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ANALYTICAL AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATIONS OF RELIGIOUS k
EXPERIENCE: ALSTON AND HUSSERL

William Alston, who translated Husserl's *The Idea of Phenomenology* along with George Nakhnikian in 1973,¹ published *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* in 1991, a seminal work in the burgeoning literature in analytic philosophy of religion. In this paper, I will briefly present his understanding of religious experience and his view on how it justifies religious belief—at the same time he provides a kind of justification of the legitimacy of religious experience. Although Husserl never developed a full-fledged account of how religious experience justifies religious belief, he did devote himself in repeated works to discussions of justification particularly through his analysis of *Evidenz*. In relationship to Alston's work, I will demonstrate how Husserl's discussion of *Evidenz* can enhance and criticize the role that religious experience plays in justifying religious belief according to Alston and also in justifying religious experience itself. Though Alston's concept of religious experience explicitly depends on and articulates a Christian mystical perception of a personal God,² there are a great variety of religious experiences with rich traditions embedded in diverse cultures throughout the world, Alston himself recognizes the limits of his own approach while welcoming dialogue with alternative religious traditions. I believe that Husserl's discussions of *Evidenz* in his later writings warrants a similar awareness of how one's understanding of religious experience and its justifications are limited by cultural and traditional factors and, consequently, how extensive dialogue between alternative perspectives is called for.

1. Alston on Religious Experience and Its Justification

Repeatedly describing his account of religious experience as “phenomenological,”³ Austin emphasizes how the subject experiences God, as “what the subject takes (or would take if the question arose) to be an awareness (perception) of God,”⁴ in the bipolar, noetic/noematic sense typical of phenomenology, namely that “one is aware of X through a state of consciousness that is distinguishable from X.”⁵ Early on in his text, Alston provides a wide sampling of mystical reports (e.g. those cited by William James or a variety of mystical authors, much like those also cited from all the Abrahamic traditions by Anthony Steinbock⁶), and he concludes that these experiences, with cognitive and affective dimensions, involve God being “presented to their awareness in a way that does not depend in any way on their own efforts.”⁷ Such experience differs from other modes of intending God, such as thinking about God, calling up mental images, remembering God, considering propositions, reasoning, or engaging in internal or external conversations about God.⁸ For Alston, those experiencing God have a “distinct sense of something’s (taken by them to be God) *presenting* itself to their awareness in generically the same way that physical objects present themselves to our awareness in sense perception,”⁹ though such religious experiences usually do not include sensory qualia, such as colors, shapes, sounds, smells, and the like.¹⁰ Religious experiences, then, are analogous to perception insofar as they are presentative but without sensory qualia, and hence Alston dubs them examples non-sensory perception or mystical perception.¹¹ Alston’s account appears as phenomenological in another sense insofar as he stresses that he is describing the experience of God and that any causal explanation of such experiences presupposes the experiences of what is felt, heard, or seen, however varied the causal sources might be thought to be.¹² In addition, he differentiates reflective levels, separating the theoretical, justificatory level from the experiential level on which God does not present God’s self to render beliefs justifiable and the one having religious

experience is absorbed in the experience of God as part of a personal relationship with God instead of trying to justify the experience or even seeing the need for a justification.¹³

As far as justification is concerned, Alston argues that base-level experiential presentations elicit a belief about a perceptual object, whether one is even conscious or not of having formed such a belief. In addition, Alston asserts that one can be justified in believing a belief even though one has not justified it oneself, and this statement seems to suggest that such justification must occur when one subsequently, in a reflective moment (as if one were an other person outside one's earlier self), recognizes that one's previous belief had been justified or when someone else assesses that belief as justified (at the same time). All such justification requires that the justifier have an "adequate ground" for a belief, where "adequacy" indicates that the basis for the belief is "sufficiently indicative of the truth of the belief,"¹⁴ that is, that the ground for the belief shows it to be very probably true (in some objective sense of probability). Such adequacy, however, need not figure in the ground of the belief as if the belief were based on an assumption of adequacy; rather, the process of subsequent justification of a perceptual belief must demonstrate adequacy or not (e.g., show that there were no conditions at work that may have misled the perceiver) to show that the belief held is justified. When the question of whether a perceptual belief is justified is posed and the only basis offered is the experience in which X appears to my experience as ϕ and not on any reasons (above and beyond that experience), then that belief is said to be "immediately justified."¹⁵ Consequently, in the case of perception, the immediate belief that the flower in the greenhouse is purple is based on the flower's purple look and is thereby *prima facie* justified, that is, the mere purple look of the flower in a greenhouse renders the perceiver *prima facie* justified in believing this immediate belief. Such *prima facie* status indicates that such a belief is justified, unless there are other

considerations (e.g., I know from another source that there are no purple flowers in the greenhouse) or there are overriding conditions (a purple light in the greenhouse renders all the flowers to appear falsely as purple).¹⁶

Applying this framework to mystical experience Alston argues that in the experience of God as ϕ (e.g., as loving or almighty), one is *prima facie* justified in a belief formed on the basis of such an experience that God is ϕ , just as one would be *prima facie* justified in believing that the flower is purple. Such justification relies on no other reasons insofar as related contextual beliefs about properties such as “loving,” “almighty” or “purple” have become so internalized, e.g., integrated into one’s skills of perceptual recognition, that such beliefs do not actually figuring as a partial basis for one’s perceptual belief. If there are beliefs, however, that go beyond what is explicitly given in the experience, then one’s encompassing belief system would be based on both the purely immediate (perceptual) justification and on mediate justification. However, insofar as perceptual beliefs, including mystical perceptual beliefs, depend for their justification upon such other (non-perceptual) related, justified reasons, Alston finds himself led to the idea that there are “standard,” “accepted,” and normal” ways of forming and assessing perceptual beliefs, whether sensory or mystical, as part of what he calls socially well-established doxastic practices.¹⁷

