JSP

Religious Emotion as a Form of Religious Experience

Íngrid Vendrell Ferran
Friedrich Schiller University Jena

ABSTRACT: This article argues that religious emotions are variations of general emotions that we already know from our everyday life, which nevertheless exhibit specific features that enable us to think of them as forming a coherent subclass. The article claims that there is an experience of joy, sorrow, regret, fear, and so on that is specifically religious. The aim is to develop an account that specifies what makes them "religious." The argument is developed in three stages. The first section develops a phenomenologically inspired account of the emotions by focusing on three of their moments: phenomenal quality, cognitive dependency, and intentionality. Drawing on this theory, section 2 distinguishes the class of religious emotions from similar phenomena. The third and final section examines the main features of religious emotions.

KEYWORDS: religious emotion, phenomenology of the emotions, emotional depth, religious values, value sensitivity

Any approach to the phenomenon of religious experience has two initial challenges to tackle. The first has to do with a widespread skeptical attitude typical of secularized societies with respect to experiences that might be called religious. While we accept as a matter of course the existence of aesthetic and moral experiences—such as the pleasure in contemplating a

Copyright © 2019 The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

JSP 33.1_06_Vendrell Ferran Page 78 16/02/19 12:26 PM

beautiful landscape or compassion for others—the reality of religious experiences has been rigorously questioned. There is a generalized mistrust of the real meaning of religious experiences—such as the experience of a transcendent being, of the immortality of the soul, or of an unearthly world. The second challenge is related to the ambiguity of the concept of religious experience. From apparitions and hearings of supernatural presences, with or without the use of our sense organs, to encountering ordinary objects with a religious significance, from the consciousness of an all-perfect being to the feeling of being in the presence of something greater than us, religious experiences cover a wide range of phenomena with very few in common. In this light, it seems hard to avoid the sense that we are dealing with a fuzzy concept whose lack of clarity renders it extremely difficult to investigate. Is our investigation doomed to failure?

In order to address these problems, I will adopt two strategies. To address the skeptical challenge, I put to the reader an imaginative exercise. Imagine that it were possible to call an experience "religious": What would constitute its essential features? To imagine religious experiences as conceivable does not commit us to their existence. With this strategy we do not dodge the issue; rather, we make it fruitful. To deal with the impression of vagueness that emerges from the richness of the phenomenon, I will center the analysis around one of its types. In this article, attention will be paid to the case of religious emotions as a form of religious experience. We could have started by focusing on epistemic questions about the experience of God, the cognitive achievements derived from it, and the form of knowledge we might obtain (mediate or immediate, conceptual or nonconceptual, etc.) or by focusing on existential aspects regarding the potential for religious experiences to change us and give meaning to our lives, but there are initially strong reasons that justify a focus on religious emotions.

First, it is worth noting that while not all religious experiences are emotions and, in my view, religion cannot be understood exclusively in terms of emotion, religious emotions present an interesting case. Many religious experiences are (or at least involve) emotional experiences.[1] There are numerous examples to be found: fear of the afterlife, feeling unconditionally loved by God, or remorse for the sinful condition of the human being, to name but a few. Second, the study of the emotions may help us shed light on other aspects of the religious experience. Emotions are characterized by a qualitative dimension; they provide us with an answer to the question "What does it feel like?" But they also involve cognition, evaluations, and action tendencies,

and they are existentially significant to those who experience them. By analyzing the emotions, we might also obtain a better understanding of other aspects of religious experience that are not emotional. Finally, considering that the emotions have been one of the central objects of research for at least a century now, we have at our disposal the necessary theoretical tools to approach the topic successfully. These reasons are a strong motivation to approach the topic of religious experience by focusing on religious emotions.

For my account, I will adopt a phenomenological perspective. This implies a methodological attitude that takes as its point of departure what is de facto given or might be possibly given to me or to others in the experience.[2] This enlarged interpretation of the term *experience*, which is not reduced to what is factually given in the first-person perspective, is important since religious emotions are not experienced by everyone. My main task will consist in examining the possibility of such experiences, delimiting them from similar phenomena, and identifying their key features. This article is also phenomenological because it is committed to a specific view of the emotions, namely, that first developed by early phenomenologists. This view will be refined and enriched with recent developments in the philosophy of mind.

The main argument of the article is that religious emotions are variations of general emotions that we already know from our everyday life, which nevertheless exhibit specific features that enable us to think of them as forming a coherent subclass.[3] That is, there is an experience of joy, sorrow, regret, fear, and so on that is specifically religious.[4] My aim is to develop an account that specifies what makes them "religious." The argument will be developed in three stages. In the next section, I develop a phenomenologically inspired account of the emotions by focusing on their moments (phenomenal quality, cognitive dependency, and intentionality). Drawing on this theory, in section 2, I distinguish the class of religious emotions from similar phenomena. In the third and final section, I examine the main features of religious emotions.

1. The Emotions: A Phenomenological Approach

What are emotions? In this section, I will answer this question—essential for the analysis of religious emotions—by taking some early phenomenological insights and enriching them with contemporary insights taken from

emotion theory. Three key aspects of emotional experiences are their qualitative character, their relation to cognition, and their intentional structure. Let us take each one in turn.

AU: insert missing text citation

a. Qualitative Character

Emotions are felt. Each emotion has its own experiential quality: each has its own typical sense of "what it is like." Envy is felt differently from love, just as shame is felt differently from disgust. This qualitative feel that is typical for each emotion is an essential aspect of them. To define the qualitative character of the emotions is a complex enterprise that can be accomplished by focusing on different phenomena. I will introduce here two aspects that later will be crucial in characterizing religious emotions: the hedonic valence and the level of depth.

