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# Spirituality as Consummatory Experience: The Promises and Limitations of John Dewey's Phenomenology of the Religious

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**ABSTRACT:** The mission of this article is to unpack Dewey's phenomenology of religious experience as it is found in both *A Common Faith* and *Art as Experience*, and to outline its promises and limitations. After first piecing together Dewey's position on the nature and constitution of religious experiences, I explore the question of whether or not a Deweyan phenomenology can assimilate or account for some of the most forceful and intense sorts of spiritual intuition as described by several philosophers of religion. William James, Rudolf Otto, and Emmanuel Levinas are among the figures discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** John Dewey phenomenology and religion philosophy of religion pragmatism and religion religious naturalism

## I. The Bodhisattva and the Mountain

A good part of what makes the seemingly endless ascent up Mount Jihuashan such a powerful experience, for the curious visitor no less than for the earnest pilgrim, is the overwhelming solemnity of its atmosphere. As it is one of the four holy mountains of Chinese Buddhism, throngs of the pious march

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dutifully over its stone steps, passing temples and nunneries on their way to the summit. Bells ring out from behind open windows of old shrines, as if rushing to compete with the glow of candles and wafts of smoking incense. Every element seems to conspire in inducing a sense of the beyond. All of this is entirely appropriate, for Jihuashan is the abode of Dizang—the *bodhisattva* or savior being most known for refusing to enter the final nirvana until all spirits are released from even the lowest of the hells.

The image of a mountain is found right at the very beginning of John Dewey's influential work on aesthetics. "Mountain peaks do not float unsupported," he wrote in the opening of *Art as Experience*: "They do not even just rest upon earth. They *are* the earth in one of its manifest operations" (1934a, 2). If the mountain peak here represents the fine arts along with the elevated feelings and perceptions of which they are both the cause and product, the earth is our supposedly ordinary form of life. The loftiest forms of the aesthetic, for Dewey, did not originate from some other, supernal realm but are merely the intensification and refinement of our worldly experiences at their most integral. As for the aesthetic, so with the religious: Dewey's mature thought attempted to heal the chasm so often taken for granted between our most exalting experiences and the mundane realm in which we exist.[1] In short, the beyond is but an enhanced modality of what is *here*.

The essential task of what follows is to examine what Dewey had to offer a phenomenology of religious experience, as well as the strengths and limitations of his contribution. In sections II and III, I unpack Dewey's insights on religious experience as they are found in his most definitive works on religion and art: *A Common Faith* and *Art as Experience*. Dewey's mature thought not only challenged the split between the sacred and the mundane but tended to unearth what Walter Stace calls the "underground connections between the mystical and the aesthetic" (1960, 81). In section IV, I introduce two influential phenomenologies that rival Dewey's picture of the religious. The theological philosophies of Rudolf Otto and Emmanuel Levinas are here used to point out the limitations of Dewey's position—or more accurately, its inability to account for the structure and force of certain forms of spiritual experience. I conclude with a brief assessment of Dewey's phenomenology of the religious in light of these limitations.

There are some who may contest my inclusion of certain phenomenologists of the spiritual life in a discussion of comparative religious experiences. In fact, to "experience" something, for Martin Buber as well as for Levinas, was understood pejoratively as an approach to the world in which

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phenomena are beheld as mere objects or items of our own consciousness, and are amenable to categorization and manipulation. In *Phenomenology and Mysticism* (2007, 12), Anthony Steinbock argues that "experience" can be understood in a far more inclusive sense, and may equally denote a nonobjectifying relationship to what may resist our attempts at cognitive closure and the interests of utility. It is this broader notion of experience that I employ throughout this essay.

