

Introduction

A voice within whispers strangeness. We all experience it. It elevates the Prufrockian “That is not it at all.” What confronts us strikes us as reasonable, but it somehow eludes the effluence stirring within. This study gives personal voice to that experience. It has been with me ever since I started reading works of philosophy and theology as an undergraduate. It has intensified over the years of teaching a broad demographic in religious studies, with backgrounds and interests in religion figuratively and literally worlds apart from my own. No one work or combination of works that influenced me formatively could facilitate this yawning chasm. Not unlike many colleagues, I faced this situation daily in my professional life. As a result, I set myself the rather solitary task of revoicing the voices that helped me to listen to my own, a practice colleagues are familiar with and which “comes with the territory.” The challenge was to do this without (completely) alienating those curious enough to lend an ear, students and colleagues alike. The present work is a result of that exercise—perhaps better: anguish, a form of philosophizing religion that accents the irreducible experience of self-discovery in deference to systems too specialized and determinate to form my teaching curriculum.

This is neither a comprehensive nor an erudite work in the philosophy of religion. It develops a hunch induced painfully through trial and error. It can, in principle, serve such works, but its cluster of points, if deemed valid, is applicable no matter the overview. The research, then, is selective, there to facilitate a discussion correlating a personal insight with a stream of relevant literature that sets a problematic in disparate configurations of philosophy, religious studies, and theology. The chapters are independent entities written for different occasions that exemplify my basic theme. (“Variations on a theme” was a tempting subtitle vetoed on

account of being prosaic.) Together they flesh out a perspective to which each chapter contributes in its own way. The theme is personalizing philosophy of religion. The context is eclecticism in the academic study of religion, which can be beneficial in furnishing a rich horizon. It can also be precarious when the reflex stifles attention to self. “Enecstasis” is my term to mark out an interstice in this binary of circumstance. As will be evident to readers familiar with the history of philosophy, the term itself contains fragments reminiscent of perspectives in the transcendental tradition that are radically critical of notions of personhood qua the notion of the subject. Clearly “personal” and “subjective experience” will mean something different and yet necessarily related in this exposition.

The chapters are reworked essays produced over roughly a decade. This is important to index for the simple reason that the chapters are separate inscriptions formulated at different times addressing diverse, though related, pressing issues as I understood them. They are inscriptions, in other words, that develop a momentum addressing a specific situation at different times and in different contexts. The covers of this project close on a personal venture. It began formally in 2010 with chapter 1 (“Enecstasis: A Disposition for Our Times?”) of part 1 (“Delimiting Enecstasis”), when I threw my proverbial hat into the philosophical ring. The context was poststructuralism and the death of the subject. The burden was my conviction that, although dead, the subject, phoenixlike, was rising from a peculiar ash heap.

In this inaugural chapter, I begin to delimit my principal theme coined enecstasis. I provide background information concerning its general nature, etymology, and basic form. Heidegger is the key figure. His critique of the Cartesian tradition and his answer to the disengaged analysis of representational thinking is a basic presupposition of the post-Heideggerian context after which enecstasis models itself and aims to address. While I turn to the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit*—which the later Heidegger finds too transcendental for an appreciation of the unity, singularity, and commonness of Being—his thoughts on ecstatic *Dasein* nonetheless embody a notion of care consonant not only with programs of philosophy that seek to cultivate the self, but also, incidentally, with the entirety of Heidegger’s thought (see Olafson 1993). Noteworthy, too, is that Foucault, that great modern exponent of “care of the self,” numbered Heidegger among his chief influences. The prefix “en” in enecstasis is meant to summon this sensibility as apropos to present-day thinking and scholarship, that is, it brings with it the practical underpinnings of Heidegger’s ontology to

shape an orientation befitting an ontic practice for our times. I cannot be sanguine about completing the movement of return, as Ricoeur wished, from fundamental ontology “to the properly epistemological question of the status of the human sciences” (1981, 59). My project is less ambitious while maintaining ties with this wish. Eneccstasis provides, necessarily perhaps, a rough outline of one particular aspect within this return as it pertains to the human sciences of philosophy and religious studies. It seems apropos to examine another word from the national heritage of *en-ec-stasis* to flesh out this aspect further.