Alston admits that we cannot avoid running into epistemic circularity when we attempt to provide direct arguments for the reliability of the standard ways in which we perceive the world or perceive God (since, for example, we would have to use perception to decide whether perception is reliable). However, marshalling Thomas Reid to his support, Alston observes that we cannot but help make use of these capacities and the doxastic practices within which they are exercised, that is eminently reasonable to form and assess beliefs in the way that we standardly

do, and that we are not relegated to endorsing the status quo uncritically insofar as such doxastic practices include within their implementation specific grounds for their own criticism. Thus, the doxastic practice of sense perception prescribes intersubjective assessment procedures for perceptual beliefs, appropriate linguistic practices with reference to perception, appropriate bodily stances for accurate perception, and skills for recognizing the need for further investigation and modes of pursuing it. Similarly, the doxastic practice involving religious experience is acquired before one becomes explicitly aware of it as a practice or critically reflective about it, and within that practice one acquires the ability to evaluate the practice's outputs; develops appropriate relationships, attitudes and feelings; engages in relevant, accompanying physical behaviors (e.g. praying, participating in liturgies); and, as any doxastic practice, rests on distinctive sets of presuppositions (in the religious practice, e.g., belief in the existence of God). Within such the doxastic practices for religious experience, that experience is by no means "self-authenticating,"¹⁸ and, instead, self-authentication is atypical for religious traditions that have often undertaken incessant efforts to distinguish genuine from counterfeit perceptions of God. Religious experiences, for instance, are able to be tested in terms of whether they promote inner peace or improve one's moral comportment toward others.¹⁹ Likewise, within such a holistic doxastic practice, one finds support for one's belief in God's existence insofar as the sense of being presented with God in religious experience repeatedly counters the assumption that God is nothing more than a subjective projection. However, Alston acknowledges that he cannot on the basis of religious experience provide an argument for the existence of God convincing to those who refrain from embarking upon the doxastic practice.²⁰

Given the variety of doxastic practices, Alston contends that one need not dismiss the epistemic value of certain doxastic practices just because only a smaller minority of the universal

population, often those partaking enthusiastically in holistic doxastic practices, might find them useful or even comprehensible. Likewise, Alston is puzzled by the different doxastic practices exhibited by different religious traditions, and, failing to find any external, independent reasons to suppose that one religious tradition is more accurate than another, he counsels one to “sit tight with the practice of which I am a master and which serves me so well in guiding my activity in the world.”²¹ At the same, Alston provides for criticism among doxastic practices when he points out that practices that have persisted across generations and over large segments of the population deserve serious consideration, in contrast with idiosyncratic practices, for example, one that might endeavor to predict the future behavior of the stock market by consulting sun-dried tomatoes. Finally, the attempt to discredit mystical perception by comparison with sense perception because of the latter’s “universal distribution,”²² the latter’s more decisive testing procedures, or because there is no sensory evidence for God, amounts, in Alston’s view, to “epistemic imperialism”²³ in which one unwarrantedly takes “the standards of one doxastic practice as normative for all.”²⁴

On the one hand, the explanation of religious experience as one’s experiencing God as presenting God’s self to oneself and its similarity to sensuous perception is the route by which Alston shows how religious experience can justify one’s religious belief, analogously to the way that perceptual beliefs are justified. However, this experience of God’s presenting God’s self inchoately supports a belief in God’s existence and thereby suggests the legitimacy of religious experience itself insofar as it is not merely a subjective concoction. This further justification of religious experience itself is buttressed when Alston situates it within a distinctive, more holistic, encompassing doxastic practice and the attempt to relate this experience and its doxastic

practices to other experiences involves a further effort to legitimate religious experience itself, even though such efforts in the end may not win universal assent.

2. *Husserl: The Eidos of Evidenz*

Husserl, to my knowledge, never developed an account of religious experience or showed how it might justify religious beliefs like in the way that Alston has done. Nevertheless, as George Heffernan has suggested, “No philosopher has thought as long and as hard about evidence as Edmund Husserl.”²⁵ To consider the possibly justifying role of religious experience within the Husserlian paradigm and to compare it with Alston’s approach entail discussing the meaning of *Evidenz*, and this will, in turn, require discussing the fuller context to which justification itself belongs for Husserl, Husserl’s views on the rationality of religious experience, the social-genetic origins and practices of justification, and the regional ontological framework that religious experience’s justificatory potential presupposes.

In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl describes evidence in its fullest sense:

In the broadest sense, evidence denotes a universal primal phenomenon of intentional life, namely—as contrasted with other consciousness of, which is capable a priori of being “empty,” expectant, indirect, non-presentative—the quite pre-eminent mode of consciousness that consists in the *self-appearance*, the *self-exhibiting*, the *self-giving*, of an affair, an affair complex (or state of affairs), a universality, a value or other objectivity, in the final mode: “Itself there,” “immediately intuited,” “given originaliter.” For the Ego that signifies: not aiming confusedly at something, with an empty expectant intention, but being with it itself, viewing, seeing, having insight into, it itself.²⁶

