings arise and to understand the structures of those meaningful experiences. The central issue in phenomenology is neither the subject nor the object, but *givenness*.<sup>1</sup> I find "givenness" a particularly suitable expression for describing experience because it takes us beyond a subject-object dichotomy often attributed to Western philosophical thought insofar as givenness is not necessarily attached to the appearing of an object over against a subject.

We are involved in the very course of our experiences. We hardly notice them when they flow on concordantly without disruption or when

everything works harmoniously. These concordant experiences are "normal." One lives "normally" in everyday experience in the sense that one survives the disappointments caused by the rupture of meaning, the discordances, the atypicalities and unfamiliar sensible and eidetic landscapes of experience by integrating them into an overarching harmonious set of experiences. Cognitive reflection within these experiences poses no special difficulties because it too is involved in the very movement of these events; it is affected by them, it reflects on them, and it moves within them. Cognitive reflection remains normal in this constitutive sense.

But phenomenological reflection is supposed to be a peculiar kind of attentiveness that radically distinguishes itself from the movement of the natural everyday comportment, whether on the level of passive habituality and anonymous functioning, or on the level of egoic judicative rationality. In one sense, phenomenological reflection becomes radically "abnormal" when it ruptures the concordance of everyday life; it not only reflects on it, but in distinction from everyday "normal" reflection, it no longer yields to the flow of positing meaning, and instead abstains from the presuppositions that it carries out pre-reflectively and reflectively.

In another sense, however, phenomenological reflection is "normal"—"hyper-normal," as Edmund Husserl would say—in the sense that it is optimal; for it institutes a new order of experience that is, contextually speaking, "the best possible" even though it is not "concordant" with the natural attitude; it does this by describing the very ways in which the natural attitude unfolds and how objects and the world are there as in-themselves-for-us. Phenomenology is a peculiar kind of reflective attentiveness that distances itself from everyday life in order to get to the root of that very life.<sup>2</sup>

Inquiring into how something is given, and in order to short-circuit our active and latent prejudices, the phenomenologist holds assertions about being in abeyance, and to this extent he or she is said to be the disinterested observer or spectator.<sup>3</sup> What kind of attentiveness is it that claims not to participate in the world's validities? In what sense is the phenomenologist disinterested?

Phenomenology is a type of reflective attentiveness attuned to givenness that occurs *within* experiencing itself. One describes the experience of the "thing itself" as it is given within the very process of experiencing the matter, while simultaneously glancing at a distance, as it were,

through an attentive reflection. It is only when these matters appear outside of the experiencing altogether that the putative descriptions of experience are merely construed or constructed.

In order to accomplish its openness to the matters themselves within experience, the phenomenologist can actively dis-position him- or herself. On the one hand, this entails disposing oneself openly toward the matters in question; on the other, it entails an attempt to "dis-position" him- or herself from the event, that is, to dispose of the "self." The interest at stake in the so-called phenomenological dis-interestedness is precisely *self-interest*, namely, the self's interest in the world that intrudes on the scene and imposes itself on the phenomena; the preconceptions in question concern the preconceptions of the self with which one comes to the phenomena. We leave aside for now to what extent this can be accomplished. My point is that what phenomenology really wants to bracket is a self-imposition so as to let the matters flash forth as they give themselves; what we become dispassionate about is our selves through an attempted dis-position of the self, and by so doing, dispose ourselves to being struck *in which ever way* the given gives itself. This is at least the pretension and the goal.

Of course, this manner of putting it can be misleading. As we will see, generally speaking, it is impossible to dis-pose the self in order then to have the phenomena give themselves, especially where it concerns matters of vertical experience. Dis-position is not idle or random curiosity in things that we generate from ourselves, but an active remaining open; it has a directedness because the open posture is motivated *by the self-givenness* of the matters themselves. Moreover, the individual him- or herself is not the sufficient condition for carrying out such a dis-position. Thus, the "conversion" cited at least nominally by Husserl in the *Crisis* and elsewhere is to be understood most profoundly as a conversion necessary even for the practice of phenomenology, but it is also a conversion that most profoundly is not generated from the self.

