Title

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Permalink

Journal

ISSN

Authors

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Publication Date

DOI

Editorial

Faith in a Religiously Ambivalent Age: The Negative Phenomena of Hostility, Violence, and Revenge

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Today, the so-called "decline of religion" in the Global North needs to be considered in light of the simultaneous "return of religion" in the Global South. Although this is a broad generalization, it at least helps draw attention to a certain ambivalence in religiosity in the world. Notably, when confronting the many discontents and crises of late modernity, religion appears on many fronts, embodying lingering threats and disconcerting anxieties, as well as high hopes and empowering answers. Furthermore, one apparent characteristic of this ambivalence is a heightened potential for conflict and hostility, especially between those representing either religion's supposed "decline" or its "return". Perhaps this ambivalence and its negative phenomena are why many across the social sciences and the humanities have recently taken a greater interest in religion again. Many are exploring the status of these declines and returns—whether they express hard sociological facts, philosophical artifacts, or theologically fueled acts and whether the concept of religion is but a secret epistemic weapon of Western hegemonism or an empowering resource of subaltern communities. Given the ways religiosity becomes instrumentalized in these contexts as both a trigger of conflict and a vessel for peace, necessary are more detailed and specific engagements in the *phenomena* that help constitute such conflict or peace. Here, we are faced with the aporia of how the redemptive mission to *make peace* all too often parades as purported sanctity and cloaks the violence it is convinced to legitimately use.

Many recent advances, especially in the phenomenological study of religion, have successfully demonstrated the more positive, community-building potential of religious experience in terms of its performative practices, models of coping in times of crises, and the embodied habitus that helps individuals develop more co-creative and grounded forms of social reason. Without disregarding or disagreeing with the innumerable potential effects and benefits of having, creating, and practicing religious experiences, it also is necessary to probe these investigations more deeply as well as concretely: to what degree might these "positive" evaluations of religion actually shroud a certain hegemony of an "ideological secularism" for which an agenda is not always transparent? By focusing only on the positive aspects of these phenomena, and thereby excluding their negative aspects, in what ways might the depth of religious experiences of persons be disrespected or distorted? How might we actually offer descriptions of only religion´s positive aspects and not pay attention to its often vexed ambiguities and internal dialectics, which are part and parcel of being *human*? Finally, what are we to make of the "dark sides" of religious experience in our contemporary context in which globalization seems to be spinning out of control, thus drawing more attention to those all-too-human ambiguities and dialectics?

Each article in this Special Issue grapples in its own way with such questions and explores such irrevocable ambivalences of religious experience, especially in relation to the topics of hostility, violence, and revenge. Although *violence* is not the necessary product of hostility, it indeed looms as a threat within developing habits of *hostility* and is often motivated by various processes of *enmification* against other persons, groups, communities,

or even *ideals*. Additionally, although *revenge* is not a necessary response to some preceding act of violence, hostile agents and groups quite often resort to it in order to appease aggrieved individuals and parties. These terms have tormented origins that also easily let us overlook their *positive* potentials: Hostility can even be "positive" as it is born of the will to protect what one believes to be sacred. Violence can become replete with meaning as a response to devious acts or structural forms of disrecognition. Revenge may also be born from the insatiable will for (indeconstructible) justice and to proudly represent one's community by performing acts of (often sacrificial) solidarity. This undoubtedly disconcerting trifecta of hostility, violence, and revenge of course can appear in the absence of religiosity and irrespective of religious traditions and engagements. Yet, in all too many cases, the negative socialities of these behaviors become even more amplified due to how individuals and groups actively *make* their religious experiences and *use* religious narratives to justify violent, hostile, and vengeful responses.

These are, of course, complicated matters that require much broader scrutiny in the context of interdisciplinary investigations. The articles in this volume mostly employ or are deeply influenced by work from within the phenomenological movement and are the result of a symposium of the *Society for the Phenomenology of Religious Experience*. Methodologically, the articles range from post-phenomenology, hermeneutics, and deconstruction to historical engagements with theological phenomenology, cultural anthropology, and political phenomenology. This breadth of accounts sparks a number of critical questions one might ask of any attempt to use phenomenology to describe such complex matters of religiosity. How, for example, might we so confidently describe the core *motivations* for why persons and communities engage in hostility, violence, or revenge? What kinds of presumptions might be made about hostile persons who justify acts of violence or vengeance because they claim to represent the will of their God? Could using phenomenological methods to achieve some *pure description* of such violent phenomena actually reveal a self-righteous attempt to also forcefully eradicate "threats of disorder" or impurity, that is, by exploring their inherent "intelligibilities"?

The clear-cut orders of the sacred/secular divide have not solely contributed to deepening an age-old dualism (for which we seek an equilibrium with revenge). The very invention of such a distinction may in nuce be expressive of a violent act that tears the *cosmos* and the order of persons (religious and "secular" alike!) in two. Yet, as noted, this is not to ignore the forms of religious experience that seem to contribute to the (re)production of negative socialities that revolve around imaginations of threat and disorder. Each of the 11 articles in this Special Issue address in their own unique way such ambivalence of religiosity.

Olga Louchakova-Schwartz's article offers a description of essential changes in perception and embodiment during religious experiences. Using Husserl´s concept of *Evidenz*, she analyzes how these changes ground one´s judgments regarding reality. The main distinction between the intuitive understanding of reality in religious and non-religious experience lies in the kind of reality to which one refers: "physicalist", in the case of non-religious experience, and "ultimate", in the case of religious experience. The article brings these findings into the light of Husserl's analysis of religious experience in HUA XVII and ultimately argues that Husserl´s grounding of religious experience in a preconceived idea of God limits religious experience to regressive forms that do not constitute knowledge per se. Such experiences instead remain teleologically directed toward the world-horizon. By contrast, religious experiences—grounded in changes in perception—have a different teleology. Nevertheless, they still might be counted as forms of knowledge.