Valence is a central feature of the emotions: we experience them as pleasant or unpleasant (Meinong 1923, 132; Wundt 1887; more recently, Elster 1999, 279). Although this thesis seems uncontroversial at first sight (joy is pleasant, sorrow is unpleasant), a closer look raises complex cases, which can only be explained by introducing refinements to the idea of emotional valence. First, some emotions seem to have the capacity to change their valence in light of the context in which they are experienced. For instance, sorrow, horror, and disgust are negative, but when they are experienced in response to fictional settings in a context of aesthetic enjoyment, we might find them pleasurable. Second, some emotions—such as surprise—seem to be polyvalent: there are both pleasant and unpleasant surprises, as well as those that leave us indifferent. Finally, given that mixed emotions—such as bittersweet melancholy—are possible, it is necessary to think of the dimensions of pleasure and pain not as real opposites but, rather, as moments that are capable of working independent of each other (Charland 2005, 233). As a result, the intuitively right idea that emotions have a hedonic valence can only be upheld if we accept that this valence is context-dependent, that it can be neutral, and that it can involve both dimensions simultaneously.

Emotions also display different degrees of depth: some emotions affect us more than others. However, "depth" is a metaphor that can have different meanings (Geiger 1913, 671–72), of which I will focus on two, which I call "emotional value depth" and "emotional quality depth" (neither has to do with the intensity of the emotion or the strength with which it affects us).

Emotional value depth expresses the relation between the evaluative properties, axiological qualities, or, as in the terminology I will use, values of the objects and our emotional reactions to them. The higher the value, the deeper our emotional response will usually be. Reacting to a perceived beauty will involve us less than reacting to something perceived as holy. Or to put it the other way around: the latter reaction will be less easy to control than our reaction to a beautiful object. Phenomenologists (mainly Scheler, who first elaborated this claim) speak of a correlation between the emotional layers of the person and the rank of values they involve (Kolnai 2007; Pfänder 1913, 1916; Scheler 1973, 330; Stein 1989, 42; more recently, Mulligan 1998). Usually they distinguish four main layers, although only the last two correspond to the class of the emotions: sense feelings (pleasure and pain), vital feelings (feeling tired, vital, ill), psychological feelings (shame, disgust, fear), and feelings of the personality (despair, bliss).[5] Although I will adopt this idea, my model is not committed to a specific set of layers. The idea behind this model of the stratification of emotional life that I want to utilize here for my concept of "emotional value depth" is that sometimes our responses to certain aspects of the world require more energy or involvement from our side. To perceive something as pertaining to the domain of religious values will thus involve us much more deeply than the perception that something is pleasant.

In the context of the stratification model, phenomenologists also use the term *depth* to express the capacity of the emotions to fill the layer they occupy to a greater or lesser extent. Emotions have a "reach" or a degree of "centrality" (Kolnai 2007; Scheler 1973, 328; Stein 1989, 104; 2000, 217). Sometimes, when experiencing fear, this fear might appear as a punctual emotion with no reach. But on other occasions, it might spread through our whole person, so that all our thoughts, actions, wishes, and so on are imbued with it. In order to differentiate this meaning of *depth* from the other two, I will refer to this specific quality of our emotional experience as "centrality."

The concept of "emotional quality depth" refers to a specific qualitative feeling by which an emotion might be felt. The idea is that the same emotion type can be experienced with different qualities. Think of joy: there is a loud joy, a grave joy, a silent joy, a momentous joy, a hollow joy, and a deep joy (Geiger 1913, 674; Stumpf 1928, 43). Our vocabulary is too poor to express them all, so we often borrow the language of sensorial perception in order to express these different qualities. Such qualities are not directly derived from the values toward which the emotion is directed (though they

might be indirectly connected). Emotional quality depth refers to a nuance in the feeling of the emotion. This nuance depends on the involvement of the subject in his or her own emotional experience and not the value toward which it is directed (Geiger 1913, 672). Emotions with quality depth are those when the experiencer is totally surrendered to the emotion.

b. Cognitive Dependency

In order to take place, emotions require cognition. The cognitive bases of the emotions are responsible for providing the objects toward which emotions are directed. As phenomenologists have pointed out, these acts of cognition are constituted by different phenomena: perceptions, memories, imaginings, beliefs, suppositions (Pfänder 1913, 340; Stein 1989, 100–101; for a defense of this claim, see Goldie 2002, 45).[6] As an example, take the following cases of fear, which vary depending on their cognitive bases: my fear of a dog can be based on the perception of the dog, on the memory of the dog, on an imagining of the dog, on the belief that the dog is rabid, or on the supposition that the dog is aggressive. It is not simply that the emotions require such cognitive bases; they also depend on them. If one changes the cognitive basis of an emotion, the emotion in question changes (if I no longer believe that the dog is rabid, my fear will probably vanish). These cognitive bases are constitutive of the emotional experience. They are also relevant in determining whether or not an emotion is appropriate to its object. For instance, if I feel fear of a dog, this fear is partially justified if my belief that the dog is aggressive is correct.

Whereas some emotions—such as fear or disgust—might be based on different types of cognition (as the example of fear above makes clear), other emotions are more restrictive regarding the cognitions on which they are based. Contempt, for instance, necessarily contains a judgmental structure and is based on the belief of one's own superiority over the other who is held in contempt. Emotions with a judgmental structure require the existence of cognitive abilities—such as beliefs, judgments, or suppositions. Some of them might be quite sophisticated, and as a result, so too will the emotions based on them be. For example, patriotism presupposes the belief that one's homeland is the best in the world. Compared with those emotions—such as fear or disgust—that seem to be universal and shared with nonhuman beings, these sophisticated emotions require advanced cognitive abilities.

c. Intentional Reference

Emotions are *about* something. To refer to this object-directedness, phenomenologists as well as contemporary philosophers use the term *intentionality*. When I fear a dog or I rejoice at being promoted, my fear and my joy are about an object and a state of affairs, respectively. These objects (here understood in a general sense that also includes states of affairs) are—to put it in contemporary terms—the "material objects" of the emotions (Kenny 1963).

