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THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF CONVERSION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Paul DiGeorgio

May 2021

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Paul DiGeorgio

2021

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF CONVERSION

By

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ABSTRACT

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF CONVERSION

By

Paul Anthony DiGeorgio

May 2021

Dissertation supervised by James Swindal, Ph.D.

Abstract: The goal of this dissertation is to offer a systematic phenomenology of the conversion experience based primarily on the transcendental method of Husserl. Conversion is an empirical phenomenon that, when phenomenologically analyzed, is revealed to have several eidetic or essential features that shape any conversion in general. After reviewing the secondary literature on conversion, I construct a synthetic account of the empirical experience. I then sketch the transcendental phenomenological method and proceed to evaluate conversion as a firsthand experience in the “natural attitude” which is necessary in order to ensure that I can exclude or bracket all of the assumptions that I make regarding conversion in this attitude once I enter the phenomenological attitude. Before attempting a reduction of conversion, in the phenomenological attitude I explore the nature of self and consciousness, and I examine the nature of conversion as an

embodied phenomenon. I also revisit the famous conversion story of Saint Paul, which I treat as a phenomenological case study. Finally, I present an eidetic account of the conversion experience, where my most important claim is that on the phenomenological level all conversions require judgment, the world, the Other, and time-consciousness. Ultimately, I conclude that conversion is a fundamental human experience for which we appear to be phenomenologically predisposed.

DEDICATION

To my daughter, Josephine, whose introduction into my life has brought about a conversion in me.

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I could not have completed this dissertation without the patience and support of my family, friends, and teachers.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents, Joseph and Teresa, for their support of my lifelong education, as well as their incredible patience. Thank you for allowing me to pursue freely the academic career that I have chosen. I owe a special thanks to my mother for instilling in me a love for reading from a young age, and later on, for proofreading my drafts several times. Second, I would like to thank my wife Rebecca, without whom I could not have completed this dissertation. I cannot put into words how much I appreciate the sacrifice that you have made in giving me the time to complete this project. I would also like to thank my sister Natalie, the godmother of my child, who has for my entire life pushed me to be better.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AK = Kant, Immanuel. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Edited by George Reimer and Walter de Gruyter. Berlin: Königlich-Preussischen/Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1900-.

APS = Husserl, Edmund. *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Syntheses*. Translated by Anthony Steinbock. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001.

BT = Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

CM = Husserl, Edmund. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Translated by Dorion Cairns. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1999.

CPR = Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Crisis = Husserl, Edmund. *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Translated by David Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

EB = “‘Phenomenology,’ Edmund Husserl’s Article for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.” Translated by Richard Palmer. In *Husserl’s Shorter Works* pp. 21-35.

EJ = Husserl, Edmund. *Experience and Judgment*. Translated by

FTL = Husserl, Edmund. *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. Translated by Dorion Cairns. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978.

Hua = *Husserliana: Edmund Husserl – Gesammelte Werke*. Dordrecht: Kluwer/Springer, 1956-. Forty-two volumes.

Ideas I = Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Book I. Translated by Fred Kersten. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982.

Ideas II = Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Book II. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Andrew Schuwer. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989.

LI = Husserl, Edmund. *Logical Investigations* Volumes I and II. Translated from Second Edition by J.N. Findlay. Edited by Dermot Moran. New York: Routledge, 2001.

PITC = Husserl, Edmund. *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*. Translated by James S. Churchill. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964.

NABRE = *New American Bible Revised Edition*. Charlotte: Saint Benedict Press, 2010.

PP = Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald Landes. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Varieties = James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

INTRODUCTION

Conversion *defines* our lives. It is the process through which we *ourselves* change over the course of time. It is almost as hard to imagine a life without personal change as it is to imagine a life that exists outside of time. To the extent that we live *in* time our existence essentially entails the phenomenon.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that much of our art and culture focuses on conversion as a central theme. First, conversion is often construed as an essential experience in the major Western religions. While ordinarily it is supposed that every religious believer is not necessarily a convert in a formal sense, a broader definition of conversion would include all of them, since every religious person was once, at some point in time, not religious (e.g., childhood). This universality is reflected in the preponderance of scriptural examples of the phenomenon. Consider, from the Abrahamic religions alone, the stories of King David, Ruth, Zacchaeus, Saul/Paul, and Cornelius. All of Christ's Twelve Apostles are converts, with some, like St. Peter, being converts twice over.¹ Outside of scripture there are the beatified cases of Saint Augustine, Edith Stein/Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, and Saint Josephine Bakhita, as well as instrumental proponents of the experience, like John Cotton and Jonathan Edwards.

Second, outside of the purview of religious experience, conversion occupies a status as a common theme in art and literature. For example, conversion is a particularly popular theme in the Baroque and Renaissance periods of art history. The conversion phenomenon is the focus of paintings by Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Bruegel the Elder, Rubens, Murillo, Reni, and Par Myriad.

¹ I refer to the Peter who emerges after the threefold denial of Christ. Luke 22:54-61 NABRE

Numerous works of literature incorporate the thematics of conversion, which makes for a compelling and humanized characterization, since to live is to experience personal change. Examples include *Beowulf*, Goethe's *Faust* (1808/1831), Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1871-1922), and more; in fact, it can be argued that any work of fiction which incorporates a dynamic character involves in some sense a conversion.² By such a definition we could include Guy Montag from *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), the boys in *Lord of the Flies* (1954), Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* (1866), and even Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphosis* of Kafka (1915). More recently there are cultural giants who have converted, like Sojourner Truth, Salvador Dalí, C.S. Lewis, Oscar Wilde, and T.S. Eliot. Some demented individuals have also gone through conversion experiences, including Mark David Chapman, who murdered John Lennon. It should come as no surprise that conversion has been such a prominent theme in the history of human culture; it is universal.

But I suggest that conversion, precisely because it is so universal, can take on many different variations. In this respect it is rather like consciousness itself. It would be an understatement to characterize consciousness in general, in all of its variegated manifestations across the breadth of human experience, as vast and diverse. The truth is that even these strong words are not enough to accurately capture just how free-flowing heterogeneous the phenomenon of consciousness truly is. Consider the fact that even in our ordinary and natural modes of

² The conversion that occurs in Goethe's version of *Faust* resembles more closely a traditional conversion in the sense that the conversion is associated with moral improvement. Many early scholars of conversion presupposed that conversion always incorporates such improvement. In this text I will argue that this is misguided. For example, consider how we can compare the repentant Faust in Goethe to the version presented by Christopher Marlowe. In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, the namesake character essentially "converts" to wickedness. See Susan Snyder's "Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* as an Inverted Saint's Life," 566. Snyder suggests that Faustus "is 'converted' to the devil."

consciousness, whereby we complete activities as manifold as answering emails, running errands, solving puzzles, reading books, exercising, and preparing meals, we are actually living out sundry experiences. This is a bit ironic since we often approach our consciousness as if it is a homogenous “thing.” For example, we typically assume that consciousness is stable and consistent on the level of personal identity, missing the fact that it is constituted out of remarkably variegated constituent parts which are, so long as we have consciousness, maintained in a state of perpetual flux.³ Consciousness, in short, is at once both monolithic *and* ever-changing. Conversion is analogous to consciousness in general since it marks the shift or change from one state of existence to another.

Experiences are easy to enumerate, but they sometimes prove to be difficult to describe as they are experienced by consciousness. Descriptions are mediated by language, after all, and even the most rigorous description of human experience will be limited by the radical ontological difference between *explicans* and *explicandum*, since language is attempting to describe something that is practically ineffable. Ordinary language must reach too far as it endeavors to grasp an object that is radically different in kind from itself.

The phenomenological approach can partly overcome the difficulties of ordinary language. Without a doubt there persists an enigmatic remainder that eludes the analysis of even the most practiced phenomenologist (and phenomenologists contend differently regarding the nature of this remainder), but when considered overall, not so much as a clearly defined discipline (which it is not), but instead, as an approximate set of methods and concepts,

³ Heraclitus and Friedrich Nietzsche are two of the most famous advocates of this sort of description of the state of reality. See Heraclitus DK22B12. Nietzsche refers often to Heraclitus. See, for example, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* §§5-7, *The Birth of Tragedy* §24, and “On the Utility and Liability of History for Life,” §1.

phenomenological philosophy is more capable than any other approach at describing lived experience as it appears before consciousness. Thus phenomenology is uniquely equipped to objectively grasp the nature of conscious reality, despite the fact that consciousness and language are radically different in kind; phenomenology is the best compromise that we are afforded.

To this day one of the most mysterious aspects of conscious reality—and therefore one of the most deserving of scholarly attention—is the domain of religious, spiritual, and/or mystic experience. William James (1842-1910) is among the first to have recognized that religious phenomena, as objects of consciousness, were worthy of serious and careful analysis.⁴ Indeed his *Varieties of Religious Experience* reads much like a phenomenological study, specifically because James focuses on “subjective phenomena” and passes over questions of theological and metaphysical significance. Thus, he was able to study religious and spiritual experiences without worrying about the question of religious or absolute truth. In so doing he can carry out a bold and adventurous foray into “alternative” modes of consciousness that transcend that which is “ordinary and natural” in an empirically scientific sense. In a section of *Varieties* where he is exploring mystic experience, James writes that:

Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question—for they are so discontinuous with ordinary

⁴ It might be true that philosophers as early as Aristotle studied topics of eventual interest to philosophers of religion, but metaphysics is not equivalent with the study of the consciousness of religious phenomena.

consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality.⁵

What James here states cannot be stressed enough—any scientific explanation of nature would be incomplete if it did not strive to explain, or at least acknowledge, the existence of modes of consciousness that differ from the “normal waking” version. It is William Blake (1757-1827) who famously indicates that “[i]f the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.”⁶ This quote has inspired countless musicians and recreational drug users, but it should inspire scientists and philosophers as well, especially when the full quote is presented: “[f]or man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thru' narrow chinks of his cavern." Indeed this is the issue with any partial or arbitrary limitation that is imposed upon the supposedly “proper” objects of intellectual study. The best science is the most complete science, one which employs careful methods to the study of all aspects of nature.

And yet, not everyone is convinced that the examination of religious or spiritual experiences should take up the time of serious scientists, philosophers, and surprisingly even theologians. Karl Barth (1886-1968), for example, rejects the very idea of religious empiricism.⁷ Going further back in the western tradition, David Hume (1711-1776) concludes that religious experience cannot serve as evidence of the divine.⁸ John Locke (1632-1704) does not come down quite so hard on religious experience, and seems willing to grant that sense experience can qualify as evidence for a belief.⁹ It should be clear that Hume and Locke are not quite on the

⁵ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 296.

⁶ Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 36.

⁷ Swindal, “Faith and Reason” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

same page, though. While Locke will grant that the experience can count as evidence for the belief in God, Hume is saying that the experience cannot count as evidence for the existence of God (ignoring the question of belief).

These days, with the insights of modern psychology, modern medicine, and phenomenology, it practically goes without saying that the experiences are worthy of scientific study regardless of their supposed objective reference.¹⁰ This is particularly obvious in clinical cases, where, for example, a medical subject might be experiencing frightening night terrors in which he is certain that shadowy figures congregate around his bed, despite the fact that no one else can see them—a psychologist can benefit from the study of this experience, just as a physician or neuroscientist can benefit from studying the events that occur in the brain as the patient has these frightful hallucinations. Clearly the scientist or philosopher who studies the hallucinating subject need not concern himself over the question of the objective reference of a perception. To do otherwise would be to muddle one’s own investigation with peripheral considerations.

As Jonna Bornemark and Hans Ruin note, phenomenological philosophy has proven to be especially useful for problems and questions that are “religious” in nature.¹¹ This is because phenomenology, at least as it is commonly understood, takes as its subject matter the immediate experience of consciousness. It is particularly useful for studying the experience of religious phenomena because of the way in which it concerns itself only with those very phenomena.

For the phenomenological student of religion, metaphysical questions concerning the empirical existence of God are to be “bracketed” to the side while the analytic focus is placed

¹⁰ By ‘modern psychology’ I mean post-Wundt scientific psychology, in contrast to the older versions of psychological philosophy explored by Aristotle, Hume, etc.

¹¹ Bornemark and Ruin, *Phenomenology and Religion*, 7.

upon the mystic's *experience* of God. Similarly, investigations of the so-called "real" world that exists independent of mind, the world that is purely and only objective, cannot be taken up by a phenomenologist. This "real" world separate from consciousness is that which Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) would call the "noumenal" precisely to the extent that it is non-phenomenal—it does not appear to consciousness or "mind." We cannot be sure if such a thing exists or not since we are limited to our own consciousness.

In any case with phenomenology new realms of philosophical inquiry are uncovered. Even an atheistic philosopher who is positively convinced that a God does not exist now finds herself in front of a door that was previously locked. The experience of religion and the experience of spirituality are phenomenologically analyzable whether a God really exists or not. The very question of whether such a God exists is one upon which the phenomenologist must remain agnostic, at least for as long as the phenomenologist retains his method and theory.

While it is true that, at least since Plato, philosophers have concerned themselves with questions that are of interest to theologians and spiritualists, it is also true that what is called the "philosophy of religion" is a relatively nascent field in western philosophy, at least when we compare it to other areas of inquiry, many of which are thousands of years old. It is already obvious why this must be the case. The phenomenological "realization" is something of which Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), and René Descartes (1596-1650) all remain ignorant. Indeed, we might source the historical emergence of the phenomenological realization to Kant's first *Critique*, and the institution of phenomenology in a methodological sense to G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), who is also one of the first authors to explore phenomenological philosophy, but not in any manner that closely resembles the phenomenological movement that starts with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938).

Suffice to say that today much work is being done in religious studies on the phenomenology of religion. It was nearly twenty-five years ago that Dominique Janicaud noted a “theological turn” in phenomenological studies, evinced in the work of authors the likes of which are as variegated as Jean-Luc Marion (b. 1946), Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004).¹²

To be sure, phenomenology seems uniquely equipped to address religious experience. As Husserl explains in a 1919 letter to Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), we can understand religion if we more fully understand “inner life.” Insofar as both the experience of the transcendental and the doxic position of faithfulness can only be mediated phenomenologically—a basic insight derivable from Kant's “Copernican” revolution in *The Critique of Pure Reason*—it is only natural that phenomenological philosophy is a fecund environment within which one can return to classical questions in a new light.

Thus it will here be assumed that the academic study of alternative modes of consciousness is a worthwhile scientific and philosophical pursuit. In order to continue with the analysis of phenomenology, it is necessary to make preliminary distinctions between different types of experience.

The Different Types of Experience in General

At first glance it appears that any given experience is either physical, emotional, mental, or some combination thereof.

¹² Janicaud, *Le tournant théologique*, 17.

If an experience is physical, it could be said to be physical in several different ways. First, an experience could be physical in that it directly involves the organs of the body and corresponding physiological “feeling.” According to the phenomenological view, I *am* my body and I perceive with it, such as when I taste a sumptuous dessert, delight at the harmonious melodies of live music, or run my hand across the head of a dog. There are other organs, like the stomach or reproductive organs, the primary function of which is not the transmission of a feeling, yet nevertheless are capable of transmitting that type of information, as when one feels hunger, or sexual arousal. What is more, there are ambiguous types of experience where one does use organs of sense, but not in a primary fashion, such as when one plays a video game that simulates a visual field which in fact is not suspended in empirical, three-dimensional space-time (in other words the sight corresponds to a simulated reference but lacks an objective, non-phenomenological reference).

Emotional experiences comprise a rich domain of the human experience. These experiences are sometimes called “feelings” but not in the physical sense of the word. Emotional experiences include relatively precise, culturally transmitted feelings like sadness, happiness, anger, love, or boredom, but an emotional experience can also be less defined, especially when one is experiencing a combination of different emotions.

Sometimes but not always an emotional experience has a correlate on the level of physical experience, as when a stomachache accompanies nervous feelings before an important event. Another example is the case of the experience of love, which probably has a tacit correlate. Like religious experiences, emotional experiences have only more recently entered the fold of serious academic study.¹³

¹³ Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge.”

The third type of experience is mental experience, which includes the use of reason, the holding of beliefs, all imaginative activity, and all other forms of what is ordinarily referred to as “thought.” Often, we experience emotions corresponding to our mental life, and often we reflect in our mentality on the experience of our emotions. Thus, these two types of experience often comprise a sort of continuous feedback loop.

There is still scientific debate over the extent to which mental life can be causally explained solely in physical scientific terms (like the statement “the mind is what the brain does”). While it is presently unclear whether or not all mental experiences are ultimately caused by physical processes, we can still determine that at least some of our mental experiences rely on our sense organs in this way, as is the case when one calculates a sum “in one’s head,” which one must admit would still require a brain.¹⁴ In still other cases we can have mental experience in the style of physical sensation, but without their actual involvement, especially with respect to situations involving vision, like when one uses their imagination to picture a magical creature, or recalls something from the past, or even has a dream.

Mental experience would also include the consciousness of memory. To the extent that one has a memory, one also experiences most if not all of the time something like a story of oneself, a personal narrative. This narrative is tied to one’s sense of identity and selfhood. In part this story is composed of big events and significant moments, but it also would not be much of a story at all without all of the more banal and routine details that comprise the majority of a typical life. It could be fairly stated that so long as one is living, even idly and monotonously, this story is always being written in the “background” of one’s experience.

¹⁴ There are debates regarding the extent to which mathematics is mind-dependent but here I will assume that at the very least performing a mathematical calculation is something that can only be enacted by consciousness.

The idea of a “background” of experience is intriguing but rather peculiar. Consider how, on top of human experience as heretofore characterized, there waits at one’s recourse the human faculty of reflection by way of which one can, in any moment, “retreat” back into the confines of the mind to “think” and otherwise perform analysis. For this reflective retreat to be possible, the “content” of experience has to “be” a certain way. Indeed, constituent to the human experience of subjectivity is a linguistic and mathematical film that naturally colors, shades, and provides depth to “bald” experience as such.¹⁵ To be sure this dynamic and generative layer of concepts and number is not always at the fore of one’s consciousness, nor is every aspect of this layer discursive, but, as Kant understood, the layer itself in part establishes the very possibility of human experience.¹⁶ According to Kant, forms of intuition integral to the understanding actively construct the foundations for experience.

Of all the variegated experiences that are possible for consciousness, from the richly textured experience of flavor or music to the subtle numbness of a “sleeping” limb, perhaps the experience of religious or spiritual conversion is most fascinating—and mysterious—of all. These experiences are remarkable in that they disorient the human subject in such a way that the end result is a reoriented being. The experience of conversion can fairly be reduced to the experience of self-change.¹⁷

The experience—*subjective phenomenon*—of conversion is mysterious and therefore especially worthy of academic interest primarily due to the way in which the experience is at

¹⁵ It would be reasonable to doubt the extent to which such a “bald” version of human experience is even possible.

¹⁶ For example, Kant denies that space is simply a “discursive concept” and states rather that it is a “pure intuition.” CPR A24/B39.

¹⁷ I will show that self-change includes changes not only in the experience of identity but also of role.

once both *ordinary* (in the sense of being common) but also remarkably *powerful*. Marie Baird writes that it is in the “foundational capacity” for conversion that a subject confronts “an ultimate, transcendent field of signification” and thereby self-transcends, thus “escap[ing] the biogenetic determinism that consigns pre-human life forms to those roles dictated by the environment in which they live.”¹⁸ If this propensity to convert is as universal as Baird suggests, then it is practically an essential feature of our very Being. Furthermore, if Baird is right, then not only is this experience what distinguishes our humanity from other organisms, but having the experience is actually the (only?) means of avoiding the strictures of an existence that is otherwise ultimately determined by outward forces rather than one’s own will.

Conversion: Psychological Mechanics

The etymology of ‘conversion’ can be traced to the Latin *convertere* of the 1300s, which means only “turn altogether.”¹⁹ Later via Middle English the word picks up a specifically religious (and Christian) connotation, when it comes to mean “turn as a sinner to God.” Here I do not presuppose that conversion is only something that occurs in religious or spiritual contexts, and my reasoning for this will be made clear much later. But for now, I would like to add a third sort of conversion, the “philosophical” conversion, which need not entail a formal philosophy *per se*, but can instead amount to a change in certain relevant beliefs held by the subject.

When consciousness experiences a religious, spiritual, or philosophical conversion, it is a “turn altogether” to the extent that consciousness has identified itself on new terms. Is the subject

¹⁸ Baird, “Role and Dynamics of Conversion,” xxvi.

¹⁹ Early Modern Conversions, “OED Research Usage for Conversion.”

always aware of this re-identification? For starters, how can consciousness “turn altogether” if not of its own volition? Yet, in the case of a non-denominational and non-religious spiritual conversion, it is far from obvious that a “genuine” conversion experience would necessarily require analytic knowledge (and awareness) thereof. Consider, for example, how a person can go through an experience (it need not be harrowing) that has an enormous impact upon one’s character, albeit one that is more gradual and therefore harder to notice, both for the person herself as well as those who encompass her milieu. Without a doubt this sort of conversion would depart significantly from the sort described by Baird, wherein one encounters a “transcendent field of signification,” unless we are to suppose that one can encounter said field in such a casual and nonchalant fashion over the course of time that one did not even have an inkling that the encounter occurred at all. Devoid of reflective intentionality, can this experience properly be called a “conversion”? Can consciousness execute a re-identification that is so gradual that it does not rise to the “tip of the iceberg” of conscious awareness? And does the answer to the question change if the subject herself does not believe that she has experienced a conversion, but those who know her think otherwise? Perhaps consciousness can “turn altogether” in the sense of a subtle series of small changes resulting in an eventual overall evolution rather than a quick and deliberate “turn” toward something more immediate, as if to proceed through a transformative gateway. Indeed, this is the basic schematization employed by William James, who groups all conversion experiences into either the “gradual” or the “sudden.” James, however, understood that the gradual conversion was deliberate and volitional.

Even if we are satisfied for the time being with the analysis of this question, there remain other astounding facets to the mechanics of conversion experience, which I will here outline preliminarily. A spiritual conversion is something that seems to occur in just a given instant or

moment, while, in order to have any real meaning, it must also transcend, in the present, the connection between the past and the new self of the future. Unlike other experiences had by humans, spiritual conversions, when authentic, are understood to be tied to one's essential identity, to the real "substance" of what makes one oneself.²⁰ Although the conversion produces an essential change in the person, the inner workings of this process are obscure, especially if one strives to refrain from making metaphysical assumptions.

Consider briefly how remarkable it is that in order for a conversion to be complete, it must institute the transition and difference between two different versions of oneself (that is, of consciousness). The result of this transition is a "fresh" conception of consciousness that self-identifies within a new conceptual field. This new state of consciousness thus freshly defines the essence of the identity of the person.

This experience at once both disrupts and stabilizes the consciousness of the subject. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) captures this idea when he writes that "true religion consists in annihilating self before that universal Being"²¹ The experience of self-annihilation is utterly intense; it should come as no surprise that often conversion experiences are ecstatic, euphoric, and hallucinatory. In leaving behind the old way for the new mode of consciousness, there is a hypothetical instant of transition where one passes from the prior identity to the new. It is in this instant that self-transcendence occurs, and understandably this phenomenon sounds like it could make for a frightening ordeal.

Consider the words of Alphonse Ratisbonne, whose vision of the Virgin Mary (and consequent conversion) is recounted by William James in his *Varieties*: "I did not know where I

²⁰ Here I do not use 'substance' in a technical sense, ontological or metaphysical.

²¹ Pascal, *Pensées*, §470.

was; I did not know whether I was Alphonse or another. I only felt myself changed and believed myself another me; I looked for myself in myself and did not find myself.”²² Interestingly this temporary loss of self is disorienting but not, in fact, negatively perceived; to the contrary, Ratisbonne writes that at the bottom of his soul he “felt an explosion of the most ardent joy.” While he describes an experience that one would think would be terrifying for its displacement of one’s very sense of identity, to the contrary his perception of loss of self is colored with buoyant feelings. While it must be disconcerting to experience this displacement of one’s ordinary identity, in the moment of the experience this is not a focus at all. What is more, in the case of conversion experiences, the subject’s disorienting intuitions are typically interpreted optimistically.²³

In fact, many “supernatural” or “paranormal” experiences have been noted to have this effect. In a 1973 study carried out by Andrew Greeley, a remarkable number of survey participants showed a significant positive association between the experience of a “bereavement visit” and “positive emotional health.”²⁴ As David Hufford writes, this relationship is later observed in a 2001 study by Pim van Lommel, wherein positive psychological outcomes were the result for the majority of near-death experiences.²⁵ Hufford himself has observed the same pattern in his study of sleep paralysis and other forms of “out-of-body” experience (OBE).²⁶ In all of these types of

²² James, *Varieties*, 177.

²³ Contrast these disorienting perceptions with those experienced during sleep paralysis and the perceptions are not interpreted as positively, although, perhaps surprisingly, some do regard their experience favorably, especially when the experience is a recurrent event. See Hufford, “Visionary Spiritual Experiences and Cognitive Aspects of Spiritual Transformation.”

²⁴ Greeley, *Sociology of the Paranormal*.

²⁵ van Lommel et al. “Near-death Experience,” 2039-45.

²⁶ Hufford, “Visionary Spiritual Experiences.”

experience one comes into contact with deviations from normal waking consciousness, and yet the result is not earth-shattering.

This might be surprising, but there is a probable reason behind it. William James's full definition for 'conversion' is: "the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self, hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes united and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities."²⁷ What is significant here, and useful for our purposes, is James' concept of the "divided self." In a nutshell, bereavement visits, NDE's, and OBE's can afford a subject with what is required in order for one to feel whole or complete again. For example, after the death of a loved one, a self is divided in its consciousness of loss and absence. With an NDE one's self has been divided through the harrowing and traumatic ordeal of having nearly died.

It is clear that disorienting experiences of self-transcendence, including the experience of conversion, are experienced (and interpreted optimistically) via the medium of a relative comparison. If someone feels lost, broken, or otherwise poor prior to a disorienting experience of self-displacement, then it reasons out that one is likely to interpret what an outsider may call a disorienting experience as something that is in fact an *orienting* experience when taken firsthand. In the case of the potent experience of "self-annihilation" described by Pascal, James' divided self is effectively reborn through a subtractive process the result of which is only a "good" remainder of one's self. While the consciousness of self-dissolution looks to be debilitating when surveyed from the sterile vantage point of psychology or rationalist philosophy, because this self-dissolution can occur only for someone who is, as James puts it, "consciously wrong, inferior, and unhappy," the ultimate outcome of a frightening ordeal turns out to be positive.

²⁷ James, *Varieties*, 171.

But while James' definition allows for either a sudden or gradual conversion event, his take on the corresponding states of self-consciousness seems to be misguided. Working off James' definition of conversion, it is unclear how he understands one's self-consciousness to map onto temporality. He seems to suggest that in the case of *every* conversion, he who eventually is to convert is, *prior to his conversion*, aware of the fact that he is "wrong, inferior, and unhappy." Surely *after* the conversion one may experience this realization, but it seems implausible to suppose that one's misguided ways are the object of consciousness before every conversion, even if sometimes this is the case, as with St. Augustine.

Perhaps James' definition is rather too strict in its conditions. We can loosen and simplify his take on spiritual conversion as follows: *essential change in oneself* or, perhaps, *essential change of self*. In order to reasonably define a religious conversion, we could add more criteria: "*intentional and essential change of self in accordance with an established metaphysical belief system.*"²⁸ In these definitions the word "essential" is used to capture the sense in which the experience is transcendent. Baird chooses to call this essential change "an experience of disruption in human subjects' spontaneous self-understanding."²⁹ This wording helps clarify the way in which reflection maps onto time-consciousness; this self-reflection is always in a state of flux. Prior to a conversion event one might be unknowingly errant, or fully cognizant of the wrongfulness of one's ways—either can make for an authentic conversion experience.

It might be the case that the inadequacy of James' own definition comes down to his obscure use of the phrasing "consciously wrong" and "consciously right." One would think that James means by this "aware that one is wrong (or right)" but that interpretation leads to the

²⁸ This definition leaves it unclear how to treat the significance of a so-called "personal religion."

²⁹ Baird, "Role and Dynamics of Conversion," xxvi.

ostensible dismissal of the case of every convert who did not know that his old ways were imprudent, which is an analytic judgment that, as we have seen, seems to be in error. But what if by “consciously wrong” James meant something more like “deliberately choosing to be wrong” instead of “awareness that one is wrong”? Thus, the only case of conversion that need be dismissed is the one wherein the convert’s old ways were perhaps wrong, but not as the result of any volition or act of will on the part of the convert himself. This seems to be a much more satisfactory account, at least for the time being.

Furthermore, this understanding of James’ thinking can help make more sense of even the famous cases from history. Take, for example, one of the most famous conversion stories of all time, and perhaps the single most famous example of a specifically Christian conversion.³⁰ Saul of Tarsus was a first-century rabbi who persecuted early Christians until he had a blinding vision of Jesus Christ, the effects of which lasted three days before Saul could again see. One could hardly imagine that, prior to his conversion, Saul thought that his persecution of Christians was “wrong.” On the other hand, it goes without saying that Saul conscientiously chose to persecute Christians and did not do so by any accident or coincidence. The rest of the story holds that Saul fasted deep in prayer for three days after his magnificent vision; he was no longer the same person: he admitted the divinity of Christ, took his new name, Paul, and spent the remainder of his days as a missionary traveling around Europe and Asia.

To return to the conception of conversion as self-annihilation, the story of Paul is especially interesting because of how, on a theological level, the calculus of sin and salvation dictates that Paul’s past life as the Christian-tormenting Saul is supplanted fully by the new individual. While it would be hamartiologically (and eschatologically) problematic to suppose,

³⁰ Acts 9 NABRE

granting Paul's remarkable conversion, that Saul and, more importantly, his actions, never existed and never occurred, the whole point of the story is that effectively this erasure is indeed the case. Indeed, it is something of a Christian platitude that any act, no matter how heinous, can be forgiven. If one commits some atrocious offense but then later authentically comes to a spiritual conversion, then it is understood that the "real" and genuine self is the reformed self, that the person who in the past committed a horrible deed is no longer. If the old subject is still there, after all, it is not a case of self-transcendence as Baird describes.

At the end of the day, in an ordinary and sensible way of looking at things though, the story of Saul/Paul is unremarkable. People go through changes all the time, after all, and when people decide to change their ways in a lasting and meaningful way, one might think that this process should not be hard to explain. This more or less sensible view is in fact misguided—the question of why or even how people choose to convert is not at issue; rather, what is unclear is how it can be that deep spiritual conversion, wherein consciousness itself changes, is a possible experience at all for consciousness, especially given the relatively stable, consistent, and unchanging nature of consciousness as ordinarily experienced.

Overview of Chapters

In the first chapter I review much of the conversion scholarship that already exists. It should be noted that all this scholarship belongs to the human sciences, but I have not so far found any sustained treatment of the phenomenology of conversion. After reviewing the scholarship on conversion, most of which comes from psychology, sociology, anthropology, and theology, I derive a general definition of conversion according to these disciplines. In the second chapter I

outline the specifics of my general explanatory framework and method, that of transcendental phenomenology. I mostly follow Husserl, and this continues throughout the rest of the text. In the third chapter I sketch the conversion phenomenon in the natural attitude. While I reviewed scholarly research in the first chapter of the text, here I take up a first-person account of the experience of conversion as I experience it in the natural (and theoretical) attitude. In the fourth chapter I take up the self and consciousness in the phenomenological attitude. I present an account of the phenomenological features of both in preparation for the eventual transcendental reduction of the conversion phenomenon in general. In the fifth chapter I examine conversion as a specifically embodied phenomenon; in this chapter I employ a significant number of ideas from Merleau-Ponty here. In the sixth chapter I present a case study of Saint Paul from a phenomenological perspective. Since this is just one particular conversion narrative, I do not attempt an eidetic reduction of the conversion on the basis of this case. In the seventh chapter, my conclusion, I proffer an eidetic reduction of the conversion phenomenon. I identify seven essential features of the experience, and I ultimately conclude that there is something fundamentally symmetrical between conversion and consciousness in general.

Ch. 1. Types of Conversion Experiences According to the Human Sciences

Sudden “Pauline” Conversion vs. Gradual Conversion: A History of the Field

A wide range of human sciences purport to explain conversion. It may turn out that deriving my own definition of conversion from these other accounts will prove to be challenging. In defining conversion, it can be hard to break with the historical trends that have driven conversion scholarship. Indeed, some scholars, like Lewis Rambo, suggest that defining conversion in fact turns out to be a “vexing problem” due to the sheer number of ways in which it can be interpreted.¹

These historical trends are often times so implicit that even a conscious effort to avoid bias can prove to be difficult. Historically this played out in the contest between the “gradual” and “sudden” models of conversion. Rambo, for example, notes that for a long time, academic studies of conversion were largely confined to a western and specifically Christian context (in fact a “hegemony” according to Rambo) which interpreted conversion only according to the “Pauline paradigm of sudden, dramatic change.” Hood and Chen actually go so far as to maintain that this style of conversion “defined the emergence of an empirical psychology of religion in America” because the phenomenon served as one of the earliest analytic foci of the fledgling science which was “courageous enough” to try to explain such a difficult topic.²

For better or for worse Paul’s story essentially occupies the role of Christian archetype for the conversion phenomenon. According to the Pauline model of conversion, which dominated

¹ Rambo, “Anthropology and the Study of Conversion,” 213.

² Hood and Chen, *Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, 537.

early academic studies, the vast majority of which employed psychological methods, there is nothing slow, gradual, or subtle about conversion. This type of conversion is exemplified in the description given in a key passage of *The Acts of the Apostles*: “As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”³ When this is your standard for identifying instances of conversion, it is easy to see how the restrictive pacing could present a problem. After all, our own everyday experiences most likely contradict this understanding of the timing of conversion, especially since it is likely that we know people who have experienced conversions that are far less tumultuous than the one had by Paul. Yet for many years, academic studies of conversion disregarded these sorts of situations, limiting themselves to the “classical” model epitomized by Paul, although, as we will soon see, the gradual model is proposed rather early on (by James), although it is largely relegated to the periphery.

It should be noted that there are other important dimensions to the classic, Pauline model, not all of which directly deal with its immediacy, although most of these are, to be sure, correlates thereof. Rambo hits upon these other aspects of the Pauline model as he elaborates that “[t]he Pauline model of conversion combines notions of an unexpected flash of revelation, a radical reversal of previous beliefs and allegiances, and an underlying assumption that converts are passive respondents to outside forces.”⁴ Thus his theory is that, in addition to its immediacy, the “classical” type of conversion involves, first, the surprising and even volatile revelation, second, the extreme renunciation of one’s old ways (in terms of the *doxic* as well as one’s loyalty to something or other), and third, the notion that the convert is a vehicle for something external

³ Acts 9:3-4 NABRE

⁴ Rambo, “Anthropology and Conversion,” 213.

to himself, something that itself catalyzes a change of heart and mind in the convert.⁵ Here it is apparent that the surprise revelation and the passivity of the convert are correlates of the rapid pace with which this type of process occurs.

There is yet another property that is commonly attributed to the sudden Pauline model of conversion and it is the emotional involvement of the phenomenon. Scholars backed with contradictory data have debated the extent to which a heightened emotional state is a common pre-condition for conversion.⁶ Typically the sudden map of conversion, with its corresponding intense emotions, is understood to be diametrically opposed to any sort of rational or intellectual conversion. The idea is that the more gradual conversion phenomenon is one which is sought on an intellectual or rational basis. But in fact it is far from self-evident these the emotional and the rational should be rigidly distinguished like so, despite the fact that this has been the tradition at least since Plato.⁷ While it might be true that some conversions, like that of Paul, are precipitated primarily by emotional factors, it is an error to assume that the phenomenon has no rational component whatsoever. Phenomenologically speaking it is apparent that, in a sense, to “feel” is (in a way) to know, and this is true whether we are talking about feeling an emotion or feeling in a physical, tactical sense.

In any case it is with this general “Pauline” model that many early studies of conversion were concerned, perhaps, as I have indicated, due to the way in which modern psychology was, in its early years, guided by an implicit Christian bias, noted not only by Rambo, whom I have already mentioned, but also Hood, Hill, and Spilka.⁸ This goes even for G. Stanley Hall’s famous

⁵ Here ‘doxic’ means “that which has to do with belief.”

⁶ Contrast Coe’s 1916 *Psychology of Religion* with Spellman et al., “Manifest Anxiety.”

⁷ Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge,” 151.

⁸ Rambo, “Anthropology and Conversion,” 213; Hood et al., *The Psychology of Religion*, 5th ed., 222-223; Coon, “Testing the Limits of Sense and Science.”

1881 lectures on the topic, eventually the focus of his seminal 1904 monograph, *Adolescence*.⁹ Rambo, writing with Charles Farhadian, points out that there is something distinctively Protestant about this “subjectivist” reading of Paul’s conversion.¹⁰ But while Miller and C’de Baca think that this “quantum” model is far wider than religion conversion, there have long been concerns that religious or spiritual conversion could occur in a less abrupt fashion.

This notion of a more gradual conversion is in fact present right at the start of the approximate discipline of conversion studies, defined early on, as I indicated, by the psychological approach. It is embodied in the work of William James, whose groundbreaking *Varieties* of 1902 delineates that conversion is a process that can be “gradual or sudden.”¹¹ James cites Leo Tolstoy and John Bunyan as examples of gradual conversions and he repeatedly asserts the gradual and the sudden as two different types of the conversion phenomenon, but as noted by Hood et al., James remains more or less preoccupied with the classical and sudden model of conversion, which takes up much more of his time and space in the text.¹² In fact it should be argued that James seems to find the gradual model of conversion to be obscure, evinced by his statement that, “it must be confessed at the outset that it is hard to follow these windings of the hearts of others, and one feels that their words do not reveal their total secret.”¹³ In other words, James takes it that the gradual conversion is far harder to analyze psychologically.

There is also something of a gradual conversion model in the approach of George Coe, whose 1916 monograph *The Psychology of Religion* enumerates six distinct types of conversion,

⁹ Hood et al., *Psychology of Religion*, 4th ed., 206.

¹⁰ Rambo and Farhadian, *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, 5.

¹¹ *Varieties*, p. 150.

¹² Hood et al., *Psychology of Religion*, 4th ed., 212.

¹³ James, *Varieties*, 145

although the author confesses that the term itself is best reserved for the sudden conversion.¹⁴ Really it is not until the 1920 publication of *The Religious Consciousness*, by James Pratt (a student of James), that gradual conversion is given primary focus, but this text was largely ignored since, as Anne Taves points out, its gradual model of the phenomenon did not complement the more sudden and radical paradigm which lent itself more readily to the “revival” mindset that defined the Third Great Awakening (1855-1930).¹⁵ More influential was Strickland’s *Psychology of Religious Experience*, in which the gradual model for conversion is taken up in a sustained manner. Strickland, like James, contrasts the gradual and sudden models of conversion, but whereas James only briefly explores the gradual by way of a handful of supposedly enigmatic cases, like Tolstoy, Strickland goes much further in his analysis. Most importantly, as Hood et al. point out, Strickland understands that the gradual conversion is one wherein the convert is an active (rather than passive) agent seeking out the transformation of self.¹⁶

A multitude of examples confirm the aptness of this analysis. Indeed, it is surely possible to convert in the absence of the “unexpected flash of revelation,” even in the Christian context which has been so often confined to the Pauline model. The gradual variant is typified in the case of Edith Stein, who would later become St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Stein’s conversion was not enacted by an unexpected flash or revelation but rather a deliberate and intentional reading of the autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila. Similarly it must be possible to convert in an active and volitional sense in contrast to the “passive” model established in the case of Paul;

¹⁴ Hood et al., *Psychology of Religion*, 4th ed., 212.

¹⁵ Hood and Chen, *Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, 538.

¹⁶ Hood et al., *Psychology of Religion*, 4th ed., 215; Strickland, *Psychology of Religious Experience*, 110-11.

indeed it would seem that the vast majority of religious conversions in the United States take place on the volitional, actively-willed basis, exemplified by various sacramental rites of initiation which actually require the consent of the convert—like the Roman Catholic Sacrament of Confirmation, or the *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*—in order to be complete. After all, certainly Edith Stein *chose* to read the Avila biography that precipitated her own change.

In short it is clear that there has been something of a controversy regarding the gradual vs. sudden conversion dichotomy, but Hood and Farhadian point out that starting around the 1970s, psychology and its sudden, Pauline model of conversion began to be supplanted by the gradual model that was not necessarily limited to Christianity and which was accompanied by new methods from sociology, anthropology, and neuroscience.¹⁷

With so many disciplines vying to give their account of the phenomenon, new struggles materialized, even after the gradual model of conversion became the standard paradigm across the disciplines. One issue is that a diversity of approaches yields a diversity of differing definitions. Rambo for his part suggests that defining conversion just gets in the way of examining and analyzing the phenomenon. He suggests that instead of this more specific account, conversion should instead be viewed as a “cluster of types of changes that have been observed and discussed.” He furthermore adds that the more common sort of conversion is indeed the gradual and subtle variety that occurs over a much longer duration and is less extreme than the Pauline type.

But even today the Pauline paradigm should not be entirely disregarded in attempting to define the phenomenon. While plenty of studies have been carried out on the Pauline model, which obviously originates in the Christian context and has been particularly focused upon the

¹⁷ Hood and Farhadian, *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, 6.

evangelical strand of the religion, the general application of the Pauline figure does not have to be limited, and in fact has not been limited, only to the analysis of Christian conversion. Indeed, as the counterculture conversion studies of the 60s and 70s grew more popular, these studies appropriated the same “radical” and sudden orientation model established in the case of Paul, since the “gradual” model simply was not relevant for those cases which could be defined by their suddenness and, often times, ephemeral nature.

In the last analysis, instead of being viewed as competing models, the sudden versus gradual paradigms of conversion should be seen as case-specific alternatives. There is no reason why one or the other model must be the exclusive option to which researchers and scholars refer. A model encompassing both the sudden and the gradual process should be incorporated into the transcendental phenomenological reduction of the phenomenon.

General Review of Definitions for Conversion as Offered by the Human Sciences

Now I will turn to the conversion definitions themselves, comment briefly on each one (and, in some cases, review significant comments from others), and then attempt to synthesize the different definitions into a “master” definition of the phenomenon grounded in phenomenology which in turn can be used to establish the limits of the conversion experience, which will be phenomenologically analyzed in the final chapter.¹⁸ In other words here I am carrying out an

¹⁸ Since I will here attempt to synthesize these definitions, I am following ground already covered by the Dutch anthropologist Henri Gooren. The thirteen conversion models that Gooren reviews in his 2010 monograph *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation* are: James, Lofland-Stark, Travisano, Straus, Greil, Heirich, Bromley-Shupe, Long-Hadden, Snow-Machalek, Richardson, Gartrell-Shannon, Stark-Finke, and Rambo. Here I cover James, Lofland-Stark, Travisano, Snow-Machalek, Richardson, and Rambo.

historical overview of the different conceptions of the experience in order to sketch out the fullest possible account of conversion prior to its phenomenological reduction.¹⁹

The definitions below come from a diverse set of disciplines, from psychology, to sociology, to anthropology, to neuroscience, to even theology. While psychological studies of conversion were exceedingly active for a period of time at least beginning with James up to the 1930s, eventually they were challenged by sociological and anthropological approaches, via which there are several well-known critiques of the psychological paradigm for explaining conversion. For example, some authors, like Beverly Gaventa, have argued that it is impossible to draw psychological conclusions regarding conversion cases in the New Testament based on the limitations of scriptural sources. Gaventa and Alan Segal have suggested that there is insufficient data to psychologically analyze figures like St. Paul in particular, while others, like Zeba Crook, point out that psychological analysis of scriptural conversion should be avoided because the texts belong to another historical-cultural period with the result being that a modern understanding of psychology simply isn't pertinent to the source material.²⁰

Note that the definitions are for the most part reproduced in their original form below, with edits only as necessary, and they are ordered by date of publication:

1. Starbuck (1900):

Conversion is characterized by more or less sudden changes of character from evil to goodness, from sinfulness to righteousness, and from indifference to spiritual insight and activity. The term conversion is used . . . to stand for the whole series of manifestations just preceding, accompanying, and immediately following the apparently sudden changes of character involved.²¹

¹⁹ This historical overview of the definitions for conversion is also instructive in the sense that it shows how the concept itself has been subtly re-constituted over time.

²⁰ Crook, *Reconceptualizing Conversion*, 28-52.

²¹ Starbuck, *Psychology of Religion*, 21.

Here conversion is explicitly construed as a sudden event rather than an enduring or more gradual process although it must be pointed out that Starbuck does situate the duration on a continuum. It should be noted that Starbuck specifically interprets conversion as a bridge between different moral states, and only in the one direction, from “evil to goodness.” Thus he thereby excludes from the domain of conversion phenomena the likes of which would later take central importance in the scholarly literature on the topic, from disaffiliation to so-called “deconversion.”²² That said, it has to be granted that the move from evil to goodness hinges in large part upon the perspective and perception of the converting subject, meaning that the nature of what is “good” could be entirely subjective or relative, since what one person finds to be evil might be what another finds to be good. Thus, while it is almost certain that this is not what Starbuck had in mind, we could include within the limits of his conversion definition the idea of converting from goodness to evil, with the proviso that the convert does not understand his new worldview to be evil or otherwise inadequate—otherwise, if he “converts” to a character that he recognizes to be evil and the antithesis of true good, then it would not count as a conversion at all, at least not per Starbuck’s criteria.

Starbuck’s definition takes for granted that conversion involves a change of character, which again situates his theory of conversion within moral limits, and aside from addressing “spiritual insight” he does not seem to include “intellectual” conversion within the purview of

²² Disaffiliation refers to abandoning a personal religious affiliation although it does not necessarily entail abandoning religious life altogether. When a nun leaves her order but continues to practice Catholicism, this is disaffiliation. Sometimes this is referred to as “disengagement.” See Ebaugh’s “Leaving Catholic Convents: Towards a Theory of Disengagement.” Deconversion is a term that emerges in the 1970s and refers to most often to a general departure from religious life. See Campbell & Cole, “Religiosity, Religious Affiliation and Religious Belief.”

the phenomenon.²³ But what does it mean for a conversion to be “intellectual”? Is not even the “moral” conversion one which has some intellectual content? It is clear that the move from evil to goodness presumably requires some knowledge in order to be possible, although the content of the *episteme* would again be moral in nature (what is good or goodness?) instead of intellectual, at least in any pure sense, like the way in which $2+2=4$. This is not to suggest that every intellectual pursuit is conversional, such that learning new mathematics could be called a conversion—but is it possible that every *conversion* has at least some “intellectual” content, if we use this term to refer simply to *knowledge*? Is there any conversion that does not somehow involve knowledge? For now I will leave this question open-ended, to be resolved after reviewing more of the conversion models.

What Starbuck fails to recognize is the existence of conversion that some conversions are decidedly neutral with respect to morality. Indeed many conversions lack any moral significance whatsoever, like the transformation of an individual into a father (which *can* involve a moral change, not to mention physical change, but does not have to), or the sort of change that one takes up when transitioning from one gender to another, or even a significant career change.

Remarkably Starbuck is one of the earliest scholars to take up conversion, at least in a sustained, full-length study, and yet he realizes that the phenomenon is not always fully conscious. In contrast to the overwhelming popularity of the early Pauline model, which elaborates on a passive conversion that is unexpected but conscious, Starbuck is one of the few “early” figures who contends that conversion is not always a fully conscious phenomenon,

²³ I take it that an intellectual conversion is one which is deliberate and almost always gradual rather than sudden.

devoting an entire chapter of his monograph to the “conscious and subconscious elements” of the psychology of conversion.

Starbuck also addresses the role that volition plays in conversion, which pertains more closely to the measure of passivity in the archetypal conversion model. In what he terms “self-surrender” he identifies the sort of conversion in which one “gives in” to forces external.²⁴ Even though giving in to the forces compelling one’s conversion seems, in a way, to be a sort of volition, Starbuck considers self-surrender to be the opposite of the voluntary conversion. Is this right? Does St. Paul surrender himself to God? Self-surrender still seems to be a sort of volitional conversion. In any case this supposed distinction is an idea which is picked up two years later in the *Varieties* of William James.

2. James (1902):

To be converted [...] denote[s] the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong [and] inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right [and] superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.²⁵

Unlike Starbuck, who was actually a student of James at Harvard, James encompasses the more gradual sort of conversion in his definition, as I noted in the previous section, but he does not at all treat it at length in his very influential monograph that defined the nascent field of conversion studies for decades and even today retains some authority in the field. Via this theory of conversion as the movement from division to union James, unlike Starbuck, is able to include a far wider range of phenomena within the limits of conversion experience, including events like disaffiliation and deconversion, so long as the state of affairs preceding the conversion was such

²⁴ Starbuck, *Psychology of Religion*, 117.

²⁵ James, *Varieties*, 150. Here I have inserted the conjunction ‘and’ in between the phrases “wrong inferior” as well as “right superior.” It is unclear why James uses this phrasing.

that the self was in a fragmented state, although James remains obscure on the issue of whether the subject is actually aware of its own division, despite the fact that it is clearly conscious of its wrongness and unhappiness. For example, James could consider a Roman Catholic's turn to atheism to be a conversion so long as the person's "self" was split before the unification that atheism enacted for the subject, while it remains unclear whether the subject discerned his own underlying division, although certainly he grasped that his ways were "wrong" and "inferior" and "unhappy." Assuming that it is possible that James meant to include conversions where the divided self is not the object of conscious awareness, his theory resonates with psychoanalytic theories regarding the status of a "subconscious" mind or unconscious. Lastly, while the James definition concludes with the notion that the self is unified by way of a "firmer hold upon religious realities," James leaves these realities vague, such that I would feel comfortable including atheism within the limits of these "realities," although to be sure in a "negative" sense, with a negative orientation toward those realities in question.

James also rather astoundingly distinguishes the "volitional" type of conversion from the non-volitional, citing Starbuck as one of his influences for the idea.²⁶ This is surprising since for so many decades the non-volitional model dominated academic studies of conversion. James, however, does not get the distinction quite right. This is because he establishes a tight link between the "conscious and voluntary way" on the one hand and the "involuntary and unconscious way" on the other. He reasons that the conscious conversion is always one which is chosen, which seems like a fairly obvious mistake given the conversion case *par excellence* typified in the case of St. Paul. Paul, after all, does not *choose* to convert, but nevertheless he is most certainly *aware of* his own conversion. In other words, his conversion is involuntary, but he

²⁶ Ibid., 184.

is aware of it. The only way to explain this apparent error is to resolve that by ‘conscious’ or ‘unconscious’ James refers only to the conscious *decision* to convert—the volition to do so. The “unconscious decision” of course is not much of a “decision” at all, assuming that deciding requires making a choice. The unconscious decision, in other words, is nothing more than the involuntary variety of conversion, *à la* the Pauline model.

This charitable reading of James’s remarks renders his position far more coherent, but a problem remains. James actually cites Starbuck for the idea that something “incubates” in the subject unconsciously *until* it eventually gives way to the sudden conversion event and consciousness thereof. This is not at all equivalent with the charitable interpretation of James that I offer above. Specifically, James writes that Starbuck: “[s]eems right in conceiving all such sudden changes as results of special cerebral functions unconsciously developing until they are ready to play a controlling part, where they make irruption into the conscious life.”²⁷ Here James very clearly suggests that every sudden conversion is in fact far more gradual than we might believe. The crucial point to note, however, is that James is specifically referring to a specific type of sudden conversion in the work of Starbuck: the “sudden non-religious alteration of habit or character.” The idea is that when someone experiences a sudden reorientation of character that is decidedly non-religious (or non-spiritual), this is in fact the product of something that has been “stewing” for quite some time. These profound changes do not, that is, occur on a purely spontaneous basis, although the awareness thereof often manifests in a seemingly spontaneous instance.

²⁷ Ibid., 164.

3. Nock (1933):

By conversion we mean the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right. It is seen at its fullest in the positive response of a man to the choice set before him by the prophetic religions.²⁸

Nock is often credited with formulating the distinction between conversion “proper”, in which one turns from an irreligious perspective to a religious one, and the sort of religious *intensification* that Nock elsewhere (but not in this particular excerpt) refers to as “adhesion.”²⁹ Some scholars, most notably Roger Beck, have suggested that adhesion is a lesser category that only pertains to “cults” instead of the case of Christianity, in which case true conversions occur rather than mere adhesion.³⁰ In other words, the idea is that a subject could never “convert” to a cult—instead, the subject can only “adhere” to its tenets. Clearly “conversion” has a positive connotation whereas the same is not necessarily true for adhesion. Today it is clear that this is the obvious manifestation of bias. The Christian who intensifies in his beliefs should certainly count as a sort of convert, even if he is different in kind from the atheist who converts to the religion, and it is just as apparent that someone who joins a cult and adopts the corresponding set of beliefs undergoes a significant change in identity, such that this should be considered conversion.

That said, there is an astute anthropological difference in the classical period between adhesion and the traditional model of conversion. Zeba Crook maintains that for Nock as for James it is emotion that is the “central and defining characteristic of conversion” and this is what distinguishes conversion from the “lesser” phenomenon of adhesion.³¹ He continues, describing Nock’s work:

²⁸ Nock, *Conversion*, 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 36. More recently Gooren has referred to adhesion as “affiliation.” See *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation*, 32.

³⁰ Beck, “Religious Rivalries in the Early Roman Empire,” 241.

³¹ Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion*, 25.

Greeks *adhered* to religions and cults, according to Nock, they were not emotionally or psychologically bound to them, and for this reason one cannot talk about, nor does one find, conversion within them.³²

These cults were more like tools for the ancient Greeks, in contrast to the various “philosophies” that transcended simple utility to the extent that they required fidelity, or as Crook puts it, “loyalty.” He argues that in Nock’s model, the emotional dimension of conversion is a direct result of this loyalty, and this is why philosophies and later Christianity require investment in terms of both “body and soul.”³³ Crook points out that in the case of certain philosophies and religions one must recognize some sort of “glorious and new present reality,” directly akin to the “transcendent field of signification” that we will see in the Baird definition of 1992. As Crook suggests, the ascent to the surface world in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave can be read as an example of this sort of world-shattering breakthrough.³⁴ Platonism and Neo-Platonism would eventually have an enormous influence on the conceptual foundations of early Christianity, and this is why Western religions like Christianity more closely resemble the Ancient Greek philosophies than they do the Ancient Greek religions, which were topical and ritualistic.

Furthermore Nock, like Starbuck, considers conversion only in the one “direction,” from a more basic (“earlier”) form of piety (or lack of care, “indifference”) to a new and more profound state of piety. Thus according to this criteria deconversion, the event of losing one’s faith, would not count as a sort of conversion. Although Nock does not explicitly state as much, at least not in his definition, he implies that the new state of piety is more sophisticated, or perhaps “deeper” than the earlier form.

³² Ibid.

³³ Nock, *Conversion*, 14.

³⁴ Plato’s *Republic* Book 7.