Neal DeRoo's article develops the argument that religious communities need to attend not simply to the visible manifestations of religious violence but more so to the "spiritual" symptoms and the contextual backdrop that makes them possible. DeRoo arrives at these conclusions by first addressing religious violence using four means of analysis provided by transcendental phenomenology, beginning with a demonstration of how those means are relevant for religious experience generally. An essential point made here is that

religious experience is contained within the traditional concept of religiosity, and yet it simultaneously exceeds that concept as religious experience is laced into any and every mode of experience.

Georg Harfensteller's article considers how to *transform* hostility by considering the topic of "belonging" in regard to the social experiences of religion and community. Although community is one core element that motivates positive religious activities, it is also essential to violence. The work of German phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels is used constructively to develop modes to help unfold religious practices that can potentially turn hostile. In the end, Harfensteller concludes that violence is motivated by a performative self-sacrifice, not simply for a religious ideal but for a community with which one identifies.

Michael Staudigl's article discusses the violent and potentially unconditional commitments to "rational integration" one might have should they come into conflict with the unconditional claims of religious persons or groups. The case of the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan by the Taliban regime in 2001 is presented and analyzed in order to demonstrate this abysmal potential. By analyzing Western media's representation of counter-violence, and the prevalent discourses that legitimize it, Staudigl demonstrates that the Western universalistic discourse bears a kind of ideological secularism that all too often construes the Islamic "other" as "irrational", "barbaric", and "violence incarnate". Thus viewed, this discourse and issuing social habit only serves to escalate a cycle of violence. Although it pretends to prevent such violence by the implementation of universal standards, it unfortunately is guilty of embellishing the self-righteousness of discursive reason and its violent effects.

Matt Rosen's article addresses the "Peace Testimony" of the Society of Friends. The activist, anti-war sentiment of this Peace Testimony is made possible by the communal practice of seeking the guidance of God. The article investigates the Quaker peace movement as a response to violence. This Peace Testimony, which is a part of modern Quaker belief, is deeply ambivalent: by employing Muers's concept of "negative testimony", the argument is made that the Quaker movement vehemently calls for us to refrain from war yet simultaneously presumes war to be endemic within human nature.

Bill Powers's article considers the deeply puzzling nature of "revenge". The puzzle is that revenge cannot achieve its aims, which is to alter a past action or actually salve the wounds of an original act of violence against which an act of revenge is directed. Extending Marion's work, the article develops the idea of "negative saturated phenomena" to account for how we act in revenge. These experiences are saturated in that they carry a deep influence upon revenge seekers that keeps them "enthralled" in an original act of violence to the point that they become obsessed with trying to make logical sense of the act. Here, one is bound to act in revenge.

Michael Barber's article offers a juxtaposition of Levinas's and Nietzsche's at times opposed concepts of innocence. This juxtaposition does more than compare and contrast, and offers constructive approaches that blend these two approaches into a unique conceptualization of innocence that is neither merely a disguised violence (Nietzsche) nor a means of escaping culpability (Levinas). The paper demonstrates clearly how we can avoid the pretenses of the false, bad faith versions of innocence against which both authors warn us.

Naomi Janowitz's article turns to the concrete practice of suicide bombings and demonstrates the utter elusivity of the motivations behind suicide bombers. These bombers indeed are sourced by psycho-social "cultures of violence" that employ concepts of martyrdom, witness, and self-sacrifice. By turning to the present state of the debate in the work of Srenski, Aran, and Stein, who, respectively, consider Islamic theology, redemption via self-sacrifice, and the intricate web of love and hate as the basic motivations for such bombings, the article broadens the reader's understanding of the big "why" that motivates religious suicide bombers in particular.

Damian Barnat's article considers two unlikely and divergent dialogue partners in considering the basic reasons for why religious violence exists. Barnat then develops a constructive argument for an ethical orientation that embraces the need for both a

transcendent good and a non-religious psychoanalytic good. Although this constructive argument is developed from the work of Charles Taylor and Robert Drozek, the paper shows how both positions are far too exclusivistic to account for the value of the other. Instead, we learn that moral-spiritual reasons and psychological liberation are not exclusive from one another.

Maciej Witkowski's article argues controversially that despite the value we gain from the works of two of the most towering and influential figures from the German interwar period, Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt, they are both guilty of instrumentalizing theological conceptualizations in order to promote their own political agendas and concepts. Since violence, war, and peace were of vast political import, and since religiosity has proven to be helpful in unifying people around certain causes, it of course makes sense that both thinkers would be predisposed to such instrumentalization. From Schmitt's attempt to secularize Catholic order and sovereignty to Benjamin's hope to use Judaism to raise anarchist and Marxist liberation to the forefront, they both shifted their own metaphysical conceptions in order to address their present crisis—a shift and instrumentalization that we must be careful not to mirror.

Paul Slama's article traces one essential metaphysical root of violence down to the psycho-theological way in which we describe God as distant. Slama's analysis follows the history of the immanentization of transcendence in the drama that violently separates subjectivity from transcendence. By conducting a study of the central works of Descartes, Kant, Schelling, and Levinas, it becomes clear that we need to look more carefully at the cosmological "proofs" for God's existence: proofs that may serve less to provide comfort for the afflicted and more to create violent distance from the very God whose existence we aim to prove.

Author Contributions: J.W.A. is the corresponding author, yet all authors contributed to this manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.