What is the phenomenologist to do in order to approach this self-disposition? Husserl advanced an exercise he called generally the *epoché*, or the reduction. This is not the place to explore the details of practicing the reduction.<sup>4</sup> Suffice it to say that either by design or by trial, Husserl did not propound one single intellectual activity accomplished once and for all under the rubric of the reduction but practiced a philosophical activity, sometimes with more clarity, sometimes with more obscurity, that he took

up over and over again according to the circumstances and intellectual bearing. The way through psychology, the way through the lifeworld, the way through anthropology, the Cartesian way, the way through the empirical sciences, the way through regional ontologies, and so forth, are just so many ways of attempting to liberate the phenomena and to mitigate the intrusion of the self on the phenomenal field. They constitute rigorous and disciplined exercises aimed at abstaining from the simple assertion of being in favor of witnessing how its meaning is given to us.

Phenomenology can be understood as a methodological attempt to practice such a disposition for a possible dis-position. Such a practice can lead us, perhaps beyond our own efforts, to the forgetfulness of the self as the openness to perceptual and epistemic objects, but also to whatever gives itself in its own manner: to the *epiphany* of the Holy, to the *revelation* of human persons, to the *manifestation* of cultural products, to the *disclosure* of the Earth, and to the *display* of elemental beings. All the givens that phenomenology is trying to track have in some sense been given all along, so that the phenomenologist's activity is just as much a response to such an initiated givenness.

In becoming vulnerable to the givenness of what is giving itself in its self-givenness, the phenomenologist becomes *subject to* the experience in the description. So it may happen that even if we try to describe these givennesses "abstractly" or "theoretically," by opening ourselves implicitly to the direct experience of them, we open ourselves to being "struck" by them, instigating a perceptual, an epistemic, an aesthetic, a moral, or even a religious insight, relation, and transformation. Of course, if there is too much *self-interest*, we can distort the descriptions/experiences to such an extent that the whole process becomes compromised. The danger here is not just that we leave too much out of account but that we become mere academics, mere professionals.

The task in phenomenology is not to become inured to the forces of the given, but to dispose ourselves toward them, realizing that the self-givenness of the given is not simply our own doing. This implies, further, that the given itself is not neutral, and my position in relation to it, or rather, my disposition in relation to it, cannot be neutral, either.

Something counts as a matter of experience to the extent that it can be given; and in principle, one should be open to all kinds of givenness, which is to say, all types of experience, without discrimination, no matter how paradoxical the givens may seem to be. Traditionally, there has been

an arbitrary exclusion of areas of experience from philosophical discussion. Because there are certain areas of experience that are conceived in advance as not being able to be described meaningfully since they are putatively not given, many of our reflective enterprises have been dismissed as so much theology, sophistry, or dogmatism.<sup>5</sup>

In my view, this exclusion hides a deep-seated and widespread contemporary prejudice, one so powerful and pervasive that it has dominated nearly all contemporary thinking on these topics, even if it has not been expressed in this way. The prejudice is this: All matters, especially those that concern the Holy, have to conform to *one* type of givenness in order to be given and hence to be experienced. If they do not conform, they are said to remain essentially on the limit of experience and are subject only to theory, speculation, or mere personal belief.

Phenomenology is a style of philosophical reflection, however, that is trained on the given, and, in principle, on however the given gives itself. In its peculiar manner of attentiveness, the givens are susceptible to philosophical description. Since the central issue of phenomenology is givenness that bears on experience, phenomenology is in a privileged position to surmount this arbitrary restriction to one kind of givenness and to inquire into the givens peculiar to verticality.

### Verticality

*And there is nothing more disastrous for all of epistemology than to establish at the beginning of one's methodological procedure a too narrow, restrictive concept of "experience," to equate the whole of experience with one particular kind of experience and with that mental attitude that is conducive [only] to it, and then to refuse to recognize as "primordially given" anything that cannot be reduced to this one kind of experience.*

—MAX SCHELER, 1920<sup>6</sup>

*One of the principal theses defended in this work [Totality and Infinity] consists in maintaining that the noesis-noema structure is not the primordial structure of intentionality (which is not equivalent to interpreting intentionality as a logical relation or as causality).*

—EMMANUEL LEVINAS, 1961<sup>7</sup>

### *The Sphere of Presentation*

The mode of givenness that has dominated a philosophical (and especially a phenomenological) way of seeing, I call *presentation*. Presentation is a type of givenness that is peculiar to sensible and intellectual objects and is more or less dependent upon my power to usher things into appearance within a context of significance.