It also should be noted that unlike both Starbuck and James, Nock stipulates that conversion entails consciousness of the change that has occurred since conversion is here framed in its “fullest” sense as manifest in a decision (we can disregard for scholarly reasons the ethnocentric qualification he provides regarding the “prophetic religions”). In other words the most complete form of conversion is that which follows from a rational choice, similar to the Gelpi definition found below.

4. Lofland and Stark (1965):

For conversion a person must: 1. [e]xperience enduring, acutely felt tensions 2. [w]ithin a religious problem-solving perspective, 3. [w]hich leads him [or her] to define himself [or herself] as a religious seeker; 4. encountering the D.P. [Divine Precepts] at a turning point in his life, 5. [w]herein an affective bond is formed (or pre-exists) with one or more converts; 6. [w]here extra-cult attachments are absent or neutralized; 7. [a]nd, where, if he [or she] is to become a deployable agent, he is exposed to intensive interaction.³⁵

This rich and precise model is considered to be the original “process” model for conversion, and it is one of the most frequently appearing definitions present in the secondary literature on the topic.³⁶ Like the conversion model offered by James, this account begins with the stipulation that the subject who is to convert must start out in a state of pronounced tension—what James calls the “divided self.” But for Lofland and Stark the context within which these tensions take place is much more specific than what is proffered by James: this tension originates in a religious perspective where the focus is on “problem-solving.” Here problem-solving may seem like an odd choice of words but the reference is to the existential “situation” to which religion is but one solution out of many. Depending on the religion the problematic nature of the existential

³⁵ Lofland and Stark, “Becoming a World-Saver,” 874-5. This definition is specifically derived from a study of a minority religious group, but in the summary to their article Lofland and Stark indicate that they believe their definition is generalizable to “other types of groups and perspectives.”

³⁶ Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation*, 1862.

situation may vary, but in most Christian contexts the problem would be nothing more than the concept of sin or the wish for eternal life, etc. Because the person-in-tension wants to attain a solution to some sort of existential (or theological) “problem,” she or he becomes—and self-identifies—as a “religious seeker.” Of course, then, this would require consciousness of the identification, without which no identification could occur at all. At this point the converting subject turns to the codified propositions that the religion offers as solutions to the existential problem (the Divine Precepts in the specific case of the Unification Church of Reverend Moon in San Francisco). Sometimes these precepts are imperative in nature, as in the case of the Ten Commandments of Christianity, while in other cases they are more propositional in nature, such as the belief that the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ secured eternal life for mankind. Whether the precepts are imperative or propositional, to the extent that they *are* precepts they are instructive and regulatory. In either case the content is decidedly rational, which should not be overlooked. No matter the presentation of this moment, when the converting subject acknowledges and furthermore explicitly or implicitly pledges fidelity to the precepts, the result is a rite of passage for the converting subject and this is what enables the subject to relate, emotionally (which is, following the work of Jaggar, not necessarily devoid from rationality), with other converts who are “going through the same thing” or at least did so in the past.³⁷ It is what the convert adheres to on a fundamentally rational level that establishes the basis of an emotional connection with the Other. In the convert’s sense of identification with others in the religious community, everything else is, to use phenomenological language, suspended or put out of play. In other words, the sort of identification that occurs here on an intersubjective level is

³⁷ See Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge.” Jaggar’s argument is that because emotionality is “active, voluntary, and socially constructed” it is therefore epistemic, utilized in both “evaluation and observation.”

such that the only means of identification is religiously situated (or limited), to the extent that all other defining properties of the Other are disregarded—precisely because in this instance they are nothing short of irrelevant. It is the final step of this process that is perhaps the most obscure, where Lofland and Stark mandate that the conversion process concludes with “intensive interaction” *if* the convert is to become a “deployable agent.” Lofland and Stark actually appropriate this concept from the work of the sociologist Philip Selznick, whose classic 1960 study of communist propaganda employs the term to simply refer to an adherent who is ready for service, to further the larger cause.³⁸ All this means in the context of conversion is, in the words of Lofland and Stark, a “total convert” who is willing to “put [his life] at the disposal of the cult.”³⁹ Would this apply in addition to the case of the mainline convert who makes the transition to a garden-variety denomination of Christianity? Lofland and Stark offer their definition for the “conversion to a deviant perspective,” where a deviant perspective is one which is more or less obscure, unusual, and/or “socially devalued,” which is to say, one which simply stands in contradistinction to a majority group, like Catholics or Communists, and is, in turn, relatively unknown and—to the extent that the majority is even aware of it—stigmatized as representative of the “fringe.”⁴⁰ Despite this specific focus in their study, I suggest that this seventh step of the process is not only part of fringe conversion phenomena but fundamentally characterizes the Christian conversion, wherein one is subject to the injunction to evangelize, as well as the Islamic conversion, where it too is the case that adherents to the faith have a duty to seek out converts. Often but not always when the facilitation of the conversion of others is something of a

³⁸ Selznick, *Organizational Weapon*, 18-29. Cited in Lofland & Stark, “Becoming a World-Saver,” 873.

³⁹ Lofland and Stark, “Becoming a World-Saver,” 873.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 862.

responsibility within a faith system, it derives from the dogmatic belief that the religion is the “one truth faith.”⁴¹ Surely conversions to these two particular religions constitute a large number of conversions, but this is not the case with Judaism as well as many other world religions which do not actively seek out converts.

5. Travisano (1970): Conversion is “a radical reorganization of identity, meaning, and life.”⁴² He continues:

Conversions are transitions to identities which are *proscribed* within the person’s established universe of discourse, and which exist in universes of discourse that negate these formerly established ones. The ideal typical conversion can be thought of as the embracing of a negative identity. The person becomes something which was specifically prohibited.⁴³

Like the Lofland-Stark definition, the Travisano definition is something of a watershed contribution to conversion studies and is heavily cited in the literature, particularly in the fields of sociology and anthropology. This definition was so influential because of the way in which it identified an important distinction between true conversion on the one hand and the distinct case of “alternation” on the other. Whereas conversion is a significant and profound change, epitomized in the transition from a total lack of religious mentality to a new religious worldview, like converting to Islam from atheism, akin to Thomas Kuhn’s famous “paradigm shift” but on a personal and self-perceptual level, the phenomenon of alternation is rather different.⁴⁴ As David Zehnder notes, the concept of alternation is adapted from the work of Peter Berger, a sociologist who argues that when people are faced with an overabundance of information, much of which is contradictory, as a result they tend to “construct several versions of themselves through which

⁴¹ “The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics, and Society,” Pew Research Center.

⁴² Travisano, “Alternation and Conversion,” 600.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 601.

⁴⁴ See Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

they alternate back and forth.”⁴⁵ This is the fundamental basis for Trivisano’s account of alternation as distinct from conversion; in the case of alternation the change is less profound, involving a shift in what is termed “role” but no significant change in underlying identity, which is but a substrate onto which various roles are mapped. The difference between role and identity is that the former is the product of—and manifest in—intersubjective relations which are themselves partly determined by the identity of the subject, which itself is flexible, but generally more consistent—according to Trivisano’s theory—than the role. Without identity there could be no roles, but for any given identity there are countless roles. While identity in a sense “grounds” the possibility of role, significant life changes can be brought about by changes in role with no shift in underlying identity.

The point is that these role shifts can still be profound but are different in kind from identity changes. Within the limits of an identity there are various roles around which a subject can rotate. These roles can vary in type; for example, a Christian can alternate from a role within Protestantism to one situated in Roman Catholicism, or alternate from regularly attending services to failing to do so. Even the decision to become a *lector* or minister of the sacrament of Communion would classify as a change in role. Whether or not it is a “conversion,” however, should probably be scrutinized.

While shifts like these may resemble conversions in certain respects—when a relapsed Catholic decides after many years to return to the Church, this can look like a conversion—ultimately these sorts of transitions are not true conversions because, according to the theory, they do not represent the adoption of a negative identity. Thus mere denominational changes within religious traditions are excluded from the limits of conversion. A radical subjective

⁴⁵ Zehnder, *A Theology of Religious Change*, 29.

reorientation like the classic example epitomized by Paul would, by contrast, count as a conversion on Travisano's terms.

6. Scobie (1975):

One common [religious] experience is usually referred to as conversion. It frequently represents the beginning of the religious life. Each conversion experience is undoubtedly unique, but we shall subsequently suggest that they can be assigned to three broad categories: (1) sudden conversion; (2) gradual conversion; and (3) unconscious conversion.⁴⁶

This definition is not given the attention that it warrants in the secondary literature on conversion. Of note first and foremost is the fact that this definition of conversion is very general, construing conversion simply as "the beginning of the religious life," and it is this generality that enables Scobie to encompass the notion of "unconscious" conversion within his model. Scobie's 1973 article and subsequent 1975 monograph are two of the only contemporary studies in which the idea of an "unconscious" conversion is postulated.⁴⁷ It should come as no surprise that mention of this sort of conversion is highly infrequent in the scholarship on the topic. This is because the idea of an "unconscious" conversion is rather counter-intuitive, since such a conversion, devoid of awareness, does not seem to be much of a "conversion" in any meaningful or substantial sense. It would be very reasonable to ask how one could possibly "convert" without realizing it. It is similarly difficult to fathom how volition or will fits into the conception of unconscious conversion. On the basis of a cursory examination of the unconscious conversion, it almost seems as if the idea can be dismissed outright as incoherent.

⁴⁶ Scobie, *Psychology of Religion*, 10.

⁴⁷ Both the 1973 article as well as the 1975 monograph are based on work from Scobie's 1967 dissertation.

This understandable skepticism should be measured against careful scholarly consideration, however, and in fact the unusual and somewhat obscure case of unconscious conversion can reveal important but easy-to-miss insights regarding *all* conversions.

The concept of unconscious conversion does not begin with Scobie; I have mentioned that it is already present, albeit in kernel form, in the work of William James, and even before that, it is found in Starbuck, who inspires James to discuss the same topic. But Scobie's work, dating to the 1970s, takes the idea much further than either James or Starbuck, and when he makes reference to unconscious conversion, he does not really intend the same idea as Starbuck and James, despite the fact that he suggests that he and James refer to the same phenomenon but by different names; what is the "unconscious" conversion in Scobie is the "once-born" conversion in James.⁴⁸

Starbuck realized the possibility of the unconscious conversion in a latent but ultimately functional sense. He directly associated the unconscious process of conversion with neural events (in contrast to a more psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious). According to Starbuck's model, this unusual variety of conversion subsists on a subconscious level via neural links and associations, until one day it all violently surfaces on the level of conscious awareness. This conversion is typically non-religious, or as Starbuck calls it, an instance of "natural experience" meaning that this experience is both "normal" as well as "common."⁴⁹

The fact that Starbuck's theory of unconscious conversion dictates that the phenomenon culminates with a newfound state of awareness cannot be overlooked. With his theory of the unconscious conversion, Starbuck effectively does no more than furnish an additional condition

⁴⁸ Scobie, *Psychology of Religion*, 50.

⁴⁹ Scobie, *Psychology of Religion*, 135.

that is superimposed upon the traditional “sudden” model of conversion, wherein the reoriented individual does not apprehend the progress of his own reorientation and then eventually “passes through” a specific threshold, wherein he grows aware of what has occurred. Thus, for Starbuck, the unconscious progression of the conversion eventually culminates in intentionality.

Scobie, too, understands the unconscious conversion as a process that occurs on a level below conscious awareness, but for him the process does not conclude with a violent realization or new awareness; while converts of this sort might be made aware of their “conversion” when prompted with the right questions by an investigator, these believers don’t really think of themselves as converts at all, and they struggle to recall a time in their lives in which they were not religious.

Similarly, while Starbuck conceives of the unconscious conversion as common but non-religious, for Scobie the unconscious phenomenon is religious in nature. It must be admitted, though, that there is nothing in Scobie’s work that suggests that the phenomenon is *only* religious, despite the fact that he focuses on religious (specifically Christian) examples.

For Scobie, contra Starbuck, there is no “passageway” moment or threshold in an unconscious conversion. Indeed, for Scobie the unconscious conversion is, in a sense, the conversion that never occurred, at least not in any discernible manner, since the “convert” in question cannot recall ever *not* being religious. It must be granted that choosing to refer to this phenomenon as “conversion” is rather odd, to the extent that if someone always was a certain way, then it doesn’t make much sense to talk of their conversion, which implies a change in the way someone *is*, from his religious or spiritual worldview, to his political worldview, to his conception of his own gendered identity. Due to tensions such as this one, Spilka notes that today

psychologists are wont to classify this sort of phenomenon as “religious socialization” in contrast to authentic conversion.⁵⁰

So why do I bring the Scobie definition before consideration here? Simply put, to the extent that, with the exception of monolithic and/or prophetic figures from the course of religious history, no person is “born with” religion, even in the case of faith systems such as Judaism, where a set of beliefs and practices are superimposed upon one’s Jewish ethnicity. If that is true, then *all* religious believers are ultimately arguably “converted”—at least in a phenomenological sense—and without a doubt these conversions are extremely variegated in type and kind. This is how some people convert to religion without even realizing it, often while very young, while for other people, it is a deliberate and fully conscious adult decision that occurs on a shorter term.

Why do I suggest that the former phenomenon is a conversion, when there are no antecedent beliefs from which the convert has arrived? If one of the conditions of having a conversion is converting *from something*, then how is Scobie’s unconscious conversion a conversion at all? These are important questions. If this sort of gradual and subtle phenomenon is a conversion is one which is so gradual and subtle that it can bring one out of a completely neutral (or nonexistent) set of religious beliefs, then it does look to encompass many phenomena that resemble traditional conversions even less, to the extent that *everyone who is born* will ultimately, in becoming who they are, experience many conversions. In becoming who they are, these people grow into their likes and dislikes, their distinct personality features and general dispositions, their political, scientific, and religious worldviews, their philosophies of life and living. These people “convert” once as they leave their toddler years for their childhood, then again for their puberty, then again for adult life—perhaps with significant changes occurring in

⁵⁰ Ibid., 210; Jankiewicz, *Lived Experience of Conversion*, 73.

the early twenties, and again with middle age, and yet again in the twilight of one's being. If I accept Scobie's unconscious model, am I not forced to accept all of these phenomena as "conversions"?

I am prepared to accept this conclusion, for the following reasons. First, here I am examining the phenomenology of conversion, meaning that the phenomenon of conversion is my focus, conversion as it is experienced first-hand. What is the phenomenon of conversion in general? It is the experience of *a certain sort of change immanent to my "self."* Here immanent means inherent as we understand in the natural attitude, with the proviso that for phenomenology, the experience of that which transcends consciousness is itself immanent to my consciousness. Thus, both the star I see in the sky and the memory I have of my grandfather's face are both "immanent" to my mental experience, but I experience the sky as an external object, whereas my retained image of the face is only "inside" my head, since my grandfather is deceased. I point out this distinction because there are many types of changes that I experience (and regard in the natural attitude) as if at least partly immanent to my self, but not all of these experiences are conversional. For example these changes can occur in terms of my intuition (like thinking something was the case but changing my mind, like thinking a color is red but then deciding that it is purple), my beliefs about my self (thinking I am no good at tennis but then deciding after some practice that I am), my beliefs about the world and the Other (I thought that a place or a politician was perfect but then I decided that was not the case), my awareness and control of my physical body (growing more skilled at one of the important movements in a sport), and so on. Not every change in beliefs about myself counts as a conversion, in other words—the change must be essential, part of who I am. Thus one person's transformation into a magnificent swimmer might amount to a conversion, while for someone

else, this change is merely ancillary, such as the advanced dive training one might receive for a career in the emergency rescue profession.

But can a change in beliefs concerning an external object count as a conversion? Note that some of these experiences I encounter as if they involve an external object, such as my judgment regarding the color of something.), and my body I experience as both object and subject. Can the experience of change *in an external object*, or the change in how I judge an external object, really be considered a conversion? If the change corresponds with some significant change in my identity, then yes. How significant must the change be? While simply changing one's mind is not sufficient for experiencing a conversion, some changes of mind, *if they are essential*, should be considered conversional. This is a relative matter; for example, a change of political parties may be an essential change for one person, if he considers his organized political ideology to be part of his personal identity, while a party change for another person might be a matter of much less significance and commitment.

Let us not forget that even though this is the experience of an essential self-change, this is not to suggest that the change is necessarily the object of my awareness. This is the significance of Scobie's innovative contribution to the study of conversion.

The model also offers a unique alternative to the logic problems raised by the traditional models of conversion. While psychologists are keen to distinguish socialization from conversion on the basis of temporal duration, this analysis does not fit as well when considering conversion from the standpoint of experience. Psychologists before Scobie wanted to stipulate that an authentic case of conversion is marked by the subject's ability to discern the time before the conversion as well as the time after the conversion, and according to such a criterion Starbuck's account of unconscious conversion would count as conversion, while Scobie's model would not.

But even if we permit the approximate estimation of the times in question, there are certainly some true converts who are incapable of carrying out the requisite dating of significant conversion events. Consider, for example, the case of the person who survives an accident in which they sustain a traumatic brain injury. Such injuries are well-known to institute radical changes in personality—consider Merleau-Ponty’s famous study of Schneider.⁵¹ While some scholars are probably fine with excluding cases such as these from the purview of conversion proper, again this raises the difficult question of whether consciousness and choice are truly necessary conditions for conversion.

Why do we take for granted that these mental acts (namely those by which the subject is able to identify the “before” and “after” of the conversion) are the marks that define the true or authentic conversion? Phenomenological analysis reveals the insight that my experience is constituted out of myriad elements which are in large part below the surface of conscious attention. My world can change in ways subtle or drastic, as I too change with it, but these perpetually reordered appearances of the world are not such that I am conscious of every change which I experience. Perhaps it is the historical bias of conversion studies, which took for granted the paradigmatic status of the Pauline case, that accounts for the difficulty in parsing the conversion phenomenon from the conscious awareness phenomenon. But if we again return to the early work of James, we find that he gets this point right. As Scobie himself notes, what he refers to as “unconscious” conversion is, for James, the “once-born” conversion of the “healthy minded.”⁵² This sort of conversion is not instantiated via a crisis or breakthrough realization—it

⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty, PP, 103. I recognize that it may be contentious to identify the case of Goldstein’s patient Schneider as an instance of conversion, especially since Merleau-Ponty’s main purpose in his discussion of Schneider is to show how his altered motor intentionality demonstrates certain phenomenological correlates on the physiological side of embodiment.

⁵² Scobie, *Psychology of Religion*, 50.

is Pauline bias that keeps us from considering this less tumultuous phenomenon as an authentic conversion.

For many religious believers, their relationship with religion is one which has existed as a constituent part of their lives from a young age. These religious believers don't necessarily think of themselves as "converts" since their faith life has been part of their nurturing and conditioning from very early on. Thus it seems that being introduced to religion as a child is not ordinarily understood to fall within the purview of religious conversion, which to the contrary looks to be an experience unique to adults and perhaps teenagers. This reflects the everyday wisdom that converting requires a more developed and sophisticated understanding, as well as a more refined sense of freedom and choice. While it is not forbidden to speak of the conversion of children, it has to be granted that the way in which a child "converts" to a different religion is drastically different from the more deliberate and conscientious conversion of a teenager or adult. It is typically understood that it is not until a person reaches adolescence that a person is capable of experiencing a crisis of identity.⁵³ Erikson suggests that for the teenager this crisis comes down to the opposition between self-sure sense of identity on the one hand and confusion regarding social role on the other.⁵⁴ But that sort of experience is not unconscious like the account given by Scobie.

The fact that the unconscious conversion is subtly embedded in a long-term process, the beginning of which is not necessarily clearly recalled, can make it difficult to recognize as an authentic instance of the phenomenon. The unconscious conversion does not, however, have to

⁵³ There are some exceptions to this, including Freud and Sartre.

⁵⁴ See *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. For Erikson role follows from sense of identity, such that a person who is unsure about their identity will also be unsure of how he or she fits into the social sphere.

be one which is mediated via a long-term process or sequence. It is a problem that Scobie specifically conceives of unconscious conversion only as the result of a process and not an event. This is misguided. While it may be assumed that the process-based unconscious conversion is in fact the more common variety of unconscious conversion, I have already pointed out how some conversion cases, as I suggest we classify Schneider, are more sudden (determined in large part by a single event or episode) but still unconscious. Make no mistake, however, that the sudden unconscious conversion *must* be the result of physical damage or trauma to the brain and central nervous system. It is certainly at least possible that someone could experience a conversion enacted by a singular event but could remain unconscious of the conversion change. Consider, for example, the retrospective reflection of someone advanced in years who, in hindsight, is able to define the specific “threshold moment” that the psychologists maintain to be a criterion for true conversion *contra* mere socialization; this person might have gone decades without realizing that he or she had changed in (or became) a specific way that previously was not their own, while he or she is nevertheless capable, at least in theory, of identifying that singular moment that instituted the deep and significant change in personal identity. Arriving upon the insight or realization that one has changed is in fact an incredibly common phenomenon and it might be part of normal human development; it may even occur several times as one progresses through various phases or stages of life.

Lastly, I have to address the question raised by Scobie’s work regarding conversion’s requirement of choice, and the extent to which choice is conscious. Ordinarily when we think of choice, we assume that it is something that is deliberate and conscious, something of which we are fully aware. To be sure many of the choices that we make on a daily basis are choices of this

variety, and there is a common tendency to refrain from calling any action that is not deliberate and/or/conscious a “choice.”

This common tendency is likely misguided. As Elissa Asp shows, there is neuroscientific evidence suggesting that “relatively automatized selection” should be part of any “non-reductionist account of choice.”⁵⁵ Similar to what Merleau-Ponty achieves with the abnormal case of Schneider, neuroscientists have recognized that damage to circuits in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex or the anterior cingulate cortex correlates with the slowing of cognition, issues paying attention and “reduced initiation.” In other words, choices that seem to be automatic are more executive than we thought, based on measured brain activity. Asp cites the work of Michael Halliday, who shows that linguistic choices are not carried out on the volition of the speaker (or subject) but instead on the grammar of the language spoken. According to Asp, Halliday’s work shows that agency does not require intentionality. She points out that other authors, like Jackendoff, include intentionality in their requirements for agency, but there is an important proviso that must be noted: as Asp puts it, a “doer of an action . . . has the capacity for intention.”⁵⁶ Having the *capacity* for intention is worlds away from actually exercising intentionality. This is not the concept of intentionality as understood in Scholastic Philosophy, Brentano, and eventually phenomenology; instead this is the more ordinary and non-technical sense of the term, where ‘to intend’ means something more like “to do deliberately.” The point, however, is that to do something deliberately one might still be acting more or less automatically and with a negligible degree of attentiveness—Asp compares it to the morning habit of making a coffee.

⁵⁵ Asp, “Twin Paradoxes,” 162.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

This is not so different from certain cases of religious conversion, especially those in which a person is raised within a faith system from a very young age. Eventually the habits of religious practice start to produce automatized worship behaviors, exemplified in the Christian repetition of common daily prayers like the Our Father, as well as the automatic knowledge of when to sit and stand during a mass or service, which is sometimes executed on an almost involuntary basis. Thus it is plainly apparent that unconscious religious conversion is indeed a coherent and in fact very common phenomenon. But to the extent that this type of conversion is, at least at Scobie conceives it, not the object of intentionality, it may prove to be impossible to phenomenologically analyze it. In the third chapter I will explore what consciousness of this sort of conversion looks like on a first-person basis, and if successful I will attempt to derive phenomenological conclusions from the fact that unconscious experience is a real and valid, if often largely ignored, phenomenon.

7. Snow and Machalek (1983): “[F]our key properties [...] define the convert: biographical reconstruction, adoption of a master attribution scheme, suspension of analogical reasoning, and embracement of a master role.”⁵⁷ This contribution from Snow and Machalek is contained in their well-known essay “The Convert as a Social Type” and it is at once both similar to and different from the earlier traditional models. To begin with, whereas James and Nock both describe a turn or re-orientation, the present account specifically frames the change in idea as not only a re-orientation but a hermeneutic event, a re-interpretation of one’s self. To the extent that one can turn or undergo a shift without necessarily interpreting anew the events of one’s past, the Snow-Machalek definition addresses the retroactive perception of personal history in a manner

⁵⁷ Snow and Machalek, “Convert as a Social Type,” 266.

that no earlier definition could capture, despite the fact that they credit James with the term and cite how often the general idea appears in the literature on conversion starting in the 1960s, including the offering from Travisano, cited above.⁵⁸ The second condition mandated in the Snow-Machalek definition, calling for the “adoption of a master attribution scheme.” This sociological jargon simply refers to the way in which a subject explains or makes sense of the world—in other words, the interpretive framework of the convert. Here the reference is to a framework as a general explanatory model, like a worldview.⁵⁹ These frameworks are often understood to be literal rather than metaphorical (or analogical), as the third condition suggests. Converts turn to these sorts of frameworks because they perceive their new religious or spiritual views as inconsistent, incompatible, or at the very least, “incomparable,” as Snow and Machalek put it, with all alternatives. Thus to endorse an analogy between Christianity and Islam would be, as Travisano puts it, proscribed (forbidden.) The reason for this is that the analogy is often perceived to constitute a threat to the “authenticity and sacredness of conversion,” since the comparison could potentially “invalidate and profane” the experience.⁶⁰ Lastly when the convert takes up a “master role” she or he adopts a new socially-mediated position or duty, facilitated by or through the conversion process. It should be noted that embracing a master role is not, for Snow and Machalek, the embracing of a master in one’s life, akin to the acceptance of authority. To the contrary, the idea of the master role is the overarching “default” way in which one views their role in life. This role, to the extent that it is one’s dominant identification, is not compartmentalized, despite the fact that, as Gooren notes, the role is specifically situated within

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ It might still be possible that Hegel’s “Lordship and Bondage” story is relevant here to the extent that the adoption of a master attribution scheme does require the annihilation, figurative or literal, of the subject’s old way of being.

⁶⁰ Snow and Machalek, “Convert as a Social Type,” 274.

a “specific universe of discourse.”⁶¹ Thus in comparison to the account offered by Trivisano, a shift in role is not just the mark of alternation *contra* conversion, but instead can define a conversion so long as the role change is significant enough—in fact, this take on the “master” role is more like a change in identity than a change in role. It would be prudent to add to this definition the final qualification that Snow and Machalek place upon their model for conversion: “it is the convert’s rhetoric rather than institutional context or ideological content that denotes the convert as a social type.”

8. Richardson (1985):

The old conversion paradigm, with its deprivation and strain assumptions about the passivity of human beings, and its overemphasis on the individual, is giving way, at least partially, to another view of conversion. This new view stresses humans as volitional entities who assign meaning to their action and to the actions of others within a social context.⁶²

This account is pulled from Richardson’s influential article in which he identifies a “Kuhnian crisis” manifest in the switch from the old paradigm that eventually gave way to the more contemporary idea that conversion is something that is actively sought out, instead of something that merely “happens” to a subject, as is the case with the classic “Pauline” model.

For Richardson conversion cannot be framed on a solely individual or personal basis. Rather, the interpretive significance of a conversion is such that an intersubjective milieu is required in order for the conversion to make any sense at all. Richardson underscores the extent to which action plays a crucial role in conversion, which is not exactly a novel contribution to the field, present in even the earliest offerings from Starbuck and James, but is nevertheless an

⁶¹ Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation*, 43.

⁶² Richardson, “The Active vs. Passive Convert,” 164; Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation*, 46-47.

important qualification to add to clarify how conversion is not simply an intellectual change but also a change in praxis.

9. Gaventa (1986):

There are, then, three categories of personal change of which we need to be aware in this study [of conversion]: alternation, conversion, and transformation. Alternation is a relatively limited form of change that develops from one's previous behavior; conversion is a radical change in which past affiliations are rejected for some new commitment and identity; transformation is also radical change, but one in which an altered perception reinterprets both present and past.⁶³

Gaventa is a Bible scholar who has significantly challenged some of the psychological assumptions in 20th century work on conversion. As Zeba Crook points out in *Reconceptualizing Conversion*, the 20th century saw an influx of psychology-based studies of New Testament conversion.⁶⁴ But according to Crook, despite the abundance of these psychological studies, “there was a growing awareness that psychological assessments of ancient texts and characters were problematic...”⁶⁵ He credits Beverley Gaventa with challenging the notion that conversion anecdotes in the New Testament can all be classified as one single type of event. Gaventa, like Alan Segal, proposes a sociological reading of these conversions. She argues that there are three distinct types of phenomena: the pendular, alternation, and transformation.⁶⁶ A pendular change is a radical movement that requires the rejection of old beliefs, whereas alternation is a more practical change that occurs on the basis of cause and effect—like realizing that the commission of violent crimes has resulted in one's incarceration, which makes one unhappy, even if one does not go so far as to reject his openness to living a violent life. Gaventa notes that switching from one type of Christianity to another, so long as the two are reasonably different (like Mormonism

⁶³ Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 12.

⁶⁴ Crook, *Reconceptualizing Conversion*, 28.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light*, 8-10.

compared with Roman Catholicism) is a pendular conversion, but not alternation, which she suggests should not be considered a conversion at all. Alternation is just something that “grows out of the past.”

Transformation is a third phenomenon in which one does not react pragmatically (alternation) or negatively (pendular), but instead “reinterprets and reconstructs” the past in part of one’s reconsideration of self and world. Gaventa suggests that this third type of conversion is the sort that most commentators tend to focus on in their study of Christian and Hebrew scripture.

Despite the fact that most commentators focus on transformative conversion, it is Gaventa’s own account of transformation that is her most novel and inventive contribution to conversion studies. First, Gaventa calls ordinary conversion a change that is “radical” in nature, but unlike figures who share her view, namely Nock and Starbuck, Gaventa indicates that this sort of change does not necessarily entail the rejection of one’s prior ways. In this way Gaventa’s more open model is closer to that of James. She gravitates toward an understanding of conversion that is couched in authentic change in identity rather than the less intense shift of role.

The only difference between a standard conversion and a transformation is that the converting subject reinterprets or “re-perceives” the past but also the present (as most of the definitions allow). Unsatisfied with categorizing this sort of change under the more typical conversion, Gaventa reserves self-reinterpretation for the special case of true transformation. Obviously, this entails the notion that it is possible for a subject to convert *without* reinterpreting everything up to that very moment, but it is rather unclear, despite Gaventa’s use of the conjunction “and”, whether the “mere” convert can become a transformed being simply by

reinterpreting the past in addition to the present, since, after all, it is hard to fathom how one could convert without the simultaneous change in self-perception. It would seem that it is the retroactive reinterpretation alone that distinguishes the transformation from the convert.

10. Gelpi (1986):

I use the word 'conversion' ... to mean the decision to assume responsibility for a distinguishable area of experienced growth and development. Converts turn from irresponsible to responsible living...By 'conversion' I mean the double decision to repudiate irresponsible behavior and to take responsibility for the subsequent development of some aspect of my own experience.⁶⁷

While the Snow-Machalek and Gaventa definitions are in part noteworthy for their treatment of retrospective reinterpretation, the Gelpi model is intriguing for its incorporation of premeditation and thoughtfulness.⁶⁸ This should be considered a relatively “intellectual” or “rational” model of conversion since deciding to take on responsibility is the definite result of reflective contemplation, especially when the responsibility is taken for a determinate zone of improvement, again requiring careful thought.⁶⁹ But the nature of this rationality is, according to Gelpi, *ethical*. Like the Starbuck and James definitions, this conversion model places moral values on the trajectory of the change, wherein one moves from the lack of responsibility to the adoption thereof. Thus while it is true that growth and development are relatively situated, ultimately Gelpi allows only for the conversion moving in the one (“positive”) direction, rather

⁶⁷ Gelpi, “The Converting Jesuit,” 4-5. Cited in *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 146. Rambo indicates that Gelpi delineates five “dimensions” of conversion: “affective, intellectual, ethical, religious, and social.”

⁶⁸ Bernard Lonergan also offers an intellectual account of conversion. See *Method in Theology*.

⁶⁹ For other “rational choice” models see Gartrell and Shannon’s “Contacts, Cognitions, and Conversion: A Rational Choice Approach”, 33, as well as Stark and Finke’s *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, 123; Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation*, 47.

than the more fluid continuum that defines the approach of Gaventa, according to which losing one's religion could count as a conversion phenomenon.

This is problematic. Adding a positive value judgment to any conversion model forces us to exclude authentic examples from our consideration. Consider, for example, how the accounts of conversion offered by the earlier commentators (namely Starbuck, James, and Nock) force us to confine the phenomenon to a very narrow range of experiences. While conversion ordinarily has a positive connotation, it seems there are major risks that come with assuming that conversion is *always good*. I cannot accept any metaphysical argument that conversion is always good, nor can I definitively prove that conversion is an improvement of the individual without taking recourse to reductive pragmatic criteria that would radically restrict the number of scenarios that I can classify as conversion. For example, I can defend the pragmatic “goodness” of the conversion of a violent murderer who turns to peaceful religion. St. Paul essentially fits this mold. For a person like that, conversion is good.⁷⁰ But these are rather extreme existential examples; surely it is the case that not all conversions have to involve such complete and sweeping change? For example is a Baptist who converts to Catholicism necessarily doing something “good” or even definitely improving? This is an entirely relative question—we cannot answer it here.

But why does conversion have to be good at all? Are not the adherents of worldviews like Nazism or fascism, a bit like “converts” to evil? Not only do some conversions have neutral value, but it also seems that others amount to the worsening of the individual. It is an utter mistake to assume that religious or spiritual conversion always brings someone to the good, and it is a mistake to think that conversion is always a good thing.

⁷⁰ But *entirely* or *totally* good? Here I hesitate to agree that these conversions are totally good.

While it has to be admitted that “being evil” is not a religion or even (necessarily) a spiritual worldview, we should carefully evaluate the idea of converting to evil as a valid phenomenon. First, simply doing something wrong does not amount to a “conversion” to evil. For a person to “convert” to evil, he or she needs to undergo a change in identity or role. This change cannot be merely temporary.

Second it seems that when a person has an experience like this, of “converting to evil,” the experience does not have to be *interpreted* as wrong or evil. Ultimately, we have to resolve ourselves to the fact that some “evil” people will think of themselves as “good.” Many people perform objectionable acts but never think of themselves as evil even though they regularly make choices that most of society is prepared to agree are “evil.” As I have argued elsewhere, it is not necessary for someone to *realize* that he or she has converted (to evil) in order for it to be a conversion—all that is required are “evil” judgments, choices, or beliefs that ultimately bring an individual to a “tipping point” where a change in identity or role is enacted. Thus it is crucial that these judgments, choices, and beliefs exert existential influence on the individual.⁷¹

It is this existential influence, and significance, that enables us to distinguish between an individual evil act and the essential evil of an individual. In fact physically “doing” evil is not necessary in order for one to “be” (a convert to) evil. While it is tempting to assert that the reality of material evil acts (like murder) is what distinguishes true evil from mere daydreaming, in fact it is the evil *idea* that bears the mark of real evil, because without the idea or concept of evil, no act could be interpreted as such. The “evil idea” is not the idea of evil as a concept, but instead the subject’s having a belief, choice, or judgment that is “evil” (according to social consensus).

⁷¹ I do think that it is possible to unconsciously convert to evil, assuming that certain conditions are met.

Ultimately the subject may or may not interpret his belief, choice, or judgment to be evil. After all a child can commit an “evil” act without understanding what he has done.

Believing one’s self to be evil is not required in order to have experienced a conversion to evil. Just as I argued with the ordinary examples of “unconscious” conversion, it is possible for someone to experience conversion by making judgments and choices that are not necessarily interpreted as having to do with conversion. The same goes for evil; if someone (of sound adult mind) makes judgments that manifest an existential difference, he does not necessarily need to judge *himself* to be a convert or to have converted. Instead the sufficient condition is a judgment or series of judgments, a choice or series of choices, or a belief or series of beliefs.

One final noteworthy aspect of the Gelpi definition is the way in which it focuses on the resolution to change, epitomized in the choice, instead of the event or process of change itself, which is the case with the rest of the models I survey here. In this way the Gelpi model resembles that of Nock. Thus it is worth emphasizing that transforming into someone evil has to come as the result of willful judgments. Becoming evil, in other words, is something that is chosen. Here the choice does not help to explain the theology of sin or the problem of theodicy, but instead, differentiates conversion from becoming-in-general. I will later clarify this issue and offer an extended argument, but the conversion phenomenon has to occur on the basis of conscious decision-making, even if, somewhat surprisingly, the conversion itself is not realized by the subject. There are many aspects of our selves that are not necessarily the result of our own choices, exemplified by the extreme example of a young man who is violent and abusive because he was the victim of violent abuse as a child. Surely a situation like this requires some analytic nuance— even if the young man has made his own poor choices, it is also true that he did not choose parts of who he “is.” This is true to some extent for all of us. And if we do not take this

position, consider how this multiplication of the phenomenon weakens the classic concept and the examples of it—like the story of St. Paul which, true or false, tells a story of a determinate and special phenomenon that should be distinguished from becoming a braggart or a talkative person. Include too much under the heading of conversion and the phenomenon becomes watered down and impossibly differentiated. Similarly a non-volitional model of conversion would require us to classify the forced “conversions” of indigenous peoples as authentic conversion experiences. If someone makes you change, this is existentially violent; the “forced” conversion cannot be accepted here.

11. Baird (1992):

Conversion... [is] an experience of disruption in human subjects' spontaneous self-understanding, resulting from a confrontation with an ultimate, transcendent field of signification, which [...] invites subjects to re-identify themselves in the new context it provides.⁷²

This definition refers to “disruption” reminiscent of the account from James and his divided self, but there are several novel dimensions to this contribution from Baird. First, whereas James and Lofland-Stark conceive of a self that is divided and then unified in conversion, Baird describes a conversion that itself enacts the disruption (i.e. division in the parlance of James.) The object of this disruption is also significant, since for Baird it is not merely self-understanding that is at play but specifically “spontaneous self-understanding.” In the fragment excerpted above this qualification is obscure, but elsewhere Baird makes it very clear that the disruption experienced by the subject is precisely one which interrupts *what was previously merely or only* a spontaneous understanding of self, meaning an understanding which was predicated entirely

⁷² Baird, “Role and Dynamics of Conversion,” 346. Baird continues, “[t]he conversion moment proper then occurs when subjects embrace the new context, and indeed re-identify themselves in its light.”

upon the thematics of autonomous self-actualization.⁷³ This understanding of self is also described as “functional.”⁷⁴ Thus when conversion is here characterized as a disruption of the spontaneous understanding it is implied that the new form of understanding is of a higher order, more essential and of an indelible nature. This is precisely the idea behind the “transcendent field of signification” that catalyzes the process, which is deserving of a few remarks. First the inclusion of this aspect characterizes this account as theological in scope. This means that this conversion model makes theological assumptions or at the very least takes a theological view of its subject matter, which will necessarily differ from a strictly psychological or sociological view. Second, this transcendental field makes for a highly restrictive condition imposed upon the phenomenon of conversion, since the absence of such a field precludes any shift or change from being classified as a conversion. To this limitation, however, one has to wonder what makes for a “transcendent field of signification” in the first place. Without a doubt this would include the likes of experiencing an apparition, hallucination, or vision, exemplified in the paradigmatic case of Saint Paul. But it would seem to be an error to limit the field of transcendent signs to only those cases manifest before visual sensation; many times the field is experienced purely through tactile correlates of embodiment, through “feeling,” like the overwhelming physical reaction one can feel, including but not limited to tingling, warmth, the rush of blood, chills, goosebumps. etc. And lastly would it not be possible to encounter the transcendental field of signification through purely discursive, intellectual means? Given the wide variety of ways in which one could encounter the transcendent field of signification, which enacts and catalyzes the religious or

⁷³ Ibid., xxvii.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 163.

spiritual change, on a fundamental level the Baird definition is capable of encompassing a wide array of conversions.

The real question, though, is whether the transcendent field is always passively encountered. By “passive” I mean not actively pursued. Certainly St. Paul’s conversion is like this. But it is actually very possible that someone could *look* for transcendent meaning. This is exactly what institutional forms of conversion amount to, like the lesson and practices that Catholic converts go through in order to become Catholic. The difference is that this sort of confrontation is not abrupt and isolated. Instead, this conversion is something for which one prepares for many weeks and sometimes years. In short it is easy to interpret Baird’s conversion as only applying to the tumultuous, Pauline sort of cases, but in fact she provides the framework for situating the profound transformative power of conversion beyond the limits of the passive, adventitious conversion. She shows, in short, that the conversion that results from (or is manifest in) a transcendent cognition can be one which is tracked, as the object of a desire or motivation.

Despite being a theological definition, this definition is not unidirectional, like some of the older alternatives, nor, like Gaventa’s model, is it morally situated, as are the accounts from Starbuck, James, and Nock. Thus it is becoming easier to identify definite disciplinary trends and correlations in the conversion definitions here considered.

12. Rambo (1996):

... [C]onversion is what a group or person *says* it is. The process of conversion is a product of the interactions among the convert’s aspirations, needs, and orientations, the nature of the group into which she or he is being converted, and the particular social matrix in which these processes are taking place.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 7.

In addition to this rather open take on the phenomenon Rambo also provides the following, more restrictive set of conditions:

Conversion takes place (1) when a person or group is connected to relationships in a religious community; (2) when rituals are enacted that foster experience and action consonant with religious mandates and goals; (3) when the rhetoric or system of interpretation of life is transformed into a religious frame of reference; and (4) when a person's role or sense of place and purpose is enacted and guided by religious sensibilities and structures.⁷⁶

Ultimately Rambo's monograph *Understanding Religious Conversion* identifies seven overall stages of the conversion process and they are as follows: 1. context, 2. crisis, 3. quest, 4. encounter, 5. interaction, 6. commitment, 7. consequences.⁷⁷

The first noteworthy feature of Rambo's well-known conversion definition is the way in which it is restricted to conversions in a specific context: institutions and group belonging. This is in complete contrast to the Snow-Machalek, Gelpi and Baird definitions which are framed in far more individualistic terms. The Gaventa definition mentions affiliation but is less restrictive than what is presented here by Rambo. According to Rambo's criteria there is no such phenomenon as the "private" conversion that is not tied to some specific group or institution. This most certainly raises an interesting point that heretofore has not been addressed—should it be called a conversion if you are experiencing something private? While the early Starbuck definition would not allow for such an event, due to the way in which he presupposes religious concepts values, e.g. "from sinfulness to righteousness", which would without an established religious worldview have no significance, the more open account of James could fully accommodate a private conversion event since ultimately all that is required is the unification of a divided self as facilitated through a "firmer hold upon religious realities." While the descriptor 'religious' has institutional connotations, if it is expanded to include more general "spiritual

⁷⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 236.

perceptions,” then the personal conversion can occur. Nock’s model, too, would accommodate this sort of phenomenon, even if he sees the Christian conversion as the most complete type.

Another sense in which the Rambo definition differs from its forebears is in its identification of the importance of rituals to the conversion process, which again limits the phenomenon to institutional, organized contexts. For Rambo these rituals are sourced in religious communities, so the idea of a “personal” ritual is precluded from consideration.

The sequence of steps that Rambo provides near the end of his monograph are less restrictive although their concise articulation is subject to numerous elaborations, such that, for example, the sixth step of the sequence, wherein one becomes committed to a new worldview, is specifically a commitment to a religious worldview. Again the more private and individual sort of conversion is thereby excluded from this analysis. Interestingly in his enumeration of the major steps of conversion Rambo elects to include “crisis”, which calls to mind the “divided self” of James as well as the Nock definition from 1933. As I have indicated, this notion of crisis and the divided self has a basis not only in emotional being and loyalty but also in Hegel’s analysis of unhappy consciousness.

13. Marion (1997): While he does not directly define conversion *per se*, Marion’s ideas regarding the “saturated phenomenon” are particularly relevant for my phenomenology of conversion, so I would like to determine whether aspects of his concept can be incorporated into my synthetic definition of the conversion phenomenon.

Marion characterizes the basic features of the saturated phenomenon as follows: “The saturated phenomenon will be described as *invisible* according to quantity, unbearable according

to quality, absolute according to relation, [and] irregardable according to modality.”⁷⁸ Here Marion employs the Kantian categories of understanding as the basic rubric against which he outlines the saturated phenomenon. In short, the idea is that the saturated phenomenon is one which surpasses or goes beyond these categories. This is because the saturated phenomenon provides—or better yet, *gives*—an “intuition [that] passes beyond the concept.” For example, when Marion indicates that the saturated phenomenon is *invisible* with respect to quantity, this means that the magnitude of the phenomenon cannot be intended (by the phenomenological subject). Here Marion is using ‘intend’ in the same sense as Brentano and Husserl—the point being that the saturated phenomenon is a type of phenomenon that transcends the ordinary limits of our understanding. If the magnitude or quantity of a phenomenon cannot be the object of my intentionality, this means that I am encountering an “overflowing” phenomenon that outstrips my ability, as a perceiver, to have perceptions “about” the magnitude or quantity of the phenomenon. Marion provides several examples of this, from amazement to the Kantian sublime. The same basic idea—that the saturated phenomenon exceeds the limits of my understanding—applies to the other four features above. While phenomena of this nature cannot be understood, they nevertheless furnish the subject with more intuition than can complete his intention; thus, these phenomena “overflow” and are “saturated.” But the subject is incapable of determining or identifying whether the phenomenon presents an “excess” or a “shortage” of intuition.⁷⁹ But this also raises a paradox: the givenness of the saturated phenomenon at once both intuits an excess at the same time that it circumvents intentionality. As Marion puts it, “[t]he visibility of the appearance thus arises against the flow of the intention” (225). This is what makes the saturated

⁷⁸ Marion, *Being Given*, 363n41. “Invisible” is not a typographical error; it is a conscious choice by the translator to try to capture the sense of *viser*, to aim at, mean, or intend.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 245.

phenomenon so otherworldly and so unusual. If not for this paradox, the saturated phenomenon would not be saturated at all, but would be like any other “common law” phenomenon, which Marion stresses would in fact, rather surprisingly, be impossible if not for the saturated variety, which offers the subject a sort of standard to which the givenness of the “common” phenomenon can be compared.

Marion dictates that there are five types of saturated phenomenon. They are the historical event, the idol, the flesh, the icon, and the phenomenon of revelation (228-34). This last phenomenon, that of revelation, is the example *par excellence*, to the extent that it “concentrates the four types of saturated phenomena and is given at once as historic event, idol, flesh, and icon (face)” (235). Since I am dealing only with conversion it is not necessary to get into the finer details of Marion’s argumentation in this regard, but the basic idea is that the revelation phenomenon is similar to the four preceding types of saturated phenomena in virtue of its aggregation of horizon and narrative (like the historical event), its continual exhortation to be observed (like the idol), its capability to dissolve the ego pole (like the flesh), and its power to deploy its own gaze instead of merely being seen (like the icon/face). Via its concentration of these phenomenological features the revelation phenomenon is a “saturation of saturation” (my italics), the very “culmination” of the saturated phenomenon.

In what way does this relate to the conversion phenomenon? It is undeniable that saturated phenomena sometimes but not always catalyze conversion experiences. Saint Paul, for example, indubitably encounters a saturated phenomenon on the road to Damascus.⁸⁰ During this episode Paul’s intentionality cannot contend with the overflowing degree of intuition given during the

⁸⁰ Marion does not reference Paul in *Being Given*; the present analysis of Paul’s conversion follows Marion’s argumentation but is of my own design.

revelatory encounter. The manifestation of Christ exceeds Paul's understanding of quantity to the extent that it is a saturation of his vision; Christ's appearance could not have been foreseen by Paul, in contrast to the way in which Paul's vision can anticipate ordinary phenomena, such as the flight of a bird or insect. The manifestation exceeds Paul's understanding of quality insofar as Paul cannot bear the sight of Christ; he is blinded and falls to the ground. Christ's manifestation exceeds Paul's understanding of relation because of the way in which the appearance of Christ interpolates and disrupts Paul's phenomenological horizon as well as all possible horizons, specifically via the way in which the manifestation violates Paul's understanding of spatiotemporality. Lastly the manifestation of Christ surpasses Paul's understanding of modality through the way in which Paul is regarded by Christ and actually *constituted by Christ* (in direct contradiction of the contemporary theory that Paul was merely having an epileptic episode, such that the transcendental ego was constituting the appearance of Christ, and not vice-versa). In other words, the manifestation of Christ *qua* saturated phenomenon makes Paul its witness, instead of Paul *qua* witness making the saturated phenomenon/manifestation of Christ.

While it is certainly the case that conversions often occur without some basis in an encounter with a saturated phenomenon, Marion's concept provides a useful phenomenological framework for analyzing the conversion that is accompanied by any variety of spiritual or religious *ecstasis*. Later I will need to determine whether the "garden variety" conversion that is gradual and not sudden, the result of reflection and contemplation and not spontaneous insight, nevertheless shares some of the features of the saturated phenomenon.

14. Hervieu-Léger (1999):

The first [type of conversion] is that of the individual who *changes religion* [...] The second modality of conversion is that of the individual who, never having belonged to any religious

tradition, discovers, after a more or less long personal journey, that in which he recognizes himself and to which he finally decides to enlist himself. [...] The third modality of the figure of conversion is that of the reaffiliate, of the inner conversion, the one who discovers or rediscovers a religious identity which has remained until then formal [nominal], to lived practice, in pure communion with the group.⁸¹

Like Gaventa, Hervieu-Léger prudently classifies several distinct types of conversion. She incorporates into her model the person who moves from one religious paradigm to another, the person who turns to religion after previously holding no religious worldview, and the person whose faith is intensified or perhaps authenticated or emboldened, without any change from one religion, or no religion, to another. Here, with respect to the last type of conversion, the idea is that one has considered oneself to be religious but not in any meaningful sense, such that an enlightening and new self-discovery is possible, in which one reorients one's self toward a more orthodox sort of religious worldview, not to mention belonging. The second type of conversion is interesting for the way in which it factors in the idea that the convert recognizes a sense of belonging in a religious entity. Lastly it should be added that Hervieu-Léger's conversion model refers to 'religion' but does not necessarily invoke the idea of religion in an institutional or organized sense, as is the case with some of the other models that I have reviewed.

15. Meintel (2007):

“Conversion [is usually defined as a] ritually-marked adoption of a new religious belonging. [...] Conversion so defined normalizes exclusive identities and global (i.e. fundamentalist) religious discourse as the “gold standard” of conversion, and, by expansion, of religious experience.”⁸²

⁸¹ Hervieu-Léger, *Le Pèlerin et le converti*, 121-24. This is my own translation, and it is not one which is conducted *à la lettre* although it does capture the overall sense of the writing.

⁸² Meintel, “When There Is No Conversion,” 149, 158.

Here the point is that a conversion can occur even in the absence of distinct institutional boundaries, as exemplified by the Spiritualist Movement in Montreal vis-à-vis the larger Catholic demographic. Meintel argues that these Spiritualists should be considered as converts despite the fact that they do not necessarily view themselves as such; they do not think of themselves as having left their Catholic faith. This argument is crucial for my purposes here because this directly addresses the question of whether a subject has to think that he or she has converted in order for a conversion to have occurred. According to Meintel it would seem that the answer to that question is no.

16. Gooren (2007): “Conversion . . . refers to a comprehensive personal change of worldview and identity.”⁸³ This concise and general definition from Gooren is the result of his attempt at a “synthetic” account of conversion. In framing conversion in such a general and broad way, Gooren avoids many of the restrictive limitations found in other models, although as a consequence his definition is certainly not as rich or nuanced as some of the other offerings. In particular, this definition is so broad that it clearly transcends the limits of spirituality and religion. This definition could accommodate “conversions” of a political or philosophical nature so long as the conversion in question is sufficiently “comprehensive.” Gooren’s model has rich phenomenological implications evinced in the suggestion that identity links with worldview; as one changes, so too does the other. Gooren contrasts conversion with what he terms “disaffiliation,” which is akin to a sort of “negative” conversion in which one leaves a religious or spiritual worldview behind.

In his review of thirteen different conversion models, Gooren conspicuously neglects to incorporate the unconscious variety of the phenomenon (as discussed by Scobie), probably since

⁸³ Gooren, “Reassessing Conventional Approaches to Conversion,” 350.

he seems to favor the active and rational model, which is of course diametrically opposed to the unwitting conversion. Ultimately Gooren attempts his own synthetic approach to conversion, bringing together the “basic” and “best” aspects of the historical models that he reviews. These aspects are as follows: 1. “emphasis on subjective religious experience,” 2. “conversion in the narrow sense should always involve a change in religious worldview and hence a change in identity,” 3. a “spoiled identity” produces “changes in levels of religious activity,” 4. some but not all spoiled identities embolden subjects into “religious seekers” whose “socialization” and gender determines the limits of the “seeking quest,” 5. subjects judge the “cost-benefit” value of religious membership before investing completely therein, 6. “religious commitment is built up through *role learning* and mastering,” 7. there is an “organizational side of the conversion process,” 8. a true case of conversion must be marked by Snow and Machalek’s “empirical indicators” such as the master attribution scheme, 9. “social networks” have an impact on conversion (here, to be clear, the reference is to the subject’s social milieu and not electronic social networks like Facebook, although the website would certainly count as a digital representation of real interpersonal relations, albeit in a possibly contrived or overly-manipulated sense, 10. religious recruitment is distinct from but related to conversion, and religious recruitment is a competitive enterprise, demonstrated in the concept of the “religious market,” 11. the competitive methods employed in the religious market should be analyzed as part of the academic study of conversion, and 12. “cultural or societal factors that influence differences in religious activities must be carefully described and explored.”⁸⁴ What Gooren accomplishes here is a significant contribution to the field of conversion studies but it is imperative to take note of the fact that a synthetic “approach” to

⁸⁴ Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation*, 60-2.

conversion is not equivalent with a synthetic “definition” of the phenomenon, which is something that only phenomenology can accomplish.

17. Paloutzian (2014):

[Conversion is] a more distinct process by which a person goes from believing, adhering to, and/or practicing one set of religious teachings or spiritual values to believing, adhering to, and/or practicing a different set. The transformative process in conversion may take variable amounts of time, ranging from a few moments to several years, but it is the distinctiveness of change that is its central identifying element. In contrast to someone arriving at a point of belief through the process of socialization and other developmental mechanisms, the convert can identify a time before which the religion was not accepted and after it was accepted.⁸⁵

Somewhat problematically this model from Paloutzian is not termed in such a way as to recognize the case of the irreligious or atheistic person who resolves to turn to religion. It is hard to fathom why such a case would be excluded from the limits of conversion. Of course this difficulty can be resolved, so long as one is willing to classify atheism or the lack of religious belief as a “religious teaching or spiritual value”, which seems to be a fairly obvious category error. A related issue would occur for the case of the religious believer who loses his or her faith; it is hard to see how this should be considered a religious or spiritual belief in any meaningful sense of the term. While it feels forced to construe atheism as a religious teaching, if by “religious teaching” all that is intended is a “teaching regarding religion,” then perhaps the difficulty is not so great. While Paloutzian allows for both quick and gradual conversions, going so far as to specify that a conversion can take years, he indicates that, in contrast to other sorts of pathways toward epistemic states, in the case of an authentic conversion the subject is always able to identify the threshold of the event. Whether this has to be a specific moment or not is unclear, although that seems unlikely,

⁸⁵ Paloutzian, “Psychology of Religious Conversion,” 111.

but at the very least this suggests that the subject is able to discern the time before his conversion and likewise distinguish the time after it. There is no indication that the subject has to be correct in his identification of this conversion threshold, but at the very least, he is able and willing to divide his existence into two distinct phases.