As stated above, emotions are also directed toward values. Values are the "formal objects" of the emotions. In fear I react to something presented as fearsome, joy is a response to an object presented as positive, and so on (Scheler 1973, 259; Stein 1989, 93; and more recently, de Sousa 1987, 1949). However, there are different phenomenological theories about the specific relation between emotions and values. The one I will adopt here is a Reinachian and Schelerian one, according to which emotions are possible reactions to values. According to this view, emotions are responses to values, but they do not perceive, apprehend, or disclose such values. Values are not given to us in emotions, but in value perceptions or value feelings, the rank of the values is appreciated in acts of correct preferences, and they are discovered in the act of love. Notice that this theory distinguishes strongly between emotional reactions, on the one side, and a genuine emotional intentionality, on the other, which can occur as value feeling, as preference, or as love, which is a movement of the heart toward higher values (Reinach 1989, 295; Scheler 1973, 255; more recently, Mulligan 2009).

AU: fix page cited

Once we perceive a value, we can respond (or not) with an emotion. When experiencing a situation as unfair (a case of value perception), we can react with indignation (i.e., we react with an emotion), but it is also possible that we remain indifferent (in this case no emotional reaction follows the value perception).

This view contains the intriguing idea that while we do not always perceive a value when we experience an emotion, values *demand* the emotional responses. That is, the perception of a situation as unfair demands that we react with indignation (although this does not always happen). This demanding character is responsible for the correlation between the rank of values and the depth of the emotional response: the perception of values demands an emotional engagement from our side. This link between emotions and values provides us with a further condition with which to determine their appropriateness: fear is appropriate if it is a response to something presented as fearsome but not as a response to something that presents as disgusting.

2. Religious Emotions and Similar Phenomena

a. Religious Sentiments

The next step to define our field of investigation consists in distinguishing the phenomenon of religious emotions from similar and associated phenomena. Our main goal is to delimit our field of research by narrowing it down. Do religious emotions constitute their own unique domain of experience?

The application of the theory of the emotions sketched above will be useful to distinguish first between religious emotions and religious sentiments. As an example of religious emotions, let us consider the joy of feeling loved by God, and as an example of religious sentiments, let us take the veneration of God.[7]

Both religious emotions and religious sentiments are characterized by a qualitative feeling: Joy and veneration can be described as specific qualities of our experience; both can be more or less intense; and both mobilize us, although to different degrees. However, whereas the dimensions of pleasure and pain are central to our emotional experiences (joy is usually a pleasant experience), the involvement of these bodily feelings does not constitute a central element for religious attitudes (for instance, we would not say that veneration is pleasant or unpleasant).

Moreover, emotions and sentiments require cognitive bases in order to occur. Feeling joy about being loved by God and venerating Him imply that the situation and the person toward which my emotion (joy) and my sentiment (veneration) are directed are presented in cognitive states (e.g., perceptions, judgments, or imaginings). However, there is an interesting difference in terms of the temporal structure of both phenomena. While sentiments are enduring states that constitute a form of attachment to their objects (normally persons but also animals, institutions, etc.; Broad 1954, 212–14; Pfänder 1913, 362), emotions have a temporal duration. My joy in feeling loved by God is a mental episode with a particular temporality. In contrast, veneration is a stable way of being directed toward Him.

Regarding their intentional objects, there are differences between the intentionality of sentiments and the intentionality of emotions. Sentiments "stream" from the subject to the object and imply the adoption of a pro attitude (love, benevolence, reverence) or contra attitude (hatred, malevolence, disrespect) toward it (Pfänder 1913, 362). While veneration implies a tendency to connect with the venerated object and to approve of it, emotions are responses or reactions, but they do not tend to bridge the gap between

subject and object. Venerating God will imply a tendency to be close to Him in our actions, thoughts, and words, but our joy about being loved by God rests in itself.

Both phenomena are directed toward values: in religious joy, we perceive the value of being loved by God, while in veneration, we worship the value experienced in thinking about Him. However, they differ in the following sense. My religious joy is a possible reaction to the perception of the goodness of the state of affairs in question: there is a demand that I respond to this perception with joy, but it is possible that such joy does not arise (for instance, because an instance of suffering obfuscates the joy). In contrast, sentiments have a cognitive function: they are responsible for attending to specific features of the object toward which they are directed. My veneration will make me inclined to worship God by perceiving certain attributes, for instance, the veneration might lead to an acknowledgment of our dependency on Him.

Despite these differences, sentiments and emotions are related in multiple ways. Emotions might reinforce our sentiments toward certain objects (my joy might reinforce my love), and our sentiments might make us inclined to feel in a certain way (because I feel love, I will tend to feel joy about the loved object), but the two phenomena ought not be conflated.

b. Religious Moods

Religious moods—such as dread, quietude, or contentment—and religious emotions share a series of traits: Both are characterized by a qualitative feeling; they might be pleasant or unpleasant; they might be more or less intense; both have a temporal duration; and both might be more or less rooted in our personality. Indeed, like emotions, moods might be more or less deep: a bad mood following a disturbed night of sleep is less deep than the religious contentment in which I serenely encounter the world (this mood might be a result of having had a religious emotion of joy, for instance).

Despite this initial similarity, religious moods differ from religious emotions in the following respects. First, moods do not require cognition in order to occur (my bad mood due to a lack of sleep is not based on a perception, belief, or supposition etc.). In addition, there are also differences regarding their intentionality. Unlike emotions, moods are not responses to perceived values but generalized states. Religious contentment is a mode

of existence, a state in which I encounter the world and engage with it as a creation of God; it is the background of my perceptions, evaluations, and actions, but it is not a reaction toward an aspect perceived as meaningful, since this mood does not even have a specific object toward which it is directed. How to grasp the difference between the intentional reference of emotions and moods? Those theories that claim that moods lack intentionality (Goldie 2002) or that they are a form of generalized emotion (Solomon 1993, 15, 71) do not fully capture their essence. Moods might also be intentional, but in a way that differs from how the emotions are intentional: Moods are not responses to values; rather, they are the frame that gives structure to our experience and—to put it in the metaphorical language of moods—"color" the way in which we are directed toward the world (Calinich 1910, 1–67; Stein 1989, 92).

