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RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AS SELF-TRANSCENDENCE AND SELF-DECEPTION

Merold Westphal

Religious experience can be defined as self-transcendence. Models of this decentering of the self are not found in the transcendence of intentionality or in either contemplative or ecstatic self-forgetfulness, since all these leave the self as center. While they play important roles in authentic religion, experience that does not get beyond them is self-deceived and ultimately idolatrous. Only in the ethical claim that places limits on my will to be the center do I encounter the truly other. Even here the form of true religion may assist self-deception about the presence of its substance.

Perhaps you've heard those lemonade ads that refer to the good old days when we listened to baseball games on the radio. That part reminds me of my own conversion—to lifetime membership in the Diehard Cubs Fan Club. Every summer afternoon, as I sat in front of my grandmother's floor model radio, Bert Wilson would preach the good news, "We don't care who wins, as long as it's the Cubs." And in spite of the fact that in good years they only managed to beat out the Pirates for seventh place, I became a true believer. But when the lemonade ad suggests that it's "sorta cheatin'" to watch baseball on television, I am reminded of something quite different. It was my sophomore year in college and one of the most gifted students I have ever known, whose specialty was the oral interpretation of literature, was giving his senior speech recital. Like an ancient Greek rhapsode, and all in a little under an hour, he gave us *Doctor Zhivago*. For all its visual splendor, like televised baseball, the movie version that I was to see later did not surpass this old-fashioned oral version in dramatic power. The concluding line, taken from one of Pasternak's poems, was utterly shattering and unforgettable. "To live life to the end is no childish task."

Kierkegaard expresses this same conviction that life is the task of a lifetime by satirizing those for whom most of life is supposed to consist in living happily ever after. For such, "when they have arrived at a certain point in their search for truth, life takes on a change. They marry, and they acquire a certain position, in consequence of which they feel that they must in all honor have something finished, that they must have result...And so they come to think of themselves as really finished...Living in this manner, one is relieved

of the necessity of becoming executively aware of the strenuous difficulties which the simplest of propositions about existing *qua* human-being involves" (1941: 78-79; cf. 1980: 55-56).

By arguing that such persons are strangers to religion, no matter how orthodox or pious, Kierkegaard suggests that this enduring adult task has religious import. But what is this task, which is the *sine qua non* of religion, and from which, apparently, only death can release us? The Augustinian tradition, to which Kierkegaard belongs, is united in its answer: self-transcendence. This is why Augustine speaks of the incarnation as the means by which Jesus "might detach from themselves those who were to be subdued and bring them over to Himself, healing the swelling of their pride and fostering their love so that instead of going further in their own self-confidence, they should put on weakness...should cast themselves down upon that divinity which, rising would bear them up aloft" (1963: 155). From this perspective follows the Augustinian beatitude: "Blessed is the man who loves you, who loves his friend in you, and his enemy because of you" (79).

Thomas Merton gives the same answer when he writes, "We do not detach ourselves from things in order to attach ourselves to God, but rather we become detached *from ourselves* in order to see and use all things in and for God" (1972: 21).

Gabriel Marcel puts the point on the horizontal plane in describing the nature and difficulty of admiration, "whose enormous spiritual and even metaphysical significance is still not recognized. The verb *lift* forcefully and accurately denotes the kind of effect admiration evokes in us, or rather realizes in us as a function of the object which evokes it...It is clear that the function of admiration is to tear us away from ourselves and from the thoughts we have of ourselves...Not so long ago a dramatist affirmed during an interview that admiration was for him a humiliating state which he resisted with all his force...An analysis similar to the one Scheler has given of resentment should disclose that there is a burning preoccupation with self at the bottom of this suspicion [of anything superior], a 'but what about me, what becomes of me in that case?'...To affirm: admiration is a humiliating state, is the same as to treat the subject as a power existing for itself and taking itself as a center. To proclaim on the other hand, that it is an exalted state is to start from the inverse notion that the proper function of the subject is to emerge from itself and realize itself primarily in the gift of oneself" (1964: 47-49).

Finally, as if to exhibit the agreement between Protestant and Catholic Augustinians on this point, we can return to Kierkegaard himself. His definitions of the self and of faith spell out his understanding of self-transcendence as the lifelong task of life. The self is "a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another" (1980: 13-14). This latter relation is faith when "in relating itself to itself and in willing to

be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it" (49; cf. 14, 30, 82, 131).

Augustine and Merton introduce the basic notion of becoming detached from ourselves. Marcel makes it clear that this involves the transition from a self preoccupied with itself and its position as the center to a self capable of giving itself in admiration and creative fidelity to another. From the point of view of the point of departure, this is a humiliating tearing away from that to which I cling with all my might. From the point of view of the destination, this is a liberating elevation above the narrow horizons defined by the question, But what about me? In short, self-transcendence is the journey from the false self to the true self, with all of its agony and its ecstasy.

In spite of its austere form, Kierkegaard's formula for faith recapitulates these themes and introduces another. First, with Augustine and Merton he is explicit that we are to be detached from ourselves in order to be attached to God. 'Freedom from' is in the service of 'freedom for.' Here we encounter the wonderful ambiguity of the term 'transcendence.' It can mean that which is beyond, the transcendent. Or it can mean going beyond, transcending. For the Augustinian tradition the two are united, and transcending is toward the transcendent. What is beyond my false self is not simply my true self, but the not-myself in proper relation to which it first becomes possible for me to be my true self. Only by losing myself, in the sense of going beyond myself toward the not-myself, do I ever truly find myself.

Second, with Marcel, Kierkegaard is explicit that the relation to the other is a humble, decentering relation. (This is why it is experienced by pride as humiliation.) Self-transcendence means willing to be myself while at the same time willing to let God be God, that is, willing to be myself without insisting on being God. It is the exact opposite of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, who says, "if there were gods, how could I endure not to be a god! Hence there are no gods" (1966b: 86, "Upon the Blessed Isles"). It means learning to pray

Hallowed by *Thy* name

Thy kingdom come

Thy will be done

without surreptitiously co-opting the name and the kingdom so that *my* will may be done on earth and in heaven.

Finally, for all of its emphasis on the role of the transcendent in self-transcendence, Kierkegaard's account explicitly links relation-to-an-other to self-relation. Only as self-relating selfhood does the self transcend itself toward its true self in relation to the transcendent. Given the historical linkage of the Augustinian *dubito* to the Cartesian *cogito*, this introduction of inwardness should not take us by surprise. Among its most important implications is that

the metaphor of organic development can never be more than a metaphor, and a rather poor one at that, for self-transcendence. The latter presupposes too much in the way of self-awareness and self-involvement (Evans, 1963).