But no sooner does Husserl give this sophisticated description than he immediately adds that “experience in the ordinary sense is a particular evidence”²⁷ and that any consciousness that gives its object originaliter is already to be characterized as evidence.²⁸ As early as the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl provided for the possibility of a static encounter between a word-suffused intentional act and a perceptual object in which the expression clothes the object like a garment (*als wie sein Kleid*)²⁹ and fulfills a meaning intention, thereby producing recognition or knowledge (*Erkennen*) through evidential having. Later he allows for wordless recognition³⁰ and also for the possibility of the separation of a meaning intention from its object which it emptily and dynamically points toward and finds itself fulfilled, having evidence, when its object intuitively presents itself.³¹ Even in the later genetic phenomenology operative in the *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Husserl traces predicate evidences back to the non-predicative evidence which is called experience,³² in which objectivities of every sort first give themselves and which precedes other modes of consciousness.³³ Naïve experiencing and naïve judging comes first,³⁴ (279), and consequently George Heffernan rightly quotes Husserl’s statement, “*Man lebt in der Evidenz, reflektiert aber nicht über Evidenz,*”³⁵—a statement that is meant to characterize practicing scientists but Husserl also extends such unreflective living in evidence to all possible spheres of knowledge, including immediate and mediate knowledge, in which the evidence at play may need description and clarification.³⁶ Husserl’s view that the entire project of evidential justification must take as its starting point the experience in which an object is given to an intentional act originaliter converges with Alston’s account of religious experience in which God is experienced as presenting Godself to an intending experiencer prior to any theorizing or justifying and in which this experiencer might be so absorbed in the experience that he or she

does not see the experience as justifying religious belief or even see that religious belief needs a justification.

Husserl, though, is not content with one abiding unreflectively in the simple evidence of experience itself. Simply having the evidence of experiencing the thing as a starting point is by itself not sufficient for grasping things and defining them with objective validity, and, furthermore, simple experience can also be deceptive.³⁷ When one remains passively absorbed in the object given, one risks complying uncritically with the surrounding prejudices of one's intellectual environment instead of self-responsibly shaping one's views in accord with the evidences one has produced for oneself.³⁸ Consequently Husserl praises the creative, responsible scientific investigator of nature who is intent on authentic knowledge insightfully grounded in contrast to the average investigator whose methods have gradually succumbed to being "customary practice" such that that investigator lacks any insight—a component of evidence according to the above citation from the *Cartesian Meditations*—into the grounds of his or her epistemological procedures.³⁹ Even the practical person in everyday life, the cautiously shrewd person, does not yield to torpor but seeks to "find out how matters are"⁴⁰ regarding what is important for him or her, judging "in naïve evidence"⁴¹ on the basis of a giving of something itself, while asking continually what can be actually seen and given faithful expression. Trying to determine which claims are supported by evidence and how far they are supported is, then, a matter of the "constant spirit of self-responsibility" to strive for the living truth from the living source, one's absolute life.⁴² The struggle for *Evidenz* then is a performance on the part of intentionality aimed at "*die intentionale Leistung der Selbstgebung*" instead of succumbing to the inert force of habit.⁴³

Further, Husserl, by describing the essential features of what *Evidenz* is, that, is as an insightful having of an experience that fulfills an emptily signitive meaning, demonstrates a kind of ultimate self-responsibility; instead of just relying on an unclarified notion of what *Evidenz* is, he attempts to lead his reader to the seeing or insightful having of what *Evidenz* itself is, that is, to make possible an evidential having of what *Evidenz* itself is, to take for the object of one's investigation the very process one will be involved in (without reflecting on it) in coming to grasp that object clearly and distinctly. Paradoxically, such responsible reflection also penetrates even into the situational horizons of the thinker and his or her community "without which the surrounding world of daily living would not be an experienced world,"⁴⁴ although such horizons, as genetic phenomenology recognized, are already in place for the reflecting philosopher long before he or she begins to reflect. Such horizons, though, are never to be exhaustively, expressly, and determinately grasped⁴⁵ and, rather, call for vast and comprehensive inquiry. Finally, these horizons lead to all the relativities in which being and validity are involved.⁴⁶

Husserl, then, converging with Alston, elucidates the continuum from experience to reflective justification. He elaborates the differences between experience, in which one may be absorbed without any need for a justificatory project, and simple theorizing, in which one might make use of experience to justify beliefs. Husserl further explains the motives (of self-responsibility) for undertaking justificatory projects, and this requirement for self-responsible investigations calls upon one to attend to the broader everyday setting, including its genetic origins, from which such justificatory processes take their start.

Although one might think that for Husserl, religion might lie beyond the scope of phenomenological treatment, a *Grenzproblem*, but if anything, the recent volume 42 of the *Husserliana* makes it quite clear that Husserl, although he did not develop an account of

religious experience as a kind of evidence, envisioned religion in general as a rationalizable endeavor and religious experience as providing evidential bases. Acknowledging that one proceeds rationally when one does not let oneself be governed by passivity but when one as a free individual, thinks, evaluates, and busies oneself pragmatically grasping conclusions and exercising critical restraint,⁴⁷ Husserl constructs a type of the wise individual, in contrast to the unwise who can also be truly stupid (“der auch recht dumm sein kann”).⁴⁸ The wise individual appears in all spheres of spontaneous activity, including religion, in which “the authentic religious person naturally sees the divine relations manifesting themselves and appearing in his own life-realm and in the wider circle of history, which he understands deeply out of his own life-experience, and taking upon himself or herself in feeling, valuing, and willing the attitude belonging to and motivated by such a religious perspective.”⁴⁹ He or she explores whatever is questionable in human subjectivity and religious matters, thereby aiding the universality of wisdom to extend its horizon into the religious realm and promoting endless reflection.⁵⁰ In spite of a religious institution’s status as a world-political institution, “a heritage of rich religious experience and a rich measure of seriously pursued theoretical comprehension lies in the historical development of the church.”⁵¹ Repeatedly stressing the importance of a religious believer’s free self-responsibility in assessing a religious institution’s teaching, Husserl emphasizes the importance of a theoretical, religious science, a theology, that would mediate the layers of religious insights, at the base level those acquired on the base of intuition and on a higher level, the development of theological theory, marked by theoretical insight.⁵² The idea of a complete science requires one to reject no evidences or no intuition and to investigate all evidences. Reason does not conflict with “with the religious experience, with revelation, as long as it is undergone as an experience, as an original intuitive (evident) certainty.”⁵³ It is clear that