Despite their differences, both phenomena are linked to each other. Being in a mood determines the emotions that I might experience. Thus, my religious gladness will lead me to positive emotions of joy, while others—such as sorrow—will not arise so easily within this framework. Thus, moods are responsible for the range of emotions we are able to experience at a certain moment. Moreover, moods might arise as a result of having experienced an emotion. Thus, feeling joy might lead me to a state of gladness.

c. Religious Beliefs

One might be tempted to explain religious emotions in terms of religious beliefs, that is, beliefs about specific theological content. Can our joy of feeling loved by God be explained through the belief in being loved by Him? There are strong arguments against this view. First, beliefs lack the qualitative character typical of the emotions. Emotions are felt, but it is questionable whether beliefs also have a qualitative feel. And even in the case that there is a cognitive phenomenology of beliefs, their qualitative feel does not involve the body in the way that emotions do. We cannot find a hedonic valence for beliefs—in other words, they are not linked to pleasure and pain.

Furthermore, we can hold a religious belief without experiencing an emotion. We can believe that God exists, but this need not involve an emotion of joy, sorrow, or fear about it. It is also possible to experience an emotion that is contrary to our beliefs. We might believe in the afterlife where we will be in God's glory, and yet despite this belief, we might feel scared about dying.

Moreover, unlike emotions, beliefs have a propositional structure. We believe that something is the case, but not all of our emotions are propositional. No doubt, some of our religious emotions are based on beliefs, and in such cases they will have a propositional structure: to feel regret about the sinful human condition is an emotion based on the belief or the supposition that there is an ancestral sin. However, not all religious emotions are based on beliefs: when one exclaims that in contemplating the sunset one has perceived God and feels religious joy, this joy is based on a perception, not a belief.

The latter example leads to the question about the relation between religious emotions and religious beliefs. Does this case of joy presuppose that the subject has background religious beliefs? Do not all religious emotions take place because there is a system of beliefs behind them? For sure, this is the case for some religious emotions that involve complex theological content (for instance, this is the case with regret over the sinful condition, which is based on a specific system of beliefs). But the religious joy felt by contemplating the sunset makes us also think about the possibility of experiencing a religious emotion that, rather than being based on beliefs, is a form of emotional consciousness of something transcendental, Divine, supernatural. Then, the opposite would be the case: this religious consciousness, instead of presupposing a system of beliefs, could work as the basis for our religious beliefs. In section 3, I will return to these thorny questions.

d. Religious Virtues

In contrast to the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and courage, religious virtues have been considered (at least in Christian theology) to be only accessible to humans with assistance from God. The difference between religious virtues and other religious phenomena is not always easy to trace. Some of the names for religious virtues are also names for emotions. For instance, this is the case for joy, contrition, compassion, and gratitude, which Robert Roberts has called "emotion-virtues" (2007, 9).[8] Other virtues called religious—such as humility—have the character of a sentiment or a disposition, rather than that of an emotion.

In order to delimit the class of religious virtues from the class of emotions, I will focus on the three classical Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Faith can be characterized as confidence in a system of religious

beliefs that is accepted despite not being open to evidence; hope is trust in God and our union with Him; and charity is a friendly respect for God and for others for God's sake. Like the emotions, these virtues are characterized by a qualitative feeling. However, as was the case for religious sentiments, the hedonic valence of virtues is of secondary importance. Moreover, unlike the emotions, which have a temporal duration, virtues are enduring attitudes.

In contrast to emotions, which are responses to perceived values, the virtues of faith, hope, and charity are not reactions to the value of the good but habits or dispositions to do good, and as such they can be cultivated in order to achieve good. Religious virtues might also make us predisposed to perceive certain aspects of the world, but they neither disclose them nor respond to them.

Religious virtues and religious emotions can be strongly related to each other. Having faith in God may be accompanied by joy, and this joy might reinforce our faith. We can have faith that God will support us, this thought can work as the cognitive basis of our joy, and this joy might predispose us toward accepting the belief in His support. By contrast, if our faith is accompanied by sorrow and fear, the exercise of this disposition to do good can be negatively affected by it; that is, our faith might be weakened. Hence, emotions might reinforce or weaken the exercise of our virtues.

In this section, I have applied the phenomenological view of the emotions so as to delimit religious emotions from similar states. Having defined our object of research, we require an examination of the criteria that make emotions instances of religious emotions.

3. Religious Emotions

What are the essential traits of religious emotions? Do they constitute their own class? In this section, I will answer these questions by focusing on the three essential moments of the emotions described above and assessing whether we can discover in each of them specific religious traits.[9] My aim is to show that the three moments present specificities in the case of religious emotions. That is, the religious character of the emotions will be defined not only by focusing on their material objects (God, deities, etc.) or the values involved (the holy, the sacred, the divine, etc.) but also by exploring their qualitative character. It will be shown that religious emotions also have a unique character in the way they are felt.[10]

a. The Quality of the Experience: Emotional Value Depth and Quality Depth

Can a significant genuine religious trait be discovered in the qualitative character of religious emotions? In terms of their experiential aspects, is there anything that makes religious joy different from nonreligious joy?

From the perspective of hedonic valence, some of our religious emotions are pleasant—such as religious joy—and others, unpleasant—such as religious regret. Religious emotions are, however, context-dependent. Thus, although religious regret concerning the sinful human condition is unpleasant, when this regret is felt within the context of baptism, its painfulness is weakened: the regret can be positively experienced in light of its capacity to illuminate redeeming sides of the human being, for instance, in promoting humility. It is also possible to think of religious emotions as hedonically neutral: religious astonishment in experiencing the presence of God in nature might be an example of this. Many religious emotions have a hybrid structure and involve more than one emotion at once. The emotions combined can be varied in nature. They might have the same valence (both might be pleasant or unpleasant), but equally their valences could come into conflict. Otto's (2014) description of religious emotions as a mixture of dread and wonder (*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*) constitutes a paradigmatic case of mixed religious emotion (for an overview of the long tradition of hybrid religious emotions, see Järveläinen 2008, 16). By focusing on hedonic valence and its peculiarities, however, we cannot discover a genuinely religious trait. Religious emotions are, in this respect, like nonreligious ones.