On the other hand, by making self-presence itself a task rather than an achievement, Kierkegaard excludes that total self-presence by virtue of which the self could claim to be the center. This expresses the great gulf fixed between his Augustinianism and its modern, secular counterpart, the Cartesian-Humean (Husserlian-positivist) tradition. In its self-relation the self is not posited as the ground of certainty, the criterion of truth, the self-sufficient and absolute mode of being, in short, the center. If I may be permitted to express the point oxymoronically, to counter Cartesian modernity's arrogant Augustinianism, Kierkegaard develops the inwardness of a decentered Cartesianism. The I of the Augustinian "I think" is always a problem, never a possession nor an Archimedean *pou sto*.

Having given this somewhat extended Augustinian definition of self-transcendence, I now want to suggest that we use it as at least a working definition of religious experience. Religious experience =_{df} self-transcendence, the self-aware, self-involving, self-transforming relation to the ultimately transcendent. While I believe this definition has advantages at the descriptive level for the phenomenological and historical study of religion, the present essay will focus on its prescriptive employment as a norm for distinguishing authentically religious experience from its look-alikes. Not all the beliefs, practices, and feelings that are easily recognized as religious are acts of self-transcendence. Prayer, for example, can easily be "a burning preoccupation with self," a solemn repetition of the question, "But what about me, what becomes of me in that case?"

Alterity is a big topic among philosophers these days, and a number of contemporary conversations have reminded us how difficult it is for the human spirit to be "at home [*bei sich*] with itself in its otherness *as such*" (Hegel, 1949: 790, my italics; cf. Taylor, 1987). This formula of Hegel's is strikingly similar to Kierkegaard's designation of faith as a self-relating that is simultaneously an other-relating. Its "as such" is meant as a reminder that the other is meant to remain other. But for all his emphasis on dialectic as the path of otherness, opposition, negation, contradiction, and so forth, Hegel himself stands accused of taking away with dialectical reconciliation what he first gives in the form of dialectical difference. Dialectic turns out to be a monological self-mediation rather than a dialogical other-mediation (Habermas, 1987 and Desmond, 1987).

In a similar vein, Derridean deconstruction, flying significantly under the banner of *différance*, is a sustained polemic against the metaphysics of presence precisely as the reduction of the different to the same. The debate with Gadamer, for example, can perhaps best be summarized as the reciprocal

claims, I am more open to otherness than you are (Michelfelder and Palmer, 1989; cf. Caputo, 1987).

These discussions provide an important context for any contemporary discussion of religious experience as self-transcendence. What is more, reflection on specifically religious experience can make an important contribution to the wider discussion of otherness in general. For, in the first place, the holy, the ultimately transcendent, has appropriately been designated, not merely as other but as "wholly other." It is quintessentially transcendent. Secondly, self-transcendence may be more than casually linked to the transcendent; it may well be the condition and measure of the transcendent. This would mean, not that there is the transcendent only to the degree that we are able to transcend ourselves, but that we experience the transcendent as such, as truly other, only to the degree that we are able to transcend ourselves. Conversely, to the degree that self-transcendence fails, transcendence is only apparent, that is, idolatrous.

In order to explore this hypothesis and to clarify the normative significance of the concept of religious experience as self-transcendence, I want to look at a variety of other modes of experience in order to highlight the tenuousness of transcendence in them. The claim that knowledge is self-transcendence is an good point of departure both because religion is so often identified with religious beliefs and because philosophers so often speak of knowledge as transcendence. For example, Fichte says that "the I forgets itself in the object of its activity...*Intuition* is the name of this action, a silent, unconscious contemplation, which loses itself in its object" (Breazeale, 1988: 260). Kojève expands on this idea. "Now, the analysis of 'thought,' 'reason,' 'understanding,' and so on—in general, of the cognitive, contemplative, passive behavior of a being or a 'knowing subject'—never reveals the why or the how of the birth of the word 'I'...The man who contemplates is 'absorbed' by what he contemplates; the 'knowing subject' 'loses' himself in the object that is known. Contemplation reveals the object, not the subject...The man who is 'absorbed' by the object that he is contemplating can be 'brought back to himself' only by a Desire" (1969: 3). In other words, in desire we are related to the other, for example, something we want to eat, only as the mode in which we are preoccupied with ourselves and satisfying our needs; but in cognition real transcendence occurs as we lose ourselves and become absorbed in the object.

Since Husserl treats intentionality primarily as cognitive, his claim that intentionality is transcendence can help us make this claim more precise. In the first place there is the transcendence of the physical object to perception. It is transcendent by virtue of exceeding whatever it is able to give of itself "in person," whatever is directly present to perception. It can present its front side, but not its other sides. It can only present itself in adumbrations

(*abschattungen*) which it always infinitely exceeds (1983: par. 41-42). In this way the object transcends the perception of it.

Other objects, such as mental processes (*Erlebnisse*) are not given in this way. "*Ein Erlebnis schattet sich nicht ab.*" For this reason there is a sharp distinction to be drawn between a mental process and a physical thing (*Ding*), namely that the former "can be perceived in an immanent perception," while the latter is always transcendent (par. 42).

There are also nonspatial objects that have their own mode of transcendence. In reflection my intentional object is a *cogitatio*, one of my own, and we might label this "internal perception." But Husserl prefers the language of immanence and transcendence to that of internal and external. So he says that "by *intensive mental processes related to something immanent*, we understand those to which it is *essential that their intentional objects, if they exist at all, belong to the same stream of mental processes to which they themselves belong*...Intensive mental processes of which that is *not* the case are *directed to something transcendent*" (par. 38, his italics). This means that my cognition is transcendent whenever it is directed to an "object" that is not a *cogitatio* or *Erlebnis* of my own. Among such objects are not only spatial objects but essences, other egos, and their *Erlebnisse*.