When I intend an object, an object gives itself (whether or not it is the object I intended). I lean against the tree, I enjoy the fresh air, I look up and admire the rock cliff, I imagine the contours above that I cannot see, I walk toward the rope; flushed with both excitement and nervousness, I talk about it with a friend, I convey its qualities, I map out my approach. My opening to the thing ushers its appearance to me and for me as bodily or intellectually significant—even if a moment later it does not turn out to be what I initially intended it to be.

Far from the presentation of an object being static, a feature of an object points further on to new features in response to my initiating moves, the subsequent orchestration of my body, and the instigation of my thoughts. Walking toward the rock cliff motivates new appearances; what was presented at first points further on to new ontic themes and new horizons, and I pursue a richer fulfillment; I strive toward an expected situation delineated by what was initially presented; perhaps I will dismiss it later as a hallucination. Moreover, I organize my world according to types and perhaps later, concepts: I walk down a path I have never walked before, I identify this rock formation before me as granite, even though I have never seen this particular formation in "real life," I can categorize it under a particular species of igneous rock.

In many ways, then, the object yields to my perceptual and cognitive powers. If it is dark outside, I can shine my flashlight or lantern on the rock surface and usher it into appearance. If I only see the front side, I not only can anticipate a back side, but I can change positions and in this way provoke its new appearance. I can drill holes into the rock surface and explore "inside" the rock. I can break it down into its chemical and physical properties, and where it resists physical inspection, I can theorize about it and catalogue it.

Belonging to presentation is the *power of provocation*. It is to be contrasted with the process of *evocation*, which belongs to modes of vertical

givenness. Briefly, by the power of provocation I understand my ability to induce or to produce an experience; by the process of evocation, I understand the process of "eliciting" so as to let an experience come of its own accord or so that another can "freely" experience this givenness in its own terms.

All this—presentation and provocation—is possible, in part, because of the "depth" structure of my relation to the world.<sup>8</sup> When an object *presents* itself, it does so with a certain prominence and in such a way that it implies new themes that can become salient; there is always a "horizon" or background of significance as a nexus of referential implications that leads me to new presentations. The context is that in which some things come to the fore, and appear, and other things simultaneously recede into the background, becoming provisionally concealed, characterizing the very interplay of perceivers and explicitly or implicitly perceived objects.

Objects that are "presented" are given in both "inner" and "outer" experience, and they are given through functions and acts peculiar to this very order of givenness, namely, through perception, moving, thinking, imagining, believing, remembering, anticipating. In each instance the object or situation is presented in conjunction with the perceiver or thinker who prompts a schema of possible presentations that are, in turn, concordant with these aspects or those objects already presented. The object's identical sense remains identical in and through variations of perspective. The presented object, the Self of the object, endures through time with its temporal horizons. In its genesis, it *becomes* an in-itself-for-us.

The object's sense is understood as my accomplishment, a *Leistung*. Here "accomplishment" is also a broad enough concept to encompass the work done on the part of the object to appear. Although presentation does have the effect of bringing a world *to me*, allowing me to possess a world; although presentation is ultimately instigated by me, this mode of givenness is not at all tied one-sidedly to the subjective aim, since it encompasses the givenness prompted on the side of the object: The objects themselves call us to an encounter; they function as allures and affectively motivate my turning toward them so that they can be ushered into appearance in an explicit way.<sup>9</sup> In fact, in order for something to come into being as prominent, it must be affectively significant and exercise an affective pull on the perceiver or thinker, whether or not it actually comes into being as an explicit theme. This salience and turning

toward can be more or less gradual or sudden.<sup>10</sup> I respond to the demands on the part of the object for it to be given in the best possible manner: I tilt my head to adjust to the presentation, I orient myself by a tall building, and so forth. Furthermore, a particular scene may come to the fore purely passively: objects, or aspects of objects, team up with others by transferring their affective significance without any active participation on the ego's part. But even here, through presentation, the things remain relative to my field of possibilities.