A word concerning Dewey and phenomenology: Dewey was no phenomenologist in the manner of one who would apply strict Husserlian methods—including the systematic bracketing of all assumptions concerning the existence of the natural world. However, the cornerstone of Dewey's approach to philosophical problems was an increased attentiveness to the full texture of experience, with the latter understood as the living relationship of an active and embodied agent with its environment. For Dewey, the artificial split between a disembodied subject and an external world of objects is the root of many of philosophy's most long-standing problems. The novelty and care of Dewey's observations in this regard have invited more than one apt comparison between his work and the "existential" variety of phenomenology.[2]

There are no mountains without their surrounding valleys, no peaks without an underlying base. A Deweyan approach, its limitations notwithstanding, may serve to illuminate the thick continuity subsisting between the bases and peaks of human experience, to see the ecstatic as but a refined and intensified version of what lie implicit, if improperly realized, within our ordinary life. The consequence of this may be our enhanced capacity to shape meaningless experiences into profound and meaningful ones, and for a greater number of human beings. Perhaps we may yet learn to escape from the hell realms without the descent of a heavenly bodhisattva into our world for aid and assistance. This is an enormous claim indeed, and it is my contention that the far-reaching implications of it alone make it worthy of exploration.

## II. Moral Faith and Natural Piety

In an appendix to *The Divided Self of William James*, Richard Gale shared a humorous image of James and Dewey seated before a Ouija board. While Dewey is smirking, the "sweat of earnest conviction" is pouring off

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of James's face (Gale 1999, 351).[3] While the older pragmatist argued for the existence of a supramundane reality, one in which all of our individualized selves are ensconced, Dewey's naturalism found no need for the supernatural.[4] The overall purpose of *A Common Faith*, in particular, was to demonstrate the possibility of a spirituality free of the divisiveness of allegiance to a particular denomination—one unburdened by belief in what is not amenable to the discoveries and methods of the empirical sciences. Whether one is sympathetic to this goal or perceives it as a failed project from the outset, it was precisely Dewey's attempt to isolate what is most salient in our spiritual lives away from all metaphysical presuppositions and historical revelations that led him to focus so originally on the nature of spiritual experience.

*A Common Faith* opens with a distinction between religions and "the religious" (Dewey 1934b, 1–2). While religion denotes the beliefs and rituals of the different denominations, each with its specific revelations and supernaturalisms, the *religious* is a certain attribute shared by our most meaningful experiences. There was, for Dewey, no such thing as *the* religious experience, for there exists a broad variety of ecstatic experiences that have been recognized as religious throughout history and across different cultures. At one point in *A Common Faith*, Dewey runs through a series of vivid and divergent examples: from the "trances and semi-hysteria" evoked by Native American tribes, through fasting, to "the mystical ecstasy of Neoplatonism with its complete abrogation of the self and absorption into an impersonal whole of Being" and more (1934b, 35–36). While such experiences have typically been interpreted through the metaphysical concepts predominant in their respective cultures, the religious may be found in the midst of experiences that are entirely secular and unconnected to any concept of the divine. "There is no reason for denying the existence of experiences that are called mystical," Dewey wrote. "On the contrary, there is every reason to suppose that, in some degree of intensity, they occur so frequently that they may be regarded as normal manifestations that take place at certain rhythmic points in the movement of experience" (1934b, 37).

In *I and Thou*, Martin Buber (1970, see pt. 3) argued that even in our most receptive and nonmanipulative engagements with the world, the self never unites itself with another: the "I" never becomes one with the "Thou." And yet, there is a kind of unification involved, for while only a fragment of ourselves participates in our more shallow and instrumental relationships

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(the calculative ego), the totality of our being is employed when we truly step out to meet the other—whether this other is a tree, a work of art, or another human being. The unity, for Buber (for instance, 1970, 125, 134), occurs *within* the self. Likewise, one form of the religious for Dewey is also an integration of the self, a gathering of ourselves away from our former state of distraction and dispersion and a shaping of ourselves into a whole.[5] In Dewey's case, this unification of the self is achieved in passionate commitment to the moral improvement of the world.