This seems to be very close to the realism of G. E. Moore, grounded in the distinction between the act and the object of consciousness (1953: ch. XVI and 1959: ch. I-II). Given the way in which both Moore and Husserl distinguish the intentional object (*noema*) from the act that intends it (*noesis*), it is not clear why we shouldn't say that every intentional act involves transcendence. Whether or not that is what they intend us to conclude, we can distinguish three theses about intentionality and transcendence:

- 1) We encounter transcendence in every intentional object (since the act and the object can always be distinguished).
- 2) We encounter transcendence in those intentional objects which are not themselves our own *cogitationes* or *Erlebnisse* (since they do not belong to the stream of mental acts that includes the acts that intend them).
- 3) We encounter transcendence in those intentional objects that are physical, i.e., spatial (since they can only give themselves partially, perspectively, *abschattungsweise*).

No doubt each of these theses embodies a legitimate and useful concept of transcendence. But none of them gives us the self-transcendence we are looking for, that detachment from self that moves us beyond preoccupation with what Kant calls "the dear self."

The first reason for this is clear if we return briefly to Kojève. The separation of cognition from desire that he attributes to the knowing subject is by no means typical of cognition. Hume, the father of positivism, says, "Reason

is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (1888: 415). Nietzsche, the father of postmodernism, agrees: "but reason is merely an instrument, and Descartes is superficial" (1966a: 104). If we think of positivism and postmodernism as diseases to be eliminated like polio and smallpox, the best we can hope to do is show that Hume and Nietzsche are not right all of the time. We would surely be kidding ourselves to deny that they are right at least most of the time. And whether instrumental reason is to be seen as the glory or the curse of modernity, it is nothing if not preoccupation with the self (personal and collective) and its desires.

But, it may well be objected, did not Fichte and Kojève speak explicitly about contemplation, making it clear they have disinterested cognition in mind? The Greeks and their modern followers often speak of philosophy as *theoria* in this sense, but at least since the eighteenth century the notion of disinterested contemplation has primarily been developed in relation to aesthetic experience. A tradition that extends from Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Burke, and Alison through Kant and Schopenhauer to Croce and Edward Bullough has sought to make the transcendence of self-interest the key to aesthetic appreciation (see Westphal, 1984: 131-35). The anti-instrumental, anti-utilitarian theme of this tradition is succinctly expressed by C. S. Lewis, "the many *use* art and the few *receive* it" (1961: 19), and by Oscar Wilde, "All art is quite useless" (1981: xxiv).

The examples Shaftesbury gives of disinterested contemplation make it clear that breaking the link between intentionality and desire is the heart of the matter. It is the absence of the desire to command, the desire to own, the desire to eat, and the desire to touch sexually that makes the perception of beauty disinterested, and Shaftesbury understandably speaks of this as the transcendence of "selfishness," "self-interest," and "self-love" (1964: II, 126-28, I, 78, 274-75, 317).

There can be little doubt that in theoretical and aesthetic contemplation we have the self-forgetfulness Fichte and Kojève have in mind, in which the subject sinks from sight, playing at most the role of background or horizon while the object becomes foreground and theme. If we remember that Shaftesbury's primary interest in disinterestedness was not aesthetics but ethics and religion, we may think that we have found what we are looking for (cf. O'Connor, 1972: 151-52). But this model is also too weak.

Contemplative self-forgetfulness takes us beyond instrumental reason, to be sure. Hume and Nietzsche might deny that it ever exists, and we would do well to take their suspicions seriously. But let us retain the hypothesis that it sometimes does occur, at least to a significant degree. The problem begins with Aristotle, whose *Metaphysics* begins with the words, "All men by nature desire to know." It looks as if the link between knowledge and desire has not

been cut after all. Of course, the desire to know is not a selfish desire, as if knowledge were a zero sum game. But it is, even when it has no instrumental significance, the desire to satisfy and fulfill the self. To use a Rawlsian distinction (1971: 127-29), it is a desire both of the self (my desire) and in the self (for my satisfaction). For this reason, Aristotle's ethics, including his theory of contemplation as an intellectual virtue, is properly identified as a self-realization theory.

Shaftesbury points us in the same direction. "For though the habit of selfishness and the multiplicity of interested views are of little improvement to real merit or virtue, yet there is a necessity for the preservation of virtue, that it should be thought to have no quarrel with true interest and self-enjoyment" (1964: 274). The point is not that self-realization and self-enjoyment are evil. It is simply that contemplative experience, theoretical or aesthetic, that is properly interpreted in these terms can hardly be a convincing model for religious experience conceived as detachment from self. Disinterestedness may delimit but it does not displace the supremacy of the self, which remains the horizon for contemplative self-forgetfulness. Conversely, if religious experience is to be conceived as self-transcendence, any piety that does not get beyond both instrumental self-seeking and contemplative self-enjoyment is not genuine religious experience.

C. S. Lewis fails to see this point in an otherwise illuminating discussion of heaven in *The Problem of Pain*. People are nervous about "pie in the sky" escapism, he notes. But if there is no "pie in the sky" then Christianity is false, and if there is, then we must deal with it. He writes, "we are afraid that heaven is a bribe, and that if we make it our goal we shall no longer be disinterested. It is not so. Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God, for only the pure in heart want to." With the right kind of glosses on these claims Lewis could take us beyond disinterestedness to genuine transcendence. But instead of doing so he remains within the dichotomy of disinterested and mercenary. "There are rewards that do not sully motives. A man's love for a woman is not mercenary because he wants to marry her, nor his love for poetry mercenary because he wants to read it, nor his love of exercise less disinterested because he wants to run and leap and walk. Love, by definition, seeks to enjoy its object" (1962: 144-45). By being satisfied as long as enjoyment is not mercenary, Lewis, like Shaftesbury, fails to notice the limitations of enjoyment with reference to transcendence.

The mercenary is one who does what is not enjoyable for the sake of what is. Mercenary behavior is instrumental, means-end behavior. Mercenary love is false love, as when a man loves a woman for her money or a woman loves a man for the security he provides. Disinterested behavior does not have this means-end structure, and disinterested love does not arise from ulterior mo-

tives. When the Psalmist prays, "For God alone my soul in silence waits" (62.1), this can be a mercenary prayer meaning, "Only God can get me out of this mess," or it can be a disinterested prayer meaning, "Not even the benefits of divine grace, but only God in person can satisfy me." There is a huge difference between these two prayers, but in both cases the self is concerned with its own satisfaction, and the love that seeks to enjoy its object is caught up in its own enjoyment.