Husserl would be quite in favor of the kind of justification of religious belief through religious experience that Alston executes and that any other similar alternatives might represent.

When one considers the definition of *Evidenz* given in the *Cartesian Meditations* and variations given throughout Husserl's works, which Heffernan's comprehensive discussion traces (Lucubrations) and which I do not have space to pursue here, it is clear that Husserl presents an eidetic account of what *Evidenz* is that is capable of applying to all areas of theoretical endeavor and that is presupposed unreflectively even as one reads this paper and considers whether Husserl's own presentation of what *Evidenz* is is itself evident, that is, does it deliver the thing itself, does it give a clear and accurate presentation of what *Evidenz* is for the reader whose understanding of *Evidenz*, as he or she tries to determine if Husserl's presentation of *Evidenz* is evident, may be only vague and as yet unclear.

In *The Logical Investigations*, one can follow the development of Husserl's concept of *Evidenz* that starts with the dynamic interchange between an emptily intending act of meaning, whether informed by words or not, and a temporally subsequent intuition of the object meant (and Husserl begins with the perceived object as an example), as opposed to the static experience of recognition in which intentional meaning clothes the object it intends without any gap between them.⁵⁴ The synthesis of the two acts of intending and experiencing the object intended as given produces the experience of fulfillment, that is expressed as "This is the thing itself."⁵⁵ "Fulfillment," Husserl notes, can be achieved in various other ways, and he references acts of wishing, imagining, and expecting (though not all intentionality is expecting), or even the listening to a melody as one anticipates what is to come.⁵⁶ When the object intended frustrates the meaning intending it, one still has a synthesis, though, one of "distinction,"⁵⁷ and when one considers the synthesis of a total act with several meaning intentions and several dimensions of

the intuited object, some of which fulfill and some of which frustrate parts of the comprehensive meaning-intending act, then one has a synthesis of subsumption.⁵⁸ Husserl also articulates how fullness adds a further dimension, or moment to the intuitive act,⁵⁹ that is, to the matter of that act (that feature of act directed to its content), and the act quality (the feature of the act determining it to be the kind of act it is, whether presentative, judgmental, emotional).⁶⁰ Such fullness heightens the richness of the experience, introduces a kind of liveliness, and strengthens the sense of the reality of what is at hand.⁶¹ As observed, Husserl's treatment of *Evidenz* in the *Logical Investigations* begins with sense-perception as the model, and Gail Soffer rightly observes that "the most perfect type of fulfillment is perception."⁶²

But then, in the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl also explains how, for instance, an act of assembly of perceptually experienced objects can present an aggregate of A and B and C and how one can then lift the universal form of "aggregate" to conceptually universal consciousness⁶³ and can do the same for other categorial forms such as "indefinite pluralities, totalities, numbers, disjunctions, predicates (right-ness) and states of affairs," or parts and wholes—all accessible to and meant by categorial signitive acts that are founded on sensuous acts and that, in effect, set up new, higher-order objects.⁶⁴ But Husserl argues that these categorial significations can be tested, given in *Evidenz*, by a categorial intuition by which the object meant is set before one's eyes or by which one sees the "conditions of the possibility of the objects of such categorial intuition."⁶⁵ Husserl expounds how one can arrive at a similar kind of non-sensuous, fulfilling, evidential intuition with regard to a mathematic concept that would be parallel to a categorial object, namely the mathematical concept $(5^3)^4$. One would follow step-by-step one expression of this number to the next one in order, with each step clarifying and enriching the content of the previous step (all the way back to the first), until one at last arrives at the final,

completely explicated result, “This is the number $(5^3)^4$ itself.”⁶⁶ Elisabeth Ströker argues that in categorial intuition one brings about the actual connection of the components of meaning, as if such objects can give themselves only in the execution and in production of syntheses.⁶⁷

Similarly, she argues that only after Husserl developed eidetic variation as a methodologically testable procedure for acquiring insights into essence was he able to explain that what one would achieve after such procedure would be a fulfilling intuition, or *Evidenz*, for an abstract concept of an essence.⁶⁸ Hence the categorial intuition of *Evidenz*, for instance, might take place after one has considered Husserl’s own careful descriptions of what (the essence of) *Evidenz* is and then insightfully experiences *Evidenz*, the object one had been considering, beginning with much vagueness and unclarity, and now experiences as clearly set before one’s sight.