A graduate student turns into a passionate and committed activist after spending a weekend volunteering to fix homes battered by a terrible hurricane. Her new life is no mere acknowledgment of the way "things are" on a planet beset with natural disasters, nor is it solely an attempt to alter the environment to better safeguard the security of human beings. Neither a passive resignation to circumstances nor a striving to reshape them, what Dewey called *accommodation* and *adaptation* respectively, involves enough of a deep-seated recalibration of the self to account for the power of this young woman's transformation. It is *adjustment* that exemplifies the genuinely religious for Dewey. Although including a "note of submission," adjustment also entails a more robust and active engagement with things. Yet it is not *just* voluntary, since it arises in a place far more basic than from where we direct our actions: "It is a change *of* will conceived as the organic plenitude of our being, rather than any specific change *in* will" (Dewey 1934b, 16–17).

Since the experience of a whole is an achievement of the imagination rather than "the limited world of our observation and reflection" (1934b, 19), Dewey argued that any unification of the self seizes us through a depth beneath operations of the intellect. There is some justification, he suggested, for the traditionally religious to attribute this overturning of our former self to factors beyond our more purposeful acts of cognition. Reinforcing for us that a transcendent entity is still not required for this adjustment of the self, Dewey (1934b, 19) quickly went on to cite William James's discussion of the role of the unconscious from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.[6]

This unification of the self through its ethical commitments is what Dewey (1934b, 20–23) called a *moral faith*. As the allegiance of our whole being to the realization of an ideal, moral faith is to be distinguished from the more traditional notion of faith as belief in a proposition or a creed concerning the way things are. It is in this projection of what is best in

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our experiences into a "supernatural realm for safe-keeping and sanction" through which the gods—or God, Brahman, or the One—are born (Dewey 1934b, 73). Dewey (1934b, 22) here explained the motivation for reifying what is found within our natural experience into a preexisting reality: the overpowering desire to make what may become true through the rigors of individual and communal effort into a picture of what is already true behind the appearances of things.

If one fails to read through the entirety of *A Common Faith*, it may be tempting to perceive Dewey's naturalizing of religious experience and rejection of the supernatural as akin to a form of hard-core and defiant humanism—one as much in vogue in our time as in his. This would be until we come across Dewey's (1934b, 25, 53) notion of *natural piety*: namely, the appreciation of our place within and connection to the broader universe. There is a hidden agreement, Dewey argued, between supernaturalism and the most militant humanism. While the former is obsessed with the drama of sin and salvation, the latter takes ourselves as possessing the sole value in a cruel or meaningless cosmos. In both cases, humanity is taken alone (Dewey 1934b, 53). "A humanistic religion, if it excludes our relation to nature," explained Dewey, "is pale and thin, as it is presumptuous when it takes humanity as an object of worship" (1934b, 54).

Partly as an attempt to fend off the despair of solitude, and partly as an acknowledgment of the surrounding context in which even our highest values and achievements are made possible, Dewey (1934b, 51–53) found a justification for the word *God*. The latter is neither a transcendent supernatural being nor some supra-personal and divine ground underlying the universe; rather, it is a term for the perpetual merging of our imagined ideals with empirical fact. Even here, Dewey's opposition to all transcendentalisms cannot be overstated: for this unity is neither a Neoplatonic One nor the Brahman of Advaita Vedanta, but one that "is active and practical; it is a *uniting*, not something given" (1934b, 52).

The fact that the ideals that are to be realized in nature first develop within our imagination and are subsequently brought about through our efforts should not lead us, once more, into an arrogant and defiant humanism. For although ideals are formed within the imagination, they are not therefore "made out of imaginary stuff. They are made out of the hard stuff of the world of physical and social experience" (Dewey 1934b, 49). In the thought of Dewey, even our inner life speaks of our condition as environmentally embedded and contextualized beings.

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## III. Consummatory Experience

Toward the end of *Art as Experience*, Dewey states that "there is no test that so surely reveals the one-sidedness of a philosophy as its treatment of art and aesthetic experience" (1934a, 286). Considering that some of his most penetrating observations on the spiritual are located in this text, he would likely not have protested if we substituted "religion" and "religious experience" for "art" and "the aesthetic."