It is Levinas who sees more clearly than anyone that the other enjoyed is not necessarily transcendent, and, consequently, that enjoyment is not necessarily self-transcendence. Echoing the Hegelian formula we noted earlier, Levinas finds us not content merely to be at home with ourselves in familiar surroundings (his *chez soi* = Hegel's *bei sich*) but disposed to reach out "toward an alien outside-of-oneself, toward a yonder." He calls this desire for genuine otherness metaphysical desire. But the other thus desired "is not 'other' like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate...I can 'feed' on these realities and to a very great extent satisfy myself, as though I had simply been lacking them. Their *alterity* is thereby reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or a possessor. The metaphysical desire tends toward *something else entirely*, toward the *absolutely other*" (1969: 33).

As this passage indicates, eating is the paradigm of enjoyment and the source of the appearance of transcendence therein. Against all forms of idealism, which interpret knowledge as the primacy of subject over object, the reduction of the latter's otherness to the sameness of the former, alimentation reminds me that I am a body within the world and not just a mind for whom the world is a spectacle. Food overflows its meaning as an object of representation and becomes a condition for the very acts by which such meaning is constituted (127-30). In my dependence on the elements of life I seem to encounter something quite other than myself.

Levinas makes three points about enjoyment so construed that are relevant to our project. First, as Shaftesbury and Lewis have noted, in enjoyment we are beyond self-interest conceived in instrumental or mercenary terms. "Here lies the permanent truth of hedonist moralities: to not seek, behind the satisfaction of need, an order relative to which alone satisfaction would require a value; to take satisfaction, which is the very meaning of pleasure, as a term. The need for food does not have existence as its goal, but food. Biology teaches the prolongation of nourishment into existence; need is naïve" (134).

Second, enjoyment is pure egoism, not self-transcendence. "In enjoyment I am absolutely for myself. Egoist without reference to the Other, I am alone without solitude, innocently egoist and alone. Not against the Others, not 'as for me...'—but entirely deaf to the Other, outside of all communication and all refusal to communicate—without ears, like a hungry stomach" (134; his ellipsis). I may be dependent on the elements from which I draw my nour-

ishment, but "in the satisfaction of need the alienness of the world that founds me loses its alterity...Through labor and possession the alterity of nutriment enters into the same" (129).

Finally, as the phrase 'like a hungry stomach' suggests, eating is but a model of many different modes of enjoyment. As "an ultimate relation with the substantial plenitude of being," enjoyment "embraces all relations with things" (133). I take this to mean not that there is nothing but enjoyment, but that there is no relation that cannot be elevated to/reduced to enjoyment. In spite of the initial distinction between knowledge and enjoyment, Levinas is explicit that cognitive relations can have this structure, especially when they have a contemplative character. Thus, "I but open my eyes and already enjoy the spectacle" (130). And we have already seen him assimilate "the landscape I contemplate" to "the bread I eat." The psalmist who thirsts for the face of God as a deer for streams of water (42: 1-2) has surely made spiritual progress over those whose only appetites are for "wine, women, and song." But the journey toward genuine religious experience may not be over.

There is still another mode of self-forgetfulness that turns out to be something less than the self-transcendence we are seeking to clarify. Like contemplation it takes us beyond the mercenary, and it often turns up in religious contexts. We can call it ecstatic self-forgetfulness, as distinct from contemplative. The two are not totally different, for there surely is a contemplative ecstasy, for example, in Yoga.

We can consider play, as interpreted by Gadamer, as something of a transition experience. Since he relates play to the religious festival and claims that "The player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him" (110, 97-98), there is obvious reference to our own question about religious experience. Even the spectator is able "to forget one's own purposes...To be present...has a character of being outside oneself." This "ecstasy of being outside oneself [*Ekstatik des Ausser-sich-seins*]" is "the positive possibility of being wholly with something else. This kind of being present is a self-forgetfulness, and it is the nature of the spectator to give himself in self-forgetfulness to what he is watching" (110-11; cf. 113-14).

More sharply distinct from contemplative self-forgetfulness than Gadamerian play is the Dionysian, as described by Nietzsche. It is not only a self-forgetfulness by contrast with Apollinian self-knowledge; it also dwells among the "wilder emotions" from which Apollinian calm is free (1967: 45, 35). Far from being any kind of spectator sport, it is a realm of *Rausch* (intoxication, delirium, frenzy, transport, ecstasy, rapture) and *Verzückung* (ecstasy, rapture, transport, trance, convulsion). In the "dancers of St. John and St. Vitus," in "the Bacchic choruses of the Greeks," and "as far back as Babylon and the orgiastic Sacaea," we find the Dionysian experience in which "everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness" (33-37).

There is clearly a dimension of self-transcendence here, even of detachment from self. But ecstatic self-forgetfulness is no more what we are looking for than was contemplative self-forgetfulness. Gadamer tells us as much himself when he writes, "Thus to the ecstatic self-forgetfulness of the spectator there corresponds his continuity with himself. Precisely that in which he loses himself as a spectator requires his own continuity...the absolute moment in which a spectator stands is at once self-forgetfulness and reconciliation with self. That which detaches him from everything also gives him back the whole of his being" (1975: 113-14).

This sounds so much like the words of Jesus (Mark 8: 35) that we might easily think we have found the definition of religious self-transcendence if Gadamer had not also said, in the middle of the passage just quoted, "It is the truth of [the spectator's] own world, the religious and moral world in which he lives, which presents itself to him and in which he recognizes himself." William James is said to have complained that for Josiah Royce "the world is real but not so very damn real." We might say here that the ecstatic self encounters something other than itself, but no so very damn other. In other words, though the elements on which the self feeds here are spiritual rather than physical, we have not gotten beyond the realm of nutrition. Like its contemplative counterpart, ecstatic self-forgetfulness is a species of enjoyment.

That this is also true for Nietzsche's wilder version is perhaps clearest in his linkage of the Dionysian with sexual ecstasy (1967: 36; 1968: sec. 798-801). I do not mean simply that sex is fun. What I have in mind is best expressed in the comment one of my students made to me years ago. After living together for a while, she and her boyfriend had broken up and separated. Though she had no apparent scruples about having lived together, she was obviously not comfortable about the fact that they still secretly got together to have sex. Her explanation/excuse: "the only time I can ever forget myself is when I'm having sex." Her ex-boyfriend was "other but not so very damn other" because he was but an element through which her need was satisfied. That her need was primarily for oblivion rather than for pleasure or intimacy does not take her experience, or Nietzsche's Dionysian of which it is a model, beyond the framework of enjoyment. Self-forgetfulness continues to be a mode of being preoccupied with oneself, in this case with killing for oneself the pain of being oneself.