Precisely because of this interplay of intentionality, this "constitutive duet," as Husserl called it, the economy of concealment and appearance governs the way things are presented.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, an object can resist my intending, my power to present; my perceptual "I can" can be checked by an "I cannot," a concept may exceed by ability to think it, my "I think" can be guarded by an "I cannot think." But even in these cases, what challenges my ability or freedom to think is still relative *to me*, and thus it remains within the general economy of presentation. Likewise, I can try to stop my intellect or inhibit my perceptual powers, but even this would still be to circumscribe the intellectual or perceptual fields by my "I think" or my "I can."

It is not necessary to describe this structure of presentation any further; it is already well known through the work of the early phenomenologists like Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gurwitsch, just to name a few. All this—the dynamic interplay or "constitutive duet" of my "I can" and the affective pull of the object, the intersubjective orientation to the world, the passive association of sense, the constitution of both simple and categorial objects, the foreground/background structure of the phenomenal field—all this belongs to the province of *presentation* and is governed by its systematic laws and interconnections.

There is nothing intrinsically problematic or illegitimate about this order of givenness.<sup>12</sup> However, the difficulty has been and continues to be that "presentation" is assumed to be the *only* mode of givenness. This has two regrettable consequences. First, if we were not attentive to any difference in the way the matters give themselves, we could attempt to apply presentation to anything that has the potential of being given. Thus, for example, animals other than human, the other person, God, would be described as susceptible to the same kind of intention and fulfillment, verification and disappointment that we find in the case of perceptual or intellectual objects. Kant's First Critique is certainly to the point. We

would fall into a philosophical illusion to think, for example, that God can be experienced like an object.

Second, if we were attentive to a difference in givenness, we could concede that there are "matters" that do not conform to this kind of givenness in principle or that there are matters that are in principle not accessible to perception or thought (the person as "Other," for example). In this instance, the matters would be described only paradoxically as being accessible *in the mode of* inaccessibility, given *as not being able* to be given, experienced *as not being able* to be experienced; hence, they would be characterized as on the "limit" of phenomenal givenness.<sup>13</sup> And if one still wanted to speak of these matters, such discourse would be dismissed as so much speculation, theology, dogmatism, essentialist thought, foundationalism, metaphysics of presence, philosophy of origins, and so forth.

While presentation describes a dimension of our experience that concerns the relative givenness of things in the economy of appearance and concealment, and while it describes our relation to the world as one of both immediate and mitigated belief in its being, presentation has become the dominant model of givenness for us and has been allowed to efface other legitimate modes of givenness. But why should phenomenology, in order to reflect *within* the very experiencing itself, not open itself to *all* kinds of "givens" *in the distinctive manner that they give themselves*? Is it not an act of forceful arbitrariness to limit in advance the ways in which givenness takes place?

Precisely because presentation has defined what gets counted exclusively as a matter of experience, vertical relations have been left virtually out of philosophical and, specifically, phenomenological accounts. As a collateral consequence, if and when we do treat God, the other person, or the Earth, we tend to miss the unique style of givenness characteristic of each sphere. Take Kierkegaard to cite just one example among others. While Kierkegaard understood the religious dimension as an absolute relation to an absolute, at least in *Fear and Trembling*, he misses the genuine givenness of the other person, obfuscating the moral dimension of experience.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the aesthetic dimension of experience is confined to presentation and leaves out any serious consideration of the Earth as the aesthetic ground of spatio-temporal experience. Similar critiques can be made *mutatis mutandis* of Heidegger, Husserl, Henry, Levinas, and Merleau-Ponty. The fact that the unique style of givenness peculiar to each sphere has been missed by so many prominent philosophers should at least

cause us to take note of the extent to which the model of presentation has a hold on us and how much it colors what we regard as important.

Although the dominance of presentation and the effacement of other modes of givenness is evident in the vast majority of work from classical phenomenology to postmodern philosophy, the adherence to a monolithic order of givenness—which either covers everything or defines *via negativa* what cannot count as givenness—has been called into question in contemporary thought.