It is the third chapter of this work wherein Dewey draws a distinction between experience and what he calls *an* experience. A person may have more than one experience climbing a mountain. Rising listlessly from his hostel bed after a late-night argument with his travel companions, unclear even of the time, the young man is distracted from noticing the unique vegetation and landmarks as he slowly heads up the trail. One step is taken after another in a mechanical fashion, and each rest break is embraced as only a relief: there is no assessment of how far he has come, no anticipation of what is to come ahead. A rainstorm brings the day to a sudden close, and he begins to head back to his hostel. The experience had no clear beginning and no meaningful conclusion. It was at turns repetitive and dissolute, and it was cut short at the end. It was a mere experience.

For someone else, the experience of the same mountain may be entirely different. Rising purposefully before the crack of dawn, making her way through the chill and the dark, the woman feels her chest pound with a mix of excitement and nervous energy. Each rest she takes is used to appreciate how far she has come as well as to renew her resolve to go just a little farther. Just as her stamina feels strained beyond its limits and her muscles are seemingly about to give out, the narrowness of the mountain path opens to the broad rock face near the peak, and the darkness of the early morning hours begins to give way to the light of dawn. Collapsing at the summit, she sits up to watch the shimmering orange orb rise to send its rays over the tops of trees and adjacent peaks both near and far. As she is filled with indescribable joy, all of her former anxieties along with the long hours of near-relentless physical exertion are now appreciated as the necessary buildup for which the warmth and vision of this glorious sunrise is the culmination. This mountain journey possessed not only a clear inception but a meaningful ending—what Dewey (1934a, 37) called a *consummation*. Despite all of the inner and outer challenges, the triumphant end was held firmly in sight, even if half-buried beneath all of her doubts and worries,

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from the very start. This promise of a victory following her physical and emotional strain, all the while surrounded by the beauties of the natural landscape, grants the entire day a kind of unity, one felt every step on the way up. This was no routine experience; it has been *an* experience.

Experience, for Dewey, is the living and dynamic relationship of an organism with its environment. Falling out of step with its surroundings, it reachieves a state of coordination with it; facing obstacles, it overcomes them; undergoing profound insecurity, it discovers stability. Within these felt contrasts and the juxtapositions and movements between them is the deep root of all heightened experience (Dewey 1934a, see chap. 1, "The Live Creature"). Dewey's description of this process includes passages that not only make any hard distinction between an aesthetic experience and a religious experience seem entirely arbitrary, but exude enough of the ecstatic to make his observations in *A Common Faith*, even those pertaining to the mystical, feel stifled and inhibited by comparison.

In the midst of the most anxious and unstable moments of our life, we may recall those rare consummatory experiences that have stood out, those that serve as a promise of what a genuinely meaningful experience can possibly be: "Through the phases of perturbation and conflict, there abides the deep-seated memory of an underlying harmony, the sense of which haunts life like the sense of being founded on a rock" (Dewey 1934a, 16). Concerning the unity pervading consummatory experiences, "the work of art operates to deepen and to raise to a great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience;" one that Dewey further explained is then "felt as an expansion of ourselves" (1934a, 202–3). In another place, Dewey suggests how, in bringing to light the interconnectedness of the human being with its broader context, art takes us to "a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of this world in which we live in our ordinary experiences" (1934a, 202). Finally, Dewey's phenomenology of embodiment accounts for our yearning for the illimitable: "We envisage with pleasure Nirvana and a uniform heavenly bliss only because they are projected upon the background of our present world of stress and conflict" (1934a, 16).

One promise of Dewey's phenomenology of the religious, as I have mentioned in the introduction, is its demonstration of rich possibilities of experience already latent within our allegedly ordinary existence. A second and third promise, also previously indicated, are found in the explicit aims of *A Common Faith*: these are a reconciliation of the spiritual with the

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findings and methods of the empirical sciences, and a religious life that is truly *common*—one beyond the demarcations of creed and denomination.