In the transition from signitive judgments and sensual, fulfilling intuition to categorial signitive judgments and fulfilling categorial intuitions, Husserl is very clear that he needed “to widen the concept of perception and other sorts of intuition.”⁶⁹ It is as though the eidetic concept of *Evidenz* developed first with reference to perceptual judgements and sensuous intuitions is modified in accord with the object domain about which one is seeking to find *Evidenz*. One establishes *Evidenz* differently when one is dealing perceptually intended meanings and categorically intended ones; the insightful having of the givenness in the categorial sense depends on a whole different kind of “intuition.” A similar analogical understand of *Evidenz* takes place in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation at the point at which Husserl acknowledges that the other person is never given originally and that the other’s original sphere is only appresented by his or her body—and the concept of “appresentation” is used analogously here insofar as ordinary appresentation (e.g., the front of a perceptual object appresents its back side) permits me to go around and perceive the appresented back side, but I will never have access to the

other's appresented originary sphere. While the ordinary appresentation of the backside of an object permits verification (*Bewahrung*) through a fulfilling presentation (*erfüllende Presentation*),⁷⁰ in the case of the experience of the other, a "fulfillingly verifying synthesis of harmonious further experience"⁷¹ proves that the other is an animate organism like me. Again the *Evidenz* that validates one's intended meaning, here that this is another animate organism, differs from the sensuous intuition of an object or from the originary experience of the other's subjective processes,⁷² and consequently the very meaning of *Evidenz* is modified depending on the kind of object that is to be meaningfully grasped and intuitively given. Husserl summarizes how *Evidenz* depends on the different ontological regions within which one seeks it when he entitles a section of *Cartesian Meditations*, as "Material and formal ontological regions [serve] as indexes pointing to transcendental systems of evidence."⁷³ It is no wonder that Husserl after his discussion of evidence often proceeds to delineate the regional ontologies within which diverse kinds of signitive intentionalities indicate possibilities for conversion into possible fulfilling evidence.⁷⁴ In other words, the phenomenology of reason is followed by regional ontologies.

In summary, religious experience, the having of the self-presentation of God, its self-exhibiting and self-giving in *Evidenz*, would be able to justify religious belief within the Husserlian framework. But if one hopes further to show the legitimacy of religious experience itself, one needs Husserl's eidetic notion of *Evidenz*, that allows for religious experience to be seen as parallel to other types of *Evidenz* and yet *Evidenz* itself is differentiated in accord with the kind of object whose *Evidenz* one is seeking and hence *Evidenz* itself must be further coordinated with regional ontologies. In a sense, Husserl's encompassing theory of *Evidenz*

permits one to develop the encompassing framework within which religious experience itself can be taken to justify religious belief,

3. *Evidenz and the Justification of Religious Experience*

Given this just-completed highly condensed and abbreviated exposition of Husserl's concept of *Evidenz* which is key for questions of justifying beliefs, what conclusions can be drawn about the relevance of Husserl's understanding of *Evidenz* for Alston's justification of religious belief through the religious experience of the perception of God?

1. In contrast to Alston, Husserl spells out the motivation underlying any project of justification, beginning with the basic intending of meaning that perceptual intuition can fulfill, in the intellectual self-responsibility that underlies any intellectual endeavor and that refuses to limit itself to the simple givenness of an object and to any capitulation to passivity or regnant prejudices.
2. This intellectual self-responsibility leads Husserl to view the entire domain of religion as needing the kind of inquiry that Alston executes and that shows that religious experience provides evidence for religious beliefs. In addition, it would seem that the idea of non-sensuous perception of God, according to which the object presents itself to an intentional act and is not merely the idealistic product of that act, can be assimilated to the idea of Husserlian *Evidenz*, namely that the object is self-given, "itself there" and not merely a subjective projection.
3. Husserl articulates an eidetic account of *Evidenz* as a meaning being fulfilled by the insightful having of the object intended, and he does so on an ultimate plane that Alston presupposes (insofar as he specifies different domains of *Evidenz*, such as of mystical and sense perception) without making explicit. By reaching the eidetic

plane, Husserl is better placed to show how the different domains, such as those of science and religion, are part of a shared evidencing process, even though the evidences deployed are different from each other in accord with their placement within a comprehensive regional ontology. This “ultimate plane” includes also recognizing that even as one tries to determine what *Evidenz* is, one presupposes and is already involved in an evidence-making project.

4. Husserl’s notion of *Evidenz*—and, in particular, evidential syntheses of all types, including empty and fulfilled intending and the synthesis of identification of these different intendings—perfectly accords with philosophies in which intentionality plays a major role, as Husserl’s and Alston’s do.
5. Like Alston, Husserl respects experience and also recognizes the continuum that extends from experience to the ascending levels of evaluation and, finally, theory, which in turn springs from experience and finds its *Evidenz* in experience. But Husserl’s examination of the tensions and cooperation between experience and theory extends to a level of eidetic ultimacy.
6. Precisely because of his eidetic understanding of *Evidenz*, Husserl is able to acknowledge that different kinds of meaning and fulfillment (e.g., perceptual, categorial, and empathetic) are appropriate for different ontological regions and that these kinds of meaning and fulfillment function analogously in these domains. Consequently, Alston’s idea of a non-sensory, mystical perception in which one experiences God presenting God’s self and justifying beliefs about God, much as a perceptual object presents itself and is justified it correlative to perceptual belief would converge with the Husserlian analogizing of different kinds of *Evidenz*.