The most inchoate attempts can be seen in the struggle to expand the sphere of evidence to include moral, but especially religious experience—though the presupposition is that one must enlarge the field of *presentation* in order to cover religious or moral themes, and only then possibly brush up against various limits to such an approach. Exemplary of this approach is Adolf Reinach, who writes, "religious experiences, especially sudden ones, cannot be 'understood.' They are not 'motivated.'" For this reason, he calls for us above all to respect the sense that religious experiences have of their own accord, "even if [their sense] leads to enigmas."<sup>15</sup> Under this general style, we also place Jean Hering for his phenomenological study of the unique nature of religious consciousness<sup>16</sup> and Kurt Stavenhagen for his research into the possibility of an absolute personal comportment vis-à-vis an absolute sphere.<sup>17</sup>

These should be distinguished from other attempts that merely describe empirically the variety of religions and religious experiences—whether to catalogue their types or advance a philosophy of religion—because they not only presuppose attributes of the Divine, but they fail to ask how the Holy or the other person is *given*. This is the case, despite the fact that even these approaches can provide a genuine starting point if they yield (or were to yield) an inquiry into modes of givenness. As examples of this kind we would include the likes of William James,<sup>18</sup> G. van der Leeuw,<sup>19</sup> and Friedrich Heiler.<sup>20</sup>

Ultimately, both kinds of attempts are unsatisfactory because of their implicit or explicit adherence to presentation even when they are trying to challenge its bounds. There are, however, other key figures who have been able to mount the challenge to the dominance of presentation in a more forceful and explicit manner. Most notably are Max Scheler, who distinguishes explicitly and systematically between givenness as revelation (*Offenbarung*) from manifestation (*Offenbarkeit*),<sup>21</sup> as well as Michel Henry, whose monumental work *L'essence de la manifestation* criticizes as

“ontological monism” this kind of limitation of givenness to one kind of being (=monism) and understands the very essence of manifestation to be revelation.<sup>22</sup> I also have in mind Emmanuel Levinas’s work, *Totalité et infini*, which, despite the fact that it seems to qualify the Other as what is not able to be given, makes a clear distinction between givenness as disclosure and absolute givenness or givenness as revelation.<sup>23</sup> Following in this tradition is also Jean-Luc Marion, who draws a similar distinction between manifestation and revelation in his work *Dieu sans l’être*.<sup>24</sup> These works mark an important and fruitful beginning where the openness to the field of evidence is concerned.

Despite the fact that vertical givenness is distinct from presentation, I nonetheless speak of “experience” in both cases. The assumption that experience should be reserved only for object givenness—no matter how broadly or narrowly conceived—was held not only by the great religious thinker and philosopher Martin Buber (who contrasted the I–It word pair [“experience”] with the I–Thou word pair [“relation”]),<sup>25</sup> but also in a more equivocal manner by Levinas—equivocal because at times he asserts that the Other cannot be experienced and at other times he himself writes of an “experience” of an Other as an “absolute experience.”<sup>26</sup>

The virtue of such descriptions lies in the attempts to show that there is “something else” going on here, beyond the presentation of objects. But it is a sign of capriciousness to assume that one must equate “experience” and “presence” with the presentation of objects, that is, with a “having” of things, perceptually or epistemically, or with an accomplishment initiated by the self. It is an insidious form of positivism to force vertical experiences into the noesis: noematic logic of appearance and fulfillment under the rubric of being true to “evidence.” It only highlights the prejudice that presentation exhausts experience, and that presentation somehow comes first and gets to claim experience for itself. If we take givenness seriously, then it would go against the very grain of the given itself to hold, for example, that God, the other person, the Earth are not “experienced” just because vertical givenness is radically different from what gets experienced in presentation.

### *Vertical Givenness and the Problem of Idolatry*

I use the term “verticality” because of the existential sense it bears—the orientation, the meanings, and the dynamic movement it evokes. Verticality expresses a lived directedness—religiously, morally, and

bodily—like when we aspire to reach new heights, when we look up to someone, when we value the life of another above our own, when someone honored or esteemed is held in “high” regard, when we are “upright” both morally and physically, when we are in an elated mood or “uplifted” because of an event or at the sight of a friend. And it also implies the antithetical movement of falling. If we were to look for a meteorological expression to evoke vertical movement, “updraft,” would be an appropriate term.