Greeks have an untranslatable expression that communicates an activity performed with soul, creativity, or love. The term is *meráki* (μεράκι). According to linguist Christopher J. Moore (2004, 156), it means putting “‘something of yourself’ into what you’re doing, whatever it may be.” It is “often used to describe cooking or preparing a meal, but it can also mean arranging a room, choosing decorations, or setting an elegant table.”¹ While the quality of the form is not ignored, the proper referent in *meráki* is the “spirit” of the act, how one identifies with whatever one is doing. In other words, when one does something with *meráki* the defining element is not whether one does it well, according to accepted standards, but whether one does it lovingly, wholeheartedly. Of course, the two go together. If something is done with *meráki*, it is the skill with which it is executed that typically draws attention. However, in devising this contrast I distinguish *meráki* from the skill that happens to manifest it. *Meráki* is defined by a state of being or quality of disposition, not the skill with which it is engineered. One can, for instance, be an accomplished artisan but lack *meráki*. Conversely, one can practice one’s art with *meráki* but be a subpar artisan. An act of personal investment is essentially what is at stake in *meráki*, and it is this element that I conjoin with the thinking implied in enecstasis.

It seems to me that *meráki*, in conjunction with enecstasis, captures the classical significance of philosophy according to which one pursues knowledge as an integral part of oneself, as a way of caring for the self and, by extension, others interested in thinking. Rather than simply communicating a craft, a specialty, or facilitating a disengaged acquisition of knowledge, enecstasis embodies a thinking that possesses soul, creativity, or love. Without *meráki*, thinking is like body without soul: necessary, perhaps, but lifeless. It is not too surprising, then, to discover scholars identifying philosophy with *meráki* in ancient Greece in terms of an “art of living” or “way of life” (see Nehamas 1998; also Hadot 1995 and Foucault

1999). This lies behind the whimsical reference to the “jig” of enecstasis in chapter 2. Nietzsche is the more immediate referent here, whose love of this artistic metaphor, let alone his love of the ancient Greeks, is not among his best-kept secrets. “I should only believe in a God that would know how to dance” (Nietzsche [1883–1891] 1999, I.7).

In chapter 2, then, these themes come together with explicit developments in religious studies that negotiate the element of the personal that has been spearheaded by certain phenomenologists of religion. The basic proposal of enecstasis in this context emerges in critical sympathy with phenomenologists but as philosophy of religious studies, which is something altogether different from phenomenology of religion properly so called and, incidentally, what typically passes as philosophy of religion, a bewitching designation simple only in form. In a pointed overview of current trends in philosophy of religion and academic theology, discussed in chapter 1, I further delimit enecstasis in solidarity with these trends but also in its difference from them. The enecstatic jig consists of a supple movement that guards the scholarly integrity desirous of meeting the particular aims of a research program while simultaneously embracing, in self-critical reflexivity, the ideological underpinnings of such aims as they pertain to religion. This movement, on my reading, is what philosophy of religious studies is fundamentally about. It is taken captive to the view that one’s methodological commitment can not only enrich a research program but also become a potentially cancerous metaphysics that metastasizes into one.

In the subsequent chapters of part 2 (“Contouring Enecstatic Philosophy of Religion”), I configure enecstasis in conversation with different philosophical postures that overlap in their interest with religion. Highlighted is the connection to continental philosophy. As I explain in the conclusion, enecstatic thinking is not averse to philosophical theology and the analytic tradition that informs it. However, as incited by issues and concerns arising out of the continent, enecstasis has a special relation to the philosophizing birthed by Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel. It also stands to reason that the search for a philosophy of *religious studies* would turn to philosophical styles that root early “comparative” religion and subsequent schools of phenomenology. An enecstatic philosophy of religion, then, which addresses traditional analytic concerns, will, de jure, betray continental leanings. The new face of philosophy of religion, to embellish the title of chapter 3, forges a rapprochement between the two traditions but at the level of personal involvement. It complements the

equivalent concern in phenomenology of religion by reconstructing the dimension of the personal according to “postmodern” complaints voiced against phenomenology. And yet enecstasis signals a space different from what both advocate in the study of religion. In effect, enecstasis means to complement systems in its difference.²

Chapter 4 (“Philosophy of Religion Religious Studies Style”) is an example of philosophy of religious studies in action. It represents issues broached in my graduate seminars, which treat key figures when tackling religion in the second-order tradition of religious studies. While the issues are methodological in nature, they nonetheless presuppose a manner of philosophical inquiry that causes scholars of religion to look askance at “philosophy of religion” or the discipline typically identified as such. I am not making the case that philosophy of religious studies, the trope depicted in this chapter, is true philosophy of religion. Rather, enecstatic involvement, focused on such issues, is a propaedeutic for a fuller appreciation of it.