Finally, consider Emerson's words on the great political cause of his day: "I have quite other slaves to face than those Negroes, to wit, imprisoned thoughts far back in the brain of man, and which have no watchmen or lover or defender but me" (quoted in James 1984, 288). Although the Sage of Concord would come around to champion abolitionism, for a considerable period of time this cause took second place to his transcendentalism. Some may see in this a very old tension between the contemplative's thirst for ecstasy and spiritual completion and a this-worldly mission for social justice. By contrast, consider two of the most key elements of Dewey's take on religious experience: the unifying of the self in our struggle toward the realization of an ideal, and the appreciation of our belongingness to nature along with our responsibility over its improvement. Here is the promise of heightened and deep experiences that are inherently infused with the ethical.

## IV. Theologies of Transcendence

Toward the end of his exhaustive and mostly sympathetic study of Dewey and religion, Stephen C. Rockefeller (1991, 532–40) argued that the American philosopher's naturalism simply cannot account for the phenomenology of the religious life found in *A Common Faith* and elsewhere. A worldview acknowledging only empirical phenomena, one in which death and the eventual annihilation of the universe must inevitably have the last word, simply cannot make sense of the mood of transcendental peace some have felt, including Dewey himself, even in the midst of life's struggles. Rockefeller went on to write of the need for a deeper metaphysical core in order to support such an intuition, one spoken of by contemplatives East and West as both transcendent and yet somehow immanent within our experience, a "beyond-within." Lacking this ontological grounding, explained Rockefeller, Dewey's naturalism is too thin to support such a crucial element of the religious sensibility.

It is not obvious that a sense of something both transcendent and immanent was entirely missing from one who can write of "a world beyond this world" that is simultaneously "the deeper reality of this world in which live in our ordinary experiences." Moreover, the manner in which

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a longed-for consummation is held in mind from the very inception of any integral experience, as Dewey also pointed out, may offer just enough inner peace for some. It is strictly the *beyond* component of a religious experience that I would like to focus on here instead: namely, our encounter with that which stretches ahead of our comprehension and exceeds our emotional bearing. The question here is whether Dewey's phenomenology of the religious is too thin to account for the structure and sheer intensity of some of the most definitive accounts of our comportment toward the transcendent.

As we have seen, the religious for Dewey is an attribute found within a broad variety of our natural experiences, a number of which include ethical and aesthetic ones. This is already in stark contrast with the picture offered by the German philosopher Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy*. Spiritual intuition for Otto (1958, 7) is not only completely unrelated to any other sort of experience. It is brought out by our direct communion with the divine, including the overwhelming and electrifying character of the *numinous*: the nonrational or supra-rational element within the Absolute, to be distinguished from its more rational and moral aspects.[7]

A key part of the numinous for Otto is the *mysterium tremendum*. Insofar as it is a *tremendum*, it is replete with "awfulness" and "majesty" (Otto 1958, chap. IV). It forces us, radically, to confront our own finitude, our "creature-feeling" (Otto 1958, chap. III). As a *mysterium*, its very presence floods the mind with a sense of *stupor*, meaning "blank wonder, an astonishment that strikes us dumb, amazement absolute" (Otto 1958, 26). The *mysterium* is purely "wholly other" to us and is forever outside of our rational and intellectual categories (Otto 1958, chap. V). At one point in *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto affirms the fear of and fascination with ghosts to be a kind of rudimentary and immature version of the numinous. In resisting all of our philosophical and conceptual schemes, the numinous both unsettles *and* draws us in (Otto 1958, 28–29 and chap. VI).

Otto was neither the first nor the last to write of a yearning for the mind to brush up against what it cannot assimilate. In his first major work, Emmanuel Levinas articulated a similar mood in his distinction between *need* and *desire*. While the former pines for a kind of fulfillment, a state of reconciliation or satisfaction, desire actually *increases* as it bends toward what remains perpetually beyond it. Desire, stated Levinas rather prosaically, "does not long to return, for it is desire for a land not of our birth, for a land foreign to every nature, which has not been our fatherland and to which we shall never betake ourselves" (1969, 33–34). This perpetual and

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forever-increasing desire for transcendence, what Levinas perceived as the quest of *metaphysics*, is most properly directed toward the face of another human being.