Conclusions and Classifications Pertaining to the Definitions

There are a couple of general and significant conclusions to draw from this assortment of models and definitions before I enumerate the essential, general categories of conversion. First, out of the samples I reviewed here, two out of the three theological definitions (Gaventa and Baird, but not Gelpi) do not ascribe moral significance or value to the trajectory of conclusion, in contrast to what is true for most of the contributions from disciplines like psychology or sociology, which do not take gods or other metaphysical objects as their primary object. Gelpi's work is an exception to this, since in his model conversion entails the movement from irresponsibility to responsibility. Thus his account of the directionality of conversion is more akin to what is in James, Nock, et al., where conversion, simply put, is typically understood to leave one better off than when he or she started. The issue with this, in an academic sense, is that this is arguably an instance of supposedly impartial academic disciplines granting implicit favor toward one of the primary Western religions, Christianity—but this is not something that has been overlooked in recent literature on conversion.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ See, for example, Gorsuch's article "Psychology of Religion." Cited in Hood et. al., *The Psychology of Religion*, 207. See also "Issues in the Psychology of Religious Conversion," by Scroggs and Douglas.

The seventeen models of conversion that I have reviewed can be grouped into eight approximate categories or “types.” These types are not necessarily mutually exclusive, meaning that any given conversion model can be defined by—indeed *almost always* can be defined by—more than one of these typical properties. These classifications reflect the major trends in the history of conversion scholarship.

The Eight Categories of Conversion from the Human Sciences:

1. Character-Identity (Personal)
 - Starbuck, James, Nock, Travisano, Gaventa, Gelpi, Baird, Hervieu-Léger, Meintel, Gooren
2. Role (Intersubjective and Social)
 - Snow-Machalek, Rambo, Meintel
3. Event (Sudden, Sometimes Unexpected, Often Emotional)
 - Starbuck, James, Gelpi, Baird
4. Process (Gradual)
 - James, Lofland-Stark, Baird, Gaventa, Rambo, Paloutzian
5. Active (Volitional and/or Rational)
 - James, Lofland-Stark, Travisano, Snow-Machalek, Gelpi, Gooren, Baird
6. Passive (Paradoxical, Seemingly Involuntary)
 - Baird, Meintel
7. Conscious

- Starbuck, James, Nock, Lofland-Stark, Travisano, Snow-Machalek, Gaventa, Gelpi, Rambo

8. Unconscious

- Starbuck, James, Scobie

My synthetic definition should take into account all of these potential features, since I am of the opinion that no single approach can or should take on the status of the “master” approach; to the contrary, any reasonable and rigorous synthesis of the definitions offered above will have to incorporate all eight categories that I have discovered.

It must be noted that most of the conversion models I have here reviewed are defined by several of these different categories, with some even being sub-types of the others (every process conversion is also technically an event conversion, at least phenomenologically—this will be shown in the final chapter.) Gaventa’s model, for example, includes aspects of the character-identity type as well as the process model. Similarly, the Rambo model involves both process and role, and the Meintel account involves both identity and role. Some of these typical categories are correlated with one another, like the relationship between the active conversion and the conscious conversion, but this link is not absolute; in other words, not every conscious conversion is the result of a choice, although every active conversion is necessarily one which is conscious. The difference between the active and conscious categories is that the former pertains to the decision or resolution to convert, whereas the latter refers to the awareness of the conversion. Lastly, it is crucial to avoid mistaken pseudo-distinctions from the history of

philosophy, such as the idea that the emotional conversion has no rational component (and vice versa).⁸⁷

Just as any given definition for the conversion experience can most likely be characterized by more than one of these typical features, so too can any given case or example of conversion be classified across multiple categories. For example, the paradigmatic example of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is a sudden and conscious change in identity tied to a singular, emotional event, but it occurs on the basis of a passive impetus. Paul, in other words, did not seek out his conversion, but instead, the conversion "happened" to him.

While it is evident that not all event-based conversions have to be "passive" in this way, exemplified by the counterpoint of the ritualistic or sacramental conversion (like Catholic Confirmation, or the *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adulorum*), it is far from clear whether the event-based conversion *must* be a *conscious* conversion. It is at least possible that a potent event could set off a gradual conversion without any notion of the process becoming the object of my conscious awareness. I will return to this question in the final chapter to determine whether the ambiguity is resolved in the phenomenological attitude.

Furthermore I can conclude from my review of these various models for conversion that it would be a mistake to synthetically define conversion as something specific to—and therefore confined by—the limits of religion and spirituality. While some early authors like Starbuck and James acknowledge the supposedly "alternative" types of conversion in their work, the conversion of religion and spirituality dominated the focus of scholarship for several decades, and this is probably an oversight. The criteria that I have enumerated are in fact decidedly non-

⁸⁷ In "Love and Knowledge" Jaggar argues that because emotions are "active, voluntary, and socially constructed" they are therefore epistemic. She maintains that emotions are rational, used in both "evaluation and observation."

specific in terms of the general *content* of conversion. I hope to fill in the nature of this apparently indeterminate content using the eidetic phenomenological method, which I will pursue in the final chapter.

Lastly it should be noted that these categories all apply to experience and the analysis thereof. These categories are not, in other words, abstract types that fail to consider the experiential nature of conversion. For this reason, these categories can be called existential, and the phenomenon of conversion in general can be labeled an existential phenomenon of transformation.⁸⁸

A Synthetic Model of Conversion for Phenomenological Analysis

After classifying the basic type or categories of conversion based on my review of some of the common models thereof, synthesizing a general definition for the experience is relatively straightforward. I maintain that a comprehensive, empirical definition of personal conversion can be constructed as follows:

A conversion is an existential transformation; it is a change in self that occurs for a subject when he or she experiences a shift or transformation in role and/or identity, either as the result of (or culminating in) an event or as mediated via a process; this conversion can be active or passive, and it can be conscious or unconscious. *Both* active and passive conversions can be either conscious or unconscious.⁸⁹ An event-based conversion is almost always an identity conversion, but a process-based conversion can enact a conversion in either role or identity. Event-based conversions as well as process-based conversions

⁸⁸ Here I do not use the word “existential” to refer to a Heideggerian or Sartrean model of phenomenology, but instead, to the more general meaning of “pertaining to human existence.”

⁸⁹ While this seems counter-intuitive, it remains possible because the distinction between the active and conscious categories is that the former pertains to the decision or resolution to convert, whereas the latter refers to the awareness of the conversion. According to this conceptualization it is theoretically possible for someone to actively seek out a conversion without necessarily being aware of the eventual “flip of the switch” constituted by the conversion itself.

involve either an active or passive converting subject, and the subject is either conscious or unconscious of the phenomenon. Process-based conversions can also involve either an active or passive converting subject.⁹⁰

With this definition I strive to have incorporated all of the possible features of conversion in general.

Postscript: Badiou and Agamben on Saint Paul

Despite the fact that “Pauline” conversion has occupied the vast majority of scholarly focus in the earliest studies of the phenomenon, here I would like to briefly review one final pair of interpretations of St. Paul in order to determine whether these recent and influential readings of Paul bear any insights for my phenomenological analysis of the conversion experience.

In *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (2003), Alain Badiou characterizes Paul as a new “formal figure” of subjectivity. In other words, Paul invents a new way of being a subject. This happens via a change in Paul’s “being and acting,” which Badiou describes in terms of “situation” and “event.” It is Paul’s famous move from persecutor to acolyte that Badiou refers to as a change in his situation.⁹¹ For Badiou situations are, in short, epistemological contexts (or knowledge-structures). New situations are instituted by “events” which are, as Badiou phrases it, akin to Lacanian ruptures in established systems of knowledge (viz, the previous situation).⁹² The event always “erupts as singular” but in such a way that is “immediately

⁹⁰ While conscious process-based conversions frequently involve a sacramental event, the process conversion is often unconscious as it starts at a young age when the subject is raised as religious.

⁹¹ Badiou, *Ethics*, 41.

⁹² Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 56.

universalizable.”⁹³ In Paul’s case the event begins with him, but what happens to him is of no significance without its adaptation to everyone; the new truth would lose its meaning.

This is why Badiou argues that events are what make possible all “truth processes” (43). A truth, as Badiou puts it, is that which is produced by maintaining “fidelity” with respect to an event (42). He also calls this “declaring” an event. Thus, while it is the event that makes a new truth *possible*, without a subjective response to the event—specifically, *sans* fidelity—there is no actual change, no production of truth.⁹⁴ But according to Badiou, this subject does not exist at all until he is “induced” via the event. This is why Badiou focuses his analysis on Paul’s *reaction* to the event, evinced through his writings, and not on the antecedent incident on the road. It seems that for Badiou, Paul’s actual conversion is enacted through his fidelity to the event, and not the event itself. In fact, Badiou would not call the Damascus episode the event at all—Paul’s event is Christ’s resurrection (14). Badiou writes:

What Paul must be given exclusive credit for establishing is that the fidelity to such an event exists only through the termination of communitarian particularisms and the determination of a subject-of-truth who indistinguishes the One and the “for-all.” [. . .] Its bearing, in a mythological context implacably reduced to a single point, a single statement (Christ is resurrected), pertains rather to the laws of universality in general. This is why it can be called a *theoretical* break, it being understood that in this instance “theoretical” is not being opposed to “practical,” but to real. Paul is a founder, in that he is one of the very first theoreticians of the universal.⁹⁵

Badiou is very clear that truth is subjective, but his novel argumentation suggests that this subjective truth is only true because it can be universally applied, insofar as it is “indifferent to the situation (15). In Paul’s case his truth is subjective to the extent that it is his own fidelity to

⁹³ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 11.

⁹⁴ It should be noted that Badiou distinguishes his subject from the subject in psychology in addition to the Cartesian subject and the transcendental, Kantian subject.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

the event that generates the truth—he declares the event, he validates it, he lends it credence. *But Paul could have been anyone*; the truth is universalizable.

In a 2005 interview with Adam Miller, Badiou indicates that something becomes universal when “differences become indifferent” and new truths are created.⁹⁶ It is in “living the event” of his experience and disclosing or “declaring” the event to the Other that Paul institutes a new universal truth. This truth is one which not only transcends Jewish Law but also the philosophy of the ancient Greeks. But here truth is not redefined in such a way that it refutes the truths of previous situations, because truths are always specific *to* situations, even if they are indifferent to their circumstances.

Badiou is careful to distinguish these truths from mere opinions; whereas opinions evoke “multiple-being,” Badiou’s event institutes a “new way of being.”⁹⁷ The difference lies in the fact that the new way of being redefines one’s subjectivity, whereas simply taking on a new opinion does not. The authentic event redefines the subject because the subject reinterprets himself in the new context; it is a constitutive relation.

But for this subject to remain stable and intact it is necessary that the subject maintains a relation with the event that reoriented or founded the new iteration of the subject. In other words, the event requires one to be persistently faithful to it.⁹⁸ Thus the event, and how one consistently relates back to it, redefines the nature of the ethical decision. Badiou uses the expression “ethic of truth” to refer to the idea that ethical decisions are those which can be identified by their “fidelity” to the truth of the relevant situational event. The significance of the “event” is that the

⁹⁶ Miller, “Interview with Alain Badiou,” 38.

⁹⁷ Badiou, *Ethics*, 41

⁹⁸ This is the “rule of faithful connection.” Badiou, *Being and Event*, 239.

truth that is generated by the event “renders insignificant” the differences that characterized the previous situation.⁹⁹

For Badiou, the “event of the resurrection” refers less to a miracle story than it does to the event’s relatability to a subject, which in this case would be Paul himself. Paul’s response to the event is one that involves “living the event” by transforming one’s thought in such a way that the world itself is altered and no longer looks (quite as) infinitely multiple. This is tantamount to the annihilation of difference, exemplified by Paul’s message concerning the event that “[t]here is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female” is itself a repetition of the event, as an establishment of universal subjective truth.¹⁰⁰ The dissolution of these categories of difference yields a new identity, one that is characterized by its transcendence beyond the provenance of the prior division. Rather than marginalizing cultural differences in the sense of canceling them out, the event and its transmission calls out for each person to reinterpret himself or herself *qua* subject specifically in relation to the transformative event. For Badiou this activity is the closest thing we have to immortality, this ability to achieve difference-sublimating sameness with an event.¹⁰¹ If every conversion can be construed as an event via which the subject is redefined and brought into identity with some new and radical way of looking at self and world (one which relegates the old way to a position of nullity), then it is in conversion that we have the closest approximation of human participation *in* truth. I suggest that most conversion scholars would agree that without the superseding of the old (whether in the form of denial or reinterpretation), conversion cannot occur.

⁹⁹ Badiou, *Ethics*, 27. This move enables Badiou to challenge the particularism and relativism of contemporary ethical movements.

¹⁰⁰ Gal. 3:28 NABRE

¹⁰¹ Badiou, *Ethics*, 27-8.

But is this denial actually permissible? Badiou maintains that “the Pauline break does not base itself upon the production of a universal” but rather repeats or performs the law of universality itself.¹⁰² In fact this supports the understanding that Badiou’s concept of truth (and by extension, conversion) does not have to operate by way of paradoxical exclusion of one’s former self or the Other (paradoxical because the new paradigm cannot be universal if it does not encompass the old); rather, one must take Badiou to mean that the universal truths of subjectivity are wholly detached from societal situations or cultural differences. In other words, the new subjectivity opened up by the conversion has to *transcend* or *surpass* the old subjectivity. This is the precise form of Paul’s response to the event. Paul’s message is not introduced to incite political revolt or put individuals against one another; rather, its purpose is to create a new identity that is defined by its relation to the universal.

Alain Badiou focuses on Paul’s experience of the “event” on the road to Damascus in a way that can enrich my account of sudden conversion and perhaps even enhance my model of gradual, process-based conversion. I suggest that Badiou’s reading of Paul as initiator of a new universal, yet subjective truth can fairly be considered a theory of conversion in so far as his account focuses on a shift in subjectivity that involves a personal reorientation with respect to truth.

While Badiou describes Paul as a figure of universal address to others, Giorgio Agamben’s reading of Paul is markedly different. He argues that “Paul is not an advocate of universalism but of radical separation.”¹⁰³ But in fact Badiou and Agamben are discussing

¹⁰² Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 108.

¹⁰³ Agamben, *Time That Remains*, 46.

different facets of Paul; while Badiou essentially treats Paul's political theory, Agamben focuses on Paul's theology and philosophy of time.

The crux of Agamben's argument concerns how Paul contends with the concept of "remaining" time, also referred to as "the contraction of time."¹⁰⁴ Agamben writes:

In defining himself as *aphōrismenos*, one who is "separated," Paul thus alludes, in an ironic, albeit cruelly ironic fashion to his separation of times past, [to] his segregation as a Pharisee. He refers to it and negates it in the name of another separation that is no longer a separation according to the *nomos*, but a separation according to the messianic proclamation (*eis euaggelion theou*).¹⁰⁵

While Agamben is describing Paul's status as one who is separated, the reason Paul is separated comes down to his relationship with two temporal modalities—then versus now. The differentiation between the two is partly juridical. In the "then" Paul was separated for a different reason than he is separated in the "now." The distinction is between being separated by law, which characterizes Paul's old status with respect to the Judaic *nomos*, and being separated by virtue of Christ's message, which effectively supersedes the Judaic *nomos*. As Agamben puts it, the proclamation of the Messiah "brings down" the old "wall of separation."

Similar to Badiou's account of "declaration," Agamben maintains that Paul, as an apostle, relays this message (regarding separation) to others. To that end he is an essentially Schmittian figure—in separating off the past and the old law, Paul institutes what is essentially a state of exception; the law suspends itself.¹⁰⁶ We can assert that the law suspends itself insofar as Christ is a Jewish figure—in other words, Christ is the law. This relates back to messianic time insofar as it is only a sovereign—in this case a Messiah—who can activate this exceptionality. Thus it is

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹⁰⁶ Britt, "Schmittian Messiah," 273. See also Schmitt's *Political Theology* and Agamben's *State of Exception*.

Christ and not Paul who establishes this exceptional timeframe. For Agamben, again following Schmitt, this establishment is somewhat paradoxical; it is the Messiah who renders the law inactive and suspended at the same time that only the Messiah can serve as the *telos* of the law.¹⁰⁷ The temporal situation in which this paradox obtains is precisely “messianic time”—the time that remains, which can be alternatively rendered as “the time of the now.” This “now” is not the same as the ordinary present, like the present moment that defines my temporality as I write out these words for the first time and glance at the clock on my desk. That is the temporality of *chronos*, which is time in a sequential and quantitative sense. Instead, this messianic present is formulated in terms of *kairos*—the “right” time.

This construal of temporality in terms of messianic *kairos* is readily applicable to the phenomenon of conversion. The convert, in separating off some aspect of his old identity or even role, suspends not his prior law (as in Badiou’s reading of Paul), but his prior subjectivity. Recall that for Badiou there is no subject prior to the event. For Agamben, this suspension would be necessary to the extent that if one has converted, the old identity cannot coexist with the new precisely insofar as the conversion (and resultant identity transformation) requires the separating off of (at least some part of) the old self. Furthermore in conversion one’s old subjectivity needs to be made inoperative (albeit to varying degrees, as we have seen—it is certainly not the case that the convert *must* change in every single way in order to be called a convert), at the same time that it is the convert himself who is the end or *telos* of his own subjectivity. *To put it loosely, the convert has to step outside of his own subjectivity in order to redefine his subjectivity.* Thus this is a form of radical separation that is not self-destructive but is in fact aimed toward self-preservation. The result is the “remaining time” which now becomes, for the subject, the “right”

¹⁰⁷ Agamben, *Time That Remains*, 98.

time. This does not mean that the converting subject cannot remember his own past, or has to deny his personal history, since, as I have argued, sometimes the convert reinterprets his own history instead of outright rejecting it. But the subject, precisely insofar as he has converted, must inhabit the new temporality comprised by his new identity or role. This new temporality results from the convert's separation of himself *from* himself. As we have seen it is an error to assume that this phenomenon of division is always the object of conscious awareness; that said, in the final chapter I will show that the phenomenon *does* have to be the product of volition and judgment.

The upshot of this interpretation is that every convert inhabits, on a personal level, something analogous to messianic time and thereby adopts the figure of what Agamben refers to as the "remnant." He writes:

[T]he remnant is closer to being a consistency or figure that Israel assumes in relation to election or to the messianic event. It is therefore neither the all, nor a part of the all, but the impossibility for the part and the all to coincide with themselves or with each other. At a decisive instant, the elected people, every people, will necessarily situate itself as a remnant, as not-all.¹⁰⁸

This, too, can be applied to the phenomenology of conversion. At the "decisive instant" of conversion (the point at which the convert "passes through" from his old identity toward the new) *part of* the subject is subject to division and separation. The remnant is this divided portion of the self, which is equivalent neither with the entire self nor the undivided part or portion. It is this remnant that helps explain how someone can change without having to change *entirely*.

The ultimate significance of the convert's adoption of the remnant figure is that it is a divisive mode that is teleologically oriented toward (self) fulfillment.¹⁰⁹ This is why messianic

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 54-5.

¹⁰⁹ Delahaye, "About Chronos and Kairos," 88-9.

time can be characterized as a “threshold.” It is impossible for a subject to convert without passing through this temporal threshold. That is not to say that the convert needs to be capable of identifying the precise temporal limits of the conversion experience.

Ch. 2. Transcendental Phenomenological Framework and Methodology

Transcendent Experience

This is a phenomenology of conversion, but there are several different “types” of phenomenological investigation, each of which is associated with different figures. Transcendental phenomenology, associated with Edmund Husserl, might seem like a natural starting point with which to begin this study to the extent that conversion itself deals with a subject matter that could be considered “transcendent.” In fact, however, “transcendent” and “transcendental” are not simple equivalents and, to the contrary, the difference between the two terms entails important distinctions. When it comes to conversion, transcendental phenomenology can always be used to analyze the phenomenon, but the transcendent nature of the phenomenon will vary, taking on different forms.

The linguistic congruence between ‘transcendent’ and ‘transcendental’ is somewhat misleading; whereas religion and spirituality often deal with the *transcendent* in the sense of the supernatural or mystical, this is not at all the sense in which classical phenomenology is called transcendental, which is in fact closer to the meaning of the term in the “transcendental idealism” exemplified by Kantian philosophy. Nevertheless it is possible to conduct a *transcendental* phenomenology of a *transcendent* experience, namely conversion, so long as we regard analytically (only) the “givenness” (*Gegebenheit*) of experience. In other words it is fully possible to conduct a phenomenology of an experience that is transcendent, but is not possible to conduct a phenomenology of anything that transcends the experience (like the mind-independent existence of God).

When it comes to transcendent experience and conversion, I suggest that there are two types, but they are not entirely distinct. After all, if to transcend something is to surpass it, then transcendent experience is that which surpasses something—but what? The first type of transcendence can be reduced to the “interior” domain of identity and selfhood, while the other type can be reduced to the “exterior” world. As I will argue, these two types of transcendence presuppose each other.

First there is the phenomenon of interior transcendence. Conversion, even in its milder forms, is equivalent to self-transcendence. While this phrase evokes lofty ideals reminiscent of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, it is important to note that much subtler forms of self-transcendence should be included in our consideration, like switching from one Protestant denomination to another. In short, any change in self should be considered as self-transcendence, with the proviso that such changes can be more or less complete, and therefore more or less profound.

The second way in which experiences can be transcendent expands upon the self and extends out to the world and “outside” reality, that part of my experience that is shared by others, and which itself encompasses my experience of others. In the world, some experiences stand out to me as different. These experiences transcend what is normally encountered in what James calls “normal waking consciousness.”¹ These experiences might be strange, surreal, and even frightening. Sometimes these experiences are called supernatural, mystical, paranormal, miraculous, or even metaphysical. This type of transcendent experience is exemplified in the case of an apparition or the hearing of a disembodied voice.²

¹ James, *Varieties*, 296.

² Both pertain to the famous case of St. Paul.

These sorts of transcendent experiences should be qualified on phenomenological terms. Here I can take no firm position on the mind-independent reality of anything I encounter in experience; all experiences are immanent to consciousness itself, even if the experience “intends” toward a so-called object that consciousness can discern is not identical with itself. In other words I can determine that the statue that is talking to me is not the same as me, since, after all, I perceive it as an object in the world, but I am limited in the metaphysical conclusions that I can draw from my perception. According to this view it is not possible to encounter “things-in-themselves” as they exist independent of or external to human consciousness; to the contrary, the world of things and the Other are mediated via consciousness and it is to that domain that their ontologies are restricted. In other words, the mind-independent objectivity of transcendent phenomena (e.g. “Is God real?”) are of no use here. As we will see, under a classical phenomenological paradigm the only thing that could be said to *transcend* the acts of consciousness is the transcendental ego—pure consciousness—*id ipsum*.³

The most general and common sense of “transcendent experience” would be any experience which surpasses or goes beyond what is standard—and not simply in the manner of deviating from one’s normal routine, like when your car gets a flat tire on the way to work, since deviations of that sort are trivial, lacking in deeper significance and meaning. Conversion *qua* self-transcendence should also be grouped into this category of transcendent experience, since it is itself something that deviates from a normal day. A truly transcendent experience would be marked by a definite intensity and other-worldliness; as Baird puts it, in the conversion experience the subject encounters a “transcendent field of signification” that reorders the

³ The classic method of phenomenology gives a general strategy for the “uncovering” of this “unconstituted” pure ego, which Husserl calls “transcendence in immanence.” *Ideas* I §57, 133 <110>.

subject's own "self-understanding."⁴ In other words, it is some new *meaning* that inaugurates the potential for conversion. Thus it should be underscored that a transcendent experience can only be categorized as part of a conversion if the effect or result of the experience is *self-transcendence*. This transcendence of self is an epistemologically intense experience to undergo, to have one's knowledge (especially self-knowledge) upended. It is tantamount to escaping from Plato's Cave; it is a profound human experience that stands in stark contrast to the banal events of everyday life.⁵

With both forms of transcendent experience, it is the confrontation or even violation of limits that marks the experience as transcendent. The limit might be who you think you are, or what you think is the purpose of existence, or what you are accustomed to thinking is "real." But the limit, which is specific to and relative for each individual, is what defines the norm. It follows that what might be a transcendent phenomenon for the first person (e.g. hearing a voice) is routine for someone else.

But there is a significant problem with an account of conversion that defines the phenomenon as self-transcendence; the requisite intensity and depth of change would seem to preclude many experiences from being considered as authentic "conversions." Are we ready to dismiss these less intense, more mundane experiences from our analytic consideration? Is conversion *always* a transcendent experience?

⁴ Baird, "Role and Dynamics of Conversion," xxvi.

⁵ While it is among my aims to demonstrate here that not every conversion is at first glance as radical as what is recounted in some of the famous conversion stories, like that of St. Paul, I also want to suggest that even the "minor" conversion (like switching from one Protestant denomination to another) is radical in its own way, after some analysis.

The Transcendental Method

When Husserlian philosophy is called “transcendental” something quite different is intended. Transcendental phenomenology purports to discover the essential properties of consciousness as experienced on a firsthand basis. Husserl, who is often called the founder of transcendental phenomenology, could not have taken transcendental concepts further if not for the work already done by Kant, for whom transcendental philosophy involves the identification of the conditions that make experience possible. Husserl’s work is similar on a basic level but instead of focusing on the pre-conditions of experience, he proposes phenomenology as a precise “science” of appearances the ultimate insights of which are to reveal “transcendental consciousness.”

As I have stated, his phenomenology cannot investigate anything that is transcendent beyond experience itself, but it is a “transcendental” discipline by way of what it is to reveal. This upshot is attained via the two-part application of what Husserl calls the “transcendental” (sometimes “phenomenological”) reduction, whereby one first brackets out everything extraneous to a present experience (the *epoché*) and then leaves behind a remnant of pure consciousness—the “transcendental residuum.”⁶ It is in this residuum that the phenomenologist is able to identify the activity of the transcendental subject that is responsible for the constitution of all intentional objects. This residuum is not simply theoretical nor is it the result of a logical deduction; rather it is a genuine “field” of experience. In the course of this discovery the phenomenologist also understands that inter-subjectivity and the life-world are transcendental phenomena. Thus the classical, Husserlian conception of phenomenology is understood to be

⁶ Husserl, *Ideas* I §33, 58.

transcendental in part due to how it explains the very genesis of experience as encountered firsthand.

Husserl took it that phenomenology could work only as a transcendental philosophy, and he expresses in the *Crisis* that phenomenology was an “endform” thereof.⁷ But clearly the sense in which Husserl understood his philosophy to be transcendental is rather anomalous when compared with the tradition, exemplified in his famous expression “transcendence in immanence.”⁸ In several respects his philosophy can be reasonably compared with earlier ideas from Kant and Descartes, but ultimately he means something quite unique by ‘transcendental’ in his writing. His philosophy is not simply transcendental due to his regard for the transcendental ego, which he compares to Cartesianism, nor for his focus on the way in which the intentionality of the transcendental ego is a condition for the possibility of experience, but in each of these ways, and then some. While some commentators have suggested that Husserl struggled to articulate clearly how his phenomenology was transcendental, it was not for lack of ink spilled; he would spend much of his career elaborating and revising the methods of transcendental phenomenology until his death in 1938.

The Transcendental Phenomenological Framework

Before proceeding to a more technical discussion of the transcendental phenomenological method it would first be useful to situate the general framework of transcendental phenomenology. There are three parts to this framework—there is the *object* of the method itself,

⁷ Husserl, *Crisis* §14.

⁸ Husserl, CM §47.

the method's very *way of looking* at what it explains, and the way in which the method purports to *explain* the object. It has already been indicated that the phenomenon to be analyzed is conversion, but here I will explicitly identify the scope of the phenomenon, the way in which the phenomenon is regarded, and lastly the mode of explanation that is to be employed.

As we have seen the object (*objectum*) of phenomenological analysis is always the *phenomenon*. Here we know that the phenomenon is conversion, but the starting point should be the way in which consciousness experiences this phenomenon. Thus the various meanings of this term should be discussed briefly. In the *Theaetetus* Plato uses the term to mean "appearance" and his connotation is certainly negative.⁹ For Aristotle it refers to "images apprehended by sense."¹⁰ Both of these definitions for phenomenon are far too limiting to apply to the case of conversion, since *prima facie* conversion involves some intellectual component that surpasses the merely sensible realm.

After the phenomenological "turn" that begins with Kant and is realized by Husserl the term 'phenomenon' is interpreted and defined rather differently. While some writers (like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty) may use the term to refer only to what is "given" to or, properly speaking, *constituted* by and present before, consciousness itself, like the red color of a ball that one sees in his field of vision, others, like Heidegger, use the term in a more fundamentally ontological fashion, whereby the meaning of the word 'phenomenon' is closer to "that which shows itself."¹¹ With this sense of the term the focus is upon ontologically-positing concepts like care, ready-

⁹ Pl. Tht. 155A, cited in Liddell and Scott.

¹⁰ *Metaphysics* 338 b23, cited in Liddell and Scott.

¹¹ In Heidegger's case he is using this different sense of the term in order to re-frame the phenomenological question away from Husserl's agenda towards his own ontological program. The difference in language could reasonably suggest to the inexperienced reader of phenomenology a sense of agency on the part of the phenomenon, which would be incorrect. See Part II Chapter 1 for much more detail.

handedness, and authenticity; Heidegger does not employ the term to focus on a technical analysis of the constitutive structures of conscious experience, which is the case with Husserl's transcendental phenomenology.

Within the purview of the transcendental method of phenomenology, the meaning of 'phenomenon' is most closely traceable to Kant, as we again note that transcendental phenomenology inherits certain aspects of its general framework from transcendental idealism. For Kant, the term means "appearances to the extent that as objects they are thought in accordance with the unity of the categories."¹² In other words, the phenomenon is an object that is experienced and ordered by mind-dependent structures (through sensibility and understanding).¹³ Thus for Kant, an appearance is *only* a phenomenon if it is delineated *a priori* by the categories, or, alternatively, categorical unity. Therefore, as Nicholas Strang points out, as far as Kant is concerned something like a "visual after-image" (such as that which one sees after staring for too long at a bright light) is an appearance but *not* a phenomenon due to the lack of congruence between the intuition manifest to sense and its object.¹⁴

What is this "intuition"? Here 'intuition' refers not to the "folk" sense of the word, which is often used to refer to a feeling or even a supernatural premonition.¹⁵ In the context of transcendental phenomenology the term is instead used in a way that relates to the technical manner in which it features in Kant's philosophy. While the precise meaning of the term is somewhat controversial to Kant scholars, since we are interested here in Husserl's reformulation of the concept I will just reproduce Kant's own words from the First Part of his Transcendental

¹² Kant, CPR, A249.

¹³ Ibid., A320.

¹⁴ Stang, "Kant's Transcendental Idealism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

¹⁵ E.g. "She had an intuition that they were going to win the game."

Aesthetic in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: “In whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is directed to an end, is intuition.”¹⁶ Clearly this could take on thorough elaboration but what is most important for our purposes is what Kant says intuition *cannot do*—by way of his distinction between “sensible intuition” on the one hand and “intellectual intuition” on the other, he argues that we possess only the former faculty.¹⁷

As far as transcendental phenomenology is concerned, there is no such problem because there is no such object, *if* what is meant by object is “thing-in-itself.” While, as we have seen, Kant very famously contrasts the phenomenon with the *noumenon* or “in-itself,” the dichotomy is utterly “out of bounds” in transcendental phenomenology, where the internal-external, subject-object dichotomies cannot be reproduced on the grounds that they would violate the very limits what is “given” in sense experience. This is true even if one regards the *noumenon* only on the basis of a logical posit since what is posited is the status of a “thing” independent from the human experience thereof.

Husserl himself defines ‘phenomenon’ in *The Idea of Phenomenology* where he writes: “The meaning of the word “phenomenon” is twofold because of the essential correlation between appearing and what appears. “*Phainomenon*” properly means “that which appears,” and yet it is predominantly used for the appearing itself, the subjective phenomenon.”¹⁸ What he is referring to is the double reference of the word; to be sure there is, by law, no external or material object immanent to the immateriality of consciousness, and yet there are two distinct dimensions to the appearance, both the cognition or conscious experience itself (*cogitatio*) as well as the object of

¹⁶ Kant, CPR, A19/B20.

¹⁷ Ibid., A250/B307.

¹⁸ Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, Hua II 14.

the cognition (*cogitatum*). Understandably it might first be hard to grasp how this isn't a simple reproduction of the same sort of subject-object ontology that Husserl takes pains to condemn. It all comes down to the *cogitatum*, the materiality of which is manifest only in my sensation. It is not, in other words, the external cause of the perception but rather is the thing *qua* perceived. As Moran points out, what Husserl had here discovered was that “the “things themselves” manifest themselves to us in relation to the very manner in which we are present to them.”¹⁹ Failure to grasp this phenomenological fact is what leads one to the subject-object dichotomy; in Husserl's framework, the only “object” is the intentional object towards which consciousness points, comprising the so-called “noematic” core of the perception (*cogitatum*). This noematic core does not correspond to an empirical/material object with an independent ontological status; rather, this core is nothing more than the object of intentionality strictly *as* it is encountered.

The object of transcendental phenomenology, the *phenomenon*, now clarified, it is time to turn to the manner in which the phenomenon is regarded by the phenomenologist. Beyond taking no position on the existence of so-called material objects that (might or might not) exist independent of human consciousness, transcendental phenomenology calls for faithfulness to what Husserl calls “the principle of principles.”²⁰ This principle states that:

¹⁹ Moran, *Dictionary*, 252.

²⁰ The fact that technically transcendental phenomenology *takes no position* on certain realist-empirical problems is sometimes overlooked. Take for example Quentin Meillassoux's well-known and controversial *After Finitude*, which more or less persuasively advocates for a mathematical ontology but does not go so far as to demonstrate the invalidity of phenomenology. The better reading of this book is that it takes issue that phenomenology takes no position on the existence of mind-independent objects, which is of course something that phenomenology cannot do, for reasons already stated.

[E]very ordinary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originally (so to speak, in its 'personal' actuality) offered to us in 'intuition' is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there.²¹

Here Husserl simply indicates that every intuition is to be taken simply as it is given and no more.²² These perceptions or appearances do not have to be visual but instead are constituted in various manners of sense, from the five senses to pure intellection. According to Husserl's version of the phenomenological method, it is of utmost importance to avoid at all costs the adoption, implicit or explicit, of any metaphysical presupposition that is projected onto or supplemented into the "givenness" (*Gegebenheit*) of phenomena as present before consciousness itself. In other words the content of consciousness as experienced is understood to be objective irrespective of the allegedly concrete and external "cause" of the perception, as something outside of consciousness itself which accounts for the appearance of the conscious quality.

Thus a perception that one is fairly sure is hallucinatory has, before consciousness as it is experienced on a firsthand basis, a deceptive status or "reality." This is of utmost importance since it is easy to fall into concerns over the supposed "external cause" of religious intuition. For example one might wonder whether St. Paul "really" hears the voice of Christ when he falls down on the way to Damascus, or if it is all just "in Paul's head." For the phenomenologist, the difference between hearing or seeing something "real" and hearing or seeing something illusory comes down to the synthesis of fulfillment. As Jay Lampert points out in *Synthesis and Backward Reference in Husserl's Logical Investigations*, this is "the relation between intention and fulfillment." He writes:

²¹ Husserl, *Ideas I* § 24, 44 <44>.

²² See the work of Jean-Luc Marion for more on the concept of givenness, especially *Being Given* (1997).

An expression has an “empty” meaning-intention for an experiencing subject if it refers to an objective state of affairs which he has not intuited; it acquires a meaning-fulfillment if the subject has intuitively “confirmed” or “illustrated” its meaning.”²³

With St. Paul, then, the problem comes down to whether the voice that he hears is supported by his own intuition. As the story goes, Paul’s conversion event has meaning precisely because he intuits the presence of Christ. For him this is not merely an empty intuition, but one that is intuitively supported. Specifically, this is what Husserl refers to in the Sixth Logical Investigation as “categorical intuition.”

This is what Lampert, following Zahavi, refers to as “imaginative fullness.”²⁴ This is a real problem, since a fantasy can be experienced with the sort of fullness that would suggest that the experience has some objective reality, despite the fact that the fullness is not genuine. Lampert reasons that the fulfillment has to be structured a certain way: with systematic and objective syntheses.²⁵ What this means is that the “objective reference” of an experience belongs to a judgment regarding that experience, and not the experience itself (this will be very important in the final chapter, where I will argue that all conversions, even those which are rather paradoxically called “unconscious” conversions, require judgments.) Lampert points out that what girds the synthetic objectivity of a set of judgments (in this case regarding outer sensation) is that the constituent theses of the judgments are mutually supportive and foundational, and they *point back to nomenclature while at the same time* the names presuppose the relevant judgments.²⁶ Thus in order to judge that an apparition has objective reference, not only do I have

²³ Lampert, *Synthesis and Backward Reference*, 59.

²⁴ Zahavi, “Constitution and Ontology,” 122.

²⁵ Lampert, *Synthesis and Backward Reference*, 38.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, *Reference*, 152, 158. The idea is that names have a “backward reference” to an “act” in which the properties of an object are determined. This is the synthesis of the object as I encounter it.

to affirm that what I am seeing is veridical, but I have to *name* what I am seeing, and I cannot make the judgment without naming, nor can I name anything at all without judging.

This points to a subtle difficulty in Husserl's conception of meaning-fulfillment: his analysis can easily explain the hallucination or apparition that is identified as such, but it becomes difficult to apply his ideas to the more profound and convincing sorts of illusory experiences *that are not judged*. Perceiving and judging are not simple equivalents, after all. While it is true that Husserl devotes much time and space to the elaboration of syntheses and epistemic fulfillment, with the idea being that the unfulfilled expression is phenomenologically distinguishable from the expression that is verified through intuition, in the lived experience of religious and spiritual phenomena, this is overly idealistic. The person who is hallucinating is most likely not judging what he or she sees, and if they are, then there is no reason why their syntheses cannot corroborate what they are seeing. Husserl's sustained interest in fulfillment as it concerns the fleshing out or identification of intentional acts arguably falls short, even if it offers a test that can sometimes differentiate the hallucination from the fulfilled intentional act. In short the test will only work in relatively mild cases in which the phenomenological subject can suspend or push back against the force of his mystical stupor, chemically-induced change in mental state, or whatever else accounts for his "wild" perception or intuition. In other words it is the nature of hallucination to present itself as if intuitively fulfilled, and it is overly optimistic for the phenomenologist to suppose that in the present moment a convincing hallucination can be identified as such on the basis of its status as unfulfilled intuition. Perhaps in retrospect the phenomenologist is able to conclude that his perception of some voice or vision was unfulfilled, but in the moment, this determination is highly unlikely. For the duration of the hallucinatory or mystical episode, this rational conclusion is next to impossible. This is the significance of

Marion's "saturated phenomena"—the religious or spiritual experience transcends the typical limitations of intuition and intentionality.

Indeed it is difficult to even identify any perception as hallucinatory or otherwise illusory in the first place to the extent that *in the natural attitude* the criterion for distinguishing such experiences would fall upon the presence of an external cause or stimulus. Often the ecstatic or hallucinating individual is incapable of determining whether or not there is such a cause. But in the phenomenological attitude, every perception is taken *only* as a perception instead of making assumptions regarding the supposed physicality, materiality, or externality of the thing that is perceived. The procedure for assessing the objective reference of an illusory experience involves, as I have said, the enactment of judgments, and *not* the "real" or material external cause of the experience (this is what Meillassoux does with the fossil).²⁷ When we restrict ourselves to what is "given" there is no room to posit a Kantian thing-in-itself as correlate of the thing appearing to us in sense. In more basic terms we can capture the sentiment here with the cliché "what you see is what you get." It is still true that Husserl can differentiate "mere" sense experience from things themselves (in other words I can tell the difference between looking at the sun, and the sun as the object I am looking at), but it has to be noted that the thing itself is only known through its manifestation in sense experience. I would not have any idea of the sun if not for its givenness to me in sensation. There is no material thing-*in-itself* to which we can refer, something that is other than the thing that appears before consciousness, the thing that is experienced (in other words the thing itself is the object I experience, and the thing-in-itself is illicit, a countersense). In the practice of our everyday lives, this is hard to do. We have conversations with people whom we assume to exist independently of our own consciousness of them—to do otherwise would be to

²⁷ Meillassoux, *After Finitude*.

fall into the despairing isolation of solipsism—and yet when using phenomenological methods, we are compelled to focus on consciousness alone. I know the Other insofar as the Other appears to me and I have perceptions of him or her.

It is via sensible intuition that our more primitive perceptions (i.e. impressions) are conditioned with formal aspects like space and time, without which it would be impossible to understand phenomena at all. The point of difference in Husserl's thought is that through phenomenology and the reduction we are able to employ the latter type of intuition, the intellectual. Husserl refers to this as "eidetic seeing" (*Wesensschauung*).²⁸ Whereas Kant indicates that this type of intuition is impossible and aligns it theoretically alongside the *noumenon* which we have already discussed, for Husserl it is intellectual intuition, as specifically non-sensuous, which enables us to categorially situate our experiences, to encounter them on the terms of their own self-evidence. Whereas for Kant intellectual intuition is creative and the province of no less than a God, Husserl's intellectual intuition simply grasps the *categorial* features of experience. These categorial features refer to the phenomenological "structure" of an intellectual intuition, the way in which an ordinary object is, for example, situated in a larger contextual environment. For example, when I look at a painting that hangs on the wall, it is the painting's placement against the plane or background (*Hintergrund*) of the wall that comprises a necessary relation for the object (i.e. the painting). The same would be true for a painting suspended by wire with no wall immediately behind it; my categorial intuition would still apprehend the empty background behind the object.

There is more to focusing on the givenness of the appearance as such. It has to be noted that there is a precise focus to the manner in which perceptions are analyzed phenomenologically

²⁸ Husserl, *Ideas I* §3, 8 <10>.

according to the transcendental model. As we will see in the next section where we explore the specific tools of the transcendental method, the idea of radical doubt is of paramount importance. Husserl calls for the adoption of a specifically “phenomenological” attitude that holds in suspension our ordinary assumptions about the material and scientific world. In other words, we are to leave behind our ordinary naiveté that defines our non-reflective way of dealing with the world. Thus when a perception is being analyzed in the phenomenological attitude, everything else has to be ignored. This includes the vast body of assumptions that we carry with us as we go on living our daily lives, without which it would be difficult to operate as a member of society. For example, I ordinarily take it for granted that my campus exists independent of my own experience of it—I assume that it is “there” even when I am not. So too do I assume that my students exist even when we are not together in the classroom. As we will see, focusing on the perception and ignoring the rest is managed through what Husserl calls the *epoché*, which is used to “bracket off” everything extraneous to a perception proper.

Lastly there is the overall conceptual framework via which the transcendental phenomenologist renders an *a priori* explanation of an intuition. Early in his career Husserl roughly equated his phenomenology with “descriptive psychology.”²⁹ Husserl’s understanding of descriptive methodology was influenced in large part by Franz Brentano and his descriptive psychology but after the *Logical Investigations* Husserl moved away from this phrasing, perhaps largely in part through his desire to distance himself from accusations of psychologism. Later on Husserl would call transcendental phenomenology not a descriptive psychology but rather an “eidetic science,” although certainly his method would still necessarily involve linguistic

²⁹ See the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*.

description.³⁰ The difference comes down to phenomenology as Husserl conceived it prior to his “discovery” of the reduction (first published in *Ideas* in 1913 although present in his notebooks almost a decade earlier) compared with the later iteration.³¹ The later phenomenological model could more properly be called transcendental, with the only real issue with the “descriptive psychology” paradigm being that Husserl wanted to elevate his work beyond that of a “mere” psychology. In part his attempt was to remove phenomenology from the limits of the empirical and what he refers to as the “scientific attitude.”

Ultimately the precise way in which transcendental phenomenology describes and explains its objects of inquiry comes down to the *telos* or *proposita* of transcendental philosophy and phenomenology in particular, and this is why Husserl eventually preferred to use the term “eidetic science” to describe his work—instead of aligning it with the descriptive phenomenology of Brentano. As we have seen, the ultimate goal of transcendental phenomenology is the elucidation of the *a priori* essential structures of acts of transcendental consciousness. Here we are specifically concerned with a very specific act of consciousness: the conversion act. The goal is to identify the essential phenomenal structures of any conversion whatsoever, but the only route to such a conclusion is through the examination of specific conversion cases and specific conversion models from various academic disciplines.

³⁰ Husserl coins the term “eidetic” based on the Greek word *eidos* meaning essence.

³¹ See the Seefelder manuscripts of 1905.

Conversion and the Phenomenological Method

With my historical outline of the transcendental approach to philosophy as well as a basic sketch of the classic phenomenological framework, I can now turn to the particulars of the transcendental phenomenological method *per se*. The most important components of the method are the phenomenological attitude, the *epoché*, the reduction, imaginative free variation, intentionality, noesis and noema, constitution, and the horizon. These components all link together to comprise the form of the transcendental phenomenological method.

The most complete examination of the transcendental phenomenological method should begin with an overview of the various “attitudes” that Husserl identifies in his writings. These attitudes, discussed at length by Husserl in *Ideas I* and the late-career “Vienna Lecture,” have a deep influence upon a subject’s way of dealing with and experiencing the world (as well as other egos).

Rather than referring to something like a mood or disposition on the part of one’s personality, attitudes are here used in a technical sense, as *Einstellung*. This term refers to outlook or mentality. For the Neo-Kantians and 19th century psychologists, *Einstellung* is used to refer to overall dispositions of consciousness, like the different and specific ways in which one would mentally encounter a math problem versus a beautiful sunset. Against the former I am thinking arithmetically and in terms of reason. Perhaps I have a few formulas present before my mind as I solve the problem. In the case of the latter I of course take no recourse to arithmetic. Rather I am focused on the rich textures manifest in my visual field. I take note of the subtleties of color and light. Perhaps I am contemplating the vista conceptually in terms of their beauty or

symmetry. These different ways of “looking at” (not only visually) different things are what we have in mind when we refer to the attitudes relevant to phenomenological inquiry.

It makes sense to begin with the most common attitude, the one that Husserl calls “the natural attitude.” In *Ideas I* §27 he discusses this attitude, which serves as the normal *modus operandi* of our everyday lives. In this attitude the world is “endlessly spread out in space” despite the fact that no such indication is explicitly “given” to me in consciousness.³² It is a plain assumption on my part that the world simply extends out indefinitely from my vantage point (in the phenomenological attitude we can identify the reason for this—this experience is constituted in part on the basis of sensation, Kant’s outer intuition.) Objects in the world are “there for me,” as are other humans, and I take for granted the material status of the objects that I encounter in sense. Husserl points out that in normal consciousness we operate like this at all times—it is our default. It is a practical orientation without which we would struggle to live modern lives.

In this natural attitude I also carry out what Husserl calls “the general positing” (also referred to as the “general thesis” that is posited).³³ This is the consistently held presumption that the world and everything in it is “factually existing” and actual. To question any of it would not occur to me, and even if I did doubt some specific bit of “data belonging to the natural world,” it wouldn’t change the fact that I already naively suppose the world to exist in the first place.³⁴ Thus even if I am faced with a fantastic mirage as I wander about a barren desert, my doubt regarding the veracity of my vision does not preclude my normal assumption that the world itself is actually “real” in a material sense.

³² Husserl, *Ideas I* §27, 51 <49>.

³³ *Ibid.*, §30, 56 <52>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 57 <53>.

While the natural attitude is our most frequent disposition with respect to the world, it is not our only one. Husserl also describes a “theoretical attitude.”³⁵ Scientific knowledge is pursued in this non-practical attitude, which involves self-aware detachment from the object of study. Here one takes on a position of disinterest and looks at the world as if an onlooker instead of an active participant. Even if we are not carrying out scientific experiments in a laboratory we still might be in the theoretical attitude, so long as we are seeking out knowledge and doing so by objectifying some aspect of our experience instead of “living in” the experience in a primary and unreflective sense. Mathematics, science, and philosophy would all, prior to phenomenology, be conducted in this theoretical attitude. Without this theoretical attitude there could *be* no phenomenological attitude.

Indeed lastly, we must examine the “phenomenological attitude.” Contra the theoretical attitude which requires one to view an object of knowledge as if from the vantage point of an outside observer, the phenomenological attitude requires the strict adoption of, and confinement to, a first-person perspective. All descriptions which are rendered in this attitude must be faithful to the experience at hand. In practice this is extraordinarily difficult to do because of how easily we dwell in the natural attitude for most of the time. Indeed it is in the natural attitude that conversion is experienced. How can we use the phenomenological method to analyze a phenomenon that occurs in the natural attitude?

The way around this is through the deployment of what is called the *epoché*. Inspired as we have seen by the *Meditations* of Descartes, in the phenomenological attitude we use the broad application of the *epoché* to bracket off everything that we ordinarily assume about the world when we are in the natural attitude. Husserl lifts the term *epoché* not from the *Meditations*, where

³⁵ Husserl, *Ideas* II §3, 5 <4>.

it does not appear, but rather from Ancient Greek, where the word refers to “suspension of judgment.”³⁶ The founder of transcendental phenomenology is quick to point out that this classical sense of *epoché* is markedly different from the procedure employed by Descartes, where beliefs are explicitly doubted and are the object of skepticism, instead of just being out of consideration.³⁷ Husserl claims regarding Descartes that “his attempt to doubt universally is properly an attempt to negate universally.”³⁸ To the extent that Descartes entertains the possibility of an evil demon who would be tempted to deceive him into believing in the existence of things that did not really exist, this seems like a fair assessment on Husserl’s part.³⁹

This isn’t at all what Husserl does with his *epoché*, which is instead a variety of “neutrality modification.”⁴⁰ Most generally what is excluded from judgment (but *not* outright denied) on the basis of the *epoché* is the general positing of the world that normally defines our disposition in the so-called natural attitude. This is to place on hold the “thetic” nature of the natural world whereby that which is presented in consciousness is specifically presented as “factually existing actuality.”⁴¹ Earlier in the *Logical Investigations* Husserl had referred to this same property of normal consciousness as “belief-character.”⁴² The idea here is that things present themselves to us via our perception in such a way that the very presentation (illicitly) of things implies to us their mind-independent existence. The world itself presents itself to us in this way. When we perform the *epoché* we make the conscious and deliberate decision to no longer

³⁶ Pyrrho and Arcesilaus are examples of writers who use the term. See Moran, *Dictionary*, 106.

³⁷ The difference is like the contrast between atheism and agnosticism. The former holds that God does not exist, whereas the latter refrains from holding a belief regarding God’s existence.

³⁸ Husserl *Ideas* I §31, 59 <55>.

³⁹ Descartes, *Meditations*, <22-3>.

⁴⁰ Husserl *Ideas* I §109, 257 <222>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, §§90, 99; Moran, *Dictionary*, 107.

⁴² Husserl LI 5: §23, 130.

permit ourselves to be “seduced” by the perception. We bracket the imagined indication that the thing presents itself to us as “external” and independent of sense.

As far as some commentators are concerned, the *epoché* is essentially equivalent with the phenomenological reduction. But later in his career Husserl would begin to distinguish between the two terms more clearly. Indeed this is why the phenomenological reduction is typically characterized as a two-step process that begins with the application of the *epoché* to the general positing of the natural attitude and culminates with the eidetic reduction.⁴³

It is the eidetic reduction which, as “an inquiring back into consciousness,” uncovers the transcendental conclusion(s) regarding the phenomenon. As Husserl puts it in *Cartesian Meditations*, by the method of transcendental reduction each of us [...] was led back to his transcendental ego.”⁴⁴ We have seen that in order to isolate the universal theoretical conditions of an experience, any subjective aspect of the experience has to be ruled out. The experience has to be taken at face value as it appears to one’s own consciousness but also to any given consciousness. In contrast to the metaphysical speculations from the history of philosophy, the avenue to this transcendental knowledge lies in a methodological move that Husserl understood to be thoroughly scientific.

Since it is impossible to transcend one’s own point of view, the way in which the phenomenon appears has to be “imaginatively varied” in order to grasp something that isn’t simply individual or particular. When the phenomenon is encountered in experience it naturally does not present itself eidetically, in term of its essence or its form. So in order to arrive upon the *eidos*—what is necessary and essential—for the phenomenon, this variation has to be performed.

⁴³ Cogan, “The Phenomenological Reduction,” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

⁴⁴ Husserl, CM §34, 69 <Hua I 103>.

Thus this procedure is also often referred to in Husserl's writings as the "eidetic variation." Occasionally it is referred to as the "free variation" because of the way in which it is "pure"—it fully disregards the notion of existence and the "real" or "actual" object.

"Free variation" is an essential component of the transcendental method because it is the operational tool that carries the phenomenologist from a singular iteration of the phenomenon to its form, and yet despite the selection of terms that are used for this activity, Husserl in fact only infrequently discusses the technical points of the matter at length in his writings.

There may not be much detail in print regarding the variation, but thankfully Husserl provides a couple of clear examples of the procedure involved, which is not always the case with his other concepts. The easiest way to explain how the variation works is by using the example that Husserl provides in *Phenomenological Psychology*.⁴⁵ In this text Husserl explains how to move from seeing one single hue of red to the *eidōs* of red, i.e., red in general. As one cycles through the numerous varieties of red that can be imagined before sense, that which is invariant is equivalent with the essential properties of red. It is of course impossible to imagine every single red color, and impractical to even garner an attempt, but doing so is in fact not necessary in order to grasp the essence of red. I can conceive of a red that is more orange, or a red that is more yellow, or a red that is rather dark like garnet or mahogany, or one which is light, like scarlet or even salmon. All of these colors are differentiable before my imagination, and yet each partakes in that quality that makes it a hue of red. Once I have entertained a sufficient number of examples such that I can discern the essence of the color in general, there is no need to continue. The form in virtue of which the various hues all appear to me as red is a transcendental insight manifest to me via intuition.

⁴⁵ Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie* §9, 59; Hua IX 78-79, 82.

In his *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl furnishes another example of eidetic variation, where he explains the process using the perception of an ordinary table:

Starting from this table perception as an example, we vary the perceptual object, table, with a completely free optionalness, yet in such a manner that we keep perception fixed as perception of something, no matter what. Perhaps we begin by fictionally changing the shape or the color of the object quite arbitrarily, keeping identical only its perceptual appearing. In other words: Abstaining from acceptance of its being, we change the fact of this perception into a pure possibility, one among other quite 'optional' pure possibilities—but possibilities that are possible perceptions. We so to speak, shift the actual perception into the realm of non-actualities, the realm of the as-if.⁴⁶

Here we can see how it all comes together, how the free variation begins with what is established by a specific perceptual object but moves to the very essence of the perceptual object in general.