Although we have not yet found the model that will clarify for us what is essential about the peculiar combination of transcendence and self-transcendence which the Augustinian tradition offers as a normative concept of religious experience, the time has come to introduce our second major theme, self-deception. For it will throw light on our negative results to this point. Our point of departure can be the suspicion Nietzsche directs toward religious

experience, even that of religious founders. "One sort of honesty has been alien to all founders of religions and their kind: They have never made their experiences a matter of conscience for knowledge. 'What did I really experience?'...None of them has asked such questions, nor do any of our dear religious people ask them even now" (1974: 253).

Paul Ricoeur translates this kind of question into the language of the biblical prophets on the warpath against idolatry as he introduces his own hermeneutics of suspicion. "In our time we have not finished doing away with *idols* and we have barely begun to listen to *symbols*. It may be that this situation, in its apparent distress, is instructive: it may be that extreme iconoclasm belongs to the restoration of meaning" (1970: 27). To listen to religious symbols is to open oneself to a claim from what purports to be ultimately transcendent and to entertain the possibility of transcending oneself in that direction. To do away with idols is to take seriously the suspicion that what purports to be listening to religious symbols is actually something quite different, an acoustic illusion in which my own voice is mistaken for the divine voice. When this occurs, religion becomes a disguised form of self-centering or preoccupation with oneself. For corresponding to false-consciousness are false gods, and the deities who are the means or the elements for self-centering are wish-fulfilling projections whose fictitious character does not keep them from being rivals to whatever may be truly sacred (see Westphal, 1987).

Ricoeur's suggestion is that the pursuit of any possibly genuine self-transcendence must include a negative, iconoclastic moment. He calls us to renew the question that Jonathan Edwards put so sharply with reference to the "holy affections" in which "true religion, in great part, consists" (1959: 95)—how can we distinguish the truly holy affections from their counterfeit counterparts? Precisely our failure, to this point, to find an adequate model for the self-transcendence that constitutes genuine religious experience puts us in a good position to see why Nietzsche and Ricoeur and Edwards (like Amos and Jesus) refuse to take everything that offers itself as religious experience at face value. For that failure contains the transcendental deduction, so to speak, of three idols.

To begin with, any religious experience that contents itself with what we have called intentional transcendence can be shown to be idolatrous. Religion that consists of nothing more than doctrinal knowledge of a transcendent creator and savior, for example, no matter how correct and orthodox such doctrine may be, reduces God to one of my clear and distinct ideas. Having already reduced the wholly other to the propositionally possessed, it will complete itself as the instrumental religion in which the truth serves as a security blanket or a weapon against one's opponents and thus as an escape from the call to a decentered selfhood (see Westphal, 1980).

Similarly, insofar as religious experience can be adequately described in terms of either contemplative or ecstatic self-forgetfulness, its gods will be but vehicles of enjoyment, nutritional elements lacking the kind of transcendence in themselves that would make them wholly and genuinely other or enable them to inspire any detachment from self.

To call the gods of such religions idols is to recognize them as convenient fictions masked as transcendent realities. But the iconoclasm that labels them as such should not be misunderstood to be the claim that there is no place in true religion for doctrinal affirmation or for either contemplative or ecstatic self-forgetfulness. On the contrary, I want to insist that there is an important place for each of these in true religion. The point is that by themselves these moments do not make up the true religion we seek. Something is missing, something so essential that without it these important moments of true religion become the embodiment of false. What is it?

There is an important clue in Gadamer's analysis of contemplative and ecstatic self-forgetfulness. Much as Lewis distinguishes the few who receive art from the many who use it, Gadamer emphasizes the "important difference between a spectator who gives himself entirely to the play of art, and someone who merely gapes at something out of curiosity." For the former "the play of art does not simply exhaust itself in the ecstatic emotion of the moment, but has a claim to permanence and the permanence of a claim" (1975: 111-12).

We might take this talk about a claim in purely aesthetic terms, as if the work of art lays claim to be recognized as a classic. But Gadamer seems to have in mind something more nearly like the experience Rilke expresses in his sonnet, "Archaic Torso of Apollo."

Never will we know his fabulous head
where the eyes' apples slowly ripened. Yet
his torso glows: a candelabrum set
before his gaze which is pushed back and hid,
restrained and shining. Else the curving breast
could not thus blind you nor through the soft turn
of the loins could this smile easily have passed
into the bright groins where the genitals burned.

Else stood this stone a fragment and defaced,
with lucent body from the shoulders falling,
too short, not gleaming like a lion's fell;
nor would this star have shaken the shackles off,
bursting with light, until there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.

(MacIntyre, 1957: 92-93)

We are not prepared for these last five words, 'You must change your life.' Like the words, 'To live life to the end is no childish task' at the conclusion

of *Doctor Zhivago*, their claim upon us shatters the calm of contemplation and calls us beyond the realm of aesthetic enjoyment to ethical, even religious responsibility. For this reason Gadamer explicates his notion of the claim in terms of Kierkegaard's challenge to contemporaneity with Christ and to hearing the proclamation of the gospel in a sermon, as understood by dialectical theology (1975: 112-13). His earlier notion that "the player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him" (98), now becomes the notion that in the claim we encounter the "truth" of the "moral and religious world" in which we live (113).

There is an ambiguity here. As a moral and religious claim, this truth seems to have the categorical character that would render it truly other. But, as Kant and Freud insist with the greatest clarity and persuasiveness, the voice of categorical claims may very well be our very own voice. And Gadamer himself qualifies the alterity of the claim by saying, with reference to the spectator, "It is the truth *of his own world*, the religious and moral world *in which he lives*, which presents itself to him and *in which he recognizes himself*" (113, my italics). If the truth that claims me is simply the tradition that has already shaped me, the spiritual world in and from which I live, and move, and have my being, its voice is other but not so very damn other. If Gadamer wants us to take seriously his appeal to Kierkegaard and to dialectical theology he must identify a claim that evokes fear and trembling not only from me as an existing individual but from my established order as well (Kierkegaard, 1944: 89; Barth, 1968: 27-54). His lack of enthusiasm for such a task is notorious.

For an unambiguous development of the clue we have found in Gadamer, the idea that it is in the form of a claim upon us that we encounter the otherness of the other, we can return to Levinas' account of metaphysical desire as directed toward "*something else entirely*, toward the *absolutely other*" (1969: 33). His analysis of enjoyment as involving self-centering rather than self-transcendence is one of several foils against which he develops the thesis that "the absolutely other is the Other" (39).