In the thought of Levinas, our encounter with the face of the other is an event with some very heavy religious significance. The living presence of another human being points to a sense of the divine; it is a *trace*, in fact, of a purely elusive and transcendent God (Levinas 1986). Whatever intimations of the divine we may have therefore originates nowhere within the depths of our own selves, and still less within our connection to the rest of nature: they are found solely in the limitless responsibility we have over our neighbor. In commanding our aid and assistance through his or her vulnerability, the other appears to us in the mode of what Levinas (1986, 352–53) described as *height*. Levinas (for instance, see 1969, 35–36) argued that it is precisely the unequal or asymmetrical character of this encounter between the self and the other, this prioritizing and positioning of the face as above ourselves, that refuses all attempts to place both ends of the relationship into some unifying or integrative picture. Against a communion with some pantheistic idea of a divine in which the self becomes "one" with an Absolute, what he pejoratively called the *sacred*, Levinas (1990) directed us toward the *holy*—namely, a life of loving service toward the needs of other human beings.

We have seen that Dewey's take on the religious is a strongly moral vision. Moreover, his account of an inner transformation achieved through our social commitments, along with his rejection of a reliance upon the supernatural instead of our own efforts, may even appeal to a Levinasian. A full and undoubtedly fruitful comparison of the thought of Dewey with either Otto or Levinas is beyond the scope of this essay. What I would like to suggest here is that from the perspective of our theologies of transcendence, Dewey's depiction of the religious as heightened and consummatory experience is simply one more attempt to banalize the spiritual by reducing the transcendent to what is immanent.

Levinas and Otto were by no means aligned in their perspectives and in fact passed each other in opposite directions. While the latter focused on the aspect of the holy over and above the moral, for the former the holy is *strictly* the ethical. Levinas wrote approvingly of the manner in which speech discloses the holiness of the other "without any odor of the 'numinous'" (1969, 195). And yet, discerning a few similarities between the two accounts of transcendence when they are contrasted with Dewey's

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phenomenology of the religious, the limitations of the latter become more apparent.

In terms of *structure*, the felt direction of our experience of the transcendent does not begin from us and then move outward—even if we may make ourselves available or receptive to the divine. It is directly impressed upon us from *outside* of ourselves. For Otto this is the "wholly other," the numinous; for Levinas, it is the needful eyes of another human being, who, thrusting a host of obligations upon us, stands as the trace of a distant God. It is true that Dewey tried to account for how the transformative experience does seem to come from beyond, something he attributes to the unconscious. But there is a qualitative *immediacy* to the impact of the transcendent upon us in the phenomenologies of Otto and Levinas, one that does not so readily accommodate itself to a Deweyan account. The face of the other, for Levinas, spills its meanings into our field of experience while standing perpetually apart from us—its words and gestures always one step ahead of our anticipations and calculations. "In a face," he stated, "the expressed attends its expression, expresses its very expression, always remains master of the meaning it delivers" (1969, 110). Throughout *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto draws upon Kantian thought to argue for the presence of transcendental factors in the psyche that come alive in our response to the wholly other (Levinas 1969, chap. XIV). But the numinous, for Otto, seems to emanate directly from a reality that is no expression of ourselves.[8]

Inseparable from the structure of religious experience is its *intensity*. The spiritual, as outlined by Otto and Levinas, possesses a force that seems to overflow the intellectual and emotional capacity of the subject to contain it. Using the language of *trauma* and *insomnia*, Levinas (1996) wrote of the manner in which the face both shatters the ego's complacency and refuses all of its attempts to reestablish a sense of comfort and equilibrium. This is in addition to the mood of desire, which, as we have already seen, only increases as we bend toward the metaphysical other. In *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto writes of the scorching power of the numinous, that which can be felt as either love or wrath and "whose burning strength the mystic can hardly bear" (1958, 24).