More promising for our purposes is the analysis of depth. According to the first meaning of depth—the value depth—there is a parallelism between emotional responses and the values they respond to (some values are higher than others and demand a deeper involvement). Given that all instances of religious emotions are related to religious values, they will be emotions that mobilize us in a much deeper manner than their nonreligious counterparts. The fear of eternal damnation, religious despair, bliss, religious joy of feeling loved by God—all are variations of general emotions that, in being related to religious values, will involve us more than their nonreligious analogues, which lack these deep dimensions of value. My fear of eternal damnation is linked to the quality of the fearsome and the holy. In being directed not only to the quality of the fearsome but also to the holy, such an instance of fear exhibits more value depth. Thus, in a stratified model, religious emotions are to be placed in deeper layers of the

personality. Although this characteristic is not exclusive to religious emotions (an existential envy directed toward the entire existence of the other is also deep), it is an essential characteristic of them.

Religious emotions might expand in each of the personality layers to a greater or lesser extent. My fear of eternal damnation might affect me more at certain times and less at others. The reach or "centrality" of the fear will depend on the circumstances in which I experience it. When experienced in a cheerful mood it will not affect me in the same way as when I experience it while depressed. Regarding the feature of centrality, there is nothing that makes religious emotions different from nonreligious ones.

Let us focus now on the second meaning of emotional depth: the quality depth. Here, I will claim, we find specific features in the case of religious emotions. Unlike our general emotions, which can appear with different qualitative nuances (loud joy, hollow joy, silent joy, grave joy, etc.), the religious variations always imply an emotional quality depth: We abandon ourselves in them; we surrender to them (religious joy is always deep joy: it is a massive, grave, momentous joy). Religious emotions are emotions with weight; we are completely and totally affected by them.[11] This complete and total involvement of the subject might be related to the height of the values toward which they are directed, but it should not be conflated with the emotional value depth mentioned above or with the feature of centrality. Some examples will serve to clarify this point. Consider the fear of eternal damnation: this fear involves a perception of the holy, and thus it has value depth. This fear might expand to a lesser or greater extent, showing different levels of centrality. Now, this fear when experienced presents itself as having weight, that is, our stance toward this emotion engages us completely. A consequence of this claim is that for an emotion to be a genuine case of religious emotion, our total involvement is required. That is, if our emotional experience is felt as hollow or superficial, then it is not an instance of religious emotion. Imagine that we experience this fear of eternal damnation, but contrary to the case above in which this was experienced as having the qualitative nuance of depth, we experience it as light, superficial, coreless. In this case, this hollow fear is not accompanied by a total involvement of the subject, that is, it is not in tune with the rest of one's psychic life (for instance, because the experience is accompanied by a cynical attitude toward religious matters). Cases such as this, which imply that the emotion is felt at distance and thus has no quality depth, are in my view not genuine instances of religious emotions (they are inauthentic cases).

From the experiential point of view, what makes an instance of emotion a religious one is that it has an emotional value depth (it involves a response to religious values), while at the same time it has an emotional quality depth (it is felt as having weight). Although these criteria characterize religious emotions from the experiential point of view, they are not enough to define the class of religious emotions. An instance of fear is not just religious fear because it is felt with value depth and quality depth; however, according to the view defended here, this depth is a crucial and necessary (but not sufficient) aspect of the experience.

b. Cognition with Theological Content

Religious emotions are based on cognition. This cognition is necessary so as to present us the objects toward which the emotions are directed. Considering their cognitive bases, do religious emotions display specific traits that determine their religious character?

The most common case is probably constituted by those religious emotions based on beliefs or suppositions. Imagine the religious regret based on the conviction that human nature is sinful. This is an instance of religious emotion based on a theological belief. A similar case might be made with suppositions: we can also feel this regret because we suppose that there is something like original sin. It is beyond doubt that many of our religious emotions are based on multifaceted beliefs and suppositions with theological content, and some of them might be very complex. For instance, if in the celebration of the Eucharist, a priest drinks from a chalice filled with wine, exclaiming that this is the blood of Christ, and on the basis of this perception I feel joy, then this religious joy is based on the Christian belief that the wine represents the blood of Christ. These beliefs and suppositions are as varied as religious traditions, creeds, and faiths, as well as the individual interpretations and variations of them.

As already mentioned, the case of religious emotions based on perceptions is more challenging. Let us focus first on those cases of religious emotions based on the perception of nonreligious objects. The perception of nature, of music, or of a smell might also work as a basis for a religious emotion. Each religion is associated with a series of practices whose aim is precisely to provide us with elements so that religious experiences might arise. What is religious in these perceptions? If in perceiving a sunset I claim to experience religious joy, at first sight the direct perception of the

sunset involves nothing theological. However, on closer inspection, by analyzing such cases, we discover that the experience based on the immediate perception of a nonreligious object always presupposes a mediate or indirect perception with theological content. Thus, in claiming to have experienced religious joy through contemplation of the sunset, I feel joy that involves not just the perception of the sunset but the indirect perception of God, a deity, a supernatural or unearthly object (understood here in a broader sense to also encompass states of affairs). Thus, these sensory perceptions of nontheological objects seem to be imbued with theological content: they are perceptions that indirectly lead us to the perception of a theological object (God, a deity, etc.).

Other religious emotions are based on the perception of religious objects. Each religion has a series of objects and states of affairs considered religious, so that the range of such objects varies considerably depending on religion, culture, society, historical epoch, and so on. The way in which we learn to react emotionally might explain this variety. As Ronald de Sousa (1987, 182) has noted, we learn the vocabulary of emotions through association with paradigm scenarios. That is, there are situation types that provide us with the characteristic objects of emotions (Berendsen 2008). We learn from childhood onward what make up the objects of our emotions and how we have to react in certain circumstances. Thus, in some religions, cultures, societies, and so forth, certain objects and states of affairs are deemed to be objects of religious emotions. This does not exclude the possibility that some of the objects of our religious emotions are quite individual and heavily dependent on the experiences of the person who has them.