Enter Jacques Derrida. Chapter 5 is a pivotal chapter in this regard. In it, I examine the philosophy of religion of the great *philosophe* who mastered the art of suspicion wholly constructively, in my opinion. Derrida frames the basic compartment of enecstasis described in earlier chapters, bridging its explicit formulation in the programmatic outlined in later chapters. He offers the philosophical sources for the difference in (the tradition of) *le souci de soi* that Michel Foucault, his fellow countryman, spins more historically. Enecstasis is a tribute to the view that the self is different from itself, a singularity that necessarily eludes the necessary singularizations of a system. This conundrum puts Derrida above interpreters who read him as though he were offering more than a self-critically reflexive strategy. Once this is grasped one sees immediately why in later chapters I do not seek an escape route from particular transcendental methods, but rather contextualize their shaping import on enecstasis in its difference.

This launches the third and last part of my discussion (“The Heritage and Modus Operandi of Enecstasis”) concerned with the inheritance and basic procedure of enecstasis. The cluster of chapters (6–8) formulates my version of what John D. Caputo (2000) calls “hyper-realism” and the releasing of “the possibility of the impossible” in thinking. As Caputo discovered hyperrealism in Derrida, who fashioned it out of his early interest in the rigorous phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, I discovered the hyperrealism of enecstasis, as it were, through the range of scholarship discussed in this study. Notable in this connection is my critical conver-

sation with the equally rigorous “phenomenology” (rather: generalized empirical method) of Bernard Lonergan. Eneclasis bears the stamp of Lonergan, even if Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida shape its form. If this study is unique, it is owed in great part to Lonergan’s influence, which many overlook in metamethodological discussions of philosophy of religion like this one. Charles Winquist is among the few notables in the conversation that considers Lonergan, which is why he factors into my discussion (see chapter 6).³

Lonergan’s idea of self-appropriation is key to understanding the path to eneclasis. Self-appropriation is the inner lining of Lonergan’s model of understanding, which he states aims to effect “the appropriation of one’s own rational self-consciousness” (Lonergan [1957] 1992, 22). This is a target interest of eneclasis. Lonergan further goes on to state that self-appropriation is a “necessary beginning” in a quest that “heads through an understanding of all understanding to a basic understanding of all that can be understood.” He puts it famously as follows in his defining work *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1957): “*Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and not only will you understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding*” (Lonergan [1957] 1992, 22, italics his). In Lonergan’s procedure, I discovered a clue for inciting a hyperrealism indwelling his “critical realism.” It is fixed by his own peculiar transcendental method, which involves a series of mental “exercises” in the examination of what Lonergan calls operations immanent in consciousness. The main objective is to get readers to personally encounter and appropriate their own intellectual foundations, which is a wonderful opportunity for thinking with *meráki*.

This program of self-appropriation, understandably, however, “is not an end in itself but rather a beginning” (Lonergan [1957] 1992, 22). The editors of the critical edition of *Insight* (1992) highlight this sentiment by connecting it to a similar point Lonergan makes several years later in *Method in Theology* (1972b). Significant for us is the editors’ observation that the reaffirmation in *Method* is “useful for perspective on Lonergan’s long-range strategy” (Lonergan [1957] 1992, 780m): “‘The withdrawal into interiority is not an end in itself’ [Lonergan 1972b, 83], and ‘withdrawal is for return’ [Lonergan 1972b, 342].”