7. The idea of a non-sensuous perception, though, seems to confound ontological regions. While the experience of God and perception are similar in their presentative dimensions, the idea of a non-sensuous perception without any perceptual qualia seems contradictory. I have suggested elsewhere that—at least for those religious frameworks in which God is experienced as a person, such as in the Abrahamic traditions that Steinbock documents and in the accounts of Alston and Max Scheler⁷⁵—the presentative experience of God might be better understood as an encounter with what Alfred Schutz calls a face-to-face Consociate who intervenes continually and immediately in one's experience and corrects one's apprehensions as opposed to a distant, inferentially constructed, ideal-typical Contemporary within the regional ontology of personal relationships. However, even then, for Schutz, everyday life Consociates are present bodily, and so God, who is bodiless, can be experienced as a Consociate only in an analogous sense (just as mystical perception is analogously perception). Consequently, perhaps God ought to be placed within a regional ontology all God's own. Husserl's ascent to the ultimate level of regional ontologies might have profited Alston, who, at least in his distinction between sense perception and mystical perception and his resistance to the epistemic imperialism by which one judges the latter according to standards of the former, seems to presuppose something like regional ontologies. It should be noted that Husserl's panorama of regional ontologies takes account of a much wider set of practical and theoretical domains than science and religion.
8. A distinction needs to be drawn between religious experience disconnected from any project of justification and religious experience as *Evidenz*, the having of the thing

itself in contrast to the empty thinking about or merely conceptualizing that thing. Such religious experience, taken evidentially, can play a role in justifying one's beliefs within a specific religious practice. But, on the basis of Husserl's eidetic account of *Evidenz* and regional ontologies, one can go further to show systematically the legitimacy of religious experience itself in comparison and contrast with other kinds of experiences and ward off Alston's concerns about epistemic imperialism. Husserl in effect is able to "develop the encompassing framework within which religious experience itself can be taken to justify religious belief"—something that Alston with his notion of distinctive doxastic practices with different presuppositions aspires to. But it would be another and far more difficult task to provide an eidetic description of religion itself, as an essence, whose justification might take place upon the completion of a sufficiently rigorous and comprehensive free variation and through the extensive dialogue and investigation about genetic origins that Husserl recommends. Husserl's distinction between sensuous and categorial/essential signitive intendings and their intuitive counterparts opens the door to eidetic explorations.

9. Finally, Alston speaks of doxastic practices, which would certainly be particularized and correlated with the different regional ontologies in which they are located, such as those of sense perception, natural science, and religion. For Alston, often one is initiated in such doxastic practices before one is even aware of them as practices or able to be critical of them; and such practices are conducted through the intersubjective engagement by which groups distinguish counterfeit from authentic practices, false religious experiences from true ones. The later Husserl, as mentioned

above, undertakes genetic phenomenology, as a result of the transcendental subject's commitment to self-responsibility insofar as such responsibility requires one to investigate the often hidden situational horizons that pertain to that subject and that subject's community, without which one's surrounding daily life-world would not even be experienced as a world, and that lead to all the relativities in which being and validity are involved.⁷⁶ As a result, Husserl's idea of a genetic inquiry into the social and historical origins of one's "world" and even one's determinations of validity would seem to be very similar to Alston's socially developed doxastic practices into which one is initiated early and within which one is enabled in dialogue with others to distinguish authentic from specious religious experience. For the later Husserl, who admits that he recognized the importance of genetic phenomenology very late,⁷⁷ one investigating evidence is led back into the vast system of the constitutive subjectivity. As one proceeds from level to level of self-discovery, the evidences one holds appear unavoidably relative, provisional, or falsely absolutized, and one finds oneself continually in a new naiveté that calls for even more penetrating investigations of *origins*.⁷⁸

Soffer explores just this relativization of evidence, which by no means undermines it, by repeatedly pointing to passages from Husserl's work contrasting the concrete life-worlds—the genetic sites where different worlds are formed—such that the worlds of Europeans and the world of Bantus do not even have the same objects or the same understanding of art works, literature, and so on.⁷⁹ As Husserl examines these genetic horizons, he uncovers "all those relativities in which being and validity are involved,"⁸⁰ and one's evidence appears more and more tentative, limited, and

relative to one's own group without leading to an incommensurability of lifeworlds or to conflict, since the groups do not share a basic mode of apperception or bilateral verification procedures, or without precluding the possibility of dialogue between those whose worlds depend on different genetic underpinnings.⁸¹ Soffer contrasts this later position with the earlier, anti-relativist position of the *Prolegomena* in which Husserl affirmed "What is true is absolutely, intrinsically true: truth is one and the same, whether men or non-men, angels or gods apprehend and judge it."⁸² Heffernan, too, comments on this trajectory of Husserl's work that ends with evidence being more relative, inadequate, and dubitable than it was at the outset.⁸³

Of course, such relativized understandings of truth and evidence appear perhaps most prominently in religion, as Soffer emphasizes and Husserl alludes to also.⁸⁴ This relativization is accentuated, perhaps because, as Husserl himself observed and as Alston's idea of doxastic practices also suggests, for the authentic, critical religious person, the religious attitude is rooted in one's "feeling, valuing, and willing."⁸⁵ Husserl himself in the *Grenzprobleme* discusses how difficult it might be to understand the religious experience of another which might bear similarities to his own:

I can convince myself that others have a more encompassing "religious experience," a richer and more valuable religious life, a more inner God-relatedness than I do. What they report, I can feel with them and understand. As far as I can, a growing domain of religious experience is transferred to me. If I cannot, I have an original, evident, empirical anticipation, a justifiable probability, that they are "higher" human beings,

nearer to God, that they are called to lead me and that I am called to follow them, even where I do not understand.⁸⁶

Given the difficulties of understanding the religious experience of one within one's own religious tradition and given Husserl's genetic phenomenology and Alston's treatment of doxastic practices into which we are initiated, it begins to become understandable how it can be that an almost uncrossable gap opens between people of quite different religious traditions or people who have no understanding of religious experience at all.