Who is this Other? In the first instance it is the one whom I encounter face to face in conversation (39, 71). In other words, the Other is another human being. Because our encounter takes place in language, it can be no animal other, and because it takes place face to face it can be no divine other. Rather, "it is only man who could be absolutely foreign to me" (73; cf. 71-79).

Secondly, the Other is the one whose face and speech I first encounter, beyond all knowing, all using, and all enjoying (38), as a claim, the unconditional constraint upon my freedom that leaves me fully free to accept or reject it and that is expressed in the words, "You shall not commit murder" (199, 216, 262, 303). Only in the realm of ethics, only in "the ethical impossibility of killing [the Other]" (87), do I encounter otherness as truly other.

This claim has a radically decentering intent. "To welcome the Other is to put in question my freedom" (85; cf. 51, 43). It reminds me that I am not the center to which all else is peripheral, the end to which all else is the means. In the claims of the Other I am suddenly beyond all objects to be known, all tools to be used, and all elements on which to feed either body or soul.

What is worse, from the perspective of the "dear self," the relation is asymmetrical. It is not a prudent, contractual arrangement among equals in which I offer to spare your life (and liberty) if you agree to spare mine. On the one hand is the asymmetry of loftiness. The unconditional character of the Other's claim can only be expressed in images of height and authority. For this reason, although the Other is human and not divine, Levinas speaks of the Other as "Most-High" (34) and "Master" (72, 75, 86). On the other hand there is the asymmetry of indigence. This is why Levinas also refers to the Other as the stranger, the widow, the orphan, and the poor (77-78). The Other has nothing to offer in exchange for my welcoming, least of all a bribe. With such indigent loftiness it is impossible to negotiate or to strike a deal.

Finally, the face of the Other "*expresses itself*," it manifests itself "*kath' auto*" (51). We are familiar with this Greek phrase through its Latin equivalent, *per se*. The face of the other expresses itself, and it does so through itself and not through another. This does not consist in its being disclosed, "its being exposed to the gaze that would take it as a theme for interpretation, and would command an absolute position dominating the object. Manifestation *kath' auto* consists in a being telling itself to us independently of every position we would have taken in its regard, *expressing itself*" (65; cf. 67, 74, 77).

The concept of disclosure that Levinas here contrasts with expression *kath' auto* or 'revelation' has Husserlian-Heideggerian connotations. "To recognize truth to be disclosure is to refer it to the horizon of him who discloses... The disclosed being is relative to us and not *kath' auto*" (64). By contrast, the notion of the face as self-revelatory "brings us to a notion of meaning prior to my *Sinngebung* and thus independent of my initiative and my power" (51). Even more important, it is independent of the horizons of meaning we bring with us, the tacit dimensions of our awareness that confer meaning without our noticing it (28).

Levinas knows exactly what he is doing here. He is claiming immediacy for the Other's self-expression. "The immediate is the face to face" (52). In spite of all attacks on the "myth of the given," he is claiming that the face is a theory free datum. In willful disregard for the alleged inescapability of the hermeneutical circle, he finds us pointed toward "the possibility of *signification without a context*" (23). And in spite of all attacks on the metaphysics of presence and the transcendental signifier (Derrida, 1976: 49-50, 69-71; 1981: 19-20, 29, 44), he insists that "the signification of the face is due to

an essential coinciding of the existent and the signifier. Signification is not added to the existent. To signify is not equivalent to presenting oneself as a sign, but to expressing oneself, that is, presenting oneself in person" (262).

Such claims are bold heresy in the present philosophical climate. But in spite of the avalanche of criticism they are bound to evoke, Levinas will want to stick by them, for they are the key to his project. Without self-expression *kath' auto*, I could not welcome the Other *as such*. The Other would be permitted to encounter me only as a meaning relative to my own (present) acts of *Sinngebung* or to the sedimented (past) acts of myself and of others that I bring with me as horizon, context, pre-understanding, *a priori*, tacit dimension, pre-judice. Since as thematizing and as operative intentionality I would be the condition of the possibility of her appearance, she would clearly be merely phenomenal. No *per se*, no *an sich*. Such an Other is not so very damn other. But as the claim that challenges my centrality in its own terms and not in my own, the Other is very other indeed.

This is not the immediacy that ends up as pure indeterminacy (Hegel, 1969: 82; cf. 1959: Par. 86). It is concerned with presence, to be sure, but not with sheer presence beyond difference. It is Derrida, pursuing his own agenda of *différance*, who points this out. By virtue of the lofty majesty attributed by Levinas to the Other, the encounter with the Other "does not take the form of an intuitive contact" since the Other is present "not as a total presence but as a *trace*" (Derrida, 1978: 95). What we have here is "absolute proximity and absolute distance...A community of nonpresence, and therefore of non-phenomenality...Only the other, the totally other, can be manifested...within a certain nonmanifestation and a *certain absence*...It can be said only of the other that its phenomenon is a certain nonphenomenon, a *certain absence*" (90-91, my italics).

This is why Levinas sometimes speaks of the Other simply as "the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself" (1969: 39). Without the additional appellations of widow, orphan, and poor, such a reference evokes Camus rather than the Law and the Prophets and serves to make it clear that the Other, when encountered as truly other, is an intangible intrusion and not an intuitive intelligibility. It is for the same reason that Levinas emphasizes the nudity of the face. This is not to deny that the face may be the bearer of cultural codes, as when an expensive coiffure, a matted beard, or the unmistakable signs of Downs syndrome enable me to assign faces to their places in the social hierarchy. It is simply to deny that the meaning and validity of the Other's claim, "You shall not commit murder," is in any way dependent on these cultural codes. The ethical immediacy of the Other as face has nothing to do with pre-predicative indeterminacy; it is rather a matter of expressing a claim unmediated by the cultural codes that normally censor all claims.

The face as the presence of the Other as absolutely other "is produced concretely as a temptation to total negation, and as the infinite resistance to murder...in the hard resistance of these eyes without protection—what is softest and most uncovered" (262). If Camus' *The Stranger* renders uncomfortably concrete this "temptation to total negation," the death of the black man, Christmas, in Faulkner's *Light in August* reveals "the infinite resistance to murder...in...these eyes without protection." A white lynch mob is determined to kill him, in spite of the testimony of the preacher, Hightower, that, "He was here that night. He was with me the night of the murder, I swear to God—" Grimm, their leader, finally corners Christmas, fires five shots into him, and, as he lies dying, castrates him. The others catch up. "But the man on the floor had not moved. He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness...For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out of the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath...upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatening, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant" (1950: 406-407).