Here I recall my favorite image from a classic religious epic, one in fact cited by Otto (1958, 62): Arjuna, the great warrior of the Pandavas, collapses on his knees before the horror and sublimity of Krishna's universal form as Vishnu in book 11 of the *Bhagavad-Gita* ("Like the fire at

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the end of Time which burns all in the last day," 11:25). Dewey may have been correct in insisting upon the independence of the mystical experience from any particular theological interpretation of it. And yet, it is difficult to conceive of what is being alluded to in these passages as a mere projection or reification from even the most exuberant or terrifying "rhythmic points in the movement of experience," as Dewey envisaged it (1934b, 37). Even the more ecstatic quotations we have seen in *Art as Experience* are tepid in comparison.

## Conclusion: The Varieties of Verticality

I have always been attentive to the presence of mountains among different religions and mythologies, both figurative and literal. I come from a people, after all, whose main prophet descended a great mountain with the tablets of the Law. It is little surprise that a formation whose top seems to scrape the heavens would serve as a common stage for the eruption of the divine into the mundane, what Mircea Eliade (1987, 11) called a *theophany*.

And yet, the question remains: Is religious experience the product of an illumination granted from above, one sending its light downward into the profane and the ordinary? Or is every peak experience simply an extension from below, as with the naturalistic picture offered by Dewey?

Of course there is a third possibility: just as some mountains may have separate trails going in opposite directions, so there may exist experiences intimately connected to a beyond or a wholly other; and other experiences, equally profound, that are merely intensified shapes of what we have available to us right here, in our everyday lives. In this way, we may not claim to *know* that all transcendent realities are but reifications woven from out of our heightened experiences. And yet we may still see the value of Dewey's depictions of moral faith, natural piety, and the transformative power of the aesthetic.

Because of a few of the theological assumptions surrounding the term *transcendence*, Anthony Steinbock (2007, 13) prefers the term *verticality* in his work on religious experiences. Labeling verticality the "vector of mystery and reverence," as opposed to the objectifying and manipulative approach to things he calls *horizontality*, we see in his concept of "vertical givenness" the same mystical and ethical resonances we have witnessed in the

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theologies of transcendence outlined above (2007, 13). What is particularly striking in Steinbock's account, however, is his list of a variety of "vertical givenness." These include experiences deriving from our interactions with others, with artifacts, and with the natural world (Steinbock 2007, 15–17). Some may concur with Steinbock that only the experiences of the mystic connect with what he recognizes as the "religious absolute" found in human experience, as opposed to other forms of experience that he places under the "moral" and "ecological" absolutes (2007, 15). *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, after all, is essentially a study of the relevance of mystical experience as it is found in the Abrahamic spiritual traditions. Others may claim that other forms of verticality may equally deserve to be called religious. Perhaps it is simply enough for the present to recognize a broad range of intensified experiences—or a variety of vertical givenness—that are of the utmost meaning and value for human beings; and that Dewey's rich descriptions in his later work speak to those heightened experiences sought and cherished by those who do not require what is said to lie beyond, or beneath, this supposedly ordinary world in which we live, move, and have our being.

## NOTES

1. This attempt at such a synthesis demonstrates the influence of Hegel. See Dewey's confession on how his early Hegelianism "left a permanent deposit" in his thought (2008, 154).

2. A classic example is Kestenbaum's (1977) comparison of Dewey and Maurice Merleau-Ponty on the nature of habit.

3. Gale explains that James and Dewey are actually reported to have sat before a Ouija board in 1905.

4. See, for instance, James's "over-beliefs" in the conclusion to his classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1958).

5. Steven C. Rockefeller (1991, 204, 528–29) also compares Buber and Dewey on the unity attained within the self.

6. Dewey here refers to James's chapters on conversion: *Varieties*, Lectures IX and X.

7. Otto conceived both elements as part of the divine. See his forward to the first English edition of *The Idea of the Holy* (1958).

8. Levinas 1969, 11: "The numinous is thus felt as objective and outside the self."

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