It is important to note that here when Husserl refers to “[a]bstaining from acceptance” of a perceptual object’s “being” he refers to withholding ontological judgment of the object’s existence, not its essence—the latter is determined, necessarily, via application of the classical method. Husserl points out that the perceptual object with which we begin need not even exist *de facto* in order for this procedure to yield transcendental findings. In other words starting with an imagined fantasy object like a hippogriff would not be a problem for the method despite the fact that no “real” ontological correlate of the perception “exists.”⁴⁷ The same goes for the acts of wishing or daydreaming, each of which can be eidetically varied. Ultimately even the perception of a “factual” or “posited” object involves free variation that is employed entirely on the basis of an imaginative act, so the concern over “fantasy objects” is easily resolved.

None of this would be possible without the phenomenological concept of intentionality, without which consciousness itself would be unthinkable. “Intentionality” refers to what a state of consciousness is about; “all consciousness is consciousness of something” is the most famous

⁴⁶ Husserl, CM §34, 60 <Hua I 104>.

⁴⁷This comes down to the difference between “positing” vs. “non-positing” acts. The difference between the two comes down to the “matter” of the perceptual act. See Rollinger, *Husserl’s Position in the School of Brentano*, 55.

formulation, although it is Sartre's wording rather than Husserl's.⁴⁸ Here when we use the word "about" in the first definition, it is quite broad in its reference; consciousness might be of something in the visual field, or a number before one's mind, or the sensation of pain.

Husserl encounters the term in the work of Brentano, who develops the concept after encountering it in Scholastic philosophy.⁴⁹ But Brentano remains limited to an understanding of "intentionality" that construes the term in an implicitly "representationalist" manner, such that "[e]very mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself."⁵⁰ By contrast, for Husserl intentionality is an "objectifying act" that is neither subject nor object. Instead of a split between subject and object, according to Husserl's understanding of the objectifying act, subjectivity and objectify are intrinsically "tied up" with one another. In other words an object of experience is only an "object" at all insofar as it is an object phenomenally experienced by a constituting subject. This is far different from the notion of an "external" object that exists independent of a perception thereof; rather, this object is inherent to the act of perception itself, and its only existence of which we validly speak is the existence that is mediated in the perception.

In his Fifth Logical Investigation Husserl identifies two different modes of this intentional object manifest in perception: "the object as it is intended" and "the object which is intended."⁵¹ According to the example he gives in the text, the object which is intended may be the Emperor of Germany but this object might be intended as "the grandson of Queen Victoria" etc. While it may be assumed that here the Emperor of Germany *qua* object is mind-independent,

⁴⁸ Sartre uses this wording in his short 1939 article on intentionality in Husserl and he calls it Husserl's "famous phrase," but the words do not appear anywhere in Husserl.

⁴⁹ Husserl, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, 68.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵¹ Husserl, LI 5: §17, 113.

this is in fact not the case; Husserl is referring not to the emperor in a material or external sense, since that sort of consideration defines the natural attitude that has been left behind. The object instead refers to a presentation, the object of the reference. This analysis will later be revised into the noesis-noema characterization that first appears in print with the first volume of *Ideas*.

In the *Logical Investigations* Husserl goes so far as to say, “each intentional experience is either an objectifying act or has its basis in such an act.”⁵² This is to say that not every directed experience is one which refers to an object; in the case of feelings and volition, for example, reference is not made to the object but the very presentation of the object is mediated by the feeling. Here Husserl is trying to clarify what Brentano refers to as “presentation” (*Vorstellung*), which Husserl found to be obscure, and eventually critiqued in the *Logical Investigations*. Contrary to Brentano’s formulation, for Husserl “objectifying act” replaces Brentano’s “presentation” to refer to the act of consciousness whereby the intentional object is made present. Not every state of consciousness is one through which the intentional object is made present, however. For example, if I experience an emotion respective to the intentional object, like feeling happy when I see a shark tooth which reminds me of a childhood family vacation, then in the consciousness of the emotion the shark tooth itself is not made present, but the way in which I interpreted the shark tooth is.

Late in his career Husserl states that intentionality *is* the correlation *a priori* between subject and world⁵³. Here his wording may be new, but the underlying idea has been present in his work for several decades; instead of the modern subject-object split that is instituted in the work of Descartes, Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology calls for a conception of subject-

⁵² Ibid., §41, 167.

⁵³ Husserl, *Crisis* §46, 159.

object wherein the two are not distinct but are rather different inherent aspects of consciousness. When it comes to conversion this schema “self-contains” the transformation in the mental experience of the individual.

Preliminary Analysis of the Conversion Noema

Starting with *Ideas I* Husserl uses a different term to refer to the object of consciousness: the *noema*.⁵⁴ This is a term in Ancient Greek used to refer to what a thought is about. The noema, simply put, is the object as experienced by consciousness, and Husserl employs this term as a replacement for what Brentano would refer to as “content” or “object.” In *Ideas I* Husserl calls it “the perceived as perceived.”⁵⁵

Here we should prepare an advance account of the noema of conversion. First, perhaps we imagine that conversion itself is the noema of conversion. But we already saw in the last chapter that some empirical researchers do not think that a conversion has to occur on a conscious basis. Furthermore breaking down a conversion into a converting act (noesis) and conversion (noema) is not particularly helpful because these specific terms need to be phenomenologically generalized. What specific type of mental act does conversion involve? The second answer to this issue is that the noema of conversion is the self, insofar as conversion involves some sort of change in selfhood (this account will be much further refined in the next chapter). But in fact the idea that the noema of a conversion experience is always the self is mistaken, too hasty; it is not actually necessary to have a perception of the self when converting,

⁵⁴ Husserl, *Ideas I* §88, 214 <182>.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 216 <183>.

so long as one understands that ‘self’ refers to the object of deliberate reflection. As I will elaborate later on, following the work of Dan Zahavi, it cannot be the case that the reflective self is the only phenomenological self. After all, I do not necessarily have to reflect upon the self in order to have an “experience” of my self if by ‘experience’ I am willing to allow pre-reflective and non-reflective types of consciousness. While I can deliberately and explicitly think about my self and my own identity, I also have experiences of self that are not necessarily the object of my conscious awareness. For example, as I sit here and type out these words, this, too, is an experience of self, even if I do not think about my own self as I am typing. I cannot, after all, imagine sitting here typing these words without it being an experience for myself, so my self appears to be an irreducible component in the experiential situation.

There are certainly some conversions that involve conscious reflection (see Gelpi) and so-called “intellectual” consideration of spiritual/religious change and transformation, but plainly it is not the case that every convert has his or her self “in mind” (i.e. in a reflective sense) throughout the duration of his conversion experience. Even a convert who is required to attend classes before his conversion is commemorated in a ceremony as someone who is caught up in a longer-term process, even if it lasts only a few weeks or months. He will spend time learning about the religion or spiritual worldview (or even philosophy?) for quite some time without necessarily reflecting upon his own self, even if those considerations of self are in the “background” of whatever he may be learning. Consider also the so-called “spontaneous” convert like St. Paul, to whom we will return in depth in the third chapter, whose conversion is instituted by an event from without. When Paul falls to the ground, blinded, the noema of his experience is not his selfhood. To the contrary Paul is focused at one moment on his lack of vision, on the unembodied voice that he hears in another moment. After the episode when Paul is

led by his colleagues to his destination of Damascus, he reflects on his own identity and the transformation that he has been compelled to make by the miraculous incident. At this time the noema of Paul's experience is the thought of his own self, from his beliefs to his past to his personal worldview. Thus I argue that this transformation is still volitional and judgmental, not just something that "happens" to Paul as if he is a passive vessel, which is to this day one of the dominant interpretations of Paul's story.

While properly understood this phenomenological self can take on several different manifestations, like self-consciousness or self-experience (*Selbsterfahrung*) or even simple, cognition-free activities like breathing or becoming immersed in music. That said, we have to exclude any sort of self that is subtracted out of or removed from my own lived experience. Thus we cannot construe the conversion self in a biological or material sense. In *Ideas* I Husserl indicates that:

The *tree simpliciter*, the physical thing belonging to nature, is nothing less than this *perceived tree as perceived* which, as perceptual sense, inseparably belongs to the perception. The tree simpliciter can burn up, be resolved into its chemical elements, etc. But the sense—the sense of *this* perception, something belonging necessarily to its essence—cannot burn up; it has no chemical elements, no forces, no real properties.⁵⁶

Here Husserl is not endorsing a physicalist or externalist metaphysics, but instead is doing precisely the opposite; he is pointing out that the tree could be damaged or destroyed by fire, and of course it would be possible to have perceptions of this damaging process, but those perceptions themselves are not subject to the laws of physical nature that lend themselves to fire, etc. The object of the perception instead has an immaterial status that cannot be influenced in the same way that the tree can be influenced by fire.

⁵⁶ Ibid., §89, 216 <184>.

It is important, however, that we carefully distinguish the self as intended from the self as object of sensation. Sokolowski points out that the object as intended is not necessarily equivalent with the object as perceived.⁵⁷ While at first it might seem as if there is no difference between the two, in fact there is a significant point of contrast, and it is already evident in one of the examples that Husserl himself provides: the same object, Emperor of Germany, can be intended through various references, from “grandson of Queen Victoria” to “son of the Emperor Frederick III” to any of the other “properties neither named nor described.”⁵⁸ Here the noema is the object phenomenologically considered, in other words, the emperor. It is the emperor to whom I refer with my proposition “grandson of Queen Victoria.” To relate this back to the self at the center of the conversion experience, the intentionality of my mental act is just the reference or aboutness of the act, in other words, my self, whereas the self as noema can be details from my own past, or specifics regarding my beliefs, character, and personality, with the acts themselves taking on the status of noesis.

In his *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl indicates that the noema is a “transcendental clue” to the range of experiences.⁵⁹ He echoes his earlier remarks as he points out the correlation *a priori* between noema and noesis, which is close to his earlier conception of intentionality as the correlation *a priori* between subject and object. It is in grasping, via the reduction, this *a priori* relationship between the noema and noesis that makes possible, via intuition, knowledge of the *eidōs* or essence of the appearance.

We can take the schema of noesis and noema and use the previous phenomenological example to elaborate. With the shark tooth that we analyzed, the sharktooth as meant object is

⁵⁷ Sokolowski, *Introduction*, 59-61.

⁵⁸ Husserl, *LI 5*: §17, 114

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, §23.

our noema, whereas the perception of the tooth is the noesis of the perception. Thus the noesis is situated with respect to its correlative noema (meaning there can be no noesis without corresponding noema). Since the noesis is the intending act, it is the noesis that contributes to sense-bestowal; in other words, the noesis constitutes the meaning of that which is apprehended in intentionality. Without this noesis nothing would have meaning since devoid of consciousness there would be no meaning of which to speak. As Sokolowski points out, we can thank Descartes for the ready confidence that we place in our noeses, the underlying implication of which is the ready distrust that we place in the corresponding noemas, whereby we doubt that we directly engage or know the world, insisting that “an intermediary, a representation” be interpolated between ourselves and the “things outside.”⁶⁰

Now we can “zoom out” from the analysis of the phenomenon at the noesis/noema level and consider the presentation of the object (the self) in light of the phenomenological concept of constitution as it pertains to the transcendental method. In other words, how is the self constituted? There are two distinct approaches via which transcendental phenomenology takes up constitution, referred to by Husserl as the static and the genetic.

Static phenomenology is the term used to refer to the phenomenological study of objects as experienced, with no special regard taken to the temporal constitution of meaning, although this is not to exclude experiences that occur in time, like watching a football match. This method of transcendental phenomenology is the first type that Husserl developed out of the two approaches, exemplified in texts like the *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*.⁶¹ In these texts Husserl’s goal is the

⁶⁰ Sokolowski, *Introduction*, 60.

⁶¹ Husserl, *Ideas I* §37, 75 <109>.

phenomenological apprehension of constitution, achieved via the adoption of the correct philosophical disposition (the phenomenological attitude) and through the implementation of certain phenomenological tools (the *epoché*, eidetic variation, etc.) These tools, employed in the phenomenological attitude after or concomitant with the reduction, enable the transcendental phenomenologist to “pin down” essential insights regarding the constitution of objects as they are constituted in a single “snapshot” of experience.

A brief discussion of the mechanics of constitution is warranted. The constitution of the appearance is facilitated in part by the subject, that is, by and through consciousness, and it is *only* through this involvement on the part of the subject that objects can be encountered as phenomena. The specific way in which an object appears to consciousness, for example, the way in which one regards a tree from a specific perspective and therefore from a certain optical angle, is intelligibly determined by the subject herself, since, after all, aspects of the subject, like where she is standing, influence the very appearance of the tree qua object. In this particular example, if you notice, the simple physical positioning of the perceiving subject takes a role in the overall appearance of the tree, which cannot in one instance be seen from every possible point of view. Husserl calls this property of the phenomenal object its “adumbration” (*Abschattung*).⁶² Here the subject is not constituting the tree by doing something akin to actively creating or constructing the tree as object.⁶³ Rather, the vantage of the subject is playing a small part in the composition

⁶² Ibid., §3, 9 <10>.

⁶³ This is a popular misreading of constitution, where one interprets Husserl to say that consciousness hoists up a world out of nothing like a painter begins a painting with a blank canvas. This misreading is tempting because of how it seems to be more faithful to the phenomenological principle requiring us to refrain from positing external objects which correlate with our perceptions of them and are mind-independent. Moran points out in his *Dictionary* that Eugen Fink, one of Husserl’s assistants and the author of the famous Sixth *Cartesian Meditation*, goes to great lengths to argue that constitution is not a subjective “activity.”

of the appearance, since the object could not appear before consciousness without some specific orientation of view.

But what is here true regarding the way in which an optic orientation can determine the appearance of a phenomenal object before consciousness is applicable to numerous different aspects of subjective constitution. The constitution of a phenomenon is not the result of some sort of “construction” *ex nihilo* on the part of consciousness, but rather, it is the givenness of meaning. No matter what is given in experience, consciousness itself plays a part in the structuration of that which is given. This disclosure not only requires a subject for whom the meaning is constituted but requires the object to permit its own significant appearance, hence any interpretation of constitution as enacted solely on the part of the subject is misguided. For example, the appearance of the aforementioned tree is such that the tree “brings to the table” certain material aspects to its profile (*qua* adumbrations) that allow for the phenomenological subject to view the tree, in contrast to the immaterial aspects of a geometric shape, namely its purely formal properties, which permit one to mathematically intuit the figure.

Yet it is imperative to note that the objects that appear before consciousness are not simply constituted in one fell swoop, but instead are often the product of stratified levels of constitution. The “achievement” of constitution, as Husserl likes to call it, is a complex process that often times is passive instead of active. Husserl stipulates that the experience of the world is the product of intersubjective constitution, comprised of layers, that is responsible for establishing meaning (*Sinn*) before the subject even enters the scene. Consider, for example, the way in which my experience of the world is of an “object” that has been historically constituted, molded on a diachronic level. In the present this same world is synchronically maintained insofar as I can have a sensible conversation about current events with another mind, not to mention

observe the same event together in real-time. Later in his career, when he turns to wider considerations regarding phenomenology, Husserl begins to focus on how various dimensions of phenomenal constitution are composed via “sources” which are “exterior” to the individual.

Indeed if static phenomenology is the analysis of the final constituted object, then genetic phenomenology is the analysis of constitution in an active and dynamic sense, typically over the course of time and in such a manner that transcends individual solipsistic consciousness. In the CM and the *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, Husserl uses the term “genetic phenomenology” to refer to the transcendental ego’s constituted experience of the world and intersubjectivity.⁶⁴ Whereas static phenomenology studies the constitution of intentional objects, genetic phenomenology treats objects as we encounter them in the natural attitude, as wholes, but wholes which are in flux and subject to time. Genetic phenomenology defines the approach of the later Husserl and takes to task historical and time-oriented dimensions of phenomenology, like the experience of intersubjectivity and the “lifeworld.” These domains of experience are never exclusive products of the individual subject but instead are cooperatively constituted in the stream of time.

No phenomenology of conversion can be complete without incorporating the approach of the genetic method, since change and transformation on a personal level is subject to the passage of time and the individual’s active involvement in a lifeworld. In other words there is no possibility for conversion without, first, temporality, but second, the phenomenon of the world.

But in fact the experience of temporality is intersubjective, emphatically so. As Lanei

Rodemeyer puts it:

Intersubjective temporality maintains my own self-experience alongside my experiences of intersubjective horizons, and it projects beyond my “presencing” of consciousness toward other consciousnesses in my experience. It enables my fluid constitution of other subjects, and my

⁶⁴ Husserl, CM §34, 69 <103>.

experience of the world as shared, co-constituted, and mutually experienced in one temporality called world-time. It does not cause my own ego to self-destruct, nor does it disable my ability to reflect or carry out the phenomenological reduction. Instead, intersubjective temporality explains phenomenologically most of my experiences of the world and any experiences of other subjects.⁶⁵

Indeed the experience of conversion is one such experience that would not be possible without the experience of intersubjective temporality. Rodemeyer's argument, following Husserl, is that consciousness, on a primitive level, is what constitutes time, personal identity (the self), and all other experiences, but that consciousness cannot perform such accomplishments without the Other. It is the intersubjective aspect of my experience that grounds many meanings, the result of my identified association with the Other and the world, which occurs on the level of passive synthesis. In a study of conversion this distinction should not be glossed over. Without the co-constituted world, the individual cannot convert in any meaningful sense.

I will conclude with the phenomenological concept of the horizon (*Horizont*), which could have just as easily begun the present exploration of the transcendental method. Indeed the horizon is referenced in the very first section of *Ideas I* where Husserl uses the word to refer to the idea of a general limit encompassing the possible.⁶⁶ There the term is employed with reference to all possible areas of inquiry within the natural (theoretical) attitude but more generally Husserl uses the term to refer to the limits of experience.

But the phenomenological horizon is also akin to the background of the specific object, where the background refers not only to the "surround world" (*Umwelt*) within which the object is encountered, but also the myriad other ways in which the object could be encountered. Put differently, we could state that any given experience implies other possible ways of experiencing the same thing. Consider perception proper, like simple vision. As we saw in our example of

⁶⁵ Husserl, *Intersubjective Temporality*, 197.

⁶⁶ Husserl, *Ideas I* §1, 5 <7>.

static constitution (seeing a tree), whenever you see something in your field of vision, you see it in such a way that other ways of seeing it would be possible, whether from another angle or perspective, or in different lighting, or at a different time of day. You might recognize that your own neighborhood is like this, where it will appear to you in drastically different fashions on the basis of only a minor change in weather or light or even mood.

This open-endedness is a necessary possibility for the very appearance of the object in general. In APS Husserl describes how the horizon is integral to consciousness:

[E]verything that genuinely appears is an appearing thing only by virtue of being intertwined and permeated with an intentional empty horizon, that is, by virtue of being surrounded by a halo of emptiness with respect to appearance. It is an emptiness that is not a nothingness, but an emptiness to be filled out, it is a determinable indeterminacy.⁶⁷

This emptiness is akin to a lack or privation; it is to be completed. But the point here is that its manner of completion is infinitely variable. It follows that there is no object, phenomenologically speaking, which could be experienced in just one way. Thus this open-endedness is essential to the appearing object and with every experience of consciousness comes other possible mods of givenness.

Just as experiences are not only perceptual, so too do horizons surpass that single category; a horizon can be historical, linguistic, cultural, individual, shared, etc. Late in his career these types of horizons would occupy much of Husserl's attention, exemplified in texts like the *Crisis*.⁶⁸ These are the phenomenological horizons that are most relevant for my purposes here, as no conversion can occur without some fundamental reference to the context of the world. In contrast to what is present or immediately given, this horizon determines the scope of possibility. This referential milieu is what makes every conversion possible specifically to the

⁶⁷ Husserl, APS §1, 42 <6>.

⁶⁸ Husserl, *Crisis* §2, 6.

extent that it was also possible *not* to convert, *not* to transform, *not* to change. But even the conversion that is pursued and experienced is one which occurs on the basis of an infinite number of other ways the conversion could have occurred. Similarly the “empty” possibilities of a conversion, which regard that which is not perceived, play a role in the experience of what *is* perceived. If we consider the case of St. Paul, for example, we find that these empty possibilities take on an especially significant role, since it is Paul’s temporary lack of vision and audition of a disembodied voice that take on central importance in his conversion story. Paul has to synthesize his experience in order for him to make the judgment that he is experiencing a Christ phenomenon. But even in more mundane cases of conversion, such as the decision to move from atheism to Catholicism or vice versa, the emptiness of experiential horizons are what ground the actual experience as lived; the experience of converting recedes into the hazy and undefined horizon of the past, not to mention the future.

Merleau-Ponty and the Transcendental Method

It is important to supplement Husserl’s conception of transcendental phenomenology with the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. That said, commentators disagree regarding the extent to which Merleau-Ponty can be properly said to have a “transcendental” phenomenological method. He was instrumental in bringing Husserl’s work to the French language and he is often grouped in with the “classical” school of phenomenologists. While he does significantly diverge from Husserl’s framework and method, as we shall see, his “existential” revision of phenomenology retains aspects of Husserl’s model while at other times his thinking is closer to Heidegger. Thus

there is some debate over how to classify his work, although here I will endorse the transcendental reading of his phenomenology.

Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the transcendental is the subject of debate because, to begin with, he understood phenomenology to be "transcendental" in a different manner than did Husserl. While each phenomenologist is inquiring about the subjective transcendental preconditions of phenomena, for Merleau-Ponty the culmination of the phenomenological reduction is not a transcendental ego, but the manifestation of consciousness as deeply and complexly entangled with the world of the "natural attitude" (wherein Merleau-Ponty locates naturalistic thinking, which for him, *contra* Husserl, has its virtues). The conclusions of phenomenology are therefore qualified in Merleau-Ponty when compared to Husserl, as the former would argue that his own philosophy does not resolve into the underlying contradictions that define Husserl's transcendental approach.

There are myriad methodological differences between the two philosophers but here we will focus on three primary points. First of all, and in continuation of the point regarding transcendental thinking, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological reduction is not identical with the version that is employed in Husserl. Second, he emphasizes the embodied, "lived" dimension of phenomenology—one of the most basic and fundamental dimensions of our experience—to a degree not present in Husserl. Third, Merleau-Ponty incorporates the findings of empirical science into his phenomenology, which Husserl, as a matter of principle, does not do.

To begin, Merleau-Ponty is generally opposed to the idea of "reductive" science and ultimately, he does not use the phenomenological reduction like Husserl, whose version he critiques in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty uses his own reduction to try "to rediscover, along with structure and the understanding of structure, a dimension of being and a

type of knowledge which man forgets in his natural attitude.”⁶⁹ This is not exactly the research agenda of Husserl, for whom the reduction constitutes a path to the domain of pure transcendental experience. Merleau-Ponty is intrigued by that which is prior even to this transcendental subjectivity, which he contrasts with what he calls “the idealist return to consciousness,” itself producing a transcendental subject that is the result of analysis rather than true experience⁷⁰ As he puts it in the *Phenomenology of Perception*:

To return to the things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.⁷¹

Here he is of course repeating Husserl’s slogan, “to the things themselves.”⁷² But for the Merleau-Ponty these in fact are not the same “things themselves” at all, although each writer is using the same expression and a phenomenological method. The two writers understand the object of phenomenology rather differently, both in a teleological sense (*propositum*), in terms of its goals or ends, as well as the object to be studied (*objectum*).

It would be instructive to follow Merleau-Ponty’s line of thinking here. In the sustained critique of the Husserlian model of phenomenology in the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, he stresses that:

The world is there before any possible analysis of mine, and it would be artificial to make it the outcome of a series of syntheses which link, in the first place sensations, then aspects of the object corresponding to different perspectives, when both are nothing but products of analysis, with no sort of prior reality. Analytical reflection believes that it can trace back the course followed by a prior constituting act and arrive, in the ‘inner man’—to use Saint Augustine’s expression—at a constituting power which has always been identical with that inner self.⁷³

⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty, “The Metaphysical in Man,” 92.

⁷⁰ Merleau-Ponty, PP, x.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Husserl, LI, §2, 168.

⁷³ Merleau-Ponty, PP, x-xi.

Indeed it could be fairly argued that for Husserl phenomenology, in both its genetic and static iterations, is conducted upon the world posterior and not prior to analysis, despite Husserl's best attempts to refrain from supplementing what is purely given. Here the problem is not simply that Husserl employs language as part of his descriptive method, since, as Merleau-Ponty recognizes, working around language itself would be impossible. "The real," Merleau-Ponty writes, "has to be described, not constructed or formed. Which means that I cannot put perception into the same category as the syntheses represented by judgments, acts or predications."⁷⁴ Husserl regards perceptions, judgments, memories, and so on, as different types of intentional acts, but in his analysis of perceptions he does not treat them so differently from the more complex case of judgment, which involves volition and reason in a way that pure perception does not.

According to Merleau-Ponty's view, our perceptions of the things themselves are not as equivalent with the analysis of the things, as he suggests is the case in Husserl's thinking. Instead of describing the perception precisely as it is given, which is his goal, Husserl elects to analyze the givenness of the perception, which is of course not the same thing. Merleau-Ponty points out that the result is that, added to the perception itself (*qua* sensation), there is a link that is established to "aspects of the object corresponding to different perspectives, when both are nothing but products of analysis, with no sort of prior reality."⁷⁵ But the issue is that this link is not itself part of givenness. Here Merleau-Ponty is referring to the free variation of an object, whereby, as we saw, the phenomenologist uses her imagination to catalog other possible ways of appearing for the object. This is truly one of the cruxes upholding Husserl's entire method, but Merleau-Ponty takes issue with it.

⁷⁴ Ibid., xi.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Consider this example that we have already considered from Husserl, where he suggests, “Perhaps we begin by fictionally changing the shape or the color of the object quite arbitrarily, keeping identical only its perceptual appearing. [...] We so to speak, shift the actual perception into the realm of non-actualities, the realm of the as-if.”⁷⁶ On Merleau-Ponty’s understanding it is unclear why the phenomenologist would go through this procedure; what is revealed in so doing? As we know, Husserl was trying to pin down the very essence of the appearance/appearing, but the critique focuses on how the essence of the appearing is the result of “synthesis” rather than the description of what is in fact given. He accuses Husserl of trying to find the essence of the world by “looking for what it is as an idea once it has been reduced to a theme or discourse” when what should be done is looking at it “as a fact for us, before any thematization.”⁷⁷ This simple reduction as utilized by Husserl effectively “kills” or flattens the world rather than illuminating it.

As Merleau-Ponty puts it himself, “When I begin to reflect my reflection bears upon an unreflective experience...”⁷⁸ He is implying a distinction between describing and reflecting, where the former is good and is the proper goal, since the latter distorts the phenomenon from the form in which it is purely given. Hence the charge is that Husserl approaches the first moment of reflection in such a way that the pure, unreflective experience is betrayed. Consider for example the place of such concepts as the horizon, adumbration, etc., which are products of analytic reflection rather than pure givens. According to Merleau-Ponty it is undeniable that an object might appear before consciousness in such a way that implies other views thereof, as

⁷⁶ Husserl, CM §34, 60 <Hua I 104>.

⁷⁷ Merleau-Ponty, PP, xvii.

⁷⁸ Ibid., xi. This insight is essentially the starting point for later readings of Husserl enacted by Derrida and then Gasché. See the former’s *Speech and Phenomena* and the latter’s *The Tain of the Mirror*.

depicted via these Husserlian concepts, akin to other ways of experiencing whatever it is, but we have to note that the “other” view is in fact synthetic and not itself given and hence it violates the guiding principles of the Husserlian method. As Merleau-Ponty reminds us in “The Metaphysical in Man,” phenomenological philosophy should describe experience as it is present prior to the wide-ranging and deep-reaching (over)-conceptualization of the philosopher, for whom the temptation to add to the given is too great, all the while he reminds himself that no assumptions are to be made according to the principles of his method.⁷⁹

Rather than take up perception in Husserl’s own sense and use what are understood to be overly discursive methods, Merleau-Ponty relocates perception within a different phenomenological milieu. He takes perception from the narrow technical sense in which it is used in Husserl’s work and expands its limits in every direction. He writes that “perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out and is in fact presupposed by them.”⁸⁰ In other words perception is like a context within which experience can be possible. While this at first sounds less technical than the presentation of perception in Husserl’s writing, and perhaps closer to what Heidegger formulates in *Being and Time*, in fact Merleau-Ponty will proceed from these preliminary considerations toward a thoroughly empirical and scientific approach to perception, phenomenologically considered. Thus while it may be true that, as he says, “perception is not a science of the world,” scientific claims concerning perception, especially at the physiological level, are vital to his program. But as Jack Reynolds notes, the meaning of “perception” in *The Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Primacy of Perception* is actually fairly nuanced and even

⁷⁹ Merleau-Ponty, “The Metaphysical in Man,” 92.

⁸⁰ Merleau-Ponty, PP, xii.

technical, since here perception is not simple vision or even intellection, but instead is an intertwined complex of body and world.⁸¹ It is by dint of this definition of perception that Merleau-Ponty can redefine intentionality from the Husserlian formulation of “consciousness is consciousness of something” into “all consciousness is perceptual.”⁸² Rather than being limited to a conception of perception in a narrow sense, including the likes of the faculty of vision, physical sensation, and mental intuition, Merleau-Ponty expands perception to encompass all fields of experience.

Indeed this is because for Merleau-Ponty our experience of the world is mediated primarily through our embodiment, which serves as the very source of our perception. Merleau-Ponty suggests that it is through our physical embodiment, our “flesh,” that we are inserted into a world whose “closely woven fabric” predates us.⁸³ This world of which we are just a part, he notes, does not await our rationalization before it presents us with phenomena; the “truth” inhabits the world and not the isolated *cogito*, the “purity” of which he will deny.

In question of the *cogito*, the transcendental subject itself, Merleau-Ponty asserts that, “[t]here is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself” (xii). This brings us back to the question of the transcendental reduction in his own phenomenology. It is readily apparent that he critiques the transcendental basis of Husserl’s phenomenology, and we have already shown how he questions the validity of eidetic variation. Furthermore he seems to question the idea of any phenomenological reduction whatsoever when he makes statements like “[t]he most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete

⁸¹ Reynolds, “Maurice Merleau-Ponty,” Internet *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

⁸² Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy of Perception*, 13. In the earlier *Phenomenology* he writes “all consciousness is, in some measure, perceptual consciousness.” Smith 459, Landes 416.

⁸³ Merleau-Ponty, PP, x-xi.

reduction” (xv). He goes on to point that because we are not “absolute mind,” the reduction cannot work; we are “in the world,” caught up in “temporal flux” in such a way that inquiring into the flux is impossible if the goal is to find a “thought which embraces all our thought” (xv). He concludes with a succinct qualification: that the reduction is not a method of idealism but instead of existentialism.

This does not mean that he does not employ the reduction in his own phenomenology. Rather it could be said that he preserves the reduction within specific limits. Indeed the version of the reduction which he uses in his own philosophy is one which re-situates phenomenology in what could be called an existential context. In his famous discussion of the pathology of the medical patient Schneider he actually refers to his descriptions as “existential analysis” (157). The term “existential” is fitting to characterize his work since his phenomenology takes to task experience as bound up with the world itself, rather than the crown achievement of pure transcendental subjectivity, closer to genetic phenomenology than the early-period “static” method that defines the approach in texts like *Ideas*.

Despite this fact Merleau-Ponty is presented here along with Husserl because, while his work treats “existence” more fully than Husserl’s, there remains a transcendental side to his thinking, albeit one that is different. Sebastian Gardner has argued that Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy should be seen as a “contribution to a transcendental theory with metaphysical implications.”⁸⁴ In short this argument claims that the method discovers transcendental (“a priori and necessary”) conditions, namely the “pre-objectivity of perception” that makes possible experience’s “objectual character.”⁸⁵ Thus while the transcendental upshot of his reduction is not

⁸⁴ Gardner, “Merleau-Ponty’s Transcendental Theory of Perception,” 300.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 301.

a pure constituting ego, instead he argues that our “pre-objective perspective” itself takes on this role.⁸⁶

Ultimately Merleau-Ponty suggests that for all of his measures to avoid the isolated *cogito* of Descartes’ philosophy, Husserl himself winds up dividing subject and world, thereby parking transcendental subjectivity in that same problematic view from nowhere which he critiques in the Cartesian philosophy. So too does he fail to avoid the subject-object dichotomy, evinced by his own phenomenology’s replication of the Cartesian split between mind and body. It is contrary to this contradictory schema that Merleau-Ponty first analyzes the body, in *The Structure of Behavior*; and ultimately declares in his own phenomenology “I am my body.”⁸⁷ Citing Gabriel Marcel’s inverted analysis of being versus having, Merleau-Ponty arrives upon this locution after revising the normal expression “I have a body.” Marcel famously maintains that the difference between “being” and “having” can be demonstrated via the exceptional example of the body as something that I both *have* as well as something that I *am*.⁸⁸ Instead of extracting a pure subject from the body, a subject that is in possession of the body *qua* object, Merleau-Ponty collapses the two sides into one dimension. In his philosophy, simply put, our experience makes it abundantly clear that our minds do not “rule” our bodies. Furthermore it is not, contra the rationalist tradition (or intellectualist, as he puts it), via the mind that we come to more fully know the body.

Analyzing the body specifically as we know it through living, rather than as a removed object “out there” in an external world, in his *Phenomenology* he writes that “[o]ne’s own body is in the world just as the heart is in the organism: it continuously breathes life into the visible

⁸⁶ Merleau-Ponty, PP, 81 (Landes).

⁸⁷ Ibid., 151.

⁸⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Being and Having*.

spectacle, animates it and nourishes it from within, and forms a system with it.”⁸⁹ In *The Structure of Behavior* this is the distinction between the so-called objective body as known by science, and the phenomenal body as known through experience.⁹⁰ Hence he manages to avoid the subject-object dichotomy by way of this notion of the lived body which subverts the very opposition of mind versus body, subject versus object, and inside versus outside.

Lastly Merleau-Ponty differs from Husserl in his implementation of the findings of empirical science. His orientation toward science is both critical and conflicted, exemplified in his critique of naive ontological assumptions that are carried out on the part of science, especially, as Landes notes, during the “classical” period, in contrast to his general trust of more modern forms.⁹¹ Merleau-Ponty is particularly intrigued, for example, by the findings of neuropsychology.

The most famous example of scientific work included in Merleau-Ponty’s writing would be the case of Schneider that is sourced in the work of Gelb and Goldstein. Schneider was a German soldier who received a significant traumatic brain injury. What interests Merleau-Ponty about Schneider is how he serves as an atypical case of lived experience via his injury; his difficulty with respect to sensorimotor control demonstrates how the control of the body is mediated via consciousness, thus clarifying “motor intentionality.” Merleau-Ponty’s conclusion, in short, is that when I want to move my arm, I move it without first necessarily thinking about doing so, although I am able to “virtually” imagine such a movement; his empirical examination of Schneider’s consciousness indicates that his inability to take up a virtual orientation with

⁸⁹ Ibid., 209 (Landes).

⁹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Structure of Behavior*, 157.

⁹¹ Landes, *Merleau-Ponty Dictionary*, 202.

respect to his own embodiment correlates with his inability to perform certain movements in the “typical” fashion.

But it has to be noted in closing that for Merleau-Ponty modern science is not in itself a sufficient source of truth. Irrespective of the historical periods in which various forms of science have developed, he questions “the dogmatism of a science that thinks itself capable of absolute and complete knowledge.”⁹² Like Husserl, he suggests that the scientific outlook on nature is still just a mode of consciousness, situating the discipline of phenomenology in a more primordial “space” than the scientific perspective that can only arrive later on.

Eventually I will argue, following Merleau-Ponty, that the body plays an indispensable role in the experience of conversion, and is no less crucial and necessary for conversion than the experience of temporality and the lifeworld.

⁹² Merleau-Ponty, *World of Perception*, 36.

Ch. 3. The Phenomenon of Conversion in the Natural Attitude

The Synthetic Definition Considered in the Natural Attitude

In the first chapter I reviewed a diverse set of definitions for conversion and offered a new, general definition of conversion of my own. The general definition I compiled is the synthetic result of different perspectives on conversion in the human sciences, with disciplines ranging from psychology, to theology, to sociology.¹ While these fields all belong to the human sciences and therefore belong also to the natural attitude, we have not yet considered my holistic definition of conversion in the natural attitude, which is only necessary insofar as all relevant assumptions and presuppositions need to be identified on a preliminary basis so that they can be excluded in the phenomenological attitude. Thus in this chapter I will consider in the natural attitude the ordinary assumptions of my synthetic account of conversion, in preparation for the phenomenological reduction of the phenomenon.

Consciousness in the Natural Attitude

In order to determine the eidetic form of conversion, it will first be necessary to prepare a sketch of conversion as I encounter it in the “natural attitude.”² This is required so that we can be sure to

¹ Significantly, I was not able to consider conversion models from neuroscience, because as of this writing, there are none, although the human propensity for religious belief is an active area of research. See Grafman’s “The Neural Basis of Religious Cognition.” While our innate proclivity for religious belief could be related in a meaningful way to conversion, I cannot draw phenomenological results concerning conversion in particular from theories such as these.

² Husserl, *Ideas I* §27, 51 <48>.

exclude all of the particular and empirical features of conversion experience in the natural attitude in the interest of securing valid phenomenological conclusions regarding the invariant essence of conversion.

I will begin in the natural attitude not with conversion but with consciousness, because the phenomenon of conversion is a modality of consciousness, the empirical nature of which will dictate the specific shape taken by my synthetic conversion model. Insofar as conversion is something that happens for consciousness, an empirical explanation of conversion should include a natural, empirical explanation of consciousness. What is the empirical ego that *lives* conversion as a concrete experience?

In order to answer this, first let us characterize the natural attitude itself.³ In the first volume of *Ideas* Husserl characterizes the natural attitude as the mindset within which the world is “simply there” for me, whether I pay attention to it or not. In the natural attitude my experience of consciousness is as follows:

I am conscious of a world endlessly spread out in space, endlessly becoming and having endlessly become in time. I am conscious of it: that signifies, above, that intuitively I find it immediately, that I experience it. By my seeing, touching, hearing, and so forth, and in the different modes of sensuous perception, corporeal physical things with some spatial distribution or other are *simply there for me*, “*on hand*” in the literal or the figurative sense, whether or not I am particularly heedful of them and busied with them in my considering, thinking, feeling, or willing.⁴

This is the world that I intuitively encounter as I go about my daily life, “living naturally,” as Husserl puts it, but also “naively.”⁵ In this more or less default attitude I take for granted the objective existence of the world and everything in it. Husserl calls this a naive approach to reality specifically because it is pre-phenomenological; I do not realize that upon closer (phenomenological) inspection, the world is not in fact as simple as it appears to be. I essentially

³ David Carr, “The Emergence and Transformation of Husserl’s Concept of World,” 182.

⁴ Husserl, *Ideas* I §27, 51 <48>.

⁵ *Ibid.*, §39, 81 <69>.

just go along with things without questioning what I am experiencing. If I do question things, I do so in such a way that befits the orientation of the natural attitude. In other words if I do question anything, I only question it on a superficial or topic level; I do not question the existence of any of the objects of my experience, even those I “question” (e.g. is the distant shape on the horizon a ship or a landmass?)

Later on Husserl distinguishes this type of thinking as belonging to the “theoretical attitude.”⁶ In the theoretical attitude my experience is “performed or carried out in the function of knowledge.”⁷ In this attitude I might question why someone does something, or ask someone to explain something to me because I am not convinced (e.g. some cutting-edge scientific theory), but these concerns are critical only on a topical level that does not call into question the underlying basis of my own consciousness. Husserl takes the scientific orientation of this attitude as his model for the orientation of the phenomenological attitude, but the natural scientific attitude (within the theoretical attitude) ultimately attempts to eliminate or at least downplay the effects of empirical results deriving from consciousness, namely from the perspective of the perceiver or observer, which is of course impossible, whereas in the phenomenological attitude it is precisely consciousness that is taken up as scientific object.

In fact in the natural attitude and even the natural-scientific attitude (a specific mode of the theoretical attitude) my naive assumptions about the “external” world are accompanied by similar assumptions that regard my own consciousness. When I regard my consciousness in the natural attitude in particular, Husserl says I encounter the cogito, which is my default state of consciousness in this attitude whether I reflect upon it or not. Husserl writes in *Ideas* that:⁸

⁶ Husserl, *Ideas* II §2, 4 <2>.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II §3, 5 <3>.

⁸ Husserl, *Ideas* I §27, 51 <48>.

Living along naturally, I live continually in this fundamental form of “active” [*aktuellen*] living whether, while so living, I state the cogito, whether I am directed “reflectively” to the Ego and the cogitare. If I am directed to them, a new cogito is alive, one that, for its part, is not reflected on and thus is not objective for me.⁹

The cogito, or “I think” is whatever my natural consciousness is presently occupied with as I go about living. This ordinary, natural consciousness is capable of reflection, as Husserl points out, but it is not phenomenological reflection (which involves the eidetic, transcendental tools of the phenomenological method). Most of the time this natural consciousness just occupies itself with experiencing the world through various different sorts of experience, from “outer” senses to “inner” thoughts. As these various experiences are given to me, I accept them at face value.

When I *do* reflect on my “self” in the natural attitude, typically I reflect on my self as an object.¹⁰ As I continue my sketch of consciousness in the natural attitude, I take note of the fact that there are many ways in which I encounter this “objective” or “objectified” self in reflection. For example I can reflect upon my material appearance in a mirror, or I can reflect on my own personality or the “way I am like” in the present moment, or I can reflect on the idea of who I “was” in the past. Notice that all of these considerations are concerned with things that I assume to exist. In all of these cases my intentionality is focused upon my self as if it is an object, whether I regard my self in an embodied material sense or in a more abstract, propositional sense, exemplified in something like the thought that “I am a good friend.” In all of these examples I am experiencing myself as I am some sort of separate “thing.”

I also observe even in the natural attitude that I understand my experience to be distinct from the world—but not in a phenomenological sense. In fact in the natural attitude my essential error is precisely the fact that I regard my consciousness as *too* distinct and divorced from the

⁹ Ibid., §28, 54 <50>.

¹⁰ This the type of self-consciousness that Kant refers to as “empirical.” CPR, B132.

“external” world of objects. Indeed in the natural attitude I take the world to be a totally separate “thing” from my own consciousness, something that my consciousness encounters in a truly objective, mind-independent sense.

In short, the world is just “there” for me as I go about living my daily life. In this attitude I take it that the world is there whether I am or not, or as Husserl puts it, I take the “factual” existence of the world for granted.¹¹ This is what he refers to as the “general positing” of the world. I ordinarily posit the matter-of-fact existence of the world as I go about living in the natural mindset. The fact that Husserl terms this a “positing” cannot be glossed over; my general, uncritical sense that the world “exists” is nothing more than an ordinary assumption. Without this assumption it would be difficult to participate in human life. I do not doubt the real existence of the things that I encounter in the world, and I do not view my own mental life with a critical orientation. It is hard to imagine how I might ever experience a conversion if not for the assumption that the world exists!

Just as my natural consciousness conceives of the “external” world at its face value, which is to say, as a mind-independent thing, the same consciousness does not critically regard its own analytic structure. Without a doubt I can think about thinking, but this does not necessarily involve the phenomenological method; after all, nearly every philosopher from the course of history will examine thought in some way, shape, or form, but until the work of Kant, Husserl, and a few others, critically assessing consciousness as “phenomenon” was an unknown path. This does not mean that all of these philosophers looked at consciousness with the transcendental framework of Husserl, Kant, and others. Indeed in the natural attitude my experience of consciousness is such that it I am capable of reflecting upon my own experience

¹¹ Husserl, *Ideas I* §30, 56 <52>.

but without transcending my own perspective and determining the essence and limits of that conscious perspective. The deeper regard that I can take up in the natural attitude is certainly not equivalent with the phenomenological perspective. As Husserl puts it in *Ideas*, this deeper regard *qua* “self-observation” is not the same as phenomenological reflection. The former belongs to psychology and inquires into the “range and the essentially necessary cognitive value of *existential* findings which give expression to the givenness of our (human) experiences of the internal—we therefore ask about psychological method.”¹² In other words the psychologist concerns himself with the assessment and evaluation of *actual* mental phenomena. Thus this particular sort of analytic approach will always confine itself to the concrete. Phenomenology, by contrast, inquires into the “essentially necessary possibility and range of *essential* findings which, on the ground of pure reflection, should concern mental processes as mental processes with respect to their own being free from natural apperception.”¹³ Husserl is pointing out that the difference between the psychological method and the phenomenological method is that the latter transcends the concrete and existential and focuses to the contrary on that which is essential, necessary, and possible.

Therefore we can see how it is that when I consider my “self” as an abstraction of deeper regard in the natural or theoretical attitudes, this abstracted self is not my “self” as conscious phenomenon *per se*, nor my self as the stream of my mental life *eo ipso*; these considerations belong to the phenomenological attitude. Instead the “deeper” self in these attitudes is the self that I am always “living,” not only in terms of “sensuous perception” but also the field of

¹² *Ibid.*, §79, 81 <152>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

intuition.¹⁴ This is the experience of self that is simply “given” to me, “prior to any ‘theory.’”¹⁵ This self, like the larger world, belongs to the general positing associated with the natural attitude and encompasses not only the so-called external world but also the very stream of my own consciousness; I do not critically approach either phenomenon. Certainly the failure to regard consciousness as origin of knowledge is epistemologically problematic, and the end result of such a failure is a system of scientific knowing that rests on a fundamentally insecure foundation. As I go about my everyday life, though, this is not a problem, nor is this a problem for the experience of conversion.

Conversion in the Natural Attitude

In the natural attitude I understand that conversion is always something that happens for the self, whether on the basis of a change in my identity or a shift in my role.¹⁶ In this attitude I take for granted various aspects of my selfhood the likes of which include my individual and family history, my personality, my mannerisms, my temperament, my drives, my hopes and desires, my sense of personal purpose, my way of speaking, my way of acting, my idea of my self, my philosophical beliefs, my spiritual beliefs, my political beliefs, my body, and my general understanding of my appearance to myself and to the Other. I can experience a meaningful conversion in any number of these “categories” of selfhood, but in the natural attitude I

¹⁴ Husserl, *Ideas I* §27, 51 <48>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, §30, 56 <52>.

¹⁶ To experience a change in identity is not to annul every previous aspect of identity. Here I am using the concept of “identity” to refer to an existentially significant idea of one’s self. An idea is existentially significant if it contributes to the subject’s sense of who they “are.” It is clear that an idea like this can only belong to the natural attitude.

presuppose that all of these ideas and beliefs correspond to concrete actualities in the “real” and “external” world.

This is because my natural, empirical experience of conversion is probably predicated on at least a few metaphysical and ontological assumptions. First, I assume that I exist. Whether I am someone who is pursuing a conversion with intent, or someone who is subject to an event that brings about a conversion, I make the assumption that I exist, since if I did not, then there would be no one to convert. Second, I assume that the world exists. This is the world within which I convert. Whether my conversion is something that occurs on the basis of a choice or a spontaneous event, the resulting change in my identity or role can only make sense if there is a world as a “backdrop” against which my sense of identity or role is given sense. As we have seen, I do not have to be consciously aware of the fact that I have converted, but in order for a conversion to have occurred (whether I know it or not), I have to be living naturally in the world.

If my conversion is one involving organized religion, then the experience likely involves explicit beliefs about the underlying “nature” of the world. These beliefs obviously presuppose the existence of the world. Often these beliefs entail metaphysical or ontological positions about the way things really are. But the same is true for many other types of conversions. A philosophical or political conversion (which is a change in identity or role on the basis of a shift in philosophical or political beliefs, meaning that it is *not* a conversion every time I change my mind about some little issue here or there, but that it *is* a conversion if I “become” a Marxist or a Platonist or even a nihilist) would by definition include essential beliefs about the world, beliefs which would require (i.e. presuppose) that the world exists in the first place. What we mean when we say the world “exists” might take on different manifestations, epitomized by the very different perspectives of a Thomist and a Kantian.

What about more general “moral” conversions, such as the archetypal “change of heart” from a life of wickedness to a life of righteousness and justice? A conversion such as this may lack a formal belief system (whether religious, spiritual, philosophical, or political) but it still hinges upon a specific ontological orientation: the world exists, and so do I.

Thus, it is apparent that the experience of conversion is something that I regard with no real phenomenological scrutiny in the natural attitude, since such scrutiny would compel me to reconsider my naive assumptions about the world and the ‘I.’ That said, this does not mean that I cannot have beliefs about the *value* of conversion; the point is that these potential beliefs do not critically concern the conversion phenomenon at the level of consciousness. If I have any beliefs about the value of conversion, they most likely regard metaphysical claims that a personal conversion may (or may not) entail. For example, I may be of the mind that converting to Christianity is a “waste of time,” because the religion requires one to hold beliefs that I myself cannot personally hold (i.e., ‘God exists and has certain knowable properties.’) A similar situation could hold for political and philosophical ideologies that offer essential explanations for matters in the natural world.

It seems that the experience of conversion *must* occur in the natural attitude, because it entails a change in an individual’s identity or role, which are concepts that belong to the natural (or scientific) attitude and not the phenomenological attitude. How can I have an idea of my own identity without naively presupposing that “I” exist? How can I defend any account of role without the concept of the world? If I take up the imaginative perspective of St. Paul as he drops to the ground, it seems that the moment I bracket the “universal thesis” that holds that the world and the things in it *exist*, myself included, I disrupt the continuation of the conversion experience. In short, I can discern that because conversion is experienced in the natural attitude, I

cannot concomitantly experience a conversion as I employ the phenomenological method. Critically I note that phenomenology forces me to bracket off aspects of the world that conversion seems to *require*.

For example, my decision to convert from Judaism to Catholicism entails numerous existential and ontological presuppositions, not only about the way the world “is,” but also *that* the world “is.” Would it even be possible for me to experience the conversion phenomenon without holding at least some naive metaphysical assumptions about the existence of a so-called “objective” world? Perhaps the one sort of conversion that would seem to operate *sans* such assumptions would be a “conversion” to strict solipsism, and it must be admitted that calling such a change in belief a “conversion” would be strange indeed. But even a strange “conversion” like that does not require the phenomenological method—the solipsist, after all, is still making assumptions about the nature of his *own* perspective. In the phenomenological method he would be afforded no such move.

When we consider conversions as events in the third person, we sometimes think of them as disruptive or disorienting; in such cases the conversion “shatters” the subject’s very Being and replaces it with something “new.” Without a doubt this can feel like a crisis. But on the phenomenological level a conversion does not have to be so dramatic, and in fact it seems likely that most conversions are of a milder variety. What is surprising is that the change, irrespective of its intensity, can occur without the subject’s awareness that a life-altering change occurred. In the case of the gradual, continuous conversion, I may not realize that my self has changed until late in my experience of the process; indeed I am not always aware of this change until later in time. This can also occur when an abrupt event has an impact on me, but not in such a way that I realize the significance of the effect. It may be the case that I only realize retrospectively that the

change occurred. If I am raised to be religious or spiritual from a very young age, then I may never notice my own conversion without being prompted to reflect on the specific subject.

While it is my self that changes and is changed, I do not always directly “choose” this change. Indeed I can experience conversion without actively seeking out such a phenomenon. This means that sometimes, causes external to my self are what bring about changes internal to my self. I can choose to convert in the world, or the world can affect me in such a way that I am converted by the world. When my conversion is enacted through the occurrence of an event, sometimes I seek out this event deliberately, while at other times, the event is extemporaneous, and it spontaneously enters the trajectory of my existence.

When my self shifts or changes, sometimes it is because I am grasping a new personal identity. I am redefining for myself that person whom I consider myself to be. Other times I can experience this shift without a change in my underlying identity. In these cases what shifts is my sense of role. While I can experience a conversion in my understanding of my role without a corresponding conversion of identity, typically when I do convert in identity, a change in role follows. In other words a shift in identity entails a shift in role, but the converse is not true; a role change does not necessarily include a change in identity, as the concept was formulated specifically in order to identify instances of self-understanding which are procedural and occupational but not reflective of any identity change.

In sum in the natural attitude the experience of conversion is a non-critical phenomenon that I (can) encounter as I go about the “active living” of my life. Identity and role are concepts that belong to the empirical world; therefore conversion is something that occurs for the empirical ego (although, once again, this does not mean that the subject is *aware* of the change to the empirical ego). While I do not (and cannot) consider the conversion at its most essential

phenomenological level when (or as) I experience a conversion firsthand, because conversion requires either identity or role (each of which require empirical self and world), it is in considering the phenomenon of conversion at the phenomenological level that its essential and necessary possibilities actually come to light.

Three Modalities of Conscious Experience in the Natural Attitude

We can see that there are three different classes or modalities of experience in the consciousness of the natural attitude as conceived by Husserl. If we consider this natural consciousness phenomenologically, we can discern significant differences among these three modalities, despite the fact that Husserl presents the natural attitude as somewhat homogeneous in constitution, at least in the first two books of *Ideas*, insofar as the variegated experiences that belong to the natural attitude can all be grouped under that single heading. While he has reasons for this, he actually does identify several important key distinctions regarding natural consciousness. Here I want to phenomenologically thematize these distinctions because they hold significant implications with respect to the consciousness of conversion.

Husserl's clearest account of these differences in the natural attitude is articulated in the first book of *Ideas*:

I can let my attention wander away from the writing table which was just now seen and noticed, out through the unseen parts of the room which are behind my back, to the verandah, into the garden, to the children in the arbor, etc., to all the Objects I directly "know of" as being there and here in the surroundings of which there is also consciousness—a "knowing of them" which involves no conceptual thinking, and which changes into a clear intuiting only with the advertence of attention, and even then only partially and for the most part very imperfectly.¹⁷

¹⁷ Husserl, *Ideas* I §27, 52 <49>.

Notice how Husserl describes three distinct conscious modalities here. The most basic and essential modality is my “baseline” consciousness, which is flowing so long as I am awake (and, it seems, as I dream.) According to Husserl this is a sort of consciousness that does not involve thinking with concepts (but can involve other sorts of “thinking” along the lines of a rationalist definition of the activity) nor is this consciousness marked by clear intuiting via my attention. Clearly this is related to the consciousness that Husserl describes as “simply there” or “immediately there.”¹⁸ At the most fundamental level, this is a pre-reflective modality of consciousness, although, as we shall see, there are at least two different types of pre-reflective consciousness. This is the domain to which the transcendental ego belongs, which cannot be determined in the natural attitude, but is made clear via the reduction of the phenomenological method. This domain of consciousness, as the manifold stream of “things” that are “present as actualities in my field of intuition even when I do not heed them,” is arguably undifferentiated because the constituent structures of the experience are not individually acknowledged by me.¹⁹ Husserl even goes so far as to state that this phenomenal field includes that which is “co-present” Consider, for example, how I might “mindlessly” gaze out the window of a train as I ride inside of it. This example works particularly well because even if I did make the effort to “process” the appearances in my sensory field, I would struggle to do so, due to the velocity differential—I am traveling quickly and everything in the world outside of the train is standing still. This backdrop factors into every experience that I have and is given to me in the background even when I am focused in a reflective act. Furthermore, without this background I would have nothing to intentionally attend to in the first place; this phenomenological background is a supportive

¹⁸ Ibid. §27, 51 <48>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

stratum that makes possible the other sorts of experience. Nevertheless this background aspect of consciousness must be considered to be a sort of “experience” despite the fact that I am not directly “conscious” of it in a reflective sense. Here it is useful to again bring in the concept of intentionality: in the first modality of conscious experience in the natural attitude, I do not reflect on the contents of my experience, but the experience still has the requisite “aboutness” of intentionality, although in such a way that is devoid of my attention, which would furnish the experience with “clear intuiting.”