From out of the gaze of that black face the whole body of Christmas becomes face, so much so that the black blood that gushes from between his legs is transformed into a breath exuding from that face. According to the cultural codes that are the horizon for white perceptions of that black face, it is possible to interpret this killing, in spite of the victim's humanity, as equivalent to slaughtering a hog, and simultaneously, in spite of the victim's innocence, as a just punishment. If that were the whole story, it would be possible to forget the deed. But those who were there cannot do so, because the face of Christmas, against all the operative cultural codes, expresses unambiguously and unforgettably a claim that they could reject but not refute, "You shall not commit murder."

They can kill him, but they cannot reify him. They cannot reduce his otherness to an object of their knowledge, a tool for their use, or nourishment for their enjoyment. Helpless and humiliated, defeated and dying, he embodies a transcendence unlike any they have ever encountered in church. For the gods they worship are idols, but Christmas is "wholly other."

Here we have the model we have been seeking to help us clarify the Augustinian notion of self-transcendence. This is an Other whose transcendence consists in an unconditional claim that removes me from the center of

the universe both ethically by constraining my will and epistemologically by refusing to be constrained by the cultural codes of the world in which I recognize myself.

This is the double decentering that constitutes Augustine's double conversion in Books VII and VIII of the *Confessions*. That independence of cultural codes precludes any account of knowledge as recollection is not only the argument of Augustine's critique of Platonism in Book VII, but also, and in greater detail, of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments*, taken jointly. Levinas reprises this argument by sharply distinguishing the ethical, in which I encounter the Other as truly other, from the political, in which I do not, and by repudiating recollection repeatedly as the vehicle of the ethical (1969: 21-24, 43, 51, 61, 171, 180, 204). According to Derrida's apt summary, Levinas sees western philosophy as "dominated since Socrates by a Reason which receives only what it gives itself, a Reason which does nothing but recall itself to itself." In this way "it has always *neutralized* the other, in every sense of the word" (Derrida, 1978: 96; cf. n. 27).

What here separates ethics from politics is what joins it to religion. Thus Kierkegaard's tight linkage in the *Postscript* of ethics and religion as the life-world of subjectivity, totally different from that of aesthetic-speculative objectivity, finds its echo in Levinas's claim that true religion presupposes ethics (77-78). We cannot truly love God while hating our sister and brother (1 John 4:40). If Marcel and Merton are the great Catholic Augustinians of our time, and Kierkegaard the great Protestant Augustinian, Levinas is the great Jewish Augustinian.

The Other whose transcendence Levinas has helped us to specify provides us with the opportunity for a unique self-transcendence. To welcome an Other so unwelcome to the pride that the Augustinian tradition finds to be the heart of our darkness and the darkness of our heart is to become a new person indeed. We are, of course, still in the realm of ethics and not yet talking about religious experience. For this Other is human and not divine. But all we have to do is replace the human with the divine Other to have the normative concept of religious experience we are looking for. Genuine religious experience is the self-transcendence in relation to a divine transcendence that radically decenters us as will, and, correspondingly, as belief and affection. Perhaps this link between the ethical and the religious is the truth behind Kant's claims that "morality does not need religion at all," that "morality leads inevitably to religion," and that "Religion is (subjectively regarded) the recognition of all duties as divine commands" (1960: 3, 7n., 142).

It is now possible to specify just where a couple of earlier formulations that looked so promising came up short. Gadamer's account of ecstatic self-forgetfulness in play, art, and religious ritual culminates in these words—

"That which detaches him from everything also gives him back the whole of his being" (1975: 113-14). These words evoked for us the claim of Jesus that only those who lose their life will find it. But what Jesus says is this—"whoever loses his life *for my sake and the gospel's* will save it" (Mark 8:35, my italics).

Who is this Jesus, and what is this "gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1)? Jesus is the one who has just responded to Peter's "You are the Messiah" with the announcement, to be repeated on two subsequent occasions (9:30-32, 10:32-34, cf. 45), that far from being the Davidic warrior who has come to slay the pharisaical-scribal Goliath of the Galilean synagogue, or the priestly Goliath of the Jerusalem temple, or the imperial Goliath of Rome, he is the Human One who must suffer and die at the hands of these Goliaths. And the good news about him centers in the call to a discipleship of self-denial and joining him on the way of the cross (8:34). By leaving out the crucial words, "for my sake and the gospel's," Gadamer leaves out precisely that decentering of the self as will (to power, cf. 10:35-45) that distinguishes the Markan account of self-transcendence as losing and finding oneself.

Similarly, we can now identify what C. S. Lewis failed to say when he wrote, "Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God, for only the pure in heart want to" (1962: 144-45). His glosses on this claim, you will recall, were in terms of love as enjoyment of the object of desire. In order to get beyond the self-referential character of enjoyment, we need to specify that the pure in heart are precisely those who have learned to welcome Mark's Jesus as their center. It is safe to tell them of the "pie in the sky" that consists in seeing God not simply because they want to see God. For the God some want to see is an idol, the cosmic legitimizer and guarantor of their own will to power (Peter in Mark 8—"Get behind me, Satan," James and John in Mark 10, the crowd on Palm Sunday). Rather, it is safe to tell them that they shall see God because their purity of heart consists in willing the one thing they cannot will from the center—

Hallowed be *Thy* name

Thy kingdom come

Thy will be done

The enjoyment of God known to such pure hearts is authentic self-transcendence, and the God enjoyed is genuinely transcendent. Transcendence is an ethical category relating to the will, not an ontological category relating to being.

A normative concept of religious experience defined in terms of welcoming Mark's Jesus and learning to pray the prayer of *his* kingdom may seem too specific, even sectarian, to define religious as distinct from Christian expe-

rience. But the generic character of the concept is not compromised by the concreteness of the tradition through which it has been introduced. It is, for example, not difficult to show that the Brahman of the Hindu tradition and the Nirvana of the Buddhist tradition are wholly other in the sense we have now identified, for they confront me as an ethical claim that in both its ascetic and altruistic dimensions defines the false self as the will to be the center.

It would seem, then, that the concept of self-transcendence is useful beyond the biblical framework used here to render it concrete. It focuses attention on the ubiquitous challenge of religion to autonomous selfhood. It is not the task of this essay to spell out in detail the differences and similarities that emerge as the concept is employed across the spectrum of religious phenomena.