In philosophical literature the concept of verticality has been largely ignored or suppressed. But it has cropped up every now and again, erupting into contemporary thought in poetry and prose. W. H. Auden asks us, where we are able, to honor the person who is “vertical,” even though we tend only to value the one who is “horizontal.”<sup>27</sup> Bachelard was acutely aware of the significance of verticality when he wrote of the “truly positive experience of verticality.”<sup>28</sup> Verticality permeates all existence: “At the very heart of psychic phenomena there will be a real verticality. This verticality is no empty metaphor; it is a principle of order, a law governing filiation, a scale along which someone can experience the different degrees of sensibility. Finally, the life of the soul, all the delicate and discreet emotions, all the hopes and the fears, all the moral forces that are involved in one’s future have a vertical differential in the full mathematical sense of the word.”<sup>29</sup> Reflecting on the axiomatic character of the vertical, Bachelard sums up: “The positive dynamism of verticality is so clear that we can formulate this aphorism: what does not rise, falls. Human being *qua* human being cannot live horizontally.”<sup>30</sup>

For Erwin Strauss the “upright” is a posture, but not merely physiologically; it is an *Einstellung*, an attitude, in the global sense as a specific mode of being in the world. He notes that cultural patterns such as lowering our heads or kneeling in prayer, arms uplifted, bowing, expressions of reverence, asking and granting a request, the fact that one has “leanings,” and so forth, despite their divergences in other cultures, are all variations on the theme of verticality.<sup>31</sup>

Verticality is the vector of mystery and reverence; horizontality is what is in principle within reach, graspable, controllable. I prefer verticality to a term like “transcendence” because the latter is encumbered with too many philosophical and religious presuppositions that oppose it to “immanence.” In this respect, I also find it illuminating that in his last work, Merleau-Ponty starts to move away from expressions like

"transcendence" and even his favored expression, "depth," toward *verticality* as the operative ontological characterization. In this way, verticality suggests dynamic orientation/sense, movement, dehiscence, density.

The "rediscovery of vertical Being," Merleau-Ponty writes, is the solution to the problem of the soul and body, the encroachment of the visible and the invisible.<sup>32</sup> As a probable reply to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty even writes of rediscovering *phusis* and *logos* in terms of "vertical history."<sup>33</sup> And in reply to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty contends that "It is the whole field of the 'vertical' that has to be awakened. Sartre's existence is not 'vertical,' not 'upright' [*debout*]: it certainly cuts across the plane of beings, it is transversal with respect to it, but precisely it is too distinct from it for one to be able to say that it is 'upright.' What is upright is the existence that is threatened by weight, that leaves the plane of objective being, but not without dragging with it all the adversity and favors it brought there."<sup>34</sup> These insights into Being as vertical announce a task as well: "it is a question of creating a new type of intelligibility (intelligibility through the world and Being as they are—'vertical' and not horizontal)."<sup>35</sup>

The unpredictability of the vertical, the dangerous, spontaneous, undomesticable quality of the vertical is incompatible with what we predominantly value and are encouraged to value. If we live in a "horizontal" world that suppresses the vertical, it is nonetheless a world that is susceptible to verticality and beyond its control; it is a world into which the vertical erupts.

It is only when we mistakenly—but for historically understandable reasons—want to reduce the vertical to domination and to control over another that we might be led to think of verticality as something "static." In fact, verticality is antithetical both to the fixed meaning and static hierarchy peculiar to Totalitarianism<sup>36</sup> and to the reactionary nonhierarchical homogeneity of power (which institutes its own power of homogeneity or "invisible ideology") that permits all differences as long as they make no difference.<sup>37</sup>

For me, verticality evokes and signifies those dynamic vectors of experience that have a unique structure of their own, harbor their own kinds of evidence and manners of givenness, and as such are irreducible to the field of experience characterized by what I have called presentation. What is given vertically incites awe, and only as a later consequence, wonder. Modes of givenness are "vertical" in the sense that they take us

beyond ourselves. These modes of vertical givenness are testimony to the radical presence of "absolutes" within the field of human experience.

By "absolute" I mean a presence that is so unique that it can be predicated neither of singularity nor plurality. "Absolute" in this sense is not synonymous with "universal." There are three main spheres of absolute experience: the religious, which pertains to the vertical experience of the Holy; the moral, which pertains to the vertical experience of the other person; and the ecological, which pertains to the vertical experience of the Earth as aesthetic ground.

The general philosophical project with which I begin here is to describe vertical kinds of evidence. Each mode of vertical givenness has its own manner of givenness, its own internal coherence and regularity, and its own essential interconnections that pertain to evidence, modalization, deception, illusion, and so forth. Epiphany, revelation, manifestation, disclosure, and display are distinctive modes of vertical givenness, and each of them is distinctive in kind from presentation.