However, not all religious objects are mundane objects that, by way of socialization, we have learned to take as religious. What about the case of directly perceiving God, deities, supernatural beings? These objects are not mundane but, rather, belong to the sphere of religious entities. Can they also be perceived? If they are like the common objects of our perception, they should be perceived with the help of one of our sense modalities and be accessible to everyone equipped with sense organs. It is obvious, however, that this is not the case. Thus, to refer to the perception of a religious object per se, it is common to speak of a "nonsensory perception." For instance, Saint Teresa of Jesus claimed to be conscious of Christ, although "neither with the eyes of the body nor with those of the soul did I see anything." As she further says: "All the time Jesus Christ seemed to be beside me, but, as this was not an imaginary vision, I could not discern in what form: what I felt

very clearly was that all the time He was at my right hand, and a witness of everything that I was doing, and that, whenever I became slightly recollected or was not greatly distracted, I count not but be aware of His nearness to me" ("Religious Experiences," 41). Should we also consider this kind of nonsensory perception as a possible cognitive basis for religious emotions? I will examine two possible ways of understanding them as forms of cognition.

One possibility consists in claiming that these are cases of nonsensory perception. In this vein, Alston has noted that the possibilities of "experiential givenness" cannot be reduced to what is given by the powers of our five senses (2014, 53). To perceive, he claims, means to appear, so that in this model when we have a perception, something is presented or given to us in a certain way. Using this model of perception, he (1991, 96–99) argues for the possibility of having a direct and genuine perception of God. The difficulty with this theory consists precisely in accepting this form of nonsensory perception as a real case of perception. Zangwill has raised objections against the existence of nonsensory perception, and his criticisms are convincing enough to reject Alston's claim about the direct perception of God. Consider first the differences between those things we usually perceive and God as a possible object of our perception. As Zangwill (2004, 4) claims, when we perceive objects, those objects play a causal role in producing our perceptions of them, but for the hypothetical case of a perception of God, we lack an explanation of how psychotheological causal interaction is possible (How does He cause an experience of Him?) and how the religious experience stands in a spatiotemporal relation to its cause (Does it presuppose that God has spatiotemporal proprieties? This would contradict the idea that He is outside of space and time). Further problems arise from the fact that a perceptual experience must correspond to a sense modality. If this is the case, then we stand in a spatial relation to God, which implies that He would also be part of the physical world, that He would have parts that are subjected to the causality of the physical world (which contradicts the idea that He is indivisible and all-powerful), and that He would be extended (Zangwill 2004, 7). These objections suffice to show the difficulties of interpreting such nonsensory perceptions as cases of perception.

An alternative way to characterize them goes beyond the model of perception. Although this model is one of the most predominant ways of thinking about experience, it would be a mistake to reduce what is given to the model of sensory perception. In this regard, Steinbock (2015, 590) has claimed that religious experiences are not understandable via the model of perceptual

experiences. In his view, there are different modes of givenness, and not all of them can be reduced to what he calls *presentation* (whose paradigmatic case is sensory perception). Presentation works with the idea of intention and fulfillment (noesis-noema)—that is, it implies a type of givenness that is dependent on our capacity to bring things to appearance (Steinbock 2015, 587). This leads Steinbock to follow some ideas already proposed by Scheler and to consider other forms of givenness for religious experience, in which the notion of revelation plays a crucial role. Revelation, as Scheler understands it, is "the manner, strictly correlative to the nature of the religious act, in which a reality of the divine character is given to human consciousness" (2010, 254).

Let us apply this to my question and ask whether revelation—supposing that it is possible—can be a form of cognition and function as one of the cognitive bases for the emotions. Here I have serious doubts. In general terms, cognitions have precisely this structure of noesis-noema typical of presentations. In order to have an emotion, we require that something be *presented* to us in a perception, an imagining, a belief, and so on. From this perspective, it is not easy to explain how a mode of givenness that works with a model other than presentation could make us have access to the objects that emotions are directed toward. Thus, although I am sympathetic to the possibility of different modes of givenness, I do not think that revelations can work in my explicative model as bases for religious emotions.

A further cognitive basis for religious emotions is imaginings, which include voluntary fantasies as well as visions and dreams. If, inspired by the right-hand panel of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Bosch, I voluntarily imagine Hell as the panel represents it, I see it in my mind's eye, and I feel afraid, then this imagining works as the basis of my fear. Other imaginings have a propositional structure, as when I imagine that something is the case (for instance, in imagining that I am supported by God, I feel joy about it). What about visions? Visions are common in the description of religious experience. They are not voluntarily produced but experienced as something that happens to the subject. They are as varied as individuals, and they might also constitute the basis of religious emotions. Think of Raimundus Lullus, one of the chief philosophers of the Middle Ages, and his mystical visions of the crucified Christ and the consternation he experienced on that basis.

Religious emotions can take a wide variety of cognitive bases. Some of them are nonpropositional (perceptions, some imaginings); others have a propositional structure (beliefs, suppositions, some imaginings). Some of

them have a specific theological content, while others are only indirectly imbued with theological content (direct perception of a nonreligious object, which mediates the perception of religious ones, or at least so claims the experiencer). It is a further characteristic of religious emotions that their cognitive bases consist in a perception, imagining, belief, or supposition related (either directly or indirectly) to theological content.

c. Emotional Responses and Sensitivity to Religious Values

Religious emotions might be directed toward objects (nature, mirrors, statues, God, a deity) and states of affairs (that one is loved by a personal God, that one suffers eternally, etc.) that are widely varied in nature. Some of these objects may be very mundane (nature, mirrors, etc.), while others clearly have religious connotations (God, deities, etc.). Characteristic of religious emotions is that these objects are presented as having a religious value. Examining this religious value will offer us an additional defining feature of religious emotions as their own class.

The family of religious values is configured by evaluative properties such as the holy, the sacred, the divine, and so on (and their negative opposites: the unholy, the profane, the earthly, etc.). These values do not imply the predication of any specific belief about God, the supernatural, and so forth, because they are not defined by specific theological content (for an interpretation of the Divine in these terms, see Järveläinen 2008, 19). Religious emotions, then, are responses to these religious qualities. That is, the objects toward which the religious emotions are directed have to be presented as having a religious value. These emotional reactions are appropriate when the cognitive bases that present their objects and the values associated with them are adequate to them.