The second phenomenological modality is also pre-reflective, but in this modality, I am more engaged with and occupied by the “world”—I give the phenomenon my attention.” In short this is the level of consciousness that involves a more focused and attentive perceiver, but no reflection. For example, if I am a spectator at an automobile race, as I watch the vehicles navigate through the twists and turns of the circuit, I am actively perceiving events (as object) as they unfold in time. Perhaps I focus upon a single car and follow it along with my eyes. In the background of this experience is the same undifferentiated background from the first modality. Even as I watch the race there are what Husserl calls co-present phenomenal features in my sensory field that come and go, entering the horizon of my experience at one moment, and then dropping out of my experience the next. The clouds that float by in the sky are an example of that sort of background, as well as what is likely only a vague awareness of the outdoor temperature (unless it is very cold or very hot). This modality is also (phenomenologically) pre-reflective despite the fact that it differs markedly from the baseline modality of consciousness. Many conversions that occur within the limits of established, organized religion occur with significant activity in this modality of consciousness. These conversions often involve important

events that are the object of conscious awareness and mindfulness, although they are not necessarily fully reflective.

The third type of experience is reflective. When I reflect, I am conscious not of a certain sensuous object or even abstract proposition but rather via my reflection I focus my experience *on* experience of the object itself, whether it is a material object that I see or a proposition that I am believing or considering. Thus essentially superimposed upon the first two strata of my experience to the extent that reflection takes as its object the objectified consciousness of the second modality which is itself only possible by way of the non-objectified primary modality. At the automobile race I enter this modality of consciousness when my conscious intention is itself directed in a self-conscious way toward the experience of being at the race, of following a vehicle with my eyes, of the various sounds and smells which are phenomenologically given to me as I sit and watch the event unfold. In contradistinction to the first two modalities of conscious experience, this modality requires mindful volition from me. I do not accidentally reflect upon something, although it might be possible that I can enter the reflective mindset without realizing it, as when my mind “drifts off” in its own direction. In the case of conversion, that which occurs on the reflective level is perhaps the most meaningful to the extent that it is the most volitional and contemplative. That said, there is an argument to be made for the opposite end of the spectrum, where a conversion occurs so subtly in the background of consciousness that one does not even notice that it has occurred until after the fact. After all, this conversion occurs so automatically and smoothly so as to be fairly construed as simply natural. It is the more intellectual sort of conversion that is perhaps more tenuous since it follows the essentially arbitrary meanderings of the conscious mind.

Two phenomenological modalities lie beyond these three modalities of the natural attitude. Beyond the third, reflective modality of consciousness lies the domain of free imaginative variation, which Husserl also refers to as “eidetic variation.” If reflective consciousness involves the consideration of some specific mental act as it is concretely experienced, then it is limited *de jure* to the sphere of empirical consciousness, whereas eidetic consciousness entails the expanded consciousness of the act’s essence or form (*eidōs*) as it surpasses the empirical and encompasses all of its fundamental possibilities. In other words, the reflection inherent in eidetic variation takes a specific conscious experience and delineates all of its possible but necessary appearances or manifestations.

We cannot stop there. Beyond even eidetic consciousness there is the domain of scientific inquiry the object of which is the eidetic essence of experience. If the eidetic variation can afford us the opportunity to determine the essential features of any given conscious act, then it is phenomenology that can offer to us a critical discipline that is equipped to assess scientifically the eidetic endeavor in the first place. The questions that phenomenology can pose for conversion in general are not oriented towards the empirical corroboration of religious, spiritual, or metaphysical claims about the underlying nature of self and reality, but instead, they inquire into the experiential validity of the conversion experience in the first place. Therefore, even if conversion ultimately belongs to the empirical ego, as I have argued, a phenomenological model of conversion has to analyze this empirical transformation at the level of its constitution.

Ch. 4. Self and Consciousness in the Phenomenological Attitude

What Is the Self? A Phenomenological Account

In the natural attitude I understand that when I say that I have converted, this means that my “self” is changed, or has changed.¹ In the last chapter I showed that this change in self occurs for the empirical ego. But how is the empirical ego *constituted*?

Essentially the question regards the nature of the “self,” and as we know, there are many answers to this question since it is one of the oldest and most basic—but also most perplexing—philosophical questions. Here, though, I am interested in a phenomenological answer to the “self” question, meaning that I will focus on the eidetic aspects of the self instead of the abstract theoretical consideration thereof. A phenomenological account of selfhood can offer something that cannot be matched by any of the above examples from the history of western philosophy: it refocuses the inquiry upon the essential features of the lived experience of the self-phenomenon.² It is indubitable that an analysis of the actual lived experience of selfhood can answer the selfhood question on a surer, more “scientific” foundation than what can be offered by traditional pre-phenomenological approaches.³

As we have seen, Husserl holds that the phenomenon of consciousness takes on many different manifestations in the natural attitude, the “actual living” that Husserl references in *Ideas*

¹ A change in self that occurs at various levels of awareness.

² As we have noted, this self (or ego) cannot be confused with the empirical ego.

³ Here I suggest that both metaphysics and ontology are “traditional” pre-phenomenological approaches. By metaphysics I refer to the speculative mode of inquiry As Husserl maintains in “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” by situating its basis in “consciousness itself” any science can secure its own phenomenological validity on the most “scientific” of grounds. See p. 259 <301>.

§28. But in addition to my propositional thoughts my consciousness also encompasses many different types of experience, including sense perception, memory, fantasy, emotion, embodiment, willing, desire, and so on. Husserl makes it very clear that all of these “complexes of my manifoldly changing spontaneities of consciousness” can and *should* be grouped under the heading of *cogitare*.⁴ We need to determine what it is that these various *cogitationes* have in common, looking beyond their empirical specificity. As Husserl poses the question in *Ideas*, “*What can remain, if the whole world, including ourselves with all our cogitare, is excluded?*”⁵ If there is some “thing” that remains, then it surely is of a different status than the empirical contents of my experience.

In order to answer this question and determine the eidetic structure of consciousness it is first necessary to radically alter my perspective and enter the phenomenological attitude. I have to leave behind the natural attitude and all of the ordinary assumptions that the attitude involves. The “thing that converts, the “self,” now has to be considered as a phenomenological structure. Thus all aspects of the empirical self (or ego) immediately fall away. A new, phenomenological “self” (if by ‘self’ we mean pure consciousness) is revealed in the phenomenological attitude; it is the very givenness *of* consciousness itself. Thus, the remainder that persists after we bracket off the various empirical *cogitare* is the general presence or givenness of consciousness: “consciousness has, in itself, a being of its own which in its own absolute essence, is not touched by the phenomenological exclusion.”⁶ This means that there is an aspect of my consciousness

⁴ Husserl, *Ideas I* §28, 53 <50>.

⁵ *Ibid.*, §33, 63 <58>. In the Copy A version of *Ideas I*, Husserl puts it thus: “What can still be posited as being if the worldly All, the All of reality, remains parenthesized?” Here it is most obvious that the phenomenological method is a method that operates by way of a procedure that is partly “negative,” at least in the sense that its conclusions are ultimately ascertained via the sustained suspension of the majority of the empirical beliefs that I entertain in the natural attitude.

⁶ Husserl, *Ideas I*, §33, 65 <59>.

that endures even after I bracket the existence of every correlate of my conscious acts. This enduring aspect has a certain sensuousness in and of itself; there is a qualitative “way” that my consciousness *is*. This is the immediate givenness of consciousness as a general phenomenon.

This givenness is the constituted product of what Husserl terms “pure” or “transcendental” consciousness starting with his *Ideas*. We can see that this is what remains and therefore is “revealed” as “phenomenological residuum” after the enactment of the *epoché*.⁷ As something that is “revealed” this transcendental ego is technically a sort of phenomenon, but it is very different from other phenomena insofar as it is not directly “given” but instead the very presupposition of givenness.⁸ Here we will take it that this is the most primitive stratum of the “self,” phenomenologically understood, which is to say, non-empirically. Husserl writes:

The *epoché* can also be said to be the radical and universal method by which I apprehend myself purely: as Ego, and with my own pure conscious life, in and by which the entire Objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me. Anything belonging to the world, any spatiotemporal being, exists for me—that is to say, is accepted by me—in that I experience it, perceive it, remember it, think of it somehow, judge about it, value it, desire it, or the like.⁹

My experience of the “I am” is a transcendental experience of self, and it is this self that makes possible my experience of the world. It is this self that is oriented with objects and things according to the law of intentionality. This is the phenomenological self, a consciousness that grounds my experience of the world in addition to my experience of self.

While in the passage quoted above it may seem as if Husserl is situating empirical consciousness in the phenomenological stratum of experience, that would be a misreading based on what we know distinguishes phenomenological consciousness from psychological “self-observation” and ordinary “actual living” as an empirical ego; in the phenomenological attitude

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Breazu, “The Question of Violence,” 164.

⁹ Husserl, CM §8, 21 <60>.

what is significant is the *mineness* of the perceptions and experiences through which I encounter the supposedly “objective” world, such that this world really is not so objective after all.¹⁰ Recall that the significance of this is that in the natural attitude the world is naively understood to be simply “there” but I do not view it as an “achievement” of my own consciousness. It is the apodictic and immediate givenness of this self, as phenomenological Ego, that makes it possible for phenomena to appear *for* me. As we have seen already, some commentators have suggested that this forces Husserl to deny outright the existence of a “natural” mind independent world (cf Meillassoux), but this sort of critique misinterprets the fundamental orientation of classical phenomenology: the world as phenomenon originates, by definition, in consciousness—without consciousness, there is no phenomenon as such. Is there a non-phenomenal world? Husserl’s phenomenology will not and cannot answer that question.¹¹

To the contrary what we can be quite sure of is that, in the phenomenological attitude, this pure consciousness that I apprehend, through which the world is constituted for me, is marked by what appears to be a dual nature. Husserl indicates that:

If we retain a pure Ego as residuum after our phenomenological exclusion of the world and of the empirical subjectivity included in it (and an essentially different pure Ego for each stream of mental processes), then there is presented in the case of that Ego a transcendency of a peculiar kind—one which is not constituted—a *transcendancy within immanency*.¹²

What Husserl is saying is that the pure ego is “alive” in every immanent conscious moment. But all of these conscious moments are part of a larger, single “stream of mental processes” that is itself constituted by the very same ego. This is why the ego transcends the individual, immanent moments of conscious subjectivity.

¹⁰ Husserl’s critics challenged him to consider the phenomenon of the world more fully after *Ideas* I was interpreted to be an account of an isolating idealism. Heidegger is perhaps the best example of such a challenger.

¹¹ Strictly speaking the question seems to invoke a pseudo-problem in Wittgenstein’s sense.

¹² Husserl, *Ideas* I §57, 133 <109>.

Thus we can see how on the phenomenological level an entirely new terrain emerges. I note that all of the myriad experiences that I consider to be part of my essential selfhood, whether as identity or role, are mapped upon the more fundamental aspect of my Being that is my transcendental ego's unification of experience. This transcendental self is non-objectified and non-reflective and therefore becomes something different as soon as it is considered as if it is an "object." Like Kant's conditional transcendental ego, it seems to me that this self *qua* ego is also a necessary thing for experience, but via the phenomenological reduction I am afforded an analytic "view" of the phenomenon the likes of which Kant could not have imagined. There is no experience that I can have that lacks this essential component of experience; this ego is the ubiquitous feature of every possible consciousness.

It could be objected that this ego is in fact only a modality that consciousness deceptively hoists up as a stable omnipresent feature of experience. For example, what can we say about the phenomenon of deep dreamless sleep? While I am not consciously aware during this experience, it is still an experience, is it not? The truth is that while we must grant that this sort of sleep is an experience, it is only retroactively identified as such. I can only infer indirectly that I have had this experience *after it has occurred*. It is countersensical to speculate that the deep sleep is experienced as it occurs, since deep sleep is by definition a state of rest that involves no experience, no appearance of consciousness whatsoever. It is only the transcendental ego that is able to make the inference that what must have occurred during the episode of dreamless sleep *was* dreamless sleep in the first place. Thus a closer inspection of this sort of objection reveals that it ultimately only serves to reinforce the point that it purported to contest.

But one problem is that beyond grasping the givenness of its appearance subsequent to the reduction, it is difficult to say much more about this ego. It is on the subjective end of my experience, but it is not itself an experience *per se*, despite the fact that it appears:

After carrying out this reduction we shall not encounter the pure Ego anywhere in the flux of manifold mental process which remains as a transcendental residuum—neither as one mental process among others, nor as strictly a part of a mental process, arising and then disappearing with the mental process of which it is a part. The Ego seems to be there continually, indeed, necessarily, and this continualness is obviously not that of a stupidly persistent mental process, a “fixed idea.” Instead, the Ego belongs to each coming and going mental process; its “regard” is directed “through” each actional cogito to the objective something. This ray of regard changes from one cogito to the next, shooting forth anew with each new cogito and vanishing with it. The Ego, however, is something identical. [. . .] [I]t [the ego] *cannot in any sense be a really inherent part or moment* of the mental processes themselves.¹³

Thus the ego occupies a rather unique place in Husserl’s phenomenology. It is, after all, what is left behind qua “phenomenological residuum” is what essentially makes the entire phenomenological method possible; it is via the *epoche* and the resulting residuum that “‘pure’ consciousness, and subsequently the whole phenomenological region” are made accessible.¹⁴ Despite the fact that the transcendental ego cannot be directly experienced in isolation, it is sedimented in every possible experience and it appears to me. It is at once the foundation of subject as well as object. Indeed this is one of the reasons why Husserl elects to describe it as at once both immanent and transcendent.

It is the transcendental ego that carries out the objectifying act in virtue of which consciousness can move from one *cogito* to another. This transcendental ego always appears to me as inextricably bound to some mental process. It is the transcendental ego’s status as linked to, but not identical with, mental processes that compels Husserl to relate the ego itself to a larger structure that he refers to as the “ego pole.”¹⁵ We can see Husserl elaborate on this concept,

¹³ Ibid., §57, 132 <109>.

¹⁴ Ibid., §33, 66 <59>.

¹⁵ Husserl, CM §31, 66 <100>.

absent from the earlier *Ideas*, in his *Cartesian Meditations*, where he indicates that it is the ego pole that is *executor* of intentionality:

The ego is himself existent *for himself* in continuous evidence; thus, in himself, he is *continuously constituting himself as existing*. Heretofore we have touched on only one side of this self-constitution, we have looked at only the *flowing cogito*. The ego grasps himself not only as a flowing life but also as *I*, who live this and that subjective process, who live through this and that cogito, *as the same*. Since we were busied up to now with the intentional relation of consciousness to object, cogito to cogitatum, only that syntheses stood out for us which “polarizes” the multiplicities of actual and possible consciousness toward identical objects, according in relation to *objects as poles*, synthetic unities. Now we encounter a second polarization, a *second kind of synthesis*, which embraces all the particular multiplicities of *cogitationes* collectively and in its own manner, namely as belonging to the identical Ego, who, *as the active and affected subject of consciousness*, lives in all processes of consciousness and is related, *through* them, to all object-poles.¹⁶

Here Husserl again describes the ‘I’ that maintains a sense of identity through the flow of time.

But this time Husserl elaborates more completely on the nature of this temporal ‘I.’ All relations to given objects are linked to this ego pole, which Husserl points out is itself never empty (as in Kant) but is to the contrary always marked by content, as Husserl puts it, “determined by. . . [its] abiding *habitus* or state.”¹⁷ The ‘I’ has a personal identity, in other words. The identity is constituted by the various actions and beliefs of the ‘I’. These actions and beliefs leave behind a trace or “sedimentation” the result of which is the ongoing development of the transcendental ego. The *habitus* or state is the transcendental generation that results from my acts and behaviors, via which I take on “abiding propert[ies]” that leave their mark behind¹⁸ But it is certainly not the case that I have to constantly and continuously “fill” immanent time with mental processes that maintain or even just reinforce my *habitus*. This is why the term “sedimentation” is used by Husserl to describe the way in which bits of “knowledge stemming from previous thought-

¹⁶ Husserl, CM §31, 66 <100>.

¹⁷ Ibid., §32, 67 <101>.

¹⁸ Ibid., §31, 66 <100>.

activity adhere to what is in each case actually experienced.”¹⁹ The transcendental ego is thus determined by the effects of sedimentation with no conscious involvement from me.²⁰ In other words, I do not have to resolve to keep existing in order for my transcendental ego to carry on. Husserl indicates that the ego itself works the same way—it is related to the “stream of subjective processes” but not equivalent therewith.²¹ It is apparent how such a situation lends itself to the conceptualization of a “transcendancy within immanency.” At once the transcendental ego surpasses the immanent experience of consciousness, at the same time that it is manifest, in a limited sense, in those same immanent moments. Therefore, for Husserl, the transcendental ego is, rather paradoxically, what grounds my *concrete* existence.²² In the next section I will examine more closely the technical details concerning the constitution of consciousness on the basis of one interpretation of synthesis.

The “Backward Reference” Interpretation of the Synthesis of Consciousness

All of this is relevant for our present purpose to the extent that we have examined conversion as a phenomenon that occurs at the level of the empirical ego. Until now we have not been able to link the general conversion experience, which occurs on an empirical basis, to the essential phenomenological processes that actually make possible the empirical transformation. The relationship between these two levels of experience is starting to become clearer; while conversion occurs at the level of the empirical ego, it can only do so on the basis of the ongoing

¹⁹ Husserl, *Phenomenological Psychology*, 42 <57>.

²⁰ This is a major point of similarity between Husserl’s phenomenology and Freud’s psychoanalysis.

²¹ Husserl, CM §32, 67 <101>.

²² Carr, “Kant, Husserl, and the Non-Empirical Ego,” 687.

interpretive nature of consciousness at the transcendental level.²³ This “interpretive consciousness” is self-constituting over the course of time, and without this constitutive role played by the transcendental ego, there could be no conversion.

So how exactly does this interpretive consciousness operate? Or rather, how does it sustain itself? Husserl was exploring this aspect of consciousness even in his earliest published writings, including the *Logical Investigations*.²⁴ There and elsewhere the term that Husserl uses for this activity is “synthesis.” Lampert calls Husserl’s synthesis a “self-propelling dynamic of interpretive consciousness dominated by systems of forward and backward reference.”²⁵ This is an essentially logical endeavor; in short consciousness constitutes and sustains itself by way of relating its meanings and intuitions, *qua* individuals or particulars, to universals.²⁶ Without such objects that hold intuited meanings that surpass the limits of their own concrete presentation, consciousness would not be able to make much sense of the world.

On the empirical level there are several distinct ways in which this reference can occur, although I will not take up their exegesis here. On the phenomenological level though, Husserl stipulates that the reference occurs on an ideal (therefore not concrete) basis:

[W]e are dealing with *the acts in which general names achieve their direct relation to specific unities*, and also with the acts which belong with these names in their attributive or predicative function, in which, therefore, forms like *an A, all A, some A, S which is A etc.*, are constituted; and lastly with the acts in which the objects apprehended in these manifold forms of thought are self-evidently ‘given,’ with the acts, in other words, in which our conceptual intuitions are fulfilled, achieve self-evidence and clarity. Thus we directly apprehend the Specific Unity *Redness* on the basis of a singular intuition of something red. We look to its moment of red, but we perform a peculiar act, whose intention is directed to the ‘Idea,’ the ‘universal.’²⁷

²³ To be clear, the transcendental ego does not itself “interpret” anything; it temporally grounds the continuity of conscious experience by “referring backward” to its own source as if given before itself. See Husserl, *Ideas I* §124, 296 <258>. Cited in Lampert, *Synthesis and Backward Reference*, 202.

²⁴ Later on, Husserl is more interested in *passive* synthesis in particular.

²⁵ Lampert, *Synthesis and Backward Reference*, 9.

²⁶ Husserl, *LI 2*: §1, 239.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, §42, 312.

It is apparent that this explanation is supposed to encompass all the different empirical references to universals. But unlike empirical reference (which is really empirical apprehension of a universal), which holds that the universal is not a universal at all but rather a distinctive particular which is concrete and in the world, and therefore (at least according to logic) encounterable via sense, for Husserl the presentation of red is not grounded on some curious particular, but instead, an ideal universal.

To the extent that consciousness grasps meaning, Lampert is right that (logical) reference in both directions makes these meanings possible, although it would seem that backward reference is far more instrumental in the constitution of the majority of the meanings that we encounter as given in the present.²⁸ If this is what makes meaning possible, then it follows that this is also the way in which consciousness is able to relate to itself, since without so doing it would not be much of anything at all, since the very idea of meaning (and other types of conscious content) require such inter-referentiality.²⁹ But furthermore this is what enables consciousness to have experiences of consciousness in its own past, as well as to anticipated, “futural” experiences of consciousness in the future.

As Lampert puts it, synthesis is ultimately “the combination of one experience with another” and he explores the way in which this activity raises certain problems regarding possibility, necessity, and limitation (35). He suggests out that some of these problems eventually only raise other problems, such as the way in which the positing embodied in backward reference posits as possible a meaning or intuition that is not present. How are these meanings “stored” by

²⁸ This is why it is odd that more attention has not been given to this topic in the LI; without backward reference there is no meaning for consciousness.

²⁹ Lampert, *Synthesis and Backward Reference*, 49.

consciousness? In *Logical Investigations* Husserl offers no answer to this, as the model of consciousness that he offers is one that is comprised of a countless number of conscious instants, the unification of which is left unresolved. But Lampert points out that Husserl manages to solve this problem with the account of pure consciousness that he presents in *Ideas*. This pure consciousness is the unity that results “as synthetic interpretations “draw back” or “withdraw” to the ground of their own self-articulation (viii). But the *ground* of this synthesis is intriguing: I am able to apprehend the universal, Lampert argues, via my synthesis of acts of apprehension of individuals (62). Eventually my “synthetic combinations” start to take on certain patterns which eventually start to operate like universal laws. But crucially it is the backward, “reflective reference” to the syntheses of my individual apprehensions that makes it possible to refer to a universal as such (63). Effectively the ground of the universal category is the framework of the individual (67).

Ultimately Lampert contends that for Husserl synthesis is “cognition’s [own] self-critique” (194). That is just the thing, really: consciousness is *not* just the product of logical reference, but it is actually conditioning its own possibilities on the basis of these references (accordingly it is a kind of “critique” in the Kantian sense.) Indeed without this internally referential nature, consciousness would not be able to undergo a conversion, because it would lack the mechanics via which conversion could occur. But the “backward reference” reading of synthesis itself is not enough for us to experience consciousness as we do, even if it does explain how we encounter a world with logical meaning. How do I track these meanings throughout time and make them part of my own personal history? And while backward reference can explain the typification of one conscious act into a category of meaning, how is it that all of these meanings are brought together under the concern of a unified phenomenological subject? As we continue

on in our examination of consciousness in the phenomenological attitude, we find that there are two distinct phenomenological aspects of the transcendental ego that really explain how we are able to have rich and complex experiences like conversions: absolute time consciousness and the unity of the ego.

Absolute Time Consciousness and the Unity of the Ego: Toward the Reduction of Conversion

We can isolate the transcendent immanence of the pure ego in the very constitution of time consciousness. Furthermore we can see that the transcendental ego is not manifest in any one moment of reflection despite the fact that the stream of the (empirical) ego's experience requires the succession of moments. It is through this succession of moments that the transcendental ego is solidified as an identity which maintains a sense of unity throughout time.

This unity is partly captured in my own experience of having a personal history. Husserl writes:

The ego constitutes himself for himself in, so to speak, the unity of a "history." We said that the constitution of the ego contains all the constitutions of all the objectivities existing for him, whether these be immanent or transcendent, ideal or real. It should now be added that the *constitutive systems* (systems actualizable by the Ego), by virtue of such and such objects and categories of objects exist for him, are themselves possible only within the frame of a genesis in conformity with laws. At the same time they are bound, in their constituting, by the universal genetic form that makes the concrete ego (the monad) possible as a unity, as having particular constituents of his being that are compossible. That a Nature, a cultural world, a world of men with their social forms, and so forth, exist for me signifies that possibilities of corresponding experiences exist for me, as experiences I can at any time bring into play and continue in a certain *synthetic style*, whether or not I am at present actually experiencing objects belonging to the realm in question. It signifies furthermore that other modes of consciousness corresponding to them—vague intendings and the like—exist as possibilities for me, and also that these other modes of consciousness have possibilities of being fulfilled or disappointed by experiences of predelineated types. This involves a firmly developed habituality, acquired by a certain genesis in conformity with eidetic laws.³⁰

³⁰ Husserl, CM §37, 75-76, <109-110>.

This ego endures through time irrespective of my attention or my oblivion. It should be noted that the ego subsists on an entirely involuntary basis; it requires no volition from me in order to continue on. As we have seen, even if I am to attempt to focus on the transcendental ego, I can note its experience but only as it is mediated by some object pole, even if the object pole corresponds only with the momentary presence that I can seemingly isolate in the stream of my conscious flow. When I focus on this phenomenon, I am not grasping the transcendental ego directly and in itself, otherwise it would not be transcendental at all. When Husserl references the “new” *cogito* that is “alive” when the intentional object of my reflection is the ego or the “I think” and notes that this *cogito* is “is not reflected on and thus is not objective for me” he is pointing toward the constitutive work of the transcendental ego.³¹ This is not to suggest that the transcendental ego and the *cogito* are the same thing (in fact they are not), but instead, to point out that it is the activity of the transcendental ego that makes possible the reflection *of* reflection.

The transcendental ego is related to (but not quite equivalent with) what is, in classical phenomenology, referred to as “pre-reflective self-awareness.” Pre-reflective self-awareness has actually occupied a somewhat controversial position in the secondary literature on Husserl. Many commentators have suggested that Husserl lacks any theory of such a self-awareness prior to reflection. These commentators essentially have argued that there is no non-objective consciousness according to Husserl’s philosophy, and that therefore the only consciousness for which he can account is that which is objective, which is to say, reflective. The issue that these commentators take with what they allege to be Husserl’s stance (which I will contest) is that they take for granted the phenomenon of pre-reflective consciousness. Thus they construe a

³¹ Husserl, *Ideas* I §28, 54 <50>.

deficiency in Husserl's thought on the basis of his supposed failure to account for such a phenomenon.

The issue here is that Husserl does not in fact deny the existence of the variety of consciousness that these commentators describe, although it should be noted that pre-reflective consciousness should probably not be considered to be an ego.³² David Carr attempts to show that the transcendental ego is the "intentional ego" that guides the direction of our acts of consciousness; indeed I do not have to reflect on my intentionality in order to constitute the intentionality of my consciousness.³³

Consider, for example, how the awareness of self manifest in the experience of certain affective phenomena, including anxiety and fear. The appearance of these phenomena are not subject to reflection because they are examples of phenomena that are "felt" rather than thought. Certainly, it is possible to think about or reflect upon one's anxiety or fear, but it would be a mistake to forget that anxiety and fear, as affects, precede their contemplative objectification. They do not have to be thought about in order to be felt. But here the distinction between that which is thought and that which is felt hits precisely upon the actual problem: what is being contested is what can be called "consciousness" in the first place.

Dan Zahavi is one of the most prominent defenders of pre-reflective consciousness in Husserl's work. Zahavi points out that many commentators, including Heidegger, Tugendhat, Heinrich, Frank, and Gloy have suggested that Husserl does not conceive of a non-objective variety of consciousness, a sort of consciousness that subsists outside of reflective

³² Lampert says many commentators make this mistake. *Synthesis and Backward Reference*, viii.

³³ Carr, "Kant, Husserl, and the Non-Empirical Ego," 687.

intentionality.³⁴ But as Zahavi shows, this is far from a reasonable interpretation of Husserl. Take the following quote, for example, wherein Husserl writes:

The lawfulness with which we have become acquainted in the structure of perceptions easily reveals its universal significance as a primordial lawfulness of the life of consciousness in general. For the latter is not only a lived-experiencing continually streaming along; at the same time, as it streams along it is also immediately the consciousness of this streaming. This consciousness is self-perceiving, although it is a thematically executed awareness on the part of the ego only in exceptional circumstances. Belonging to the latter is a reflection that is possible at any time. This perceiving that presents all lived-experiencing to consciousness is the so-called inner consciousness or inner perceiving.³⁵

It is apparent that the inner consciousness that is immanent to all lived experience is only occasionally reflective, and thus only occasionally thematic. Alas as far as we know it is the potential for thematization that makes our experience “consciousness” in virtue of which we distinguish ourselves from other animals.³⁶ But insofar as consciousness is able to thematize any strand of experience, it is the temporal flow of experience itself that makes it possible to perform this thematization in the first place. Indeed without this inner consciousness no self-reflection would be possible at all.

Because my sense of inner time is not thematized until my consciousness intends toward it, it can be easy to misinterpret Husserl to mean that internal time consciousness endures outside of the limits of self-awareness. I think that this is precisely the view that leads some commentators to charge Husserl with failing to recognize the stratum of pre-reflective experience. But as the above quote shows, Husserl takes it that inner consciousness (of time) is still “self-perceiving,” just not in the reflective sense. What he means is that lived experience is fundamentally self-perception even when the self is not being mindfully perceived. We can

³⁴ Zahavi, “Inner Time-Consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness,” 157.

³⁵ Husserl, APS, 607 <320>.

³⁶ Of course this might be a mistaken. We might not be right to make this distinction since by definition we do not know, and cannot know, on a firsthand basis what it is like to have the mental life of other animals.

corroborate this intuitively; it surely is not the case that we no longer continue to be ourselves during the intermittent episodes in which we do not consciously think about or reflect upon ourselves.

This latent sense of background, primitive “awareness,” epitomized in the flux of temporal consciousness, is one of the phenomenological features that renders possible the experience of subjectivity. On the most basic level, this is the self, stripped down with neither description nor consideration. In his early philosophy Husserl conceives of this self as the source of conscious acts, but later in his career Husserl pivots away from acts and focuses instead on how the ‘I’ is, as Elisabeth Ströker puts it, “a field of experience . . . that by means of its sense-constituting achievements . . . gains its own characteristics, thus revealing itself as a concrete ego.”³⁷ To be “self-perceiving,” then, is (at least in part) to constitute self-characteristics throughout time. As I have indicated, the transcendental ego is determined by the sedimentations of conscious experience; it is what Zahavi calls a “developing structure.”³⁸ This is not at all an entirely conscious process; to the contrary, it is mostly outside of our conscious awareness.

Admittedly, it is a slight issue that Husserl’s remarks in this text are, by design, not really focused on the objective side of intentional acts. The result is that the way in which Husserl describes subjective phenomena takes on a different framing. Thus one could fairly object that the present characterization of subjectivity is not necessarily indicative of the more general thought of Husserl. Even if this is true, however, there is nothing that outright contradicts in a logical sense Husserl’s other writing from the same period. We cannot look at the different perspective from which subjectivity is here approached, namely, that of foundational

³⁷ Ströker, *Husserlian Foundations of Science*, 83.

³⁸ Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, 256n4.

consciousness of inner time, as less authoritative or important than his remarks elsewhere. These remarks are as significant for phenomenological subjectivity as the rest, but in a different way, due to the difference in what is actually being explained.

In any case the living present is the ego's experience of time; it is the ego's "internal" perception of time as synthesizer of experience. In other words the ego experiences the "present" as a continuous stream of time that includes the protention of the future in addition to the retention of the past. Without this dual nature that involves the anticipatory nature of protention in addition to the "slipping away" of the present by way of retention, I could have no experience of the present "moment." While the living present can be seized upon momentarily in such a way that it appears to be standing still, it is also always in a state of flux whereby it continuously slips away.

Husserl concludes that the experience of a unified living present is made possible by "absolute time consciousness," which constitutes the ego's very experience of temporality.

In other words, absolute time consciousness is self-securing. But in order to perform this accomplishment, absolute time consciousness has to itself be *atemporal*, otherwise consciousness would not be capable of grounding itself. This is because it would always be subject to the same temporal laws that define the constitution of its objects. In order to serve as the foundation for temporal consciousness, absolute time consciousness has to transcend the temporal limits of its presentation.

Husserl writes:

There is one, unique flow of consciousness in which both the unity of the tone in immanent time and the unity of the flow of consciousness itself become constituted at once. As shocking (when not initially even absurd) as it may seem to say that the flow of consciousness constitutes its own unity, it is nonetheless the case that it does. And this can be made intelligible on the basis of the flow's essential constitution.³⁹

³⁹ Husserl, PITC §39, 84 <80>.

Here Husserl describes the way in which the stream of consciousness is experienced as a unity at the same time that consciousness guarantees this very same unity. We experience the temporal unity of consciousness in such a way that we can “track” its constitutive role as it unfolds for itself. This is epitomized in Husserl’s example of the consciousness of a (musical) tone. I experience this tone via a temporal succession of conscious moments. This is the “flow” of my conscious stream. One of Husserl’s most important breakthroughs is the realization that the flow itself, and not merely the object of consciousness (of a tone or whatever else), can be rigorously analyzed. Not only does the perceptual object straddle the “flow” of conscious duration, but the flow itself follows the same rule of presentation. It is arguably retention that performs the most work here since it is the retention of consciousness-just-past that enables the ego to synthesize the experience of itself as a unity instead of just a series of unrelated conscious “snapshots.” While we could not experience consciousness without the protention of the future to come, retention is especially vital since it is what enables consciousness to enjoy the relative stability (in unity) that originates in the identification of some prior conscious moment with the *present* conscious moment.

In fact the idea that consciousness is a unity is a matter of much debate. As I have indicated already this is something that I intuitively understand even in the natural attitude. Indeed several writers have challenged the extent to which this level of consciousness could be a unity, with some going so far as to call it a “myth.”⁴⁰ I have noted that the essential nature of consciousness determines the essential nature of conversion, since conversion is a specific modality of consciousness, so I am obligated to determine whether consciousness is in essence a

⁴⁰ Evans, “Myth of Absolute Consciousness.”

unity or not before I can proceed. Thus let us consider the argument that consciousness is *not* a unity.

Sartre is one figure who advances such an argument. He contends in *The Transcendence of the Ego* that the transcendental 'I' is in fact temporally divided because his interpretation of Husserl's model of the 'I' is such that the 'I' cannot be the unifier of all consciousness because, in short, it is consciousness that unifies the 'I' and not the 'I' that unifies consciousness. Sartre maintains (perhaps misguidedly) that the transcendental ego performs no such function if it is as Husserl and his followers describe, and that it is actually consciousness itself that performs the unifying role for the 'I.' Here he presupposes (as does Husserl) that consciousness is consciousness of something, in other words, of an *object*. Sartre's alternative explanation for the unification of consciousness suggests that it is in fact the achievement of consciousness's relational nature, namely with respect to the *object*, like the subway I pursue as I run late, that unifies my temporal consciousness, and therefore my subjectivity is grounded by objectivity, and not my subjectivity *qua* transcendental ego, manifest in the absolute living-present.⁴¹

Whether Sartre misunderstands Husserl or not, this dispute forces us to confront the difficult problem of resolving the issue of whether consciousness, without anything *of which* to be conscious, would be consciousness at all. For Husserl, the answer would be yes, because on his account the transcendental 'I' makes possible the phenomenon of consciousness. It follows that consciousness is an effect of temporal subjectivity. But isn't it true that by definition consciousness can always at the very least take itself up as object? If so, then for Sartre the answer is no, that this sort of consciousness is logically problematic and impossible. For a moment it almost seems as if Sartre could be right, since he raises what appear to be pertinent

⁴¹ Sartre, "Transcendence of the Ego," 3-4.

mereological problems regarding how consciousness could grasp itself *by* itself, without in fact being non-equivalent with whatever it is that it manages to grasp as itself.

But the problem is that Sartre is not really referring to the same *level* of consciousness as Husserl. It is true that the object of his critique is clearly the multiplication of conscious states, but in the phenomenological attitude these states are not multiplied, nor are they divided—indeed this is Husserl’s point. For Husserl it is the ego itself that constitutes time, and the differentiation between retention, protention, and the “now” are not multiplications of consciousness itself (as per Sartre) but are to the contrary the eidetic features of the flow of absolute time. Indeed to say this is to admit that the pure ego is itself also a unity that is produced via synthesis. With his alternative, Sartre elaborates on the mechanics of the process via which consciousness *qua* living present is given depth, but his approach simply cannot unify the subject. Sartre does not seem to totally accept that consciousness is fundamentally in flux; if we are to grant that he does accept this, then we must insist that he does not reasonably discern the consequence of this flux.

While Sartre is prepared to argue that it is the object of consciousness that gives consciousness its depth, for Husserl it is the dynamic constitution of the living present that performs this function, and in so doing, unifies my conscious life. Lanei Rodemeyer explains in *Intersubjective Temporality* that for Husserl it is the unity that is partly constituted through retention that gives “depth” to consciousness.⁴² In other words a consciousness “reborn” in every moment, with no possible recourse to the consciousness of the past, would be a strange experience; indeed, we would resist the impulse to identify such a strange, perpetually-new mental life as “consciousness” of any sort recognizable to us. Curiously, this is precisely the sort

⁴² Rodemeyer, *Intersubjective Temporality*, 81.

of model that Sartre claims to plague Husserl's work, despite the fact that it is his own alternative theory that seems far more likely to raise the concern.

But one issue with Husserl's account is that retention is not something that is indefinitely "held" by consciousness. Eventually what is retained falls away and has to be recollected. Husserl is not wrong about that. But Rodemeyer addresses the concern, articulated by David Carr, that Husserl likely interprets retention too strictly to the exclusion of phenomena that are retained but are not as temporally proximate to the present as Husserl suggests.⁴³ In a nutshell Carr is of the opinion that Husserl fails to realize the variability of retention and mistakenly overemphasizes, as Rodemeyer puts it, the "more immediate, lived aspect of retention." Thus, Carr suggests, Husserl fails to account for consciousness's retention of that which is more distant from the immediate present, supposing instead that these intuitions must be recalled. Rodemeyer suggests that this more inclusive model of retention is reasonable, but comes at the cost of a "trivialize[d]" account of retention in the more immediate, "just-past" sense. Rodemeyer argues that: [T]here must be some "in-between" that exists between immediate retention and recollection, an "in-between" whose activity makes possible my comfortable, and usually effortless, dealings with common and familiar objects.⁴⁴ The point here is that my relatively adroit dealings with the world of things is accomplished in part via the retained "presence" of certain "habitual objects." Thus Rodemeyer ultimately distinguishes two varieties of retention in Husserl's phenomenology, "near" and "far," with Husserl actually using this terminology in his own APS. There are several important things to note here with respect to the present phenomenology of conversion. First, it is undeniable that without retention, there can be no

⁴³ Carr, *Interpreting Husserl*.

⁴⁴ Rodemeyer, *Intersubjective Temporality*, 86.

conversion. But our specific experience of consciousness is such that retention requires protention, and vice-versa. Second, insofar as retention and protention belong to the domain of “passive” experience, there can be no conversion phenomenon without passive synthesis. As of yet it remains to be seen whether the same is true of active synthesis, but I will return to this question in the final chapter.

Recall that we were originally lead down this path in the pursuit of an answer to the question: is consciousness a unity? Put differently, the question is: how is consciousness constituted for me—as a unity, or not? Presently, though, these questions are framed in an even more specific context, namely, is the phenomenon of conversion something that occurs for a unified consciousness, or not? At first glance we were tempted by this question insofar as the very existence of “conversion” seems to imply that consciousness is not a unity, or at least, not an inviolable unity insofar as the occurrence of conversion seems to problematize the idea of a rigid and homogeneous consciousness. Furthermore we have already seen that some of the earliest conversion studies presupposed that some sort of divided or split consciousness defines the pre-convert.

Sartre merely offers his own account of how consciousness is afforded with depth—but not self-constituted. His notion of consciousness as “being-for-itself” is not equivalent with the consciousness to which Husserl refers, which is, at least in his early work, a consciousness that for better or for worse is situated in a domain that is essentially compartmentalized from the Sartrean (and Heideggerian) phenomenon of the “world.” This early conception of pure consciousness has no technical need for the world, which Husserl determines to be just a “correlate of consciousness.”⁴⁵ He even goes so far as to famously declare in *Ideas* that

⁴⁵Husserl, *Ideas* I §47, 105 <88>.

consciousness would endure even after the “annihilation of the world,” by which he refers to the reduction of the world to a “mere” thought thereof.⁴⁶ While his wording here may be a bit too strong (and he later considers the world to be much more important in his later phenomenology), his point is that transcendental consciousness has no need for the empirical consciousness of the world. Technically, he is correct.

When Husserl later incorporates the phenomenon of the world more fully into his thinking, he indicates that the transcendental ‘I’ always appears in the world. Thus according to this later model of phenomenology, the possibility remains that in some cases my experience of consciousness *is* unified (at least in part) by phenomena on the side of the world.⁴⁷ It has to be admitted that when this unification occurs, it is not explaining the same phenomenon as Husserl’s account in *Ideas* or *The Phenomenology of Consciousness of Internal Time*; it is in the latter text that Husserl indicates that “absolute time consciousness” is “not an object.”⁴⁸ Sartre himself admits that consciousness cannot be its own object.⁴⁹ After all, there can be no doubt that without the pre-reflective temporal flow of my consciousness, it is far from clear how I could ever pursue any train of thought at all. The transcendental ‘I’ makes possible this experience; it is obscure how (my consciousness of) the object could produce the ‘I’ when consciousness is a power of the ‘I’ and not of the object. In short, Sartre’s critique of Husserl seems to miss its target.

⁴⁶ “[W]hile the being of consciousness, of any stream of mental processes whatever, would indeed be necessarily modified by an annihilation of the world of physical things its own existence would not be touched.” Husserl, *Ideas* I §49, 110 <92>.

⁴⁷ Sartre claims that even in CM Husserl still holds the view that temporal consciousness is self-unifying.

⁴⁸ Husserl, PITC Appendix 5, 117 <112>.

⁴⁹ Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, 5.

That said, it is not completely unreasonable to question the extent to which my consciousness is a unified whole. After all, my “stream” of consciousness is constituted out of flux and change on a temporal level; I am conscious, in other words, *in* and *through* time. We have already examined how it is temporality that contributes to the unity of consciousness, but my present concern is to show how the phenomenon of conversion suggests that the unity of consciousness is a qualified sort of unity the integrity of which has to be essentially fluid in order for the unity to undergo what can reasonably be called an *existential* change.

Husserl writes in his *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis* that:

Perception is a process of streaming from phase to phase; in its own way each of the phases is a perception, but these phases are continuously harmonized in the unity of a synthesis, in the unity of a consciousness of one and the same perceptual object that is constituted here originally. In each phase we have primordial impression, retention, and protention.⁵⁰

It is the impression of the “now” moment along with the corresponding phenomena of retention and protention that structure my experience of the flow of time. At a fundamental level retention and protention are the two functions that constitute this flow for me. When I direct my intentionality toward my own experience *of* experience (i.e. conscious sentience), I become aware of the manner in which the phenomenon of consciousness flows through time itself, but not like water through a pipe, but instead as a flame consumes its fuel. Intentionality itself is circumscribed within temporal limits. I note that, somewhat paradoxically, this phenomenon of the present moment does not persist simply on the basis of that which is immediate and imminent for consciousness, since protention and retention continually rotate in and out every single passing instant.

Husserl indicates that:

[T]he most general aspect of the ego’s form ... [is] the peculiar temporalization by which it becomes an enduring ego, constituting itself in its time-modalities: the same ego, now actually present, is in

⁵⁰ Husserl, APS §16, 107 <66>.

a sense, in every past that belongs to it, another—i.e., as that which was and thus is not now—and yet, in the continuity of its time it is one and the same, which is and was and has its future before it.⁵¹

It is true that I cannot experience absolute time “directly.” I can only manage a sort of snapshot moment that is singular and fixed, despite the fact that to the contrary I experience conscious life in a much more fluid and continuous manner. But regardless of the fact that the snapshots on their own are not consciousness but instead require succession via the temporal flow, I am nevertheless able to isolate any given instant when I seize upon the immediately present moment. As “ego pole” I am “sovereign” over that instant to the extent that I can momentarily pick it out as an instant, but my momentary grasp of it evinces what is ultimately my utter lack of control over the onset of time. Indeed as I experience consciousness through an infinite series of “now” moments that proceed from the imminent, each moment passes away as it gives rise to the next one, which, if I focus on nothing but my own consciousness and awareness of the flow of time, I am unable to differentiate, formally, from any other.⁵² To describe this phenomenon Husserl uses the terms “retention” and “protention.”

Thus while I experience, typically, a stable and unified conception of my own ego as present to my consciousness, it is apparent in the phenomenological attitude that this presence of my self to my self is, in fact, not a solid whole, but to the contrary, the result of a succession of intentional moments. In other words, as we have already seen, pure consciousness is the product of synthesis.

⁵¹ Husserl, *Crisis* §50, 172.

⁵² Husserl, *Ideas* I §77, 175 <145>.

Ch. 5. Conversion as Embodied Phenomenon

Realism, Material Science, and the Mind-Independent World

There is an ostensible problem for Husserl's "grounded" view of scientific philosophical analysis, despite the fact that his phenomenology does manage to avoid some of the errors of the older philosophies. While Hallward is astute to point out that many scientific claims arguably fail to reach objective status due to the fact that they are based on arbitrary measurements that make sense to human consciousness, there are at least some scientific claims, mostly in the realm of material science, that seem to be of a more fundamental type.¹ These claims are still claims made by consciousness, but they are significantly different in kind from many other scientific claims, and therefore present a conspicuous problem for Husserl's ideas. This is essentially the critique of Quentin Meillassoux.² Consider, for example, that archaeological science suggests that there are trees which pre-existed humans and therefore human intelligence, consciousness, by many years, dating as old as 385,000,000 years ago.³ It would certainly appear that this sort of ancient archaeological object is mind-independent. Alas even this it not true without major qualification. This approximated dating is only *realized* within the continuum of consciousness. As Husserl puts it, "Objects exist for me, and are for me what they are, only as objects of actual and possible consciousness."⁴ Furthermore this fact can only be uttered, as a true proposition, by

¹ Hallward, "Review of *After Finitude*."

² Meillassoux, *After Finitude*.

³ Stein et al., "Giant Cladoxylopsid Trees Resolve Enigma," 904–907.

⁴ Husserl CM §30, 65 <99>.

consciousness in the present. It is a deeply-ingrained fidelity to the ontological assumptions of the natural attitude that makes it so hard to grasp this actuality.

We have to be careful to avoid interpreting this phenomenological view as one which holds that the world is entirely constructed or constituted by consciousness.⁵ This is not at all what Husserl intends. As J. Leavitt Pearl notes, for Husserl it is not that givenness is created from consciousness, but rather that givenness is presented *to* it.⁶ To take the former position is to maintain that consciousness itself “makes” the world. By way of intersubjective verification we can determine very easily that that is false, though. I do not seem to craft the world *ex nihilo*, but it can be difficult to see how this is not tantamount to the admission of a material, mind-independent world. But aside from ostensibly existing in a material sense, these ancient trees had no real “properties” but instead just a primitive and intrinsic “nature,” since no consciousness existed at this time to afford the tree with properties. Consciousness cannot be conflated with Nature, which itself knows no concepts and no divisions.⁷ When consciousness makes claims regarding pre-conscious objects, it still does so on the basis of mind. Thus radiocarbon dating discloses approximate dates that do not prove the material existence of an arche-object that predates conscious humanity, but to the contrary, become valid and universal perceptions as soon as they are manifested by consciousness. It is the difference, in short, between the bald existence of the natural object and the “dating” that does not “exist” until consciousness employs its methods *of* dating.

⁵ I will elaborate on this issue when I present my eidetic conclusions in the seventh and final chapter.

⁶ Pear, “*After Finitude* and Phenomenological Givenness,” 14.

⁷ Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense.”

What is most noteworthy is that these epistemological restrictions and qualifications apply not only to the world of so-called external objects but also to my self. Givenness can be thought like a shadow, which requires something to cast the shadow as well as someone to see it. While it is tempting to post the existence of the shadow as seen by no one, this must be avoided at all costs. Givenness is always framed against the backdrop of a horizon, meaning that to follow through with the same metaphor, givenness takes upon a specific silhouette depending upon the perspective of the person who beholds it, since horizons shift with vantage.

This of course also goes for the phenomenon of self. Indeed my “self” is given to me, as are all phenomena; the self “appears” to consciousness. Despite the fact that my self is given in a rather unique way to me when compared to other phenomena, it nevertheless remains true that I am not “given” to myself beyond the way in which my “self” appears before consciousness. The sole “exception” to this would be phenomenal features of my self-givenness itself, like the horizon, which is itself still intuited and therefore “appears.” But *contra* Kant’s indication, there is no “way I really am” that occupies some more fundamental and absolute epistemic level. Thus to conceive of the way in which I “am” irrespective of consciousness is, in other words, incomprehensible. This is difficult for consciousness to grasp since, confined within its own limits, the tendency of consciousness is to deny the existence of its parameters. It is tempted, for example, regarding that which transcends itself, despite the fact that it can have no access to such a realm. Phenomenology wards off this temptation by examining only that which is phenomenologically “given.” In fact it is the misinterpretation of this position that yields incoherent conclusions the likes of which are shown in Meillassoux’s *After Finitude*. Simply put, I *am* the way in which I appear to myself, because the transcendental ego constitutes that phenomenon for me.

Realism and materialism are still important topics to address phenomenologically. In the next section I analyze how my embodied, material existence informs my conscious experience and how this in turn plays a role in phenomenology of conversion.

Embodied Conversion and the Conscious-Body: Matter, Habit, Space

It is possible to incorporate material considerations into this analytical phenomenology of conversion from another angle, inspired by the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, as the intertwined complex of body and world. According to this view consciousness can only be approached as embodied and intrinsically worldly. I designate the term “conscious-body” to refer to this embodied analog to consciousness.⁸ In this section I will examine some of the ways in which the experience of conversion can be phenomenologically manifest in embodiment. The primary point that I wish to demonstrate is that, in short, when ‘I’ convert, my body converts, necessarily. This conversion plays out in different ways. There is the material and physiological dimension to embodied conversion, which encompasses my body’s psychophysical relation to my consciousness, but there are also the aspects of embodied conversion that come down to my body’s habits as well as my body’s orientation and/or relationship with respect to worldly space.

There are many ways in which conversion is mediated through my body, or otherwise has some physical correlate on the level of my material organism. First and foremost there is the way in which my body places a vital role in the constitution of consciousness. Not only do my five

⁸ It should be noted that the conscious-body is not always conscious in the sense of awareness, but is at least capable of focusing on its own bodily consciousness, like the way something feels. This is not an instinct, as it might be in other types of animals, which is why I suggest that we conclude that the conscious-body is a human phenomenon. This phenomenon may exist in other animals with “higher-intelligence.”

senses require their corresponding organs, but even my purely intellectual experiences, are correlated with observable cerebral events. While I do not want to go so far as to maintain that conscious experience (i.e. having a “mind”) requires a brain, my specific way of experiencing consciousness is ostensibly the result of various physical processes. I cannot know whether other types of consciousness could be possible without such a basis in physical matter. At the very least as an embodied conscious being, I find it impossible to conceive of consciousness without my extension. Even accounts of out-of-body experiences, wherein a subject experiences consciousness as if detached from his usual sense of physical existence, are correlated with specific neural events. Furthermore the person who encounters this phenomenon still lives out an experience of embodiment, only as if the conscious-body is outside of itself.

So I can take my personal account of what experience is like and examine it in terms of the physical phenomena that are involved, although it goes without saying that I am not consciously aware of the vast majority of the physical events correlated with my consciousness. There is an empirical-scientific approach to this area of inquiry, and it can be used to supplement my phenomenological analysis of embodied conversion. Indeed Merleau-Ponty is particularly well-known for his implementation of scientific and medical research into his phenomenology. Using a transcranial magnetic stimulator (TMS), researchers are able to inject electrical current into a waking brain to observe its reaction, as well as into a sleeping brain—without waking it up. They do this to observe the way in which the cerebral cortex reacts to the input, the hope being that the cortex will be observably “different” in states of consciousness and unconsciousness.⁹

⁹ Extensive damage to the cerebral cortex permanently renders a person unconscious (vegetative), whereas the complete *removal* of the cerebellum, which has even more neurons,

Electrodes on the TMS measure activity changes in the brain. A pulse of magnetism (researchers call it the “ringing of a bell”) lasting 100ms causes neurons in a small section of the cerebral cortex to “fire.” When the TMS is fitted to someone who is awake, this “firing” is signaled to other neurons, which proceed to fire as well. The resultant complex pattern of neural activity fans out to cover around about 1/3 of the cerebral cortex, and the signaling (“firing”) endures for around 330ms. When the TMS is fitted to someone who is in unconscious deep sleep, there is no reverberation after the initial signaling of the first neuron that fires. Lastly and most importantly, when the TMS is fitted to someone who is in an REM dream state, the reverberation and primary “firing” return—as does a form of consciousness, experienced in dream form by the sleeping subject.

Giulio Tononi and others have inferred that while the brain in deep, unconscious sleep may be “active” to some extent (demonstrated by the presence of the initial “firing” even when no reverberation/echo occurs), it has ostensibly lost the ability to share information between its parts. This is why there is no observable reverberation.

There are several important conclusions that should be made from the experiment. First, conscious experience is correlated with physical events in the body, specifically the brain. Therefore mental life (as I experience it) is associated with physical correlates in my organism. Second, when there is no physical event observed in the brain/body, there is no report of consciousness or experience in the sleeping subject. It follows that without a body, a phenomenological subject will not have experience—at least not any sort of experience that would closely resemble what I enjoy today. Tononi’s experiment suggests that the sharing of

does not have much effect upon consciousness at all. See Tononi, “Consciousness as Integrated Information: A Provisional Manifesto.”

neural information is a key ingredient for the appearance of consciousness. When the sharing occurs, consciousness occurs, and when the sharing does not occur, as is the case in deep sleep or after extensive damage to the cortex, then there is no occurrence of consciousness. The idea that a phenomenological entity could have an experience separate from its body is thus refuted. It would be utterly impossible for phenomena to “appear” to that which is not predisposed to experience phenomena.¹⁰

This “Information Integration Model” shows the intrinsic link between conscious events and physical events, although of course it cannot offer any description of what these experiences are like for the subjects who live them. Only a descriptive phenomenological method can give an account of consciousness as lived experience. But in looking at the conscious-body as a scientific object, we can uncover important insights regarding embodied consciousness. If there are physical processes that correlate with conscious experience, then my experience of a phenomenon like conversion can be phenomenologically analyzed in light of scientific research. For example, in 2011 a group of researchers discovered that certain “religious factors” correlated with atrophy of the hippocampus.¹¹ One of the religious factors with the single biggest impact on hippocampal size was “life-changing religious experience.” The authors suggest that this might be the result of stress. The hippocampus, situated in the temporal lobe’s inner medial region, plays a crucial role in the limbic system, assisting in the regulation of emotional responses.¹² In 1953 Henry Molaison’s hippocampus was removed in a surgical procedure the result of which was

¹⁰ Here it should be noted that experience is not equivalent with observation; scientific instruments are capable of “observation” evinced by the factor that electronic sensors play in contributing to the so-called “observer effect” exemplified in the famous “double-slit” experiments.