*Epiphany* is the mode of givenness that qualifies a dimension of experiencing as religious. For this style of experiencing and evidence, I appeal to the mystics within the Abrahamic tradition: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic mystical experiences. The description and clarification of epiphany is the task of this work.

*Revelation* is a mode of givenness that qualifies a dimension of experiencing as moral. The movement in and through which the person is revealed is interpersonal such that the moral sphere is foundational for political, economic, and social life. Revelatory givenness is the experiential dimension that pertains to exemplarity. By exemplarity, I mean a personal kind of givenness that is both revealing and revealed; it is the "personal" tie between human persons and between human persons and the Holy.

*Manifestation* designates a vertical givenness that pertains to the ways in which products or cultural artifacts give themselves as "giving" the Holy or human persons. While cultural objects can be "presented," they can also "manifest" vertically. Here they function as "icon." An icon does not represent something, but points beyond itself; and like the movement of exemplarity, it stems from what is other, not from itself. But whereas the person as the locus of epiphany and revelation evokes absolute infinite Person while remaining absolute as person, the icon "evokes" the absolute in its own relativity. Icons cannot be made absolute just because in their

manifestation, they evoke absolutes. By remaining relative in manifesting an absolute, an object may lose its efficacy as icon depending upon historical circumstances. For example, the way a work of art is taken can vary according to historical contexts, changes in aesthetic perception, "losses" or "advances" in cultural life, or in the demise or augmentation of religious institutions.

There are two types of iconic givenness where manifestation is concerned. First, a bodily movement like dance, or a cultural artifact like a painting can manifest the Holy in the sense of being the site of the Holy, but when it is fixed merely as an art object, or as a scientific object for carbon dating, it no longer functions in this instance as "icon." Second, an object can manifest the finite absolute human person. A shirt, for example, can manifest persons and vertically give a network of relations, relations that are most profoundly moral (here we see the significance of Marx's critique of capitalism, alienated labor, and surplus value).

In short, whereas the exemplar is a *personal revelation* pertaining to absolute infinite and absolute finite persons, the icon is an *impersonal manifestation* pertaining to absolute persons (infinite or finite).

[Disclosure pertains to the way the Earth as ground is given in spatio-temporal experience as absolute. The Earth as such is never *presented* in the perception of an object or as an object; rather, it is *disclosed* as absolute ground (*Boden*) in that perception and not as an object, for example, a "planet." Even though our own body functions as a ground or zero-point of orientation for the perception of things near and far, left or right, it is the Earth that is disclosed as ground for our bodily (aesthetic) orientation toward things and that ultimately gives them meaning. Up and down is the dimensionality that becomes prominent here. It is by virtue of the Earth's function as ground that the lived-body can be self-giving and such that transcendent objects can be given at all.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, even though the Earth is given as absolute in its function as aesthetic ground in terms of *disclosure*, elemental beings can *display* the Holy. Things Earthen (a tree, a grain of sand, a body of water, etc.) can also display absolute Person while themselves remaining relative. It is in this respect that we can speak, for example, of the sacredness of water.

In the strictest sense, idolatry is the destruction of vertical relations. Certainly, one could interpret this destruction or disorientation, experienced as the problems of oppression and objectification, as violence and its resulting personal and social discontents, and the like, in terms of a

crisis (Husserl), ideology (Marx), forgetfulness (Heidegger), or even as a problem of drives (Freud). But one could only do so at the expense of arbitrarily dismissing and ignoring actual dimensions of our lives: religious, moral, and ecological. Only when these dimensions are brought back into our account of human experience do we encounter the full wonder, weight, and horror of our contemporary situation. It is from this perspective of the fullness of our experience, which I attempt to recognize without dismissive prejudice, that the experiences and problems disclose themselves in terms of verticality and idolatry.

Idolatry is a way of living that "deforms" or reverses "verticality." I use the term "idolatry" despite the fact that, and precisely because, it does not—and indeed cannot—accommodate itself to a postmodern worldview. Unfortunately, the identification of idolatry as the root of the problems we face can all too easily be read as a call to fundamentalist violence. It is quite understandable that one would want to avoid using "religious" terminology today, given the pervasive stronghold of religious conservatism, the sometimes tyranny of orthodoxy, and the easy association of anything "religious" with spiritually and physically violent movements. But we would eschew the religious dimension of experience as a whole for these reasons only at our own peril and at the hazard of missing a crucial dimension of our lives.