Alston, in his notion of doxastic practices, and Husserl, in his genetic phenomenology, point to the comprehensive contexts to which religious experience belongs, and, given the that these contexts include a continuum extending from base-level experience to theoretical examination, it seems understandable that within the contexts, religious experience itself acts as a fulfilling *Evidenz* for merely thought or conceptualized religious meanings—a having of the thing-itself for the religious practitioner—and that such religious experience in turn enlivens the encompassing religious context. However, at the same time, the genetic account of transcendental subjectivity and the doxastic practices into which one is initiated perhaps explain why it is that those inhabiting the religious mindset and those who find it incomprehensible find a chasm opening between them. This chasm probably prompted Alston's insistence that one ought not dismiss the epistemic value of some doxastic practices just because they are plausible to some members of the universal human population and not others. Similarly, Alston seems to admit his discomfort with the fact that he seems unable to cross the breach between different religious

traditions and that there seem to be no external, independent reasons to prove that one religious tradition is more accurate than another. In a sense, it becomes difficult for religious believers to produce claims for which there might be *Evidenz* to be experienced by those who have never had a religious experience or by those whose religious experience is different from that of one's religious home-world.⁸⁷ Likewise, it is difficult to marshal evidence for one inhabiting a distinctive religious home-world for the claims that those of other religious traditions or those who are unreligious might propose for one in that distinctive religious home-world, although there might be some concurrence on some issues between these different groups. The provision and experience of convincing evidence can occur much more easily within the bounds of one's home group and one's group's doxastic practices than can happen across the boundaries separating such groups and practices. Hence efforts to demonstrate the truth of one's religious beliefs may require those vast investigations Husserl calls for in his genetic approach to phenomenology. Indeed, such reaching out in dialogue is mandated by the sense of philosophic self-responsibility at the origin of Husserl's phenomenology. Such responsibility will not permit one to remain ensconced within the parameters of one's religious group's home-world or doxastic practices any more than the fulfilling experiencing of God presenting Godself in religious experience allows to refrain from raising questions and considering whether religious experience provides *Evidenz* for one's religious belief.

¹ Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), a translation of *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, ed. Walter Biemel, *Husserliana* 2 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950).

² William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991),

³ Alston, *Perceiving God*, 10, 66.

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- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 11, see also 10, 12, 66-67. Alston insists that the subjective experience of God ought to be taken seriously even if it is not infallible, and he asks “Who is in a better position to determine whether S is having an experience of something’s presenting itself to S as ϕ than S?” (*Ibid.*, 40)
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.
- ⁶ Anthony J. Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism: The Verticality of Religious Experience* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007).
- ⁷ Alston, *Perceiving God*, 16.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16-17.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5, 11, 59n49, 143.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 16, 64-65.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 71-72.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 71-72, 74, 77-79, 85.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 210.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 201-205, 210-211.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3, 3n2, 4, 146-149, 150, 158-159, 177-178, 187-188, 210, 299.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 274.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 199.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ George Heffernan, “Miscellaneous Lucubrations on Husserl’s Answer to the Question ‘was die Evidenz sei’: A Contribution to the Phenomenology of Evidence on the Occasion of the Publication of Husserliana Volume XXX,” *Husserl Studies* 15 (1998): 1.
- ²⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, ed. S. Strasser, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950), HUA I, § 24, p. 92-93; Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Mediations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 57. “Im weitesten Sinne bezeichnet Evidenz ein allgemeines Urphänomenon des intentionalen Lebens—gegenüber sonstigem Bewusstsein, das apriori leer, vormeinend, indirect, uneigentlich sien kann, die ganz ausgezeichnete Bewusstseinsweise der Selbsterscheinung, des Sich-selbst-darstellens, des Sich-selbst-gebens einer Sache, einer Sachverhaltes, einer Allgemeinheit, eines Wertes, usw., im Endmodus de *Selbst-da*, unmittelbar anschaulich, originaliter geben.”
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, §24, 93/57.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, §24, 93/58.
- ²⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, bd. 2, zweiter Teil, *Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, ed. Ursula Panzer (The Hague/Boston/Lancaster 1984), HUA XIX/3, §6, p. 559; Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. 2, trans. J.N. Findlay, ed. D. Moran (Routledge: London and New York, 2001), 202.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, *Untersuchung* 6, §15, p. 592/223.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, §8, 566/206.
- ³² Edmund Husserl, *Formale und transzendente Logik: Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1929), §86, 186; Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 208
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, §105, p. 246/279.
- ³⁵ Heffernan, “Miscellaneous Lucubrations on Husserl’s Answer to the Question ‘was die Evidenz sei,’” 2, 37; Husserl, *Einleitung in die Logik und Erkenntnistheorie, Vorlesungen 1906/07*, ed. Ullrich Melle (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster 1984), HUA XXIV, §31d, pp. 164, 11, 17–18; Edmund Husserl, *Logik und allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie, Vorlesungen 1917/18, Mit ergänzenden Texten aus der ersten Fassung von 1910/11*, ed. Ursula Panzer (Dordrecht/Boston/London 1996), HUA XXX, §69, pp. 329, 11. 14–18.
- ³⁶ Husserl, HUA XXX, §69, pp. 328-329.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, §67, p. 316.