¹¹ Owen et al., “Religious Factors and Hippocampal Atrophy in Late Life.”

¹² Yassa, “Hippocampus.”

anterograde amnesia.¹³ This means that he was no longer able to create new memories. Despite this, most of his mental operations were unharmed. Depression and stress have been correlated with hippocampal decline. All of this research seems to suggest that religious experience can correlate with stress, the effect of which is essentially diminishment of the physical organ that, among other things, helps to found memories and control emotion. I will leave aside the question of whether religious/spiritual conversion is inherently stressful, but *prima facie* a shift as significant as phenomenological conversion would seem to require, for many if not all of the types I have delineated, at least some degree of stress (if not outright crisis, as in the case of the sudden and unexpected conversion.)

Suffice to say that in at least some cases, the experience of a religious phenomenon such as conversion can actually make present life events harder to remember and can make it more difficult to moderate emotional impulses. It should be noted that this is not something peculiar to religious experience or even necessary across all subjects; to the contrary, the reduced volume of the hippocampus is ultimately correlated with high stress levels. Nevertheless the fact remains that a stressful experience like conversion can have a physical impact on the brain's structure. To the extent that one could be aware of the reduced ability to form new memories, it can be said that the phenomenon of conversion can produce a neurophysical change that itself carries phenomenological consequences.

But the authors of this same paper suggest that this insight should be carefully considered; they point out that “some religious variables have been found to be associated with positive mental health” citing a 2001 paper from Koenig and Larson.”¹⁴ Belief in God has

¹³ Corkin, *Permanent Present Tense*.

¹⁴ Owen et al., “Religious Factors and Hippocampal,” 2, 5n59.

actually been correlated with reduced anxiety and stress, in contrast to the findings we just examined.¹⁵ More recently the neuroscientist Andrew Newberg has shown how certain religious practices like meditation can correlate with physical changes in the brain, often associated with an increased ability to focus.¹⁶ So while some religious variables like conversion or minority status correlate with stress and therefore correlate with hippocampal decline, some religious beliefs and religious practices correlate with reduced stress or increased focus. The latter case, like the former, is another example of an experience producing a neurophysical change with phenomenological consequences. After all, going about in the world with less stress or more focus is certainly tantamount to a change in one's very subjectivity.

In both of these types of cases, the one which can be reduced to improvement and the other to decline, we observe the sort of effects that my consciousness, my experience, can produce on the very materiality of my existence, especially the structure of the brain. The changes to the material basis of my consciousness themselves correlate with shifts in my subjective orientation, like my mood or disposition, or even my mental functions, like focus.

Consequently there is an apparent feedback loop between my conscious experiences and my physiology, where mental events produce physical effects that in turn influence the events that constitute my experience. This is in fact a very common and general phenomenon, not just limited to religious or spiritual experience. I can discern many hypothetical situations in which I am first aware of some sort of physical experience that tends toward a mental effect. For example I might feel an eerie physical sensation that prompts me to recall a traumatic event from my past. After lounging on the couch for too long I may find it difficult to think in a clear and efficient

¹⁵ Inzlicht et al. "Neural Markers of Religious Conviction."

¹⁶ Newberg, *Principles of Neurotheology*; Newberg, *How God Changes Your Brain*.

fashion. After drinking alcohol my sense of inner time consciousness may slow down, and the rate of my thoughts slows down in consequence. If I sit with better posture, then I may have more positive ideas about my health and image, etc. In all of these examples my physical experience is associated with a mental result in such a way that the “mental” experience almost seems to follow from what at first appears to me as physical, through my body.

At other times my physical experience appears to follow from what begins as mental. If I am thinking about a traumatic event from the past, I may shudder. If I am feeling lazy, I find it not only difficult to think but difficult to get up off the couch. If I decide to ingest alcohol, then my perception of time may slow down. If I consider myself to be in good physical shape, then I am more confident in my body and carry myself differently, walking differently and so on. In all of these examples we can observe a changing perception of my body that is the result of a mental process. Even this mental process has a physical correlate, but it is not one that I can sensuously feel, like I can feel heat or something soft, or feel what it is like to touch my own two hands against each other. The fact that we can observe these relations in both directions indicates something important. Namely, the question of cause and effect is of no use in this particular case since my experience suggests that mental and physical processes often occur in simultaneous concert.

As Ted Toadvine indicates in reference to the thought of Merleau-Ponty, what I have termed a “feedback loop” inherent in and intrinsic to the conscious-body can be aptly characterized as a dialectic relation, between “the present body (characterized, after Husserl, as an “I can”) and the habit body, the sedimentations of past activities that take on a general, anonymous, and autonomous character.”¹⁷ This is essentially analogous to the passive synthesis

¹⁷ Toadvine, “Merleau-Ponty.”

that Husserl describes, although there is no indication that he really had embodiment in mind in his discussions of the topic, since his commentary regarding passive synthesis is limited to the more traditional model of “mental” consciousness, which has, in Western philosophy, tended to take on a privileged position at the cost of the marginalization of the philosophy of the body.

But to the opposite extreme it cannot be the case that physical conditions alone suffice to establish the experience of conversion. A medical patient who has inflicted a traumatic brain injury resulting in a major personality change is not someone who has “converted” according to the criteria presently under consideration. The difference between a case such as this and an authentic conversion, broadly construed, is that an actual conversion has to be an existential transformation, meaning that it has some basis in experience, even fantastic and hallucinatory, and cannot be the pure result of a physical process. Even cases that may have some medical explanation, like those regarding the potential epilepsy of Saint Paul, involve significant and profound experiential correlates that carry much meaning for the subject. This does not mean that the change is one of which the individual is aware, although in Paul’s case it certainly is the case that it is. The point is that a traumatic injury or disease that “flips a switch” in the subjective constitution of an ego cannot itself serve as the singular cause of conversion. Even if Paul’s story can be reduced to a neurological account, such a simplification that dispenses with the experiential content and significance for Paul is nothing short of an absurd interpretation. Badiou’s atheistic reading of Paul serves as an excellent counterpoint to the idea that the profound *lived experience* can be distilled into a “scientific” account like cognitive science, neurology, or psychiatry. Even the unconscious conversion of the lifelong religious believer is the result of experience.

In any case the “habit body” is such an important concept because it captures how sedimented meanings do not just map onto mental consciousness but in fact apply to my physical experience as well. This habit body is a vital aspect of what I have been referring to as the conscious-body. We can see the habit body play out in something like muscle memory, where my body moves more or less automatically, without conscious deliberation from my “mind.” After repetition the practice starts to become customary for me, almost automatic, as if my body is manipulating itself without any personal involvement from me (i.e. it is anonymous). We often think of physical habits in terms of special technique, like riding a bike or playing a musical instrument. But in fact these habits can be far more general, like knowing how to walk or sitting with a certain posture when reading at a desk. Even partaking of the Sacrament of the Eucharist is a sedimented physical habit in this way, from the procession to the other movements *de rigueur*, like bowing and performing the Sign of the Cross, to the physical act of consuming the host. Meditation, yoga, and prayer are much the same—all of these spiritual and religious acts have physical correlates on the level of embodiment. In other words there is a physical feeling associated with being involved in these acts. After I perform these activities a certain number of times, their habitual repetition starts to affect my body in such a way that my experience of the body takes on a different physical “feed.” Almost paradoxically this change is often one that comes down to reduced conscious awareness of some physical practice, like subconsciously sitting and standing at the right times during a church service. As my mental awareness of the practice is diminished, my physical awareness picks up the slack. The enactment or manipulation of the practice is turned over more fully to my organismal side. The point is that the phenomenological subject’s mental and physical habits sediment themselves onto the conscious-body over the course of time.

But this is not at all equivalent with the phenomenon of conversion according to the “classical” model exemplified by St. Paul. In that case it is not that Paul loses conscious awareness of some physical practice that starts to become rote, but instead that he experiences an interruption of his habit. His physical practices, namely the persecution of Christians, are interrupted by the apparition of Jesus Christ, who interrogates Paul (at that time Saul). Thus instead of establishing a habit the sudden conversion case is defined by the disruption of a habit. But in fact, *all* conversions result from some sort of disruption of the subject’s prior habit body. Even the case of the gradual or unconscious conversion is one which is marked by substantial change in the habit of the subject; it is just that this change was so gradual that the subject was not attentive to its occurring as it unfolded in present time.

This all ties into conversion because it shows (again) how my mental life and my physical being cannot be easily disentangled from each other. Since I have never experienced without my body, it is impossible for me to imagine how unembodied experience could be possible at all. Even a so-called “disembodied” experience is sensible to me insofar as I have the sensation that my body is alien or Other to myself. I can only have this experience in virtue of the fact that I remain nevertheless “in” my body, otherwise I would have no basis to make the judgment that I was allegedly “out” of it. This example shows what in fact applies in all cases of experience: my experience of my body presupposes my experience of “inner” mental life, just as my experience of inner mental life presupposes bodily experience.

There are other ways in which conversion is mediated through the body. Via this passive and latent constitution of the habit body, the phenomenological subject and his body are situated in both the spatiotemporal present as well as the non-present, or perhaps, the psychophysical

retention of the unfulfilled present. This reveals the fact that a conversion is made possible not only by temporality and my experience thereof, but also by *spatiality* and my experience thereof.

Merleau-Ponty indicates that the body is vitally involved in the constitution of my experience in space. He writes:

[T]he life of consciousness—epistemic life, the life of desire, or perceptual life—is underpinned by an “intentional arc” that projects around us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation, or rather, that ensures that we are situated within all of these relationships. This intentional arc creates the unity of the senses, the unity of the senses with intelligence, and the unity of sensitivity and motricity.¹⁸

The claim is that it is not only intellectual consciousness that is capable of relating via intentionality toward objects; to the contrary, this operation belongs also to the body. This intentionality is neither cognitive nor Cartesian. The body’s intentionality derives from its motor potential, the actualization of which realizes external space for me. In short it is the power of the body that grounds its intentionality. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, “there would be no such thing as space for me if I did not have a body.”¹⁹ Space, in other words, is phenomenological. This does not mean that space is merely a mind-independent construct, however. Rather, the idea is that space is known to me in such a way that reflects my embodiment across the three dimensions of space. Clearly this manner in which space appears to me is different in kind from the bare mathematics of space, which are perhaps known by my intellect but also interpreted in applied form in my lived experience. In short, the way in which I can know space is radically different from the way in which an unembodied intelligence could conceive of the same.

It should be pointed out, though, that the hypothetical unembodied intelligence is the bare minimum when it comes to conceiving of space, despite the fact that its understanding of space would be radically different from my own. While claiming that a mind is required for an idea

¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, PP 137 <169-170>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 104 <132>.

sounds tautological, this is often the subject of consternation. It is certainly the case that a mind is required in order for a thought to exist, so it follows that the conception of space requires consciousness. This is emphatically not the same as the claim that space in-itself, if there is such a thing, requires consciousness in order to exist. As we have seen, if there is such a space-in-itself, then by definition we can know nothing of it. The point is that space as an idea is not the same as space as such. It is useful to compare Merleau-Ponty's view to that of Kant:

Space is not something objective and real, nor a substance, nor an accident, nor a relation; instead, it is subjective and ideal, and originates from the mind's nature in accord with a stable law as a scheme, as it were, for coordinating everything sensed externally.²⁰

Merleau-Ponty would agree in principle with most of this. But crucially he has to add that it is specifically via the *body* that the mind is afforded with the "stable law" that permits coordinated external sensation. While space can be construed in terms of pure mathematics, the math rests on a foundation established by consciousness on both the intellectual as well as *material* levels. The mathematics in virtue of which space is construed is still true *a priori*, but until consciousness enumerates all of the axioms that would in cooperation with one another establish a system of rules, math as "undiscovered" is "known" by no one. It is after conscious synthesis that the entire domain of mathematized space is uncovered, and it is via my embodied consciousness that I know what space feels like. My knowledge of space is not just propositional, in other words. My consciousness knows space in such a way that reflects that I am conscious *in* space, through my body.

The idea here, in short, is that the body *is* space, it "inhabits" and "assumes" space in such a way that it establishes the very basis of the phenomenon for consciousness. Without space, after all, there would be no experience. Merleau-Ponty uses the term "body schema" to

²⁰ Kant, AK, 2:403

refer to this “practical system” comprised of “bodily space and external space.”²¹ It is by way of the body schema, as *my* space, that I can have an understanding of external space. On a material level, my knowledge of the latter is derivative from the former, from my conscious embodiment.

Thus while it can be easy to interpret these words too strongly, one should not misunderstand Merleau-Ponty to suggest that space is just a mind-dependent construct. Consciousness cannot fabricate space without there being some appearance or phenomenon before consciousness that itself establishes the idea. So the present thesis, that space requires consciousness, has to be supplemented with a second thesis, that space also requires the world. It is through the body that consciousness knows the world.

Kant points out that the concept cannot just be empirical, however. Space informs my outer experience in such a way that space cannot itself be something I derive from experience.

Kant writes:

Space is not an empirical concept which has been derived from outer experiences. For in order that certain sensations be referred to something outside me (that is, to something in another region of space from that in which I find myself), and similarly in order that I may be able to represent them as outside and alongside one another, and accordingly as not only different but as in different places, the representation of space must already underlie them. Therefore, the representation of space cannot be obtained through experience from the relations of outer appearance; this outer experience is itself possible at all only through that representation.²²

Here he points out that the concept of space is not extrapolated from experience, since experience clearly already requires the representation of space in order to be sensible in the first place. Instead, the concept structures the experience itself. If it was any other way, then I would not be able to have the experience of space.

If my experience presupposes the experience of space, then my ability to experience conversion relies in part upon my body’s engagement with space. There are two different ways in

²¹ Merleau-Ponty, PP 105, <132>.

²² Kant, *Inaugural Dissertation*, 203

which my body's engagement with space changes in significant ways as the result of spiritual or religious conversion. First there is the embodied-phenomenon of my own body *within* space, and second there is the embodied-phenomenon of "outer" space (meaning space external to my own body).

Conversion affects the way that the conscious-body, the body-phenomenon, is present to me. With my Cartesian-influenced understanding of my "self" as both mind and body any significant change of mind brings about a reordered perception of my body. If a religious change precipitates a change in my personal identity, this change most likely but not necessarily entails a difference in the way in which I interpret my own body as well as its ultimate significance. This can also be seen in the theological concept of the "sanctity" of the body. In some cases of conversion the body is perceived in a new way as a result of the change in spiritual identity. In some of these cases, especially in Christianity, the body is professed to be a sacred physical counterpart to the intellectual soul. Often times this doctrine is related to moral teachings concerning chastity, but a new understanding of the *corpus sancti* can also institute changes in dietary habits, exercise habits, and so on.

This does not necessarily mean that the body will develop into something that I come to prize or value. To the contrary it can start to become something that I regret, lament, despise, deny, etc. This understanding may be one of positive or negative appraisal, something via which the soul can reach some higher plane of Being, or, conversely, something in spite of which the soul will strive to reach the same. Thus it is apparent that instead the relevant general requirement is that when there occurs a phenomenological conversion, it also, by strict necessity, brings about a change in the conscious-body's understanding of itself, albeit to varying degrees of awareness.

If the conversion is not one of identity, but rather one which pertains to role, then there still results a difference in the phenomenon of personal embodiment. If my role has changed then the functionality of my body has changed. My body has taken on some new important purpose that plays a part in the very constitution and definition of myself, even if not on the level of fundamental “identity.” For example if I was always a Catholic but only very recently became a Eucharistic Minister, then my underlying identity, as a Catholic, has not changed, but one of my roles has—I am not the facilitator of a Catholic sacrament to my peers. By our criteria this has to count as sort of conversion. This conversion or change in role brings about a series of subtle changes in my perception of my body, including the directional practices I abide by during a Mass, i.e. where I stand in the sanctuary, as well as the precise movements that my body performs as I administer communion, sometimes dividing a singular host by halves or even by fourths, i.e., the way in which I perform the repeated motion of repeating with my mouth certain sacramental words, repeatedly placing a host in the hand of he or she who receives communion, as well as the way in which I understand my own physical presence in the liturgical space, namely, as a minister of the sacrament.

In all of these situations there is a correspondence between my purely conceptual understanding of my self and my conscious-body, in other words, my embodied self. Often times these two, exemplified in the appearance of inner consciousness and the appearance of the conscious-body, are difficult to separate.

Ch. 6. Saint Paul: A Phenomenological Case Study

The Conversion of St. Paul: Free Will, Judgment, and the Body

In this chapter I will phenomenologically analyze the famous case of the conversion of Saint Paul. Here my objective is not to produce an eidetic explanation of Paul's empirical case, but rather, to present a phenomenological reading of the most influential conversion anecdote of all time.

According to my synthetic phenomenological model of conversion, Paul undergoes his conversion when he experiences a radical change in identity that is mediated by a transcendent perceptual event. But what exactly does it mean for his conversion to be mediated—or otherwise “involved” with—this event? There are at least two different ways to attempt an answer to this question.

The first explanation essentially holds that Paul's conversion is equivalent with the event, meaning that his conversion is entirely passive. According to this view, Paul is converted *in* and *by* the transcendent event. Paul does “do” anything. He is converted “by God” as if he is a passive recipient, a “lightning rod” through whom the divine conducts a radical and instantaneous transformation. This is the “standard” or “traditional” model of Paul as passive convert. This interpretation epitomizes the view of some eminent commentators, the likes of which include St. Thomas Aquinas, who writes, “Paul, suddenly when he was in the midst of sin, his heart was perfectly moved by God.”¹ There are weaker versions of this explanation, such as the one we saw in the first chapter as characterized by Rambo, who defines the Pauline

¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q. 112, art 2.

conversion as one which involves a “passive respondent to outside force.”² Rambo grasps the need to incorporate Paul’s response into his conversion sequence, which is arguably further than St. Thomas is willing to go, but he ultimately characterizes the respondent as passive, which is utterly incongruous. What does it mean for someone to respond passively? Is this equivalent to responding out of instinct or automatic response? “Passively responding” could benefit from further analysis, but at least at first glance this account of Paul is inadequate. The idea that Paul is just a passive respondent downplays and arguably undermines the extent to which his conversion is so profound and meaningful.

Ultimately, while neither of these accounts make for unreasonable ways to analyze Paul’s example, there is another, different way of examining his case. This second, alternative explanation suggests that Paul’s conversion is set in motion by the transcendent event but is not entirely reducible to the event’s occurrence. This view also holds that Paul is more than a mere “passive” respondent to a transcendent or supernatural event. While the view of Aquinas bolsters the significance of divine omnipotence and grace, it arguably undermines the extent to which Paul is *free*. Without Paul’s freedom there is no conversion at all. If Paul is forced by God’s grace to convert—with no possibility to do otherwise—then on a phenomenological level, he is no different from a medical patient who is “converted” through subjection to electroshock therapy. The forced and manipulated alteration of his consciousness is difficult to reconcile with the idea that he has attained a new identity. The forced alteration of consciousness is a case in which the subject responds to an imperious assertion from without; the subject is named or identified, but from the outside. This is not conversion. While identity is not something that is constituted on a

² Rambo, “Anthropology and the Study of Conversion,” 213.

basis that is entirely conscious or aware, it is not extrinsic to the subject, either. Existential identity must emanate from existence itself, not from something that transcends existence.

Without a doubt we can be sure that St. Thomas realizes this, but he mandates along typically Aristotelian lines that God “moves” Paul’s free will. It is certainly unclear whether Thomas thinks that Paul could have rejected God’s grace in this case, even though the Council of Trent established that grace can be rejected by the will. Looking at Paul’s case in this way imparts much theological significance and allays certain metaphysical questions regarding the causal source of his conversion, but from the phenomenological perspective it only offers an incomplete analysis of Paul because it does not take up his consciousness firsthand.³ Setting matters of faith and theology aside, strictly speaking it may or may not be the case that God “moves” the will of Paul, but even if God does, phenomenology can assert as much only if this divine movement is “given” or appears.

So is it true—does Paul in fact convert through something that *follows from* the transcendent phenomenon, such that his “actual” conversion occurs *not* in the instant of his transcendent experience but rather in the way in which he *responds* to the event? According to this interpretation Paul’s conversion would be actuated or incited by the spectacle he encounters via his sense, but not itself equivalent with or reducible that sensory “spectacle”—or whatever divine force is the supposed cause thereof.⁴ In a way this is arguably similar to the account of Aquinas, wherein God is the efficient and final cause of Paul’s conversion, with the proviso that the “principle of principles” precludes us from grasping outside of Paul’s conscious experience

³ Indeed the experience is ultimately theologically significant in itself, although it is not being analyzed here for such a reason.

⁴ Here I deliberately use Guy Debord’s term “spectacle.” Culture is arguably preoccupied with the image of Paul on the ground on the road.

in search of objective “causes.” Thus the metaphysical claim concerning the ultimate causality of the judgmental act is reduced to a “mere” belief. The corollary of this is that any supposed “cause” is just a belief evinced in an act of consciousness—in other words, a mere perception. Certainly, Paul determines that the transcendent event that he witnesses is the manifestation of divine grace, but according to the phenomenological perspective that is a perception, an appearance. So at least for now this opinion regarding the cause of the belief is to be bracketed, despite the fact that it is often the case that the Pauline conversion story is recounted with a definite focus on precisely this aspect of the account, namely, the way in which it purportedly occurs involuntarily, as if for a passive subject whose transformation is the wholesale effect of some outside impetus. Now, to be sure, to eliminate the transcendent phenomena at the beginning of the story would constitute a violent redaction of the tale, so I do not mean to suggest that it bears no importance to the overall picture. This is not at all the case. Rather, it is that the “divine interaction” in Paul’s story can be reduced to sensory events that feature centrally in Paul’s story but do not themselves constitute anything remotely proximate to an authentic existential conversion. In short, when we examine Paul’s phenomenology, we find that the sensuous correlates of his conversion entail a rather minor role in the grand scheme of things.

Make no mistake, it has to be granted that the transcendent phenomenon conspicuously imparts the potency of divine power. Paul’s very will is overpowered by the appearance of “a light from the sky ... [that] flashed around him.”⁵ God’s will, in other words, trumps that of the convert. Paul even uses passive language to describe the epistemological side of the experience: “... I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. For I did not receive it from a human being, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of

⁵ Acts 9:3 NABRE

Jesus Christ.”⁶ But at the same time, there is another sort of violent redaction that is committed by depicting Paul’s conversion in such a way that it is the result of divine force *alone* and not also Paul’s own free will. The Aristotelian account of the efficient cause behind Paul’s conversion is all well and good, but Paul’s conversion is misinterpreted if the result of God’s grace is *Paul’s choosing to believe* is passed over. Paul does *choose* to convert, after all, even if divine intervention pushes him into the scenario where he must make his choice. The issue is that if Paul’s possibility of rejecting grace is not admitted, then neither nor his choice nor his conversion are really free. But if my interpretation of his example is reasonable, then his famous conversion is passive only in a limited sense, while it is quite active in other respects. I will demonstrate this by showing how Paul’s partly “passive” conversion is impossible without multiple “active” judgments on his part. If I can show that this is true in all cases and not just Paul’s, then I can reasonably conclude that the active vs. passive conversion schema constitutes a false dichotomy. Conversions always involve volition.⁷

It is certainly true that Paul does not seek out his transcendent roadside event on the way to Damascus. Having been a regular aggressor toward Christians a conversion to Christianity is not something in which Paul is interested; conversion is not something for which he is “looking.” To the contrary Paul says that he is “called. . . through his grace.”⁸ This call is interpreted by Paul in such a way that it is understood to be what is, in the natural attitude, referred to as an “outer” appearance. This means that the phenomenon results from “outside” of the subject himself. But

⁶ Gal. 1:11-12 NABRE

⁷ Even the unconscious conversion is one that involves volition on some level. For example, even if an adult cannot remember ever being not religious, and therefore cannot identify any conversion in his or her past, the adult’s previous practices were volitional.

⁸ Gal. 1:15-16 NABRE

to the extent that this identification is an interpretation that Paul makes, it is not really “manifest” until a judgment is made on Paul’s part.

Paul makes further judgments throughout the course of his conversion. When he eventually stands up from the ground, he can “see nothing.” While it must be admitted that the “matter” of this act, as Husserl puts it, does not follow from a judgment that Paul makes (i.e. the sensuous visual appearance); it is nevertheless apparent that the verbal or even mental expression of his blindness entails a judgment, in this case just the statement of the obvious, that he is “seeing nothing.” Judgments such as these are extraneous to the *fact* of Paul’s blindness. In other words Paul’s judging that he is blind does not make it so—his words do not have this power. Sensory deprivation, even unexpected, is not enough in itself to precipitate a change in identity. Thus it is as Paul is led in blindness to his destination that the most important and meaningful judgment of all takes place. It is via this judgment that Paul is actually converted, at least in a phenomenological sense.⁹

It is undeniable that Paul “sees” something, and then “hears” something, and makes at least a few judgments pertaining to these appearances, but the *real* conversion, his conversion proper, resides in the radical *result* of these “outer” appearances, which is Paul’s judgment to become Christian. This is why his conversion is in fact achieved not in his reception of the transcendent event, but in his answering to the “call” that the event constitutes. His answer is of course the result of a series of profound *judgments* that he makes regarding his identity. The transcendent event can also and should also be framed as part of the phenomenological re-

⁹ By “phenomenological sense” I mean the sense in which the experience involves appearances that are “given” to consciousness. These appearances can come from within or without but an appearance that seems to emanate from an external source cannot itself manifest a conversion without a corresponding belief in the ego.

positioning of Paul, to the extent that the sensuous and transcendent appearance does play a role in the conversion, despite the fact that it does not (and cannot) play the sole role in a conversion. Along the same lines one could fairly call the transcendent phenomenon a *conditioning* event; it sets the scene for what is to follow via judgment.

It must be admitted, however that not only are Paul's conversion judgments existential and volitional in nature, but they are also thoroughly rational and intellectual. When Paul is directly presented with an appearance that he judges to contradict what he had previously held to be the truth, this is so groundbreaking for him that he is compelled to revise his beliefs. Paul judges his sensuously-given to be direct experience of the divine, and he deems it only rational to reconsider what he had previously held to be true. He is presented, after all, with what appears to be external, "material" counter-evidence to his previous religious worldview.¹⁰ It is not that naive belief in the "external world" is necessarily a rational judgment, but instead that concrete phenomenal evidence compels Paul to alter his beliefs—it would be *irrational* for Paul to continue along in his old ways of believing.

These judgments are Paul's own, the product of his own volition and liberty. So while Paul's conversion is commonly construed to be a sort of personal subjective crisis caused by an external force, on the phenomenological level the crisis in fact comes *from within*, not from without; Paul is not a forced convert. The critical event disrupts Paul's perception of himself to such a degree that he no longer conceives of himself as a separate individual but to the contrary as a member of a universal affiliation. This too is a judgment. Like Descartes, he begins to question everything he previously took to be true, the result of which is the careful reconsideration of all of his prior judgments.

¹⁰ Here "material" does not mean *physical*.

These judgments are what comprise the sustained self-inquiry of Paul. They result from the transcendent event and they culminate in, and constitute, Paul's complete existential transformation. In other words, Paul's experience of consciousness, his awareness of his own body, and his engagement with the world all change as a result *not* of his encounter with the transcendent, but more properly with his judgments regarding that encounter. While it is true that it is the transcendent event that, as Badiou suggests, produces a "tear" or rupture in the very fabric of Paul's subjectivity, Paul, as phenomenological subject, is the executor of this subjective tear.

Paul's conversion thus restructures the frameworks and limits of his own consciousness. This radical existential shift comprises for him a complete phenomenological reorientation.¹¹ While attempts have recently been made to analyze Paul's conversion using the methods of psychiatry and neurology, ultimately the most "scientific" account of Paul's story, at least in a Husserlian sense, is that which focuses on the first-person perspective with respect to the experience. The root cause or inspiration behind the experience, whether it is metaphysical or neurological or otherwise, is irrelevant.¹² This is because no matter the ultimate cause (if any) of Paul's mental states, the conscious determinations of these mental states, i.e. the judgments, are the true vehicle for his conversion.

But the reason why these judgments are too often overlooked is in light of the undeniable effect that the transcendent event produces upon Paul. Even if Paul does not convert on the mere basis of the sensory event, he cannot convert without it. Thus our attention should be called back

¹¹ As we have seen, not everything in my lived experience is the object of conscious awareness. To the contrary much of my life eludes the focus of my attention.

¹² Landsborough, "St. Paul and Temporal Lobe Epilepsy," 659.

to where we began, with the catalyzing sensuous phenomenon that inaugurates Paul's episode—the Damascus incident.

The Conversion of St. Paul: A Phenomenology of Light and Voice

While Paul is often called a “passive” convert, I have suggested that his conversion is actually constituted by a series of judgments that he makes regarding his own identity (in crisis) and thus his true conversion should not be deemed to be equivalent with or reducible to the supernatural phenomenal events that he experiences. It is true that his conversion begins with a “passive” positioning of his subjectivity. It is the “external” event that conditions his existence in this moment. Indeed at the time of the transcendent event his subjectivity is defined as “passive” in relation to an adventitious impetus; if we isolate this single instant, we can see Paul (as Saul) as just someone to whom the event “happens.”

As I have argued, the real change in Paul materializes through his *reaction* to what happens to him on the road to Damascus. He quickly transcends the passive conditioning of the event via the judgments that he makes concerning the transcendent event. His subjectivity thuswise exercises its sovereignty over the contents of its experience—as transcendental ego. It is this ego's judgments that themselves enact the conversion proper, which involves, as I have shown, not only intellectual and/or spiritual changes, but also changes to embodiment as experienced.

But just as any account of Paul's conversion that ignores or downplays his judgment is arguably inadequate, so, too, is any account of Paul that ignores the sensuous correlates of his experience. Here I have treated the former first because my argument is that it is more primary

and essential, but my phenomenological study would be incomplete if it were to focus solely on the experience of conversion judgments and did not include an analysis of the “outer” sense experiences involved in the conversion. It would be a grave oversight to ignore the fact that the transcendent phenomenon makes the conversion possible, despite the fact that it is judgment that makes it actual.¹³

Let us begin with Paul’s first-person consciousness and from there proceed toward the specific sensuous phenomena that are relevant to his case. From this viewpoint conversion is a first-person experience that is tied to a definite and determinate event, occurring in real time, in what appears for Paul to be the present or “now” moment of his conscious stream. As Paul is walking along his way to his destination his ordinary mundane experience is suspended by an extraordinary sensory event. This event is disruptive in nature, its disruption enacted via the temporary debilitation of Paul’s sensory experience. Thus it is the interruption of Paul’s ordinarily experienced and anticipated “outer sense” that makes possible (but does not itself execute) the complete reordering of Paul’s identity.

As we have seen it is the judgment that executes the conversion proper, but these judgments cannot be made without the occurrence of the phenomenon from which Paul first concludes that his previous ways were wrong. The existential judgments follow from what begins with the judgment that the sensuous phenomenon is the provenance of (the Christian) God. All of Paul’s conversion judgments can be traced to this single sensuous moment.¹⁴ But the significance of this is that Paul’s conversion is both intellectual *and* sensuous; its rational dimension is opened up by the sensorial. Here I will more closely examine this sensorial

¹³ In other words it is judgment that actualizes what is only the potential for conversion.

¹⁴ It is this sensuous moment that, theologically speaking, demonstrates the potency of divine grace.

“moment” using the methods of transcendental phenomenology. I will focus on the two modes in which the event is sensuously given to Paul: via his vision and his hearing.

Let us begin with Paul’s visual experience of the phenomenon of light: “a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him.”¹⁵ It is especially significant that it is via the appearance of light that Paul’s conversion is initiated. Light is a curious phenomenon as it is at once both that which makes possible the phenomenon of sight while it is also a possible object of sight—at least in a limited sense, since I cannot see light in the same way that I can see trees or my desk. In the natural attitude I may operate under the pretense that I see light, but in the phenomenological attitude “seeing” light is in fact heavily qualified. In short, I do not see light in the way that I see objects. My experience of light is different from that of ordinary objects because even in the natural attitude I understand that my experience of light is not of light in itself, of light *qua* material object. Light is something that I see in that it is part of what I see, but I cannot (even in the natural attitude) see light itself. In the natural attitude, light seems to “fill” the air without being materially present to me.

It is apparent that my perception of light is different in kind from material perception. But sometimes phenomena that are related to light can be confusing for analysis. We cannot let these initially confounding examples undermine what is a reasonable analysis. It is imperative, for example, that we do not confuse brightness, such as the brightness of the sun or the screen of an electronic device, with the (direct) perception of light. Light has to be reflected; it requires an object in order to be perceived. Like color, my perception of it cannot be removed from the objective phenomenal world.

¹⁵ Acts 9:3 NABRE

Projected light can also be confusing. I encounter projected light all the time, like the light that emanates from the lamp in a room that is already well-lit. I can see this light as cast against the wall. But in other cases, especially those where my environment is poorly lit, projected light can appear as if it is an object. Consider for example the bright output of a spotlight against a dark night sky. In this example do I not see light directly? In short, no—in this case light is discernible for me only in virtue of the fact that it is cast across the sky as a sort of background object. Thus it is a background in a visual sense and not a physical sense, although physical properties of the “empty” sky do affect my perception of light, such as the particles in the air that account for the red appearance of a setting sun. Thus these exceptional cases of light perception can be explained in the same terms as background light. It is worthwhile to state the obvious here and point out that we do not perceive light in the way that we perceive material objects since, after all, light is not material. This is confirmed by my sense of touch, although I am not capable of physically encountering every material object, at least if a physical encounter requires a discernible sensation on my part, since I can “touch” microscopic particles that will appear to me through the assisted vision of a lens, and yet I cannot feel them when I touch them.

It is apparent even to so-called “common sense” that light is not a thing, not a material entity—and yet I still *see* it. What exactly do I see if light has no material status? In the natural scientific attitude it is understood that light, as energy, cannot be directly perceived, not only by virtue of its physical properties but also my own physiological constitution.¹⁶ While light does not have mass, its objective “existence” is grounded in its perpetual motion. Light is always

¹⁶ Sometimes it is suggested that energy cannot be perceived at all, but this argument is a gross distortion of something manifestly true in the phenomenological attitude, namely, that with my eyes, brain, and central nervous system I am not capable of seeing light as “what it is,” energy. I am to the contrary seeing the effects of the energy.

moving. It moves in waves and while I can feel the effects of these waves, I do not regard the massless object directly (I cannot do so). While I can feel the effects of some but not all of the various wavelengths of light that surpass the capabilities of my vision, even the wavelengths that I can “see” are interpreted as such by the brain. Outside of this interpretive milieu the light itself has no color. The color of the world is confined to the limits of consciousness and perhaps instruments for detection, which obviously cannot “experience” the color in sensuous fashion, despite the fact that they may be able to “identity” the color on the basis of measured wavelength.

In the phenomenological attitude, things change. Despite the fact that I do not experience light as an object in itself, light is still a phenomenon that I recognize and face on a daily basis. While I may not technically see light in itself, at least according to the natural and theoretical attitudes, light often appears to me in a primary way. Phenomenologically speaking, I *do* see light and I can direct my intentionality toward its manifestation(s). I see light coming out of the fixtures in the room, I see the light of my computer screen as I type these words, I see the light shining through the slanted blinds of the west window. A physicist can tell me that I do not really see light itself in these scenarios, but my experience confirms otherwise. I know, after all, when I do *not* see light like this.

But light is also something much more preponderant than what is involved in these allegedly “direct” cases. Light is something that I often see without looking at it directly, like the way in which a room illuminated in ordinary daylight just appears to me as a room of objects and things, and not as a room of light. It is the light that makes it possible for me to see anything at all. Like the case of the light that I see coming from a lamp or window, this light requires my intentionality in order to stick out from what is otherwise only a latent and partially given

phenomenon. Husserl has a term for this sort of partial presentation. The phenomenal experience of light falls under the category of what Husserl calls “apperception.” Although his phenomenological findings need no confirmation from the natural scientific attitude, it is worth nothing that his account is corroborated by the explanations of optics given by scientific researchers.

Apperceptions are rather different from ordinary, “direct” perceptions in that they are not directly given as are ordinary material objects. But this is not to say that an apperception is interpretive; Husserl intimates that it is not inferential, not a “thinking act.”¹⁷ Thus an apperception takes on a rather unique status caught between the two modes of perception—it is neither perceived nor reasoned.

So what *is* apperception? An apperception is a *part* of a perception that is indirectly given but nevertheless grasped in an immediate manner. Husserl writes of apperceptions that they are:

. . .intentional lived-experiences that are conscious of something as perceived, [but this something as perceived] is not self-given in these lived-experiences (not completely): and they are called apperceptions to the extent that they have this trait, even if in this case they also consciously intend what in truth is self-given in them. Apperceptions transcend their immediate content. . .¹⁸

The first thing to note is that apperceptions entail intentionality. While intentionality is often confused with conscious awareness, this is a misconception that likely results from confusion with the word “intent.” Intentionality as a concept in transcendental phenomenology actually refers as we have seen to the “aboutness” of an experience. Not all experiences have intentionality; sensations, for example, are not intentional. They can be made intentional via phenomenological reflection, but until then, the sensation is only the “material” correlate of a

¹⁷ Husserl, CM §51, 111 <141>.

¹⁸ Husserl, APS, 624 <337>.

possible mental act. This is the distinction that plays out in the difference between *being* in pain and *thinking about* the pain.

Second it is significant that the apperception is essentially the perception of something that is not immediately perceived. This sounds abstract but with a concrete example we can see how straightforward the notion of apperception actually is. I will elaborate upon an example given by Moran: I sit indoors as I write this, in a room with both shape and size. As I face in one direction, I perceive the limit of the interior space in front of me—the wall. Even though I cannot see the wall behind me, I grasp that it is there. This does not require any sort of cognition from me; while I am inside of the building my sense of being inside of not only a room but also a larger structure is latent in my consciousness despite the fact that it is neither an inference *nor* something that is given directly to sense.

In this particular example I have most likely seen the back wall of the building previously, but this prior experience is not necessary for apperception. Consider how I can look from a close distance at a material object. The object appears to me in its “profile” view, according to the specific “adumbration” of its presentation. This adumbration is essentially the perspective of the phenomenal object, but it applies more so to the object than to the perceiver. The fact that I can only regard this object in adumbrated form while I nevertheless can intuit its other possible adumbrations is the product of my apperception. Despite the fact that I have never seen the other or “back” side of this object, I grasp that it is there. Again, I do not have to think about it in order for the object to have the other side, nor do I directly see that side—it is just “there.”

Light is a bit more complicated of an example than the back side of a material object, but the mode of its phenomenal appearance is just the same: it is apperceived. Curiously, Husserl

does not discuss the apperception of light much at all in his writing, which is surprising for such a fundamental and ubiquitous apperception, without which visual perception would be impossible.¹⁹ As vision occupies a primary place in outer sensation, as I have argued, its requisite basis in the apperception of light is a surprising oversight on Husserl's part.

It is light that at once both makes it possible for us to see at the same time that it is only partially given itself, which accounts for its apperceptive status. Light is not perceived as a distinct object in itself but is instead part of a perceptual "schema." The apperception of light is an example of what Husserl has in mind when he indicates that "it is in relation to "circumstances" that the thing is what it is."²⁰ Husserl points out that an object can remain the same while the lighting changes, which he calls a change in the "sensuous schema."²¹ This schema is apperceived since light really only appears to my vision as "cast." Its givenness is therefore indirect; I do not experience it as a singular presentation, in the way that I can see a book or an animal.

At the same time that light is more difficult to see than material objects, it is that which makes it possible to see material objects in the first place, just as the back side of an object makes possible its appearance as a multi-dimension shape that takes up space. Take, for example, the way in which I am able to see the output of a flashlight in the dark, but not in daylight. In the case of daylight light is already cast upon the extent of my environment, such that I cannot see any "additional" light that is added onto it, at least insofar as the light is of the same polychromatic wavelength as the background sunlight. In the natural attitude, physicists can explain the phenomenon of vision in terms of the reflective qualities of an external object's

¹⁹ The most sustained discussion of the phenomenology of light is probably in *Ideas II*.

²⁰ Husserl, *Ideas II*, 44 <41>.

²¹ *Ibid.*

molecules. As we have seen the “color” of an object is the brain’s identification of the wavelength of light that the object reflects. But crucially this requires a *source* of light in the first place in order for reflection to occur at all. This is why it is impossible to see a material object in complete darkness; there is no light, which is necessary in order to see. In pitch darkness, the red ball has no color at all. While it is true as we saw in the natural attitude that we do not directly see light appear to us, it is manifest via apperception that it is a phenomenological condition of the experience of vision; it is evident in experience that without light we would have no vision at all.

The visual component of the phenomenal field is especially significant in that it is more “present” than the other sensuous dimensions of experience. Consider just how primary the status of sight really is; at least when I am awake, more often than not I am seeing something. This does not mean that I am noticing anything in particular. Furthermore, I am likely paying more attention to vision (although perhaps not a lot more) than any of the other senses, which are either essentially hibernating, as is my olfaction when I do not seem to smell anything in particular, or marked by empty content, exemplified by the situation wherein I “hear silence.” The silence almost paradoxically “sounds” a certain way to me as sensuous phenomenon. Vision is, at least ordinarily, different in kind from other sensory situations like these.²² Unless I am in deep and dreamless sleep, then my vision is either passively or actively occupied.

²² There is even a need to analyze the appearance of blindness, just as it is necessary to analyze all other sorts of non-objective visual objects, from hallucinations to vivid dreams to pure imagination. There are fascinating insights to be found in the phenomenology of blindness. Someone who is profoundly blind from birth sees not “blackness” but “nothing.” Only someone who has at one point seen is capable of identifying “blackness.” For those who can see, it is next to impossible to phenomenologically differentiate the vision of “blackness” from “nothing.” Many people who are not profoundly blind are capable of what is called “light perception.”

Because vision is so primary and fundamental to the constitution of experience, when Paul is temporarily blinded by a bright light, his blindness *is itself a seeing*—it is determined by its circumstances. It has to be a seeing to the extent that Paul is capable of identifying it as blindness in the first place. This is a familiar experience that many people have had at some point or another; I have experienced my own visual field in a “washed out” mode wherein all I see is bright white, or, if I squint my eyes, what appears instead to be a dark and red “wall.” Either of these visions can result from having looked directly at a bright light source. Even if I close my eyes right now, I am at once both not seeing, or seeing nothing, and also seeing something, namely a black field or map that comprises my entire visual field.

As we can see in these examples, sight is a continuously occurring phenomenon for me. Even when I am not noticing things or focusing on anything in particular, I still have the experience of seeing. My sight is more continuous than perhaps any other faculty of sense. I am almost always “seeing” to some degree, whereas it is far from obvious that the same is true for my other external senses.

The apparent primacy of sight is likely related to the provenance of the numerous epistemological tropes that employ visual metaphors in order to link the intellectual to the visual. This analogy is epitomized by the question “do you see what I mean?” as asked to someone regarding a matter that involves only words and has no visual basis whatsoever. Indeed intellectual understanding is often characterized using visual metaphors. In Plato’s dialogues Socrates often asks his interlocutor whether he “sees” whether something is the case or not.²³ Phenomenology inherits this idiomatic schema. Indeed this is occasionally suggested to be a limitation of phenomenology; as Don Ihde puts it, this is the “intense visualism” manifest in

²³ In a survey of *Meno* I note ten instances of “see” idiomatically employed like so.

phenomenology, a favoritism that is traceable at least to Heraclitus and the Greeks.²⁴ But this arguable bias is confirmed by the nature of our experience, which, with certain clinical exceptions, tends to privilege the phenomenon of sight. My experience of vision is persistent and nearly omnipresent compared to the other modes of outer sensation.

The primacy of vision reinforces the sensuous primacy of Paul's conversion—it is given to him in the most fundamental of ways. The visual component of Paul's conversion evinces the fact that his transformation occurs, if not on the basis of some external thing that has properties of its own, on the basis of external *perception*, of the presentation of some “given” that in the natural attitude would be considered to be really “outside” of the subject. To this end it is fair to characterize the conversion of Paul as at least partially “passive” to the extent that the original catalyst for the transformative shift is something that is (at least understood to be if not actually) external to the subject. In effect, even if Paul's conversion is the result of a neurological event like an epileptic seizure, it is Paul's interpretation of the seizure that trumps everything else. In other words, even if Paul was experiencing an epileptic episode, he thought he saw Christ. It is notable that even the sensuous correlate of the conversion entails a judgment, in this case an identification. Paul sees a bright light, and he decides that it is the light of Christ.²⁵ Here the judgment pertains to what is an apperception since, as I have shown, light cannot be directly perceived but only apperceived. Despite the fact that this apperception is by definition indirect, it is potent enough to temporarily strip Paul of his sense of sight. Paul attributes this intense and disruptive apperception to the work of God.

²⁴ Ihde, *Phenomenologies of Sound*, 21, 51.

²⁵ This should not be understood to imply that it is not “really” the voice of Christ. It may or may not be the voice of Christ and Paul's decision regarding whether it is or not ultimately has no bearing on that matter.

Paul also judges that he hears the voice of Christ, thus this is the other sensuous catalyst for his conversion. If there is any faculty of sense that rivals the primacy of vision, it is hearing. Even when I hear “nothing,” I am still hearing, just as with vision when I see nothing, I am still seeing. It is less clear that when I taste nothing I am still tasting, or that when I smell nothing, I am smelling. While darkness/blackness and silence (rather paradoxically) have determinate appearances before sense, it is far from obvious that “nothing” has a taste or a smell. These senses do not operate so noticeably “in the background” as does my vision and hearing. It is almost as if the taste or smell of nothing would require a judgment in order to ascend to the level of presence, whereas the sight or sound of nothing is something that is more immediately given (and therefore more immediately noticed). While it is true that when I taste something I do not need to make a judgment in order to experience the taste, in the case of the absence of flavor I typically need to determine that I taste nothing. The same is not true for my sight and hearing, each of which is essentially pre-judgmental or pre-reflective in nature. I may not notice that there is no sound, but I am hearing the lack of sound in a different, more direct manner than what I experience when I am tasting or smell nothing. Without a doubt I do not have to make a judgment in order to taste or smell something, but the “presence of absence” is more sensuously felt by me in the case of my seeing and hearing. I am more likely to notice seeing nothing than I am to notice hearing nothing, but each dimension of sense is more continuously present to my consciousness compared to other modes of sensation like taste and smell.

All of this is to say that the fact that Paul’s conversion is mediated by one of the more primary domains of sensuous experience is not insignificant. Paul is addressed in the most direct and effective manner possible—after all, seeing is believing. Indeed in Paul’s particular case it is

not the “sound of nothing” that accompanies his conversion but instead a determinate sound that is identified as a voice. In Acts the author recounts that:

He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” He said, “Who are you, sir?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do.”²⁶

Let us begin with the perceived origin of the voice. This must be distinguished from the so-called “actual” origin of the voice, which cannot be guaranteed on phenomenological grounds. That said, while it is true that the origin of the appearance cannot be known with absolute certainty, Paul does make a judgment regarding the provenance of this voice that he hears. Taking at face value the veracity of the scripture, Paul judges the voice to come from without, from some external source. Even if this judgment were to be considered “true” in the natural attitude, likely via the corroboration of other eyewitnesses (indeed such accounts are in the scriptural sources), it is nevertheless not necessarily the case that Paul’s auditory experience is of something present “in the flesh.” It should be noted that the scripture indicates that Paul hears a voice, not that he hears *someone*. The difference between the two is enormous; the sound of a *voice* can appear as if it is unembodied and phantasmic, whereas the sound of *someone* is material and concrete. Despite the fact that Paul has been temporarily blinded, and despite the fact that scripture says that he hears a voice (and not someone), at first Paul is not sure what he hears, as we can tell by the fact that he asks the voice to identify itself. It is only after the voice answers his question that Paul judges that he hears someone.

It is still possible that Paul makes this judgment in natural error, but it cannot be considered a phenomenological error. It is true that people with schizophrenia hear internal voices all of the time; it is obvious that a voice that appears to correspond to some real individual

²⁶ Acts 9:4-6 NABRE

may not necessarily correspond to material “reality” in such a manner. The real phenomenological issue to examine is whether Paul’s hearing is in this case presentation or presentification.

If the voice is a presentation to Paul, then it is fully present, immediate, and direct. It is a givenness “in the flesh.” This is the type of voice that Paul hears when he speaks to one of his fellow travelers, or any other “real” person. We cannot yet be sure that Paul does not hear the voice in a way like this.

If the voice is a presentification, then its givenness is partial. The difference between this type of mental experience and presentation comes down to representation and mental status, for Husserl conceptualized via the noematic distinction between the different types of acts. It is the contrast between the noema of a heard voice compared to the noema of an imagined or remembered voice. The latter sort of noema is limited to my own inner sense, whereas the former appears as sensuously fulfilled. Differentiating inner speech from external speech is typically rather straightforward. Don Ihde calls this the difference between “inner” and “outer” sound.²⁷

As Ihde points out, there are exceptions to this difference in lived experience. Hallucinations can often appear as sounds instead of sights. Ihde suggests that these hallucinations are the synthesis of sound that is directly perceived, and sound that is imagined. In such a case an inner sound would appear to me as if it was an outer sound. This is why such a sound would seem to me to be so real; it would be given “in the flesh.” I have mentioned the clinical attempts to explain Paul’s conversion using neurology. If an epileptic episode does indeed account for Paul’s experience, then we can assume that the visual and auditory phenomena are presentations via the effective synthesis of inner and outer sense. This is directly

²⁷ Ihde, *Phenomenologies of Sound*, 132.

analogous to the research experiments in which electric stimulation is used to produce a “feeling.”

But let us assume that Paul is “neurotypical” and has not in this case synthesized inner and outer auditory sense. Can we then determine what type of givenness is present to him when he hears the voice? It is possible to resolve this question on the basis of the intersubjective verification provided in the scriptural sources. “The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, for they heard the voice but could see no one.”²⁸ It has been the object of much scholarly consternation that this account in Acts 9 is ostensibly contradicted by what is written in Acts 22: “My companions saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who spoke to me.”²⁹ Longnecker has argued that this is simply the result of different meanings behind the verb “hear.” This polysemy is evident in English as well as the original Greek. To “hear” can mean to be aware of a sound, but it can also mean to understand the meaning of a sound. Longnecker maintains that only Paul understands what is being said, while others hear the voice but not the message. This is akin to hearing a voice speaking a language that you do not know. I can tell that it is a voice that I hear, but I do not grasp or understand what it is saying.

If others witness some of the same events that are experienced by Paul, then what is given to Paul is presentation. It is impossible, after all, for me to think about a memory with someone else in the same way that I can “make a memory” by doing something with another subject. Merely talking about a memory is not the same as intersubjectively sharing in the sensuous thinking act. My presentifications are limited in their givenness; they are confined to the limits of my own consciousness. So it cannot be the case that Paul’s sight and hearing are presentifications

²⁸ Acts 9:7 NABRE

²⁹ Acts 22:9 NABRE

to the extent that others experience the same (or at least similar, if less intense) phenomena as he does.

Can we be sure that this event is not the result of *folie à deux*? This is a well-documented but thoroughly perplexing phenomenon that notably was removed from the most recent, fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Essentially the phenomenon is of shared psychosis. Could Paul's fellow travelers have shared in his psychosis? This is of course possible but even if it is indeed the case, we can revert back to the insight that in some clinical cases there is a synthesis of inner and outer sense. In such cases phenomenology and its focus on first person lived experience compel us to classify the "irreal" phenomena as presentations. It may resemble a presentification to some third party, but that violates the limits of phenomenological perspective.

It is apparent that it is *only* Paul who has a totally synthesized experience on the road to Damascus, evinced by the fact that his sight and hearing are complementary phenomena. Even if others see the light, it does not blind them; even if others hear the voice, they do not understand it. Only Paul seems to experience the event in its fullness, in its completion. It goes without saying that the event is *for Paul*, not for his cohorts. Since the event is for Paul, only he can fully interact with it, epitomized in the judgments he makes about what he senses.

As we have seen, this is where the real phenomenological significance of Paul's case is revealed—that he is a passive convert who experiences what appears to be a divine revelation (via outer sense, his vision and hearing) but in fact cannot be certified to be any more than a cluster of associated phenomena confined to his own consciousness and grouped together via a judgment on his part. By phenomenological definition a conversion, insofar as it is an experience, cannot directly result from an external cause without some judgment on the part of

the subject. All of the intense and turbulent phenomena that are associated with his conversion reinforce the notion that the conversion is ultimately self-contained in Paul's own "mind." The voice that he hears *may* have some external referent, and the blinding light that strips him of his vision *might* be produced by Jesus, but it is also quite possible that the voice and blinding light are entirely the fabrication of his own consciousness. While other scriptural accounts indicate that Paul's peers also hear the sound of the voice, in the end it is of little consequence whether the phenomenon is shared or individual since our purpose is not to corroborate the existence of some external cause for the appearance(s). That said, it is the true value of the epileptic interpretation of Paul that it can offer an explanation of the material events correlated with the conscious phenomena, thereby definitively subtracting from the case the obligation to rationalize the metaphysical, theological assumptions inherent therein. The material explanation offered by psychiatric medicine is, in other words, a welcome supplement to the phenomenological analysis, but it is not in and of itself sufficient for explaining anything of import regarding Paul's conversion. It should be noted that in the last analysis it is still *very possible* that Paul really does see and hear Jesus at the same time that major abnormal processes occur in his brain. Thus even definitive "proof" that Paul was epileptic would only go so far. Since the speculative metaphysical issues may never be resolved it is best to look to phenomenology and focus on what is actually given to consciousness, with the question of "real" or not bracketed off to the side.

While my focus has been on the visual and auditory correlates of Paul's conversion, I should note that it is not just a sound or sight (or lack thereof) that is sensuously given to Paul's consciousness. His visual and auditory experiences are accompanied by intense emotional phenomena. I do not need to elaborate at length upon this dimension of Paul's conversion

because traditionally Paul's emotional reaction to the phenomenon has taken on central importance in the scholarship.

I will point out, however, that focusing exclusively on Paul's emotional reaction can be dangerous, in part for reasons deriving from bias. When commentators have focused on Paul's emotional response to his conversion, they have tended to downplay his rationality. To be emotional is to be out of control, so the story goes. The result of this misguided interpretation is that Paul's conversion is understood to be passive rather than active. But again the real upshot of my findings is the insight that Paul's alleged passivity is really not so passive at all. It is often common practice to refer to Paul as if he is a recipient or vessel or even object onto which a conversion is essentially forced, and to portray his story in such a way does make some sense to certain ends, as in to characterize the potency of God's power, as we saw in the writing of Thomas Aquinas. But in truth, the "passive" reading of Paul in fact belittles the real magnitude of the story.