Religious values affect a sphere of reality that is beyond our everydayness and beyond all that is mundane and earthly (the sphere of the "absolute," as Stavenhagen [1925], drawing on Scheler and Reinach, has claimed). Thus, the values relate to a domain of reality that is felt by human beings as transcending our own existence. From this perspective, religious values occupy the highest rank within the hierarchy of values. They are the highest values that the human being can experience, and as such they demand a deep response.

According to the view of the emotions that follows a Reinachian or Schelerian line, religious emotions are not responsible for the apprehension of religious values. The *apprehension* of religious values presupposes

JSP 33.1_06_Vendrell Ferran Page 96 16/02/19 12:26 PM

a sensitivity to them. This sensitivity differs from individual to individual in accordance with personalities and predispositions, so that some people are open to religious values, while others are blind to them.[12] Moreover, the perception of religious values also requires that we have enough energy to experience them.[13] Religious values are of the highest degree and require more energy to be grasped than lower values—such as the value of beauty, elegance, and so on. In this regard, it is possible that there are values that are only accessible to certain individuals. These individuals would then be responsible for making these high values accessible to the rest of the community. In this light, we could learn of them, despite not being able to perceive them on our own. One way to discover them by ourselves, and not simply learn about them from others, consists in being open to them in love. Only love (which is not an emotional response) makes us accessible to such values.

Summarizing, religious emotions are responses to religious values; these religious values, however, are given to us not via our emotions but by other means (directly in love or indirectly learned through the experience of others). In any case, this presupposes that we are sensitive to them. Once a religious value is given to us, we can react to it emotionally. There are several emotional responses possible, which correspond to the variety of emotions we call "religious."

We can now return to the initial question set out at the start of this section: What are the features of religious emotions? Religious emotions are variations of general emotions that, however, have some specificities: They are felt with an emotional value depth and an emotional quality depth; they are based on cognition with theological content; and they are directed toward religious values. Our religious emotions, when they are genuine and appropriate, are felt with depth; they involve the givenness of an object in cognition with theological content; and they respond to religious values. These three criteria provide the sufficient and necessary conditions with which to see religious emotions as constituting a unique class of emotional experience.[14]

Concluding Remarks

In this article, I have explored religious experiences by focusing on one type of them: religious emotions. Religious emotions, I claimed, are variations of our general emotions, albeit with some specific features relating

to their value depth, their quality depth, their cognitive bases, and the values toward which they are directed. The account developed here should be understood in line with Platonic-Augustinian tradition, according to which an immediate and direct awareness of the Divine is possible.[15] However, rather than explaining awareness of the religious sphere by presupposing that the human being is provided with two kinds of perception—namely, sensory perception (which is responsible for giving us knowledge of the world) and spiritual perception (which may lead us to knowledge of the spiritual sphere of reality)—my account explained it by resorting to our emotions and their capacity to respond to religious values. These theses also have consequences for our understanding of religious experience: if we accept that there is an emotional consciousness capable of being directed toward the sphere of religious values, then at least some of our religious experiences are as constitutive of the human being as our emotions.

NOTES

1. The approach developed here is close to a long tradition in the philosophy of religion (exemplified in the works of Rudolf Otto and Max Scheler) that attributes to emotional phenomena the ability to make the religious sphere of reality accessible to us (Lauster and Schütz 2014, 238, 250).

2. This understanding of the phenomenological attitude is based on early phenomenology. See Reinach 1989, 531–50; Scheler 1986, 380.

3. My account rejects the idea of a single "religious emotion." The descriptions we have of such a phenomenon, as William James already stated, are too varied and have nothing in common, so that we can conclude, following James, that the term *religious emotion* is a collective name for different emotional phenomena.

4. Although the examples used in this article are mostly taken from the Christian theological tradition, my concept of religious emotion is broad enough to be applicable to other religions.

5. This account draws on Scheler's work, but it differs from the former in two key respects. For Scheler, religious emotions are limited to bliss and despair, whereas, in my account, religious emotions as instances of general emotions are more varied in nature. Moreover, while in Scheler emotion types belong to specific layers (for instance, shame belongs to the psychological emotions etc.), in my account the layer that an emotion type might occupy depends on the values to which it reacts (nonreligious fear might be a case of psychological emotion, but religious fear as a response not only to the fearsome but also to the holy occurs at a deeper layer of the personality). These aspects will be developed in section 3.

6. This contrasts with those theories developed in early periods of the analytical philosophy of emotion that considered only beliefs and evaluative judgments to be cognitive bases for the emotions. For this early view, see Solomon 1993.

7. For an analysis of religious sentiments or stances (*Stellungnahmen*) such as love, hatred, veneration, and disregard, see Stavenhagen 1925, 42. For the concept of stance in early phenomenology, see Salice 2016. According to Stavenhagen (1925, 13–14), a stance of love for God is one in which the distance between subject and objects is abolished, i.e., the main feature of love that consists in different forms of positive approach toward its object involves us so deeply that it appears to be given in its maximized form.

8. Roberts considers hope as an emotion. I agree with him that hope can be an emotional experience, but it might also refer to an attitude that can be cultivated.

9. For an insightful approach to religious emotions from the perspective of contemporary analytical philosophy, see Järveläinen 2008, 20. Järveläinen also notices the lack of interest of recent philosophy of mind in the field of religious emotions.

10. My emphasis on the experiential moment is inspired by Geiger and Stavenhagen. According to Geiger's (1913, 672–74, 678) analysis of aesthetic pleasure, pleasure can be characterized as aesthetic not by virtue of its objects (we also experience aesthetic pleasure in relation to nonaesthetic objects) but by virtue of the intrinsic quality of its experience (aesthetic pleasure is deep). It is Stavenhagen's merit to have applied the same idea to the case of religious or "absolute" stances (love, veneration, hatred, contempt). These stances are analyzed not in terms of their object (the sphere of the absolute as opposed to the relative sphere of our interpersonal relations) but, rather, by examining how human consciousness would be directed toward them (Stavenhagen 1925, 7, 103ff.).