Rather the question is whether this generic concept of genuine religious self-transcendence takes us beyond the dangers of religious self-deception? Will it no longer be necessary to ask Nietzsche's question, "What did I really experience?"

Let us make the question even more concrete, returning to the tradition we know best. Suppose I am Thomas à Kempis, and that I offer the following prayer in all sincerity. "O Lord, Thou knowest what is the better way, let this or that be done, as Thou shalt please. Give what Thou wilt, and how much Thou wilt, and when Thou wilt. Deal with me as Thou knowest, and as best pleaseth Thee, and is most for Thy honour. Set me where Thou wilt, and deal with me in all things just as Thou wilt. I am in Thy hand: turn me round, and turn me back again, even as a wheel. Behold, I am Thy servant, prepared for all things; for I desire not to live unto myself, but unto Thee; and O that I could do it worthily and perfectly" (1900: 127). Can we be confident that this prayer is offered to a truly transcendent God, rather than an idol, and that the prayer belongs to an experience of genuine self-transcendence?

Unfortunately not. We have already stipulated that these words are sincere. We can further stipulate that their sincerity is attested by the appropriate deeds. Our Thomas lives, let us say, an exemplary life of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Still, we will be reminded, "However painstaking our work, so long as we omit to surrender ourselves to God while performing it...our efforts build up within us not so much a true spirit of grace but the spirit of a Pharisee" (Chariton, 1966: 137). But how could such words and deeds fail to express a decentering surrender of oneself to God?

The answer is simple. Sincerity is no guarantee against self-deception. Corresponding to the three idols whose transcendental deduction we noted earlier are three modes of religious experience which do not even have the form of true godliness, decentering self-transcendence. This piety, by contrast, has that form so conspicuously that it could be used as its paradigm.

But that form may still be but appearance not supported by the reality it professes. Our Thomas may unconsciously be a hypocrite.

To see how this is possible let us recall *The Total Woman*. Perhaps like me you feel you have read this book even though you haven't. It suggests that the way to happiness for a woman is to subordinate herself entirely to the happiness of her lord and master. No, not God, but her husband. The combination of the theological claim that a radically hierarchical relation should exist between husband and wife with an emphasis on the wife's responsibility to keep the husband both sexually stimulated and satisfied, led Martin Marty to summarize his review in four words: fundies in their undies. Some years ago a student of mine wrote a review of this book which revealed the manipulative character of this conspicuous subordination. Again and again the book said, in so many words, Treat your husband as your lord and master and he'll be yours. You'll have no trouble keeping him for yourself or getting him to do what you want. You'll be in control.

The life of the total woman has the form of decentering self-transcendence, but not the substance. She may sincerely hold the beliefs and feel the emotions that her idea calls for, and she may perform a lifetime of sacrificial service for her husband. But this does not keep her from being self-deceived about what she has experienced, nor does it keep her devotion from being manipulative. What appears to her as subordination and service is in fact a complex web of strategic action in the service of her will to power. Secretly, and she keeps this secret even from herself, she is the center of her world.

Exactly the same may be true of our saintly Thomas à Kempis. The form of his piety is that of a decentering self-transcendence. Its inner content may or may not correspond. The form is visible, to others and to him. The content may be hidden from both. If it does not correspond and if he has managed not to notice this, he is self-deceived and the god he serves, so far from being genuinely transcendent, is not only constituted by his intentionality but also constructed by his (hidden) intentions. Such a god, so far from being "wholly other," is not so very damn other at all.

Given the multiple possibilities for self-deception, perhaps we can now see why self-transcendence is the task of a lifetime and why genuine transcendence is so elusive. And perhaps the current preoccupation with alterity among some philosophers is more the expression of hunger than of curiosity.

I want to suggest two conclusions for the philosophy of religion that seem to me to follow from these reflections. If this essay were addressed primarily to pastors or spiritual directors, I would address a very practical issue at this point. While the foregoing has shown, I hope, the need for suspicion and *self-examination* (since suspicion reduced to a tool for unmasking others becomes thereby a tool for sustaining our own self-deceptions), it has not

mentioned the dangers this entails, dangers of morbidity, masochism, and cynicism. Since I do not want to draw too sharp a line between the pastoral and the philosophical, the therapeutic and the theoretical, I pause at least long enough to mention these issues.

But the two conclusions with which I want to conclude concern philosophy as theory. It may seem as if our phenomenological reflections have ignored one of the most intensely debated philosophical questions relating to religious experience, namely whether it can provide good reasons to support religious beliefs. But this is not so. Instead, the account of religious experience we have developed together would seem to place a major obstacle in the way of any positive answer to this question we might seek to develop. Our normative concept suggests that the intentional object of religious experience that lacks either the form or the substance of true godliness will be an idol of one sort or another. Such experience can hardly provide rational support for beliefs that purport to express the genuine transcendence of the truly divine. For religious experience to have any evidential value, it will first have to be shown to be authentic.

There are perhaps two reasons why this task has been conspicuously absent from most discussions. One is its obvious difficulty. The other is the principle of charity, the tendency to consider religious experience innocent until proven guilty. But neither of these is a good reason. An essential task becomes less essential because of its difficulty only in the presence of self-deceptive laziness. And no matter how wonderfully American it may sound, the innocent-until-proven-guilty principle simply ignores 1) the biblical claim that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt" (Jer. 17:9), 2) the powerful theoretical analyses, only briefly developed in this essay, of self-deception whenever self-transcendence is at issue, and 3) our own "thou art the man" experience in the presence of such analyses.

One way to put this point would be to say that religious experience cannot provide any evidence for truth as objectivity until it has passed the test of truth as subjectivity. This link between the hermeneutics of suspicion and questions of inwardness and authenticity leads to a second conclusion. It puts in question the wisdom of doing business as usual within the religious epistemology industry. No doubt reflection is and ought to be *ancilla vitae*. But when the philosophy of religion, on this issue or any other, so focuses on objectivity as to let issues of subjectivity get forgotten or rendered peripheral, it shows itself to be ancillary to the life of some objectivist culture, Hegelian, positivist, technocratic, or whatever, that is systematically prejudiced against religious experience in general and the life of Christian faith in particular. This fact, if it is indeed a fact, is deserving of more attention than it usually gets among Christians in philosophy.

NOTES

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