Lonergan had a determinate plan for his generalized empirical method. It coalesced with many of his overlapping concerns regarding the classist notion of culture embodied in scholasticism, the view that

takes culture to be universal and permanent (see Kanaris 2005b, 330–334; Lonergan 1972b, xi). This is captured in a hyperbolic statement by Lonergan that “all [his] work has been introducing history into Catholic theology” (Lonergan as quoted in Crowe 1992, 98). It is wise not to reduce the significance of self-appropriation—which takes up only the first of two parts in *Insight*—to this aim. However, we risk the ahistorical metaphysics Lonergan sought to overcome by thinking that his empirical method and accompanying empirical notion of culture—“the set of meanings and values that informs a way of life” (Lonergan 1972b, xi)—are incidental to his subordination of self-appropriation to its proper objective qua the pure desire to know: the universe of proportionate being (Lonergan [1957] 1992, 373–374). This “return” virtually becomes an end in itself in the exposition of self-appropriation. Moreover, and also not incidentally, the return is mediated most satisfactorily (one quickly gathers reading *Insight*) by the explanatory mode of the intellectual pattern of experience exemplified in science (see Lonergan [1957] 1992, 204–212, 397–409, 512–552, 657–708).

I do not wish to dispute the legitimacy of Lonergan’s delineation. Ecstasy merely displaces it for reasons provided in this last part of my exploration. I summarize these reasons along the lines of hyperrealism, my spin on which is to see it as a virtue of releasing the possibility of the impossible—specifically the peculiarity of thinking the impossible, the irreducible, that is, the singularity of an appropriating self—for ontic purposes. Ecstasy emphasizes the withdrawal of self-appropriation *as* an end in itself. The return it envisions remains a “knowledge” *strategy* under the constancy of the hyperrealist problematic. If we imagine this in the terms introduced in chapter 6, which are Lonergan’s own, it is to trump explanation in the intellectual pattern by the exigencies of an artistic thinking pattern (see chapters 7 and 8). Briefly, the artistic pattern of experience is one in which one experiences, understands, and judges differently from the pattern driven by intellectual concerns, that is, differentiated knowledge commensurate with and immanent in scientific generality concerning reality. The artistic pattern, by contrast, consists of a differentiation of concerns whose aesthetic manner of thinking is absorbed by a world that is “other, different, novel, strange, remote, intimate” (Lonergan 1993, 216). It underscores a conscious decision to live accordingly based on such “knowledge.” The sensibility, in other words, can be found in hyperrealism, which as a matter of course problematizes the rationality that the intellectual pattern features.⁴ We might want to call it “alterity thinking,” which is admittedly clumsy. However we wish to

nominate it, the point is to recognize that such thinking is disruptive of the effective historical consciousness that equates knowledge with science and analytic philosophy. By calling it a thinking, I am clearly elevating alterity thinking, in solidarity with enecstasis, to the status of knowledge, albeit a form many would struggle to see as such. I acknowledge this earlier by placing the term knowledge in scare quotes.⁵

My sense is that the specificities surrounding Lonergan's formulation of self-appropriation—that he was Catholic, that he wished to usher his Church into the modern era of historical consciousness and empirical science—not only bias the withdrawal of the enecstatic dimension of self-appropriation *for* return, for determinate generalized expression, but also bias the return in favor of the explanatory, intellectual pattern of experience. Invoking Charles Winquist in chapter 6, both a sympathizer and critic of Lonergan, is intended to this end. He serves as a notable example of one reacting specifically to this tendency in Lonergan and managing a view of self-appropriation (although not in word) as an end in itself. Winquist does this based on a reconstituted understanding of the general principles that underlie transcendental method. Whether Winquist's alternative biases another return route, I leave to the reader. My only purpose here is to show that Lonergan's otherwise laudable bias is a historical accident, not an integral, necessary presupposition of his notion of self-appropriation and perhaps even his philosophy. Indeed, I do not see anything in Lonergan that biases self-appropriation when treated strictly phenomenologically, for us enecstatically, as an end in itself; the emphasis on the self-appropriating venture in its singularity requires this. In the final chapters I discuss ways in which this is true, the ways in which the pragmatics of this possibility of the impossible further contours philosophy of religion for religious studies. While the overall framework is enecstatic philosophy of religious studies, in the conclusion I pinpoint how my main argument also applies to the various branches of religious studies, including philosophical theology and academic theology. If this does not resonate with readers, if “that is not it at all,” I can only beg their pardon and wish them well.