11. Drawing on Reinach, Stavenhagen claims that the specific depth of religious emotions cannot be conceptually maximized. For instance, absolute love would be a love in which the tendency typical of love that consists in approaching its object would be given to us maximally, so that the separation between subject and object would be abolished (Stavenhagen 1925, 104).

12. It is Rudolf Otto's and Max Scheler's original idea to conceive of the holy as a value given to us in a value feeling (which is not an emotion). For this idea, see Geyser 1923.

13. Stein (2000, 220) speaks about a life power necessary to experience values.

14. A further question that cannot be answered here concerns whether there are religious variations of all our general emotions.

15. This tradition is opposed to the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition, which claims that our awareness of God is mediate and indirect. Departing from the experience, our intellect compares, judges, deduces, infers, etc. in order to achieve knowledge of God and the Divine. That is, our awareness of God is derived from the experience of the world. See Geyser 1923; 1924, 13–14.

JSP 33.1_06_Vendrell Ferran Page 99 16/02/19 12:26 PM

WORKS CITED

Alston, William. 1991. *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Alston, William. 2014. “Religious Experience as Perception of God.” In *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, edited by M. Peterson, W. Hasker, B. Reichenbach, and D. Basinger, 52–58. New York: Oxford University Press.

Berendsen, D. 2008. “Religious Traditions as Paradigm Scenarios: Applying Ronald de Sousa’s Concept to William James’ View on Religious Emotion.” In *Religious Emotions: Some Philosophical Explorations*, edited by W. Van Herck and W. Lemmens, 59–74. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.

Broad, C. D. 1954. “Emotion and Sentiment.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 13: 203–14.

Calinich, M. 1910. *Versuch einer Analyse des Stimmungswertes der Farbenerlebnisse*. Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann.

Charland, L. C. 2005. “Emotion Experience and the Indeterminacy of Valence.” In *Emotion and Consciousness*, edited by L. Feldman Barrett, P. M. Niedenthal, and P. Winkielman, 231–54. New York: Guilford Press.

de Sousa, R. 1987. *The Rationality of Emotion*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Elster, J. 1999. *Alchemies of the Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Geiger, M. 1913. “Beiträge zur Phänomenologie des ästhetischen Genusses.” *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* 1 (2): 567–684.

Geyser, J. 1923. *Augustin und die phänomenologische Religionsphilosophie der Gegenwart*. Munster: Aschendorff.

Geyser, J. 1924. *Max Schelers Phänomenologie der Religion*. Freiburg: Herder.

Goldie, P. 2002. *The Emotions. A Philosophical Exploration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Järveläinen, P. 2008. “What Are Religious Emotions?” In *Religious Emotions: Some Philosophical Explorations*, edited by W. Lemmens and W. van Herck, 12–26. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.

Kenny, A. 1963. *Action, Emotion, and Will*. London: Routledge and Paul.

Kolnai, A. 2007. *Ekel, Hochmut, Hass: Zur Phänomenologie feindlicher Gefühle*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Lauster, J., and P. Schütz. 2014. “Rudolf Otto und *Das Heilige*. Zur Einführung.” In *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, 232–54. Munich: Beck.

Meinong, A. 1923. “A. Meinong.” In *Philosophie der Gegenwart* I, edited by R. Schmidt, 100–158. Leipzig: Meiner.

Mulligan, K. 1998. “The Spectre of Inverted Emotions and the Space of the Emotions.” *Acta Analytica* 18: 89–105.

Mulligan, K. 2009. "On Being Struck by Value." In *Leben mit Gefühlen*, edited by B. Merker, 141–63. Paderborn, Germany: Mentis.

Otto, Rudolf. 2014. *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*. Munich: Beck.

Pfänder, A. 1913. "Zur Psychologie der Gesinnungen." *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* 1 (1): 325–404.

Pfänder, A. 1916. "Zur Psychologie der Gesinnungen." *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* 3: 1–125.

Reinach, A. 1989. *Sämtliche Werke*. Munich: Philosophia Verlag.

Roberts, R. C. 2007. *Spiritual Emotions. A Psychology of Christian Virtues*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans.

Salice, A. 2016. "Love and Other Social Stances in Early Phenomenology." In *Phenomenology of Sociality. Discovering the "We,"* edited by T. Szanto and D. Moran, 234–48. New York: Routledge.

Scheler, M. 1973. *Formalism in Ethics and Non-formal Ethics of Values*. Evanston: Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy.

Scheler, M. 1986. *Gesammelte Werke* 10. Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann.

Scheler, M. 2010. *On the Eternal in Man*. New York: Transaction.

Solomon, R. C. 1993. *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Stavenhagen, K. 1925. *Absolute Stellungnahmen. Eine ontologische Untersuchung über das Wesen der Religion*. Erlangen: Philosophische Akademie.

Stein, E. 1989. *On the Problem of Empathy*. Translated by W. Stein. The Collected Works of Edith Stein, vol. 3. Washington, D.C.: ICS.

Stein, E. 2000. *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*. Edited by M. Sawicki. Translated by M. C. Baseheart and M. Sawicki. The Collected Works of Edith Stein, vol. 7. Washington, D.C.: ICS.

Steinbock, A. 2015. "Evidence in the Phenomenology of Religious Experience." In *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*, edited by D. Zahavi, 583–606. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stumpf, C. 1928. *Gefühl und Gefühlsempfindung*. Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth.

Teresa of Jesus. 2014. "Religious Experiences." In *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, edited by M. Peterson, W. Hasker, B. Reichenbach, and D. Basinger, 41–43. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wundt, W. 1887. *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie* 2. Leipzig: Engelmann.

Zangwill, Nick. 2004. "The Myth of Religious Experience." *Religious Studies* 40 (1): 1–22.

AU: provide city

AU: insert missing reference