- ³⁸ Husserl, HUA I, §2, p. 47/6.
- ³⁹ Husserl, HUA XXX, §66, pp. 315-316.
- ⁴⁰ Husserl, *Formale und transzendente Logik* §105, 246 (“herauszubekommen, wie die Sachen wirklich sind”)/278.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.* (“in einer naiven Evidenz”)
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 246/279 (“in der steten Gesinnung der Selbstverantwortung”)
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, §59, pp. 146/157-158 (“die intentionale Leistung der Selbstgebung”); Husserl, HUA XXX, §69, p. 329.
- ⁴⁴ Husserl, *Formale und transzendente Logik*, §80, 177/199 (durch die die Umwelt des täglichen Lebens überhaupt Erfahrungswelt ist).
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, §105, 247/279 (“zu allen Relativitäten führt, in die Sein und Geltung verflochten sind”)
- ⁴⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie: Analysen des Unbewusstseins und der Instinkte, Metaphysik, Späte Ethik; Texte aus dem Nachlass (1908-1937)*, ed. Rochus Sowa and Thomas Vongehr (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), HUA XLII, #21, §1, 266.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 268.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 269.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, #21, §3, p. 276.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 276-277.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, #13, §1, p. 178.
- ⁵⁴ HUA XIX/2, Untersuchung 6, §5, pp. 552-553, §8, 567/197-198, 207.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Untersuchung 6, §16, p. 597/227.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.* Untersuchung 6, §10-12, pp. 572-578/210-214.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Untersuchung 6, §11, p. 575/212.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Untersuchung 6, §12, p. 579/214.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Untersuchung 6, §17, pp. 600-601/229; §21, 607-608; §25, 618, p. 241.
- ⁶⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, bd. 2, Erster Teil: *Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, ed. Ursula Panzer (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), HUA XIX/1, Untersuchung 5, §20, pp. 425-426; *Logical Investigations*, vol. 2, Untersuchung 5, §20, 119.
- ⁶¹ HUA XIX/2, Untersuchung 6, §23, p. 614/238.
- ⁶² Gail Soffer, *Husserl and the Question of Relativism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 77.
- ⁶³ HUA XIX/2, Untersuchung 6, §44, p. 670/280.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Untersuchung 6, §45-46, pp. 670-676/280-283; §57, pp. 704-705/302.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Untersuchung 6, §62, pp. 718-719/310.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Untersuchung 6, §18, p. 601/229.
- ⁶⁷ Elisabeth Ströker, *Husserl’s Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. Lee Hardy (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 37-38.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.
- ⁶⁹ HUA XIX/2, §37, pp. 649-650/262; §45, pp. 670-672/280-281.
- ⁷⁰ HUA I, §50, p. 139/109.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, §52, pp. 144/114.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, §50, p. 139/109.
- ⁷³ HUA I, §29, p. 97/62.
- ⁷⁴ HUA I, §29, pp. 97-99/63-64. See also Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, bd. 1: *Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, ed. Walter Beimes (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950), HUA III, §136-153, pp. 333-380; *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Book 1: *General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 326-370.
- ⁷⁵ Max Scheler argues that God is personal and that, as Steinbock’s and James’s examples suggest, the religious act depends on God’s free taking the initiative in one’s life, see Max Scheler, *Vom Ewigen im Menschen* (Bern and München: Francke Verlag, 1968), 157-328.
- ⁷⁶ Husserl, *Formale und transzendente Logik*, §80, p. 177/199; §105, 246-247/279.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.* §107c, p. 255/288.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, §102, pp. 239/270-271; §105, pp. 246-247/279. My italics

⁷⁹ Soffer, *Husserl and the Question of Relativism*, pp. 152, 161, 194n23. See Edmund Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie: Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1925*, ed. Rudolf Boehm (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), HUA IX, 487-507; Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität, Texte aus dem Nachlass, Dritter Teil: 1929-1935*, ed. Iso Kern (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), HUA XV, p. 194.

⁸⁰ Husserl, *Formale und transzendente Logik*, §105, pp. 246-247/279.

⁸¹ Soffer, *Husserl and the Question of Relativism*, pp. 158-159, 161, 194n23.

⁸² Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, bd. 1, *Prolegomena zur reinen Logik*, ed. Elmar Holenstein (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), HUA XVIII, §36, p. 125; Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. 1, trans. J.N. Findlay, ed. D. Moran (Routledge: London and New York, 2001), "Prolegomena to Pure Logic," §36, 79; Soffer, *Husserl and the Question of Relativism*, pp. 158-159.

⁸³ Heffernan, "Miscellaneous Lucubrations on Husserl's Answer to the Question 'was die Evidenz sei,'" p. 62.

⁸⁴ Soffer, *Husserl and the Question of Relativism*, p. 157; Husserl, *Formale und transzendente Logik*, § 99, pp. 221-222/251.

⁸⁵ HUA, XLII, #21, §1, p. 269.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, #21, §3, p. 275. "Ich kann mich davon überzeugen, dass Andere eine umfassendere "religiöse Erfahrung," ein reicheres und wertvolleres religiöses Leben, eine innigere Gottbezogenheit haben wie ich. Was sie mir berichten, kann ich nachfühlen, nachverstehen. Soweit ich es kann, überträgt sich auf mich ein wachsender Reichtum religiöser Erfahrung. Soweit ich es nicht kann, darüber hinaus, habe ich (eine) ursprüngliche, evidente empirische Antizipation, eine rechtmässige Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass sie "höhere" Menschen sind, Gott näher, dass sie dazu berufen sind, mich zu leiten, ihnen zu folgen, auch wo ich es nicht ganz verstehe." One need not conclude that these others are "higher human beings," but could just conclude that they have a religious experience that I do not have and I am not at all familiar with what they are talking about.

⁸⁷ This use of "home-world" references Husserl's long discussion of the "Heimwelt" pertaining to one's life-world pertinences and generative origins, see HUA XV, pp. 214-266, 428-457, 613-633.