Despite the fact that Paul's conversion is typically modeled as if passive, in fact his conversion is *not* the result of passive synthesis. While Paul experiences on a firsthand basis events that he interprets to be transcendent and supernatural, the transcendence of the events is entirely the result of an *active* synthesis performed on the part of his ego. It is the judgment that Paul makes regarding the phenomenon that solidifies his experience as one of conversion.

The Conversion of St. Paul: The Body-Convert

I have argued that in prioritizing Paul's judgmental involvement in his own conversion we do not want to completely pass over the phenomenological significance of the fact that Paul's

conversion experience is something that is (in part) sensuously mediated for him, something that he lives through, something that “feels” a certain way for him. In the last section we looked at how the experiences “feel” a certain way to Paul via his vision and his hearing. But these sensuous dimensions to his conversion are of course channeled via Paul’s body. While his conversion cannot be *reduced* to physical events or causes, any sufficient analysis of his experience should take note of how sensuous experience and physical “feedback” correlate with the rich complexities of Paul’s “inner” experience, his conscious life.

The physical side of Paul’s existence figures centrally in his written reinterpretation, or reevaluation, of his own past. This past is recounted in Paul’s autobiography, as expressed in the Letter to the Philippians:

For we are the circumcision, we who worship through the Spirit of God, who boast in Christ Jesus and do not put our confidence in flesh, although I myself have grounds for confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he can be confident in flesh, all the more can I. Circumcised on the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parentage, in observance of the law a Pharisee, in zeal I persecuted the church, in righteousness based on the law I was blameless. But whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith to know him and the power of his resurrection and sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.³⁰

In this excerpt we can see Paul describe his transition from identifying first and foremost in terms of his physical nature, his “flesh,” to a self-perception the *noema* of which is primarily supra-physical, founded on the “Spirit of God.” To a degree this appears, at least at first glance, to entail the ascetic denial of embodiment and physicality. It is well-known that there are scriptural passages in which Paul makes critical or negative remarks concerning the body.³¹ But

³⁰ Phil. 3:3-11 NABRE

³¹ 1 Cor. 12:23 NABRE

in this particular case an interpretation such as this would actually stretch and distort the real meaning of Paul's remarks. Here, where Paul denies the "confidence in the flesh," he is first and foremost addressing the contentious status of mandatory Gentile circumcisions in the early Christian church. In the early church it was first necessary to become a Jew before coming a Christian, meaning that cultural practices like circumcision were required for entrance into the Christian faith. This is the context of Paul's remarks. He is not denying that he is "flesh" but instead stipulating that incidental physical differences are insignificant before Christ, whose believers combine to form a unity comprised out of difference. As we will see, Paul uses the body to explain this relation.

The body's centrality in human experience is perhaps what motivates Paul to return to it over and over in his writing. While it cannot be denied that Paul occasionally shuns the natural body, in such instances he does not use the same term as he uses to refer to the spiritual body. This latter sense of the body definitely takes on significant theological and ecclesiological importance in Paul's writing, typically construed in terms of its mereological significance.

Paul refers to the body as *sōma* frequently in his writing, often using it as part of a larger phrase or expression.³² Michelle Voss Roberts notes that the locution "body of Christ" in particular has at least three discernible, albeit related, meanings.³³ These meanings do not pertain to the body as the object of occasional debasement but instead the spiritual body, which Paul renders in such a way that it effectively amounts to what I will refer to as a *phenomenological heuristic*. Paul suggests that the spiritual body, in other words, offers subjects a phenomenological example in which they are encouraged to participate by focusing intentionally

³² Evola, "St. Paul's Error."

³³ Roberts, *Body Parts: Theological Anthropology*, 101.

on what they are already “living out.” In one of the most well-known passages of the entire New Testament Paul writes:

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, “Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body,” it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, “Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body,” it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I do not need you.” Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.³⁴

This analogical passage is phenomenologically fascinating. Here Paul appeals to the unified and holistic—but also differentiable—phenomenon of embodiment as a means of explaining the universal Being commented upon at length by Badiou. Paul describes the way in which the body is a collection of distinct parts. It is experienced in different modes, like the way in which the ears respond to sound compared to how the eyes facilitate sight, but all of the individual modes or ways of appearing are ontologically synthesized into the larger, more general structure. It is an example that can be taken up as one’s own, insofar as one has a body, and through the adoption of the identification one is afforded a deeper understanding of an abstract metaphysical concept: that the infinitely singular comprises the universal.

It is wondrous that Paul has ever been considered to be champion of the immaterial soul at the cost of the ascetic denial of the body (see, for example, Nietzsche’s *The Antichrist*) when, in passages such as the one above, he specifically characterizes the body as undivided and uses

³⁴ 1 Cor. 12: 12-26 NABRE

the lack of division to express a theological message. In fact the entire significance of his analogy between the body and the Christian Being hinges upon the fact that each is undivided and whole. As Vito Evola suggests, Paul's notion of body as *sōma* is derived from the Hebrew *nefeš*, which is a "holistic" term that stands for neither soul nor body but both.³⁵ Evola points out that when Paul discusses the body in a literal and negative sense, as a physical thing, he uses the Koine term *sarx*, which is close to "flesh" which we see Paul undermine in the excerpt above, and the connotation of negativity is novel on Paul's part. It refers to the part that is "not wanting to accept Christ." This is not at all the body that Paul describes when he depicts the image of the Body of Christ, etc. At least when it comes to his notion of identity, the body as *sōma* is not marginalized but in fact brought to the front and center. The body is a central Pauline concept, not only for its heuristic use in conceiving of and imagining universal Christian identity, but also for the role that it plays in the constitution of personal identity, including, importantly, the past.

For Paul, while the flesh passes away it is the convert as Body of Christ who endures. The ephemeral significance of mere "flesh" pales in comparison to the significance of the eternal soul. This is itself exemplified through Paul's stance that the particulars of circumcision, or the lack thereof, are ultimately of theological insignificance. The body, in effect, is just a temporary thing that is paired with consciousness, which is far more definitive, essential, and persistent, specifically because it is in virtue not of the flesh-body (*sarx*) but of consciousness (here *qua* soul or "spirit body") that the individual is made into, as Badiou puts it, a universal subject.

In the case of Paul and other Christian converts, this reordering of the subject into a universal form brings about a corresponding "conversion of the body." Materially this conversion entails no "real" or "substantial" change to the organismal dimension of the body;

³⁵ Evola, "St. Paul's Error."

there is no metaphysical or material transmutation of the subject that occurs with conversion. Instead the change in the body is perceptual and phenomenological—the body changes in the way that it appears for its subject. Despite the fact that there is no necessary material change to the body, we should be wary of reducing the embodied conversion to a simply psychological shift. It is not just a matter of *gestalt*. To the contrary the phenomenological reorientation of embodiment is a *substantial* transformation. If it entails like *gestalt* the reinterpretation of configuration or pattern, it differs in the essential significance of the reinterpretation. While the body is “only” reinterpreted via conversion, this reinterpretation plays a role in the constitution of the body itself. This is precisely the sort of redefinition that we observe in the case of Christian converts who almost paradoxically encounter new embodied selves through their transformation; the body becomes a sacred object that requires specific practices (from circumcision in the early Church to simple chrismatic anointing to something as routine as the performance of the Sign of the Cross.) This sacred body does not and cannot reconstitute itself without the volition of the subject. The subject’s volition is manifest in a judgment (or, more likely, a set of judgments). Thus the conversion of the body is just as much the result of a judgment as is the general “intellectual” or ‘spiritual” conversion.

Conclusions Concerning Active and Passive Conversions

Earlier I included in my synthetic model of conversion a distinction between the “active” and “passive” varieties of conversion.³⁶ After phenomenological analysis it is apparent that this

³⁶ It should be noted that here I am not using these terms in Husserl’s sense, to refer to active and passive synthesis.

distinction is not manifest in experience itself. In other words, there is no phenomenological evidence that the convert can be a “passive respondent to outside forces,” as Rambo puts it.³⁷ In short the difference between the two supposed types is not phenomenologically meaningful, at least in the immediate present. In the natural attitude it is understood that the active and passive types of conversion differentiate the “source” of the conversion, either from within or from without. Phenomenologically speaking it cannot be denied that each type of experience has its own objective correlate corresponding to its acts of consciousness. In other words, there is a noematic difference between the two types; my experience is such that I can identify the conversion that I seek out compared to the one which supposedly “happens” to me. But in the two sorts of conversion there is in fact not a difference in intentionality. In the case of the active conversion the experience is understood to be pursued, whereas the passive conversion involves no such deliberateness. It cannot be denied that it is possible to phenomenologically distinguish the conversion that commences with an intentional act from that which appears to be more extemporaneous, but in the present, given, “now” moment of consciousness, there is nothing inherent to the phenomenon that marks it as the product of activity or passivity on my part.

All of this gestures toward the question of whether a truly “involuntary” conversion is possible (as described in Baird and Meintel). Ultimately the answer to this question depends on what one means by “involuntary.” In Paul’s case it is undeniable that he *chooses* to convert—he is not forced—despite the fact that he makes this decision after encountering a subjectivity-disrupting event that institutes a personal crisis. In Paul’s case this comes in the form of a “why?” question, which he is incapable of answering, which catalyzes the complete upheaval of his identity. So did Paul actively seek out his own conversion? No, certainly not. His life was

³⁷ Rambo, “Anthropology and the Study of Conversion,” 213.

entirely oriented toward the persecution of those he would eventually join after his conversion to Christianity. But did Paul *consent* to his conversion? Yes. The conversion was not his own idea or suggestion, but when he is, as Baird puts it, invited to re-identify, he accepts the opportunity. To the extent that Paul accepts the invitation, his conversion is not entirely a passive occurrence. The best way to distinguish this type of conversion is in Badiou's terms: Paul is a passive subject whose life is upset by a subject-shattering event. But in another way, it is also an active conversion for Paul. Paul is the recipient of revelation, but the theological significance of his story is undermined if Paul does not make a specific choice when faced with revelation. It is important that we realize that the specific decision that Paul makes, that he accepts the call to which he is subject, constitutes an entirely non-passive dimension of his conversion. In short, this decision is a *judgment* on Paul's part, which is important when it comes to analyzing the supposed passivity of the conversion of Paul as well as others. A judgment is not, after all, a passive occurrence.

It is apparent that the idea that Paul does not ultimately actively execute his conversion is thoroughly problematic on a phenomenological level. Even Badiou points this out: it is partly Paul's *response* to the event that facilitates his subjective transformation. Paul needs the revelation to be given to him in order to convert, but he does not convert at all without assenting to it. If a conversion does not require some sort of judgment on the part of the subject and can be enacted from without (or outside of the subject), then the sort of changes that result from abominable pseudo-scientific methods of the past, like electroshock therapy or lobotomization, would count as "conversions." It would also be difficult to phenomenologically distinguish the case of the "forced" conversion, like the kind enforced by the Spanish against the indigenous peoples of Florida, in which case the supposed judgment was not freely enacted, and therefore

was not really a judgment at all. This does not seem right. My phenomenological model for conversion is intended to account for the “passive” conversion that is adventitious, extraneous, and most of all thoroughly unexpected, but it cannot accommodate the idea of a conversion that is devoid of judgment. Thus the idea of an *entirely* passive conversion is incoherent—a conversion is always active on the level of judgment. Paul did not plan to convert but ultimately the conversion does not occur at all without some fundamental and basic assertion on the part of his subjectivity. So the phenomenological subject must be actively involved in a conversion, at least on some level, not only in the case of conversions that are deliberately pursued, but also those are fortuitous for the subject.

It has to be noted, however, that this is not equivalent with nor does it entail that *unconscious* conversion is (or is not) a possible experience. One should wonder whether it is possible to convert as Paul does, on the basis of a passive impetus, even making a judgment regarding the event, *but* without being conscious of the resultant or constituent “conversion.” In the last chapter I posed this very question. Certainly, this is not the type of conversion that Paul experiences, as I have shown. Yet it is at least conceivable that an event could initiate a conversion without the subject’s knowledge thereof. So the question is whether or not it is possible to convert as the result of an experience without having recognized that the conversion has occurred. This is tantamount to the case in which someone is substantially affected by a life event that is not until much later—or perhaps never at all——realized. There are many childhood events that could have this sort of effect on one’s existential identity. It comes down to whether or not it is possible for an event to profoundly change someone without their recognition. The controversial but well-known psychoanalytic assumption is that this is not only possible but common.

This is indeed a possible experience so long as it begins with a judgment, albeit not necessarily one the gravity and/or significance of which is realized by the subject. According to Husserl the process of sedimentation requires a judgment to inaugurate the process. According to Husserl's model of sedimentation, what is at first "on the surface level" of one's conscious awareness recedes into the depths of one's mind, the ego's "underground."³⁸ He writes that the meaning manifest in a given act of judgment:

... then sinks ever further into the background and at the same time becomes ever more indistinct; the degree of its prominence gradually lessens until it finally disappears from the field of immediate consciousness, is "forgotten." It is henceforth incorporated into the passive background, into the "unconscious," which is not a dead nothingness but a limiting mode of consciousness and accordingly can affect us anew like another passivity in the form of whims, free-floating ideas, and so on.³⁹

Something that does not result from a judgment cannot be sedimented "into" or "onto" the ego. This judgment requires an act of the will, and the act of the will requires conscious awareness. But the judgment in this case does not regard whether or not a conversion has occurred, in which case the conversion would be conscious. To the contrary this conversion is one comprised of many more or less unimportant and insignificant judgments which when considered on their own are of relatively little consequence but which, in their (passive) synthesis, combine to make something profound. It is also manifest that the object of the judgment differs markedly in these two cases; in the case of the conscious conversion the relevant judgment regards my self and my existence, whereas for the unconscious conversion the judgment does not regard my self and existence, although ultimately it will prove to have some effect on those areas.

This is the key to solving the enigmatic case of the seemingly paradoxical "unconscious conversion." Indeed this is how Scobie's theory of unconscious conversion, an apparent

³⁸ Hua IX 480.

³⁹ Husserl, EJ §67, 279.

oxymoron, can be resolved—while the overall transformation is not (at first) recognized by the converting subject, individual judgments are the constituent parts that comprise and therefore make possible the conversion. Thus the conversion itself is not an intentional object, at least so long as one assumes by “conversion” to refer to the more general change, but the individual conscious moments that are sedimented into the layers of the ego *are* conscious. The unconscious conversion is not, in other words, entirely unconscious. No such conversion can exist.

Using Scobie’s definition, the unconscious convert is the person who cannot remember being non-religious in the past, at least not subsequent to the adoption of some sense of personal identity, even if rudimentary and developing. Here it is presupposed that the person’s present religion is the only religion that he or she has ever had, and the point is that this person’s sense of identity has always been tied to religious belief and/or practice. This identity likely dates back to adolescence, or perhaps even earlier. If I adopt the phenomenological attitude and via free variation examine this point of view from the first-person perspective, a couple of significant insights emerge.

First, I note that my belief that I have always been a member of my religion, that I lack any memory of a “conversion” event via which I became or took on my new religious identity, does not entail that I have no recollection of my religious practices, which themselves necessarily involve judgments. To the contrary I have many memories of significant religious events, but none of them appear to me as my singular “conversion event.” Instead I recall these past events as if they are indeed important events, but not necessarily transformative in and of themselves. I reflect upon these events as if they are akin to different chapters of my own biography, each of which is important and plays a role in making me who I am, but none of

which stand out on their own as the precise moment of my “conversion.” These events involve judgments of various sorts, from matters of metaphysical truth (e.g. Christ rose from the dead) to those pertaining to personal identity (e.g I am a Christian).

This is how someone is able to participate habitually in religious practices without necessarily feeling that there is some determinate moment before and after which one was religious in the relevant way. The relevance of this type of conversion is not limited to the religious and spiritual contexts; one must wonder whether the vast majority of psychological conversions, the primary category, are enacted on a basis similar to the one I have here described.

This brings me to the second insight. I observe that the unconscious conversion can only be called unconscious by virtue of the fact that it presupposes a very specific and narrow conception of the phenomenon of conversion. The standard unconscious model (i.e. Scobie) takes for granted the sort of conversion that is mediated by a singular event. It is assumed that conversion is sudden and that it is known. There are many types of conversions, as I have shown, that are not sudden but are not necessarily unconscious, and the necessary decision to convert cannot be conflated with the necessary consciousness of the occurrence of a “conversion.” Actual lived experience shows us how it is possible that many conversions could occur without the subject thinking of himself as a “convert.”

Maybe the vast majority of conversions are unconscious, but not necessarily in the way Scobie means, since the habitual practices are the object of consciousness at least some of the time (or were in the past.) The same could be true for the so-called passive conversion. Ultimately *all* conversions could be called passive if by passive we refer to the fact that a series of contingent events precedes a conversion. Cases like that of St. Paul are easily identified as

“passive” since the chance event that precipitates conversion is sudden and more or less determinate. The contingency of these events derives from what we take to be “free” choices.⁴⁰

But in the last analysis, to the extent that “free” choices drive the progression of contingent events in our lives, the opposite is true; it is not that all conversions should be called passive, but to the contrary, that all conversions should be called active, if by “active” we refer to the fact that the judgments and practices (which themselves can be reduced to judgments) that eventually combine and can together comprise what we call “conversion” necessarily require free choice. This choice, freely made, has to be *actively* made.

⁴⁰ If the progression of events is not contingent but to the contrary follows a necessary course, then we are not free. This line of thinking is exemplified in the early Christian heresy of *apokatastasis*.

Ch. 7. Conclusion: An Eidetic Reduction of Conversion

The Fundamentality of Conversion

In this chapter I will review the eidetic features of the conversion experience, and I will attempt to show that conversion is a fundamental structure of consciousness, a universal phenomenon that we are predisposed to encounter by virtue of the way our experience is structured. This calls into question the claims of some empirical researchers, for example, Snow, who claims that “the convert is a social type.” Snow’s idea is that there are certain sociological properties that characterize this type, and they ultimately serve to distinguish this type from other types. In a sociological context, Snow is probably right. But *I* would like to suggest that there is nothing phenomenologically distinct or unique about the subject who converts, meaning that there is nothing that *a priori* distinguishes this person from any other, even if the occurrence of a conversion ultimately constitutes such a differentiation *a posteriori* (and therefore reinforces Snow’s empirical theory within its own appropriate, non-phenomenological context—a context which is ultimately less scientific than the phenomenological approach at the level of constitutive consciousness).¹

I would like to stress that according to my own phenomenological theory the transformation that occurs for this subject should not be understood to be necessarily radical, intense, or even complete, since, as we have seen, the transformation can be of such a nature that

¹ Husserl states, “[W]hat is cognizable by one Ego must, of *essential necessity*, be cognizable by *any* Ego.” Husserl, *Ideas* I §48, 108 <90>.

the converting subject is not even aware of it, thanks in large part to the sedimentation of knowledge constituent to the conversion itself.

My hypothesis that conversion is a fundamental aspect of human experience should not be interpreted as an attempt at a direct “denial” or refutation of Snow’s theory, nor any of the other well-known accounts of conversion (e.g. acculturation, syncretism, etc.)² It is not that these other theories are necessarily “wrong” given their own disciplinary parameters, but instead, their issue is that they do not scientifically assess conversion for what it is: a first-person “lived” experience.³ This is not to say that my own phenomenological approach to the issue is not in part inspired by a general sense of conversion that has been inspired by the work of these others. Indeed this was the entire purpose of the first chapter. It will be seen, for example, that my phenomenological account of conversion is utterly incomplete without incorporating the shared horizon of the lifeworld.

Instead of a denial or refutation of these other theories, my purpose here is to show that conversion can ultimately be reduced to *a priori* phenomenological properties that define the experience in a more essential way than other empirical theories.⁴ For example, Snow does not explain the social nature of conversion in phenomenological terms. Thus, in offering this thesis I am contesting the common interpretation that conversion can be exhaustively and scientifically reduced using the methods of psychology.⁵ To the contrary I will first analyze the noema of conversion, which is some “religious or spiritual object” but *not* (necessarily) the conversion itself. In the second section, I show that while conversion always requires a noesis of judgment,

² Baer, “History and Religious Conversion,” 25–47.

³ “Scientifically” in Husserl’s sense.

⁴ All of which are limited to results drawn *a posteriori*.

⁵ See Ch. 1.

this judgment can regard a religious object as noema, *or* it can take up as its noema a noesis regarding that religious object. Here I also demonstrate that via the sedimentation of knowledge, sometimes the conversion phenomenon is not a singular, determinate act but instead the end result of a sequence of discrete judgments, the eventual (final) synthesis of which constitutes a conversion experience. In the third section I describe what I call the “secondary noeses” of conversion, which are noeses that regard similar noemas as the converting act *par excellence*, the judgment, but are themselves supplemental to the conversion itself. But despite this fact I also show how sometimes these secondary acts are themselves necessary in order to bring about or fulfill the sense of the judging noesis that institutes the conversion. In the fourth section I show how the constitution of the conversion phenomenon is intermingled with the constitution of the shared horizons of the world at various levels.⁶ In this section I also explain how conversion relates to different aspects of the world, including the “spiritual world,” the “homeworld,” and the “lifeworld.” In the fifth section I address the extent to which the Other is a necessary feature of the conversion experience. In the sixth section I show how the eidetic structure of the conversion phenomenon involves physical, embodied phenomenological correlates. In the seventh and final section I demonstrate that the conversion phenomenon always occurs on a temporally indeterminate basis. This temporal indeterminacy is a consequence of the dynamic, flowing nature of my streaming consciousness and the way in which it is subject to sedimented meanings.

⁶ I will demonstrate that the convert is not a social type at all but is, to the contrary, a possibility even for the radically isolated consciousness. It might even be the case that solitary consciousness accompanies conversion more often than socialized consciousness. That said, conversion is almost always experienced in the social dimension.

As my final conclusion I argue that after examining these various aspects of conversion it is apparent that the phenomenon is not just something that we spontaneously experience from time to time but in fact is actually something grounded in phenomenological subjectivity itself insofar as the existential modifications entailed by conversion are part and parcel of the interpretive, self-constitutive nature of consciousness. The conversion phenomenon, I argue, is *embedded* in the very conditions of consciousness on a basic and fundamental level.

An Eidetic Reduction of the Conversion Phenomenon

Having already shown that the fundamental essence of my experience is unified temporal consciousness, I can now examine the phenomenological structure according to which unified consciousness actually *experiences* conversion. Essentially what we should expect to see is the analytic elimination of the various different “categories” of conversion according to the human sciences, replaced with a far more general—but far more fundamental—account of conversion on the phenomenological level.

Without unified consciousness and the inner consciousness of time, we would not experience subjectivity as we presently enjoy it, as complex but unified beings whose existence straddles a temporal continuum the objectification of which makes possible not only sustained beliefs in various propositions but also conscious phenomena like recollection. Without time consciousness there could be no experience of conversion—*there could be no experience of any kind at all*. Since consciousness itself constitutes time for me, all of the experiences that consciousness has are situated within its temporal frame. This sedimentation within time is not static; it necessarily entails not only the present moment but also the “Before” and the “past

Now.”⁷ Husserl identifies this as the relation *a priori* (an “eidetic law”) between intentionality and “temporal succession.” In addition to this fundamental temporal constitution, genesis and synthesis structure the experience of consciousness and intentionality and therefore structure the experience of conversion, including the unconscious and passive varieties.

Ultimately what this means, assuming that we can account phenomenologically for pre-reflective consciousness, or at least, *that we should consider pre-reflective experience to be consciousness*. This conclusion is relevant to the present phenomenology of conversion to the extent that I have argued that conversions can occur, empirically, without the awareness of the subject. In taking this position I have endorsed the supposedly controversial Scobie definition of conversion, but only because I have found that the “unconscious” conversion is in fact phenomenologically grounded. But ultimately pre-reflective experience is not sufficient on its own to bring about a conversion. While pre-reflective experience can help explain how a significant existential event like a conversion can occur outside the limits of the subject’s direct, reflective awareness (in short, because I am not always reflecting), this cannot actually give us enough to explain what brings about conversion.

In order to answer this question, we will need to conduct a full phenomenological analysis of the experience of conversion, starting with the application of the *époche* and culminating in the eidetic reduction whereby the empirical experience of conversion is reordered according to its invariant features. Thus, the result will be an account of the essential structure of conversion.

⁷ Husserl, *Ideas I* §82, 96 <165>.

I. The Noema of Conversion

When we consider conversion in the imaginative sphere, we find that conversion is bound by several essential requirements. These essential requirements are the eidetic features of conversion. The first requirement pertains to the noema of the conversion phenomenon; thus, it regards the intentional object of the act of consciousness. Insofar as we have seen that the subject is not necessarily aware of his own conversion, it cannot be the case that the intentional object of the conversion experience is necessarily the conversion itself. Nor is it the case that the noema or intentional object of conversion is existential transformation, for the same reason that it cannot be the conversion; I have demonstrated that unconscious conversion is an authentic phenomenon, which means that the noematic object of the conversion cannot necessarily be the counterpart to the noesis that fulfills the sense of the conversion proper. I will pursue this matter in the next section. For now let us note that the noema of the conversion phenomenon is a religious, spiritual, or philosophical object. Here ‘object’ refers to the intentional object of the converting act, and not an object in external, empirical sense. Furthermore, in a strict sense, this religious, spiritual, or philosophical object is a *judgment*, which we will explore on the noetic side (as the act of *judging*) in the following section.

We can discern that the noema of conversion must be a judgment with this approximate significance or meaning-context (namely, religious, spiritual, or philosophical) because the possible object of the conversion has to be an object with existential significance for the subject, meaning, an object that has some possibility to bring about the modification of the identity or role of the empirical self (or empirical ego).

An example of such an object in the religious sense is the figure of Christ, which, when paired with the appropriate noesis, such as one of accepting belief, establishes that the subject is someone who is subject to (and accepts) Christ's saving. Here Christ serves as a noematic correlate that, with its corresponding (variable) noesis, bears existential significance to the extent that it is what helps bring about the change in the converting subject on the side of the noesis. There are countless examples of possible religious intentional objects (noemas) of conversion, including: reincarnation, eternal life, sin, forgiveness, mercy, punishment, and so on. Obviously, the religious object should not be limited to any one religion or system of religions. That said, as we have seen, conversion is a phenomenon that is typically associated with a small handful of religions. This does not mean, however, that conversion is phenomenologically impossible outside of the limits of these religions.

Consider the case of the spiritual or philosophical conversion. Each of these transcends the limits of religious practice. Perhaps it is even possible that there is such a thing as a practical conversion, like the existential change that one experiences when becoming a father or a mother for the first time.⁸ Surely a significant life event such as this sometimes entails a shift in one's self-understanding such that one's very identity or role is no longer the same as before. Should we just consider this a spiritual conversion, or even a philosophical conversion? It would depend on how we define spirituality, and whether the transformation into a father or a mother entails having beliefs that we could classify as "philosophical" in nature. I would suggest that to the extent that any conversion entails an existential transformation, every conversion can be considered to be philosophical on at least some level.

⁸ I also wonder whether significant career changes might count as conversions. For example when one becomes a soldier, or a lawyer, or a professor, is this a conversion?

But if we consider just the spiritual and philosophical conversions, and set aside the theoretically “practical” conversion, we find that the two are similar but there are a couple important distinctions among them. I take it that this is true even if, as I suggested, every religious and spiritual conversion is also technically a philosophical conversion. For example, the spiritual conversion and the philosophical conversion differ drastically in their teleology; the former is concerned with explaining a specific (metaphysical) aspect of the human being, whereas the latter is far broader. I cannot suggest that either of these does not bring about a necessary change in the self or consciousness, but the nature of this change is not at all identical in the two cases. Furthermore the spiritual conversion does not have the same standards of approach as does the philosophical conversion, to the extent that the former (which will still require a judgment noesis, as I will show in the next section) is likely to include practices like meditation, prayer, physical exercise, and rituals, the latter takes up a different approach typified by the tools of logic and argumentation. But perhaps this is not true of all cases, as it is possible that one is drawn to any particular philosophy, whatever it may be, as a result of a feeling instead of a rational position. As I will elaborate in the next section, even the feeling will necessarily involve some judgment.

It is imperative that we note that the noematic correlate of conversion is not necessarily some object that I regard as if “external.” In fact for any of these three types of intentional objects of conversion, the noema of conversion is potentially the phenomenological subject herself. A case such as this is emblematic of a “conscious” conversion.⁹ In other words it will never be the case that the so-called “unconscious” convert (as envisioned by Scobie) experiences

⁹ Recall that the unconscious conversion is the one that occurs without the subject being aware of it, whereas the passive conversion (which can be conscious *or* unconscious) is the one that is not actively sought out. Saint Paul is an example of a conscious but passive conversion.

a conversion the noema of which is herself. It is important to note that even when the noema of conversion is the subject herself, this subject is ultimately phenomenologically reducible to an object of religious or spiritual significance. In fact most religious conversions, at least those which are actively pursued, will include some act the noema of which is the very subject herself.

As I have already suggested, we will see that the noema as religious object is a possible intentional object of any number of different noeses that can contribute to a conversion experience. In all of these cases it will ultimately be necessary that an act of judgment regards either an “originary” noema (which could in this case resemble the “saturated phenomenon” of Marion or the “grace” of Christianity), *or* it regards a different, non-judgmental noesis specifically *as* noema—in short, reflection. Put differently the distinction is between the case wherein there is a noesis that corresponds to some empirical object (where “empirical” could refer to an ecstatic vision of something no one else sees), and the alternative case where the noesis corresponds to a perceptual act specifically *as* such. For example, it is possible that the subject perceives via vision a sacred apparition. The perceiving of this apparition is a noesis, the noema or object of which is the apparition itself *qua* “object” perceived. For example, a Marian apparition appears to a subject; the subject sees the Virgin Mary, so she is the first noematic object of the act. To be clear this object need not be a traditional “religious” object; the sparkling dish in Böhme’s famous vision of 1600 would work just the same. But either of these cases could produce a conversion in one of two ways, and these two ways map onto the distinction I offer above. On the one hand the subject may judge the object itself in such a way that bears existential significance (without reflecting on the noesis), *or* the subject may judge the *perceiving of* the object. I should add that here the object can be ordinary, like comprehending a work of Scripture, or it can be extraordinary, like beholding an otherworldly apparition. But it

should be noted that it is the latter, reflective case that is arguably the more “self-aware” variety of conversion, specifically to the extent that the convert judges his own experiencing instead of something in the so-called “external” world of the natural attitude.

But it is important to note that a noema that concerns some religious or spiritual object is not necessarily a noema that is part of a conversion experience, because not every religious and spiritual object bears intrinsic existential significance, or even lends itself to such an application. For example, if the intentional object of a monotheistic subject’s (negative) noesis is some object pertaining to polytheism, (neither) this noema (nor the corresponding noesis) is not sufficient to make for an existential transformation, that is, a shift in identity or role. Perhaps the monotheistic subject was not aware that polytheistic religions exist, and when she finds out, she denies the truth of such religions. Clearly this does not constitute a conversion since there is no existential change for the subject. Indeed there are countless religious and spiritual noemata that are part of daily practice and ritual and have no bearing on the experience of conversion. That is not to say, however, that a religious or spiritual object that is encountered on a routine basis cannot *ever* make for the spontaneous and extraordinary manifestation of conversion.

In short it follows from these considerations that a conversion experience has to involve some noematic correlate that bears existential significance for the converting subject, despite the fact that we cannot go so far as to maintain that existential transformation is itself a necessary noema of conversion. As I have specified, this noema can still be reduced to a judgment. It is this judgment that does the constitutive work behind the existential transformation. Put differently, the judgment brings about the transformation. That said, if this is true then the subject himself or herself is also a necessary noema at some phase of the conversion experience, which, as I have indicated, can be a process instead of an instantaneous event. But again I have to emphasize that

this transformed subjectivity is not necessarily something of which the converting subject is aware. Now, though, it is necessary to justify this position on a phenomenological basis.

Consider first of all the contrasting case of the conscious conversion. As I will demonstrate in the next section, this conversion requires an act of judging. Here I have indicated that this judgment as noema has to regard a “religious or spiritual object.” *But the final caveat to this point is that the religious or spiritual object can be the subject himself or herself.* It is apparent that in the case of the conscious conversion, the subject will at some point of the conversion make the resolution or judgment to convert. This judgment corresponds to the subject’s very existence. But it is also true that the unconscious convert will at some point make a judgment the object of which is the self. Thus it is crucial to note that the distinction comes down to the fact that, in the case of the unconscious conversion, the converting subject does not *realize* that the judgment made, which pertains to the self, bears existential significance. This is the way in which someone can convert in a gradual and subtle manner, but also the way in which someone who grows up with a particular religious or spiritual worldview might convert without even realizing it. This individual is making the requisite judgments in order to convert, and is doing so as a matter of choice, but he or she does not grasp the upshot *of* the judgments. The fact that in these cases we are dealing with a plethora of judgments that occurs over a longer duration of time probably has something to do with the fact that the subject does not discern the consequence or upshot of the myriad judgments that she makes in route to her conversion. Presently let us turn to the noeses that correspond to the conversion noema in order to characterize the experience of conversion more completely.

II. Judging: The Noesis of Conversion

The next eidetic feature of conversion regards the nature and scope of its noesis, or rather, noeses. Every conversion will require a “converting act” as noesis, but the knowledge that this act constitutes is sometimes sedimented in the pure ego, sometimes along with what I am terming “secondary noeses of conversion,” with the result that the convert is not always aware that an existential transformation has taken place. It is also important to note that the noesis of conversion can be an empty or filled intention; it is not necessary that every conversion noesis will intuit something fulfilled.

As for the converting act, it will always require an act (or set of acts) of *judging* that either itself constitutes a conversion experience *or* constitutes a conversion experience via the fulfilling sense of a “secondary” noesis of conversion. Here I will characterize this primary noesis of conversion and explore several important phenomenological distinctions that regard it, and then I will describe several of the other possible noeses of the conversion act (“secondary noeses”) in order to characterize judgment more completely as the “converting act” itself. I will show that these secondary noeses are themselves possible objects of the act of judgment, decision, and will. I will not address the temporal limits of these noeses, although they certainly are significant, because I will take them up in one of the following sections concerning the temporal horizon of the conversion phenomenon.

Ultimately on the noetic side of conversion everything centers upon the judging act itself, which is the most necessary aspect of the conversion phenomenon, not to mention one of the most fundamental and ubiquitous noeses of all conscious experience. It could fairly be said that it would be impossible for us to imagine a conscious life remotely like ours without the inclusion

and influence of judgment. But it is impossible for a conversion, defined as an existential transformation, to occur without a judging act because such a transformation, which is tantamount to a change in my own unique essence, can only be brought about as a change in my understanding of *self-meaning*, via a deliberate, attentive determination on my own part. It follows that any change that occurs for me on such a basis that does not require a judgment is not an instance of a change in self-meaning, i.e., conversion.

But what exactly is a judgment, a category that *prima facie* seems rather broad? In the Fifth Logical Investigation Husserl describes judgment thus: “When we make a judgment, an act of complete predication, something seems to us either to be or not to be, e.g., that *S* is *P*.”¹⁰ In other words a judgment is a statement that it is the case that something is a certain way. In short, judging is *positing*. Remember that in the context of conversion that judgment need not regard the occurrence of the conversion itself, but instead must only pertain to the “situation” (as Husserl puts it) or circumstances that *bring about* the conversion. The judgment(s) made must then correspond to some set of affairs that bear existential significance for the subject, which is an entirely relative matter. What is existentially significant for one subject is not necessarily significant for another. That said, we can still carry out the phenomenological reduction of the phenomenon. Here I reduce existential significance to the potential for change brought about by a judgment that has some impact on a subject’s identity (self) or role (obligation with respect to action).

Of course the LI is a very early text and Husserl will later revise some of the views that he articulates therein. In *Formal and Transcendental Logic* Husserl conceives of judgment of the “scientific” sort, which is a judgment that aims to cognize the truth in contrast to the “identical”

¹⁰ Husserl, LI 5: §33, 148.

judgment which is not marked by such an objective and only operates on the basis of “distinct evidence” that is not necessarily true.¹¹ We will see that Husserl will retain this distinction his later phenomenology, although upon closer analysis the distinction occasionally breaks down on a phenomenological basis.

Before we take up a critical interpretation of the distinctions relevant to judgment, let us note that in the late-period *Experience and Judgment*, Husserl calls judgment a specific “mode of ego-decision,” which he alternatively characterizes as “active position-taking.”¹² Position taking involves the acceptance of some claim as true; to take a position on some issue is to hold a belief, or, as Dahlstrom puts it in his translation of *Ideas I*, to take a “stance. But more generally, position taking (*Stellungnehmen*) can also be reflective; it can be the ego’s orientation or stance with respect to the various activities of the ego, from feeling to believing to thinking to even judging itself.¹³

Husserl’s explanation of the nature of judgment is arguably rather unclear in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and *Experience and Judgment*, which presupposes some of the main ideas as the former, earlier text, albeit using different phrasing. I say this because one might imagine that what Husserl means to suggest is that judging is *always* position taking. In a strictly logical sense I suppose that this is true, but it is misleading because Husserl in fact differentiates certain or apodictic judgments (or stances) from those which are *not* made with certainty. We find that he uses the phrase “position taking” in a broader *and* a narrower sense, where the latter refers to cases where a judgment is made when in doubt, or when one has to deliberate before judging due to the

¹¹ Husserl, FTL §17, 62-63 <55>.

¹² Husserl, EJ §66, 261.

¹³ It follows that a judgment can be the object of position taking. This would be the judging of a judgment. For example: “It was foolish of me to think that I could trust that person.”

nature of the given evidence, or difficulties with interpreting it.¹⁴ We could fairly say that essentially there are different “grades” of position taking, where the gradation corresponds to the degree to which the position taking is certain or apodictic.

It is apparent that I need to resolve whether conversion might involve the stricter sense of judging *qua* position taking, where one is truly *judging* something because it is not obvious whether he is making the correct judgment due to the fact that he is in doubt regarding the evidence that is given, or the broader sense of judging (position taking) that pertains to *any* judgment whatsoever, including that which is certain, or even potentially both.

One final, important distinction that Husserl offers regarding judgment concerns the epistemological quality of different types of judgments. Some judgments are made “in the mode of certainty,” which Husserl distinguishes from a second type of judgment, the “modalized” judgment, which is precisely the judgment that does not have the “original form of simple certitude.”¹⁵ With the former type of judgment we are concerned primarily with “categorical judgment” that regards some “uncontested” object. An example of this type of judgment is epitomized by the judgment that a geometric shape I perceive is an isosceles triangle. Here my judgment is grounded by the essential and formal features of a certain category of shape, and I make the determination that the object I regard belongs to that category. This does not mean that it is *impossible* that I misjudge the triangle as a scalene triangle (because I do not know the essential and formal features of the isosceles triangle, or because I cannot see it clearly, as if it is an exceptionally poor scan of an original copy), but to the contrary, that if I do (correctly) judge the triangle for what it is, then that judgment is made with certainty.

¹⁴ Jacobs, “Husserl on Reason, Reflection, and Attention,” 259.

¹⁵ Husserl, EJ §66-67, 271-275.

But often the judgments that I make are not afforded this degree of certainty. Thus in the other type of judgment, the “modalized” judgment, I am making judgments that “must be understood as modes of decision.”¹⁶ This would apply only to “predicative” judgments, as in any statement that *S* is *P*.¹⁷ These are the types of judgments that Lampert will focus on in his book on decisions: those that are *not* defined by modalized certainty.¹⁸ These are “decisions” proper as far as Husserl is concerned. These decisions are not just those that lack the ideal amount of evidence in order to make a certain judgment, but also the type of decisions that are “open-ended,” like the decision to try to lose weight, which is such that I am not judging the quality or even essence of something, although that does not mean that I do not base my decision on my perception of my own body. In other words, it is not necessarily the case that a modalized judgment is made without any corresponding evidence. I suggest that it is useful to think of this type of judgment not only as a judgment, but as a resolution or a choice.

Let us contrast this type of judgment with the first, apodictic variety of judgment that we discussed. It does not sound quite right to state that I “decide” something is a certain type of triangle when certain objective qualities simply inhere in a certain shape (assuming I have the required evidence to judge it correctly, and that I am able to meaningfully interpret that evidence for what it is). Nor does it sound right to state that I am “taking a position” on the nature of that triangle, to the extent that nothing about the situation is really “up for interpretation” assuming that my perception of the geometric figure is such that the perceptual evidence given to me is reasonably clear and unambiguous. It would be rather grand and inappropriate to declare to those who are around me that a triangle that is obviously isosceles is in fact isosceles; I simply do not

¹⁶ Husserl, EJ §66, 272.

¹⁷ Lampert, *Many Futures*, 56.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

need to take a position on something that can be viewed to be rather obvious. But it *does* sound reasonable to say that I decided or “took the position” that the hazy figure I saw on the horizon was a light pole when in fact it later turned out, as I drew closer and had better perceptual evidence, that it was a bare tree that only *appeared* to be a light pole from far away.

When Husserl introduces the modalized judgment, it is different from the apodictic judgment insofar as it is the former is a judgment that deals with an empty or anticipated presentation. In short, this type of judgment is not a simple classification of some “thing” according to formal properties *a priori*. This modalized sort of judgment, whether it is active or passive, regards an object my perception of which is interrupted or “broken,” where broken does not mean malfunctioning, but rather, incomplete. Husserl points out that most of the objects that we encounter in judgment are conditioned by anticipations that operate “on the basis of passive expectations.”¹⁹ Rarely do we encounter objects of sense in the complete mode that we encounter geometric figures. The phenomenon of the world is such that I often only perceive objects incomplete, with adumbration and apperceived qualities. When our concern is with the phenomenon of conversion the judgments that are involved therein belong to this second modalized class. There is no religious, spiritual, or philosophical object that I can regard *en toto*; my judgment of these objects will never be one made with mathematical certainty. While the judgment *qua* converting act may be regarded as if it is made with certainty, e.g. “I am certain that my judgment of the object *x* is a *certain* judgment,” where the object is Christ, the “middle way,” or Marxism, the certainty that pertains to these judgments is more of a testament to my feeling and confidence in my judgment, rather than a quality or state that inheres in the indubitably veridical nature of my judgment, again with mathematical certainty as the clearest

¹⁹ Husserl, EJ §66, 271.

comparison.²⁰ We have already seen that Husserl also provides doubt and conjecture as examples of modalized judgments that by definition do not subsist on a basis of certitude.²¹

Essentially the question that now arises concerns whether the judging that is involved in a conversion is judging that is made with certainty or not. Clearly this is an issue for determining the eidetic noesis of the conversion experience. I suggest that in the phenomenological attitude it is readily apparent that it is in fact possible for the conversion experience to result from either of these classes of judging acts. I say this because on the one hand it is apparent that the evidence that the converting subject judges can be given in such a way that it is perceived to be incontrovertible. I think that this is the way in which we should classify the conversion story of Saint Paul. According to the *Acts of the Apostles* Paul asks whose voice he hears as he falls to the ground.²² Perhaps we should admit that at this phase of his conversion, Paul could be trying to judge something that is not given with certainty, otherwise he might not ask the question. But crucially, once Paul receives his answer, he does not regard the object of his experience with doubt or even much deliberation; Paul is certain about what he thinks he heard.

But this does not demonstrate that *every* conversion has to occur in this manner. Let us imagine the case of the subject who attributes the cause of some remarkably fortuitous occurrence to the providence of God. Perhaps this subject is at first utterly at a loss to figure out how he could be so lucky as to have whatever it is happen to him. Eventually since he lacks any other explanation that he deems to be reasonable, he judges that it must have been God who was responsible for the event, and he converts on the basis of this judgment. In sum must a conversion occur on the basis

²⁰ If there are such “conversion objects” that I can judge with certainty, they are likely philosophical objects that are rendered in purely formal terms (e.g. symbolic logic) my certainty of which regards the validity of the claim (as object) and not the soundness thereof.

²¹ Husserl, EJ §76, 302.

²² Acts 9:5 NABRE

of a certain judgment? No, but it does not follow from this that a conversion *never* occurs on the basis of a certain judgment.

While Husserl maintains that every judgment that is made actually requires a decision necessarily, some writers have attempted to disentangle the two acts from each other.²³ I should point out that I do think that it is countersensical to imagine a judgment that does not involve the *deciding* of the ego, if what we mean by ‘deciding’ is willing a belief. But it seems to me that some of these writers have pointed out something valid when they point out differences on the basis of Husserl’s own conceptualization. For example Lampert proposes that one of the differences between the two acts is that “a judgment can be instantaneous, but a decision is genetic.”²⁴ In other words, *a decision is never instantaneous*. According to Husserl’s phenomenology, to say that a decision is “genetic” is to suggest that it pertains to constitution rather than the “static” level of final constituted products of sense.²⁵ Of course I have also indicated that every judgment is a decision, though, so it might sound as if I am offering a contradictory model here. To the contrary there is no contradiction; without the genetic, constitutive work of unfolding decisions, we would not be able to make judgments.

I would also like to treat the question of whether a judgment is in itself sufficient for a conversion to occur, or it requires something outside of itself. Lampert argues that the conversion event could be a type of decision, but he notes that some writers (Evangelicals, in particular) have argued that merely deciding is insufficient for salvation, as they maintain that the grace of God is a necessary condition for an authentic conversion.²⁶

²³ Lampert, *Many Futures*, 56.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁵ Husserl, CM §37, 76 <109-110>.

²⁶ Lampert, *Many Futures*, 106.

I suggest that an intermediate position between Lampert and the Evangelical writers is most reasonable. On the one hand, not every conversion must require “grace” of the sort intended by these Evangelical writers, or even other Christian writers.²⁷ For these writers grace is, in short, undeserved favor. It is favor that is undeserved due to the supposedly sinful nature of humanity. Here on the basis of my phenomenological approach I cannot presuppose this sort of grace. In the phenomenological attitude it is not manifest that this type of grace is an eidetic feature of the conversion phenomenon; I have already shown that conversion to Christianity cannot be the only type of conversion.

However, if we consider grace more generally as some sort of “claim” that comes from what is understood, in the natural attitude, to be “beyond” the converting subject, then it seems that grace *is* required.²⁸ After all conversion cannot occur in a solipsistic vacuum. If one were limited only to the resources within himself or herself, then the sort of judgments that take on existential significance for the subject would never arise in the first place. Indeed such judgments would be impossible. Shortly I will demonstrate that this sort of “grace” is necessary, but only

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas offers a fairly complete account of grace according to the Christian Scriptures. *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q. 110, arts 1-4.

²⁸ While I do not have the space to explore this issue, with a recently renewed scientific interest in the study of hallucinogens and psychedelics it would be interesting to investigate whether certain chemical substances can help bring about or aid a conversion. Aldous Huxley is the most notable writer to explore such a hypothesis in *The Doors of Perception*. Ultimately even if it is possible that such psychotropic substances can help bring about conversion, the substance itself cannot be sufficient for the conversion process to occur, otherwise, we would be looking at the sort of “forced” conversion the authenticity and validity of which I contest. The converting subject will still require all of the necessary aspects of conversion that I delineate here. In short, psychedelic use does not constitute a shortcut to conversion. It might play a role in conversion for some individuals, but the matter is really not so different from visiting a fantastic cathedral or beholding a wonder of the natural world, either of which could help bring about a conversion. In clinical contexts, these substances are being used as a treatment for depression and the like, but it is important to note that if a “conversion” occurs in one of these clinical contexts (i.e., a patient recovers from depression), all of the phenomenological features of conversion still have to obtain. The substance without a relevant, corresponding noesis cannot produce a conversion.

manifest in the appearance of the world and the Other. The “grace” of the Christian God, or any other god, cannot be necessary for conversion to occur, but the grace of the world and the other are strictly requisite. Thus the Evangelical critics to whom Lampert refers cannot be right.

On the other hand, I do not take it that Lampert’s view, namely, that a conversion can be reduced to a type of decision, is quite right either—at least not without some qualification. If an open-ended decision cannot be instantaneous due to the way in which it requires the consequences of its execution to be necessarily indeterminate and virtual with respect to future possible outcomes as they result not only from the singular decision but all of the decisions that follow it, then conversion cannot in every case be reducible to an open-ended decision—if anything I suggest that the existential transformation involved in conversion is actually more concerned with the present and even the past rather than the future, even if it is ultimately true that a conversion will have some bearing on the course of the subject’s future.

If I am right that conversion is primarily concerned with that which has already occurred rather than what will occur in the future, then we should regard the convert’s sense of time as linear since that which has occurred is the *only* course of events that has, for me, in this actual world, led up to the present moment. After all the past is all set and done; what has occurred has occurred, and that is what has brought me to the present.

While certain conversions *may* involve beliefs about what should be done in the future, such as acting a certain way in accordance with certain precepts, or even holding beliefs about events that are predicted to occur in the future, such as the second coming of the Messiah, not every conversion, which is “only” an existential transformation, will entail a shift in the way in which one regards the future, even if sometimes this *does* occur. Perhaps it sounds radical to assert that conversion entails no such necessary shift. But consider the fact that we have said that

a convert can move from one subset of Christianity to another, for example, from Episcopalianism to Catholicism. I do not take it that such a conversion occurs on the basis of a decision that regards the future as a complex, multi-branched set of possible outcomes, nor am I convinced that such a conversion even involves any shift at all in the way in which one perceives the future. It is probably warranted to question the extent to which such a shift should even count as a conversion since it does not seem like much of an existential transformation when compared to other more extreme sorts of conversions, but in the last analysis this matter is entirely up to the convert. If his new religion is significant with respect to the manner of his own self-understanding—and I maintain that in the phenomenological attitude it is manifest that most religious conversions, even that which operates internal to a specific faith system like Christianity, Islam, and so on, this is precisely what occurs—then a conversion has occurred. “I was an Episcopalian, but now I am a Catholic.” I see no issue with viewing a case such as this as one which bears existential significance for the converting subject.

I think that it is apparent that sometimes conversions *are* instantaneous, *at least in terms of the manner of their givenness to the converting subject*, even if it must be admitted that this is not true in *all* cases. Consider how it does not seem that a conversion theory such as this can really explain the paradigmatic case of Saint Paul. Does Paul judge that he hears the voice of God in such a way that the givenness or appearance of the corresponding evidence (in virtue of which the judgment is made) is defined by its open-endedness, or is it a judgment that is made on a simpler basis? Is Paul’s conversion more like the decision to get up early the next day, or more like the decision that takes for granted that the future is complicated, defined by innumerable possible outcomes? Lampert likes to refer to the latter as more of a “project”—I wonder whether we should regard Paul’s case as a project, or something more basic.

All of that said, nevertheless I think that we must further qualify the apparently “instantaneous” variety of the conversion experience since the judgment(s) involved therein, as enacted by a historicized subject, are still subject to all of the temporal aspects of consciousness, from retention and recollection, to sedimentation, to the various secondary noeses that I will address in the next section.

Lampert criticizes the idea that conversion could be so swift (“quick and clean”) as “irresponsible” although he then points out that it may be problematic to challenge the worth of such a thing. This cannot be right if decisions cannot be instantaneous. Conversions, I suggest, can occur on an instantaneous basis. Look at the story of Saint Paul, for example. The objection to this would be that Saint Paul’s conversion is not actually an instantaneous judgment but a decision that occurs over an extended duration. The problem with this rebuttal is that it is not corroborated by the scriptural sources that furnish us with the narrative. These sources could be accurate or inaccurate but altering the details of the anecdote seems to be a misstep.

But there is another problem with the idea that conversion is a decision. If it is true that a decision is necessarily open-ended with respect to the future, then I do not see how this can be made congruent with conversion as it is actually experienced. Who experiences a conversion with the expectation that he will soon enough convert again? This is an extreme counter, and I recognize that Lampert probably would see no issue with this, that his real point is that the decision to convert is one that is futurally indeterminate, from which it logically follows that maybe the convert will relapse his faith or even convert yet again. But my point is this: is it not the case that what defines a conversion is the present moment of the “now”? As I have already stipulated numerous times, this does not mean that the subject realizes that the conversion occurs at some specific moment. Conversion can be a gradual process, and it can be unconscious. When

I indicate that conversion occurs in the present moment of the “now,” I refer to the judging act. The judging act belongs to the present, not the future, the yet-to-come. What I contest in opposition to the phenomenological decision theory of conversion is that it holds that the reduction of the givenness of the decision *qua* phenomenon uncovers the fact that the *eidōs* of the decision is that it appears precisely as branched, futurally indeterminate, virtual, and open-ended. When we examine the judgment involved in the conversion experience, we find that the appearance of the judging act does not always abide by this characterization.

Furthermore I ask: are conversions not assumed with a sense of finality, even if they are ultimately subject to being superseded by some future event? Conversions involve taking more or less “firm” positions (firm as in lasting), which is necessary for the event to have any existential significance instead of just being some passing fad. Perhaps Lampert would argue that the subject who decides is not necessarily *aware* of the open-ended futural noema of his act. I would respond that it ultimately does not matter whether or not the subject is aware of these matters regarding his act, since the distinction between the judgment and the decision comes down to, as Lampert himself puts it, the way in which a decision’s value is determined by the act of deciding and not its content.²⁹ With my account of judgment as noesis of conversion, the content of the act *does* afford the act with its value, since I have indicated that it is only a specific type of judgment, namely, that which bears existential significance for the subject, that is capable of bringing about a conversion. To be sure the judging itself is still important but, as Lampert notes, decisionism can ultimately be rather arbitrary, and that simply will not do with this particular case since the content of the judgment needs to look a certain way in order for the conversion to occur.

²⁹ Lampert, *Many Futures*, 105.

For now that settles the question of whether it is a judgment or a decision that is eidetically necessary for conversion. Next, I would like to address the judging noesis of conversion from another angle; we cannot gloss over Husserl's description of judgmental position-taking as "active," which is intended to convey the sense in which his view, according to which our judgments regard our perceptions and "situations," contrasts with that of Brentano, for whom judgments are solely propositional.³⁰ This will become important for my own argument. For now we should note that this account of active position-taking does not contradict what we have already established regarding the nature of the "passive conversion," which I have defined as a conversion that the subject does not pursue, but nevertheless entails constitutive judgments, which are themselves necessarily "pursued" insofar as they are made.

Crucially Husserl's model of judgment is one that holds that judgments entail, in every instance, acts of will. In Husserl's most sustained discussion of judgment, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, this is especially clear. There he writes, that "judging [...] is acting."³¹ And instead of being confined to a removed, ideal logical sphere, these judgments *qua* positions regard individual, "real" objects and have a "*relation to a real universe*, a "world" or a *world-province*" (Husserl's italics).³² This will be important later on, when we delineate the worldly horizon of the conversion phenomenon.

But if every judgment entails an act of willing, another important problem arises. *Is it judgment or will that is eidetically necessary for conversion?* If judgment can be reduced to an

³⁰ Cobb-Stevens, "Husserl's Theory of Judgment," 151. The author traces similarities between Husserl's model of judgment and that of Aristotle but points out that there is no influence that his theory is influenced by Aristotle.