Compromising verticality in the very face of the epiphany of the Holy, the revelation of the person, or the disclosure of the Earth, idolatry has the effect of systemically closing off epiphanic, revelatory, manifest, disclosive, and displaying givenness; it is the deepest way to characterize our de-spiritualizing downspin in all its forms. Living under the sway of idolatry becomes actualized in many ways: injustice, hatred, racism, institutionalized poverty, militarism, misogyny, ecological terrorism, and general earth-alienation.

We see idolatry function not only on macro levels of experience but on micro ones as well: when someone sees a lonely or frightened person on the street but keeps his mind on business affairs; when someone witnesses a friend's joy at good fortune but thinks only of how it affects her; when someone watches images of war on the local news but is troubled about how it will effect tomorrow's stock market; when someone hears the cry of another in emotional or physical distress but is preoccupied with payment for succor; when someone hikes in a forest and sees the trees merely as a renewable resource.

Our habituation to this way of being slips over, often unnoticed, into the way we treat others. We find that the more we invest ourselves in our selves and in things, and the more successful we become in this style of involvement, the less we are able to dispose ourselves to modes of vertical givenness. Vertical relations get reversed. We live in idolatry in such a profound manner that we do not even experience it as idolatry; it becomes the "natural" element of our experience, the way our own smells and odors become the background and basis for detecting any other smells or odors. One of the dangers of idolatry is that, persisting too deeply in this way of life, it will dominate our thoughts, actions, and perceptions, with the additional effect that we will lose our power to discern loving from hating in our daily lives.<sup>39</sup>

This reversal of verticality in favor of idolatry has led to the profound de-spiritualization of our times: egotism, materialism, indifference, cruelty; as the film-maker Robert Bresson notes, just plain ugliness and stupidity become ways of life.<sup>40</sup> It has the further consequence of dulling our sensibilities to exemplars and icons that otherwise point us back vertically; exemplars, icons, and elements appear "flat."

Each sphere of vertical experience is susceptible to its own kind of idolatry. In the religious sphere, it arises in terms of pride (before the Holy), idolatry of the world expressed in terms of both secularism and fundamentalism, and delimitation, or the mono-dimensional character of experiences that fail to evoke vertically. In the moral sphere, idolatry takes the form of pride (before others), idolatry of the world expressed in terms of humanism and reification—a form of idolatry I term "evil." In the ecological sphere, idolatry appears as lived-body centeredness, the misplaced absoluteness of the Earth expressed as environmentalism and objectification.

Although there are several forms of vertical givenness, this work is concerned with just one kind of vertical givenness, namely, epiphany and its countervailing movements of idolatry. *Phenomenology and Mysticism* treats the dimension of human experience that is opened up by this kind of givenness and is therefore devoted to a phenomenology of religious experience.

More specifically, in the first chapter, I begin with a general characterization of religious experience. But it is only general. In order to sharpen the meaning of religious experience as the experienced presence of the Holy, I appeal on the whole to the mystical experiences within

the Abrahamic religious traditions. As I indicate below in more detail, mystical experiences are not to be equated with all religious experiences, but in their focus and exemplarity, they elucidate the deeper meaning of religious experience as the inter-Personal structure of epiphany. It is in the following three chapters that I focus more specifically on the three principal figures that I employ as exemplary of the Abrahamic religious traditions: St. Teresa of Avila, a Christian mystic (chapter 2); Rabbi Dov Baer of Lubavitch, a Jewish mystic (chapter 3); and Rūzbihān Baqlī, an Islamic mystic or Sufi (chapter 4).

The subsequent chapters are philosophical elaborations of these phenomenological givens. I develop the implications of these givens by describing the unique and irreducible structure of evidence and its modalizations in the religious sphere (chapter 5), by explicating this religious mode of vertical givenness as epiphany in distinction to withdrawal (chapter 6), and by expounding upon epiphany as it concerns the issue of personal individuation (chapter 7). Because idolatry is founded in verticality, since it only makes sense within verticality, and because epistemically, we implicitly disclose idolatry by understanding verticality, I develop vertical modes of givenness first and then bring idolatry into sharper focus (chapter 8).