³¹ Husserl, FTL §63, 166 <149>.

³² *Ibid.*, §83, 204 <181>. It should be noted that this does not mean that the object has to be a so-called "external" object necessarily, evinced by Husserl's category of "determinative judgments." See FTL §54, 225.

act of willing, is it not the case that it is an act of will that is essential for conversion to occur, and not just a judgment, which is but one sort of volition. In fact this is a misguided line of reasoning. In the *Logical Investigations* Husserl characterizes willing as “non-objectifying” and points out that it thus requires some intellectual act as its ground.³³ This does not mean that an act of willing does not correspond to a noema as object; the difference is that a non-objectifying act does not itself add to the referential relation to the object, but instead only influences the very presentation of the object. Husserl must make this move in order to establish the fact that a simple act of willing cannot itself “make” the object. Every act will still necessarily involve an objectifying act, however.

To the extent that there are all different sorts of acts of will, only some of which involve judgments, we cannot in good faith reduce a judgment to willing. Every conversion will necessarily include a judgment (or set of judgments), and so every conversion will necessarily include an act (or acts) of willing, but *not every act of willing is an act of judgment*. As Husserl points out in the LI, every act of the will requires some basis in a founding presentation.³⁴ This founding presentation need not be a judgment; it can be a perception or feeling. It is via feeling in particular that the resulting act of will involves a sense of the value or worth of whatever it is toward which the ego wills. Thus it is apparent that willing itself cannot be reduced to judgment.

Presumably, it may seem rather counter-intuitive to reduce all conversions to judgment, especially in light of the fact that I have already suggested that not every conversion is the object of conscious awareness on the part of the convert. And indeed, it is undeniable that many conversions will include other noeses, some of which are directly perceived, others of which are

³³ Husserl, LI 5: §37, 158-159.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

apperceived. But one might be wondering why other intellectual acts like thoughts and beliefs are not sufficient for bringing about a conversion. The problem with these acts, which can appear as secondary noeses but cannot themselves constitute a conversion, is that they do not necessarily require a shift in the active position-taking of the ego. In other words, I can have a thought about some religious object, but it may be a thought that has occurred to me in the past. Perhaps it is even a thought that I have more or less consistently retained for quite some time. This thought does not necessarily bring about a change in who I am, and if it does, it is because I have *judged the thought*. In fact the noesis of judging is the only noesis that is itself sufficient for a conversion. Thus it is the only necessary and essential feature of conversion at the noetic level, therefore it is the only noesis that constitutes an eidetic aspect of the conversion phenomenon.

The noesis of judgment in conversion takes some sort of rational and/or logical position on a religious or spiritual object (as noema). It is important to note that this judgment could be affirmative (S is P) or negative (S is not P). For example one could judge that Christ is his savior, or he could judge that Christ is not. In either case it is apparent that the judgment has to mark a departure from some previously held belief (or lack of belief). Thus if a conversion is to result from the judgment “Christ is savior” then it has to occur on the basis of the fact that the subject previously held *either* no belief regarding Christ as savior, or the belief that Christ was *not* savior. In either case the conversion is manifest in the epistemic change on the part of the subject.

But phenomenologically speaking, there are several important distinctions to make regarding types of judgments, with most of these distinctions coming down to differences in the very constitution of the judgments.³⁵ One such distinction is determinative versus relational

³⁵ Husserl, EJ §67, 274; Husserl, FTJ, Appendix 2: §1, 312 <275>.

judging.³⁶ The essential difference between the two regards the nature of the object judged; determinative judgment is “internal explication” (also known as internal determination) whereas relational judgment involves “external contemplation” (sometimes referred to as relative determination). Husserl stresses that it is only in the latter case that “objects are actually put into relation with one another in a thematic way.” But Husserl also admits that on a formal (not genetic) basis the difference between these two types of judgments collapses, and many “internal” judgments should be taken as relational, insofar as the difference between the is-judgment and the has-judgment breaks down when a judgment includes more than two substantives (i.e. subjects).³⁷ The second substantive is, according to Husserl, a “relative object.” In short, taken a certain way, many inner determinations are technically relational. Conversion as I have here defined it is always a “putting-in-relation” (as Husserl calls it), but if a judgment (*qua* converting act) is regarded as genetic, then the distinction is preserved.

The question, then, comes down to the number of substantives involved in a judgment *qua* conversion act, wherein, if there are two or more substantives, the result is that the conversion judgment is not just an inner determination, but a judgment of relation. I have already indicated that the noema of a conversion experience is some religious or spiritual object. But I have also admitted that this religious or spiritual object can be the convert’s very self. In such a case are we dealing with an is-judgment or an has-judgment? Husserl concedes that determinations and relations can occur in either type, depending on the circumstance. But the specific circumstance that we are dealing with is one in which there is one substantive on the “subject side” and, insofar as we are talking about an *existential* judgment (regarding identity or

³⁶ Husserl, EJ §54, 225.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 226.

role), a *second* substantive on the “predicate side.” For example, when one resolves “I am (now) a Christian,” we are dealing with a case of double substantives. Thus the judgment is not just “internal”—it is thoroughly relational. This is because the second substantive, ‘a Christian’ is a relative object.

The second important distinction for our present purpose concerns the difference between the universal judgment and the non-universal judgment.³⁸ In the case of the former my judgment is such that my judgment makes reference to a universal and, crucially, this universal reference is the object of thematization. In a judgment like this, my apprehension of the generality of the object is itself a “productive activity.” As Husserl puts it, this means that “new objectivities are actively constituted which can then enter into judgments as cores—cores which are no longer, like those which we have considered up to now, *individual cores*, but *general cores*, belonging to some level of generality or other.” The question, then, is whether conversion is necessarily limited to either of these varieties of judgment, namely, the thematically universal, or the negative case wherein I do not render as thematic the universal reference.³⁹ It seems that the conversion phenomenon can occur on the basis of either of these types of judgments. In some cases the conversion object is judged specifically as representative of some universal (e.g. God), epitomized in Saint Paul’s realization that the voice and the light belong to God. But it also seems that in other cases conversion can be far more “unique.” For example, many individuals have grasped some important existential insight on the basis of something as random and particular as catching sight of a flash of light (e.g. the conversion of Philip K. Dick). At first

³⁸ Ibid., §80, 318.

³⁹ Husserl implies that this universal reference will always be necessary. “To be sure, in all apprehension of a particular there is already at work a reference of the particular object to the general type...” Ibid., 317.

glance it would appear that the religious conversion is more likely to involve a judgment that entails thematic universal reference, whereas this is less likely of a requirement for the spiritual conversion. It seems that the philosophical conversion could occur in either category.

As our final consideration regarding the noesis of judgment, it is now clear why judgment is essentially so problematic. The fact of the matter is that the world and everything “in” it are such that we are often not able to make judgments with certainty. Indeed it is significant that judgment has even been called a “problem.”⁴⁰ The problem comes down to the extent to which the necessary presupposition of a judgment is a “pregiven object.” This is what Husserl explores in his writing on transcendental logic. The question is: from what origin does predicative judgment emanate?⁴¹ This origin is, by definition, pre-predicative. If this origin, which is the pre-given world of objects, is pre-predicative, then it is the object of “passive doxa.”⁴² What this means is that every conversion has some necessary basis in passivity on the “object” side, with the result that any given conversion whatsoever is never the sole product of judgment *eo ipso*, but a judgment that can only originate from the “backdrop” that is the phenomenon of the world.⁴³ This is a phenomenon that is passively constituted for me. I will elaborate on this aspect of conversion later in this chapter.

III. The “Secondary” Noeses of Conversion

Next, I must describe several of the other possible noeses of the conversion act in order to characterize more completely the “converting act” itself. This offers a more complete

⁴⁰ Sallis, “Problem of Judgment.”

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴² Husserl, EJ §7, 30.

⁴³ Husserl, FTL §86, 204 <181>.

characterization to the extent that, as I argued in the prior section, some judging noeses of conversion will achieve their fulfilling sense with a secondary noesis either as forebear to the noesis of judgment, i.e. as one of its causes, or as noematic correlate of the noesis itself. While judgment is the only noesis that is in itself necessary and sufficient, the phenomenon of conversion is such that sometimes the judging act actually *requires* a complementary noesis in order for the judging act to be furnished with its *aboutness*.

All of these noeses are capable of regarding the existentially significant religious object, whether it be an empirically “external” object or the “subject” that is the self, occurring either concomitantly with or sequentially to the judging noesis, but they are themselves also, as we will see, possible noematic objects of the act of judgment.⁴⁴

No matter how these “secondary” noeses should appear, they are never capable of constituting the conversion on their own. Significantly, however, insofar as it is the judging act that is constitutive for the conversion, it can never be the case that a conversion happens for a subject as a result of an act of judgment *followed by* whatever secondary noesis. There would be no such problem for the scenario wherein the secondary noeses *precede* the judging noesis, in which case the secondary noesis (or noeses) may actually causally bring about the judging noesis, or even serve as object of the act of judgment.

The former case can be called an “originary” or “founding” noesis of conversion. While every conversion will necessarily require a judgment noesis at some point, the originary noesis of a conversion (as cause) can be a volition, affect, perception, belief, or thought. Traditionally it has been held that many converts will convert solely on the basis of some sort of judgment (e.g.

⁴⁴ In other words these “secondary” noeses can either occur *alongside* the judging noesis, or *in addition to* it.

RCIA). These subjects will take their conversion on purely judicative terms. But for others, conversion is something that starts with a noesis the noematic correlate of which is a religious object that is not rational in nature, but instead one which results from something more akin to a feeling or emotion. Some converts feel as if they are “called” to convert, and while I would still suggest that these converts ultimately must make a judgment in order for the conversion to occur, their conversions do not at all *begin* with judgments. Still others begin their conversions as a simple act of will or volition that is not necessarily rationally approached, such as the choice to convert in order to appease a spouse.⁴⁵ In other cases a conversion can be precipitated as a result of a perception, like the vision of an apparition or mystical object. Even in the traditional case, epitomized above in the case of RCIA, the convert is judging some religious object that is constituted at least in part on the basis of thoughts and beliefs.

As for the latter case I describe above, namely, that wherein a secondary noesis itself serves as intentional correlate of the judgment (i.e. the “thing” the judgment is about, like the judgment I make about a belief I have in Christ), in the previous section I provided the example of the conversion that results from reflection, which is what occurs when the judging noesis regards another noesis instead of something on the noematic “side.” As Husserl puts it this is the distinction between an “immanent” noema and the “actual object” noema.⁴⁶ Technically every noema is, in the phenomenological attitude, immanent. But as I have shown, I do not convert in the phenomenological attitude. When I convert, empirically and in the natural attitude, I can

⁴⁵ It may be objected that this should be considered a forced and therefore inauthentic conversion. Based on the analysis I have presented here, if the conversion is forced, that is, the volition of another but not the subject herself, then it is not a really a “conversion” at all. I suggest that a conversion like this is authentic so long as the convert freely makes the decision to convert in order to please some other person.

⁴⁶ Husserl, *Ideas* I §90, 217 <185>.

regard as the object of my mental act some “actual” object, e.g. Christ, or I can regard as object my *own* mental act, e.g. my belief about Christ.

It is critical that we note that almost always a conversion occurs as a result of a combination of two or more of these noeses. Husserl indicates that:

[T]he full noema consists of a complex of noematic moments, that in <that complex> the specific sense-moment only fashions one kind of necessary *core-stratum* in which further moments are essentially founded which, therefore, would likewise be designated as sense-moments, but in an extended meaning.⁴⁷

For example what might start as a feeling about some religious object could eventually yield to some volition regarding that same object, which in turn yields a resulting judgment. It is even possible that the most potent conversions, such as that of Saint Paul, will encompass all of these noeses, although certainly not simultaneously. Ultimately, however, it is the judgment noesis that is eidetically necessary for conversion, and it is the only noesis of conversion that is on its own sufficient. As we have already said it must be granted that the judging noesis need not take up as noema a judgment that pertains to a religious, spiritual, or philosophical object, but instead can take up as object a volition, affect, perception, reflection, belief, or thought that corresponds to this “conversion object.”

The noesis of volition in conversion is a desire or willing regarding some religious or spiritual object. The difference between a noesis of judgment and a noesis of volition is that the latter is not (experienced as) rational, whereas the former is. While it can at first glance be difficult to differentiate these two noeses, in fact the most straightforward way to distinguish these two noetic categories is in terms of “judging that” versus “wanting that.” For example someone who converts to some version of Christianity and therefore judges something akin to “Christ is my savior” should be distinguished from some other person who wills “I want to be

⁴⁷ Ibid., 218 <185>.

united with Christ.” But as we have seen, very noesis of volition, as non-objectifying, actually entails an objectifying noesis enacted by judgment (or feeling). Consider how, in the example, the desire for unification with Christ presupposes some judgment about Christ. For example, the implicit judgment might be something to the effect of “Christ is someone with whom I should desire to be united.” It should be noted that the affect noesis might be paired with a judgment noesis that negatively assesses the “more primitive” affect; in such a case obviously no conversion would occur, since the judging act would trump the affective act.

The noesis of affect in conversion is epitomized in the occurrence of a feeling, or even emotion. For example, it is possible for one to “feel” that Christ is her savior. But insofar as conversion requires an existential change, the “mere” feeling on its own is not sufficient for conversion; the feeling has to be accompanied by an analogous judgment noesis that bestows existential significance upon the feeling. Consider, for example, how an atheist can “feel” a certain way about Christ while she sits in a worship space, but without some judgment regarding that feeling, the feeling is not on its own enough to make for a change in existential identity or role.

Lastly, I will treat together the noeses of perception, reflection, belief, and thought. First, the perceiving sometimes associated with conversion correlates with the seeing or hearing of some existentially significant “object,” whether it be supernatural or worldly. For example if I see someone on the side of the road, asking for money and for help, this can be part of a conversion. Thus I typically face this noema as if it is an “actual object.” Second, the reflecting associated at times with conversion, which I have already briefly treated, typically correlates with something immanent to consciousness. I can reflect on a judgment that I made, or something I desired, and so on. It is less clear that I can reflect, however, on what I presume in

the natural attitude to be an actual object. For starters, Husserl characterizes reflection in such a way that it is intentionality that turns toward itself. But second, what might in the vernacular be called the “reflection” of some object, for example, reflection on the nature of God’s omniscience, is closer to contemplation, and therefore, thought or even belief. Thought and belief are the final two noeses of conversion that I will discuss here. The thinking or believing inherent in these noeses corresponds to a concept or idea *as* thought or believed. It is critical to note that with any of these secondary noeses of conversion, the sense and therefore horizon of the secondary noesis need not be something religious, spiritual, or philosophical. It is the judging noeses that belongs to these domains of existential significance. For example, if we think back to the example I gave of an encounter with someone who is in need of help, it is apparent that there is nothing necessarily religious, spiritual, or philosophical about my seeing of this person. It is the judgment that I make about my seeing of this person that takes on religious, spiritual, or philosophical significance, which is to say, existential significance.

There are a few final concerns regarding all of the noeses of conversion, judging in addition to the secondary noeses I have here covered. While conversion itself (*eo ipso*) need not be the intentional object (noema) of the conversion experience, it will never be the case that a conversion occurs for the subject without a corresponding “attentive form of intentionality” on the noetic side.⁴⁸ As I have argued, this attentive form of intentionality will always be included in a judging act (or, more often, set or series of acts), but as we have seen, it could include other forms of attentive noeses, from affect to reflection to perception. Indeed, as I argued, it might even require those other noeses for itself, either causally or noematically.

⁴⁸ Jacobs, “Husserl on Reason, Reflection, and Attention.”

Furthermore it follows from everything I have already indicated that the noesis of conversion is not (necessarily) some specific, singular act that institutes the “completion” or fulfillment of the conversion, as if the convert is passing through some determinate threshold before which he was not converted, after which he was converted. Here the problem is not the fact that the judging noesis may be accompanied in some fashion by secondary noeses—to the contrary I have actually suggested that in all of these cases it is the judging act that produces the conversion-meaning, even though sometimes the act cannot occur without some initiation or even a noema of one of the secondary noeses here identified. The real issue is that there is some concern that the conversion itself (*as* existential change), precisely insofar as it may not be realized by the subject, is not necessarily a change that occurs on the basis of some single, determinate act of consciousness. Indeed if conversion is the result of a judgment, then it seems counter-intuitive to suggest that a conversion could occur unaware to the converting subject. But we can confirm this surprising conclusion by differentiating the fulfillment of the conversion from the act that brings its fulfillment about. While the judging act is necessary to bring about the fulfillment of conversion, it is not the case that this fulfillment is immediate. Indeed this fulfillment is often the result of the retention of meaning. In such cases the conversion results from the sedimentation of the convert’s judgments upon the convert’s self. Essentially this is the “bridge” between the judging/judgment and the ego. In *Experience and Judgment* Husserl explains this bridging sedimentation thusly: “[it is] the continuous transformation of what has been originally acquired and has become a habitual possession and thus something non-original.”⁴⁹ The idea is that the course of my experience is eventually imprinted upon my very ego. Husserl calls this alteration in my habituality “non-original” because of the fact that these

⁴⁹ Husserl, EJ §67, 275.

imprints upon me are not immediately “present” like other objects of sense. For example consider the difference between living a fantastic, life-changing experience, and the ultimate consequence of that experience upon your existential identity. The latter can certainly take on a profound impact upon who I “am,” but that impact is not present to me in the manner of the original, “founding” experience.

Of course, in the present case, we are considering the way in which an experience that is *not* identified as fantastic or life-changing can become sedimented and ultimately change one’s life, which means that something the impact of which was not realized can ultimately take on a significant existential impact. I can see how this might be viewed as dubious; how can something that I do not recognize ultimately play a role in the constitution of such an important change in my identity? Husserl can resolve this concern for us. Sedimentation belongs to passive synthesis, such that once some experience starts to “disappear from the field of immediate consciousness” it vanishes “into the ‘unconscious,’ which is not a dead nothingness but a limiting mode of consciousness *and accordingly can affect us anew* like another passivity in the form of whims, free-floating ideas, and so on” (my italics).⁵⁰ It is the power of these sedimented bits of knowledge to “affect us anew” that furnishes us with the explanation that we need to make sense of how something can make such a profound impact on the subject over the course of time, without the subject immediately (or ever) realizing that impact. Whether I abandon or retain some relevant conversion experience, the sedimentation of that experience can ultimately take on an influence on my overall outlook that surpasses what was given to me in the original, immediate experience.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 279.

In the last analysis what is revealed via the noema and noeses of conversion is the fact that conversion is grounded in phenomenological subjectivity itself. To the extent that the noema of conversion is some judgment regarding an existentially significant “object,” the noesis of which is capable of producing in the subject an existential change, where such changes are often the result of the sedimentation of meanings (namely the meanings of religious objects of all sorts) over the course of time, it is apparent that conversion is not always radical and intense. We are tempted in the natural attitude to regard only conversions such as these, namely, those which are radical and/or intense, *as conversions*. Similarly, we shy away from calling these more gradual changes a change in “identity.” But if we consider the fact that the conversion experience, *like all experience*, would not be possible if not for a temporal basis and without active position-taking, we can see that conversion is a very natural “side effect” of consciousness as we experience it, specifically, as a streaming flow defined in part by our choices. This flow is manifest in my unified sense of experience over the duration of time (thanks to retention and protention) which has meaning on the basis of the synthesis carried out by myself, as the ‘I’ in the ego pole, or the transcendental (i.e., intentional) ego. The interpretive nature of consciousness is such that consciousness is “writing” its own history over the course of its experience. I will elaborate on the temporal horizon of conversion later in this chapter.

IV. The Worldly Horizon of Conversion

The fourth eidetic feature of conversion concerns the nature of the phenomenological horizon. The constitution of the conversion phenomenon is integrated with the constitution of the shared horizon of world at various levels. Without the world there could be no conversion because

consciousness is such that it constitutes for me a world that serves as essential counterpart to my embodied experience.

It is important to qualify what this means in phenomenological terms, because it is also true that the conversion experience could technically survive the destruction of the world, and it is true that a radically isolated subject can convert. Simply put, when I state that the conversion experience requires the world, this is meant phenomenologically. We will see precisely what this means soon enough. But we already know that this entails that my present remarks regarding the world should not be taken to mean that the world necessarily exists in a physical or material sense.⁵¹

As we know, consciousness for Husserl centers on the mechanics of intentionality. The world thus relates directly to this intentionality insofar as it grounds innumerable objectifying acts. In its broadest sense the world is in short the totality of all possible intending, which in *Ideas I* Husserl refers to as the “horizon of horizons.”⁵² As horizon of all horizons the world plays a role in the establishment of the “experienceableness” of the physical thing (which is not necessarily capable of being seen but instead a thing that is potentially experienceable.)⁵³ In other words the physical thing is not necessarily a material thing but such a thing as that which is speculated to “exist” according to the science of physics. These things can be experienced in any number of different ways beyond the limits of touch. For example sound is a physical thing, despite the fact that it is not material and cannot be touched (although at certain frequencies it can certainly be felt). It is of course true that conversion is not a physical thing, but in many

⁵¹ Husserl, *Ideas I* §49, 109 <91>.

⁵² *Ibid.* §1, 6 <7>. Later, starting with the *Crisis*, Husserl will use the term lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) for this specific world-concept, but with much more consideration given to the temporality of the lifeworld than what is offered in *Ideas I*, or any text before the *Crisis* for that matter.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, §47, 106 <89>.

cases its occurrence will involve a noesis the object of which is some physical thing out in the world, which ultimately corresponds to a judgment made that bears transformative existential significance for the convert.

But the world is also something the very appearance of which is statically constituted. This is why Husserl also calls the world the “correlate [...] of experiencing consciousness.”⁵⁴ In *Ideas I* one of his main points regarding this issue is that without the correlative world my “factual experience” and “experimental consciousness” would not have anything to be “about.” The concern that Husserl has for the world in this text is mostly logical and ideal in nature; one of his most important points is that the statements that I make would have no reference without the world.⁵⁵ My statements, in order for them to mean anything, require the world as correlate. In short in the first volume of *Ideas* Husserl is mostly working to ground in consciousness the relation of scientific claims to the world.

In *Ideas II* he takes a rather different approach to the world. There he distinguishes material nature from animal nature from the spiritual world. It is certainly significant that Husserl only chooses to use the term “world” in this particular text to describe the spiritual world, even though his discussion of animal nature mostly focuses humans, albeit as “natural objects,” which for him refers to the human or animal soul that is “connected” with the body.⁵⁶ The spiritual world and therefore the spirit itself transcends this sense of soul for Husserl. This sense of spirit is neither natural-scientific nor “psychophysical.”⁵⁷ Husserl understands that here

⁵⁴ Ibid., 105 <87>.

⁵⁵ Granted, Husserl insists that consciousness could survive the destruction of the world, a point to which I will soon turn.

⁵⁶ Husserl, *Ideas II* §19, 96 <91>.

⁵⁷ Husserl, *Ideas I* §48, 181 <173>.

he enters the domain of metaphysics and he does not shy away from using the term.⁵⁸ In *Ideas II* he shows that all of our experience of the material world is ultimately grounded by the work of the spirit. While he preliminarily regards this spirit in a solipsistic way, he also notes (even before doing so) that the spirit is not an isolated figure but is to the contrary inextricably linked to the world.⁵⁹ In fact it is not just one spirit that is linked to the world in such a manner, but every spirit. In *Ideas II* Husserl elaborates on the nature of this correlation between subject (*qua* spirit) and world, noting that “I am what I am (and each other person is what he is) as *subject of a surrounding world*.”⁶⁰ But he takes this idea even further when he indicates that the spiritual world is a world that is intersubjectively constituted by Others, which I will address in the next section.⁶¹

Conversion is fundamentally linked to the spiritual world insofar as, as I have shown, conversion is an experience that involves some transformation of existential significance. Existential significance is not anything that we will find in physical nature, which amounts to “bare life” itself; instead, it is something that belongs to the human spirit, for whom “existence” is a concern in the first place. Nature knows of no such thing. While non-spiritual “things” like material objects or even the body as physical correlate or “animal nature” can certainly take *on* existential significance, the significance itself is meaning for the spirit and none other. In other words nature can bear existential significance for humanity, but never can it bear such significance without our involvement.

⁵⁸ Ibid., §48, 181 <172>.

⁵⁹ “...if we take the subject at first again as the one and only subject, as solipsistic, then we find a plethora of relations between the posited Objects and the “*spiritual*” subject, as we are now calling the subject of intentionality.” Ibid., §55, 227 <216>. Also, “[t]he concepts of the Ego and surrounding world are related to one another inseparably.” Husserl, *Ideas II* §50, 195 <185>.

⁶⁰ Ibid., §50, 195 <185>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

As Husserl puts it in *Ideas II*, the spirit, phenomenologically construed, is the “subject of intentionality.”⁶² It is because the spiritual subject is the intentional subject that conversion occurs only for the spirit, because conversion can only occur on the basis of the activity of the intentional subject.⁶³ We have seen that this intentionality specifically centers around certain judgments that regard the significance of the convert.

This is even more significant because this highlights the fact that even if there are secular sorts of conversion that involve no “religious” or “spiritual” content, ultimately *every* conversion is a conversion of the spirit. That said, it is important that we do not subject this spirit to metaphysical assumptions that are not grounded in a science of consciousness. While it would be appropriate to use terms like ‘mind’ or even ‘soul’ to refer to this spirit, we have to limit ourselves to the analysis of this *Geist* only insofar as it appears—as subject of intentionality.

Since conversion is something for the spirit, we must analyze briefly this spiritual “world” in which conversion occurs. First, Husserl identifies the essential law of the spiritual world as motivation.⁶⁴ Motivations play a crucial role in the constitution of our lives in the world. There are actually several different types of motivations according to Husserl: the use of reason, association and habit, association and experience, each of which he carefully distinguishes from “natural causality.”

When reason is our motive it drives the course of our judgments and dictates the parameters of justification and verification. Husserl distinguishes two different types of reason in *Ideas II*: active reason and relative reason.⁶⁵ The former is what I use when my ego is “motivated

⁶² Ibid., §56, 231 <221>.

⁶³ It should be noted that there are plenty of types of intentionality that do not necessarily bring about existential change in the subject.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., §56, 233 <221-222>.

by insight.” When I employ active rationality there are no breaks or disruptions in my line of thought; my thought is coextensive with this type of rationality, where I am identifying “connections of requirement.” Similar to Descartes, Husserl does not take it that I can err when I use this rationality; if something is logically necessary, then there is nothing to debate. As my active rationality is active only in the moment that it is taken up, it is restricted in use. Indeed since active rationality requires constant usage, it is only intermittently involved in my life.

Relative rationality does not deal with logically necessary connections but merely the relations between things. It, by contrast, is not necessarily consistently employed, and it is in virtue of this fact as well as its subject matter (relative relations) that accounts for it being much more prone to mistakes and errors. When I use relative rationality, I am faced with a “confused unity” that I do not regard with instantaneous logical insight. Since relative rationality is not subject to the same activity requirements as its counterpart, it resembles much more of a mindset or a mood than it does a noesis grounded in pure logic.

It seems to me that the conversion experience derives primarily from judgments that are made via relative rationality. While I cannot indubitably demonstrate that it is impossible for a conversion to follow from judgment(s) that have been made only in the mode of active rationality, it seems likely that this sort of conversion, if it is possible, occurs only on a very rare basis. Consider for example what a conversion in active rationality would look like: a series of deductions and calculations the result of which is some certain conclusion. While this mode of rationality is useful when we deal with problems in the logic or mathematics classroom, we do not live most of our lives using this type of reason. Far more important for us in a practical sense is the use of relative reason, which Husserl alternatively characterizes as the pursuit of some value the source of which is genuine, and we can see how this would complement quite nicely

our phenomenological model of conversion. This account of relative rationality also serves as another limiting factor in virtue of which we can exclude the forced conversion as inauthentic; the value that is pursued does not have a genuine source within the subject himself.

Before we move on to the homeworld it is critical that we take note of the fact that Husserl incorporates affect in his discussion of reason as motivation, not only in terms of how judgment is motivated by affect, but also how affect is motivated by judgment. In some cases, such as when I become distracted by an instinct or a drive, I am subject to irrationality. In a case like this my judgment is motivated by affect, negatively so. The experience of conversion is driven by judgments that may be rational, or irrational.

The lifeworld and homeworld are part of Husserl's attempt to incorporate the context of culture, history, and society in his phenomenology, and as such they emerge in his later works like the *Crisis*. Out of the two the homeworld, as its title implies, is the more specific concept.⁶⁶ Each of these concepts is essentially an analytic elaboration of the more general idea of the world that Husserl presents in *Ideas I*, as "horizon of horizons." But he eventually comes to characterize this meta-horizon according to intersubjective criteria in his later thought.

The homeworld is the world of familiarity for me.⁶⁷ For me it constitutes what seems to be normal or typical, but not in any ethical sense.⁶⁸ It is the sum of the horizons that are specific to me and are derived from the localization of my consciousness in some specific time and place. The homeworld is a unity of meaning and sense comprised by worldly things' pre-givenness.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Husserl occasionally uses the term near-world (*Nahwelt*) for the homeworld. There is no significant difference between the two concepts, and we find that he uses them interchangeably. See Hua VI 303.

⁶⁷ Hua XV 210.

⁶⁸ Donohoe, "Place of Home," 32.

⁶⁹ Steinbock, *Home and Beyond*, 154; Donohoe, "Place of Home," 33.

But we should push Husserl to conceive of the homeworld in even more precise terms, including my race, my class, and my gender, all of which play a profound role in the operation of my conscious life. Without a doubt the homeworld *qua* familiar but passive referential context for consciousness bears an obvious influence on the constitution of my consciousness, which does not originate *ex nihilo* but is always already founded in a homeworld, which is relative on a cultural, historical, and social basis. Essentially this homeworld is a more specific “horizon of horizons” that is relative to my own life on the basis of certain definitive variables that play a role in the life of my consciousness. Thus this homeworld accounts for many of the meanings and assumptions that I make as I go about my life. Furthermore my homeworld is specific to me, as my “home” is not the same as the home for Others, but something that is my *own* “home” of consciousness (in other words not a literal a literal dwelling place). We can consider the lifeworld to be a reduction of the homeworld taken in terms of its general essence; the homeworld is just the lifeworld of some particular subject. The lifeworld is essentially the broader conception of the homeworld in general, for anyone, anywhere.

The homeworld, and by extension lifeworld, are relevant for the phenomenological analysis of the conversion experience because it structures the conversion possibilities for the subject. This comes down to the distinction between the homeworld and its antithesis, the alienworld. It may be the case that I am more likely to convert to a religion, spiritual worldview, or philosophy that is already familiar to me within the outer limits of my homeworld. For example if I am a citizen of Europe or the United States, Christianity is probably more culturally familiar to me than Sikhism, whether I am a Christian or not, although this is certainly not true for a Sikh living in Europe or the US. In virtue of this increased familiarity with some ideas, and less familiarity with others, I am more likely to pursue conversions that are “available” to me

within my larger homeworld, and less likely to pursue those that rest outside of it. To be sure it is certainly possible that someone can convert to a religion or spiritual worldview or even philosophy that surpasses the old limits of his homeworld, but this would require in advance the reorientation of the homeworld in order for the new existential framework to be an “option” for the converting subject. Indeed, when this happens the homeworld is rearranged for the subject with new meanings embedded in it as ground. Because conversion possibilities within my own homeworld are already embedded in my consciousness, I deduce that I am more prone to pursue these possibilities that are in closer proximity to myself.

But it is also the case that any conversion whatsoever plays a role in the reconstitution of the homeworld. Even if a religion like Christianity, which is already familiar to me given the homeworld I inhabit, is not my own religion, were I to convert to it, then my sum of horizons would shift. Thus we can see how the requisite existential transformation upon which I have already elaborated at length plays a role in the structuration of the very horizon (of horizons) within which my experience takes place.

In closing we should note that it is not quite the case that consciousness is itself derived from the world, as if the world is logically or causally prior to consciousness (in a phenomenological sense). In fact the two require each other in a mutually constitutive relation. Husserl writes that, “The concepts of ego and surrounding world are related to one another inseparably.”⁷⁰ In Husserl’s later phenomenology it is undeniable that the world is constituted by the ego, where constitution entails the appearance of the world as a phenomenon, and not the material existence of the world in a mind-independent sense. It is the world that serves as the

⁷⁰ Husserl, *Ideas II* §50, 195 <185>.

“universal ground of belief pre-given for every experience of individual objects.”⁷¹ Objects in the world are always already there for me, and all of my mental acts presuppose the existence of these objects. They “stimulate and set going” all of my mental processes, from which they are given structure and “legitimacy.”⁷² But furthermore we have to consider this world as, first, a spiritual phenomenon that does not necessitate very much with respect to the veracity of the claims my religion, spiritual worldview, or philosophy makes with respect to “material” nature or reality, and second, as a culturally, historically, and socially embedded phenomenon.

I have stated that without the world there can be no conversion. It is important to address the extent to which this is not a contradiction of a famous passage in *Ideas I* wherein Husserl describes the “annihilation of the world.”⁷³ There Husserl writes:

The existence of a world is the correlate of certain multiplicities of experience distinguished by certain essential formulations. But it *cannot* be seen that actual experiences can flow *only* in such concatenated forms; nothing like that can be seen purely on the basis of the essence of perception taken universally, and of the essences of other collaborating kinds of experiential intuition.⁷⁴

How are we to reconcile these remarks with what I have said here? First it should be noted that the larger context for these remarks Husserl makes in *Ideas I* regard the “material countersense” of an idea that there could be a world outside of our own.⁷⁵ Husserl concludes that it is problematic to speculate that a real world exists outside of our own because there is no actual ego to which this world appears, with the real point being that what is experienceable for any single ego must “of *essential necessity* be cognizable by *any* Ego.”⁷⁶ But a world outside of our own is not experience, so this cannot be right. Second, to return to the original issue with the supposed annihilation of the

⁷¹ Husserl, EJ §7, 28.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷³ Husserl, *Ideas I* §49, 109 <91>.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* §48, 108 <90>.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

world, Husserl's precise claim is that if the "world of physical things" were annihilated, then this would not "touch" the existence of consciousness. One might wonder how he can say such a thing when I have presented the world as I have, as a thoroughly necessary correlate of intentional consciousness. Ultimately, we can resolve the tension by reminding ourselves that we cannot presuppose the real, external, material existence of the intentional objects that are present to my consciousness. Husserl insists that pure consciousness is entirely self-contained, such that the annihilation of the allegedly material world presents no problem for the existence of consciousness *eo ipso*. But beyond this there is the fact that even if it is true that consciousness itself could survive an incident such as the annihilation of consciousness, that does not mean that this consciousness would have access to the experience of conversion, which seems to require the world as correlate in order to furnish for itself the necessary subject matter to pertain to the constitutive judgments that comprise it.

V. Conversion and the Other

The fifth eidetic feature of conversion relates back to the fourth, the world. I suggest that, as we saw with the world, it would be impossible for the conversion experience to occur without the givenness of the Other. While Husserl will typically use the term Other to refer to the other ego, here I refer to the Other in two senses, the Other as (the) transcendental ego (of the Other), and the Other as social institution, as non-self. It is critical that we note that each of these senses of Otherness are defined by the fact that they pertain to things that I understand to my transcendent to my self. If my experience were limited to my self, without these transcendent correlates on the "outside," then I would not have much of a life; my consciousness would be limited to the

reflection of its own internal states, and these states would be rather “bald” and plain without any involvement with that which is external to my self. Indeed both of these senses of Other are required in order for a conversion experience to occur, primarily because without the Other there would be no world phenomenon, without which judgments of existential significance could not be made.

The first necessity is the intersubjective constitution of the world as enacted by other transcendental egos. We already say Husserl make this point when he characterized the spiritual world in *Ideas II*. The fact that conversion requires Other transcendental egos is a testament to the fact that the world phenomenon is the product of intersubjective constitution. Strictly speaking, however, the constitution of the world is the product not just of my own transcendental ego, but any number of transcendental egos *qua* “community of monads.”⁷⁷ Husserl alternatively refers to this community structure as “transcendental intersubjectivity,” noting that the world is the accomplishment of this transcendental intersubjectivity.⁷⁸ It is the achievement of this community to make possible “a world of men and things,” without which conversion could not occur. Husserl describes this interrelation of monads an “intentional communion” which he characterizes as “essentially unique connectedness.”⁷⁹ The crucial qualification, however, is that these other monads are constituted by my own consciousness. Critically, these others are constituted “in me” precisely “as monads, existing for themselves.”⁸⁰ Thus while it is true that the world phenomenon is the product of intersubjective constitution, it is also true that the Other is constituted *by me*, with a givenness such that I take it that this Other is also an ego, like me.

⁷⁷ Husserl, CM §55, 120.

⁷⁸ Ibid. §49, 108.

⁷⁹ Ibid. §56, 129.

⁸⁰ Ibid. §56, 128.

The second necessity is that the Other is required in the sense of social institutions, without which conversion would not be possible. I am identifying social institutions as Other to the extent that Husserl includes culture in his conception of “other experience.”⁸¹ This social institution may be a religion, a spiritual worldview, or a philosophy, but more generally, this social institution could be a language, or set of cultural practices. I realize that this condition stipulates that there can be no such thing as a private, personal conversion that surpasses the limits of individual reference and meaning. But upon closer analysis we can tell that this must be true, insofar as *sans* the Other *qua* social institution, we would lack the requisite linguistic and cultural domains in order for a conversion to take place. Insofar as I have reduced the conversion phenomenon to essentially require judgment noeses, a conversion without the social institution of language could never take place.

Ultimately my self-experience would not at all be the same without other experience.⁸² I can see how many aspects of my self are ultimately entangled with the outer world. It follows that ultimately what I consider to be my “self” is influenced by, and informed by, that which is not actually within the limits of my selfhood. For example, would it make sense to talk of personality, as a way that we interact with other egos, without these other egos? Would it be possible for something like religion or a formal philosophy to exist at all without the constitution of the Other? Perhaps the most concerning problem would concern the origin of language itself. Without the Other, would language be possible at all? And without language, would conversion make any sense? For all of these reasons I take it to be clear that my experience of my self, and

⁸¹ Ibid. §44, 98-99.

⁸² Ibid., §43.

therefore my experience of the conversion phenomenon, requires on a fundamental level the Other.

VI. The Essential Embodiment of the Converting Subject

The sixth eidetic feature of the conversion experience concerns the essential embodiment involved therein. I have already shown that every conversion experience will require judgment, but here I will demonstrate that these judgments could not be made not only without world and the Other, but also embodiment. In fact, without embodiment, I would not be able to experience the world as environment. Furthermore, it is through bodily mediation that certain sensations that factor in the conversion experience are constituted.

In *Ideas II* Husserl characterizes the body as “organ of the will” and “seat of free movement.”⁸³ What Husserl means is that the body is something that is, despite its material or physical nature, intrinsically linked to my will. In this respect it differs from other “objects.” In contrast to other objects, I have an “immediate and spontaneous” relationship with the object that is my body. This is why Husserl also refers to the body as “willing body.”⁸⁴ With these words he refers to the fact that I enjoy a primary relation between my self and my body; when I want to move some part of my body, I simply will it in a direct and immediate fashion.⁸⁵ It is this sense of the body, specifically as *Leib* rather than *Körper*, that is tantamount to the very center of all my life experience. The reason for this is that the body is “the medium of all perception; it is the

⁸³ Husserl, *Ideas II* §38, 159 <151-152>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, §54, 223 <212>.

⁸⁵ Here I am referring to the physiological norm; as Merleau-Ponty shows us with Schneider, there are certainly clinical exceptions to this embodied volitional immediacy.

organ of perception and is *necessarily* involved in all perception.”⁸⁶ It follows that without the body, there is no perception of an external world. We can link this conception of the *moving* body, and of the *sensing* body as locus of all perception, to the conversion experience.

As we saw in the fifth chapter, there are several important respects in which embodied perception plays a role in conversion. First there is the critical role that my body plays in the constitution of consciousness. My consciousness is embodied consciousness, which means that my experience of outer as well as inner perception is influenced by my status as an embodied subject. I cannot imagine the experience of consciousness without the embodied basis that I presently enjoy. One implication of this is that I cannot imagine the experience of conversion without a body. It follows from this that the annihilation of my body would prevent me from experiencing a conversion—or at least, a conversion that remotely resembles the type that I can encounter in this embodied life of mine.

How does this relate to the judgments made by the converting subject? Recall that we have stated that the judgment(s) made by the converting subject are ones which have some bearing on the existential status of the convert. But since judgments are enacted by consciousness, and since consciousness is necessarily embodied, embodiment is an essential feature of the possibility of human judgment. This may seem counter-intuitive to the extent that I am fully capable of making judgments that do not regard physical or material issues. For example, these are the sort of judgments that I make when I employ “active rationality.” I have shown, however, that it is not clear how a conversion could occur solely on the basis of the use of active rationality. To the contrary conversion typically involves the use of relative rationality. Second, and more importantly, just because the *object* of a judgment is non-material “thing,” it

⁸⁶ Ibid., §18, 61 <56>.

does not follow from this that the judgment itself, as noesis, would be possible if my consciousness were not partly constituted on the basis of my physical organism. Using Husserl's terminology, we can see how the body serves as a "hyletic" foundation for the determinative form that consciousness brings to the table. Certain biophysical conditions correlate with my experience of consciousness; while we cannot (in the phenomenological attitude) make ungrounded claims regarding the ontic status of my biophysical organism, we should also note that the way in which I *live* as such an organism is radically different in kind from any claim that I make about the existence of mind-independent material or physical objects in an external world. My body is not this type of object—it is mind-*dependent*.

Existential significance is always constituted in part along with the embodiment of the subject. In short who I "am" is not just a conceptual belief but to the contrary a belief that involves non-conceptual correlates such as my physical being. The relationship between mind and body is mutually constitutive; my sense of who I am entails a certain orientation with respect to the body. Husserl says, "[A] human being's total consciousness is in a certain sense, by means of its hyletic substrate, bound to the Body."⁸⁷ I do not regard myself simply as an abstract, immaterial ego; as Marcel puts it, I am my body. My experience of consciousness is such that my very subjectivity is a unity that is comprised of body as well as mind. Thus, for the converting subject it is the case that every conversion experience entails not only a conversion of the mind or soul but also a conversion of the body. Perhaps the clearest example of this can be found in the case of Saint Paul, for whom bodily issues occupy a major concern subsequent to his conversion experience. We already saw Paul contend with practical body issues like circumcision. But Paul's position on the matter of circumcision is actually only part of the much larger concern that Paul

⁸⁷ Ibid. §39, 160 <153>.

has with the body; specifically, after his conversion he thinks of himself as one with the Body of Christ. In other words, his *physical* self-understanding is restructured in such a way that he no longer approaches his own embodiment with the same schematization as before. Perhaps it would be instructive to include a more mundane example of this sort of “conversion of the body” that I maintain is involved in every conversion experience, including those which subsist outside of the limits of organized religion. Consider for example the way in which someone who “converts” to Marxism. This person does not just change their political and economic beliefs; he or she comes to view their body, and *be* a body, in a different manner. This convert certainly looks at his personal identity in a new way, specifically on the basis of class struggle. But part of this class struggle comes down to the exploitation of labor, which requires the body; without the body there is no labor, including even labor that involves no strenuous physical exertion. After all as I write out these remarks I am laboring. I need my hands, my eyes, my brain, and so on. If every conversion involves existential transformation, and every conversion is a conversion of the body, then existential transformation involves a change in the very constitution of embodied consciousness.

But we have to note that when this conversion of the body occurs, it is the product of interpretation on the part of the ego. In other words, this conversion of embodiment requires no necessary physical or material change to the subject (although it is certainly the case that such changes are *possible*). Instead, the reorientation of the body is the product, again, of judgment.

Second, we must address the sense in which the body is involved in the constitution of various sensations that accompany the conversion experience. We have already seen that often but not always conversion will involve certain embodied sensations, whether it is something that is seen, heard, or felt. Because a conversion experience, culminating in a judgment, is often

brought about by some instituting secondary noesis, whether it is a flash of bright light, a voice that is heard, or some sort of feeling, we can conclude that often it is the case that conversion begins with an embodied sensation. But in fact our final conclusion should be even more extreme; since, as we have seen, conversion requires the world, and since my experience in the world requires my embodiment, ultimately it is true that every conversion “begins” with the body, even in cases where some pre-judgmental noesis precedes the conversion proper.

Lastly, to the extent that the body is “seat of free movement,” without my body I could not experience the world in the same way. It is my body that permits me to move about the world and experience all that it has to offer. Thus it is apparent that without a body not only would it be impossible for me to have perceptions of the external world, but without a body I could not move about that same world. Therefore I would never be able to convert without being embodied.

But just as I could not convert without a body, I could never convert without temporality, which I will treat in the next section as the nature of its horizon is one of the eidetic features of all experience, including the conversion experience.

VII. The Temporal Horizon of Conversion

Elaborating on the nature of existential transformation itself, we find that it occurs on the basis of the unity of the pure ego and it requires the identity of this ego over time, manifest in time consciousness. In short this means that experience requires time, and conversion, as an experience, requires time in a general sense as well as a narrower sense. To the extent that conversion involves an existential transformation, this transformation requires a succession of temporal moments in order for said transformation to occur; to transform takes time. But we find

that the amount of time is wholly variable; as for the specific *temporality* within which the conversion occurs, it is the seventh eidetic feature of conversion that it involves no definite or determinate temporal limits at the level of the horizon.

A conversion can be the final result of a lifetime, or it can be a rapid and brief occurrence. The most important implication of this is that the distinction between the process-conversion and event-conversion fundamentally collapses within the stream of conscious time. Phenomenologically speaking, the process conversion is just a specific type of *extended* event that occurs over a longer duration of time.⁸⁸ It is the ego that constitutes this phenomenological time, the flow of which makes conversion a possible experience. This is furthermore compounded by the fact that conversion is a phenomenon that transcends a single conscious instant; as *transformation*, it requires a wider temporal context in order for the transformative change to be traceable.

This phenomenological time does not appear to me as differentiated—this is precisely why it is characterized as a stream or flow, every aspect of which is comprised of undifferentiated constituent parts, unlike a single drop (or even molecule) of water. Thus, in the phenomenological attitude, there is no “material” difference between the event conversion and the process conversion. In the phenomenological attitude the difference between the two is entirely relative considered in light of *my reflection upon* the onset of time. In other words, any supposed difference in the two appearances is merely the product of my own judgment regarding the matter.

⁸⁸ Even delimiting the phenomenological duration of an “event” proves to be difficult. There are certain situations for which I can set some specific threshold as the temporal boundary between an event and a process, but my selection of such a figure would be wholly arbitrary.

There is another important temporal feature of conversion in essence. It concerns the temporal noema of the *future*, what Jay Lampert refers to as a “futural noema.”⁸⁹ We have already reviewed another aspect of Lampert’s decision theory of conversion, even as it regards the way in which the converting subject contends with his or her future, but here I would like to take up another angle of Lampert’s theory. Following his account of the way in which any given decision “projects” into multiple timelines in the future, I maintain that this defines *some* conversions but not all; I suggest that sometimes conversion actually *closes off* and narrows the scope of possibilities in the future. In other words, conversion is not always an open-ended event. I will attempt to prove this shortly.

First let us sketch another portion of Lampert’s argument. He focuses on decisions as evocative phenomena; in short, the way in which they are given is such that they disclose something about the future. To disclose something about the future is to disclose something about the nature of temporality, at least, temporality as we experience it. According to Lampert the central disclosure regarding temporality is that the consequences of a decision are indeterminate. This relates to time insofar as this contrasts with the ordinary assumption in the natural attitude that time is something that is linear, which is actually only the case for a “simple” decision vis-à-vis an “open-ended” decision. If Lampert is right, insofar as most of the decisions that are consequential for the meaning of our lives are open-ended rather than simple, then time is a web or series of branches, not a straight line. Time looks like such a web insofar as any given decision has an indeterminate effect or outcome. But furthermore any given decision is subject to the effects that subsequent decisions will bear. The end result is a web of possible future

⁸⁹ Lampert, *Many Futures*, 10.

outcomes, all of which are interrelated and “virtual,” which is to say, projected and not (yet) actual.

So for our current inquiry the first question is whether the conversion experience is futurally virtual or indeterminate, which is to say, open-ended or not. I grant that I have indicated already that a conversion cannot be reduced to a decision (in lieu of a judgment) but we should remind ourselves that I also indicated that every judgment does require a decision in the sense of willing.

To be fair, the only case in which I can see a conversion of this nature (namely, one that opens up future possibilities instead of precluding them) would be a philosophical conversion wherein one made the judgment that this theory regarding conversion is first, true, likely true, or at the very least thoroughly reasonable, and second, is something the position-taking of which bears existential significance for the subject, either consciously or according to sedimentation. Phrased this way, this sounds like a conversion to a variety of existentialism that centers upon rhizomatically unfolding future possibilities.

In contrast to this account of conversion, the temporality of which constructs a “future composed of multiple, virtual time lines,” my sense of conversion is that its temporal effect is such that, while it does not eliminate outright all multiple future timelines, nevertheless it does *reduce their number*. We can see this play out in the present as well as the future. Before the subject experiences a conversion, it (*viz.*, conversion) was just one possibility out of an innumerable sum of possibilities. Conversion is something that could potentially occur for me. But once the conversion occurs and therefore shifts from that which is merely possible or potential, to that which is *actual*, at least some of the other, “old” possibilities are no longer possible, at least not at that specific time and place and for that specific subject, insofar as the

moment of the act has passed as what was present but is now past. This is also true for the possibilities of the future, however. When someone converts to some specific religion, spiritual worldview, or even philosophy, this conversion is guiding the course of their future in such a way that some possible situations are rendered impossible. By ‘impossible’ I refer to the state of no longer being part of the causal trajectory that follows from the converting act as “source” or, better yet, a determinant of the future. For example, if I convert to Christianity this will have an effect on how my future plays out. The effect need not be drastic or even something about which I have knowledge. The point is that the conversion itself will drive the course of future events for me.

I suggest that the temporality of conversion is indeed fascinating, but not according to how it pertains to the future, but rather, the way in which we see it play out in the present as well as the past. The temporal indeterminacy of conversion, I argue, is sourced in these two divisions of time rather than the future. Conversion is temporally indeterminate for several reasons. First, there is no set number of changes which can be considered phenomenologically sufficient for conversion, no “tipping point” at which a conversion “occurs” for the subject with empirical certainty. Since we experience consciousness as a dynamic stream of moments rather than as a sequence of discrete “dominoes” or conscious snapshots, there is no phenomenologically valid procedure for isolating in time the supposedly precise moment at which the ego converts. Without a doubt, in *some* cases the subject will be aware of this moment. But across *all* cases we can be sure that this is not always the case. It could be objected that a judgment, which I have suggested is eidetically necessary for conversion to occur, occurs at some specific and precise time. Logically speaking this is true. According to logic alone, the conversion definitively “occurs” when the relevant judgment is made. But ultimately, I think that his line of thought is

mistaken, and I think that it is rather misleading to present conversion as something that occurs as if through a threshold such as I here describe, because in at least some cases, this is not how conversion plays out. Insofar as this is a phenomenology of conversion, I have to exclude the particularities of any given conversion experience and focus on what is truly essential. I have already addressed the extent to which sedimentation plays a crucial role in the constitution of the subject and therefore any of the judgments that he makes. But there is a second move to make here. I think that it is likely that at least some conversions occur on the basis of a set of judgments rather than just one. Perhaps it is tempting to declare that in such cases, it is the final judgment that brings about the conversion. This cannot be right, though, because that final judgment required all of the antecedent judgments (or secondary noeses, for that matter) in order to occur. Thus it makes much more sense to talk of such a conversion as a gradual process with multiple constitutive aspects, instead of some single instant. That said, I *do* think that conversion *can* be instant like that. The issue, phenomenologically speaking, is that if conversion is sometimes instant but sometimes not instant, this means that its temporal unfolding is eidetically indeterminate. It is a fluid process that occurs in flux; there may be great divergence in how time affects any two given conversions.

The Phenomenological Fundamentality of Conversion

In conclusion I would like to stress that the conversion experience is grounded in phenomenological subjectivity itself. I know that I have dismissed neuroscientific studies of religious belief that specifically focus on the human predisposition for religious belief. I

indicated that I was not able to derive phenomenological conclusions from these studies. That is still true.

But now I think that I am able to draw a very similar conclusion regarding conversion (where the conclusion is, informally, that we appear to be “hard-wired” for the experience of conversion). I suggest that this hard-wiring is phenomenological in a constitutive sense. Conversion is something that we are prone to experience simply on the status of our being as transcendental subjects. Maybe it is for that reason something that is not just possible but even likely or probable for us.

I realize that it may seem odd or even illicit to attempt to use phenomenological methods to grasp an inductive conclusion regarding the probability of conversion occurring. Ultimately, though, I maintain that this is true for phenomenological reasons. The eidetic features of conversion are such that they encompass many of the most fundamental features of consciousness itself as a totality. The structure of the conversion phenomenon, I suggest, is embedded in the very conditions of consciousness on a basic and fundamental level. In other words there is a fundamentally symmetrical relation between consciousness and the conversion phenomenon.

From its basis in judgment, the world, the Other, and a time that is both futurally determinate and otherwise indeterminate, we can see how conversion encompasses many of the most common and essential aspects of consciousness in general. But furthermore we find that there is a fundamental link between the phenomenon of conversion and the interpretive nature of self-constitutive consciousness. To say that self-constitutive consciousness is of an interpretive nature is to suggest that the synthesis that consciousness carries out is comprised of innumerable interpretive acts that ultimately ground the very progression of consciousness itself.

Consciousness sustains itself on the basis of its own endeavor to grasp meaning and retain that meaning over the duration of time. Therefore we can construe conversion as a sort of experience that corresponds to our sense of existential significance (in terms of identity or role), as a sort of self-fashioning. The judging acts that a conversion involves are such that the subject is essentially “making” himself or herself in the course of carrying out these relevant acts. Thus we should note that the meanings with which consciousness is concerned do not just regard the truths that are supposedly “out there” in the “external” world, but even more importantly, the meaning of personal identity, of self-experience, the answer to the perennial question “who am I?”

Indeed to convert is to undergo a shift or change in the way in which one interprets oneself, with the rather paradoxical caveat that, thanks to sedimented meaning and knowledge, this self-interpretation is not always the object of the converting subject’s conscious awareness. But as we have seen, insofar as the subject must make judgments in order for a conversion to occur, at least some portion of the conversion process is volitional, which is to say, conscious and deliberate. No one can coerce the consciousness of the Other to reconstitute itself against its will. The conversion in the name of the Other is not a conversion at all; while conversion requires the world and the Other in order to be possible, ultimately every conversion must be the result of consciousness’s own will.

In closing I cannot help but wonder if there are other aspects of human experience that are similarly embedded in the phenomenological conditions of our conscious lives. If not, then is conversion the quintessential experience for the phenomenological subject?

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